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Kelley Walker's Continuum:

Commodifying, Consuming and Recycling as Aesthetic Tactics

Robert Hobbs

A commodity is therefore a mysterious thing, simply because in it the social character of men's labour appears to them as an objective character stamped upon the product of that labour; because the relation of the producers to the sum total of their own labour is presented to them as a social relation existing not between themselves, but between the products of their labour. This is the reason the products of labour become commodities, social things whose qualities are at the same time perceptible and imperceptible by the senses.... It is only a definite social relation between men that assumes, in their eyes, the fantastic form of a relation between things.

Karl Marx, *Capital*, 1867

A widely heralded source for 1980s appropriation art is Douglas Crimp's *Pictures*. A 1977 exhibition at Artists Space in New York City, featuring the work of Troy Brauntuch, Jack Goldstein, Sherrie Levine, and Robert Longo, among others, 'Pictures' was also the title of Crimp's catalogue essay and revised text, which *October* published two years later. In his essay, however, Crimp does not mention the word "appropriation", since he was writing before this term became commonplace in critical reviews. But he does refer in passing to French theorist Roland Barthes' 'The Third Meaning' to describe the type of situation that later was called "appropriation": the fact that "underneath each picture [in the group of works he is assessing] there is always another picture."[1] A major theoretical source for Crimp and for the artists in his exhibition that continues to be slighted in histories of appropriation art, Barthes' text

refers to this type of overlapping imagery as a third level beyond straightforward information and coherent symbolism to constitute "a multi-layering of meanings which always lets the previous meaning continue, as in a geological formation, saying the opposite without giving up the contrary. . . .".[2] Crimp commends Barthes' creative stratagem as a "counter-narrative", a "play of presence/absence", thereby "appearing-disappearing".[3] He considers it to be particularly evident in actors' occasional lapses that inadvertently reveal gaps between assumed roles and themselves, thereby creating a nesting of differently directed images.

Predicated on tensions between old and new connotations, Barthes' "third meaning", which was soon reconceived as appropriation, was at first deemed a radical approach. But soon it was co-opted by fashion and advertising where it played on differences between present/past references in the former and personal/bureaucratic associations in the latter. One of the more playful appropriative ads in the mid-1980s was an American Express mailing, purporting to be a personal note from a friend, even to the point of including snapshots of this person whose face was blurred because of diving into a pool of water while on vacation. In 1991 the tactics of appropriation achieved renewed criticality as the *modus operandi* for the infamous Benetton ad campaign that appropriated such unsettling journalistic photographs as a dying AIDS patient, a black and a white man joined by handcuffs, environmental disasters, plane wrecks, war, and natural catastrophes, which were all decontextualised and re-presented under the auspices of the Benetton brand name. After the initial surprise of finding such images subsumed under Benetton's logo subsided, appropriation, which had been crucially important for such artists as Cindy Sherman and Richard Prince, was soon relegated to art's sidelines

by the next generation of artists. Fifteen years after the Benetton ads, critic Johanna Burton declared the 1980's term "appropriation" to be superannuated because it constituted "the kind of sign of criticality that is easily consumed".[4] Her judgment was no doubt informed by her efforts to champion several young artists, including Wade Guyton, Seth Price, and Kelley Walker, who had already began rethinking this critical approach around 2000 and were innovating ways to advance it.

Their reconsideration of appropriation has indicated the need for a new term to critics Lauri Firstenberg who suggested "neo-appropriationist" and Vincent Pécoil who advanced the rubric "secondary appropriation".[5] In consideration of the interest in this revised form of appropriation, it is important to note that Kelley Walker, whose complex art is the subject of this essay, has gone on record as one of its vocal proponents and also one of its outspoken critics. His oscillation underscores his dialectical turn of mind and also the self-critiques forged by his works that play on the themes of appropriation and reappropriation as well as commodification, consumption and reclamation. Among Walker's early works is a poster in the form of an advertisement with the prominent subheading, "fight capitalism: reappropriate", which constitutes one of nine *disasters* he made in 2001. Even though his works were created earlier than the fateful terrorist attack on the World Trade Center, Walker was aware that the 9/11 events substantially changed the public's attitudes toward his *disasters*. These prescient works focus on one of the issues that has become recognised as a reason for Al Qaeda's antipathy of the West: capitalism and its inequities that empower certain groups while disempowering others.[6] Like other works in Walker's series, the ad-like poster consists of an image culled from a collection of *Time Life* photographs. Specifically, it pictures an image of a house

