

# Ghostly Familiarities

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Although the strategy of appropriation was central to much art criticism of the 1980s, with the subsequent development of advanced and accessible digital reproduction and manipulation technologies, and once considered together with growing suspicion toward the dense rhetoric of 1980s styled critical postmodernism, the threat of copyright infringement, and of course the ethical implications of cross-cultural appropriation, artists of the 1990s and 2000s have certainly inherited myriad incentives for 'concealing' appropriated elements in their work. Appropriation, no longer necessarily limited to strategies of ironic, critical or historical distancing, is perhaps now more commonly used to unearth "low frequency emotional ties to advertising design"<sup>1</sup> and popular culture generally. As New York-based Australian artist Jeff Gibson put it in 1996, "ironic appropriation" is being "overtaken by a potentially expressive language of reconstructive sampling."<sup>2</sup> At any rate, the conscious act of appropriation is no longer a critically explicit subject of art, but rather, a convenient, often secretive, but nonetheless widely utilised tool of artistic production. Formerly employed primarily as an assault on prototype forms, strategic appropriation has by contrast, become a default, omnipresent, yet tacit means of extending their qualities.

Historically, art criticism has dealt with the idea of appropriation in terms of a perceived construction of historical, ironic or cultural distance between copy and prototype. Appropriation in the visual arts is of course generally defined as the inclusion of either hand-duplicated or mechanically reproduced copies (or components) of existing works, usually accompanied by a claim that the recontextualised meaning constitutes the work of the appropriating artist. More aggressive than allusion or citation, appropriation has typically constituted an explicit form of material or stylistic quotation designed to critique established dichotomies such as that of original/copy. Typically involving transference from one historical or cultural context to another, explicit strategies of appropriation represent an attempt to reveal some hitherto unrecognisable irony in the original. Upon recognising a visual quotation, viewers are confronted not only with the image before them, but also with a *priori* knowledge of the appropriated form (the combination creating a binary frame of reference). This process of recognition of course becomes more problematic if the quoted form is in itself a quotation, or, as is often the case with digitally recombinant works, a series of layered quotations upon quotation. Once an appropriated element is consciously 'concealed' from recognition, only the appropriating artist remains aware of its specific

paternity. Although established critical theory is well equipped to describe explicit strategies of appropriation, a critical context, in which to describe the conscious concealment of appropriated elements in digital artistic production is less established. Of course, only in order to be critically recognisable as appropriation art, need the copy's provenance remain transparent. Otherwise, once coupled with the disguising capacities of new digital technologies, concealed strategic appropriation becomes a default means with which contemporary artists can actually make use of the relentless barrage of privately owned imagery, sounds and words that populate most contemporary cultural landscapes.

"Notions of originality", for French critic Nicolas Bourriaud, "are slowly blurred in this new cultural landscape marked by the twin figures of the DJ and the programmer, both of whom have the task of selecting cultural objects and inserting them into new contexts."<sup>3</sup> For Bourriaud, "one can recognise a DJ's style in the ability to inhabit an open network."<sup>4</sup> From "mash-up"<sup>5</sup> artists, to "phantom editors,"<sup>6</sup> computer game hackers,<sup>7</sup> "culture-jammers,"<sup>8</sup> to programmers and re-mixers, recombinant strategies certainly play a significant role in the production of much so-called new media culture. According to new media theorist, Kevin Robins, digital reproductive technologies place the nature and function of representation even further in doubt, for "digital information is inherently malleable."<sup>9</sup> For Bourriaud, it is no longer about "creating meaning on the basis of virgin material, but of finding a means of insertion into the innumerable flows of production."<sup>10</sup> Ultimately, "the artwork is no longer an end point, but a simple moment in an infinite chain of contributions."<sup>11</sup> The consumer is therefore a producer as a producer is a consumer. The house music producer for example, is also by default a house music consumer.

