

# What's in a Copy?

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## **Abstract**

I will answer the question “What’s in a copy?” by considering three sets of related issues: the importance of copies in academia; in cultural life; and in the economic world. In academia the current capability of making copies is challenging pedagogical practices and the trust of its members, plagiarism being the most immediate problem. The notion of authorship is also undergoing changes provoked by a proliferation of authors and new possibilities opened up by cyberspace. In cultural life, imitation and mimesis have long been fundamental engines of socialization. Our enhanced capacity of copying problematizes, with new intensity, the relationships between homogeneity and heterogeneity, between the genuine and the spurious. In the economic world, the digital era is threatening some of the fundamental tenets of capitalism, especially of its variant called the “knowledge society”, regarding the control of intellectual property rights. The gap between normativity and social practices is widening. The many dilemmas and tensions identified in the text are understood as symptoms of two major characteristics of the current times: hyperfetishism and hyperanimism.

**Keywords:** copy – digital era – knowledge society – imitation – plagiarism – fetishism – animism – property rights

## **Resumo**

Responderei à pergunta “O que existe em uma cópia?” considerando três conjuntos de questões relacionadas: a importância das cópias na academia, na vida cultural, no mundo econômico. Na academia a presente capacidade de fazer cópias está desafiando práticas pedagógicas e a confiança dos seus membros, o plágio sendo o problema mais imediato. A noção de autoria também está sofrendo mudanças provocadas por uma proliferação de autores e novas possibilidades abertas pelo ciberespaço. Na vida cultural, a imitação e a mimese de há muito são importantes motores de socialização. A nossa capacidade ampliada de fazer cópias problematiza, com nova intensidade,

as relações entre homogeneidade e heterogeneidade, entre o genuíno e o espúrio. No mundo econômico, a era digital ameaça algumas das premissas fundamentais do capitalismo, especialmente da sua variante “sociedade do conhecimento”, no tocante aos direitos de propriedade intelectual. Cresce a distância entre normatividade e práticas sociais. Os muitos dilemas e tensões identificados no texto são compreendidos como sintomas de duas grandes características do presente: o hiperfetichismo e o hiperanimismo.

# What's in a Copy?<sup>1</sup>

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Copying makes us what we are. Our bodies take shape from the transcription of protein templates, our languages from the mimicry of privileged sounds, our crafts from the repetition of prototypes. Cultures cohere in the faithful transmission of rituals and rules of conduct. To copy cell for cell, word for word, image for image, is to make the known world our own (Hillel Schwartz, 1998: 211).

In academic life, it is rather common to start with an issue that one supposes to be familiar with only to find out – after successive approximations – an enormous and intriguing complexity that needs to be further explored. This is, once more, the case. I first thought of writing about copies as an opportunity to present my latest findings concerning the extensive economic reality that is hidden behind “piracy.”

I entered this fascinating world in the late 1990's by making a simple question while looking at the Made in China goods sold by hawkers in downtown Brasilia and in a crowded street market called the Paraguayan Fair: how did these things get there? I then started research that has lasted for more than ten years. I ended up coining the notions of “economic globalization from below” and of “non-hegemonic world system.” While I will present my ideas about them here, I will also explore new issues that arise from another question – what's in a copy?

A few initial considerations are in order. The English word copy comes from the Latin word “copia” the meaning of which, “abundance, plenty, multitude” (Boon, 2010: 41), already insinuates a vast semantic universe. The world has always been full of copies. The Industrial Revolution accelerated the multiplication of objects and images while the Digital Era made copying

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1 Keynote speech of the congress of German speaking anthropologists, Austrian Academy of Sciences, Vienna, September 14, 2011. I thank my colleagues in Austria, especially Andre Gingrich, for such an honor.

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easier, more perfect and ubiquitous. Copies always imply several tensions: between essence and appearance; the particular and the universal; the unique and the many; the original and the replica; the authentic and the fake/spurious; between sameness and difference; production and reproduction; homogeneity and heterogeneity; creativity and commerce.

What's in a copy? At this point, I could well answer this question with a simple "everything." Indeed, according to Canadian philosopher Marcus Boon, in his thought provoking book "In Praise of Copying," copying "rather than being an aberration or a mistake or a crime, is a fundamental condition or requirement for anything, human or not" (2010: 3). Succumbing to the temptation of answering "everything" would certainly grant me the world record of the shortest article ever, but the answer's astonishing generalization would amount simply to avoid facing the subject's complexity. Therefore, I will answer this question by considering three related dimensions: the importance of copies in academia; in cultural life; and in the economic world. Of course, it goes without saying that these dimensions are not mutually exclusive.