damaged by a mudslide, together with brightly colored abstractions lightheartedly distributed across the lower section of the image, which the artist composed on Photoshop. The piece goes under the low-key and sardonic title *Then We Joked About How We Had Always Wanted a Sunken Living Room.* Although this pointed reclamation and redirection of a mass-media image might appear to be sufficient cause for regarding this work as appropriative by using Barthes' third meaning as a criteria for doing so, five years later Walker severely criticised this approach, stating, "I think appropriation points to or suggests some sort of original – a locatable source that one appropriates and in many ways eclipses."[7] His observation questions originality in the twenty-first century, where it, like genius, valorises an overly romantic view of individual inspiration that is out-of-sync with a mass-media world and its broadly based signs and projected meanings as well as with the type of transactional art that he has in mind.

In Walker's distinctly new *disasters*, the "art object" is downgraded to the level of a poster (a token graphic output) that he made to be sold with an accompanying CD-ROM on which it is digitally stored. Instead of focusing on the traditional artwork per se as a completed statement, Walker reconceives it as part of a "continuum", predicated on a new type of distribution and ongoing collaboration that he describes in the accompanying text:

> The disc and the image it contains can be reproduced and disseminated as often as the holder desires. Whoever receives a copy of the disc or image can likewise reproduce/disseminate either as desired and so on. Furthermore, anyone with a disc or reproduction can manipulate the image and reproduce/disseminate it in its

> altered state. All forms of reproduction/deviation derived from the image on the disc signed Kelley Walker perpetuate a continuum correlating to the artwork. . . .[8]

In this type of work Walker reconfigures the roles of both the artist and the viewer so that both are part of an ongoing continuum, involving the use of Adobe Photoshop tools to change and transform this and his other eight *disasters*. In addition to serving as a subject for this series, the word "disaster" can also be taken as a wry metaphor for Walker's generous open-ended collaboration. On the subject of the continuum, he has reflected:

> I was aware that this type of art was capable of instigating a dialogue. I was intrigued with artists who made works that are able to be re–read and to shift in meaning. I became interested in creating objects capable of perpetually remaking themselves or allowing themselves to be remade by participating in the culture industry.[9]

In consideration of his re-evaluation of art as an open-ended collaboration continuum, Walker no doubt was intrigued with Duchamp's readymades, which he was then studying, as well as with this artist's observation that a work of art is not completed until forty years after it is made because the critical reception accrued during this period completes the creative process. In his *disasters* Walker goes a step beyond Duchamp's readymades when he permits viewers an actual role in transforming and personalising his art and thereby refrains from objectifying it. In this way he leaves the work of art

perpetually open to new transformations and additions. Like the globalism it so clearly references, this art's boundaries are permeable to new ideas and attitudes.

In my opinion, Walker's art is more complex and far more permeable than appropriation's relatively straightforward dialectic. His work employs images already in the world, complete with the semiotically charged protocols for reading them, which it then redirects. Instead of being content with a single appropriation, Walker raises the process to the next level so that he appropriates the appropriators and, then, in the *disasters* leaves himself open to subsequent appropriation by collectors/viewers. As we will see, he connects this interplay with the mutual interdependence connecting commodification and consumption with recycling, viewing the three as implicated in an ongoing destructive and constructive process. In addition, he casts aspersions on the ways that his own works must collude with aspects of this never-ending cycle if it is to represent this process sufficiently in order to critique it. And he underscores in this strange symbiosis the manner in which his art assumes the role of a commodity fetish and becomes implicated in the unreal spectacle of our everyday mass-media world. I believe that Walker's work diverges from well-established definitions of appropriation in these and other compelling ways that indicate an understanding and personalisation of Guy Debord's *détournement*, as well as Michel de Certeau's theorisation of individual user tactics to thwart the programmed responses official culture prescribes for them.

A mid-twentieth century French Marxist, Debord converted Marx's thoughts regarding the tragic consequences of capitalism's transposition of *being* into *having* into a distinctly twentieth-century situation whereby both are reduced to mere appearances.[10] He named this situation whereby the world moves into representation "the spectacle".