Whereas New York painter Jack Featherly sources his background abstractions from 'Oreos packaging' and letterbox-style compositions from faux art-house advertising formations, a hip-hop music producer might leave only the filtered bass faintly audible in an otherwise explicit James Brown sample. This tendency is now typical across a range of media. Although something might be visible almost twenty-four hours a day, it often remains largely ignored by an art world audience conditioned to recognise art historical references.<sup>12</sup> For many artists, it is not that appropriation is over *per se*, but rather that we have all 'graduated to the next level' and therefore made "it [appropriation] harder to identify."<sup>13</sup> Artists therefore no longer make art that's about appropriation for they now consider it to be a 'standard tool'.<sup>14</sup>

Since the strategy of appropriation was crucial to the construction of postmodernism in the visual arts during the late 1970s and 1980s, as a consequence, it became a dominant topic in art criticism of the 1980s. By the late 1980s and early 1990s however, appropriation art was widely regarded as indicative of art's banal descent into empty pluralism and not surprisingly, postmodernism's role in western capitalism's continued homogenisation of difference. Although the historical evolution of appropriation art (from Duchamp and Picabia, via 1960s Pop, to the *Pictures*<sup>15</sup> generation and later to the so-called simulationists) is extensively documented, its retreat from the critical frontline is less accounted for. Moreover, since most accounts of the retreat of appropriation are variously connected to the perceived failure of critical postmodernism and consequently with a negation of the critical value of appropriation, they tend to ignore the extent to and manner, in which appropriation has maintained a default yet tacit presence in actual artistic and cultural production.

Just as much art criticism of the 1980s looked at relationships between art of the 1970s and the 1980s in terms of the legacy of conceptual art, certain differences between art of the 1980s and the 1990s make more sense in relation to the legacies of appropriation art and critical postmodernism. For those not accustomed to the post-literality of critical theory, much art criticism of the 1980s appeared to have degenerated into an incoherent series of buzzwords, jargon and specialised rhetoric without ever presenting a cogent theoretical position. In time, any significant distinction between those versed in the specialised rhetoric, and those not yet accustomed to a climate of post-literality had dissolved. By the late 1980s, much of the jargon considered prerequisite to a correct understanding of postmodernism had become standard in university undergraduate courses across a variety of disciplines. Based on the model of the text,<sup>16</sup> critical interpretation had, in accordance, become almost exclusively linguistic in orientation,<sup>17</sup> and was often limited to abstract or hypothetical applications of theories, pooled from general problem fields that required a specialised but interdisciplinary rhetoric. With serious art criticism increasingly focused on the model of the text, as informed by slippery and primarily linguistic terms as poststructuralism, deconstruction, simulation and hyperreality, it was perhaps understandable that the intangibility of 1980s styled rhetoric would eventually come under fire. By the late 1980s and early 1990s, explicit appropriation art would be targeted as epitomising all that was problematic about postmodernism's alleged assimilation of cultural difference. Avoiding overt association with the legacies of appropriation,

art would become increasingly important in order to be taken seriously in the post-theoretical terrains and relative subjectivity of the 1990s art world.

The first phase of postmodern appropriation art (which was already the second post-war moment in neo-avant-garde appropriative tendencies), appeared in New York in the late 1970s and early 1980s and was widely characterised as an iconoclastic anti-modernism, aimed at overturning established perceptions of authorship and originality. It often involved aggressive acts of re-representation (as exemplified in the rephotographic strategies of *Pictures* artists Richard Prince and Sherrie Levine). The next phase, by contrast, would be significantly more ironic and playful in tone. Far less would now appear to be at stake, either for or against any selected prototype. Parody now constituted any abstracted critical reference to 'culture at large'. Homage was still more specific. By the late 1980s, many artists appeared less concerned with destroying originality and more interested in reclaiming or redefining it. Neither defiant nor enthusiastic in their attitude towards historical prototypes, much appropriation art of that period appeared increasingly driven by aesthetic or stylistic concerns. This shift away from anti-aesthetic attitudes would herald the banal phase of postmodern appropriation art; an all-permissive pluralism in which the historical problem of art versus non-art was stripped of critical significance and cynically reduced to an ornamental value (whilst claiming to be a simulation or 'commodity critique'). In response to this condition of banality, by the 1990s and 2000s, the strategy of appropriation would assume a relatively backgrounded function, as a tacit yet ubiquitous tool of artistic and cultural production. No longer a central critical focus, it was free to mutate.

