THE AFTER-PARTY:
THE RETREAT AND CONCEALMENT OF STRATEGIC APPROPRIATION IN CONTEMPORARY ART

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The after-party:
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Abstract

The strategy of appropriation, a defining aspect of postmodern art during the 1980s, had significantly retreated in critical precence by the 1990s. This investigation finds that the formerly anti-aesthetic strategy of appropriation, its critical function exhausted yet not resolved, has in the wake of postmodernism become more a standard and convenient tool of artistic and cultural production than a critical strategy. In examining the manner in which various artists of the 1990s and 2000s have actively distanced themselves from the now dated category of appropriation art, either by ‘concealing’ any explicitly quoted elements in their work or by expressly engaging with more subjective critical categories (such as multiculturalism or postcolonialism), the author points to the ghostly traces of familiarity that remain as indicative of appropriation’s tacit insistence. The influence of changing critical fashions, the legacy of an exhausted yet unresolved paradigm, the illumination of ethical dimensions within postmodernism, the threat of copyright infringement claims, the collapse of an appropriation art-centred art market and the manipulative capabilities of new digital reproduction technologies are all cited as contributing motives for the conscious concealment of appropriation. Conceding that the ‘successful’ concealment of appropriation invariably makes critical detection difficult, several practical examples of the manner in which quoted elements can be disguised while nonetheless repeating some of their prototypes’ ‘qualities’ are presented in conjunction with the author’s studio practices as an artist and musician. The paradoxical ramifications of appropriation, formerly an anti-formalist device, being tacitly applied to formalist ends are considered in conjunction with the question of what it means for an artist to still want to make art in a historical moment now self-consciously situated ‘after’ the ‘end of art history’ portended by 1980s postmodernism. Finding that many contemporary artists have nonetheless resolved to carry on ‘as if’ original and authentic art is still possible ‘after’ the crisis of postmodernism, a model of art criticism that neither cynically negates nor naively accepts the idea of originality in art is explored. Using the metaphor of a belief/disbelief dichotomy, the ‘agnostic model’ is presented as a potential register of the complex dilemmas presented to contemporary art ‘after’ appropriation.
Introduction

During the late 1970s and 1980s, the strategy of appropriation became a key element in the construction of postmodernism in the visual arts, and as a consequence, became a dominant theme in much western art and art criticism of the 1980s. Against the modernist ideal of radical and autonomous originality, the postmodern appropriation artist, by removing something from its original context and ‘reframing’ it, supposedly implies an ironic or critical distance from the original via its repetition. Repeated over and over and to the point of banality however, the critical function of appropriation was by the late 1980s widely regarded as generally indicative of both contemporary art’s apparent descent into empty pluralism and postmodernism’s role in western capitalism’s continued homogenisation of difference. By the late 1980s and early 1990s, the strategy of appropriation was increasingly rejected as a dominant critical paradigm in the visual arts.

Although the historical development of appropriation art is extensively described in numerous art historical accounts, the conditions and legacies of its ‘retreat’ are less accounted for. Moreover, since most accounts of the retreat of appropriation as a dominant critical paradigm are variously connected with the perceived critical failure of postmodernism and consequently with a negation of the critical value of appropriation, they tend to ignore the extent to and manner in which the strategy of appropriation has maintained a tacit and default presence in contemporary artistic and cultural production.

This investigation demonstrates that far from declining in material application, the historically self-conscious act of appropriation has variously persisted in deliberately ‘concealed’ formations in much art of the 1990s and early 2000s. But before exploring this hypothesis as to the potential condition of art ‘after’ the critical decline of appropriation as witnessed during the late 1980s and early 1990s, a series of definitions and historical backgrounds of the practical and theoretical evolution of the strategy of appropriation in the visual arts must first be established. These histories and definitions are examined extensively in Chapter 1.
The strategy of appropriation in the visual arts is generally defined as the inclusion of hand-duplicated or mechanically reproduced copies (or components) of existing artworks, usually accompanied by a claim that the resulting artwork is that of the appropriating artist. More aggressive than allusion or citation, appropriation constitutes an explicit form of material or stylistic quotation, generally designed to critique or problematise established relationships between the idea of the original and of the copy in art. Typically involving the use of materials or elements from one historical or cultural context in another, the strategy of appropriation is also usually accompanied by an assumption that in doing so, the appropriating artist has revealed some hitherto unrecognisable irony in the original work or location. Upon recognising a visual quotation, the viewer is supposedly confronted not only with the image before them, but also with a priori knowledge of the appropriated form; this combination then creates a binary frame of reference. The process becomes more complicated if the quoted form is in itself a quotation. Appropriation art can range from the production of outright replicas to mixed-media constructions containing multiple or layered quotations. Appropriation has been utilised by artists throughout the twentieth century in order to target specific works, generic styles and the idea of art itself. As such, it has served as a vehicle for a variety of social, political and philosophical perspectives, both celebratory and critical.

Formed both as parody of and homage to earlier forms, and often re-presented both as a critique and as a simulation\(^1\) of the idea of art itself, appropriation art appeared in many guises throughout the twentieth century. Historically, the three most prevalent applications of strategic appropriation are: the removal of an object from the context for which it was produced and its subsequent placement within the context of art (commonly referred to as the 'readymade' strategy\(^2\)), the transformation of a recontextualised

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1 A term imported from the writings of French philosopher Jean Baudrillard, 'simulation' denotes the substitution of the 'real' for its 'sign'. A vague and contested idea at best, especially in application to the visual arts, the arrival of 'simulationism' (mainly in New York) during the mid 1980s is explored extensively in Chapter 1.

2 The origins of appropriation as a critical and conceptual strategy are widely attributed to French dadaist Marcel Duchamp’s idea of 'readymade' sculpture. In 1914, Duchamp inscribed a household bottle rack purchased at a shop in Paris and declared it a 'readymade' sculpture. In doing so, Duchamp claimed to have resituated the aesthetic task from principally being an act of making to being one of choosing. By claiming that an everyday object could now effectively refer to more than its own literal objecthood, Duchamp is
element, either whole or fragmented, into a compositional matrix of other found objects and deliberately created forms (such as collage\textsuperscript{3}), and the construction of generic references (or simulations) of earlier styles or forms. These three forms of appropriation can also coexist or be combined within the same work, as is the case with ‘re-photography’ (an example of ‘readymade collage’\textsuperscript{4}). A subsequent formation, that of ‘concealed appropriation’ is defined in this investigation as a form of appropriation in which the artist makes a conscious application of one or more of the aforementioned forms of appropriation in a manner that is not necessarily visible or consequential to the viewer. Unlike more typical examples of postmodern appropriation art, ‘concealed’ appropriation art is distinct from pre-appropriation art only in terms of the historical self-consciousness of the artist, not the viewer.

Although appropriation would only become a major critical issue in art in conjunction with revisionist assaults on modernism’s alleged myth of radical and autonomous originality, the reuse of motifs and earlier forms can be seen to extend through most histories of art. From ancient Greek use of Egyptian figurative architectures to the Roman assimilation of Greek conventions, to the return of classical forms during the European renaissance, to systems of artistic apprenticeship that dictated styles considered acceptable to the establishment, or to the wants of the church or royalty, before modernism, artistic reverence towards iconographic forms was largely considered standard modus operandi. The idea that appropriation might constitute a self-conscious critical act, however, is generally seen to have its origins in twentieth-century western art. This investigation will demonstrate that once art became self-conscious in relation to its repetition, post-appropriation art could not simply negate the weight of history; it could only background the continued insistence of that weight.

\textsuperscript{3} By the early 1910s, artists ranging from Pablo Picasso to Francis Picabia had started to collage fragments of newspapers or other printed materials into their paintings. The term ‘collage’ comes from the French verb \textit{coller} (to glue). The work of Picabia, who is often considered the ‘father’ of appropriation art, is often seen as that which most closely anticipated postmodern appropriation art (see Chapter 1).

\textsuperscript{4} As exemplified in the minimal mediations and re-photographic strategies of seminal New York appropriation artists Richard Prince and Sherrie Levine (see Chapter 1).
The question of how appropriation changed established ways of generating, seeing and disseminating art is multifaceted, and like the paradoxical nature of the question of originality in art, it remains contested. What is however evident, is that viewer awareness of the presence of quoted elements was a prerequisite for the interpretation of most appropriation art during the 1980s, and that by contrast, a less directly tangible sense of referential familiarity would characterise much contemporary art of the 1990s and early 2000s. Although the use of appropriation is widely apparent in much art of the 1990s and 2000s, as a centrally exhibited theme it is generally considered exhausted, and critically unfashionable. A consequence of that unfashionability is that artists had an incentive for ‘concealment’, finally constituting appropriation as more an efficient and convenient means of artistic production than a centrally exhibited theme of contemporary art. This investigation will show that as part of a general desire to avoid critical association with the (now widely considered dated) paradigm of appropriation, many artists began to actively conceal consciously quoted elements in their work.

The central assertion made by this investigation is that appropriation, historically an anti-formalist strategy (and especially associated with the formation of postmodernism during the late 1970s and 1980s), had by the late 1980s and early 1990s retreated considerably as a central critical focus or visible presence in contemporary art, and been reassigned a tacit role within the pursuit of other more fashionable critical themes. By the early 1990s, themes such as postcolonialism, multiculturalism, globalisation, the return of the ‘real’, the reconstructed ‘self’ and the disenfranchised ‘other’, all of which variously implied a partial re-engagement with the idea of subjectivity in art, would come to dominate the art world. As a consequence, the cynical implications of appropriation would take a back seat, unless used as a means with which to ‘reclaim’ identity. This investigation (in conjunction with accompanying studio works) will explore the idea that once the formerly anti-modernist and anti-formalist device of appropriation is applied, with the intention of only revealing certain ‘qualities’, and not the specific paternity of the prototype to the viewer, a paradox is set up in which quasi-modernist (or formalist) artworks are created using postmodernist (or anti-formalist) means. By identifying
legacies of appropriation that remain in effect, a model of art criticism with which to traverse the uncertain terrain of post-appropriation art might be provisionally constructed.

The purpose of Chapter 1 is to establish the preconditions of concealment in terms of the historical development of appropriation art, first by tracing the modern problem of originality and influence in art, with its theoretical precedents in eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth-century European philosophy, and second by examining the postwar convergence of French poststructuralism with US popular culture under the rubric of postmodernism. Identifying principal contributions in the evolution of appropriation art, from the work of historical avant-garde figures such as Marcel Duchamp and Francis Picabia, to the ‘first horizon’\(^5\) of postwar appropriation tendencies (as marked by pop and fluxus art of the 1960s), and the ‘second horizon’\(^6\) (as marked by the ‘pictures generation’ of New York photo-appropriation artists of the late 1970s and early 1980s), a loose historiography of appropriation art is established. In elaborating more specifically on the sequence of change that occurred within the postmodern paradigm of appropriation, a rough genealogy of postmodern appropriation art is also established. Using Australian critic and art historian Rex Butler’s nomination of the iconoclastic phase (late 1970s and early 1980s), the iconic phase (mid to late 1980s), and the banal phase (late 1980s and early 1990s),\(^7\) a fourth phase of appropriation is nominated: the concealed phase (1990s and early 2000s).

The iconoclastic phase of postmodern appropriation art consisted primarily of works that aimed to overturn established perceptions of authorship and originality, and usually involved aggressive acts of re-representation. This phase is extensively examined in relation to the ‘re-photographic’ strategies of artists such as Sherrie Levine. By the mid 1980s, many artists (including Levine) had clearly softened their stance on originality. The iconic phase can therefore be characterised less as a direct assault on the idea of originality and more as an attempt to comprehend or ‘reclaim’ it. Levine’s generic

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\(^6\) Ibid.

\(^7\) See Rex Butler’s introductory essay to his edited anthology; *What is Appropriation?*, Institute of Modern Art, Brisbane and Power Institute of Fine Arts, Sydney, 1996.
modernist abstractions of the mid 1980s are discussed as examples of iconic postmodern appropriation art. Neither defiant nor enthusiastic in attitude towards historical prototypes, much appropriation art of that period appeared to be increasingly driven by aesthetic concerns. This move away from the anti-aesthetic attitudes that had characterised iconoclastic appropriation would prove a precursor to the banal phase of appropriation, which can be characterised as an all-permitting pluralism in which the historical problem of art versus non-art was stripped of critical significance and reduced to an ornamental value. The banal phase of appropriation is noted as particularly epitomised in New York artist Jeff Koons’ porcelain reproductions of pre-existing images, such as *Ushering in Banality* (1988) and *Michael Jackson and Bubbles* (1988). In response to this climate of banality, a general retreat from explicit appropriation art was staged. By the 1990s, many works appeared to contain more of an uncertain sense of ghostly familiarity, historical references were no longer as easily recognisable and, as a consequence, the strategy of appropriation was less detectable. The concealment of appropriation is revealed to be both a product of contemporary art’s desire to purge itself of postmodern cynicism and generally indicative of art historical movement away from radical disruptions and toward patterns of subtle displacement.

Chapter 2 is concerned with identifying potential incentives for post-appropriation artists to actively avoid direct association with the paradigm of postmodern appropriation. Five principal incentives are cited as concurrent contributing motives for the retreat and concealment of appropriation: a general ‘retreat from theory’ (particularly the apocalyptic rhetoric of critical postmodernism), the illumination of ethical dimensions within postmodern attitudes to cross-cultural appropriation, the threat of copyright infringement, the collapse of an appropriation art-centred contemporary art market, and the manipulative capabilities of new digital reproduction technologies. Just as much art criticism of the 1980s attempted to reconcile certain differences between art of the 1970s and the 1980s in terms of the legacy of conceptualism,⁸ this thesis aims to reconcile

certain differences between art of the 1980s and the 1990s in terms of the legacy of appropriation.

The general resistance to theory that eventually replaced the densely rhetorical climate of critical postmodernism that had characterised much contemporary art parlance of the 1980s would understandably involve a corresponding suspicion towards the subject of appropriation. Certainly, the proliferation of criticism related to the subject of appropriation art during the 1980s had placed enormous pressure on an art movement that had come to prominence in a decade otherwise noted for its rapidly shifting trends. By the late 1980s and early 1990s, the sheer weight of critical rhetoric associated with the subject of appropriation had started to limit the continued fashionability of explicit appropriation art. That the subject of appropriation finally came to be regarded as passé is in itself testimony the extent of its critical impact. As a consequence, post-appropriation artists would be left ‘grappling with the problem of how to make material, concrete art after that moment of appropriation when everything becomes rhetorical’. ⁹ The question of how and why appropriation art, or rather its critical fashionableness, retreated in presence during the 1990s is addressed in Chapter 2:1.

The next incentive for retreat and concealment is located in an increased sensitivity towards the indigenous or non-western subjects of postmodern appropriation, a sensitivity that was especially illuminated within debates surrounding ideas such as postcolonialism, multiculturalism and globalisation during the 1990s. The central question became whether the western appropriation of images, motifs, symbols or music of marginalised cultural or ethnic groups simply represented a continuation of the grand western capitalist tradition of assimilating all difference. Since western constructions of postmodernism typically operate within an ‘inherent assumption that the playing field is level’, ¹⁰ once this assumption is considered against the needs of ‘other’ cultures, certain ethical


¹⁰ Christine Nicholls, ‘From Appreciation to Appropriation: Indigenous Influences and Images in Australian Visual Art’, Catalogue essay for exhibition *From Appreciation to Appropriation: Indigenous...*
dimensions are illuminated. This debate is especially exemplified in the case of non-indigenous appropriations of Australian Aboriginal art motifs or symbols. Although occasionally reducible to a form of cultural censorship enacted in the name of political correctness, the debate is indicted in Chapter 2:2 for actively discouraging many artists of the 1990s and early 2000s from continuing to engage in non-consenting acts of cross-cultural appropriation.

The threat of charges of copyright infringement is considered in Chapter 2:3 as an additional impetus for the retreat and concealment of explicit appropriation. Although western copyright law allows for the use of appropriated materials in limited situations under what are termed ‘fair use’ exceptions (designed to accommodate certain forms of commentary, parody or educational use), the characteristically vague critical aspirations of postmodern appropriation art are generally lost when considered against both the economic prerogatives of copyright law and the notoriously grey standards of public taste. To challenge the question of by whose standards an appropriation artwork might be considered a valid form of satire or parody is to accept the risk of copyright infringement. Although rapid technological changes in western societies in regard to the electronic transfer of images, texts, sounds and ideas have complicated the policing of copyright laws, and despite the fact that relatively few appropriation artists have actually lost cases or been forced to pay royalties and/or damages to copyright holders, their plights have nonetheless fuelled debate regarding appropriation art and intellectual property law. With precedents established in regard to infringing works by such emblematic appropriation artists such as Jeff Koons and Sherrie Levine and by ‘culture jammers’\(^ {11} \) such as San Francisco audio collagists Negativland, a strong economic deterrent for explicit appropriation is established.

\( In\)fluences and Images in Australian Visual Art (curated by Christine Nicholls), Flinders University Art Museum City Gallery, 5 March –16 April 2000, p. 4.

\(^ {11} \) With ‘culture-jamming’, privately controlled subjects of broadcast media are ‘captured’, reassembled as self-parody and then reinserted into the broadcast media with the aim of creating a ‘circular mayhem’. Culture jammers such as San Francisco Bay area-based collectives Negativland and Plunderphonics deliberately flaunt copyright as a critique of the restrictions it allegedly imposes on artistic expression. For Negativland, the result was financially crippling (see Chapter 2:3).
An additional incentive for artists of the early 1990s to actively avoid direct association with the theme of appropriation art was provided by art market shifts; this is discussed in Chapter 2:4. The restructuring of the contemporary art market that took place following its partial collapse in the late 1980s inevitably involved a general suspicion towards the kind of contemporary art associated with the inflated excesses of the 1980s. The New York contemporary art market of the 1980s had seen early and mid career (often appropriation) artists propelled towards virtual superstardom at an unprecedented rate. Following the collapse of the art market, however, appropriation art’s often-cynical yet marketable duality of critique and complicity with the idea of art as a commodity lost both favour and context. Due to the often-literal relationship between economic and critical value in art, significant reductions in the formerly inflated market value of much art of the 1980s are shown to invariably lead to a corresponding loss in critical confidence in that art. As a consequence, the relationship between art fashions and the market is identified as an additional incentive for artists of the 1990s to actively avoid association with the legacies of 1980s appropriation art.

In Chapter 2:5 the rapid evolution of digital reproduction, manipulation and communication technologies is shown to have had a considerable impact upon the contemporary artist’s ability to conceal the sources of appropriated elements. The new capabilities of such technologies as digital scanners, image manipulation software, oversize digital printers, the Internet and digital audio samplers in particular are identified as having provided artists with effective means with which to translate the formerly critical device of appropriation into a highly efficient yet tacit tool of material production. With an increased ability to distort or manipulate appropriated elements beyond recognition, it has become possible for artists to repeat certain ‘qualities’ of the original work without implying any association with the critical subject of field of appropriation. German photographer Thomas Ruff, for example, has exhibited images appropriated directly from pornographic ‘thumbnail galleries’ on the Internet. In transforming that which is already a heavily pixellated second, third, or fourth generation image (and
probably originally sourced from videotape) into an enlarged photograph,\textsuperscript{12} Ruff avoids specific categorisation as ‘an appropriation artist’. By the 1990s and early 2000s, in conjunction with the enhanced capabilities of new digital reproduction technologies, the strategy of appropriation was largely regarded as a ‘given’ tool of contemporary artistic production and generally as a secondary consideration in relation to other more visible concerns.

In Chapter 3, attention is turned to the tacit role that appropriation has played in the return and tentative reconstruction of subjectivity in much contemporary art of the 1990s and early 2000s. The post-ironic approach adopted by many artists ‘after appropriation’ seemed to serve an apparent desire to try to see the world directly once again, without feeling the need to continuously reflect on how and from where one might be looking. This desire to transcend irony emerged at a moment of critical fatigue across many disciplines, including art. A renewal of interest in the intermittent tradition of politically engaged art reflected the fact that the postmodern ‘self’ was clearly still positioned by sexuality, class and race. Art started to try once more to convince the viewer that it could attend to ‘real’ issues outside the circumscribed concerns of the art world.

These issues would provide some artists with a useful distraction from their continued use of appropriation. As part of an examination of shifting attitudes to appropriation in Australian postmodernism, the ‘post-appropriation’ work of three artists closely associated with appropriation during the 1980s, Imants Tillers, John Young and Lindy Lee, is examined in Chapter 3:1. By substituting appropriated themes related to art history for themes more related to the subjectivities of ‘identity’, artists such as Tillers, Young and Lee have managed to remain critically and commercially relevant a decade after the novelty of postmodern appropriation was considered exhausted.

As ‘successful’ strategies of concealment are invariably resistant to external critical detection, a series of hypothetical applications of the deliberate concealment of

appropriation are presented in Chapter 4. With the aim of retaining some of the selected prototypes' 'qualities', the capabilities of digital reproduction and manipulation as aids in the deliberate concealment of explicitly appropriated elements are demonstrated. In conjunction with the studio and exhibition components of this investigation, it will be demonstrated that appropriation can be secretly used as a means of generating a sense of referential familiarity that draws a viewer response not necessarily based on recognition of the specific appropriated prototype. Envisioning an image bank that might be accessible to the largest possible audience, corporate logos were selected as prototype images for an exhibition of paintings (created using the Internet, Adobe PhotoShop, oversized digital printing and overpainting) intended to accompany this investigation.

In conjunction with a second demonstration of potential applications of strategic concealment, the analogous evolution of material appropriation in popular music that followed the introduction of digital sampling technology is historicised. Initially appearing in an ironic capacity during the 1980s, by the 1990s and early 2000s, appropriation had become a tacit tool of musical production. Due variously to changing critical fashions, the threat of copyright infringement charges, and the new capabilities of digital sound manipulation technology to distort appropriated material beyond recognition, many songs soon seemed to generate ghostly sense of familiarity rather than a tangible sense of recognition. The initial impetus for this thesis was derived from a 'successful' application of concealment by the author in the form of the concept underlying Australian band Def FX (1990–97). The concept had involved creating a database with which to match the key and tempo properties of thousands of No. 1 hit songs dating from 1960 to 1990. Matching samples were then layered, manipulated and disguised to form songs, many of which achieved commercial chart positioning both in Australia and the US. This process is also explored in relation to the development of a current (as yet untitled) project due for commercial release in late 2003.

Much has already been written on the subject of appropriation throughout the twentieth century and its popular culmination in 1980s postmodernism. Rather than replicating these histories, this thesis concerns itself with an exploration of their legacies. The fifth
and final chapter is dedicated to the construction of a critical model that is potentially applicable to contemporary art 'after' the decline of critical postmodernism. Ever since the debunking of the modernist myths related to radicality, autonomy and originality, in the late 1970s and early 1980s, postmodernism has gradually moved away from direct opposition to modernism and towards attempts to interact with modernism. With the 'softening' and gradual amalgamation of such former oppositionalities as postmodernism versus modernism, anti-formalism versus formalism, anti-art versus art and strategy versus subjectivity, the so-called 'end of history' has paradoxically transformed into a silent mechanism of its continued existence. In consciously refusing to answer the questions posed by the problem of appropriation, post-appropriation artists are assumed to be essentially agnostic in regard to the existence of originality in art. The 'agnostic model' is therefore suggested as a provisional means with which to comprehend the dissemination of art produced by artists who no longer necessarily 'believe in art' but nonetheless carry on 'as if' it were still possible to do so.\textsuperscript{13} In exploring the idea that post-appropriation artists have resolved to carry on 'as if' original and authentic art is still possible, a position that neither cynically negates nor naively accepts the idea of originality in art is assumed.

\textsuperscript{13} According to artistic director of the 2002 Biennale of Sydney, \textit{The World May Be Fantastic}, Richard Grayson, although contemporary artists now realise that it is not possible to 'do grand narratives any more', they nonetheless resolve to 'pretend' that they still can. Richard Grayson, interviewed by Jacqueline Millner, 'Sydney Biennale 2002: Tripping Over a Zeitgeist', http://www.realt imearts.net/rt48/millner.html, accessed 21/06/02.
Chapter 1

The evolution of the strategy of appropriation in the visual arts

The critical value of appropriation as a strategy is typically constructed within one of two seemingly contradictory assumptions. The first and most common assumption is that the copy somehow derails the autonomy of the original simply by repeating it, an assumption that was particularly central within early postmodernism and is explored extensively later in this chapter. The second, and less common, assumption is that nothing is more distant from the original than its direct copy. In order to comprehend this second assumption it is first necessary to consider that since art is typically valued in terms of its perceived level of originality, the copy must therefore contain either no originality (if considered only against the context of the original), or conversely a form of originality that is not revealed by the material presence of the copy alone but rather in the elapsed historical and/or cultural distance between original and copy. Therefore, irrespective of whether the copy is seen as unimaginatively derivative (and therefore as an antithesis of the original), or conversely as a cleverly ironic form of originality which is privileged by its historical vantage over the original (and therefore also as an antithesis of the original), either way it can be logically defended as somehow different from the original. When both assumptions are considered together, the copy is simultaneously modelled as both a repetition of the original and its opposite. The implications of appropriation are clearly paradoxical, and once recognised, are difficult to refute or reconcile against more literal comprehensions of originality in art.

Within the seemingly contradictory (or ‘doubled’) logic of appropriation, the exact copy is often considered to be more the critical antithesis of the original the more it assumes the physical appearance of the original. Despite the degree to which an appropriated copy might resemble its original, since the copy exists together with knowledge as to what has occurred historically since the original’s conception, the argument in defence of the originality of the copy therefore generally assumes that the copy cannot help but somehow infuse an awareness of that historical distance – hence creating a binary frame
of reference. An exact 're-photographed' copy of an original photograph by US photographer Walker Evans by US appropriation artist Sherrie Levine is therefore able to be read as critically distinct from its prototype, both by its detractors, who might claim that since it is distinctly unoriginal it is therefore different to the original, and by its supporters, who might typically counterclaim that Levine’s photograph of a photograph is instead radically unoriginal, and therefore also distinct from the original. Both responses require an acknowledgment that the copy is actually an Evans by Levine. Ultimately, the strategy of appropriation is limited in its critique of originality by its own prerequisite for 'another' form of originality. A paradox invariably arises, because in order to qualify as a critique of authorship, the presence of authorship is still required. Moreover, once the operation of this paradox is self-consciously repeated, its critical proposition becomes increasingly banal, despite the fact that it is never actually resolved. Ultimately, and largely as a consequence of the paradoxical logic of appropriation, self-conscious artistic activity becomes plagued with an overarching anxiety of influence, and the presumed autonomies of art history are also retrospectively redetermined. Once widely recognised as an irreconcilable condition of artistic activity within 1980s postmodernism, the pervasive logic of appropriation could not simply be forgotten or negated by the 1990s – it could only be actively backgrounded (or rather ‘concealed’) from view.

Before proceeding with this hypothesis as to the retreat and concealment of strategic appropriation in contemporary art of the 1990s and early 2000s it is first necessary to chronicle the theoretical and practical evolution of the problem of originality in western art generally, then, more specifically, the role of strategic appropriation within the construction of critical postmodernism in the visual arts during the 1980s. This chapter will trace first, the theoretical origins of strategic appropriation in western thought generally; second, significant contributions made by ‘appropriation artists’; and third, appropriation art’s passage from an initially iconoclastic anti-modernism to its eventual ornamental banality by the late 1980s, and finally to its subsequent retreat and concealment as a central critical mechanism in the visual arts by the 1990s and 2000s.

14 Sherrie Levine’s strategies of explicit appropriation, including the act of ‘re-photography’, are examined in 1:2 (ii).
1:1 Originality and influence: a historical problem

Contemporary western conceptions of originality in art form part of a longstanding debate in western thought regarding originality and imitation that have spanned from Ancient Greece to late nineteenth-century European philosophy. Historically, western contempt for imitation has its roots in the writings of the Greek philosopher Plato and his distaste for mimesis. Plato argued that art should be banished from the republic, for since it was a copy of a copy, it was thus separated twice from the world of ideas. Later, with the philosophies of Aristotle, trust in artistic representation was somewhat restored. According to Aristotle, art was not merely a copy of the real world but more an access to the ideal world as origin. With the return of classical ideas during the European renaissance, the valuation of European culture generally would often be determined in relation to this dichotomy of original and copy. While each subsequent era would reshape this dichotomy of original and copy in its own image, it was primarily with the advent of late nineteenth and twentieth-century modernism that the debate would be predicated upon the triumph of ‘radical’ originality. Ultimately, within certain variations of the modernist avant-garde, and more generally within the popular advent of postmodernism, the focus would again turn to the idea of the copy. Many of the ideas that would later consolidate in critical postmodernism had their theoretical origins in eighteenth and nineteenth-century European philosophy.

The idea of self-reflexivity, which in western thought has its origins in eighteenth and nineteenth-century Kantian philosophy,\(^{15}\) forms an important precondition for postmodern appropriation art. Self-reflexivity refers to the formation of a line of questioning that is conscious of both the ontological existence of the questioner and his or her temporal and cultural position within that line of questioning. Self-reflexive art is therefore art that refers to its own ontological status as art: in other words, art that is about the status of art itself rather than about the world at large. Appropriation art, in that it typically aims to problematise ideas related to originality, authenticity and paternity in

\(^{15}\) German philosopher Immanuel Kant’s 1784 essay What is the Enlightenment? can be cited as one of the first explorations of the idea of self-reflexivity in western thought.
art, is therefore highly self-reflexive. A related development in eighteenth and nineteenth-century European philosophy regarded the question of artistic ‘faith’. Early nineteenth-century German philosopher Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel was among the first to suggest that romantic conceptions of art might soon no longer be possible due to a potential for loss of faith in artistic integrity.\(^\text{16}\) By the late nineteenth century, German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche had elaborated this idea into a more generalised suspension of belief in such (related) concepts as truth, god and art.\(^\text{17}\) Hegel and Nietzsche’s projections for a loss of faith in art can be seen as not only portentous of the popular consensus of postmodernism a century later, but also as a reflection of modernism’s implication that humanity was now responsible for such ‘errors’.\(^\text{18}\)

By the twentieth century, for the most part, significant theoretical developments posed in relation to the problematic of originality in art were framed in response to new cultural conditions imposed by mechanical reproduction. The impact of mechanical reproduction on art was most famously theorised by German critic Walter Benjamin in his widely cited 1936 essay, ‘The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction’.\(^\text{19}\) On the one hand, Benjamin praised the photograph as a work of art in the age of technical reproducibility because of its power to democratisate art’s production and reception, but at the same time he pointed to the potential for a loss of ‘aura’ in the traditional art object. Benjamin’s essay represents the first significant theoretical exploration of the idea that mechanical reproduction might potentially strip art of its uniqueness and aura. Benjamin used the term ‘aura’ to mark the limit of art’s reproducibility. The central question posed

\(^\text{17}\) ‘It is not without profound sorrow that one admits to oneself that in their high flights the artists of all ages have raised to heavenly transfiguration precisely those conceptions which we now recognise as false: they are the glorifiers of the religious and philosophical errors of mankind, and they could not have been so without believing in the absolute truth of these errors. If belief in such truth declines in general … that species of art can never flourish again which, like the Divina Commedia, the pictures of Raphael, the frescoes of Michelangelo, the Gothic cathedrals, presupposes not only a cosmic but also a metaphysical significance in the objects of art. A moving tale will one day be told how there once existed such an art, such an artist’s faith.’ Friedrich Nietzsche, ‘Aphorism 220’, Human, All Too Human (1878), in R.J. Hollingsdale (trans.), A Nietzsche Reader, Penguin Books, London, 1977, p. 129.
\(^\text{18}\) Ibid.
by Benjamin concerned whether the erasure of a physical distinction between original
and copy would necessarily erase all distinction as such. Ultimately, as Benjamin defined
the artwork’s aura in terms of the connection that it made with its own historical context,
he tentatively concluded that the irreproducibility of that ‘location’ was indeed the key to
its uniqueness.

1.1 (i) ‘French theory’: the influence of poststructuralism and deconstruction

The theoretical precedents for many of the ideas later explored in postmodern
appropriation art and critical theory are located in various twentieth-century
developments in (mainly French) philosophical, literary and cultural theory. Several ideas
regarded as particularly significant within the later development of critical
postmodernism are found in the models of poststructuralism and deconstruction. Later
reduced to buzzwords across a variety of disciplines, it was perhaps in relation to the idea
of appropriation in art that their comprehension was most tentatively and ambiguously
applied. Poststructuralist-inspired accounts of art history typically argued that the history
and theory of art had become subsumed within the history and theory of representations.

Poststructuralism is framed in direct relationship with its precursor, structuralism. Swiss
linguist Ferdinand de Saussure’s Course in General Linguistics (1916) described
language as a complex system composed of relationships between signs – elements
ordinarily nominated as words. The ‘sign’ refers to the relationship between the
‘signifier’, being the sound or symbol that makes up a word, and the ‘signified’, the
meaning denoted by that word or symbol. Also inspired by ideas first formulated in
Russian formalism (1916–26) and Czech structuralism (1926–40), structuralism, which
became a fashion in Paris and later in western Europe generally, reached its peak in
France between 1950 and 1970, with figures such as Michel Foucault, Roland Barthes
and Jacques Derrida. As a linguistic approach, structuralism sees language as a system in
which meaning is derived from the opposition of elements within that system.
Structuralism holds that it is precisely the differences that exist between the concrete
entities of language, rather than some internal or a priori meanings, that provide
intelligibility. These differences may be presented in an oppositional pairing of two words or as chain of several words. This method of examining the relation of entities within a system (designed to expose the manner in which meaning is imparted to the former by the latter) was applied by Claude Levi-Strauss to the field of anthropology and by Roland Barthes to the study of modern culture.

Influenced by Nietzschean ideas, poststructuralism took structuralism further, eliminating the remaining assumption that any ‘real’ meaning denoted by that word or symbol could independently exist. Once the signified dropped away, the meaning of the signifier could only be defined in relation to other related signifiers. Meaning is therefore constantly being deferred; it is never fixed. Poststructuralism is modelled not an inherent meaning embedded in a text waiting to be discovered or translated but rather in terms of sets of meanings generated both by the text and by the interaction of the text with the reader. Meaning and knowledge are thus doubly relative, dependent both upon the context of the text and the subjectivities introduced by the reader. Figures such as Gilles Deleuze, Jean-François Lyotard and Julia Kristeva all contributed significantly to the development of poststructuralism. The elimination of inherent meaning implied by poststructuralism was later widely analogised in relation to postmodern appropriation art in order to negate the idea of independent autonomy in art and therefore stress the supposed inevitability of appropriation. New York critics Craig Owens and Hal Foster were instrumental in the development of critical associations between French poststructuralism and burgeoning US postmodern theory during the 1980s.

After 1970, ‘French theory’ (also known as ‘continental philosophy’) received a new connotation in the model of deconstruction, as developed by Jacques Derrida. Deconstruction attempted to relocate signification in the spaces between texts, in terms of how they are read through and against each other. The aim was to expose that which has been suppressed in the name of coherence and therefore reveal the inevitable contradictions that underlie the logic in any argument. According to Derrida, any exposure to self-contradiction invariably becomes prey for self-contradiction. Paradox and infinite regress therefore become not flaws in discourse but rather its fundamental
condition. Later, when applied to the art object during the 1980s, modernism’s claims of autonomy were brought further into disrepute, the inevitability of appropriation was (albeit ambiguously) supported, and perhaps more accurately, deconstruction became a popular – but perhaps the most commonly misused – buzzword in much critical postmodern rhetoric.

Eventually, poststructuralism and deconstruction, together with many other related or descendant French postwar literary, psychoanalytical and philosophical currents, were grouped together within US postmodernism under loose rubrics such as ‘French theory’ and ‘critical theory’. Texts considered particularly portentous of ideas explored within critical postmodernism and appropriation art include Jacques Derrida’s ‘Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourses of the Human Discourses’ (1967),20 Roland Barthes’ ‘The Death of the Author’ (1968)21 and Michel Foucault’s ‘What is an Author?’ (1969).22 These essays variously suggested that texts or images are formed from tissues of quotations and interpretations, none of which is original, and all of which are formed from other sets of quotations and interpretations. As the specific paternities of words, ideas, meanings, interpretations and images were now seen as essentially blurred, the former autonomous distinction of authorship was consequently considered dead. What had killed the author, according to Barthes, was a decentring of language in which ‘the text’ no longer constituted ‘a line of words releasing a single “theological” meaning (the “message” of the Author-God)’ but rather ‘a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash’. Against the idea of the author as origin, Barthes argued that ‘the text’ was instead ‘a tissue of quotations’, with myriad authors, each of whom can only ‘imitate a gesture that is always anterior, never original’.

In French-influenced US critical postmodernism, the role of the author (generally considered as substitutable for artist) was soon widely considered as limited to that of producer, arranger or editor. In Foucault’s highly influential 1977 essay ‘What is an Author’, for example, the author was defined as ‘not an indefinable source of significations which fill a work’ but rather ‘a certain functional principle by which … one limits, excludes and chooses’ and finally ‘impedes the free circulation, the free manipulation, the free compositions, decomposition and recomposition of fiction’.

Meanwhile, alongside Derrida, Barthes and Foucault’s rejection of authorship, during the 1970s, expatriate Bulgarian writer Julia Kristeva (a student of Barthes) developed the model of intertextuality. The model of intertextuality referred to a textual ‘field’ in which a variety of diverse meanings overlap. Kristeva’s model, as laid out in her 1974 thesis, La Revolution du Langage Poétique (Revolution and Poetic Language), charted a three-dimensional textual space containing three ‘coordinates of dialogue’: the writing subject, the addressee (or ideal reader) and the influence of exterior texts. Kristeva described a ‘textual space’ in which a series of intersecting planes with horizontal and vertical axes fracture language and meaning within the interaction of multiple texts.

Poststructuralism, deconstruction and intertextuality were widely (yet loosely) applied in much US (and subsequently international) critical postmodernism during the 1980s as means with which to comprehend and describe the complex relationships between artworks, their historical paternities, and surrounding culture. Australian critic Chris McAuliffe offered a comprehensive account of the enormous influence of imported French theory in establishing the ideas and rhetoric later endorsed within US critical postmodernism in his thesis Ideas Recues: The Role of Theory in the Formation of Postmodernism in the United States, 1965–1985 (1997). McAuliffe does, however, also point to a series of corresponding shifts in US culture (ranging from the libertarian civil rights and psychedelic ‘counter-cultures’, pop art and minimalism of the 1960s to the

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conceptualism and seminal photo-appropriationism of the 1970s), many of which occurred contemporaneously yet separately from the arrival of French theory, and arguably in response to comparable cultural conditions. The direct formation of postmodernism in the visual arts generally can perhaps be less exclusively attributed to French poststructuralism than to its critical validation using the rhetoric of poststructuralism.

1:1 (ii) The construction of postmodernism in the visual arts

Postmodernism, a term resistant to consensual definition, generally denotes the alleged crisis that occurred across the humanities in the late 1970s and early 1980s. According to French philosopher Jean-François Lyotard, postmodernism can be characterised as an 'incredulity toward metanarratives'.25 According to UK-based expatriate German historian Eric Hobsbawm, 'all postmodernisms had in common an essential skepticism about the existence of objective reality, and/or the possibility of arriving at an agreed understanding of it by rational means' and thus a tendency to 'radical relativism'.26 According to Roland Barthes, 'to be modern' was now 'to know that which is not possible any more'.27 Postmodernism's advocates regarded modernism's seeming projection of history as a grand narrative of successive acts of heroic authorship with deep suspicion. Within postmodernism, history was seen as both over and doomed to self-consciously repeating itself. Ideas such as originality, subjectivity, gesture, autonomy, radicality and literality were considered corrupted. Distinctions between projections of reality and virtuality, rebellion and conformism, orthodoxy and heterodoxy, etc also became increasingly blurred. An intellectual climate of relativism and scepticism was reflected in a general mood that was characteristically detached, cynical and ironic in tone. An imperative to cross-traditional disciplinary boundaries was

25 'The narrative function ... is being dispersed in clouds of narrative language elements – narrative, but also denotive, prescriptive, descriptive, and so on ... Each of us lives at the intersection of many of these.' Jean-François Lyotard, The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge (1970) (trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi), University of Minneapolis Press, Minneapolis, 1984, p. xxiv.
increasingly evident, and the influence of French models such as poststructuralism and deconstruction helped project a view of the world modelled as a complex of intersecting narratives of whose truth-value is not absolute.

The Latin origin of the word ‘modern’ is *modo*. When translated directly, it means ‘just now’. ‘Postmodern’ therefore literally means ‘after just now’ – an implicitly paradoxical definition for a now apparently equivalently paradoxical theoretical terrain. Within postmodernism, the history of art is generally reduced to an infinitely extendable series of quotations, capable only of being self-consciously strung together for critical or ironic effect, and as an illumination of the impossibility of autonomous originality.

