

The Migratory Cycle of Images: Reactivation Strategies in Contemporary Artistic Productions

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Abstract

Since the 1990s, an increasing number of artists, curators, dancers, choreographers and other professionals of the cultural panorama have looked at reality with an extractive approach: they have used objects already in circulation in the artistic context and re-proposed them in the present by adjusting them on a formal and/or content level. With the aim of analysing the consequences of these reactivation strategies, the essay intends to outline the importance of the so-called "re-enactment studies" which have hitherto dealt with the subject, and it then discusses the utility of a novel analytical model called "migratory cycle of images". The latter proposes to approach a generic act of reactivation in operational terms, identifying the role that images play in the various phases of the process. Finding proper support in contemporary philosophical theories such as Object-Oriented Ontology and in the analysis of some exemplary artistic productions, this operation allows to: question the terminology currently used in the field, arrive at the formulation of new nomenclatures, and, finally, outline the boundaries of the "enactment studies", along with different prefixes to differentiate the multifiform methods of re-generating the existing.

Over the past thirty years, contemporary artistic production has been guided by a general creative drive to reactivate existing objects and narratives. Perhaps aware of the overabundance of material already in circulation, arts and culture practitioners have expressed their creative exuberance by formally or conceptually interpreting images, visual documents, textual fragments, entire exhibitions, scripts or scores already belonging to public and private memoirs. The contemporaneity's need – as it has been perfectly clarified by French critic Nicolas Bourriaud in a well-known essay from the early 2000s – no longer seems to be to “elaborate a form based on raw material but working with objects that are already [...] informed by other objects” (2002: 13). If the reasons for such an approach can be explained in the great contemporary attention to archival practices (Baldacci 2017) – and especially in the attention to approaching this device by mimicking its forms or “unearthing” the materials contained in it (Giannachi 2021) –, the results of these episodes of reactivation have coincided with the uncontrolled diffusion of a particular type of artistic projects which, from the smallest painting to the largest exhibition, from the most static installation to the most performative choreography, contain traces of other materials and, of consequently, take on the appearance of spatially and temporally complex *mise-en-scène*. Up to now, the problem of those who have approached these peculiar objects has not only been understanding the images or narratives contained in the new creations – a question often resolved thanks to the authors' declarations. The most challenging task for the history of art and visual culture has rather been to orientate among the outcomes of these strategic reactivations, defining the different ways in which they look at the existing and/or re-propose it into the present.

Dealing with the circulation of similar reactivation, repetition and appropriation practices not only entails the inevitable disappearance of any distinction between statutory categories in the history of art – such as production and consumption, creation and copying, replica and original (Bourriaud 2002). This programmatic creative attitude pushes contemporary artistic production to deal with a regenerative movement that has encouraged reality to migrate indiscriminately over time based on the adaptive capacity of the visual and conceptual information it

has conveyed. Because of the entropic proliferation made up of exiles and exoduses of images, the contemporary art scene according to Jacob Lund appears today as a receptacle of “heterogeneous clusters generated along different historical trajectories, across different scales, and in different localities” (Lund 2019:1).

To analyse the consequences of this reference context, the following contribution intends to trace the rules of the so-called “re-enactment studies” which have dealt with the subject so far, to contribute by describing a new analytical tool called “migratory cycle of images”, which acts as an orientation model and imagines dividing a generic reactivation operation into three phases based on the role played by the images involved in the process. Finding valid support in the most contemporary philosophical theories, such as Object-Oriented Ontology (Harman 2017), and in analysing different artistic productions, this operation leads to the formulation of new nomenclatures to describe some of the multiple ways of re-generating the existing.

1. Re-enactment studies as a theoretical anchor point

Since the early 2000s, the concept of “re-enactment” has been a fundamental tool for dealing with the temporal exuberance that defines contemporary artistic productions. Its fortune was such that a field of transdisciplinary studies¹ has developed around the study of its complex dynamics, which, from visual art to dance, from performance to cinema, from archaeology to ethnography, have solved the problems deriving from the operations of reactivation and reconfiguration of reality. The terminology was born in the context of historiographical studies around the mid-20th century (Collingwood 1954) and then spread to other disciplinary contexts only around the late 1990s, when it was adopted above all in the dance field (Franko 2017) to indicate the attitude with which certain choreographers and dancers used their bodies to re-adapt previous scripts or scores. Then, perhaps also thanks to the growing disciplinary hybridization that characterised the early 2000s, the term was used by the visual and performing arts, among whose ranks it has now come to indicate a “widespread strategy” helpful in

describing any artistic product whose characteristics suggest “new temporal encounters between past, present and future” (Baldacci, Franco 2022).