Although it could be monolithic in its usurpation of a media and consumer-oriented society predicated on the consumption of images, Debord crafted the countering theory of *détournement* as a way to reverse the spectacle's insidious ability to rob the world of its reality. Related to the concept of *détournement* is the complementary activity he called *dérive*, a purposive letting go so that one walks through cities guided by desire and whim, a process he calls "psychogeographic".[11] He defines *détournement* as a linguistic operation whereby one redirects given texts by first "recognis[ing] their *fluidity* and their inevitable destruction" before keeping "one's *distance*", so that one might enact a "*reversal* of established relationships" capable of "radicalis[ing] previous critical conclusions that have been petrified into respectable truths."[12] Describing this operation as "the opposite of quotation", which would only affirm an original meaning, Debord emphasizes the fact that *détourned* materials are "fragment[s] torn from [their] own context and development", thus constituting "the flexible language of anti-ideology."[13] Although he views this approach as a "*violent subversion* that disrupts and overthrows every existing order", he also acknowledges an ongoing "double meaning, from the enrichment of most of the terms [constituting a *détournement*] by the coexistence within them of their old and new senses",[14] thus paving the way to regard this method as an early French version of what later becomes the an accepted definition of appropriation. However, appropriation's means of suspending and holding in tension old and new meanings is far more conservative than *détournement*'s emphasis on bankrupting a given term's accepted definition in favor of a new one superimposed over it. This potentially destructive approach is more in line with Walker's investigations, which involve joining aspects of *détournement* and appropriation with recycling.

Before moving to the topic of recycling – a crucial subject and a method for Walker's work – it is essential to look briefly at Michel de Certeau's reframing of both Debord's *dérive* and his *détournement* in his now classic study *The Practice of Everyday Life*, which demonstrates how consumers can subvert the power of the spectacle. As suggested earlier, while Marx's theory of capitalism's commodity-form (also known as commodity fetishism), which the Hungarian Marxist critic Georg Lukacs named "reification", invokes re-conceiving human relationships as things, Debord's spectacle regards them as even more removed from reality by reducing them to mere images. Debord's controversial follower, Jean Baudrillard, takes this ongoing type of abstraction a further step by considering reification in terms of semiotics and the attendant tendency to consume images as signs, a processs that he calls "simulation". Since Walker's speech is regularly punctuated by references to "commodity fetishism", "reification", "the spectacle", "consumption", and "semiotics and signs" – he has noted, for example, "My interest in the fetish is caught up in the reification (again historically and as repetition) of cultural forms"[15] – it behoves us to look at how his art demonstrates the possibility of breaking through the constraints implicit in all these terms by endorsing de Certeau's theorisation of individual consumption that is tied to the special meanings he attaches to the words "strategies" and "tactics" in *The Practice of Everyday Life.*

When Walker inscribed in two of his *disasters* the slogans "resist capitalism: interrogate spatial relations" and "fight capitalism: support failure", he was most assuredly alluding to de Certeau's ideas regarding individual consumption. According to this French theorist, *strategies* consist of the programs and products of institutions and ensconced power, while *tactics* involve the active use or re-use – Walker would say

"recycling" – of mass cultural representations. Strategies are hegemonic and organisational – in the art world they can be regarded in terms of the cultural industry: the bureaucratisation, rationalisation, and commodification that members of the Frankfurt School studied – while tactics are personal, makeshift, parasitic re-workings of them. Strategies are developed through polls, focus groups, and case studies to define their consumers, as well as advertising and PR campaigns to ensure homogenised and monolithic responses. Despite strategies' concerted efforts to anticipate and manage the utilisation of their cultural representations, consumers' tactics regularly *détourne* such established images or signs by enacting a series of ruptures and breaks that often are unseen since they occur on the level of individual use and the activities of daily life. An eminently viable and far-flung approach, de Certeau's tactics reverse the determinative operations of Michel Foucault's theories pertaining to the capillary actions implicit in positive productions of power, which functions in the same way as the rule of law by being consensual throughout a given society and equally incumbent on all its members. Instead of Foucault's implicit cooperation, which is catalysed and held in check by the needs of members of a given society to participate fully in an established power structure, de Certeau envisages myriad infractions that empower consumers as individuals and undermine the hegemony of strategies. When Walker's general title *Laughing We Joked* for several of his *disasters* is connected to the subtitled imperatives *interrogate spatial relations* and *support failure*, he indirectly and ironically refers to (1) the fact that strategies employ overarching systems that define specific places while tactics operate in terms of *spatial* relations, and (2) the idea that the *failure* of a given strategy can be re-construed as an individual tactic's success. Walker's reference to an earthquake in one of

his *disasters* can be construed as a metaphoric aggregation of individual tactics; a magnification of these small infractions into sizeable ruptures capable of breaking down such overarching strategies as a major highway.

