

that actually brings the couple together, assumes the legality of their union, and initiates the scene in which James (the hero) will finally be recognized as the legitimate protector of the small child. While Molly's parents are seen near the beginning of the film, not only are they ineffectual (her mother dominates the father who, in contrast to Mikey, never speaks within the entire film)—the "reason" for Molly's own independence and difficulty with men), but they drop out of sight once the hero's family is introduced.

TEN

Appropriating Like *Krazy*: From Pop Art to Meta-Pop

Jim Collins

Loretta Lynn guides my hand to the radio

'Where would I be in times like these without the songs Loretta wrote?

'Cause when you can't find a friend you still got the radio

The radio, oh, listen to the radio

Nanci Griffith¹

Why *not* Theolonius Monk goes country, or Sun Ra meets Hank Williams?

k. d. lang²

The "retro" phenomenon in the past decade has taken a number of different guises, ranging from simple revivalism to highly sophisticated forms of rearticulation that frustrate traditional notions of irony and parody. To dismiss these retro texts as mere nostalgia is to fail to appreciate the complicated set of issues they raise concerning the evolution of popular culture. "Mass" culture texts hitherto have been considered disposable commodities, but what happens when they not only get older and gain a certain kind of "classic" status, but continue to circulate and resonate decades after their original appearance, either through their continued transmission/publication or through their intertextual citation by contemporary texts?

The quotation of mass media images has been a recurrent feature of "museum art"³ for the past four decades, from the Pop art of the fifties and sixties, through the Appropriationist photographers of the late seventies and early eighties. A self-reflexive approach to the ideological, aesthetic, and psychological functions of popular culture has become a commonplace within the institutional frameworks that continue to delimit "high art" in America, but for the most part this creative work (and the critical work devoted to it) concentrates on the impact that the use of popular imagery has *within* and *on* those frameworks. The increasing self-reflexivity of popular culture coming from *within* popular culture remains to be fully explored. How do we account for texts that are so hyperconscious

about their own history and their own discursive frameworks that the very basis of their textuality appears grounded not in representation, but in the appropriation of antecedent representation.

The two quotations that I have appropriated to introduce my argument represent two related but often opposing strategies used by popular artists to sort through the accumulated past of popular culture which, through technological developments (cable television, VCRs, "oldies" rock stations, etc.), now appears in a "suspended simultaneity." That simultaneity is either selectively rehistoricized in an ad hoc manner by popular texts anxious to demonstrate their allegiance to or departure from a particular "tradition," or it is just as selectively recombined in radically eclectic amalgamations that make a virtue of that simultaneity, thereby throwing into question the very category of tradition.

In the first quotation, Nanci Griffith situates herself quite explicitly as the inheritor of Loretta Lynn's brand of traditional country music, and at the same time the song valorizes the very technology that makes Lynn's continuing existence, and continuing relevance, possible. Listeners are encouraged to listen to the radio because it connects them with the music of the past, whereby listening becomes a form of meaningful communication that can take the place of friends "in times like these." What is especially significant about this intertextual reference is its ad hoc construction of a tradition in the very process of insisting on the connection. In the kind of intertextual referencing that Harold Bloom describes in *The Anxiety of Influence* (1973), a poet situates his or her work in relation to the already-established masterpieces (or the author as the producer of them), and literary history is, of course, filled with countless examples of poets and prose writers laboring to align themselves with various "Great Traditions." The particular case of Nanci Griffith's song, which epitomizes the historicist strategy in contemporary popular culture, is differentiated by the absence of the "always already" masterpiece status of the antecedent text, which is given its "classic" status only through the intertextual reference that valorizes in both directions at once, privileging the present text as an inheritor while it defines the wealth of the progenitor. Popular texts operating outside the confines of the academy and/or museum are deprived of the very institutional frameworks that secure canons and maintain traditions. Consequently, the intertextual reference, from simple quotation to elaborate "cover versions" of an antecedent song, remains one of the few consistently viable ways of conferring value to that antecedent text and of forging significant connections, even if such references fail to give the sort of stability to those relations that the academy or the museum might be able to ensure.

The other epigraph, a brief remark made by another contemporary country singer, suggests a rather different strategy, one which relishes that lack of stability, the outside-the-walls status of popular texts making them

subject to virtually endless re-articulation because they are not "anchored" by the academy/museum. The singer in this case moves beyond the merely revivalist, reflecting the shifting nature of the "retro" gesture. Until quite recently, k. d. lang had "made a name for herself" by insisting that she was the reincarnation of Patsy Cline, naming her band the "Re-Clines," and having her own album produced by Cline's producer Owen Bradley in order to reconstruct the same sound for her album. This obsessive revivalist perspective is self-consciously retro, but the more current statement of the epigraph signals a very different sort of retro gesture that eschews simple revivalism just as self-consciously. Lang's statement is emblematic of this other strategy of re-articulation which has become so prevalent in texts like Jay Cantor's *Krazy Kat* (1987), Max Apple's *Propheteers* (1987), David Lynch's *Blue Velvet* (1987), Julien Temple's *Earth Girls Are Easy* (1989), Alan Moore's *Watchmen* (1986), and Frank Miller's *The Dark Knight Returns* (1986). According to these texts, the last thing popular culture needs to be is canonical; popular texts remain a source of attraction decades after their initial appearance because they continue to circulate, and therefore resonate, in diverse ways for heterogeneous audiences, both in their original forms and in their various reincarnations. One finds in these texts not the construction of a separate-but-equal canon, but the replacement of the canon with the eclectic paradigm which rejects the necessity of the canon as a means of organizing cultural production and evaluating its effects. This involves a similar kind of ad hoc development of hitherto unspecified intertextual connections, but here the goal appears to be not the acquisition of a certain degree of cultural legitimacy, but a far-reaching redefinition of what constitutes cultural literacy.

