



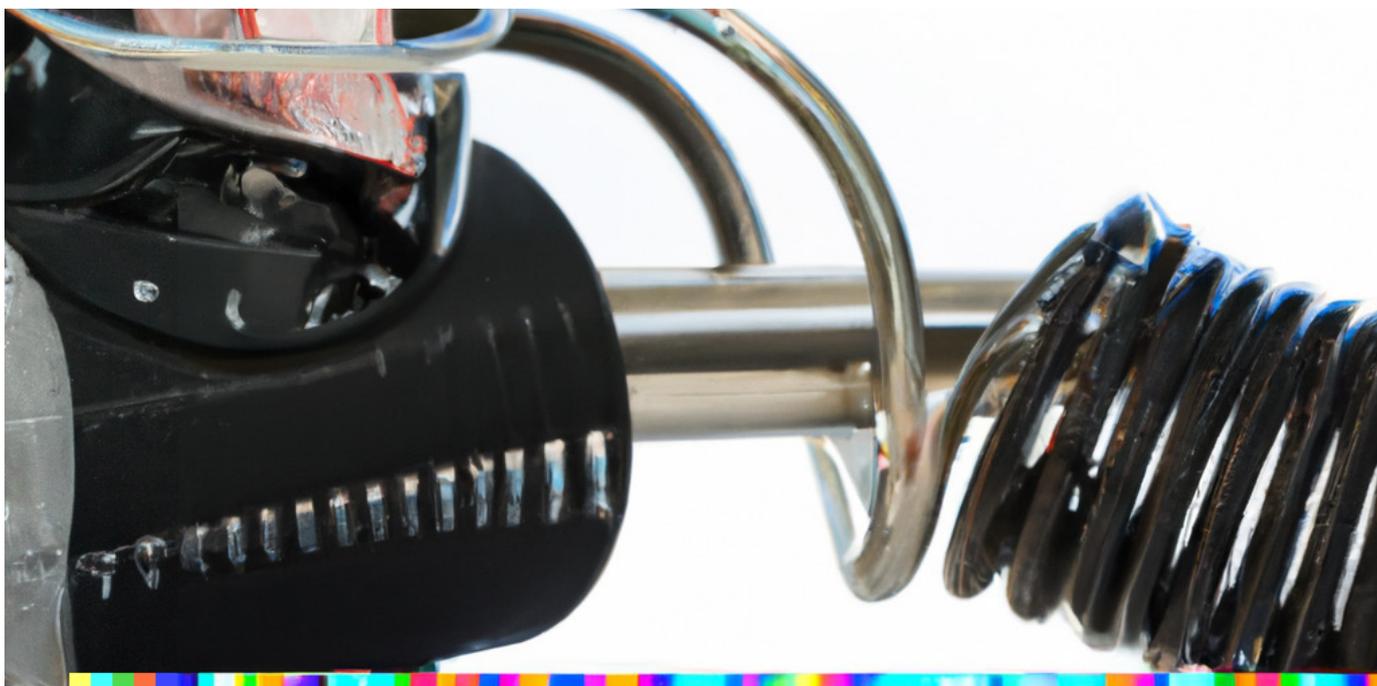
MIMES

On my eleventh birthday I won a game of Monopoly by cheating. It was my birthday and nobody noticed. From that day on, I systematically cheated in every game I played.



Of course, I cheated to win, but the pleasure I got from cheating went far beyond the lure of winning. Sometimes, having lost, I would even gloat inside, as if I had won a decisive battle, because I had cheated like never before. As an adult, I naturally turned to business as a profession, but I found the capitalist way of cheating too abstract for me.

And after all, I was not a thief. I needed something else. I tried the casinos, of course, but nothing helped, an insatiable desire continued to proliferate in my veins.



At the age of 32, my therapist helped me to realise that my vice was not gambling, but cheating as such. What turned me on, in the erotic sense, was the fake. Having identified the engine of my desire, I started trading in fakes. Nothing satisfied me more than helping people look like something they weren't by giving them access to things they couldn't have.

