

## The Work of Art in the Age of Digital Reproduction: Appropriation, Copyright and the Public Sphere

Session Chair: Margaret Morgan, independent artist, Los Angeles

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Collective memory of popular film increasingly stands in for the collective itself. As the modern turns into the post-modern, the spaces of modernity wane in status. Public institutions are seen not so much as places of common entitlement, but as inconveniences, or, worse, sites of potential threat. In the decline of the public sphere, the physical experience of being in public – at the town square, the museum, the university, the arcade, the café and so on – is less and less what we have in common. Increasingly, what we share is limited to virtual experience – of television, cinema and the Internet, film-memory filling a void left by the evacuation of public space. While going to the movies still entails being in a large public group, it is precisely not about the kind of direct exchange associated with the spaces of modernity.

Concurrent with this shift, film has taken an increasingly central place in culture in general, as reflected in the rise of film- and cultural-studies. Likewise, many contemporary artists see film as a primary referent in their work and quote or sample film accordingly. Yet access is increasingly restricted: even as digital technology allows ever greater ease in reproducing and re-editing photographic, video and film stock, legal access is diminished by the complex workings of copyright law: unauthorized appropriationist works are prohibited outright and the artists required to cease and desist; copyright clearance has become prohibitively expensive and time-consuming; and access to copyrighted materials is often simply capriciously denied. In the name of preserving the rights of the author, the fair use of another author is subsumed. The problem is exacerbated when, for fear of litigation, museums and galleries that might otherwise exhibit works of art that appropriate Hollywood film self-censor their programs or are subject to costly legal suits.

This session is a very timely consideration of the artistic, legal and ethical dimensions of the appropriation of Hollywood film by artist and fan alike. What is the balance between the rights of the author and the rights of free speech? What happens when the 'author' is replaced by a copyright holder that is a powerful corporate entity? Issues around technology, Open Source ethics, freedom of expression and a changing notion of the public sphere will be raised.

Presenters:

Matthew Bakkom, independent visual artist

Douglas Davis, independent artist, media theorist and author

David Lange, law faculty, Duke University

Donna Tracy, visual effects artist