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THE FEATHERS OF THE EAGLE

Contemporary culture is built on appropriation. With digital technology, it has become ever easier for consumers to reuse and manipulate images. Like other consumer-producers, artists use Photoshop and other widely available editing programs—though the most commonly practised form of appropriation is still the act of channel-hopping, creating unforeseen and ephemeral combinations of images at the touch of a TV remote control.[1] Nicolas Bourriaud has argued that in today's digitized culture of browsing, sampling, file-sharing and photoshopping, we are almost all 'semionauts' who 'produce original pathways through signs'.[2] If this is true, then what is the value of these millions of 'original pathways'? Though digitization is often presented as heralding the end of the standardizations associated with modern mass media, could it end up reinforcing them? Might the 'pathways' it produces turn out to be interchangeable consumerist trajectories?

The term 'Appropriation Art', which emerged around 1980 to characterize work by artists such as Richard Prince and Sherrie Levine, has clear intimations of transgression and illegality. Yet by now the art in question is historical, some of its practitioners have become blue-chip artists, and the critical claims made for appropriation as an artistic strategy in the late 1970s and 1980s have met serious objections. If the culture industry is based to a significant degree on the appropriation of material from art and various subcultures, as well as from different historical epochs and cultures, why should appropriation as an artistic strategy have special status? Even in 1982, Douglas Crimp—one of the main defenders of appropriation art—noted that 'if all aspects of culture use this new operation, then the operation itself cannot indicate a specific reflection upon the culture'.[3] Early claims for the inherently critical cast of appropriation were themselves too abstract and uncritical, much like

Bourriaud's sampling utopia. In a culture in which materials are everywhere appropriated and re-appropriated, how can appropriation *as such* be intrinsically progressive?

Recently, Isabelle Graw has pointed out that Appropriation Art theory has often—in spite of the post-structuralist critique of originality and authorship—treated the appropriating artist as a fully conscious, detached and critical subject, thus denying that the appropriated material may have a hold on the artist, acknowledged or otherwise, influencing the outcome of the appropriation. Graw has noted that Richard Prince, the alleged inventor of re-photography, took pictures of photographic images in such a way as to give the result a seamless quality and operate subtle modifications: in Prince's early re-photographed advertisements, the interiors, watches and pens seem to possess an uncanny lustre.[4] His re-photographed Marlboro ads are devoid of logotype and text, leaving only photographic images of cowboys; while the 'critical' imperative of art world discourse ensures that this is seen as a reflection on masculinity and visual culture, the cliché hardly loses its power altogether—it remains as compelling and seductive as the pens and watches.

The same could be said of Prince's notorious *Spiritual America,* a re-photographed picture of a naked, pre-pubescent Brooke Shields first shown in 1984 as the sole work in a makeshift gallery. The use of this image made at least one early supporter of Prince extremely uncomfortable, leading to a break-up with the artist because he seemed 'mesmerized' by the image. Regardless of the exact ratio of fascination and critical detachment in Prince's use of this image, it is obvious that such an appropriation and presentation could hardly be free from some measure of libidinal investment.[5]

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[1] Fittingly, the artist Johan Grimonprez, whose *Dial H-I-S-T-O-R-Y* (1997) recounts the rise of hijacking with the use of (mainly) appropriated footage, has also charted the history of the remote control. See www.zapomatik.com.

[2] Nicolas Bourriaud, *Postproduction*, New York 2000, p. 12.

[3] Douglas Crimp, 'Appropriating Appropriation' (1982), in *On the Museum's Ruins*, Cambridge, MA 1993, pp. 126–37.

[4] Isabelle Graw, 'Dedication Replacing Appropriation: Fascination, Subversion and Dispossession in Appropriation Art', in George Baker, Jack Bankowsky et al, *Louise Lawler and Others*, Ostfildern-Ruit 2004, pp. 45–67.

[5] 'Spiritual America: David Deitcher on Pre-Teen Spirit', *Artforum*, October 2004, pp. 89–90, 278, 281.

Graw's text is part of a recent re-examination of Appropriation Art—and the accompanying discourse, with its blind spots and limitations.[6] Such a renewed investigation is a necessary step towards a reappraisal of the possibilities and pitfalls of appropriation, and the development of a tactical approach, rather than an essentialist stance that assumes appropriation to be inherently critical. But the net should be cast wider, beyond its American exponents of the late seventies and early eighties. For there is an under-examined aspect of the history of appropriation: its recurrent conception as a *mythological* practice. As we shall see, this neglected genealogy highlights both its urgency as an artistic strategy, and the problems with which it is fraught.

