

Babylonia Constantinides / Simon Gröger /
Elisa Leroy / Doris Rebhan (eds)

Change Through Repetition

Mimesis as a Transformative Principle
Between Art and Politics

Neofelis Verlag

Contents

- 7 **Babylonia Constantinides / Simon Gröger / Elisa Leroy / Doris Rebhan**
Repetition, Sens(e)uality, Transformation
Mimetic Practices Between Art and Politics
- 29 **Alexander García Düttmann**
Hat der Mai 68 stattgefunden oder „Mit dem Weltgeist sein“
- 43 **Burak Üzümkesci**
‘Recognizing the New Once Again’
Childhood, Mimesis, and Revolution in Walter Benjamin
and an Analysis of the Gezi Park Uprising
- 59 **Florencia Sannders**
The Color of Protest
A Recent History of Scarves in Argentinean Women’s Movements
- 73 **Yarden Ben-Zur**
Kings’ and Masters’ Way
Gustav Landauer’s Poetics of Resignation
- 89 **Leonie Hunter**
On the Political Failure of Liberalism’s Comical Promise
- 101 **Johanna Zorn**
Phantasms of Repetition
Preliminaries for the Practices of Mimesis and Deviation
- 111 **Annika Haas**
Théo rit
A Mimetic Approach to Writing Difference(s) With Héléne Cixous
- 127 **Elisa Leroy**
“The flowers again”
Repeating Ophelia, Performing Gender in Katie Mitchell’s *Ophelias Zimmer*

- 147 **Matthias Warstat**
Intervention and Repetition
On Rhythmical Specifics of Political Theater
- 163 **Simon Gröger**
Remembering Forward
The Theatrical Reenactments of the
International Institute of Political Murder (IIPM)
- 177 **Doris Rebhan**
Fictional States as Mimetic Criticism
Reflecting on Concepts of Nation-Building in and Outside of Art
- 191 **Penny Dan Xu**
The Transformation of Mao Zedong's Image in Propaganda Posters (1950–1967)
- 209 **Bahar Majdzadeh**
Cartography as a Possible Support of Representation
Tracing the Spectrality of Khàvaràn, Iran
- 225 **Babylonia Constantinides**
Natalie Bookchin's Video Installation *Testament* as a Compilation of Dissent
- 237 **Brigitte Rath**
Partial Repetitions
Niina Pollari's *Form N-400 Erasures* and Srikanth Reddy's *Voyager*
- 257 Table of Figures

Babylonia Constantinides / Simon Gröger / Elisa Leroy / Doris Rebhan

Repetition, Sens(e)uality, Transformation

Mimetic Practices Between Art and Politics

In 2017, Forensic Architecture (FA), a collective of architects, artists, and journalists based at Goldsmiths, University of London, released a video entitled *77sqm_9:26min*.¹ It attempts to trace connections between the German *Verfassungsschutz* (State Office for Constitutional Protection) and the ninth of ten murders committed by a neo-Nazi organization known as the National Socialist Underground (NSU) across Germany between 2000 and 2007. On April 6, 2006, 21-year-old Halit Yozgat was murdered at the desk of his family-run internet café in Kassel – in the presence of secret service agent Andreas Temme. It is this particular circumstance of the right-wing terrorist attack that the video is concerned with, as it raised questions regarding the ways in which Germany's security services monitor and are embedded within the neo-Nazi underground. In the wider context of the murders that had already been committed and the subsequent official investigation by the German police, the case has been perceived as an example of the questionability of their practices. Even though the NSU repeatedly conducted murders with the same weapon, targeting people from similar minorities, mostly persons of Turkish background who were successfully running small businesses in Germany, the police did not acknowledge any racist agenda behind those murders.² And although a secret agent who was investigating the neo-Nazi scene was present on the crime scene at the time of the killing, both government bodies, the German police and the State Office for Constitutional Protection,

1 The Murder of Halit Yozgat. In: *Forensic Architecture*, 2017. <https://forensic-architecture.org/investigation/the-murder-of-halit-yozgat> (accessed: December 23, 2019).