Postmodernism assumes that there is nothing behind the surface, that art is all surface, with nothing that might be called ‘depth’ behind it. Denial of depth is the key to postmodernism, which aims at a contemptuous dismissal of modernism’s suggestion that the surface is merely a symbol and symptom of depth, rather than something to be taken at face value. Where the modernist artist wants the viewer to see a depth behind the surface, the postmodern artist assumes that everything that is needed and can be known can be seen on the surface. Seminal Russian abstractionist Wassily Kandinsky epitomised the modernist position when he declared: ‘I’d like people to understand at last what there is behind my painting … and not to be satisfied to notice that I use triangles and circles.’²⁸ Andy Warhol, on the other hand, anticipated a postmodern attitude when he claimed: ‘If you want to know all about Andy Warhol, just look at the surface of my paintings and films and me, and there I am. There’s nothing behind it.’²⁹

The term ‘postmodernism’ entered wider parlance via architecture, when in 1979, US architect Philip Johnson, an advocate of the international style of architecture, placed a Chippendale top on a skyscraper he had designed for AT&T. In doing so, Johnson had

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reportedly offered a material example of the thesis already set out by Robert Venturi in his 1972 essay *Learning from Las Vegas*, which had called for a return to the vernacular forms and historical or popular cultural references that modernist architecture had banished from buildings as part of its allegedly elitist plight for autonomy.\(^{30}\) Meanwhile, prominent US literary critic Harold Bloom had addressed the idea of ‘an anxiety of influence’ in poetry. Bloom described a phenomenon in place since Homer, in which every poet bears as a burden the weight of those who have come before.\(^{31}\) For Bloom, a strategy of explicit borrowing might ‘accomplish a reversal in which lateness will become a strength rather than a weakness’.\(^{32}\) Soon various parallels between French theory, architecture and literature were being drawn within the art world in relation to the work of burgeoning New York photo-appropriation artists such as Sherrie Levine and Richard Prince, artists who had already received the attention of New York-based critic and curator Douglas Crimp. Crimp’s seminal 1977 catalogue essay ‘Pictures’, which was revised and reprinted in the influential journal *October* in 1979, was particularly instrumental in establishing a critical context for the first generation of New York appropriation artists, which included such artists as Levine, Prince and Barbara Kruger. By the early 1980s, the term ‘postmodernism’ was widely used within the visual arts as a means with which to legitimise the strategy of appropriation.

Crimp, together with seminal US critics such as Rosalind Krauss, Craig Owens and Hal Foster, saw postmodernism’s model of pastiche as an effective critical device with which to help derail modernism’s insistence on deeper hermeneutic meaning in art. The dialectic of modernism in art, particularly as extracted by critics such as Clement Greenberg and Michael Fried, was now characteristically modelled as a ceaseless search for stylistic variation in painting that had stretched from Manet to Frank Stella. Postmodernism in the visual arts was served as a direct assault upon the alleged dogmas of Greenbergian

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modernism. Postmodernists characteristically saw the act of appropriation as necessitating an inextricable and self-conscious realisation that every artwork or text was made up of other previous artworks and texts, therefore effectively negating modernism’s claims of radical autonomy. This assault on modernism, in various incarnations, and coupled with various consortiums of imported French intellectual currents, ranging from psychoanalysis to linguistics, would soon splinter into myriad formations upon a theoretical terrain which remains resistant to generalisation.

By the early 1980s, much of the critical rhetoric applied to postmodernism in the visual arts was already established in the related fields of literature and architecture. Despite the apparent slipperiness of this new theoretical terrain, the rubrics of French theory and critical theory would nonetheless become virtually synonymous with postmodernism in much criticism. Owens and Foster in particular were advocates of a postmodernism critically engaged to the project of derailing modernism’s projected autonomy and universality. The work of artists such as Sherrie Levine, Richard Prince, Barbara Kruger and Cindy Sherman in particular was counted as critical due its apparent capacity to question fixed notions of originality, subjectivity or universality. The strategy of appropriation was regarded as critical where it ‘deconstructed’ media forms by adopting its forms and techniques. Owens’ essay ‘The Allegorical Impulse: Towards a Theory of Postmodernism’ (1980) represents an early example of an argument that supported a linkage between poststructuralism and postmodernism. Soon, essays related to poststructuralist criticism and appropriation art appeared in leading US art journals such as *October, Art Forum, Art in America, Arts Magazine, Vanguard, Flash Art* and

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33 In the late 1940s and early 1950s, US critic Clement Greenberg helped shift the projected centre of the art world from Paris to New York. As an ardent promoter of a small and initially obscure group of New York-based abstract expressionist artists (most famously including Jackson Pollock), Greenberg created a critical context and corresponding marketing platform for the work of the abstract expressionists that placed them at the perceived forefront of modern art. Greenberg’s influence began to crumble in the 1960s as his doctrinaire version of art history began to clash with the emergence of art movements such as minimalism, pop art and conceptual art, all of which variously evacuated the importance of aesthetics and introduced seemingly alien elements such as text. Pop art in particular had revelled in the kitsch, mass culture and popular taste from which the Greenberg thought he had saved art.

Artnews. October in particular became a forum in which many key critical ideas related to the problematic of appropriation, together with English translations of French poststructuralist texts, first found a sustained critical audience. Essays such as Crimp’s ‘On the Museum’s Ruins’ (1980) and ‘Appropriating Appropriation’ (1983), Benjamin Buchloh’s ‘Parody and Appropriation in Francis Picabia, Pop and Sigmar Polke’ (1982) and ‘Allegorical Procedures: Appropriation and Montage in Contemporary Art’ (1982), together with the Foster edited anthology, The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture (1983) all helped validate the emerging critical weight of postmodern appropriation art.

New York was now the centre of a critical discourse in the visual arts regarded as radically anti-hierarchical and anti-authorial. Postmodern critical theory had evolved into an anti-canon that endlessly reiterated the alleged death(s) of modernism. Death became a widely used metaphor with which to signify the suspension of belief, distortion of historical sequence, anxiety of influence, and general evacuation of confidence in authentic cultural production that had pervaded contemporary art. This ‘death’ of art, painting, originality, authorship and modernism was often presented as a mock nihilist celebration of the encroachment of the final conflagration itself. Western culture was apparently dead, yet still living – endlessly repeating itself inside its own tomb. For Foster, ‘Painting must die as a practice so that it might be reborn as a sign.’ This metaphor of ‘death’ or ‘the end’ of art was not intended to indicate a literal stop to painting or sculpture. Instead, what was at issue was the continued possibility for formal innovation and historical significance within these mediums.

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35 The highly influential journal October was established by US critics Rosalind Krauss, Jeremy Gilbert-Rolfe and Annette Michelson in 1976.
38 Benjamin Buchloh, ‘Allegorical Procedures: Appropriation and Montage in Contemporary Art’, Artforum 21, September 1982, pp 43–56. This essay was considered a seminal article on appropriation in New York during the 1980s.
39 Hal Foster, ‘Signs Taken for Wonders’, Art in America, June 1986, p. 86.
Critical projections of the ‘end of art’ during the 1980s were as varied as definitions of postmodernism. US philosopher Arthur Danto, for example, had called for the ‘end of art’ as a form of philosophical investigation but had nonetheless maintained that art would still continue, now free from the necessity of philosophical inquiry. For Danto, art had entered a new era of pluralism. Now that history was over, everything was permitted. According to Danto, Andy Warhol’s perfection of the question ‘What is art?’ during the 1960s had enabled post-Warholian art to be free to do whatever – the role of art as a form of philosophical inquiry was therefore now complete. Other projections of the ‘end of art’ were far gloomier. At the pessimistic end of the spectrum was the argument presented by marxist-influenced theorists such as Fredric Jameson and critics such as Victor Burgin. For Jameson, the appearance of art that borrowed promiscuously from history was yet another symptom of the homogenising forces already rooted in the proliferation of consumer capitalism. Capitalism as an economic and cultural system, argued Jameson, obliterated national and psychological borders, fragmenting the individual psyche and turning active citizens into passive consumers. Moreover, thought Jameson, such a fragmentation produced a world dominated by the twin conditions of pastiche and schizophrenia. Jameson’s description of pastiche, drawing heavily upon Barthes’ ‘Death of The Author’, suggested that the ease with which contemporary artists or writers gaze over history is evidence of a disconnection from the self. Jameson concluded that ‘in a world in which stylistic innovation is no longer possible, all that is left is to imitate dead styles, to speak through the masks and with the voices of the styles in the imaginary museum’.

A growing perception that art had arrived at a cul-de-sac in terms of the continued legitimacy of its avant-garde practices, coupled with the new technological and discursive

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42 Fredric Jameson, 'Postmodernism and Consumer Society', in Hal Foster (ed.). *Postmodern Culture*, Pluto Press, London, 1985, pp. 111–25, and 'Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism', in
influences of postmodern culture at large, had by the mid 1980s brought many
established valuations of art as a critical force into disrepute. The chess term ‘endgame’
was, on occasion, employed as a metaphor with which to describe this defeated feeling of
historical impasse. Some critical conceptions, however, were not so much about the
death of modernism as about its continuation within postmodernism. Critics such as
October cofounder Rosalind Krauss and Harvard Professor of the history of art Yve
Alain Bois, for example, saw that modernism had long employed a process of
reinventing itself by repeating itself. Consequently, thought Bois in particular, the idea of
death was not necessarily always pathological, for it had still produced a history of art.
For Bois, the process of mourning had been a significant part of the activity of painting
throughout the twentieth century. Just as Russian painter Alexander Rodchenko had
declared in 1921 that he had painted the ‘last painting’ (three primary monochromatic
panels), art history had retrospectively re-credited him with having painted the first last
painting. Art history could therefore also be modelled, within postmodernism, not on a
single final apocalyptic death, but rather as a series of ends.

For many critics, 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 of course no longer based on the
literal idea of resemblance, but rather on modes of representation. The strategy of ‘re-
photography’ (the act of taking a photograph of an existing photograph), as exemplified
by seminal photo-appropriationists Sherrie Levine and Richard Prince, was upheld as an

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43 The term ‘endgame’ was even used for the title of the exhibition *Endgame: Reference and Simulation in
Recent Painting and Sculpture*, which was shown at the Institute of Contemporary Art Boston in 1987.
44 See Rosalind Krauss. ‘The Originality of the Avant-Garde: A Postmodernist Repetition’, *October* 18, 
45 See Yves Alain Bois, ‘Painting as Model’, *October* 37, Summer 1986. Reprinted in Yves-Alain Bois,
Task of Mourning’, first appearing in the exhibition catalogue for *Endgame: Reference and Simulation in
46 ‘This is the end of painting. These are the primary colors. Every plane is a plane and there will be no
more representation.’ Alexander Rodchenko is referring to his works of 1920–21, *Hanging Construction*
important critical device with which to rethink established ideas regarding representation. Photography itself had long been regarded as a modern emblem of mortality, and therefore the idea of re-photography was seen as a natural extension of the central metaphor of apostasy found in much postmodern critical theory. According to Crimp's 1980 essay 'The Photographic Activity of Postmodernism', with the advent of photo-appropriation, art's 'aura' had reduced its presence to that of 'a ghost'. According to Scottish US-based critic Thomas Lawson in 1981, 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'. At the same time, however, 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.

Perhaps the most readily applicable critical correlation between photography and postmodernism was founded on German theorist Walter Benjamin's 1936 observation that since 'the photographic negative' can generate 'any number of prints ... to ask for the "authentic" print make no sense', for all mechanically reproduced images are equally exchangeable. Since, by the 1980s, the photograph (and its descendant image reproductive technologies) had clearly become the dominant domain of the image in capitalist society, any critical model that supported the idea of a 'world of copies without originals' would naturally be directly applicable to photography. Since the photographic image formed the core of advertising and mass media systems, it was therefore also seen as the most appropriate vehicle with which to deconstruct and disseminate its ideologies. Critics such as Douglas Crimp, Hal Foster, Rosalind Krauss, Thomas Lawson, Abigail Soloman-

(Surfaces Reflecting Light) and the triptych Pure Colors: Red, Yellow, Blue. Quoted in Benjamin Buchloh, 'From Faktura to Factography', October 30, Fall 1984.


49 Ibid.
Godeau and Craig Owens all saw photography as both an exemplar of reality mediation and as the correct antithesis to the mythical autonomy of the modernist avant-garde. For Soloman-Godeau, for example, ‘(v)irtually every critical and theoretical issue with which postmodernist art may be said to engage in one sense or another can be located within photography’.50

The often implied primacy of theory over practice suggested within much ‘serious’ postmodern art criticism would ultimately come under fire within other often more ambivalently ‘popist’ projections of postmodernity. Poststructuralist theory might be a useful critical tool with which to disseminate postmodern cultural conditions generally, but it was certainly not necessarily a precondition for postmodern art. There were also important ideas taken from novels, science fiction, media, film, rock and drug culture that were often not given the intellectual credentials expected of such a serious project as postmodern criticism. At any rate, the strategy of appropriation had clearly existed as a conceptual strategy in avant-garde art well before poststructuralism developed an intellectual currency. McAuliffe, in his aforementioned thesis, has described an essentially contested rather than consensual relationship between French poststructuralism and US postmodernism during the 1980s. According to McAuliffe, cultural phenomena such as the general disruption in fixed ideologies and political hegemonies that had occurred had since the 1960s (as indicated by the proliferation of free speech and civil rights movements, feminism, psychedelic consciousness, student activism, gay rights and anti-war protests, etc), coupled with the proliferation of image consciousness in media, advertising and rock music, had all contributed to the later formation of postmodernism without necessarily being directly ‘informed’ by academic anti-formalist criticism. Anti-formalist criticism, appropriation art and postmodern culture can be seen as contemporaneous responses to shared historical conditions. McAuliffe concludes that US postmodernism emerged ‘from a limited and eclectic anti-

formalism’, which then consolidated around poststructuralism but later ‘split into critical and commodified streams’.  

It was in the initial identification of a split between critical and commodified streams that critics such as Hal Foster had first defined their assault on the latter. For Foster, ‘commodified postmodernism’ had become a ‘neoconservative’ formation, ‘defined mostly in terms of style’, and ‘a return to narrative, ornament and the figure’.  

Against this ‘neoconservative’, pluralist and ‘style’-oriented stream of postmodernism Foster identified a ‘postmodernism of resistance’, whose principal role was to ‘deconstruct modernism and resist the status quo’. According to Foster, ‘radical postmodernism’ was a discourse that had formed a critique of representation via poststructuralism. Ultimately, however, despite the best efforts of critics such as Foster, it would be formations of postmodernism that were ‘attached to the more palatable notion of style’ that would grow to dominate the discourse, for even the pretence of radical disjunction itself was ultimately reducible to style. Once appropriation, a strategy initially conceived as a critical response to formations in mass culture, was visibly being re-employed by advertisers and media agents in order to give their campaigns a cool contemporary detachment, the critical value of the strategy of appropriation could be said to have travelled full circle. Just as Crimp had earlier outlined a potential distinction between ‘material’ and ‘stylistic’ appropriation, noting that the former could less easily be arbitrarly applied to a new context, the act of appropriation clearly contained any critical value only within a specific critical discourse. For Crimp, postmodern

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54 Ibid., p. 420.
appropriation was finally 'just another academic category – a thematic – through which the museum organises its objects'.

1:1 (iii) Baudrillard and the 'end of the real'

A central idea imported from outside art criticism in order to further critically legitimise postmodern appropriation art was French philosopher Jean Baudrillard’s model of the sign as a 'simulation' of the real. Again borrowing from the language of structuralism, Baudrillard maintained that the conventional relation of sign (the word) to signified (the object in the real world to which the word refers) was now reversed. Therefore, he concluded, the 'territory no longer precedes the map ... it is the map that precedes the territory'. It was with this idea that postmodern artists would entertain the slippery notion that the imitation might also now somehow precede the original in art. Since the referent in postmodern art was no longer 'nature', but rather a closed system of prefabricated signs, many critics therefore saw Baudrillard’s model as also applicable in artistic representation. Baudrillard’s essays ‘The Precession of Simulacra’ and ‘The Orders of Simulacra’ would exert such influence in the visual arts (despite Baudrillard’s own flat refusal of the tenability of their application to art) that a quasi art movement, loosely nominated as simulationism, developed as a consequence in New York during the 1980s. In Baudrillard-influenced postmodernism, the idea of a 'floating signifier' refers to the notion that the meanings established through language are innately fluid, indeterminate, shifting, subject to constant slippage and spillage. The bond between the signified (the concept) and the signifier (a form that represents that concept) is seen as arbitrary. The identity of the sign is therefore relational and a function of differences, oppositions and contrasts between signs and the system (or language) in which the signs operate.

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60 The mini-movement often called simulationism is examined later in this chapter.
The word ‘simulacrum’ refers to a shadowy likeness or image of reality, and in Baudrillard’s model of simulation, was now substituted for reality itself. Baudrillard called for the ‘end of the real’, both in social and political spheres, contesting that individuals could now no longer distinguish reality from an image of it, and, moreover, that images were now substituted for what they had once described or represented. For Baudrillard it was ‘no longer a question of imitation, nor of reduplication ... (but) of substituting signs of the real for the real itself’. Accordingly, he claimed, the mass media had neutralised reality by ‘substituting signs of the real for the real itself’. Accordingly, the mass media were ‘murderers of the real’, and late capitalism was an age in which ‘truth, reference and objective causes have ceased to exist’. Therefore, he concluded, ‘the whole system’ had become ‘weightless’, and was now ‘no longer anything but a gigantic simulacrum – not unreal, but a simulacrum, never again exchanging itself for what is real, but exchanging in itself, in an uninterrupted circuit without reference or circumference’. Once applied to the visual arts, Baudrillard’s ideas often amounted to little more than a clever means with which to critically justify the reduction of art to the borrowing of detached decorative surface or style.

In Baudrillard’s model of late capitalist society, signs and images only appear to have a connection with political cause and effect, and therefore have effectively replaced the realities they once denoted. Therefore, he argued, the utilitarian application of any object or action was now effectively substituted for its connotation as a symbol, and consequently, all politics were thus reduced to being merely a play of symbols. Now that the sign had become detached from what it had signified, there could no longer be any real distinction between true and false, good and evil, or subject and object. For many postmodern appropriation artists, this reduction of the real then implied that any distinction between critique and complicity with commodification was now effectively

62 Ibid., p. 4.
63 Ibid., p. 10.
64 Ibid., p. 6.
65 Ibid., pp. 10–11.
meaningless. As keen Baudrillardian advocate, New York artist Peter Halley, had claimed in 1986: ‘Along with reality, politics is sort of an outdated notion.’

The terms ‘simulation’ and ‘simulacrum’ soon became virtual synonyms in art criticism. Despite the fact that Baudrillard’s model of simulation was difficult to interpret without assuming his specialised language, it nonetheless became extremely fashionable in contemporary art parlance from Australia to New York. Various adaptations of Baudrillard’s model would help to catapult the careers of New York-based artists such as Peter Halley, Haim Steinbach, Ashley Bickerton, Allan McCollum and Jeff Koons. Halley’s flat day-glo paintings of cells and conduits, for example, were intended as a visual representation of Baudrillard’s model of the circulatory and mechanistic systems of postindustrial late capitalist society. Without its corresponding theoretical justifications, however, much appropriation art of the 1980s appeared simply to be reduced to an empty decorative function. The role of representation in art was now seen as a mere re-representation (or simulation) of pre-existing representations of reality.

1:2 The appropriation artists

Having traced the philosophical and theoretical underpinnings of the problem of originality in art criticism, this investigation will now trace a corresponding genealogy in terms of significant historical contributions made by artists to the evolution of appropriation art. The separation of theoretical from artistic precedents implied by the structuring of this chapter corresponds directly with the difficulties often experienced in attempting to critically reconcile the terrain of postmodern critical theory with the subjectivities invariably presented in artistic practice itself. Postmodernism’s challenge to formalist modernism is often presented as a ‘historical double’ of the ‘pewar avant-garde recovered by a postwar avant-garde’. Given the many art historical accounts that

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already chronicle various passages of influence and recovery through French, German and Russian avant-gardes of the early twentieth century to postwar US and European minimalist, pop, fluxus and conceptual movements, this investigation will move more specifically to identify artists considered most influential in relation to the development of postmodern appropriation art.

1:2 (i) Duchamp versus Picabia: legacies of the historical avant-gardes

While artists have long tipped their hats to their predecessors, prior to the European avant-gardes of the early twentieth century, artists had rarely placed the act of quotation at the intellectual centre of their work. The explicit use of appropriated elements in artistic production effectively started during the European cubist movement (c. 1906–25). By the early 1910s, some artists had started to collage fragments of newspapers or other printed materials into their paintings. The term ‘collage’ comes from the French verb _coller_ (to glue). One early example of this process can be seen in Pablo Picasso’s _Still Life with Chair Caning_ (1912), in which a piece of oilcloth printed with a caning pattern was adhered directly to the canvas. It is the work of French artist Francis Picabia, however, that perhaps most closely anticipates postmodern attitudes towards appropriation. Often considered the ‘father’ of appropriation art, Picabia was an exemplar of collage. Picabia’s _L’Oeil Cacodylate_ (1921), for example, which combined the medium of oil on canvas, painted text, collaged photographs, postcards and other printed paper materials, certainly appears more analogous to the stylised anti-formalism characteristic of much postmodern appropriation art than it does to the overt radicality of his modernist contemporaries. By emphasising the stylistic rather than the critical aspects of the strategy of appropriation, Picabia’s work appeared to imply a level of self-conscious compliance with the inevitability of its institutional fate. In short, Picabia’s ‘subtler’ level of radicality appeared to lack the heroic conceit of overt radicality. Before

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68 '...for the avant-garde to be recovered, it first had to be lost, and this breach, which began with its suppression by the Nazis and Stalinists in the 1930s, was deepened with the trauma of war and holocaust in the 1940s.' Ibid., p. 130.
69 Just as Manet had borrowed compositions from Raphael, Picasso had paid homage to Rubens and Velázquez, and neo-classical architecture was openly indebted to classical architecture, the notions of quotation, homage, parody and influence were certainly not entirely novel in art generally.
elaborating more specifically on Picabia's significance in terms of the distinction between critical and complicit approaches to appropriation, the role of influential French dada artist Marcel Duchamp must first be considered.

Figure 1. Francis Picabia, *L'Oeul Cacodylate*, 1921. Figure 2. Marcel Duchamp, *Fountain*, 1950 (replica of 1917 original).

The origins of appropriation as a critical and conceptual strategy are widely attributed to Duchamp's introduction of the idea of 'readymade' sculpture. In 1914, Duchamp, whose stated aim was to put art 'at the service of the mind', inscribed a household bottle rack purchased at a shop in Paris and then declared it to be a readymade sculpture. In doing so Duchamp claimed to have resituated the aesthetic task from principally being an act of making to instead being one of choosing. By claiming that an everyday object could now effectively refer to more than its own literal objecthood, Duchamp is widely considered

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70 'Dada' was a collective term for a loose formation of European anti-art movements that first emerged in the neutral city of Zurich in 1916 during the First World War. Various exiled writers, poets, artists and musicians from both sides of the conflict had initially focused their centre of collective activity at the infamous Cabaret Voltaire. Typical proceedings at the Cabaret Voltaire included the performance of poetry, noise music, and automatic writing together with innovative costume and prop design, all with the variously stated aim of inducing critical thought via the notion of absurd juxtaposition.

as having extended the role of representation and allegory in art. By 1917, Duchamp had submitted a regular mass-produced men’s urinal for exhibition. Duchamp later reproduced *Fountain* in miniature porcelain in 1938 for his *Box in a Valise*, a leather case containing miniature replicas of his work. New full-scale versions, made for purposes of exhibition and sale, followed in 1950, 1963 and 1964. These reproductions have been considered problematic by some critics because they seem to compromise Duchamp’s own oft-stated goal of not repeating himself. For other critics, Duchamp’s repetition effectively premeditated postmodern art’s own distinction as constituting a self-conscious repetition of the gestures of modernist avant-garde art. For Duchamp, art was like a game of chess (of which he was also an enthusiast) in which he had already played the endgame move. By 1960, Duchamp saw the readymade as ‘the most important single idea’ of his career, and the inextricable precondition of all art: ‘Even if you mix two vermilion together, it’s still a mixing of two ready-mades.’

Variously interpreted in postwar art criticism, Duchamp’s idea of readymade sculpture is now regarded as one of contemporary art’s most significant precursors. According to most accounts of the evolution of anti-aestheticism and the function of the abject in art, Duchamp is widely rated as the ‘exemplar and model’. Other accounts, such as that of Belgian critic Thierry De Duve, have modelled Duchamp’s strategy as neither strictly aesthetic nor anti-aesthetic, but rather ‘meta-aesthetic’. According to De Duve, the idea of the ‘meta-aesthetic’ relates more specifically to the question of how aesthetic judgments are made. The idea of ‘indifference’ to personal taste was paramount to Duchamp. As a consequence, he saw utilitarian objects as best suited for his readymade project because they were yet to be prescribed an aesthetic status in the order of things. Once a transferral of aesthetic status is accorded to that object, it will thereafter become signified within the

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72 The original urinal of 1917 survives only in a photograph by Alfred Steiglitz.
74 Ibid.
discourse of art. It is for this reason that Duchamp's urinal has become as much of an
icon of modernity as has any other legacy of the historical avant-gardes.

Despite the enormous (albeit belated) impact of Duchamp's readymade strategy on
postwar art currents ranging from fluxus to minimalism, conceptualism and
postmodernism, it would still, arguably, be Picabia's approach to pastiche that would for
certain critics provide a more neatly applicable precedent for postmodern appropriation
art. As radical critiques of the institution (when 'successful') are inevitably seen to
eventually cohabit with (or replace) the institution, their very radicality will inevitably
become trivialised. Picabia's position, though conservative when first compared with
Duchamp's, is finally more comparable with postmodernism's negation of implied
radicality. Picabia's approach was complicit with the institution in that it did not
necessarily lose critical consequence within the institution. Similarly, postmodern
attitudes to appropriation are often characterised by a realisation (in advance) that 'all
works made within the compass of the present art institutions will inevitably find their
life and their resting place within those institutions', and that 'the presumed autonomy
of the signifying practice of high art is, eventually, institutionalised both culturally and
socially in the museum'. Duchamp's strategy might seem more consequential upon
initial inspection, but as noted by seminal postmodern critic Benjamin H.D. Buchloh in
1982, because Picabia's approach was more concerned with a subtle juxtaposition of
mimicry and reification within established systems of visual mediation, it can be
considered as more precursory of postmodern attitudes. According to Buchloh,
Duchamp's strategy 'obliterates the ideological framework that determines the
manipulation of the code', while Picabia's 'remains within the conventions and
delimitations of the discourse while manipulating the codes in a parodic fashion', and
is, as a consequence, 'the more potentially successful position for artists to assume'. In
short, where Picabia had recontextualised art as art, Duchamp had attempted to

78 Benjamin Buchloh, 'Parody and Appropriation in Francis Picaba, Pop and Sigmar Polke', Artforum,
79 Ibid.
80 Ibid.
recontextualise non-art as anti-art. Of course, in time, Duchamp’s model of anti-art was to be widely considered as art anyway.

1:2 (ii) The first horizon: pop art

Perhaps the most widely recognised sea change in the evolution of the strategy of appropriation occurred in the late 1950s and 1960s with the advent of pop art in the US (paralleled in France by nouveau réalisme and in Germany by capitalist realism).\(^{81}\) Where avant-garde modernisms had assumed a relatively limited appeal, pop art assumed a broader appeal precisely because its images were familiar to a broader population. It did not require any comprehension of abstraction or symbolism, or require \textit{a priori} art history understanding. For German theoretician and art historian Peter Bürger in 1984, the moment of pop art represented the ‘first horizon’ of postwar appropriative tendencies in western art (the ‘second horizon’ being the moment of appropriation art during the late 1970s and 1980s).\(^{82}\) While important precursors are cited in Richard Hamilton’s 1956 collage \textit{Just What Is It That Makes Today’s Home So Different, So Appealing}, Stuart Davis’ 1920s collages of Lucky Strike cigarette packaging and Jasper Johns’ neo-dadaist appropriations of everyday symbols such as flags, the term ‘pop art’ itself is commonly attributed to Lawrence Alloway’s February 1958 essay for \textit{Architectural Design} titled ‘The Arts and the Mass Media’. Archetypal pop art works of the early 1960s include Andy Warhol’s silk-screened repetitions of Campbell’s Soup labels and serialised simulations of Brillo Boxes, Roy Lichtenstein’s comic strip simulations and Claus Oldenburg’s enlarged, stylised sculptures of everyday objects such as clothes pins and ice bags. Such was the wider cultural impact of pop art that following pop art’s showcase exhibition ‘The New Realists’ in New York 1962,\(^{83}\) even high-circulation mainstream publications such as \textit{Time, Life} and \textit{Newsweek} ran cover stories.

\(^{81}\) The German variation known as ‘capitalist realism’ (the term is attributed to Gerhard Richter) debuted in a show of the same name at the René Block Gallery in Berlin in 1964.


\(^{83}\) The exhibition ‘The New Realists’ was held at New York’s Sidney Janis Gallery in November 1962.
In a manner analogous to the later postmodern moment of appropriation art, many artists of the pop art moment appeared to have merged a complicity with the mass-produced imageries and commercialised cultures of postwar capitalism together with a critique of the claims of radical gesture and autonomy paraded by Greenbergian abstract expressionism. The apolitical positivism of pop art encouraged the general population’s interest. Pop art in turn influenced the popular culture from which it had derived its inspiration, influencing styles in advertising, product design, film, fashion, television and rock album cover design. The Beatles, for example, commissioned album cover designs from pop artists such as Peter Blake and Richard Hamilton, while Andy Warhol designed album covers for The Velvet Underground and The Rolling Stones. Modern art had never experienced such a depth of cross-pollination. While pop art’s convergence of institutional complicity with the anti-gestural act of pastiche was also reminiscent of Picabia’s approach, it was not critically linked with the historic avant-gardes to the extent that postmodern appropriation art was. Even Warhol, pop art’s biggest figure, claimed in 1985 that he had never heard of Picabia during the 1960s. Warhol did, however, adopt a similar strategy of manipulating codes from within the confines of the discourse. Consequently, many postmodern theorists have cited Warhol’s approach as best reflecting the contradictory allures, banalities and superficialities present in western capitalist culture. Employing a mechanistic and non-gestural process in which mechanically reproduced images of popular origination were repetitively transferred by silk-screen onto canvas (enabling the production of multiple series containing slight variations), Warhol’s art appeared ironically detached and generally ambivalent as to whether it was finally critical of or compliant with capitalist culture.

Since the 1960s, art history can be said to have largely traded critical categorisations in terms of specific disciplines for conceptual genealogies.\textsuperscript{86} The legacies of the historical avant-gardes, and pop art, together with minimalism, the specifically anti-disciplinary fluxus movement\textsuperscript{87} and conceptualism all helped set the stage for disciplines ranging from photography to painting, film, video and sculpture to later coexist under the moniker of appropriation art during the late 1970s and 1980s. It was therefore the conceptual commonality of the strategy of appropriation itself that would enable the categorisation of otherwise disparate groups of artists: any artist who employed pastiche, quotation, irony, mimicry and allegory in their work during the late 1970s and 1980s could be defined as an appropriation artist. Moreover, strict disciplinary distinctions would prove incompatible with the quick turnover of pre-existing styles that would characterise postmodernism in the visual arts.

1:2 (iii) The 'second horizon': the pictures generation

Many artists of the late 1970s and early 1980s no longer considered the idea of rebellion via a course of literal negativity an option. Anti-aestheticism and the dematerialisation of the art object had featured in critical art discourses since the late 1960s, appearing in various guises, ranging from minimalism to conceptualism to performance art, and in avant-garde art since the early twentieth century. Art was increasingly suspected to be incapable of speaking from a radically opposed position. Instead it appeared to have descended into a self-conscious and ultimately self-effacing repetition of the now institutionalised avant-garde. For the critically and historically aware artist, art's only activity now appeared to be in its very repetition. By the late 1970s in New York, this emerging crisis of influence would see the arrival of an art movement loosely canonised within an inquiry into the logic of images, originality and the status of the art object. For

\textsuperscript{86} 'Something unprecedented in the whole history of art surfaced in the sixties: it had become legitimate to become an artist without either being a painter, or a poet, or a musician, or a sculptor, novelist, architect, photographer, choreographer, film-maker, etc. A new "category" of art appeared — art in general, or art at large — that was no longer absorbed in the traditional disciplines.' Thierry De Duve. \textit{Kant after Duchamp}, October Books, MIT Press, Cambridge, Mass., 1996, p. 377.

\textsuperscript{87} The fluxus movement constituted a loose consortium of artist/performers, rallied by chief protagonist George Macunis, that attended anti-disciplinary 'happenings' and performances.
Peter Bürger in 1984, this moment marked the ‘second horizon’ of post-war appropriative tendencies.  

The first wave of appropriation art to appear in New York during the late 1970s was closely associated with the arrival of French poststructuralism. The critical validation of photography that soon emerged borrowed much of its rhetoric directly from imported French theory generally. Photography was soon considered the most ‘correct’ medium with which to enact the deconstruction of art, primarily because it was historically thought of as operating with a high degree of fictionality, both despite and due to the preconditions of its material production. The critically related problems of originality and authenticity appeared to be no better exaggerated than in a mechanical medium that contained no specific original. According to Rosalind Krauss in 1981, the inherent multiplicity of photography was in itself that which tested the notion of authenticity, ‘for to ask for the “authentic” print makes no sense’. For Krauss, with photography, ‘there are only multiples in the absence of an original’.  

The strategy of re-photography in particular was presented as a critically significant intervention, with the homogenising impact of reproducible image culture more generally. The chief aim of re-photography was generally to somehow reveal a legitimising ironic distance from an original photograph. Meanwhile, in order to avoid being seen as having lost any autonomy within the institution of art (as was the fate of the original image), a total complicity with the institution was feigned from the outset so as to paradoxically maintain the original status of the copy. Once armed with this cynical strategy of compliance with the institution, it was then possible to present appropriation art as a valid critical response to modernist claims of radical and autonomous originality.  

Appropriation art’s seminal moment is widely considered to be the ‘Pictures’ exhibition which was curated by Douglas Crimp at the alternative non-profit gallery Artist’s Space

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in New York in 1977. From that exhibition, the ‘Metro Pictures’\textsuperscript{90} collective (which included artists Richard Prince, Barbara Kruger, Sherrie Levine, David Salle and Cindy Sherman) was formed. These artists, according to the majority of accounts, would come to epitomise the first wave of postmodern appropriation art in New York during the early 1980s. Crimp’s original catalogue essay for ‘Pictures’, which was later updated and reprinted in the influential journal \textit{October} in 1979, laid out much of the critical groundwork. With the assistance of French theory, critics such as Crimp, Foster, Owens, and Krauss continued to contextualise their burgeoning models of postmodern critical theory against the work of these artists. The ‘Pictures generation’ was initially introduced to the wider New York art world through the work of Sherrie Levine, whose rephotographed images were first shown at the new Metro Pictures Gallery in 1981. Metro Pictures Gallery soon became known as the home base of this new stable of artists. Metro Pictures artists were heralded as ironically affirming the decreasing autonomy of high art in a historical period otherwise marked by the inflation of cultural capital. For some critics, these artists appeared to question the integrity of journalistic images that claimed to speak in the name of social democracy or justice in a cultural climate where similar images were used in advertising campaigns. For others, the act of re-photography questioned the ontological status of art itself. According to Crimp, Levine’s rephotographed photographs enacted the ‘presence of \textit{dêjà vu}’ and the idea of ‘nature as representation’.\textsuperscript{91}

\textsuperscript{90} ‘Metro Pictures’ was initiated by former director of Artists Space Helene Winer, three years after she had first asked Crimp to curate \textit{Pictures} at Artist’s Space. From the original \textit{Pictures} exhibition (which had included Sherrie Levine, Troy Brauntuch, Jack Goldstein, Robert Longo and Philip Smith), Winer started the official Metro Pictures Gallery roster.

Levine’s appropriations provided many critics with a convenient vehicle with which to project their ideas regarding repetition, originality and authorship, primarily because they were extremely explicit in their use of appropriation. Levine declared her appropriations as her own and made no attempt to disguise her sources. By the early 1980s, Levine’s rephotographed images of photographs by Walker Evans and Edward Weston were widely considered as emblematic in the battle against the modernist myth of autonomy, because according to many critics, her photographs of pre-existing photographs appeared to operate closest to originality’s ground zero and pushed the distinction between original and copy to its most logical extreme. Where other photo-appropriationists such as Richard Prince had cropped, rearranged or juxtaposed images taken from outside the discourse of art (such as advertising or popular culture), their work therefore being more easily interpretable as a ‘composition’, Levine simply appeared to be re-representing the work of another artist as her own. For Levine, it was ‘no more remarkable to make photographs of a photograph’ than it was to ‘make a photograph of a nude or a tree’.\footnote{Sherrie Levine, quoted in Jean Siegel, ‘After Sherrie Levine’, \textit{Arts}, Summer 1985, p.142.} It was the very explicitness of Levine’s strategy, and its specific application to the language of art history, that for many critics saw it best legitimise critical postmoderism’s attack
upon the ‘myths’ of modernism. In order to remain critical, it had to remain clear that Levine’s work was a copy of an original. Explicit viewer recognition of the implied distance and displacement of the original was crucial to any reading of Levine’s work. Perhaps in order to guarantee explicit viewer recognition as to the original sources of her appropriations, Levine would include the name of the original artist in her own title (for example, *After Walker Evans, After Edward Weston* or *After Duchamp*). The re-framing of the original was effectively determined as the only content of the copy.

According to New York curator/critic Paula Marincola in 1983, Levine’s strategy of re-photography presented a copy that was now ‘doubly distant from its original’ and therefore a ‘ghost of a ghost’. The original, after all, was still a photograph, a copy without an original, and therefore a fictional representation of reality. Many of Levine’s critical justifications offered deference to Walter Benjamin’s aforementioned 1936 essay ‘The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction’ in order to argue that since there could never be an exact repetition of the actual context in which a work originally appears, consequently, the literal existence of plagiarism was somehow negated. In addition, the ‘aura’ of the original was now both co-inhabited and retrospectively redefined by the subsequent existence of the copy. The copy defined the existence of the original, while the original defined the existence of the copy. Again, Levine’s work served best as a clear embodiment of the problem of originality, and therefore of postmodernism.

Much of the heated rhetoric that surrounded Levine’s early work was charged with an iconoclastic denial of authorship. This rhetoric was also often coupled with Lacanian psychoanalysis in order to play Levine against her male historical prototypes. Some feminist accounts of Levine’s work even claimed that in appropriating the male eye, she had also somehow appropriated the male desire to master the world, and its reconstitution

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94 ‘Even the most perfect reproduction of a work of art is lacking in one element: its presence in time and space, its unique existence at the place where it happens to be.’ Walter Benjamin, ‘The Work of Art in the
as art. Modernism was therefore flatly conceived as a projection of the male self upon the world. To reflect that male self back onto itself was therefore to somehow negate it. Ultimately, however, it would prove difficult to maintain any specific sociological or politicised agendas within the anti-narrative and depoliticised climate of postmodernism. As a result, Levine made little more than passing reference to potential feminist interpretations of her work. For Levine, 'because I am a woman', appropriating male images became 'a woman's work' by default.95

Levine regularly spoke of her admiration for the story "Pierre Menard, Author of Don Quixote", published by the Argentinean writer Jorge Luis Borges in 1956.96 The story subsequently became required reading in many art schools during the early 1980s. Written in a dry and scholarly manner, it recounted the literary career of twentieth-century Frenchman Pierre Menard, whose crowning achievements were the ninth and thirty-eighth chapters of Part One of Miguel Cervantes' Don Quixote. The reader is invited to read two identical passages from Cervantes' great seventeenth-century novel and Menard's obscure twentieth-century French symbolist 'version'. Menard's goal is outlined as not making a copy but rather making a new version that would coincide word for word with the original of 300 years earlier. The narrator satirically refers to the greater subtlety of Menard's text, presented by an ironic and anachronistic writer who had arrived at an antediluvian style despite his knowledge of the intervening centuries. Borges's point (being that the meaning of a book changes when the reader imagines a different author) provided an alternative illustration of Roland Barthes' aforementioned claim that 'the birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the author'.

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According to Levine, despite the fact that the texts are identical, ‘the second is almost infinitely richer’. 98

It was perhaps then understandable that in such a climate many artists and critics of the early 1980s would be gullible to the appearance of an extension of Borges’s satire in the form of a mock anthology of conceptual art called Idea Art, supposedly originally published in 1973. Idea Art contained a review of the one and only show of a fictitious Hank Herron, an artist who supposedly created exact copies of paintings by artist Frank Stella. Writing under the pseudonym of Cheryl Bernstein, the reviewer claimed that Herron’s work, in ‘reproducing the exact appearance of Frank Stella’s entire oeuvre, nevertheless introduces a new content and a new context ... that is precluded in the work of Mr. Stella, i.e. the denial of originality’. Herron and Bernstein were later revealed to be a pseudonymous parody of the consequences of conceptualism. For many critics and theorists, Levine’s re-photographed series After Walker Evans and After Edward Weston existed not as images present on a wall but rather as evidence of a strategy. As Levine’s critical legitimacy, for the most part, stemmed from her challenge to established ideas regarding authorship, autonomy and originality, once those challenges were examined to the point of cliché, critical regard for Levine’s work would start to follow suit.