Barthesian thefts

Around 1980, Richard Prince and Sherrie Levine 're-photographed', respectively, contemporary ads and historical masterpieces of photography, while Louise Lawler photographed works of art installed in museums or collectors' homes, or at auction houses. Critics—most notably Douglas Crimp and Hal Foster—regarded these artists as Barthesian mythologists who 'steal' and subvert media myths: 'Drawn to pictures whose status is that of a cultural myth, Levine discloses that status and its psychological resonances through the imposition of very simple strategies . . . [she] steals them away from their usual place in our cultures and subverts their mythologies'.[7] Although it may be slightly crude, this Barthesian discourse—by now part of appropriation art's history—can also serve as the starting point for a more differentiated discussion.

As is well known, the 'myths' studied and criticized by Barthes in *Mythologies* (1957) were examples in the media of a bourgeois ideology that transformed history into nature, hijacking signs and giving them a saturated surplus meaning. Myth was a second-degree semiotic system grafted onto a first-degree one. The image of a black soldier saluting, presumably before the French flag, had a second, 'mythical' meaning beyond the literal one: it signified that France was a great nation, its principles

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[6] On (a recent reconstruction of) Douglas Crimp's *Pictures* exhibition, see David Rimanelli, 'Signs of the Time' and Scott Rothkopf, 'Hit or Myth', in *Artforum*, October 2001, pp. 130–34. See also the appropriation issue of *Texte zur Kunst*, no. 46 (June 2002).

[7] Douglas Crimp, 'Pictures' (1977/79), in Brian Wallis, ed., *Art after Modernism: Rethinking Representation*, New York and Boston 1984, p. 185.

were universal, and people of different races gladly pledged allegiance to it.[8] Barthes defined his mythology as a synthesis of two sciences: semiology and ideology—the latter possessing a historical dimension, unlike semiology.[9] Founded during the French Revolution by Destutt de Tracy to enable rational inquiry into the human mind and ideas, the science of ideology was a fruit of the Enlightenment's reassessment of knowledge and beliefs. Ideology's roots 'lie deep in the Enlightenment dream of a world entirely transparent to reason, free of the prejudice, superstition and obscurantism of the *ancien régime*'.[10]

Yet, of course, the term 'ideology' came to stand for the opposite, in the curious inversion of meaning that seems to beset words ending in '-ology', as Terry Eagleton has pointed out: psychology has become a synonym for psyche, and ideology has come to stand for dogmatic beliefs and false consciousness—the very things that should be investigated by 'ideologists'. Sometimes the two meanings coexist: 'psychology' can refer both to the psyche and to the discipline devoted to the study of it; 'mythology' can mean both a group of myths and the systematic study of myths and mythologies (in the first sense of the term). It is no coincidence that the eighteenth century saw the rise of a discipline of mythology as the critical study of myths. The Enlightenment needed myth as its other, or negative *Doppelgänger*. While mythology as a discipline deals primarily with myths in ancient Greece, Egypt or contemporary non-Western cultures, ideology is the science of the modern, apparently post-mythical world. If this was a discourse that often led to various depreciations of non-Western cultures, it could also lead to a critique of Western culture itself. To someone like Destutt de Tracy—who wrote an extensive text about that monument of French Enlightenment mythology, Dupuis's *Origine de tous les cultes*—it was painfully clear that irrational religious sentiments and political misconceptions were far from extinct.[11] Hence it is also not surprising that Barthes positions himself as a mythologist of modern media.

Some time ago, when the Kunst-Werke in Berlin planned an exhibition on 'Mythos RAF'—devoted to artistic and media responses to the

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[8] Roland Barthes, *Mythologies* [1957], Paris 1970, p. 189.
[9] Barthes, *Mythologies*, p. 185.
[10] Terry Eagleton, *Ideology: An Introduction*, London and New York 1991, p. 64.
[11] Antoine-Louis-Claude Destutt de Tracy, *Analyse raisonnée de 'l'Origine de tous les cultes ou Religion Universelle'; Ouvrage publié en l'an III, par Dupuis, Citoyen français*, Paris 1804.

