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НАЙДЕННЫЕ ИЗОБРАЖЕНИЯ В СОВРЕМЕННЫХ ХУДОЖЕСТВЕННЫХ ПРАКТИКАХ

Цифровые технологии, всеобщее использование компьютеров и Web 2.0 дают возможность создавать, хранить, потреблять и делиться фотографиями и другими изображениями без ограничений во времени и пространстве. Важными темами искусства эпохи пост-Интернет становятся мощный поток информации, циркуляция и переизбыток изображений, конструирование своего образа в Интернет-пространстве, а также изменения том, как мы смотрим на изображения, читаем их и думаем о них. В статье исследуются произведения художников Александры Доманович, Оливера Ларича и Джона Рафмана. Это исследование позволяет сделать выводы о том, как феномены, существующие в Инернет-пространстве - мемы, нишевые интересы и сетевые структуры, отражающие множественность интересов, постоянные перемены и ассоциативные сочетания – представлены в пост-цифровой арт-практике. Все три художника используют найденные изображения, которые изымают из обращения и придают им новое значение. Таким образом, изображения используются как сырьё, а сами произведения можно рассматривать как непрекращающееся исследование процессов повторного использования контента и творческого потенциала такой практики. Художники декодируют используемые ими изображения, производят альтернативные нарративы, предлагают новые пути движения сквозь реальность. Разнообразие сочетаний изображений между собой и с текстом превращает эти произведения в средства для дестабилизации и совершения открытий.
Ключевые слова: Интернет, повторение, аппроприация, Web 2.0, циркуляция, визуальная коммуникация, пост-Интернет, постпродакшн, ремикс, сэмплинг

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PERFORMING THE MATERIAL… WHEN IMAGES ALREADY EXIST

Digital technologies, ubiquitous computing and Web 2.0 have made it possible for users to create, archive, consume and share photos and images at any time and any place. The exuberant flow of information, the circulation of images, the performance of one's self in the net, and in general the surfeit of images and the changes in seeing, reading and thinking of and with images constitute one subject of Post-Internet Art. Through a close reading of several works of the artists Aleksandra Domanović, Oliver Laric and Jon Rafman,

the following text will examine how Internet phenomena such as memes, niche interests and network structures that permit a plurality of perspectives, constant change, and associative couplings are being represented in post-digital art practice. All three artists take found images out of their circulation and inscribe them with new meaning. Treating these images as raw material, the presented works might be seen as an ongoing investigation into the processes and creative potential of re-staging or re-showing content. They decode the raw material, produce alternative narratives, and offer different pathways through reality. In the way images and texts are assembled, their works could be regarded as a vehicle for destabilization and discovery.

Keywords: Internet, repetition, appropriation, Web 2.0, circulation, networked image, Post-Internet, post-production, remix, sampling

Never before have so many individuals been able to distribute content to so many others, participate and interact visually with the surrounding reality, and share their views and understandings of the world in which they live. Susan Sontag's statement from 1977, that asserts that «just about everything has been photographed» [16; P.3] is long outdated. The number of images and videos uploaded to Facebook, Instagram or for example YouTube is rising every year. While 300 million images were uploaded to Facebook in 2012, there were 351 million in 2014, a similar trend can be discerned for Instagram, where around 9 million images have been published in 2012 and around 60 million in 2014; statistics that can be supplemented by about 400 hours of video material uploaded per minute to the video platform YouTube in 2015.[3] Digital technologies, ubiquitous computing and Web 2.0 have made it possible for users to create, archive, consume and share photos and images at any time and any place. They have led to an image circulation that is unparalleled to anything that we may have ever seen before: «a photo taken at a party can within minutes be whatsapped halfway across a continent, cropped, loaded onto Instagram, regrammed, saved, and uploaded onto another platform, and so forth.»[7; P.73-74, 99, 73] These possibilities facilitate the access to a virtually inexhaustible source of images, of which some representatives of the Post-Internet Art automatically make productive use. Artist and theoretician Hito Steyerl describes the situation as follows: «with digital proliferation of all sorts of imagery, suddenly too much world became available.» [19; P.19] Through the lens of this contemporary reality I would like to address the relationship between artistic production and the Internet, or more precisely the artistic exposure to the excessive image noise related to the web.