Regarding the examples proposed by a now vast literature (Agnew 2004; Lütticken 2013; 2015; Muhle 2014), the term re-enactment in the artistic field is currently associated with those productions which, regardless of the medium, have reactivated any pre-existing object or a portion of it. According to Muhle, “a re-enactment is specifically a practice in which two temporal dimensions [narrative and historical] are necessarily entangled” (2014: 49).

In retrospect, for example, the masquerades of the American Cindy Sherman have been defined as re-enactments; since the 1980s, she photographed herself playing the role of film characters, art history icons or famous real-life women. There was talk of re-enactment when referring to the renowned video performance by Jeremy Deller entitled *The Battle of Oargreave* (2001), in which the English artist reconstructed the 1984 clashes between English miners and the Labor government led by Margaret Thatcher. Or again, the term has been used to describe the curatorial approach of exhibition events such as *When Attitudes Become Form* (2013), the exhibition that Germano Celant presented at the Prada Foundation in Venice forty-four years after the namesake exhibition curated by Harald Szeemann at the Kunsthalle of Bern.

But not only that. Curiously enough, just in the last ten years, re-enactment has begun to be used as an umbrella term (Mudu 2022b) to identify multispatial and multitemporal artistic episodes: innovative products or processes whose formal and conceptual characteristics are the result of the encounter of pre-existing materials coming from different times and contexts. Consider, for example, the Cypriot artist Haris Epaminondas’s approach. From the beginning of her artistic career in the 2000s, she conceived her works as complex installations composed of objects that allude to different aesthetics or cultural imaginaries. Or think of *The Squash*, the work of the English artist Anthea Hamilton who, in 2018, re-imagined a new setting for the permanent collection of Tate Britain by bringing together historical works and her new interventions.

Even if the meaning and form of these works will

be discussed later in the text, just from these brief descriptions, it is already clear how their attitude differs from those of their precursor called re-enactment. The examples of Sherman, Deller and Celant offer an idea of reactivation based on the repetition of the object and (at most) deviate from their references to impose a series of differences (Deleuze 1968; Schneider 2011). Conversely, Epaminonda or Hamilton soar the perspectives of that mechanism which at most had to deal with the return of a single moment in the past, and create stratified objects based on the montage of multiple sources taken from an ever-wider iconosphere. What emerges is a condition which not only magnifies the complexity of the term re-enactment but also makes the analysis of the composition of the artwork even more problematic.

2. A Philosophical Support. The object-oriented ontology

Thus, understood as a complex encounter between previous artistic experiences, the concept of re-enactment seems explainable by resorting to one of the most promising philosophical systems of recent years: the so-called Object-Oriented Ontology, known as OOO and pronounced as *Triple O*. It is a method applied by the philosophical current called Speculative Realism,² which states that the world is made up of relationships between “things” or, better, between “objects”. Regardless of their nature – human, non-human, imaginary – they contribute to the world’s construction by aggregating in progressively larger configurations.

With the same functioning of computer programs³ in which single pre-existing codes always combine to form new outputs, the objects of reality – at least according to the founder of the theory, the philosopher Graham Harman – would be independent of each other and would adapt to different situations to create always new items. Each of them would be equipped with a series of “encapsulated” information (Harman 2017: 11) that will be assembled one on top of the other to create materials that preserve the memory of what they are made of but are also endowed with a surplus of characteristics that do not belong to any of the starting materials.

Given the independence of their parts, computer programs

no longer need to be written each time from scratch since one can make use of programming objects already written elsewhere for different purposes, bringing them into a new context without needing to change their internal structure; in other words, rather than having to create a whole new program each time, one can bring together individual programming objects to create new sets for new purposes – repurposing them in various combinations to create new uses (Harman 2017: 11).