An important legacy that many contemporary new media practitioners have inherited from 1980s critical postmodernism is that of attitudes to the photographic image. For many critics during the early 1980s, the only correct antidote for the death of painting was photography. Photography's infinite and exact reproducibility was seen as mirroring the ontological aspirations of representation itself. Representation was no longer based on the literal idea of resemblance, but rather on modes of representation. Photo-appropriation in particular was upheld as an important critical device with which to rethink established ideas regarding representation. Since photography had long been regarded as emblematic of mortality, the idea of rephotography naturally formed a logical extension of the central metaphor of apostasy found in much postmodern critical theory. According to (*Pictures* curator/writer) Douglas Crimp's 1980 essay 'The Photographic Activity of Postmodernism', with the advent of photo-appropriation, art's aura was reduced in presence to that of 'a ghost'.<sup>18</sup> USA-based critic Thomas Lawson stated in 1981 that since the "photograph is the modern world", and given its apparent irreconcilability, artists "are given little choice"; either "accept the picture and live as shadow, as insubstantial as the image on a television screen or feel left out, dissatisfied, but unable to do anything about it".<sup>19</sup> At the same time, however, he noted that although "photography holds reality distant" it also assumes a certain immediacy that enables artists to "catch the moment". Therefore, concluded Lawson, "a truly conscious practice" is one concerned above all with the implications of that paradox.<sup>20</sup> The appearance of photo-appropriation art in New York during the late 1970s was of course closely associated with the burgeoning influence of French poststructuralism. Photography was soon considered the most appropriate medium with which to enact the deconstruction of art, primarily because of its historical relationship with fictionality, both despite and

due to the preconditions of its material production. The inherent multiplicity of photography was in itself that which tested the notion of authenticity, observed Rosalind Krauss in 1981, "to ask for the authentic print makes no sense". For Krauss, "there are only multiples in the absence of an original".<sup>21</sup> Photographs of pre-existing photographs were seen to operate closest to originality's ground zero and push the distinction between original and copy to its most logical extreme. In 1983, New York curator/critic Paula Marincola asserted that rephotography presented a copy that was now "doubly distant from its original" and therefore a "ghost of a ghost".<sup>22</sup>

Reproductive technologies have long played a significant role in artistic production and criticism, primarily due to the political significance of mass (re)produced photographic images. Photography, the medium critically regarded as most directly applicable to the critical questions raised by the problem of appropriation, had by the late twentieth-century splintered into myriad descendant formations. Given that many of the more tactile qualities of modernist art (such as uniqueness, autonomy, authenticity and originality) were widely regarded as negated by the repeatable nature of the photographic image, with the advent of more advanced and accessible digital image technologies in the 1990s and 2000s, traditional modes of image interpretation became even further confused. With digital image manipulation, virtually every aspect of the photographic image can be substantially and easily altered. Once the domain only of professional graphic designers, with the advent of affordable software and faster home computing, anyone could easily add or subtract elements, alter colours, shapes and sizes—and therefore distort appropriated images beyond recognition. With the addition of moving digital imaging and digital audio sampling technologies, the possibilities for recombinant new media works seem limitless. The personal computer is now the site of a previously unimaginable access to information and images. On the flip side however, in a world in which most images are instantaneously accessible, the artist is now far less likely to be regarded as any kind of specialised conduit for ideas or social orders expressed via image mediation.

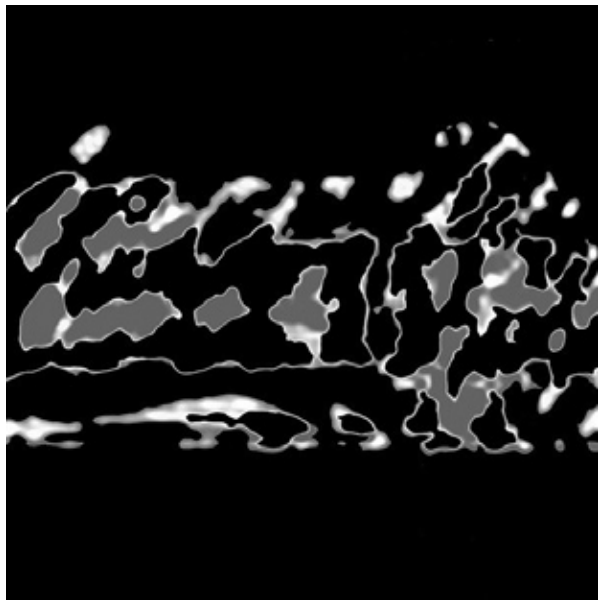
According to the late Australian critic, Nicholas Zurbrugg, although postmodern culture can be considered in many ways "apocalyptic... superficial, weightless (and) static", it is nonetheless finally capable of functioning more profoundly, weightily, or radically when considered against "the complex creative potential of its ever evolving technology".<sup>23</sup> Now armed with a technologically enhanced ability to distort or manipulate appropriated elements beyond recognition, it has become possible for artists to consciously repeat certain *qualities* without inviting direct association with the now dated category of appropriation art. Until the mid 1980s, appropriation had been largely a conceptual strategy, but with the relaxation of anti-aesthetic attitudes, appropriation had become post-conceptual. It was now free to evolve as a production methodology rather than as a centrally exhibited focus. During the early 1990s, for example, Australian photographer Anne Zahalka produced a series of works specifically designed to "prevent a nostalgic reading".<sup>24</sup> In *Gesture V* (1993) Zahalka cropped away any recognisable elements from Johann Baptist Lampi's *Alexander Bezbordko* (1794). All that remained was a hand clasping a document. Zahalka claimed that "by removing the gesture from its context", she was "able to expose its ambiguity",<sup>25</sup> and as a consequence, invent "new pictures from images that are culturally familiar".<sup>26</sup>