2 On the contrary, the German police were attributing the murders to violence within the Turkish community and its allegedly mafia-like structure.

failed to protect the victims' community. During the ensuing police investigation, the secret agent in question did not come forth as a witness. When the agent's presence in the internet café could finally be ascertained through his login data on a website, he was the only one out of five witnesses who claimed not having been aware of what happened. To prove the truth of Temme's statement, the police staged and videotaped an official reenactment at the original crime scene, performed by secret service agent Andreas Temme himself. Intending to show how he could have logged out and left the café without noticing anything, the interplay of staging, performance, and recording represents the perspective and interest of the state's agent and police. At the same time, intelligence officials ordered that parts of a research file completed by the secret service agency in 2014, which contain information on Andreas Temme's mission on the crime scene at the time of the killing, remain classified for 120 years.

Forensic Architecture's video *77sqm_9:26min* seeks to demonstrate that Temme's testimony is sufficiently questionable to justify that the sealed files be made publicly accessible. The research agency conducted an investigation that challenges the state's official narration and criticizes its handling of the case.³ Using the reenactment video and other police files that had been leaked to the public, FA asked whether the scenario depicted in those media is plausible; or whether, on the contrary, the video itself might be considered perjury. Commissioned by an alliance of civil society organizations named Unraveling the NSU Complex, FA indeed unraveled the institutional entanglements surrounding the terrorist attack on the microcosmic scale of the murder scene and the duration of the crime. Their approach, which focuses on the exact reproduction of the police reenactment and the detailed spatiotemporal and sensory conditions of the murder, is reflected in the video's title *77sqm_9:26min*: Although Andreas Temme was located within the 77 square meters of the internet café during the 9:26 minutes the terrorist attack lasted, he claimed in his testimony that he did not see, did not hear, and did not smell anything. However, the video that is a result of Forensic Architecture's research is itself a repetition of the police's official reenactment of the events.

For its counter-investigation of the events, it establishes repetition as its own mimetic method of research and narration. It thereby not only calls into question the official narrative about them. *77sqm_9:26min* is a work that also defies the distinction between the artistic and the non-artistic, challenges conventional

3 Cf. lecture by Eyal Weizman, director of Forensic Architecture, on November 10, 2018 at Haus der Kunst, Munich as part of the exhibition *Contextualizing NSU – Installations by Forensic Architecture and the Spot of Silence* (November 1–11, 2018), Haus der Kunst, Munich. <https://hausderkunst.de/veranstaltungen/eyalweizman> (accessed: December 23, 2019).

understandings of what an artwork is and calls into question the possibility of providing an essential distinction between art and non-art.⁴ Since its production includes skills as diverse as architecture, video simulation, acting, and many more, and its reception took place in contexts as different as a democratic parliament and an art exhibition, it poses the question of the relationship between art and politics. This question can be addressed to many contemporary works of art. Answers usually look for “a representational, documentary or interventionist relationship between political and artistic theory and practice”.⁵ Forensic Architecture’s work allows us to reformulate this question in light of another one: What is the potential and effect of procedures of repetition within and outside the realm of art?

77sqm_9:26min is not only the reenactment of a reenactment that attempts to repeat past events with exactitude, right up to the details of a sensory environment including sight, sound, and movement. By reconstructing the events, the video also refers to the fundamental role of repetition as a cause for the crimes themselves and their potential repeatability in the future due to the suspected structural racism that allegedly impacted the official investigations into the case. Taking the available non-classified data as their starting point, FA investigated the structures and conditions of production of the police video and its implicit assumptions. It follows its line of thought by considering the event from Temme’s own biased perspective.⁶ With the help of the official reenactment video, motion-detection software, and analogue measurements, the researchers reconstructed a computer animation of Temme’s actions from his cone of vision and then repeated the digital simulation in a physical real-scale model they had built for the purpose. To establish what the secret agent could and must have perceived, FA combined several kinds of repetition into a digital simulation by creating a full-scale replica of the architecture of the crime scene, as well as conducting and recording reenactments of the previous reenactment conducted by the police with Temme himself. Through the experiments documented in the video *77sqm_9:26min*, FA asked very specific questions about whether Andreas

4 Cf. Maria Muhle: Einleitung. In: Jacques Rancière: *Die Aufteilung des Sinnlichen. Die Politik der Kunst und ihre Paradoxien*, transl. from the French by Maria Muhle / Susanne Leeb, ed. by Maria Muhle. Berlin: b_books 2008, pp. 7–17, here p. 12.

5 “[E]iner repräsentativen, dokumentarischen oder interventionistischen Beziehung zwischen politischer und künstlerischer Theorie und Praxis” (ibid., p. 7; when not otherwise referenced, translations into English are the editors’).

