

Daniel Becker, Annalisa Fischer, Yola Schmitz (eds.)

# FAKING, FORGING, COUNTERFEITING

Discredited Practices at the Margins of Mimesis



[transcript] Culture & Theory

Daniel Becker, Annalisa Fischer, Yola Schmitz (eds.)  
Faking, Forging, Counterfeiting



DANIEL BECKER, ANNALISA FISCHER, YOLA SCHMITZ (EDS.)  
in collaboration with SIMONE NIEHOFF and FLORENCIA SANNDERS

# **Faking, Forging, Counterfeiting**

**Discredited Practices at the Margins of Mimesis**

**[transcript]**



Funded by the Elite Network of Bavaria as part of the International Doctoral Program MIMESIS.

**Elite Network  
of Bavaria**



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# Preface

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*Annalisa Fischer (LMU Munich)*

Hardly any other picture has been reproduced as often as Leonardo da Vinci's *Mona Lisa*. Many great artists have created their own versions of the painting, among them the likes of Andy Warhol and Robert Rauschenberg. Marcel Duchamp even created several variations in his famous *L.H.O.O.Q.* The image has been printed on mugs, posters, shopping bags, and numerous other objects of varying artistic value. For the cover of this volume, we chose a recent work by Lithuanian artist Šarūnas Joneikis, entitled *Looking for Mona*. In this work the artist examines the relationship between the well-known visual image, its title and the expectancy this title creates in the observer. In fact, in 1911, when the painting was stolen from the Louvre, people were literally “looking for Mona”. When it resurfaced in 1913, the picture was not identified as the original due to its appearance or an analysis of the canvas, but rather because of its inventory number. The theft sparked an unforeseen interest in copies of the absent original, and made the *Mona Lisa* the famous painting it is today. The history of Leonardo's *Mona Lisa* is thus deeply connected with forgeries, copies, and disputable originals. In a series of etchings in which the same motif is shown with slight variations, Joneikis attempts to determine the point at which one of his prints actually could become the *Mona Lisa*. By deforming the image in his prints, the artist emphasises the arbitrariness of the connection between title and image. Hence, every version he creates effectively becomes a kind of *Mona Lisa*.

Forgeries are a universally current topic. In the last few years the art market was shaken by forgery scandals surrounding the works of Max Ernst and Alberto Giacometti, creating a great amount of public interest. Documentaries and movies such as Stefan Ruzowitzky's Oscar-winning film *The Counterfeiters* are being produced to critical acclaim, and in contemporary art research, forgers and their work are a topic of continuing interest. See, for example, Christopher S. Wood's *Forgery, Replica, Fiction: Temporalities of German Renaissance Art* (2008) or Thierry Lenain's 2011 study *Art Forgery: The History of a Modern Obsession*. Forgeries are an omnipresent part of contemporary culture, and closely related to historically and culturally informed ideas of authenticity, legality, authorship, creativity, tradition and innovation. Current interest revolves around not only the concept of faking, but an interrogation of the categories ‘authentic’ and

‘fake’. The international conference *Faking, Forging, Counterfeiting: Discredited Practices at the Margins of Mimesis*, held in Autumn 2015 at the Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich by the International Doctoral Program MIMESIS, aimed at expanding the horizon of research in this area. In this conference publication, different approaches to the concept of forgery are brought together to highlight the notion that forgeries have to be understood as productive mimetic processes and seen in the context of their time. To reach a broader understanding of what such a perception entails the editors chose essays from different scholarly fields such as art history, literary studies, media studies, and theatre studies. The contributions describe the practice of forgery not as the inability on the part of the artist to create an original, but rather as a creative act in itself. They focus on various implementations of forgery such as faked traditions, pseudo-translations, imposters, identity theft, and hoaxes in different cultural and historic contexts. By opening up the scope of the aesthetic implication of forgeries, this anthology aims to consolidate forgeries in the aesthetic discussion as an autonomous mimetic method of creation.

In lieu of an introduction, in his essay Henry Keazor (Heidelberg University) discusses the theory of ‘six degrees of separation’ that can be discerned between what is commonly referred to as the ‘original’ and as the ‘forgery’. Hereby, it becomes evident that most of the practices that can lead to a forgery are in themselves legitimate and even well established in every day art practice. It is only the way in which their results are presented that can make them become forgeries. In the second part of his text, Keazor goes on to discuss cases in which the boundaries between a “hoax” and a “fake” are blurred, thus demanding the implementation of new, fitting notions which can cover both phenomena. He coins the term ‘foax’, a compound neologism melding forgery and hoax, and emphasises how such forgeries develop a life of their own. Keazor proposes to understand these not merely as deceptions but as entities that challenge our understanding of originality and authorship.

Friedrich Teja Bach (University of Vienna) takes a more critical approach with regard to forgeries as an independent art form. Whilst discussing several recent cases of forgeries and relaying his own experiences as an expert on Constantin Brâncuși, Bach examines strategies of unveiling forgeries, and in doing so scrutinizes the interdependence of the forger and the art market. By discussing the stories behind forgeries, he emphasises the narrative as a possible key to uncover a forgery. In this way, he characterises forgers as storytellers rather than as artists.

In a case study Jacqueline Hylkema (Leiden University) explores the 17<sup>th</sup>-century discourse in which painters and playwrights identified themselves with the figure of the mountebank — a character which by the late 1500s had become a byword for all types of forgery and fakery. Hylkema discusses three artworks by Hendrick Goltzius, Ben Jonson, and Gerrit Dou, which use the mountebank as a vehicle to explore the illusionary nature and dynamics of their own métier. She then argues that the Earl of Rochester’s Alexander Bendo handbill (1676) is a continuation of this particular discourse but takes the identification between the

mountebank and artist one significant step further and thus challenges the boundaries between art and forgery.

Through a reading of 19<sup>th</sup>-century Voltaire pastiches, Manuel Mühlbacher (LMU Munich) explores the transition from the early modern to the modern paradigm of authorship in France. While the emerging discipline of bibliography and the editors of Voltaire's collected works strive to enforce new publishing conventions, Mühlbacher argues, such figures as the notorious pastiche writer Nicolas Châtelain continue to subvert the ideal of identifiable authorship. Playing with multiple identities and questioning the concept of personal style, 19<sup>th</sup>-century pastiche writers seem strangely faithful to Voltaire, who was himself a master of literary mystification and deceit.

Margaret S. Graves (Indiana University Bloomington) focuses in her essay on pre-modern Islamic art objects and their inauthentic modern 'completions'. In the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, an enormous number of objects without secure archaeological provenance were sold. In her study of the *Andarz-nāma* manuscript and certain *minā'ī* ceramics, Graves examines and problematizes the techniques by which dealers fabricated complete objects to meet the demands of the market.

Tina Öcal (Heidelberg University) proposes a reading of the forgeries of Giovanni Bastianini against the background of Italian *risorgimento*. She stipulates that Bastianini's forgeries embody the transculturation process of the European-American gaze of the 19<sup>th</sup> century into early Renaissance art. Öcal argues that these forgeries can be perceived not only as a falsification but also a way of preserving the culture by merely selling duplications instead of the original. Both essays also examine the cultural and spatial transfers these objects have been subjected to.

With Klaus Benesch's essay we both leave the forgery of art and art objects behind and take a leap into the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Benesch (LMU Munich) argues that William Gaddis' 1955 novel *The Recognitions*, in response to the abundance of fake art in contemporary society, sets out to redefine the act of repetition itself. The essay reads Gaddis' novel together with Kierkegaard's philosophical narrative *Repetition* (1853) and thus identifies Gaddis' handling of various repetitions and recognitions in his text as the re-capturing or unfolding of an existential truth in Kierkegaard's sense.

Florencia Sannders (LMU Munich) focuses on a different aspect of repetition. In her essay, she explores the grey area between literary experimentation and plagiarism. Sannders takes a look at Pablo Katchadjian's 2009 novella *El Aleph engordado* (*The Fattened Aleph*). Since this book adds 5,600 words and thus 'fattens' Jorge Luis Borges' short story 'El Aleph' from 1949, Borges' widow, who is also the heir and copyright holder of his literary estate, considered the work an act of plagiarism.

Laura Kohlrausch (LMU Munich) then proceeds to contextualize and scrutinize i.a. Borges' own acts of forgery in her essay. Taking a theoretical approach, she aims to show how literary texts since antiquity have invented their own sources by referring to or even quoting from fictitious texts. Kohlrausch points out that

in these instances of feigned intertextuality texts are not forged in the traditional sense but rather non-existing sources are referenced and thus effectively brought into existence.

Yola Schmitz (LMU Munich) explores yet another kind of forgery with James Macpherson's *Poems of Ossian* (1765): the feigning of a translation. Schmitz examines what many consider to be one of the most sensational literary forgeries of all time, discussing how Macpherson achieved these poems' apparent authenticity, and how he managed to convince so many readers, including linguists, of their veracity — in spite of the absence of 'original' texts.

Laura Fenelli's contribution (Kent State University/Richmond College in Florence) addresses the faking of miraculous images and relics. The icon of St. Dominic of Soriano in the 17<sup>th</sup> century created a cult which rapidly spread from southern Italy to Spain and the Americas. Yet, this image was in fact shown to be a late 15<sup>th</sup>-century painting, only later promoted as a miraculous icon for political and economic reasons.