In simpler terms and with some possible inconsistencies, this assumption does not seem too far from the aggregative mechanics as foreseen by the generic reactivation operation in the artistic field. Especially in the examples already mentioned (Epaminondas and Hamilton), the mechanics of re-enactment claims that references and quotations behave like well-bounded materials that migrate into new configurations, regardless of their formal, medial or conceptual nature. Following the transformation processes outlined by OOO, every fragment of the history of art and visual culture – image, gesture, document, photograph, script, score, and so on – turns out to be a necessary material for constructing ever new works. These often present themselves as “compound objects” (Harman 2017: 105), witnesses of the spatial and temporal experiences of the objects that compose them and, at the same time, “new things-in-themselves” (ibid: 107), perhaps to be equally re-activated.

The works by Haris Epaminonda clarify this com-

Fig. 1-2 | Haris Epaminonda, *VOL. XXVII*, 2019, courtesy Haris Epaminonda e Galleria Massimo Minini, Ph. Nick Ash.



positional mechanism. Being compositions of objects, they function as a perfect visual transposition of the world imagined by Object-Oriented Ontology. As briefly anticipated, the Cypriot artist works with small sculptures, ceramics, books or photographs: found objects that she visually combines to create iconic installations. These works feel like real, un-edited compositions that do not hide their individual parts. At the 2019 Venice Biennale,⁴ for example, Epaminondas presented her work *VOL. XXVII* (2019) [Fig. 1, 2] as a palimpsest of different objects which maintained, preserved and protected their own space-time experience while contributing to the construction of a new *mis-en-scène*.

As stated in the exhibition catalogue, these objects “entangled in a network of historical and personal meanings unknown to the public” (Cf. Paniagua 2019: 242) and transformed “into something different as they become part of the installation of the artist” (ibidem). A plaster cast that recalled the unmistakable Phidias’ horse appeared as the symbol of the West; bonsai, fabrics and polychrome marble alluded to more distant iconography of the East; a column, the statue of a bird, a few signs limited in space opened up the imagination of a bygone era. Altogether and without hierarchies, these objects created a more complex one: an installation that presented itself as “mixed” in time, space, and statute.

Paraphrasing a statement that another exponent of the OOO, the Spanish philosopher Tristan Garcia, uses to refer to the “things” of the world (Garcia 2014), Epaminonda’s work appeared both as a compound object isolated in space and time as a material



that can be inserted chaotically in a broader context: an example of how it is possible to consider things in themselves and, at the same time, in their accumulation and interaction.

This double approach at the particular and the general is undoubtedly the most useful to fully understand the regenerative movements that now guide contemporary art objects. In fact, it allows both a compositional/iconographic analysis of the single objects and a survey of the materials they are made of and, therefore, of the historical trajectories that lead them to coexist in ever-new works.

3. The migratory cycle of images

According to what is already mentioned by OOO, therefore, every material of the so-called “iconosphere” is an object endowed with space-time characteristics and can be repositioned if necessary. As it has been widely done, it seems possible to refer to this material uniformly using the generic term “images”. Although the choice is functional to immediately recall the visual connotations that distinguish the category of artistic products here analysed, we should, however, remember that the term is used here as a synonym for “objects” (in the OOO sense) and it alludes to all the production materials envisaged in the artistic field, both in a formal, narrative and conceptual sense.⁵

But regardless of their iconographic, gestural, and textual nature, and whether they are fixed or moving objects, what path do these images follow in their continuous aggregation and reconfiguration? What is, if we can summarise it, their status, function, and role during their inevitable exiles and exoduses? Is it possible to go through the historical trajectories Jacob Lund talks about, and what are the compositional structures of the new images that derive from this training process – if they can be analysed?

At this point, it is useful to analyse a partial view of the landscape articulated according to a *before-after* temporal model⁶ to understand how reality works as a reference for contemporary artistic productions. As if we wanted to isolate only a segment of a broader mechanism or, using scientific language, identify the “syntropic” – that is, orderable – functioning of a group of elements inserted in a broader entropic context.

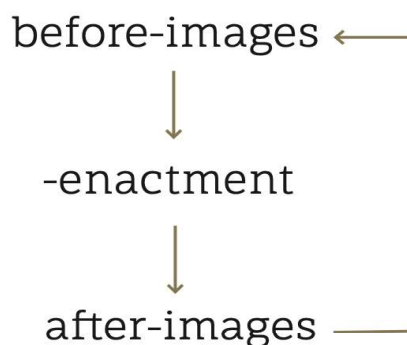


Fig. 3 | *The Migratory Cycle of Images* (schematic drawing), original illustration, courtesy the author.

