


REPETITION AS A POWER OF DIFFERENCE IN CONTEMPORARY ART <https://doi.org/10.56238/sevned2024.037-051>**Emerson da Silva Massoli¹****ABSTRACT**

The article presents conceptions of the terms Repetition and Difference, based on Gilles Deleuze (2018), addressing a general notion of Repetition, succeeding issues related to Difference; as well as discusses the three temporalities in the act of repeating, producing relationships with the conceptualizations of Contemporary Art by Alain Badiou (2013); thus, weaving links with the poetics that I develop, pointing out how repetition, seen as an artistic process, enhances the difference in Contemporary Art.

Keywords: Difference and Repetition. Gilles Deleuze. Contemporary Art.

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INTRODUCTION

In the face of the constant profusion of images, in which we experience in contemporary times, the repetition of images becomes something common in the virtual environment, where reproducing, sharing and copying something is an easy, fast and possible task for everyone; not being very different from the physical environment and materiality. Bearing in mind that capitalism and its demands or requirements as an economic system require a mass reproduction and accumulation of consumer goods; Such circumstances of functioning move and affect the way of life of the subjects inserted in this contemporary context, where the action of repeating often becomes an unconscious and constant act in the most varied dimensions of life in society.

In this way, repetition is also perceived in contemporary artistic productions, in which the action of repeating is understood by the artist as a power to address and problematize the issues present in our time, typical of Contemporary Art. Thus, Alain Badiou (2013) defines the term "contemporary" as something "of now", belonging to its time; extending to Contemporary Art, the author defines the productions and the current Art System as combatant of the very notion of work, in this way, Contemporary Art would be an art criticism, an artistic criticism of art, addressing, mainly, the concept of finitude of the work.

The author adds that the notion of Contemporary Art is subject to two norms, essential to characterize current artistic productions. The first of them makes an attack against the figure of the artist, who was previously considered a genius, someone spectacular and sacred. This issue is combated through the idea that the artistic gesture can be associated with banal actions and elements of everyday life, at the same time that it can be done anonymously (Badiou, 2013. P. 03).

The second norm is directly related to repetition. Through the conceptions of Alain Badiou (2013) it is possible to consider Contemporary Art as possessing a potentiality that would enable repetition. In this sense, repetition, reproduction and serialization are procedures designed to destroy the idea of a single work within Contemporary Art, as opposed to what was in force in Art History for a long time. This repetition or reproducibility of the work of art, already presupposed by Walter Benjamin (1892–1940), is something linked to the context of capitalism and the market, requiring mass production at the industrial level and also referring to the technological advances in the circulation of information.

In the same way, the artist and, therefore, also the Art System inserted in this context, bring problems of his time in his contemporary productions, questioning in various ways the reproduction of images, and consequently, problematizing the uniqueness,



singularity and aura of the works, within the notion of art and idea, coming from a spiritual realization.

In this perspective of repetition being a possibility within Contemporary Art, Gilles Deleuze (2018) states that the more everyday life becomes standardized, subjected to an accelerated reproduction of consumer objects, explicitly related to capitalism, the more Art must connect to these reproductions of contemporary life and, mainly, the artist must extract from this experience within this context a Difference that, simultaneously, it is present between repetitions and their temporalities. Thus, aesthetically reproducing the problems of contemporaneity, to the point of expressing Difference as a repetitive force of opposition with an effect of freedom.

Perhaps the highest object of art is to make all these repetitions act simultaneously, with their difference of nature and rhythm, their respective displacement and disguise, their divergence and their decentralization, to fit them into each other and from one to the other, to envelop them in illusions whose 'effect' varies in each case. Art does not imitate, but this happens, first of all, because it repeats, and repeats all repetitions, from an inner power (imitation is a copy, but art is simulacrum, it subverts copies into simulacra). Even the most mechanical, the most everyday, the most habitual, the most stereotyped repetition finds its place in the work of art, and is always out of place in relation to other repetitions on condition that one knows how to extract from it a difference from the other repetitions. This is because there is no other aesthetic problem than that of the insertion of art in everyday life (Deleuze, 2018, p. 385).

