

Untitled (Parrot)

1982/93

crystal, cibachrome and felt

Portrait



KOPIE 03_02.2026

PHOTO KOPIE



Fifteen Words with Multiple Meanings

(For Louise Lawler, 1984)

**Appropriate
Arrangement
Authority
Collect
Corporate
Discriminate
Display
Label
Muse
Object
Point
Present
Procurement
Select
Work**

7. Ibid., p. 17.
8. John Richardson, "Your Show of Shows," *New York Review of Books* 27, no. 12 (July 17, 1980), pp. 16–24.
9. For a critique of the prevailing view of Picasso's art as autobiography, see Rosalind Krauss, "In the Name of Picasso," *October*, no. 16 (Spring 1981), pp. 5–22.
10. John Szarkowski, "Introduction to *The Photographer's Eye*" (1966), in *The Camera Viewed: Writings on Twentieth-Century Photography*, vol. 2, ed. Peninah R. Petruck (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1979), p. 203.
11. Ansel Adams, "A Personal Credo," *American Annual of Photography*, vol. 58 (1948), p. 16.
12. Ibid., p. 13.
13. Szarkowski, "Introduction," pp. 211–212.
14. See Julia van Haften, "'Original Sun Pictures': A Check List of the New York

Graves's eclecticism thus maintains the integrity of a self-enclosed history of architectural style, a pseudohistory immune to problematic incursions from real historical developments (one of which would be modern architecture, if it is considered as more than merely another style).

Gehry's practice, however, retains the historical lessons of modernism even as it criticizes modernism's idealist dimension from a postmodernist perspective. Gehry takes from history an actual object (the existing house), not an abstracted style. His use of present-day products of the building trade reflects on the current material conditions of architecture. Unlike the sandstone or marble that Graves uses or imitates, Gehry's materials cannot pretend to a timeless universality. Moreover, the individual elements of Gehry's house resolutely maintain their identities. They do not combine into an illusion of a seamless whole. The house appears as a collage of fragments, declaring its contingency as would a movie set seen on a sound stage (a comparison this house directly solicits), and these fragments never add up to a style. Gehry's house is a response to a specific architectural program; it cannot be indiscriminately reapplied in another context. Graves's vocabulary, on the other hand, will seem to him as appropriate to a tea kettle or a line of fabrics as to a showroom or a skyscraper.

What, then, becomes of these differences when applied to photography? Can analogous distinctions be made between the photographic borrowings of Robert Mapplethorpe on the one hand and Sherrie Levine on the other? Mapplethorpe's photographs, whether portraits, nudes, or still lifes (and it is not coincidental that they fall so neatly into these traditional artistic genres), appropriate the stylistics of prewar studio photography. Their compositions, poses, lighting, and even their subjects (*mondain* personalities, glacial nudes, tulips) recall *Vanity Fair* and *Vogue* at that historical juncture when such artists as Edward Steichen and Man Ray contributed to those publications an intimate knowledge of international art photography. Mapplethorpe's abstraction and fetishization of objects refer,

guish Graves's use of pastiche from that of Gehry? For the sake of convenience, let us take the most famous building by each architect—Graves's Portland Public Services Building and Gehry's own house in Santa Monica. The Portland building displays an eclectic mix of past architectural styles drawn generally from the orbit of classicism. But it is an already eclectic classicism to which Graves turns—the neoclassicism of Boullée and Ledoux, the pseudoclassicism of Art Deco public buildings, occasional flourishes of beaux-arts pomp. Gehry's house, in contrast, appropriates only a single element from the past. It is not, however, an element of style; it is an already existing 1920s clapboard house. This house is then collaged with (surrounded by, shot through with) mass-produced, from-the-catalogue materials of the construction industry—corrugated iron, chain-link fence, plywood, asphalt.