Whatever migration they perform or modification they are subjected to, the images can be analysed before, after and during their participation in a generic reactivation process. In these three moments, each artistic object – or fragment of it – can be traced back to a different phase based on the functions it has during its reactivation. In fact, with a good approximation, its transformation, evolution, or modification can be summarized schematically as a “life cycle” or “migratory cycle of images” [Fig. 3]. A novel model which, however simple, needs to be discussed in portions and/or moments.

4. Reactivation in three stages

The first moment to investigate within the migratory cycle concerns the material used in the reactivation phase: that is, the statute of the so-called *before-images*, of those images that already exist – they are “already born” – and have always been used freely by new authors. This category includes those objects that assume a reference function, which therefore precedes the re-generation process and are often found (sometimes discovered) as inert sediments of more or less conscious configurations – archives, deposits, family albums, museum collections, and so on. These are places of maximum linguistic and conceptual openness in which, like “puncta” (Giannachi 2021), “things that have been” (or before-

images) are taken from their context of origin with an increasingly less philological approach and used by new authors. In this sense, before-images are the objects used by Haris Epaminonda or, in principle, all those autonomous entities which, according to the OOO, are available and necessary to form relationships with other entities of other dimensions or space/time locations. Each of these images, with its features and contents, is the evidence of a specific, long and articulated historical trajectory.

This first phase of the cycle is followed by a second one: the so-called *enactment* phase, which corresponds to a generic enunciative moment, to the “creative” operation with which – often live in the time-based act – the artist⁷ rearranges the references, proposing a new configuration. The moment of enactment is the crucial moment of transformation for the before-images that composed the new artwork. It is when the aggregation of objects occurs and the relationships of space and time that will characterise the new works are established.

It is no coincidence that the term is here deprived of the prefix “re-”, which the literature on the subject has always used. What I propose here is that the term “enactment” – as a synonym of “mise-en-scène” – already indicates “an instance of acting something out” and, therefore, already alludes to a process of ordering pre-existing materials.⁸ As previously underlined, the criterion or approach followed by the reactivation is not always the same, nor does it always lead to the same results: the references used in the new work can be few or endless, faithful or completely different; they can be repeated, simply juxtaposed, or sometimes assembled in such a chaotic way as to make it almost impossible to recognize them. In short, the parameters that distinguish one enactment from another are anything but referable only to the model of repetition suggested by the “re-”. Indeed, each reactivation would deserve to be specified differently also on a terminological level, precisely following on from the different space/time stratifications found on a compositional level. If the prefix “re-” still lends itself perfectly to describing compositions based on the repetition of references, studying other prefixes could help to clarify the much more exuberant methods of reactivation widespread in the contemporary art world. In recent years, various neologisms have been proposed that are useful for addressing the is-

sue: we speak of “pre-enactment” when we want to refer to those projects that appear as a “prefiguration of a potential future” (Lütticken 2022), or other works have been defined “post-enactment” when they “come to light for the first time in a context after the one in which they were conceived” (Modena 2022). But following a similar taxonomic attitude, one could also speak of “over-enactment” to indicate the approach with which artists (for example, Haris Epaminonda) usually gather multiple space/time experiences within the perimeter of the same work. Moreover, the prefix “over-” I am proposing here indicates something in excess compared to normal standards and would lend itself well to describing those compositions in which heterogeneous objects aggregate synchronically in a new present rather than just being repeated along the diachronic axis of history, as re-enactment does.⁹

More generally, replacing, adding, or mixing prefixes to the term enactment would make it possible to describe ever-changing compositional methods that each time open up new reflections on the meaning of a specific type of reactivation and on the temporal nuances they call into question.