## **Copying and academia**

It is impossible to think of a university without copies since it is a place for the production, re-production, storage, exhibition and reverence of knowledge. We find copies everywhere: in the libraries or in the copy shops, in the up-loaded PDF files of scanned texts or in the term papers downloaded from virtual firms that may even write customized monographs for their clients. Copying is also at the center of the classrooms, at the heart of pedagogy and learning, not only because professors repeat other authors' works while teaching but also because students are supposed to show they understood them by copying and reproducing their thoughts. Furthermore, isn't the academic ethos itself heavily based on admiration and on the mimicry of certain role models sometimes displayed and incorporated in theories sometimes in behavioral and political styles?

At the university, the contradictions between copying and originality abound. At the same time that copyrights are praised by many as a modern right, they are constantly disrespected in the name of education. At the same time that students need to know and copy other people's work, they

are supposed to add something new. At the same time that they admire and often emulate their mentors, they are supposed to make original contributions to knowledge. Originality here means aggregated difference. Perhaps, in the pragmatics of the academic world, we are, most often unconsciously, accepting the fact that there isn't such a thing as 100 per cent originality and that there is never a perfect copy, that copying always means adding something different, a fact that is especially clear in art history (Boon 2010). In the end, creation and innovation signify an addition to previously known things or processes resulting from copying exercises and from the imperfections of memory and reproduction. But, since in academia we need to be authors, the tendency, as in other spheres, is to abhor copies and praise originality, something made clear by expressions such as "my own theory is" and "in my view".

In academic life, nowhere is the scorn for copying greater than when the issue is plagiarism, a problem that has consistently grown since "paste and cut" became popular jargon. Paste and cut make the pedagogical role of copying problematic. One thing is a handwritten copy of a published text, another is its digital copy. A handwritten copy demands a time for reflection, for becoming acquainted with an author's ideas, for thinking of how to appropriate and criticize interpretations. The digital copy is an almost instantaneous action in which the contents of what is being copied may be completely unknown. I am not so much interested in the ethical problems triggered by plagiarism and forgery which most of the time are related to moral and professional deceptions and/or frustrated economic interests. What interests me is the idea that the current spreading of plagiarism is embedded in major changes in the technologies of teaching, publishing, reproducing and using information that are having an impact on traditional working routines in the academic milieu in ways that are still difficult to understand but that will certainly generate radically different scenarios and practices. According to Hillel Schwartz

Lexicographers responsible for defining plagiarism have been accused of plagiarizing definitions. A University of Oregon booklet plagiarized its section on plagiarism. Given this compulsion to repeat that which bears on repeating, plagiarism in our culture of the copy appears inevitable. (...) our culture of the copy tends to make plagiarism a necessity, and the more we look for replays to be superior to originals, the more we will embrace plagiarism as elemental" (1998: 313).

The scorn for plagiarism is intimately related to the Western idea of authorship, a central notion for the understanding of modern academic and scientific life. Marilyn Strathern (1986: 21 and 22) considers “the eighteenth century idea that persons are the natural owners of both themselves and their labour” a “notion of singular ownership/authorship [that] also sets up the conceptual possibility of one author supplanting or displacing the other”. In a productivist era in which competition is taken to its limits, Strathern’s statement is self-explanatory.

At the same time that authorship reinforces authenticity and originality as major academic values, it deprecates copying. Yet obloquy for copying is far from universal. The importance of copying as a way of learning has long been acknowledged in Buddhism and in China where “the multiplication of nearly identical images is understood not as the degradation of an original but the invocation of an impermanent, provisional form with the goal of training the mind to recognize its own true nature” (Boon, 2010: 63). Interestingly enough, authorship developed in the eighteenth century alongside with the regulation of copyrights in Europe, an offshoot of an established and growing book industry.

