

DEDICATION REPLACING APPROPRIATION:  
FASCINATION, SUBVERSION, AND DISPOSSESSION IN APPROPRIATION ART

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**1. Active Formation or Parasitic Behavior?**

Appropriation is a precondition of artistic work. Appropriation, in the literal sense, is the process of making something one's own property. The Renaissance artists, whose legends were collected by Giorgio Vasari, spent a great deal of time appropriating technical skills and artistic standards, with the aim of surpassing these standards and skills while assimilating them. The majority of them received instruction from teachers: appropriation became organized in the crucial institution of the teacher-pupil relationship. The classical academic study of art can also be interpreted as a lesson in practices of appropriation, considering how much time is spent copying pictures. Copying a picture means no more than to appropriate it by reproducing it, and to thus internalize the knowledge contained in the image. However, this form of appropriated reconstruction remained—still in modernism—oriented toward the production of "originality." When, as a young man, Picasso, for example, copied the Old Masters, this was considered to be a kind of preparatory study, which, although already showing signs of his own handwriting, would at some point be replaced by an "original" visual expression. A work of art that feeds only on appropriation, and even makes this explicit, would have no chance of acknowledgement in this scenario. Something must be added, something more than simply appropriation that could be described as the artist's own achievement. This system of values, however, was shaken up radically in the 1980s in the course of postmodernism with its questioning of the significance of authorship and originality. Postmodernism was a quotation culture (Fredric Jameson). The definition of art began to change as the notion of genuine creation was lost in favor of "pastiche"—the method that reassembled what was already to be found that Fredric Jameson declared to be one of the main characteristics of postmodern practices.<sup>1</sup> The image of the artist also underwent radical changes: artists were no longer outstanding individuals but instead fell back on an existing stock of images, "making their nest" there. A model of appropriating, parasitic behavior replaced the model of the strong subject that creates something new using its own resources. The artist fed on cultural symbols and was to a large extent dependent on these, while at the same time possessing enormous subversive potential. Biologistic and viral imagery enjoyed considerable popularity both in postmodern theory and in art critical theory and artistic statements.<sup>2</sup> In the case of Peter Halley, this went so far that he wanted his abstract half-tone images to be understood as

"cells and conduits," which were meant to visualize the viral dispersion and networking logic of society, and he drew on theorists such as Jean Baudrillard and Michel Foucault as evidencing their existence.<sup>3</sup> According to Halley, these painted cells were intended to be a reference to real cells such as residential buildings or hospital beds, connected to power lines just like these, lines through which vital fluids are able to leave and enter.<sup>4</sup> This analogy between painting and a society based on molecular structures made it possible for painting to lay claim to a close reference to society—a kind of history painting. Subversion metaphors also followed this viral scheme—in the 1980s, the image of the Trojan horse was widespread. The artist duo Clegg & Guttman stated in an interview that good art should function like a Trojan horse: enticing enough to be let in, and subversive enough later.<sup>5</sup> Thus art disguises itself in order to be able to infiltrate enemy terrain. When it reaches its goal, it unfolds its power to degenerate—like a virus that has infected its host organism. It should be noted that Clegg & Guttman make no mention of the nature of this subversion and how it is achieved in an artistic context.

## 2. Extending the Zone of Appropriation

The first break with the prevailing modernist system of beliefs that still continued into the 1980s, and in which appropriation to a certain extent ranked as a preliminary stage before the development of an individual signature, was esteemed to be Duchamp's readymades, and the diverse Duchampian effects of the twentieth century (Pop art, Minimal art, Conceptual art, Appropriation art). Readymades, industrially manufactured objects that have been taken from their functional context and declared a work of art by artists, represent a form of artistic appropriation—a particular type of artistic appropriation to be more exact—which has a special role. Artistic appropriation in this case means to select and take possession, or to declare the object to be one's own work. However, a readymade is not the result of arbitrary selection, as is often alleged. It results much more from the choice of a particular object, and this chosen object is appropriated and taken possession of all at once. Selection and appropriation go hand in hand and each readymade is the embodiment of this appropriating selection. The readymade owes a debt to the appropriating gesture of the artist, and it bears witness to this gesture—to a specific artistic sensibility. The artist has not chosen a random object, but a specific one—in the case of Duchamp the famous pissoir. The object is manipulated in such a manner that it is able to reflect artistic "sensibility." In the case of readymades, something is thus added, for example the title that Duchamp gave to his work of art, which the art historian Thierry de Duve, with good reason, compared to the effect of a color.<sup>6</sup> Readymades are colored with the help of titles, and artistic expression survives in the titles. Thus, on the one hand we can say