Red Army Faction—the German press and political elite went into a state of collective hysteria, having apparently read the term 'myth' not in Barthes's sense but in line with the Romantic view of it as a poetic force sadly lacking in the modern world. From this point of view, speaking of the myth of the RAF seemed tantamount to glorifying terrorism. But while Romantic ideas of mythology generally look back to historical examples, bemoaning their absence in the modern age, the tradition descending from the Enlightenment sees myth everywhere. Here the idea of myth, as the Other of reason, increasingly loses its moorings in concrete narratives about gods or heroes, issuing into a generic conception according to which anything can become a myth or be infected by it. Adorno and Horkheimer deploy a particularly grim version of this idea in their famous analysis of the reversal of modern rationality into myth; Barthes sees 'bourgeois myth' everywhere in the 1950s media. At a certain point in *Mythologies,* he remarks that our mentality is still pre-Voltairean; it is, in other words, still riddled with myth, and a second Enlightenment is needed.[12] But Barthes is also close to Lévi-Straussian structuralism and the notion that some sort of logic, however harmful, is inherent in 'mythic thought', which can therefore be submitted to structural analysis.

By presenting his *Mythologies* project as part of a second Enlightenment, Barthes appears to subscribe to a simplistic ideal of complete rationality and 'transparent communication', seeing the Other of reason as something to be completely eradicated. However, in the end he develops a more dialectical model of a practice that involves hijacking myth in its turn. 'Since myth robs us, why not rob myth?'[13] This would result in a 'true mythology', Barthes claims, and one can scarcely wonder that the defenders of Appropriation Art have latched onto this, since this 'true mythology' could be an artistic as well as a theoretical project. One of his most important models, after all, was a literary one—Flaubert's last unfinished novel, *Bouvard et Pécuchet,* perhaps the book he invoked most often throughout his career. Barthes presents this sardonic portrayal of a certain segment of the nineteenth-century bourgeoisie as an experimental 'second-degree myth'.[14] With the mature Flaubert, literary composition became a matter of re-writing, copying, appropriating.

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[12] Barthes, *Mythologies,* p. 63.
[13] Barthes, *Mythologies,* p. 209; quoted by Hal Foster in a discussion of appropriation art in *Recodings: Art, Spectacle, Cultural Politics,* Seattle 1985, p. 169.
[14] Barthes, *Mythologies,* pp. 209–10.

Breaking with the romantic model of the writer as a divinely inspired seer, he developed a merciless art of second-degree writing by quoting and paraphrasing material from a wide variety of sources. But whereas Flaubert's attitude was one of conservative, sneering retreat, Barthes tried to turn Flaubertian language-theft into a progressive strategy.

Barthes's list of terms and their definitions in *Mythologies* is clearly modelled in part on the *Dictionnaire des idées reçues,* a catalogue of clichés that Bouvard and Pécuchet were presumably to compile from various sources at the end of Flaubert's unfinished novel, recording the human follies in which they themselves indulged so freely. In the *Dictionnaire,* clichés of the nineteenth-century bourgeois *Weltanschauung* are distilled into sardonically minimal sentences. In *Mythologies,* Barthes clearly attempted something similar with his enumeration of cyclists and the 'African Grammar' ('God.—Sublimated form of the French government').[15] Through his use of Flaubert, Barthes hints at a true mythology in which logos and mythos criticize, transform and liberate each other. *Mythologies* does not claim to be an example of this 'true mythology'. It is a vision of something else, of a practice that goes beyond *Mythologies,* a promised land occasionally glimpsed but perhaps never to be reached. Appropriation art too is more promise than achievement; it can only hope to achieve at least some degree of success if it is as obsessive as Flaubert's œuvre, and follows a less than transparent logic.

Divine spirit, conquest, imperialism

Appropriation Art's link with Barthesian mythology does not begin in New York in the late 1970s. Marcel Broodthaers's seminal exhibition *Der Adler vom Oligozän bis heute* (The Eagle from the Oligocene to the Present), held in Düsseldorf in 1972, was a direct artistic response to the challenge posed by *Mythologies* by an artist who, according to his contemporaries, studied Barthes's book extensively. The exhibition—consisting of the *Section des Figures* of his Musée d'Art Moderne, Département des Aigles—contained numerous images of eagles in all media, two- and three-dimensional, from various eras and ranging from high art to kitsch. The eagle is a creature of the air laden with mythical connotations but also a real animal, not merely a product of the mythopoeic imagination. Zeus's pet is perfect material for demonstrating how an object can be appropriated by myth and subjected to 'always the same meaning on

[15] Barthes, *Mythologies,* p. 130.