Given the highly theoretical concerns of Walker's art, one might wonder about the types of personal relationships and conversations that would give rise to such abstract and playful concepts. The youngest member in a Georgia-based family of four children, whose father, a noncommissioned officer, was a veteran of three wars and mother was employed as an online worker in a surgical glove factory, Kelley Walker became the first person in his family to graduate from both high school and college.[16] Receiving a scholarship to study at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, he first enrolled in graphic design courses and then transferred to printmaking where he could work with mixed media. While at UTK, he became friends with Wade Guyton, a university scholar from a similarly modest background, who was able to plan his own program and chose to focus on cultural theory as well as on art. These two aspiring artists would often read the same theoretical texts and discuss them at length. Walker joined the recently formed art gallery in downtown Knoxville initiated by Guyton, their UTK classmate Meredyth Sparks and a few other people where they could all put theory into practice. Named A.1. after the steak sauce, no doubt as an extended joke about art as a consumer product, the young gallerists invited such New York artists as Robert Beck to exhibit in their space, screened such films as Todd Haynes's *Dottie Gets Spanked* and Sonic Youth's *Death Valley 69*, conducted readings, and sponsored local art competitions. In order to involve the gallery in critical discussions similar to the ones occurring between themselves, they formed the counter group based on the name of another consumable, M.I.LK. (written as

an acronym). M.I.L.K.'s function was to post protests, attack A.I.'s policy, and even deface the outside of the gallery with graffiti. This practice of first setting up a situation and then establishing a critical forum for critiquing and understanding it has since been a basic modus operandi of Walker's work and also his artistic collaboration with Guyton, called "Guyton\Walker", which makes works separate from either artist's individual oeuvre and also creates entire exhibitions and installations.

In addition to critiquing the presentation and merchandising of art in his work, Walker began to question aspects of the art industry after he settled in 1998 in New York, where he joined Guyton, who had relocated there six months earlier to attend the graduate studio program at Hunter College. The catalyst for his inquiry was his employment, first as a mover of general merchandise and household goods before working for Fred Worden Trucking where he became an art handler. Among the artists employed by Worden as art handlers during the years 2001–2005 when Walker was connected with this concern were such rising and recently established art stars as Jules Balincourt, Jason Rhodes, and Rirkrit Tirivananija, who, in particular, impressed Walker with the extraordinary care he would take in wrapping works of art. While Walker was associated with Worden Trucking, collectors would sometimes ask him to make suggestions about installing works of art. At that point he began to think about the public's misplaced perception of the lifespan of artworks that sometimes remain for only relatively brief periods in the artist's studio and on view in white-box galleries in comparison with the protracted periods of time spent in collectors' homes and museums. Walker notes that at the time:

> I became aware of how fashion changes perception so that works of art that have come back into fashion are brought out of the back room and re-hung. I was intrigued with how a work changes from being marketed as culturally relevant, to becoming a potentially historical object and also a commodity.

This realisation correlates with de Certeau's overall perception regarding the potential roles users assume in breaking down the strategies that large bureaucracies such as the one established for marketing and critiquing contemporary art attempt to instil.

In 2003, New York gallerist Paula Cooper offered Walker an exhibition. Since he was well versed in theory, Walker began to think about what it means to organise a show as a set of ongoing and related concepts as opposed to making individual works of art. The prospect of a New York debut represented an enormous challenge for Walker because he recognised that it could become the standard for further investigations. He has recounted his deliberations in the following manner:

> I wanted to question how you enter into a system and make a body of work. And I also wanted to think about how to introduce myself as an artist to the world. I did not want to attempt to reduce art to zero or undertake an end game. Such an approach is more about style than what I wanted. I wanted zero, but I wanted the negative and positive to remain on both sides of zero. There was no way to begin with zero because whatever I would start with, it would have a history.

Not surprisingly, in addition to the work of Duchamp, Walker was immersing himself at the time in the work of Andy Warhol, Joseph Beuys, and Robert Smithson. He was intrigued with Duchamp's ability to inflect the meaning of his work, Warhol's way of collaborating with culture and permitting it a crucial role in making the art, Beuys' view of art as a means for social and political change, and Smithson's emphasis on considering works of art in terms of presences and absences.