All images: Sean Lowry, *Untitled*, 2005



Perhaps such an evacuation of contextualising elements simply represents a continuation of art's more generalised flight from interpretation.<sup>27</sup> German artist Thomas Demand, for example, who meticulously builds models of sites selected from historical, political and criminological documentary photographs, especially for the purpose of photographing them (the photographs are all that is exhibited), has since the late 1990s refused to identify his sources, mainly because he feels that they only restrict interpretation.<sup>28</sup> USA-based critic and historian John C. Welchman stated that much art of the 1990s no longer employed appropriation for the purposes of critique or as a function of pleasure in, or desire for, commodities themselves, but rather in a manner that had become implicit, almost invisible, as if the predicate of taking had become simply a material, like paint, canvas or marble. Consequently, the role of appropriation had been reduced "largely to signify(ing) stirring effects" and "gory, giddy, eerie, poppish sensations".<sup>29</sup> Ultimately, still unwilling to entirely accept or reject the seemingly incontrovertible logic of appropriation, many artists of the 1990s and 2000s have maintained an uneasy relationship with the idea of originality. Aware at once that explicit appropriation is passé, yet that orthodox claims of originality are still considered the domain of the naïve, many artists are comfortable using appropriation as a background production tool, but shy away from employing it as a central critical subject.

By the early 1990s, contemporary art's frontline was full of ideas related to globalisation, postcolonialism and multiculturalism, with new buzzwords (such as the 'real', the 'self' and the 'other'), all of which variously implied a partial re-engagement with the idea of subjectivity in art. As a consequence, the cynical role of appropriation would take a back seat, unless of course when used as a means with which to reclaim identity. This latest (partial) renewal of the intermittent tradition of politically engaged art reflected the fact that the postmodern 'self' was still clearly positioned by sexuality, class and race. Art once again attempted to attend to 'real' issues outside the circumscribed concerns of the art-world. For Australian art historian Rex Butler, most art of the 1990s did not constitute a complete break with art of the 1980s, despite some artists attempts to forget the previous decade by making so-called real objects, asserting lived experience, rejecting theory and taking up a kind of real world politics.<sup>30</sup> The 1990s, like any historical period, can be defined as both a rejection and absorption of the era that preceded it. The art of the 1990s was



no longer specifically about appropriation; it instead consciously *utilised* appropriation as a given production methodology. Appropriation arguably had become a means with which to (re)construct culture rather than critique it.

As the art world's focus shifted toward a provisional reinstatement of subjectivity, many artists established within the 1980s paradigm of appropriation found that they needed to shift accordingly. Emblematic 1980s Australian appropriation artists Imants Tillers, John Young and Lindy Lee, for example, have certainly increased referential deference to their respective Latvian or Chinese-Australian ethnicities, in order to shake the legacy of appropriation and resituate their practices within the new postcolonial subjectivities of the 1990s. For New York-based critic Thomas McEvilly, the inner meaning of appropriation art was the "opening up of the concept of history to a global scale" and the consequent "intermingling of different cultures' image banks".<sup>31</sup> Certainly, for any artist able to (even subtly) exploit an identifiable sense of 'otherness' (as in not white, male, heterosexual, or from an English speaking middle-class background), the strategy of appropriation would remain a legitimate part of the burgeoning relationship between identity politics and contemporary art. The postmodern claim that all culture was now equalised and available to re-use on a level playing field of detached signs, was significantly reconsidered in the 1990s against 'real' disparities still evident outside the circumscribed concerns of art theory. Words such as difference, relativism, multiculturalism and diversity would be substituted for critically unfashionable words such as appropriation, simulation and hyperreality. From Oprah to art-criticism, personal affirmation and empowerment had become more important than calculated cynicism or dry image mediation in this new sociologically engaged variation of postmodernism. This new rhetoric helped contemporary art distance itself from the relatively apolitical legacies of 1980s postmodernism. When practised by an authentic 'other', appropriation could be remodelled as 'reclaiming'. Reclaiming could of course extend to themes ranging from civil rights to public space, to police violence and colonialism, to domestic and personal pleasures.

