

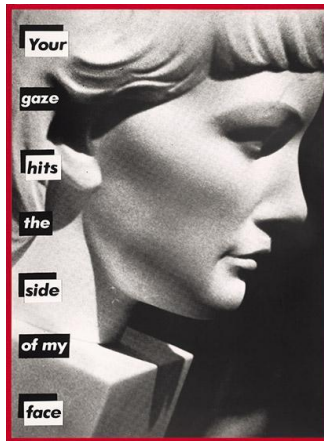
**Appropriation: Repositioning the Ideas and Forms
of Pre-existing Resources for Original Creation**

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Appropriation, an active and expressive art form from Postmodern times, has been controversial throughout the years because it challenged modernism's value of originality. Some people believe that appropriation is immoral due to copyright issues, and they think artists create value only if the artworks are original. Compared to traditional artists, people who use appropriation have a different interpretation of originality; they always borrow a pre-existing artwork and reposition its idea, form, or context. With the help of pre-existing artworks and certain contexts, the artists can have a dialogue with the audience; they use this method to arouse curiosity and attention and express their ideas and viewpoints based on their conception. The appropriated works open a space for everyone to speculate and examine --- which is the value of their "originality".

Appropriation of ready-made images is very common among postmodern artists. Among diverse forms of representation, photography, and film are favored by Picture Generations (Eklund, 1984) like Cindy Sherman, Sherrie Levine, and Richard Prince. This paper takes Barbara Kruger's photograph *Your Gaze Hits the Slide of My Face* as the main research object, explores how Kruger uses the method of appropriation, and how Kruger's manipulation of media suggests her originality. Furthermore, the paper compares two critics' ideas of originality and appropriation to distinguish their different attitudes.

As an American conceptual artist, Kruger has a bold and visual style. She makes art as a mix of found photographs with aggressive texts. Writing bold letters against a red background is like a trademark, a signature of her work. Generally, Kruger appropriated the imagery of advertising and the magazine industry to create sarcastic images to suggest social situations. The strong contrast and condensed slogans are like impressive epigrams, always suggesting the idea of gender, power, and consumerism.



Barbara Kruger, *Untitled (Your Gaze Hits the Slide of My Face)*, 1981. Photograph, 60 x 40", Collection Vijak Mahdavi and Bernardo Nadal-Ginard.

Above we see a classical example of Kruger's appropriated artwork. The classical female statue with a clear facial contour in the picture is a representation of male gazing. On the one hand, the side face of the statue is located in the middle, using a contrast image of a black and white intersection. The viewer's first glance and many subsequent gazes fell on this cheek area, making people feel the invisible pressure of rejection and resistance. On the other hand, like all of Kruger's work, the statements that cover the image are succinct, confrontational, and pungent; the form of text is emphasized through contrasting colors. "*Your Gaze Hits the Slide of My Face*" is a caution for the viewers as the viewers stare at the artwork, at the woman's side face. With the intervention of the title and text, the viewers are forced to expose subconscious thoughts and weaken the pursuit of pleasure with subjective consciousness. Especially for male viewers, they may forget the difference in gender and unknowingly change their identity with the objects in the photograph. Kruger tried to incorporate the audience into the arrangement of her work, subverted the active-passive relationship between outsiders and characters in the artwork, and challenged the basic structure and order of society. It is interesting to note that when the viewers look at the sentence, they unconsciously regard "gaze" as the gaze of a male. In fact, the idea of "the male gaze" originated in the 1970s, suggesting the art with straight males in mind. For most

of the artworks, artists depict the nude as female but unconsciously assume it to be male. "Males have acquired primitive pleasure and satisfied desires through the gaze" (Lacan, 1977). Obviously, the concept of gaze is related to gender, which implicitly expresses the potential patriarchal legal society. In many artworks, the reproduction of female images is shaped by the eyes and desires of male audiences, in order to satisfy male staring desires and privileges. Similarly, this artwork shares the same idea as Manet's *Olympia* whose character is gazing at the audience, and she is humanized rather than objectified --- she is her own person.