Thus, it is interpreted as possible that the most varied forms of repetition (mechanical, virtual, manual, habitual, everyday, among others) are viable to serve as a power for contemporary artistic production, however, a Difference must be extracted from these repetitions, which is of the nature of the action of repeating, in order to produce art from and through Repetition, being both a concept and an aesthetic in artistic making.

In this way, I develop a research in visual poetics, in accordance with Alain Badiou's conceptualizations of Contemporary Art, in which repetition is the central point of study, unfolding in numerous conceptual and aesthetic questions. The problem of the study is the question of how to unfold a base image, not considered original, from the perspective of the production of others, creating a visual unity between the different repeated images. Therefore, how to develop images through repetition, which at first glance are similar and equivalent, but which at their core have differences, arising from varied conceptions; but at the same time that individually they are considered a unit and together they form a unified whole. As well as linking artistic practice to a hybrid process, articulating exclusively manual techniques and digital technologies, typical of my artistic work.

Following what has been exposed, this article presents perceptions about the concept of Repetition pertinent to research in development, having as a basis to discuss the



conceptions of the term, the French philosopher Gilles Deleuze (1925-1995) and his book "Difference and Repetition", originally his PhD thesis in Philosophy, published in 1968 in book format. The general conceptions about the concept of Repetition are highlighted, as well as the three temporalities of the action of repeating, outlining notes pertinent to the research.

Deleuze in "Difference and Repetition", as the name of the book itself elucidates, addresses the two concepts together, in which each of them complements the conceptualization of the other. In this sense, the author states that Repetition is not generality, and that between Repetition and similarity Difference is of nature. Thus, generality is presented in two major orders, the qualitative of similarities and the quantitative of equivalences (Deleuze, 2018. p. 17).

Generality expresses that one term can be exchanged or replaced by another, this exchange of particulars corresponds to the conduct of generality. Contrary to generality, Repetition is only a necessary and well-founded conduct in relation to what cannot be replaced. Repetition refers to a non-interchangeable, irreplaceable singularity. Therefore, the criterion of generality is exchange, while Repetition has theft and gift as criteria (Deleuze, 2018. p. 18).

Thus, to repeat is to behave in relation to something unique or singular, something that has no similar or equivalent. Repetition has as an external conduct an echo of a more secret vibration, of an inner and deeper Repetition in the singular, concretizing itself in a potency. Deleuze (2018) states that in the act of repeating there is a Difference that superimposes itself on the repeated. In this sense, Difference inhabits Repetition, it makes us pass from one order of Repetition to another; the Difference is between two repetitions, just as the Repetition is also between two differences.

Thus, Repetition is possible to something singular and irreplaceable, as well as Art and the uniqueness of each artistic work. The act of repeating takes place between the two generalities, threatening to subvert them, into another power. In this way, Repetition belongs to humor and irony, being by nature transgression, exception, always manifesting a singularity against particulars, being a universal against generalities.

From the initial considerations of the concept of Repetition proposed by Gilles Deleuze, it is possible to have an idea of what are the circumstances of the action of repeating and some of the aspects of Repetition. However, the author goes deeper into the concept, presenting the three temporalities, present, past and future, in the act of repeating, revealing how Repetition behaves in each of them, ensuring itself in syntheses of time.



Despite the uniqueness of Repetition in each time, it will be present simultaneously in the three temporalities genuinely.

Within this perspective, the repetitions that I carry out in the research as an artistic practice, aiming at the construction of the proposals, are simultaneously located in the three temporalities and, consequently, in the syntheses of time belonging to each of them. Thus, the act of repeating as an artistic process relates to the present, the past and the future together, comprising the singular characteristics of each of the temporalities of Repetition, which together form an internal power in the repeating subject and external in the repeated object.