Contemporary practices that could be considered forgeries are explored by Daniel Becker (LMU Munich) in his paper on imitation in new media art. He discusses how strategies similar to those of forgers were used by artificial intelligence and avatars to disguise their bodiless existence. Becker addresses the dimensions of deception and counterfeiting on an interactive level, from Alan Turing's theory of the 'Imitation Game' to contemporary art works that deal with questions of the autonomy and agency of computer software and data. His paper retraces such strategies and points out their consequences for a modern concept of forgery.

Simone Niehoff (LMU Munich) also focuses on 21<sup>st</sup>-century strategies of forgery, specifically examining hoaxes. She defines the hoax as a mimetic practice, which employs forgery as a means of parody, subversion, and, more recently, political activism. Niehoff reads the infamous *Dreadnought Hoax* from 1910 as a precursor to more contemporary artistic interventions expressing critical political views. She contrasts this approach to recent fake political campaigns by The Yes Men and the German Center for Political Beauty.

This conference collection could not have been realised without the support and kind encouragement of the directors Christopher Balme and Tobias Döring and our friends and colleagues at the International Doctoral Program for Literature and the Arts MIMESIS at LMU Munich. The editors especially would like to thank Silvia Tiedtke who as coordinator of the IDP quickly responded to our every question. Our gratitude also goes to the Elite Network of Bavaria which not only funds the IDP itself but also generously financed the conference as well as this publication. We would also like to thank the Center for Advanced Studies (CAS) of the LMU Munich for kindly hosting and supporting our conference. Furthermore, we thank all those who contributed to our conference and thus enhanced its cooperative and pleasant atmosphere. The cover image of *Looking for Mona* was kindly made available to us by Šarūnas Joneikis.

# Six Degrees of Separation

The Foax as More

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Henry Keazor (Heidelberg University)

## PART I: SIX DEGREES OF SEPARATION

It is not coincidental that the title of this article references the stage play by John Guare from 1990, specifically its film adaptation, directed three years later by Fred Schepisi and starring Will Smith, Donald Sutherland and Stockard Channing.<sup>1</sup>

Interestingly, the premise of *Six Degrees of Separation* is implicitly connected with the idea of forgery. The main character, Paul, presents to his hosts, the couple Ouisa and Flan Kittredge — who happen to be professional art dealers — an invented, forged existence. It turns out that he is actually not who he pretends to be: among other things, he claims to be a friend of their children at Harvard University and the son of a man who is directing a film version of the Broadway musical *Cats*. Ultimately, both the viewer and the Kittredges can only speculate about Paul's motivations for forging a false existence, but in doing so, he presents a mirror to the art dealers' privileged and only apparently liberal existence, since he has modelled his invented character as a reaction to their expectations and way of behaviour.<sup>2</sup> This is an important aspect of forgery: it is often created in response to something which already exists, and therefore can be considered reactive rather than purely active. Moreover it is very closely modelled on the expectations, hopes, fears and the behaviours of those whom the forgery aims to convince of its originality. In the end the fake 'Paul' also serves as a link in the 'six degrees of separation': before approaching the Kittredges, he had already deceived other couples who were also members of the New York upper-crust, and because Paul has a profound, baffling effect on each couple he encounters, he links them in their shared experience.

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1 | Six Degrees of Separation, USA 1993, D.: Fred Schepisi. See also: Plunka 2002, Chapter 8: 186-202.

2 | See Plunka 2002: 191: "Flan and Ouisa are essentially con artists — upper class hustlers. Through elegance and erudition, Flan und Ouisa have mastered the art of the deal but have no idea of their hypocrisy [...]."



However, the title *Six Degrees of Separation* actually refers to an unproven theory, developed in 1929 by the Hungarian author and translator Frigyes Karinthy in his short story *Láncszemek* ['Chains' or 'Chainlinks'].<sup>3</sup> According to this theory, anyone or anything on the planet can be connected to any other person or thing through a chain of acquaintances that has no more than five intermediaries. Thus, everyone is six or even fewer steps away, by way of introduction, from any other person in the world. Any two people on the planet are therefore connected by a chain of a friend of a friend statement from each other in a maximum of five steps (Newman / Barabási / Watts 2006; Barabási 2003). I have borrowed the title for the first part of my article since I want to show that what we today call 'the original' is only five degrees of separation from what we conceive of as a 'forgery'.

Thus we have:

- I. The 'original'
- II. The replica or replication
- III. The copy
- IV. The pasticcio/pastiche
- V. The stylistic imitation (or stylistic appropriation since here somebody takes on the style of somebody else)
- VI. The 'fake' or 'forgery'.<sup>4</sup>

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3 | See for this among others: Newman / Barabási / Watts 2006, Chapter 2: 9-11 as well as 21-26 with a reprint of the English translation of Karinthy's short story.

4 | There has been a tendency to distinguish between the two notions, so for example by the curator Colette Loll who in 2011 organized the exhibition *Intent to Deceive* or by the author Noah Charney. But the claim that these terms (according to Loll) are properly used when applying 'fake' to an exact copy of an already existing work, which is then passed off as the original, and 'forgery' to a work that is not an exact copy, but rather done 'in the style of' (stylistic imitation), which is then passed off as an original, or (according to Charney) to apply 'fake' to the "alteration of, or addition to, an authentic work of art to suggest a different authorship", and 'forgery' to "the wholesale creation of a fraudulent work", is unjustified because these uses are (as the contradicting definitions of Loll and Charney already show) utterly arbitrary, since not covered by any etymology. No wonder, thus, that in the art world (for example in art technology which is occupied with fake-busting) the distinction has not been established so far. For the distinct use of the terms by Loll and Charney see the CBS-News-report by Mason 2014 on one of Loll's touring exhibition stops, where from 1:18 to 1:30 min., the supposed difference is explained, and Charney 2015: 17.

I want to demonstrate these steps in the following.

I place the terms ‘original’, ‘fake’ and ‘forgery’ in quotation marks for two reasons: firstly, in order to distinguish them from the other four manifestations, which in a certain way are more objective terms inasmuch as one does not have to argue if something is a replica, a copy, a pasticcio or a stylistic imitation, because there is a series of criteria for settling this. However, the question if and when something is an ‘original’ and/or a ‘fake’ is more open to discussion, and this is related to the second reason why I put these notions into quotation marks.

The ‘original’ is something that is throughout the ages each time culturally negotiated and defined anew: we can see this by the fact that in Western antiquity ‘original’ or ‘authentic’ meant something different for a Greek than for a Roman — and for both again something slightly different than to us. Since the object in question was, when declared ‘original’ or ‘authentic’, in ancient Greece less associated with the particular name of an artist or even a workshop than in Rome; it was related to the material and to the way something was technically made.<sup>5</sup>

Later, in early modernity, a client or an expert again had very different expectations from a single artist and/or his workshop or studio than today, depending in particular on how the contract was stipulated: did the artist pledge that he would personally work with his own hands at the work of art, and to what extent? Or did he just pledge that the artwork would be executed in his studio and under his supervision? (Keazor 2015: 32-33) How differently one and the same object can be judged becomes clear when we look at the case of a long-lasting legal battle, only recently concluded, about the second version of the painting *Ready-Made de l'Histoire dans Café de Flore* by the German painter Jörg Immendorff, which today is in a gallery in New Zealand. A private client had bought a second version in 1999 from a workshop assistant of Immendorff in his studio for 30.000 Marks (15.000 Euro) and received a certificate of authenticity. After Immendorff's death in 2007, his widow Oda Jaune claimed that the second version was actually a forgery: according to her, it is just a copy executed without any authorisation by her late husband and then fraudulently sold as an original. She also stressed the fact that the signature on the certificate had been produced mechanically. In 2012 the district court, the Landgericht Düsseldorf, agreed to her point of view and ordered the destruction of the painting. However, in August 2014 the Higher Regional Court, the Oberlandesgericht Düsseldorf, decided that the client had bought the second version legally in the studio of the painter and therefore could expect him to know of this deal, especially given that the production and the direct selling of such copies via studio assistants had occurred before in Immendorff's workshop. Thus, it would have seemed as if the painter had agreed to this practice and hence to the release and the

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5 | See i.a. Keazor 2015: 32.

valorisation of such pictures as part of his œuvre. Consequently, the plaintiff could claim neither the destruction of the painting nor its identification as a forgery. The court, however, emphasised that it would not be able to make a statement concerning the actual status of the work as an 'original' or a 'copy'. Thus, the court refused to comment on its artistic value.<sup>6</sup>

In a way, here we witness the clash of two conceptions of the artist: the first stems from the early modern era, in which the artist had at his disposal a workshop and assistants working in his style and under his name, who were therefore allowed to sell replicas or copies with the Master's agreements as originals. The second is the modern, contemporary conception according to which only works which have been directly created by the artist himself can be sold as originals.

To turn to an artistic trend which came to the fore in the 1960s, the so-called *Fake* or *Appropriation Art* consists of artworks which repeat motifs and elements from other works and nevertheless claim to be 'original' and 'authentic', whilst simultaneously baptising themselves 'fake'.<sup>7</sup> Of course, given that the works are presented and understood under this heading, the works presented are of course not true fakes, since a fake intends to deceive whereas these artists here aim at asking critical and provocative questions concerning what actually lies at the heart of art, what makes a work of art 'original' and 'authentic'. Is it the idea in the first place or the manual execution by the artist himself? Art which employs appropriated imagery or labels itself 'fake' thus illustrates that art always references art which already exists.

