Interfaces
Image Texte Language

37 | 2016
Appropriation and Reappropriation of Narratives

Editor’s foreword

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OpenEdition Journals

Electronic version
URL: http://journals.openedition.org/interfaces/278
DOI: 10.4000/interfaces.278
ISSN: 2647-6754

Publisher:
Université de Bourgogne, Université de Paris, College of the Holy Cross

Printed version
Date of publication: 1 January 2016
Number of pages: 1-6
ISSN: 1164-6225

Electronic reference
Carole Cambray, Catherine Marcangeli and Stéphanie Prévost, “Editor’s foreword”, *Interfaces* [Online], 37 | 2016, Online since 19 March 2018, connection on 06 January 2021. URL: http://journals.openedition.org/interfaces/278 ; DOI: https://doi.org/10.4000/interfaces.278

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EDITORS' FOREWORD

The 2015 *Interfaces* conference, held at Paris Diderot University, invited specialists of history, art history, cinema, visual culture, literature, and linguistics interested in the relationship between text and image to look into the appropriation and reappropriation of narratives, be they collective or personal, canonical or marginal. Papers considered the broad-ranging ways in which these sources and narratives have been visited and revisited, rewritten and manipulated, reclaimed or subverted. A selection of papers presented at the conference appear in this bilingual issue of the illustrated journal *Interfaces: Image, Text, Language*.

Gérard Genette defines all texts as intertext, a fabric into which previous texts are woven, more or less recognizable, sometimes anonymous, disseminated quotations without inverted commas.[1] Quotation is thus defined as traces of an intertext that is not necessarily identifiable, seen as a dynamic rather than as the borrowing of specific fragments or works. Moreover, because the artist or writer does not fully control the degree of heterogeneity that infiltrates their work, and because they cannot intend *all* of the intertextual, or interpictorial, echoes their works give rise to, thinkers like Monroe Beardsley have dismissed "intentional fallacy," suggesting that our aesthetic evaluation of an object should not rest on such would-be intentions.[2]

However, the objects and narratives under consideration in this volume exemplify types of quotation and appropriation that are often much more identifiable and deliberate than such definitions would suggest. Quotation plays on notions and degrees of resemblance, or distance, between an "original" and its variations, interpretations, reincarnations. A dialogue is established, which goes beyond the tension between imitation and *invenzione*: the quoted work is not considered as a model, but it finds itself summoned, it is there again, and differently. For quotation and appropriation are not just a matter of "cutting and pasting," as Antoine Compagnon's metaphor of scissors and glue would suggest.[3] Indeed the "source" is not removed when it is quoted; on the contrary it is made even more present. "Copy and paste" may therefore be a more appropriate description. In the process, the "original" is altered, turned into a new object. Once, and twice, removed.

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1 Gérard Genette. *Palimpsestes*. Le Seuil: Paris, 1982.

2 W.K. Wimsatt, Jr., and Monroe C. Beardsley. "The Intentional Fallacy" in *The Verbal Icon: Studies in the Meaning of Poetry*. Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1954.

3 Antoine Compagnon. *La Seconde Main ou le Travail de la Citation*. Le Seuil: Paris, 1979.

Such transfers also attract our attention to what happens in that repetition itself and point to the relationships, echoes and impacts of the various occurrences. The act of appropriating incites us to consider or reconsider the way images and texts work. This was deftly shown by Stephen Bann (Emeritus Professor of History of Art at the University of Bristol) in his keynote lecture "Unrolling the Painting: Appropriation and Transformation in Paul Delaroche's *Charles I Insulted by the Soldiers of Cromwell"* (1837).[4] Bahn was at the time taking part in a wider exhibition project at the Musée des Beaux-Arts de Lyon, on 'The Invention of the Past.' In this context and with that project in mind, he gave a fascinating inkling into Delaroche's processes of historical reappropriation. Building on a previous argument made in his *Paul Delaroche: History Painted* (1997), Bann dissected the interpretation of the historical episode Delaroche exposed in this painting, leading him to question what History is made of, how it is written and passed down from one generation to the next, with the constant possibility of distortion. The French artist depicts Charles I of England, taunted by the victorious soldiers of Oliver Cromwell after the Second English Civil War, prior to his execution in 1649. This oil painting had been commissioned by Lord Francis Egerton. The artist regarded it as one of his greatest achievements, but its reception at the 1837 Paris Salon was rather unfavourable, possibly because Delaroche's Charles I conflated Van Dyck's famous portrayal of the king with a Christ-like figure. The painting had long been thought to have been lost in the 1941 Blitz, after a German bomb had been dropped close to Bridgewater House, where the picture was displayed. It resurfaced in 2009 and restoration work ahead of the 2010 National Gallery exhibition revealed that Delaroche had made several preparatory drawings. Bann retraced Delaroche's hesitations in painting this historical moment, while taking into account his patron's own understanding of it. The paper thus showed the extent to which reappropriation could be an individual process that always occurred within a larger ideological, historical context.