Mickey Is Taken to the Museum; Cindy Goes to the Movies

To understand the ongoing reconstruction of the history of popular culture and the reestimation of its current functions, I believe it necessary to discuss the historical development of both the appropriationist strategies used by primary texts and the critical work devoted to them. While the hyper-consciousness of popular culture in the eighties may not have "evolved" out of Pop art or "Image Scavenger" photography in any causal or teleological sense, comparing the recent work of Jay Cantor and Max Apple to Roy Lichtenstein and Cindy Sherman enables us to appreciate their points of contact, as well as their profound differences, which reflect the diverse set of personal motivations/institutional frameworks that inspire their different uses of popular images.

The first significant, widespread reevaluation of popular culture, specifically in regard to its binary relationship with "high art," occurred in Britain and the United States from the late fifties to the mid-sixties. The term "Pop art" was used to describe quite differently the relationship between

spectives on what was then considered "mass culture," i.e., homogeneous, mass-produced objects designed for immediate gratification/enslavement of their consumers. But the very appropriation of Pop imagery and mass production techniques by artists as different as Richard Hamilton, Andy Warhol, David Hockney, Claes Oldenburg, and Roy Lichtenstein meant that the popular could no longer be banished from the canvas or the museum. The definition of the avant-garde as that-which-is-not-mass-culture (developed and institutionalized by Theodor Adorno, Clement Greenberg, and company) was at that point held up to greater scrutiny because of the growing dissatisfaction with Abstract Expressionism as the official, hegemonic style of museum art. The aridity of that style (its self-enclosure, its removal from the realm of everyday experience, its Romantic fetishization of the originality of the artist's personal vision) and its institutionalization (the fact that it was not only hegemonic, but immensely profitable) led to a reevaluation of the dichotomies that hitherto safeguarded its "integrity." The need to challenge this institutionalization is typified by Oldenburg's insistence that "I am for an art that is political-eretical-mystical, that does something other than sit on its ass in a museum. I am for an art that grows up not knowing that it is art at all, an art given the chance of having a starting point of zero."⁴ The recognition that "art work" as a critical category had become, by the late fifties, a set of pernicious prohibitions and enclosures antagonistic to the original, radical gestures of the avant-garde led to the Pop attack on delimitation of that category. The mass production techniques adopted by Warhol and others were an affront to that most sanctified of categories—personal genius—that by the late fifties—early sixties was a form of product differentiation, a "name-brand" that guaranteed investment value: "That's probably one reason I'm using silk screen, so that no one would know whether my picture was mine or somebody else's."⁵ Using image conventions and techniques developed within the realm of popular culture became a way of challenging the structures of that discursive formation that had "capitalized" on its prohibitions that were so completely institutionalized in its modalities and circuits of exchange.

Whether Pop artists were engaged in formulating a radical critique of the commercialization of Modernism, or simply "capitalizing" themselves by violating those prohibitions, has been debated since their first appearance. The initial criticism of Pop—that it wasn't "transformative" enough to be considered genuine art (i.e., that Lichtenstein, Warhol, et al., simply appropriated images without demonstrating the requisite level of personal manipulation of those images) reveals the exigencies of that discursive formation which demanded that any image "outside the walls" of that discourse had to be "converted" before entering the Holy City of the museum. The fetishization of the act of personal transformation was founded on a Romantic notion of creativity that remained firmly in place. Two decades later, to be "transformative" remains artists' highest priority, only now the

term of choice is "oppositional" or "contestatory," reflecting the move away from personal creativity as transcendent value to a more "politicized" notion of creation as critical intervention. Andreas Huyssen's discussion of the cultural politics of Pop rests squarely on this division between the transformative and nontransformative potential. His historical overview of Pop centers on his own first encounter with it at the *Documenta* in Kassel in 1968, when he believed it might signal the beginning of a "democratization of art and art appreciation," but he then rejects it, arguing that "Pop artists took the trivial and banal imagery of daily life at face value, and the subjugation of art by the laws of a commodity-producing capitalistic society seemed complete."⁶ The failure to be sufficiently transformative in this context means that capitalism necessarily subjugates art, but if truly transformative, then art subjugates capitalism. The absolute, either/or dichotomy leaves no room for ambivalence, for texts which might critique the mass-produced homogenization of mass culture, but which still acknowledge the force of popular images, especially in reference to the aridity of Abstract Expressionism. Huyssen modifies the rigid either/or alternatives in his conclusion, but even there he maintains, "the goal should still be a fictional transformation (Umfunktionierung) of false needs in an attempt to change everyday life."⁷

In his analysis of the origins of British Pop in the fifties, Dick Hebdige likewise acknowledges the inevitable absorption of Pop art into the language of commercial art, but argues that it played a crucial role in redefining the term "culture," throwing into sharp relief the tensions between the Arnoldian concept of culture ("the best that has been thought and said") and the more anthropological sense of the term (the ritual, images, and practices that form a "whole way of life"). Hebdige makes the crucial point that

the dismissive critical response [to Pop] merely reproduces unaltered the ideological distinctions between, on the one hand, the "serious," the "artistic," the "political," and on the other, the "ephemeral," the "commercial," the "pleasurable"—a set of distinctions which Pop practice set out to erode. . . . Pop's significance resides in the ways in which it demonstrated, illuminated, lit up in neon, the "loaded arbitrariness" of those parallel distinctions, lit up the hidden economy which serves to valorize certain objects, certain forms of expression, certain voices to the exclusion of other objects, other forms, other voices by bestowing upon them the mantle of Art.⁸