that Duchamp's readymades historically mark the extension of the zone of appropriation in that they extended the possible area from which objects can be appropriated, while on the other hand, it must be noted that their claim to an individual signature is in no way revoked. The indications for this signature have merely been pushed to the edges of the artistic work. Singularity can no longer be located "immanently," as in the brushstroke. It becomes manifest on the level of the appropriating selection, for example as a signature that has been added to the readymade, or, in the case of Duchamp, a title that suggests a particular meaning. The assumption made by postmodern art critics well into the 1990s, that Duchamp's readymades signaled the "death of the author," cannot really hold its ground when viewed from this perspective. There are too many indications of an active creative author. However, Duchamp's readymades have once and for all broken with the classic expressive ideal that postulates the idea of artists who express themselves in their artistic work. The appropriating—in the sense of selecting and taking possession—artists do not express themselves directly, should they ever have done this at all. On the contrary, they have decided on a particular system of experiments, have set out on a (probably casual) search for an object or a situation that they find worthy of appropriation. Such situations as appear in the works of the artist Louise Lawler—which have been appropriated in a particular manner—are a good example of this. It is appropriate to describe them, in analogy to the Surrealist "objets trouvés," as "situations trouvées" (Johannes Meinhardt).<sup>7</sup> This is because the situations photographed by Lawler are the result of a choice to the extent that the artist came across or found them. They quasi fell into her hands. The idea that, in an artistic practice which is primarily based on appropriation, we are dealing exclusively with goal-oriented action by an active artistic subject with intents and purposes, must be qualified in the light of this perspective. However, the problem is that the majority of art-theoretical appropriation discourse is based on this premise of voluntary action.<sup>8</sup> This does not take into account the fact that the appropriating artists are also pulled along by their object.

### 3. Appropriation as an Antimodernist Antidote

In one of the primary texts on this subject, the art historian Benjamin Buchloh described appropriation as an "act." The choice of this term is significant, not only because every action obviously requires a subject. More than that, an action assumes a subject that has decided to carry out a particular action and who knows what he or she is doing. Consequentially, a whole heap of cognitive and theoretical intentions and performances is imposed upon this "act": "Each act of cultural appropriation therefore constructs a simulacrum of a double negation, denying the validity of individual and original production, yet denying equally the relevance of the specific context and function of the work's own practice."<sup>9</sup>

Although Buchloh is talking about "cultural appropriation" in general here, these ideas contain the basic art-theoretical claims that were made for artistic appropriation in 1980s, beginning with the negation of "individual and original production" that the "cultural appropriation" is supposed to automatically provide, and leading to the view that this appropriation is in fact a simulation, and is thus merely feigned, a notion that was very widespread at that time, due to the popularity of subversion and simulation theories (Jean Baudrillard, Michel de Certeau). Buchloh's objection that appropriating gestures ignore the context also proved to have prophetic qualities.

The Buchloh quote is enlightening in three respects. Firstly, it stands for the notion that appropriation is an act that can have sociocritical functions imposed upon it. Secondly, the word "simulacrum" points to the at the time remarkably widespread—and today hardly conceivable—influence of Baudrillard's simulation theory, based on the notion of reality made up only of signs, out of control and no longer able to be influenced.<sup>10</sup> Thirdly, with his reference to the disregard of the context that accompanies cultural appropriation, Buchloh formulated a problem that the Context art of the 1990s faced by declaring the context to be an integral part of artistic work.

For progressive American art critics of the late 1970s, the slogan of the time was to challenge autonomy, and "appropriation" was a concept that could be used to contest the hegemony of modernism, embodied by critics such as Clement Greenberg or Michael Fried.<sup>11</sup> In view of a modernist ideology, which assumes a given, immanent law that applies to art, the concept of appropriation was in a position whereby it could become a bearer of new hope. It allowed the modernist claim to immanence to be challenged inasmuch as something "extrinsic" is always added to art in the process of every artistic act of "appropriation." The "immanent" in art can no longer claim to be visibly evident: the boundaries between "internal" and "external" are in a state of flux.