different levels—comparable to the circles of a bird in flight: grandeur, authority, power. Divine spirit. Spirit of conquest. Imperialism.'[16] At the 1972 Documenta, the exhibition was followed by the *Section Publicité* of the Musée d'Art Moderne, which contained photos and slide projections of eagles on various products. In his article 'Adler Pfeife Urinoir' (Eagle, Pipe, Urinal)—of which Broodthaers published an extract in the catalogue of his eagle show—the anthropologist Michael Oppitz explained that the German Mark had a 'mythical surplus value' that made it embody German prosperity or the *Wirtschaftswunder*. The Mark of course sported the *Bundesadler*, the federal eagle. Oppitz claims that Broodthaers 'defuses' the mythical power of the eagle by multiplying eagles and also showing the 'weak derivatives' of the German national emblem in the logotypes of various organizations and wrappings for 'deutsche Markenprodukte'. 'In the constant interconnections suggested by the serial arrangement, the eagles are made to part with their mythical feathers.'[17]

Broodthaers concurred with this reading, but noted that the mythic eagle was alive and well in advertising: 'The language of advertising targets the unconscious of the spectator–consumer, and so the magical eagle regains his power . . . I have pulled some feathers from the mythical eagle. But in advertising it remains intact, as aggressive as is necessary.'[18] He also provided the kind of statement of intent that is appreciated by those who like their art critical: 'It can be easily ascertained that I wanted to neutralize the use-value of the eagle symbol, to reduce it to its zero degree in order to introduce a critical dimension into the history and use of this symbol.'[19] This is the stern theoretical face of Broodthaers. But his amassment of eagles is also an absurd and hilarious exercise of a Flaubertian type. Having absorbed Barthes's ideology critique, Broodthaers tried to create a 'true mythology' that would use the exhibition space and catalogue as second-degree media in which the poetic becomes critical and vice versa.

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[16] Marcel Broodthaers, 'Section des figures' (1972), in Anna Hakkens, ed., *Marcel Broodthaers par lui-même*, Ghent 1998, p. 90.

[17] Michael Oppitz, 'Adler Pfeife Urinoir', in *Der Adler vom Oligozän bis heute*, vol. 2, Düsseldorf 1972, pp. 20–21. This extract has been stripped of the more 'technical' Barthesian parts. The complete text (signed Mark Oppitz) appeared in *Interfunktionen* no. 9 (1972), pp. 177–80.

[18] Broodthaers, 'Section des figures', p. 91.

[19] Broodthaers, 'Le Degré zéro' (1973), in Hakkens, *Broodthaers*, p. 95.

In analysing myth, Barthes focused on the additive aspect: myth is as it were grafted onto a text or image that remains outwardly intact.[20] Yet such an addition is also a negation; it cancels actual or potential meanings that do not square with the naturalizing tendency of myth. The result is an outwardly identical second sign that is inflected by mythical connotations; the historicity and complexity of the—hypothetical—first representation is largely undone. In turn, intimations of a 'true mythology' would have to negate the coherence and closure of myth and (re)introduce different meanings. But this would not necessarily lead to literal appropriation.

Photographs and readymades

In *Mythologies* Barthes analyses images as well as writings, but just as there are no long quotations, there are no illustrations, no direct visual appropriations. The images are represented only through descriptions. But then Barthes advocated stealing myths rather than specific images or texts. If a true mythology is a meta-language that uses myth as its signified, this does not necessarily mean that texts or images have to be used wholesale. The mythologist might, on the contrary, want to extract the myth from its host or hosts and condense it into a few lines or paragraphs. Yet one can defend the interpretation of appropriation in Barthesian terms. Placing an image or a text—or a fragment of one—in a new context can make the myth which it 'hosts' explicit. This kind of practice became common in visual art rather than in literature, once the avant-garde had made the simple 'taking' of a pre-existing object or image a valid artistic act. It can be argued that photography served as an important model for this: the camera facilitates the two-dimensional appropriation of objects, and in this respect Duchamp's readymades can be seen as a radical manifestation of a culture informed by photography.[21]

In later writings, particularly in 'Eléments de sémiologie' (1964), Barthes recasts the distinction between first- and second-degree (mythical) semiological systems as the difference between denotation and

[20] Barthes, *Mythologies*, pp. 194–204.