Lichtenstein's comic strip paintings of the early sixties destabilized the parallel distinctions Hebdige cites; as such they helped inaugurate a process of redefinition of both the confines of popular culture and the critical pre-suppositions used to evaluate cultural production. But in order to appreciate the significance of Lichtenstein's work in relation to the more recent

assaults on those parallel distinctions, we need to examine more closely what was and wasn't appropriated from popular culture in those paintings. Lichtenstein became interested in the subject matter and Ben Day dot patterns of the comic book because of the graphic possibilities they offered. In response to the criticism that the characters featured in his "action" comics (e.g., *Takka Takka* [1962], *Whiam* [1962], *O. K. Hot Shot* [1963]) were militaristic, he argued that "the heroes depicted in comic books are fascist types, but I don't take them seriously in these paintings—maybe there is a point in not taking them seriously, a political point. I use them for purely formal reasons." "What I do is form, whereas the comic strip is not formed in the sense I'm using the word; the comics have shapes, but there has been no intent to make them intensely unified. The purpose is different, one intends to depict and I intend to unify."⁹ Lichtenstein's appropriation of both the iconography and materiality of the comics represented an affront to both Modernism and the institution of the museum, but the emphasis on formal experimentation, in which Ben Day dots were yet another form of abstraction, made Lichtenstein's "radical" gesture easily recuperable by both. That the comics merely served as the raw material for a new minimalism becomes particularly conspicuous in Lichtenstein's subsequent homages to Cubism, Purism, and Surrealism, which feature the same Ben Day dots, but also figures appropriated from Picasso, Leger, and Dali. The comparability of the comic and Modernist "masterpiece" as sources for abstract experimentation/quotation emerges most clearly in his two Artist's Studio paintings. In the first, "Look Mickey" (1973), Donald Duck is the image on the wall, but in the later "The Dance" (1974), Matisse's masterpiece functions as the visual inspiration/antecedent for this work.

Recognizing this comparability of comics and Early Modernists as sources of appropriation in Lichtenstein's more recent work does not mean that his work does not destabilize the "parallel distinctions" to which Hebdige refers, but it does require a careful delineation of the object of the attack, of just what after all was being destabilized. Lichtenstein's comic book paintings of the early sixties were in a sense already "Artist Studio" paintings, in that the arena of conflict is still the specific discursive formation constituted by the gallery, the legacy of art history, the extended New York art scene, etc. Lawrence Alloway, in his perceptive study of Lichtenstein, argues that in paintings like *Reclining Nude* (1977), which quotes Henry Moore, Salvador Dali, and his own "Brushwork" series from 1966, Lichtenstein constructs the twentieth-century equivalent of the "gallery picture," comparable to Jan Brueghel's *The Sense of Sight*, or David Tenier's *Gallery of the Archduke Leopold William*; all "take culture itself as subject."¹⁰ Alloway's analogy is convincing, but just how culture is constituted here is not fully explored. For the comic book paintings of the early sixties, "culture" might include the popular image, but it remains circumscribed by the institutional framework that produced those parallel dis-

tinctions. Two paintings in particular, *Masterpiece* (1962), and *M-Maybe* (1965) epitomize that sense of enclosure, of a calculated gesture made in reference to a very particular framework. In the former, the woman says, "Why Brad Darling, This Painting is a Masterpiece! My, Soon You'll Have All of New York Clamoring For Your Work," while in the latter, a lone woman says of an unspecified he, "M-Maybe He Became Ill and Couldn't Leave the Studio!" Arguably, the last phrase defines the scope of the attack—these paintings, these appropriations have force only so long as they remain, in a sense, within the studio, within the wholly artistic space defined by a particular circuit of production and evaluation. The use of the comic book creates a scandal only within that discursive space, and as such the iconoclastic dimension of the appropriation exists only within the world of museum art. Lichtenstein's pop appropriations may tell us a great deal about the limitation of that institutional framework, but they evidence little or no interest in the resonance of popular texts outside that realm, how they might capture the imagination of widespread publics, how they might affect us at a visceral level, forming the "stuff that dreams are made of."

The Appropriationist or "Image Scavenger" school that developed in photography of the late seventies—early eighties, specifically the work of Sherrie Levine, Barbara Kruger, and Cindy Sherman, also made appropriation a weapon in a similar series of attacks on the institutionalized notion of Fine Art Photography, but one also finds, particularly in the work of Sherman, a shift in emphasis, a fascination with the effects of the popular beyond the confines of that discursive formation. Levine's photographs of masterpiece photographs by Walker Evans and Edward Weston challenged the fetishized values of personal vision and the "aura" of the individual work in a medium capable of infinite reproducibility. Kruger's use of advertising images/file photos to which she affixes printed messages transforms the "found" image into a confrontational text. The openly discursive (in the Benvenistean sense of the term as well as the Foucauldian) nature of that confrontation in works such as *We Won't Play Nature to Your Culture*, *You Destroy What You Think Is Difference*, and *You Divide and Conquer* (all 1981–83) signals a crucial shift in the motivation for the appropriation. Here the exigencies of appropriation are not a matter of personal expression as formal experimentation, but a matter of taking control over an image-making process that, within a patriarchal order, has served only to exploit and subjugate women. The appropriation of the fashion image, coupled with the confrontational address to other women ("we") and men ("you"), foregrounds the connection between the construction of images and the construction of gender difference in both the "original" photo and in its re-articulations. Here Kruger broadens the scope of the appropriationist gesture, expanding the number of interested parties involved by that activity, and in so doing redefines the "stakes" by making the reception of

popular imagery a vital critical issue. As such, Kruger's work marks a significant advance over the Pop art appropriationists because of its sensitivity to impact. This is not to suggest that Pop art was oblivious to or unconcerned with reception, or that it didn't involve a different relationship between artist and spectator. Carole Ann Mahsun argues, following Alway, that in Pop "spectators are confronted with a self-contained entity removed from its familiar surroundings and challenged to do their 'own work of looking.' . . . Thus the pop artist avoids interpretation, 'message,' emotion, or personal style—avoids anything alien entering into the viewer's experience—and instead turns the viewer back upon his [sic] own sensory experience by thwarting conventional interpretive practice."¹¹ While Mahsun's characterization of that relationship may be accurate, the activity of the viewer is predicated on the relative silence of the artist, whose very disinterested neutrality on the subject of eventual impact allows that viewer to fill in the gap, as it were. But Kruger could hardly be called silent, nor does she avoid interpretation. Her second-person address emphasizes quite explicitly that the text is constructed in reference to that "you" who has already "interpreted" in regularized ways, so the appropriationist gesture is by ideological and semiotic necessity a discursive exchange.

