

REPETITION
AS VARIATION



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"The only real trip to discovery consists not in seeking new landscapes but in having new eyes"
Marcel Proust

The repetition phenomenon characterizes each aspect of our daily life, from the cellular mitosis in the microscopic field, to the day's cycles with its routines (breakfast, lunch and dinner), to the year with the seasons and the life with its continuous untangling between birth and death. We are so dipped in repetition phenomena and driven by iterative rhythms that barely everything vanishes in an indistinctive magma. The repetition is a changeable tool, subjected to different interpretations and uses. In the first part ("What's the repetition?") we will remind how that is an extraordinary educative tool, the imitation of gestures and sounds it's the base behavior to learn something, but also stylistic if we consider the use of the language.

In "Repetition, difference" we will consider the repetition value as difference, analyzing in short the practice of the epic poetry in the ancient Greece. A cyclic repetition, where the version is similar but not the same as its former. And it's exactly the difference that makes the repetition a creative tool. In fact the difference brings to the "invention", without it, every part would remain the same, simply generating a repetition.

In the subsequent part ("Repetition, sameness") will emerge the role that the technology has taken to condition the repetition concept and to transform it from creative tool to an alienation instrument that form and deform us.

In "Originality, creation", we try to identify the characters of the contemporary creativity, a creativity where the concept of origin doesn't make sense anymore, but everything is pushed through a different where the copy of something else generates an "another".

From the practice of the Kata to the mantra recitation, in the eastern culture the people live in a more serene way the repetition idea. In the western culture, repetition is often a synonym of boredom, a real sequence of planned actions, a sort of cage, for a society continuously searching for innovations. Our main instrument for the innovation search is the remix, the restoring on cycle with a new formatting ("Re-cycle, the remix: the computer talent"): thanks to the strong expansion of the computerized instruments, we are living a redefinition of the repetitiveness on creative way. While in the classic experience where there's continuity with the tradition, our contemporary is more an idea of copy and paste to create cultural Frankensteins. One of the art that conditions and represents our present the

most, where there's a continuous use of these repetition practices, is the cinema world, we close then with a little window hunting for remakes, quotes and clones.

What's the repetition?

With the term repetition, we can identify those phenomena that involve a form of "put again in place", in other words when "the same thing" happens again, more times. The repetition is used to classify (things, ideas, behaviors, ...) in term of model definition, or rather when common distinctive characters are defined, when in a group some characteristics are repeated: in nature, each living being is an element of an infinite series of beings, and shows a typical relationship from the individual and general characteristics (color, dimension, shape, ...) the generations renewal is therefore expression of a repetition of the typical characteristics of the species in its complex, with variations at the level of the individual characteristics.

The repetition is also a basic tool of learning, it allows to entrust to the memory our experiences even from the first interactions with the world: the repetitive habits from mother and son are at the base of the way a newborn learns what's a signal endowed of communicative intention. As the language anthropologist Elinor Ochs (1986) explains, repetition as inexact imitation for learning the "communicative competences", or rather the various uses of the language. That for example when a baby expresses an sentence, "dog street" and it is repeated in the correct way by the adult: "there's a dog in the street" (Brown, 1998).

In the language practice, the repetition is also a stylistic way aimed to define the character of elevated linguistic registers, of the oratory and the ritual languages (think about the "Credo" formula in the Christian liturgy, where the key word is repeated. Poetry itself is an evident example of certain repetitions, the rhythm, alliterations, and these are also the techniques used to define a sophisticated language.

Obviously there are also forms of repetition less pure, forms concerning the content, when for example synonyms and paraphrases are used to reiterate a concept in a different form: repeating permits to emphasize some parts of the conversation or reestablish attention on that specific detail.

