[image : Saville, Love will tear us apart]

The first piece of sort of **real** 'graphic design' I ever did was in the late 1980s. It was a poster for my first gig with my first **real** band. I was about 15, and we were a painfully serious and teen-angst inspired punk band, our disparate tastes and musical opinions united by a mutual love of another band called Joy Division.

The poster I made was a relatively blatant appropriation of the Peter Saville's cover for Joy Division's 12" 'Love will tear us apart' – the very same copy you see on screen now. I had gone to the public library one day after school and picked out a book on the French neo-classicist painter, David. From memory his paintings were good for our purposes because they photocopied well. **Primarily though** it was his use of light, and the sense of pathos, that seemed to me at the time to closely mimic the imagery with which Joy Division had become inextricably linked. It was a detail from David's 'Death of Marat' That I eventually ended up using to make our poster.

At the time, I can't remember, but I don't think I had thought to check out the name of the designer whose work I was referencing. It definitely didn't occur to me that the work I was appropriating might have, in the first place, been appropriated anyhow. I probably would have thought that **real** designers (not that I knew what they were then) wouldn't copy, but I certainly didn't feel bad about what I'd done – quite the opposite . . . and all our friends thought the poster was very cool.

This then, is how I came to design – through appropriation . . . and it is to this point that I now return to introduce my research topic.

[image : title of project and my name]

My name is Luke, and this is my topic . . .

Looking back over my own practice, as part of a generative exercise in developing this topic, it occurred to me how important appropriation had been at various stages in my work. The moments that, over the last ten years, I seem to value the most, are points at which my practice has changed – or **hybridised**. These **hybrid** moments seem to occur when, via an act of **appropriation**, I have stepped outside of what I have considered to be my actual practice. Moving outside my **ideological boundaries** perhaps?

It is this **generative** notion of appropriation that I wish to advance within this research programme.

The related notions of appropriation and hybridity are sometimes discussed within the discourse of graphic design, yet it seems there is little in the way of any common understanding or development. I obviously won't be adding much to this today – sorry. But this is where I hope my research will lead.

In my talk here today I would like to outline what has been an influential challenge to the practice of appropriation, laid down by Frederic Jameson in the early 1980s – basically his distinction between two types of appropriation – parody or pastiche. To counter this, and to attempt to flesh out my notion of a 'hybridity', I will discuss the much earlier, but less **Modern**, ideas of Mikhail Bakhtin.

[image : Warhol, brillo boxes]

Any investigation into the increasingly common phenomenon of appropriation in the visual arts of the 20thC will run into the American literary critic, Frederic Jameson. In his widely referenced 1983 essay 'Postmodernism, or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism', he mourns the fall of High Modernism.

He mourns the breakdown of distinctions between high culture and mass or commercial arts, and 'tastes'. He mourns the unprecedented level of commodification and commodity fetishism.

[image : Warhol, coke bottles]

Jameson suggests that Warhol's images, appropriated from popular culture are **quote** *"debased and contaminated in advance by their assimilation to glossy advertising images"* unquote.

That Warhol's images foreground commodification and commodity fetishism, without any detectable political or critical edge, is of grave concern to Jameson. He states that they **quote** *"ought to be powerful and critical political statements."* unquote**.**

In what has probably been the most **influential** piece of his argument Jameson draws a distinction between the related acts of pastiche and parody.

Parody contains a satiric impulse, the intention to ridicule and deflate it's subject. Pastiche, according to Jameson, is an entirely neutral practice, **quote** "*pastiche is blank parody, parody that has lost it's sense of humour*" unquote.

Modernism set out to critique, and thereby improve the modern world. Modernism usually combines it's critique with a utopian alternative.

[image : Warhol, elvis]

Images such as Warhol's are, however, ambiguous and ambivalent – they posit only questions, rather than **an answer**.

For Jameson, acts of artistic appropriation are symptomatic of an exhausted and bankrupt culture. Of particular concern to him is the historically referential nature of the then new cultural mood, and he presents us with a Postmodern world in which **quote** *"stylistic innovation is no longer possible, all that is left is to imitate dead styles, to speak through the masks and with the voices of the styles in the imaginary museum."* Unquote.

[image : Saville, Movement: New Order]

In the same year, 1983, an article of similar sentiment appeared in the pop cult magazine 'The Face'. The article, by English cultural critic Jon Savage, represents an early attack on the same trend in graphic design – toward the revival and appropriation of historical forms.

Peter Saville's design for the cover of the New Order album 'Movement' was used as a prime example next to the derogatory headline – **'The Age of Plunder'**. To make the point, Saville's piece was reproduced alongside the 'original' work from which he had 'quoted'.