The increased emphasis on the resonance of images outside the realm of museum art also distinguishes the work of Cindy Sherman, who, through her particular strategy of appropriation, conflates the concerns of personal expression and the cultural impact of popular media images. In her series of "Untitled Film Stills" (1977–80) and "Untitled" photographs (1981–85), Sherman poses herself as the heroine of a number of different genre films, enacting or "impersonating" the visual stereotypes those films produced and/or reiterated. By making herself into a series of icons, Sherman immerses herself in popular imagery and explores the connections between that imagery and personal gender identity. Where a Pop text like Richard Hamilton's *She* (1958) may have presented a series of advertising images featuring women in the home (forming what he describes as "a sieved reflection of the ad man's paraphrase of the consumer's dream"),¹² Sherman's impersonations situate her as a performing artist within that world, thereby constructing the strange duality which is the foundation of her work. She is critical outsider, the director of an imaginary film, and character within the film, whose identity is enmeshed in and inseparable from that iconography. In her introduction to Sherman's photographs, Judith Williamson stresses the implication of the viewer in that work, arguing that Sherman's presentation of the multiple images of women "is such a superb way of flashing the images of 'Woman' back where they belong, in the recognition of the beholder. . . . Within each image, far from deconstructing the elision of image and identity, she very smartly leads the viewer to *construct* it; by presenting a whole lexicon of feminine identities,



4. Cindy Sherman, "Untitled Film Still #6."

all of them played by 'her,' she undermines your little construction as fast as you can build them up."¹³ Following Williamson's argument, one could say that Sherman is able to effect such a critique because she is the director, character, and beholder simultaneously, "Woman" looked at, but also a woman looking ambivalently at her self-image as cultural image. In this context, the act of appropriation is inseparable from the act of self-definition.

While the work of Kruger and Sherman invests the art of appropriation with broader significance by emphasizing the impact of popular images, as well as their modes of production, popular culture remains a category framed by the institution of museum art. This is not to suggest that either

photographer wants to remain within that discursive context; like Pop, Appropriationist photography was initially considered an affront to all that was sacred about that context. But just as Pop was absorbed into the museum, the Post-Modernist photography of the early eighties has already been institutionalized. Abigail Solomon Godeau details this most recent absorption, pointing to the inclusion of these photographs in shows at galleries (Burden, Light, and White Columns) that specialized in showcasing Modernist and Official Art photography. "The appearance of Postmodernist photography within the institutional precincts of art photography signaled that whatever difference, much less critique, had been attributed to the work of Levine, et al., it had now been fully and seamlessly recuperated under the sign of art photography, an operation that might be called deconstruction in reverse."¹⁴

The cultural significance of the appropriation/citation of popular iconography may have been taken beyond the confines of museum art in the work of Kruger and Sherman, and in the process culture is defined as more than simply the best that has been shot and developed, but that activity remains a critique of popular image-making and Fine Art Photography from within the discursive formation of the latter, a formation that might steal images from the former, but must still keep its distance. That the critical component of that discursive formation continues to insist on a demonstrable distancing, a discernible, oppositional "transformation" of the popular image is apparent in Solomon-Godeau's condemnation of what she labels the "second generation" of Post-modernist photographers (Frank Majore, Alan Belcher, Stephen Frailey), "whose relation to the sources and significance of their appropriative strategies (primarily advertising) seemed to be predominantly a function of fascination."¹⁵

To be fascinated appears to be the greatest sin of all, because it suggests a lack of respect for an institutional framework that may be challenged, but not jilted, especially by artists who have been seduced by mere popular culture. Making fascination antithetical to "critique" has been a stock-in-trade feature of avant-gardist self-promotion since its inception; fascination has been made to mean uncritical acceptance, promiscuity, lack of rigor, etc. Patrice Petro, in her brilliant study of Weimar cinema, makes the crucial point that distinctions between the popular and the avant-garde have been consistently linked to gender difference. "Mass culture is itself commonly personified as 'feminine,' having the capacity to induce passivity, vulnerability, even corruption. And as mass culture's opposite, modernism was often construed as masculine, as providing an active and productive alternative to the pleasure of mass cultural entertainment."¹⁶ The disqualification of fascination as an acceptable response to popular culture reveals a series of interconnected problems, particularly the inability to account for pleasure,¹⁷ except in terms of a negative category, that which the truly

oppositional text will not allow, except in the form of a self-congratulatory detachment.

We Won't Play Other to Your Culture

The viability of fascination as a critical perspective distinguishes the most recent appropriationist texts like Max Apple's *The Propheteers* (1987) and Jay Cantor's *Krazy Kat* (1987), and fascination as a category is particularly useful in differentiating these works from earlier strategies of appropriation. Here the hyperconscious reflection on the nature of popular culture is not conducted from within a discursive framework that defines popular culture as its "Other," but in relation to the conventions, mythologies, and institutions of popular culture as another sort of discursive formation, or more precisely, a series of discursive formations. While these works are still aggressively appropriative in orientation, they are meditations on popular culture and how it resonates outside the walls of museum art. They are "transformative" in regard to the history of popular culture and its possible functions, challenging accepted opinions concerning its homogeneity, what it is capable of expressing, what factors shape its most recognizable forms, and how it circulates as a commodity.

In *The Propheteers*, Apple appropriates not just images or iconography of popular culture, but the entire personas of some of its major figures. Where Lichtenstein's artist's studio may have included Donald Duck, Apple's novel makes Walt Disney one of its major characters in this story of the development of Disney World, in which Disney's major foils are his evil brother Will, his rival Howard Johnson, and his sworn enemy, Marjorie Post Merriweather (and by extension her father C. W. Post, and her lover Clarence Birdseye). Unlike E. L. Doctorow's *Ragtime*, which features cameo appearances by historical figures like Emma Goldman and Henry Ford, Apple makes these figures his central characters, and instead of characterizing them in ways consistent with their historical images, he invents elaborate personal histories that he admits in his prefatory comments are "drawn entirely from my imagination. My only connection to the real names used in this novel is the frequent appearance of a number of them at my breakfast table." The reference to the breakfast table as the source or genesis of his inspiration is significant insofar as it functions as an image comparable to Lichtenstein's "Artist's Studio" paintings, but the disparity between the two sites suggests profound differences in their respective positions vis-à-vis popular culture. Where Lichtenstein's appropriation is a matter of bringing a "foreign" element into his discursive space, Apple's appropriation comes from within a world where Disney, Johnson, and Post form the fabric of everyday life.