In the religions, it's evident not only the language matter, but also the one about the ritual, where the repetition becomes a basic instrument for the construction of the group identity. In the work of Spencer and Gillen (1904), first analysis on the tribal organization of central Australia, in

particular the Aranda, it's revealed a real core of ceremonies that foresaw the ritual repetition of an origin and foundation event: those tribes believed that their ancestors, through particular rituals and with heroic ventures, gave life to various species of animals and plants. The act of repetition brought to their present the same capacity of their ancestors to regenerate flora and fauna, and that's possible due to the initiation ritual, nothing but a moment of transmission of knowledge, a precious knowledge, a consciousness raising of what was in the origin. The term used to describe the initiation ritual is "intichiuma" that etymologically means "start something", "show how to do it". When those were made in the ancestors places, the ritual assumed a different name "mbatjalkatiuma", related to the concepts of fecundity, fertility. Repeating the ventures or the achievements of a divine being is a common practice also in the modern religion, so much so that on Sunday the priest restages Christ's last dinner, it's really about renew and live again the myth in the group.

Repetition, difference.

In the classic world, therefore in a world without widespread memorizing systems as in our contemporary, the action of repeating something has the reconfiguration value in itself, the regeneration, in other words has the difference concept in itself.

Let's take as example the Aedo figure, the professional cantor that stages the heroes ventures. As he does not have a written text, the Aedo uses a system of bonds: for example the formulaic language, the rhythm and the narrative track, as guide in a continuous re-creation of the story that obviously can't be the same as its previous in each word. The singing is strictly related to the music, that is the muses technique (mousiké téchne), divinities daughters of Zeus and Mnemosyne, the memory. The music then is the way the men attract the muse on the earth and the Aedo, in the singing moment, becomes the tool with which the divinities speak to the men, reviving what is the memory common to everybody, the culture (Dupont, 1993).

We said that the Aedo recomposes each time his singing in a new form, his speech does not remain, it is possible to say that, in part, he becomes, in turn, composer. Despite the diversities, who listens feels the poem just played as the same as the precedent, in fact the studies of Lord (1960), demonstrate as the combination of memory of the poetic form of the theme and of the style, combine together with the cultural

structures to reach an adequate form for an identical perception of the auditors.

The oral knowledge permits also radical mutations that however are not perceived just because slow in their development, because they are lived as a present, they are a flux. That kind of mutations are accepted because they are not traumatic, they are accepted because incorporated on the system itself. Repeating and varying using the "Aedo technique" permits to change the thing inside the cultural system, with slow but significant actions, working on the "now", in this moment.

Repetition, sameness.

The idea of repetition as idea of difference is distinguished from the idea of memory acting, that is a recent idea, bearable only by the press culture, where "the book is the fetish of a civilization terrified by the oblivion [...]" (Dupont, 1991; Italian edition 1993, p.11)

Both the orality (repeated in rituals as the epic lyric) and the writing are tools against the oblivion, memory instruments (in Greek, memory is *aletheia*, the non-oblivion), but this function is developed in a different way: while the word changeably fit its context, the book completely represents the theoretic moment in which has been conceived. In fact when a book in order to guarantee the passage through the time, is reprinted, the preface becomes the only tool of bringing up to date, of course, if a book is published, it means also that its conceptual meaning is not finished.

Benjamin (1936) and Mumford (1958) teach us that also the works of art have always been reproducible, but what is significant to change the reproducibility impact, is the use of the technique. The real change happens when the invention of the press and the paper diffusion are combined for the mechanic reproduction of images through the xylographic impression, allowing the introduction of products on the market in great quantity.

The arrival of the industrial age consolidates and amplifies the replica concept (as mass product. Science and technique change the valuable features of the "copy", as the case of Antoine-Louis Barye who uses the zoometry tools to accurately replicate the animals on his sculptures: then it is not to return an ideal figure, a model based on the proportions study and the harmony research, in research of the essence, but it's a precise return of that single animal, a transposition of it in the sculpture moment.