Levine would, however, continue to justify her interest in the early moments of modernism as merely a symptom of her own anxiety of influence as an artist. Repeatedly claiming that she did not decide ‘not to paint expressionistically’, rather that the issue was more to do with her inability to make ‘that activity feel authentic’, 99 Levine’s prototypes were clearly selected so as to most explicitly illuminate her intended status as a copyist. Her target artists were characteristically male and generally historically renowned for their formalism and authenticity. Levine clearly wanted to make it abundantly clear to her audience that she was an appropriation artist. Historical US photographer Edward Weston

(a consistent target of Levine’s strategy of re-photography) can certainly be seen as antithetically concerned with his work’s singularity and resistance to manipulation. Weston, writing in 1965, had clearly laid out his own regard for the integrity of his photographic images:

The extreme fineness of (photographic) particles gives a special tension to the image, and when that tension is destroyed – by the intrusion of handwork, by too great enlargement, by printing on rough surface, etc.– the integrity of the photograph is destroyed. 100

Levine clearly showed little respect for the supposed integrity of Weston’s original photographs when she simply re-photographed them from posters advertising an upcoming Weston retrospective in New York. The continuous spatial and tonal variations of analogue images may not be exactly reproducible upon close inspection, but most viewers were nonetheless unable to discern any degradation in Levine’s copies. Only once aware that they were in fact copies of Weston’s work might the viewer assume that Levine’s images were of a lower technical quality than the original. It is probably no coincidence that of all fine art photographers, Levine chose to appropriate the work of someone so specifically concerned with the immutability of the medium of photography itself. Ultimately, Levine’s strategy itself was also infinitely reproducible, yet lost impact with each repetition. Once constituted as representing originality’s ground zero, Levine literally had nowhere to go that would not be read as a retreat by her critics.

Levine's next rounds of appropriations were fixed on such vastly dissimilar modernist figures as Egon Schiele, Kasimir Malevich and Joan Miró. Her selections were again claimed to both underscore the disparate nature of twentieth-century painting and expose inadequacies in the monolithic canons narrated by modernist accounts of art history. In contrast with such claims, however, an emerging attitude within postmodernism generally that art history now simply constituted an image bank, free and ready for the taking, was translating into the emergence of a postmodernism in which appropriation was regarded more as a stylistic convention than as a critical strategy. Levine, perhaps aiming to confuse this distinction, turned to more visceral means of reproduction – the reintroduction of the hand. She was soon prolific in her reproduction of scaled down versions of drawings and watercolors by modernist masters. While it had become relatively straightforward to problematise the idea of originality in relation to a mechanically reproduced image, it was not quite as straightforward when it came to handmade copies. Regardless of whether this strategy confused any distinction between appropriation as style and critique, explicit viewer recognition of their status as copies was still prerequisite to their legitimisation. Despite the fact that works such as Levine's 1985 watercolour Untitled: After Vasily Kandinsky now implied a limited form of subjectivity (by virtue of the introduction of the hand), Levine still left the viewer armed with a priori knowledge of the paternity of the copy. Without a priori knowledge, how
could anyone recognise the difference between a Sherrie Levine and the prototypes? There is certainly no way of easily determining the difference simply by looking.

By the mid to late 1980s, even for Levine, the strategy of appropriation had started to be considered merely a tool for the pursuit of other ends. But for Levine in particular, the legacy of appropriation could not be easily shrugged off. Perhaps more than any other artist of the 1980s, Levine’s work was doomed to being reduced to a strategy by most critics. How could she expect people to look for image content beyond that of the prototype when her work was already considered emblematic of originality ground zero? Since the continued significance of Levine’s oeuvre relied so explicitly on the currency of criticism related to anti-modernism, it would therefore ultimately suffer the same negations as that criticism. Levine’s fate as a typecast appropriation artist was now sealed, and (as evidenced in Chapter 2) would provide a significant deterrent to explicit appropriation for the next generation of artists. Despite repeated efforts to the contrary, Levine’s work continued to be typecast as the work of an ‘appropriation artist’. Often hopelessly railing against the continual ‘reduction of the work to its strategy’, Levine now ‘wanted to insist that there was something to look at’, an ‘object’, or ‘image’ that ‘must be taken into account’.  

In a move that aimed to defer and confuse the relentless critical reduction of her work to a now played-out strategy, Levine shifted in the mid 1980s from appropriating specific works to simulating generic movements. Moving on from hand-copying specific compositions by artists such as Schiele, Malevich, Picasso or Miró, Levine turned to the production of generic modernist paintings. Simulating the stripes and forms of generic moments in the history of abstraction, the idea of repetition and critical distance implied by the copy and singularity by the original became further blurred. For Levine, the content of her new work had become ‘the discomfort that you feel at the déjà vu that you experience’. Justifying her retreat from a more literal occupation of originality’s

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ground zero, Levine was now starting to claim that it's 'even more troublesome when something's almost original'.

Levine had given her endgame some provisional relief. Appropriation was now one step closer to its concealment. Critical response to Levine's generic abstractions was now focused on the idea that they presented a copy without an original. They simulated the 'look' of various moments in modernist abstraction without grounding specific historic details. Levine later admitted, however, that despite her continued portrayal as an emblem of anti-aesthetic iconoclasm, on another level her work had started to indicate more subjective concerns. The legacy of her textbook association with anti-aesthetic appropriation would continue to limit subjective analysis:

In my work, it was originality that got repressed, that did not get discussed. There was a reading of my work, and I collaborated in it, that expunged all poetry from it. It's something I regret.  

Levine's next series of paintings was based on the patterns generically attributable (within the language of modernism) to the grid. Generally interpreted as repeating the modernist tradition, in which the painting is seen to repeat the surface on which it is painted, Levine's checkerboard series made no specific reference to individual works or artists; rather, they referred to generic representations of abstraction. Historically, the grid had long represented modernist painting's desire to be free of any reference beyond the formal restraints of the support on which it sits. Levine aimed once again to discredit modernism's quest for autonomy by simply repeating its quest. Levine's abstractions did not refer exclusively to their surface or support (as their modernist counterparts had aimed to), but instead mocked their modernist counterpart's desire for exclusivity in itself. Levine's surfaces were now plywood, mahogany or lead, her mediums were casein or wax, her scale was again smaller than her modernist prototypes, and her colourations were atypical (see, for example, the flat orange and pink used in Medium Check 12). The overall effect was one that was both familiar and unfamiliar at once. To the typical

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103 Ibid.
admirer of modernist abstraction they were at once seductive and disquieting. Aesthetic gratification nonetheless appeared a suspect reaction to many critics. Although they were still framed as pictures of other pictures, they were not copies of specific pictures. Levine’s strangely familiar abstract paintings appeared far more ambiguous and playful than her earlier iconoclastic assaults upon modernism. Her attitude to the idea of originality had clearly softened. It was now even starting to become evident that appropriation art was not necessarily resistant to formalist or aesthetic interpretation.

Figure 6. Sherrie Levine. *Medium Check 12*, 1985.  
Figure 7. Sherrie Levine. *Untitled (Lead Checks: 6)*, 1987.

Another significant artist to emerge from the seminal ‘Pictures’ moment of New York-based appropriation art was Richard Prince, who is widely regarded as one of appropriation art’s most consistent and provocative practitioners. Arguably less of a textbook anti-aesthete from the outset, Prince’s approach to the problematic of appropriation was arguably less formulaic than Levine’s from the outset. In 1977, while clipping editorials for staff writers at *Time–Life* magazine, Prince had cropped four images of living room ensembles from *The New York Magazine* and re-photographed them. The resulting ‘gang’ of images, although re-photographed like Levine’s, nonetheless evoked a limited subjectivity by virtue of deliberate cropping and

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arrangement. Declaring himself as more editor than artist, by the early 1980s Prince’s strategies of re-photography (for critics such as Crimp and Foster) came to represent the ground zero of collage. Crimp and Foster, in particular, had lauded Prince’s use of re-photography as an exemplary example of minimal mediation with the appropriated form. Prince’s approach to re-photography was subtly distinct from Levine’s from the outset. Since Prince’s work characteristically consisted of cropped part(s) of images selected from outside the discourses of art history – whereas Levine’s more often consisted of iconoclastic appropriations of ‘whole’ artworks – it was therefore more easily engaged on aesthetic and sociological levels. Less specifically associated with a textbook anti-modernism from the outset, Prince would ultimately be less typecast as an appropriation artist than would Levine. For Prince, appropriation would become a tool within the pursuit of broader thematics, rather than remaining the focus of a critical strategy, as it had for Levine. This difference is evident in a 1982 artist statement from Prince:

... it (re-photography) shouldn’t be mistaken for something that’s exclusively theoretical or for that matter programmatic ... It’s a means to produce, a mode of production.  

Freed from an exclusive relationship with the critical problematic of appropriation, Prince’s work could use appropriation to address more subjective concerns. In locating codified images of American masculinity such as the cowboy, the drunk, the salesman, or the superhero via appropriative process such as editing and ironic displacement, Prince’s work was just as easily theorised alongside the generic female sexual caricatures exhibited by fellow Metro Pictures artist Cindy Sherman as it was alongside Levine’s, despite the fact that Sherman’s images were actually staged rather than appropriated. Prince’s best-known photo-appropriation work was his Cowboy Series (a thematic to which he returned throughout the 1980s), which was based on cropped and recontextualised images of the cowboy originally pictured in Marlboro cigarette


\[106\] Cindy Sherman’s *Film Stills* series had depicted the artist in generic 1950s caricatured sexually vulnerable poses (such as nervously smoking a cigarette or looking pensive in downtown Manhattan) that were essentially simulated ‘stills’ from generic non-existent films.
advertisements. Other appropriation-based works by Prince were also cropped in a manner that was resistant to specific meaning. In Untitled: Joke (1986) for example, Prince appropriated a cartoon from The New Yorker which depicted two men drinking at a bar together with the caption, ‘I’m missing and presumed dead.’ After enlarging and reprinting the cartoon, Prince cropped and reproduced six fragments in which neither the whole cartoon nor its caption wholly appeared. Prince often described his artistic enterprise as existing somewhere between generative and editorial functions, and his authorial presence as ‘almost me’. Unlike Levine’s stricter anti-formalism, Prince’s more ambivalent attitude towards ideas such as originality and authorship was arguably ‘agnostic’ in terms of its level of specific critical adherence.

![Figure 8. Richard Prince. Untitled (Cowboy), 1980–84.](image1)

![Figure 9. Barbara Kruger. Untitled (I Shop Therefore I Am), 1987.](image2)

Another seminal Metro Pictures artist to emerge from the world of commercial images was Barbara Kruger, who, like Prince, also appropriated images from magazines and advertising. Working in the style of a graphic designer (her previous occupation), Kruger

107 Interestingly, by the early 1990s, Marlboro cigarette advertisements in Germany had themselves employed similarly cropped images of the ‘Marlboro man’, without any explanatory logo, text, or actual product depicted. This kind of circulatory movement serves to exemplify postmodernism’s central assertion that any critical strategy of counter-representation will return to feed dominant systems of representation.


109 The notion of adopting an agnostic attitude towards problematics such as originality and authorship is explored in Chapter 5.
juxtaposed short bands of text with appropriated images, which, unlike Prince's more gaudy contemporary images, generally consisted of black-and-white images from the 1920s to the 1960s. Her bands of text generally consisted of adaptations of clichés and famous quotations, designed to interrupt and interact with the grainier photographic selections. The band of text used in Untitled (I Shop Therefore I Am) (1987), for example, consists of an adaptation of the famous Descartes quote, 'I think, therefore I am.' In the case of Kruger's photo-appropriations, the (albeit ambiguous) inclusion of sociologically applicable theamics (such as feminism), helped distract much critical attention from the more specifically art historical problematic of appropriation in art per se. Kruger uses appropriation as a tool within the pursuit of broader critical ends than the thematic of appropriation itself.

The photo-appropriation work of the 'Pictures Generation' is widely regarded as representing a seminal moment in the evolution of postmodern appropriation art. New York's accepted precedence was, however, refuted by many critics and artists from outside the canonical art world 'centre' of New York. Australian critic Graham Coulter-Smith, for example, points to seminal Australian appropriation artist Imants Tillers' Conversations with the Bride (1974), which juxtaposed a reproduction of historical Australian painter Hans Heysen's Summer with fragments of Marcel Duchamp's The Large Glass. For Coulter-Smith, Tillers' work indicates an entirely independent evolution of postmodern-styled appropriation art.\(^{10}\) Tillers, in referring to his later Heysen reproduction (Untitled: 1978), also made a series of observations that appeared to partly anticipate the critical logic applied to New York's photo-appropriationists. Tillers had noted in 1978 that his mechanically reproduced copy of a printed reproduction of a Heysen original, when itself later reproduced, was indistinguishable from any other reproduction of Heysen's original. Therefore, thought Tillers, any reproduction of Summer could now purport to be both a reproduction of Heysen's original Summer and of Tillers' copy, for there was now 'one signifier but two signifieds'.\(^{11}\) By the early 1980s,
Tillers, together with fellow Australian painter Juan Davila, had instigated a distinctly Australian approach to appropriation (which is examined in Chapter 3). Tillers’ and Davila’s work was also retrospectively applauded by English US-based critic John C. Welchman in 2001 as possessing ‘a more unstinting, rambunctious sense of humour, irony and critical wit’ than the more ‘correct’ school of New York photo-appropriation artists.112 Ultimately, though, despite anything outside the ‘centre’, it would primarily be the relationships forged between French theory, the work of photo-appropriationists such as Levine and Prince, and the writings of critics such as Crimp and Foster that would lay the most direct groundwork for the incarnations of appropriation art that would dominate the New York art world during the 1980s.

1.2 (iv) The ‘return of painting’

With a few notable exceptions, the iconoclastic anti-aesthetes of seminal postmodernism had rejected painting as hopelessly corrupted by a historic dependence on the art market and the mythology of radical autonomous originality. Moving, as Hal Foster put it, ‘from production to reproduction’, the anti-aesthetes saw text, photography and film as the ‘correct’ tools of a critically engaged postmodernism. Meanwhile, an initially smaller faction suggested that painting’s more specific historical relationship with now discredited ideas such as gesture, authenticity and originality attributed to it an ironic and antithetical value with which it might further discredit modernism. According to critics such as Thomas Lawson, the ‘appropriation of painting as a subversive method’ could potentially enable it ‘to place critical aesthetic activity at the centre of the market place, where it can cause the most trouble’.113 Unexpectedly, via appropriation, painting would start to recapture some of the critical centrality it had lost to sculpture, installation and performance art during the late 1960s and 1970s.

The ‘return of painting’ witnessed in New York during the early 1980s is widely attributed to the 1960s work of German painter Sigmar Polke (along with Francis Picabia). Rejecting the idea of individual style or thematic coherence, Polke had combined imagery taken from sources as varied as pop art, abstract expressionism and the baroque. One of the first US painters to rework Polke’s approach was David Salle. Salle’s juxtaposition and fragmentation of elements in a painterly manner was also reminiscent of the work of 1960s US pop artist James Rosenquist. Thomas Lawson praised Salle’s paintings in 1981 for their ‘dead, inert representation of the impossibility of passion in a culture that has institutionalised self-expression’.\textsuperscript{114} Similarly, New York-based critic/curator Lisa Phillips saw Salle’s work as ‘embracing the intensity of empty value at the core of mass-media representation’.\textsuperscript{115} But for Salle, appropriation was less a critique of originality and more a tool of production; ‘originality is in what you choose … and how you choose to present it’.\textsuperscript{116}

\textsuperscript{114} Ibid.
The eclectic images that appear to float unanchored across the surface of Salle’s large canvases were heralded as detached and independently meaningless signifiers at play in some kind of aestheticised anti-narrative. Contrary to these (more typical Baudrillardian-styled) interpretations of Salle’s work during the 1980s, some feminist critics argued that his use of nude and headless female bodies and detached genitalia was less an ambivalent deconstruction of representation and more a specific objectification of women which therefore reinforced misogyny. New York critic Eleanor Heartney disagreed with such literal feminist interpretations, declaring that ‘the body in Salle’s work offers no privileged access to a network of imagined relationships’ and furthermore that it seemed ‘somewhat strange, given the work’s determinedly non-narrative – if not in fact anti-narrative – manner, that the issue of pornography or of pornographic representation in Salle’s painting comes up with such persistence’.¹¹⁷ Salle repeatedly downplayed the literal significances of his work’s paternities: ‘To focus on where the images come from … distorts their life together in a painting.’¹¹⁸

Painting soon reappeared in myriad mini-movements, with styles ranging from neo-expressionism to neo-geo and new abstraction appearing and disappearing in the New York art world with unprecedented frequency during the 1980s. Artists such as Mike Bidlo, for example, paid homage to modernist icons ranging from Pablo Picasso to Jackson Pollock. Bidlo described his works as simply formalist re-representations of the originals; at first glance they appeared to be exact copies, but on further inspection differences became discernable.¹¹⁹ According to Bidlo, as Pollock’s contribution to art had consisted simply of a formalist advance, ‘anyone could paint a convincing Pollock

simply by copying his technique'. Bidlo soon set himself the task of systematically working through a repetition of modernist art history, removing its only constraint – the necessity of choice. At the crux of postmodern painting's legitimisation was the necessity of explicit viewer recognition of the self-conscious act of mimicry that had produced the work. As another artist that had long engaged a similar approach to Bidlo, Elaine Sturtevant, put it: 'in order for the work to function, you have to recognise the work immediately'. Largely as a consequence of this requirement for overtly recognisable paternities, which was characteristic of much postmodern painting of the early to mid 1980s, by the late 1980s and 1990s many artists would find that they now needed to start actively avoid using recognisable appropriated elements in order not to be belatedly categorised as a textbook postmodernist. This impetus to actively disassociate from textbook postmodernism by deliberately concealing easily recognisable appropriated elements is examined in Chapter 2.

1:2 (v) Towards banality: neo-neo and simulationism

One of the first New York-based movements to appear after the initial critical success of the photo-appropriationists was loosely nominated as neo-geo. Neo-geo, neo-futurism, neo-pop, neo-conceptualism, new abstraction, simulationism and commodity criticism were arguably less art 'movements' in their own right than diminutive art trends with which to exploit the cynical promotional strategies of loose consortiums of artists and their respective dealers. From mimicking modernist abstraction to exhibiting readymade or especially manufactured objects that 'simulated' the decor of slick consumer commodities, postmodern irony had started to become as reified, overfamiliar and predictable as the sincerity it reported to mock. Sherrie Levine's generic stripe and checkerboard abstractions, Peter Halley's day-glo cell paintings, Ross Bleckner's neo-op images and Philip Taaffe's ironic neo-sublime paintings, according to Hal Foster, were all examples of a post-historical recycling of signs now traced with a 'passive

121 In interview with Dan Cameron, 'A Conversation: A Salon History of Appropriation with Leo Castelli and Elaine Sturtevant', in Flash Art 143, November/December 1988, pp. 76–77.
pessimism’, a signature ‘reduction to style’ and a defeatist opportunism that had finally become ‘more nihilistic than dialectical’. ¹²² Being ‘neither modern abstract painting nor (post) conceptual appropriation art’, neo-geo et al. indicated a general shift away from questions relating to representation, reproduction and copying and towards those relating to simulation and the subsequent production of ‘simulacra, not copies’. ¹²³

Despite appropriation art’s initial appearance as a form of anti-aesthetic critique (and finally to the consternation of critical postmodernists such as Foster) postmodernism was eventually adjusted in order to defend the return of the object. This was the object staged not as a personification of formalist, critical or aesthetic concerns, but rather as a simulacrum of those concerns. Carefully positioned as simultaneously complicit with and critical of art’s commodification, simulationist artists repositioned the Duchampian gesture, formerly regarded as deflating art’s status as a commodity, into somehow re-conferring Benjamin’s ‘aura’ upon the object. Simulationism was not about producing objects that looked like art; it was about producing objects that looked like the products of commercial culture. Presented as a symptom of the inherent emptiness of late capitalist culture, simulationist criticism was infused with traces of Marxist rhetoric mixed with poststructuralism. Critical reflections on the apparent inevitability of commodification, both from the point of view of neo-Marxist criticism and from a more generalised and celebratory sense of apolitical complicity, were widely used in order to endorse the strategies of simulationist artists.

Selling art was now not only an artist’s economic prerogative; it was also a critically defensible activity. Moreover, for much of this second generation of New York postmodernists, it was only as a commodity that art could actually fulfil any critical function. The act of appropriation simply constituted a self-conscious representation of the inextricable conditions to which art is inevitably subjected during its processes of commodification and acculturation. Calculated emptiness aside, it was arguably much of neo-geo and simulationist art’s uncanny resemblance to renowned modernist abstract

¹²³ Ibid.
paintings or sleek decorative commodities that allowed it to easily enter capitalism’s distribution and marketing systems. The market was no longer the enemy. Critically distanced from the consumer culture from which he or she benefited materially, the cynically detached postmodern artist could now have it both ways.

New York critic Eleanor Heartney noted in 1985 that appropriation art, ‘far from being an irritant’, had now ‘become high chic’. By the mid 1980s in New York, loose references to simulationism, appropriation and commodity criticism surrounded the exhibition and sale of everything from the latest running shoes to liquid decanters and vacuum cleaners. Production by mechanical repetition (as predicated in 1960s minimalism and pop art) had become almost a prerequisite. Art was considered incapable of heightened emotional awareness, transformation, heightened sensory cognition or anti-institutional critique. Ideas such as desire, beauty or invention were considered inferior to information. Heavily promoted by their dealers, young, recently emerged yet now high-profile artists were now mass producing ‘simulations’ of bright decorative kitsch, which, despite its underlying premise of deep intellectual despair and cynicism, was being sold at an unprecedented rate. The strangely subjective allure of this contradiction was particularly epitomised in the attitude of Ashley Bickerton:

Figure 11. Haim Steinbach, *ultra red #2*, 1986.

Figure 12. Allan McCollum, *Perfect Vehicles #6*, 1986.
I want to create objects that are shamelessly beautiful at the same time that they invest in the utter bankruptcy of all possibility. But then again, I think this is a possibility that creates its own poetic dynamic, that is capable of producing its own optimism.\textsuperscript{125}

Bickerton attempted to reflect his ambivalent romance with the products of consumer culture in a series of objects ranging from footlockers to pinball machines, objects that exaggerated the generic physical attributes of the artwork as commodity to the point of parody. Many of Bickerton's works were fitted with large brackets for hanging, and even included neatly stored packing materials and digital counters for recording minute-by-minute price increases. Another New York-based artist, Israel-born Haim Steinbach, simply substituted the production of objects that simulated commodities for 'real' commodities. Steinbach, whose work most closely resembled a retail environment, was particularly attracted to objects that already possessed a fetish or kitsch value. Objects such as lava lamps, designer toilet brushes, running shoes and digital alarm clocks were, according to Steinbach, particularly imbued with the seductions of consumer desire. With a view to melding the ambience of the commercial gallery with that of a department store, Steinbach placed his newly purchased consumer products on brightly painted shelves which mimicked the work of 1960s minimalist Donald Judd. According to Steinbach, shopping had replaced art as an act of self-expression.

Another New York-based artist to epitomise the strategy of commodity simulation was Allan McCollum. McCollum's \textit{Plaster Surrogates} series of the mid 1980s consisted of cast plaster objects, all individually framed, dated, numbered and signed by the artist. McCollum's objects possessed all the essential defining characteristics of a traditional work of art. They were originals, signed by the artist, and exhibited a consistent style. Yet they also gave the impression of industrial mass production. Another series of McCollum's \textit{Surrogates} had consisted of identical mass-produced shiny black

\textsuperscript{125} Ashley Bickerton in interview with Dan Cameron, \textit{NY Art Now}, Summer 1985, pp. 19, 32.
monochromes on white passe-partout. His enamelled solid cast hydrocal series Perfect Vehicles (1986) in particular enacted the empty yet self-fulfilling prophecy (suggested in their title) and sold quickly in the heated contemporary art market of New York during the mid 1980s. McCollum also enlarged images that he found floating un-signified in the backgrounds of media landscapes, such as the ‘little picture’ he had seen ‘on someone’s wall in a TV show’. Often, by the time McCollum’s ‘recuperated’ pictures were exhibited, he would have no idea himself as to ‘what any of the originals were’.  

The specificity of the prototype was clearly no longer of as much importance as it had been in seminal anti-aestheticism of the ‘Pictures’ generation of New York appropriation artists. For many critics, however, it would be the work of Jeff Koons that would come to epitomise everything that was contradictory and banal about postmodern appropriation art. As far as the photo-appropriationists could be counted as critical, or simulationism regarded as ambivalent, Koons’ brand of uncertainty was arguably all too easy to read. There was no longer a perceived need for critics to take sides in the critical versus stylistic appropriation debate. Since Koons had self-consciously accepted in advance that his art was routinely contradictory and banal, it had consequently become rhetorical to critique it without also entering its banality. The strategy of radical unoriginality handed down from Picabia and Warhol had become predictably easy to read. It was now common art world parlance that appropriation art might, in a self-conscious manner, simultaneously endorse and subvert the medium. The unknowability of postmodernism’s ambivalence had become too knovable.  

This moment, according to Australian historian and critic Rex Butler, represents a point after which ‘the logic that Warhol took from Duchamp’ had become ‘formalised’ and ‘empty’. Some critics, though, still insisted that Koons was a cultural critic who challenged established categories in order to shock the public into greater sensibility. Many have analogised Koons’ work as an extension of Warhol’s ironies, but with differences that are subtle and discrete. Where

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128 Ibid.
Warhol had declared his work to be about surface. Koons’ work was considered as homogeneous with surface.

Figure 13. Jeff Koons. New Hoover Celebrity IV, 1980–86.

Figure 14. Jeff Koons. Michael Jackson and Bubbles, 1988.

A self professed capitalist and playboy, Koons aimed to eradicate all distance between his work and the surfaces of surrounding consumer kitsch. Koons’ best-known works include serialised porcelain knick-knacks, new vacuum cleaners placed in minimalist-styled plexiglas display boxes, basketballs inflated with water and mercury suspended in sleek saltwater aquariums. Koons’ trademark banality was perhaps best epitomised in porcelain works such as Usher in Banality (1988) and Michael Jackson and Bubbles (1988). For many critics, Koons represented the end of appropriation as a ‘serious’ or ‘engaged’ practice. His reliance upon explicit viewer recognition of his work’s paternities, together with an accompanying realisation that Koons indeed knew that he was generating commodities while critiquing them, would also ultimately bind Koons’

129 Koons’ empty self-perception as a playboy was epitomised in his controversial Made in Heaven series, in which he and his then wife, the former Italian porn star Ciccolina, engaged in explicit sexual encounters in an array of gaudy photographic productions. Compounding speculations that his moral ambivalences were feigned and self-contradictory, Koons would later find himself embroiled in a bitter custody battle with Ciccolina. Koons had sought custody of their child on moral grounds, arguing that a former porn star was not a fit legal guardian.

130 See Jeff Koons, New Hoover Celebrity IV, New Hoover Quick Broom, 1980–86 (Fig. 13).
legacy to textbook definitions of 1980s postmodernism and appropriation art (and to the ballooned art market that had supported them). Despite maintaining an otherwise considerable profile to date, the conspicuous absence one decade later of more than a few texts dedicated to the career of an artist who once proclaimed himself as the ‘most written-about artist in the world’ is in itself testimony to the lead-weight legacy of textbook postmodernism.

Simulationists and ‘commodity critics’ such as Koons had cynically avoided any effort to deflect history from its apparently inevitable apocalypse. In maintaining that truth was interchangeable with fiction and that capital was beyond morality, they posited a world in which meaningful action was no longer possible. Eventually, however, the insistent return of ‘real’ issues such as AIDS or environmental degradation, coupled with the impact of the stockmarket crash of 1987, would deem their critical fashionability to be short-lived. Significant contemporary artists to emerge after Koons, such as the coveted YBA artist Damien Hirst, although maintaining the ‘look’ of simulationism, would often appear to actively avoid any specific reference to its now unfashionable rhetoric. Hirst’s ‘showcase art’ of the early 1990s substituted Koons’ ‘simulations’ of vacuum cleaners and suspended basketballs with ‘real’ dead cows and sharks suspended in formaldehyde. Postmodern criticality, as Foster et al. had envisioned it, had now largely given way to catchy label marketing and ‘lifestyle’ media formations.

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131 Only three dedicated texts were still listed in US books in print in September 2001.
133 'Young British Artist' is a term now commonly used to denote an expanding group of British artists who emerged as contemporaries of Damien Hirst, mainly in the late 1980s and early 1990s, and were recognised in conjunction with London exhibitions such as Freeze (1988), Modern Medicine (1990) and Sensation (1997). See Richard Shone. ‘From Freeze to House: 1988–94’., Catalogue for Sensation: Young British Artists From the Saatchi Collection, Royal Academy of Arts, London, 18 September–28 December 1997, pp. 12–25.
134 Like Koons, Damien Hirst was well versed in a Warholian merger of art with lifestyle magazines, cosmopolitan nightlife and advertising, and had also attracted the commercial interest of advertising mogul Charles Saatchi at an early stage in his career. Hirst’s ‘showcase art’ of the late 1980s and 1990s, a merger of pop and minimal idioms, was clearly influenced by Koons (whose work was first seen in London in the Saatchi Gallery’s New York Art Now exhibition of 1987–88.
1:3 A genealogy of postmodern appropriation art

Postmodern appropriation art can be loosely modelled into four successive phases. The first three phases, as suggested by Rex Butler, can be loosely described as iconoclastic (late 1970s/early 1980s), iconic (mid to late 1980s), and banal appropriation (late 1980s and early 1990s). The fourth, as nominated by the author, will be referred to as the concealed (or retreated) phase of appropriation art (1990s and early 2000s). The iconoclastic phase primarily consisted of works that aimed to challenge modernist attitudes to originality, authorship, autonomy, heroic radicality and authenticity in art. The iconic phase represented an attempt to redefine rather than necessarily attack established attitudes to the problematic of originality. The banal phase represented the reduction of appropriation to a style, emptied of critical signification and cynically complicit with its status as a commodity. The subsequent retreat from critical theory that occurred in the late 1980s and early 1990s saw the strategy of appropriation backgrounded as a tacit tool with which to pursue other (often more sociologically or subjectively engaged) themes.

Aggressive strategies of re-representation, the formation of critical links to poststructuralism, the construction of critical distance from the historical prototype and a stated aim to discredit modernism were all characteristics of iconoclastic appropriation art. Since, from a neo-Marxist perspective, authenticity in art was now considered a bourgeois myth calculated to divert attention from actual losses of autonomy, the only art that might avoid complicity with such a system would be art that sought to directly repudiate authenticity. The re-representational logic of photo-appropriation was considered the most effective strategy with which to discredit modernism by many of the advocates of iconoclastic postmodernism. It was soon clear to the iconoclastic anti-aesthetes of postmodernism, however, that at the same time that the appropriated copy commandeers the original, it also serves to reinstate it. It was with this dilemma in mind that, by the mid to late 1980s, many artists started to adopt a slightly different attitude

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towards appropriation. Art history was now staged less as a series of radical disruptions and more as a series of subtle displacements. Butler models the shift from iconoclastic to iconic appropriation in relation to corresponding shifts in the work of seminal appropriationist Sherrie Levine. According to Butler, Levine’s formerly iconoclastic attitude towards appropriation (as revealed by her strategy of re-photography) had started to soften by the mid 1980s, revealing ‘not an attempt to debunk originality … but rather an attempt to come into contact with it’.¹³⁶ Butler characterises the difference between the first and second phases of appropriation in terms of a partial reintroduction of more subjective and qualitative concerns:

The first was iconoclastic, attempted to destroy notions of originality and the canon, was part of a politically radical project that demanded the inclusion of other constituencies within the discourse of art history. The second was iconic, spoke of the work of art in terms of quality, rules and tradition, did not see the image merely as a ‘text’ to be decoded or translated, something always standing in for extra-aesthetic concerns.¹³⁷

By the late 1980s Levine appeared neither overly defiant nor enthusiastic in her attitude towards her selected historical prototypes. Butler notes that Levine’s Lead Pieces and Meltdowns series appeared to possess ‘a kind of ambience or décor within’,¹³⁸ and that she was now producing work ‘whose sources’ were ‘not so obvious, not so easily commented upon’, and ‘in which there was nothing polemically at stake – either for or against their prototypes – in their appropriation’.¹³⁹ By the mid to late 1980s, many artists now appeared less interested in assaulting the idea of originality and more interested in reclaiming or redefining it. The model of the copy was now read not just as an emptied reiteration of the original but also as a perpetuation of some of its qualities. The distinction between parody and homage had become blurred. Postmodern appropriation art, as part of its overall passage of reduction to style, now appeared increasingly focused upon (borrowed) aesthetics and formalisms rather than on the necessity of critical distance.

¹³⁶ Ibid., p. 38.
¹³⁷ Ibid., p. 37.
¹³⁸ Ibid., p. 39.
¹³⁹ Ibid., p. 39.
This move away from the anti-aesthetic approach to appropriation that had characterised much early postmodernism was a precursor to what Butler nominates as the ‘third, banal period of appropriation’, where ‘everything is already permitted in advance’ and ‘recuperated by some form of the aesthetic’, leaving the artist to display an ‘empty virtuosity’ which is ‘freed forever from the problem of art versus non-art’ and able to ‘generate a wilful, arbitrary, inconsequential sensory affect’.

With an absence of meaningful correlations or critically engaged mechanisms for image mediation, nothing appeared to remain other than an ornamental value stripped of any critical signification. Banality had now, in itself, become the subject of contemporary art. According to Butler, the ‘inescapability of appropriation [had] at last been grasped’, yet there was ‘no longer any stylistic or emotional way of making sense of it’.

Appropriation was ‘no longer that which the artists attempt to master’, but rather ‘that which masters the artist; no longer a subject or theme within art, but that to which art itself is subject’.

By the late 1980s and early 1990s, the strategy of appropriation was no longer considered a central critical device in most ‘serious’ art criticism. Although the novelty of postmodern appropriation was now largely absorbed into tradition, its circular logic was neither convincingly refuted nor overcome. For Butler, the final incontrovertibility of appropriation was not that it was ‘merely a topic within the wider categories of style, artistic identity and history’, but that it was also something that both preceded other categories of art and ‘made them possible’. It was a ‘moment’, or ‘turning point’ that retrospectively affected all of art history, both that which came ‘before’ and that which

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140 Ibid., p. 40.
141 ‘Could the objects they [modern artists] produce be something quite other than art? Fetish objects, for example, but disenchanted fetishes, decorative objects for temporal use (as Roger Caillois would say, hyperbolic ornaments)?’ Jean Baudrillard. ‘Warhol: Snobbish Machine’ (trans. Julian Pefanis, University of Sydney, Department of History and Theory), 1999, unpublished, p. 6.
143 Ibid.
144 Ibid., p. 13.
came 'after' it. Once recognised as a pre-condition of self-conscious artistic activity, appropriation could obviously not be simply forgotten or negated – it could only be consciously backgrounded or downplayed. But as mere mention of the word 'appropriation' now implied a rhetorical association with a paradigm now considered dated, the only remaining option for the self-conscious artist was the deliberate retreat from and concealment of appropriation.

Characteristics of the concealed (or retreated) phase of appropriation art include an uncertain sense of ghostly familiarity rather than a discernable paternity on the part of the viewer and the use of appropriation as a tool rather than as an overt strategy on the part of the artist. Until the mid 1980s, appropriation had largely been a conceptual strategy, but with the relaxation of anti-aesthetic tendencies, appropriation art became post-conceptual. Once appropriation became post-conceptual, it could evolve qualitatively and tacitly as a tool of production rather than polemically and critically as a centrally exhibited focus. The heavy reliance on ironic or critical distancing that had featured in much appropriation art of the late 1970s and 1980s had indicated that for the most part, specific recognition of a work's paternity was generally considered prerequisite to that critical function. By the 1990s and early 2000s, only a ghostly sense of referential familiarity would remain visible to the viewer. The problem presented by this paradigm of appropriation is that external critical assessment becomes more difficult once appropriated elements are 'successfully' concealed by the artist. Consequently, this investigation must resort to the determination of possible motives and the demonstration of possible methodologies if it is to account for the concealment of appropriation. By the 1990s and early 2000s, appropriation was largely a 'given' tool of contemporary cultural production rather than a discursive critical function of fashionable contemporary art, and therefore was to be actively avoided in explicit formation. As this investigation will attempt to demonstrate, appropriation art would assume several different guises in its retreat, and on occasion would even be tacitly employed in feigned critical opposition to the appropriative tendencies that had characterised much art of the 1980s.

\[^145\] Ibid., p. 13.
Chapter 2

Incentives for retreat and concealment

Once we’re convinced that all is appropriation and appropriation is all, it cancels itself out and we’re back at square one.\textsuperscript{146}

Once the act of appropriation was understood to reinstate ‘precisely those contradictions that it set out to eliminate’,\textsuperscript{147} any suggestion that appropriation remained a legitimate critical device was destined to appear futile. Consequently, appropriation-based art that appeared after the decline of appropriation as a centrally exhibited critical thematic often appeared to imply a resolve to extract something other than simply a cynical or ironic value from selected prototypes.\textsuperscript{148} By the early 1990s, the strategy of appropriation had shifted from its former status as a centrally exhibited thematic to more of a tacit – yet default – means of artistic production. This chapter will attempt to identify any potential cultural, legal, economic and technological incentives for the retreat and concealment of explicit strategic appropriation in contemporary art since the late 1980s. Unfortunately, when an appropriation-based artwork’s paternities are deliberately concealed from view, the external critical detection of them becomes correspondingly limited. Since external detection is understandably limited by the ‘success’ of the act of deliberate concealment itself, this chapter will focus upon establishing potential incentives for concealment. In charting the critical, cultural, political and technological landscape in which much contemporary art is generated, the motives for retreat and means for concealment are identified. The primary incentives for retreat and concealment identified in this chapter include (in order of presentation): an apparent desire to transcend the critical rhetoric of textbook postmodern appropriation art; the impact of revised copyright laws; the ethical


revision of postmodern attitudes towards cross-cultural appropriation; the re-evaluation of inflated careerisms following the art market crash in the late 1980s; and, lastly, the enhanced capabilities of new digital technologies to distort appropriated elements beyond detection.

2:1 The 'retreat from theory'

The dead end for appropriation is evident – and literal. Its often chronic dependence on theoretical pretexts, advanced forms of 'reading in', curatorial cross-referencing and ventriloquised critique becomes nothing more than a spectre posed in front of the mass grave of appropriated image/objects.149

The first of five incentives cited by this investigation as having contributed towards the retreat of art explicitly associated with the thematic of appropriation during the late 1980s and 1990s is located in an apparent desire to transcend the critical backlash now aimed at 'textbook' postmodernism generally. This would prove no easy task for the generation of artists to appear 'after' the period already nominated as 'after' both modernism and art history itself. According to Australian critic and art historian Rex Butler, many artists of the 1990s were left 'grappling with the problem of how to make material, conceret art after that moment of appropriation when everything [became] rhetorical'.150 Since banality was already self-nominated as a characteristic of the last significant phase of New York appropriation art (with artists such as Koons turning their complicity with that banality into an entire oeuvre), a backlash against the culture of copies, simulations and anti-aesthetic strategies that had dominated the art world for the best part of a decade was certainly not entirely unexpected. The proliferation of critical rhetoric that had been produced around the problematic of appropriation during the 1980s had exerted an unsustainable level of critical pressure on an art 'movement' that had appeared in a time otherwise characterised by rapidly shifting cultural trends. That the subject of appropriation had come to be regarded as passé was in itself testimony to the level of its impact during the 1980s. Considering the weight of appropriation art's impact, it is

149 Ibid., p. 36.
difficult to imagine that it could simply disappear from view. More likely, in an attempt to escape its legacy, a strong incentive to distract attention from appropriation had appeared. As the self-conscious artist was unlikely to entirely refute the anxiety of influence implied by postmodern appropriation art altogether, the only means by which a literal association with its legacies might be avoided would be via distraction or concealment.

For those not accustomed to the post-literality of postmodern 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. Many artists had, however, flourished in a climate in which it no longer appeared necessary to provide formation to any narrative or fixed idea in order to be regarded with the utmost seriousness. In time, a legitimising distinction between the projected elite, well versed in the specialised rhetoric of postmodern critical theory, and those not yet accustomed to postmodernism's climate of post-literality, started to dissolve. Postmodernism had become comprehensible to the point of banality. 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. Since much postmodern critical theory had explored premises based 'on the model of the text', critical interpretation had, in accordance, become 'almost exclusively linguistic in orientation'. 'Serious' critical discussion was therefore often limited to abstract or hypothetical applications of theories pooled from general problem fields that required a specialised but interdisciplinary rhetoric. Moreover, as encapsulated by U.S. literary theorist Fredric Jameson, any engagement with critical postmodernism had in general required 'an agreement, tacit or otherwise, with the basic presuppositions of a general problem-field'.

150 Rex Butler, An Uncertain Smile: Australian Art in the '90s, Artspace Visual Arts Centre Limited, Sydney, 1996.
153 Ibid., p. 221.
Comprehension of much art criticism of the 1980s required a lexicon that an earlier era would scarcely recognise. As much critical theory was established upon limited interpretations of texts imported from other fields (such as philosophy or psychoanalysis), a relatively sparse knowledge of the original theoretical context of that theoretical premise was common. Much of the rhetoric found in art theory during the 1980s seemed so unattached from the art that it claimed to be commenting upon that it seemed to have developed independent patterns of occurrence and recursion. By the late 1980s and early 1990s, a collective desire to transcend strictly poststructuralist definitions and determinations of art had become apparent. Consequently, many of the buzzwords of critical postmodernism, including the word ‘appropriation’ itself, became correspondingly unfashionable as the 1980s drew to a close.