Apple's imaginary history undermines a number of the most commonly

held assumptions about mass culture, especially the binary, negative definition—i.e., that its mass-produced, corporation-based nature means that it can be neither folk culture (which was indigenous, spontaneous, of the people), nor genuine art (which is unique, of the individual artist). Folk culture and high art are united in this negative definition by their alleged authenticity and organicity, founded on the direct connection between produced and artistic producer. Apple's characters are among the most significant inventors of mass cultural existence, but their respective products, and the visions of America they entail, are represented within this novel as fundamentally authentic and almost maniacally organic. The novel opens with Howard Johnson endlessly roaming the highways with his assistant Milly, searching out locations for new motor inns, Johnson roams until he begins to know the territory:

Howard knew the land, Mildred thought, the way the Indians must have known it. . . . Howard had a sixth sense that would sometimes lead them from the main roads to, say, a dark green field in Iowa or Kansas. . . . And before the emergency brake had settled into its final prong, Howard Johnson was into the field and after the scent. . . . he felt some secret vibration from the place. Turning his back on Milly he would mark the spot with his urine or break some of the clayey earth in his strong pink hands, sifting it like flour for a delicate recipe. She had actually seen him chew the grass, getting down on all fours like an animal. . . .¹⁸

If the determination of the right place for his "houses" is described in terms of an organic folk-culture ritual, the inspiration for the orange roofs is characterized in terms of poetic inspiration comparable to genuine Art. In the course of their early travels, Milly and Howard visit Robert Frost, Howard's old poetry teacher. The two great men meet amicably, and then after leaving Frost, Howard and Milly stop for lunch, from which point Milly remembers:

We stayed on that hilltop while the sun began to set in New Hampshire. I felt so full of poetry and of love. Howard only an hour's drive from Robert Frost's farmhouse. . . . I think the sun set differently that night, filtering through the clouds like a big paintbrush making the top of the town all orange. And suddenly I thought what if the tops of our houses were that kind of orange, what a world it would be. . . . The feeling we had about that orange, Howard, that was ours and that's what I've tried to bring to every house, the way we felt that night. Oh it makes me sick to think of Colonel Sanders, and Big Boy, and Holiday Inn and Best Western. . . .¹⁹

The connections that Apple makes between Johnson and the Indian (the natives who know nature most intimately) and Johnson and Frost (one of America's foremost nature poets), obviously suggest a high degree of

both authenticity and organicity in his "oranging" of America. But the conclusion of Milly's reverie is just as notable, because it restricts those qualities to Johnson and depicts his rivals as their antithesis. Here "mass" culture is represented not as one homogeneous system of relations, but as a deeply conflicted, internally inconsistent collection of divergent envisionings of America. The conflict between authentic and inauthentic, organic and inorganic within popular culture recurs throughout the novel. Howard Johnson and Walt Disney come to represent (at least in the former's mind) polar opposites along exactly these lines. Their opposition becomes most explicit when Johnson stops in San Antonio and daydreams while contemplating the Alamo:

Without too much effort he imagined himself, Milly, and Otis entrapped in that small clean fort while Walt Disney surrounded them with the engines of war. The Disney wolves and dogs growled at the walls, mice skirted the parapets. . . . Outside the fort were the Disneys, like bus tourists lined up before a gas station urinal. O smug one come out, they yelled from their pissoir, O eater of ice cream, longer for calm sleep, make way for us who are future.

We have a thousand musicians synchronized to our movements and ten million carefully framed actions. All possibilities are predrawn. Already, five minutes from now our banner in 35-mm. color overhangs your roof. Your Alamo Lounge will become a wax museum, your 28 flavors a single gray Tastee Freeze. . . . As he tried to enjoy a quiet meal, the Disney creatures bombarded the walls with their popcorn machines and stormed the motel on ladders of pink and white peppermint sticks. Fess Parker led them singing the Davy Crockett anthem. . . .²⁰

The conflict between Johnson and Disney, each representing different ways of capturing the hearts and minds of their public, culminates in the mid-sixties, and as such this novel could be considered a retro text, but the choice of this period is not motivated by a nostalgia (even a parodic one) for a bygone era. The choice of this period emphasizes its pivotal status in the history of popular culture due to the advent of television, the theme park, the superhighway, rising levels of disposable income, etc., all of which made for an increasingly mobile America where consumers begin to circulate as endlessly as the popular artifacts that surround them. At this point, American culture is "in transit" in a physical sense, but also in reference to what this new public considered to be pleasure or entertainment. Johnson sees his mission as providing comfort, a "house" (not a hotel) away from home, where "you were redeemed from the road,"²¹ whereas Disney and company build an empire on the exhilaration of the road, the very foreignness, the fact that enjoyment comes from displacement. As Milly tells Howard, "The Disneys have made a happy little nightmare. Making nightmares, Howard, even good ones, is the opposite of what we've always tried to do."²² The opposition between Johnson's trav-

elers and Disney's vacationers represents the shifting geographic and psychological terrain. For the former, being in transit, the loss of connection with a sense of place, is a trial to be endured, but for the latter it becomes the maximum entertainment.