As the World Wide Web appears as an immense data reservoir, the genesis of images as the original primary task of art has undergone a shift in meaning. A lot of artists do no longer feel the need to create original material, instead they choose to work with existing matter and modify it according to a specific intention. «'I don't see any necessity in producing images myself – everything that I

would need exists, it's just about finding it.' This is Oliver Laric's effective description of the role of the artist in a culture of overproduction and access, where means of production and distribution are accessible to all and all cultural artefacts are at the disposal of anyone who wishes to use them.» [12; P.118]

Thus, they build on artistic movements of the past, which have broken with modernity's idea of the auratic original. Focusing on examples of the so-called Post-Internet Art, I would like to illuminate the shift from production to post-production as an artistic mean and explore why we speak today of the networked image.

The term Post-Internet refers not to a time 'after' the Internet, but rather to an Internet state of mind. It regards the net – its content and its structure – as an essential condition. For Post-Internet art the net with all its peculiarities is the starting point, the current artistic practice involves the Internet, thereby the web is not necessarily the artists' space of action. The focus of the artists associated to the Post-Internet Art is the study of the aesthetics of the Internet, the survey of different visual languages and the ubiquitous network structure, furthermore the commercial conversion of the Internet affects their works. Artie Vierkant summarizes the phenomenon as follows: «Post-Internet is defined as a result of the contemporary moment: inherently informed by ubiquitous authorship, the development of attention as currency, the collapse of physical space in networked culture, and the infinite reproducibility and mutability of digital materials.»[20] The exuberant flow of information, the circulation of images, the performance of one's self in the net, and in general the surfeit of images and the changes in seeing, reading and thinking of and with images constitute the starting point of Post-Internet Art. But in their works the artists try to find not only a way to represent the World Wide Web and its content, but also try to translate the social practices that came along with its use.

By looking at the works of the artists Aleksandra Domanović, Oliver Laric and Jon Rafman, I would like to illustrate how Internet phenomena such as memes, niche interests and network structures that permit a plurality of perspectives, constant change, crossovers, and associative couplings are being represented. For their works all three artists take found images out of their circulation and inscribe them with new meaning. This artistic activity has become an important mode of the consumption or use of all the user generated content, which effectively every Internet-user can anonymously upload onto dedicated platforms. The mass culture that dominated the 20th century is no longer with us: «digital networks that solicit user participation, blur distinctions between formal and informal forms of circulation, and carve up publics into smaller and smaller selfselecting enclaves.»[1; P.86] The boundaries between consumption and production have become fluent. The artists do not make any difference between high and low, and open themselves up quite naturally to popular pheno-

mena. They decode the raw material and produce alternative narratives, bringing collective scenarios to consciousness and offer different pathways through reality. Remixing, sampling, reorganizing, translating, recycling, reediting and so on, are today a part of the image's social reality. In using techniques like montage or collage the works by the aforementioned representatives of the Post-Internet Art link to several works from the 20th century. In the 1920s as well as the 1960s, the 1970s or '80s, artists already have explicitly interacted with the mass media of their times. Back then as well as today these practices can be understood as statements regarding contemporary media consumption. Concerning the artist's original material and its meaning, some ideas from Hito Steyerl's essay about the poor image – as she describes a circulating copy of an image – seem quite interesting: «Altogether, poor images present a snapshot of the affective condition of the crowd, its neurosis, paranoia, and fear, as well as its craving for intensity, fun and distraction. The condition of the images speaks not only of countless transfers and reformattings, but also of the countless people who cared enough about them to convert them over and over again, to add subtitles, reedit, or upload them.»[18]