6 Cf. lecture by Christina Varvia, deputy director of Forensic Architecture, at the conference “Change Through Repetition. Mimesis as a Transformative Principle Between Art and Politics” on December 1, 2018 at the Center for Advanced Studies at LMU Munich. https://cast.itunes.uni-muenchen.de/clips/7yo8gVTIno/vod/high_quality.mp4 (accessed: December 23, 2019).

Temme could have seen Halit Yozgat's dead body behind his desk, heard the gun shots, or smelled the gun powder. Taking into account the spatial positions of the victim and the witnesses – especially that of Andreas Temme – possible scenarios of the murder were simulated, analyzed, reenacted and filmed: A camera attached to the head of an actor moving through the real-scale model of the crime scene showed that Halit Yozgat's dead body would have been visible to a man of Temme's height as he approached the counter and leaned down to leave a coin. This was only one element out of several that Forensic Architecture reproduced and tested by basing them on the official depiction and thereby contradicting them. The results were not only achieved through the synthesis of the official investigation and its counter-investigation through repetition, but also by combining digital and live approaches: The same actions were simulated within the controlled conditions of a virtual environment, but also reenacted and performed once more in the architectural real scale model. This process of objectively reconstituting a physical experience demonstrated that evidence is the result of a construction out of the raw material of sensory events occurring in space and time. The models, the simulations, and the reenactments drew on repetition as a method capable of revealing and addressing the repetitive structures of official narrations. The counter-investigation opened a rupture between the official narrative and its underlying intentions and conditions, and ultimately established that the police video and Temme's testimony – that he did not see anything, did not hear anything, and did not smell anything – were very unlikely to be truthful.

In contrast to a government or police investigation, which progresses directly from crime scene to courtroom, the counter-investigation is multilayered and moves between cultural, legal, and political forums. It engages with civil society and the media in order to proceed. While the instruments of the state are already resorting to the means of repetition and aesthetic practices such as reenactment for the justification of their position, FA refuted the official narrative through almost the same practices in order to find representations for marginalized perspectives on political phenomena. Crossing the border between aesthetics and politics, FA faces constant confusion about the attribution of their practice to either the political or the artistic realm.⁷ Their emphatically

7 When viewed as producers of evidence rather than artists, they are criticized for their participation in art exhibitions, while at the same time being accused of not having the authority to contribute to politics because of their being artists. (Cf. lecture by Eyal Weizman, on November 10, 2018 at Haus der Kunst Munich. <https://hausderkunst.de/veranstaltungen/eyalweizman>.) They were invited and showed an overview of their work at the Tate Modern in London in 2018 and screened their video *77sqm_9:26min* at documenta 14 in Kassel, 2017, the

aesthetic approach produces multimedia narratives that are dedicated to legal and political dimensions presented in courts as well as in art exhibitions. This might be precisely the reason why Forensic Architecture's work in general and *77sqm_9:26min* in particular did more than "unravel": When FA presented the video at the art fair *documenta 14* in Kassel, journalists and politicians gained access to the case through the counter-investigation and, as a consequence, FA were invited to present their research in the Hessian parliament in front of Andreas Temme. Entering that space from the realm of art, it eventually made its way through to the political inquiry.

77sqm_9:26min operated through a complex accumulation of repetitions and produced new insights that directly impacted political events. It therefore poses the fundamental questions that this volume is concerned with: Is there a concept of repetition that subsumes the artistic and political practices united in this book? Can it help redefine the relationship between art and politics? Can the interplay between representation, documentation, and intervention be articulated around such a concept of repetition in order to enlighten us on the nature of 'political art'?

Art and politics. Challenging the distribution of the sensible

The hypothesis of this volume is that art and politics are related through repetition. It is the aesthetics and practices of repetition that reveal the relation between both realms. Repetition renders reflection upon the nature of this relationship and experimentation with it possible. The focus of this book are experiments in the artistic realm and their material, social, and philosophical preconditions. Given the fact that practices of repetition structure, rhythmize, and connect objects, events, and actions, their close observation and concrete description offer insights into the performative processes that link sensory perception and social reality.

Not only are both realms structured by practices of repetition, they both share a common space of sens(e)uality – *aesthetics* in the emphatic sense of the word – in which it manifests. With his dictum of the "distribution of the sensible", Jacques Rancière has pointed out this fundamental relation of politics and art as founded on perception and sens(e)uality, which goes hand in hand with a reformulation of the concepts of politics as well as aesthetics:

same city where the event in question took place. Since narrative spaces are not fixed, but moldable and can change the landscape of political agendas, FA uses these cultural institutions as forums for its investigations.

