

## The lord of the postmodernity: Plagiarism

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### Abstract

Today's art, which is dominated by postmodernism, evolves into a completely different sense of art that reverses the system over its own weapon and changes all the known values of art. Postmodern art, which focuses on questions about what is the thing that is art, canalises itself into citations and compilations which turn into imitation, appropriation, pastiche or plagiarism. While postmodernism turns into a kind of citation and compilation aesthetics; imitation, which is at the centre of the questions related to what is the thing that is art, becomes the strategy of postmodernism. The article titled 'The Lord of the Postmodernity: Plagiarism' is about the transformation of an art object into an art material or the re-presentation of it in today's sense of art which extends from imitation, appropriation and pastiche to plagiarism.

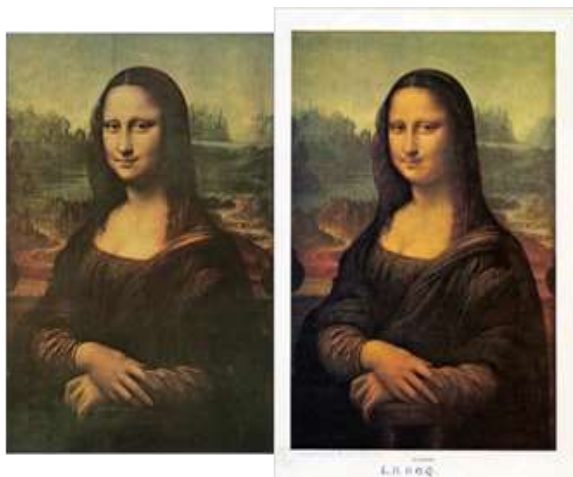
**Keywords:** Postmodernism, plagiarism, power, imitation, appropriation, art, pastiche.

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## 1. Transformation of imitation into appropriation and pastiche

With postmodernism, the period which glorifies mini-narratives, personal stories, localities, new identities, differences and privileges has started. While postmodern art approaches banality, waste and ordinariness as an ideology and a value, it ignores the ethical values and responsibilities. It opposes the exorbitance and perceived value created by modernism, while it wages a war against values related to being real<sup>1</sup> (original) and unique. It questions both the existing art market and the 'what' of art, the 'who' of the artist and the value of art object. What lies behind this discussion is the 'Anything goes' motto, which emphasises that in postmodernism, everything is permissible and that postmodernism is open to any idea or practice. The post-industrial system that led to postmodernism spread with commercials in the 1950s, globalisation in the 1980s, the Internet in the 1990s and finally social networking and computer games in the 2000s. The reality was blurred when the information and image bombardment have transformed everything, and the images that get into the network in a short time have replaced reality. According to Herbert Marcuse, cultural and artistic products that are produced to gain profit make individuals similar by making them adopt



Ben Vautier (1972), Art is only a question of signature and date.

Left: Léonard de Vinci, La Joconde (1503-1506)

Right: Marcel Duchamp, L.H.O.O.Q. (1919)

a certain way of life and world view through commercials. The created one-dimensional way of thinking and course of action acting spreads with globalisation and the Internet, and sameness turns into an identity. Adorno, who argues that the only field that will produce reality, truth and hope in the future utopia is art, believes that art can survive to the extent that it subverts the society in which it was born; however, how the artist will escape from this system is vague. In this system, artists inescapably adapt to transformation as curators, critics, historians and audiences do. The postmodern art, which focuses on the questions concerning what is the thing that is art, reproduces the existing through imitation, appropriation, pastiche or plagiarism and questions it. While postmodernism turns into a kind of citation and compilation aesthetics; imitation, which is at the centre of the questions related to what is the thing that is art, becomes the strategy of postmodernism.

Duchamp, who started this process, produced imitation objects at the beginning of the 1900s and thus waged a war against the values of modernism by presenting a new reality (originality). Andy Warhol joined Duchamp with his fabricated products and replicas. According to Baudrillard (2005), who states that the entrance of ready-made objects into art is an end rather than a beginning, the sum of originality and art is *null* after this point. The reason behind this is that all the scientific, philosophical and socio-economic spheres that could be reached have been experienced, explored or defined with modernity. Thus, now, we have nothing but to experience the combination of countless concepts and models that come from the past and that get into the network quickly through globalisation and communication channels, and the reality that has been reproduced countlessly, that

