

To begin, “appropriation” the noun is the result of “to appropriate” the verb which is spelled identically although pronounced differently than “appropriate” the adjective. Now, this is an adjective concerned with correctness, or rightness, or propriety (not property, but propriety).

In cultural circles, “appropriation” shifted from its negative colonialist or imperialist connotations toward its 80s deployment as “appropriation art”, which implied a critical disdain for tired hegemonic (white heterosexual male) masterpieces and delusions of grandeur or even “genius”. Isabelle Graw’s essay *Dedication Replacing Appropriation* notes this shifting and its art-world entrenched results, while she laments that the alleged criticality of materialist appropriation was believed to hinge upon an absolute distance meaning disdain on the part of the appropriated artists from their sources or materials. Graw informs that the primary artists of the appropriation movement (Sherrie Levine, Richard Prince, and Louise Lawler) indicated far more complex relationships to their source materials than disdainful critical distance. The word ‘fascination’ even enters Graw’s discourse here. Perish the thought of fascination and its more than implied modernism raising its problematic head in this anti-heroic zeitgeist. Lawler herself liked the word ‘dedication’. The situation appears to be dedicated to the appropriation (the act of). The dedication is not to the ‘original (or, is it?)

Also, Graw duly notes that the appropriation artists did deploy idiosyncratic strategies of presenting their re-acts or not-exactly-remakes or re-constructions or whatever. Sherrie Levine, for example, did not replicate the modes of framing for her stolen or copied ‘originals. Prominent appropriation art theorists or critics (Crimp, Owens, Krauss, and Buchloh) managed to avoid mentioning such modernist leftovers as individualist framing strategies.

To begin, Michael Lobel’s title on his essay regarding the practice(s) of artist Elaine Sturtevant (*Inappropriate Appropriation*) is a classic. The title assumes nobody will argue that there appropriation cannot be proper (as in ethical, or of value etc.). This title is very punny, and thus very funny.

But also to begin, Allen Wood’s *Karl Marx (2nd edition)* opines that wage labour does indeed appropriate its own conditions and products (those used but not owned by the workers themselves); but who is doing the appropriation? Well, wage labour itself, and not the workers who work for wages. “This is due to the social fact that the labourer’s activity is something the capitalist has bought for a wage, which therefore is ‘alienated’ from the labourers and no longer belongs to them”. (Wood, p.41). So the appropriation is here one of subordination and usurpation and deterministic force etc. I think one can by now assume that such is an inappropriate appropriation.

So, the artist Sturtevant’s perhaps appropriative practice is surely a differently inappropriate appropriation, right? But Elaine Sturtevant was active (and neglected or

underrated) as her practice was of the nineteen sixties before the nineteen eighties when the word “appropriation” became *au courant* to describe the practices of art stars such as Sherrie Levine and Richard Prince among others. So, is Sturtevant’s work being rediscovered because of commonalities with Levine and Prince among others? Well, yes and no.

Lobel uses the word “repeats”, as did Sturtevant. Her (perhaps) replications of works by high-profile (and male) contemporaries repeat the art-objects or gestures of their ‘originators’. Sturtevant’s art-objects are themselves repetitions or repeats, as she does repeat and also bring to light the repetition so prevalent throughout Pop Art in particular. Images or motifs or tropes or patterns become repeated as they are already in play — they are (perhaps) in the public domain and not specific to the ‘originators’? It is important that Sturtevant did not make ‘copies’ and that she re-framed recognizable art objects associated with other artists — assigning them to shelves that only serious collectors rather than gallery patrons can access, or even closing off gallery space to ‘the public’. So Sturtevant is perhaps more concerned with what has become so prevalent as “institutional critique” than with questions of authorship? Yes, but her repetition also brings to light the fact that audiences become confused about authorial precedents due to the omnipresent repetition already at play in Pop. What was thought to be her repeat of a Segal sculpture of Sidney Janis in fact predated Segal’s sculpture? Who is (not copying) but homaging or quoting who and who is being “appropriated”? Sturtevant’s practice suggests the label “inappropriate appropriation” because appropriation is not an adequate word for her maneuvering —her practice predates the ubiquity of the word and also doesn’t fit neatly within its parameters. Lobel also admits to liking the word ‘repeats’ as a means of avoiding the by now overly-appropriated word “appropriation”.