But in the digital era, with the world wide web, the notion of authorship may well undergo dramatic changes if not disappear. As Michel Foucault anticipated, a concept that came into being at a given moment in history may well disappear in the future. The notion of “author,” as Foucault put it, is intimately related to a “privileged moment of *individualization* in the history of ideas, knowledge, literature, philosophy and the sciences” (Foucault, 1984: 101). On the internet, there are experiments that use the immense collective creativity found in the global fragmented spaces that may now be articulated online. The global cooperation that currently exists within the virtual public space (Ribeiro, 2003) and is practiced by political collectives such as the free software movement provides an interesting example of global creativity enacted by a great number of persons that are not interested in individual authorship and copyright but in the collective perfection of a freely available common good.

Such collective online creation may in effect challenge the notion that the relationship between creativity and commerce is always mediated by individual authorship and copyrights. This does not amount to saying that we are on the verge of discovering an alternative to capitalist appropriation of creative

work, as some activists of the open source and free software movements would like to believe (Evangelista, 2010). It is not impossible to suppose that a corporation, such as Google, is likely to profit from an environment free of copyrights, a sort of global fragmented creative mind, where global hackers would provide, for free, the work and information needed to improve the company's products. If such a scenario comes into being at this point of computer electronic capitalism's hegemony, we should add Googleism as a new label to classify capitalist production, after Taylorism and Toyotism.

Authorship may also radically change in the face of other types of online cooperation, and here the main example is Wikipedia. Although Wikipedia is no panacea (in the end there is always an editor who controls what is publishable or not), it allows us to speculate about the possibility of a radical wiki-anthropology, for instance. Such on-line text construction would go beyond the traditional journals with their referee system, which, in the core of the world system of anthropological production, more often than not replicate the styles and agendas of the Anglo-American academic milieu (Kuwayama, 2004). The possibility of writing with a myriad of other known or anonymous cyber-colleagues may also lead to the emergence of post-authorial academic texts. Are we ready to make global wiki experiments in academic writing and theoretical production? Are we ready to go beyond the notion of authorship in academia, another of the basis of inequality reproduction in a world full of individualism and individual power seekers? I don't know. Perhaps my generation is not. Perhaps younger scholars, natives of digital culture completely immersed in cyberspace, are.

## **Copying and culture**

There are several possible ways of exploring the relations between copying and culture. I will tackle only a few of them here. How one acquires or learns a culture and a language, that is, how a person becomes human or a member of a culture and a society, has been a much debated subject in philosophy, sociology and anthropology. Learning is taken to be central to the evolution of Homo Sapiens Sapiens. Indeed, if, say, every hunter and gatherer had to invent arrows and bows again and again, the human capacity to adaptation and evolution would have been seriously affected. Mimesis, socialization, enculturation, diffusion, borrowing, are recurrent concepts

in this universe. Discussions often resonate with questions of structure and agency in ways that resemble the attribution of positive characteristics to authenticity, originality and authorship and of negative characteristics to copying and imitation.

A relatively recent revisionist perspective on enculturation, for instance, by Cindy Dell Clark (2005) provides an interesting illustration of a position that emphasizes children's agency. Dell Clark considers enculturation "not so much a straightforward mature-on-immature imposition of practices" (p. 182) but "a many-laned and multi-directional matrix in which children and elders interact." Following Jean Briggs (1992, 1998), Dell Clark asserts that "enculturation entails a complex, shifting assortment of ingredients to be actively selected and interpreted by the child." Critical of the notion of "cultural reduplication" she concludes that a "revisionist notion of enculturation implies a dynamism and fluidity to cultural learning, rather than a cloning like social reproduction process" (p. 183). Once more, what seems to be at stake are the tensions between creativity and inventiveness on the one side and repetition, copying and imitation on the other.

In the social sciences the notion of imitation enjoys today a greater visibility than in the past. Perhaps we are witnessing a return of its influence as interest grows in the work of French sociologist Gabriel Tarde (1843-1904) and his *Les Lois de l'Imitation* published in 1890. Matei Candea (2010: 2), the editor of a recent volume entitled *The Social After Gabriel Tarde*, speaks of a Tardean comeback and revival. *The Laws of Imitation* came out in English in 1903. Tarde's mimetic paradigm is, at the same time, an exercise on the value of difference, for in his view repetition provokes difference. His thinking informed disparate but influential works. One such example is Everett Rogers' (2003) *Diffusion of Innovations*, first published, in 1962, a book that became a classic on the subject. Rogers' theoretical approach is radically different from those of authors such as Gilles Deleuze and Bruno Latour, also influenced by Tarde. I will not summarize Tarde's rather complex texts nor the equally elaborated current appropriations of his work. Rather, I am more interested in looking at the renaissance of his influence as another indication of the increased awareness of the importance of copying and the challenges it brings.