#### 4. Infected by the Object

In the 1980s, the image of an appropriating artist was of someone who encountered a world that only existed as a simulation with a practice of simulation (Peter Halley), an act of appropriation thus always situated on the level of the system of signs.<sup>12</sup> Halley wanted his abstract, colored, cellular pictures to be a representation of this stage in social development, in which the signs float freely and constantly create and reproduce themselves. Like many other artists of his generation, Halley made sure, by means of written statements, that this "content" would be read into his pictures, which led to the most obvious features being disregarded—these were, when it came down to it, variations on the modernist theme of the grid. It was expected even more so of artists that they would take

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**Bought in Paris, New York,  
Switzerland, or Tokyo, 1987**  
Stella/Brass (detail) *Les Indes Galantes IV...*  
purchased from a banker, now located  
on the Blvd. Victor Hugo, 1966/1986

5 cibachrome photographs, transfer type  
on wall, 23 x 15<sup>1/2</sup> inches (each image)

part by means of appropriation in society's generation of signs, although for theorists such as Baudrillard this generation of signs was synonymous with society itself. The objections to this simulation theory, which claimed that society still generated real effects such as exclusion or discrimination, were not voiced until the late 1980s, favoring identity-political approaches. For the time being, people imagined the artist drawing on the diverse forms of "mass culture"—nowadays one would speak more specifically of a "visual culture"—as a source. The central problem of the prevailing understanding of artistic appropriation can be seen precisely in the fact that an instrumental relationship between the appropriating artist and his or her visual material, was, and is, assumed. This began in the 1980s with the idea that the appropriating artist "subversively infiltrates" existing media images, to use a viral metaphor that was common at that time. This operation was considered to be successful at the moment when it had managed to "permeate" the "immune system" of the "body" like a stealthily spreading virus. One example for the viral metaphors that were widespread then, and still are now, can be found in an entry in a dictionary of art historical terminology, which reads: "When an appropriation does succeed, it works silently, breaching the body's defenses like a foreign organism and insinuating itself within, as if it were natural and wholly benign."<sup>13</sup> The possibility that this body would activate its powers of resistance and fight back against that which the artist had appropriated, was not taken into account at all. Instead, the artistic subject and its power to act were, with hindsight, incredibly overrated. This even went so far as to say of the appropriating artist that he or she was intervening, an association that drew parallels to state intervention. Every time a work of art seemed to suggest that an artist could also perhaps be fascinated or even overwhelmed by his or her material, then this was seen as a danger, perhaps even the greatest danger of appropriation.<sup>14</sup> The appropriating artists who allowed themselves to be overwhelmed by their own material had given up and joined the enemy camp, so the theory went. The idea that the "enemy" who had been infiltrated could also to all intents and purposes be stubborn, had no place in the theory of appropriation prevalent at the time, in which appropriation was seen as a unilateral act. To allow the appropriated material even a minimum of own momentum would have meant falling back on modernist premises, and this, as already indicated, was to be avoided at all costs. For this reason, neither the appropriated material and its specific character, nor the process of appropriation itself was examined in detail.<sup>15</sup> After all, the belief that something emanated from the material, and that it made certain claims of its own, was the modernist credo par excellence—a credo which was to be rejected due to its mystical connotations. In order to avoid misunderstandings: I have no desire to promote a return to modernist premises; however, in my view, the modernist conviction that material has its own ambience can be seen productively and in a way that is not mystical. Rather than regarding appropriation as a process controlled by one side only, it can be seen as a process of mutual influence, in which the dynamic of

the appropriated material is transferred to the appropriator.

Thus I would propose an interpretation of artistic appropriation that allows the appropriated material a certain momentum, and in which the possibility that the artist is enthused by this dynamic is feasible. This material can also have the form of an institution with which artists see themselves confronted, if for example they have an exhibition in a gallery. Institutions have particular specifications, especially for practices that are circumscribed with terms such as "institutional criticism" or "location specifics." Thus one could say that the institution-critical approach—such as that of Michael Asher—continues to be led and influenced by the appropriated institution. Louise Lawler pointed out this power held by the appropriated institutions in an interview, when she said that her early exhibition *An Arrangement of Pictures* (in which she appropriated the work of other artists from the gallery, by photographing or presenting them) was virtually molded by the gallery Metro Pictures. "I self-consciously made work that 'looked like' Metro Pictures," she says.<sup>16</sup> Thus when situations not only make particular specifications but also generate methods of appropriation, this must have an unavoidable effect on the term appropriation. Appropriation must now be understood as a form of dedication—because the situation appears to be dedicated to the appropriator—it is a situation with which the appropriating artist is confronted as if it were meant to be. This kind of reconstruction of the concept of appropriation is particularly useful for artistic production. Because the moment an artist appropriates something—be it an illustration from advertising, or the situation in the home of a collector—then this something has, in a certain way, fallen into his or her hands. This can be clearly demonstrated using the example of the history of readymades. When Duchamp selected and appropriated everyday objects, these were supposedly products of a chance encounter; at least that is how he himself depicted it, as if these objects—which could be a cellaret or a comb—had forced themselves upon him unexpectedly while he was walking through department stores or strolling past shop windows in Paris. Apart from the fact that such statements by artists, which have also been made by contemporary artists such as David Smith or Christopher Wool, are variations on the topos of "inspiration"—the classic myth of the artist—they also record something fundamental: the other face of appropriation, the moment of dedication ascribed to it. A person who appropriates an object is also faced with something that emanates or appears to emanate from that object. The object infects the person and something transfers from it to the person. The advantage of this view is that it refers specifically to artistic production. Whereas abstract and schematic subversion theory declared the artist to be the only agent of subversion and paid no heed to the tension resulting from the appropriated material, here appropriation becomes a process in which the artistic subject bargains with something that has unpredictable consequences.