Replication and sameness are strong themes in the dodecaphony music of Schonberg: the control of repeatability of an element and the

absolute sameness in sense of value in the composition define a music that opposes itself to the creativity bound to feelings and personal impulses, typical expressions of the romantic music. On the Schonberg serialism, for example, the 12 musical notes of the chromatic scale have all the same importance, on the contrary to the tonal scales hierarchy, and the piece is built on a prearranged succession where each of the 12 sounds have to appear one and only one time, to avoid that a repeated sound could take a predominant position. A composition method that permits to integrate nature and culture, to recognize, forcing the situation, that in the world does not exist a real repetition and that all the single elements of an opera are bound to each other from relationship based on numeric and proportional calculation as in nature. In the serial music evolution of the Sixties, in fact, the repetition becomes symmetry and variation, identity and difference at the same time, all remaining inside the identity standards not representative. This new serial identity becomes fundamental to build a new creativity that we will see better in the next parts ("Re-cycle, the re-mix: the computer talent").

It's obvious how that phenomenon of "industrial" diffusion of the copies, developed mostly on the XX century, has been fundamental to fix and transmit our experiences and then to form a collective memory in addition to be an educative tool, fundamental to learn and know feelings, stories, in short, all that composes our social heritage. Mumford (id.) however, reports one of his present, that's possible to easily project to our days, overwhelmed by the capacity to reproduce and therefore unable to choose and assimilate: "The general effect of this multiplication of the graphic symbols has been to decrease the shock wave of the art itself [...]", the one the Benjamin (1936, Italian edition 1998, p.12) calls "Aura decay", or rather that mystic or "religious" character, raised in the audience in presence of the original work of art. "In this world crowded with images, we are forced to devalue the symbol and reject every of this aspects except the sensational one" (Mumford, 1952, Italian edition 1961, p.96-97) The repetition itself of the stimulus would induce us to empty the symbol from its meaning, working only on the special effects: "the more a symbol is empty of meaning, the more the one who uses it has to count on the pure and simple repetition and effect pursuit" (ibid) If we look at some examples coming from the popular culture, where there's a maniacal technique exercise (as for example the Transformers saga), poor of content but full of astonishing images, that, as drugs, after few

time lose of efficacy and then, if we want to maintain the effect, the dose has to be renewed (and so make a sequel with more invasive effects).

This happens, and Mumford (ibid.) specifies it, when we push to the maximum each possibilities of multiplication, or better when we lose the control of this instrument.

It's always our will that allows us to balance the forces and use the repetition instrument (in this case as a copy) as act of creativity, of meaning strengthening or of meaning renewal, just because we are disciplined no more by the lack, we have to introduce measures and criteria that define the value. It's the use of the tools that makes the difference (see "Re-cycle, the re-mix: the computer talent.")

Originality, creation.

The modern techniques of copy allow a kind of fruition where it has no more sense to distinguish between the original fruition and copy fruition (Benjamin, 1936): looking at a copy or at the original of a Botticelli painting is not the same thing (the first is a "fake"), that has nonsense in the sphere of cinematographic art, where a "privileged function" is missing because different copies of the same movie are seen in different places simultaneously.

According to Benjamin (id.), the aura allows to trace the coordinates of the opera origins, losing the aura, it's lost the origin and the authenticity value. Baricco (2006) refers to the contemporary as a barbaric period, which distinguishes itself from the previous, where it was thought "that in depth, on the origin of things and gestures, resided the auroral place of their exposing to the creation". The authenticity definition allows to set up a measurement system, a reference system for the definition of the works values. They said "you're so original", to define the goodness of an action or a work.

For the contemporary man on the contrary, the sense evolves where the things start to move, in sequence one to the others.

"The sense of things does not house in one of its original and authentic line, but from the trace that comes from them when they enter into connection with other pieces of world: [...] they are not what they are, but what they become". (Baricco, 2006; p.155)

The idea of beautiful was related to the process, or rather the step forward, the overcoming that however generates a welding between new and old, giving authority to the work itself: Mozart brings the symphonism of Haydn to new expressive peaks, Beethoven transports the mozartian symphonism across the eight-

een century and so on. On the other hand the barbarians love the lateral movement or rather when the development linearity is broken and it shifts sideways and when the relevance stays in the difference, the difference from the previous (different from the difference within the classic poetry bonds above mentioned).

"Is it possible to say that the Red Hot Chili Peppers or Madonna or Bjork are the overcoming of something or a step forward respect to something? [...] the point that their success is founded on making a step sideways, on their capability to generate difference, strong, well structured, self sufficient. However is not what the music multinationals obsessively are looking for? A different sound. They don't look for an overcoming of Springsteen at all." (ibid.; p. 157).

