

THE PROBLEM LIES IN THE MEDIUM by Pablo Marte

The copy tells us: "I'm enjoying this"
(Marina Gržinić)

Imitation, copy, remake. Words that refer to a particular connection between one cultural product and another that preceded it. Analyses of association type in the relations between reproduction, repetition, plagiarism, fake or falsification, interpretation or inspiration, simulacrum, parody, pastiche, burlesque, satire, the long citation... have abounded since the publication of Johann Joachim Winckelmann's famous "Thoughts on the imitation of Greek works in painting and sculpture" (1755). Tackling the notion of "original", be it to criticise or to yearn after it, seems to be the order of the day, an end in itself. As it is to isolate the phenomenological character of the copy-without-original¹ that the simulacrum becomes, related with the end of history² and the image in endless loop mode.

With "The problem lies in the medium", my project for HPC, I set out to rethink these categories as subjects within a historic relation or, which is more of the same, to rethink the relation itself. The project comprises three phases, in the dialectic sense, which I shall now situate:

1. Correspondence

"Pretty Woman and other stories, a film with Alexander Kluge" (2011-12), my most recent film at the time of writing, proposes the concept of a hypothetical re-editing of the North American film under the aegis of the German director. It is precisely here that the first phase begins. "Pretty Woman and other stories..." questions the category of copy, for it is actually more of a re-write. Its images stand at a level of survival vis-à-vis their own past (Pretty Woman, films by Alexander Kluge, archive), wrested from the pretence of their original construct and violently relocated within

¹ "(...) a representation that seems to refer to a real model but is only simulating its reference. According to Giuliana Bruno, the replicants in Blade Runner "are a complete fraud. They look like humans, they speak like humans, and they have feelings but no history' (...) Their future is in the ability of acquisition, in the attainability of the past; their future is in constant attempts to form a persistent identity in time." ("Fiction reconstructed: Eastern Europe, Post-socialism and the Retro-avant-garde". Marina Gržinić, 2000, cit. in "What is Modern Art (group show) - Preface", Inke Arns, 2006). I draw quite different conclusions from the idea set out by Bruno, via Gržinić. The figure of the replicant appeals to the only eternity materially capable of being lived: the temporary. The flaw is not to be found in the search for a past, but in the exact knowledge of the cut-off point. It contradicts any logic of serial life, since the provisional is sustained by an infinite repetition of the cycle of birth and death. This is the replicant's policy. They rebel in order to attain a night-time spot on a television channel that endures beyond existence. They yearn after the tranquillity and rest of inopia and no-time. They do not seek history, they champion ahistoricity

² "One has the impression that a large part of current art participates in an enterprise of deterrence, a work of mourning for the image and the imaginary, a –mostly failed– work of aesthetic mourning that leads to a general melancholia of the artistic sphere, which seems to survive in its own demise by recycling its history and its relics although neither art nor aesthetics are alone in heading towards this melancholic destiny of living beyond their means and their own finalities). It seems we are condemned to the infinite retrospective of all that has preceded us. What is true of politics, history and morality is also true of art, which holds no privileged position. The whole drift of painting has withdrawn from the future and shifted towards the past. With citation, simulation, appropriation, present-day art is currently re-appropriating, more or less playfully, or in a more or less kitsch fashion, all the forms, the works of the –distant, recent or even contemporary– past. This is what Russell Connor a North American painter, calls the 'kidnapping of modern art' ("Aesthetic illusion and disillusion", Jean Baudrillard, 1994).

a new discourse. The words of Marina Gržinić ring out here, in that she sees the association between “original” and “copy” as an ‘assymetric’ relation “of domination and submission”³. I partially share Gržinić’s opinion. The objective of this first stage is grounded exactly in this asymmetry. To this end, since above all else a relation is a kind of correspondence, I will be sending a letter to Alexander Kluge along with the film. My purpose is not just to make contact (paying my respects, expressing my admiration for him), but also to close off an escape route from the logic of kidnapping that operates, according to Baudrillard, in every copy. So, this letter may also be taken as a kind of plea for rescue.

2. Displacement

The relation of domination and submission that Marina Gržinić perceives between copy and original does not discern that different temporalities penetrate each of them. Or that copy as category (the original too) never completely matches the wide range of variables in such an association. That is exactly why I ruled out cases of excessively literal repetition for this project. I wished, on the contrary, to project examples of rewriting, attempts at dialogue with preceding works, where nothing is seeking to impersonate anyone and repetition is countenanced as an act of re-updating. A fundamental displacement opens them up to the difference. A basic imbalance.

To make this displacement clear I considered inviting an expert on the subject of copy, original, reproduction, and so forth, in the shape of historian and museologist Walter Benjamin, who will offer a lecture at the Bilbao Museum of Reproductions entitled “The Unmaking of Art”, regarding the relation of copy with art history and museum art.

