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3 Keywords: Appropriation, Postmodernism & Advertising

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This written submission will help identify my proposed question for a dissertation. I have researched three keywords which will help focus on a clear understanding to then combine all to a bigger question which can then be answered with a very clear understanding. The three keywords I have chosen are appropriation, postmodernism and advertising. My interest in these has come from my specific area of practice being graphic design, they are elements I would like to be completely clear on when practising my own work so fit well to be researched and questioned. For each keyword I will be exploring images, thinkers and adverts. At the end of this piece I would like to be able to construct a well thought about and academically thought through question. The question will have a full background of understanding into its key elements produced by the keywords given and studied.

The first key word as stated above is appropriation, defined by the Cambridge dictionary as “the act of taking something for your own use, usually without permission.” (Appropriation, Cambridge English Dictionary, 2020) It can be used in different occasions such as art, music, idea’s and customs. Specifically, within the use of art it is another pre-existing artefact which is then tailored to be given a different look, meaning or emotion. This is subjective on which of those the artist is trying to achieve.

A technique frequently used during early 1912 onwards is the practise of defacing newspapers. They are originally a collective of another person’s words surrounding a topic, which are then taken by artists and repurposed. The new artwork can follow similar meaning to what the original intention was or is changed into something completely new. This technique brings forward the questioning of the artists ability to produce original work (Appropriation, Art Term, Tate, 2020).



Figure 1 & 2

An artist who uses appropriation is Barbara Kruger, born on January 26 in 1945 Newark. an American graduate from Syracuse university who specialises in Conceptual art who is known for covering feminism with images combined with type. Her work mainly covers the behaviours of consumerism and the stereotypes based around feminism. Her work has been seen to use phrases such as “I shop therefore I am.” And “Thinking of you.” Shown above as figure one and two, simple phrases without much meaning until viewed overlaying an image. She produces the work and projects it out to the world by putting it on posters, T-shirts, electric signs, billboards and photographs (Barbara Kruger, Artnet, 2020). Her work has been influenced by multiple factors from movies to everyday stereotyped life (Rider, 2020).



Figure 3

"We don't need another hero," Figure 3 Said to be a reference to the wartime poster "We Can Do It!" made of bright colours and empowerment for women by J. Howard Miller from 1943 is made up of a photograph taken of Norman Rockwell from the purpose of the Saturday Evening Post (Rubin, 2020). In the photograph there is a photo of a young woman observing the bicep of a young man (Rider, 2020). This can be seen to project a message onto the younger generation, to form their minds while they're young that women are just as important as men.



Figure 4

An instance where Barbara Kruger's style work was used is when Supreme a clothing brand filed a \$10 million lawsuit for an offence of copyright infringement carried out by Leah Mc Sweeney part of the 'Complex' group. The case was specifically because of a 'parody' version of the logo which said, "Supreme Bitch."

Kruger who originally created the look using red text boxes with white Helvetica text was asked for her input on the case and responded with a blank email and an attachment which "What a ridiculous clusterfuck of totally uncool jokers. I make my work about this kind of sadly foolish farce. I'm waiting for all of them to sue me for copyright infringement. Barbra Kruger." She also attached an updated version of her earlier work from 1984 "Don't be a Jerk" (Totally Uncool Jokers: Barbara Kruger's

Conceptual Comeback to Supreme Lawsuit, 2020). The two images are shown about in figure 4.



Figure 5

An example of well-known appropriation is the world famous Marilyn Diptych (Figure 5) 1962 a series of silk screen prints composed together to build one big piece created by artist Andy Warhol. Is a great example of appropriation in the earlier stages and near the time appropriation began. Using a method of silk screen printing the image originally taken from the film 'Niagara' was printed in colour and then in black and white. The technique although using the same template image creates a different outcome every time.

Repetition is used in this artwork which can be seen as a form of flattery Marylyn who earlier that year had appeared to commit suicide (The Death Of Marilyn Monroe: Accident, Suicide, Or Murder? 2020). The painting was eerie and had been 'flattened' this perhaps deliberately to emphasise the fact she is dead.

The emotion given into this painting could also represent that she was more a brand than a person. As the images fade towards the right-hand side, is it a representation of a timeline and a downwards spiral. The last photos are very faint and can be described as ghost-like. The way the diptych is set out is similar to the frame of a camera roll, this enhances the fact that she was a famous movie star and someone who was photographed a lot throughout her whole life (Marilyn Diptych by Andy Warhol, Article, Khan Academy, 2020).

Second keyword is Postmodernism a term used to conclude the meaning of something produced from scepticism and the suspicion of reason, whereas modernism is the opposite and based upon idealism and reality (Postmodernism, Art Term, Tate, 2020). Postmodernism came from questioning modernism. It took the art world into being more random, thus freeing the mind of the viewer and leaving

people liberated in their own thoughts and opinions. It's given art more of a right to express more than one meaning at a time.

The movement is similar to Roland Barthes 'understanding text's'. Simply, 2 different types of text, one being 'readerly' which has pre-determined meaning in both its style and content for example, an academic piece or a newspaper article(Introduction to Barthes's Theories of the Text, 2020). The other being in complete contrast to this, 'writerly' which are texts which have many different meanings and no subconscious narrative structure so therefore giving the person reading the complete control to form their own opinion, this could be in the form of poetry, where you are left to imagine and feel what comes naturally. An open ending text, something without a conclusion(3.5 Readerly and writerly texts, 2007).



