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MIRJAM HORN, *POSTMODERN PLAGIARISMS: CULTURAL AGENDA AND AESTHETIC STRATEGIES OF APPROPRIATION IN US-AMERICAN LITERATURE (1970-2010)*, WALTER DE GRUYTER, BERLIN/BOSTON, 2015.

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While we can agree the infamous word “plagiarism” immediately evokes a theft of the intellectual property, a violation of copyright laws, the book that is in front of us goes on to show that plagiarist practice when conveyed in complex literary concept is au contraire a very radical movement. A movement that wants to break up with hard-coded traditional literary logics by breaching its most protected sanctities - individual authorial ingenuity, textual integrity and hegemonic system of patriarchal language.

Naturally, the authoress of *Postmodern Plagiarisms: Cultural Agenda and Aesthetic Strategies of Appropriation in US-American Literature (1970-2010)*, starts off from examining the genealogy of the term plagiarism (deriving from a Latin word *plagiarius*, firstly used by a Latin poet Martial in one of his Epigrams). In modern sense, this term usually represents the unmarked appropriation of another authorial subject’s ideas and language presenting them as one’s own. It is considered to be amongst the most scandalous and punishable misdeeds in the intellectual realm, “most damaging behaviour within the production of art and especially literature”, as

the authoress remarks. Since the production of postmodernist theoretical manifesto by Roland Barthes *The Death of the Author*, Michel Foucault’s demystification of the author in *What Is the Author?* and Derrida’s concept of *différance*, the idea of plagiarism that it is usually being designated as a pure literary theft has shifted to become a spectrum of different literary appropriation strategies “that communicate a high level of language criticism and propose a fundamental, all-pervasive textuality of culture”, as Mirjam Horn thoroughly and convincingly illustrates by applying them to several case studies.

Horn develops three original post-modern plagiarist strategies affirmed in complex literary and language theories, that she later employs in explicating and analysing five novels published in the US from 1970 to 2010: Critification/Plagiarism, ConText and Neo-Conceptual uncreative writing. Rightfully, she poses a few enormously important questions to legitimize and evaluate the purpose of her study: why postmodern plagiarist texts as mode of appropriation when we already have intertextuality or postcolonial re-writings? First and foremost because the cultural agendas she was

dealing with surpass the textual presence of one literary text in another and dive over into a more “contextual approaches... of the production of contemporary authorship, the notions of originality and creativity as well as the implementation of these aspects in the literary field”. The program of postmodern plagiarism always includes a negotiation of plagiarism as a taboo challenging the etiquette of literary production, a critique of the structures in the literary field of cultural production (Bourdieu) and a renegotiation of conventions that concern authorial agency, authority and intentionality.

Studying literary plagiarism (and not plain textual or literary theft) transcend the usually perceived limits of literary criticism as it includes transdisciplinary frameworks of economics, law and politics but also aesthetics, philosophy and history of ideas. Postmodern plagiarism practices combined and theorized in this study evolve into a whole programmatic field of poetics of literary plagiarism. Novels which served as bold examples of postmodern plagiarism address a complex spectrum of issues surrounding the key concepts of authorship (as ownership), creativity, originality as well as authorial and textual authenticity. Literary work is not just a standalone textual item that came out as a mere product of creativity and ingenuity – it is corresponding with the standards of literary market, with logics and laws of commodification of literature and with the concept of authorship as ownership. A book is a marketable good that has a monetary exchange value and every corruption of its parts involves legal enforcement as well as it causes disruption in desired economic profit margins. This is where the authoress follows Bourdieu’s approach to the “field of cultural production” to explain the literary-economic perspective of literature as commodity which is one of a few crucial aspects of theory of postmodern plagiarisms.