In a manner comparable with visual art's recovery of figure and architecture's recovery of decor, the 1980s had also seen popular music, advertising, film and fashion alike embrace the postmodern strategy of appropriation. As noted by Douglas Crimp, appropriation could now "be seen to extend to every aspect of our culture, from the most cynically calculated products of the fashion and entertainment industries to

the most committed critical activities of artists".<sup>32</sup> In 1985 New York critic Jeanne Siegel observed that appropriation's manifestation in the commercial world already constituted little more than a form of utility.<sup>33</sup> This wider aspect to postmodernism can also be seen as contributing to the eventual exhaustion of appropriation's perceived critical value within contemporary art itself, for as noted by Crimp, "if all aspects of the culture use this new operational mode, then the mode itself cannot articulate a specific reflection upon that culture".<sup>34</sup> But the evolution of reflexive approaches to appropriation was hardly peculiar to visual art in the first place. From the appearance of sampling and scratching in seminal Brooklyn-based hip-hop during the late 1970s, to punk rock poster and record sleeve designs, to retro fashion from designers such as Vivienne Westwood or Jean Paul Gaultier, to the impact of USA pop icon Madonna's ironic reiterations of female stereotypes, the appearance of postmodern appropriation in popular culture generally can certainly be acknowledged as variously contemporaneous with its appearance in art or architecture.

An analogous genealogy of appropriative tendencies to that already outlined in relation to the visual arts can also be applied to shifting attitudes and approaches to the use of 'sampling' in popular music. 'Sampling' is a term used in contemporary music production in order to describe the electronic appropriation of previously existing sounds, parts of songs or beats. As a complex collage of fragmented self-referencing parts, contemporary pop music, like contemporary visual art, can also be modelled as a largely self-conscious reconstruction of previously existing components or styles. Digital sampling and sequencing technology has enabled actual digital copies of parts of existing songs to be integrated into new songs. As with the visual arts, in its earliest manifestations, sampling relied upon ironic or historical distancing in order to function in its new location. Rap and hip-hop juxtaposed with the nostalgic value of Motown and funk with recontextualised quotations from white pop music. Concurrent with the arrival of photo-appropriation art in Manhattan, street culture in Brooklyn and Harlem had arrived at a similar juncture. Hip-hop had witnessed the role of the DJ and a role formerly limited to song selection, become central within live music. With the addition of digital sampling, myriad variations of hip-hop, electro and house music would exist by the late 1980s. The emergence of house music was of course largely predicated on the retro/camp value of 1970s disco.

African-American street culture has repeatedly re-established an ironic distance from white American culture by (re)appropriating it. Influential rap artists Run DMC's 1986 single *Tricky*, which explicitly sampled white rock group The Knack's 1979 No. 1 hit single *My Sharona*, provides a good example. *Tricky* consisted of clearly recognisable excerpts of *My Sharona* mixed with a simple drum machine, rapped vocals and record scratching. Run DMC are also retrospectively credited with creating a proto 'mash-up' in 1986 using Aerosmith's *Walk This Way*. Meanwhile, a different approach to sampling was being pioneered by another influential rap group Public Enemy. Although Public Enemy's music consisted largely of appropriated elements, their samples were ultimately far less immediately recognisable than those used by Run DMC. Mixing up sampled beats with ghostly samples of James Brown bass or Slayer guitar, and then layering and manipulating them to such an extent that they were less immediately recognisable, the result was more a fragmented sense of familiarity than the construction of ironic distance. Public Enemy's 1987 album *It Takes a Nation of Millions to*

*Hold Us Back*, which, excluding vocals, was constructed virtually entirely from samples of previously released recordings, was widely heralded as a ground-breaking and original work.