[21] On photography and the readymade see Rosalind Krauss, 'Notes on the Index: Part 1' in *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths*, Cambridge, MA 1985, pp. 196–209.

connotation.[22] This is also the idiom of the famous reading of photographic ideology in pasta advertisements that he developed in 'Rhetoric of the Image', an essay of the same year. According to Barthes, photographs appear at first sight to be pure denotation, identical to 'things as they are'. Connotation is disguised by the illusion that the photographic image is completely natural. In this sense photography is the mythic medium par excellence; indeed, one could posit photography as the basis of Barthes's model in *Mythologies*, which employs the fiction of a purely denotative first-degree sign that is then 'infected' by mythical connotations. In photography, Barthes showed that connotation is introduced through cropping, composition and captions—as in the Panzani pasta advertisements, where everything is made to signify a cliché of 'Italianness'.[23] When first published, 'Rhetoric of the Image' was accompanied by a full-page colour plate of the advertisement: in the era of Pop Art and Situationist *détournements*, Barthes revealed himself a re-photographer *avant la lettre*, who underscored his analysis by appropriating the image in question. Artistic appropriation then as it were scraps Barthes's analysis (or takes it as read), its effect mainly depending on changes of context. Re-photography and other forms of photo-based appropriation turn photography's naturalizing tendency against itself by making apparent the images' constructed and coded character.

In the catalogue to the 1972 eagle exhibition, Broodthaers acknowledged Duchamp's readymades—as well as Magritte's famous pipe painting—as crucial precursors. While modernist movements tried to purge art of representational elements, foregrounding the formal properties of the visual sign, readymades are ordinary objects which serve as their own representation through alteration of context and negation of their original function; in the process they accrue strangely solipsistic surplus meanings. A subcategory of Duchamp's readymades consists of appropriated industrial images such as the kitsch landscape print of *Pharmacy* (1914) or the Mona Lisa postcard of *L. H. O. O. Q.* (1919). Here, the negated and represented element is already a representation, already the negation of presence. Broodthaers too used images as readymades,

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[22] Barthes, 'Eléments de sémiologie', in *Communications*, no. 4 (1964), pp. 91–134. See also, in the bibliography of this publication, the description of the project of *Mythologies* as a theory of mass media myths defined as '*des langages connotés*' (p. 137). Barthes is one of the authors of this bibliography, and is no doubt responsible for this subtle reformulation of his earlier project.

[23] Barthes, 'Rhétorique de l'image', in *Communications*, pp. 40–51.

but the image-readymades in the *Section des Figures* in Düsseldorf were sometimes quite rare and precious objects. Broodthaers clearly enjoyed combining them as photographic reproductions in the catalogue, and when he moved on to the *Section Publicité* at the 1972 Documenta, photography became dominant. The assembly of largely 'original' eagle artefacts was replaced by a slide show and mounted photographs. With the *Section Publicité*, Broodthaers moved further away from the appropriation of images as objects to the appropriation of images through photography (or in some cases re-photography).

Art which aims to reflect on media myths by a conceptual use of photography risks becoming mythified itself. The myth it embodies is that of a 'critical' art which a priori differs from other commodified images. This quasi-Barthesian misconception accompanied classical Appropriation Art, and is still alive and well: when the RAF exhibition finally opened in Berlin—re-christened *Zur Vorstellung des Terrors* (Representing Terror)—the critic Tom Holert took the curators to task for presenting the artist Hans-Peter Feldmann as the prototype for practitioners who take on myth by 'singling out', 'monumentalizing', 'reprivatizing', 'filtering' and 'distancing' what the media produce. The effect, he thought, was to idealize the relation between art and mass media.[24] Here a Situationist critique of the art world was required: by pretending to 'purify' media images, art disavows its own implication in spectacle. While the current art world freely indulges in Situationist chic, its art of negation—which uses and perverts Barthes and Broodthaers by assuming its appropriations are automatically critical, has forgotten this lesson.

Decodings

In 1957, when they were still members of the Lettrist International, future Situationists Guy Debord and Gil Wolman wrote a 'user's manual' for *détournements*, in which they distanced the practice from (neo) Dada appropriations:

> The literary and artistic heritage of humanity should be used for partisan propaganda purposes. It is, of course, necessary to go beyond any idea of scandal. Since opposition to the bourgeois notion of art and artistic genius has become pretty much old hat, [Duchamp] drawing a moustache on the

[24] Tom Holert, 'Enzyklopädisches Sammelsurium', *Jungle World*, no. 6, 9 February 2005, available at www.jungle-world.com.

> *Mona Lisa* is no more interesting than the original version of that painting. We must now push this process to the point of negating the negation.[25]

For the SI the re-representation of images in an artistic context would only mean their integration into an art world that is itself part of spectacle; the *détournement* of texts and images in pamphlets, magazines or posters had to go beyond this. While artists like Broodthaers wanted to use the art world as a subdivision of spectacle for the production of divergent, mutant, self-critical commodities, the Situationists demanded the negation of art itself as one prerequisite for an end to the spectacle.