Therefore the contemporary lives of alternative copies, where the difference does not build itself on his previous, with slow and metabolized times, but with fast and often violent mutations, where does not count the tradition but what is generated. The copy of today does not rehash the shape transforming it in linear way, but generates various versions of the same thing, indeed it's not a flux but an "another."

Re-cycle, the re-mix: the computer talent.

The young generations live in a context where there's a great diffusion of a new matter, which it loans more than others to continuous copies and modifications, reuniting under the same roof different media. It's the digital matter. The digital computer language is based on the repetition principle, and it's a formidable investigation space to probe the infinite variations that this allows to be possible.

The artistic experimentations of the Twentieth Century from the Dada to Fluxus, from Oulipo to the programmed art have prepared to the coming of a digital art: many of the concepts of these artistic movements have been revealed as proper of the computer science instrument: let's simply think about the "controlled randomness" idea, one of the main informatics paradigm, or rather the casual access of the data for processing the information, included right in the Cage works. Or if we think about the Fluxus events, organized following precise instructions, we can't avoid to connect them to the idea of algorithm.

Works in general are the expression of processes and repetition, as Reas and McWilliams explain (2010; p.49), becomes a very powerful expression mean with effects on the body and mind.

We can find examples in some representatives

of the Op art (optical art) like Bridget Riley or Victor Vasarely, where the optical illusion of their works is the result of obsessive repetitions and changes that interact with the eye's physicality by planning the reactions.

Computers are designed to repeat operations in a cyclic way, Vera Molnar and Manfred Mohr were the first artists to understand the computer potential in order to discharge the artist from the dreary work of the repetition of repetitive patterns, they develop themselves some personalized software in order to give shape to their aesthetic concepts (ibid; p.53).

Mohr considered the computer as a "legitimate amplifier for our intellectual and visual experiences" (Leavitt, 1976, p.94)

A new mean, a new language that has to be understood in all its potentialities such as precision, high speed performance (that allows to create many more interpretations offering a large range of comparison) and also the fact to be a sort of the human memory extension, able to store hundreds of orders and commands (ibid, p.95).

Modularity and recursion are two other basic features of the digital means that implies the repetition concept: modularity is defined with the setting of many elements in order to produce a myriad of shapes, like in the videogames made of voxels where single unit are repeated (not transformed but replaced) in order to create a variety.

Recursion is the process that implies the copy of an object in a self-similar way, using a function that involves a self reference as part of the function itself. Koch snow flake is a clear example of that: a complex shape that arises from the repetition of a simple element.

Therefore the repetition allows to define patterns that are the expression of the inner rules of repetition itself, that is to say the algorithm. In the informatics field the repeating action has similarities with the word recycle, that is to say put in cycle again, put something in a new treatment.

As said before the digital data allows to encode with the same language, information from different sources, for example we can computerize audio, video and images.

These are a data collection in the computer that are read (algorithms) in order to be recomposed in images, video and audio.

The decoding can take place in a brand new way, different from the codification, and so the definition of new interpretative algorithms can transform (recycle) the data in order to transform them in a different way.

That is to say that the same data can have dif-

ferent formal expressions. The code, the DNA, is repeated but it is also re-read in order to create diversity. At the beginning of the year 2000, Yoshi Sodeoka makes a template that translate in real time audio and video tv segments.

Using this technology he has converted some historic rock video clips and two speeches to the State of Union made by George HW Bush in 1991 and George W Bush in 2003.

The chromatic masses of the images are codified and associated to their alphanumeric forms, in a sort of data flow in continuous cross over: a formatting of the virtual world put together from the media code: repetition, crossing over and transformation: repetition is recycle, repetition is remix.

Remix means to combine or to modify existing material in order to produce something new.

The word comes from the music type related to the hip-hop culture, that is to say rap.

Rap is a real expression of repetition because it is made of melodically and rhythmically repetitive tunes.

