

Maureen Kaegi

It is like the point where the rainbow touches the forest...

Opening: 15.03.2019

Exhibition: 16.03.-11.05.2019

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Recognize and Repeat

In today's age, one of the most important talents—beyond the mere ability to perceive the world with a sense of wonderment—is being able to explore it through the practice of recognition. By 'exploring the world,' I don't mean the quest for what has never before been observed, but the pursuit of familiarities that have been lost. At its core, research means searching again, rediscovering, repeating. In this sense, expertise is the ability to maintain a level of relevance, to not give up or relinquish, to continue to appropriate. Repetition is at the base of the practice of rediscovering. To invent is to rediscover.

How did we get to the point of thinking that new things are only good if they don't contain anything old? How did we get to the point of believing that repetition limits us from discovering anything new? Everything new has been transformed from something old to a version of what it once was. Repetition facilitates this transformation. Those who are weary of repetition or incapable of repeating because they misinterpret the new as an expression of forgetting the old—as opposed to a variation and transformation of it—are forced to endure the old as a compulsion to repeat, for nothing is ever finished just because it has elapsed. Only the one thread that we keep picking up does not become part of an entangled mess. We thus try to use artificial repetitions in order to transform the ever-present fateful repetition into a self-determined one. The enemy of repetition is not just oblivion, but also automation. Automation is not concerned with repeating an action as precisely as it has been executed once before. What it is concerned with is: firstly, not stopping, and secondly, a conception of singularity without any affiliations. Repeating an action, by contrast, allows singularity to be affiliated with a series.

Repetition also assumes the idea or notion of something tangible. Automation, on the other hand, is based on pure abstraction. We humans turn into preposterous machines the moment our movements are perceived as being mechanical and our daily tasks appear to be mere reproductions of life. As Henri Bergson states in his essay *Laughter*, comedy is when the mechanical prevails over the mind and the imagination: "The attitudes, gestures and movements of the human body are laughable in exact proportion as that body reminds us of a mere machine."¹ Automation represents a deep fantasy of total power void of any ideas—social cybernetics void of any feedback, psychology, contexts, or conventional authenticity. It represents the cold horror of the copy. While the artistry of repetition lies in the degree of similarity between a second version to a first, a third version to a second one, and so on, it also expects to yield differences or variations. Automation, on the other hand, seeks pure resemblance between originals and facsimiles, and thus always returns the same results.

¹ Henri Bergson, *Laughter - An Essay on the Meaning of the Comic*. Temple of Earth x

Repetition is never a pure gesture in that it requires a vision. If you only repeat a form in order to extract content—like the post-modernists do—you must give up awareness in favor of oblivion; you must exercise actions without appropriating them; you must disassociate yourself from the consequential sequence of similarity and difference, and associate yourself with a pure formal identity that renders repetition impossible.

Everything that exists reminds us of something. Things of other things, actions of other actions, designs of other designs. Only repetition that is concentrated and always new is able to achieve the status of variation: the representation of similarity and novelty at once.

Repeatability turns coincidences into science; events into experiences; singularities into art; sequences into decisions; destinies into biographies; and arrangements into works of art.

Rolf Bossart

Rolf Bossart is a docent for religious studies and psychology. Diaphanes recently published a collection of interviews between Bossart and director Milo Rau entitled “Wiederholung und Ekstase.” He lives in St. Gallen, Switzerland.