

ADAA7000 Coexistent Perspectives Module

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Abstract

This essay explores Question 6: The Politics of Desire, analyzing how appropriation highlights the complexities of authorship, originality, and authenticity in contemporary visual culture. Through the works of Richard Prince and Sherrie Levine, it argues that appropriation is not just imitation but a critical lens that shows how images are continually reshaped through repetition, circulation, institutional framing, and changes in cultural value.

Focusing on Prince's *Untitled (Cowboy)* series and his appropriations of Instagram content, the essay investigates the ways in which commercial imagery constructs notions of desire, masculinity, and authenticity, while simultaneously undergoing revaluation within the art market. Prince's oeuvre exemplifies the fluidity of images as they traverse the realms of advertising, social media, and fine art, prompting a re-examination of ownership, authorship, and the dynamics of commodity fetishism.

In contrast, Levine's interventions, notably *After Walker Evans* and *After Russell Lee: 1–60*, confront the primacy of the original by demonstrating how photographic meaning is constructed through processes of reproduction, art historical discourse, archiving practices, and the mechanisms of institutional recognition. The essay draws upon theoretical frameworks from Crimp, Berger, Sontag, Marx, Irvin, and Singerman to unpack how appropriated images subvert conventional understandings of originality and photographic veracity.

Ultimately, the argument concludes that contemporary images are devoid of fixed origins or meanings; rather, they are subject to ongoing negotiations within the systems of visibility, interpretation, exchange, and power. Thus, the act of appropriation reveals originality and authorship as fluid, culturally contingent constructs rather than firm artistic foundations.

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In what ways does appropriation expose the instability of authorship and originality in contemporary image culture?

Introduction

In contemporary visual culture, appropriation has emerged as a pivotal strategy for artists seeking to interrogate and redefine conventional notions of authorship and originality (ICrimp, 1979). This methodological shift contrasts with the pursuit of entirely novel images, favouring instead of the creative reworking, reframing, and dissemination of pre-existing visuals situated within expansive visual economies (Berger, 2013). Appropriation functions as a critique of the entrenched belief that artistic value is solely derived from individual innovation, static ownership, and singular expression (Irvin, 2005, pp. 123–137). It emphasises the reality that previous representations, technological modes of reproduction, and circulatory systems profoundly influence images prior to any new artistic intervention (Lund, 2021, pp. 6-7).

This inquiry into appropriation is highly relevant to our current concept, where the distinctions between originality and imitation, authorship and consumer engagement, and creation and recirculation are increasingly nebulous (Hick, 2011). In today's digital world, spanning photography, advertising, mass media, and various online platforms, concepts of replication and redistribution flourish (Ritchin, 2013). This trend underscores that the authority of images increasingly stems not from their uniqueness but from their ubiquity and recognizability within visual culture. Engaging with Douglas Crimp's assertions, we note that postmodern visual practices supplant the conventional ideal of transparent originality with methods involving quotation, reframing, and layered representation (Crimp, 1979). In this context, authorship is less about chronological precedence and more about deliberate acts of selection, recontextualization, and critical reframing of existing imagery (Irvin, 2005, pp. 123–137).

The works of Richard Prince and Sherrie Levine exemplify the complexities and fluidity inherent in the notion of authorship within visual culture. For instance, Prince's rephotographed Marlboro advertisements (see Figure. 1), along with his subsequent Instagram appropriations, demonstrate that the impact of an image lies more in the culturally ingrained myths and visual codes associated with it, than in the individual vision of an author (Sante, 2020). Similarly, Levine's rephotographs of Walker Evans' seminal works from the American South (see Figure. 3) further destabilise conventional notions of fixed authorship in a field characterised by reproducibility (Singerman, 2002). By revisiting and reinterpreting these iconic images, both artists reveal how the authority of an original work is constructed through various discursive practices, institutional contexts, and claims to cultural legitimacy rather than being rooted in an intrinsic quality or essence (Lovatt, 2011 pp. 601–604,).