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<sup>1</sup> In this article, the word 'real' is used for the first work of art that attained a place in art history, that is, the original work of art. *Real* means the first one that exists. The first artwork may have been copied or inspired from something else. However, it is the first in history. On the other hand, the source of inspiration for appropriation and pastiche is this first art object. In other words, it means reproduction of a value that already exists in art history. Appropriation or pastiche may also be original. For this reason, in this article, *real* refers to and represents the first one. The copy before the modern is not referred to as original because it is a copy, and the attributed value as the copy is based on the skill of the person who made it (O.I.).

is, the hyper-reality. As the contrasts between the concepts have lost their meaning, the difference between what is original and not has disappeared. The original and the imitation have been made equal. Now, for the artist, 'in this world where innovations and discoveries within the framework of styles are not possible, the only thing to do is to imitate the styles that died already'. For Jameson, who supports this argument, this situation is the transformation of reality into images, which is called *pastiche* (Jameson, 1985, pp. 114, 115). In other words, pastiche is the images of other images, art of another art, realism that is not real and imitations that never had originals, that is, *simulacrum*<sup>2</sup> (Artun, 2013).

It is understood that Baudrillard (2005), who says that inevitably there is nothing original or there is nothing that cannot be imitated at this point, is right as imitation in art has been legitimised, and it established a reputation as appropriation and pastiche.<sup>3</sup> However, both styles of reproduction bear the anxiety arising from producing new work of art, and rather than the imitation of the real (original), they have a structure in which intellectual actions and symbols are read. Nicolas Bourriaud perceives appropriation and pastiche as the 'first stage of postproduction'. He draws attention to the fact that the reproduction of cultural artworks that have existed since the 1990s has, in a way, intensified, and that the interpretation, exhibition or the use of somebody else's works or cultural products have become more widespread among artists. These artists who adapt themselves to the existing through appropriation and pastiche cause the traditional difference between production and consumption, creation and imitation, and the original and ready-made object to disappear. Now, the value they transformed is not primary. For this reason, today, the important issue is not to take originality as the basis. The important issue is to work with the objects that are already in the network in the cultural market (Bourriaud, 2005, p. 22).

The point, where the issue of working with the objects that have already got into the network in the cultural market has finally brought us, is plagiarism. That is, the issue of presenting something that is not yours as yours... No matter how it is gained, if a piece of knowledge is produced by someone else, it is compulsory to indicate the source of that knowledge. What happens if you do not? You commit a crime<sup>4</sup> by exhibiting an unethical behaviour called 'lifting', 'stealing', 'idea theft' or 'plagiarism' in legal terms. However, the devil looks after his own. If the act has an intellectual basis, then the situation changes. If what is cited, compiled or imitated says something new or has an intention, that is, if there is an appropriation, the crime is prevented. Postmodernism does just this. That is, it claims that it legitimises all the prohibitions of modernism and transfers the things of the past into the present and abolishes them. The acts of imitation, appropriation and pastiche in postmodernism are a stance against or a response to Modernism's excessive glorification of an art object as the original and authentic artwork of the artist. These acts are the acts of carrying an image with a certain value into the *present* and adding it a new value. That is, the value of the existing image increases, while the newly-produced one also increases in value. In other words, postmodernism neither rejects the past nor imitates it; it puts the past on agenda again to enrich it and to make it known (Kumar, 1999, p. 137). However, this situation changes as far as social

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<sup>2</sup> A term used to describe something which does not have the original, real and the prototype; it is used to express the copy of something which itself is already a copy. According to the description of Baudrillard, the most basic characteristic of a thing that is simulacrum is that it manifests itself when two different things which seem impossible to come together due to their nature can come together. Baudrillard further emphasises that today simulacrums have taken the place of originals; the truths have turned into images; and the copies without the originals are all around. Retrieved May 2, 2017, from <http://www.turkcebilgi.org/sozluk/felsefe-terimleri/simulacrum-11674.html>.

<sup>3</sup> Pastiche, which is one of the techniques of citation, is defined as 'imitation'. It is used as making a reference to the existing works of art, making a copy of a work of art or imitation.