This distribution and redistribution of places and identities, this apportioning and reapportioning of spaces and times, of the visible and the invisible, and of noise and speech constitutes what I call the distribution of the sensible. [...] This means that art and politics do not constitute two permanent, separate realities whereby the issue is to know whether or not they ought to be set in relation. They are two forms of distribution of the sensible, both of which are dependent on a specific regime of identification.⁸

The historically and socially variable distribution of the sensible establishes socially effective apportionings of social positions, activities, and forms of expression. It designates who has a part in and shares something in common, i. e. the sensual reality, by apportioning different possibilities for the sensual perception of this common.⁹ This apportioning determines, defines, and regulates which practices, objects, and modes of articulation are identified conventionally as part of the realm of politics or instead of the realm of art.¹⁰ In that, the distribution of the sensible operates through social habits and gains validity in the coexistence of people and their bodies as common reality, with unequal abilities and possibilities to speak and appear in certain places and contexts.

It is Rancière's decisive postulate that every distribution of the sensible, every unequal apportioning of active or passive possibilities of perception and sens(e)uality can be challenged based on the equality of all human beings, an equality not understood as identity, but as equal validity. This act of challenging constitutes the very notion of politics, in Rancière's terms, as an antagonistic activity opposed to its anchoring in the institutions of the state: Every human being can become perceptible, make itself visible and audible at least as discord. Everyone can claim the right to appear on the basis of this equality as part of the social reality.¹¹ Thus, emancipatory activity¹² becomes a challenge to the institutionalized and socially anchored distribution of the sensible as well as to the positions and conventions assigned to and apportioned with it.¹³ Politics occur when something or someone is perceivable, becomes visible and audible, in a way that they are not supposed or accustomed to, when people appropriate an activity or carry out a practice whose sensual perception and sensible participation they have

8 Jacques Rancière: *Aesthetics and Its Discontents*, transl. from the French by Steven Corcoran. Cambridge / Malden: Polity 2009, pp. 24–26.

9 Cf. Jacques Rancière: *The Politics of Aesthetics. The Distribution of the Sensible*, transl. from the French by Gabriel Rockhill. London / New York: Continuum 2004, pp. 12–13.

10 Cf. Rancière: *Aesthetics and Its Discontents*, pp. 22–23.

11 Cf. Jacques Rancière: *Disagreement. Politics and Philosophy*, transl. from the French by Julie Rose. Minneapolis / London: Minnesota UP 1999, pp. 29–33.

12 Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 34–35.

13 Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 38–39.

been excluded from before.¹⁴ They thereby claim and realize their equal potential to be part of the common reality: “Politics is the conflict over the question of which objects belong to this [common] space and which do not, which subjects participate in it and which do not.”¹⁵ This conflict itself is a sensory conflict, a “dissensus”,¹⁶ a situation of disagreement and discordance, in which the usual modes of perception are disrupted¹⁷ by the encounter of two heterogeneous positions within the distribution of the sensible.¹⁸ As it comes into being through dissensus, politics provide a real possibility to change collective practices. According to Rancière, then, the capacity of art to provoke change does not lie in the fact that it is some kind of separate standpoint or reality that intervenes into a different realm, that of ‘politics’.¹⁹ Art, too, can bring politics in Rancière’s

14 Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 35–37.

15 “Politik ist der Konflikt um die Frage, welche Gegenstände diesem [gemeinsamen] Raum angehören und welche nicht, welche Subjekte daran teilhaben und welche nicht.” (Jacques Rancière: *Die Politik der Kunst und ihre Paradoxien*. In: J. R.: *Die Aufteilung des Sinnlichen*, pp. 75–100, here p. 77.) This text is a translation of an otherwise unpublished speech originally given by Rancière in French at the 2004 São Paulo Biennale.