Historically, with every new visual language, new forms of written language develop to describe it. Just as it was inappropriate to try to describe appropriation art of the 1980s using the vocabulary of modernist abstraction, it would become difficult to try to discuss the ‘real’ radical revisionism of the early 1990s using the language of simulationism, poststructuralism and appropriation. The model of simulation in particular seemed inappropriate in a world still marked by ‘real’ war, poverty and racism. For many of its detractors, postmodernism in the visual arts had consisted of little more than loose rhetoric used in defence of an art movement that had strayed unrecognisably far from commonsensc ideas regarding originality and aesthetic judgment. According to US critic Robert C. Morgan, for example, ‘art had somehow lost a sense of necessity and, in doing so, had forfeited any notion of the need for qualitative standards’. The main problem, according to Morgan, was that ‘these standards’ had been replaced by ‘a politicized rhetoric encased in a hardened academic language’. Such rhetoric had often consisted of little more than transparent promotional hype. For New York critic Eleanor Heartney

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154 See Carl Goldstein, Teaching Art, Oxford University Press, 1996, for a historical view of this debate about language and art.
in 1986, promotional hype had clearly overridden critical consensus in the New York art world:

Despite a breathtakingly rapid rise within months from back room to the Charles Saatchi collection, the New York art world’s latest movement/trend/tendency (take your pick) has yet no name (or, rather, too many names, none of which captures its peculiar ambitions). It has no firm membership roster and no consensus as to what it all means.\(^{156}\)

Unlike earlier ‘movements’, which often only included a handful of artists and stylistic permutations, New York-based appropriation art of the 1980s had spanned from the re-photography of the ‘Pictures’ generation to the plexiglass-enshrined simulations of so-called commodity criticism. For New York-based historian critic Thomas McEvilley, most simulationist criticism of the late 1980s was more promotional than critical, in that it had primarily emerged from artists and their curatorial representatives rather than from independent peers. Much like advertising, according to McEvilley, the ‘simulationist critics simply declare the art new’, and then surround it with the ‘rhetoric of newness’.\(^{157}\) McEvilley’s comments were directed at criticism such as that exemplified by the curatorial team of Tricia Collins and Richard Milazzo. Collins and Milazzo, who were among the first to promote artists such as Peter Halley and Jeff Koons, had endorsed an unabashed blend of grandiloquent theoretical jargon, complicity and commercial insight that appeared more to mirror the strategies of the artists themselves than to offer a critique per se. As art criticism of the 1980s was characteristically focused on the model of the text, as ‘informed’ by such slippery and primarily linguistic terms as ‘poststructuralism’, ‘deconstruction’, ‘simulation’ and ‘hyperreality’, it is perhaps understandable that the very intangibility of such rhetoric was the first thing to come under fire.

The often intangible pretexts presented in 1980s critical theory were to be countered in much art of the early 1990s by the return of more tangible and politicised issues in art criticism generally. But despite this return of more sociologically engaged thematics and

curatorial premises, literal relationships between issues and art objects were nonetheless still to be avoided. Referential ambiguity was the key to avoiding associations with fleeting critical trends. US critic Howard Singerman observed in 1989 that ‘a great deal of today’s art may be understood as motivated by a flight from interpretation’. In order to avoid specific interpretation, references needed to be emptied of historical baggage. According to Australian critic Chris McAuliffe, ‘the meaning of the image’ could ‘not to be reduced to recognition – either of intention or of source – for this would anchor meaning’. As a consequence of contemporary art’s continued ‘flight from interpretation’, the concealment of explicit references became mandatory. But as with 1960s minimalism or 1970s conceptualism, indeterminacy of meaning did not necessarily imply an absence of meaning. After all, as noted by Douglas Crimp in his seminal ‘Pictures’ catalogue essay of 1977, an absence of specific meaning in itself provides ‘a stimulant to the invention of a whole structure of narrative’. By the late 1980s and early 1990s, an ambiguous allusion to any vaguely sociological issue considered contrary to appropriation, simulationism or postmodernism was often enough to distract critical attention, without anchoring specific meaning.

By the late 1980s and early 1990s, appropriation was widely considered to epitomise all that was problematic about postmodernism’s alleged assimilation of cultural difference. Avoiding a direct association with appropriation was therefore important for artists who wished to avoid such accusations. The more specifically the artist’s former association with appropriation, the more difficult it would be to avoid. For Australia’s best-known appropriation artist, Imants Tillers, for example, the legacy of appropriation would prove difficult to shrug off:

For me ... ‘appropriation’ as a modus operandi is like a millstone around my neck. I long to be free ... Critics (especially in the US) have been quick to focus on the lack of seriousness

159 Chris McAuliffe, ‘Quarrelling with Language’, *Tension* 18, October 1989, pp. 54–55.
in my work – pointing all too readily to the aspects of humour, irreverence, postmodernism. What they mean is triviality. This sentiment is now echoed also by critics in Sydney, with my current show at Yuill/Crowley dismissed out of hand [by Sydney Morning Herald Journalist Christopher Allen] with the leader ‘appropriative games no longer appropriate’.162

For Sherrie Levine, the legacy of appropriation would also prove difficult to escape. As Levine was considered an emblematic figure in postmodern appropriation art, she would understandably be among the first to feel the burden of her close association with it. Even according to critical advocate Douglas Crimp, Levine’s ‘appropriations have only functional value for the particular historical discourses into which they are inserted’.163 New York critic Donald Kuspit made a similar assessment of Levine’s position in 1987:

Sherrie Levine’s art is more significant for what it stands for than for what it is in itself. And what it stands for has become almost a cottage industry in the art world. These days, artist after artist reruns important past art, as if to attain instantly the meaning and energy that reference, erasure, revision, montage, and quotations can indeed accrue.164

Kuspit likened Levine’s oeuvre to that of a gossip columnist – whose strategy is to achieve fame by commenting on fame. A growing perception that appropriation was a form of historical opportunism, sycophancy or tautological defeat, ultimately limited by its cannibalistic reliance on history, would start to impact heavily on Levine’s reception. For Kuspit, Levine’s work relied ‘on a schematic of what art is supposed to be’, and was finally ‘a “learned” textbook art about what happens to art’.165 Meanwhile, Levine had repeatedly claimed, in defence of her work, that her own ‘originality’ was now repressed by the critical rhetoric that surrounded her every move. In a 1987 interview with the late Australian New York-based critic Paul Taylor, Levine complained that it had effectively ‘gotten to the point where people couldn’t see the work for the rhetoric’:

161 The work of Imants Tillers is examined in Chapter 3.
165 Ibid.
People weren’t really reading what I was doing as photographs or drawings or watercolors but as position papers ... I also wanted to stress some things that I thought the rhetoric around my work had prevented people from getting: originality, pleasure ... In making the new paintings, I thought: What has been repressed in my art, repressed by the rhetoric around it?166

As Levine started to claim that her works might also be experienced as art objects in their own right she was forced to engage with the decorative surfaces of postmodern painting in a qualitative manner. Claiming that ‘it’s even more troublesome when something’s almost original’, 167 Levine now saw appropriation as more the ‘modus operandi’ than the content in her work.168 But despite her formerly iconoclastic anti-modernism becoming more ambiguous in approach, and her specific references now being more to individual artists than to artistic movements, by continuing to explicitly reveal appropriated images or styles in her work, Levine never escaped her close association with the rhetoric of postmodern appropriation. Her move towards partly qualitative concerns did, however, herald a shift in the role of appropriation.

Despite having evolved primarily out of theoretical considerations, by the late 1980s appropriation had become primarily a formal or decorative device. What had formerly been considered a conceptual and anti-aesthetic act had become a default tool of artistic production. From art schools to Hollywood, the question as to which pre-existing element to juxtapose or merge with which other pre-existing elements had arguably become as common an artistic endeavour as picking up a pencil or paintbrush. With its critical value all but evacuated and its explicit application now considered dated, appropriation was best left to serve as a useful though carefully disguised tool of self-conscious artistic production.

By the late 1980s, the critical value of appropriation art was widely disputed, even by such seminal advocates as Hal Foster. For Foster, appropriation’s ‘critique of

representation' had long been destined to be 'a mixed enterprise', and to be increasingly associated with political passivity and disengagement. For others, the legacy of appropriation remained inextricably tied to what Collins and Milazza had once called 'the spell of a self-marginalising radicality'. Similarly, U.S. based German art-historian and director of Guggenheim Museums worldwide, Thomas Krens warned that postmodern art criticism was now 'on the very verge of surrendering to an entirely uncritical bias'. Just as the radical originality sought by modernism was finally trivialised by repetition, so too was the apocalyptic complicity of postmodernism. For Australian-based English critic Nicholas Zurbrugg, postmodernism had seen to the death of 'authoriality, originality, spirituality, monumentality, beauty, profundity – everything, in fact, except apocalyptic cliche'. For many critics, art now constituted little more than a highly self-conscious form of symbolism in which an allegedly 'empty sign' occupied the place where there had apparently once been 'art'. According to U.S. critic and October co-founder Rosalind Krauss, to indefinitely repeat such a gesture was ultimately 'to do nothing more than occupy this historical position that can be called the Duchamp effect'.

The critical backlash to postmodernism soon gathered more momentum. For English U.S.-based critic John C. Welchman, 1989 was 'the last moment in which the annexation, appropriation and re-presentation of media images could be counted as critical'.

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169 Hal Foster, 'Signs Taken for Wonders', Art in America, Vol. 74, No. 6, July 1986, p. 139.
171 Krens continues, pointing out that 'Artists have always wanted 1) to make history and 2) to make money', maintaining that 'the contemporary appetite for art has upset the modernist axis that chose to emphasize the former and ignore the latter'. Thomas Krens, 'German Painting: Paradox and Paradigm in Late Twentieth-Century Art' in Thomas Krens, Michael Govan and Joseph Thompson. Refigured Painting: The German Image 1960–88, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, p. 16.
173 The term 'Duchamp effect' was coined in 1952 by Michel Carrouges. See Rosalind Krauss, 'Bachelors', October 52, 1990, pp. 57–58.
174 'In 1989, it was still possible to believe – indeed in avant-garde circles in New York it was perhaps necessary to believe – that the reorganisation and transmission of advertisements, film stills, TV serials, even of (reproductions of) art works themselves, could effectively change or denounce the social and economic power structures that supply the image world'. John C. Welchman, 'Some Horizons of
According to French philosopher and theorist Felix Guattari, 'the prostitution of art in trans-avant-garde painting, and the virtual ethical and aesthetic abdication of postmodernist thought leaves a kind of black stain upon history'.\textsuperscript{175} New York critic Donald Kuspit described artist Julian Schnabel's work in 1990 as parading a 'post-Modernist bankruptcy of purpose masquerading as a post-Modemist abundance of means'.\textsuperscript{176} Writing for the \textit{Sydney Morning Herald}, Sebastian Smee dismissed Australian Aboriginal appropriation artist Gordon Bennett's work out of hand in 1999, claiming that 'the complex riddles of recent art history can make great sport if that's what you go in for, but reference-spotting doesn't have much to do with aesthetic experience'.\textsuperscript{177} For some of its detractors, postmodernism was some kind of academic plot hatched against those marginalised by its specialised jargon. For Smee, appropriation art was simply a 'product of university-pushed post-modernism'.\textsuperscript{178}

Even Baudrillard himself finally revealed that he regarded appropriation art as a poor representation of his model of simulation, arguing that as his model contained no singular original it could not be represented in a singular object. His flat dismissal of appropriation art in a lecture at Columbia University during the late 1980s\textsuperscript{179} certainly helped discredit simulationist art criticism. As noted by French writer Sylvère Lotringer in 1991, Peter Halley's idea of representing the model of simulation as a model of 'cells and conduits' may initially have been intended as 'a tongue in-cheek exercise in theoretical travesty', but in employing Baudrillard's model 'at face value' he had introduced a critical 'misreading' of plague proportions.\textsuperscript{180} The paralysing influence of what leading New York postmodern critic Hal Foster had once termed 'Baudrillard's endgame' had become so pervasive by the late 1980s that a 'Forget Baudrillard' exhibition and 'Resistance:

\begin{quote}
\textsuperscript{176} Donald Kuspit, \textit{Artforum}, September 1990, p. 152.
\textsuperscript{178} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{180} Ibid.
Anti-Baudrillard' symposium were held conjunctively at White Columns Gallery in New York in 1987. Just as Baudrillard had described contemporary cultural conditions in terms of the substitution of the real by its image in simulation, Baudrillard’s model had itself finally been substituted for what it had once described. According to Australian critic and theorist Catherine Lumby, by the late 1980s, ‘the discourse of reality’ was finally ‘exchanged for the reality of discourse itself’.

The question of whether appropriation art had formed an adequate critique of the commodification of art or was, Conversely, an inevitable symptom of its commodification had formed the core of much art criticism of the late 1980s. Ultimately, it was the variously implied assumption that appropriation art somehow stood outside the expectations of conventional aesthetic or qualitative determination, and possessed no ‘real’ meaning or value in and of itself, that would limit its continued critical legitimisation once postmodernism’s critical moment had passed. Various claims were made towards the end of the 1980s for art that might succeed appropriation. For Australian curator and critic Juliana Engberg in 1987, the viewer should ‘not be left stranded in the unsatisfactory haziness of Déjà-Vu’ or ‘taken for a sucker’. For Engberg, there was clear ‘evidence of “fakery” with appropriation art’ and, moreover, it finally ‘makes no difference to our preference for the original (the first time we saw the trick)’. Now considered comprehensible, the answer to the question posed by appropriation art had become ‘so what’.

By the early 1990s, as noted by Welchman, the dominant mood in the art world indicated ‘that many paradigms inherited from the 1980s needed to be rethought’. Art that relied too heavily on academic theorising was increasingly viewed with suspicion. As

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184 Ibid.
185 Ibid.
appropriation art relied so heavily on a specialised rhetoric for its critical legitimisation, it would therefore fare poorly against a general mood that was now increasingly resistant to theory. What had made pop art ‘popular’ during the 1960s was that it had appeared to engage in a clear dialogue between mainstream culture and the more circumspect demands of the art world. While for many observers, artists such as Jeff Koons had achieved similar objectives during the 1980s, the distinction between postmodern appropriation and pop art was really only visible to those familiar with the specialised rhetoric of postmodern critical theory. Without access to critical theory’s often more linguistically based legitimisation, appropriation art did not appear particularly different from what most people already knew of modern art. After all, many appropriation artworks were simply copies of modernist ‘masterpieces’ anyway. To most people, some obscure idea that the copy actually constituted a ‘simulation’ of the original was immaterial. Little about appropriation art made sense without access to its corresponding critical discourse. As appropriation art had generally relied on its relationship to text to project its brand of academic elitism, once that relationship was removed – or perhaps even worse, became overtly comprehensible – little remained to distinguish appropriation art from the modernist forms it had claimed to be commenting on. Since appropriation art had ultimately asked a rhetorical question, its central strategy – attempting to connect the viewer with an otherwise invisible premise – would in itself become rhetorical. Appropriation art’s critique of originality was destined to keep returning to the same predictably cynical conclusion: that no artwork contains a singular origin. This idea is of course neither novel nor capable of adequately accounting for the breadth of contemporary artistic practice.

Critical postmodernism of the 1980s was at best a tentative conglomeration of disparate academic disciplines that somehow purported to inform or comprehend art objects and strategies. As art objects or actions can never be considered equivalent to their surrounding texts, any linkage between a theoretical model and an actual artwork is heavily dependent on corresponding theoretical justifications. The cynical rhetoric of

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postmodern appropriation art would find it difficult to survive within the new climate of sincerity of the 1990s. While much of the critical rhetoric surrounding postmodern appropriation art suffered a fall from grace in the 1980s and early 1990s, that retreat in itself does not necessarily imply a corresponding decline in practical applications of appropriation. There was simply a greater impetus for artists to actively conceal appropriated elements in order to avoid direct association with what was now widely considered a dated paradigm – textbook postmodernism. Consequently, appropriation art shifted from being primarily a conceptual act framed against an object to being perhaps more commonly an object (which was incidentally) produced via appropriation.

If appropriation art’s strength lay in its challenge to modernism’s doctrine of radical originality, its weakness lay in its apparent failure to offer any alternative. Simulationism may ultimately have failed to adequately address a world in which tangible differences remained clearly visible, but despite a partial reinstatement of the ‘real’, it nonetheless remained the very worst of nostalgic faux pas to wholly or naively evoke the spectre of the real in most ‘serious’ art of the 1990s. Although literal political gestures were still treated with suspicion, a limited subjectivity had again returned to art. From readdressing the politicisation of political disenfranchisement, to readdressing conceptualisms borrowed from 1960s minimalism, the art world of the 1990s was certainly less polemically focused on questions of originality and authorship than it had been during the 1980s.

Despite the fact that explicit appropriation would now likely leave an artist open to critical dismissal, many works nonetheless appeared to maintain a strangely derivative appearance – as if appropriation must have occurred somewhere in the background. For the critic to easily nominate an influence was again viewed as somehow exposing the artist’s ‘game’. The incentive for artists to conceal their work’s paternities had grown. Postmodernism had encouraged artists to display as little commitment as possible, often favouring cynicism over sincerity. By the 1990s, sincerity was again (provisionally) possible – as long as it remained measured and self-reflexive.
Since appropriation art of the 1980s had characteristically relied on explicit viewer recognition of an implied critical distance between original and copy, once that imperative vanished, any artist who tacitly continued to appropriate historical prototypes in a self-conscious manner might avoid being classified as an appropriation artist. The relative conveniences and efficiencies of appropriation as a tool of artistic production, especially when coupled with the capabilities of new digital reproductive technologies,\textsuperscript{187} were certainly not dismissed out of hand simply because of newly fashionable critical paradigms. For this reason, consciously appropriated elements were more likely to be backgrounded or concealed from view than outright avoided. A desire to transcend the hardened apolitical cynicism of postmodernism had also appeared across many other disciplines, particularly in literature and the newly coined ‘cultural studies’. These disciplines, in turn, would influence contemporary art’s renewed interest in the intermittent tradition of politically engaged themes. Ultimately, like so many unresolved dialectics, textbook appropriation art was widely dismissed as a cliché, perhaps due more to the empty repetition of its associated rhetoric than to any substantiated antithesis. Ultimately, the legacy of postmodernism’s ‘cut, past and edit’ aesthetic left art suspended somewhere between irony and belief.

\textbf{2.2 Ethical dimensions: postmodernism and cross-cultural appropriation}

The failure of postmodern appropriation art, according to New York critic Donald Kuspit in 1986, was at least partly due to its general lack of a moral dimension. For Kuspit, postmodern appropriation art did not serve to ‘respiritualize and morally re-educate’ its subject, but rather to ‘thematisize the notion of the death of art’, which of course was only a western obsession.\textsuperscript{188} The nihilist aspect of postmodernism, the idea that the end of history had somehow released society from the need to apologise for history, was increasingly questioned by the late 1980s and early 1990s. In particular, the ethical acceptability of wholesale western appropriations of non-western cultures became an

\textsuperscript{187} The implications of the new capabilities and widespread availability of new digital reproductive technologies are examined later in this chapter.

\textsuperscript{188} Donald Kuspit, ‘Young Necrophiliacs, Old Narcissists’, \textit{Artscibe}, April–May 1986, p. 30.
important issue. Postmodernism in general was now starting to be seen as simply a self-excused continuation of the assimilative and hegemonic patterns already displayed by modernism, colonialism and capitalism. According to postmodernism's latest detractors, there was a penalty for failing to distinguish between cultural theft and more mutually cooperative 'transcultural' formations of cultural appropriation. Indigenous or disenfranchised cultures were of course particularly vulnerable to unchecked western appropriation. This ethical dimension to the general reassessment of appropriation in the late 1980s and early 1990s can be seen as providing a second incentive towards retreat and concealment.

By the late 1980s and early 1990s, appropriation art, although having initially aligned itself with the interests and institutions of a New York-centred art world, had become global and multicultural in reach. Often seen more as an effective tool with which to critique western cultural hegemonies, the strategy of appropriation was now no longer exclusively the domain of western constructions of postmodernism. Welchman has pointed to 'appropriation, in unstable alliance with postmodern, postcolonial and poststructuralist theory' as the 'first quasi-global language of international vanguard art'.

According to Welchman, many artists of the 1990s 'inflected, recast and refused the cultures of borrowing and citation' as a direct response to 'the relocation, annexation or theft of cultural properties ... associated with the rise of European colonialism and global capital'. This new sensitivity towards the ethical aspect of wholesale western relocations of indigenous or non-western art and culture can be seen as part of a more general resistance to simulationist attitudes towards appropriation, which had more characteristically seen all culture as operating on an even ground of detached signification. The Baudrillardian conception, that late-capitalist culture had reached an impasse in which it was now unable to make value judgements, was now widely contested. Baudrillard's model, in which there was apparently 'no point of reference at all', in which 'value radiates in all directions occupying all interstices, without reference

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190 Ibid., p. 1.
191 Ibid.
to anything whatsoever', could no longer sufficiently account for 'real' inequalities caused by western appropriation of motifs, symbols and images of marginalised cultural or ethnic groups.

The controversial nature of this debate was perhaps no better exemplified than in the case of the debate surrounding the white appropriation of Australian Aboriginal cultural motifs and symbols. The critics of white appropriation characteristically see postmodernism as simply another variation of white cultural homogeneity; its supporters warn of the dangers of censorship and political correctness. Australian academic and curator Christine Nicholls, an authority on indigenous Australian art and its relationship with Australian contemporary art, argues that the main problem with postmodernism, and its tendency to quote 'from other cultural traditions', is an 'inherent assumption that the playing field is level'. Appropriation becomes a highly contested terrain once intersected with the displaced status of the Australian Aboriginal people within wider Australian society. After two centuries of oppression and often near-genocidal treatment, a relatively powerful Aboriginal rights movement started to emerge in Australia. Meanwhile, increased international interest in the cultural products of indigenous cultures generally had created a large market for contemporary Aboriginal art. According to Nicholls, the increasing international profile of Aboriginal art had created yet another environment for non-indigenous opportunism: as Aboriginal art started to command considerable international attention in the late 1980s, it was evident that Australia was largely finding its place in the contemporary art world by virtue of the commercial and critical success of its contemporary Aboriginal art. Contemporary Aboriginal art was first significantly exhibited alongside white Australian contemporary art at the Biennale of Sydney in 1979 and 1982 and in Australian Perspecta in 1981. By the late 1990s, the export value of indigenous art was calculated at more than AUD$200 million per

annum, a figure that easily outweighed the value of all other contemporary Australian art combined. An association with Aboriginality was therefore potentially lucrative for any Australian artist.

The problem of originality, as addressed by appropriation art, can be considered as applicable to Aboriginal art somewhat by default. According to Rex Butler, it should not be forgotten ‘that, from the beginning, Aboriginal works of art are reproductions’, and moreover, that since they ‘are produced for commercial reasons’, they ‘would not exist but for a desire for [them] on the part of a white audience’. Prior to the 1980s, Aboriginal art was generally only considered of commercial value when sold as an ethnographic curiosity or anthropological artefact, and only insofar as it constituted a reflection of historical or traditional Aboriginal culture. According to Australian critic Eric Michaels, historical non-indigenous responses to Aboriginal art were generally framed in terms of a ‘separation of artistic content from ethnographic content’. Non-indigenous viewers are often romantic in their assumptions that traditional or authentic meanings inhabited every Aboriginal image. The increased profile of contemporary Aboriginal art during the late 1980s and 1990s was further exaggerated by international western culture’s increasing appetite for exoticised western constructions of otherness, despite the fact that most contemporary Aboriginal artworks were distinctly different from the traditional sand paintings – which had once served as maps for traditional Dreamings. Once transferred to canvas and sold as contemporary art, the variation of motifs once freely handed from one generation to the next introduce a range of critical and ethical questions. If made for westerners, can these paintings still be considered

194 In Australian Perspecta 1981, works by white Australian artists supposedly influenced by or possessing an affinity with Aboriginal art were exhibited alongside the acrylic paintings of contemporary Aboriginal artists Clifford Possum Tjapaltjarri, Time Leura Tjapaltjarri and Charlie Tjapangatti.
'authentically' Aboriginal? Once entered into western systems of circulation and commercial exchange, are they not merely 'simulations' of traditional Aboriginal sand paintings, and therefore open for critical discussion in the same manner as any other product of international postmodern culture? Do westerners discriminate simply by viewing Aboriginal motifs without an understanding of their original symbolic context? These questions, although demanding a depth of consideration beyond the scope of this investigation, nonetheless all point towards a general illumination of the question of whether the logic of postmodern appropriation can be applied to pre-modern or non-western cultural contexts without inviting ethical consideration.

Through uninitiated western eyes, a certain aesthetic or formalist reading of traditional Aboriginal motifs may indeed be possible without a priori knowledge of the 'correct' cultural context. The addition of ethnographic detail of course enables an alternative interpretation. To imply that one reading is more correct than another is of course problematic within a postmodern critical discourse. Most ethical consideration, however, is limited to the question of whether or not any given incorporation of Aboriginal images, symbols or motifs in a western context actually serves to misrepresent, disrespect or negate the traditional Aboriginal domain of reference. For some, this question is addressed by the act of gaining 'permission'. The main obstacle is the question of who owns the permission rights. Traditional Aboriginal artistic production is characteristically collectivised. Artists either earn or inherit the right to paint pre-existing designs. The death of an individual artist does not imply the end of a series, as is often the case in western artistic production. Design traditions are seen as located in a collective past rather than in individual authorship. Another obscuring aspect of the debate is that Aboriginal values, languages and modes of artistic expression vary greatly from region to region. Each peoples their own series of motifs, stories, songs and dances. 'Unauthorised use' therefore refers to any application outside the culture of origin. Although Aboriginal art is characteristically non-authorial, most contemporary Aboriginal artists have adopted western attitudes to individuated authorship; with only 250 of the over 600 individual tribal groups in existence before European colonisation intact, most artists draw upon a cultural base that is invariably wider than their own ancestry. For the postmodern
appropriation artist, the question therefore becomes whether or not this adoption of a western signature places contemporary Aboriginal art within a western cultural framework, and therefore open to the same cultural considerations as any other contemporary artwork.

Should a tragic history and disenfranchised social status exempt Aboriginal culture from being the subject of white appropriation? Or, conversely, does making such an exception marginalise Aboriginal culture even further? Australian critic Vivien Johnson, in critiquing the use of appropriated Aboriginal imagery by white Australian artist Imants Tillers, argued that while appropriation of Aboriginal culture is problematic, in another sense it is also ‘imperative in order to contradict in practice the dismal doctrine that no rapprochement is possible’.198 Is any effort by non-Aboriginal people to cross that cultural divide simply an act of cultural imperialism? If non-Aboriginal people cannot escape the contamination of their direct association with an oppressive colonial past, can Aboriginal people ever break the confines of otherness in the present? Both parties are potentially locked into positions that limit their potential for cultural growth. Such debates in the art world are in many ways a perpetuation of divides already established in postwar Australian politics between the ideals of mandatory cultural assimilation and multicultural diversity. In 1973, the Australian Labor government, led by then Prime Minister Gough Whitlam, had announced that Australia now embraced an official policy of multiculturalism. This was a new vision of Australia that supposedly recognised cultural diversity as an integral part of its national identity and was in stark contrast to the ‘White Australia’ immigration policies of the 1950s. Multiculturalism became a significant part of the rhetoric of contemporary Australian politics during the 1980s. Multiculturalism was seen as both a celebration of diversity and an ideology manufactured and manipulated in order to further serve the interests of a white Australia. Many Aboriginal Australians, for example, remained marginalised within multicultural projections of Australia.

In 1988, during Australia's Bicentennial celebrations, many Aboriginal Australians and their sympathisers recognised an opportunity to publicise their grievances. In the art world, ensuing debate would soon help highlight the ethical dimension of postmodern attitudes toward the appropriation of Aboriginal cultural forms. Court actions concerning improper use of Aboriginal motifs would surface with increasing frequency. The question of 'authentic use' became the central focus of most debate. As a consequence, a Label of Authenticity was developed as a trademark designed to certify that artworks and cultural products are actually produced by Australian Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander artists. The intercultural appropriation of motifs and materials was increasingly modelled as an enemy of cultural diversity. Such a dilution of traditional culture was also often seen as emblematic of larger grievances, such as disputes concerning land ownership.

Figure 15. Imants Tillers, *The Nine Shots*, 1985.


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On January 29, 2002, members of the Aboriginal Tent Embassy in Canberra lodged a writ in the High Court of Australia on calling for an end to the use of the kangaroo and emu on the Australian Coat of Arms. The writ argued that symbols of these indigenous animals were directly connected to the Australian Aboriginal people via both religion and law. This writ followed the earlier illegal removal of a brass Coat of Arms from Old Parliament House (across the road from the Tent Embassy). See Tony Stephens, 'Up in Arms About our Quirks of Nature', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 30 Jan 2002, p. 1.
Australian artists Imants Tillers and Tim Johnson are often considered antithetical poles in the debate that surrounds non-Aboriginal use of Aboriginal motifs. Although Johnson and Tillers both clearly employ a strategy of quotation, there is a marked difference in their respective approaches. While Johnson attempts, 'sensitively' and with 'permission', to incorporate the manner and approach of the Aboriginal artist into his oeuvre, Tillers quotes from Aboriginal art as he would from any artefact of twentieth century culture, placing, for example, a generic design taken from Aboriginal Papunya painting next to one from a European artist such as German Georg Baselitz. Tiller's justification is typically postmodern:

For me, images circulating in the printed media are like signifiers detached from their referents and all such signifiers are equally available for my work whether they originate from Michael Nelson Tjakamarra, Georg Baselitz or Colin McCahon. 200

In Tiller's The Nine Shots (1985), decorative motifs were lifted from Aboriginal artist Michael Nelson Tjakamarra's Five Dreamings (1984) while the figure of the soldier was taken from German artist George Baselitz's B for Larry (1967). For Prism (1986), Tillers appropriated Aboriginal artist Timmy Tjapangardi's Kangaroo and Shield People Dreaming at Lake Mackay (1980). Later, as part of the 1988 Australian Bicentennial celebrations, Tillers was commissioned (together with architect Alexander Tzannes) to tender a pavilion design for Sydney's Centennial Park. Despite being heavily criticised for his appropriations of Aboriginal motifs, Tillers repeatedly claimed that he was attracted to using Aboriginal imagery 'for purely visual reasons' and readily admitted that he 'didn't know what the original Papunya work actually "meant"'. 201 Although Tillers claimed that he was not interested in the specific cultural paternity of his purloined Aboriginal imagery, by the mid to late 1990s he had markedly increased his use of

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200 Jenny Harper, 'Tillers' McCahon', Tension 18, October 1988, p. 34.
201 Imants Tillers, quoted in Christine Nicholls, 'From Appreciation to Appropriation: Indigenous Influences and Images in Australian Visual Art', Catalogue essay for exhibition From Appreciation to Appropriation: Indigenous Influences and Images in Australian Visual Art, curated by Christine Nicholls, Flinders University Art Museum City Gallery, 5 March - 16 April 2000, p. 4.
Latvian references in deference to the (arguably distant) otherness of his own cultural heritage.202

For artists such as Tillers, the practice of appropriation was an acknowledgment of the second-hand nature of the Australian cultural experience in relation to dominant western artistic traditions. For Tillers, the idea of Aboriginality neatly analogised the omnipresent provincial bind experienced by all Australian artists.203 Tillers argued that the ‘socially-engaged artist ... accrues “aboriginality” by association’, even when the appropriated reference is ‘ironic in tone’ in order to expose ‘our in-built prejudices’.204 Australian critic and curator Paul Taylor proposed a similar premise with the controversial term ‘White Aborigine’, which he used in reference to his showcase exhibition of Australian appropriation art, Popism, which was held at the National Gallery of Victoria in 1982. By the late 1980s, however, the emphasis had shifted. Australian critic Bob Lingard saw the term ‘White Aborigine’ as a merely an extension of the more generalised white Australian ‘appropriation of Aboriginal identity’, absurdly reapplied to the critical classification of artists such as Johnson and Tillers.205 Tim Johnson also rejected the expression, claiming that Taylor was merely trying to exoticise white Australian art in order to give it a ‘trade mark’.206 Fellow Australian artist Juan Davila agreed, arguing that Taylor’s proposition relied on a fake marginality compared with the exclusion experienced by Aboriginal people in their 200-year struggle for a self-determining place within Australian society.207

To contrast Tillers approach, Tim Johnson was actively engaged with Aboriginal art, had spent extensive time living and collaborating with the Papunya artists of the Western Desert, and had made regular visits to the Papunya area since the mid 1970s. During such visits Johnson collaborated with Aboriginal artists such as Turkey Tolson Tjupurrula,

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202 This contradiction in Tiller’s approach is examined in Chapter 3.
204 Ibid., p. 53.
206 Ibid.
Clifford Possum Tjapaltjarri and Michael Jagamura Nelson. Johnson also worked to promote the Papunya artists, curated the exhibition Paupunya Tula: Aboriginal Art Of The Western Desert at Macquarie Univeristy in 1980 and has lectured on Aboriginal art at Sydney College of the Arts. Since 1977 Johnson has also built up a considerable collection of Aboriginal art, in particular work of the Papunya artists. Johnson’s own work was characterised by an exploration of altered states of consciousness and alternative systems of cultural and spiritual representation. Johnson always maintained that he was sensitive to and respectful of Aboriginal culture.208 According to Lingard, Johnson displayed ‘an uncommon sensitivity’ and was ‘far more conscious of the ethical questions involved in the appropriation of Aboriginal imagery’ than Tillers.210 Although Lingard conceded that ‘Johnson’s practice cannot help but refer to an idealised rapprochement between white and black cultures’, he pointed to its important ‘advantage of incorporating within itself the past history of either misappropriation or preservation’.211

Notwithstanding such sensitivities, Johnson nonetheless also provided distinctly western justifications for his use of Papunya motifs, first by consciously deciding ‘to make their paintings my paintings’,212 and second by defending his use of the ‘dot’ by declaring it a universally used marking and not unique to Australian Aboriginal culture.213 Johnson did, however, recognise that Aboriginal art employed symbols and motifs that pre-dated western culture by 30,000 – 40,000 years. Unlike the more figurative traditions of western art (from early cave painting onwards), Aboriginal art had long employed abstracted forms to denote a language. For that reason, Johnson concedes that as western

208 Johnson recognised that ‘the overall effect of our culture is that it tries to destroy theirs’. Tim Johnson, quoted in I. Periz, 'The Problems of Appropriation: Tim Johnson', Tension 3, April 1984, p. 11.
210 Ibid., p. 50.
211 Ibid., p. 49.
213 ‘... the Papunya painting dot technique coincides with the use of dot screen in Western culture and to go to the obvious example, there are a lot of similarities to pointillism. I thought that through and decided that it was okay to use those aspects of Aboriginal art.’ Tim Johnson, quoted in Bob Lingard. Contemporary Australian Art to China 1988–89, Darling Downs Institute of Advanced Education, 1988, p. 42.
art only really developed a comparably sophisticated language of abstraction during the twentieth century, the Papunya paintings are therefore ‘unique in the world in that they derive from a forty thousand year tradition but supersede modernism’.  

Perhaps contemporary Australian Aboriginal art can perhaps finally be considered as at once a form of contemporary western art and something distinct to Australian Aboriginal culture. At any rate, the intensity of debate surrounding the ethical dimension of non-Aboriginal appropriation of Aboriginal imagery has helped provide an additional incentive for artists wishing to avoid a literal association with the dated paradigm of explicit textbook appropriation. The subtler approach to Aboriginal appropriation indicated in the work of Johnson, one that serves less as a critical device and more as an integrated mechanism of artistic production, is therefore more indicative of the general softening and relaxation of the original/copy dichotomy that flavoured much art of the 1990s generally. This general trend towards a subtler play of quoted references was in no small part influenced by a wish to avoid problematic ethical consequences and transcend the rhetoric of textbook postmodern appropriation. As outlined by US critic and historian Thomas McEvilly in 1991, the influence of such ethical considerations led to ‘a conscious effort’ – ‘particularly on the part of white Westerners’ – to include ‘ethical considerations’ in their understanding of the ‘image banks of other cultures’.  

2:3 Appropriation art and the threat of copyright infringement

If creativity is a field, copyright is the fence.

Another significant incentive towards the retreat and subsequent concealment of appropriation witnessed in the late 1980s and 1990s was the economic deterrence of intellectual copyright law. The critical aspirations of postmodern appropriation art are generally lost when considered against the economic prerogatives of copyright law and

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the notoriously grey standards of public taste. Several high-profile US appropriation artists of the 1980s (including Jeff Koons, Richard Prince and Sherrie Levine), together with audio-collage artists (such as ‘culture jammers’ Negativland) have appeared in court accused of copyright infringement or plagiarism. Despite the fact that relatively few appropriation artists have actually lost cases or been forced to pay royalties and/or damages to copyright holders, their plights have nonetheless fuelled increased debate regarding appropriation art and intellectual property law. Nonetheless, by the late 1980s and early 1990s, many artists chose to err on the side of caution. Once the critical profile of appropriation art started to decline, the risk of copyright infringement became substantially less attractive.

Copyright infringement is generally defined as a ‘substantial unauthorised copying of expression from a copyrighted work’. Copyright laws are designed to protect authors of original works that are fixed in a tangible form. Works considered fixed in a tangible form can include literatures, photographs, paintings, musical compositions, computer softwares, and films. Copyright law also anticipates the possibility that, once created, additional value might be added at a relatively lower additional cost. Copyright lasts for the life of the author plus 50 to 70 years in most western countries, and serves to protect a prevailing understanding of art in western law, which ‘is based upon a romantic property right whereby an artistic work is perceived as the natural embodiment of imagination, projecting the personality of its creator’. The economic argument for copyright protection is that in the absence of copyright protection, unauthorised copying will drive the price of copies down to the cost of making copies. Although the stated aim of copyright law is to secure the economic welfare of artists, in many cases it is a representative third party, such as a gallery, collector, publisher or record company that stands to gain relatively more from the preservation of copyright. Ideally, the task for copyright law is to define a procedure by which the law of copyright might be

216 John Oswald, quoted in Chris Cutler. ‘Plunderphonia’, Musicworks 60, Fall 1994, p. 16.
administered in conjunction with artistic imperatives. As this investigation will reveal, western copyright laws have yet to exactly determine how copyright laws apply to appropriation art, particularly when it digital reproductive technologies are involved.

The standard 'tangible form' criterion that is prerequisite in most copyright law is particularly problematic in relation to appropriation art, for appropriation art can be read as containing both a conceptual element (the critical, ironic or poetic act of appropriation) and an aesthetic element (the visual or material similarity of the appropriated element to its prototype). Western copyright law generally has less difficulty identifying or contending the status of the latter, but the immaterial nature of the former has proven extremely problematic. As New York-based critic Benjamin Buchloh noted in 1982, 'ultimately it is the visual ... existence of an object that imbues it with material reality, since that reality is the basis of its existence as a commodity'.\(^{219}\) Although Buchloh conceded that most forms of expression do eventually find ways to 'accommodate their production to the conditions of the acculturation apparatus' (as is evident in the commodification of conceptual art or even critical theory), he nonetheless concluded that 'the object/image has become the essential ideological correlate of private property'.\(^{220}\) It is generally only in this 'visual existence' sense that an artwork falls under the jurisdiction of copyright law. Within much of the logic of postmodernism, the appropriating artist is seen as entering into a mutually affecting partnership with the prototype work: the existence of the copy alters interpretation of the original and vice versa. This relationship is not easily transferable to the world of commerce. The idea that an exact copy, such as a photograph of a photograph, might also be an engaging satire, a critique of representation, or simultaneously the same as and different from its prototype is therefore of little interest to prevailing copyright law.

The question as to whether the creative methodologies employed by appropriation artists are significantly different from the methodologies employed by artists in general is also central to the copyright debate. From parody to homage, from political satire to quotation,

the liberal use of pre-existing material is not a postmodern phenomenon, nor is it unique to the visual arts. As the celebrated Russian avant-gardist classical composer Igor Stravinsky once observed, ‘a good composer does not imitate, he steals’. Most historical accounts of the history of art in some way assume a lineage of artists consciously working on their prototypes. Unlike typical postmodern appropriation art, however, Stravinsky did not rely on specific audience recognition of quoted elements in order for his compositions to function, and to the contrary, was widely regarded as radically and profoundly ‘original’. Appropriation was therefore only part of a working process and not a critical function. With appropriation art, the distinction between original and the copy is generally more immaterial than elemental. Copyright law, with its stated interest in protecting that which is commodifiable, is therefore poorly equipped to deal with immaterial distinctions. To the postmodernist, however, the proposition that there are on the one hand artists who appropriate the material on which their work is based, and on the other artists whose practice is ‘authentic’ and thus in need of copyright protection is a false dichotomy. But to a general public, not versed in the specialised rhetoric of postmodern critical theory, the explicit appropriation of another artist’s work is tantamount to robbery. Outside the discourse of contemporary art, few voices are sympathetic to the concerns of appropriation art. Kathy Bates, Lecturer in law at Macquarie University, Sydney, represents an exception, conceding that ‘for all sorts of reasons’, copyright ‘hinders the development of socially relevant art’.