<sup>4</sup> Ozenc Ucak, Nazan (Assoc. Prof.). Bilimsel iletisim ve intihal. Retrieved May 22, 2017, from <http://uvt.ulakbim.gov.tr/toplanti/uay10/nucak.pdf>.

dynamics are concerned. Disconnection between the ideal and the real has almost made plagiarism, which is at the heart of imitation, appropriation or pastiche and the lord of postmodernity.<sup>5</sup>

## 2. The devil looks after his own

During the postmodern period, when success and economy have been equalised, the power of art is the art market which is made up of critics, curators, galleries, auctions and the others. And for the power, what is important is the pace of network because each day in the art market belongs to the market and each day is money. From this point-of-view, the new power holders in the art market created by globalisation and capitalism start to conceive artistry as an occupation. Artist is evaluated through creativity and commercial success (which almost turns into an ideology). Thus, for them, every work of art that gets into the market (network) must quickly gain the economic value. Otherwise, it loses all its artistic (!) value. The personality of the artist who is at the centre of discussions turns into a brand that guarantees the value of the artistic product, and it becomes unnecessary to learn the idea which the art object puts forward as its value in the market is enough. The audiences who have been taken out their context are now customers. According to Chin-tao Wu, those who established this system are today's firms which have been equipped with their own curators and art departments since the 1980s. They exhibit the collections they have built up using their economic power at home and abroad, and thus, they turn into power elites that determine the art and artist. The art collections and folders, which the firms that hold the economic power have, turn into the role model of art. Like Wu, Isabella Graw<sup>6</sup> also argues that power is based on economic power. For her, information markets, which proved that modern art is a field in which large amounts of money can be earned and which accumulates cultural prestige (museums and various disciplines of history of art, cultural studies, aesthetics and so on), justify and acknowledge the interest in young artists with the established networks (Isitman, 2017, p. 59). The understanding and artistic view favoured (!) by those who hold the power inevitably determine the market, and the market causes the artists who are close (!) to it to become popular. Artists do not have enough time to get into the



Right: Tyler Shields, 2014  
Left: Sally Mann, 1989



network and to be acceptable. Thus, it is necessary to find a solution *now*. It seems that this situation, which inevitably brings about a contradiction in terms, has led to a rapid break between the real and the ideal. To be an artist, to be successful and the pressure you feel to have these two *now* render what you do and the idea behind what you do unimportant. It is astonishing that the uncorroborated statements whose sources are not known and which were made by some important people in history suddenly become a guide for those who are interested. For example, 'Good artists copy, great artists steal' by Picasso (1932), 'The immature poet imitates; the

<sup>5</sup> Postmodernity (postmodern situation) is a term used to express the social and cultural reflections of postmodernism. The term is used with reference to the appearance of the artistic, cultural, economic and social situation took on at the end of the 20th and the beginning of the 21st century. What creates the postmodern situation is globalisation, consumption, the breakdown of authority and the commoditisation of knowledge. While postmodernity describes the state or condition of existence or the changes in institutions and conditions, postmodernism expresses an aesthetic, literary, political and social philosophy. Postmodernism is a 'cultural and intellectual phenomenon', while postmodernity focuses on the social and political reflections of this philosophy on society. Retrieved June 23, 2017, from <https://www.uludagsozluk.com/k/postmodernite/>.

<sup>6</sup> The chief Editor of *Texte zur Kunst*. *Cagdas Estetik/Cagdas Sanat Nedir?* December 1, 2015. *Skopbulten/Isabelle Graw*, Ceviri: Ayse Boren. Retrieved April 1, 2016, from <http://www.e-skop.com/skopbulten/cagdas-estetik-cagdas-sanat-nedir/2718>.

mature poet plagiarises' by Eliot (1920), 'Immature artists copy, great artists steal'<sup>7</sup> by William Faulkner (1974) and the others.

For those who favour simple solutions, setting discussions and problems aside, heading towards postproduction (!) and re-handling the objects that are already in the network in the cultural market are the simple solutions. For the *thing* that he needs to put in the network in a short time, the material the artist has now is exactly the same *work of art* that was produced before. The artist (!) can get into the network quickly by re-handling the objects of art that made history in art and by presenting them as appropriation. In the famous remake film by director Michael Radford, the postman, the confession of the postman who uses the poems of Pablo Neruda as if they were his own is not for nothing: 'Poetry doesn't belong to those who write it; it belongs to those who need it'.<sup>8</sup>

### 3. 'Are you really not even a little bit embarrassed'?<sup>9</sup>



Ben Vautier (1972),  
Art is only a question  
of signature and date.