Or, to shift our perspective to non-Western cultures, such as for example Japan or China, we encounter a different idea of 'forgery'. Here, imitations and replications of an already-existing object are highly esteemed because, firstly, 'originality' is not conceived, understood and defined in such a material way as in our culture, but rather in a conceptual way; and secondly, there is a greater cultural appreciation of the craftsmanship which is needed to repeatedly manufacture an object. Thus, the 'original' has a very different status than in our culture.<sup>8</sup>

Since 'original' and 'fake/forgery' are terms which refer to each other, because without the original there is no forgery, the concept of faking is relative if the concept of the 'original' is already relative. Indeed, it is also culturally negotiated, depending on the culture and the precise context, what a forgery is (see the above mentioned Imendorff-example). Now we will see that each of the degrees between the 'original' and the 'forgery' are steps which all can be considered as legitimate — or if, misused, tampered with or misread by society, as activities which can result in something that can be used as a forgery. Therefore I will demonstrate the 'six degrees' or steps, separating the original from the forgery, by reference to certain art works.

6 | See the news report by Müller 2014 and Keazor 2015: 91-92.

7 | See, for example, Römer 2001.

8 | See, for example, Fraser 2013, Shan 2002, Barboza/Bowley/Cox/McGinty 2013 and Effinger/Keazor 2016.

Thus, we have the ‘original’ or the prototype (I) which can be replicated (II) by the artist himself. If the artist redoing the work is not identical with the original author, we have the case of the copy (III). The French Master Nicolas Poussin painted the picture *Camillus and the Schoolmaster of Falerii* (Pasadena, Norton Simon Museum) in 1635, based on a story passed on by ancient authors such as Plutarch and Titus Livius (Thuillier 1994: 254, No. 109). Two years later the Parisian Louis Phélypeaux de La Vrillière commissioned a replica of the painting, which was executed by Poussin himself and sent to Paris (Paris, Musée du Louvre) (Thuillier 1994: 255, No. 122). However, we also know of instances where Poussin’s paintings were copied by other artists such as in the case of his *Plague of Ashod*, painted around 1631 for the Sicilian nobleman Fabrizio Valguarnera (Thuillier 1994: 251, No. 81). Possibly while the original painting was still unfinished, he ordered a copy by the Italian painter Angelo Caroselli (London, National Gallery), who, probably also in order to emphasize the function of the picture as a copy, altered various aspects of it. These alterations included the size of the painting, measuring rather squarely 148 × 198 cm in Poussin’s version, and an oblong 129 × 205 cm in Caroselli’s version, but also details such as the architecture and colours (Keazor 2012: 56). The next step away from the original is the pastiche or pasticcio (IV) where individual elements from several works of an artist are assembled by another artist into a new composition. The Italian term — meaning literally ‘pie’ — is borrowed from the art of cooking, since it was common in the early modern period to bake pies, the filling of which consisted of a mixture of various ingredients, which only formed a whole when baked together in such a pie. Such a pasticcio, based on Poussin’s paintings, can be observed for example in a composition designed for the packaging of an instant cappuccino in the 1990s, sold by the Italian company *Lavazza* (fig. 1) (Keazor 2007: 95). Here, the female lute player in the left foreground is taken from Poussin’s *Bacchanale with Lute-Player* (Paris, Louvre, 1627/28) (Thuillier 1994: 248, No. 55), the woman with the basket directly behind her comes instead from his *Adoration of the Shepherds* (London, National Gallery, 1633) (Thuillier 1994: 252, No. 92), the musicians on her left come from Poussin’s *Triumph of David* (Dulwich Picture Gallery, 1632/33) (Thuillier 1994: 252, No. 91) while the group of dancers on her right, apparently moving to the sound of the wind players, in turn stems from Poussin’s *Adoration of the Golden Calf* (London, National Gallery, 1635) (Thuillier 1994: 253, No. 100). Finally, the man in the right foreground, clad in a green garment, is taken from his *Death of Germanicus* (Minneapolis Museum of Arts, 1629) (Thuillier 1994: 249, No. 58). One can thus see that the anonymous painter of the pasticcio has chosen paintings which Poussin did between 1627/28 and 1635, thus covering a more or less coherent artistic and stylistic period which also adds to the impression of a certain consistency the pasticcio gives — and which could be treacherous if the painting was presented as an alleged original. The penultimate step is the stylistic imitation (V): here, an artist does not refer with such precise and identifiable quotes from another artist’s work as in the case of



Figure 1: Pasticcio (after Nicolas Poussin) for the packaging of an Italian brand of instant cappuccino, around 1999.

the pasticcio, but the resulting art work instead stylistically points to a distinctive artistic manner of an individual artist or an era. For example, the German Romantic painter Johann David Passavant in his *Self-portrait in Front of an Italian Landscape* (Frankfurt am Main, Städelsches Kunstinstitut, 1818, fig. 2) heavily refers via the costume worn by him in the painting, the composition and of the prospect onto a landscape, to typical Italian Renaissance portraits of the 16<sup>th</sup> century such as Raphael's *Portrait of a Man* (Florence, Uffizi, 1503/04, fig. 3). Passavant's picture could easily be confused with this painting at a first superficial glance. The painters of the Romantic era with their reverence for Italy in general and for Raphael in particular were longingly looking back to the Renaissance. However, Passavant did not paint such works with the intent to deceive (Keazor 2015: 35).

Thus, all these forms of imitation are not only perfectly legitimate, but also traditional and well-established tropes in the history of art: until photographic reproduction, a copy of the work was the only way to produce the (coloured) image of a painting a second time. Learning to reproduce an original was also an important means of gaining the technical skills of painting or drawing. By copying, a young artist learned the manual techniques of artistic execution, and even the pasticcio or the working in the style of somebody else was an accepted practice in artist's studios: the assistants of a Master very often had to execute entire paint-



Figure 2: Johann David Passavant, "Self-portrait in Front of an Italian Landscape", Frankfurt am Main, Städelches Kunstinstitut, 1818.



Figure 3: Raphael, "Portrait of a Man" (Francesco Maria della Rovere?), Florence, Uffizi, 1503/04.

ings in his manner and therefore needed to be able to paint in the Master's style. They sometimes even executed compositions which were only roughly sketched by their Master and hence they had to be able to finish the detailed composition by combining known elements from other works in the way of a pasticcio. However, all these legitimate, well-established, and traditional forms can also become 'forgeries' if they are passed off as supposed 'originals'. Although it would seem as if even the category of the 'replica' could hardly threaten the 'original', since in both cases they are done more or less by the same author, i.e. respectively his studio and the Master himself, it suffices to refer to the Immendorff-case. Here, the question as to whether the disputed work was an 'original', a replica or a copy shows that such things can quickly get difficult. It thus becomes clear that the one and the same object can assume very different states, depending from the context in which it is seen each time and the viewpoint of the beholder.

The act of 'forgery' can thereby be perpetrated by presenting a copy (III) as an alleged original. Giorgio Vasari's life of Andrea del Sarto tells the story of a copy done by the painter after a portrait by Raphael, with the purpose of substituting the original which the Medici were supposed to give away, but which they kept by swapping the original with the copy (Vasari 2004: 143). A pasticcio can also be misused when it is fraudulently displayed as an original: the painting *Christ and*

*the Disciples at Emmaus* (Rotterdam, Museum Boymans-van Beuningen, fig. 4), done by Han van Meegeren in 1937, not only adopts the style of the Dutch painter Jan Vermeer, but combines it with references to Caravaggio, thus presenting a thoroughly mixed pasticcio (Kilbracken 1967: 47-51). However, van Meegeren presented this imaginative composition as an original by Vermeer which not only delighted art historians with a newly-discovered work by Vermeer, but which moreover gave them one of the rare religious paintings by the artist. Eventually, the work, via the Caravaggio references, even seemed to confirm the previously purely speculative connections between Vermeer and Italy. The fakes of the German forger Wolfgang Beltracchi launched into the art market from the middle of the 1980s onwards (Koldehoff/Timm 2012), appear to be primarily stylistic imitations. This seems to be in accordance with the fact that Beltracchi was always very proud to point out that he never copied.<sup>9</sup> But on closer inspection it becomes clear that they also rely on the techniques of the copy and of the pasticcio. His painting *Liegender Akt mit Katze* (*Reclining Act with Cat*), executed in 2003 and passed off as a painting done by the German painter Max Pechstein in 1909 (fig. 5), is actually a painted and amplified copy of an original drawing by Pechstein (Berlin, Brücke-Museum, 1909, fig. 6) (Keazor/Öcal 2014: 35). That Beltracchi practised this kind of forgery already earlier in his career can be shown by the origins of the picture *Energie entspannt* (*Energy Relaxed*; fig. 7). This painting was done in 1985 and aimed at appearing to be an original by the German painter Johannes Molzahn from 1919. However, Beltracchi only copied a woodcut by Molzahn from 1919, titled *Energien entspannt* (*Energies Relaxed*, fig. 8), and colourised it (Keazor 2016: 14). But Beltracchi also worked with the technique of the pasticcio: his infamous forgery *Rotes Bild mit Pferden* (*Red Painting with Horses*) from 2005, apparently created by the German painter Heinrich Campendonk in 1914 (fig. 9) and which ultimately led

9 | See for example his statement in an interview with the German news-magazine *Der Spiegel* where he claims that (using the metaphor of music) he wanted to “create new music” (in the original: “Jedes Philharmonie-Orchester interpretiert nur den Komponisten. Mir ging es darum, neue Musik dieses Komponisten zu schaffen. Ich wollte das kreative Zentrum des Malers so erreichen und kennenlernen, dass ich die Entstehung seiner Bilder mit seinen Augen und eben auch das neue, von mir gemalte Bild mit seinen Augen sah—und zwar bevor ich es malte“). A few lines later he heavily objects to the assumption that he would have used technical devices in order to copy (in the original: “Auch wenn im Verfahren Gutachter anderes behaupteten: Ich habe bei keinem einzigen Bild technische Hilfsmittel benutzt. Keine Projektoren, keine Raster. Ist ja lächerlich. Warum soll ich eine Skizze umständlich projizieren, wenn ich sie aus der Hand malen kann?“). For the interview see Gorris/Röbel 2012: 131.





