Editors' Foreword:Interfaces: Crossing Borders: Appropriations and Collaborations

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INTERFACES: *CROSSING BORDERS: APPROPRIATIONS AND COLLABORATIONS*

Robert Rauschenberg, painter, sculptor, photographer, performance artist, is associated with one of the mid-20th century's art world's audacious crossing of borders, of total appropriation, of complete collaboration when he executed "Erased de Kooning Drawing, Robert Rauschenberg, 1953." The piece was lettered as just quoted by Jasper Johns. As is well known, the project was understood and supported by de Kooning, who, if at first did not like the idea, finally gave Rauschenberg a favorite, multi-media drawing difficult to erase, as it was an important piece for both artists. Rauschenberg's projects always crossed borders; here again to test fundamental assumptions, and even a technical problem: Could drawings be made by erasing their markings, and by extension, need drawing be the foundation of painting? Marcel Duchamp, in appropriating a postcard image of the "Mona Lisa" and placing a mustache on the iconic face, as well as in re-framing everyday found objects as ready-made art, had already raised some questions about appropriations and the nature of art. Unlike Duchamp, Rauschenberg was not in "Erased de Kooning" manipulating commonplace samples of industrial products, but confronting a unique work of art by a living artist of great repute. The "Mona Lisa" *sans moustache* still hangs in the Louvre behind bulletproof glass. Only modern technology can at SFMoMA *re-view* de Kooning's drawings–and also some of de Kooning's erasures. When Rauschenberg was done, only vague traces of de Kooning's work remained; the appropriation was understood by many viewers as a "patricidal gesture." Rauschenberg avowed his respect and devotion for de Kooning's work, and on the contrary declared his erasure gestures to be a celebration of the Abstract Expressionist. The episode also informs us about the nature of collaborations, as there are in fact three artists involved: Rauschenberg who conceived and executed the project; de Kooning who contributed his drawing, and who understood and consented to the sacrifice of a favored work for the sake of an experiment not his own—nor did in practice did they share much in common, but they commonly pursued solving problems in painting; and Jasper John whose words bear witness to the proceedings and raise the questions as to what those proceedings signify (still present, though unseen by the public, is a de Kooning drawing on the verso of the erased paper).

Volume 38 of *INTERFACES*: *CROSSING BORDERS: APPROPRIATIONS AND COLLABORATIONS* revisits and extends the focus of Volume 37: *APPROPRIATIONS AND REAPPROPRIATION OF NARRATIVES*. The term *Appropriations* has itself been variously "appropriated" to include such diverse constructs as cultural *mis*appropration and seizure, influence and adaptation, recycling and subversion, to cultural diffusion and intertextuality. Each presents its own

issues. Referencing Derrida, Liliane Louvel begins her discussion of Stanley Spencer's appropriation of sacred text with the following:

> To appropriate something means to make it proper, to make it one's own and thus to integrate it, to incorporate it, thereby giving it a new life. Because it becomes one's property, one imparts it with one's own being: what one knows, what one hates, what one likes, what one chooses, is. Then the appropriated is cut off from its former self and becomes other, transformed, re-created.[1]

Louvel's focus is primarily on the positive results of appropriation, on what has been made "proper," that is, made good, made correct, made suitable, made fitting, that which is "giving it a new life" and has been "cut off from its former self." Necessarily also implied, but left unstated are collateral issues which remain to be interrogated. What is the relationship of the "appropriated and transformed" to its original matter? If the transformation has now made the source "proper," in what sense is the original "inappropriate," "alien," (even "foul"); was it always so, or at what point did it so become? If given "new life," was the original moribund, can it be erased? Can "the appropriated [be] cut off from its former self" and yet still assume the authority and retain the aggrandizement, the purpose and legitimacy, the original must endow? If "the appropriated [be] cut off from its former self," on what terms is the original still present? For Rolland Barthes, texts are inherently made up of multiple appropriations, gleaned from many sources, and drawn into unwitting and/or conscious dialogue–the site of creative exchange.

The process of appropriation is one of incorporation, assimilation, absorption, engrossment, captivation and transformation of original matter for the benefit of new interests. Collaboration introduces further dynamics and additional questions; it is to be distinguished from a collaborative endeavor in which numerous craftsmen and artists discreetly contribute to a project–e,g., the building of Chartres Cathedral–in that it demands the immediacy of constant mutual transaction and arbitration of ideas which can only be settled by the intermediary of the common project. Is it possible to collaborate without forfeiting some autonomy, some control, relinquishing some personal artistic identity for the sake of the collaboration? Does collaboration confound our formal understanding of that identity–the notion of autonomy in creativity? Or do collaborations aspire to be larger than its constituent parts?

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[1]   Liliane Louvel, "Stanley Spencer's Eccentric Styles," *INTERFACES*, Vol. 37, 2016 115-126. Cf. Derrida's concept of re-appropriation and the impossibility for one to re-appropriate what is proper to another one, like a signature, only the other one can do so, in *Penser à ne pas voir, Ecrits sur les arts du visible,* « Trace et archive, image et art », ed. Ginette Michaud, Joana Maso et Javier Bassas, Paris, *La Différence*, 2013, p. 94.