This discussion, furthermore, will critically examine contemporary image culture with a focus on appropriation and its broader context (Irvin, 2005, pp. 123–137). Rather than erasing the image, this practice illuminates the underlying systems that construct meaning, authority, and value within the visual world (Berger, 2013). Appropriation reveals the ongoing mediation, repetition, and cultural contextualization of images, challenging the foundational assumptions about creative ownership (Crimp, 1979). Through the artistic works of Prince and Levine, appropriation transcends mere borrowing; it operates as a nuanced critical strategy that clarifies the processes of production, claims to authorship, and contestation in contemporary visual culture (Irvin. 2005, pp123-137). By exposing these underlying mechanisms, appropriation enriches our understanding of images and prompts a revaluation of the evolving dynamics of authority and value in today's world (Davis, 2024).

Appropriation and authenticity

Appropriation challenges the authenticity of photography by disrupting its traditional connection to truth and evidence (Sontag, 1977). While photographs may seem inherently linked to reality, their authority is shaped by factors such as framing,

selection, and interpretation (Berger, 2013). When a photograph is removed from its original context, its authenticity no longer belongs solely to its source; it becomes a matter of circulation, context, and meaning (Irvin, 2005, pp. 123–137).

The tensions in photographic appropriation are significant (Hick, 2011). When a photograph carries cultural weight due to its connection to reality, appropriating it directly questions established ideas about photographic truth (Crimp, 1979). The concept of authenticity must adapt; it is no longer enough to ask if an image originally depicted something real (Lund, 2021, pp. 6-7). Instead, we must examine how that representation has been framed, circulated, and reinterpreted (Berger, 2013).

Photographic authenticity emphasises that images are inherently partial; they do not convey their origins or the processes behind their creation (Sontag, 1977). The meaning derived from images is influenced by the viewer's photographic literacy and broader cultural understanding (Berger, 2013). Thus, authenticity is determined by interpretation rather than being exclusively dictated by the image itself (Hick, 2011).

In today's media-driven world, the challenge to authenticity is increasingly complex (Ritchin, 2013). As digital technologies advance, the perception that images are no longer reliably connected to reality grows stronger (Elsaesser, 2016). While the fundamental relationship between photographs and light remains significant, digital manipulation makes alterations less detectable, undermining viewers' trust in images as evidence (Perlmutter and Dahmen, 2008). In this context, authenticity becomes a socially negotiated concept rather than something guaranteed. It is no longer adequate for an image to simply appear; viewers increasingly scrutinise how it was created, by whom, under what circumstances, and for what purpose (Ritchin, 2013).

Appropriation highlights the inherent instability of images by emphasising their multiple lives (Crimp, 1979, pp. 75–88.). An image can begin as documentation, publicity, personal expression, or an archive, only to be transformed into a critique, artwork, or commodity (Sekula, 1986, pp 3-64). This recontextualization alters not only the image's meaning but also the conditions under which authenticity is understood (Irvin, 2005, pp. 123–137). Richard Prince's *Untitled (Cowboy)* series exemplifies this dynamic

(Sante, 2020). By rephotographing meticulously staged Marlboro advertisements that aimed to convey authenticity, Prince reveals that the Cowboy figure symbolising ideals of freedom, masculinity, and self-sufficiency connecting the product to deliberate composition and cultural mythmaking (Gagosian Quarterly, 2020). His work underscores that authenticity operates as a visual effect rather than a given quality.

Appropriation ultimately challenges the area of authenticity by exposing forgery and fakery, revealing that authenticity is a compelling construct in visual culture (Sontag, 1977). The appeal of the cowboy archetype is rooted not just in its realistic representation but in the entrenched status achieved through continuous repetition and recognition within cultural contexts. Prince's analysis underscores that our conception of authentic identity is significantly influenced by our engagement with existing visual paradigms. This implies that authenticity functions as a cultural performance, shaped by social conventions rather than simply being an intrinsic attribute (Foucault, 1988).

At the same time, appropriation raises important ethical and political questions. If authenticity is fluid, does that grant the freedom to take and reuse any image? This debate transcends aesthetics, encompassing legal and interpretive dimensions (Diack, 2023, pp. 144–146). Appropriation in the context of ownership is like holding a painting in a gallery. Just because it is placed on the wall does not signify creative ownership; you can frame, illuminate, and even write a plaque that shapes its interpretation. However, the original artist's vision and meaning still linger, reminding the audience that authority over interpretation is as complex as the layers of paint on the canvas (Elsaesser, 2016). This power is crucial because appropriation reassigns value. When an image is extracted from one context and inserted into another, it becomes newly interpretable and often more marketable. In this way, authenticity is challenged not only through repetition but also by the politics of who gets to redefine an image's essence (Diack, 2023, pp. 144–146).