Rap was born from the will to be in contrast with the concept of music "creativity", where variety is the rule.

In reality it is the lack of resources that oblige rappers to make necessity a virtue and they begin to use some musical extracts in order to produce another theme.

These extracted themes are called samples, they are credits, quotes, fragments, elements of a new aesthetics.

Clearly with digital technique the samples are more flexible and they can be created with a computer or in a studio, they can be easily recorded live and modified in order to be endlessly repeated.

The remix idea can also be found in the cut-up idea, the aleatory writing technique where the text is cut and rearranged in order to create a new one.

The origins can be clearly found in some experimentations of the 20's like Tzara in the Dadaistic movement that became more popular in authors like William Burroughs: novels like "Naked lunch" and "The soft machine", are the result of the rearrangements of other manuscripts that B. wrote between 1953 and 1958.

Collage, decoupage and photomontage are remix techniques that are extremely melted in our everyday life, if you look in any social network you can see a lot of crossed over images and audio-video remix.

In the movie.

The cinema was born as a mean to repeat reality in order to make it approachable to the public of every social class and from every place.

The "views" (as the machine movement that was experienced by Eugène Promio who was Lumière operator) developed in the cinema at its beginning, were real moving pictures and they were able to show the audience some landscapes (like Egypt Pyramids) and scenarios that otherwise it would not have been possible to see in real life.

Since its birth the cinema personifies itself as "a cloned eye of the reality", it is not important if it is through faithful copies of it or simply through the use of possible invented stories; each moving frame it's "already seen", "already lived" (even only by the operator who films the scene). Each framing impressed upon a film remains always and anyway a repetition or a propose of something previously happened.

Everything is seen, and proposed again many times; also in a direct take recording the "filmed copy of the original" is anyway a repetition of what is happening.

The characteristic to reproduce already existing elements is tied not only to the inner characteristics of the cinematographic mean but also to the contents that it shows to the audience.

The cinema has often used literary or theatrical reviews transported on the screen thanks to some arrangements in order to make the text compatible with the audiovisual mean.

The cinematographic review of already existing projects (included comics, graphic novels and videogames etc...) does not touch only literary or theatrical texts or texts inspired to "really happened facts" but often the cinema copies from itself proposing again a project exactly alike a previous one varying only some elements (actors, production nation, music etc...) or simply "gluing" the contents of different films in just one text creating a sort of inspiration and quote "collage".

Taking for example the American movie of 2010 *Blood Story (Let Me In)* directed by Matt Reeves it is easy to note that the American movie is a faithful remake (or more precisely a clone) of the Swedish film *Let me in (Låt den rätte komma in)* directed by Tomas Alfredson in 2008.

This repeating chain does not end with Alfredson's work because the Swedish movie *Let me in* is based on the same name novel by John Ajvide Lindqvist.

The example of *Let me in* is one of many that can show how easy it is to find links of copy of copy in the cinematographic mechanism.

The so called shot-for-shot remake (that implies

the faithful repetition action by action changing only some elements, for example the main actors) can also be directed by the same director of the original movie.

An example of that is the Austrian movie of 1997 *Funny Games* directed by Michael Haneke and later repeated in 2007 by the same director in an English version with American actors.

Needless to say that also about the remake with same direction we can find many examples; Hitchcock repeated his *The Man Who Knew Too Much* of 1934 in a movie with English production (in which he changed the setting, the plot and the movie's ending) in 1956.

The cinema history is full of many examples of narrative repetition similar to the above mentioned ones (both from the same director or others) and the reasons of these remakes are always related to the fact of not having fully used (by the director or by the production) the potential of the movie.

Changing some elements (issue date, production nation, color or black and white, etc...) the artistic result or simply the movie success (combined by a strategic choice of these changes) can produce an independent and different movie from the original one.

The theme becomes more complex in a movie where there are quotes, imitations and references to other cinematographic texts.

The cinema nourishes itself from its history as directors who are passionate cinephiles or who comes from a cinema critics and theoretical imprinting (think about the Nouvelle Vague artists) nourish themselves of the great directors works in order to show the love and admiration for the cinema itself.