After all the various instances of appropriations and collaborations are traced, examined, explicated, contextualized theorized, these and similar interrogations are what the articles which follow leave us to ponder.

Véronique Plesch's "On Appropriations" is a magisterial discussion in which she illustrates the plasticity of the term over time. The first section of her article reviews her own scholarship in the iconography of the 14th and 15th century and how certain paintings of that era appropriated and combined the imagery of earlier engravings to create altogether new iconography, an example of "the cultural processes of appropriation." The following section centers on graffiti in the oratory of San Sebastiano in Arborio, Italy. The carved inscriptions on 15th century frescoes of saints are devotional gestures made by worshipers. That these ritual markings pointedly echo the wounds of the saint which bears the name of the oratory, not only record communal events and trauma, but also carry symbolic efficacy; it raises in practical terms the troubling question: What is the relationship of the "appropriated and transformed" to its original matter? The authorities, we understand have stopped the practice and thus have come to one conclusion. Finally, the discussion turns to the transformation and adaptation of tattooing in contemporary culture. Indelible marks, successively signs of belonging, of rites of passage, of possession, of ostracism, of dehumanization, have been appropriated as masques, as decorations, as verbal and visual deflections, as self affirmations, as sites "where culture is inscribed, [and] also where the individual is defined and inserted into the cultural landscape."

"*An Túr Gloine* (Tower of Glass) at the Newton Country Day School of the Sacred Heart" addresses the work the renowned Dublin cooperative workshop did at the American school. Inspired both by medieval aesthetic and the Irish Arts and Crafts movements, this turn of the 20th century collaborative proved to be ideal; their work signals knowledge of "Italian panel painting, metalwork, and medieval stained glass" evident in their appropriations. They also shared the values and aspirations of the Arts and Crafts revival. Virginia Raguin demonstrates how in their execution of the windows, commissioned artists kept their own approach, even as the collective favored modern "linear abstraction and an emphasis on planar composition," even as by collective agreement each window contains "a standing figure" reminiscent of the Italian panel painting. Artists of individual windows retained their personal control and artistic identity throughout the creative process and avoided the "tiresome and dead uniformity devoid of all personality" which arises where a window is constructed by "a number of nameless" hands. Eight women saints are represented.

John A. Tyson's "Signals Crossing Borders: Cybernetic Words and Images and 1960s Avant-Garde Art," recounts the collaboration of the Philippine poet and artist David Medalla and British

curator and critic Paul Keeler. It is the history of a short–lived (August 1964 – March 1966) albeit bright episode of the London based *SIGNALS,* the avant-garde art publication and gallery which in its mission–i.e. manifesto–declared itself a space and forum "for all those who believe passionately in the correlation of the arts and Art's *Imaginative* integration with technology, science, architecture and our environment." Their agenda was more than a call for multidisciplinary practice–and thought it was also that, it crossed language and national borders: *Signals* not only "juxtaposed text and image for rhetorical and aesthetic ends," it contained texts in English, French, Spanish, Portuguese, and Greek, as well as many translations, "and served to forment an imagined transatlantic community of artists and thinkers." More, it provided an alternative space to New York and a platform Latin American artist did not otherwise have.

In "Strategies of Engagement in *Using Life: A Multimodal Novel,* " Marie Thérèse Abdelmessih explores the experimental and collaborative graphic novel of Ahmed Naji who writes and Ayman el-Zorqany who draws. *The Using Life [Istikhdam al-Hayat, 2014]* defies logical and conventional expectations: the title is ironic; appropriations of texts include references to Lucretius, Egyptian and Arabic folklore, ballads, and western pop culture; graphic references seem to allude arbitrarily to classical painting, as well as to cartoons, illustrations, caricatures, a variety of comic book genres, advertisements and other modes of print culture. Texts and graphics seem not merely to digress but disrupt and dispense with any narrative drive, only–as Tristram Shandy might note–to bring them straight into the heart of the matter: cultural dislocation; social dysfunction; failed revolution; political and personal betrayals; intellectual and moral bankruptcy; environmental disaster, and apocalypse.

Christelle Serée-Chaussinand best describes the collaboration of poet Paul Muldoon and painter Rita Duffy in «Lin et *lignes retissés* : *De la réappropriation de l'histoire dans CLOTH de Rita Duffy et Paul Muldoon»* . We cite her abstract: "Muldoon's poetic text and Duffy's paintings were commissioned by the Millennium Court Arts Centre in Portadown in 2007 to feature in a collaborative exhibition and catalogue under the general banner "Interrogating Contested Spaces in Post-Conflict Society." Duffy's images and Muldoon's prose poem–which subtly echo W.B. Yeats's poem "Cuchulain Comforted"–are all about delineating and crossing borders between domestic and institutional spaces; personal and political spaces; garments, skin and psyche; violence and peace; etc. Duffy's images of vestments, shirts or handkerchiefs deprived of the human bodies that gave form to them; Muldoon's prose focusing on flax-growing, linen production and sectarian atrocities, combine and dialogue to address questions of violence, power and impotence, posture and imposture, suture and elision, etc. This paper examines how Rita Duffy and Paul Muldoon exhume the past, appropriate it for their own

creative purposes and re-view it, thus redefining the contours of the political landscape of the North. It also shows how this collaborative creation is about the whole nature of looking."