The perception that explicit appropriation is a crime that should be punishable by law is far more prevalent.

A common criticism of copyright law is that it has failed to keep up with both new technologies used for the electronic reproduction and transference of images, texts, sounds and increases in the level of private ownership in cultural enterprise generally. As distinct from literary copyright infringement cases, copyright problems encountered in art and music are generally less easily solved, for unlike plagiarised words, which can be

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220 Ibid.
221 Igor Stravinski, quoted in John Oswald, ‘Plunderphonics (or, Audio Piracy as a Compositional Prerogative)’, *Musicworks* 34, 1985.
excised or rewritten if found to be infringing, removing infringing parts from a physical artwork or a recorded piece of music will generally destroy, or at least severely compromise the artwork in question. By acknowledging a visual or audio quotation upfront, permission is often granted, in return for a fee or royalty percentage. As this procedure can often take many months to complete, the process can become a bureaucratically nightmare, particularly where multiple quotations are involved. Generally, it is only where the political or critical incentive outweighs the economic that artists will deliberately flaunt copyright. It is for this reason that, once the critical imperative was diminished in the wake of critical postmodernism, that artists would be, for the most part, less likely to risk infringement. This has nonetheless remained an imperative for certain artists in conjunction with freedom of speech issues – despite sometimes debilitating consequences.

Western copyright laws are generally based on the premise that once an author has expressed an idea in material form, that expression may not be explicitly reused by anyone else without the author’s permission. Many artists believe that this premise conflicts with basic freedoms of individual expression, as outlined in, for example, the US First Amendment. For artists who are critical of this copyright framework, the idea of portraying art as a form of social or political commentary becomes a crucial defence. Appropriation art usually needs to be seen as operating in the form of a parody to have any chance of legal legitimisation. Western copyright laws allow for a limited use of appropriated elements in certain situations, under what is called a ‘fair use’ exemption. Fair use limits the rights of the copyright holder by allowing unauthorised copying in circumstances consistent with economic and educational efficiency or free speech. Photocopying a few pages from a book for educational purposes, for example, is generally not considered to harm the copyright holder, for the copier would not have otherwise bought the book, and moreover, if such copying were prohibited, high transactions costs might prevent an educational exchange from taking place altogether. Copyright is also generally overlooked in matters of implied consent, such as in the case

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of a published image in a review of an exhibition. Certain forms of parody or critique are also protected under fair use, but generally only where the integrity of the critique would be clearly compromised by the requirement for consent.

Fair use does not generally apply to artists who explicitly copy their prototypes, such as Sherrie Levine and Jeff Koons, particularly when the appropriated work has assumed a higher economic value than its prototype, or where it ambiguously targets 'society at large' rather than the prototype. Although it is acknowledged that if copyright holders could prohibit all forms of related parody or critique the result would be a compromise of the democratic ideals of free speech, the main problem with fair use exceptions is that they are limited by the same sort of grey standards of public taste as are commonly represented in censorship laws. By whose standards is an artwork determined to be a genuine satire or parody – or, conversely, a copyright infringement? Copyright strives to balance incentives and benefits against access costs in a manner that promotes economic efficiency, social welfare and cultural evolution, but the question of whether existing copyright laws can be sufficiently adapted without assuming special rules for artists is clearly problematic. Any idea that a 'reasonable person' might comprehend the manner in which an artwork humourously or critiques its prototype presents a hurdle for postmodern appropriation art, which often relied on a dense, convoluted and specialised critical rhetoric in order to justify its actions. In most cases, the literal incorporation of pre-existing artistic elements in a new work appears to be beyond the scope of existing copyright law. Given these restrictions, the option to conceal, distort or hide explicitly appropriated elements from recognition is clearly attractive.

The risks are however never certain. Copyright law is largely determined on a case-by-case basis. While US photographer Annie Leibovitz lost a dispute with Paramount Pictures concerning whether or not a promotional poster for the film *Naked Gun 2½* infringed her photo of a pregnant Demi Moore (the court ruled that the poster was a parody despite evidence of commercial gain), in another lawsuit, Jeff Koons was successfully sued by US photographer Art Rogers for appropriating Rogers’ commercially available postcard Puppies (depicting a man and a woman holding eight
German shepherd puppies) to produce the sculpture *String of Puppies* (1988). As Koons had readily admitted to employing a foundry to produce four sculptures based entirely on the postcard, the issue was not whether his work was a copy, but rather whether that copy was a fair use. Although Koons had argued that his appropriation was fair use, consisting of both a parody and a form of legitimate social criticism, the idea that Koons was in any way satirically commenting upon the banality of Rogers’ image may have eluded the court. The court found the criticism in Koons’ appropriation to be far too subtle, and deemed the two works ‘substantially similar.’ This loss was not received well by the art world.

In contrast with the plight of Koons, other explicit appropriation-based artworks have managed to avoid such legal consequences. Such is the case with the image used by New York photo-appropriationist Richard Prince to produce *Spiritual America* in 1983. The original image’s legal passage had begun in 1981, when well-known US actor Brooke Shields and her mother began a three-year legal battle to suppress a nude photograph of Shields taken by US commercial photographer Garry Gross when Shields was only ten years old. Although Gross eventually won the case, his reputation as an advertising photographer was severely tarnished by media suggestions that the image had pornographic connotations. In 1983, Prince re-photographed Gross’s original image and gave it the title *Spiritual America*. Prince then exhibited the appropriated image anonymously in a New York shopfront that he had rented solely for the occasion. Prince actively emphasised the illegal element of his re-photographic appropriation, even provocatively declaring that there was no difference between his photograph and Gross’s

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224 Ibid., p. 15.


‘except that I took it’.

*Spiritual America* became Prince’s most commercially valued work. By 2001 it was valued at US$151,000 – more than ten times the average value of Prince’s other photographs, which in the same year were selling for around US $14,000. Gross was too broke to consider a lawsuit and settled out of court for US $2000.

European courts are generally more open to ideas such as appropriation than their US counterparts. The first significant European copyright infringement case involving appropriation art was in 1995, and was argued all the way to Germany’s highest court. In this case, Russian artist George Pusenkoff was accused of plagiarism by Australian US-based fashion photographer Helmut Newton. Pusenkoff had appropriated Newton’s *Miss Livingstone* (1981) to form part of his painting *Power of Blue* (1995). Newton was not impressed with the idea of appropriation art, calling it ‘unoriginal’ and ‘a whole lot of bull’. Minutes before the opening of his exhibition in Hamburg, Pusenkoff was handed a fax from Newton’s lawyers claiming that *Power of Blue* was copied from one of Newton’s photographs and consequently that Newton had the right to have it destroyed, pending a compensation payment equivalent to the price of Pusenkoff’s materials only. As most legal precedents for appropriation art had occurred in the US, Newton v Pusenkoff represented a major test for the European legal system’s sympathies. The court finally held that Pusenkoff’s work was a ‘free adaptation’ rather than a ‘reworking’ and that it did not infringe Newton’s copyright. The European art world was impressed with the result, though recognising that the US intellectual copyright market would remain of substantial importance.

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231 Ibid.

Copyright law is a relatively recent development in relation to art history. In pre-nineteenth century European law, the term ‘author’ did not carry with it a mark of unique distinction but was instead used more as a means with which to distinguish cultural from industrial labour. In traditional or folk cultures, melody, image and narrative characteristically evolves via a handing down of pre-existing melodies, images and narratives. With the advent of copyright control, however, certain restrictions were introduced as to how, where and when melodies, images or narratives could be used or circulated. By the late twentieth century, most contemporary western melodies, images and narratives in popular circulation were copyright protected. To a large extent, culture had become privatised. Considering that large doses of daily sensory attention were now focused on a privately owned media barrage, many artists felt that illegal forms of artistic intervention such as appropriation represented a kind of symbolic liberation from the status of passive consumer. ‘Culture jamming’ represents one such form of symbolic liberation. With culture jamming, the privately controlled subjects of broadcast media are ‘captured’, reassembled as a form of self-parody, and then reinserted into the broadcast media with the aim of creating ‘a circular mayhem’.\textsuperscript{233} Culture jammers such as San Francisco Bay area-based collectives Negativland and Plunderphonics\textsuperscript{234} deliberately flaunted copyright infringement as a direct critique of the restrictions it imposes on artistic expression. For Negativland, the results were financially crippling.

Negativland cut and layered together various forms of electronic media into absurd juxtaposition, both to critique the private ownership of culture and to test their hypothesis that ‘no matter how related or unrelated the elements are ... people will always manage to create a meaning for themselves’.\textsuperscript{235} Negativland argued throughout the 1990s for an extension of the fair use exception in order to allow for more unencumbered practices of appropriation art. Negativland’s most controversial work juxtaposed audio samples of

\textsuperscript{233} See Craig Baldwin (producer/director), \textit{Sonic Outlaws} (video documentary), featuring interviews with Negativland, Emergency Broadcast Network, Tape-Beatles and Barbie Liberation Organization. Film Forum, 209 Houston Street, South Village, New York, 1995, duration 87 minutes.

\textsuperscript{234} US ‘culture jammer’ John Oswald’s project \textit{Plunderphonics} consisted of a series of audio collages made from appropriated and deconstructed samples of artists ranging from Michael Jackson to the Beatles. Negativland are a San Francisco Bay area collective that regularly broadcast ‘media-collages’ on a local radio band.
‘mysteriously acquired’ studio out-takes of well-known America’s Top 40 announcer Casey Kasem\textsuperscript{236} with a rendition of well-known Irish rock band U2’s hit song ‘I Still Haven’t Found What I’m Looking For’. The resulting ‘audio collage’ was then repackaged for commercial release with the provocative title \textit{U2} by Negativland (audio CD track 1). The band U2 should theoretically have been in no position to object to \textit{U2}, for during their own landmark ‘Zoo TV’ tour of the early 1990s they too had taken ‘images from live cameras, from optical disks, and from live satellite transmissions\textsuperscript{237} to form part of their concert experience.

\textit{U2} by Negativland was released in the US in August 1991 under a recording contract with SST Records. Within days of its release, SST Records was threatened with a lawsuit by Island Records (to whom U2 was under contract) and Warner/Chappell Music (with whom U2 had a publishing agreement). Island Records and Warner/Chappell Music contended that \textit{U2} constituted a case of both copyright infringement and image defamation, primarily because it was sold in ‘deceptive packaging’. The cover art for \textit{U2} depicted a large ‘letter U and numeral 2’ alongside a picture of the U2 spy-plane after which the band U2 itself was originally named.\textsuperscript{238} Such ironies were however considered too subtle to legally substantiate a parody. A preliminary injunction on the sale or manufacture of \textit{U2} was promptly granted, and SST settled immediately. Under the terms of the settlement, SST was prohibited from distributing \textit{U2} and agreed to destroy all remaining copies. In addition, SST was forced to pay an estimated US$25,000 in legal costs and to assign the copyright of \textit{U2} to Island and Warner/Chappell. SST Records in turn demanded that Negativland reimburse them for the cost of the settlement plus legal fees, amounting to the crippling sum of US$90,624.33.\textsuperscript{239} SST’s demand was pursuant to

\textsuperscript{236} Casey Kasem’s studio out-takes included exclamations such as ‘... this is Irish band U2 with their new single ... hey ... this is bullshit, nobody cares ... these guys are from England [sic] and who gives a shit?’
\textsuperscript{238} See Negativland, \textit{The Story of the Letter u and the Numeral 2}, Seeland, California, 1995, unpaginated.
what SST cited as an indemnification agreement in Negativland’s contract.\textsuperscript{240} Negativland refused, so SST declined to make any more royalty payments to Negativland for U2 or any previous recording. In continued defiance, Negativland then published a collage of the primary documents used during the case, including official court papers, press releases and legal correspondence. Shortly after the publication of their book, The Story of the Letter U and the Numeral 2, Negativland were again sued by SST. The complaint filed by SST\textsuperscript{241} alleged that the booklet constituted copyright infringement, violation of the Fair Credit Reporting Act, and breach of contract. Casey Kasem was also moved to pursue ‘all legal remedies available’ in order to prevent any future circulation of U2, claiming that ‘free speech and theft for private gain aren’t synonymous, nor should they be’.\textsuperscript{242} U2 remains commercially unavailable to this day, but it can be freely downloaded as an MP3 from http://www.negativeland.com.

The relative ease with which artworks can be digitally copied, manipulated, stored and transmitted raises many questions in relation to the ‘substantial part’ aspect of copyright law. ‘Substantial part’ determinations are also typically made on a case-by-case basis and generally in accordance with that which a ‘reasonable person’ might recognise. Questions that might impact on any substantial part assessment might include: How much of a work must be sampled in order to constitute an infringement? Have digital alterations affected the substantiality of the reproduction? Is it material or intellectual appropriation? Is an appropriated sound or image that is rearranged into a different melodic or pictorial structure acceptable? Questions such as these have emerged with increasing frequency and complexity as digital technologies become increasingly common as tools of artistic expression. Despite the fact that explicit practices of appropriation became less common during the 1990s in most commodifiable cultural applications, the more immaterial domain of the Internet was soon recognised as a potential sanctuary from the need for

'substantial part' assessment. In contrast with the fate of Negativland and SST Records, many contemporary audio collagists prefer to make their work exclusively available on the Internet, a sphere in which it has proven particularly difficult to police copyright infringements. With the rapid popularisation of the Internet, artists (especially if working under a pseudonym) are relatively liberated from the threat of copyright infringement charges. UK audio collagist Osymyso, for example, produces freely downloadable MP3 works that deliberately flaunt copyright.243 Intro-Inspection (audio CD track 2), for example, consists of 12 minutes of carefully blended 'introductions' to very well-known but copyright-protected pop songs. In contrast with the legal risks more commonly associated with physical commodities (such as Negativland's record or Koon's sculptures), artists such as Osymyso are relatively less restricted by legal consequence because of the relative anonymity and virtuality of the Internet.

As copyright laws generally only protect original works of authorship that are fixed in a tangible medium, insofar as works consist of an expression of something that is recognised as an original work, to prove copyright infringement, copyright owners must prove that the appropriating artist has reproduced an expression, or has sold reproductions of an expression, that is protected by copyright law. Neither Koons nor Negativland denied that they had reproduced a protected expression. They did, however, insist that their use of the protected material was a fair use.

The prospects for appropriation artists under a fair use exception are certainly unpredictable, at best. Without clear precedents, many artists might indeed be less inclined to subject themselves to the risk of infringement charges. If it is accepted that copyright law might provide artists with a legal disincentive towards overt practices of appropriation, to desist or conceal appropriated elements is therefore the only option available in order to escape detection. Moreover, if it is then accepted that appropriation remains an inextricable part of artistic practice, consciously concealing any explicitly appropriated elements becomes a viable means of avoiding copyright infringement.

243 Osymyso's appropriation-based audio-collages are freely available (in downloadable MP3 format) at http://www.osymyso.com, accessed 12/09/02.
In conclusion, the notion of authorship is synonymous in western culture with intellectual copyright ownership. As the idea of authorship also forms the central critical problematic of most postmodern appropriation art, the impact of copyright law on its continued practice is therefore inevitable – without a legally recognised status of authorship, the economic possibilities for appropriation artists are limited. In the end, the same problematic that forms the critical antithesis of authorship in art – that of appropriation art – is inevitably lured by the economic and legal privileges of authorship towards retreat or concealment. Outside the specialised rhetoric of contemporary art, critical justifications of appropriation art are difficult to comprehend – especially in relation to copyright law. As neither the practice of appropriation nor the threat of copyright infringement is likely to disappear in western cultural conditions, the strategy of actively concealing appropriated elements appears an inevitable resolution for artists who wish to continue using appropriation as a conscious part of their artistic production.

2:4 Appropriation art and the art market collapse

The relative economic successes enjoyed by many appropriation artists in New York during the 1980s were the product of both an economic boom and a strategically and rhetorically inverted critical justification of postmodern art’s apparent complicity with its status as a commodity. Contemporary art, or at least that which was most visible in leading galleries and glossy art journals, reflected the impact of the economic boom that occurred before the stockmarket collapse of 1987. Once the heated art market of the mid 1980s collapsed, however, a renewed sociological engagement started to emerge in much contemporary art. Appropriation art, now associated quite literally with 1980s excesses, would correspondingly start to fall from critical favour. Although critical theory’s quasi denunciations of the commodification of art had coincided with a heated contemporary art market, its cynical validations were not necessarily accepted as faits accomplis by all critics at the time. Critics such as Hal Foster and Craig Owens still claimed that critical (as opposed to stylistic) modes of postmodernism had potential for social or political application. The equalising rhetoric of poststructuralism may have superficially enabled a
legitimisation of much of appropriation art’s apparent complicity with capitalist modes of production, but many critics nonetheless pointed to the failure of critical postmodernism to adequately address the question: How valid is any critique of capitalism that aims at total success within the system?  

Contemporary art, particularly in New York, attracted an unprecedented commercial value during the 1980s. As a sign of what was to come, in February 1979, a relatively young 29-year-old artist named Julian Schnabel was given his first solo exhibition at the new Mary Boone Gallery in SoHo, New York and subsequently became an overnight commercial success. Paintings ranging from US $2500 and $3000 in price were sold on and even before the opening night. By the mid 1980s, many early-career artists were commanding prices previously unthinkable. In 1987, four New York artists – Peter Halley, Ashley Bickerton, Meyer Vaisman and Jeff Koons – were all taken on and exhibited by the prestigious Sonnabend Gallery in a show that became one of the best attended in the gallery’s history and quickly sold out, with prices ranging from US$10,000 to $50,000. Art world speculators such as young collector Michael Schwartz would often buy several works by a single artist in order to avoid being placed on waiting lists. Schwartz, a 27-year-old securities trader on the US Stock Exchange, amassed a collection containing works by artists such as Sherrie Levine and Richard Prince and Ashley Bickerton. Schwartz even convinced his wealthy parents, collectors Barbara and Eugene Schwartz, to start buying the new work. Artists and their dealers now employed aggressive marketing strategies in order to attract such significant collectors. Being in the right private collection started to become as important as inclusion in public museum collections. Investors and collectors now wielded a far greater influence than critics. The opinion of advertising giant and keen collector Charles Saatchi, for example, was considered capable of making or breaking an artist’s career in

247 Ibid., p. 133.

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New York during the mid 1980s. Corporations also got in on the action. In the five years from 1981 to 1986, the number of US corporations collecting art had risen by 50%, to include at least 1000 organisations.

During the economic boom witnessed during the 1980s, contemporary art was as much ‘critically engaged’ as it was commercial to an unprecedented degree. That Jeff Koons, who had supported his early art production while working as a commodities broker, was able to give away such a symbol of 1980s affluence due to the greater fortune he had started to amass as an artist, is testimony to the size of the contemporary art market in New York during the 1980s. The art world of the 1980s, for New York-based critic and historian Benjamin Buchloh, coincided with a ‘historical moment’ in which ‘a reactionary middle class struggle[d] to ensure and expand its privileges’, while artists ‘obediently’ provided ‘gestures of free expression with the cynical alibi of irony’.

The market interest in appropriation art seemed all the more absurd given the cynical rhetoric and supposedly ‘empty’ presence that accompanied much of the work. New York artist Allan McCollum exaggerated the logic of commodity simulation with his Plaster Surrogates series of the mid 1980s. Consisting of a series of intentionally ‘fake’ painting-like cast plaster objects, shaped and painted to suggest little pictures with black rectangular interiors and white frames, Plaster Surrogates had all the essential elements of a certified artwork aside from the absence of a real painting within a real frame. All were framed, dated, numbered, and individually signed by the artist. They sold quickly. By the mid to late 1980s, the specialised rhetoric of critical postmodernism (and particularly the strategy of being simultaneously critical of and complicit with art’s status as a commodity) no longer seemed applicable to a relatively downsized and theory-wary art-world. Stripped of both its rhetoric and its commodity value, appropriation art was emptied of significance. As an ardent detractor of appropriationist tendencies in

248 Ibid.
contemporary art, Robert C. Morgan argued that art had separated entirely during the 1980s from the idea of art as a form of creative expression, and that boundaries between critically engaged art and popular trends in fashion, media and entertainment had become indiscernible. Morgan pointed to the acceleration of this tendency at the end of the 1970s, its saturation by the mid 1980s and partial dissolution within a general dissatisfaction with both cynical and market-driven trends by the 1980s and early 1990s.

Like most commodity stocks, the monetary value of artworks acquired during the boom period of the 1980s dropped suddenly after the market collapsed, and remained relatively lower into the 1990s. The contemporary art boom of the 1980s was a symptom of economic rationalism and 'Reaganomics'; it presumed a supply-weighted art world, structured as if clients were infinitely available to buy gargantuan works. It soon proved only as stable as the economy that supported it, and artists would soon need to adjust their approach. Ashley Bickerton indicated in 1988 that he and other artists were now ‘pulling away from the idea of commodity art’. Many artists who had gained success rapidly would ultimately suffer the same fate as any commodity considered overvalued in a financial stockmarket. Robert Hughes, expatriate Australian New York-based critic for Time magazine, warned in 1985 that ‘the moral economy of the art world’ was now ‘so distorted by hype and premature careerism’ that it rivalled the ‘unreality and weightlessness’ of Hollywood. Displaying fortuitous form, Hughes had predicted the art market crash that came at the end of the decade as early as 1984.

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255 ‘Perhaps it is not the business of critics to predict, but I am going to try anyway. I don’t have a date for the crash but I do have a story line. At present the contemporary art market is very extended. It is so extended - meaning that so many pictures by newly fashionable names have been lodged with collectors who expect to realize on them one day - that the old processes of defending an artist’s prices may no longer work ... It will not affect every artist, because there are many reputations with the justifiable solidity that will enable them to survive such vicissitudes. But it will shake the confidence of the art market, and of the art world, as a whole. It won’t happen in 1983, or in 1986, but we shall see what has happened as the millennium crawls close by 1990’. Robert Hughes, ‘On Art and Money’, The New York Review of Books, Vol. 31, 6 December 1984, p. 27.
Hughes' prognosis would come true on ‘Black Friday’ at the New York Stock Exchange (16 October 1987), the day when the stockmarket crashed. Within two years the art market had followed suit. Once the art market crashed, so too would critical and market confidence in many artists previously associated with that boom. The 1980s art boom was short-lived, and had, as Hughes noted, no tangible relationship with function, material content or labour. With the onset of a recession in 1990, the value of non-income producing assets such as artworks quickly collapsed. The market did not recover until the mid 1990s, and most artists who had made their name during the heated art market of the mid 1980s would never command the same prices again. By the 1990s, the art market was ‘plagued by superstition’. 255 In 1994, Hughes described a very different art market, in which much work purchased during the 1980s was now ‘considered tainted’ in the auction houses of New York, mainly because ‘nobody want[ed] them enough to pay ’80s prices for them’. 256

By the 1990s, many of the fallen millionaires of the 1980s had sold up or ceased to buy contemporary art. The excesses of the 1980s were now widely perceived, both in social and economic terms, as a black mark on history. The restructuring of the art world that occurred in the early 1990s following its partial collapse in the late 1980s naturally included reappraisal of the kind of art most prominent before the market collapse. There was new hope among many in the art world that art would become less focused upon money. For some artists, refocusing upon immediate, subjective or bodily experiences would represent an attempt to restore the self in art. Art that had been closely associated with the art boom of the 1980s, particularly simulationist appropriation art, would become correspondingly unfashionable. Much art now seemed to be more concerned with re-engaging with ideas related to the ‘real’, politics or personal subjectivity, all ideas considered antithetical to the cynical commercial compliances of 1980s appropriation art. Since the collapse of the art market was relatively contemporaneous with the critical decline of appropriation art, and as the relationship between art and its commodity status formed a large part of postmodern art criticism in the first place, it would not seem

unreasonable to suggest a correlation between the two events. The collapse of the art market at the end of the 1980s clearly contributed to the retreat (and therefore potentially to the concealment) of appropriation during the 1990s.

2.5 Concealment and the capabilities of digital reproduction technologies

According to Australian-based English critic Nicholas Zurbrugg in 2000, although postmodern culture can be considered in many ways ‘apocalyptic … superficial, weightless [and] static’, it might nonetheless be finally capable of functioning more ‘profoundly, more “weightily”, and more radically’ when considered against ‘the complex creative potential of its ever-evolving technology’. 257 Certainly, with the advent of new and relatively accessible digital imaging and reproductive technologies, many contemporary artists have gained access to unprecedented means with which to source, manipulate, distort and conceal appropriated elements in their work. In nominating new digital technologies as a fifth significant incentive for concealment, and demonstrating the degree to which appropriation has become a secondary ‘given’ in much technologically engaged cultural production, this investigation will now explore the shifting status of reproductive technology within appropriation-based art.

Characteristically employed within much 1980s postmodern art as a means of critically illuminating the idea of the copy in art, by the 1990s and 2000s, reproduction technology had instead become an aide in the concealment of the copy.

Reproduction technologies have long played a significant role in artistic production and criticism, primarily due to the significance of the photographic image. Photography, the medium often regarded as most directly applicable to the critical questions raised by 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

256 Ibid.
the repeatable nature of the photographic image, with the advent of easily accessible
digital image technologies in the 1990s, traditional modes of image interpretation became
even further confused. According to digital cultural theorist Kevin Robins in 1996, digital
reproduction technologies place the nature and function of photographic representation
even further in doubt, precisely because ‘digital information is inherently malleable’. 258
With digital image manipulation, virtually every aspect of the traditional photographic
image can be substantially and easily altered. Until recently the domain of professional
graphic designers, with the advent of affordable home computing during the 1990s,
anyone with access to a scanner and software tools could easily add or subtract elements,
alter colours, shapes and sizes – and therefore distort appropriated images beyond viewer
recognition. From image manipulation software to digital audio sampling technology in
electronic music, the possibilities for appropriation and concealment are considerable.
For many artists, digital appropriation has become as much of a default means of artistic
production as painting or photography.

Computer imaging systems consist of three basic stages in which the manipulation of pre-
existing images can take place. The first (or input stage) includes processes such as
scanning, using a digital camera, or utilising Internet search engines to download pre-
existing images. Scanners and digitisers allow artists to appropriate photographs, videos
or images created by traditional means and often contain limited parameters for initial
image manipulation. The second stage consists of image processing tools such as
software programs specifically designed for image manipulation. Off-the-shelf programs
such as Adobe PhotoShop are available to anyone with enough money and access to a
standard desktop computer, and can easily be used to manipulate appropriated images
beyond recognition. Paint programs allow artists to ‘paint’ in simulated view on a
computer monitor using a mouse and the command keys of a keyboard. With programs
such as these working in conjunction, complex forms of collage, sometimes referred to as
‘electrobricollage’, 259 can be created. The third stage consists of output devices such as

printers, which can reproduce images on surfaces ranging from paper to canvas, vinyl, metal or plexiglass (the results may also be over-painted with traditional materials), and also projection devices, such as monitors, holograms or oversized screens. The same three stages can be identified in audio applications, as sampling, mixing and mastering respectively (see Chapter 4).

As a tool, computers are extremely useful for producing complex images and for making production processes more efficient. In many artistic applications, computers are used in conjunction with older imaging mediums to produce 'real' (and therefore exchangeable) art objects. Printing onto canvas with a view to over-painting the image is a common example of such a conjunction. To a certain extent, the more digital reproduction technologies invade every aspect of modern life, the more ‘real’ exchangeable art objects become fetishised as commodities. The danger of using new technologies too explicitly in artistic production is that the work will date in accordance with the pace of technological change. Many contemporary artists are therefore provided with even further incentive to conceal digitally appropriated elements in their finished work.

One of the first artists to utilise digital scanning as part of an artistic production was seminal Australian appropriation artist Imants Tillers. Tillers’ Untitled (1978), for example, was produced using the then cutting edge Japanese Necoreprographic technology. Once Tillers’ reproduction of historical Australian painter Hans Heysen’s Summer (1909) was scanned into a computer, the program then controlled precision paint jets capable of printing large images onto virtually any surface. What was of particular interest to Tillers was that in scanning a printed photographic reproduction of Summer using the latest photomechanical technologies he was doubling an image already copied using older analogue photomechanical technologies. Before digital image reproduction technologies, 1960s pop artist Andy Warhol had used silk-screen techniques; New York ‘Metro Pictures’ artist Barbara Kruger had utilised conventional commercial oversize printing methods already used in advertising. By the 1990s, scanning and printing digital images onto materials such as canvas for the purpose of over-painting was a relatively
common form of artistic production. In particular, the introduction of pigment-based inks, originally developed for durability in outdoor advertising, promised a greater archival integrity for digitally printed images.

British art historian Sir Ernst Gombrich once described the work of the painter as a ‘gradual modification of the traditional schematic conventions of image-making under the pressure of novel demands’. Arguably, with the proliferation of image reproduction technologies during the twentieth century, painting was more substantially pressured by ‘novel demands’ than ever before. Walter Benjamin, in his 1936 essay ‘The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction’, made specific reference to modernism’s aspirations toward ‘effects’ that ‘could only be obtained’ by embracing ‘a changed technical standard’. According to Australian painter John Young, a long-time user of oversize digital printing technology in conjunction with over-painting, the use of technology in artistic production, in and of itself, is not ‘particularly impressive’; he does, however, concede that as it is an ‘intrusion into our everyday life’, it must become part of any ‘honest’ engagement with ‘the spirit of our times’.

When Walter Benjamin observed that ‘technical reproduction’ placed ‘the copy of the original into situations which would be out of reach for the original itself’, he could not have predicted the extent to which that possibility would be later accelerated with the advent of modern computing and the multiple electronic transfer capabilities of the Internet. Literally billions of downloadable digital images are now freely available via modems using specialised image search engines such as Google Beta Image Search. Many artists, such as German conceptual photographer Thomas Ruff, for example, have exhibited images appropriated directly from the Internet. Formerly known for large deadpan portraits of ‘ordinary people’ and unmediated shots of everyday interiors and

architectures. Ruff’s work has long been concerned with interpretations of reality via technology. According to New York-based critic Jerry Saltz, Ruff ‘sees reality as something to be recorded or inspected, not changed or adorned’. Ruff’s Nudes series (2000), however, presented a new approach. Appropriating generic images from pornographic ‘thumbnail galleries’ available on the Internet, Ruff then enlarges his heavily pixellated selections ready for printing onto materials such as aluminium, gelatin silver, cibachrome or plexiglass. In returning that which was already a second, third or fourth-generation image (possibly originally sourced from a videotape) back into a photograph, the appropriated subject is disengaged from its original source, forced into the background, and certain hitherto unrecognised formal values are instead prioritised.

![Image: Photograph of a photograph]

Figure 17. Thomas Ruff. *Nudes DYK03*, 1999.

For Ruff, since his art does not rely on critical recognition of the act of appropriation for its legitimisation, the most obscure images are often the most suitable. Precisely because they are obscure, Ruff’s appropriated images can ‘freely absorb the multitudes of

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subjective visual assumptions, associations, and memories which the viewer brings to them’ while remaining able to ‘stand alone, without easy ironic distance or obvious meaning’. This investigation’s central assertion, that the device of appropriation is no longer necessarily an explicit critical strategy, but rather a tacit or incidental tool of production, is certainly exemplified in the case of Ruff’s Nudes. For Saltz, Ruff manages to ‘slow down’ and ‘soften’ the appropriated subject, create an ‘inherent sensuality’, and somehow turn the ‘conventional into something lavish’. Other German artists of the 1990s, such as photographer Jörg Sasse, have adopted a similar approach in terms of the subjective aestheticisation of appropriated photographs. Like Ruff’s, Sasse’s work is not generally read in the manner of postmodern re-photographic strategies, such as those used in the late 1970s and early 1980s by New York photo-appropriationists Sherrie Levine and Richard Prince. The strategy of re-photographic appropriation was in their work more a secondary ‘given’ than a central critical device. Via technology, appropriation was now more a means to other concerns in art than an end in itself.

According to some critics, the major flaw attributable to much art created in the virtual domain is that the computer’s construction of virtuality eliminates the all-important presence of the body in artistic production. For US-based Australian artist Simon Penny, the computer as a site for artistic production excludes ‘bodily ways of knowing’. If digital technology is used discreetely, and in conjunction with ‘bodily ways of knowing’ however, it can deflect specific critical detection. The reinstatement of formal subjectivity and distinction between form and content in much art of the 1990s had seen the partial rejection of anti-aesthetic applications of technology. This new resistance to the anti-aesthetic conceptualisms that had dominated art of the 1980s appeared in formations ranging from neo-romanticism and neo-futurism to hyper-modernism, and was often

266 ‘Because the most obscure images are the best, Ruff’s photographs lend unexpected ammo to the old adage that the less explicit the pornography, the more erotic.’ Jerry Saltz, ‘Ruff Trade’, The Village Voice, 24–30 May, 2000, http://www.villagevoice.com/issues/0021/saltz.html, accessed 26/05/00.
characterised by a partial return of formal, qualitative and aesthetic value in contemporary art. For US-based critic and historian Jeremey Gilbert-Rolfe, this re-aestheticised pursuit of a ‘techno-sublime’\textsuperscript{270} is closely related to the formal possibilities offered by new digital technologies, and has unexpectedly seen the recapitulation of classical, romantic and impressionist conceptions of beauty in art as a consequence.\textsuperscript{271}

An example of aestheticisation via technologies can be seen in the work of German artist Andreas Gursky. Gursky’s vast oversized photographic panoramas of the 1990s are the result of a marriage between traditional photography and digital technology. Originally trained by German master photographers Bernd and Hilla Becher, Gursky is familiar with the optical precision and lighting demanded by traditional modes of photography yet also uses a computer in order to correct perspectival distortions, alter the proportions of the image and synthesise multiple photographs into a single composition, and digitally compresses photographic detail right up against the picture plane. Gursky’s images are enlarged beyond the conventional scale of the photographic prints to the scale of billboards and stadium television mega-screens (up to 5 metres in length and 3 metres high).

Many artists who had established their careers during the 1980s were more resistant to the post-gestural efficiencies of digital imaging technology. French collaborators Pierre et Gilles, for example, who had originally emerged from the same seismic shift in visual culture that had produced the New York school of photo-appropriationists, have to date employed no digital production technologies to extend their photographic collages, preferring the combination of constructed photographic sets and hand-painting. Despite the availability of software tools that create comparable effects, and despite the ease with which their works have lent themselves to popular reproduction, Pierre et Gilles have nonetheless insisted on the arguably ‘nostalgic’ value of the labour of craft.

\textsuperscript{271} Ibid.
Attitudes towards new reproduction technologies in artistic production are varied. While it is generally agreed that the use of technology in and of itself does not constitute an artwork,\textsuperscript{272} attitudes towards the use of new technologies in cultural production range from positivist thinking, which tends to regard the growth of mass production and media as a democratising force,\textsuperscript{273} to sceptical or pessimistic thinking, which tends to regard the private ownership, diffusion and social impact of new technologies and communications media as an anti-democratising agent.\textsuperscript{274} Such dialectical opposition becomes increasingly blurred when it is considered within the virtuality of the digital domain. In addition, formerly held distinctions, such as that made by Douglas Crimp between material and stylistic appropriation, or that made by Hal Foster between critical and commodified postmodernism, also become less directly antithetical once considered within a digital cultural context. As contemporary society continues to move from a material commodity to an information base, many former theoretical and ideological boundaries have become increasingly inconsequential. Together with the now long-established medium of television,\textsuperscript{275} the personal computer is now the site of a previously unimaginable access to information and images. Technological developments such as DVD, CD-ROM, virtual reality and the Internet have not simply replaced older media such as photography or video; they have rather interwoven, overlapped and mutated with them to form a multilayered techno-media landscape that demands a further transformation of critical definitions. Using a software program such as Adobe

\textsuperscript{272} According to US artist Jeff Koons’ definition, ‘the medium is never the message, the medium is the gesture’. See Jeff Koons, \\textit{Easyfunk – Ethereal} (with interview by David Sylvester and essay by Robert Rosenblum), Guggenheim Museum Publications, New York, 2000. 

\textsuperscript{273} The idea that technology represents a democratising force capable of a radical displacement of difference was central within the curatorial premise offered alongside 1989 Image World exhibition at the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York. See Marvin Heiferman, ‘Everywhere, All the Time, for Everybody’, \\textit{Image World}, Exhibition catalogue, Whitney Museum of American Art, 9 November 1989–18 February 1990, pp. 15–33.

\textsuperscript{274} Pessimistic critics, on the other hand, cited German philosopher Martin Heidegger’s disputation of the idea that technological development could ever be value-neutral. For Heidegger, technology ‘unfolds a specific character of domination’. Martin Heidegger, quoted in Andrew Feenberg, \textit{Alternate Modernity: The Technical Turn in Philosophy and Social Theory}, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1995, p. 24.

\textsuperscript{275} Many artists see television as the clearest example of technology used as a tool of power. Television has trained perception to be familiar with fast edits, sound-bite information, mutually experienced simulated realities and a blurred distinction between content and process. US artist Dara Birnbaum’s five-minute videotape \textit{Technology/Transformation: Wonder Woman} (1978–79) represents an early example of artistic appropriation from mainstream television. In Birnbaum’s work, Wonder Woman, the main character of a
PhotoShop, a 'new' image can easily be created using a single appropriated source but without that source necessarily being consciously recognisable to the viewer. The presence of appropriated elements therefore becomes increasingly difficult for the critic to discern. According to Nicholas Zurbrugg, 'contemporary mutations in and across mass-market publicity, photography, film, television, video, and computer art' make it increasingly difficult for the critic 'to discern good from bad, substantial from superficial, innovation from entropy, and originality from banality'. In a world in which most images are now almost instantaneously accessible via the Internet, the artist is now less likely to be viewed as any kind of specialised conduit for ideas or social orders expressed via image mediation.

In conclusion, difficulties encountered in critically defining art produced within the new techno-media environments of the 1990s and early 2000s are the consequence of several factors working in opposition to the continuation of the 1980s paradigm of postmodern appropriation. This chapter has identified five significant factors that contributed to the retreat and subsequent concealment of appropriation in contemporary art during the 1990s and early 2000s: an increase in critical impetus and artistic desire to transcend the banality and rhetoric of critical postmodernism; increased ethical reassessment of postmodern attitudes towards cross-cultural appropriation; the threat of copyright infringement; the collapse of a significantly appropriation art-centred contemporary art market at the end of the 1980s; and, finally, the increased capabilities of new and relatively accessible digital reproduction technologies to distort and conceal appropriated elements. All five of these aforementioned incentives for retreat and concealment, both individually and in conjunction, can be identified as contributing to the manner in which much art of the 1990s and early 2000s distinguished itself from that of the 1980s.

prime-time program based on an action-adventure comic book of the same name, is captured in her twirling metamorphosis from 'real' woman to super-hero.

Chapter 3

Appropriation and the construction of postmodern subjectivity

The first moment of postmodernism in the visual arts was served primarily as a refusal of the modernist projections of radical and autonomous originality. The second was more concerned with the idea of art as a projection of simulated reality and art’s contradictory status as a commodity. By contrast, the third moment of postmodernism in the visual arts saw a partial re-engagement with thematics related to personal identity, a renewal of sociological content, and a general softening of anti-aesthetic attitudes. Associated with a general resistance to the hardened critical theory that had characterised the first two moments of postmodernism, this third moment can also be heralded as the beginning of appropriation’s retreat as a centrally exhibited thematic.

By the late 1980s and early 1990s, critical theory’s hardened critique of authorial distinction was starting to be intercepted by a seemingly antithetical preoccupation with thematics related to identity. By the 1990s, ideas related to multiculturalism, postcolonialism, an increased acknowledgment of the plight of the disenfranchised ‘other’, and the loss of political agency attributable to the now ‘fragmented’ postmodern 'self' were widely perceived as more applicable to the ‘real’ world than the comparatively canonical postmodernisms presented by much (mainly New York-based) 1980s critical theory. Many critics, curators and artists now turned to rewriting histories of art in order to include excluded or marginalised cultures. According to New York critic Eleanor Heartney, where ‘an entire bookcase of the New Titles section at the East Village’s ultra-hip Saint Mark’s Bookstore used to be devoted to Baudrillardian musings on postmodernism and consumer culture’, by 1990, shelves were already ‘being crowded out by books on Third World women, the politics of AIDS, the origins of psychoanalysis, and other such topics’. 277

Once the concept of history was broadened to a global scale, western projections of postmodernism could no longer be defended as neutral, apolitical and universally valid, without being accused of instead being no less hegemonic than the grand narratives they had originally purported to overturn. New York-based critic Thomas McEvilly noted in 1991 that ‘the issue of identity’ had now ‘come to the foreground both of culture in general and of the visual in particular’. According to McEvilly, the ‘inner meaning’ of appropriation art had long been the ‘opening up of the concept of history to a global scale’ and the consequent ‘intermingling of different cultures’ image banks’. The mechanisms of repression and stereotypical socialisation found in the work of gay US artist Robert Gober, the dissemination of sexual and ethnic identity found in the work of African American artist Renée Green, and the cross-cultural disenfranchisements experienced by Australian Aborigines within white Australia as exemplified in the work of part-Aboriginal filmmaker and photographer Tracey Moffatt, represent some of the better known bodies of work that have addressed this idea of the ‘other’ during the 1990s.