Critifictionist/Playgiarist strategies of postmodern plagiarist derive its theoretical material from post-structuralist and deconstructionist paradigms and transfer them into the fictional texts. The key aspects of these paradigms are repetition, doubling and play. In multivocal novel *Double or Nothing* (1970/1991) by Raymond Federman, Horn attempts to show how Playgiarism in his case, as a proto-postmodern practice, serves to methodically invalidate traditional writing modes in their quest for a wholesome depiction of reality and history. Federman blends the literary theory, language criticism and fiction by appropriating parts of texts from Beckett and Foucault in the multi-layered metafictional novel. Horn concludes that *Double or Nothing* is the least radical of the case studies presented in the book as it puts too much attention to the central figure of individual author, the spiritual father, Beckett, that becomes an overbearing literary ancestor which finally weakens the potential of this plagiarist strategy.

Already in explicating further into the plagiarist strategies with a take on the ConText as the feminist strategy of plagiarist appropriation, Horn leads a reader of this enriched monograph to a next level of radicalisation of literary appropriation and revision of male literary hegemony, inviting us to have a deeper insight into a controversial novel by Kathy Acker – *Empire of the Senseless* (1988). ConText’s agenda, as explained by Horn, “epitomizes a plagiarist program that involves a female-as-feminist literary production within the rigid system of phallogocentric meaning-making and the limiting idiosyncrasies of language”. ConText as a plagiarist strategy designates a necessary shift from the proto-postmodern playful variants of Critifiction and Playgiarism towards the feminist interest in emancipatory subjectivity. *Empire of the Senseless*, primarily as a piece of fiction, substantiates

the radical conceptuality of the plagiarist approach and thereby constitutes a development towards the programmatic application of ConText. Horn sees a Playgiarist novel *Double or Nothing* as inferior to *Empire* as the latter goes one step further to challenge the cultural territories that Playgiarism still acknowledges and affirms. She is full of praise for ConText, and which she has all the right to be, as it is a plagiarist strategy, as she claims, “pertinent in at least four ways: as an illegitimate strategy against the commodification of literature as it is manifested in the male-dominated literary industry, as a legal commitment through Copyright that flouts its initial purpose of encouraging authorial productivity, of securing a producer’s livelihood, and of promoting the Progress of Science and useful Arts, as a critical stance against both a phallogocentric society and literary canon dominated by male creative modes, products, rules, and criticism, and as a complex negotiation between the deconstructionist impossibility of meaning-making and an empowering female, or feminist, imagination issued from a marginal perspective”.

Lastly, Horn dedicates a significant part of the study to what she wittily coins as Neo-Conceptual writing. Put simply (although it is nothing but) Neo-Conceptual plagiarist appropriation strategy promotes uncreative writing as a creative mode of production. It aligns seamlessly with advent of digital technology as it has introduced crucial consequences for the ways in which we produce, perceive and process language and text. What matters more to the Neo-Conceptual programmatic writing

is the idea or concept rather than the eventual product. For Neo-Conceptualism the author is a mechanical instigator, writer as the maintaining programmer and manipulating manager – *poeta faber digitalis*. For Neo-Conceptual writers everything that surrounds us can be subjected to the text, pre-programmed, set up and put in motion. That is the reason why the two novels examined in this chapter of the book deal with the extra-literary or non-literary material – *Day* (2003) by Kenneth Goldsmith depicts one whole day completely appropriating the content of *The New York Times* (on that day), *Tragodia 1: Statement of Facts* (2010) reframes rape trial testimony as poetry. On the other hand, Yedda Morrison’s *Darkness* is a biocentric reading of Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*, where all the pre-text’s evidence of the author’s creativity is erased. Horn concludes the investigation by saying that “Neo-Conceptual plagiarism [...] has proven instrumental in underlining the prospective for contemporary radical referencing and its cultural symptoms: a litmus test for conceptions of literary authorship in the twenty-first century”.

By putting these five contemporary American novels under masterfully applied and rich theoretical scrutiny, Mirjam Horn has diagnosed the condition of literary present and envisioned the path it might be taking in future to come. How is literature reacting and adapting to the digitalized age it has inevitably entered, with all its freedom of information and opinion, net neutrality and innovation in the digital environment, will display its most prominent result in the evermore blending of writer and reader.