In parallel, in the Consonni office I shall periodically make provisional combinations of two-three works (of film, videographics) that start out from the rewriting of preceding cultural products. By comparing the original and the rewrite I aim to make clear what the project title mentions: that the problem lies in the medium⁴: the dialogue between the original and the rewrite unveils the historicity of the construction of all discourses and thereby puts to the test and questions the powers and dynamics of tension that produce them. For it shows that to contemplate the relation between both categories solely through the conjuncture of an intertextuality that is assumed to be ad infinitum, is to reduce the potential of resignification.

The setting up of the space in this manner is also offered to the public as a place of mediation and encounter with the work archive I will be working with. The idea is not to limit spectatorship either to the space itself or to the montages that are produced. The archive will be available to anyone who asks to make use of it, following the rhythms of their routine, in their own home.

3. Performativity

So I ask myself the following question: is it not perhaps an act of resignification to perform the signified, that is to say, to stage, in the present tense, what is broken from certain apparently consolidated spaces of significance? The duplicity at the junction of both works, an unquestionably fascinating mirror effect, compels towards a leap, a movement that only makes sense in the act itself, like that of a tightrope walker. The original would not so much be the first work, but the one upon and/or with which there is something that can and must be said regarding what is happening in the (temporal) space where the copy is presented. The point therefore of this third phase is to emphasise performativity as a motor element of a copy-original relation, against interpretations that prioritise defining the categories as if they were deadlocked pawns.

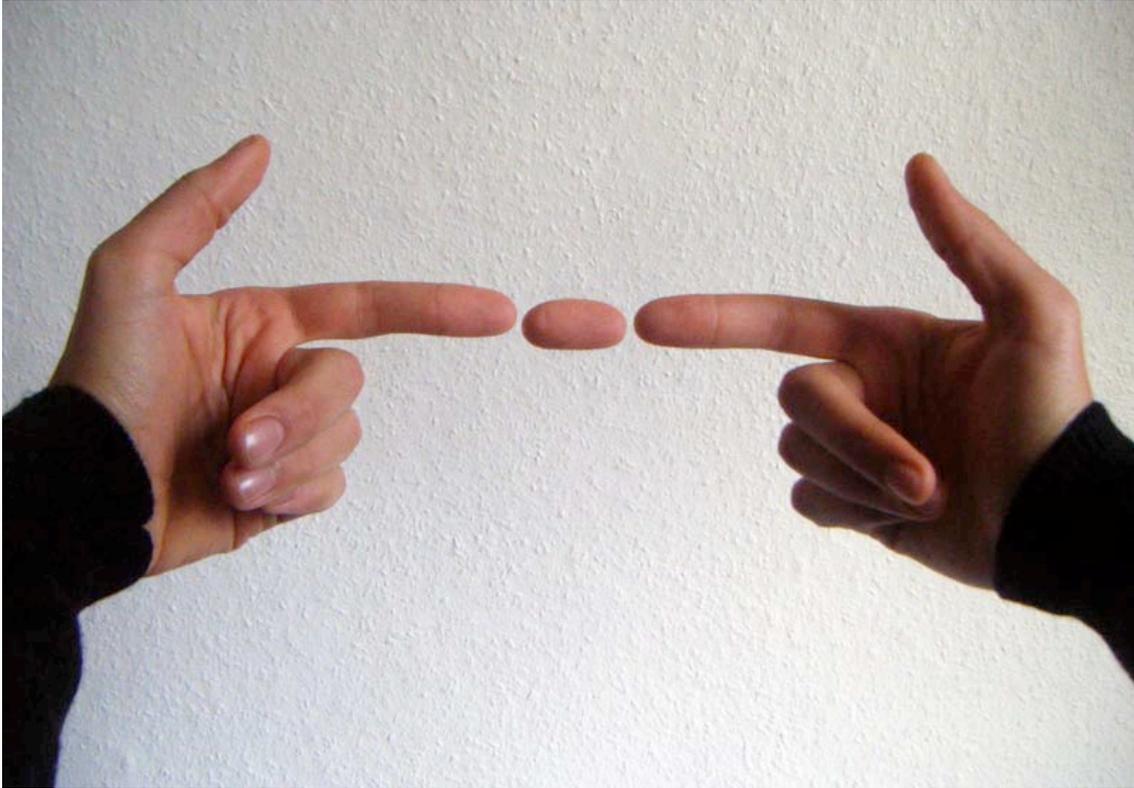
³ “Processes of embodiment at borders: Tanja Ostojić and the minimal difference”, Marina Gržinić, 2009.

⁴ “The problem lies in the medium” also plays with the multiple meanings of the word “Medio” in Spanish (it really is a very open word). Half, centre, mean, means, way, environment, substance, income, format...