The underlying assumption within much 1980s postmodernism, that all culture was equal, on a level playing field of detached signifiers, was, by the early 1990s, considered somewhat limited once considered against ‘real’ disparities still evident outside the circumscribed concerns of art theory. Soon, terms such as ‘difference’, ‘relativism’, ‘multiculturalism’ and ‘diversity’ would be substituted for canonical postmodern terms such as ‘appropriation’, ‘simulation’ and ‘hyperreality’. For many artists of the 1990s, references to ideas such as personal affirmation or empowerment had become more important than calculated cynicism or dry image mediation in this new and more sociologically engaged variation of postmodernism. This new rhetoric helped contemporary art distance itself from the comparatively apolitical legacies of 1980s postmodernism. When practised by an authentically disenfranchised artist, the act of appropriation could now be seen as an act of ‘reclaiming’. Reclaiming had of course

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279 Ibid.
already begun outside the art world, in relation to issues ranging from civil rights to public space, police violence and European colonialism. Just as African Americans had reclaimed the word ‘nigger’, and homosexuals had reclaimed the word ‘queer’, postcolonial artists would lend canonical ‘Eurocentric’ formations a new twist. The use of anti-canonical strategies was however only considered acceptable for artists in possession of an ‘authentic otherness’, an attribute generally not available to white, heterosexual, middle-class males in affluent western countries.

The ‘other’ is an idea drenched in conceptual and linguistic complexity. Like the idea of postmodernism itself, it can only be seen as existing in direct relationship with something else. The other possesses no independent essence and can therefore only be defined in direct relationship with whatever it is other to. Ideally, the idea of the other functions to undermine canonical efforts to install one cultural, gender or racial group or philosophy as the privileged purveyor of truth or reality. In practice, however, the complicated nature of racial, ethnic and gender politics is often reduced in a simple dichotomy of white heterosexual males versus a constructed other. The idea of otherness can also be seen as representing western culture’s desire for what it feels it has lost via capitalism. Consequently, it can also become fetishised as a romantic or exotic notion that is really only of interest in the west in terms of the extent to which it has influenced or will influence the larger course of western history. French theorist Claude Levi-Strauss warned in 1975 that ‘the value’ attached ‘to foreign societies’ appeared ‘to be higher in proportion as the society is more foreign’, and that it ‘has no independent foundation’ other than as ‘a function of … disdain for … the customs prevailing’ in the ‘native setting’.  

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280 Postcolonialism refers to the socio-political and cultural conditions apparent in certain countries (such as Malaysia, Australia or India) after the retreat of European colonial power. It is closely related to the concept of multiculturalism.

281 In 1984, for example, an exhibition that displayed African art only in relation to its influence on European modernism was staged at the Museum of Modern Art in New York. ‘Primitivism’ in the 20th Century Art attempted to contextualise the work of modernist ‘geniuses’ such as Picasso, Miró and Giacometti against their exposure to African art in the collections of Paris museums. Little concern for the different meanings that the African works had held within their original contexts was shown.
The construction of otherness in contemporary art of the 1990s served as an antithesis to seminal postmodernism’s critique of individualism and self-expression in art. Less concerned with targeting art historical prototypes and more with the ‘real’ world of racism, economic and social inequality and media bias, the focus of the appropriative gesture had shifted from calculated cynicism and prerequisite quotation marks to a reignited interest in ‘real’ and personally individuated subjectivities. Where art of the 1980s had emphasised artificiality, often using convoluted constructions of hyperrealism and simulation, much art of the 1990s had sought instead to address the question of the postmodern self. Questions relating to the postmodern self were, like those relating to the disenfranchised other, also often framed against a reworking of the politics of inclusion and distinction first articulated in civil libertarian, feminist and queer politics during the 1960s. For many observers, however, despite the supposedly anti-hierarchical and anti-narrative objectives of 1980s critical postmodernism, the postmodern self was clearly still positioned by gender, race and class.

In distinguishing artistic identity by virtue of race, ethnicity, gender or sexuality, an unspoken order of political correctness often dictates that artists always speak for their own ‘authentic’ marginalised group, despite the realities of migration, immigration, hybridised identity and ethnic diaspora. For some observers, western culture’s romantic obsession with ‘reclaiming’ the idea of personal subjectivity could be more accurately described in terms of a more generalised obsession with the projected suffering of fragmented identity. According to New York critic Hal Foster, western culture was, by the 1990s, largely defined in terms of a ‘tendency to redefine experience, individual and historical, in terms of trauma’.283 Pointing to a general ‘ethnographic turn in art and criticism’ towards ‘a reductive over-identification with the other’, Foster warns of the potential for excessive levels of hermeticism and narcissism, where the ‘other is obscured’ and the self is ‘pronounced’.284 Since consensus often demanded that artists

speak only for or on behalf of their own disenfranchisements (only gay artists could
legitimately address gay themes and only Australian Aboriginal artists could address
Aboriginal themes, etc), the result was often an inverted form of censorship. According to
Heartney, it soon appeared obvious ‘that some Others are more Other than other Others’,
and that a ‘divisive rhetoric of separatism’ can often accompany efforts to ‘promote work
by formerly excluded groups’, which in the end becomes a form of reversed censorship,
‘as if there could be no communication across gender or ethnic lines’.\textsuperscript{285}

Art based on the premise of otherness is difficult to critique, precisely because it
deliberately assumes that there is not just one interpretation possible – there are many
possible interpretations. Unlike typical appropriation art of the 1980s, which often relied
on viewer recognition of specific art-historical prototypes in order to function critically,
much art of the 1990s tended to rely more heavily upon viewer recognition of the
cultural, ethnic or sexual identity of the artist for its legitimisation. For Australian critic
Rex Butler, to substitute the question ‘What does it mean?’ for ‘What did its author
mean?’ is to engage with the idea of postmodern subjectivity.\textsuperscript{286} This ‘dramatisation of
intentionality’, as evident in much art of the 1990s and early 2000s, paradoxically tends
to privilege ‘subjectively specific identities’ such as ‘women, aboriginals, gays and post-
colonials’.\textsuperscript{287} According to Butler, postmodern subjectivity can therefore be defined as an
assumption of intentionality other than that which seems obvious without any \textit{a priori}
knowledge of the gender, sexual orientation or racial or cultural identity of the artist.\textsuperscript{288}
For Butler, this strategy of ‘doubling’, of being concurrently critical and non-critical, is
both the key to postmodern subjectivity and its most incontrovertible limitation.


\textsuperscript{286} Rex Butler, \textit{An Uncertain Smile: Australian Art in the '90s}, Artspace Visual Arts Centre Limited,

\textsuperscript{287} Ibid., p. 33.

\textsuperscript{288} ‘A photo of two girls sucking a guy off in an art magazine, for instance? That’s OK, it’s done by a
collective of New York feminists. Racist graffiti speaking of “boongs” and “coons”? That’s alright, it’s
installed by a white/black collective from Brisbane. Homophobic newspaper headlines trumpeting the
worst of AIDS hysteria? That’s fine, it’s done by a gay bricoleur. An aestheticisation of the Nazi
Holocaust? That’s clever because it’s done by two Parisian conceptual photographers. None of it can mean
what it appears to because it all functions strategically, contextually.’ Ibid.
Just as artists such as Andy Warhol and Jeff Koons are commonly described as simultaneously radical and conservative, Butler sees the strategy of US pop icon Madonna as both critical and non-critical. It is this kind of ironic defeatism that Butler nominates as 'the complacency of camp'. In 1966, New York theorist and cultural critic Susan Sontag defined 'camp' as a tendency to place quotation marks around ordinary words in order to alter their meaning. Initially located primarily in gay culture, camp is a form of 'in joke', usually designed to caricature the values of mainstream culture via a mock participation. For Butler, Madonna's establishment of an ironic distance from quoted female sexual stereotypes also constitutes a form of camp. The doubled logic of camp enables the artist to inhabit 'two different positions', and therefore 'two different intentionalities'. The fact that insincerity can seem sincere and that sincerity can seem insincere ultimately discredits conventional currencies of criticism. For Butler, camp 'swallows up all discussion of art today' and can therefore no longer claim to be critical 'because it is henceforth everywhere'.

Despite the general resistance to specific critical categorisation of much art of the 1990s and early 2000s, two otherwise incompatible trajectories can nonetheless be identified. One appeared more concerned with a repoliticisation of the discourse of the other, while the other, a sleek neo-minimalism, was characterised by a partial abandonment of Duchampian anti-aestheticism and a renewed focus on form and content. Both trajectories can, however, be defined in terms of a general substitution of specific for generic appropriated elements. For Butler, most art of the 1990s did not constitute a

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289 Madonna is radical precisely because we cannot tell whether the image of woman she puts forward merely replays the worst feminine stereotypes or is a subtle critique of them from within; whether she merely panders to male voyeurism or somehow turns it against itself, making it self-aware and thus unpleasurable. Rex Butler, 'The Complacency of Camp', Smiles Certain and Uncertain, Part I, Globe 8, http://www.arts.monash.edu/visarts/globe/issue8/rb1txt.html, accessed 26/12/99.
290 Ibid.
292 Ibid.
293 Ibid., p. 29.
294 Ibid., p. 15.
295 Ibid., p. 29.
296 Ibid., p. 29.
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
tory and taking up a kind of real world politics’. The 1990s, like any historical
period, can be defined as both a rejection and absorption of the paradigm that had
preceded it. The art of the 1990s was no longer specifically about appropriation; it
utilised appropriation as a tacit tool within the production of new paradigms.
Appropriation had become a means with which to construct rather than critique art. As
the art world’s focus shifted away from specific art historical recapitulations and towards
a provisional reinstatement of ‘real’ subjectivities, many artists who were established
within the 1980s paradigm of appropriation found that they needed to adjust their
approach to appropriation in order to remain relevant. This would prove a relatively
easier task for those artists able to exploit a bankable sense of otherness. For emblematic
1980s Australian appropriation artists John Young and Lindy Lee, for example, partial
deference to Chinese ethnicity coupled with a substitution of art historical for more
subjective references would enable a renewed level of legitimisation during the 1990s.
But since Australia was in itself ‘other’ to the perceived centres of the art world, a
relationship between appropriation and identity had long been fundamental to Australian
projections of postmodernism.

3:1 Shifting attitudes to appropriation in Australian postmodernism

US art was already relatively self-referential by the time of the advent of postmodernism
in the early 1980s, due largely to the triumphs of Greenbergian modernism during the
1950s, pop art and minimalism during the 1960s and conceptualism during the 1970s;
Australian postmodernism, on the other hand, was framed against a culture already
overtly familiar with the secondhand status of its art. The distance from Australia of the
influential cosmopolitan ‘centres’ of the art world had long been significant for
Australian artists. Moreover, the provincial and derivative status of Australian art was

\[297\] Rex Butler, *An Uncertain Smile: Australian Art in the ’90s*, Artspace Visual Arts Centre Limited,
Sydney, 1996.
generally considered (often inaccurately) as a given. Australian art historian Terry Smith’s 1974 essay ‘The Provincialism Problem’ is one of the first significant examinations of the centre/periphery dichotomy in relation to Australian art. Smith’s analysis was based on the historical conception that the art world is a hierarchical system focused on a ‘centre’, and that within this centre ‘the rules of the game’ are constructed by an elite handful of privileged ‘superstars’. For Smith, the ‘cruel irony of provincialism’ is that although ‘the artist pays exaggerated homage’ to the qualitative standards of the ‘centre’, ultimately, ‘to the international audience he is mostly invisible’.\textsuperscript{298}

Since most significant art historical prototypes were only ever been seen by Australian artists once in printed reproduction, postmodernism’s projection of contemporary culture as an endless array of copies created an opportunity for Australia’s self-perceived lack of cultural authenticity to be turned on its head. By the early 1980s, numerous articles relating to postmodernism and appropriation art, together with English translations of influential French thinkers such as Jean Baudrillard, were published in Australian contemporary art journals such as \textit{Art \\& Text, Agenda, Eyeline, West, Praxis M, Tension, On the Beach} and \textit{Antithesis}. Some Australian critics and artists, however, felt that the dry hyperrealities of imported postmodern critical theory, with its emphasis on ideas such as poststructuralism and simulation, did not exactly fit the experience of Australian postmodernism. Already located within a former British colony which had undergone rapid cultural transformation as a result of postwar immigration and multiculturalism, Australian postmodernism was thought to be well positioned to utilise this relationship between appropriation and the idea of identity. According to Butler, ‘Australia’s identity may well be unoriginal or inauthentic’, but ‘it embodies this condition more than … other countries.’\textsuperscript{299}

\textsuperscript{298} Terry Smith, ‘The Provincialism Problem’, \textit{Artforum}, September 1974, p. 56.

Critic and curator (and founding editor of art journal *Art&Text*) Paul Taylor and seminal Australian appropriation artist Imants Tillers were among the first to recognise that Australia was uniquely poised to exploit its provincial status using the inverted logic of postmodern appropriation. According to Rex Butler, it was Taylor who ‘first made the crucial connection between appropriation and the question of Australian identity’, and was ‘able to argue that appropriation was peculiarly Australian or was able to be given a peculiarly Australian twist’. 300 In a series of essays, and within the curatorial premise for *Popism*, the first major showcase exhibition of Australian appropriation art (held at the National Gallery of Victoria in 1982), Taylor had concluded that since Australian art was ‘born in mediation’, it already existed as ‘a carnivalesque array of copies, inversions and negatives’. 301 Therefore, thought Taylor, with the arrival of postmodernism, Australian art might ‘become the well-paid beneficiary of its timely, profound and radical superficiality’. 302 Similarly, Tillers argued that Australia’s very ‘invisibility’ and ‘powerlessness’ could be turned to its advantage. 303 Describing Australia as a ‘graveyard of reproduced images’ 304 in which artists’ ‘experience of works of art through mechanical reproduction always’ pre-dated any ‘direct experience’, 305 Tillers argued that since Australian artists were, by default, already at home in this culture of copies, reproductions and fakes, already ‘dismembered’ from their culture of origin and ‘floating textureless in books’, 306 as a consequence, this idea of a culture of copies should be emphasised, thus exaggerating a natural predisposition for appropriation.

The Taylor/Tillers paradigm of appropriation would prove to be relevant only to the moment and context of Australian postmodernism. With the benefit of ‘half a generation’ of hindsight, for fellow Australian artist John Young, Tillers’ paradigm of appropriation is limited because it is finally ‘like holding a mirror up to the rest of the world’, or

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300 Ibid., p. 20.
302 Ibid., p. 32.
304 Ibid., p.22.
305 Ibid.
306 Ibid.
'selling advertising to advertisers who advertised it in the first place'. Moreover, once appropriation’s moment was seen as critically expired in art world centres such as New York, Australian appropriation artists soon appeared doubly provincial. For artists heavily associated with the postmodern paradigm of appropriation, certain adjustments in approach were clearly necessary in order to maintain relevance in this new critical climate. As contemporary art moved away from a paradigm of postmodernism and towards the paradigms of postcolonialism and globalisation, the retreat and concealment of explicit postmodern appropriation would become increasingly apparent. Three Australian artists associated with the postmodern paradigm of appropriation during the 1980s, Imants Tillers, John Young and Lindy Lee, can be noted as having made significant adjustments in their respective approaches during the 1990s in accordance with these shifts in critical fashion.

3:1 (i) Imants Tillers

As Australia’s best-known appropriation artist and one of its most successful contemporary artists, Imants Tillers’ work is a popular reference point for Australian studies of appropriation art. Tillers’ works are generally large, but they are made up of small, sequentially numbered canvasboards. His juxtapositions of Euro-American avant-gardism with colonial and Aboriginal Australian landscape painting draw on an extensive collection of both internationally recognisable motifs, such as the work of Georg Baselitz, Joseph Beuys, Carlo Carra and Sigmar Polke, and regional motifs, such as work by Aboriginal artist Michael Nelson Tjakamarra or New Zealand artist Colin McCahon.

Since Tillers knew that the key to interpreting his early work lay in recognition of his selected motifs, he tended to restrict his appropriations to identifiable images. In The Nine Shots (1985), for example, Tillers appropriated an image of a soldier from German artist Georg Baselitz’s B für Larry (1967) and then added decorative motifs from Australian Aboriginal artist Michael Nelson Tjakamarra’s Five Dreamings (1984). In The

307 John Young, quoted from an interview with John Young by the author at Sydney’s Sherman Galleries on 24 October 2001.
Hyperborean and the Speluncar (1986), the animal figure was appropriated from Italian Surrealist Giorgio de Chirico and the use of dots was in reference to German painter Sigmar Polke. As Sydney Morning Herald journalist John McDonald noted, ‘No-one could ever accuse Tillers of concealing his sources’.

Figure 18. Imants Tillers. The Hyperborean and the Speluncar. 1986.

Towards the end of the 1980s, Tillers started to bemoan his typecasting as an appropriation artist. Starting to see artists as ‘merely tools for a particular critical moment’, Tillers declared that appropriation, ‘as a modus operandi’, now felt ‘like a millstone around my neck’ and that he longed ‘to be free’. For many critics, Tillers’ approach had become somewhat predictable. The Sydney Morning Herald, for example, ran a 1989 review by critic Christopher Allen with the header ‘appropriative games no longer appropriate’, and in 1990, Gary Catalano, writing for The Age, found Tillers’ work ‘little more than a pomper for the pseudo-intellectuals’. In retrospect, according to

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310 Imants Tillers, quoted in Anne Howell, ‘Young Artists Set to be Slaves of Sydney’, Eastern Herald, 13 July 1989.
Joanna Mendelssohn of *The Weekend Australian*, Tillers’ early fame had ‘a great deal to do with being in the right place at the right time’.  

By the late 1980 and 1990s, in keeping with appropriation art’s diminished critical fashionableness, Tillers’ appropriated references started to become more and more ambiguous. According to Australian artist, art historian and curator Charles Green, Tillers ‘exaggerated the degree of alienation involved in the production of his images until the multiple ironies of his best works were so coded that they became illegible’.  

By the mid 1990s, the explicitness of Tillers’ earlier work had clearly been adjusted, revealing a more ambiguous and personal subjectivity. Elwyn Lynn, critic for *The Weekend Review*, described Tillers’ 1994 exhibition *Jump* at Sydney’s Sherman Galleries as ‘a personal testament of aesthetic and other beliefs, with few of his usual blunt appropriations’.

![Image](image_url)

Figure 19. Imants Tillers. *Bonegilla*, 1999.

Although Tillers’ work had long referenced displacement of identity in terms of its relationship with Australian postmodernism, it wasn’t until appropriation art started to

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lose critical favour to thematics more generally related to postcolonial and multicultural identity politics that Tillers appeared to, in response, increase deference to his Latvian ancestry (Tillers was born in Sydney in 1950 to migrant Latvian parents). Although some work of the late 1980s, such as The Lord’s Prayer (1987), included words and illustrations taken from Latvian books, it was not until the 1990s that Tillers made more explicit reference to his Latvian heritage. Expatriate Scot and now curator of the Museum of Contemporary Art in Sydney, Bernice Murphy, in a catalogue essay Tillers’ first exhibition in Latvia, held at the National Museum of Art in Riga in 1993, describes Tillers’ work as ‘drawing richly on a variety of narrative connections with Latvian art’.316

According to Tillers, his Latvian references were only ‘easily recognized by Latvians’, and would therefore appear only generically ‘ethnic’ to anyone else.317 Tillers saw his exhibition in Latvia as ‘a turning point within [his] oeuvre in many significant ways’,318 and soon made increasing reference to hybridised identity in his work.319 According to artist John Young, even when Tillers ‘side[s] with the margins only’ it was still unclear where his ‘humour actually stops’.320 It did not matter – Tillers would enjoy a critical renaissance. Tillers’ 1995 exhibition at the Pori Art Museum in Finland, Diaspora in Context: Connections in a Fragmented World, which addressed the newly fashionable critical notion of diaspora cultural identity, was the first time a living Australian artist was accorded a one-person show in a non-domestic museum. According to Joanna Mendelsohn in The Australian in 1995, Tillers’ move away from an ‘over-tricky’ dependence on art historical referencing had introduced a new maturity to his work.321

319 ‘As a child I was brought up to think of myself as an Australian in the world-at-large but a Latvian at home. Thus I have inherited two cultural identities, but through this fact, ironically, I also belong fully to neither.’ Imants Tillers, quoted in Jennifer Slatyer, ‘Diaspora: An Interview with Imants Tillers’, Diaspora: Imants Tillers, Exhibition catalogue, National Museum of Art, Riga, Latvia, 30 April–28 May 1993, p. 35.
320 John Young, quoted from an interview by the author at Sydney’s Sherman Galleries on 24 October 2001.
321 ‘For the last two decades, I have often found Tillers’ work over-tricky – jokes on the art world that were a bit too clever by half. And now? With Diaspora, Izklied, Paradiso and their related works, here is an
By the late 1990s, Tillers had introduced another metaphor for identity into his work, that of geographic locality. The map-like qualities of Tillers' *The Road to Nhill* (1999), for example, depict a metaphorical road together with references to actual rural towns in New South Wales and Victoria. Again, critical responses were largely favourable. In a 1999 review for *The Australian*, Benjamin Genocchio declared: 'at long last, a move away from a reliance on art historical quotations and the development of his own visual language'.\(^{322}\) Genocchio does, however, point out that Tillers' 'celebration of local and regional experiences' was ironically antithetical to 'the very things' that Tillers had 'spent two decades denouncing'.\(^{323}\) At any rate, it is clear that Tillers has repeatedly attempted to divert critical attention from the now unfashionable paradigm of appropriation art that he had so heavily invested in during the 1990s.

3:1 (ii) John Young

By the mid 1980s, a second wave of Australian postmodernists had appeared, the most significant of whom loosely formed under the collective banner of Various Artists Ltd. Various Artists' principal members included artists John Young, Janet Burchill, Lindy Lee, Jennifer McCamley, A.D.S. Donaldson and Bette Mifsud and critics Rex Butler and Ingrid Periz. To Various Artists, appropriation was no longer strictly a critical strategy; it was also an aesthetic strategy.\(^{324}\) This second wave of mainly Melbourne-based appropriation art can be seen in part as a response to the paradigm of appropriation already presented by artists such as Imants Tillers and Juan Davila. Describing himself as 'half a generation younger than Tillers', John Young (born Young Ze Runge) had moved to Australia from Hong Kong in 1967, while still a child. After reading philosophy and mathematics at the University of Sydney, he was a student of Tillers at Sydney College of

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\(^{322}\) Benjamin Genocchio, 'Grid Tease From the Tillers Man', *The Australian*, The Arts on Friday, 4 June 1999, p. 12.

\(^{323}\) Ibid.

\(^{324}\) 'The Various Artists wanted to use the fact that everything in art had the feeling of being quoted not merely critically but "aesthetically". They saw in the secondhand nature of post-modern art not simply the death of the author, but the opening up of new expressive possibilities.' Rex Butler. 'Lost in the Mix: The
the Arts. With a background in western philosophy, Young was already well versed in much of the specialised rhetoric that had informed critical postmodernism. For Young, Tillers’ paradigm of appropriation was ‘courageous’, but was nonetheless a ‘simplified and blunt move that people could read’. With the ‘luxury of not having to convince the public that appropriation is actually an important strategy’, Young felt that he could ‘specialise more in the subtleties of the process’. 325

Despite the fact that many of Young’s early works, such as The Third Term (1986) (which was clearly based on Picasso’s Les Demoiselles d’Avignon) and Monochrome Harlequin (1987), are clearly heavily appropriation oriented, Young’s references nonetheless rapidly developed a greater ambiguity than had been thus far demonstrated by artists such as Tillers. For Rex Butler, Young’s work was ‘rarely concerned with the question of where its imagery comes from’ 326 Instead, Young appeared to be more interested in exploring the idea of the ghosted image, devoid of specific origins and cultural association. What was more important to Young was a subtler and decidedly more ambiguous evocation of ‘forgotten moods’ and ‘cultural values’. 327

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325 John Young, quoted from an interview by the author at Sydney’s Sherman Galleries on 24 October 2001.
In the ensuing decade, Young’s work would gradually become associated less with themes relating to postmodern pastiche and increasingly with thematics relating hybridised identity, culture in diaspora, and postcolonialism. Young, formerly a benchmark Australian of the 1980s, was by the mid 1990s more commonly referred to as an Asian-Australian artist. New Zealand art historian Wynstan Curnow, for example, finds that while Young’s work had ‘previously [been] ensconced in the discourses of postmodernism’, it had since become more ‘overtly positioned in the new context of postcolonial discourse and the cultural interaction of Australia and Asia’.³²⁸ Of particular interest to this investigation is that this de-emphasising of appropriation in Young’s work during the 1990s occurred alongside a more general devaluation of appropriation’s art’s critical currency. With the introduction of an Asian thematic, Young’s career was given a boost. By 1998, Young’s works were selling for around AUD$30,000.³²⁹ The January 2000 edition of *Australian Art Collector*, in listing Young as one of ‘Australia’s 50 most collectable artists’, described his work as having ‘embraced the traditions of Chinese landscape painting’, and as connecting ‘pop culture and Buddhism and east to west through an exploration of the representation of the “oriental” in western historical painting’.³³⁰ How did an artist so overtly associated with appropriation during the 1980s

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make such a fluid transition and remain critically and commercially relevant well after appropriation’s moment had passed? Finding reasons will involve tracing his steps.

In 1982, having recently returned from Paris and heavily influenced by thinkers such as Baudrillard, Young was included in the appropriation-themed exhibition *Art In The Age Of Mechanical Reproduction* (named after Walter Benjamin’s 1936 essay), curated by Judy Annear at the George Patton Gallery in Melbourne. Young’s studio notebook from 1983 reveals a similar rhetoric to that already established by Tillers and Taylor:

Reproduced images arrive in Australia like the stigmata on a thousand palms – and all we can do is mourn their perpetual death.331

To produce many of his early works, Young began by distorting photocopied ‘master quotations’332 of French Fauvist artist Andre Derain, first by manually pulling against a photocopier’s scanning direction, and then by drawing a grid onto the photocopied image and transferring it by hand and charcoal onto paper or canvas. The final images were therefore finally more a modification than a direct copy, ‘yet retained sufficient traits of the Derain image to honour the philosophy of appropriation’.333 In *The Decline of Creative Power* (1983–84), for example, three out of the 12 image panels consisted of appropriations of Derain still-lifes. Other panels contained references to De Chirico, Vlaminck and Wittgenstein. By 1987, Young was considered ‘one of appropriation’s best and more inventive practitioners’.334 By the late 1980s, Young had started to substitute the term ‘appropriation’ for terms such as ‘quotation’ and ‘occupancy’.335 In 1989, however, Young was still clearly appropriating the work of Derain, with a view to

exploring tensions ‘between the original, appropriated images and processed representations’. 336

Young’s Silhouette series (1985–89) was so named because of its use of thin, washed-out appropriations of late Derain, which were applied like a veil over a minimalist ground. Two opposing aesthetics operated in subtle juxtaposition. Young regarded the base appropriations of Derain as the ‘master quotation’ on which to work. The series was generally critically applauded, and by the late 1980s was selling fast. But commercial success as an appropriation artist would invariably invite certain consequences once a marketplace that unfamiliar with the rhetoric of postmodern theory was involved:

> It scared the hell out of me. People were buying my paintings over the phone, and they were buying them more for Derain’s imagery that I had appropriated which, of course, is only just the surface of the painting. 337

Young soon resorted to a cynically feigned complicity with the commercial banalities of his work’s commercial success. The Polychrome series (1989–92), which contained considerably less appropriated imagery, represented a marked sea change. Making deliberately empty references to German painter Gerhard Richter’s Colour Charts series, Young modified Richter’s composition from horizontal to vertical coloured rectangles and substituted Richter’s randomly organised industrial colours for subtler counterpoints of tertiary colour, partially in order to correspond with the appropriated images still placed above and below. The Polychromes appeared to counter the apparent banality of appropriation art in an abrupt manner, often drawing on the most clichéd icons of art and photography. Subsistence: Recession Painting (1992) is a good example of Young’s transitional banal phase. According to Young, during the Polychromes period he ‘really couldn’t care less what reading people brought to the work’, describing his approach as ‘defensive’, ‘banal’, ‘decorative’ and cynically exploitative of ‘sensations found in

337 John Young, quoted in Michael Hutak, ‘Canvassing a Cultural Cusp’, Sydney Morning Herald, 8 June 1994, p. 28.
advertising. Although Young's 'hyperconformism' represented a cynical coupling of critique and commercial complicity, the Polychromes did not sell accordingly.

By 1994, Young had returned to appropriated grounds and images. The strategy of appropriation, although still clearly visible, was now further reduced in status – it was now merely a tool of production. Just as Young's former 'master quotation', Andre Derain, had himself relinquished the modernist avant-garde in favour of an eclectic romanticism, so Young also attempted to relinquish his association with postmodern appropriation in favour of a more subjective level of engagement. The references were now less art historical quotations and more a juxtaposition of western and Asian images. In his Double Ground series (1992–present) and Square Paintings series (1995–present), Young has utilised both western and Asian imageries, plus western representations of Chinese subjects, images taken from Chinese erotic prints, and postcard-style images.

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338 John Young, quoted from an interview with the author at Sydney's Sherman Galleries on 24 October 2001.
339 Michael Hutak, 'Canvassing a Cultural Cusp', Sydney Morning Herald, 8 June 1994, p. 27.
340 Young's Castiglione's Dream (1995–96), for example, was based on Giuseppe Castiglione's One Hundred Horses (1728). Castiglione was a Jesuit priest who introduced western compositional perspective to China in the eighteenth century.
In the foreground of many of the Double Ground works of the late 1990s, Young employed non-specific quotations, often 'done by no-name people' or people 'who are unknown nowadays', ranging 'from the 1950s to the 1970s'. Young selected these images because unlike an art historical quotation, they had 'virtually no aura about them'. By 2001, much of Young's source material was no longer 'historically generated'; it was 'ordinary everyday images' photographed 'with a digital camera'. Other appropriated Chinese and European elements – calendar nudes, flowers or clouds – were also included and carefully repainted by assistants over lower-resolution digital reproductions of traditional Chinese paintings. Australian critic Pamela Kember noted in 2002 that 'Chinese motifs' had 'become deeper elements in the work' and that 'the cultural mixing of Chinese perspectives in Young's work' had now 'come more to the foreground'.

Figure 24. John Young. Into the Real. 1998.

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341 John Young, quoted in Andrew G. Frost, 'John Young: Ghosts on Canvas', Australiam Art Collector 6, October–December 1998, p. 44.
342 Ibid.
Despite repeatedly distancing his position from that of a literally sociological or postcolonial level of engagement, Young does concede that 'in the early '90s a lot of my postmodern friends just slipped away' and that he, fortuitously, 'got a sudden rebirth through this curious thing called regionalism'. Despite Young's reservations about both postcolonialism and the exotication of his Asianness, in examining the weight of critical reference to his relevance in postcolonial and multicultural debates, it would be unreasonable to suggest that his critical and commercial success would have existed without it. The weight of critical deference to the importance of hybridised cultural identity in Young's work is substantial. In 1998, Benjamin Genocchio reviewed Young's work for *The Australian*, describing it as an exemplary 'exploration of biculturalism'. *The Weekend Australian* referred to Young's work in 1999 as 'multiculturally layered'. Victoria Hynes described Young's work in 1998 as 'a transcultural discourse reflecting the artist's own cultural origins'. For Sydney curator, and former director of the Asia-Australia Arts Centre (an initiative of the Asian Artists Association) Melissa Chiu, Young's work both related 'to an Asian sense of reality' and alluded to shifts 'between two cultures where the diasporic culture invariably differs from the original culture'. In 2001, journalist Zelda Cawthorne described Young's work as an 'intriguing blend of Western and Chinese influences', and even attributed Young's popularity to the

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345 'By the late '80s, the ramifications of Lyotard and Baudrillard's writings and artists working in sympathy with that sort of world picture collapsed under the popularity of all those left wing sociologists that wanted a resuscitation of politics. Then, these sociologist-artists and critics had a great old time within postcolonialism and they probably will again in globalisation.' John Young, in an interview with the author at Sydney's Sherman Galleries on 24 October 2001.
346 Ibid.
347 In coming from Hong Kong, 'which is a very artificial place for art', Young felt that he could not as easily claim the 'level of identity which people from more indigenous places do'. From an interview with the author at Sydney's Sherman Galleries on 24 October 2001.
352 Ibid.
manner in which he is ‘perceived as an intellectual and creative force of exceptional value to Australian-Asian relations’.  

The curatorial and commercial premises surrounding Young’s work can also be seen as having shifted away from appropriation during the 1990s. According to Melissa Chiu, Young’s 1994 exhibition, *Diaspora Asia*, at Sydney’s Sherman Galleries, was one of the first ‘intentionally locating his work in the complex exchange at play between cultures’. In 1998 Young was included in the Art Gallery of New South Wales’s showcase exhibition *Transit*, which claimed an examination the manner in which the work of seven Asian-Australian artists was informed by multiple cultural references as its curatorial premise. The ‘very titles’ of exhibitions such as these, according to the director of the University of Melbourne’s Museum of Art, Frances Lindsay, conveyed ‘concerns that [were] central to Young’s philosophical approach’. The magnitude of Young’s quasi-ambassadorial reputation was further evidenced by his 2000 commission for a new underground railway station station at Azubu in Tokyo, which was partially a gift to the city of Tokyo from the Australian government. A media release that accompanied the gift suggested that Young’s work recognised ‘both Australian and Japanese culture’ via a ‘layering of historical, geographical and traditional images’ such as the ‘flowers of Australia and Japan’ in order ‘to suggest harmony across cultural boundaries’. In 2001 Young was also commissioned to make several large-scale works for Hong Kong’s impressive new four-level North Point Mass Transit Railway interchange. The Japanese-language edition of *Southern Cross*, touted by Ansett Airlines Australia as its ‘cross-cultural magazine for business executives’, depicted Young’s *Q Painting* (2000) on its rear sleeve.  

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354 Ibid.  
It is clear that John Young has made a critical and commercially beneficial transition from his former explicit association with 1980s appropriation, and has now become an artist more widely associated with the multicultural paradigms that have dominated 1990s discourse. Although it is widely recognised that the formal elements of Young's work are derived from postmodern methodologies of appropriation, many critics appear to agree that his 'subjects are [now] principally post-colonial in content'. A conscious move towards the selection of more obscure and therefore less historically laden source material has also contributed to his partial concealment of the strategy of appropriation, which is of course still very much part of the actual production of his work. Australian art historian John Clark sees the references at play in Young's work as 'neither concealed nor overprivileged'. According to Australian critic Andrew G. Frost, the 'meaning of a John Young work hovers discreetly in the background', operating as 'a ghost in the shell of the work's frame'. Ultimately, despite the fact that Young does still concede that the 'world we live in more or less encourages us to choose from an inventory of pre-existing things, images and objects', he no longer feels that he can quote as blatantly 'through emotions that actually belong to somewhere else', and consequently, now claims to need 'a bit more poetry in [his] life'. Perhaps Young's attitude towards originality – at once aware of the logic of cultural derivation and of the necessity of subjectivity – can be finally described as somewhat 'agnostic'.

361 Andrew G. Frost, 'John Young: Ghosts on Canvas', Australian Art Collector 6, October–December 1998, p. 44.
363 John Young, quoted from an interview with the author at Sydney's Sherman Galleries on 24 October 2001.
364 Ibid.
365 The idea of 'agnosticism' in art is explored in Chapter 5.
Another Australian artist formerly associated with the paradigm of appropriation art during the 1980s is Lindy Lee. Like Young, Lee is now more commonly referred to as an Asian-Australian artist, and has also managed to maintain a considerable critical and commercial profile well past the considered use-by date for appropriation art. Lee, also a graduate of Sydney College of the Arts, was cofounder (along with artist and writer Mark Titmarsh) of the 1980s journal *On The Beach*, which was at the time considered an important forum for emerging critical issues related to both postmodernism and appropriation. Meanwhile, other Sydney artist-run publications such as *Misch Masch*[^366] *Collective* and *Kerb Your Dog*[^367] had enabled artists such as Lee to start producing limited edition photocopy prints. The impetus behind Lee’s early photocopy work was clearly located in the theoretical push that dominated much emerging Australian contemporary art during the 1980s. Lee, familiar with the works of European Old Masters only via their printed reproduction in art textbooks, started to photocopy them with a view to locking ‘into an exchange or a sense of recognition with a face from the past’[^368]. Single A4 photocopies such as *Untitled: After Jan Van Eyck* (1985) and *Spirit of Eternal Place* (1985) serve as examples of Lee’s early photocopy work (see over).

[^366]: *Misch Masch* was edited by artists Janet Burchill and Kate Farrell of the Various Artists Collective in Sydney during 1983 and consisted of work by artists using the medium of the photocopy.

[^367]: *Kerb Your Dog* was a similar publication initiated by John Young.

By 1986–87, Lee had developed the technique that she would use through much of her subsequent work. Serialised photocopies of European Renaissance masters such as Rubens, Rembrandt, Gentileschi, Titian and El Greco, either photocopied in successively darker or lighter tones or run repeatedly through the photocopy machine, would serve as backgrounds for over-painting. The serialised images, already progressively more illegible with each successive photocopy, would be further distorted by overpainting. Lee applied thick monochromatic impasto layers of oil and wax, sometimes mixed with colour, sometimes only black, and built layers upon one another in order to partially
conceal the image. Once dry they became partially translucent, and distant hints of the photocopied image would start to appear from behind. Lee then scraped back through these layers to further accentuate parts of the mechanically reproduced image. Much of Lee’s early work was so dark (especially when seen in reproduction) that it becomes difficult to recognise the specific historical sources of her original photocopies. All that remained clear was that her background images were historically appropriated. The Sydney Morning Herald critic Christopher Allen described Lee’s appropriations as ‘approaching illegibility’ and therefore only echoing ‘the memory of the original’. In The Silence of Painters (1987), for example, Lee partially concealed her serialised photocopied images with washes of red pigment, which were then rubbed back and covered with slashes of thickly painted black marks. This darkening via repetitive photocopying and overpainting saw many of Lee’s works of the late 1980s assume a blackness that almost completely concealed the figurative elements of her quoted images. According to Lee, the viewer simply ‘had to believe the image was [still] there’. The background template for The Heart (1988), for example, is a barely decipherable image of Delacroix’s Entry of the Crusaders into Constantinople (1840), which was further concealed by a combination of coloured waxes and oils. The original ghosted image appears only within the technical space of the photocopied image. For Australian cultural theorist Edward Colless, Lee’s references seemed ‘vaguely familiar’, as if ‘derived from a painting one seems to know but can’t quite identify’. According to Rex Butler, Lee was ‘looking for precisely what [was] not reproducible’ via mechanical reproduction alone.

Lee’s use of serial photocopied imagery coupled with the apocalyptic metaphor of black would understandably ground most critical interpretation within the paradigm of postmodern appropriation. Far from playing down such criticism, Lee repeatedly

referenced the then fashionable rhetoric of simulationism in support of her appropriations:

> I see so many reproductions of paintings, they are more familiar to me than nature. I live in a city, it’s a natural phenomenon, art about art, it’s the ‘synthetic’ culture.  