Much of the artworks assigned to the Post-Internet art employ the visual rhetoric of advertising, stock imagery, corporate branding, visual merchandising, and commercial software tools. By adopting the codes of the digital culture, the works problematize the material at the same time as they celebrate it. Thereby it is not about the significant single image, but about images in their plurality. The images themselves are interchangeable and placeless as shown in Aleksandra Domanović's work Anhedonia (2007), which is based on Woody Allen's Annie Hall (1977) – a film, better known for its dialogues than for its images. Therefore the artist kept the audio track, but swapped for her version of the film the entire image track with a quick succession of stock footage from the Getty archive. Domanović picked keywords from the original script, one from each sentence, to search Getty's database. In his article The Prosumer Version Jakob Schillinger emphasized the visual language of the original material: «Juxtaposing the stock footage with the search terms, Anhedonia highlights the stereotypical, generic character of the material.»[14] Each scene seems familiar, like we have seen it before. In the context of the stock footage the question arises, if it is even right to speak of originality. Was the stock footage ever meant to be original?

The clips, Domanović chose from the Getty archive, follow one after another in a steady rhythm, which might be an indication of how uniformly one encounters the stock footage in a photo agency's archive. Her first idea, to use material from YouTube did not work out, as the online platform does not have a standardized tagging system. Therefore it was quite difficult for Domanović to find suitable material, so she decided to work with a photo agency. The simple im-

agery of the material made it possible to illustrate the sentences clearly, even if it did not always happen in a direct way.[10] In their reduction and concentrated meaning the clips reflect the absurdity of today's image economy. In its succession of existing material Aleksandra Domanović's film gives an example of the predominant copy-and-paste culture, even though she does not work with free-floating material, as the 'Getty-watermarks' and the reference numbers of the footage show. They serve as reminder that everything about the work is found.

Oliver Laric dedicates his work to phenomena such as memes, remixes, illegal pirated copies, and probable counterfeits as elementary components of historical and contemporary image culture. So Rachel Wetzlar wrote about him: «Oliver Laric explores   the circulation, repetition, and transposition of images throughout history, using the revolution in image production and dissemination brought about by the internet as a mean to consider themes of authenticity, originality, and authorship. Linking the classical past to the digital present, he emphasizes the centrality of the creative reuse of images to art and culture since the very beginnings of civilization, proposing a new image economy that privileges the collectively authored remix over the auratic original. As Laric has described, 'I tend to favour the Ersatz thing, the secondary, the stand in, the substitute, the by-product, the deuteragonist, the tortoise, secondary literature, metonymy and the B-side.'»[22; P.213] He accentuates the creative potential of the varying repetition. In confronting different versions of a photograph or a film sequence to each other, Laric's video project Versions (2009, 2010, and 2012) reflects the conditions of our digital world: how original and copy are collapsed in a flattened information space where everything is just one click away from everything else. Laric shows amongst others how circulating material underlies a permanent transformation and how present repetition is as a phenomenon. To enumerate just a few examples: The first Versions version opens with an image published by the Iranian Revolutionary Guard in 2008, showing a test of four missiles. The voiceover explains that several days later, another version of the image surfaced, showing only three missiles and thus revealing that the first had been rigged. The image quickly became a meme: several authors manipulated the photograph to produce increasingly absurd configurations. On Google the version with the four missiles can be found next to the version with forty missiles and the version with the missiles hailing back at the firing place. The images are followed by two so-called camversions of the same movie, both successfully spread via peer-to-peer networks by unknown directors. In the second Versions version Laric refers also to historic phenomena, as the voiceover explains that a statue of the Virgin was turned into a personification of justice by removing the Christ child and replacing him with scales. The explanations are followed by a one minute long clip of Mowgli from Disney's The Jungle Book (1967) presented in split-screen next to Christopher Robin from Disney's Winnie the Pooh and the Blus-

tery Day (1968), doing exactly the same things: throwing a rock, walking, interacting with animals.