Figure 4: Han van Meegeren, “The Supper at Emmaus”, forgery in the style of Jan Vermeer, Rotterdam, Museum Boymans-van Beuningen, 1937.

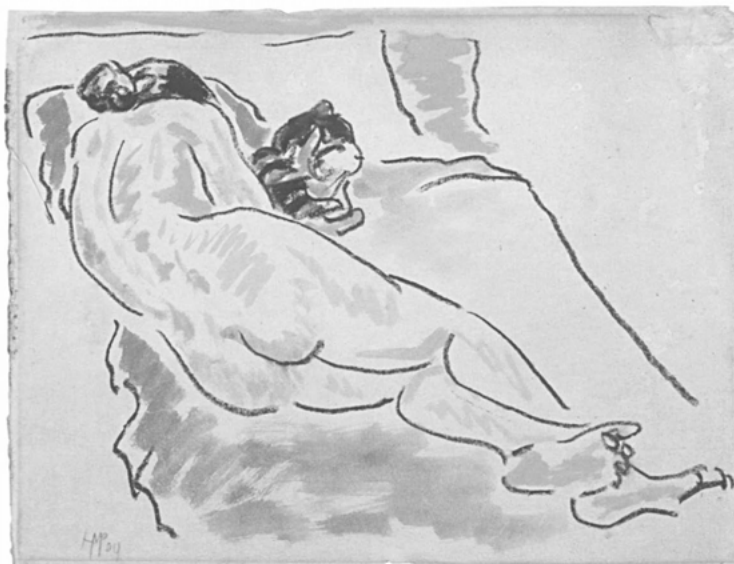
to Beltracchi’s exposure in 2010, selects and re-combines several motifs from the original Campendonk painting *Paar auf dem Balkon* from 1912/13 (*Couple on the Balcony*, Penzberg, Stadtmuseum, 1912/13, fig. 10). The horses on the left in the original are shifted to the right in the forgery, the boat below the horses in the forgery can also be found on the right in the original, and the house is positioned behind the horses in both works (Keazor/Öcal 2014: 32). Here again, a look at other forgeries done by Beltracchi shows that this practice is not exceptional in his body of work, since for his forgery in the style of Fernand Léger *Kubistisches Stilleben* (*Cubistic Still-Life*, apparently a work of the French cubist from 1913, fig. 11), he took up elements from two original works by Léger and combined them. Whereas the Léger painting *Nature Morte aux Cylindres Colorés* (*Still-Life with Coloured Cylinders*; Riehen, Fondation Beyeler, 1913, fig. 12) provided him with the idea for the machine-like arrangement of the mechanical looking elements (in Beltracchi’s case they form a steam-engine), the picture *Contraste de Formes* (*Contrast of Forms*; Riehen, Fondation Beyeler, 1913, fig. 13) served him as a model for the colours of the composition (Keazor/Öcal 2014: 30).





*Figure 5: Wolfgang Beltracchi, “Liegender Akt mit Katze” (1909), forgery, based on a drawing by Max Pechstein, 2003.*

*Figure 6: Max Pechstein, “Liegender weiblicher Akt mit Katze”, Berlin, Brücke-Museum, 1909.*



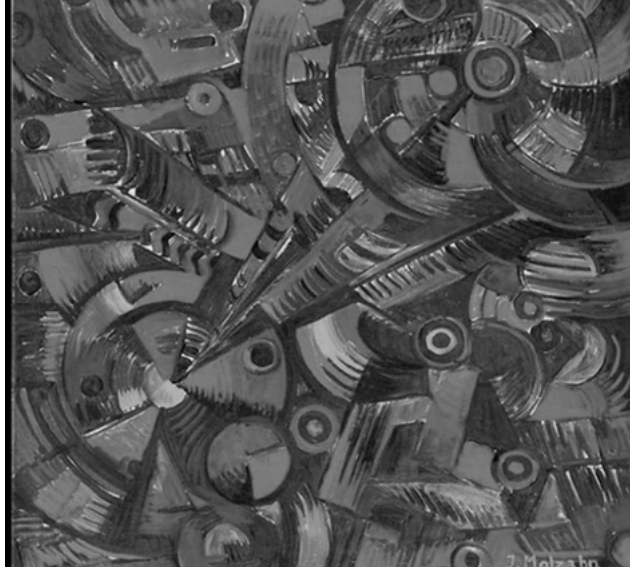


Figure 7: Wolfgang Beltracchi, "Energie entspannt" (1919), forgery in the style of Johannes Molzahn, 1985.

Figure 8: Johannes Molzahn, "Energien entspannt", woodcut, 1919.





*Figure 9: Wolfgang Beltracchi, "Rotes Bild mit Pferden" (1914), forgery in the style of Heinrich Campendonk, 2005.*

*Figure 10: Heinrich Campendonk, "Paar auf dem Balkon", Penzberg, Stadtmuseum, 1912/13.*



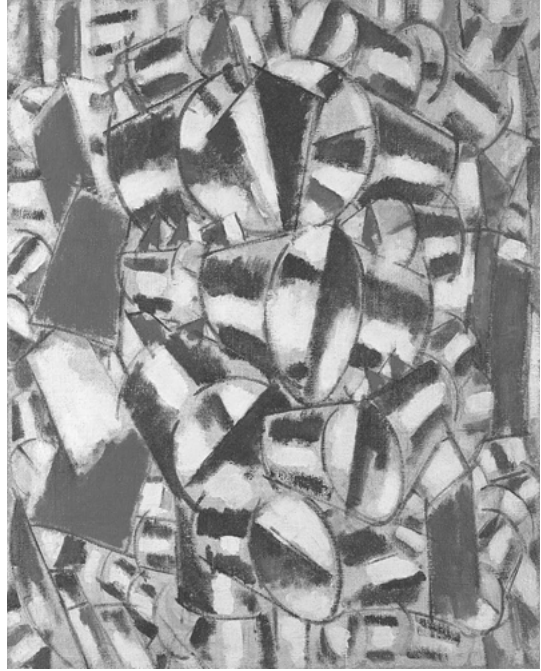
Figure 11: Wolfgang Beltracchi, “Kubistisches Stilleben” (1913), forgery, combining elements from paintings by Fernand Léger, before 2006.



Figure 12: Fernand Léger, “Nature Morte aux Cylindres Colorés”, Riehen, Fondation Beyeler, 1913.



Figure 13: Fernand Léger, “Contraste de Formes”, Riehen, Fondation Beyeler, 1913.



The boundaries between these categories are not always so distinct; they can be also fluid. A forgery such as the so-called *Tiara of Saitaphernes* (Paris, Louvre), a seemingly ancient crown made around 1895/96 by the Odessa-born, Jewish goldsmith Israel Dov-Ber Rouchomovsky, had allegedly been conceived by its author as a pure stylistic imitation with no intent to deceive. According to Rouchomovsky, it was only the merchants who had commissioned the *Tiara* who then passed it off — without his knowledge — as an original.<sup>10</sup> However, the *Tiara* is not only a stylistic imitation, but also a pasticcio of different motifs taken from antique artefacts.<sup>11</sup> And the *Tiara* brings us to other techniques which can be legitimate, but which can also be involved in cases of forgery. Thus, we observe at the *Tiara* what we could call an ‘objective falsification’: the *Tiara* in itself, as a production of Rouchomovsky, was manipulated and falsified insofar as the goldsmith subsequently inserted old antique pegs into it. When the *Tiara* was examined, these pegs, together with the stylistically old appearance of the tiara and its many visual as well as textual references to antiquity, conveyed a misleading impression as they seemed to suggest the likelihood of it being an antique object (Keazor 2015: 55). Rouchomovsky claimed that he had been told by his clients to put these pegs into the *Tiara*, but one could then ask why Rouchomovsky did not get suspicious concerning the

10 | See Rolle/Herz 1990 and Keazor 2015: 51-53.

11 | For the various sources, combined here, see Keazor 2015: 52.

purpose of the *Tiara* since a pure stylistic imitation could and should have done without such 'original' and misleading elements.

Such manipulations, however, can be also executed without any intent to deceive; see for example the changes made to paintings such as Albrecht Dürer's *Paumgartner Altar* (Munich, Alte Pinakothek, 1498/1503). It was heavily over-painted with additions and changes in costumes and personnel in 1613 in order to adapt it to contemporary taste, and was only restored to its original appearance in 1903 (Bayerische Staatsgemäldesammlungen 1986: 170-71, No. 706). Another example is Joshua Reynolds's portrait *Mrs. James Paine and Her Daughters Charlotte and Mary* (National Museums Liverpool, 1765), where the mother was over-painted at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, possibly because an art dealer thought that it might sell better if the painting only showed two young girls — an intervention which was only removed in 1935.<sup>12</sup>

In each case, these manipulations were carried out to suit contemporary tastes, and since there was no urgent need to change these elements, one can not call these interventions 'restorations' in the proper sense of the term. However, such changes can also either be carried out with the intention of restoring the appearance of an art work, or to pass it off as something different.