As a self-conscious meditation on popular culture, *The Propheteers* cultivates rather than avoids the category of "fascination." But in its appropriations the novel adopts a perspective that is neither uniformly condemnatory, nor uniformly celebratory, opting instead for a *critical* ambivalence. I use the term "critical" here because that ambivalence is not a matter of deadpan apathy, but alternation, its lack of consistency due to the very inconsistency of popular culture, which is made to appear both captivating and contemptible. This alternation is most explicit in the relation between Walt and Will Disney, which Apple constructs in terms of a popular culture doppelgänger, with Walt playing the role of the artist-visionary and Will the shameless huckster. Each envisions the nature (and eventual functions) of comic figures according to his own set of values. "An initial philosophical premise separated the brothers or cartoons throughout their lives. . . . To Walt Disney a mouse was always a mouse. Mouseness, not humanity, was the heart of his creation. The business Disney saw it otherwise. The mouse was only a cute disguise for the man who lurked within. If you put tits on girl mice, then Mickey could walk up and squeeze one and everyone would get a kick out of that."²³ Where Walt is lost in the joy of drawing, obsessed with refining the act of movement, Will hustles merchandise. One of his abortive projects is to sell biblical cartoons to the Sunday school market: "I'd say one good seven minute cartoon that we could put out for less than eighty thousand would revolutionize the Sunday Schools. . . . We talked to Stravinsky about the music and Vincent Price about the voice, but the Bishop said, 'No dice.' And this guy George Beverly Shea who does all the Billy Graham arrangements said it was too cute. Imagine a guy like him calling Walt Disney and Stravinsky too cute. Did anyone say De Mille's *Ten Commandments* was too cute?"²⁴ What happens to Walt's vision is the same thing that happens to Howard Johnson. "HJ felt the motions and the needs of travelers, and he translated his feeling into buildings and watering places. Now, his vision had become a large public corporation."²⁵ The opposition between individuals and corporations becomes the basis for the novel's ambivalence. Traditional notions of "mass" culture are rendered inapplicable because the visions of its creators are represented as entirely organic and personal, but the novel resists any kind of naive celebration of popular culture, because the popularization of those visions inevitably leads to their perversion when those visionaries shift from prophets to profiteers. Apple's own vision may be considered nostalgic, then, but only insofar as it privileges the preincorporate moment of development when popular invention remains authentic, a manifestation of a kind of postindustrial "folk" culture that responds to

the uniqueness of a newly mobile American culture without a nostalgia for the pretechnological past.

That the original inspiration for and eventual uses of popular invention are most often disconnected, or even contradictory, is most evident in the relationship between C. W. Post and Salvador Dali. Post conceives of his creation (breakfast cereal) not as a commodity, but as a distillation of his vision—in this case a world where cattle will not have to be slaughtered, because everyone will turn to a life of spiritual vegetarianism now that they have a nutritious alternative. Post's vision becomes most maniacal (and Apple's narration most parodic) when he tries to have meat dishes painted out of western art, first attempting to acquire some of the greatest masterpieces of European art, most especially *The Last Supper*, and then hiring Dali to replace the offending roasts with tasteful (and even more nutritious) fruit substitutes. This plan inspires an assassination plot directed at Post by his art dealer, and its completion remains a mystery. Not until Marjorie meets Dali years after her father's death does he make his rather startling confession. Initially expressing only contempt for the project, Dali later admits,

I was 20 years old. If you mentioned Rubens or Leonardo to me at that time tears still came to my eyes. . . . Great art, the glories of the past, the mysteries of every brush stroke—you know the whole story. It intimidates the young. There are your great-great-grandparents growing more powerful over the centuries, strengthened by death, accumulating a whole army of commentators and owners, each masterpiece becomes like a state over time, with its own citizens, its own language, it has rights and privileges. Then along comes your father, C. W. Post of Battle Creek, who recognizes none of this, is not affected by any worship of the past, considers it all idolatry. . . . Your father's commission cured me of worship of forms, of worship of the past. He didn't save the world from idolatry, but saved me from it.²⁶

This reformulation of the relationship between the realms of popular culture and the avant-garde/high art is also foregrounded in Jay Cantor's *Krazy Kat: A Novel in Five Panels*. Like *The Propheteers*, this text is retro, appropriationist (abducting figures from the history of both popular and high art), and extrapolative (inventing entire new existences for popular icons, in this case the characters in George Herriman's legendary comic strip). As in Apple's novel, popular culture is the primary subject matter of the fiction, only here the hyperconsciousness is intensified further by the proliferation of discursive frameworks and the introduction of characters who are not just popular icons, but icons who are self-conscious about their own iconicity, obsessed with their own reception as they circulate through those frameworks.

The novel opens with Krazy Kat and Ignatz now in retirement from

their strip career, but contemplating a return. Crazy sits reading trade papers, checking grosses, while Ignatz reads critical essays about them and ransacks novels looking for plots for their comeback. She muses over the tyranny of the box office and the technological changes that have occurred in storytelling, "from vaudeville to motion pictures, to radio, to television . . . and next? Computers? Video games? How would the next generation tell its stories?"²⁷ She also reflects on the current state of the comic pages, particularly the representation of cats. "They were Cute Cats, not Crazy Kats, sentimental Hallmark cards of cats tasting of cardboard sentiments cooked up on assembly lines by anonymous hands. . . . And with all the sentimentality, she thought, came its ghost, its ugly shadow—hardly its opposite!—obscurities like a book . . . a book of *things to do with a dead cat* . . . It was a sick jaded audience that wanted—as these moderns did—to either drown in sugar or . . . poison mixed with amyl nitrate."²⁸ What is especially significant about Crazy Kat's reveries is the way Cantor represents popular culture—as the intersection of aesthetic, economic, critical, and technological factors that are in a constant state of refiguration.