The original «is being replaced by mutant representations – a condition that is symptomatic of our contemporary world, and which facilitates a contemplation that situates meanings and aesthetics in ever-new contexts.» [17; P.26] As there is an equal coexistence of the different versions of an image – one could also speak of simultaneity. There exists no hierarchy among the images, just equally real worlds – same same but different. The Internet shows up as a multiverse. «[W]hat reveals itself in Laric's project is, more than anything, a contemporary (medial) reality that new digital variations (or versions) have served to expand and enhance; reality, so to say, has become more diverse.»[2; P.120-130; 124] Every lie creates a parallel world – we can hear the voice say in the version from 2010. It is not at least the overlying voice and the explaining character of the texts that are spoken, which provides the videos with a didactical appearance. In the combination of text and image, Laric's Versions seem like a patron to the discourse about contemporary image culture. Through his three variations of the video, Laric makes the phenomenon of difference and repetition clear on various levels. The network structure of the Internet and how we encounter images today is not only the content of his works but also their structural present.

The Post-Internet artists use the web as their source. They draw from memes, blog posts, actually from everything that is going on in the web. The described remix-culture is built on the artist's experience with networks. The like to research and create alternative narratives distinguishes their practice. The image – still, moving, or computer generated – functions as «objet trouvé». The screens are now the collective center of a culture, not the city. Not without reason, Marc Lanctôt mentions the personas of the flâneur and the ethnographer describing the working practice of Jon Rafman. The use of found images of the web is a recurring strategy in Rafman's work, as we can see already in his early series The Nine Eyes of Google Street View (since 2009). But while the project is simply a collection of curious or unexpected scenes which accidentally entered the visual field of the Street View cameras, his works Still Life (Betamale) (2013), Mainsqueeze (2014), and ERYSICHTHON (2015) are much more interesting particularly with regard to the aspect of performing the found material and the question of how the combination of images can represent the way of how we encounter images today. By interrupting, linking, spreading, layering and clocking, the combinations sometimes open up imaginary worlds.

«Rafman's trilogy works both as a sociological mirror and microscope: by choosing a series of phenomena and assembling them in energetic visual bursts, he reveals the Internet's vast quantities of sometimes unsettling niche interests and memes.»[9; P. 173] The artist explores different subcultures that thrive in the dark corners of the Internet. These include among others professional ga-

mers, so called furries, people who dress up as stuffed animals, fans of hentai (pornographic anime), or crush fetishists who are aroused by watching or perpetrating the crushing of objects or insects. Mainsqueeze is a collage of videos and images taken mainly from the deep web: young combatants in drinking competitions succumbing to alcohol-induced comas, their faces the canvases for the audience to disfigure with felt pens, a bodybuilder who crushes a watermelon with his thighs, a washing machine that disintegrates while performing its spin cycle, or a woman that crushes a baby lobster to death beneath her foot. Using this material, Rafman integrates the reality of everyday life in his art. He himself describes it as follows: «Some of the content, particularly the section with the 'crush fetish,' in which a woman is depicted stepping on a live shellfish, is indeed difficult to watch. But I think the fetishes can evoke repressed desires as well as reveal latent societal tensions. There's an underlying barbarism that can be found in daily life that I'm trying to capture. That said, I think the film is as beautiful and ironic, or postironic, as it is horrifying.»[13] Some of these images and videos are linked in a clear sequence; others are presented on different layers. Some scenes reappear over the course of the film like the washing machine that tears itself apart or the enchained person wearing a turtle costume. It seems like the recurring scenes encapsulate the single images. Edited in quick succession, these images course past the viewer's eyes and create such an intense impression that the video itself seems – like Kristina Scepanski writes – like «a stream of the 4chan website's entire content.»[8] Rafman simulates our viewing habits, shaped in turn by digital media. Also the voiceover text is a combination of modified quotes form literature, Tumblr, and comments on various message boards. In his film, Rafman creates a multi-layered narrative, which crosses and connects at unexpected points. The montage of the sequences appears as a linkage sometimes as a hyperlinkage and visualizes an Internet aesthetic: «There may be links based on adjacency and dizzying hyperlinks that jump across vast spaces and cultural differences.»[6; P.59]