By the early 1990s, explicit sampling had also entered its banal phase, becoming part of an established industry of mutually agreed commercial arrangements between the original and the appropriating artist. A good example of the final banality of explicit sampling is MC Hammer's 1990 hit *Can't Touch This*, which was based entirely (but for vocals and a drum machine) on an explicit sample of Rick James' 1981 hit *Superfreak*. Recording companies were however becoming increasingly reluctant to enter the copyright minefield of sampling. To legally declare a sample was expensive and detracted from profits, but releasing a CD with uncleared samples was increasingly an invitation to litigation. Explicit sampling was first litigated in the case of Grand Upright Music Limited v. Warner Brothers Records Inc. in 1991,<sup>35</sup> which had involved a sample of Gilbert O' Sullivan's *Alone Again (Naturally)* by US rapper Biz Markey. After demanding that all royalties and court costs be returned to O'Sullivan, Judge Kevin Thomas Duffy of the New York Federal Court, even referred the matter to the USA Attorney's Office for criminal prosecution.<sup>36</sup> According to USA music industry analyst Donald S. Passman, because of this case artists "now treat sampling with the utmost care and respect".<sup>37</sup> Moreover he noted, most record companies won't release a record containing samples unless they are sure that the samples have been cleared.<sup>38</sup> Another recombinant methodology employed in popular culture is the art of 'turntablism'.<sup>39</sup> Using nothing but pre-recorded material, the turntablist creates soundscapes and musical sequences in which the original recordings are barely unrecognisable. Here, 'digging' refers to the sourcing of complementary recordings, whilst 'scratching' involves the rhythmical intermingling of pre-recorded sounds using nothing but two turntables. Q-Bert (aka Richard Quitevis), a Filipino-American DJ from San Francisco, is widely regarded as the world's most technically proficient turntablist and is especially renowned for the referential illegibility of his turntable-derived soundscapes. According to David P. Hertzberg of New York University, turntablism represents a post-reproductive transformation whereby the recorded *becomes* the live, insofar as the instrument-ness of the recorded copy is unlocked via the utilisation of turntables-as-instruments.<sup>40</sup> Subterranean referencing is also exemplified in many contemporary pop music videos. In French artist and director Jean Baptiste Mondino's video for Madonna's 2000 single *Don't Tell Me*, for example, it is uncertain whether a scene in which a cowboy on a horse is projected on a giant outdoor billboard in the desert is modelled on Richard Prince's codified caricatures of cowboys taken from Marlboro cigarette advertisements, the cigarette advertisements themselves, the generic macho cowboy fantasy found in gay disco culture, or all or none of the above. In many cases, it is finally only the artist that is specifically aware of the actual elements used. For this reason only, the author's own methodology will be mentioned.

Subliminal appropriation, a methodology nominated and employed by the author in the entire production of Australian electronic rock bands Def FX (1990–97) and Celebrity Drug Disasters, uses a specially developed database in which tens of thousands of Top 40 songs from the past four decades are categorised in terms of matching musical key and tempo properties. Data matched lists of songs are then digitally sampled, layered, resequenced and otherwise manipulated to produce new pop songs—albeit with a ghostly sense of familiarity. Lyrics and melodies are similarly chopped up

and recombined with live instrumentation also added as an additional decoy. The idea is that people will be attracted to the new compositions without actually knowing why. Several hit songs in Australia and North America have (with accompanying albums) already been recorded and released using this approach—with no copyright infringements incurred to date. Reinterpreting prototypes is nothing new in pop music. The data matching methodology represents a highly systematic and conscious approach. Explicitly appropriated elements, specifically manipulated to remain undetectable, but for a 'ghostly air' of familiarity form the core of an approach to both musical and visual artistic production. A similar approach is also used to generate visual works using prototypes sourced from mass circulated corporate logos (as opposed to the relatively lower circulation of art historical references). Documentation of this methodology formed the basis of a PhD dissertation and a series of related exhibitions. The strategy of subliminal appropriation is therefore a methodology being tested and developed across a range of media and in relationship to both critical and commercial markets.