16 Jacques Rancière: *Dissensus. On Politics and Aesthetics*. London / New York: Continuum 2010, p. 139.

17 Cf. *ibid.*, p. 138

18 Cf. Rancière: *Disagreement*, p. 30.

19 Following Rancière, we must consider *77sqm_9:26min* as a work of the aesthetic regime of art. It is in the aesthetic regime that art gains the capability to create a dissensus and thereby effect politics, because it is no longer defined either as a copy of an original that is measured against the ethical criteria of the degree of resemblance, its usefulness, and its decency (the ethical regime of the arts); nor according to the structural appropriateness of a representation, measured against conventionally established criteria differentiating the arts and the rules for their production (the representative regime). Instead, the aesthetic regime follows a fundamentally egalitarian principle: Because in principle any practice can produce art and any object can be qualified as art, precisely that equality between practices and products allows for dissensus to occur and to enable equality as a sens(e)ible experience. Here lies the fundamental correlation of political activity with the notion of ‘art’ in the current aesthetic regime, as a historically specific, modernist, and post-Kantian era discourse about the definition of art and its associated practices. This structural similarity between art and politics paves the way for an understanding of repetition that goes beyond the notion of a mimetic, imitative relation of the artwork to its object of representation. Representation and mimesis are shifting and manifold concepts that can both be read as phenomena of repetition: The aesthetic regime of the arts is characterized by the distinction between mimesis as just one possible practice of representation and the object that produces it. Because of that, mimesis is no longer a specifically artistic representation, but a term that refers to the possibility of emphasizing the simultaneity and equivalence of diverging forms of representation through their productive experience. For the aesthetic regime of art and the special notion of mimesis in the representative regime of art, see Rancière: *Politics of Aesthetics*, pp. 10, 20–30; Rancière: *Aesthetics and Its Discontents*, pp. 10–11. For a critique of Rancière’s conceptualization of mimesis see Burak Üzümkesci: The Problem of Mimesis in Rancière’s Conceptualization of Aesthetic Regime of Art. In: *Art-Sanat / Histart’15* Special Issue (2016), pp. 161–173.

sense into effect as “work involved in creating dissensus”.²⁰ By organizing sensual perception, artistic practices can offer a field of encounter:

Art is political because it apports a certain space and a certain time, and because the objects with which it populates this space, and the rhythms into which it divides this time, determine a specific form of experience that is consistent or breaks with other forms of experience.²¹

Practices of repetition rhythmize art works in space and time. They unfold their effectiveness against an expectancy of consistency usually associated with repetition that forms the frame of reference for the experience of rupture. The contributions collected in this volume explore artistic acts of repetition as opportunities to effect moments of disruption and conflict. How can repetitions, in their very own performativity and rhythm, their specific temporality and materiality, initiated by artists with different cultural backgrounds and social interests or goals, challenge the distribution of the sensible that determines their production and meaning, as well as their own categorization as art or non-art?

Using Rancière’s notion of politics as starting point, our hypothesis is to understand the possibility of “change through repetition” as rooted in the transformability of any distribution of the sensible. Political processes are never entirely comprehensible when detached from sensory perception and *aesthetic* experience. Politics unfold their power to form social practices also in sensory objects and their experience, while artistic practices make the sensory perception of a certain materiality their starting point and goal. The critical potential of each repetition consequently lies in the fact that it shows art and politics as already combined through processes of organizing and defining sensory perception. Ruptures effected by repetition offer the possibility of a redistribution and reapportioning, a transformative reconfiguration of political and social validity and importance. They are about a challenge that is initiated in the realm of art, but interacts in its repetitive structure with other sensory realms and therefore expresses itself as a disruptive sensuality that possibly creates new meaning.

20 Rancière: *Aesthetics and Its Discontents*, p. 25.

21 “Kunst ist dadurch politisch, dass sie einen bestimmten Raum und eine bestimmte Zeit aufteilt, und dass die Gegenstände, mit denen sie diesen Raum bevölkert, und die Rhythmen, in die sie diese Zeit einteilt, eine spezifische Form der Erfahrung festlegen, die mit anderen Formen der Erfahrung übereinstimmt oder mit ihnen bricht.” (Rancière: *Die Politik der Kunst und ihre Paradoxien*, p. 77.)

Funded by the Elite Network of Bavaria
as part of the International Doctoral Program MIMESIS

Elite Network
of Bavaria



German National Library Cataloging in Publication Data

A catalog record for this book is available from the German National Library:

<http://dnb.d-nb.de>

© 2020 Neofelis Verlag GmbH, Berlin

www.neofelis-verlag.de

All rights reserved.

Cover Design: Marija Skara

Editing & Typesetting: Neofelis Verlag (ag / mn / vf)

Printed by PRESSEL Digitaler Produktionsdruck, Remshalden

Printed on FSC-certified paper.

ISBN (Print): 978-3-95808-320-2

ISBN (PDF): 978-3-95808-371-4