Figure 6

Figure 6 - The Physical Impossibility of Death in the Mind of Someone Living made by Damien Hirst in 1991 is a glass tank with a steel frame, containing a Tiger Shark preserved in formaldehyde. Sharks, known for being deadly, fast and usually alive contained for people to view up close is arguably where the title of the work comes from.

When viewing this work in a public place, you get a feeling of defying death similar to if you were to stand on the glass floor in a skyscraper. Although you know the glass floor is made not to break how can you trust the strangers who made it? It's the same with the shark, its clearly dead but you will have that fearful second thought among viewing (Art, P. The Most important Art of Postmodernism 2020).

An exhibition by Damien Hirst was described by Laura Tansini as “Hirst deals with the fact of mortality, and he does so by going straight to the point. We perceive that, for him, life has no purpose, death no redemption.” This is an important observation to understand his work. (TANSINI, L., LONDON :Damien Hirst 2013.)

The mouth of the shark being wide open enhances the frightfulness of its most powerful weapon, its 24 all identical teeth which are strong enough to crack the shells of hard animals such as sea turtles, it will eat nearly everything. A shark taken and dissected had unusual contents in its stomach such as tires from cars (Fact Sheet: Tiger Sharks, 2020) This installation in real life is huge as the average size of a tiger shark is 10 to 14 feet and weighing 850 to 14,000 pounds (Tiger Shark | National Geographic, 2020).

The outer work is a metal steel frame which has a look of what submerged ships would have being underwater. To compare it to another of his works ‘Away from the flock’ done in 1995 is does not have the same emotional factor to look at it. The sheep is harmless, so you sympathise its passing whereas the shark is a predator therefor you can be left feeling relieved that it is dead.

Lastly, the final keyword is advertising which according to The Cambridge Dictionary is “the business of trying to persuade people to buy products or services” (Advertising Cambridge English Dictionary, 2020) meaning that it itself is a service which is sold with the intention to sell usually done by an agency (What is Advertising? Definition of Advertising, Advertising Meaning - The Economic Times, 2020). It is a profession which provides knowledge in the form of communication. Adverts can be found across many different platforms such as television, radio, on the internet and in print (Different Advertising Platforms, 2020). Focusing on the different types of adverts featured in different places and in different sizes such as billboards, newspapers, magazines, direct mail, catalogues and internet images appropriation and postmodernism can be explored.



Figure 7

The best example of a successful advertising campaign is Nike 'Just do it' shown above in figure 7. A slogan which represents the brand without the logo always even needing to be present. The 'Just do it' campaign was created due to a 'fitness craze' emerging and forcing Nike to expand their market and take advantage of it. They stopped only catering to marathon runners to target all other sportsmen. Following this move, from the year 1988 to 1998 their sales exceeded \$9.2 billion (Kolowich, 2020).

[Darth Vader Volkswagen](#) advert shows how appropriation can be an excellent way for companies to save money by building on a memory someone already has and not creating a new one from scratch. This was done by Volkswagen for their 2011 Super Bowl commercial titled 'The force', they used a Star Wars Theme which enabled them to go straight into forming a new memory of something so already popular (Visually Blog How to Use Appropriated Advertising Imagery Appropriately Visually Blog, 2014). Star Wars was originally launched in 1977 giving the advert a head start on some familiarity and made it an instant nostalgia technique.

The advert shows a small child wearing a Darth Vader costume trying to activate his powers, the father pulls in and when he goes in the house presses the lock button and the child is left pleasantly surprised. This advert is enjoyable as soon as it

comes on as you instantly recognise the tune. This could result in you thinking about it throughout the day and therefore the advert sticks in your head especially if you were a fan of Star Wars.



Figure 8&9

Superheroes are often used in adverts because they are someone people of all ages can appreciate. Two examples figure eight and nine show the viewer just single body parts of hero's who can be instantly recognised, in this case it is the hands which are a focal point. Superheroes have been made a popular part of the world since around early 1930 so as stated above a head start on familiarity is already there (Superhero | fictional character, 2015).

A quote to help understand how advertising is art the one of Williams Bernbach an American advertising executive “Advertising is fundamentally persuasion and persuasion happens to be not a science, but an art.” (William Bernbach | American advertising executive, 2019). He suggests that the part of advertising which is art is the freedom for a viewer to make a decision following from persuasion. Similar to postmodernism adverts usually consist of an unrealistic reality that is appealing and enjoyable. It gives power to the viewers to make their own decision something which is much more affective by leaving some flexibility it broadens the audience (Morris, 2005).

After exploring into these 3 keywords which is an important part of understanding where the question has come from and what it exactly means, it reaches an observation of postmodernism and advertising both hold factors of appropriation. In terms of how the keywords lead me here, they all draw to a similar reoccurring theme of feature being shared among many different medias such as film characters, fonts, colours being used in certain areas and many more. These are just two instances of where it is used. To further explore these my final question will be *‘how does appropriation affect our capability to think for ourselves when viewing an artwork or advert?’*. As a graphic designer I think it will be important to know how

truly effective this can be as it has played a massive part in art over the years. It is something I can take forward into my future career which has many benefits. I also think as a consumer and a member of an opinionated society it would be great to learn the key elements in which change the way we think.

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