

Aus Alt Mach Neu – Recycling Arts

**Cym (Simone van
Groenestijn)** ^(nl)

Artist
cymnet@gmail.com

Some years ago I started creating wallets from empty Tetrapak packages. More than ten years I had been working with computers, but now I was making a living from creating products from trash, completely without the use of a computer. I developed a whole range of products: wallets, notebooks, lights, clocks and more, all made from empty supermarket packages.

At that time I was living in a small village on the countryside, where I was transforming an old farm into an art center. In these new surroundings there was only little interest for my qualities as a webdesigner, but the people around me were very enthusiastic about my recycled objects. When they saw my wallets made from empty milk cartons, they would say *'That's what I call true recycling!'*. They would call me a recycling artist. From now on, I would call myself a recycling artist.

But what exactly is a recycling artist? To find a definition for 'recycling artist', we should first find out what is meant with 'recycling'.

Recycling is cool, trendy, hip, modern, necessary, political, ecological, sustaining, creative and fashionable. Recycling is one of the keywords of the 21st century. Recycling is everywhere. Recycling is a way to save our planet. Recycling is a way out of the financial crisis. Recycling is *'being aware of the environment'*. Recycling is *'not knowing if the piece of trash in your hand should go into the red or into the blue container'*. Recycling is *'carefully removing the small piece of paper from the teabag and throwing each part into a different trash can'*. Recycling is a logo with three arrows, designed like a triangle, going around in a loop. Recycling is a way of living.

The Wikipedia entry of the word 'Recycling' has more than 55.000 characters. To give you an impression how much that is: this article has less than 5.500 characters. If Wikipedia needs an article that is ten times longer than this text, then there is no need to explain here what exactly 'recycling' is.

However, there is one important aspect of recycling that I would like to explain. In the original use of the word, 'recycling' means *'to break down the object into raw materials and use them to create new materials, which can be used to create new products'*. Old paper is recycled into new paper. Old aluminum cans are recycled into new aluminum, which can be used to create new cans or other things made from aluminum.

Often we think that the recycled product is not as good as the first, original product. We generally think that recycled paper doesn't look as good as

newly made, bright, white paper. The form of recycling where the recycled product has a quality less than the first product, is referred to as 'down-cycling'. Opposite to 'down-cycling', there is 'up-cycling'. 'Up-cycling' is the process where the new object has a value that is higher than the materials it was made of. When artists use old, found materials to create something new, the value of the work is almost always higher than the value of the materials that were used. When artists create a work from trash, it is almost always an example of 'up-cycling'.

When we use the word 'recycling', we often refer to a process that is called 'reusing'. We are 'reusing' an object many times, before we finally throw it away. But eventually we will throw it away.

When recycling materials, there is a cycle of things. Old products are broken down and made into new, raw materials. These materials are used to create new products. For example a glass bottle is used, thrown away, broken down into pieces and made into a new glass product again. This pattern can be repeated many times. Recycling is a loop.

When I think about my art projects, this loop has always been an important element of my work. I am always trying to turn things into new, different things. For many years I have been creating virtual spaces. These virtual spaces were usually a reconstruction of real spaces. In my installations I would connect the real space with the virtual space and connect the virtual space with the real space.

In this way a kind of loop occurred, where the visitor would cycle from the real space into the virtual space, back again into the real space, back again into the virtual space, and so on. My main interest at the time, was to mix the virtual space and the real space together. In this way a new space would emerge, a space that I would call 'the third space'.

If I look again at the definition of the word 'recycling', how I put it at the beginning of this article, then what I was doing at that time, was exactly that: creating a loop of the world around me. I was turning real images into virtual images, back again into real images, back into virtual images, again and again. And every time the total image would get a little more blurred, because the different layers would mix together. At the same time, every time the image would get more rich, because more and more layers of information would mix with each other.

You might say now, if you call that 'recycling' then anything can be recycling. Yes, you are right, anything can be recycling. In the way we use the word 'recycling' these days, more like 'reusing', 'copying', 'sampling', anything can be recycling. And when I look at it very strictly, the one thing I do that does not fit under the definition of recycling, is creating wallets from empty milk cartons...

<http://www.recycling-arts.com/>

References

- <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Recycling>