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Original Copies in Georges Perec and Andy Warhol by Priya
Wadhera (review)

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L'Esprit Créateur, Volume 59, Number 1, Spring 2019, p. 155 (Review)

Published by Johns Hopkins University Press

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/esp.2019.0011>



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BOOK REVIEWS

Priya Wadhra. *Original Copies in Georges Perec and Andy Warhol*. Leiden and Boston: Brill Rodopi, 2017. Pp. 204. \$100.00.

Recognizing that it may strike some people as a bit inconsonant to compare Georges Perec and Andy Warhol, Priya Wadhra argues a brief for that comparison early on in her book. Both of them are playful, she suggests; both challenged prevailing conventions; both worked within constraints while they pushed the limits of the possible; both overcame early critical indifference and established themselves as widely influential figures in late twentieth-century culture. Their respective practices converge upon the notion of the copy, she contends, and on the strategic manipulation of that notion in order to ask fundamental questions about the nature of art in our time. She proposes to parse their work in an attempt to put into evidence what is “original” in the copies that they put on display. “My focus lies primarily with Perec,” Wadhra warns her reader in the introduction (3), and what follows bears that out, for she does not turn to Warhol with any sustained attention until the final pages of her book. Yet what she has to say about Perec and his mimetic techniques is compelling enough to compensate for that imbalance. Her discussion is devoted mainly to *Un cabinet d’amateur* (1979), a brief novel that entertains very strong intertextual relations with what is often considered Perec’s masterpiece, *La vie mode d’emploi* (1978). In the former text, Perec plays with the idea of the copy from first page to last, on a variety of levels: through ekphrasis on a first and most obvious level, but also, more subtly, through pastiche, mise en abyme, autoallusion, and other strategies still. Four principal questions interest Wadhra: “what is a copy, what is copied, how is it copied, and why is it copied?” (9). Addressing those questions, she postulates a useful typology of the copy in *Un cabinet d’amateur*, limning three broad categories: pastiches of art history and criticism; evocations of paintings; and intertextual allusions. Devoting several chapters to each of those categories, Wadhra examines them in pleasing, rigorous detail. Along the way, she visits certain other, related concerns. She thinks about forgery, for instance, and about the sometimes uncertain relations between the copy and the “fake.” Calling upon the way that Gérard Genette understands intertextuality, she reflects on quotation, on plagiarism, and on allusion. Each of those gestures involves copying, of course, though in rather different modes. In her final chapter, entitled “Copy Play in Perec and Warhol,” Wadhra underscores the ludic, articulative impulse that animates the best work of those artists, and she examines how they encourage us to reconsider the principle of authenticity and the value that we invest in it, a reconsideration that may have serious implications for the way we imagine the aesthetic artifact and its uses.

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