The postmodern metaphor of death in particular was applied liberally in much analysis of Lee’s work during the late 1980s. For Australian cultural theorist and writer Catherine Lumby in 1986: ‘Their likeness to their prototypes is the resemblance of an apparition to its corpse.’ In 1987, Sydney critic Anne Howell described Lee’s work as ‘raising notions of the death of painting, the loss of aura and the reproduction’, and said that these were ideas ‘that Lee has pursued with dogged persistence’. Australian critic John Gregory described Lee’s work in 1990 as ‘grappling with ‘parody, pastiche, appropriation and quotation’ and reading ‘like a slide list for a brief survey of European art history from the 15th century to the 19th’. Christopher Heathcote, writing for The Age, described Lee as ‘an artist who has a quarrel with received notions of value’, and who ‘patrols the sceptical edge of postmodern art’ with a view to making ‘viewers unpack their cultural assumptions and question the mystique attached to canonical works of art’. Lee herself conceded in 1990 that her ‘primary emphasis’ during the 1980s was that of ‘the resurrection of the aura and presence of the original’, and, moreover, that her work was still primarily concerned with ideas related to appropriation:

> … the notions generated from that period (the 1980s) are the ones which form the basis of my work today. For instance, theories concerning appropriation and the impact of

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373 Lindy Lee, quoted by Robert Lindsay in ICI Contemporary Art Collection, ICI Melbourne, 1989, p. 52.
reproductions of works of art were being played out. Much was written about the diminution of the aura of the original through reproductions. 379

Critics were never unanimous, however, about whether Lee’s work should be read as that of an archetypal postmodern appropriation artist or as something quite the opposite. For Colless in 1987, Lee’s work only acknowledged the copy in terms of the ‘diminishing echo of materiality’. 380 Distinctions were also often made between Lee’s physical material work, which can appear highly aestheticised, and her work in printed reproduction, which, due to a flattening of their subtle layers of blackness, can appear decidedly more anti-aesthetic. In 1991, South Australia-based English artist, critic and curator Richard Grayson described Lee’s work, in reproduction, as offering ‘no surprise’, and as employing ‘signatures that we have come to recognise immediately as being Postmodern(ish)’ but noted, in contrast, that on a physical inspection, they appeared ‘lush, and intensely physical’ and therefore more ‘difficult to place or distance … in terms of ironic pastiche’. 381 Lee still insisted, though, that viewer recognition of the material act of quotation itself was important to a reading of her work. For Lee it was ‘important to know’ that her images were ‘done through such a process’ and that at the same time she had used ‘the very tool that disintegrates the image and undermines our relationship to it’. 382

379 Ibid., p. 10.
In *Untitled: After Tiziano Vecelli* (1991), Lee serialised the head of Titian’s Pitti Palace portrait of the mid 1540s in what appears at first to be a distinctly Warholian manner. Upon closer inspection, however, other decidedly more subjective, ambiguous and aesthetic qualities are revealed. Colless described Lee’s work of the late 1980s as combining the ‘camp disdain’ and ‘iconicity of Warhol’s silkscreens’ with a formalist ‘dedication to the very automatism of gesture’, the same sense of gesture on which Warhol had originally premised his ‘conceit based on paradoxical irony’.\(^{383}\) Colless’s observation is of course in line with this investigation’s hypothesis that by the early 1990s, the formerly critical postmodern tool of appropriation was gradually being shifted in status to a tool of formalist production. According to Grayson in 1991, Lee’s use of mechanical reproduction did not necessarily imply ‘the end of the aura of the artwork’; it instead implied that she was ‘trying to reproduce the aura too’.\(^{384}\)

The serialisation of portraiture, the shifting tones created by repetitive photocopying, and the overlain smears of dark monochromatic pigmented wax evident in works such as *Fortuity* (1991) and *Soundless Fate* (1992) now seemed to place Lee’s work somewhere between Ad Reinhardt’s black formalist monochromes and Andy Warhol’s serial pop

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portraiture, both of the 1960s. Reinhardt’s work is widely seen as emblematic of modernist formalist originality, whereas Warhol’s work is commonly seen as pre-empting the radical unoriginality of postmodernism. Lee’s work can therefore be modelled as paradoxically employing the tools of anti-aestheticism to an aesthetic end, an idea complicit with the ‘agnostic model’ presented in Chapter 5. Lee’s general ambiguity of approach towards such otherwise oppositional ideas was described by Lumby in 1986. According to Lumby, Lee’s work was complicit with both ‘the death of painting and its resurrection’, and as a consequence, the blackened surfaces of her work implied a ‘secrecy’ that ‘gives little away’.\(^\text{385}\) Despite first emerging as an artist in the highly theorised postmodern critical climate of the 1980s, Lee also seemed to engage the kind of subjective, metaphysical, spiritual and symbolic ideas that textbook poststructuralism and postmodernism vehemently opposed. Although Lee did not markedly object to the attention awarded to her work within critical postmodernism, by the 1990s it was clear that an explicit association with appropriation was also an association with a paradigm now widely considered dated. Even by 1989, the *Sydney Morning Herald* critic Christopher Allen had described Lee’s work as ‘extremely formulaic’.\(^\text{386}\) By the early 1990s, the incentive for Lee to discard her association with appropriation had become considerable.

To what degree did Lee’s work of the 1990s capitalise on the new fashion of postcolonial and multicultural discourses generally, and more specifically with the exoticisation the other? It has certainly only been in the 1990s that Lee has been extensively referred to as an ‘Asian-Australian’ artist and has more openly acknowledged that her background as a first-generation Chinese Australian is a significant part of her practice. Australian critic Sue Green observed in 1994 that Lee and fellow Chinese Australian artist John Young were now ‘thrust even more firmly into the limelight for reasons of racial origin’.\(^\text{387}\) According to Chinese Australian collector Dr Dick Quan, ‘the importance of Lee’s work

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is its ability to paraphrase the evolution of multiculturalism in this country';

Furthermore, it is an empowering 'account of her journey through European art,
eventually melding an Asian heritage to attain a unique inspiration and vision'.

The similarity of this description to descriptions of fellow 'former appropriation' artist turned
'Asian-Australian' artist John Young's work during the 1990s are striking.

Certainly many of the major exhibitions purporting to represent Australian art to an
international audience during the 1990s did so by exploiting issues relating to the
changing nature of identity in contemporary multicultural Australian society. It was
therefore clearly a strategic advantage at this time to possess a bankable sense of
otherness. The first of what were to be many significant travelling exhibitions to include
Lee, in some kind of deference to her Chinese Australian identity, despite the fact that she
had not yet developed many overtly Asian themes in her work, was Strangers in
Paradise, which travelled to Seoul in 1992 and Sydney in 1993. Despite the fact that,
to a certain extent, the exoticisation of otherness is determined externally and regardless
of an individual's wishes, it was not long before Lee had introduced more distinctly
Asian themes into her work.

Lee became a Zen Buddhist in 1994, travelled to China in 1996, and has referenced Zen
Buddhism as an element in her work since. By the latter half of the 1990s, Lee was
repeatedly included in exhibitions concerned in some way with ideas related to cultural

388 Dick Quan, 'Collector's Choice', TAASA Review: The Journal of the Asian Arts Society of Australia,
389 Ibid.
390 Strangers in Paradise was curated by Victoria Lynn from the Art Gallery of New South Wales in
conjunction with Soyeon Ahn from the National Museum of Contemporary Art in Seoul, and was a major
cultural component of Promotion Australia, a series of events organised by the Department of Foreign
Affairs and Trade. Strangers in Paradise featured the work of 15 contemporary Australian artists. It
travelled to Seoul in November 1992 and was shown at the Art Gallery of New South Wales in August
1993.
391 'John and I are in reasonably significant positions in terms of exhibitions and there is a public will to
make people like us standard bearers. It gets foisted on us whether we want it or not.' Lindy Lee, quoted in
392 After adopting Zen Buddhism, Lee increased her use of the colour orange. To Buddhists, the colour
orange represents the pivotal question of the nature of self.
identity and exchange. The 1996 exhibition *Above and Beyond*,\(^{393}\) for example, sought to compare the work of Australian artists of Asian descent with non-Asian Australian artists considered influenced by Asian culture.\(^{394}\) In January 2000 Lee was included in a showcase exhibition curated by Melissa Chiu at the Australian Embassy in Tokyo. Lee was also included in the 2002 Casula Powerhouse exhibition *Deeper Places*\(^{395}\) (together with Tillers, Gordon Bennett, Laurens Tan, Hossein Valamaresh and Guan Wei), an exhibition that used the idea of cultural convergence and its apparent relationship to contemporary art in Australian society as its curatorial premise. In 2001 Lee was included in the Art Gallery of New South Wales' showcase exhibition, *Buddha: Past Present and Future*, which included both works and historical artefacts related to Buddhism. By the late 1990s and early 2000s, most references to Lee's work would refer to Lee as a 'Chinese Australian' and a practising 'Zen Buddhist', and the question of originality in her work now related to questions of cultural or ethnic identity (rather than to questions of appropriation).\(^{396}\) Even Lee's earlier work was often retrospectively related to these new agendas. Lee now repeatedly defended her earlier appropriations of European Old Masters as simply part of an attempt 'to understand [her] own identity',\(^{397}\) because she had 'always felt' both a 'counterfeit white and a counterfeit Chinese'.\(^{398}\)

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393 *Above and Beyond* (1996) was curated by Clare Williamson at the Australian Centre for Contemporary Art.
395 The *Deeper Places* exhibition was held at the Casula Powerhouse Arts Centre in Sydney, 4 May–30 June 2002.
396 See, for example (author not given), 'The 10, 000 Things', *Object, Craft, Design, Culture: The Interiors Issue*, 2001, p. 30.
Soon after adopting Zen Buddhism, Lee’s photocopies temporarily took a back seat, albeit temporarily, only to return in her later work as a formalist mechanism of production. By the late 1990s, the strategy of appropriation, which had been a key focus in her work during the 1980s, had become more a tacit tool within the pursuit of ‘Asian’ thematics and aesthetics. Lee’s photocopies now more typically featured Buddhist robes, Asian portraits, Chinese motifs and even personal photographs of her own Chinese
ancestors, while (apparently in keeping with her Zen Buddhist philosophies) paint was now more commonly applied in ‘gestured’ drips and splotches. Otherwise, Lee’s work still appeared highly reminiscent of her appropriation-related work of the 1980s. Lee still used serialised photocopies and overpainting. Only her critical positioning and choice in prototypes had changed significantly. Lee had retreated from – but still endorsed – appropriation. *Lily-Amah* (2001) and *The End Is The Beginning* (2001), for example, still contain photocopied portraits of more ambiguous but distinctly Asian origin, the latter also incorporating Zen-inspired splotches and extensive use of the symbolic Buddhist colour orange. *Uji: Time-Being* (2001), on the other hand, sees a return to an extensive use of black together with serialised Asian photocopied portraits, which are countered with ‘symbolic’ orange. Also, since many of the more recent photocopied portraits are actually taken from old photographs of her own mother, aunt and other family figures, it becomes doubly evident that Lee has dropped the moniker of ‘appropriation artist’ in order to allow for a more subjective interpretation of her work. According to Australian critic Benjamin Genocchio in 2001, Lee has ‘spent a decade concealing images in order to reveal their essence’.

In conclusion, this chapter has demonstrated that three artists formerly associated with the paradigm of appropriation during the 1980s – Imants Tillers, John Young and Lindy Lee – can all be seen as having shifted their respective approaches towards appropriation during the 1990s. Furthermore, in examining the transition made by these three artists, it is also clear that an increase in referential ambiguity by way of a partial concealment of quoted elements, coupled with an increased deference to identity, subjectivity and otherness, together provide a successful means with which to critically and commercially transcend the legacies of textbook postmodernism. Since Australia had remained a country deeply divided in its attitude towards multiculturalism (a divide reflected in the appearance of Pauline Hanson's anti-Asian immigration One Nation Party during the late 1990s and the attitudes of Prime Minister John Howard's conservative government towards immigration related issues, and Asia–Australia relations), within the relatively

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liberal context of the art world, artists of mixed cultural or ethnic background might, as a partial consequence, attract greater critical relevance because of their perceived level of otherness. This divide between neo-conservatism and multiculturalism was of course mirrored throughout much of the western world. This chapter has served to demonstrated the manner in which subjectivity, the idea of the other, multiculturalism and globalisation have impacted on artistic practice of the 1990s and early 2000s, a shift both affected by, and in response to, the retreat of the 1980s paradigm of postmodern appropriation. Although cynicism and irony were still widely regarded as a dead-end, this return of subjectivity was still somewhat moderated by an apparent inability to accept anything at face value (see the ‘agnostic model’ presented in Chapter 5). Explicit or literal association with the now dated paradigm of postmodern appropriation was therefore to be avoided. The deliberate concealment of explicit acts of appropriation within formalist devices and/or the discourse of the other has certainly enabled many artists of the 1990s and early 2000s to achieve or maintain a commercial and critical profile.
Chapter 4

Strategies of concealment in contemporary art and popular culture

In his review of the 1996 Primavera exhibition, held annually at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Sydney, Australian artist and critic Jeff Gibson declared that 'ironic appropriation' had now become 'completely overtaken by a potentially expressive language of reconstructive sampling'.\(^{400}\) According to US-based critic and historian John C. Welchman, 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, according to Welchman, the role of appropriation had been reduced 'largely to signify[ing] stirring effects' and 'gory, giddy, eerie, poppish sensations'.\(^{401}\) Unable to entirely accept or dismiss the logic of appropriation, many artists of the 1990s and early 2000s have maintained an uneasy relationship with the idea of originality. Aware that explicit appropriation art was now widely considered passé, yet at the same time reminded that autonomous projections of originality were still regarded as naïve or romantic, many artists continued to endorse appropriation only as a backgrounded tool of artistic production, not as a central critical thematic. This chapter will nominate and examine several applications of a strategy of concealment within contemporary art and popular culture.

4:1 Strategies of concealment in contemporary art

Figure 34. Anne Zahalka. *Gesture V*, 1993.

Figure 35. Jack Featherly. *Olympic Special*, 1997.

In the early 1990s, Australian photographer Anne Zahalka produced a series of works specifically designed to ‘prevent a nostalgic reading’. In *Gesture V* (1993), for example, Zahalka cropped away any ‘recognisable’ elements from Johann Baptist Lepid A’s *Alexander Besbrodko* (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’, and as a consequence, invent ‘new pictures from images that are culturally familiar’. According to New York painter Jack Featherly, the background abstractions that make up *Olympic Special* (1997) were sourced from ‘Oreos packaging’, while the ‘letterbox-style’ composition was sourced from the ‘more sophisticated’ look of art-house film. For Featherly, such appropriations are designed both to unearth ‘low frequency emotional ties to advertising design’ and to demonstrate that although ‘something might be visible almost 24 hrs a day’, it is nonetheless still ‘ignored’ by an ‘art world’ audience that is conditioned only to recognise art historical references.

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404 Ibid.
Featherly does not feel 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’.

Featherly describes his work as an attempt ‘to fuse’ a ‘ghostly idea of ’60s painting’ with ‘design effects’ sourced from outside art history, in order to arrive at ‘the point where the specific design reference … becomes irrelevant’. Featherly also concedes that he can no longer ‘make art that’s about appropriation’ and that it is ‘now a standard tool’.

As indicated in the work of artists such as Zahalka or Featherly, the more that artists conceal appropriated elements in their work, the more difficult it becomes for the viewer or critic to identify or discuss their strategies without some kind of accompanying admission by the artist concerned. According to Sherrie Levine, artists tend to withhold their strategies from view because ‘the unconscious is often what makes art compelling’. It stands to reason that an appropriated element is only considered as such if recognised by the viewer. The fact that the artist knows that an element is appropriated makes no difference to its critical categorisation unless the viewer is also aware that the element is appropriated. As far as the viewer is concerned, appropriated references that operate on any kind of subliminal level become part of the general background *noise* of signification. During the 1980s it was considered important by the artist, in order for the work to perform its intended critical function, that the viewer recognise that an element was appropriated. In contrast, by the 1990s, many artists considered it more important for the viewer to experience little more than an uncertain sense of familiarity. In both cases, however, the intended viewer response is limited to and by the viewer’s image bank. In response to the understandable difficulties of attempting to scrutinise artistic strategies that are specifically intended to conceal any appropriated elements from view, this investigation now turns to an admission about the author’s strategies of concealment.

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406 Ibid.
407 Ibid.
408 Ibid.
4.1 (i) Application one: appropriation masked as formalism

Figure 36. Ashley Bickerton. Le Art: Composition with Logos, 1987.

In conjunction with this paper, and in order to demonstrate that which remains critically undetectable in post-appropriation art due to the manipulation of quoted materials, the author has produced a series of works in order to explore the practical applications of concealment. Rather than selecting art historical prototypes, which of course might only be recognisable to a specific audience, the author has instead selected well-known corporate logos as the prototype images. Since most contemporary visual landscapes are now dominated by the images and graphics of advertising, it was therefore surmised that once partially abstracted, widely circulated corporate logos were most likely to deliver a ghostly air of familiarity to the viewer. The idea was that with the aid of digital manipulation, what were otherwise exclusively appropriation-based works might somehow remain resistant to all but formalist, aesthetic or subjective interpretation. Unlike New York simulationist Ashley Bickerton’s Le Art: Composition with Logos (1987), in which the juxtaposition of real and invented corporate logos appeared to imply the collapse of distinctions between iconoclastic form and iconic content, in the case of the author’s work, it is intended that viewer awareness that logos were indeed present was not a prerequisite to interpretation. Presented below is an example of an original logo and its digitally manipulated variation.
To produce *Bachelor of the Year* (2002), the internationally recognisable logo of the American Express Corporation (one of the world’s largest credit card suppliers) was downloaded from their official website and loaded into Adobe PhotoShop. The appropriated logo was then digitally manipulated until the author was satisfied that the viewer (without *a priori* knowledge as to the process) would not (at least immediately) recognise the specific paternity of the appropriated image. The digitally adjusted image was enlarged, printed onto canvas and partially hand-painted in order to further divert viewer attention from the use of digital reproduction technology. This process was then repeated, using the logos for the Nike Corporation and Westpac Bank (Australia), to produce *Spoil-sport* (2002) and *Revival of the Fittest* (2002) respectively. Works related to this series are to be exhibited by the author in conjunction with this paper at Sydney College of the Arts in March 2003.

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410 The ‘Coca Cola’ logo, for example, is allegedly recognised by 92% of the inhabitants of the world. Source: www.cocacola.com/marketing, accessed 12/12/02.
Once familiar with the author's methodology, the viewer is granted a delayed recognition as to the work's paternity. Australian artist Maureen Burns indicated in a 1997 interview that the title of her floor-mounted installation *Delay With Footnotes* referred to both the initial 'delay', when the viewer is confronted with a seemingly uncertain synthesis of familiar forms, and a second subsequent moment in which previously undetectable references appear as 'footnotes'. But of course since Burns' 'footnotes' are typically deconstructed architectural references, the potential for viewer recognition is ultimately limited to the viewer's knowledge base. In the case of the author's appropriations, the 'footnotes' may eventually become apparent to the viewer, despite their concealment, due to the enormous circulation enjoyed by their prototype logos. Unlike aforementioned artist John Young's use of French Fauvist Andre Derain as his 'master', the author's selections are limited to widely recognisable imagery. Rather than relying on the diminishing echoes of historical obscurity, the author has used the tools of digital technology in order to delay viewer identification. Since further examples of the author's...

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use of concealment are in the context of pop music, a little background as to the curiously analogous genealogies of postmodern appropriation and concealment in popular culture generally must first be provided.

4.2 Parallel developments: the concealment of appropriation in popular culture

In a manner comparable with painting’s recovery of figure and architecture’s recovery of decoration, the 1980s also saw popular music, advertising, film and fashion embrace the postmodern strategy of appropriation. As noted by New York critic Douglas Crimp in 1983, appropriation can 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’. 413 According to New York critic Jeanne Siegel in 1985, appropriation’s manifestation in the ‘commercial world’ now constituted merely a form of ‘utility’. 414 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’. 415

From the appearance of explicit material appropriation in seminal African American hip-hop in Brooklyn during the late 1970s416 to punk rock poster and record sleeve designs from the late 1970s,417 to ironically charged ‘retro’ fashions from designers such as

416 Seminal African American rap and hip-hop groups such as Kool Herc, Africa Bambaataa and Grandmaster Flash had redefined the role of the DJ in New York during the late 1970s with their pioneering combinations of vinyl record scratching, break beats and spoken rhymes. Their radical reinterpretations of both the format and the presentation of live music without any ‘real’ instruments paved the way for the later invention and endorsement of digital sampling in popular music generally. A DJ and a rapper could now legitimately substitute for a band, with most of the ‘music’ consisting of directly appropriated parts of pre-existing songs, often selected in order to indicate an ironic distance from the prototype song.
417 The postmodern metaphor that related to the ‘death’ of modernism was mirrored in punk rock’s catchcry ‘no future’. From the 1977 Queen’s Jubilee release of the then London-based punk band The Sex
Vivienne Westwood or Jean Paul Gaultier, to the pop cultural impact of US pop icon Madonna’s ironic reiterations of female stereotypes during the early 1980s, the appearance of postmodern appropriation in popular culture generally can certainly be acknowledged as contemporaneous with its appearance in the New York art world. Far from directly informing or pre-empting the endorsement of appropriation in popular culture generally, the contemporaneous development of New York appropriation art and pop cultural incarnations of postmodernism can perhaps more accurately be described as a contemporaneous response to shared cultural conditions. Despite the fact that influential French philosophers such as Jean Baudrillard and Jean-François Lyotard had often explored ideas relating to postmodernism and simulated reality using examples cited from popular culture, places and events, much postmodern art criticism was (with a few

Pistol’s No. 1 UK single God Save the Queen (whose promotional posters depicted juxtaposed images of the Union Jack, official photographs of HRH Queen Elizabeth II, and newspaper clippings assembled into ‘death threat’-styled text), to the cover artwork of San Francisco-based US punk band The Dead Kennedys (whose record sleeves and promotional posters had characteristically utilised images appropriated from everyday consumer advertising juxtaposed with images of third world poverty or war (see, for example, Holiday in Cambodia (1979) or In God We Trust (1981)), the proliferation and influence of punk rock styles and fashions were considerable in paving the way for later commercial application of the strategies of appropriation and ironic distancing in many derivative popular cultural formations of the 1980s. Interestingly, just as the arrival of postmodern appropriation represented more of a popular rupture than a seminal occurrence in the visual arts (considering that French artist Francis Picabia had already pioneered material appropriation via collage in Paris during the late 1910s and early 1920s), the popular emergence of punk rock styles in London in 1977 following the situationist-styled marketing strategies of Sex Pistols manager Malcolm McLaren was similarly pre-empted by US prototype punk band The Stooges as early as 1969.

418 London-based fashion designers Vivienne Westwood and Paris-based Jean Paul Gaultier abhorred the ‘tasteful’ and purportedly ‘original’ designs of designers such as Giorgio Armani, Ralph Lauren, Calvin Klein, Claude Montana and Donna Karan. Instead, they sought incongruity of style and ironic reiteration. Westwood put her models in mini-crinolines, while Gaultier dressed his male models in skirts and placed conical breasts that were reminiscent of 1960s science fiction films on pop singer Madonna.

419 US pop singer Madonna’s reiterations of iconic female looks, ranging from Marilyn Monroe to biblical figures or street prostitutes, during the early 1980s effectively made her the first postmodern popular cultural icon. As opposed to Elvis Presley, Marilyn Monroe or James Dean, whose supposed cultivation of ‘original’ or individuating style had helped to constitute their respective statuses as popular cultural icons during the 1950s and 1960s (just as modernist icons such as Jackson Pollock or Andy Warhol had established their superstar statuses via the visual arts), Madonna instead demonstrated that direct reiteration of established ‘styles’ coupled with an ironic distance could now substitute for her own iconic status. If Monroe can be considered one of the most enduring female icons of US popular culture, then Madonna’s exact yet ironically distanced ‘copy’ of Monroe’s look can be considered perhaps the most enduring postmodern icon of US popular culture.

420 Baudrillard in particular explored his model of ‘simulation’ in essays such as ‘The Precession of Simulacra’ and ‘The Orders of Simulacra’, using examples ranging from the simulated environment of Disneyland to the political and media-driven ‘existence of a ‘virtual’ Cold War between the US and the former Soviet Union during the 1980s. Both essays are reprinted in Jean Baudrillard. Simulations (trans. Paul Foss, Paul Patton and Phillip Beitchman), Semiotext(e), New York 1983.
notable exceptions\textsuperscript{421} generally more concerned with establishing relationships between French theory and art history. Similarly, many formations of postmodernism within music, fashion or film would also rely most heavily on the specificities of their own histories.

From iconoclastic inception to the banality of the endgame, similarly cynical conclusions to those already discussed in relation to the visual arts were mirrored in many popular cultural formations. The very name of late 1980s UK appropriation-based pop group Pop Will Eat Itself,\textsuperscript{422} for example, provides a useful analogy for the cynical complicity characteristic of much contemporary art of the same period. Just as in the visual arts, many postmodern styles in music and fashion were self-consciously generated within the specific vocabularies and information channels of their prototype forms (and also often staged in mock opposition to dominant codes). As a consequence, to comprehend postmodern fashion, for example, it was necessary to already be familiar with the styles that had dominated previous decades. To demonstrate how similarly many separate yet contemporaneous formations of postmodernism have made the shift from an initially iconoclastic through to an iconic, banal and finally concealed approach to appropriation, this investigation will examine the relatively short history of ‘sampling’ in popular music.

An analogous genealogy to that already outlined in Chapter 1:3 (in relation to postmodern appropriation in the visual arts) can be loosely applied to the relatively short history of digital sampling in contemporary dance and hip-hop music. Having also largely shifted from what was initially a primarily ironic or critical strategy to a tacit yet ubiquitous tool of production, the evolution of sampling can be used as an example of this investigation’s central hypothesis: that while appropriation was a primarily critical/ironic function during

\textsuperscript{421} Popism, an exhibition curated by the late Australian critic Paul Taylor at the National Gallery of Victoria in June/July 1982, serves as one example of an attempt to construct a dialogue between popular culture and contemporary art. With a do-it-yourself mentality reminiscent of punk rock, and referencing itself against street culture rather than art history, Popism utilised promotional flyers, pamphlets and broadsides modelled on music fanzines. Taylor declared the works exhibited in Popism to represent the kind of originality found in ‘something like disco’, where each new song reshapes the past ‘in terms of a specific use value [dance]’. See Paul Taylor, ‘The Art of White Aborigines’, \textit{On the Beach} 1, 1982.

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the 1980s, it had transformed into more of a tacit tool of material cultural production by
the early 1990s. ‘Sampling’ is a term used in contemporary music 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. As an extension of this tendency, the
introduction of digital sampling\(^{423}\) and midi\(^{424}\) sequencing technology has enabled actual
digital copies of parts of existing songs to be integrated into new songs.

As with appropriation in the visual arts, in its earliest manifestations during the late 1970s
and 1980s, sampling relied heavily on explicit ironic distance as an essential part of its
intended function. Its intended audience’s recognition of the prototype, together with any
associated ironic or historical distance from that prototype, was central to the appreciation
of much early sampling. Where African American rap and hip-hop music\(^{425}\) juxtaposed
the nostalgic value of African American ‘Motown’ and funk from the 1960s and 1970s
with a critical distance from generic white pop music, the emergence of ‘house music’\(^{426}\)
was largely predicated on the ‘retro’ value of 1970s disco music. While the New York art
world was celebrating a seminal moment with the arrival of photo-appropriation art, in
nearby Brooklyn and Harlem, African American street culture had independently arrived

\(^{422}\) Late 1980s UK pop group Pop Will Eat Itself (aka PWEI) juxtaposed samples from throughout postwar
popular culture in a characteristically hilarious yet apocalyptic manner. Pop Will Eat Itself are best known
for the song *Def Con One*, 1988.

\(^{423}\) Technically, digital sampling involves electronic analysis of analogue waves at rapid intervals (in music,
typically at twice the speed per second of the highest frequency contained in the signal). Each sample thus
analysed is accorded a binary value, and the entire sound/image is converted into a stream of data. Re-
converting this data into an analogue form will then reproduce the original sound. Once a sample has been
captured in a digital form it can be electronically manipulated using specifically designed software. The
prototype sampler was first developed by the Fairlight Company (an Australia company) during the 1970s,
but did not become a big part of music production until the mid 1980s.

\(^{424}\) Midi is an interface technology that allows instruments and computer sequencing programs to work in
time with one another.

\(^{425}\) Rap is a form of generally non-melodic rhythmical rhyme delivered over a syncopated, generally DJ-
driven beat, generally known as hip-hop, both of which originated primarily in African American sub-
cultures in the Brooklyn and Harlem districts of New York in the late 1970s and early 1980s (see n. 396 for
a historical account).

\(^{426}\) House music originated in Chicago and Detroit in the mid 1980s, and originally referred to music
especially reconstructed to play ‘in house’ at specific clubs. Further developed and popularised in Europe,
by the late 1980s ‘house music’ generally referred to repetitive electronic dance music, generally 120 to
140 beats per minute, which usually contained samples of 1970s disco songs.
at a similar juncture. Hip-hop had seen the role of the DJ,\textsuperscript{427} a role formerly limited to the selection of dance music in discotheques (during the 1970s), become central within ‘live’ music. Scratching and repeating beats or short melodies to form a new musical arrangement, the hip-hop DJ’s contribution to the evolution of the use of appropriation in contemporary music is enormous. With the addition of digital sampling, myriad variations of hip-hop and ‘house music’ would exist by the late 1980s.

Just as Sherrie Levine had attempted to set up a critical distance from her modernist prototypes by appropriating them, so too would African American street culture demonstrate its distance from white mainstream American culture by re-appropriating the commercial reincarnations of rock music preferred by white middle-class America. After all, rock music had its origins in African American culture in the first place. Influential African American rap group Run DMC’s 1986 single \textit{Tricky}\textsuperscript{428} (audio CD track 4), which explicitly appropriated white rock group The Knack’s 1979 No. 1 hit single \textit{My Sharona}\textsuperscript{429} (audio CD track 3), is a good example of ironically distanced appropriation in popular music during the 1980s. \textit{Tricky} consisted of clearly recognisable excerpts of \textit{My Sharona} mixed with a simple drum machine, rapped vocals and record scratching.

Taking Run DMC’s approach one step further, the next generation of African American hip-hop was defined by the approach to sampling pioneered by rap group Public Enemy. Although Public Enemy’s music consisted largely of appropriated elements, their samples were generally far less immediately recognisable than those used by Run DMC. Mixing up sampled beats with ghostly samples of James Brown’s bass or white ‘death metal’ band Slayer’s guitar, and then layering, manipulating and processing them in such a way that they were rarely immediately recognisable, even to a specialised audience, the result was generally more a strangely fragmented sense of referential familiarity than an ironic appreciation. Public Enemy’s 1987 album \textit{It Takes a Nation of Millions to Hold Us Back},\textsuperscript{430} which, excluding the vocals, was constructed entirely from samples of other

\textsuperscript{427} An abbreviation of ‘disc-jockey’.
\textsuperscript{428} Run DMC, \textit{Tricky} (J. Simmons/D. McDaniels/J. Mizell/R. Rubin), 1986.
\textsuperscript{429} The Knack, \textit{My Sharona} (B. Averre/D. Fieger), 1979.
artists’ recordings, was widely received as a groundbreaking work, not only within the African American hip-hop community, but also by electronic artists internationally. *She Watch Channel Zero*\(^{431}\) (audio CD track 6), for example, uses a sample from Slayer’s *Angel of Death*\(^{432}\) (audio CD track 5). By their next album, *Fear of A Black Planet* (1989), Public Enemy had further developed the art of concealment, as evidenced by the song *Brothers Gonna’ Work It Out* (audio CD track 8), which contained a barely discernable sample of US pop artist Prince’s 1978 No. 1 hit *When Doves Cry* (audio CD track 7). Only a hint of appropriated material was now evident, and that only upon a detailed inspection, or with *a priori* knowledge.

As witnessed in the visual arts, by the late 1980s and early 1990, the use of explicit sampling in hip-hop was widely considered banal. Far from implying any ironic or critical distance from the prototype work, sampling was now 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 in hip-hop can be heard in MC Hammer’s 1990 No. 1 hit *Can’t Touch This*\(^{433}\) (audio CD track 10), which was based entirely (with the addition of a vocal and a drum machine) on a clearly recognisable sample of Rick James’s 1981 hit *Superfreak*\(^{434}\) (audio CD track 9). As had been the case with many other artists who had relied upon sampling, *Can’t Touch This* was MC Hammer’s only significantly successful song, critical backlash to the banality of the song was considerable, and Hammer soon ‘retired’ to become a little-known cable TV evangelist. Record companies were now 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,\(^{425}\) which had involved a sample of Gilbert O’ Sullivan’s *Alone Again (Naturally)* by US rapper Biz Markey. After demanding that all


\(^{432}\) Slayer, *Angel Of Death* (J. Hanneman), 1986 (interestingly both Slayer and Public Enemy were produced by Rick Rubin of Def Jam Records).

\(^{433}\) MC Hammer’s *Can’t Touch This* (S. Burrell/R. James) was a No. 1 US Billboard hit in 1990.

\(^{434}\) Rick James, *Superfreak* (R. James), 1981.
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 US Attorney’s Office for criminal prosecution.\textsuperscript{436} According to US music industry analyst Donald S. Passman, ‘because of this case’, artists ‘now treat sampling with the utmost care and respect’.\textsuperscript{437} Moreover, he notes, most ‘record companies won’t release a record containing samples’ unless they are sure ‘that the samples have been cleared’.\textsuperscript{438}

Various incentives for musicians wishing to use sampling in the production of commercially released music to try and conceal their sources from audience recognition can be identified. Just as in the visual arts, a major incentive became that of critical fashionability. Ironic and nostalgic value was now widely perceived as antithetical to the value of ‘keeping it real’. By the mid to late 1990s, explicitly recognisable samples were less commonly used in both hip-hop and pop music generally, but as a tacit tool of material production, sampling was everywhere. A requirement had clearly evolved within myriad splintered electronic music subcultures (such as ‘trance’, ‘techno’, ‘drum & bass’, and ‘electronica’) for more than mere nostalgic or ironic appreciation of prototype formations. This demand encouraged many musicians to digitally manipulate and therefore mask samples altogether. A faint but non-specific sense of familiarity was now often all that remained. Aphex Twin’s 1998 single \textit{Windowlicker}\textsuperscript{439} (audio CD track 11), for example, certainly seems to contain ghostly references to earlier songs and styles, yet there are none that are specifically identifiable, even to an ‘educated’ listener.

Another pronounced example of the concealment of appropriation in popular cultural application is found in the recently nominated art of ‘turntablism’.\textsuperscript{440} Using nothing but

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item \textsuperscript{437} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{438} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{439} Aphex Twin, \textit{Windowlicker} (R.D. James), 1998.
\item \textsuperscript{440} 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. South Bronx DJ Grand Wizzard Theodore, by most accounts, had first pioneered the idea of scratching a record by moving it back and forth. Grand Master Flash had earlier pioneered the concept of ‘rubbing’ a record in order to enhance a DJ’s segue into a
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
pre-recorded material, the turntablist creates soundscapes and musical sequences in which the original recordings are generally unrecognisable. Two consecutive phases, that of appropriation and concealment, can be identified in turntablism. First, there is the art of ‘digging’, which refers to the act of sourcing complementary records with which to make new music; second, there is the art of ‘scratching’, which involves the rhytmical intermingling of pre-recorded sounds to a point of virtual concealment, using nothing but two turntables. DJ Q-Bert (aka Richard Quitevis), a Filipino-American artist from San Francisco, is regarded as the world’s most technically proficient turntablist and is especially renowned for the final referential illegibility of his purely turntable-derived music. Q-Bert’s 1998 album, Wave Twisters, for example, was produced entirely using appropriated pre-recorded recordings but has to date attracted no charge of copyright infringement. 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 ‘utilization of turntables-as-instruments’.

new song, but it was Theodore who gave the backward sound a percussive, rhythmic quality. Although DJ Kool Herc is widely considered the founder of hip-hop, its biggest influence was Afrika Bambaataa, who founded The Universal Zulu Nation in the South Bronx in 1973 after a UNICEF-sponsored visit to Africa. DJ Jazzy Jay, co-founder of seminal hip-hop label Def Jam Records, was later recruited by Afrika Bambaataa to be his key DJ in the band Soulsonic Force. 440 GrandMixer DXT performed the solo scratches on Herbie Hancock’s No. 1 hit instrumental Rockit (1984), which would soon inspire a whole generation of scratch DJs, including MixMasterMike, DJ Q-Bert, Cut Chemist, DJ Faust and DJ Babu. See Jeffrey C. Ponferrada, http://www.public.asu.edu/~dejesus/210entries/qbert.htm, accessed 12/10/02, and Jessica Yadegaran. Hip-Hop DJs Do Their Movie Proud, http://sandiego.citysearch.com/profile/247684, 11 April 2002, accessed 24/12/02.

441 DJ Q-Bert, Wave Twisters (Episode 7 Million: Sonic Wars within the Protons, Galactic But Hair Records, San-Francisco.

Subterranean, recontextualised, or partially concealed references also often seem to be present in contemporary pop music videos of the late 1990s and early 2000s. In viewing French artist and director Jean Baptiste Mondino’s video for Madonna’s 2000 single *Don’t Tell Me*, for example, it is finally unclear whether a scene which depicts a cowboy on a horse being projected on a giant outdoor billboard in the desert was derived from seminal New York photo-appropriation artist Richard Prince’s codified caricatures of cowboys recontextualised from Marlboro cigarette advertisements (such as *Untitled (Cowboy)* (1980–84), the original Marlboro cigarette advertisements themselves, the camp macho cowboy fantasy that is common in gay disco culture (a target audience for Madonna), or indeed all or none of the above. At any rate, the video arguably relies less on a specific level of viewer recognition than Prince’s *Cowboy* appropriations of the early 1980s. Given the resistance to specific critical categorisation apparent in works such as Aphex Twin’s *Windowlicker* or Mondino’s Madonna video, in order to further explore the idea of contemporary popular cultural production via the deliberate concealment of appropriated elements, this investigation will now turn to an exposé of the author’s own work in the production of contemporary pop music.
4:2 (i) Application two: ‘subliminal sampling’ in pop music

The initial impetus for this investigation was founded on the success of the pop music project Def FX (1990–97), which was conceived by the author while an undergraduate student in the Painting Department of Sydney College of the Arts, in 1989. Looking for a medium outside painting in which to explore the idea of ‘subliminal appropriation’ the medium of ‘pop music’ was selected. First, hundreds of Top 40 hit songs, dating from 1960 to 1990, were systematically documented in terms of their musical key and beat per minute properties. This data was then analysed on a computer in order to isolate matching properties. The first match consisted of US disco group Chic’s 1978 hit Le Freak\textsuperscript{443} (audio CD track 12), Italian house outfit Black Box’s 1989 hit Ride on Time\textsuperscript{444} (audio CD track 13), and Swedish pop ‘supergroup’ Abba’s 1977 hit Money Money\textsuperscript{445} (audio CD track 14). All three songs were in the key of A minor, at a tempo of 120 beats per minute, and employed a ‘four on the floor’ drum rhythm. Second, a two-bar sample was taken from all three songs and the samples were sequenced on top of one another using midi (audio CD track 15). A heavily distorted guitar riff was then added over the top of the sequence in order to partially disguise the samples, new lyrics were written (by cutting up and modifying the words of dozens of hit songs at a similar tempo), a female singer was selected for the project,\textsuperscript{446} and the ‘new’ song Surfers of the Mind\textsuperscript{447} (audio CD track 15) was released on the Sydney-based Phantom Records Label in 1991. By 10 November 1991, the EP Water (on which Surfers of the Mind appeared) had climbed to No. 1 on the Aria Australian Alternative Singles Chart. It remained in the top 10 for a then Australian record of 52 weeks. Within a year, Def FX was signed to EMI (for Australasia) and RCA New York (for the rest of the world). In retrospect it is possible to faintly recognise some appropriated materials in Surfers of the Mind. In time however the process would become far more sophisticated.

\textsuperscript{443} Chic, Le Freak (Rodgers/Edwards), 1978.
\textsuperscript{444} Black Box, Ride on Time (Hartman/Limoni/Davoli/Semplici), 1989.
\textsuperscript{446} Fiona Horne became the vocalist of Def FX in March 1990.
\textsuperscript{447} Def FX, Surfers of the Mind (Lowry/Horne/Gardner/Basha/Van Kriedt), 1991.
The procedure was repeated for five albums and 14 singles, with several achieving Top 40 sales. Enthusiastic fans generally appeared unable to comprehend why they might be drawn to this otherwise unlikely fusion of heavy distorted guitar with electronic dance music. Not one claim of copyright infringement has been recorded to date, nor has any review referred to the specific paternity of any of the concealed samples. Aiming to further test hypothesis on the band’s already dedicated fan base, the same sample sequence and midi arrangement (audio CD track 19) that had already been used to produce the 1992 single _No Time For Nowhere_ (audio CD track 20) was simply reused (with new guitar, vocal and keyboard parts added) to produce the 1996 single _I’ll be Your Majick_ (audio CD track 21). Since, in the interim, _Def FX_ had replaced both its guitarist and bass player, and as the singer had never actually heard the sequences without the guitar already added, not even the band itself knew that the sequence and arrangement were being reused. Both songs were based on a data match of Ian Dury’s 1978 No. 1 hit _Hit Me With Your Rhythm Stick_ (audio CD track 17) and The Bee Gees’ 1977 hit _Staying Alive_ (audio CD track 18), both of which are in the key of F minor, at a tempo of 103 beats per minute, and employ a ‘one and three on the floor’ drum rhythm.

While researching this thesis (2000–2003), the aforementioned database of No. 1 hit songs has been expanded by the author to several thousand entries. An as yet untitled pop project (developed in conjunction with top Australian music producer Robert Taylor, singer Sherridan Nelson and bass player with Australian rock band Silverchair, Chris Joanne) is currently in production and due to be launched commercially mid to late 2003. Only rough ‘demo’ versions of songs in progress are therefore available for citation in this investigation. _Sequence 3_ (audio CD track 25) was produced using a data match of Madonna’s 2000 hit _Music_ (audio CD track 22) with La Belle’s 1974 hit _Lady_.

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448 See n. 420.
450 _Def FX, I’ll Be Your Majick_ (Lowry, Horne, Fonti, Stein) 1996.
451 Original guitarist Blake Gardner was replaced by David Stein in 1993.
452 Original bass player Martyn Basha was replaced by Sean Fonti in 1995.
Marmalade\textsuperscript{456} (audio CD track 23) and The Bee Gees’ 1977 hit You Should Be Dancing\textsuperscript{457} (audio CD track 24), which are all in the key of G minor and at a tempo of 120 beats per minute. Sequence 4 (audio CD track 29) was produced using a match of Michael Jackson’s 1982 hit Billy Jean\textsuperscript{458} (audio CD track 26), Cameo’s 1986 hit Word Up\textsuperscript{459} (audio CD track 27) and Patrice Rusher’s 1982 hit Forget Me Knots\textsuperscript{460} (audio CD track 28). Once extra instrumentation, vocals and digital effects are added, the No. 1 samples on which the songs are based should become less recognisable again. At any rate, the finished tracks are not intended for commercial release until all appropriated elements are unrecognisable without a priori knowledge. Lustless (audio CD track 30), for example, was created according to matching data from well-known artists ranging from Britney Spears to The Smiths, Prince, Soul to Soul and Blondie, whilst Dark Angel (audio CD track 31), was mixed together with matching data ranging from Donna Summer to The Village People, No Doubt, Blondie and Anita Lane.