The synthesis belonging to the present is related to habit and is extremely important, as it also constitutes the other temporalities. This synthesis is formed by a contraction, which names it, synthesis of contraction or passive, forming a synthesis of time. In this sense, time is only constituted in the original synthesis that affects the repetition of instants, contracting the instants into each other, these instants being successive and independent. Therefore, constituting the living present, it is in this present that time unfolds. Therefore, the lived present goes from the past to the future that it constitutes in time (Deleuze, 2018. p. 118).

Repetition in the synthesis of the present is represented by habit. Habit extracts from Repetition something new, in this case Difference, initially posited as a generality. Deleuze (2018) states that habit is a contraction, a fusion of Repetition in the spirit that contemplates. It is by contracting that we are habits, but it is by contemplation that we contract. Thus repetition changes nothing in the object that is repeated, but it does change something in the spirit that contemplates this repetition.

In this way, repetition understood as artistic power and process, as in the research I develop, would not change something directly in the object that is in the process of repetition, but would change something in the spirit that contemplates or performs the repetition, in this case, me as an artist. Repetition seen as a habit in the living present, modifies the interior of the artist who submits his artistic practice to the action of repeating, therefore, Repetition itself also changes.

What is transformed is the way I understand the repetition that is in action; With the re-execution of an act countless times, something is modified, gestures are abandoned and others are perfected, aiming at the improvement of repetition according to the objective set on it. I understand subjectively that the act of repeating as a habit changes as I constantly get involved with the action. They are differences that arise from one repetition to another unconsciously while I perform the repetition, they are not rationally realized improvements,



even if they may happen; However, such differences can be perceived later during the re-execution of the repetition, however, new differences will be produced at the same time that the old ones are discovered, a phenomenon related to the past and commented below. Thus, producing a cycle of simultaneous formation and revelation during repetition as a habit.

The first synthesis of time is the original one, however, it is also intratemporal. It constitutes time as a present, but as a present that passes. Time does not begin in the present, but the present is in constant movement in temporality, through leaps that are partially covered. Thus, the present is a paradox, while it constitutes time, it also passes in this constituted time (Deleuze, 2018. p. 117). In this way, another time is needed in which the first synthesis takes place, referring to a second synthesis of time, in this case, the synthesis of the past or memory. But the first synthesis, referring to habit and belonging to the present, is the foundation of time, however, it is not its foundation.

The intention of the present is to pass. However, that which causes the present to pass away and that which appropriates this present and the habit belonging to it is determined as the foundation of time, so the foundation of time is memory. Taking into account that memory is active, it rests on habit; it is at the moment when memory is founded on habit that another passive synthesis originates, in this case, the synthesis of memory or *Mnemosin*, belonging to the past. "Habit is the original synthesis of time that constitutes the life of the present that passes; memory is the fundamental synthesis of time that constitutes the being of the past (what makes the present pass)." (Deleuze, 2018, p. 118).

For Deleuze (2018) the past is closed between two presents, the first of which is the one it was and the other is the one in relation to which it is past. The old and the present are not two successive instants in the timeline, but rather, the present preserves a dimension of the old present. Thus, the synthesis belonging to the past is an active synthesis of memory, being a representation of the old present and a reflection of the present. In this way, the synthesis of habit constituted time as the contracting of instants under a condition of present, however, the synthesis of memory constitutes time as the fitting of the present themselves.

The synthesis of habit and the synthesis of memory differ from each other, thus reflecting on Repetition, and can be material or spiritual repetitions. The two repetitions are quite different from each other, while the material repetition refers to successive independent instants or elements, the spiritual repetition refers to the whole, on different coexisting levels. Such differences between repetitions interfere differently with the very



notion of Difference, derived from the act of repeating. In material repetition, Difference is extracted to the extent that the elements or instants contract in a living present. In spiritual repetition, Difference is included to the extent that the whole comprises the difference between its levels (Deleuze, 2018. p. 121).