(Elsaesser, 2016) argues that digital culture shifts focus from production to post-production, where reality is increasingly seen as something to be extracted and

reworked rather than simply captured. This shift has profound implications for authenticity. If images are predominantly created through post-production, authenticity cannot be understood solely in terms of the original moment of capture; it must instead be recognised as something assembled through layers of manipulation, interpretation, and circulation. Consequently, appropriation is not an exception to the image economy, but one of the most enlightening forms (Crimp, 1979, pp. 75–88.).

The significance of appropriation in art lies in its transformative power to redefine what authenticity means, rather than diminish it (Irvin, 2005, pp. 123–137). Authenticity is no longer found solely in the singularity of an original source; it emerges from a deeper, critical exploration of how images operate within our cultural view (Berger, 2013). Appropriation boldly contests the notion that images hold fixed truths from their origin to their reception (Sontag, 1977). Instead, it reveals that these images are continuously shaped by factors such as repetition, technological advancements, institutional contexts, and value systems (Davis, 2024).

Ultimately, appropriation exposes the fluid nature of authenticity in photography and art, it is not a stable characteristic but a contentious phenomenon (Hick, 2011). Authenticity is crafted through cultural habits, challenged notions of realism, originality, and authorship, becoming ever more elusive when we recognise that an image has been mediated, repeated, or altered by previous uses (Irvin, 2005, pp. 123–137). Far from making authenticity obsolete, appropriation reveals it as a multifaceted issue, compelling viewers to confront the intricate ways in which visual truth is constructed through context, circulation, and power dynamics (Marx, 1867).

Richard Prince



Figure.1 Richard Prince (Untitled Cowboy, 2024)

Richard Prince's work fundamentally challenges the concept of authenticity through appropriation while highlighting the economic dynamics that underpin the value of images (Davis, 2024). In his Cowboy series, Prince boldly rephotographed Marlboro's advertisements, transforming them into compelling fine art photographs. The true significance of these works goes beyond their mere reproduction of commercial imagery; they powerfully expose the Cowboy as an already fantasized image long before Prince's intervention (Sante, 2020).

Lucy Sante (2020) observes that the Marlboro images were crafted for instantaneous capture and recognition by the preoccupied eye, intentionally linking the brand to a fundamental dream of self-reliance, effortless mastery, unrestrained masculinity, and independence.

This is fitting as Prince's appropriation reveals an existing fantasy rather than creating one from scratch (Irvin, 2005, pp. 123–137). The Cowboy works are impactful precisely because they illustrate how, what seems natural and timeless is actually a product of cultural construction. The Marlboro ad has already drawn from western cinema, frontier mythology, and documentary styles to craft a sense of authenticity (Gagosian Quarterly, 2020). Prince's rephotograph highlights this truth without necessarily undermining it. The cowboy image retains its allure even when the audience is aware of its staged nature (Davis, 2024). In this way, Prince's work enriches our understanding of authenticity; it shows that in image culture, what is perceived as authentic is often shaped by stylistic choices (Hick, 2011, pp. 185–199). The photograph does not appear genuine because it is unaltered, but because its careful construction makes it feel undeniably real.

Marx's concept of commodity fetishism is essential for understanding social dynamics (Marx, 1867). Furthermore, Duzenli's interpretation highlights how this critique reveals capitalist frameworks that obscure the social relations involved in production and exchange (2011, pp. 172–179.). In *Capital*, Marx describes commodities as "mysterious things," emphasizing the misattribution of labour's social character to the commodity itself, transforming social relations into "the fantastic form of a relation between things" (Marx, 1867).

This perspective applies to the analysis of Prince. The Cowboy image conveys value and authority, masking the underlying social relationships, including labour, branding, and exchange dynamics that form the final representation (Davis, 2024). Additionally, Marxology's insights into commodity fetishism reinforce the idea that commodities seem to possess intrinsic value while obscuring the labour and socio-economic relations that create that value (Marx, 1867). This understanding encourages a critical reflection on the connections that shape our perceptions and social realities.