Reinterpreting prototypes is certainly nothing new in pop music. Former Beatle Paul McCartney once admitted that his songwriting often consists of simply ‘thinking of my favourite song and changing it until it becomes mine’.\textsuperscript{461} Similarly, Andrew Duffield, of 1980s Australian band The Models, has described writing the 1983 Australian chart hit, I Hear Motion, as simply not being able to ‘figure out’ Stevie Wonder’s 1972 hit Superstition.\textsuperscript{462} The data-matching methodology employed by the author, however, adopts a more systematic manner. Explicitly appropriated elements, designed to remain consciously undetectable to the listener, but to nevertheless evoke the kind of immediate familiarity that sells pop music, form the material basis of the author’s approach.

\textsuperscript{458} Michael Jackson, \textit{Billy Jean} (M. Jackson), 1982.
\textsuperscript{461} Paul McCartney in interview with Larry King on the NBC cable network on 12 June 2001.
\textsuperscript{462} ‘I was trying to work out how to play Stevie Wonder’s Superstition and I couldn’t figure it out. What I ended up playing was I Hear Motion.’ Andrew Duffield, quoted in ‘The 1980s’, \textit{Long Way To The Top}, television documentary, Australian Broadcasting Commission, 5 September 2001, 8.30 pm AEST.
4:2 (ii) Application three: temporal visual concealment

The temporal imageries for promotional videos (still in production) for the aforementioned pop music project are also being developed using appropriated elements already familiar to a relatively large audience. In a third demonstration of the capabilities of new digital technologies in facilitating the concealment of explicitly appropriated elements, a mock presentation of temporal visual concealment is outlined.

First, using nothing but a rented video of *Microcosmos* (1996), a French film widely revered for its high-resolution depictions of natural forms, together with a computer and Adobe Premiere (a video editing program), the entire film was digitised and colour inverted, placed in the left corner of the screen, and then copied three times to refill the screen. Second, the three copies were flipped horizontally, vertically, and vertically and horizontally respectively. Third, several short sections were then selected and continuously crossfaded, forwards and backwards, in a looping sequence. No other adjustments to colour, sound or content were made. The result, *Organic Remix* (see video/DVD attached), an audiovisual sequence of 12 minutes duration, literally consists of nothing other than digitally appropriated and manipulated parts of the original film *Microcosmos*. Co-directors Claude Nuridsany and Marie Perennou took 15 years to research, two years to design specialised camera equipment, three years to film, and six months to edit *Microcosmos*; the object of the author's exercise in concealed appropriation was to reproduce the technologically enhanced 'aesthetic' qualities presented in the original without producing a work obviously based on its prototype – and in the process, avoiding any copyright infringement charges. A shorter edited version of *Organic Remix* has already been trialled on on ABC TV Australia's weekly music video program *Rage* at 1.25 a.m. on Friday September 7 as the background visual component to former Australian rock group Great Apes’ video *Boring as Dirt* (2000).
In conclusion (to this chapter), works generated using a strategy of concealment can remain resistant to categorisation as ‘appropriation-based’ despite the explicit appropriation-based nature of their actual production. This chapter has outlined several approaches to the concealment of appropriation in contemporary artistic and cultural production. From painting, to pop music, to music video - although appropriation has clearly remained a central tool within contemporary artistic production, it is often consciously backgrounded in finished works. In an attempt to divert attention from an association with the now dated paradigm of appropriation, and in conjunction with the need to protect against potential charges of copyright infringement, contemporary artists, in conjunction with the new digital reproduction technologies, are now both more likely and more able to opt for a strategy of concealment. The strategy of appropriation, a device originally used in conjunction with anti-formalist critique, is in a sense now being secretly applied to the production of works that paradoxically invite only a formalist interpretation. Escape from a direct association with the legacy of appropriation is provisional on the artist’s ability to deflect detection. If successfully concealed, only the artist remains aware of his or her work’s status as a post-appropriation artwork. As New York painter Jack Featherly put it in 2002: ‘I love the irony of using something that is visible almost 24 hrs a day, but ignored by my primary audience.’\textsuperscript{465} Where it might not be possible to wholly and naively return to the idea of autonomous gesture in artistic production, it is certainly possible to feign such a return via the deliberate concealment of appropriated elements. Given that it is difficult to detect the use of concealment without \textit{a priori} knowledge of the artist’s prototypes, this investigation will now turn to the complicated task of building a model of art criticism that might be applicable to contemporary art ‘after’ appropriation.

Chapter 5

'As if': art after appropriation and the 'agnostic' model

Gradually, as repetition and citationality turn into habit, they will become the foundation for a new lyric poetry, whose journey has its beginning and not its end in ironic estrangement.\footnote{Mikhail Epstein, 'On The Place of Postmodernism in Postmodernity: 1. Removing the Quotation Marks', http://www.emory.edu/INTELNET/e.pm.conclusion.html, accessed 3/03/00, p. 4.}

For self-conscious art to persist after the allegedly irreconcilable endgames presented in postmodernism, it must in some way (by historical definition) be affected by the legacy of appropriation art. Unable to conceive on a blank canvas, the artist is now conscious that he or she is invariably picking up where others have left off, but at the same time, the artist is also aware of the critical and economic perogatives to re-mix, re-edit, reconfigure or in some way transform appropriated elements beyond recognition. Without engaging in this transformation, art cannot even attempt to feign a transcendence of postmodernism. Positioned in a doubly paradoxical moment, a moment after the 'end of history' implied in postmodernism, the contemporary artist might now be able to reconsider the modernism/postmodernism dialectic with the vantage of some historical distance. For New York-based Ashley Bickerton in 1986, after postmodernism, artists might be able to assume a 'vantage point' over all the 'contrary information we have witnessed in the postwar period', and, as a consequence, start to 'merge' or 'implode a variety of different strategies and epistemologies'.\footnote{Ashley Bickerton, quoted in D. Robbins (ed.), 'From Criticism to Complicity' (an edited transcript of discussion between Sherrie Levine, Pater Halley, Jeff Koons, Haim Steinbach, Ashley Bickerton and Philip Taaffe, which was moderated by Peter Nagy at Pat Hearn Gallery New York, 2 May 1986), Flash Art 129, Summer 1986, p. 46.}

Freed from the literal influence of millennial projection (a condition that has, it could be argued, influenced much late twentieth-century art criticism\footnote{See Yve Alain Bois, 'Painting as Model', October 37, Summer 1986. Reprinted in Yve-Alain Bois, Painting as Model, October Books, MIT Press, Cambridge, Mass., 1993, pp. 245–57.}), it might now be easier to comprehend not only certain historical qualities shared by modernism and postmodernism, but also the paradoxical nature of the oppositionalities in art that they now commonly represent. Wherever art
criticism is wholly aligned with aesthetic or anti-aesthetic, formalist or anti-formalist, objective or subjective, historical or anti-historical, structuralist or poststructuralist, strategic or qualitative, or sincere or cynical approaches, it ultimately becomes reducible to a ‘belief’ versus ‘disbelief’ dichotomy. For the ‘believer’, art still serves as an index of culture in general. For the ‘non-believer’, art is equalised with the culture it claims to index. For the agnostic, on the other hand, both ‘art’ and ‘non-art’ remain equivalently contestable propositions.

According to Richard Grayson, Australia-based English artist and artistic director of the 2002 Biennale of Sydney, *The World May Be Fantastic*, although contemporary artists realise that it is not possible to ‘do grand narratives any more’, they nonetheless resolve to ‘pretend’ that they still can. For Grayson, ‘this return to narrative, be it knowing although not ironic’, ‘is in some ways inevitable’, because ‘humans have a fundamental desire for pattern-making grand narrative, be that scientific, artistic or occult’. But how does this attitude actually manifest itself in art criticism? In 2002, New York artist Tom Moody, for example, described fellow New York painter Jack Featherly’s work as continuing to ‘operate “as if” purity was possible’. Similarly, New York-based critic Tim Griffin recognised a similar tension in Featherly’s paintings, ‘between self-conscious quotation and a savvy pleasure in painting’, while Ken Johnson, art critic for the *New York Times*, saw Featherly’s work as ‘playfully questioning the great 20th-century romance of abstract painting’. What is being variously implied here is that many contemporary artists are continuing to make art ‘as if’ invention is still possible and art were somehow meaningful, but without really believing that. In other words, the idea of meaningful invention in art has only made a *provisional* return after the impact of postmodernism.

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470 Ibid.
According to Russian theorist Mikhail Epstein in 1999, as a consequence of the dilemma of post-subjectivity that preceded it, the 'as if' dilemma ultimately limits the return of subjectivity in contemporary art to face value. According to Epstein, following the demise of modernist concepts such as 'truth', 'objectivity', 'soul' and 'subjectivity' under the premise of the prefix 'post', self-conscious art was only left capable of reintroducing such concepts 'as if' they were possible. By historical consequence, the 'trans-subjectivity' of the 1990s that replaced the 'post-subjectivity' of the 1980s had finally become little more than 'an "as if" utopianism', still 'aware of its own failures, insubstantiality, and secondariness'. Art criticism produced within the premise 'as if' demands an amalgamated approach to established polarities, one that does not reject subjectivity, but that at the same time remains conscious of the weight of history. Art clearly cannot be wholly reduced to either a dry cynical exercise of negation or a naïve utopian subjectivity without encountering contradiction. Once the idea of art is accepted as at once original and unoriginal, formalist and anti-formalist, aesthetic and anti-aesthetic, its scope appears indefinable. From the vantage of the late 1990s and early 2000s, it might be possible to integrate the idea of postmodernism, formerly considered the antithesis of modernism, within the unresolved yet ongoing historical project of art history.

Most art histories to date have used only one of two forms of analysis: diachronic or synchronic. In his influential work, *Course in General Linguistics* (1916), Swiss linguist Ferdinand Saussure established a structural study of language that emphasised the arbitrary relationship of the linguistic sign to that which it supposedly signified. Saussure distinguished synchronic linguistics (the study of language at a given moment) from diachronic linguistics (the study of the changing state of a language over time). The modernist paradigm of art history is typically founded on diachronic analysis. Diachronic analysis is typically used in modernist accounts of art history, such as those that describe

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474 Mikhail Epstein, 'On The Place of Postmodernism in Postmodernity: 1. Removing the Quotation Marks', http://www.emory.edu/INTELNET/e.pm.conclusion.html, accessed 3/03/00, p. 4.
475 Ibid.
the gradual break-up of the image in late nineteenth-century French impressionism, its subsequent deconstruction in cubism, and later graduation to 1950s US formalist abstraction. Where diachronic analysis typically aims to model art history in terms of linear innovation, synchronic analysis more typically refers to relationships between various ‘generations of interest’ across the present. In the visual arts, the synchronic model can be thought of as analogous to a chess game: the actual material nature of the piece does not matter, for the game can be played with pieces of any shape, size or material. What matters instead is the location of the piece. That location is what signifies its meaning within the overall context of the game. Although postmodernism is typically modelled in terms of lateral expansion rather than a vertical structuring, since it is nonetheless positioned after modernism, it can also invite diachronic analysis.

Figure 42. Diachronic and synchronic axes.

The agnostic model represents an attempt to balance critical assessment of an artwork’s perceived level of historical innovation against a judgement in terms quality and interest in the present. In the diagram below, in which a line drawn through time represents the diachronic axis and a cross at any point on that line represents the synchronic axis, an artwork critically considered somehow ‘radical’ might be located on or near the vertical

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axis, whereas a work critically considered ‘refined’ would be located closer to the horizontal axis. A work that is considered both ‘radical’ and ‘refined’, on the other hand, might sit nearer the intersection of the vertical and axes, whereas a work considered largely unremarkable in both senses might occupy a position relatively distant from both axes. As an alternative to the diachronic versus synchronic dichotomy, as exemplified in the oppositionalities of modernism and postmodernism respectively, the agnostic model favours critical consideration along both axes simultaneously.

During the 1990s, Hal Foster has worked to redefine established linkages between early twentieth-century avant-gardes and postwar neo-avant-gardes in terms of horizontal rather than vertical structuration.\footnote{See Hal Foster, The Return of the Real, MIT Press, Cambridge, Mass., 1996, p. xi.} According to Foster, the commonly held belief that postwar avant-gardes had merely repeated, re-routed or redeployed paradigms already brokered in the historical avant-gardes\footnote{For an example of such analysis see Peter Bürger, Theory of the Avant-garde (trans. Michael Shaw), University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1984, p. 53.} is ultimately limited. Instead, Foster asks whether the neo-avant-gardes acted on the historical avant-garde in ways that can only now be appreciated.\footnote{Hal Foster, ‘What’s Neo about the Neo Avant-Garde?’, in M. Buskirk and M. Nixon (ed.), The Duchamp Effect: Essays, Interviews, Round Table, October Books, MIT Press, Cambridge, Mass., 1996.} According to Foster, the triumphs awarded the historical avant-gardes were, at any rate, largely the ‘retroactive effect of countless artistic responses and critical readings’,\footnote{Ibid.} and therefore must indicate a two-way stream of legitimisation. As Foster points out, ‘the first helped to charge the second, the second to frame the first’, and ‘in the process both were transformed’.\footnote{Hal Foster, ‘This Funeral is for the Wrong Corpse’, in Design & Crime (and Other Diatribes), Verso, New York, 2002, p. 133.} Rather than seeing the neo-avant-garde’s very repetition as simply cancelling the project of the historical avant-garde, for Foster it was the neo-avant-garde that actually comprehended it for the first time.\footnote{Ibid.} Unless a historical prototype is in some way quoted, appropriated, referenced, or parodied, it stands to disappear to the margins of history. It is for this reason that the neo-avant-garde is substantially culpable for the impact of the historical avant-garde in the present. For
Foster, a historical event that is registered and recoded via another can be valued as a ‘deferred action’. ⁴⁸⁴

Foster especially decries ‘literal’ recoveries of historical avant-garde formations, ‘the effect of which is less to transform the institution of art than to transform the avant-garde into an institution’. ⁴⁸⁵ But the historical avant-gardes were limited by the lack of a critical context in which to be effective; only within the extended context of the neo-avant-garde are subtle transgressions made possible. In this way the neo-avant-gardes can be seen as reconstructive and the historical avant-garde as deconstructive, an inversion of more established oppositionalities between apocalyptic postmodernism and utopian modernism. Where the historical avant-garde had attacked audience and market, its reincarnations had managed to adopt them. As the modernist avant-garde was both destructive and utopianist and its postmodern repetition was both reconstructive and cynical, self-cancelling oppositionalities can be seen to exist both between and within the established antithetical paradigms of modernism and postmodernism. Beyond defeat, the only option, in partial acknowledgment and rejection of both paradigms, becomes the resolve to carry on ‘as if’ both options are at once both possible and impossible.

Art criticism of the future, according to New York-based critic Benjamin Buchloh in 1994, will need to contrast the question of whether we have finally reached that stage where all attempts at writing art history as a history of authors and anti-authors have become ‘utterly futile and methodologically unacceptable’ ⁴⁸⁶ with the ‘view of those who give modernism a long, last passionate study imbued with the scrutiny of mourning’, and for whom ‘Duchamp and his legacies simply do not constitute a sufficiently substantial – existentially and aesthetically complex – visual culture’. ⁴⁸⁷ Although Buchloh wishes to resist ‘lapsing into a melancholic call for old conventions of representation, types of artistic subjectivity, and models of aesthetic experience’, as epitomised by ‘tragic artists

⁴⁸⁴ Ibid.
⁴⁸⁵ Ibid.
⁴⁸⁷ Ibid.
such as Picasso and Pollock', he nonetheless warns that in continuing to expressly focus efforts on avoiding this 'fallacy', the question as to whether Duchamp and his anti-aesthetic legacies had finally 'fallen short' of their 'actual historical potential' should not be ignored.\(^{488}\) As the Australian art historian Rex Butler reminds us, much of the dilemma of contemporary art is still founded in the final incontrovertibility of the logic of appropriation:

We would want to think how tradition, authorship and expressivity might again be possible, against that appropriationism which so expediently and wrongly did away with them, without returning us to a merely "substantialist" version of them.\(^{489}\)

Having largely retreated from the iconoclastic anti-modernism initially presented by photo-appropriationists during the late 1970s and early 1980s, the problem of appropriation in art has nonetheless left a stubborn legacy that artists can seemingly neither transcend nor proudly parade. All that has changed is that attitudes towards appropriation have softened. With its initial legitimisation founded on discrediting modernism, postmodernism in general has slowly transformed into an enactment with or commentary upon modernism. Foster describes this shift as part of larger pattern of movement in postwar art from 'radical disruptions' and 'grand oppositions' to 'subtle displacements'.\(^{490}\) As civic tolerance of what was once considered 'avant-garde' is now comparable with an average evening of television, and remembering that most art ever historically revered as 'radical' has eventually inhabited the institutions it sought to disrupt and criticise, the passage towards 'subtle displacement' is assured. For Foster, postmodernism's initial 'break with the fundamental practices and discourses of modernity' was regrettably reducible to style.\(^{491}\)

\(^{488}\) Ibid., p. 4.
\(^{491}\) Ibid. 'We did not lose. In a sense a worse thing happened: treated as a fashion, Postmodernism became démodé.'
Although Foster does not disagree with ‘certain aspects’ of poststructuralist or Marxist-influenced critical theory, he does argue that ‘they concede too much too quickly’. As a consequence, Foster has attempted to try to ‘recover some of what they surrender[ed]’. Warning of an easy cynicism at play in postmodernism generally, Foster is careful to neither wholly abandon nor wholly accept the legacies of the historical avant-garde. As a former champion of a critical ‘postmodernism of resistance’ during the 1980s, by the early 1990s he had become suspicious of the empty fashionability of that resistance. According to Foster in 2002, the ‘expanded field’ of modernism initially introduced by the ‘doubling’ of postmodernism ‘has slowly imploded, as terms once held in productive contradiction have slowly collapsed into compounds without much tension ...’ Therefore, he argues, since ‘we live in the wake not only of modernist painting and sculpture but of postmodernist deconstructions of these forms as well’, might the “end of art” be one more thing about art that is not “self-evident anymore”? In conceding that the ‘expanded field of postmodernist art’ has ‘largely imploded’ and that ‘the recovered devices of avant-garde art’ are now ‘mostly attenuated’, Foster sees the potential for artists, “[p]aradoxically enabled by historical distance and/or geopolitical difference”, to transform ‘this imploded field into the departure point for an expansive practice ... in which certain aspects of both postmodernist and neo-avant-garde art are recovered’.

In partial retrospect, postmodernism’s cynical constructions of irony are finally only as overfamiliar and predictable as the art out of which they were constructed. Reduced to a view of art that consists of little more than the creation of an ironic distance, whose construction and decipherment might temporarily afford a certain intellectual interest, postmodernism could never aspire to any ‘real’ level of elation. Although irony protected the artist from the feeling that without it art might seem futile, irony in itself finally

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493 Ibid.
494 Ibid. p. 127.
495 Ibid. p. 125.
496 Ibid. p. 123.
497 Ibid. p. 141.
became a *fait accompli* and therefore doomed to banality. Although postmodernism had sought to interrogate established dichotomies such as original/copy, mind/body or history/myth, in doing so it produced other equivalently ideologically imbued polarities: self/other, centre/periphery and culture/nature. Postmodernism, as both a style and a critical function, had by the late 1990s become both subsumed as tradition and considered part of the narrative sequence of late twentieth-century art. According to Foster in 2002, ‘the model of formalist modernism challenged by an expansive postmodernism no longer drives or describes significant developments in art or criticism’. 498

By the late 1980s and early 1990s, many artists schooled in critical postmodernism were finding it difficult to sustain the paradoxical conviction that there was any truth to discover within a discourse that denied the very existence of truth. The failure of both postmodernism and modernism to accurately define or account for the conditions and functions of art must therefore have caused artists to adopt an ambivalent attitude towards both. Where modernist art had served as an allegory of progress and suffering, postmodern art had served as an allegory of boredom499 (as indicated by such boredom-inducing features as repetition and seriality). Since art had supposedly completed the line of questioning which had begun when photography stole painting’s role as an imitation of reality, was there anything else left for art to do but splinter into myriad pluralistic variations that no longer required any critical justification other than the routine doubled logic of camp? The question of where to move after postmodernism has certainly been made more difficult because of the fact that it is relatively easier to move from naivety to cynicism than it is to move from cynicism to anything else.

What are some of the legacies of 1980s postmodernism? Modern art’s former antithesis of abstraction and representation was certainly significantly merged within

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Also, as a consequence of postmodernism, the self-conscious artist now knows better than to claim a radical break for its own sake. Postmodernism also highlighted the weaknesses of the ideas that modernism should necessarily be equated with the idea of progress, or that history should be conceived as a single course. In attempting to reject modernism’s quest in art for a position radically separate from the productive contexts of the world, postmodernism successfully served to further equalise art with the productive contexts of the world. According to New York-based critic Thomas McEvilly in 1991, ‘what really happened’ to art history during the 1980s was ‘far greater’ than ‘formal fashions’.

For Australia-based English critic Nicholas Zurbrugg in 2000, to entirely negate postmodernism ‘is to neglect the most significant cultural mutations of our time’. For French critic and current Professor of the history of art at Harvard University, Yve Alain Bois, to ‘claim that the “end of painting” is finished’ is ultimately a naïve assumption when ‘reproduciability and fetishization’ have otherwise ‘permeated all aspects of life’. For Australian artist John Young, ‘postmodernism is still an important paradigm when you talking about contemporary art seriously’.

Although its more apocalyptic tendencies appear to have softened, the legacies of postmodernism are still clearly apparent for many artists. For all its contradictions and empty rhetoric, it is still clear that postmodernism has made a contribution to the way art is evaluated that cannot be simply retracted or forgotten. The modernist view of art as a grand and logical sequence of autonomous gestures has certainly lost weight. But at the same time, it is also evident that postmodernism’s cynical detachment from sincerity and subjectivity has lost steam. It is as if artists want to believe in art again yet can’t quite bring themselves to. With no other option foreseeable, artists get back to the job at hand, ‘as if’ art is still possible and relevant. For the agnostic artist, both the utopian ideal of

500 'To all intents and purposes, abstraction and representation have just about merged', Roberta Smith, 'What's New: Originality, Appropriation and So Forth', Origins, Originality + Beyond, Catalogue for Biennale of Sydney 1986.
504 John Young, quoted from an interview with the author at Sydney’s Sherman Galleries 24 October 2001.
radical originality and its cynical antithesis, appropriation art, are similarly limited in their ability to accurately describe and account for the diversity of contemporary artistic production.

The agnostic model represents a view of art that belongs to a world in which uncertainty remains the only certainty. Historically, both the believer and the non-believer accuse the agnostic of immaturity and incompleteness. The same attitudes prevail in art. According to Mikhail Epstein, this ‘courage of restraint’ is somehow ‘perceived as a form of cowardice’ or ‘fear in the face of banality’.\(^{505}\) Where the rhetoric and discursive interpretation of the postmodern paradigm of appropriation seemed excessive in hindsight, for many artists of the 1990s, it nonetheless remains impossible to wholly return to art as an unmediated reflection of the world or as a socially progressive agenda. Instead, art floats somewhere between social commentary and inextricably self-aware fictions, between public and private spheres, self and other, individual and community, and, finally, between engagement and the suspension of belief. For artists to continue in the naïve hope that the idea of radical possibility can again be possible in art seems no less clichéd or unthinking than continuing to maintain a cynical negation of the idea of innovation altogether. With no other apparent option available, many artists have returned a quasi-expressive enthusiasm to their practice, an enthusiasm that still falls short of declaring a belief in art, but that refuses the cynical endgames and wholesale negation of possibility implied by textbook postmodernism. French philosopher Jean Baudrillard once suggested that the attitude of the post-Warholian artist is essentially agnostic because ‘we no longer believe in art, only in the idea of art (which is of course no longer aesthetic)’.\(^{506}\) Moreover, for Baudrillard, all humans are ‘secretly’ agnostic.\(^{507}\) Many artists of the 1990s and 2000s can be observed as having generally softened in their approaches towards perceived oppositionalities. Australian artist and critic Ben Curnow described Australian former appropriation artist John Young’s work in 1997 as no longer

\(^{506}\) Mikhail Epstein, ‘On the Place of Postmodernism in Postmodernity: 1. Removing the Quotation Marks’, http://www.emory.edu/INTELNET/c.pm.conclusion.html, accessed 3/03/00, p. 3.


\(^{507}\) Ibid.
as 'eclectic and decadently ambitious' as it once was, therefore allowing 'a more qualitative appraisal'.508 As a consequence, having retreated from the 'rhetorical ambitions' of postmodernism, Curnow sees an artist 'asking to have it both ways'.509 For Young, this shift was a consequence of his desire for 'a bit more poetry in [his] life'.510 In a plural, faceted world, Young feels this desire is something 'which only imagination' can allow.511 For US philosopher Arthur C. Danto in 1992, the inevitable amalgamation of such antithetical projections in art as gesture and appropriation was first analogised and perhaps 'best epitomised' in German painter Gerhard Richter's 1960 depiction of an 'Abstract Expressionist Coca-Cola Bottle'.512 Even archetypal postmodern painter David Salle's work has been reconsidered in line with this new softer tension between dry appropriation and poetic subjectivity, with New York critic Donald Kuspit describing Salle's work in 2000 as a 'paragone between traditional and modern art' and as a 'kind of poetic whole of prosaic fragments'.513

Initially, post-appropriation art of the early 1990s contained two distinct streams. One was neo-minimalist (sleek, stylised and emptied of signification); the other was 'grunge' (abject, anti-aesthetic and also emptied of specific signification). Arguably, the 'best' art inhabited a position somewhere between. According to US-based critic John C. Welchman, by the 1990s it had become clear that the 'antagonism between original and copy is rarely present as an absolute antithesis';514 'the most provocative art' and 'convincing criticism' of the 1990s was that which had somehow refused 'the absolutes of this polarity'.515 Other unexpected amalgamations of previously antithetical formations also appeared in contemporary art during the 1990s. Minimalism, for example, which had

509 Ibid., p. 104.
510 John Young, quoted from an interview with the author at Sydney's Sherman Galleries on 24 October 2001.
511 Ibid.
514 Ibid., p. 7.
sought autonomy in the 1960s (i.e. to be unaffected by events such as the JFK assassination), was finally merged with its former antithesis, pop art. After all, both pop and minimalism were concerned with production and seriality, and used the Duchampian readymade as a historical model.

Another breach, which had first ignited during the late 1970s between two terms previously considered indivisible – modernism and formalism – had again become significant in the early 1990s. This split had enabled minimalism to be recycled without its modernist implications. Art of the 1990s and early 2000s also possessed, by historical definition, a differentiation founded in its ability to reflect not only on history but also on the ‘end of history’. The apocalyptic postmodern conception of the end of history now had a history of its own, a history that therefore partially disproved its own existence. Just as Roland Barthes had claimed the death of the author while emerging as the authoritative author on that subject, postmodernism’s claim that art history was over is now part of art history. Although the logic of appropriation links all artistic activity to sets of historical relationships, art cannot divorce itself from history. Without such hierarchies, art criticism would become like a game of chess where all pieces were of equal value.

In conclusion to this chapter, critical mechanisms developed within the so-called ‘end of history’ have paradoxically transformed into silent mechanisms of its persistence. The tension between modernist idealism and postmodern scepticism, commerce and high art, or indeed originality and appropriation, may have once provoked stern critical and ideological clashes, but for many artists of the 1990s and early 2000s these polarities are now simply givens; no longer opponents, but rather companions. Oppositionalities are difficult to maintain in a world of constantly shifting borders, power balances and alliances, a world no longer neatly divided into east and west. Evidence of integration and amalgamation can also be observed in other disciplines, from the integration of the nature/nurture dialectic in child psychology to the integration of economic rationalism with socialism suggested by English sociologist Anthony Giddens’ now influential model
for a 'third way'. In keeping with this general suspicion of oppositionalities, the concealment of appropriation in contemporary art represents a means by which artists can provisionally purge themselves of an otherwise assumed alliance with textbook postmodernism. The assertion that appropriation has ceased to have a critical function in contemporary art is, however, also finally an assertion that the paradigm of postmodernism has somehow transformed into something else – a kind of 'as if' approach, as yet unnamed.

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516 UK sociologist Anthony Giddens' model for a 'third way' consisted of an amalgamation of political values formerly identified with the Left or Right of the political spectrum. Giddens' model was endorsed by UK Prime Minister Tony Blair's Labour Party during the late 1990s.
Conclusion

This investigation, in conjunction with its primary studio outcomes, set out to demonstrate that the strategy of appropriation, formerly a central critical concern of much art and art criticism of the late 1970s and the 1980s, had by the 1990s and early 2000s significantly retreated, assuming a diminished role as a concealed yet nonetheless ubiquitous tool of artistic and cultural production. Although appropriation may remain unresolved as a critical problem in art, by the late 1980s, due to its eventual repetition to the point of banality, its critical value was widely considered exhausted. In developing an understanding of the preconditions of this impasse, a rough genealogy of four successive phases of postmodern appropriation was assembled in Chapter 1. The first phase, which appeared in New York in the late 1970s and early 1980s, was characterised as an iconoclastic anti-modernism aimed at overturning established perceptions of authorship and originality in art, usually involving aggressive acts of re-representation. The second phase was more ironic and playful in tone. Less now appeared to be directly at stake, either for or against the prototype. By the mid to late 1980s, many appropriation artists appeared less focused on destroying originality and more interested in reclaiming or redefining it. By the late 1980s, however, a proliferation of empty gestures shrouded in dense theoretical rhetoric, coupled with a cynical complicity with art’s destiny as a commodity, heralded the banal phase of postmodern appropriation art. By the early 1990s, a growing desire to purge art of postmodern cynicism would point to the decline, retreat and subsequent concealment of the strategy of appropriation in much contemporary art.

This retreat and concealment of explicit appropriation in art, as initially witnessed in the late 1980s and early 1990s and prevalent by the 1990s and early 2000s, was, it was argued, the consequence of several significant, concurrent and interrelated factors. First, it was part of a general desire to transcend the often convoluted claims and dense theoretical rhetoric now often associated with critical postmodernism; ideas such as appropriation, hyperreality, simulation’ and poststructuralism were replaced by ideas.
related to the fragmented postmodern ‘self’, the disenfranchised ‘other’, the ‘return of the real’, multiculturalism, globalisation and postcolonialism. Further incentives for the retreat of appropriation as a centrally exhibited critical focus in contemporary art were provided by extensive ethical reassessment of cross-cultural appropriation as a device of acculturation, the threat of copyright infringement claims, a rapid decline in art market confidence (associated with 1980s excesses) and, finally, by the capabilities of new technologies to distort and conceal appropriated elements beyond recognition.

The extent and apparent purposefulness of the alleged retreat and concealment of strategic appropriation as a central critical concern was further examined in relation to shifting attitudes towards appropriation displayed by certain artists formerly closely associated with appropriation. In particular, the transition made by three prominent Australian appropriation artists of the 1980s (Imants Tillers, John Young and Lindy Lee) in order to remain critically and commercially relevant ‘after’ the paradigm of appropriation had expired, were examined. Increased deference to the ‘identity’ of the artist rather than the ontological status of art or art-history, as exemplified by Young and Lee’s successful transition from ‘appropriation artists’ to ‘Asian-Australian artists’, was implicated as one means by which the issue of appropriation might be potentially diffused. As a consequence, debate surrounding their work would become more focused on ideas related to postcolonialism, multiculturalism or globalisation, than on postmodernism, appropriation or simulation.

If an appropriated element is ‘successfully’ concealed, only the artist is aware of the work’s post-appropriation art status. This of course presents difficulties for critically mapping the terrains of post-appropriation art. It is for this reason that the author chose to include a systematic documentation of his own strategies of appropriation and concealment. Across a range of applications, the author has demonstrated that explicitly appropriated elements can be relatively easily disguised simply by using new and relatively accessible digital reproduction technologies. In doing so the author aimed to divert association with the now dated paradigm of appropriation, divert the threat of copyright infringement claims, yet at the same time maintain some of the prototype’s
'qualities'. In particular, the commercial and critical 'success' of the author's applications of concealment to pop music, when considered against both the explicitness of the appropriated elements used and the absence of copyright infringement charges, are demonstrative the potential of the strategy of concealment. An exhibition of six paintings, an audio CD, video DVD and an oral examination also form part of this investigation's primary outcomes.

A distinction can be inferred from this investigation between 'appropriation art', where both artist and viewer share an awareness of the paternity of any appropriated elements, and 'post-appropriation art', where only the artist is privileged with an awareness of the work's paternities. This evacuation of contextualising elements can perhaps be understood as simply a continuing part of art's more generally apparent 'flight from interpretation'. German photographer 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. Difficulties encountered in critically defining art produced within the new techno-media contexts of the 1990s and early 2000s are again identified as the consequence of several factors, all working in opposition to the literal continuation of the 1980s paradigm of postmodern appropriation.

The concealment of appropriation represents a reflection of contemporary art's apparent desire to purge itself of the cynical rhetoric of postmodernism. If it is accepted that appropriation, a strategy popularised within postmodernism's projection of the an 'end' to art history, has, as a function of its retreat and concealment, paradoxically transformed into a silent mechanism of art's continued existence, it can no longer be necessarily

518 Burkhard Riemschneider and Uta Grosenick (eds), Art at the Turn of the Millennium, Taschen, Köln, 1999, p. 118.
strictly read as postmodern. What was formerly an anti-formalist and anti-aesthetic device can now be seen as tacitly performing formalist and aesthetic functions. Specific references gradually became ghostly references, ironic distance was submerged, and postmodernism slowly started to shift into something else, as yet unnamed. With no consensus yet reached as to what the dominant paradigm that might replace postmodernism might be, contemporary artists and critics can only carry on ‘as if’ art still exists.

The findings presented by this study have aimed to offer an account of significant shifts in recent contemporary art and, as a consequence, establish a better critical understanding of its present condition. In insisting that the self-conscious postmodern act of appropriation has not actually been replaced by a return to ‘authentic’ artistic gestures but rather has actually enabled contemporary artists to more efficiently feign that return, this investigation found that what was formerly a postmodern critical or ironic function in ‘endgame’ art had paradoxically transformed into an efficient tool within the production of ‘new’ art. In other words, what was formerly an anti-formalist device has been reassigned a formalist function, indicating that a postmodern strategy can be disguised to produce quasi-modernist art. The implications are implicitly paradoxical. Postmodernism can be considered a means, not an end. The so-called ‘end of history’ has in itself become a part of art history. Being aware of both the logic of the endgame and the inevitability of subjectivity in art, the self-conscious contemporary artist is placed in an agnostic position in relation to the idea of art.

Art is no longer an idea to necessarily believe in or to discount altogether; it is rather an activity that continues ‘as if’ it was still possible and valued. Artists cannot return to the naïve impression that artistic autonomy is wholly possible, but at the same time, they cannot maintain the cynical view that any level of invention is impossible or futile. Both positions are clearly limited when considered against the sheer breadth of contemporary cultural production. The logic of appropriation, once imposed, is clearly not something that can be simply negated by the mere movement of critical fashion. But nor is appropriation necessarily something that can be eternally played out as ‘end’ in itself.
When considered exclusively as a critical function, appropriation's value in application is clearly dated. Like a joke that has been told too many times, its value has been lost in repetition. As a tool of artistic production, on the other hand, appropriation is clearly an efficient means, (especially when considered in conjunction with the reproduction capabilities of emerging digital technologies) for artists to consciously pick up where other artists have left off. Moreover, it is finally a given and therefore a default means of contemporary cultural production. From undergraduate art students to commercial graphic designers, the question 'what can I mix with what?' is increasingly heard as a substitute for 'what will I draw?' or 'what will I paint?' Although the strategy of appropriation has been emptied of critical value, it has not disappeared. It would perhaps be more accurate to describe it as so omnipresent that it is no longer visible.

 Appropriation is finally only a conscious acknowledgment that artistic endeavours invariably involves picking up where other artists have left off. Making that acknowledgement a conscious part of artistic endeavour can clearly enable a more lateral expansion of possibility. To that end, post-appropriation artists, operating with a conscious awareness of the specific paternity of derivative elements in their work, are in some ways finally more capable of producing work that appears less-derivative.

 Compare, for example, popular English rock band Oasis, who are widely critically known for 'sounding like' The Beatles, with English sample-based 'electronica' group, The Chemical Brothers, who have directly sampled The Beatles. The Chemical Brothers are certainly not known for sounding anything like The Beatles.

 Given that melody, image and narrative can only evolve via a handing down of pre-existing melodies, images and narratives, an approach to art-making that utilises appropriation as a self-conscious creative means, but conceals any explicitly appropriated

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519 According to Tom Rowlands of the Chemical Brothers, there are up to 'three hundred samples' in one Chemical Brother's song. See http://www.algonet.se/~infryck/chemical/details.htm, accessed 17/01/03.
520 Compare, for example, The Chemical Brothers' Setting Sun (1997), which is based on a series of Beatles' samples, with the Beatlesque 'sound-alikes' produced by UK band Oasis.
521 '...the Chemical Brothers play funky acid rock that sounds most exquisitely right in a discotheque. Except that they don't really "play" anything. Most of their music is pieced together from samples of other music.' See http://www.algonet.se/~infryck/chemical/details.htm, accessed 17/01/03.
elements in the final work, is perhaps the only way in which artists can continue working upon the work of others in a world in which many of the materials of culture are now privately owned. To transcend this limitation whilst still enabling a continuation of the artistic ‘tradition’ of working upon the work of others, concealment becomes the only option. Should the artist necessarily spend years re-developing certain elements rather than working directly upon where other artists left off? This limitation is surely not in the interests of furthering creative endeavour generally. The author, in his capacity as an electronic music composer has consistently found, for example, that the qualitative decision to sample a guitar chord from a guitarist who has spent 20 years developing a ‘sound’, in order to blend that guitar sample with a funk drum sample recorded by one of the world’s best drummers, in one of the world’s best studios, and by one of the world’s best engineers, will not only sound ‘better’ than any attempt to recreate the sounds from scratch, but – perhaps more importantly – has enabled the author to focus attention on the function of the stylistic juxtaposition most suited to the ‘new’ context. Once any appropriated elements are actively concealed from recognition, the new song will more likely be read in a manner that does not require the legitimising value of the prototype – but nonetheless maintains some of its ‘qualities’. Beyond its function as a critical device, the strategy of appropriation therefore potentially serves the purpose of qualitatively extending the range of formal possibilities beyond that that might otherwise be available to the artist.

The significance of this investigation’s observations regarding the retreat and concealment of appropriation in contemporary art is not confined to studies specifically related to the concerns of art criticism. The relaxation of formerly antithetical ideas (such as originality/appropriation, original/copy, modernism/postmodernism, etc) witnessed in art criticism during the 1990s can be seen as somewhat analogous to broader changes in other discourses and in the world at large. From the extensive academic revision of postmodernism to the amalgamation of formerly antithetical scientific models, to the gradual dissolution of established political and social orders (such as East/West, Left/Right, or socialism/capitalism) after the end of the Cold War, the social, political and intellectual landscapes of the 1990s and early 2000s can be modelled as relatively centrist
in comparison with previous decades. The void in western political polarity that has followed the collapse of communism can certainly be seen as related to – and similar to – the void in contemporary art that appeared after the collapse of the oppositional value formerly represented by the modernism/postmodernism dialectic.

According to US critic Hal Foster in 2002, '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'.\textsuperscript{522} At the same time, Foster warns that the now popular ‘paradigm of no paradigm’ is finally no real ‘improvement on the old historicist determination of modernist art’.\textsuperscript{523} As demonstrated by this investigation, the concealment of appropriation in contemporary art has contributed markedly to this ‘flight from interpretation’.\textsuperscript{524}

Whether it is finally regarded as a prescription for sterility, as a deconstruction of established assumptions, as a precondition of all art, or as an efficient and convenient tool of production, appropriation art did not disappear simply because it became critically unfashionable. Although cynicism and irony are now widely regarded as a dead-end, the return of subjectivity witnessed in much art of the 1990s and early 2000s was still clearly moderated by a general suspicion of taking ideas and images at face value. This suspicion represents some evidence that certain legacies of postmodernism have endured.

This investigation was understandably limited by the paradoxical nature of that which it set out to uncover. Any ‘successful’ strategy of concealment is naturally resistant to critical detection. It is for this reason that the investigation was ultimately limited to the exercise of establishing motives for concealment, demonstrating how concealment might be achieved by way of practical example, and finally building a model of art criticism more suited to the uncertainty of art ‘after’ appropriation. Remembering that the


\textsuperscript{523} Ibid.

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assumptions and conclusions reached in this investigation remain deeply and incontrovertibly paradoxical, the 'agnostic model' appears a sensible application within a discourse already characterised by a lack of tangibility. In admitting that we do not know the answers to the questions of originality and influence posed by the problem of appropriation, we have resorted to an agnostic position. Intangibility is perhaps finally all that is intellectually defensible about the question of originality art. Insofar as the 'the end of history' constituted an apocalyptic 'party at the end of history' (cynically complicit with one of the most the most heated contemporary art markets in history), the moment of post-appropriation art might instead be regarded as constituting postmodernism's 'after-party'.

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*Interviews conducted by the author in conjunction with this investigation:*


The Human Ethics Committee of the University of Sydney granted approval to chief investigator Associate Professor Brad Buckley for the above two interviews on 10 September 2002, Ref. No. 2924.