Spectacle is defined by Debord as representation; life has 'distanced itself in a representation', the spectacle of commodities.[26] In this sense, not only Duchamp's appropriated images but *all* of his readymades would be representations, or at least elements within the spectacle as the hieroglyphic transcription of social relations. Representation became a highly suspect notion in the twentieth century—largely because it seemed to presuppose obedience to a pre-given reality, with signs passively 'reflecting' objects. This, it was widely felt, was to naturalize culture. With Barthes, *denotation* by and large stands in for *representation*. In contrast to more naive conceptions of the latter, here denotation can never exist in utopian purity, but is always accompanied by mythic connotations.[27] However, not all concepts of representation assume a purely denotative sign. According to Marx—whom Debord constantly quotes, paraphrases and 'detourns'—the relations between commodities on the market are abstracted, hieroglyphic figurations of social relations. This encrypted representation is not immediately recognizable as a representation; the commodities are fetishes that seem endowed with lives of their own, and only thorough analysis shows that they represent a social reality.

It is intriguing that Marx appropriated the term 'fetish' from Enlightenment mythology: as a young man, he had read de Brosses's *Du Culte des dieux fétiches* (1760), described by its author as an attempt to look at the fundamental causes of myth, which had seemed an

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[25] Guy Debord and Gil Wolman, 'Mode d'emploi du détournement', in *Les Lèvres Nues*, no. 8, May 1956, p. 2. English translation by Ken Knabb, available at www.cddc.vt.edu/sionline/presitu/usersguide.html.

[26] Debord, *La Société du Spectacle* [1967], Paris 1992, p. 15.

[27] Occasionally, Barthes uses 'representation' to refer to images; *Mythologies*, p. 188.

'indecipherable chaos' to most modern observers.[28] De Brosses argued that primitive people worship actual objects and animals as gods; rather than representing or symbolizing gods, they *are* gods in the eyes of the believers, just as commodities appear to be alive and endowed with certain qualities in the eyes of the commodity fetishist. Of course, in actual fact they represent social relations among people, but this is disavowed. Contrary to the fetishes of the 'primitives' as interpreted by de Brosses, commodity fetishes therefore *do* represent something else, but the fetishist does not realize this. De Brosses supposed that fetishism was the most original and primitive form of myth, predating Greek and even Egyptian mythology. By describing the commodity as a fetish, Marx thus defined it as a creature of myth—capitalist modernity making a dialectical leap into the mythical. Debord and Raoul Vaneigem underlined the mythical component of capitalism even more strongly, while at the same time emphasizing that capitalism differs from the mythic order of old, defined by Debord as a 'unitary construction of thought' that naturalizes the social order and relates it to the cosmic order.[29]

Situationist theory differentiates between the unified and unifying myth of traditional societies and the spectacle as its less stable modern successor: 'Spectacle is nothing but desacralized and parcellized myth.'[30] The SI's conception of myth is, in a sense, more romantic and conservative than Barthes's, and closer to that of Mircea Eliade, who saw myth as an organic-hierarchic totality that has been shattered by modernization. Only its fragments remain, integrated into the industrial totality of the spectacle. While spectacle takes on the role of myth in glossing the contradictions and antagonisms in society, it is a totality made up of fragments. It unites the separated elements, but *as separated*. In this sense, the spectacle as a fetishistically disavowed representation of social relations is also a *representation of myth*. Modernity indeed reverts into myth, but myth is not quite what it used to be.

From a Debordian point of view the destruction of spectacular myth and its fetishist illusions cannot be achieved by a mere artistic appropriation

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[28] Charles de Brosses, *Du Culte des dieux fétiches, ou Parallèle de l'ancienne Religion de l'Egypte avec la Religion actuelle de Nigritie* [1760], Paris 1988, p. 9. On Marx and de Brosses see Karl-Heinz Kohl, *Die Macht der Dinge: Geschichte und Theorie sakraler Objekte*, München 2003, p. 92.

[29] Debord, *La Société du Spectacle*, p. 127.

[30] Raoul Vaneigem, 'Banalités de base (II)', in *Internationale Situationniste* no. 8, January 1963, p. 37.

of commodity-images. Such art—above all as exemplified by Pop—is part of the regime of alienating representations that needs to be attacked; it is nothing but an artistic meta-spectacle that does not make the slightest contribution to the abolition of spectacle and the realization of a future art of 'constructed situations', or lived experience. As a thrifty attack on the spectacle that does not aspire to artistic status, Situationist *détournement* is the proper way of appropriating spectacular myth. But the Situationist utopia is hardly around the corner. The art world as meta-spectacle, it can be argued, offers at least some possibilities for practices that diverge from mainstream spectacle. How radical these differences prove to be is another matter. If Deleuze is even more popular than Debord in today's art world, it is because Deleuzian rhetoric suggests that one can easily escape spectacle's mythic returns by letting a thousand flowers of radical difference bloom. While this may not bring an end to the spectacle, it implies there are zones of creation that escape its grip.

