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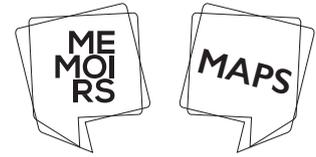
Saturday, 18 September 2021



Eugénia Mussa | *Solo carrier* | 2019 (courtesy of the artist)

## TO RECONSTRUCT, A NOT JUST TRANSITIVE VERB

Roberto Vecchi



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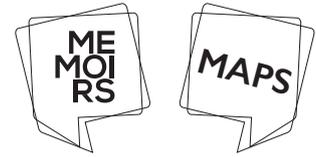
We live in a time when reconstructing seems to have become the central concern of all, as it generally happens in a post-war period. The pandemic leads to a proliferation of plans and ideas for reconstruction, recovery programmes, plans for new beginnings. It is a typical reaction to certain end-times, when one has lived a kind of end of the world, a catastrophic or final experience that has deeply and destructively come down over a certain time, leaving a posteriori an intention - previous to a gesture - of overcoming the end or restarting, of turning of the page.

To reconstruct, however, is not, as the grammar also prescribes, an intransitive verb. It always supposes an object, a relationship. Reconstruction - to return to the deverbal, of something that was lost or broken or suspended - opens up to a complex set of problems, which cannot be disregarded, lest reconstruction becomes an inexorable second destruction.

The first of these problems refers to a term close to reconstruction that is defined in contact as an event of rupture or destruction: restoration. Is reconstruction always a restoration? No. The proximity of both actions is evident, but the second term is oriented more towards a supposedly almost integral restitution of something that was interrupted or broken. Restoration maintains an original aura of returning to a condition that has been lost and that, probably in an illusory way, is intended to be reactivated, with nostalgia or an unmistakable desire to overcome. It is an aura of metaphysical character, because, as the history of art and restoration clearly shows, the interventions necessary to carry it out can be concealed, with the goal of supporting the effect of literal reproduction, or highlighted, which shows yet another concern of philological order. Rupture is not denied, but it is exhibited, as are the necessary interventions that have been deposited on the rest of the work.

A second aspect at stake in reconstruction, which also stems from similar attitudes to those referred to regarding restoration, focuses on the complexity of the relationship between original and copy. A classic example of the pure impossibility of copying may be exemplified with the novel by Machado de Assis, *Dom Casmurro*: amid the dubious contrast that permeates the entire novel, Bentinho has the house of the street of Mata-Cavalos where he was born and met Capitu rebuilt in Engenho Novo. The objective would be, for the narrator, to combine the two times of his life, through memory. But the accomplished copy of Engenho Novo proves to be mere illusion. The past does not return and the conjugation of the two pasts is not realized, even considering the copy as another original.

Reconstruction as an identical copy of an original is a critical issue that has largely dominated the field of culture. Reconstruction may be conservative, that is, imply a tautological model, of possible repetition of the identical. The non-coincidence between copy and original led, in particular in the post-structuralist context, to think of copying outside a metaphysics of identity: repetition always implies difference.



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In the context of postcolonial studies, when the theme of peripheral cultures was addressed by entering them in the formation process, the phase of copying the culture of the metropolis was defined. The mismatch between the two objects, between the original and the copy, led to consecrate the celebrated “right to copy”, because the copy would never conform. On the contrary, it would be in the copy that the subversive elements of differentiation would be inscribed, even if imperceptible or latent, by the simple act of copying. The literary manifesto of this reconstruction that loses the recursive prefix (re-) and becomes another full construction is the famous short story “Pierre Menard, author of the ‘Quijote’” by Jorge Luis Borges. Written elsewhere and at another time, *Quijote*, only apparently identical to the model, produces another writing and another readability.

Copying as a differential translation and not tautology then leads to problematizing the model of reconstructions and perhaps shifts the problem to another reflective field. It shows, essentially, that the reconstruction is based on the memory of a lost work, which acts as an active absence in its rearticulation. At the same time, it also shows the space of arbitrariness that exists in “reconstruction” (from now on between quotation marks). Thus, “reconstruction” always mobilizes a relationship with a double temporality: one focused on the past that restructures the object from one memory and, another, projected in a refunctionalization which eventually did not even exist in the object that was lost.

If we want to keep the comparison with translation, the passage from one language to another entails the acquaintance with a broad linguistic and cultural memory, but also the ability to renew a sentence assuming the responsibility - and the risk - of reformulation in the target language. Translation is always an act of ethics, in this case linguistic, just as “reconstruction” is also always an act of temporal ethics with the imbricated times in which it takes place.

Another analogy that implies the same scale of values as translation is that of memory. Memory is also not literal in relation to the past. It is always rebuilt as a selection, by the action of forgetfulness and losses. What remains after the memory process is a factually noncoincident simulacrum of the past, the artificial nature of which is evident. However, it is through memory that unique traces of the past are recorded that would otherwise be lost.

The examples briefly given serve to rethink the word and the concept with which I started this short text - “reconstruction”. What could be, after all, a lexical impropriety, reveals itself as a general problem that, in this time of post-Covid reconstructions we are invited to (re)think. Awareness of the impossibility of copying should be a first element of departure. If “reconstruction” is based on a matrix of differences, it is important to think of it within a logic of refoundation and potentialization, escaping a little from

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the trivializing ease of the fetish, the inexorability of the fake or the illusion of the literal copy.

The principle of non-identification with the originals that translation and memory show offers an immense opportunity for innovation. The same meaning can be produced in different ways, by a diversity of combinations of the constitutive elements, that must guarantee - this is the challenge - the production and the protection of the same meaning. “Reconstruction” always presupposes an ethical positioning in relation to time and must be thought of from the double movement of deconstruction and reconstruction of the object that the praxis of translation exemplifies.

Therefore, “how” to reconstruct is as important as “what” is reconstructed, as indicated in the imperfect mode by the transitive verb “to reconstruct”. Only in this way is “reconstruction” an opportunity for renewal and change, even if it always involves the risk of loss. But this is a risk to be taken, lest we be condemned to repeat the same thing, to the indifference of past and present, to the loss of the idea of desire and the future. And of our ability to act on them.

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