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Lola Lasurt: On the Battle of Media Prospecting

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Lola Lasurt examines the ways in which the media influence both the shaping of human experience and our temporal awareness. Lasurt devotes herself to the battle being waged between the various forms of media; she examines their surfaces, tears them and compares them, so as to test the political and disruptive potential of this space, a space usually understood as being reserved for establishment of code and convention.

Judith Butler has focused repeatedly on the contingency of statements: there are no sovereign speech acts that are infallibly effective in any context, yet statements have the possibility of acquiring meaning and performative power depending on their capacity to respond to conventions and media.

But what is going on with these media? Are they the faithful servants of statements, do they carry statements from one side to the other when requested without influencing them, without changing them or being changed by them, without asking any price in exchange for giving statements a particular power? The interaction between statements and the media becomes more complex if we consider each element as a potentially active agent, each with the capacity to initiate processes of shift and repetition in relation to established meanings.

In her work, Lasurt examines what we might consider the phenomena of transcoding: she addresses the phenomena of translation, though not only at the level of the shifting content; rather, she takes particular interest in how exchanges influence the formation of the code. A paradigmatic example of transcoding in our times is explained in relation to the internet: it is often claimed that until now we have understood and used the new medium according to logic we inherited from old media such as text and moving image, and thus that the intrinsic logic of the digital remains something to be exploited.

In contrast, the transcoding that Lasurt explores is moving in the opposite direction. What shifts will the internet have effected in relation to the thinking and practice of traditional artistic media? How has painting, the comic, the museum and monumental sculpture been afforded new meaning through the emergence of the digital, as well as through the culture of collaboration and participation that this new medium has brought?

The internet is often assumed to have the capacity to entirely influence our experience of the present. A power of this kind – that is, to fully imbue a context with meaning – was traditionally attributed to the monument, although in that case it is contextualization that is manifestly vertical and hierarchical. In practice, however, the monument has not been effective when it comes to containing and perpetuating meanings independently of contextual interference. In the mid-nineties Lev Manovich spoke of the “totalitarian interactivity” of the internet, thereby contradicting the expectations of radical democracy, horizontality and the elimination of hierarchies that had been initially attributed to this medium.

Lasurt reflects on the history of a monument such as that of Francesc Ferrer i Guardia, erected in Brussels in 1911, which proved a failure owing to successive changes in location and to copies that were made over time. While at first the monument was attributed the capacity to assume a context and impose on it an intended memory, eventually the freethinker it was intended to commemorate was presented – not without irony – practically as a puppet dominated and contaminated by the meanings imputed to the figure by the surroundings through which it moved.

In contrast, the renaming of the main square in Mont-roig del Camp from Plaza del Generalísimo Francisco Franco to Plaça Joan Miró, as was instituted during the Spanish Transition to democracy, is used by Lasurt to focus on a case of empowerment of the popular which retains a close relationship with the pictorial medium. Community aspiration cannot be reduced to digital media, yet in this small Catalan town both a traditional medium such as the pictorial and the popularity of Miró have become synonymous with democracy. Similarly, there has been a set of appropriations of Miró on the part of the residents which in the end contradict the codes in which the conventions of modern art have sought to contain the painter’s work.

Painting serves Lasurt as a medium of appropriation once again in *El partido*, this time as that of a frustrated collective dream. With this painting, she takes the medium to the sphere of individual remembrance, but afterwards, she also uses it to return to the present and test the aspiration for democracy that underlies the football match played by a group of Spanish women emigrants to Belgium in 1976.

With *A Visit to the C.P.Nel Museum with Mo* something of a clash is organised between the logics that run through two media: on one hand there is the museum of Oudtshoorn (South Africa), which is devoted to the so-called “ostrich-feather boom” that occurred at the turn of the 20th century, and which, with the hunting of the ostrich, accounted for the expansion of white domination in the region. On the other hand is the comic, a language that Lasurt learnt from black South African cartoonist Mogorosi, who is himself a testament to activism in the struggle against Apartheid and whom the artist accompanied on his first visit to the museum.

In the battle being waged between the media, Lasurt reveals a question that concerns politics. The media are hardly autonomous; in fact, they turn out to be as contingent as the statements and possibilities of existence they carry: monumental typology is not infallible when it contains and imposes meaning in a given context, just as the traditional media of art maintain their capacities for agency and can still be used to expand democracy in the internet era.

Lasurt thus contributes to the organisation of a historiography from a performative viewpoint. The medium, a space of convention and in which the code is used, is shown here to be an active agent. And as it is variable, it also becomes potentially disruptive.