Consequently, given that there are material production conditions (first and second phase), as a synthesis of the project I have proposed to carry out the rewriting in theatrical dialogue of a chapter of the “Aesthetics of Resistance”(1975-1981), the “red thread of history”⁵ , written by Peter Weiss⁶. The rewriting will happen through various rehearsals in which I will work the two characters from the play (a Swedish nurse and an exiled German communist) in dialogue with the actresses, who I have requested be of the same nationality as their characters. The project will conclude with a final rehearsal.

⁵ Juan Pedro García del Campo - Quimera - <http://info.nodo50.org/El-hilo-rojo-de-la-Historia.html>

⁶ The choice of Weiss is not accidental: he rewrote Kafka’s “The Trial” as a dramatic play (“The New Trial”).



Programme

Continuous session. On consonni premises.

Once a week, Thursdays, March and April at 19.00. Visit from a film archive selected by Pablo Marte.

Session 1. Around “Pretty Woman and other stories, a film with Alexander Kluge”, by Pablo Marte . At consonni.

Thursday 21 March.

Session 2. Lecture by Walter Benjamin. At Museo reproducciones

Thursday 11 April.

A lecture by Walter Benjamin, well-known philosopher and art theoretician, concerning original and copy. Years after his tragic death, he reappears. In 1986, with his talk “Mondrian ’63–’96,” organised by the Marxist centre and ŠKUC Gallery in Ljubljana, and the following year at the “TV Gallery” exhibition in Belgrade. Later on, he publishes his thesis “On Copy” (2003), participates in an interview (“My Dear, This is Not What it Seems to Be,” 2005) and co-curates, with Inke Arns, the exhibition “What is Modern Art?” (Kunsthaus Bethanien, Berlin, 2006). "

Session 3. Dramatisation of a fragment of “The aesthetics of resistance” by Peter Weiss. At consonni

Saturday 20 April.

Some rehearsals in private, and one in public, of a specific scene.

consonni HPC

consonni (www.consonni.org) is an art production company located in Bilbao. Since 1997, consonni has been inviting artists to develop projects that do not take on the shape of an art object exhibited in a space. These collaborators have included Jon Mikel Euba, Matthieu Laurette, Hinrich Sachs, Andrea Fraser, Sergio Prego, Ibon Aranberri, Itziar Okariz, Saioa Olmo, Iratxe Jaio & Klaas van Gorkum, Virginia Villaplana, Nacho Magro, María Ruido, Itziar Barrio, Alex Reynolds, Asli Cavusoglu, Asier Mendizabal, Martha Rosler, Phil Collins, Jeleton, etc. These consonni-produced projects tend to be of a long-term nature. **HPC**, in contrast, functions as a collaboration on a smaller scale (in terms of resources and duration), as a way to experiment with the fact that we have a street-level venue, and to test out the use that is proposed for the space when it is shared. Not all the programme sessions have to take place literally within the four walls of consonni.

HPC stands for "Habitación propia compartida", or "Own room to share", after Virginia Woolf. A championing of the (public and private) space that women need for themselves in order to work, reflect and create. **HPC** is also a specific programme within the activities developed by consonni, whereby an invitation is made to a series of, in the main, professionals, artists and curators, although it is not restricted exclusively to that arena, to develop a concrete programme for consonni's premises, consisting of three public sessions. The idea is to create a conceptual chain linking each event. Where the first person ends their contribution is where the next person takes it forward from. This scheduling chain begins in February 2013 with Pablo Marte, continues with Johanna Gustafsson Fürst, and then we shall see where this particular interpretation of an *exquisite corpse* ends up...

consonni presents HPC with Pablo Marte: The problem lies in the medium

With "The problem lies in the medium", Pablo Marte's project for **HPC**, sets out to rethink categories such as imitation, copy, remake, reproduction, repetition, plagiarism, fake or falsification, interpretation or inspiration, simulacrum, parody, pastiche, burlesque, satire... Words that point to a particular link between one cultural product and another that preceded it; a lengthy citation alluding to subjects within a historic relation, or a rethinking of the relationship itself, which amounts to the same thing. It is very fitting to kick off with this theme, given that consonni's programming for this venue is inspired precisely by a previous cultural product (i.e. Woolf's novel).

PABLO MARTE

Pablo Marte's work (Cadiz, 1975) revolves around the way that processes of image significance and discourse production are articulated –and rearticulated–, through a symptomatic, expansive, heterogeneous assembly practice. He has shown his work, individually and collectively, in contexts such as "Marginalia" (Donosti, 2013), Festival Pantalla Fantasma (Bilbao, 2013); EspaiDos (Terrassa, 2010); CA2M (Mostoles, 2010); Lobear (Berlin, 2010), among others. In 2012 he was the curatorial resident at the Fundación Bilbaoarte, where he developed the sporadic exhibition cycle "Enter the Ghost, Exit the Ghost, Re-Enter the Ghost". <http://www.pablomarte.com/>

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