That a popular icon is always in circulation is emphasized by the novel's aggressive eclecticism, in which different discursive formations, each giving different identities to Crazy and Ignatz, roll by like cylinders in a cultural revolver. In the first panel, the desert world of their comic landscape is invaded by the Los Alamos project, at which point the novel begins to mix "shop-talk" about a comeback with Crazy Kat's frustrated desire for Ignatz (and Robert Oppenheimer) along with scenes of nuclear holocaust. The second panel, "The Talking Cure," is a hilarious parody of Freud's correspondence, as Ignatz decides that their new career should be as analyst and analysand. In the third panel, "The Talking Pictures," the characters from the strip meet up with the Producer, with whom they discuss a cinematic comeback, the Producer throwing out one concept after another, featuring the pair in a western, a musical, a bio film, etc. The Producer is remarkably similar to Apple's Will Disney, demonstrating the same obsession with marketing, particularly tie-ins: "That's where the money is nowadays. You people are a potential K Mart full of franchised plastic."²⁹ In the fourth panel, "The Possessed," Crazy Kat and Ignatz meet the COMISALADS—the Comic Strip Artists Liberation Army, Division One, who call for the death of "Fascist Copyright Holders Who Suck the Brains of Avant-Garde Artists!"³⁰ This group, obviously a knockoff of the Symphonese Liberation Army (a link made even more explicit by the fact that Crazy Kat and Ignatz belong to "Mr. Hearst"), represents the inevitable conflation of radical politics and television culture, the former obsessed with media exposure, the latter driven by an insatiable appetite for the really new. "Media access sped like a drug through Mouse's blood. Getting on TV Ignatz said *was* the new avant-garde mass art form!"³¹ In the last panel, "Venus in Furs," the couple now imagine themselves as human

beings, inventing their "own" fantasy scenario, at which point the novel changes discourse again, now resembling, alternately, the psychoanalytic case study and hard-core pornography, in which the two try to come to terms with the inherent sadomasochism of Ignatz's brick-throwing, which Crazy sees as a gesture of love. The couple emerges from their ordeal as a wildly successful cabaret act, "Kat and Ignatz."

This eclecticism is not mere "pastiche" because the shifts from panel to panel are not simply stylistic variations, but changes in discursive formation—i.e., we see how each formation redefines their image as popular icons, as well as the love relationship between them in terms of its own discursive economy, now so wholly institutionalized. Where Lichtenstein's appropriations of popular culture were defined in terms of the institutional framework that was/is museum art, Cantor adopts a different strategy which does not, like the COMISALADS, seek to "liberate" the couple, but instead shows that they are in the "public domain," but as such they are subject to multiple articulations which anchor them in very specific ways. They circulate from discourse to discourse as mobile signifiers, but within the confines of each formation, both their identity and their desire are fixed values. In its juxtapositions of such different discourses, *Krazy Kat* resembles Manuel Puig's *Kiss of the Spiderwoman* (1978), but in Puig's novel, pulp romance and psychoanalytic theory, while quite literally adjacent and theoretically complementary, remain distinct, in two different regimes. In *Krazy Kat*, the couples cross the bar, as it were, and invade the theoretical discourse which has already appropriated and categorized their desire. Their very presence as operators of that discourse throws into question its sovereignty. Here appropriation ceases to be an entirely satisfying description of this circulation in that the preceding types of appropriation are abducted from *x* while firmly situated within *y*. But in *Krazy Kat*, the circulation of the characters, their ability to inhabit, even impersonate different discursive identities purposely obliterates any such fixed coordinates.

The traditional distinctions between popular culture and the world of the avant-garde/high art are destabilized in *Krazy Kat* due to this erasure of the coordinates previously used to measure their differences. Crazy and Ignatz argue repeatedly through the novel about the need to be more than "just a comic strip," which time and again leads to a discussion of flatness and roundness. For Crazy, "her art had been what she was—how could it have been otherwise?"³² but Ignatz longs "to create the new rounder soul that we need for artistic greatness, that Americans need to be rounded, godlike individuals. Like in really good books. . . . Why not strut uptown to the mansion of high art, of roundness and say that our gift to America could rank with Eugene O'Neill's or Henry James's? America needs a truly democratic high art. America needs a rounded comic strip!"³³ Later, when they are living among the COMISALADS, Ignatz changes his model for artistic excellence to the avant-garde. When Crazy asks him, "But Ignatz,

didn't people like us the way we were?" he responds, "That was false consciousness on their part. We have to shock and abuse them. They won't like it any more than they like twelve tone music. But our new work will awake them. . . . We're going to make the future. The future is our audience!"³⁴ But in the last panel, Krazy, in the form of Kate, the graduate student in art history, turns the tables on Ignatz when she shows him pictures of Pop art, specifically Jasper Johns's *American Flag*. Ignatz responds, "So high art wants to be flat?" Why did he suddenly feel so bewildered?³⁵ Kate launches into her own tirade:

The flag is what it is. So it has real presence. Fantasy = Reality. Art = Life. Just like in popular art where Hammett = Spade = Bogart. He's an icon like comic strip characters. Mickey Mouse, say, or Krazy Kat. Mickey isn't a drawing of Mickey. The drawing is Mickey. . . . The popular workers provided pleasure scenarios, liberated zones; the high arts stylized them and gave them back, as if they were a scandal. Trademark soup cans, flatness, same-same repetitions. But who were they shocking? Their own tuxedo dignity! Shock was spicy strychnine on the palette. The popular workers hadn't meant to shock, just to master a sorrow, improvise a pleasure.³⁶

Kate's response to Ignatz stresses the variability of all evaluative criteria, that binary distinction between roundness and flatness can no longer serve as transcendent distinctions of equality when all values are functions of specific institutions. The rejection of Pop art appropriation of comic book figures like Warhol's, Lichtenstein's, or Fahlstrom's own "Krazy Kat" series (1963-65) is part of a wider indictment of the discursive formation of museum art, including its critical apparatus. While they read reviews of their cabaret act, Ignatz reacts in disgust, "This guy is like all the high brow critics you love so much. He's showing how smart he is by writing about us. See, he says, I can make something out of junk." Ignatz didn't like these new magazines. . . . their academic discourse peppered with jive talk. . . . This was not avant-garde popular art, but avant-people being ironic about a little uptown thrill."³⁷

This dismissal, considered along with Kat's and Ignatz's "finding themselves" as a cabaret act (in which they make Cole Porter and Larry Hart songs *their own*) by singing those songs which seem to illustrate perfectly the rather unusual nature of their desire), suggests that popular culture can continue to be vitally and personally meaningful for both its producers and its audiences if it achieves a kind of hybrid status that is neither an uncritical revivalism nor an avant-garde "wannabe." Cantor's rejection of the avant-gardist appropriation, and his advocacy of an eclectic but highly selective appropriation of antecedent forms of popular culture as a way of making affecting statements about the nature of desire in contemporary

culture—instead of simply "holding a mirror up to a mirror"—leads to the simple but inevitable question: is a book like *Krazy Kat* still popular culture?