Regardless of the type of enactment and/or the taxonomy useful to describe it, each aggregation phase produces a new object that seems to fall into the category of so-called *after-images*. The terminology is inspired by the concept of “afterimage” (without hyphen), with which neurosciences describe the phenomenon whereby the impression of an image remains in the eye of an observer for a considerable time, even after the removal of the original cause (Mudu 2020). Think of those peculiar sensations accompanying a spectator who contemplates a work of Optical or Kinetic Art or those harmless clinical disorders characterised by the perception of foreign bodies in our visual field after observing a light source. In all these and other similar cases, the physical-optical effect is associated with the sensation of a delay between the act of vision and the neuronal elaboration of the observed object, which remains as a spectre of a past moment. And it is certainly no coincidence that the theory of images has sometimes used scientific terminology metaphorically, associating these phenomena with a visual production capable of evoking the traumas of history or the memory itself.

However, unlike these bizarre perceptual effects,

after-images (with a dash) are understood here not only as symbolic cultural examples of persistence and duration nor only as phenomena of survival of a given visual effect (Agamben 2007; Ciceri Via 2016) but above all, as evidence of survival itself. While in real-life phenomena, they are similar to sensory ghosts that make absent things present, the after-images described here correspond to real presences: they are physical residues of an enunciative act and not (only) their hallucinatory manifestation.

These images may coincide with the finished work (as in the case of Epaminonda), but they can also be leftover created during a performative act. In this case, documents or witnesses can be defined: that is, respectively, the video or photographic material that records the episode or the props of a performative scene that remain orphans of the act that created them. In general, this phase includes a whole specific category of visual products which “arrives later” and which, under the fragmented temporal model based on the re-circulation of images, brings memories of the past and “remains” at disposal even when the experience that produced them will be gone.

Concerning this third and final phase of the “migratory cycle”, it is appropriate to specify how the trajectory followed by the images subjected to reactivation is not linear but cyclical. Since it is possible to deduce from the scheme already presented [Fig. 3] the position that after-images occupy in the migratory cycle alludes to their ambiguous impermanence. In fact, whether they are documents or witnesses, the materials attributable to this category occupy a connecting position within the production cycle of images and, despite being the survivors of an experience that preceded them, they are also the material useful for creating it anew. Observed in this limbo between their *having been* and their *becoming*, they appear as potential before-images awaiting reactivation. On the other hand, even the most stiffened repertoire of normalised images (Montani 2010) lends itself to always being “open” (Eco 1962) if it arouses the interest of a new user/author, who revives it according to an original perspective.

5. Visualising the migratory cycle: Anthea Hamilton's *The Squash*

To reiterate the dynamics of the migratory cycle of images and, at the same time, recognize the compositional implications of an over-enactment, it seems essential to describe a work by English artist Anthea Hamilton, which is not only among the most recent but is also among the most complex and stratified. Invited to create an exhibition intervention for the prestigious annual Tate Commission event in 2018, Anthea Hamilton presented *The Squash*: a site-specific installation that changes the characteristics of the enormous neoclassical hall of the Duveen Gallery at the Tate Britain and, for about six months, provides an unprecedented image of its permanent collection.

The project consists of constructing a floor in square tiles that cover the spaces of the Duveen Gallery and seamlessly evolve into a series of geometric extrusions. These forms become the podiums on which to arrange a selection of works from the permanent collection (such as *Autumn* by Henri Laurens or *Spring* by Arnold Machin), that are chosen based on their affinity to the natural/vegetable imagery to which the title of the work alludes. In this new configuration – which the artist eloquently calls a “collage of coincidences”¹⁰ – the works of the permanent collection (before-images) are reordered (enacted) in a new and bizarre way. They are, in fact, part of a new over-enactment since each of them is the emanation of a specific historical-artistic trajectory and



Fig. 4 | Anthea Hamilton, *The Squash*, Installation view at Tate Britain, London, 2018. Ph. Maureen Barlin CC BY 2.0.

approaches the other coexisting as a unit.

The temporal stratification envisaged for the new staging is not limited to this already complex reconstruction of the collection, so much so that Hamilton structures her work by introducing to the over-enactment new space/time layers.

Far from being just the pedestals for the before-images, many of the orthogonal extrusions – as large as a facade or as small as an armchair – are empty and become the frame within which to move, in variable numbers and at regular intervals, a series of performers. Dressed in baroque clothes with large pumpkin-shaped heads (here is the primary allusion to the work's title) [Fig. 4], these strange half-human, half-vegetable individuals move in space following a random choreography: sometimes, they stop on empty pedestals becoming sculptures themselves; other times, they join the modernist models embodying their poses.