Sameness and repetition

Drawing on the work of modern mythologists such as Eliade, both Debord and Deleuze focused on the temporal dimension of myth. In contrast to the modern, historical conception of time, mythic time was identified by Eliade and others as the cyclic repetition of archetypal events in a remote, aboriginal past. Debord noted that in advanced capitalism, the linear historical time that seemed to characterize modernity is replaced by the 'pseudo-cyclic time' of the spectacle. Virtually simultaneously, Deleuze embarked on his crusade against forms of repetition that remain stuck in a mythical, cyclical model, which grounds Being by 'folding, bending, re-bending—organizing the order of seasons, years, and days'.[31] According to Deleuze, this circular repetition of archetypal models or 'originals' is also fundamental to Plato's philosophy. In depicting ideas as they are contemplated by 'circulating souls' in the heavens, and God as a shepherd presiding over the circular movement of the universe, Plato imposes order on being and separates the true from the false, good copies from evil simulacra.[32]

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[31] Gilles Deleuze, *Différence et répétition*, Paris 1968, pp. 350. For Debord see especially parts V ('temps et histoire') and VI ('le temps spectaculaire') of *La Société du Spectacle*, pp. 123–64.
[32] Deleuze, *Différence*, p. 86.

Deleuze takes up the cause of the unjustly maligned simulacrum, which promises a non-Platonic, non-mythic repetition.

> It is repetition which ruins and degrades us, but it is repetition which can save us and allow us to escape from the other repetition . . . To the eternal return as reproduction of something always already-accomplished, is opposed the eternal return as resurrection, a gift of the new, of the possible.[33]

Plato's mythic version of repetition exhibits the manifest content of the eternal return. There is, however, another form of repetition hidden in the eternal return, its latent content, made explicit by Nietzsche.[34] If the eternal return is truly eternal, then there is no foundation, just endless repetition that cannot claim an origin; it is repetition without model, without concept—repetition not as representation, but as the production of difference. Deleuze identifies representation with the copying of models, and hence with mythical repetition; in this respect mass culture as a culture of clichés remains in thrall to myth.[35] Art can appropriate these representations and turn them into something else: in the late sixties, Deleuze mentioned Pop as an example of an art that finds its point of departure in the artificial—*le factice*—which can turn into the simulacrum. 'The artificial is always a copy of a copy, which must be pushed to the point where it changes its nature and turns into a simulacrum (the moment of Pop art).'[36]

Deleuze's remark has something to tell us about Warhol. For Warhol indeed emphasized the second-degree nature of his images and often repeated them in grids to empty out the image, creating an exhilarating void. But a Deleuzian analysis of his oeuvre would tend to overlook the complex interplay within it between the 'reproduction of something always already-accomplished' and 'the eternal return as resurrection, a gift of the new, of the possible'. Warhol was an ardent fetishist, a believer in the mythic commodity. His repetitions reinforce the images of the spectacle, and bring them into question precisely by doing so. While Deleuze's model of 'bad' repetition giving birth to 'good' repetition is

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[33] Deleuze, *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam, Minneapolis 1986, p. 131.
[34] *Différence*, pp. 37, 92, 168, 380–81.
[35] Deleuze, *Cinéma 2: L'image-temps*, Paris 1985, p. 33.
[36] Deleuze, *Logique du sens*, Paris 1969, p. 307.

suggestive, it is also too abstract and potentially euphoric. For it implies that 'bad' repetition—producing only relative difference, which remains in thrall to identity—can effortlessly change into 'good' repetition and pure, positive difference without a model.[37] This vision is far too optimistic. The complex dialectical interplay of different forms of repetition does not necessarily end in the triumph of Deleuze's favourite.