In the way images and texts are assembled, the works by Aleksandra Domanović, Oliver Laric and Jon Rafman could be regarded as a vehicle for destabilization and discovery. Treating these images as raw material, the presented works might be seen as an ongoing investigation into the processes and creative potential of re-staging or reshowing content. The appropriation of the various materials is accompanied by a displacement or a deterritorialization, which corresponds to the everyday use of the Internet and its provided information. The appropriation of the raw material means the removal of cultural objects from a certain location in space and time. Often one encounters images on the web without knowing their context, their origin, or their originality. A process of repeated translation starts from the moment an image gets published. Existing images are constantly reformatted without concern for their materiality or their

context. Omar Kholeif describes this process as follows: «With each layer added to the image – a filter, a crop, or even with the continued quality dissolution, the pixellation of the image – a new formal makeup is being produced, removing the image further away from the original context and aesthetic created by its primary author.»[7; P. 73] The deterritorialization can describe the process that decontextualizes a set of relations, rendering them virtual and preparing them for more distant actualizations. Against the background of this massive image circulation, its afterlife takes the place of the image's original intention.

This «sign-referent destabilization»[15; P. 98] requires a new approach in dealing with images. One might speak of the «image at the moment of its fundamental reconfiguration,»[4; P.3] as curator Susanne Pfeffer does in her introduction to the exhibition Images at the Fridericianum in Kassel. «Changes affecting the origin, distribution, function, and mission of the image have made it both the point of departure and the principal object of artistic analysis.»[4; P.3] The question of how an image can represent reality has given way to the question of how an image can function within it. The image gets a life of its own once it circulates in the web as collectively lived space. The image becomes reality rather than simply denoting it. As Peter Osborne wrote in his essay The Distributed Image: «The digitally produced and distributed image «lives» (has social actuality) increasingly through its relations to and transformation into other images, within a tendentially globalized image-space – rather than through a direct relationship with «the real» (the indexical model), even if the content of the individual image is photographically indexically derived. And in so far as the distributive networks of digital imagery are an increasingly constitutive part of the social reality that they image, they carry with them a multiplicity of relations to other social practices. In this respect, digital imagery is an element of immanent reflexivity within global social practices and processes. Furthermore, the exchange of images – and links to images – itself produces new social networks that, in turn, become the conditions of production for new images.[11; P. 84]

Today's image is in motion, it accelerates and deterritorializes, might appear in different versions and in different contexts. So it might be one possibility to grasp photographs or better images as fluid objects with an unlimited range of virtual possibilities. At the same time it is necessary to rethink the logic of narratology. As curator Caitlin Jones describes: «It is an imprecise system that embraces the web in all its imprecise and inconsistent glory – news, opinion, comedy, and conspiracy intertwine and undermine any sense of objective truth.»[5; P.25] The circulation or better the network is the image's present. It is located in a continuous process of reorganization. Therefore, I would like to follow Birk Weiberg's idea, that PostInternet works «possibly reveal more about the current state of photography than photography itself.»[21; P.141] Accordingly the shift to post-production as an adjustment of postphotographic practice might be one

possible way to think about after post photography. It may signify the strategies of reproduction and recontextualization, it implicates a life of images in circulation following the moment of production, and it posits continuity and reverberation, rather than rupture.

Aleksandra Domanović 'Anhedonia', 2007 Video, colour sound 90 minutes. Courtesy of the artist and Tanya Leighton, Berlin

Oliver Laric Versions, 2012 HD video, colour, sound; 6 minutes Edition of 5 + 2 AP. Courtesy of the artist and Tanya Leighton, Berlin

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