Through the mass media, like magazines, Kruger cleverly combined diverse philosophical concepts, psychological analysis, and social relationships; and constructed photographs to challenge the notion of gender, which perfectly presents an active and passive relationship. From Kruger's perspective, a female is an independent individual rather than a role to cater to the desires of males. It is Kruger's method, using the bold text strikingly attached to the images, to impact audiences' optic nerve and cerebral cortex. These sentences have been refined in an extremely incisive and powerful form, sharply satire the Western male-centric society, capitalist fetishism, and the current social system; Kruger focused her gaze on these aspects, exposing capital consumption, the role of rights in a patriarchal society, the power of the media, and the concept of women ..." (Schreiber, 1987) Over the past few decades, contemporary women artists have revolutionized every aspect of women. They use a unique perspective to observe the world and they use unprecedented self-awareness, bold expressions, diverse materials, media, and methods to explore. At the same time, they launched a fierce attack on men's gaze with a radical attitude, and they advanced the public discourse to the greatest extent, allowing feminist art to be presented in public and social content.

In a word, Kruger appropriated the visual effects and rhetoric of advertisements and sometimes used reverse thinking simulation techniques to invite viewers to be in the context. Her appropriation focused on creating a new space for viewers to interpret and transferring the symbols for viewers to rethink; many artists like her favored the use of photographs to suggest their originality in ideas, but appropriation in the works can be confusing because it is hard to distinguish it from copying and borrowing. Originality is the core feature of modern times, and many scholars try to use analytical approaches to investigate originality. Van Camp and Rowe approach the idea by regarding originality as a property of the work of art itself, or a property of the artist (Van Camp, 2007). In addition, they continuously try to figure out the new position of originality in new ages, --- everyone agrees that originality does not only mean creating a new object in the world, but they have different understandings beyond. To be specific, Van Camp states that people “value originality because it demonstrates the ability of the artist to advance the potential of an art form” (Van Camp, 2007). He believes that artists use appropriation to explore a deeper meaning of the forms used before. However, his definition of originality is different from Rowe’s understanding and he ignores the artists who intentionally choose appropriation as their way to make artworks. Rowe uses the example of Sherrie Levine, showing that the use of old photographs is not a way to edit or manipulate but just to capture only (Rowe, 2011). It is undeniable that appropriation is a process of extension; excluding the content of the image in the work, there is always a possibility of narrative about the image. People are not looking for the beginning of the source, but the structure of finding the importance of the source. Appropriation in art is not a passive imitation to receive influences, but an active and subjective change, which even distorts the meaning of the original work to create new symbols, which is also the

fundamental principle of advertising operation. The artist constantly constructs new symbols with his own hands (Robert S. Nelson).

From my perspective, although the essence of pre-existing artworks and appropriated works are similar, the authors of the two works always have different intentions. The two similar words originated from different cultural backgrounds and contexts, showing distinct ideas behind them. Therefore, they have the possibility to bring new ideas by repositioning them into a different context. To be specific, when viewers see Kruger's work, they can notice that the artwork is from a part of the photo. To understand the information of the original photo, viewers can imagine the creative process of making it; while looking at the original work, the viewers may have completely different thinking instead. All the appropriated works contain various information, but also an important transformation --- the experience of the viewer determines the originality of the work. In the history of art, there is always a delicate relationship between appropriation and originality. Our aesthetics are related to how we understand the artwork; if we know that the pre-existing work and the appropriated work are not created by one artist, with different purposes, our aesthetics of this artwork will be greatly changed. The participation of the viewers brings more thoughts of appropriation, and people start to think if the viewers have the right to decide the originality behind the appropriated work and if artists have the right to use others' artwork as the basis directly. Personally, it is still necessary for the appropriate artists to indicate the source of the original work, otherwise it will become plagiarism to some extent. The creative methods of art are ever-changing and different scholars always have their own opinions, but everyone may reach a consensus in art that plagiarism is not desirable.

To sum up, art always emphasizes the creativity of heroism and is known for its uniqueness, but artists must necessarily face the cultural structures and diverse works of other artists that have emerged in the world when they are creating artworks. Artists of each era obtain many resources from their existing cultures and use them to examine themselves. In today's social life, famous artwork from various periods can be presented together in art museums and the advanced technology or media can make it possible for artists to accept diverse and even excess information from the past to create something new. They can choose and obtain the desired information from art materials and printed materials. Refusing to produce more images is reasonable, and "what the artist chose" has become one of the laws of contemporary art. Kruger's appropriation emphasizes the importance of texts and blurs the boundaries between commercial art and fine art. There is no doubt that her work suggests an important feature of postmodern art: art should not be tied to traditional concepts but any forms the artists want to adopt.

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