While imitation entails complex theories and arguments, mimesis, simulation and mimicry do not lag far behind. Suffice to mention the lasting influence of the Platonic interpretation of the relation between outward



appearance and essence in Western philosophy (Boon 2010), the echoes of which, in anthropology, could be heard in the hot debates, in the 1990's, about identity, authenticity and essentialism. Or we could also mention Jean Baudrillard's (1994) well-known contribution on the role of simulacra and simulations in the constitution and reproduction of current social life. The digital age, where copies do not have originals, may witness, perforce, the death of the original, clearly subverting the Platonic gaze. In this environment, we are inevitably drawn to a discussion on virtuality and the status of reality. Virtuality creates confusion about the phenomenological status of the real world at the same that it magnifies our life experience. This is certainly behind the choice of "Second Life" as the name of a popular virtual place in cyberspace.

I have already argued that in order to understand current public space we need to make a distinction between the virtual public space and the real public space that, together, make up public-space-in-general. (Ribeiro, 2003) The increased political usage of the internet, since the Rio 1992 Earth Conference, and of cell phones, since at least the anti-globalization 1999 Seattle battle, as well as the work of groups such as Avaaz, just to mention three out of millions of examples, clearly illustrate the intertwining of the real and the virtual public spaces, thus intensifying what I have called political activism at a distance. (Ribeiro, 1998)

Avatars insinuate the possibility of virtual cloning. This is not as disturbing as the possibility of the genetic cloning of human bodies that immediately spurs waves of technophobic reactions. To date, human cloning represents the limit that has been imposed on bioengineering's capacity to copy. As the capacity to manipulate the natural world is extended to more fundamental dimensions such as the very code of organic life, the familiar anthropological distinction between nature and culture now needs to be considered through other lenses. In an age of technoculture, it is not by chance that anthropologists became involved with science and technology studies to understand "emergent forms of life", an allusion I make to the title of a 2003 book by Michael Fischer, a leading scholar in this field.

Interested in diffusion and dissemination, in the exchange between local and supralocal settings enmeshed in flows of people, knowledge and things, anthropologists know that the relationships between sameness and difference, between homogeneity and heterogeneity are central to human life and

to the understanding of the complex symbolic umbrella we all live under. In the past, some influential anthropological visions of culture were strongly informed by a nostalgic ethos as well as by a search for an organic, harmonious, totality within which genuine links between location, history and individuality thrive. A classic reference here is Edward Sapir's well-known 1924 piece "Culture, genuine and spurious." From this perspective, "internal" factors are highly valued to the detriment of "external" ones and to what Sapir described as a "spiritual hybrid of contradictory patches, of water-tight compartments of consciousness that avoid participation in a harmonious synthesis" (p. 315). This position has long been accompanied by another that views cultural life as an amalgamation of several borrowings. Think, for instance, of Ralph Linton's equally classic piece, the 1936 article entitled "One hundred percent American" in which he stresses how Americans use and copy objects and behaviors of many different origins. Almost a century later, we surely are far from Sapir's position not only because hybridity and fragmentation are no longer seen in a negative way (see, for instance, García Canclini, 1990 and Ribeiro, 1992) but also because for many of us it is clear, as Eric Wolf put it (2001: 312) that "in a majority of cases the entities studied by anthropologists owe their development to processes that originate outside them and reach well beyond them, (...) they owe their crystallization to these processes, take part in them, and affect them in turn."

However, resonances of the genuine/spurious tension still seem to interfere in current political ideologies and in the pragmatics of identity politics, especially when interethnic politics is at stake. "Strategic essentialism", a concept in postcolonial theory, coined by Gayatri Spivak, refers to the strategic political use of a supposedly unified social identity. In a different mode, postcolonial approaches also made clear the political role of imitation and of "spurious" culture in settings where subalternity is a hallmark of the relations between different ethnic segments. Here a good example is Homi Bhabha's well known essay, "Of Mimicry and Man: the ambivalence of colonial discourse" (1994), on the role of mimicry in colonialism. For him, mimicry is at once resemblance and menace since the discourses that reproduce imperial dominance carry a weakness that destroys domination from within. The subversive force of imitation imposes itself because nothing is pure replication and new critical interpretations and practices may always arise. The realization that borrowing symbols and discourses from the dominant colonizers

always involves re-readings and the agency of native populations has its own tradition in anthropology as the classic 1958 essay by Eric Wolf, “The Virgin of Guadalupe: a Mexican national symbol,” testifies.