Another advantage of this reformulated concept of appropriation for investigations of contemporary art is that it allows art to be thought of as a

complex interactive relationship. By this I do not mean that art is sufficiently described by the idea of a relationship of appropriation, or that art consists entirely of this relationship. However, if appropriation implies both the conscious formation by the subject as well the subject's dependence on something external, then this describes a tension that is generally present in artistic work. Every work of art in which appropriation plays a role—and it can be assumed that in works of art nowadays, the artists make no secret of their uses of appropriation, but rather display them—shows traces of subjective formation and also visible traces of the effects of extrinsic laws. The latter can result both from the model of the appropriated material and from institutional constraints. Yet this understanding of appropriation as interaction amounts to a necessary break with the perception common since the 1980s that appropriation was an instrumental relationship to the world—a perception that is even more remarkable for the fact that it is completely contrary to poststructural theory at the time, which heavily influenced art theory. At that time, instrumental reason was being challenged, as was the notion of a subject with the power to act autonomously. Thus, according to this, every act of appropriation would amount to putting the subject in its place. It generates dependency and amounts to a surrender to something. Being infected by something leads to a loss of control.

## 5. The Appropriation of Appropriation Art

The term appropriation has been through countless stages in cultural history—from a negative to a positive coding. Initially, it stood for something that should be rejected, for a colonialist appropriation of the world or control by the art market or culture industry. In the 1980s it gained a new, more positive meaning in the light of the artistic practices, mainly in New York, that were subsumed under the label Appropriation art.<sup>17</sup> Before this, Pop art had extended the appropriation principle of the readymade, so that it seemed as if the appropriating artists potentially had everything—the entire collection of images in our visual culture—at their disposal. Appropriation art continued from this point, except that now the clearly visible artistic manipulation of media images, such as in Warhol's screen prints that he later painted over, were no longer a criterion, or, more to the point, were no longer supposed to be a criterion. The dictionary defines Appropriation art as having "the strategic appropriation of other images as the largest common denominator."<sup>18</sup> By definition, appropriation should thus always be strategic, implying goal-oriented behavior and a confident subject in control. Another notion of the subject, which sees the subject as being divided or as having failed, has no place in such an understanding of appropriation, and the fact that something might happen to the artist during the process of appropriation is also not taken into account.

Artists such as Sherrie Levine, Louise Lawler, and Richard Prince are—with good reason—considered to be pioneers in this field; Prince had already begun to photograph publicized advertisements as far back as the late 1970s, in a manner that further enhanced their glamour. He presented these “re-photographs” as his work. Louise Lawler’s works are based less on the media, but rather the concrete public and private location of art. Her works are a photographic glance into interiors, a glance that seems detached, yet at same time fetishizes. Sherrie Levine on the other hand specialized in the different means of reproducing works of art that have become famous—for example the photos of photos by Walker Evans, or drawings by Egon Schiele that have been torn out of catalogues or photocopied. Levine’s appropriating practice in particular seemed to depend a great deal on the cultural significance of the appropriated originals. Yet in the same way that she drew artistic legitimacy from the respective artist’s names (Feininger, Schiele, Evans), these culturally charged originals were whisked through a specific artistic process: with titles for the pictures (*After Walker Evans*) and delicate passe-partouts which framed them in an unmistakable manner—a visual signature that initially went completely unnoticed in the reception of Levine’s work, for reasons which had to do with the previously mentioned phobia toward modernism.<sup>19</sup> What counted were the political implications of her work that people automatically wanted to see in the “denial of authorship and production.”