As a demonstration of the space/time exuberance magnified by the work, the features of these stage costumes are conceived starting from another before-image, an archive fragment which – in turn – can be traced back to a series of other sources. A few years before the realization of the work at Tate, the artist found a photograph taken by Daniel Kramer in which the well-known dancer Erick Hawkins is performing the steps of a choreographic work entitled *8 Clear Places*. Hawkins, who is lying on the ground in the photo, is surrounded by a series of ropes similar to vine branches and wears an oblong and monstrously oversized mask similar to a pumpkin [Fig. 5]. Intending to represent the aesthetics of a human body in metamorphosis, the iconographic reference which



Fig. 5 | Erick Hawkins, *8 clear places, Squash*, New York 1960, ph. Daniel Kramer, courtesy of the Erick Hawkins Dance Foundation, Inc.



Fig. 6 | *Three Katsina Doll (Patung on the right)*, Plate LII from the "Twenty-First Annual Report Of The Bureau Of Ethnology: To The Secretary Of The Smithsonian Institution, 1899-1900". Bureau of American Ethnology, 1903.

the dancer alludes to is the ethno-anthropological Hopi Culture, which, with the name Patung (Squash), identifies a Katsina mask with a long-tapered snout [Fig. 6].

After reconstructing the iconographic history that hides the image of Hawkins in a visual and openly not philological way, Hamilton uses the picture as another before-image of her work and extracts the details useful for the new enactment. First, in an operation close to a pure re-enactment, she creates a black and white costume like the one in the photo and has a performer wearing it on the occasion of a project at the Serpentine Gallery in 2016.¹¹ Then, at Tate, she multiplies the aesthetic possibilities contained in that first reference image to obtain different intricate configurations in the over-enactment of *The Squash*. Together with the Creative Director of the LOEWE fashion brand, she creates a series of seven dresses that differ in the motifs variously inspired by the plant world but are all uniformed by the large and bizarre mask that covers the faces of the performers.

In terms of the so-called migratory cycle of images, the staging of *The Squash* is undoubtedly a product of aggregation of different materials, which are, in turn, the trace of a trajectory of allusions and quotations that originates in various moments in the past. Each dress by Hamilton is obviously attributable to the image by Kramer, but since the features of Hawkins represented in it cannot escape the iconographic debt to the Hopi Culture, the same work at Tate must feel linked to that first reference. Every single modernist sculpture present in the spaces of

the Duveen Gallery, then, obviously refers to a specific position in the permanent collection but cannot be separated from the cultural environment that created it or the sensitivity of its authors.

Finally, still in terms of the cycle of images, the new over-enactment constructed by Hamilton lends itself to potentially being reopened and represented. Not only because, as demonstrated by the re-staging of *The Squash* presented at the MHKA in Antwerp in 2022,¹² the work can also be reproduced in other and new contexts – providing for comparison with as many new collections or providing individual objects with a new (perhaps sculptural) guise. But above all, because its parts – including the original ones built from scratch for the occasion – will survive the staging as after-images, fragments of the over-enactment. In addition to the photographs and documentary materials, in fact, the stage costumes will be the only true witnesses of the performative act and, as “orphan objects” [Fig. 7] of the bodies that inhabited them, will present themselves both as independent fragments (perhaps sellable or stored in several archives), both as indications of past enactments and “scores” for new compositions.

6. Towards enactment studies

To conclude and summarise, what seems to emerge from the rules found in these works by Hamilton or Epaminonda – and in general, at the basis of the so-

Fig. 7 | Anthea Hamilton, *Mash Up* (Costumes designed by Anthea Hamilton in collaboration with LOEWE), MHKA, Museum of Contemporary Art Antwerp, 2022 © Anthea Hamilton. Courtesy the artist, kaufmann Repetto, Milan/New York and Thomas Dane Gallery. Ph. Kristien Daem/MHKA



called reactivation strategies – is that they exploit the narratives to which they refer in many directions. We can also argue that, among all the forms and strategies of contemporary artistic production, those attributable to the rules of over-enactment described here seem to be by now the most common. Not only because it is always easier for creative work to update a given iconographic or thematic concept; but also because it is increasingly true that, in an inter-medial context such as the present, the answers to a problem never have a single solution and the need is to consult multiple realities and sources. It is no longer urgent to reproduce a previous work, not even formally to stage its boundaries and perimeters; it is much more important to broaden the field of action and contaminate it with new grafts until novelty and originality come to life. Indeed, Anthea Hamilton’s “collage of coincides” is the perfect example of how the contemporary world is moving towards an up-cycling of the materials it has left behind. It demonstrates how each new object is a miscopy of one or more that preceded them, and how, in a seemingly random way, the various historical trajectories migrate from one context to another and, in the new objects, offer a far-from-final vision of themselves.