But what is at stake in the several facets and implications I have been exploring of the relations between culture and copying? Why are imitation and copying criticized yet so needed? Always embedded in a hall of mirrors, in a multiplicity of social relations and representations, we fear to lose our uniqueness, to lose control of who we think we *really* are and to be dissolved in an amorphous and imagined mass of other beings like us or to become avatars in a world without flesh and bones. Even worse, the fear of losing one’s authentic being and capacity of being a subject is also a fear of becoming a puppet, a drone, under someone else’s spell, desire and power.

Somewhat less dramatically, I will also explore another angle to conclude this part of my argument. Can you imagine the amount of time it would take just to move around and live our everyday lives if each object were a unique object? Copying, repetition and imitation allow for previsibility, which is fundamental to the reproduction of what Anthony Giddens (1984) called practical consciousness, our ability to reproduce patterned daily life. Without this ability the human subject and social life would not exist given the enormous amount of energy we would need to expend constantly to monitor extraordinariness and randomness. In the light of this reasoning, I can also conclude that uniqueness and authenticity are highly valued because they represent a rupture in the chain of repetitions, thereby bringing into light extra-ordinariness and newness. It is the failure in repetition, in the series of events and objects, it is the unexpected, in one word, it is serendipity that constitutes a privileged mode of creating and innovating. In the end, copying and creativity depend on each other because without copying and the flaws it implies there would be no extraordinariness.

## **Copying and economy**

There would be no economy without copying. Labor processes and technologies rely on repetition, replication and predictability. Production relies on re-production. Consumption relies not only on innovation but on the capability of predicting an object’s usefulness. The multiplication of copied objects for consumption according to previously existing templates (let’s call

it mass production) is not new. Coins and bottles, for instance, have been mass-produced in the West since ancient times (Boon 2010). However, the Gutenberg Revolution, first, and the Industrial Revolution, later, dramatically increased the mass production of objects. More importantly, the Industrial Revolution, with its accelerated production of copies, imposed the hegemony of commodification as a regime of social (re)production that impacts not only the economy but all corners of human life, in a process well captured by Karl Marx's seminal work, *Capital*, especially his notion of commodity fetishism. Hereinafter, social actors would be mesmerized by commodities and the market in ways that hindered their understanding of the social forces and the processes responsible for the re-production of their own lives.

If capitalist commodity production in the 19th century was already so powerful as to commodify the lives of the inhabitants of industrial nations, imagine today when even the unconscious has been colonized by capitalism. The digital era with its tremendous copying capacity was at its dawn when Fredric Jameson published his prescient 1984 essay on the cultural logics of late capitalism where my last assertion about the unconscious comes from. The proliferation of copies of creative works granted by digital technologies also makes Walter Benjamin's classic 1936 essay "The work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction" a little dated. It couldn't be otherwise. His writing reflects the analogue logics of reproduction of his own lifetime. Currently, we are under the hegemony of electronic and computer capitalism. Mechanical reproduction no longer sets the pace of social life. But Benjamin is a great thinker. He anticipated, for instance, that the notion of authenticity does not make sense for reproductions as well as that "technical reproduction can put the copy of the original into situations that would be out of reach for the original itself" (p. 13). Also, from his work, we can imply that there are no Benjaminian originals in the world of commodities. Originals suppose an aura that withers in systems of mass production.

More than seventy-five years later, notwithstanding Benjamin's work of genius, it is possible to see some of its limits. This, as a matter of fact, does not detract from the brilliance of the essay. Quite the contrary, its limitations can only be seen because their potential existence was already in the text. For instance, his comments about the power of photography to accelerate "the process of pictorial reproduction" (p.12) could not suppose the digital convergence that made possible mobile phones to become photographic and video

cameras. Nowadays taking pictures or making videos is so easy and massified that it is impossible to calculate how many pictures and videos are made and shared in a year. With the popularization of cell phones, everyone will soon be a camera. Concurrently, the internet has become a fantastic treasure of images. Consider, for instance, what Facebook and Youtube mean as repositories of testimonies. The scope of the Youtube archive is so immense that it makes me toy with the idea that, now, researchers in the social sciences and in psychology have the Jungian “collective unconscious” – a notion I was never truly comfortable with - available for inquiry on their computers. In the same vein, Benjamin saw that with the “increasing extension of the press,” “an increasing number of readers became writers”:

It began with the daily press opening to its readers space for ‘letters to the editor’ (...) Thus the distinction between author and public is about to lose its basic character. (...) At any moment the reader is ready to turn into a writer. (...) the reader gains access to authorship (p. 24).