Volume 37 then opens with a section devoted to "myths and metamorphosis: from text to image," with articles by Olivier Chiquet and Gabriele Quaranta. In his paper on the myth of Apollo, and Marsyas as represented in 16th- and 17th-century Italian painting, Chiquet shows how the retelling of a narrative can be determined by the contexts of production and reception. Here the political and religious Counter-Reformation movement, Renaissance neo-platonism, the development of anatomy as a science and many artists' fascination with the ugly, including in artistic treatises, all form the backdrop against which the suffering of the satyr Marsyas is interpreted. Gabriele Quaranta also examines paintings that "illustrate" narratives, focusing on the political and ideological forces that determine how texts are manipulated to fit the taste of an audience as well as to convey ideological

[4] Unfortunately, for copyright reasons, Stephen Bahn's talk could not be included in the present volume, but it seemed appropriate to give a brief summary of his argument in this introduction.

messages. His study of reappropriations and interpretations of Torquato Tasso's *Jerusalem Delivered* highlights the links between culture and politics and reveals that they operated as ideological tools in the power-legitimation battle between Marie de' Medici and her son, Louis XIII.

The subsequent two articles, by Xavier Giudicelli and Caroline Marie, analyse the reclaiming/ reappropriating process by raising the issue of a literary canon and of formal propriety. They offer a perspective on literary narratives, through the looking glass as it were. Xavier Giudicelli's paper exposes some of the mechanics of quotation in *The Folding Star* (1994)*,* a novel by Alan Hollinghurst. The book revisits the canon, and is dense with intertextual references and allusions, ranging from Henry James to Thomas Mann to the English pastoral tradition. It is also haunted by Georges Rodenbarch's novel *Bruges-la-Morte*. Giudicelli concentrates on mirror images and notions of hybridity to show how Symbolist texts and pictures are received and reinterpreted. For Caroline Marie, the figure of Virginia Woolf is as much part of the canon of literary history as her works are. With this premise in mind, Marie examines the graphic adaptation by Caroline Picard of Woolf's first novel, *The Voyage Out* (1915). The graphic novel is published in an anthology – a form that itself selects, thus constituting and sanctioning the canon – titled *The Graphic Canon. The World's Greatest Literature as Comics and Visuals* (2013). Marie's paper dwells on the highbrow/lowbrow dynamics inherent to the genre, on Picard's process of selection and rewriting, and on the tension between the poetical and the political. It thus aims to determine what "version" of Virginia Woolf is shaped by her graphic canonization.

In the next section, we move from literary narratives to issues of self-appropriation that revolve around personal trauma, or a quest for healing. The graphic work of David Huck (b.1957) is examined by David Lemaire. The artist produced an extensive series of charcoal drawings which reference the tradition of history painting. His multilayered pictures mingle allusions to Antiquity and to contemporary images, including war pictures. Huck also weaves in a network of literary references, from Ovid and Thomas Bernard to Kenzaburo Oê or H.D. Thoreau. The historical and the literary mingle with the autobiographical, creating a palimpsest effect half-way between drawing and installation art. However, Huck's versions of history can mainly be understood through references to a founding trauma, that of the loss of his own child. The very private and cathartic dimension of appropriation is also at the core of "Repellent Shapes and Bewildering Illustrations," an article by Liliane Louvel about Stanley Spencer's eccentric styles. Louvel describes how the English painter (1891-1959) freely mixes autobiographical elements with stories from the Bible or the Gospels, as shown in *The Sermon of Christ at Cookham* (his last unfinished work). In his search for a "Heaven in a Hall of War," Spencer also summons the literary canon and fills it with intimations of domesticity. Grotesque, sometimes uncanny, caricatures are thus infused with an undercurrent of *memento mori* melancholy.

Screen adaptations also engage with the notion of cultural appropriation. In her book *Who Owns Culture?: Appropriation and Authenticity in American Law* (2005), Susan Scafidi exposes ways in which cultural appropriation can be perceived as controversial, especially when elements from one culture or one group are subverted – and often mocked – by another, sometimes with an eye to commodification. Reappropriation can thus be a tool to resist and reject the imposition of a majority culture to the detriment of sub-cultures. For that reason, reappropriation is often considered offensive by the majority group/culture – especially when it affects ingrained beliefs. Cécile Sorin's article on Pier Paolo Pasonili's *La Ricotta* (1962) is a case in point. The Bible is openly pastiched and parodied in Pasolini's carnavalesque reworking of the Crucifixion. In *La Ricotta*, he rewrites the scene in such an irreverent manner that he was sued for blasphemy. Using constant references to contemporary popular culture, pop music or film, while drawing inspiration to stage the scene from canonical painting, Pasolini gives an impertinent reading of the work of Masaccio, Fiorentino and Pontormo. The use of a *mise en abyme*, the staging of a film within the film, also enables Pasolini to make a political comment on the poverty of the proletariat.