One thing remains open: if, in the examples of Hamilton and Epaminondas, it still seems possible (albeit difficult) to recognize the specific motivations that guided the aggregation operation; or if it is still possible to extract core samples that define the sources; the same operation appears to be progressively complex as these aggregative approaches adopt a dynamic citation freed from any narrative criterion. If the uncontrolled exasperation of this appropriation is not surprising – since, as underlined by Jim Jarmusch, “nothing is original” and the important thing is “not where you take things from, but where you take them to”¹³ – it is progressively harder to give a name to the results of these reactivations.

On the other hand, what compulsively changes on a practical level always requires an update on the theoretical side. The “enactment studies” proposed here, with their prefixes, can be a good starting point for a new taxonomy useful in describing the different and multiform ways of reactivating existing images.

Notes

¹ Re-enactment studies are an emerging field with a still unclear perimeter. They welcome points of view from different disciplines but believe that the reactivation of the past is today a “stable epistemic object” as a “subject of theory that promises to contribute new knowledge” (Agnew et al. 2021).

² Speculative Realism is a philosophical current born in the 2000s which bases its theoretical roots on two main and mostly contrasting assumptions with the post-Kantian philosophical systems: on the one hand, the critique of correlationism – so defined by the French Quentin Meillassoux to support the possibility to know only the meaning of thought and not what things are – ; on the other, the end of anthropocentrism and the need to consider the value of the presence of other non-human entities. OOO is a subcategory of Speculative Realism, even if it represents a variant from many points of view.

³ These are precisely the “object-oriented” computer programs from which the theory itself takes its name.

⁴ Referred to the 58th International Art Exhibition – La Biennale di Venezia, entitled *May You Live in Interesting Times* and curated by Ralph Rugoff in 2018.

⁵ OOO is a flat ontology, and as such, it states that every entity in the world, be it human, non-human, or imaginary, has a substance worthy of consideration. An approach that in the artistic field allows to smooth out any difference between the materials of an increasingly intermedial artistic production.

⁶ It should be clarified that the before-after temporal articulation that guides the scansion of the entire cycle is to be considered purely didactic, especially if many phases of artistic production can occur simultaneously.

⁷ Remember that, according to the OOO, the artist also acts as an “object”.

⁸ Cinema, for example, uses it to describe the organisation of the components that contribute to the execution of a given screenplay: location, arrangement of objects, the attitude of a person, etc.; theatre and dance use it to indicate the performative translation of a script or score (Warburton 2011); psychopathological studies, on the other hand, use it to describe the process in which a patient, during a session, finds themselves putting into action (reliving) their unconscious fantasy thanks to the interaction with the doctor (Hirsch 1999).

⁹ It is not trivial to point out that one of the most recent international conferences dedicated to repetition practices was entitled *Over and Over and Over Again: Re-Enactment Strategies in Contemporary Arts and Theory*. By identifying for the first time the potential of the over morpheme, the title of the symposium held at the Institute of Contemporary Inquiry – ICI in Berlin in 2017 underlined the need to recognize the exuberance of these practices, which already escaped the canons of the literature on the subject (Baldacci et al. 2022).

¹⁰ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3-9cFx0ysHY&t=424s> (Accessed: 23 March 2023).

¹¹ <https://www.serpentinegalleries.org/whats-on/magazine-sessions-2016-anthea-hamilton-grasses/> (Accessed: 29 March 2023).

¹² <https://www.muhka.be/programme/detail/1504-anthea-hamil->

ton-mash-up- (Accessed: 29 March 2023).

¹³ Jarmusch’s quote is also a reworking of the master Jean-Luc Godard (Jarmusch, 2004).

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