Differences between these two practices are immediately obvious: Graves appropriates from the architectural past; Gehry appropriates laterally, from the present. Graves appropriates style; Gehry, material. What different readings result from these two modes of appropriation? Graves's approach to architecture returns to a premodernist understanding of the art as a creative combination of elements derived from a historically given vocabulary (these elements are also said to derive from nature, but nature as understood in the nineteenth century). Graves's approach is thus like that of beaux-arts architects, against whom modernist architects would react. Although there can be no illusion that the elements of style are originated by the architect, there is a very strong illusion indeed of the wholeness of the end product and of the architect's creative contribution to the uninterrupted, ongoing tradition of architecture.

mental to being a painter. Being a painter should be the easiest thing in the world because there are and can be no rules. All you have to do is do whatever you want to do. You can just, and you must, make everything up.⁷

This, then, is the lesson of Picasso. There are no constraints, whether these are construed as conventions, languages, discourses, ideologies, institutions, histories. There is only freedom, the freedom to invent at will, to do whatever you want. Picasso is the avant-garde artist of *our* time because, after so much tedious discussion about history and ideology, about the death of the author, he provides the exhilarating revelation that we are free after all.

This creative freedom fantasized by contemporary artists and confirmed for them by the spectacle of a thousand Picasso inventions is seconded by art historians. A typical response is that of John Richardson, writing in the favored organ of the U.S. literary establishment, the *New York Review of Books*.⁸ Calling Picasso "the most prodigious and versatile artist of all time," Richardson rehearses the biography of artistic genius from its beginnings in the transcendence of the mere child prodigy by "an energy and a sensibility that are astonishingly mature" through the "stylistic changes that revolutionized the course of twentieth century art" to the "poignant" late works, with their "mixture of self-mockery and megalomania." Richardson's assessment is perhaps uncharacteristic in only one respect. He claims that "up to the day of Picasso's death in 1973 the power was never switched off."

Absolutely characteristic, though, is Richardson's view that Picasso's is a subjective art, that "the facts of his life have more bearing on Picasso's art than is the case with any other great artist, except perhaps van Gogh." And so that we don't miss the meaning of any of these great works, Richardson insists that "every crumb of information should be gathered while there is time. In no other great life are the minutiae of gossip so potentially significant."⁹

It is, then, as if Duchamp's readymades had never been conceived, as if modernism's most radical developments, including

Appropriating Appropriation

Picasso's own cubist collage, had never taken place, or at least as if their implications could be overlooked and the old myths of art fully revived. The dead author has been reborn; *he* has returned with his full subjective power restored—as the contemporary artist puts it—to make it all up, to do whatever he wants. Duchamp's readymades had, of course, embodied the proposition that the artist invents nothing, that he or she only uses, manipulates, displaces, reformulates, repositions what history has provided. This is not to divest the artist of the power to intervene in, to alter or expand, discourse, only to dispense with the fiction that that power arises from an autonomous self existing outside history and ideology. The readymades propose that the artist cannot *make*, but can only *take* what is already there.



It is precisely on this distinction—the distinction between making and taking—that the ontological difference between painting and photography is said to rest. The director of MOMA's department of photography, John Szarkowski, states it simply enough:

The invention of photography provided a radically new picture-making process—a process based not on synthesis but on selection. The difference was a basic one. Paintings were *made* . . . but photographs, as the man on the street puts it, were *taken*.¹⁰

But MOMA's jubilee photographer, Ansel Adams, is uncomfortable with this predatory view of photography. How could the artist Adams want to call a “photopoet” be a common thief?

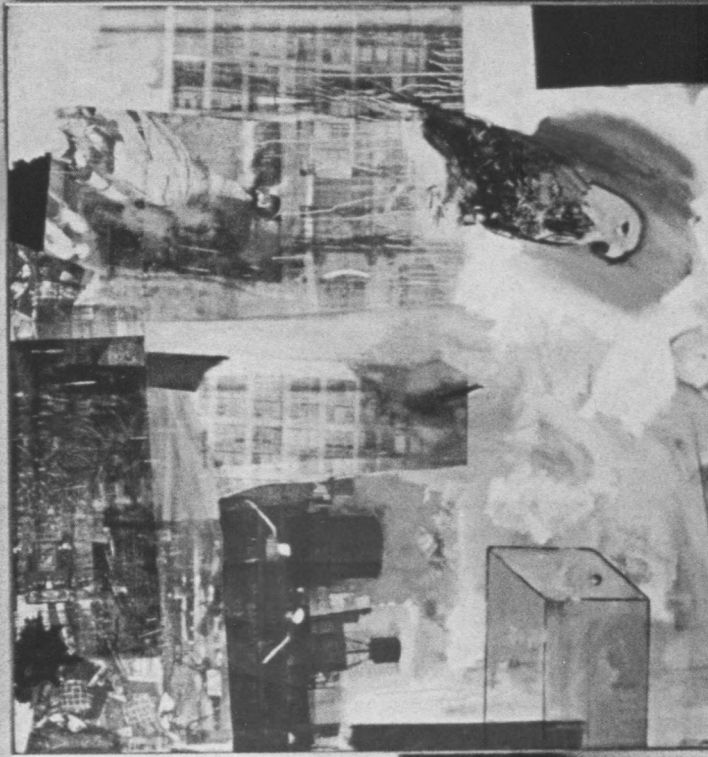
The common term “*taking a picture*” is more than just an idiom; it is a symbol of exploitation. “*Making a picture*” implies a creative resonance which is essential to profound expression.