One morning when he was eating cereal and thinking about how he might formulate both an exhibition and a developing oeuvre, Walker noticed the recycling sign on the cereal box before him and realised at that moment how this insignia could serve as the basis not only for his show at the Cooper gallery but also for a series of questions and types of redoubling that could potentially take his work in meaningful directions. He began by wondering how the reclamation trademark's three redirected arrows, which form a never-ending Möbius strip, could ever function as "a logical language, because the sign maintains the core paradox of taking advantage and exploiting what appears to be a truth or naturalised system." From this observation, we may conclude that while the recycling motif is a sign seeming to promise the benefits of superceding itself, for Walker it instead simply points to another arrow identical with itself, thus suggesting both infinite recycling and consumption. Although this insignia was originally intended to underscore recycling as an ongoing and circular process, Walker regarded it as "operating as an ideology while simultaneously throwing a stop in that reading", perhaps, because it connotes not just reclamation but also the countering never-ending cycle of consumption necessitating recycling. "In fact", Walker goes on to say, "this sign undermines the very stability of ideologies since it equalises the difference between the object and its intent",

thereby demonstrating how the recycling trademark can equate reclamation with consumption so that it can be read as easily as representing the former as well as the latter.

In order to make his first recycling images, Walker looked to minimalist Robert Morris's early 1960s work for the Manhattan-based Green Gallery employed standardised sizes of plywood sheets that endowed them with a generic character. He therefore resolved to job out the largest recycling signs that could possibly be laser cut out of metal. Then, working also with an appreciation of Morris' provisional reflections on Duchamp's readymades, he extended this type of work by characterising his recycling signs as fake readymades, which he considered to be similar to the fake Louis Vuitton purses being sold on the streets. To heighten the ambivalence of his recycling signs as real and fake and as images of reclamation as well as consumption, Walker determined decorative surfaces for them that would function as "barring devices, similar to Derrida's '*sous rature*'" (under erasure) by applying gold leaf to the surface of one, so that the sheer opulence of this material would undermine the concept of recycling, while covering another with thin cardboard, which he then painted with an image of the recycling insignia to suggest its merits. The disparate ways the artist handles the two signs undercuts any interpretation of his work as predicated on an unwavering belief in the benefits of recyclamation: when seen together, the two works affirm their role as commodities and emphasise the power of the spectacle that can subsume even critical art and ecological concerns under its insinuating auspices.

Because Walker's first show at Paula Cooper's gallery in 2003 has determined attitudes crucially important to all his subsequent works and since his early pieces inflect

the meaning of his later ones and vice versa, an analysis of work included in this first exhibition will serve as a basis for looking at Walker's work presented at Modern Art Oxford. Such an approach will enable us to see how important the recycling of imagery and ideas is to Walker's art and how subsequent recycled elements assume somewhat different yet related meanings from their earlier incarnations.

Working with the recycling/consumption theme for this first show at the Cooper Gallery, Walker continued to develop the idea of faked readymades when he scanned images of bricks and a section of a Louis Kahn reinforced concrete wall that conformed to the shape of its wooden mould. Thinking about Isa Genzken's early found industrial objects on pedestals and looking as well at images of Marcel Broodthaer's *L'Angelus de Daumier* (1975), which consists of wall pieces, a crate, and a shovel that all look as if they were fabricated with bricks, Walker made offset prints of the bricks to scale while approximating the size of the original concrete section. He remembers that he "liked the fact that these images took on the rhythm of the walls in the gallery." This constructed wallpaper, arranged in a decorative pattern resembling diacrostic squares, literalises the concept of the gallery and its walls, making both it and the walls decisive elements in the exhibition. These scanned elements were essential components for Walker's show because they gave him permission to avoid filling Cooper's space with commodities at the same time that they enabled him to emphasise the formative role that the gallery's walls assume in ratifying ordinary objects and even fragments of objects as art. The scanned elements, transposed from printed images to digital files, suggest an inherently more equitable basis for Walker to consider two-dimensional images in the future, since the mathematical basis of one digital file can be linked with another.

Walker continues to play with these two-dimensional architectural forms in his recent work for Oxford where sections of bricks, stacked one-by-one in Adobe Photoshop as if the artist were a virtual mason, are printed and transposed to a series of silk-screens so that they can be printed in CMYK (cyan, magenta, yellow, and black) using different pressures to allow the colours to vary from one part of an image to another and from one overall print to another. Placed on the wall, the silk-screen sections articulate the wall's function as both barrier and support almost as if they were cartoon-like language bubbles arising from the wall itself or, more simply, metonyms referring back to their support. In keeping with this low-key personification and/or metonymical construction, Walker's silk-screened collections of brick and mortar are certainly not traditional paintings even though they occupy their space.

