

## Destruction or cultural construction: copy-paste considered

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**M**ass production and, more recently, communication technology, have led to both scaling up and an exact copy-paste reality. This has led to an increase in total material wealth, but unfortunately on credit: the costs are both a disrupted global ecosystem and climate, and a practically impossible task for our children. Certainly, copy-paste has already gained momentum with the rise and spread of printing in the 15th/16th century, but now, with the world-wide web and social media platforms and giants like Amazon and Alibaba, it seems unstoppable. Yet life itself is also a form of copy-paste. What is "good" and what is "wrong" copy-paste?

In my opinion, transformation is a key concept to understand the distinction. Transformation depicts both community and communication. For example, tumour growth - "wrong" copy-paste - takes place without transformation. Unlike other new cells produced in a body, tumour cells duplicate without taking into account the needs of other cells, let alone adapt to them. There is no community which involves producing according to the needs of the others. That's what living organisms do, and because tumour cells don't, that's why they cause damage. Another example forms a regime such as Stalinism, a massive top-down imposed control system that does not accommodate the actual needs of local participants. Here, Henry Ford's assembly lines to realize mass production are applied to the "communist" state system, completely in line with the zeitgeist of the early 20th century. It has virtually nothing to do with community (communism), and everything to do with machination and therefore mass production.

Non-transformational duplication is non-communicative and therefore blind copy-paste. Try to imagine a much simpler society. Someone sings a catchy melody. Unnoticed you take over the melody and adapt it to your own possibilities and taste. Songs, stories or jokes evolve all the way, by mimicking and can take many forms. Diversifying and evolving, adapting and learning by doing, playing, or working. From a single start positions to millions of actualizations, that's how culture evolves. Through copy-paste that is not blind, but communicative: everyone produces according to power and receives as required. Human culture is a joint venture. As philosopher Kwame Anthony Appiah defines, culture is not an organic whole, but a constantly changing collection of expressions, thoughts and habits that are nobody's property. It goes wrong when possession is claimed. Back in our complex society, modern reproduction and mass production techniques provide exact copy-paste capabilities that make it easy to claim possession by extracting the transformational (communicative) aspect from expressions, making them items in an economy of supply and demand. Petrified items, stripped of friendship ties, literally de-humanely packaged to be able to sell. The identity of what are by nature the carriers of cultural expressions – people bound together in connections and societies – has been swapped for the label of, for example, the record company that has come to claim the rights of a traditional through mass production.

Repetition without transformation, without accounting for new facts, can take many forms, from tumour cells, to pumped-around conspiracy theories, from mechanized music to even lots of officially recognized news "facts". Unfortunately, much "digitization" is hardly anything other than cheap or even "wrong" copy-paste. In my opinion, we must stand up for our positive humanity, and in doing so we must recognise that not all new (smart) technology is good. We can condemn technology applications, just as we do with behaviour. However, this is not a black and white task. Some technology is positive, such as Wikipedia, which fully meets the definition of community and life, and is therefore transformational. Waging war remotely by breaking into or fighting with a drone or trolling in another continent is downright bad. But virtually all modern technology is somewhere in between these extremes. Social media, streaming services etc. can be both bad and good. But if, by magic, all copy-paste without transformation - the blind replication - were to disappear, very little would remain. Except for a huge playing field for authentic human enterprise and imagination!