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FULL version -

* "COPY IT, STEAL IT, SHARE IT "

The spirit of culture has been hijacked - or not, as the nature of communication is not to be proprietary. The uses of archetypical moments endow its possessors with the power and facility of shorthand communication thus creating the ICON.

Images and myths as icons can be thought of as metaphors of the current strata in history as we know it. Exploring the nature of art and communication as a structure, artists create a language that transcends cultural barriers and consumes the effect of history and current socio-political structures as a fluid medium that is replayed/remixed in our daily attitudes. The structure of iconic history plays a large role in the need for familiarity. The appropriation of icons and myths recreate the icon's intrinsic power to communicate anything from one to a multitude of meanings. The action of copying, stealing, or sharing reconstructs information in a relative style to open up new ways in which a story is told. Considering that the Icon embodies the past, present, and future, the use of appropriation, editing, and distribution of iconic figures, situations, and mutating identities, allows each evolving icon to assume the "I", the self in the created or replicated narrative.

Myth and tactical appropriation, which build the serial through repetition, create a context for the information being used to empower the icon. The use of ethnographic icons in relation to the "The idol"-an ornament of a person, pictorial study of a person, and image of a person-and its reuse of media by appropriating the signs, symbols and historical contexts, create a relationship with contemporary societies' associative use of myths and contemporary icons. In turn, this leads to the fusion of cultural mainstreaming through economic structures, personal fantasy and identity. Godfried Donker and Ellen Gallager use the tabloid and other constructions/formats of mass media to examine the position of human as commodity, and the undermining effect of this constructed race mythology on individual identities.

Godfried Donker presents "NY Times Silhouettes" and "Tyson". "NY Times Silhouettes" uses the Financial Times as a map to create a liaison between the stock market and the iconic figures of man and woman. Donker uses images of Madonna and Fighter to symbolically represent the stock market ebb and flow. Madonna, fighter, woman, man, the positioning of the Madonna and all the contexts that are attached to that icon (the mother, the sex symbol, and power) mirrors the positioning of the fighter as a late modern sport nexus. This embodies a quasi-religious status, creating a perfect paradigm for the Madonna and fighter together to reflect the seductive practice of European Orientalism's use of culture myths, and fetishism of hierarchal economic structures. "Tyson" looks at the man, the celebrity, the cultural icon and its relationship to history and myths. The image is rooted in gender, race and identity. The narrative is structured through the multi-billion dollar global enterprise that we know as Mike Tyson. Culture has been bombarded with images of aggressive, violent, ignorant men projecting the myth of the African as exotic savage in need of being controlled. These myths are rooted in oppression, undermining the western dreams of success, and Tyson's achievement of that, as cultural icon. Using Tyson as an iconic figure holds many readings, as he is enslaved on a boat with all his medals, money, and strength. Neither he, nor we, can escape the origins of the history embedded in this multi-faceted character as a commodity.

Ellen Gallagher's "Wig Maps" look at myths, icons and stereotypical images of black identity, and use the structure of advertising found in 1970s black magazines to examine the marketing of stereotypical images of black culture. Gallagher deconstructs this documentation of history through collage application, media, and mediums, exposing the complexity of icon and myth of African-American culture as commodity, and the effect of this on a cultural identity. Both Godfried Donker, and Ellen Gallagher present the icon as a critical identification through reflection of mass culture and consumption practice

Throughout time, myths, history, and iconography have been employed to symbolically create tools that reconcile the human experience. Naturally myth would project itself systematically into cinema in relation to dreams and cinematic structures that are infused with real and virtual experiences, thus becoming culture. This encapsulates documented actions and staged events, which act as archetypes/icons that mediate social and artistic gesture as contemporary history. Reynold Reynolds' "History of the Future" and Monika Bravo's "Play on Time" are two examples the reuse the cinematic lexicon of documented and created historic-critical investigation. Both take a personal approach in exploring the effects of media, phantasm, and voyeurism in creating history through cinema.

Reynolds categorically breaks down history through the appropriation of the sci-fi film. "History of the Future" systematically re-edits these films to refer to mankind's fear of impending technology, and its relationship to mankind's obsolescence. This cinema moves from historical and personal structures to engage with our reality in a personal narrative - where some entrances are more apparent then others. Fears, annihilation, and redemption through a supreme being have been a few of the iconic emotions and questions played out in commercial Science Fiction cinema. "History of the Future" recreates a reconstructed data bank that seamlessly affirms all our fears and dreams as true. It works simultaneously with the structures of society, the subconscious human psyche, the merging of media and personal memories; embedding in our personal memories the accountability of history by showing validation on the screen as if it were a documentary of real-time effects.