When discussing Prince's work in relation to commodity fetishism, we can observe the intricate dynamics between producer, brand, and artist. The Marlboro source image exemplifies this complexity, as it involves multiple contributors. First, there's the original photographer who captured the campaign, along with the advertising creatives who crafted the cowboy motif. The corporate brand then leverages this imagery to connect Marlboro with notions of rugged individuality, all within a cultural context that rendered the cowboy an appealing symbol (Sante, 2020).

Sante's analysis highlights that the ad-makers were not merely documenting cowboys; rather, they were intentionally creating a sophisticated visual object designed for immediate recognition and emotional resonance. Prince enters this narrative not as the initial creator but as an artist who recontextualises the image (Irvin, 2005, pp. 123–137). He effectively removes the overt commercial messaging and transforms the work into something that resonates within a new framework of value, one that is associated with galleries, museums, auctions, and the broader art market (Davis, 2024).

This is where appropriation becomes especially difficult to judge, on one level, Prince challenges conventional authorship by showing that the Marlboro image was never truly original in the first place. It was already a composite image, built from prior myths and visual formulas (Sante, 2020). On another level, however, Prince also benefits from commodity fetishism because the social labour embedded in the original advertising images becomes obscured once again when the rephotograph enters the art market (Marx, 1867). The viewer no longer encounters a cigarette advertisement but a Richard Prince. With the insight of Marx's values appearing attached to the object itself, when in fact it is produced through a network of labour and exchange. Prince's name, the gallery context, and the discourse of appropriation all contribute to a new fetishised form in which the image is valued as high art rather than mass advertising, even though it remains dependent on the same basic transformation of social labour into the seeing autonomy of the object (Davis, 2024).

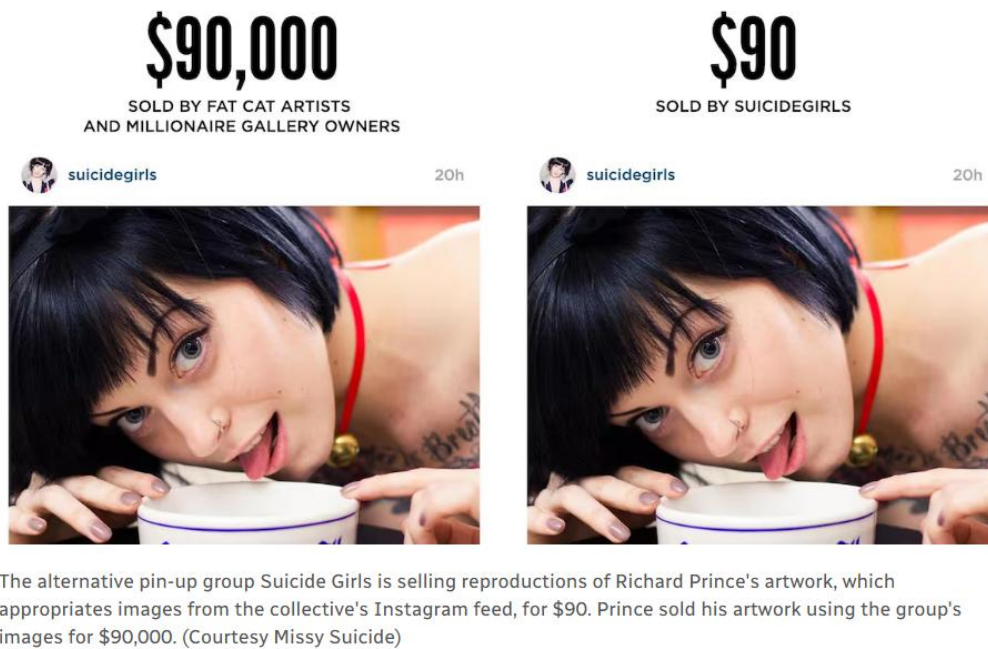


Figure 2: Richard prince and Suicide Girls (Kwong, M. 2015)

This contradiction becomes apparent when comparing Prince's Instagram works to the challenges posed by the Suicide Girls (Solomon, 2024). Prince's appropriations raise issues of copyright and infringement, highlighting the legal instability of reusing digital images in the art market (Gagosian Gallery, 2017, p11). In Figure 2, the contrast is clear: Prince's version is priced at \$90,000, while the Suicide Girls' own print is just \$90. Selena Mooney, founder of SuicideGirls, countered by selling the original photographs for \$90, redirecting proceeds to the Electronic Frontier Foundation with pro bono help from Eyes on Walls. This challenge underscores the economic aspects of revaluation (Davis, 2024, pp. 522–530) and raises the question of what exactly is being sold when Prince markets the image at such a high price whether it's the photograph, the individual depicted, the platform's visibility, or the art world's redefinition of appropriation as authorship (Davis, 2024, pp. 522–530). This question gains intensity within platform culture, where images circulate through visibility, control, and data-driven attention (Seecamp and Söffner, 2024, pp. 75–85).