[image : Saville, + Fortunato Depero poster]

– a poster from 1932 by Fortunato Depero . . .

In a similar tone to Jameson, Savage presents this turn to visual plunder as symptomatic of a culture in which everything is turned into a disposable consumer commodity – **quote** *"It is a characteristic of our age that there is little sense of community, of any real sense of history, as THE PRESENT is all that matters"* unquote.

However, the critiques of Jameson and Savage are now 20 years old. You'd assume that surely they are simply the death throes of a diminishing, once dominant, ideology?

More recently, Rick Poyner's book 'No More Rules: graphic design and postmodernism' – published late last year – looks back specifically over these last two decades in graphic design.

Of course we find that, as both Jameson and Savage had lamented, appropriation was to be a popular strategy within the practice of postmodern design.

[image : 'No More Rules' spread, chapter 3: Appropriation]

In the third chapter, actually titled 'Appropriation', Poyner makes early reference to both Jameson and Savage's critical essays. In fact, Jameson's distinction between pastiche and parody appears to be fundamental to Poyner's survey.

Poyner's use of this distinction, as a construct around which to base a survey of postmodern graphic design is problematic. It is a distinction drawn from deep within Jameson's modernist framework. Poyner's unwillingness to counter Jameson's distinction, and 'unpack' the notion of the pastiche, inevitably keeps him from dismantling and rebuilding a 'postmodern' understanding of artistic appropriation.

Dividing appropriation into two camps, the satirical and the ambivalent, is simplistic and unhelpful. Poyner's chapter on the subject suffers from this. On the one hand he posits the appropriations of Peter Saville as prime movers in the development of early postmodern graphic design . . .

[image : 'No More Rules' page 36, reproduction of Saville's design for Closer]

yet he seems to be at pains to avoid referring to it as pastiche . . . which it surely must be? If it is **not** – and it **certainly is not** – parody.

Throughout Poyner's survey you cannot avoid the sense that value judgements are being made. These seem to be based on the appropriation having a certain degree of what Poyner describes as "parodic resonance". And there's Jameson's distinction again . . . and the dismissal of pastiche.

[image : blank?]

What Poyner's book does do though, is provide some evidential background to the suggestion that the trend toward appropriation and ecclecticism that so upset Jameson and Savage, has actually proven itself to have been relatively progressive, or generative.

Appropriation as a generative strategy, a 'way forward', is the central issue within my research topic. I am therefore setting out to challenge Jameson's influential notion that parody is the only form of appropriation that has any real value, and to reclaim pastiche as a valid and valuable strategy within the design process.

This is the point then at which I would like to try and introduce my developing notion of hybridity, and the role appropriation can play as a catalyst in the evolution of new forms and ideas.

My interest in the term 'hybridity' comes from various sources, but primarily I'm referring to a Russian literary theorist, Mikhail Bakhtin – for whom language is by definition a hybrid form. His notion of a 'dialogic' work – one that is in continual dialogue with other works – counters Jameson's assertion of the blank pastiche.

Where one work influences another, both works are in dialogue. The original is altered by the new work and the new work is in turn altered by the original. There can be no mere imitation, just as there can be no 'blanks' in a dialogic utterance – and all utterances are essentially, according to Bakhtin, dialogic – formed in the process of social interaction.

Following Bakhtin by about 30 years (but not necessarily aware of him?) many postmodern texts have since staked a claim in the term 'hybrid'. Barthe's suggention that any text is a rewriting for instance.

Robert Venturi's 1966 manifesto for 'Contradiction and Complexity in Architecture' gave the signal for a hybrid building style based on a mixture of historical codes, modernism amoungst them – a "messy vitality over obvious unity".

Following this architectural departure from modernism Charles Jencks outlined, in 1977, the postmodern style as one which is "hybrid, double-coded, and based on fundamental dualites".

While precisely the sentiments that Jameson set out to counter, what I like about these ideas is their refusal to deny and ignore that hybrid identities and conflicting relationships both inhabit and define our cultures. To deny this seems to be to isolate your work from the richness of the world.

[image : Duchamp, urinal]

I've had real trouble choosing what start with here, but I think, in terms of appropriation as a 'way forward', it's hard not to start with Duchamp.

I guess I'm including this here because it seems to show so succinctly the role anappropriation can play in **destablising existing conventions**, and how this can lead to new paths of inquiry. . . .

[image : Kreisler poster]

This is a poster I did for Tom Kreisler in about 1999. This is not what I had originally designed for it though. I'd done some very designed kind of thing I think – using an image of his work with some slick modernist typography. I showed it to Tom and his son Aaron and they **hated it**!