In "Adrian Henri —Total artist," Catherine Marcangeli focuses on the eclectic interests and multi-faceted work of Adrian Henri (1932-2000) who throughout the 1960s and 1970s not only succeeded in several media–including "paintings, collages, prints, annotated scripts, artefacts and ephemera, silkscreened rock posters, stage wear and . . . audio recordings and film footage"–but as an impresario of collaborative happenings (he generously worked with fellow writers, artists, and rock bands) whose counter-culture was at once local and had international connections. These happenings were at once also installations, and interactive performance; they stimulated the senses of smell and touch of the participants as well as provoked intellectual assumptions, and incited laughter. Henri's playful and irreverent wit is evident in all his work, such as the verbal assemblage of his Daffodil poems "The New, Fast Daffodil"; "The Daffodils") which juxtapose Wordsworth and local auto advertisements; and in visual collages in which plastic daffodils, (the prize found in detergent boxes), are the focal point, as in in his *"Spring"* painting of the *Four Seasons* series.

Michael Phillips in "Blake & Shakespeare" demonstrates Blake's youthful preoccupation and absorption of Shakespeare, evident both in his earliest lyric poetry such as "Mad Song" and in his six–scene dramatic fragment *King Edward the Third* (1776)*,* which would supply a missing historical play. Another fragment, *Tiriel* (c. 1787) recalls *King Lear.* But it is in the *Songs*, where one would least look for it, that the Elizabethan poet and dramatist, is most present: "What Blake has learned from Shakespeare is the use of dramatic personae and point of view. . . . Blake's *Songs* are dramatic vignettes." The images function as stage for the drama; word and image together throb energy. The depth of Blake's absorption of Shakespeare is revealed in *Pity* (1795), a large color monotype, illustrating lines from Macbeth's speech in Act I, Scene vii. The image is not an illustration of the text, as Reynolds and Fuseli had done, but rather "probes beneath the surface of the play . . . [to reveal] the heart and substance of . . . Shakespeare darkest tragedy."

Aaron Seider's "Allure without Allusion: Quoting a Virgilian Epitaph in a 9/11 Memorial" addresses the vexing question of citing an epitaph out of context. Virgil's Latin phrase "*nulla dies umquam memori vos eximet aevo"* translates as "No day shall erase you from the memory of time." The letters forged by Tom Joyce from salvaged tower steel and anchored in concrete float in front of a paper tapestry, a collage by Spencer Finch of 2,983 blue water colors representing the sky as variously remembered. The Memorial Wall is thus a collaboration which provides the citation from Virgil's *Aeneid* a place and context which in Louvel's term makes it "proper." Associated with its source,

in Book IX of the Roman epic, as Aaron Seider among other classicists argues, clearly would "bring considerable discomfort" instead of tribute and honor. The phrase is disassociated from the epic as the source is deliberately not cited– as Aaron Seider underscores in his title and throughout his discussion, decontextualizing and reframing the citation to be "made fit for a new life" even as it retains the mantle of ancient authority.

        In "Text, Image and the Discourse of Disappearing Indians In Antebellum American Landscape Painting," Thomas L. Doughton addresses the discourses of words and images which made possible the appropriation of Native American Lands and the "departure" of Indians from the American Landscape. The implementation of Manifest Destiny rested on a narrative of disappearing Indians and empty lands, a verbal narrative rooted in the early decades of 17th century Massachusetts. Less noted is the mid 19th century *Hudson River School* American landscape painting's role in that discourse. Most known for its depiction of sublime, idealized, pre-pastoral scenery, it invited discovery, exploration; and when it occasionally juxtaposed agriculture with still untamed wilderness, it summoned settlement. The presence of Native Americans are often, as it were, present in their absence in the paintings, that is present in the names and the legends associated with the locales depicted; and in the occasional appearance of one or two very small figures in the representation of a grandiose natural phenomena such a great waterfall, or palisade. The figures function as do the broken columns in some 17th and 18th century Italian landscapes: remnants of a necessary past now disappeared.

        The volume closes with Brittain Smith's review of *Shipbreak*, Claudio Cambon's elegiac image and word documentary of a U.S. merchant marine vessel's last 13,200 nautical mile voyage from a minor port in Louisiana to the salvage yards of Chitagon, Bangladesh. Cambon's photographs are active narratives, and his prose vivid visual representations of that odyssey. Cambon reverses the expectation that the visual is primarily spatial and narrative temporal, and inverts that norm to spatialize the narrative and temporalizes the images, in a way that synergizes narrative (word) and image. Arrived at Chitagon, the *SS Minole* is taken apart, and its raw material, its parts, are transformed, recycled, appropriated for new purposes, given new life in varied industrial, domestic, as well as artistic reincarnations. Shipbreak is the history of an era as well as of the tale of the *SS Minole*, and, as are all great archetypal voyages, it is also a deeply personal story.

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