I therefore briefly want to discuss the painter and restorer Joseph van der Veken who tampered with damaged copies and mediocre early modern paintings in a way that made them afterwards appear as alleged originals of art-historical interest. For example, he manipulated an anonymous and artistically rather poor copy (fig. 16) of the late 15<sup>th</sup> or early 16<sup>th</sup> century after Rogier Van der Weyden's *Maria Magdalena* from the so-called *Braque Triptyque* (1452) (fig. 14) in such a way that it was considered a copy done by the German painter Hans Memling, who had spent some time in Van der Weyden's workshop (fig. 15). Since van der Veken thus 'upgraded' art works without, however, making his interventions perceivable, his method is today known as 'hyperrestauration', because this practice goes way beyond a mere 'restauration' (Lenain 2011: 247-48; Keazor 2015: 38-40). The same holds true in an even more extreme way concerning an alleged *Portrait of the Princess Maria Josepha the Younger of Saxony*, attributed to the circle of the French painter Louis de Silvestre, appearing on the art market in 1992 and subsequently acquired by the Deutsches Historisches Museum in Berlin (fig. 17). It turned out to be a heavily manipulated portrait of Maria Josepha the Elder of Saxony, Queen of Poland (fig. 18), which had been overpainted in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century by a French interior designer with a more appealing portrait to adorn Ochre Court, the summer residence of Ogden Goelet, then one of the richest men in the United States (Deutsches Historisches Museum 2000; Keazor 2015: 168-71). Luckily for the Berlin museum, the painting turned out to be not just a work from the circle of Louis de Silvestre, but to be a previously undiscovered work by Silvestre himself, before only

12 | See for example the entry under Liverpool Museums.

*Figure 14: Rogier Van der Weyden, "Maria Magdalena", from the Braque Triptyque, Paris, Louvre, 1452.*



*Figure 15: Copy, formerly attributed to Hans Memling, actually manipulated by Joseph Van der Veken, Belgian State.*

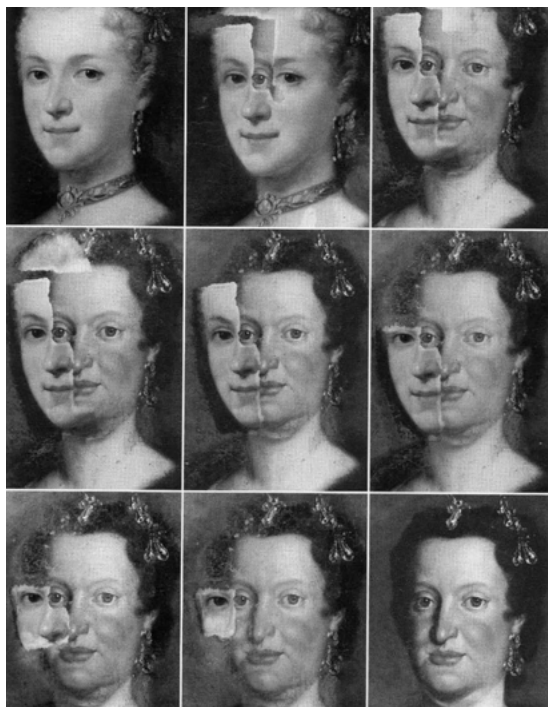
*Figure 16: Photography of a copy after Rogier Van der Weyden's "Maria Magdalena", showing its original state in 1914, prior to Van der Veken's manipulations, Archive Max Friedländer.*



*Figure 17: Circle of Louis de Silvestre, "Portrait of the Princess Maria Josepha the Younger of Saxony", Berlin, Historisches Museum, 1747/50, overpainted condition between 1892 and 1992.*



*Figure 18: Louis de Silvestre, "Portrait of Maria Josepha the Elder of Saxony, Queen of Poland", Berlin, Historisches Museum, 1743, present condition after cleaning.*



*Figure 19: The painting, illustrated in Fig. 17 and 18 in the process of cleaning and restoration.*

known because of an engraving, and it could be returned to its original state by removing the overpaint bit by bit (fig. 19). But if there is an ‘objective’ falsification, there must also be its counterpart, the ‘subjective’ falsification. The case of John Drewe and John Myatt can be recalled as such an example of this practice: between 1985 and 1995 the supposed physicist John Drewe (actually an impostor born as John Cockett), smuggled forged documents into museum and gallery archives in order to give forgeries executed at his request by the painter John Myatt a credible history and provenance (Salisbury/Sujo 2010; Effinger/Keazor 2016: 72-174).

Thus, as we have seen:

- manipulated originals (such as mediocre early modern paintings van der Veken tampered with)
- copies
- imitations

can all be used as fakes.

But the issue becomes even more complicated since we also have to discern the purpose for which these forgeries have been created. As we will see, some forgeries are made and used with the clear intention to have them unmasked sooner rather than later as a means to test the awareness of a group of experts or society. Others are made with the clear objective to deceive experts and society as long as possible — ideally forever.

## PART II: THE FOAX AS MORE

Two notions can be assigned to the two phenomena just described: objects which are produced with the clear intention to deceive experts and society as long as possible can be called fakes or forgeries, whereas things which are made up in order to have them unmasked sooner rather than later, as a means in order to check upon the awareness of a group of experts or of the society, should be more properly labeled as ‘hoaxes’. This term describes something that is often intended as a practical joke or to cause embarrassment, or to provoke social or political change by raising people’s awareness of something — all reactions for which it is necessary that the hoax is at a certain time unmasked, be it by its producers or by the target audience. But since ‘hoaxes’ work with fakes, i.e.: deliberately fabricated falsehood, it is easy to mix the two of them up and to take the one for the other. This is exactly what happens for example in Jonathon Keats’ recently published book *Forged: Why Fakes are the Great Art of Our Age* (Keats 2013). As provocative as Keats’ title might sound, the author actually falls short of the thus raised expectations, since where he talks about fakes, he merely rehashes the already well-known biographies of six forgers — Lothar Malskat, Alceo Dossena, Han van Meegeren, Elmyr

de Hory, Eric Hebborn and Tom Keating. It is moreover extremely arguable if any of their forgeries can be considered ‘great art’ since it suffices to refer as an example to the forgeries by Lothar Malskat or Van Meegeren which today are seen as works which have not stood the test of time and now look rather corny. And where Keats talks about ‘great’ respectively ‘new art’, he actually talks about *Appropriation Art* or about hoaxes. Hereby, one could discuss Keats’ definition of ‘great art’ in the first place since it seems to boil down for him to works which are ‘provocative’ and ‘scandalous’ — see for example his quote: “No authentic modern masterpiece is as provocative as a great forgery” (Keats 2013: 4). As a definition of ‘great’ or ‘new art’, this seems rather one-sided and even old-fashioned since it smacks more of the effects of the avant-garde in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century than of contemporary art practice. Among the *Appropriation* artists mentioned are Marcel Duchamp, Elaine Sturtevant and Sherrie Levine, none of whom did produce fakes with deceptive intentions, but on the contrary intend for the beholder to realise that they are subverting and undermining the classical understanding of creativity. Among the hoaxes cited by Keats is an Internet project by the Italo-American artist-couple Franco und Eva Mattes, who in 1998 created a fake website of the Vatican which copied and mimicked the appearance of the real site.<sup>13</sup> The Mattes’ enriched their Vatican website with provocative content such as quotes from pop songs, the exaltation of free love, soft drugs, “brotherly intolerance” between religions and the oblivion of the senses. The success of student movements was invoked and the member of the Vatican claimed their own “duty to civil and electronic disobedience”. In the “Intermediatic Decree on Communications Tools”, the “Great Cathodic Church” explained its “Total Domination Plan” in terms of “Technomoral Law” and “Telesalvation” and during those months the Pope absolved sinners via email in the name of the “Free Spirit Jubilee”.<sup>14</sup> It was clear that the endeavour wanted to be recognised and understood for what it really was: a hoax intended to offer a satirical critique of the extremely conservative position of the Vatican. If the hoax had failed, the Vatican suddenly would have been perceived by the society as progressive and open-minded, thereby having a positive effect on its public image.

Fakes and hoaxes are not only linked by the fact that the hoax relies on the fake, but both can blend and mutate from one into the other. When the hoax is not understood as such and unmasked, it unintentionally — or even in certain cases, deliberately — becomes a fake. On the other hand when a fake is unmasked, it is sometimes perceived as a hoax.

13 | See <http://0100101110101101.org/files/vaticano.org/> (last accessed on 12 June 2017).

14 | See the description by the Mattes themselves under <http://0100101110101101.org/vaticano-org/> (last accessed on 12 June 2017).

Alfred Lessing's seminal article *What is Wrong with a Forgery* from 1965 developed and defended a view of fakes according to which it does not matter for the beholder if he or she knows that he or she is standing in front of a fake or an original (Lessing 1965). However, the blurring of the lines between fake and hoax reveals his position to be highly disputable. Context always matters — we never perceive things objectively. Thus it affects our appreciation of something if we realise that we have been standing in front of a hoax or in front of a fake, especially if we realise that what we thought was a fake is actually a hoax and vice-versa.<sup>15</sup> In order to clarify my arguments I would like to give two known examples for each case.