Production and reception have never been as intertwined as in New York in the late 1970s and early 1980s. The exchange that took place between the fine artists and the art historians who appreciated their work was very intensive.<sup>20</sup> The artists and critics spoke the same language, read, according to Levine’s recollections, the same books by poststructural authors, and cooperated with one another. A reflection of this was the regular cooperation for example between Louise Lawler and Douglas Crimp—an art critic who earned a reputation as a writer on Appropriation art very early on. Thus a collective point of reference was created, and Roland Barthes’s essay “The Death of the Author” was one of the most important reference parameters. Theory and practice were constituted interactively, and nowadays it is difficult to say what was there first: the concept of appropriation or an artistic practice that first and foremost wanted to determine itself via appropriation and favored the transformation of appropriation into an allegorical figure of criticism. It is, however, certain that two things came together at the same time: artists who took recourse to media originals in the tradition of Dada and Pop and seemingly left it at that, and critics who combined a particular approach with the concept of appropriation—the antimodernist repoliticization of art. There was also a common foe—Neo-Expressionism—a synonym for the up-and-coming *wilde Malerei* that people believed should be fought against because it seemed to be taking over the art market. Painters such as Julian Schnabel or David Salle were seen as a threat because their paintings did not hide the fact that they were based on particular other original paintings (Polke, Picabia). Attempts were made to discredit



this form of painterly appropriation by dismissing it as pastiche. In the heat of the battle, however, there was a failure to distinguish between very different painting practices. Everything was thrown into the same pot, from Salomé through to Baselitz and Kippenberger, and written off as Neo-Expressionism. Believing oneself to be surrounded by an enemy—which nowadays can no longer be clearly defined—had the advantage that it unified the protagonists. The publication *Art After Modernism* is a witness to this unity between the theorists (Rosalind Krauss, Benjamin Buchloh, Douglas Crimp, Craig Owens) and the artists (Martha Rosler, Thomas Lawson) in the struggle against modernism and *wilde Malerei*.<sup>21</sup> Louise Lawler was responsible for selecting and arranging the images for this book in collaboration with its editor, Brian Wallis.

## 6. Appropriation as Subversion, a Criticism of Language, and Replacement

Since the 1980s, scarcely any distinction has been made between “artistic appropriation” and “appropriation” in the sense of a fundamental way of relating to the world. The question of what is specifically artistic about appropriation ceases to be valid if appropriation is seen as critical (in the sense of a criticism of language) or subversive per se. The general understanding of Appropriation art is still influenced by this critical-subversive emphasis today; this even goes as far as the current lexical definitions that describe the act of artistic appropriation itself as “re-coding” or a “shift in meaning.”<sup>22</sup> This means that a shift in meaning takes place purely due to the fact that an original image has been appropriated. The interest in how artistic appropriation takes place did not begin until the end of the 1980s, because then it became necessary to differentiate between “good” and “bad” appropriation. With such a large number of artists—such as David Salle, Julian Schnabel, Philip Taaffe, Jeff Koons, and Haim Steinbach—all riding the ticket of appropriation, a set of criteria was required. The critic Douglas Crimp, who had more or less “given birth” to Appropriation art with his legendary exhibition *Pictures*, admitted that critics had made things a little too simple for themselves by maintaining that appropriation was per se critical.<sup>23</sup> The scheme that he now offered, however, was no less arbitrary and also tended to quick conclusions. Crimp suggested that a distinction be made between a simple appropriation of style and an appropriation of the material, whereby the latter was to be accepted and the former rejected. This “criterion” also seemed to remain abstract, not taking into account the concrete aesthetic phenomena and not making strong enough distinctions. Is it not the case that every “appropriation” inevitably adapts the style of the original, whatever kind that original might be? And, if style cannot be avoided, what would be so bad about that? Could the appropriation of a style not lead to the open display and emptying out of the style, as is demonstrated in David Salle’s pictures in their appropriating reference to Picabia or Polke? The works of