The comparison is politically sharp because it reverses the fetishism. Prince's version depends on the gallery system to make the screenshot appear rare, elevated, and expensive (Davis, 2024, pp. 522–530). The Suicide Girls version collapses that mystique by placing the same visual material beside a radically lower price and by redirecting the profits. In Marxist terms, the challenge momentarily strips away the fantasy that value naturally belongs to the object. Instead, it makes visible that value is assigned through institutions, branding and power. The distinction between ninety dollars and ninety thousand dollars lies not in their tangible representations but in the sociocultural frameworks that underpin their perceived value (Marx, 1867). This is precisely what commodity fetishism obscures; conversely, the intervention by the Suicide Girls critiques and elucidates the underlying dynamics at play.

Prince's work, therefore, remains deeply ambivalent, exposing the instability of authenticity and authorship. The Cowboy works show that the authentic image of masculinity was already a commercial artifice and the Instagram works show that digital selfhood is already caught in economies of circulation and extraction (Elsaesser, 2016). Prince undeniably reproduces the very logic he critiques. He thrives on fetishism while simultaneously profiting from it. By revealing that the image is not original, he asserts its aura, claiming it for himself as an artist. This complexity is what makes his work deeply engaging for contemporary criticism. It resists easy conclusions, exposing not just what is present in the image but also the concealment of social relations (Marx, 1867).

Sherrie Lavine

Sherrie Levine is a pivotal figure in understanding how appropriation challenges concepts of authorship and originality within contemporary image culture (Singerman, 2002). Levine's work is significant not merely for its replication of earlier photographs, but for its ability to reveal the institutional and discursive frameworks that contribute to the perception of some images as original. The *Smarthistory discussion of After Russell Lee: 1–60* highlights Levine's position within the Pictures Generation, noting that her practice innovatively redefines the concept of originality (Conger and Zucker, 2025). Similarly, Art Bridges emphasises that her work continues with the established approach of photographically reproducing well-known images. Singerman further enriches this discussion by positing that Levine's work engages with reproductions, lectures, and art-historical practices that inform modern visual knowledge (2002). In doing so, she not only draws from art history but also critically examines it, positioning herself as a historiographer of its images.

Levine's work truly elevates beyond a mere copyist as appropriations do more than replicate an image; they inspire viewers to explore what defines authorship in photography (Irvin, 2005, pp. 123–137). Singerman highlights Craig Owens's insight that Levine assumes the roles of dealer, curator, and critic, stepping away from the traditional role of the creative artist. This perspective resonates with Barthes's "The Death of the Author," asserting the dynamic nature of authorship which is understood in art history (Singerman, 2020). Levine's statement that "the birth of the viewer must be at the cost of the painter" reflects a powerful shift in understanding. These insights are essential, and urge the rethink of authorship as a fluid concept rather than a fixed identity (Singerman, 2002). Instead of a singular creator whose vision dominates meaning, Levine reveals how images are transformed by institutions, discourse, and past reproductions (Sekula, 1986, pp 3-64). Her practice illuminates authorship as a vibrant relationship of naming, framing, and context (Hick, 2011, pp. 185–199).

Her most recognized series, 'After Walker Evans', explicitly confronts this challenge. Levine powerfully rephotographed Walker Evans' iconic images seen here in Figure 3, including the renowned portrait commonly referred to as *Allie Mae Burroughs, Hale County, Alabama, 1936*.