Irrespective of whether it is finally regarded as a prescription for sterility, as a historical precondition of all art, as a deconstruction of established assumptions, or as an efficient and convenient tool of production, appropriation did not retreat simply because it became critically unfashionable. Although cynicism and irony per se now reside in a critical cul de sac, contemporary art's provisional return of subjectivity is still clearly moderated by a general suspicion of taking ideas and images at face value. In considering its gradual transition from anti-aesthetic strategy to production methodology, the related question as to whether this transition also represents part of postmodernism's more generalised collapse into the larger discourse of modernism, also needs to be addressed. In 2002, American critic Hal Foster noted that, "the recursive strategy of the 'neo' appears as attenuated today as the oppositional logic of the 'post' is tired: neither suffices as a strong paradigm for artistic or critical practice, and no other model stands in their stead."<sup>41</sup> At the same time, Foster warned that the now popular "paradigm of no paradigm" is finally no real "improvement on the old historicist determination of modernist art."<sup>42</sup> Ultimately, the concealment of appropriation simply represents part of contemporary art's larger flight from interpretation<sup>43</sup> and its desire to be purged of the cynical rhetoric of the endgame. If it is accepted that appropriation, a strategy popularised within postmodernism's projection of the end of history, has as a function of its retreat and concealment, paradoxically transformed into a silent mechanism of art's continued existence, it can of course no longer be described as postmodern.

Formerly an anti-formalist or anti-aesthetic strategy, with its wider problem field now permitted in advance, appropriation is now increasingly employed to serve quasi-formalist or aesthetic ends—a way of maintaining certain qualities without carrying unnecessary historical baggage. A former critical/ironic function of art's endgame has paradoxically been transformed into an efficient tool in the production of new art and cultural formations. Emptied of critical value, explicit strategies of appropriation are clearly dated. Like a joke that has been told too many times, value is lost in repetition. As a production tool however, appropriation remains an efficient means (when employed in conjunction with the manipulative capabilities of new digital technologies) for artists to stand consciously on the shoulders of history. Far from having disappeared, it would perhaps be more accurate to describe appropriation—as so omnipresent that it is no longer visible. Given that

melody, image and narrative have always evolved via a handing down of pre-existing melodies, images and narratives, a form of artistic production that consciously utilises appropriation, but ultimately conceals any explicitly appropriated elements in the final presentation, will perhaps finally represent the only way in which some artists can actually continue working in a world, in which many of the materials of culture are now privately owned.

#### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Jack Featherly, from Tom Moody, 'An Interview with Jack Featherly', March 2002, <http://www.digitalmediatree.com/tommoody/featherly/interview/>, (accessed 21-05-2002)

<sup>2</sup> Jeff Gibson, 'Primavera 1996', *Art & Text* 56, 1997: 92–93

<sup>3</sup> Nicolas Bourriaud, *Postproduction*, New York: Lukas & Stenberg, 2002: 13

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*: 38

<sup>5</sup> Songs chosen both for their curious similarities in key, tempo, and chord progression and amusing dissimilarities in content and context, are 'mashed' together, often using off the shelf software. Due to their libellous nature, mash ups are more often available for free download on the Internet than available for commercial sale

<sup>6</sup> In 2001, several *Star Wars* fans re-edited *Episode 1: The Phantom Menace* into various shorter online versions of the film. In 2003, an edited mash-up version of Mel Gibson's *Passion of the Christ* and Monty Python's *Life of Brian* titled *Mash-ion of the Christ* appeared on the Internet

<sup>7</sup> Using cast-off cartridges of popular games from the 1980s and early 1990s, programmers create visual environments that combine familiar nostalgias

<sup>8</sup> Culture jamming is defined as the symbolic capture of sounds or images from privately controlled daily mass media sources, which are then reassembled as self-parody and reinserted into the broadcast media with the aim of creating a circular mayhem; see [www.negativland.com](http://www.negativland.com)

<sup>9</sup> Kevin Robins, 'The Virtual Unconscious in Postphotography', in Timothy Druckrey (ed.), *Electronic Culture: Technology and Visual Representation*, New York: Aperture, 1996: 156

<sup>10</sup> Nicolas Bourriaud, *Postproduction*, New York: Lukas & Stenberg, 2002: 17

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*: 20

<sup>12</sup> Tom Moody, 'An Interview with Jack Featherly', March 2002 <http://www.digitalmediatree.com/tommoody/featherly/interview/> (accessed 21-05-2002)