Sherrie Levine or Louise Lawler can also be seen to over-answer to a certain extent the style of the art they have appropriated. The fact that the artist might not have an entirely critical and detached view of the originals was an idea that did not easily go hand in hand with the main critical assumption, not least because criticism implies a critical distance. On closer examination, Levine's careful, if not affectionate, copy of a drawing by Egon Schiele indicates a relationship charged with obsessive fascination, which would presuppose another critical term. This applies equally to Louise Lawler's photographs, which also witness a relationship based on fascination.<sup>24</sup> Here, the object is seen both casually, while at the same time through the eyes of a lover. The idiosyncratic, detached perspectives, and pictures of installations which seem to have been taken in passing, and the arbitrary and seemingly abrupt sections all speak for the gaze of a connoisseur.<sup>25</sup> Richard Prince's photos were all the more suspect for progressive critics the more they were clearly indebted to personal fascination, as for example the photos in *Biker Girls*.<sup>26</sup> In the case of Levine the logic of subversion was taken to extremes: even as far as to celebrate her work as theft, and thus to confuse it with a criminal act.<sup>27</sup>

"Confiscation" was another very popular metaphor for appropriation, one that is characteristic inasmuch as it bestows on the artist the confiscating power of a state authority.<sup>28</sup> This metaphor also marks the lack of interest in the appropriated object.

## 7. Appropriating Dispossession

It cannot be said often enough that the understanding of appropriation in the 1980s was based on the Marxist interpretation of the term. In retrospect, it really does seem as if capital was deliberately made of the Marxist background, for example when the artist Sherrie Levine was celebrated for the fact that she dispossessed the male artists whose work she appropriated.<sup>29</sup> In the *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, Marx and Engels had proposed the "abolition of property" as the first measure to be taken,<sup>30</sup> and more that a hundred years later, such a method of dispossession was believed to be possible of artistic works. It was as if Levine had robbed the male artists of their male privileges and their status of genius. Artistic appropriation became a legitimate, in this case feminist motivated, counter-measure. In the same way that the Marxist background played into the understanding of appropriation, the concept of appropriation was also subject to significant changes in the course of its usage in Appropriation art. It increased in value and took a turn for the better. Whereas appropriation had been the central problem of society for Marx—the *Communist Manifesto* contains an appeal to break with existing forms of appropriation—it was now the case that artistic appropriation was ascribed sociocritical power. While for Marx appropriation was simply the form in which exploitation took place, because capital appropriated alienated

labor, alienating and dispossessing the workers from their own appropriation of the product of their labor, artistic appropriation of Appropriation art now—under conditions of private property, alienation, and totalized spectacle culture—became a legitimate and necessary method: a kind of self-defense. That which Marx believed should be abolished, in order to achieve “real appropriation,” was now one of the inevitable preconditions that could at least be artistically appropriated.

The objection at this juncture could be, with good reason, that artistic appropriation is something completely different to the Marxist understanding of “appropriation through labor.” Is it not the case that artists, in contrast to workers, have the possibility to transfer the appropriated object naturally into their work, for which they can then claim authorship? And is their work not in principle less alienated—even under conditions of the art market and the productions of commodities? This is certainly the case, whether the artist experiences his or her work as alienating or not. Even those artistic attempts to programmatically stylize art into an externally determined or impersonal venture—such as Conceptual art—ultimately come to be seen as a product of their “creator.”

Referring to Feuerbach, Marx had pointed out that work could not function without its objects.<sup>31</sup> However, he did not pay any particular attention to these objects or their potential for resistance. Under the conditions of the abolishment of private property, he imagined “real appropriation,” in which the worker would no longer be dispossessed through his or her product and in which alienation was eliminated. The concept of appropriation today also continues to be determined by this ideal of “real appropriation”—inasmuch as there was scarce interest in the appropriated objects, with instead a concentration on the appropriating subject of the artist and the question of whether or not this subject had committed the act of appropriation with an affirmative or a critical intention. It was the artistic subject that was important; the subject should also be in the position to give appropriation another (critical and subversive) direction. In other words, this means that the appropriating artist was seen as not only having the power to appropriate particular objects or situations (beyond their concrete resistance and momentum), but in addition, the object or situation that was dispossessed and now appropriated could even experience a transformation of meaning. Appropriation became a method that one assumed would stand up to alienation. This was due to the concept of a strong artistic subject, which ultimately would remain in control of the situation. And yet the signs of alienation, which restricted the power to validity of the subject, were unmistakable. Private property, for example, was more than just intact in New York in the 1980s. This was the period of the real estate boom, frenetic consumerism, and high growth rates. Nonetheless, the artist was supposed to be able to master this situation by engaging with it and giving it more potency.<sup>32</sup> The notion of a strategy of surpassing began here, and since then this strategy has been frequently drawn on in art theory debates. This strategy also assumes a powerful artistic subject that fights back using the same methods and attempts to

surpass that which it struggles against. It is true that appropriating artists continue the logic of the appropriated object where appropriate, particularly since the object is approached from an artistic angle. However, here it is also necessary to concede that the object always displays a moment that is extrinsically determined. Yet it is exactly this idea of a confrontation between the subject and its alienation that is played down in favor of a concept of appropriation, which—as had already been the case in Marx—is seen one-dimensionally as a process of “taking,” and, what is more, then goes a step further by claiming that this “taking” is automatically critical. That artists who appropriate also subject themselves to the object has been blotted out of this scenario, where in the long run only the assets count.