According to the above, it is verified that the repetitions performed through habit or memory distinguish between them and influence the differences generated from them. Material repetition is related to the present and formed by instants of independent times that contract, in this sense, making a relationship with the poetics that I develop, the elements repeated materially, physically and virtually, each one has a different temporality at its core, therefore, singular and independent among them, but contracted in a living present or gathered in just one artistic proposal.

Spiritual repetition, on the other hand, formed by memory and belonging to the past, is a fitting of the whole, of all levels of the various presents, which form this temporality. In this sense, the habits belonging to the present and their synthesis are transformed into memory; From the perspective of the research, the repetition in the temporality of the past is seen in the execution of actions that happened previously and that are resumed in the present in the form of a reflection imposed by the past. Consequently, all the difference generated within the subject during the action of repeating in the old present, accumulates in the past and is revisited at all times again in the present present. Thus, the differences will be evident in this internal and spiritual transit between the past (memory) and the present (habit), being perceived in the poetics in the performance of actions for the repetition of the elements.

The third Repetition, belonging to the future, is described by Deleuze (2018) as an eternal return, as repetition is an action before being a concept of reflection. In Repetition we only produce something by constituting the past and metamorphosing the present. What is repeated in this third time is a repetition by excess, the repetition of the future as an eternal return. The eternal return affects the new, which is repeated under the condition of insufficiency and through metamorphosis. In this process, the repeated is autonomous from other times, it is repeated by excess, it is new and alone, constituting the third time, the future (Deleuze, 2018. p. 131).

In the third synthesis, the present becomes only an agent, with the function of disappearing, while the past becomes only a condition operating by insufficiency. In this way, the synthesis of time constitutes a future that affirms the infinity of the product subjected to repetition. The present, the past and the future reveal themselves as repetition through the three syntheses of time, each acting in different ways in the action of repeating.



In this way, "The present is the repeater, the past is the repetition itself, but the future is the repeated" (Deleuze, 2018, p. 132).

According to the above, the third synthesis of time, belonging to the future, is described as an eternal return, so it is verified that the Repetition that happens in the present (habit), submitted to the repetition of the past (memory) is a repetition that will perpetuate itself infinitely, always returning and existing in itself, designating the repetition of the future. Repetition in the eternal return happens as an excess of what is already established, however, aiming at an independence of the other two syntheses, from the point of view of succeeding and constituting new temporalities.

The future is the repeated, it is the final action of Repetition that would not happen without the other temporalities, because the past is the reflection of the act of repeating in the present. The three temporalities, their syntheses, and each of the types of repetition are what constitute Repetition as a whole. Thus, Repetition should not be analyzed only in the face of one of the times, but rather as an action happening simultaneously between temporalities. Repetition is coexistent, in which the present, the past and the future each have their own singularity in the constitution of repetition as a power of freedom towards differences.

Finally, Repetition is not fixed to a term, supposedly original or last. For the repeated object moves between two coexisting time series, between the two present, the present and the ancient, so that neither series can be considered or designated as the original or the derivative. Repetition is not a simple repetition of elements or parts that follow one another, but is the repetition of totalities that coexist at different temporal levels. Therefore, Difference is not extracted from just one repetition, but between the temporalities of a repetition that is totalizing (Deleuze, 2018. p. 378).

In this way, Repetition does not have an original, an element that unfolds the others, it is the repetition of a whole that coexists between temporalities and the differences between the types of repetition. Before an action is designated as a repetition in the present, it is itself a reminiscence of the past, which was a future in other temporal cycles.

In view of this, Repetition as an artistic power in contemporaneity, makes it possible to identify differences between the numerous repeated elements/images, which in a first analysis are similar and equivalent. However, repetition also enables the heterogeneous freedom of Contemporary Art, in which Difference gains strength among repetitions, which, despite being constant, do not have a harmful character, because it is difference that matters in Art, from the point of view of questioning a society submissive to constant transformations, but increasingly automated and standardized.



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