

Full Length Research Paper

Graphical territory, series and memory

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Our world is multiple. It is a hyper-industrialized world, which can indiscriminately copy and reproduce any object, text or image. A situation that in the artistic circuit promotes certain duplicity: we can observe how to differentiate both the unique and singular to the multiple, the original name of your copy. For years we have differentiated the singular from the multiple, holding the way of the unique, with no copies violating its magnificence and value, in contrast to a world that runs in the opposite direction. Our production today can repeat, alter or modify almost anything (imagine the possibilities of digitizing). This paper questions the canon of singularity and uniqueness as a productive approach and artistic value of the work, to raise a scenario more in line with our present.

Key words: Unique, multiple, graphic art, printmaking, original, copy.

INTRODUCTION

Mobile territories: The undefined

Not long ago that multiple graphics, an entire unit for copying images, endowed with a sequence of tools, procedures and technical apparatus, was popularly known as the art of "printmaking". Independent from the impression or printing system to which we referred, it was for centuries considered a subsidiary art, as a creative procedure directed to a minority audience. If is that possible— theoretical and territorially subjugated to other "major" disciplines as painting or sculpture. Its products, still gestated from a matrix¹, were simple reproductions, and therefore, copies. Inside a world supervised over the sacred distance of the only thing, it turns out logical to devalue reproducible and multiple aims and procedures.

The dedicated cookbooks, the creative process

sequenced in phases, the apparent complexity of alchemy, and the progressive devaluation of the image increasingly massifiable were not helping that conception. A world that was not viewing still that the bet for the reproducibility was not residing in the economic value of the copy, but in the poetical one.

Torn between "apocalyptic and integrated" (Eco, 1995)ⁱⁱ, between the theocratic craftsmanship and technological blindness—of technophobes and technologists— multiple graphics practice has emerged (re-arisen) from its argumentative lack to share the languages of this age, being (re)elaborated across the exercise of introspection, and thus, to spread in its multiple-being: re-meaning the concept of matrix, original, unique, copy, repetition, serial, serialization, variation, sequencing, fragmentation, impression, printing, stamping, marking, *pragnanz*,

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deformation, displacement, infinite, immaterial, etc. Finally, all concepts, reviewed from the perspective of the complex, the anomic, hybrid and therefore blurry, replace ultimately our evolution of the "copy in devaluation" with the "copy as thought", seduced by the imprint and reproducibility as forms of creation, as *poiësis*.

Multiple arts are now a vast scene –as already pointed Stephen Buryⁱⁱⁱ– that refuses to be defined. It is a symbiotic being, living in relation, with the technologies, materials, with that reproducible, and therefore, prefers to exist in the limits of possibility, inhabiting them. Multiple graphics, can be limited to a print or conclude as casting sculpture, can be in-edition or not, because its multiplication (series) is no longer essential. Ultimately, the important thing, which endures, is its evolution into adaptation, what has survived all its mutations.

Multiple graphics moves today inside the contemporary art, expanding joyfully to the peripheries, snatching or conquering other areas of creation – before dissected in other disciplines with definite borders- or just away, at first, from what would be a graphical thinking. It operates as a self-regulated system, driven by a seemingly centripetal force (Pastor, 2012)^{iv}, weaving new connections that makes us wonder for its genetics, for those tension enclosures that define its shape and delimit its essence.

METHOD

The aim of this paper is to show how this trans-disciplinary graphic thinking has become the construction of alternative ways of conceiving and creating in multiple art. These have grown from an initial stage where the discipline of printmaking was thought under purposes merely functional –as it was the reproduction of an image, to a second stage that is emerging especially from the Pop Art and the Conceptual Art of the sixties of the last century. In this last stage, still present, concepts such as edition, original, matrix, reproduction, copying, etc., remain constantly relativized.

In this sense, this paper will conduct some reflections, with a clearly qualitative approach and exploratory scope, on issues such as *Series* –as a new way to understand the multiplicity– and *Imprint* –as a result of that contact space where the relationship between the matrix and its copy is built. They are two guiding concepts that explain some of the basic paradigms inherent to the contemporary multiple art.

DISCUSSION

The Series and Its Poetics

The phenomenon of reproducibility has already been philosophically revisited repeatedly from Benjamin^v, and

overtaken in our present, being able to travel from the autoedition to the hyper-reproduction with a simple click. Our artistic practice today glides easily over this territory, enabling the democratization of the artistic work and travelling from the exhortation of authenticity to the export art to everyday life –locating the unique work of art as something suspicious.