It was the Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben who further twisted the spiral of appropriation, with his suggestion that alienation itself could be appropriated.<sup>33</sup> He put forward this theory in the book *Means Without End*, raising the possibility that humankind may appropriate their own historical being, their alienation, themselves. Seen from this perspective, the idea of not being in control of oneself is a status quo that cannot be reversed. Appropriation provides the possibility to find a stance vis-à-vis this status quo, to appropriate it. Yet whatever is appropriated in this manner will always remain alienated. According to this, there is no possibility to come to oneself, something that Marx still believed in, and something that was implicitly taken up by the apologists of Appropriation art. On the other hand, this theory makes it possible to work from this point of alienation, to work with it. Alienation becomes a premise that cannot be shaken.

Aside from the questionable tendency to make alienation a kind of law of nature, this model has the advantage of being able to draw appropriation and alienation together and take into account the fact that they are interdependent. Numerous artists in the 1990s have used this as a starting point, by either appropriating the alienated identity that has been ascribed to them (Renée Green), or by allowing the boundaries between the real and the alienated to constantly shift, as Andrea Fraser does in her performances. In the end, however, these options remain within the logic of property that Marx wanted to abolish. Are they therefore ultimately accomplices of the idea that capitalism is here to stay? To propose this would amount to assuming an intention, which artistic work cannot be reduced to in any case. These approaches rather represent an attempt to find a productive attitude toward a situation that no one believes can be unilaterally changed. After all, this situation has influenced us all too. But at that moment when it is artistically appropriated, and an attitude toward it is found, something has changed. What has actually changed can only be determined by investigating concrete, specific works. In a society that is based on private property—and it is this kind of society that we are dealing with at the moment—it appears that there is no way around this “appropriation of dispossession.”

## Notes

1. Fredric Jameson, "Postmodernism and Consumer Society," in *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture*, ed. Hal Foster (Seattle, 1984), 113.
2. See Brigitte Weingart, "Viren infizieren! Die Topik des Viralen und der Diskurs über die Postmoderne," in *Ansteckende Wörter: Repräsentationen von Aids* (Frankfurt/Main, 2002), 75–103.
3. Peter Halley, "Notes On The Paintings" (1982), in *Collected Essays 1981–87* (Zurich, 1988), 23.
4. *Ibid.*
5. Clegg & Guttman, "Interview 86," in *Collected Portraits*, exh. cat., Württembergischer Kunstverein Stuttgart (1988), 29–32.
6. Thierry de Duve, "Die Farbe und ihr Name," in *Pikturaler Nominalismus: Die Malerei und die Moderne* (Munich, 1987), 165–99.
7. Johannes Meinhardt, "The Sites Of Art: Photographing the In-Between," in Louise Lawler, *An Arrangement of Pictures* (New York, 2003), unpaginated.
8. See the entry on appropriation by Robert S. Nelson, "Appropriation Is not Passive, Objective, or Disinterested, but Active, Subjective and Motivated," in *Critical Terms for Art History*, ed. Robert S. Nelson and Richard Shiff (Chicago and London, 1996), 162.
9. Benjamin Buchloh, "Parody and Appropriation in Francis Picabia, Pop and Sigmar Polke," in *Neo-Avantgarde and Culture Industry: Essays on European and American Art from 1955–1975* (Boston, 2000), 349.
10. See Jean Baudrillard, "Zum Verständnis einiger Begriffe," in *Kool Killer oder Der Aufstand der Zeichen* (Berlin, 1978), 6.
11. Foster 1984 (see note 1) can serve as an example for the virulence of the antimodernist mood.
12. See Craig Owens, "Sherrie Levine, A & M Artworks," in *Beyond Recognition: Representation, Power, and Culture* (Berkeley, 1992), 115: "She does not photograph women, or landscapes, but pictures of them, for we can approach such subjects, Levine believes, only through their cultural representation."
13. Nelson 1996 (see note 8), 164.
14. See Craig Owens's criticism of Jeff Koons: "Interview with Craig Owens by Anders Stephanson," in Owens 1992 (see note 12), 315: "It is not coming out of a critical dissatisfaction and attempt to understand a set of production relations." Owens here implicitly criticizes Koons's fascination for his object.
15. A remark by Owens is symptomatic of this: "The appropriated image may be a film still, a photograph, a drawing." Further distinctions were not deemed to be necessary. See "The Allegorical Impulse: Toward a Theory of Postmodernism. Representation, Appropriation and Power," in Owens 1992 (see note 12), 54.
16. Douglas Crimp, "'Prominence Given, Authority Taken.' An Interview with Louise Lawler by Douglas Crimp," in Louise Lawler, *An Arrangement of Pictures* (New York, 2000), unpaginated.
17. See Stefan Römer, *Künstlerische Strategien des Fake: Kritik an Original und Fälschung* (Cologne, 2001), 99.
18. Stefan Römer, "Appropriation Art," in *DuMonts Begriffslexikon zur zeitgenössischen Kunst*, ed. Hubertus Butin (Cologne, 2002), 15 (translated).
19. See Römer 2001 (see note 17), 86. He claims here that Levine's photographic reproductions display no noticeable medial differences to those of Evans. In fact they have their own specific framing.