The first example is from 1973, when the young art critic Cheryl Bernstein published an exhibition review under the title *The Fake as More* in an anthology with the title *Idea Art*, edited by the American art critic Gregory Battcock who collected several theoretical texts on conceptual art in this volume (Bernstein 1973). After having introduced Bernstein with a short biography, the text mostly deals with the importance of a painter called Hank Herron, who for his exhibition in a New York gallery had assembled copies of all the paintings his colleague Frank Stella had executed between 1961 and 1971. Bernstein discusses the conceptual meaning behind Herron's exhibition, which did not show new works in the individual style of an artist, but were mere copies of another artist's work. The young art critic accordingly judges Herron's endeavour, reminiscent of the still-young *Appropriation* or *Fake Art*, as a 'fake' on several levels: in her view Herron had committed an act of piracy since he had, without getting Stella's permission, copied his paintings and put them into a show carrying his own (Herron's) name. But by exposing Stella as the real author behind these repetitions, Herron also effectively 'forged' an exhibition, since he denied the visitors' satisfaction of their usual expectations upon entering an exhibition: to see something new.

Nevertheless Bernstein defends Herron's approach, since by copying only the outer appearance of Stella's paintings without any regard to their original context, grouping all of them then together in one single gallery space, and moreover by, so to speak, condensing the timeframe of their creation (Stella had painted his works in a time-span of ten years whereas Herron copied them within a year), Herron gave these copies new meaning within his exhibition concept. Bernstein therefore sees a "radical new and philosophical element" (Bernstein 1973: 44) in Herron's emancipation from the original context and time of Stella's paintings, as well as from the imperatives of the art business which continuously demands formal as well as stylistic innovations and creative developments from an artist. Instead of obeying this precept, Herron created a paradox: by simply repeating and then re-grouping something already existing, he did something new and innovative which broke with art world tradition. Through his disinterest in the visual appearance and original context of Stella's works, Herron made the intellectual process, the concept

15 | See for this also Keazor 2014.

or ‘idea’ (a notion that has an essential part in the title of Battcock’s volume) behind this procedure all the more evident. Therefore Bernstein concedes that the ‘fake’ committed by Herron creates a certain added value to the work, which is why she titles her review *The Fake as More*.

Bernstein’s text has proven to be seriously consequential because as far as I can see, it was the first defence of the fake — since 1884, when Paul Eudel cursed fakes and forgeries as something only harmful and destructive.<sup>16</sup> Bernstein’s text instead presents the notion of the fake as something positive.

Bernstein’s essay had an even more interesting afterlife. Some aspects of the text may have struck the attentive reader as somewhat odd: for example the fact that this apparently intellectually precocious young art critic obviously did not know about the American artist Richard Pettibone, who had not only begun to copy and repeat the works of famous artists such as Robert Rauschenberg or Andy Warhol in the sixties, but who in 1965 had also started to copy a series of works that Stella had painted between 1960 and 1971.<sup>17</sup> Thus, Herron’s concept was not as ‘new’ and daring as it appears in Bernstein’s review. Moreover, Pettibone had resolved a problem that Herron apparently had not: since Stella’s works are mostly of a remarkable size, Pettibone had copied them in scale-down versions; Bernstein, however, leaves the reader uncertain as to how Herron managed to cram all the same-scale copies after Stella’s huge originals stemming from a fertile 11-year-period into one single gallery space.

Maybe such inconsistencies were intended as warning signs for the attentive reader in order to make him or her aware of what he or she was actually reading, because, as it turns out, neither was there an art critic called ‘Cheryl Bernstein’, nor was there a painter named ‘Hank Herron’. Both were inventions of the American art historian Carol Duncan and her husband Andrew Duncan, who created this hoax with the complicity of the editor Gregory Battcock. The text was intended as a critique of the contemporary art-critical discourse which, in the view of the Duncans and of Battcock, was too weak and indulgent before art that seemed to circle only around itself without really involving the audience or, more generally, society. Their special target was obviously the *Appropriation Art* and the positive critical reaction it got, causing art critics to focus on abstract theories such as those voiced by their ‘Cheryl Bernstein’ in her review, instead of, as the Duncans would have preferred, raising questions about the political meaning of such art for society.<sup>18</sup>

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16 | Eudel 1884. See for this context also Lenain 2011: 252-54.

17 | See Berry/Duncan 2005: 84-87 and 174, Nos. 97-103. Interestingly, an exhibition of the *Appropriation* artist Mike Bidlo, who often respects the size of the originals he copies, was reviewed by Levin 1988 under the title *The Original as Less*, thus appropriating and varying the title of Bernstein’s review.

18 | See for this and the following Crow 1986.

The Duncans had originally thought that their hoax would be quickly unmasked and the inherent critique understood. They had even put in some humorous hints and distorted quotes from then-fashionable French philosophers, but still no-one objected to this intellectually lofty and solipsistic text. In a way, the Duncans' critique was thereby implicitly confirmed, even though it had not yet been exposed since no one took Bernstein's text for what it actually was, a parodic hoax.

*The Fake as More* thus became a fake, until it was finally exposed thirteen years later by the art historian Thomas Crow in his 1986 essay *The Return of Hank Herron*.<sup>19</sup> However, even he only knew of the hoax because Carol Duncan had made him privy to the secret behind 'Cheryl Bernstein', 'Hank Herron' and his exhibition. Now it became clear that the title *The Fake as More* revealed yet another level of meaning since it not only appeared as programmatic for the text's own nature (a fake, used as a hoax). But it also presented 'more' by actually providing less: from an invented art critic, who reviews a non-existent exhibition of an equally fictitious painter, the text raises fundamental issues about the reality of the art world and its business.

This was the theoretical side of a hoax being a blind shell. In order to also present a practical example, I would like to refer to Tom Keating and his so-called 'time bombs'. Keating was a painter and restorer who supposedly forged more than 2.000 paintings by about 100 different artists.<sup>20</sup> He was unmasked in 1976 by the journalist Geraldine Norman in an article she wrote for the *Times*. He was arrested the following year and accused of fraud, but the accusation was subsequently dropped. This was partly due to his poor state of health, but partly also because Keating always had intended his forgeries as hoaxes, meaning that he had always left clear traces of their inauthenticity. For example, he wrote messages in lead white for his restorer colleagues on the canvas before applying the first layer of paint for the forged composition. He expected the writing to become visible once the work was examined with X-rays. Furthermore he incorporated deliberate mistakes into his forgeries, such as too many fingers or crude anachronisms, or he executed them with modern materials, even if they pretended to have been created in the early modern era. With these 'time bombs' Keating speculated that sooner or later the traces would be detected, his forgeries would be unmasked and thus the weaknesses of the art market would be put into evidence, which would be irritated and destabilised. He was motivated by his contempt for what he considered to be the corrupt and gallery-dominated art market, where American art critics and dealers dictated the taste and were only keen to make a profit at the expense of naive collectors as well as impoverished artists. Keating could publicise such views in 1977 when Geraldine Norman, the journalist who had unmasked him, published together with her husband Frank Norman a biography of Keating with the title *The Fake's Progress*:

19 | Ibid.

20 | See for this and the following Norman/Norman 1977 and, for the context Effinger/Keazor 2016: 171-72.

*Tom Keating's Story*. The book's title alludes to one of William Hogarth's 'moral subjects' from 1733-1735, *The Rake's Progress*; but whereas Hogarth's Tom Rake-well falls from fortune and social favour and ends up in a mental asylum, Keating experienced a social and financial ascent. After his exposure and Norman's book, which featured a catalogue of Keating's works (Norman 1977), Keating became a celebrity and even hosted a British television series between 1982 and 1983, in which he explained the techniques of the Old Masters. To a certain extent, it could be argued that the forger became the expert who he had previously been fighting against, and he ultimately became a servant of the system he had first protested.

What is important, however, is that just as in the case of the Duncans' 'Cheryl Bernstein' hoax, Keating's hoaxes became forgeries since, instead of being rapidly unmasked, they were taken for the real thing for a long time, and thus deceived more people and for a longer period than planned by Keating.

A variation of this 'hoax turned fake' is the case of the above-mentioned Han van Meegeren, who initially intended to expose the incompetence of the art critics and experts who had derided the work van Meegeren had presented under his own name (Kilbracken 1967). But when he realised that he had successfully fooled them, he saw the comfortable side of his success in the money he earned. Therefore, instead of exposing his forgery and thus embarrassing the experts with his hoax, he decided to keep the illusion of an allegedly newly discovered Vermeer masterpiece and of further Vermeer rediscoveries intact in order to gain more and more money.

As stated above, there is also the second situation where a forgery is later declared to have been partly or even exclusively intended as a hoax. I would like to present one example of this.

The Hungarian forger Elmyr de Hory (apparently born in 1905 as Elemir Horthy in Budapest)<sup>21</sup> — made famous by Orson Welles' stunning documentary *F for Fake* from 1973 — began to forge after the Second World War. He emulated drawings and paintings by masters of classical Modernism, such as Pablo Picasso, Amadeo Modigliani, Chaim Soutine or Henri Matisse. When de Hory was exposed in 1967,

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21 | So the Norwegian director Knut W. Jorfald in his documentary "Almost True. The Noble Art of Forgery" (aka "Masterpiece or Forgery? The Story of Elmyr de Hory") from 1997. Recently, Forgy 2012: 316 referred to inquiries in the archives of the "Association of Jewish Communities" in Budapest and reported that in a book, dated to 1906, one could find the entry concerning a "Elemér Albert Hoffmann" which he, without giving any reasons why, identifies with Elmyr de Hory. Because of this lacking explanation and since Forgy also does not further specify what kind of records the book (described by Forgy only as "records" in "a coffee-table-size book dated 1906") represents, I am here following the up to now more plausible and transparent identification furnished by Jorfald 1997.

he claimed that one of his motivations was to unmask the incompetence of the experts, critics and art dealers who had judged de Hory's own creations in a negative way. At the same time, he asserted that it had been among his aims to show how mediocre some acclaimed artists were, such as Henri Matisse, who in de Hory's view was actually a bad and highly overrated draughtsman. According to de Hory, forging Matisse's work presented quite a challenge for the (allegedly) highly talented de Hory, forcing him to disguise his talent in order to be able to draw as badly as he claimed Matisse did (Irving 1969: 233).