Inside myth

In 1981 Warhol published a print portfolio called *Myths*, featuring the likes of Howdy Doody, Superman, Warhol himself, and the witch from *The Wizard of Oz*. The last was not based on an official publicity still, as were many of Warhol's sixties works. It was a new photograph of the actress from the original film, who lived in Warhol's area. In the sixties Warhol had been relatively unencumbered by copyright problems, but by this time he preferred taking his own photographs to prevent legal trouble.[38] The portfolio's title clearly reflects the ever more generic use of the term 'myth'. In contrast to Barthes, and in common with its usage in the mass media, Warhol employed it in a positive sense. So it is not entirely surprising that, while *October* critics were presenting the appropriation artist as a Barthesian mythologist, Warhol was generally regarded by then as a rather dubious figure, an overly commercial has-been who hobnobbed with Imelda Marcos. The exception among critics was Benjamin Buchloh, and among artists Louise Lawler. Since the 1980s, Lawler has made numerous photographs of works by Warhol not only in museums, but also in auction houses and collector's homes and corporations—the witch from the *Myths* series appearing in a sterile boardroom. Lawler's practice of Warhol appropriation and contextualization seems like an attempt to come to terms with the failed encounter

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[37] See, for example, Elaine Sturtevant's work, in full Deleuzian flow: 'The brutal truth of the work is that it is not copy / The push and shove of the work is the leap from image to concept / The dynamics of the work is that it throws out representation.' Sturtevant, quoted in Udo Kittelmann and Mario Kramer's preface to *Sturtevant: The Brutal Truth*, Frankfurt am Main 2004, p. 19. The radical difference to which Sturtevant aspires remains a subjective intention; her repetitions of Johns's *Flags* or Warhol's *Marilyns* are dependent on these famous paintings as if on mythic models.

[38] Pat Hackett, ed., *The Andy Warhol Diaries*, New York 1989, p. 354; Barry Blinderman, 'Modern Myths: Andy Warhol' (1981), in Kenneth Goldsmith, ed., *I'll Be Your Mirror: The Selected Andy Warhol Interviews, 1962–1987*, New York 2004, p. 292.

between Warhol and Appropriation Art and its critical reception, especially in *October*, around 1980.[39]

The near-silence with which Pop was passed over in discussion of Appropriation Art is suspect. It is as if Pop's embrace of the commodification of art was too uncomfortably close to home. It is striking that a similar mild version of *damnatio memoriae* also occurred in the case of Situationist *détournement*. Insofar as this was registered at all, its frontal attack on art as a specialized discipline was perceived as a threat. For those who defended a critical art, both Pop and Situationism—propaganda for and against the spectacle—undermined art: Pop by collapsing the difference between artistic and other commodities, and the SI by demanding the abolition of both artistic and other commodities. To these artists and critics, Warhol's sadly radiant *Marilyns* were as dubious as an image of 'Marilyn Monroë' from the *Internationale Situationniste* with a caption driving home yet again a point about the spectacle.[40] Each in its own way, both Pop and the SI demonstrated that the art world is thoroughly implicated in spectacular neo-myth, not its principled antagonist. Both can serve as a corrective for the tendency to idealize art as inherently critical. What is disavowed by much Barthesian rhetoric—both around 1980 and today—as well as by celebration of difference among freestyle Deleuzians is the attraction of the commodity and the artist's entanglement in myth. Even the SI's secession from spectacle could never be truly complete. Is there not something of the *mater dolorosa* even in the small picture of Marilyn Monroe on the pages of the *Internationale Situationniste*? And was this particular image not chosen, at least in part, for its poignancy?

Douglas Crimp doubted that critical reflection on culture could use a procedure that is an important part of that same culture—as appropriation undoubtedly is. Yet could not critical projects make use of precisely such a ubiquitous strategy for a reflexive practice that acknowledges its own implication in spectacle and myth? Some appropriations may end up reinforcing myths. Second-degree mythology may indeed become a pseudo-critical, impotent pretension, still dominated by the myths it claims to debunk. It can also become its own myth: the myth of

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[39] See Jack Bankowsky, 'Does Louise Lawler Make You Cry?', in *Louise Lawler and Others*, pp. 75–90.
[40] See p. 19 of *Internationale Situationniste*, no. 8 (January 1963).

appropriation as intrinsically radical, or productive of radical difference. For 'criticality' is only to a limited extent a result of the artist's subjective intentions. Nor is it a stable attribute of any image or text. Rather, it is something that results from the *use* of a text or image by an artist or critic, or other viewers. Apparent criticality can at any moment turn out to be a form of complicity, something seemingly different and new that is in fact just cleverly repackaged identity.

The dialectical whims of appropriation have barely begun to be examined. The theories of myth that informed the various discourses and practices considered here are in many ways anachronisms in contemporary intellectual life. But a critical re-evaluation and reactivation of the historical forms of mythological critique, and of artistic mythology, could help break open this present and regain the initiative. Time is running out. At the very moment that contemporary consumers are celebrated as happy hackers, ever more fundamentalist copyright legislation is creating taboos that will make even partial and ephemeral realizations of a true mythology of difference exceedingly difficult.