In addition to the three-dimensional recycling signs and the scanned two-dimensional images of brick and reinforced concrete Walker made for his first exhibition at Paula Cooper's, he also recycled the same image of a plane crash in Maui that he had employed several years earlier for his *disaster* series. This time, his source for the work, entitled *schema: Aquafresh plus Crest with whitener,* was Benetton's published version of the dislodged fuselage of the plane, together with its prominently displayed logo for selling its United Colors clothing line. In addition to scanning this image with its commodity-based logo, Walker liberally squirted toothpaste onto a sheet of glass, scanned the resultant image, and then laid this digital file on top of his Benetton one. He was particularly intrigued with the way that the Aquafresh product designers had mined the first two of the four CMYK colors commonly used in mass-media printing for their product, knowing full well that it would be printed exactly as designed and also would be

readily assimilated by audiences attuned to seeing visual imagery in terms of this four-color printing process. As a tongue-in-cheek nod to the old-fashioned modernist injunction to project one's ideas through one's media, Walker contrasted the Benetton logo in the upper left with a CMYK strip on the lower right. In this situation the CMYK strip can be read as a visual pun on Benetton's global rainbow coalition, branded "United Colors", a tactic on the part of Walker that reinforces the thematic of commodity fetishism and purported world unity. Both the rhyming and the ruptures occasioned by these two elements, when seen in combination with the disjunction created by the layering of the Aquafresh file over the Benetton *disaster*, are representative of the type of sweeping generational changes that commodification, consumption and recycling are capable of effecting.

These generational changes that are evident in this piece are reprised in another *schema*, subtitled *Aquafresh plus Crest with tartar control* (2003), which was also included in the first Cooper exhibition. Unlike the Benetton ad that plays with the reification resulting from the company's appropriation of a human tragedy for the purposes of endowing the company with a liberal image and enabling it to sell clothes to like-minded consumers world-wide, Walker's second *schema* draws on the ways that the Birmingham, Alabama race riots originally constituted a carefully orchestrated spectacle. Walker has recounted his understanding of the way that African-Americans' peaceful resistance was organised and orchestrated under daunting circumstances:

> Because Dr. Martin Luther King's peaceful demonstrations were regularly ending in violence and widespread news coverage, King and civil rights activists working

with and around him, decided to anticipate riot patrols' use of dogs by contacting their trainer – a black man – who taught protestors to hold their stomachs tight when assaulted so the animals would not be able to harm them as much. Then, Dr. King's organisation leaked to the Birmingham press information that police would be at the protests. In this way, one could say that these protests were staged for the press.

For a second series of *schema* focusing on the Birmingham race riots, Walker chose an image that was featured on the front page of the *New York Times*. It recalls, without duplicating, Warhol's *Race Riots* of the early 1960s, since it was made by Bill Hudson, an Associated Press photographer, and not the Birmingham-based, white southern photographer Charles Moore, who was employed by the photo service "Black Star" and whose images were sources for Warhol's work. Walker contributed to the confusion between the two photographers when he used the Black Star name as titles for his subsequent works on this theme, which all employ Hudson's image.

In these later works, Walker decided to dispense with toothpaste, perhaps because of its hygienic innuendos and sexual overtones (several critics thought it referenced ejaculate) and to turn to drips and splatters of white, milk, and dark chocolate, which he in turn scanned. From these scans he generated silk-screens so that he could squeegee melted chocolate onto his race riot images. He recycled these images a number of times, presenting them in diptychs and triptychs, in which the figures were rotated to produce different psychological emphases depending on whether the white or black man was on top. Walker also used the Coca-Cola sign in the background as the basis for conceiving

the Hudson photograph in the logo's familiar red color. He liked the idea that chocolate in these works was both a medium for representing itself and the thing represented. In these works chocolate functions literally and metaphorically as eye candy, even though it mounts an assault on the underlying digital photographic image. For Walker, freshly silk-screened chocolate is highly suggestive, eliciting associations with pleasure, slightly addictive cravings, gold, decadence, and the smells of freshly baked chocolate chip cookies in malls. A fetish, chocolate also calls to mind early Oldenburg foodstuffs, Janine Antoni's obsessions with chocolate and fat, Dieter Roth's use of this material as a sculptural material, and John Miller's reliance on it as an abject substance.