20. See John C. Welchman, "Introduction. Global Nets: Appropriation and Postmodernity," in *Art After Appropriation: Essays on Art in the 1990s* (Amsterdam, 2001), 10: "The first wave of postmodern appropriation correlates with the arrival and dissemination in New York of poststructuralist theories of reproduction and repetition."
21. *Art After Modernism: Rethinking Representation*, ed. Brian Wallis (New York, 1984).
22. The entry on "Appropriation Art," in *Prestel Lexikon: Kunst und Künstler im 20. Jahrhundert* (Munich et al., 1999), 20 (translated).
23. Douglas Crimp, "Das Aneignen der Aneignung," in *Über die Ruinen des Museums* (Dresden and Basle, 1996), 141. See also Isabelle Graw, "Der Kampf geht weiter: Ein Interview mit Douglas Crimp über Appropriation Art," *Texte zur Kunst*, no. 46 (June 2002): 34–44.
24. See the following comments by Louise Lawler in conversation with Douglas Crimp. Here a relationship of fascination may be assumed, although of course the artist's statements are not to be taken as the "truth" or the "meaning." Image, text, and programmatic statements are to be seen as forms of artistic articulation that belong together, without having to be treated on one—intertextual—level: "When I am working, I take lots of pictures. It's a way of working that's fairly flatfooted in that I have a sense that something is worthwhile documenting, but the pictures that work are those that are affecting in some other way." It is clearly the pictures that affect the artist that are the pictures that work.
25. See Isabelle Graw, "Leistungsnachweise: Cindy Sherman, Barbara Kruger, Sherrie Levine, Louise Lawler," in *Die bessere Hälfte: Künstlerinnen des 20. und 21. Jahrhunderts* (Cologne, 2003), 64–78.
26. See Isabelle Graw, "Der Hausmann: Ein Interview mit Richard Prince," *Texte zur Kunst*, no. 46 (June 2002): 44–60.
27. See Douglas Crimp, "Pictures," in Wallis 1984 (see note 21), 185: "Levine steals them [the works of art] away from their usual place in our culture and subverts their mythologies."
28. See Craig Owens, "The Allegorical Impulse: Toward a Theory of Postmodernism. Representation, Appropriation and Power," in Owens 1992 (see note 12), 54: "Allegorical imagery is appropriated imagery; the allegorist does not invent images but confiscates them."
29. See Craig Owens, "The Discourse of Others: Feminists and Postmodernism," in Owens 1992 (see note 12), 182: "She expropriates the appropriators."
30. See Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, "Manifest der Kommunistischen Partei 1848," in *Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels. Studienausgabe*, vol. 3, ed. Iring Fetscher (Frankfurt/Main, 1990), 59–89.
31. See Karl Marx, "Ökonomisch-philosophische Manuskripte" (1844), in *Studienausgabe*, vol. 2, 38–128 (see note 30).
32. See Jean Baudrillard, "Die absolute Ware," in *Die fatalen Strategien* (Munich, 1991), 144–48.
33. See Giorgio Agamben, "The Face," in *Means Without End: Notes on Politics* (Minneapolis, 2000), 91–100.