Certain areas of the big cities, where counterfeits abounded, caused me untold ecstasy. The slightest Vuitton bag, the slightest pair of Gucci glasses, the slightest counterfeit Hermès square gave me the shivers, as if the world could reveal its secrets through the fake.



I ended up quitting my job at the bank to take part in this traffic, and then I became interested in counterfeit money, which was a lifetime revelation. I finally understood how prophetic the Monopoly game I played when I was eleven had been.

I became famous, in the world of counterfeiters, to the point of being called, the King of Fake. But my desire to achieve an entirely counterfeit existence got me into trouble.

The year I turned 44, I was caught by the Fraud Squad, and ended up in jail. It was there that I met a young Colombian artist called Rafael Moreno, who was to change my life. Rafael had just received a grant from the Ile-de-France region, thanks to which he was going to be able to spend three months in the prison of his choice, as a guest artist, with the sole aim of writing poems and talking to the prisoners. Rafael and I hit it off right away.

I saw them walking through the prison corridors, books in hand, long hair blowing in the wind, and something strange happened, as if I sensed a secret bond between us. The more I observed them, the more I sensed in their manner the fibre of a forger. One day they were leading a writing workshop when they tipped over their handbag, which was lying on the edge of their desk.

To everyone's astonishment, a stream of small red coins and accordion-folded money bills spilled onto the floor. As I helped them gather their treasure, I realised that the coins had been completely polished into metal discs with no inscriptions on it. After the workshop, I was left alone with Rafael in the back room of the library, under the suspicious eyes of a guard. I decided to take the plunge and confess my crimes to them. The more I told them, the brighter their eyes became. They seemed to be overwhelmed by my story. But just as I was about to ask them to tell me their story, the guard separated us, as if the level of intimacy between us had become too obvious, too dangerous, and had to be stopped as soon as possible.

A few days later, Rafael put a paper through the bars of my cell. It was a poem that began simply with «I am a forger too», and ended, I remember very well, with the following two lines: «and transform the world / with contraband». How many times did I cry while reading that poem? The next day I came to meet them and told them that I wanted to know everything about their life and practice. They showed me photos of their work, and I immediately understood that it was not sculpture, but an attempt to counterfeit forms and to use these forms to convey clandestine things. One evening, lying in my cell, I thought again about this idea of clandestinity, and the relationship to the border on which it was based.

Earlier in the day, Rafael had explained to me that the notion of clandestinity applied to goods and people, and that in the same way there must exist, in addition to commercial counterfeits, counterfeit identities, i.e. counterfeit existences. Like the commercial counterfeits, these counterfeit existences seek to pass themselves off as more luxurious than they are. That is to say, richer, whiter, and therefore less of a minority.

From discussion to discussion, Rafael and I came to understand that there was a link between becoming a forger and being a transfugee, and that the practice of handling forgeries probably originated in the need to navigate from one identity situation to another.

Counterfeiters are always driven by the desire to go where they are not expected. To do this, they must master the language of power. In these passing practices, socially secreted desires merge with very concrete survival strategies.

The imitations of mimes and the forgeries of forgers are tools for implementing this passing. They allow minority subjectivities to appropriate the language of power while exhibiting it, i.e. subverting it. In this way, the stowaway is protected from the assimilationist logic.

In Rafael's work, objects proliferate and form a people of counterfeit sculptures. Everyone recognises the aesthetics that unfolds, but one may feel that this aesthetic no longer serves the same values. Things dance there because the fake has emancipated them. Masquerades should always end in a masked ball.

The more I think about Rafael, the more I feel I understand who I am. And when they look at me through the bars that separate us, I feel that the feeling is mutual.

Mimes and forgers are skilled in the art of forgery. They are at the service of the people, and the people repay them well, spending lavishly so that the false triumphs over the true, and the supreme value becomes obscurity again.

I am undoubtedly going astray, as I have always done. But if I am still the King of the False, as I was once called, then it could be that Rafael is the Queen of Mimes, and that things, through their counterfeit gestures, are feeding a revolt that no one knows about.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Paul Brammer". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large initial 'P'.