Jessy Neau's and Isabelle Roblin's articles provide further exemples of how cultural appropriation can be instrumental in the denunciation of imperialism and of totalitarianism respectively. Neau proposes a multilayered understanding of appropriation, given the structure of the narratives she analyses; the 1824 novel by James Hogg, *Confessions of a Justified Sinner* and Wojciech Has's adaptation of the same. Whereas Pasolini's *La Ricotta* might perhaps seem light-heartedly absurd, a darker, tragic take on religion is presented by Hogg's *Confessions of a Justified Sinner*. It offers two versions of the same story, one told by a chronicler, the other by the protagonist, and it revolves around themes of conversion and indoctrination within a Scottish Calvinist context. The plot includes the murder of a brother, religious fanaticism and, for good measure, suicide. The book moves between Gothic and satire, parody and horror. In 1985, Polish film-maker Wojciech Has adapted it for the screen, relocating the story from Scotland to some unspecified colonial farm. Neau examines how the cultural content and references of the original are thus uprooted and blurred. The film creates its own devices to juggle with the two-voiced narrative and to condemn the indoctrination and political manipulation it describes. From Scotland to Poland, from novel to film, the reappropriation of a theme gives rise to a carnavalesque aesthetics – something that Sorin had also highlighted in her study of *La Ricotta*. In her article, Isabelle Roblin examines the workings of a kind of (re)appropriation that takes us across genres, from fictionalized biography to political cinema. She examines the screen adaptation of a short novel by Fred Ulhmann, set in Germany at the beginning of the 1930s during the rise of Nazi regime. In his screenplay, Harold Pinter added many scenes and characters, changed the plot,

rewrote the dialogues. He turned the book into a much more political work, dealing with the erosion of democratic values and the need to resist oppression. Here, appropriation and retelling verge on *détournement*.

The volume ends on Isabelle Davy's article on Pierre Coulibeuf's experimental film based on the performances of artist Jan Fabre, who deals with the notion of (re)appropriation in a more abstract way. In the piece, fragmentations and repetitions create a rhythm, a new temporality, a continuum within which the viewer can move a — collaboration in more ways than one.

In many of the papers presented here, the intention of the author or artist, as well as the context of production and reception, are pertinent, loaded, and the process of appropriation is aimed at a spectator, viewer, reader. Parody or pastiche, for example, are meant to be spotted and recognised as such — the quoted texts, images or narratives are to be identified; we are invited to establish links between several works; we draw conclusions as to the effects produced by the "return of the appropriated." The complicity of the reader is thus often not only desirable but almost required for a fuller, richer, comprehension. To quote (*in praesentia*), to allude to (*in absentia*), to tell a story, to paint or write "in the manner of," to purloin, claim, appropriate or reappropriate, to subvert — all of these practices are ways of producing meaning, but they also shed light on the production of meaning.

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Interfaces has a tradition of presenting an original artwork by a living artist. For this volume, we invited a British painter, Pete Clarke, to contribute a piece in keeping with the theme of (re) appropriation.

Clarke settled in Liverpool in 1978 after studying at Chelsea School of Art, Bristol's West of England College of Art, Burnley Municipal College, and living for a time on the Isle of Wight and then London. He was Principal Lecturer in Fine Art and MA Course Leader at the University of Central Lancashire, Preston until 2014, and is now working full-time as an artist at the Bluecoat Studios, Liverpool. He has exhibited widely in Britain and internationally.

He leads the artists' initiative 'Eight Days A Week,' arranging reciprocal exhibitions, projects and events in Liverpool and Cologne. He also makes paintings, prints and installations with German artist Georg Gartz, exploring collaborative strategies that question individuality, authorship and authenticity within a European context.

Clarke is interested in the changing landscapes and cityscapes, which in many ways represent for him the social and cultural history that personifies the shifts and developments of 'modernity' and contemporary art. The cover picture, and limited edition print, is titled *The Inadequacies of Thought* (2015). In keeping with the questions tackled in this issue of *Interfaces,* it references and appropriates a painting by Hedda Sterne of New York industrial scaffolding, *NY No X* (1948).

Pete Clarke explains:

> Hedda Sterne was the only woman artist in the famous New York photograph of the 'Irascibles,' the Abstract Expressionist artists who collectively wrote a complaining letter about Moma. Sterne is the lonely woman stood on a table behind the group – Pollock, Rothko etc.
>
> The text is reused selectively from the collaboration I have been engaged in with British poet Robert Sheppard. His poem was about rebuilding the Liverpool waterfront. So the picture is attempting to explore 'historical scaffolding', the process of construction and destruction which I think is the underlying process of modernity (always influenced by Marshall Berman's 'All that is solid melts into air'). The work is paintings and collage on card, some photographs in the Pentimento are from New York 9/11 and Liverpool architecture/scaffolding.
>
> I guess most of my work is about contradictions, conflicts and resolution remaking social and cultural narratives combining history, representation, poetics and aesthetics.[5]

The editors wish to express their gratitude to Pete Clarke for his time and generosity.

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November 2016, Paris Diderot University

[5] Pete Clarke, email to the editors, January 13th, 2016.