All this shows that there are cases in which hoax and fake blend with each other into indistinguishability. Again we can recall 'Paul' from *Six Degrees of Separation*, since in his case it remains unclear whether he is ultimately an exposed con man (a forger) or somebody who, by being 'unmasked', actually reveals the self-righteous lifestyle of those who apparently debunk him.<sup>22</sup> I have suggested calling the objects involved when hoax and fake blend in such a manner 'foaxes', a mix of 'fake' and 'hoax' which sounds like the French word for fake, *faux* (Keazor 2015: 15).

Adapting the title of 'Cheryl Bernstein's' review, I believe there are cases in which one could see the 'Foax as More'. Firstly, in a very banal way adding the foax creates a third element, a 'more' which complements the two notions of the 'fake' and the 'hoax'.

Secondly and still rather simply, the criteria which are applied to the fake and the hoax also apply to the 'foax'. It holds up a mirror to society and raises questions such as 'How do we see what we think is an original?', 'As what, in which way do we see it?' and: 'What does this say about us?' Analysing a fake, a hoax or a foax can be highly informative and telling about us, how we encounter art, how to contextualise it and what to expect of it. One could thus say that fakes, hoaxes or foaxes are in some ways like caricatures: they single out and then emphasise, condense, concentrate in the object and charge it with what we perceive as typical of something. This could be an artist's style such as Beltracchi's Campendonks or Van Meegeren's Vermeers; or how we assume an old artwork should look; for instance, slightly damaged, but not too much (e.g. Spiel 2000: 54). We can also understand the fake/hoax/foax as a form of wish-fulfillment since they represent what we wish should have survived and how we wish an art work should have survived. This concept is reflected by Wolfgang Beltracchi's ascription of the origin of his forgeries to his wife's grandfather Werner Jägers' art collection. According to this web of lies, this collection hosted and preserved precious pieces from the collection of Alfred Flechtheim which normally would have been associated with 'looted art', but by claiming that Jägers bought the art works from Flechtheim in time before the Nazis could take them, Beltracchi purified the paintings from such a negative association (Koldehoff/Timm 2012; Keazor/Öcal 2014).

22 | See here note 2 above.



This subterfuge was carried out in order to convince us, but after its exposure it can cause us to question ourselves critically about the reasons for the fraud's success. The herefrom arising issues might include questions after the weaknesses in ourselves and in our systems, in art history, at the university, at the art market, in our society: which shortcomings have thus become visible and understandable?

Thirdly, it is exactly the 'foax' that prompts us to reflect upon the different and difficult-to-distinguish aggregate state.

And last but not least, it reveals the creative and performative potential that lies in hoaxes, fakes and foaxes — see again the case of Bernstein's *The Fake as More* with its invented art critic who writes an invented review of an invented exhibition of an invented artist. We are close here to what Jean Baudrillard called "the simulacrum" (Baudrillard 1995), a phenomenon that appears to be real, but actually has severed almost all of its ties to reality. There is, indeed, something real from which the whole invention stems — a real art business with painters who paint the way 'Hank Herron' does and with critics who write the way 'Bernstein' does, but what has been newly invented on this basis has then been emancipated from these real phenomena and has developed a life of its own.

One could ultimately say that more or less the same happened in the case of Beltracchi. Based on real masterworks which were once in a real collection of modern masterpieces, he conceived paintings which were then substantiated with faked historical evidence asserting that they were once part of a collection of masterpieces — which, however, had never existed. In this case, too, the whole scam started from things which really existed, such as the person of Werner Jägers, the grandfather of Wolfgang Beltracchi's wife Helene, the collector Alfred Flechtheim, or the paintings that had once been in his collection but had vanished until then, and of course the painters who had created them.

Again, the whole invention developed a life of its own, up to the point that Beltracchi even created alternative versions of the artists he forged. Because he did not entirely follow their known style, but here and there digressed from them and instead added some new stylistic elements, he even created new stylistic patterns and phases of the painters he forged (Keazor/Öcal 2014: 31-34). This was precisely the same strategy used by Han van Meegeren decades earlier, when he had presented a Vermeer in his forgeries who began apparently to detach himself stylistically more and more from the known Vermeer paintings through which Van Meegeren had first oriented himself — and instead began to paint increasingly the way Van Meegeren had done under his own name.<sup>23</sup> In both cases, this led to the paradox that new works appearing on the art market were increasingly compared not to the actual known works of the artists apparently behind these creations, but instead

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23 | Kilbracken 1967: 125: "He painted less and less in the manner of Vermeer [...] —and more and more in the manner of van Meegeren."

with those allegedly genuine works that had recently been discovered. This meant that the proof for authenticity in the case of Van Meegeren or Beltracchi became the previous forgeries by Van Meegeren and Beltracchi.

In summary, as we have seen, the fake, the hoax and the resulting hoax can actually add in some way something ‘more’ to our reality by opening up “a parallel universe” via an “art of the second degree”, or “second power” as Koen Brams calls this in his book *The Encyclopedia of Fictional Artists*, edited in 2000.<sup>24</sup> Of course, one has to keep in mind that not all fakes, hoaxes or foaxes are automatically, as Jonathon Keats maintains, “great art”, and one also has to observe under which conditions they are launched. This is because we perceive works through different preconceptions, which also shape the relationship of the agents in the art world: that is between the artist, the client and the viewer, all of whom agree to an unspoken understanding that each knows the difference between an original and a fake.

However, as we have seen, having our traditional ideas about originality shaken up is, especially in a globalised world, not something that should automatically be shunned. Because sooner or later we will be confronted with the phenomenon again, we should learn to be not reactive, but active in our response to the fake, the hoax and the hoax.

The fake, the hoax and the hoax are ‘more’, insofar as they can be conceived and taken by us as a chance to question our way of dealing with art, of reflecting upon it and therefore perhaps better explaining and understanding it. Or, to phrase it in the words of the French neuroscientist Jean-Pierre Changeux who carried out significant research on how we perceive art: “Understanding does not equal loving; but a better explanation will make for a better understanding, and more understanding will, perhaps, make for a better loving” (Changeux 1994: 13, my translation).<sup>25</sup>

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24 | Brams 2000. The German version—Brams 2003—describes the book on the back of the slipcase as dealing with “a parallel universe” via an “art of the second degree” or “second power”.

25 | “Comprendre n’est certes pas aimer; mais plus expliquer fera mieux comprendre; et plus comprendre fera, peut-être, mieux aimer.”

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# Forgery: The Art of Deception

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*Translated by Joel Scott*

For many years now, the Berlin art historian Horst Bredekamp has been interested in the relationship between art and science, and has become an advocate for the significance of a thought that thinks in images, of the hand that draws as an organ of thought. Beginning in 2005, this interest led him to his work on an edition of Galileo Galilei's *Sidereus Nuncius* that had come onto the market in New York. Bredekamp was convinced that this copy of the *Starry Messenger*, which contains ink wash illustrations of the moon in place of the etchings of the definitive edition, was Galileo's proof copy of the book, and analysed its drawings as a crowning example of the connection between scientific thinking and image production. Doubts about its authenticity had been expressed here and there in different places, but neither Bredekamp, nor the interdisciplinary research team that he put together, nor the institutions supporting him — such as the Max Planck Society, the Rathgen Research Laboratory, the Stuttgart State Academy of Art and Design, the Federal Institute for Materials Research and Testing and the Technical University of Berlin — had been able to confirm them.

In 2007 Bredekamp published his results in the wide-ranging monograph *Galilei der Künstler. Der Mond, die Sonne, die Hand (Galileo the Artist: The Moon, the Sun, the Hand)*. An extensive report on the research project appeared in 2011, published in two volumes under Bredekamp's editorship as *Galileo's O* (Bredekamp/Brückle/Hahn 2011; Bredekamp/Needham 2011). In spring 2012 it was then discovered that the New York copy of *Sidereus Nuncius* was a forgery, organised and carried out — like the forgery of other writings by Galileo — by the Italian Galileo scholar Massimo De Caro. As director of the famous Biblioteca dei Girolamini in Naples he had been responsible for the embezzlement and counterfeiting of incunabula and valuable books on a grand scale (Schmidle 2013). It is a case that can teach us a great deal about materials and technical processes, about the psychological dispositions of its participants, the self-stylisation of researchers and forgers, the success of the “cloaking strategies” of forgers, and the interaction of the humanities and science in an era when forgers and their

international networks are able to make use of laser and digital technologies and techniques. But just one point will be of special interest to us here. In the third volume of *Galileo's O*, published in 2014 under the title *Forgery: Unmasking the New York Sidereus Nuncius*, Paul Needham, the librarian for rare books and special collections at Princeton University, who was heavily involved in Bredekamp's Galileo project, writes the following remarkable sentence: "Consider: from the time that a serious problem with the authenticity of *SNML* [the New Yorker *Sidereus Nuncius*, F.T.B.] arose [...] to the time absolute proof was found that *SNML* is forged, only three weeks passed, 10 to 31 May 2012" (Needham 2014: 95). In other words, from 2005 to 2012 an entire staff of experts pored over this book — and then, once a serious suspicion was raised, it took just three weeks to establish that it was a forgery.