Now, the editing issue –more common in the decade of the 90– is already solved: it can be short or long, customized or unlimited, designed for industrial sector or limited by ephemeral material, expandable to three-dimensional space or adaptable to the magnitudes of the two-dimensional representation. Moreover, it does not have to exist, but what great potential! The multiple things thus become a way of artistic production, and its numbers or quantity in something irrelevant.

Taking this framework as starting point, there is an interesting aspect of repetition for contemporary artist: that which has become into variation. This allows him to escape of the approval of the homologation, of the overcrowded copy, cloned or reproduced physically or virtually. On one hand, the matrix can be projected as ideal, not as model; and on the other, conversely, the artistic production can take the series as an idea for its own genesis^{vi}. Conceptualizations that explore multiplicity near terms, as accumulation (ordered or random), repetition of patterns, the effects of the overlapping or juxtaposition of images, etc. Some, even opt to force the matrix, either with an image or with successive copy of a copy, up to the limit of the reproductive act –multiplying up the undesirable, the indefinable of the technical defection– or the record of the eventful finding. It is when the smooth variations of noises take place, the wears or displacements, losses of tones, details, the slight changes of approach, the zoom and the distortions. Small perceptible details only for whom who dare to dive in the apparent surface of the copy.

A dialogic structure of the unique-multiple relationship that allows to construct the creation either from deductive order (series-model) or from inductive regime (model-series), and therefore, makes possible the germination of an epistemology of multiple art, the being-series know-how. A new heterarchical scheme in which, as we see, the values are in occasions inverted. Sometimes artists do not show copies, or only show the matrix, others prefer to stage the process as snapshots of the running time. Likewise, it seemed that changes/variations in the edition, the non-edition, or work in progress, become neuralgic points of interest. Especially, in those in which the imperfections of "production line" or the mistakes, are the difference –and resistance– against industrial strength, with a perfect and identical production. Perhaps, we can consider multiple art the practice of this century, for the persistence that its paradoxical occupation/being detaches in us, precisely, in these times.

Thus, we find notable practices from the last century,

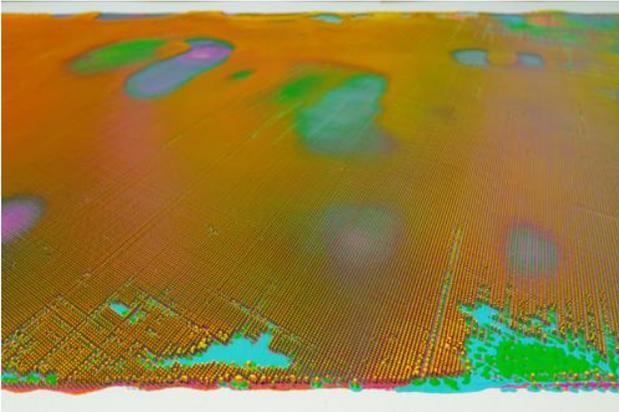


Figure 1. Kouseki Ono, “Hundred Layers of Colors .026”, Silkscreen, detail, (2014), 75 x 90 cm. Image: Courtesy of Ono Kouseki.



Figure 2. Kouseki Ono, “Hundred Layers of colors”. Silkscreen, (2013), 50 x 60 cm. Image: Courtesy of Ono Kouseki, Photo by Daisuke Aochi.

mainly during the decade of the sixties through Pop Art Andy Warhol had as usual, for example, generate purposely imperfections in some copies in order to demystify the concept of error, of seriality and mass production. Today, artists like the Japanese Kouseki Ono (1979), push the limits of the act of reproduction of the image. In opposite direction to the usual concept of reproducing an image on different media in order to obtain a specified number of copies in the format of a numbered edition ($1/n$ to n/n), Kouseki iterates the printing of its matrix hundred times on a single support, layer upon layer, so that the piece gradual and randomly acquires its own unpredictable volumetric and aesthetic state (Figures 1 and 2). It is in this way how the artist displaces the concept and the practices of traditional reproducibility. Screen printing, in this case, serves to produce artworks that reflect a creative process,

serendipity, and the search for three-dimensional space-time connotations.

The imprint as frontier Being

In multiple graphics, the imprint symbolizes the moment of transferability between the one and the other, the transition of the matrix to the multiple conception, the act of conquest / domination of other limits, and therefore, of the space where the concave and the convex are cohabiting. An expansive form of the mold that inevitably invades the transfer support, to which is infringed and submitted as matter, is interpenetrated, revealed or impregnated. Without this transduction, the multiple would not be. The imprint, the mark, the stamp, is the reduction to physical and intelligible codes of the complex matrix-copy relationship. The contact made presence.