A couple of days later Tom and Aaron showed up at my studio with a record by the violinist Fritz Kreisler.

Tom pitched me this longwinded story about how his father had actually taken the photo on the cover while working in Barcelona. I don't know if it was true, although I think now maybe it was . . . anyhow they wanted this to be the poster – only we would be changing Fritz's signature to Tom's.

I of course hated it because it wasn't my idea – it disturbed my conventions. Funny thing is that now I see it as one of the best posters I've ever done . . . if I can actually say that I did it, if you know what I mean? This represents one of the moments I referred to at the beginning of this talk as a 'hybrid moment'.

This is a work by Tony de Lautour. To make these he's cruised around second hand stores buying up cheap landscape paintings by **unknown** Sunday painters. Tony then paints over sections of the existing works adding his own characters and narratives which are in themselves a reference to colonisation. Tony calls these 'Revisionist Paintings' – some people have referred to them as 'collaborations', but they're not. They are appropriations because Tony didn't ask. They're also what I'd call hybrid – two distinctly different voices, combined in one cohesive statement.

This is a work by Ronnie Van Hout. The lettering is actually embroidered on canvas. Through the embroidery the **convention** is disrupted, and the statement hybrid – the handwritten ad from the guitar shop noticeboard, the macho guitar hero speaking through a feminist needlework. Ronnie renders the familiar unfamiliar.

This is another work by Ronnie. It's a miniature model of Colin McCahon standing next to one of his paintings. New Zealand's **biggest** big name in painting, Colin McCahon.

The impact McCahon has had on New Zealand art, and the reciprocal shadow he's left hanging over it is huge! I'm not sure I can present this fact adequately in a short enough amount of time, so you'll have to trust me. It has, for instance, been asked "how does a New Zealand artist **get over** McCahon?". Perhaps this is Ronnie's answer – to recreate him at a much more manageable size?

Ronnie Van Hout is one of quite a few New Zealand artists to appropriate McCahon – Peter Robinson, Michael Parekowhai, Shaun Kerr, Nigel Brown, and a whole list of others . . .

This is a project I began in 2001. The typeface is an appropriation, the letterforms taken as accurately as possible from the 'word paintings' of Colin McCahon. This project again represents what I've referred to earlier as a 'hybrid moment' in my own practice.

For those of you who aren't from New Zealand . . .

[image : McCahon numbers]

This is what some of his work looks like . . . these works exist deep within the cultural memory of New Zealand.

[image : McCahon long painting]

[image : McCahon type, layout for Sofa wall]

. . . and this is my typeface again.

Obviously it's not a perfect reproduction, the subtleties of the paint lost to the necessity of the outline. But it's close enough, and that's the point – the familiar is remade unfamiliar.

[image : McCahon at Hocken – 3 images]

This is an exhibition I put on last year, in which I've installed the typeface back into the context from which it came – the art gallery.

A computer was set up so people could essentially **make their own McCahon's**, and the show pretty soon took on a life of it's own, as people started sticking their own work up around the walls of the gallery.

This of course took the initial appropriation a huge step further, and it was at this point that I really felt like new questions, and reciprocally new paths really began to open up. On reflection this installation serves to highlight that the generative capabilities of appropriation lie deep within the actual relationship **between** form and context, and this brings me back to Poyner again.

[image : Saville, Love will tear us apart]

Throughout his chapter on appropriation, seems to seek out some kind of middle ground between pastiche and parody. He suggests that Saville's appropriations **work** because they create a third idea in the space between the subject matter and the imagery – the context and the form.

[image : blank]

While the connections between all the images I've presented today have quite possibly appeared kind of broad, they do all share some key aspects in common . . .

Firstly none are overtly critical or derogatory – there have been **no parodies** here.

Secondly they each contain **multiple voices**, and are what Bakhtin would call hybrid utterances – they have a dialogic relationship with their original, or referent. The utterance, or statement is new – but it is rendered new via the hybrid relationship of two or more pre-existing forms or voices.

Thirdly, each example, to varying degrees, also **disturbs some set of existing conventions** – thereby rendering the familiar unfamiliar, and opening up new paths to both the practitioner and the audience.

Without conventions there can be no communication. But conventions are essentially **artificial** boundaries – borders that we create as useful tools. Being artificial they can of course be manipulated. Borders can shift and boundaries change, this is essentially **evolution**. Appropriation then can be employed as a strategy with which to facilitate this evolution.

It is these boundaries and conventions I wish to explore by way of appropriation, within this research programme. While boundaries and conventions **can be restrictive**, they can also provide the sites at which to hybridise both artefact and practice, to develop new modes.

It is in this ability to develop and drive hybridisation that I see the generative capabilities of appropriation.

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