In a frame of the movie *Les Quatre Cents Coups (Four Hundred Shots)* by Truffaut, the main characters Antoine and René tear off from a wall the posters of Harriet Andersson in *Monica e il desiderio (Monica and the desire)* by Ingmar Bergman, the movie that in some ways refers to some contents lived by Truffaut movie's characters.

In the same way in the movie *À bout de souffle (Until the last breath)* by Godard, Michael's character performed by Jean-Paul Belmondo, copies Humprey Bogart in many scenes with the motion of passing his thumb on his lips referring his character to the gangster cinema and American celebrity.

Both the above mentioned movies are honored in *The Dreamers* by Bertolucci: the first by quoting its soundtrack, the second in one scene where Isabelle copies Patricia Franchini (Jean Seberg character in Godard's movie) screaming "New York Herald Tribune!" as a quote of a

famous scene of the movie.

The Dreamers has many examples of tributes and scenes from other movies: like the famous run around the Louvre quoting *Bande à part* and the repetition of some movie's frames like a part of Marlene Dietrich acting in *Venere Bionda (Blonde Venus)* and the scene of Paul Muni's death in *Scarface*.

In order to deeply understand how the subject of a movie can transform itself in many other parts from other texts we might think of one of the most glaring and contemporary example coming from Quentin Tarantino's cinema.

Tarantino builds inside each of his movie a precise collage net that refers to authors, and films that he particularly loves.

The Tarantino's quotes perform inside the text an action of the same importance as all the other elements of the composition (screenplay, direction, photography, acting...) because they express the author's need to live again and in some way to "posses" the artists who have deeply inspired and influenced the writing of his personal texts.

The quote element is something inherently tied to the text and it is of vital importance in Tarantino's works.

The admiration that the author has for the Italian horror and western cinema (Lucio Fulci, Mario Bava, Sergio Leone...) and the oriental cinema of samurai and martial arts (Akira Kurosawa, Chang-hwa Jeong, Lo Wei...) spells every part of *Kill Bill (vol.1 e vol.2)* that is a collage of quotes, tributes and inspired copies.

The beginning scene of *Kill Bill Vol.1* where Elle Driver goes into the hospital room to make the lethal injection to Beatrix Kiddo, strongly reminds both *Dressed to Kill (1980)* by Brian De Palma and *Black Sunday (1977)* by John Frankenheimer.

The scenes of both movies have same elements that go from the nurse character of *Black Sunday* (the eye bandage refers to the female character of *Thriller - en grym* by Bo Arne Vibenius) to the framings, division in two parts of the screen included, often present in the De Palma's movies.

Also the soundtrack of Tarantino's scene is a quote from the English thriller *Twisted Nerve (1968)* by Roy Boulting.

Every single element present in *Kill Bill* is in a way a reprocessing of something previously seen (from the Beatrix yellow tracksuit that reminds of Bruce Lee tracksuit in *Game of Death (1978)*; to the heart explosion technique with five finger shots seen in *Five Fingers of Violence (Tian xia di yi quan, 1972)* by Chang-hwa Jeong) Tarantino is so strongly in the dynamic of hyper-

text connections that he even quotes himself, by making the cell phone of one of his character in Grindhouse ring with the song Twisted Nerve by Bernard Herrmann.

The choice clearly reminds to his Kill Bill that in turn reminds to the movie Twisted Nerve by Roy Boulting.

Repeating is part of our world, it has always been and always will be.

We need to know the cycles in order to understand them; in order to insert ourselves inside them, in order to build creative strategies to renew our making.

We can get rid of the repetitions, we can link the power of seriality, of repetition on industrial scale by working on change, not the change of a model to copy (the new car's model), but the change of the model that will be unique.

The latest trends that contaminate the knowledge, allow us to build a future that leaves the culture of mass production in order to open the door to the mass customization and open manufacturing.

The value of something is in its reconfiguration potentialities, in its talent to open new ways, in its talent to raise questions.

The value is in its potentiality to be melted with other parts in order to make a whole and at the same time to be recognizable in order to become part of a new whole.

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2012

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