And in that invasive and dominant act in which the one is part of the other –coexisting–, in this transfer, registration of an appearance is generated. The part of a space and time that are no longer there, but happened, in analogy of a story that is measured by its remaining intensity. When the imprint declines, the memory weakens, fades away and irremediably, it becomes impossible to recover. The beauty of the imprint resides precisely in these infinite symbolic plays. The imprint remains as the scar, and could even be a new skin: support where the internal and the external simultaneously permeated themselves once, interconnected, and still do.

So, we might say that the print expands topographically in off shoring. It states the presence of an absence injecting a fragment of the past into the present, as a replicant with own authority that provokes a palimpsest of times and spaces.

This inter-relational nature of the footprint is what makes it poetically a border-being, between times, between places and always in touch with its limits. The major evidence in the imprint is its unrestrained and irrepressible desire to transcend. The imprint is a fracture of the oblivion, an inherent act in the practice of multiple graphics that, as well as the reproducibility, demonstrates a constant search, an exercise in self-determination, a demand of repetition that combats death instinct never satisfied.

In this poetic feeling, we can find the artworks of M^a Jesús González Fernández and Patricia Gómez Villaescusa, Spanish artists living in the city of Valencia for more than a decade, and working together on the issue of rescuing abandoned places with great symbolic power. The work of González and Gómez focus on the recovery of historical and sensitive memory of the space with great symbolic significance: old abandoned buildings as prisons are their triggers of sense and meaning. They follow a simple process with shocking results, as we can



Figure 3



Figure 4



Figure 5



Figure 6



Figure 7

Figures 3-7. Work progress of "Second Skin. Cell 805" Printed walls on black canvas. 2011. 19.7 x 29.5 ft. / 6 x 8,9 mt. Project "Depth of Surface". Holmesburg Prison (Philadelphia, U.S.A.) Images: Courtesy of the artists.

see into pieces of the "Depth of Surface" series (2011) First, they study the site in its historical dimension, after that they proceed to set up a photographic archive where you can see how the place has been battered by the years, and then subtract a physical copy on fabric of the selected walls. Thus, works like "Second Skin. Cell 805" (Figures 3-7) seek to preserve the imprint of time and, through a second skin, get a second chance at the same time. They wish to stop the forgetfulness of those spaces for inmates, which housed the burden of their waiting to freedom.

Conclusion

As Brea announced, we arrive –for many roads–, to the end of the era of the singular. Multiple graphics is a good example of this, either imploding or expansively, behaves as a magnetic system in reaction to, its increasing center of gravity. It manages border areas, always seduced by the other side, and that makes it complex to shelter in

any territory other than nomadic. In this sense, we must in this research look at extent and horizons, while that which may or may not be multiple still changes. We would like to offer the readers some certainty, so they can hold onto something, but it is difficult to track a thing which vibrates. The tectonic movement is observed from the stillness, and what lies below the surface of the current graphic still shudders.

Conflict of Interests

The authors have not declared any conflict of interests.

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i We use herein the "matrix" term, and not "plaque" or "plate" – terminologically more associated to the field of general printmaking–, treating it as a support which serves as a base, beginning and model to reproduce, due to the fact that its imprint allows its transferability. Regardless the material or the dimensions of it.

ii See U. Eco, *Apocalípticos e integrados*. México, Fábula, Tusquets Editores, 1995, pp.368.

iii S. Bury, *Artists' multiples, 1935-2000*. Aldershot, England, Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2001, pp.208.

iv See J. Pastor, "Sobre la identidad del grabado", *I Foro de Arte Múltiple, Libro Actas de Estampa Arte Múltiple*, Madrid, Instituto de Arte Contemporáneo and Universidade de Vigo, 2012, pp. 63-76.

v W. Benjamin, *La obra de arte en la época de su reproductibilidad técnica*. Buenos Aires, Taurus, 1989, pp.206.

vi It is important to check the term *seriegenesis*, coined for Juan Martínez Moro in his book *Crítica de la razón plástica. Método y materialidad en el arte moderno y contemporáneo*, Gijón, Asturias, Ediciones Trea, 2011, pp.338. He dedicates an entire section to explain deeply "el aspect productivo que ostenta la serie" ("the productive aspect that holds the series.") Martínez, op. cit., p.283.