Before we can answer that question, we must ask another: by what criteria can that question be answered satisfactorily? The most far-reaching ramification of the meta-pop hyperconsciousness of novels like *The Provincetowns* and *Krazy Kat* is their purposeful complication of that question. Neither subject matter nor attitude toward popular culture can be the distinguishing criterion, since in *Krazy Kat*, cartoon animals are the main characters, and the novel concludes with a ringing endorsement of the possibilities of popular culture. Nor can the means of production and distribution serve as a litmus test in this case, since the book was published by a major trade press and sold in mall bookstores as well as university bookstores. If that very hyperconsciousness disqualifies it as popular culture, then certainly Ann Rice's bestselling vampire novels (in which vampires write their bestselling memoirs on word processors, discuss the future of myth, watch movies obsessively, become rock stars, etc.) and the Batman phenomenon in its various incarnations (which self-consciously foregrounds the re-articulation of super-hero narrative) must be excluded as well. Perhaps more appropriate questions are how we can *not* consider *Krazy Kat* popular culture, and what value is there in making exclusionary distinctions about whether any text is popular culture?

Delimiting popular culture continues to be a viable activity, but only for those who frame it as Other, as that which must be resisted, appropriated (only to be condemned or "transformed"), or dismissed as that which might tarnish the canon or collection. Hebdige's contention that Pop art erodes the "parallel distinctions" that cast popular culture in a negative light now seems accurate, but premature, more applicable to the meta-pop of the eighties. But in a sense, these more recent texts go even further; where Pop art challenges the "parallel distinctions," it still respects those binary oppositions in order to ensure itself the requisite parameters to read its challenge as a violation of the prohibitions, perpetuating them as it contests them. The meta-pop text of the eighties dismisses even the viability of such distinctions, except to expose them as obsolete—except, of course, for those discursive formations (like museum art or the National Association of Scholars) that have such vested interests in maintaining them.

This ongoing redefinition of popular culture by popular culture involves different strategies of appropriation—one which seeks to construct traditions through citation, and one which defies the very category of tradition through eclectic appropriation—but it also presupposes, implicitly or explicitly, different notions of cultural literacy which serve as the foundation for that redefinition. Where the former approach, exemplified by texts like Joe Dante's film *Gremians* (1984) or Steven Spielberg's Indiana Jones cycle, posits a kind of separate but equal list of essential authors and titles guaranteeing a popular culture literacy, the latter approach involves the iden-

tification of names and titles, but also the recognition that "culture" is not just a "whole way of life," but an endlessly configurable assemblage of representations, the function, audience, and value of which are subject to constant re-articulation.

Notes

I would like to thank Jim Peterson for his generous contributions to the completion of this manuscript.

1. Nanci Griffith, "Listen to the Radio," *Storms*, MCA Records, 1989.
2. k. d. lang, quoted in "Uniquely Inclined," by Robert Cross, *Chicago Tribune*, July 5, 1989, sec. 2: 4.
3. The term "museum art" here refers to "high art," but in the Foucauldian sense of a discursive formation, e.g., not just a particular set of styles, but their institutionalization as "art," secured by a series of interconnected apparatuses—some physical (the structure of the museum, network of galleries, etc.), some critical (in the form of journals, catalogues, and the like, which fix the significance of a given text, set evaluative standards for admission to or disqualification from the museum), some historical (the accumulated heritage of what constitutes fine art and fine art collecting).
4. Claes Oldenbourg, "I am for an Art . . ." in *Pop Art Redefined*, ed. John Russell and Suzi Gablick (New York: Praeger, 1969), 97.
5. Andy Warhol, Interview with G. R. Swenson, in *Pop Art Redefined*, 117.
6. Andreas Huyssen, "The Cultural Politics of Pop," in *Post-Pop Art*, ed. Paul Taylor (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1989), 47.
7. *Ibid.*, 73.
8. Dick Hebdige, "In Poor Taste," in *Post-Pop Art*, 94.
9. Roy Lichtenstein, Interview with G. R. Swenson, in *Pop Art Redefined*, 93.
10. Lawrence Alloway, *Roy Lichtenstein* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1983), 93.
11. Carole Ann Mahsun, *Pop Art and the Critics* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1987), 96.
12. Richard Hamilton, "An Exposition of *She*," in *Pop Art Redefined*, 73.
13. Judith Williamson, "Images of Woman," *Screen* 24, no. 6 (1983): 102.
14. Abigail Solomon Godeau, "Living with Contradictions: Cultural Practices in the Age of Supply Side Aesthetics," in *Universal Abandon?* ed. Andrew Ross (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988), 201.
15. *Ibid.*, 202.
16. Patrice Petro, *Joyless Streets: Women and Melodramatic Representation in Weimar Germany* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), 8.
17. For an in-depth discussion of this point see Tania Modleski, "The Terror of Pleasure: The Contemporary Horror Film and Postmodern Theory," in *Studies in Entertainment*, ed. Tania Modleski (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), 155–66.
18. Max Apple, *The Propheteers* (New York: Harper and Row, 1987), 6.
19. *Ibid.*, 16–17.
20. *Ibid.*, 112–13.
21. *Ibid.*, 15.
22. *Ibid.*, 39.

23. *Ibid.*, 147–48.
24. *Ibid.*, 160.
25. *Ibid.*, 23.
26. *Ibid.*, 261–62.
27. Jay Cantor, *Krazy Kat: A Novel in Five Panels* (New York: Collier Books, Macmillan, 1987), 5.
28. *Ibid.*, 9.
29. *Ibid.*, 119.
30. *Ibid.*, 129.
31. *Ibid.*, 150.
32. *Ibid.*, 8.
33. *Ibid.*, 61.
34. *Ibid.*, 140.
35. *Ibid.*, 213.
36. *Ibid.*
37. *Ibid.*, 240.