What would Benjamin write if he could see today’s proliferation of authors on blogs, websites, Facebook and Twitter? A world where everyone is potentially or de facto an author is a world so saturated with authors that the very notion of authorship seems senseless. But not only writers proliferate on the internet, there are also crowds of photographers, filmmakers and musicians who publicize their work online. Youtube is actually functioning as a screener for the discovery of new talents by the entertainment industry. The number of exhibits of a video is a free of charge global poll. Youtube is a virtual mega impresario and employment agency for artists of all kinds on a global level.

But, at the same time, the internet also represents the greatest challenge to copyright. If, on the one hand, economic life depends on copying, on the other hand, economic agents need to control copying since retaining the rights over certain commodities is to maintain a monopolistic market niche. Yet it is increasingly difficult to maintain such control especially over transactions involving the digital culture.

Notions of originals and authenticity have long been formulated to help control economic competition. Indeed, coins have been falsified since ancient times and the history of the term piracy (Johns, 2009: 33-34), meaning the antithesis of civilization, is associated with the rise of Athens. However, according to Adrian Johns (2009: 8) in his book on piracy,

although appropriators of ideas may always have existed, societies have not always recognized a specific concept of intellectual property. (...) [that concept] owed its origins to the cultural transformations set in train by Johann Gutenberg's invention of the printing press.

Although patents were granted in Italy and England already in the fifteenth century and "patents controlling the 'rights in copies' of books can be dated to 1563 in England" (Boon, 2010: 48), people started to refer to "intellectual purloining as piracy ... sometime in the mid-seventeenth century" (Johns, 2009: 23) and the first copyright law emerged only in 1709. However, intellectual property as a regulatory mode of economic activities developed only in the 19th century. Currently, as Brazilian anthropologists Ondina Fachel Leal and Rebecca Henneman Vergara de Souza (2010) show, intellectual property is intrinsically linked to the 1994 legal global regime called TRIPS – Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights that is administered by an agency of global governance, the World Trade Organization. This international agreement legitimates a "power structure that gives support to an emerging knowledge and information economy" (Leal and Souza 2010: 15). Globalization and the digital age thus brought copyrights and trademarks to the center of economic conflicts. This is why many analysts (see Johns 2009, for instance) view piracy as the greatest threat to national and global economies or believe that the regulatory framework needs to change. Lawrence Lessig's (2004) *Free Culture*, for instance, is a well-known book on the new scenarios the internet generated regarding copyrights and the free exchange of ideas. For him current laws are used by corporations to "lock down culture and control creativity."

At the same time, the production of unauthorized copies is a most stigmatized activity (see, for instance Naím 2005). Nevertheless, it is a major economic force everywhere (Johns 2009: 14) and not only in the so-called "developing nations." Here we enter the realm of the appropriation of flows of global wealth at the grass roots, by people who participate in what I call economic globalization from below and the non-hegemonic world system (Ribeiro 2007, 2011; see also Mathews, Ribeiro and Vega, 2012). What is behind the unauthorized copies of a Louis Vuitton purse or of DVDs sold in street markets almost everywhere?

'Trader-tourists' and street vendors of global gadgets, for instance, are but the tip of the iceberg of economic globalization from below which,

in turn, is part of the non-hegemonic world system. I call their activities non-hegemonic because they defy the economic establishment everywhere. Their occupations are considered as illegal, as ‘smuggling’. In consequence, the trading networks and markets are repressed in the name of legality. This form of trading is usually defined as piracy. Sometimes they are simulacra of superlogos, i.e. highly desired global brands controlled by major transnational corporations in order to keep monopolistic niches of the global market (Chang 2004). The difference between the prices of original superlogos and fake ones is the source of profits that makes working in the non-hegemonic world system worthwhile. Economic globalization from below provides access to flows of global wealth that otherwise would not reach the more vulnerable ranks of any society.