In addition to employing chocolate for his *Black Star* pieces, Walker used it figuratively (and not literally) as a metaphor for commodity fetishism in his recycling of the George Lois' Braniff Airlines ad campaign of 1967 entitled "When you got it – flaunt it!", which became a widely bantered quip in the late 60s. Featuring celebrities portraying themselves, the ad featured such unlikely pairs as Andy Warhol and heavyweight champion Sonny Liston, crime novelist Mickey Spillane and poet Marianne Moore, and British comedian Hermione Gingold and actor George Raft. Although Walker made off-register CMYK silk-screened images on canvas of a number of these pairs, thereby literalising their commercial auras at the same time that he multiplied staggered images of them to emphasise their multiple selves, he chose the Warhol/Liston piece for a poster that he has regularly shown in conjunction with his *Black Star* works. While Braniff's commodification of human interaction is represented in terms of the canned conversation between the two men that ends with the then expected one-liner "When you got it – flaunt it!", Walker's rendition of this ad includes images of scanned blue Lindt chocolate bar

wrappers, which are then partially covered by a grouping of large standardised Photoshop stars in different colors, thereby reifying the interaction between the two figures. In the 60s, Braniff utilised high fashion and art in its bid for international recognition. Over the years, it commissioned fashion designers Emilio Pucci and Halston to create stewardess uniforms, industrial designer Alexander Girard to oversee the design of its interior spaces, stationery, and logos; and sculptor Alexander Calder to decorate the exteriors of its planes. Thus, Walker's references to the famous Lois ad campaign for this long defunct airline underscore and also allude to some of the ways industry has attempted to commodify art and reify human relations.

Although Walker continues to use chocolate in his art, he put it to a new use in his 2006 installation at Galerie Catherine Bastide, Brussels where it was cast in the form of a hollow-core disco ball (often touted as the ultimate party accessory), constituting, among other things, a recycling of John Armleder's appropriation of this form that transforms artistic influence into an odd coupling tantamount to commodity fetishism. At the Bastide Gallery, Walker suspended his chocolate disco ball from the ceiling and attached it to a motor so that it would continue to rotate throughout the course of the exhibition. Instead of reflecting and refracting light and images coming within its purview, the faceted sphere "sucks them up", according to the artist, reminding him of the earth rotating on its axis and also a wrecking ball. Through the act of converting a mirrored surface into a dark confection, Walker partially breaks down the glamour of ballrooms, skating rinks, and other amusements where this orb's mirrored equivalent is customarily used to transform and fetishise ordinary spaces by transforming them into glimmering spectacles. By remaking this festive bauble in chocolate, so that it constitutes an entirely

different type of fetish, Walker is able to comment on the way that this fixture has assumed the status of a commodity programmed for consumption. For Oxford, he has increased the number of chocolate disco balls to five, all of them different sizes and each attached to a motor. Although rotating at the same RPM, the size of the bigger spheres will move more slowly than the smaller ones, thus multiplying the overall effects of their commodification.

Working with his consuming/recycling dialectic, Walker has recently revisited his squeezed toothpaste and dripped chocolate images from 2003 and 2004, primarily because these materials' implicitly reference Abstract Expressionism in general and the work of Jackson Pollock in particular. However, rather than focusing on an image of Pollock, Walker looks to the impact of this work as it is reframed and repackaged by one of his lauded and substantially younger European competitors, the painter Yves Klein. Walker reuses an image that he believes Klein made to vie with Hans Namuth's photographs of Pollock dripping paint. It consists of Klein "painting" with a blowtorch while his assistant, dressed in fireman's garb, hoses the surface down with water to keep it from being incinerated. In Walker's estimation, "this type of staged [spectacular] image completes Klein's effort and makes him a model for other artists." Walker emphasises the wonderful absurdity of such a media-oriented event when he drags a series of Adobe Photoshop signs of paw prints across the surface of his work, as if to say that Klein's aspirations to go beyond the Pollock/Namuth spectacle can only be deemed a success if they meet the criteria of also becoming a horizontal stage like Pollock's where the artist's own footprints were inadvertently and subsequently registered. The playful

Adobe Photoshop paw prints by contrast suggest that Klein's fetishised documentary photograph is at best a Pyrrhic victory.