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> Postmodern appropriation art's seminal moment is widely considered to be the *Pictures* exhibition curated by Douglas Crimp at Artist's Space in New York in 1977. From that exhibition, the Metro Pictures collective (which included artists Richard Prince, Barbara Kruger, Sherrie Levine, David Salle and Cindy Sherman) was formed. Crimp's 1977 catalogue essay 'Pictures', which was revised and reprinted in the influential journal *October* in 1979, was instrumental in establishing a critical context for postmodern appropriation art

<sup>16</sup> See Hal Foster, *The Return of the Real*, Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1996: xiv

<sup>17</sup> Fredric Jameson, 'Reading without Interpretation: Postmodernism and the Video-text', in Nigel Favv, Derek Attridge, Alan Durant and Colin MacCabe (eds), *The Linguistics of Writing: Arguments Between Language and Literature*, Manchester University Press, 1987: 200

<sup>18</sup> Douglas Crimp, 'The Photographic Activity of Postmodernism', *October* 15, 1980: 91–101. Reprinted in Thomas Docherty (ed.), *Postmodernism: A Reader*, Hertfordshire: Columbia University Press, 1993: 179

<sup>19</sup> Thomas Lawson, 'Last Exit: Painting', *Artforum*, October 1981: 42

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>21</sup> Rosalind Krauss, 'The Originality of the Avant Garde and other Modernist Myths', *The Originality of the Avant-Garde & Other Modernist Myths*, Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1986: 156

<sup>22</sup> Paula Marincola, "Stock Situations/Reasonable Facsimiles", *Image Scavengers: Photography* (catalogue), Institute of Contemporary Art, Philadelphia, 1982: 25

<sup>23</sup> Nicholas Zurbrugg, *Critical Vices: The Myths of Postmodern Theory*, Amsterdam: G+B Arts International, 2000: 63

<sup>24</sup> Caroline Baum, 'Photography's Vanishing Act', *The Australian, Review*, 21 February 1993: 12

<sup>25</sup> Anne Zahalka, quoted in Caroline Baum, 'Photography's Vanishing Act', *The Australian, Review*, 21 February 1993: 12

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>27</sup> Howard Singerman, 'In the Text', *A Forest of Signs: Art in the Crisis of Representation* (catalogue), Los Angeles: Museum of Contemporary Art, 1989: 155–66

<sup>28</sup> Burkhard Riemschneider and Uta Grosenick (eds), *Art at the Turn of the Millennium*, Köln: Taschen, 1999: 118

<sup>29</sup> John C. Welchman, 'Introduction, Global Nets: Appropriation and Postmodernity', *Art After Appropriation: Essays on Art in the 1990s*, Amsterdam: G+B Arts International, 2001: 39

<sup>30</sup> Rex Butler, *An Uncertain Smile: Australian Art in the '90s*, Sydney: Artspace Visual Arts Centre, 1996

<sup>31</sup> Thomas McEvilly, 'Enormous Changes at the Last Minute', *Artforum* Vol 30, Issue 2, 1991: 87

<sup>32</sup> Douglas Crimp, 'Appropriating Appropriation', *Tension* 2, 1983: 12

<sup>33</sup> Jeanne Siegel, 'After Sherrie Levine', *Arts Magazine*, Summer 1985: 141

<sup>34</sup> Douglas Crimp, 'Appropriating Appropriation', *Tension* 2, 1983: 12

<sup>35</sup> Grand Upright Music Limited v Warner Brothers Records Inc. (1991) 780 F. Supp. 182 (SDNY)

<sup>36</sup> See Donald S. Passman, 'Digital Sampling', *All You Need To Know About The Music Business*, New York: Simon & Schuster, 1994

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>39</sup> Developed from record scratching, which has its origins in hip-hop culture in the South Bronx district of New York, the term 'turntablism' was later coined by Los Angeles DJ Babu to denote the use of a record player as a musical instrument worthy of pitch and rhythm

<sup>40</sup> David P. Hertzberg, 'Turntablism and the Logic of Circulation', (working paper) New York University, <http://homepages.nyu.edu/~dph209/logic.html>, accessed 24-12-02

<sup>41</sup> Hal Foster, 'This Funeral is for the Wrong Corpse', in *Design & Crime (and Other Diatribes)*, New York: Verso, 2002: 128

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>43</sup> Howard Singerman, 'In the Text', *A Forest of Signs: Art in the Crisis of Representation* (catalogue) Los Angeles: Museum of Contemporary Art, 1989: 155–66