My approach to photography is based on my belief in the vigor and values of the world of nature—in the aspects of grandeur and of the minu-

The strategy of appropriation no longer attests to a particular stance toward the conditions of contemporary culture. To say this is both to suggest that appropriation *did* at first seem to entail a critical position and to admit that such a reading was altogether too simple. Appropriation, pastiche, quotation—these methods extend to virtually every aspect of our culture, from the most cynically calculated products of the fashion and entertainment industries to the most committed critical activities of artists, from the most clearly retrograde works (Michael Graves's buildings, Hans Jürgen Syberberg's films, Robert Mapplethorpe's photographs, David Salle's paintings) to the most seemingly progressive practices (Frank Gehry's architecture, Jean-Marie Straub and Danièle Huillet's cinema, Sherrie Levine's photography, Roland Barthes's texts). If all aspects of the culture use this new operation, then the operation itself cannot indicate a specific reflection upon the culture.

The very ubiquity of a new mode of cultural production does, however, underscore the fact that there has been an important cultural shift in recent years, a shift that I still want to designate as that between modernism and postmodernism, even if the latter term is utterly confusing in its current usages. *Postmodernism* will perhaps begin to acquire meaning beyond the simple naming of a *Zeitgeist* when we are able to employ it to make distinctions within all the various practices of appropriation. What I would like to do here, then, is to suggest some ways in which these distinctions might be approached.

To begin, I should perhaps look more closely at the assertions of the regressive/progressive character of the uses of appropriation by the artists previously named. How, for example, can we distin-



Photography in the Museum

tiae all about us. I believe in growing things, and in the things which have grown and died magnificently. I believe in people and in the simple aspects of human life, and in the relation of man to nature. I believe man must be free, both in spirit and in society, that he must build strength into himself, affirming the "enormous beauty of the world" and acquiring the confidence to see and to express his vision. And I believe in photography as one means of expressing this affirmation, and of achieving an ultimate happiness and faith.¹¹

There is really less contradiction of Szarkowski's position in Adams's Sierra Club humanism, however, than there appears to be. For in both cases there is ultimately a matter of faith in the medium to act as just that, a *medium* of the artist's subjectivity. So, for example, Adams writes,

A great photograph is a full expression of what one feels about what is being photographed in the deepest sense, and is, thereby, a true expression of what one feels about life in its entirety. And the expression of what one feels should be set forth in terms of simple devotion to the medium—a statement of utmost clarity and perfection possible under the conditions of creation and production.¹²

Compare Szarkowski:

An artist is a man who seeks new structures in which to order and simplify his sense of the reality of life. For the artist photographer, much of his sense of reality (where the picture starts) and much of his sense of craft or structure (where the picture is completed) are anonymous and untraceable gifts from photography itself.¹³

By construing photography ontologically, as a medium of subjectivity, Adams and Szarkowski contrive a fundamentally modernist position for it, duplicating in nearly every respect theories of modernist autonomy articulated earlier in this century for painting. In so

LET US REMEM-
TRANSLATS
IN --

PHOTOGRAPH
IN MY OPINION, YOU CANNOT SAY YOU HAVE
THOROUGHLY SEEN ANYTHING UNTIL YOU HAVE A
PHOTOGRAPH OF IT.

EMILE ZOLA