In *Photographic Appropriation, Ethnography, and the Surrealist Other*, Linda M. Steer focuses on the quasi-surrealist publication *Documents*, and then particularly one page of a particular (1929) issue of *Documents*. On one page, there are two photographs. On top, a chorus line of Hollywood dancers or showgirls; and on the bottom, a line of Melanesian schoolboys. The two photographs resist an obvious reading when juxtaposed, although as an editor I can see cutting from the top one to the bottom one due to structural similarities.

Steer contrasts the appropriation committed by the photographer of the Melanesian schoolboys (Ernest Robin) with the appropriation made by the editors of *Documents*; who have destabilized realistic interpretation and/or meaning by means of this non-sensical but formally coherent juxtaposition. Steer states that “appropriation is a form of collection” (69). Collection refers to the transformation from subject to object. Robin has collected the “subjects” of his photographs and *Documents* has collected examples of Robin’s and other ethnographic photographers’ collections. So, is the practice of collection being undermined? Maybe problematized? The late twenties was an era characterized by a French fascination with all that was ‘black’. Are the disenchanting Surrealists at *Documents* (Georges Bataille was de facto editor) exercising their fascination cum fetishization of all that is exotic and ‘primitive’ and thus a threat to the tyranny of the rational that the Surrealists wished to explode? Are the editors of

Documents still the ones collecting, without in any way restoring subjectivity to the Melanesian schoolboys and other photo subjects? Well, what is photography?

Steer's use of the verb "collect" is interesting with regards to both Sturtevant and the dissonant Surrealists. Both take art objects or documents away from their 'original' practitioners; but do they return subjectivity to those objects? Both move toward placing art objects into public domain, but how public? Sturtevant problematizes this conundrum by closing off galleries except for her visible 'repeat' and by placing works in sections of the gallery which are not officially on display. Document offers the ethnographic photographs of Ernest Robin and others to a subscribing public; but that is still a relatively small section of 'the public'.

Is Sherrie Levine a "collector"?

Michael Alan Glassco's *Contested Images* focuses on resistance and perversion of dominant images— particularly those (over)familiar via advertising and commerce and thus capitalism. He almost litanies those who hold out hope for successful contestations. (Judith) Butler sees appropriation as a means toward re-articulation — parody is not just parody, but a questioning of subject uniformity and of the authority of the command. Marcuse sees appropriation as useful to demystification of entrenched allegedly uniform subjects and this demystification can indeed lead to 'liberation'. Ditto Antonio Negri.

"The poetics of appropriation therefore is not only about the struggle over material resources in culture, but also, over the constitution of subjects and its rule (Glassco).

"But how do the poetics of appropriation constitute democratic practice in which the counter publics form and recreate history without access to the dominant apparatuses of culture? (Glassco)

Ah, yes. Access. How can one get inside when one simply cannot get inside? What exactly defines a counter public or counterculture (Michael Warner, Theodore Roszak)? How can one detourne the power apparatus without the key or the password? Et cetera.

Henrik Olesen's *Pre Post: Speaking Backwards* ultimately looks at parallels between pre and post gay liberation codings. Olesen traces eighteenth century London histories, early twentieth century New York histories, and then focuses on various gay (mostly male) artists and how their known sexual preferences or proclivities affected both their own art practices and their art-world historical statuses. Although the word "appropriation" barely appears in Olesen's essay; the subject or practice or strategy is everywhere in it. Queers have always been adept at forming counter-cultures, whether covert or "out". But the art world and its histories has been dominated by homophobic straight males, as well as artists hostile to identification and even expression (not expressionism but expression). It was Marcel Duchamp himself who warned his colleague Charles Demuth about the danger of being reduces to his sexual preference. The homophobia of Andre Breton and his Surrealist coterie is well-documented and then of course there are the American Abstract Expressionists of the nineteen-fifties, whose figurehead Jackson "The Dripper"

Pollack heroically reclaimed the penis for pissing on enemy property and not for same-sex fucking or blowjobs or jerk-off circles.

And John Cage, whose sexuality was an open secret as was his relationship with choreographer Merce Cunningham, chose silence as a resistance or counter-mode of existence to the noisy abstractionists (and jazz musicians and nationalists and more), Cage's maintenance of this strategic silence meant that he never "came out". Cage chose to neither appropriate 'normality' nor ally himself with counter-normalities. This artist was emphatically (by never emphasizing) not a declarative gentleman.