Economic globalization from below is made up of (1) nodes, i.e., of markets where global gadgets and copies of superlogos are sold, (2) flows among such nodes, typically connected by way of migratory networks and diasporas such as the Chinese and Lebanese ones, and (3) of production centers. Larger nodes of the system feed smaller ones in a trickle-down fashion. The totality of the activities within the markets, routes and production centers of globalization from below compounds what I call the non-hegemonic world system. One may find nodes of the non-hegemonic world system as large as the Paraguayan city of Ciudad del Este, or the city of Dubai, markets that move billions of dollars annually, or in areas of major cities such as China Town in New York and in small street markets scattered on the sidewalks and squares of major metropolises of the world (Ribeiro 2006, 2006a). These are (i)llicit activities, i.e., they are considered illegal by the state and the economic establishment but are socially accepted and viewed as legitimate by their practitioners who do not consider themselves as criminals (Abraham and Van Schendel 2005). The main production centers that feed these global networks are located in Asia, in countries such as Malaysia, Singapore, South Korea, Taiwan and especially in China. The province of Guangdong in China is the center of the non-hegemonic world system.

### **What's in a copy?**

The campaigns against piracy are expressions of a crisis of the notion of property and of the related normative frameworks that are central to

the reproduction of capitalism (Boon 2010; Johns 2009). This is why copying is taken so seriously by the economic and political establishment. Unauthorized copies of commodities are subversive forces. They denounce the arbitrariness of the extraordinary profits that trademark and copyright allow, they make the promise of consumption to everyone more feasible through unregulated means and defy the monopoly and privileges of the largest corporations of the world. In the end, copying is also a political issue as the expressions copyright and copyleft make clear. Indeed, the struggle to free copies and the innovation processes from the hold of powerful corporations is basically a political struggle (Evangelista 2010).

Ultimately, the main issue at stake is whether we want to live in a world completely colonized by flexible capitalism with its tremendous copying capacity and voracious desire to control intellectual property. It seems we are almost there. I see two possible outcomes. Both in one way or another are related to the efficacy of commodification. The first could be called hyperfetishism, meaning the hyper efficacy of fetishism in a world completely colonized by copies without originals and by their central role for accumulation within the cutting-edge sectors of electronic and computer capitalism. In such a realm no one would really care about alienation. The current almost complete disappearance of the term is an indication of this. The other outcome is what I would call hyperanimism, or a return of the metaphysics of animism among the moderns<sup>3</sup>. One expression of hyperanimism is the prestige currently enjoyed by some theories that attribute agency to things. Perhaps it is a reaction to a world where copies have no originals but algorithms, a reaction to the possibility of a shallow world, finally and completely disenchanted in which human clones may exist.

There are other dilemmas brought by the enhanced capacity of copying. I argued that the very notion of author as originator (Schwartz 1998: 248), as someone who gives existence to anything is being challenged by the rise of collective and anonymous global forms of creation. I also argued that the notion of authenticity is being challenged by the disappearance of the original and of genuineness. It is hard to anticipate what a world without authors

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3 I am aware of Fabian's (1983) critique about the use of "animism." My use of the term does not imply a negation of coevalness nor is it meant to be an invective. For me, what is at stake here is not the notion of time nor its political and ethnographic usage. Rather, what is at stake are the different understandings of humankind's capabilities of changing natural and social realities by means of human labor.



and authenticity would be. Will it be a world with a more collective sense of membership?

Finally, copies compel us to think about the dialectics between difference and similarity as a necessary component of perceiving and acting in the world. On the one hand, if everything were the same it would be impossible to distinguish any particular part of the real world, it would be something akin to experiencing an empty space where recognition through contrast would be nonexistent. On the other hand, if all things were different from each other, it would be impossible to predict form, function and process, it would be something akin to experiencing an overwhelming chaotic space where all our energies would be spent to understand the uniqueness of everything and where re-cognition through resemblance would be nonexistent. In short, I consider copying as a total social fact, in Marcel Mauss' (1973) terms. It is an activity that has economic, sociological, psychological, cultural, artistic, scientific, legal, academic and political implications. Indeed, mimesis is a fundamental quality of human life in every sense. As copying has always been central to social, cultural and economic life, and is increasingly more so, it is hard not to conclude that we are on the verge of a great change in the way we perceive and react to the role of copying in the production and reproduction of our lives.

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