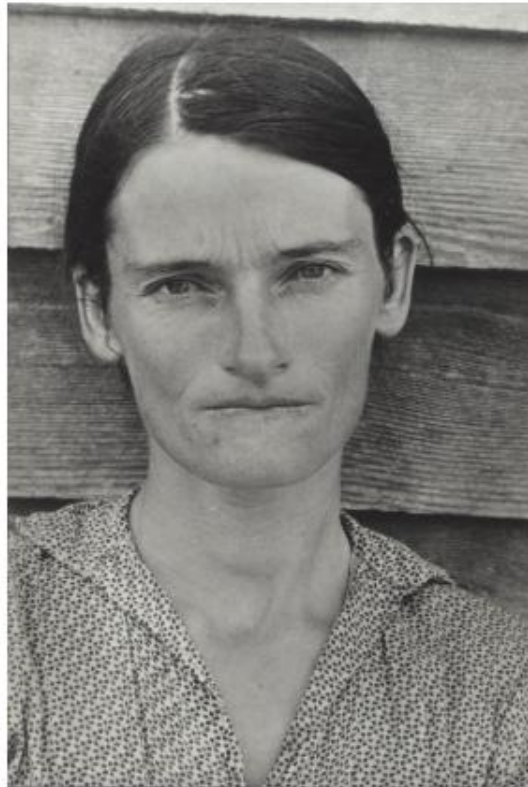


Figure 3 *Allie Mae Burroughs, Hale County, Alabama, 1936*. The (Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2020)

What is striking is not that Levine's version looks different in an obvious visual sense, but that it seems almost the same while demanding a wholly different interpretive frame. Singerman argues that the original appears as an original, as a "before," only once it has been called on to defend itself from its double, only after Levine has come after it (Singerman, 2002). That reversal is crucial. It suggests that originality is not a natural property of the first image (Lovatt, 2011, pp. 601–604). Rather, originality

becomes visible only when repetition puts it under pressure. Levine's work, therefore, exposes a structural instability at the heart of photographic authorship: the "original" is often produced retrospectively, through contrast with the copy (Singerman, 2002).

Singerman's analysis of the phrase "This is a Sherrie Levine" offers a compelling incite through which to view the performative nature of authorship in contemporary art (Singerman, 2002). He posits that identifying an image as a Levine work transcends mere true-or-false classification, embodying instead a performative act that engages with the concept of authorship in a nuanced manner (Singerman, 2002). This assertion connects seamlessly to Derrida's notion that a signature derives its efficacy from its repeatability, detaching from the singular intent of its creator to achieve legibility. In Levine's body of work, the issue of authorship is fundamentally collaborative and tied to the idea of repetition, even with claims of individuality; her artwork powerfully reveals this conflict (Irvin, 2005, pp. 123–137).

The consequences for authenticity are profound. Historically, photography has been esteemed for its direct connection to reality. However, prior discussions on photographic authenticity highlight that photographs often do not fully articulate their provenance or the processes of their creation, a dilemma exacerbated by the complexities of digital culture regarding what constitutes a "properly photographic" image (Ritchin, 2013). Levine's appropriations predate digital manipulation, illustrating that the instability of authenticity was already apparent. While the Evans photograph may reference a historically situated individual and event, Levine's work complicates any straightforward assertion of authority by underscoring that the image's circulation, labeling, canonization, and repetition are equally paramount (Sekula, 1986, pp 3-64).



Figure 4. After Russell Lee: 1–60 (The Broad, 2017)

In the series, 'After Russell Lee: 1–60' Levine produces sixty inkjet reproductions of Russell Lee's Farm Security Administration photographs from the 1940s. The initial viewer experience perceives the grid as a collection of "historic" images. However, Levine's intervention redirects focus from the documentary content to the very act of repetition. Conger and Zucker elucidates that Levine's work prompts an examination of ownership and originality, while Art Bridges directly states that her replication of iconic works interrogates concepts of originality, authenticity, and identity (2025). Crucially, Levine's interest lies not solely in the replication of canonical images but in exposing the cultural mechanisms that confer canonicity upon them and her work interrogates the processes through which photography becomes integrated into historical narratives (Singerman, 2002).

Another noteworthy aspect of Singerman's essay is his exploration of sameness and difference (2002). He observes that Levine preferred not to display her works adjacent to their "original" counterparts, potentially due to the reductive implications of direct comparison. Additionally, he also claims that similarity is fundamentally unsettling; in a two-panel presentation, the seemingly identical invites viewers to examine subtle distinctions, which he refers to as the "infrathin" difference, a concept taken from Duchamp (Manning, 2017, pp. 97–115). This technique is crucial for grasping Levine's approach. Her photographs, rather than representing overt transformations, engage through subtle yet conceptually provocative distinctions (Singerman, 2002, pp. 96–121). The minimal gap between Evans and Levine carries profound implications for authorship (Irvin, 2005, pp. 123–137). The subtle differences in artistic expression spark

important discussions about creativity and ownership in the art world. These nuances challenge our understanding of authorship, showing that small changes in interpretation can significantly impact how we view originality. This prompts us to rethink how we define and evaluate artistic merit in today's creative world.