Two new light box pieces, one of which is exhibited at Modern Art Oxford, reflect the type of compression that occurs over time with Walker's consumed and recycled images. These works play on and hold in suspension the high art/commercial art resonances invoked by light boxes because of their associations with the airport advertisements for which they were originally developed and with the fine art mode of Jeff Wall's monumental photographs, which employ this medium for photographic reprises of modern French painting's trajectory. In Walker's untitled light boxes he replaces the "calculating sameness" of Warhol's Campbell Soup cans with images of Apple's Macintosh computer, which have been redesigned on average every six months, as a way to foreground and advertise its cutting edge innovations. In his light boxes, Walker counters the Mac's frenzied evolution with a series of notable incarnations and installations of his *Black Star* race riot images, including an early flyer for Birmingham's Inter-Citizens Committee, his monumental diptych shown in the living room of Miami collectors Rosa and Carlos de la Cruz, Saatchi's *Artforum* advertisement featuring one of Walker's large triptychs in its collection, and an installation of a Coca-Cola red version of the race riots at the Paula Cooper Gallery. By presenting the Mac's strategic moves in concert with his own tactics for recycling both the Hudson photograph and his own work employing it, Walker is able to use the redeploy the corporation's policy of planned obsolescence in order to critique his own permutations on his own work and vice versa. In this way, he plays with the continuing collusion that occurs between commodifying, consuming and recycling as well as with the related arts of advertising and museum

display. At the same time, Walker demonstrates that these parallel trajectories of selling products and exhibiting art, when viewed together, function as an incisive *détournement* and internal critique, which partially redeems the lightboxes, showcasing them at the same time that is casts aspersions on them.

Walker's art no longer enables us to view recycling as an unproblematic ecological goal, however helpful that short-term approach might be, because successful recycling programs can be regarded as a naturalised means for shoring up unbridled commodification and attendant consumerism. Looking at the basic sign for recycling as a key to this problem, as well as a generative concept for his work, Walker began in 2003 to question its basic altruistic goals and regard them as commodification and consumerism's flip side. In his early *disasters*, which were made before he consciously embraced the concept of recycling, self-conscious commodification and extended consumerism are offered to prospective collectors in the form of posters advertising the works as well as DVDs offering opportunities to collaborate with the artist, thereby enabling these collaborators to add elements he chose not to include and may have never contemplated. In these *disasters* – pun no doubt intended – collectors actively extend the process of fetishising the works that Walker initiated and the art industry has perpetuated. Later, when he fully embraces recycling, Walker becomes involved with a series of subtle changes to the same images over time; he finds ways to stage and restage them so that past histories inform their present state and their present condition in turn inflects their former meanings and future incarnations. In this way Walker dramatises how art can function more in terms of an ongoing continuum and less as specific objects made in anticipation of predictable responses.

[1] Douglas Crimp, 'Pictures' *October* 8 (Spring, 1979): 75. Cf. Roland Barthes, 'The Third Meaning' (1970), trans. Stephen Heath in *A Barthes Reader*, ed. Susan Sontag (New York: Hill and Wang, 1982, rpt. 1983), pp. 317 – 333.
[2] Barthes, p. 323.
[3] Ibid., p. 328.
[4] Isabelle Graw, 'When Procedures Become Market Tools', [Interview with Johanna Burton], *Texte Zur Kunst* 62 (June 2006), n. p.
[5] Lauri Firstenberg, 'Notes on Renewed Appropriationisms', *Parkett* 67 (2003): 170–177. Firstenberg defines "neo-appropriationism" in terms of "resignification of personal, political and historical memory"(p. 173). Vincent Pécoil, 'Abstraction and Appropriation', *Art Monthly* 285 (April 2005): 8.
[6] The nine *Disasters* include: Anchorage, Elba, a city in Florida, Kobe, Los Angeles, Maui, Moran, San Fernando Valley, and TWA Flight 800.
[7] Vincent Pécoil, 'Kelley Walker', *Flash Art* 39, No. 247 (March–April 2006): 62.
[8] This text is also cited in Bob Nickas, 'First Take: Bob Nickas on Kelley Walker', *Artforum* 40, No. 5 (January 2002): 123.
[9] Kelley Walker, Interview with Author, New York City, 9 February 2007.
[10] Cf. Guy-Ernest Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, section number 17, http://library.nothingness.org/articles/SI/en/display/16 (accessed April 3, 2007).
[11] Guy Debord, 'Détournement as Negation and Prelude', trans. Ken Knabb. First published in *Internationale Situationniste* No. 3 (1959), http://library.nothingness.org/articles/SI/en/display/315 (accessed April 3, 2007).
[12] *The Society of the Spectacle*, section numbers 205 and 206.
[13] Ibid, section number 208.
[14] Debord, 'Détournement as Negation and Prelude'.
[15] Kelley Walker, Email to Author, 19 February 2007.
[16] Kelley Walker, Interview with Author, 9 February 2007 and 10 February 2007, New York City. References to otherwise undocumented statements by the artist and personal facts, as well as information about the development of particular pieces, comes from these two extended interviews.