Bravo's "Play on Time" actually plays with time and personal memory through her version of the historic 1969 USA landing on the moon. The landing marked a turning point in history with its technological possibilities, and its role as a media image that was to be repeated throughout history and reinforced through cinema; to be held as an absolute in a time of vast political uncertainty. Bravo plays with the myths and authenticity of the actual landing, as "Play on Time" validates the action as real with its arguably permanent effect on history. The reality lies as an imprint in our memory through repetition of the actual landing: through media it acts as a personal memory intact with the events that coincide with the pivotal accomplishments of a time in history. Bravo's "Play on Time" creates a personal narrative associated with the documentation, inferring a new type of cultural editing as a reflection, a capturing of a moment creating a cinematic narrative as life. Cinema of mediated iconography through historic events creates personal time-lines that weave in and out of consciousness through documentation of the real and the unreal.

Currently the computer icon has led us to rediscover the prehistoric form of communication - the hieroglyph - through the use of icons in the extended landscape of the net, communication platforms, games, and their new iconology or visual vocabulary that has risen through the development of software programs. Andy Deck's, "Gylphiti" and Space Invader's "Invasions" create a context with graffiti that appropriates private space. Similar to graffiti, the hieroglyph writer marks on the subway and temple walls. Andy Deck's "Glyphiti," is a multi-user collaborative drawing platform calling on the spirit of graffiti is a site specific project using code that filters through private sectors of the net, creating a public domain and a collaborative drawing space that recall the uses of prehistoric hieroglyphs with pixels replacing the mark, to create a real-time icon. In Space Invader's "Invasion" the attack is addressed in the public domain where the Space Invaders' mosaics lurk the cityscape, and the players are anonymous. Space Invader and Deck introduce the cross-pollination of new media, as the closest notion to public art production by depicting a position of narrative from the maker to the public space-whether it be the streets or the net-continually questioning the definition of PUBLIC. Space Invader uses the aesthetics of a Byzantine iconographer as an instrument through which a work is executed, a work that goes beyond the individual.

Similarly, Marina Zurkow's mosaic "Man + Woman" creates a relationship between the malleable nature of the pixel as a unit of measure for the screen, or various monitors- a logical transfer into creating a static image with a context or relationship to the aesthetics of Byzantium mosaics. The pixilated portrait "Man + Woman" makes reference to Christian mythology, representation of man and woman as Adam and Eve, a couple that holds biblical proprietary as a logical union. As does the transference of the proprietary action of Adam and Eve's procreation of an ephemeral society, a root that breeds the use and reuse of myth and imagery.

Carlo Zanni pulls back and uses classical oil paintings of desktop icons and software logos to recall the renaissance of portraiture and landscape painting. Documenting the extended landscape of the net, the desktop, and software logos, Zanni examines the simultaneous meanings of the icon and the software logo, images used as tools to create the many social contexts we use to exchange information. In Zanni's "landscape, Napster logo" The icon paintings generate the uses of the product as a tool and the replication of the logo as a contemporary icons, the software itself used peer-to-peer software enabling us to down load freely commercial products, the rebel in the market, the rogue affecting the monetary value of information. Napster quickly became a celebrity a rebel with a cause, just like James dean or Marilyn Monroe, making reference to pop use of the celebrity as product and media devoted primarily to the circulation of products. Pop art made use of commodity in the celebrity; marketing of commercial product, and the celebrity implied the use of graphics design and socio-economic strategies in the art market. Now the commercial market uses art history to validate its products. An example of iconic art history used in the commercial market is Adobe software logo for "Illustrator" which uses Sandro Botticelli's "Venus" as a logo. The icon is very important, lending validity to the product in recalling classical art masters and using of mythological icon Venus to lend many entrances to the product, as if reassuring the user that you too could be Botticelli if you use this tool, or allow you to be seduced by the power of Venus. As is, the desktop icon is used to identify what is available to you. Zanni borrows back the commercial logo of illustrator for his painting "Landscape, Illustrator". All icons serve a purpose as tool to generate a starting point for the next phase of the story. Carlo Zanni's paintings are portraits and landscapes of the plastic reality. The software icons, desktop, and P2P platforms all set forth the questioning of society's placement of these icons in relation to the personal. As never before has the present been so loaded with the past and future. Considering the animated present we live in, Zanni and other artists of his school look at the icons as starting points for communication.

The artists participating in COPY IT, STEAL IT, SHARE IT, claim the cultural transference of information as non-proprietary. Cultural icons as archetypical structures reflect the effects of cultural systems as a source of knowledge to generate an on going contemporary dialogue. No one, and nothing, is excluded as we and it are all part of this process of history. In that the gesture of borrowing is intact in the practice of communication as a transfer and exchange of ideas from one culture to another. My actions lend to yours, so continue to copy, steal, and share.

Michele Thursz, Post Media Network

* "Copy it Steal it Share it" Andy Deck, 2003,
http://artcontext.net/glyphiti/docs/about.html

Michele Thursz is an independent curator, based in New York. Her current project is Post Media Network located at http://www.michelethursz.com. Previously she founded and directed Moving Image Gallery. Her recent curatorial, production projects include "Brain Girl"+ "e" + "Pussy Weeval", NYC,"Nown", Pittsburgh, PA, "Fetish: Human Fantastic" Borusan Gallery, Istanbul.