Ultimately, Levine's contribution lies in demonstrating that appropriation does not merely serve as a counterpoint to originality; rather, it illuminates the constructed nature of originality itself (Lovatt, 2011, pp. 601–604). Her works suggest that authorship within image culture cannot be understood simply as a matter of precedence; it is mediated by institutional frameworks, discursive practices, signatures, and repetition (Hick, 2011, pp. 185–199). Through her projects *After Walker Evans* and *After Russell Lee*: 1–60, Levine articulates that photographs are intrinsically embedded in a continuum of series, histories, and interpretative fields prior to their designation as an individual's "own" (Singerman, 2002, pp. 96–121). In this regard, Levine's work not only challenges the concept of originality but also reveals its inherent fragility, performance, and historical contingency (Irvin, 2005, pp. 123–137).

Conclusion

In contemporary image culture, appropriation reveals the complexities surrounding authorship, originality, and authenticity (Irvin, 2005, pp. 123–137). Instead of existing as self-contained or purely original entities, images are shaped through processes such as repetition, circulation, framing, and institutional recognition (Lund, 2021, pp. 6-7). The works of artists Richard Prince and Sherrie Levine illustrate this concept, each approaching it in unique ways (Crimp, 1979, pp. 75–88.).

Richard Prince's *Untitled (Cowboy)* series exemplifies how the image associated with the Marlboro cowboy symbolising themes of freedom, masculinity, and authenticity is,

in fact, a constructed and commercially circulated fantasy (Sante, 2020). Through his rephotograph, Prince exposes the image as not merely an original representation of rugged individualism but as a repeatable sign, its impact reliant on cultural familiarity and visual myths (Berger, 2013). Furthermore, his work highlights the limitations of critique, demonstrating that while the image is appropriated, it is not extricated from commodification; rather, it gains value within the contexts of gallery exhibitions and the art market (Marx, 1867).

In contrast, Sherrie Levine directly challenges the notion of originality by questioning the authorship of the author and the stability of what is considered the "original" image (Singerman, 2002, pp. 96–121). Through pieces like *After Walker Evans* and *After Russell Lee: 1–60*, Levine illustrates that images are already filtered through the lenses of art history, reproduction, and discourse before being reappropriated (Conger and Zucker, 2025). Her practice unveils the retrospective nature of originality, which is often constructed once an image is subjected to repetition and cultural critique. Levine's work does not merely borrow images; it exposes the cultural and institutional frameworks that define and defend authorship (Singerman, 2005, pp. 96–121). Thus, what is perceived as authentic or original is influenced more by context, framing, and historical validation than by any inherent quality (Hick, 2011, pp. 185–199).

Together, Prince and Levine argue that appropriation transcends mere derivation; it serves as a critical strategy that clarifies how images acquire meaning, value, and legitimacy (Crimp, 1979, pp. 75–88.). This challenges the concept of the artist as a singular creator and instead locates images within broader economies of representation and exchange (Davis, 2024, pp. 522–530). However, appropriation does not provide a straightforward escape from these systems. Both artists illustrate that critique can become integrated into the systems it seeks to interrogate, suggesting that while appropriated images may undermine notions of originality, they can

simultaneously be artworks, prestige objects, or commodities (Diack, 2023, pp. 144–146).

Ultimately, the power of appropriation lies in its ability to keep questions of authorship and authenticity open (Irvin, 2005, pp. 123–137). It reveals that images are continually contested, with meaning, ownership, and originality treated as ongoing cultural negotiations rather than fixed truths (Lund, 2021, pp. 6-7). In contemporary image culture, where images are increasingly shaped by digital circulation, post-production, AI manipulation, and platform economies, appropriation remains a vital method for exposing the instability of authorship and originality (Hassan, 2025). In the end, conversations about appropriation promote a greater comprehension of how cultural significances develop and are reinterpreted in our ever-more connected digital world.

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