In the period when plagiarism was acceptable, Shield's response to the question 'Are you really not even a little bit embarrassed'? would probably be 'No, not at all'. Why should he be embarrassed? Tyler Shields, who is a commercially successful photographer and a brand now, has now put Sally Mann and many others, who faded into oblivion, on agenda again. As proposed by Ben Vautier as well, if art was only a question of signature and date, the situation would perhaps be different. However, the artist is free to imitate anything that exists as long as he appropriates it. As interpretation/intention makes itself known in imitation, appropriation or pastiche, both the signature underneath and the date lose their importance because what is important is the thing that is produced, not the person who made it or the date on which it was made. This has led to the problem of ownership. The problem of ownership, which helps the art object to reach its own existence, is the result of a process which started with artistic productions based on plagiarism and transformed into appropriation and pastiche and was legitimised. Each reproduction other than this leads us to often encounter plagiarised objects that are reduced to signature and date. And this encounter is *ordinary* in this process where the world has turned into images due to globalisation and where we are surrounded by replicas whose originals do not exist. When Lyotard stated that 'Art must be produced by amateurs', he did not mean that imitation by amateurs is better than plagiarism by great artists.

Questions related to what is art and what is not may well be regarded as unreasonable academic or philosophical concerns. However, reproducing a work of art that is well-known and that made history is something, and appropriating (!) an unknown artwork of someone at the same age in the same period is something else. Especially, if the market value of the artwork changes when the artist changes, it gets completely different when the situation changes. What Damien Hirst said when he was accused of 15 cases of plagiarism in 1995 is important: "It's very easy to say, 'I could have done that', after someone's done it. But I did it. You didn't. It didn't exist until I did it."<sup>10</sup> Is he wrong? Today, if you are a branded artist, you are the one that creates and determines what is art and what is not. The art market, which adds a brand value to the artist, defends its artist in any case. On the other hand, artists who have not or could not gain a brand value (mostly young artists) are accused of plagiarism in the same situation. Yet, they are, at the same time, recognised. But, of course, this

<sup>7</sup> <http://quoteinvestigator.com/2013/03/06/artists-steal/>

<sup>8</sup> *Il Postino*, *The Postman* (1994), is the remake of the movie *Ardiente Paciencia*, directed by Antonio Skarmeta and filmed in 1983. It is one of the few foreign movies that was nominated for the Best Picture in Academy Awards. As opposed to the original movie, it does not deal with political issues.

<sup>9</sup> Maria Sofou; 'Is Celebrity Photographer Tyler Shields Copying Other Artists'? Retrieved June 3, 2017, from <http://art-sheep.com/is-celebrity-photographer-tyler-shields-copying-other-artists/E.T>.

<sup>10</sup> The Art Damien Hirst Stole, by Charles Thomson, <http://www.stuckism.com/Hirst/StoleArt.html>, Retrieved 2 June 2017



happens if the act of plagiarism is noticed because everybody has already a place and a value in the market. In the case of such a problem, that is when there is plagiarism, the plagiarised work immediately attracts the attention of the market. The market, which is used to the production of the objects that have an important place in art and that have already been approved again as a value, brings this first person (the plagiarised) quickly in the network. The reason may be because the market believes that if an artist is plagiarised, s/he is not well-known, or the market now cares about the plagiarised work and wants it to be on the agenda. Another reason may be the clumsiness about reaching what is art and artist. Or perhaps for a completely different reason, the market avoids a definitive judgement and keeps an eye on it by putting it on the network. What if, in this case, the effort to be in network and to be a brand makes a new move and develops a plagiarism project? After all, today, the act of plagiarism makes two people known and helps them get into the network. The popular motto of the 1950s, 'There is no such thing as bad publicity' is still popular. With a plagiarism project launched deliberately, both parties may suddenly draw attention (by reporting each other) and thus, may, in a way, get into the network. The parties do not have to know each other to develop such a project. How nice if you plagiarise and it works! How nice if you plagiarise and it does not work! Isn't it today's motto? 'Win-win'. In both cases, you will be known and get into the network. In 2006, Damien Hirst made a further statement about the plagiarism incident: 'Lucky for me, when I went to art school we were a generation where we didn't have any shame about stealing other people's ideas. You call it a tribute'. Although it seems that the current age is like this and being recognised is more important than art, there is still no answer to the question of 'What is art?' and 'Who is the artist'?



Bedri Baykam, 1991,  
Pissoir is dead, Long Live  
This has been done before.

As the world is globalised, identities are hybridised. The differences in works of art give way to similarities, and authenticity and originality give way to imitation. 'Art-like' works that are in fact not works of art find a place in today's art environment. As the art critic Arthur Danto indicates, can such developments be the poor results of the attempts to get the art market back on track, after its near-complete annihilation (Emrali, 2006)? This dust will certainly settle and the pieces will fall in place. We need to wait to see what kinds of answers are given and what remains on the sieve. For now, 'Anything goes'!

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