How can that be? To elaborate briefly focusing on one technical detail: the paper of the New York copy being of decidedly lower quality than all other copies of this work that have hitherto come down to us, was suspect from the very beginning — too raw and in fact unsuited to illustration. But the supposition that the New York manuscript represented Galileo's proof copy, and that the watercolour illustrations were the work of his own hand, seemed to explain — indeed, to necessitate — this divergence in the quality of the paper. Moreover, the X-ray fluorescence analysis of the paper showed nothing unusual, while in the absence of any initial suspicion, an invasive examination of the material — which would mean damaging the book by removing paper fibres for examination — was out of the question. After all, in all scientific tests of authenticity, something like a principle of proportionality must be observed. Only once suspicions had been raised did an invasive analysis take place and reveal a cotton content which was much too high for the early 17<sup>th</sup> century.

Thus, what Paul Needham's remark about the "three weeks" illustrates above all else is the decisive effect of an initial suspicion — of a change of perspective that it introduces. It demonstrates the truth of the phrase from Max Friedländer's *On Art and Connoisseurship* that serves as an epigraph to the third volume of *Galileo's O*: "The eye sleeps, until the spirit awakes [sic] it with a question" (after Bredekamp 2014: 5). In their introduction to this volume the leading members of the team carrying out the research into the New York *Starry Messenger* identify the reason for their failure: "the evidence of authenticity seemed so unequivocal that none of the authors thought them questionable. All participants had used the method of negating the possibility of forgery, instead of attempting to confirm the opposite" (9). Logically speaking, these seem to be equivalent — the attempt to exclude the possibility of forgery and the attempt to demonstrate it. But in reality, and as working processes, they are fundamentally different.

The second case of forgery to which we shall briefly turn is the Beltracchi / Spies affair. In Autumn 2011, Wolfgang Beltracchi and three co-defendants appeared before a court and were sentenced in relation to a number of forged paintings that



they were proved to have created.<sup>1</sup> The case achieved particular prominence not only on account of the scope of Beltracchi's activities as a forger — according to his own avowals having forged the works of around 50 modernist artists — but also because the seven Max Ernst paintings he produced between 1994 and 2004 had been examined and authenticated by Werner Spies, Director of the Musée National in Paris 1999-2000, and one of the world's most renowned experts on the work of Ernst.

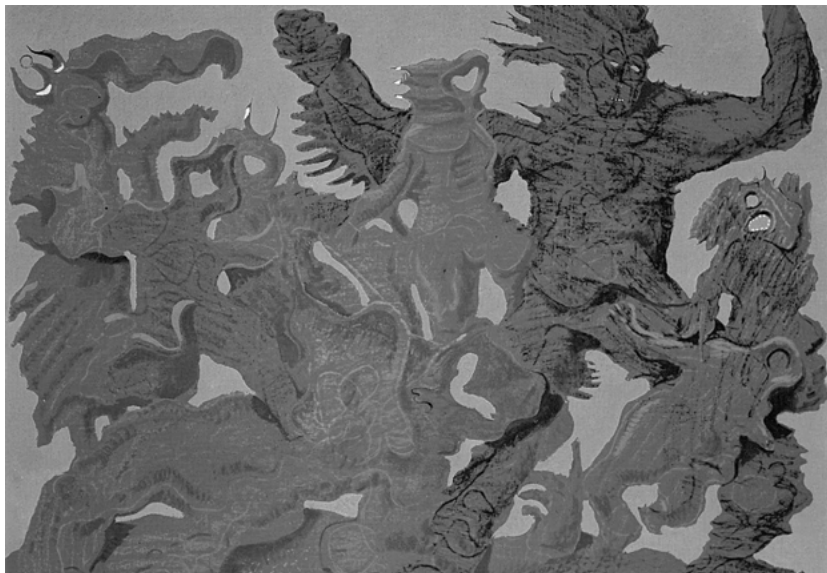
Let us compare two versions of the 1927 painting *The Horde* by Max Ernst, one of them an original, the other forged by Beltracchi (fig. 1 and 2). Naturally it is impossible to properly address the question of whether something is an original or a forgery merely by looking at reproductions, but one dimension of the question can nevertheless be adumbrated here. Would it have been possible or necessary to arrive at an initial suspicion in this case? By what criteria could one's attention have been guided in order to arrive at such a suspicion, beginning merely at the level of stylistic analysis? Above all, criteria which result from tensions between the subject of the picture and its painterly execution. The subject of *The Horde* implies a menacing ferocity — and something amorphous, a basic undefinedness.

Thus, in comparing the two images, our attention would be directed above all towards the different levels of determinacy and articulation: the legibility or illegibility of the “figures”, the degree to which they are articulated as human, as male or female, and the corporeality of their depiction, which is to say: towards the spatiality and plasticity of the orifices of the body, the application of colour and shadow to delineate the respective figures, and the qualities of the outlines, the shading and the internal line-work and of the ground of the painting. And of course, in encountering differences one would have to consider which aspects might be due to the difference in the format of each painting, and a potentially related difference in the status of the two works.

Studying these differences, one could notice the sexualising quality of the corporeality of the second figure from the left in figure 2. This sexualisation in the way the figure is portrayed has an explicitness, a definiteness in the form, which is not present in figure 1. Does this quality appear in comparable works painted by Max Ernst around 1927? In particular, is it to be found in paintings that bear explicit references to sexual themes in their titles? And in others, such as *The Horde*, for which this is not the case? If you pursue these questions, then you will find that this fleshly tactility does indeed stand out. This need not imply that the picture shown by figure 2 wasn't painted by Max Ernst. But the obviousness of such a detail could generate something like an initial suspicion which would have to be pursued further. A good magnifying glass would in that case identify acute problems like the ‘craquelure’, the quality of the small cracks on the surface of the paint. And the

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1 | On Beltracchi more generally, see, for example, Koldehoff/Timm 2012; and the autobiography Beltracchi/Beltracchi 2014.



*Figure 1: Max Ernst, “The Horde”, 1927, oil on canvas, 115 × 146 cm, Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam.*

*Figure 2: Max Ernst, “La horde” (forgery by Wolfgang Beltracchi), 1927, oil on canvas, 65.4 × 81.2 cm, European Collection.*



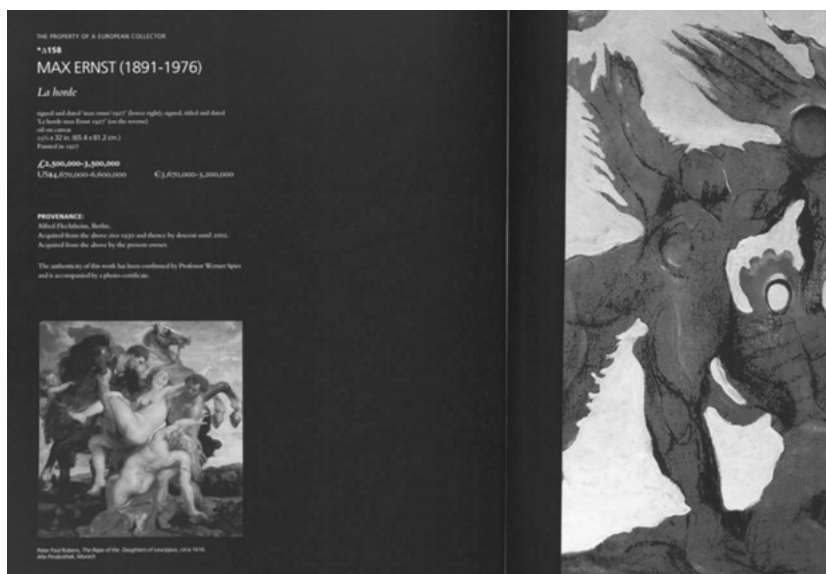


Figure 3: Page of the Auction-Catalogue “Impressionist and Modern Art” (with a detail of Peter Paul Rubens, *Rape of the Daughters of Leucippus* on the left side), Evening Sale, Christie’s London, 20 June 2006, pp. 174/75.

Figure 4: Wolfgang Beltracchi, *untitled (framing: F. T. Bach)*, drawing, undated.



analysis of the material to which this would have to lead would reveal pigments that were simply not available in 1927. Although one should add that there are also other reasons why, in the case of Max Ernst around the year 2000, analysis of the material would have been an urgent necessity, even in the absence of initial suspicions.

I don't wish to speculate on why these analyses weren't carried out. An equally interesting question is why the forged Max Ernsts were so readily accepted. Consider a brief addendum on this point: in the Christie's auction catalogue Beltracchi's Max Ernst was accompanied by a reproduction of Rubens' *Rape of the Daughters of Leucippus* on the opposite page (fig. 3). In its marketing strategy, by including a reproduction of Rubens' *Rape* as a point of reference, the auction house has completely succumbed to the detail which we examined earlier. That means that the sexualising shift that Beltracchi applied to Max Ernst's *The Horde* corresponded to one of the trends of contemporary taste, which — as one can discover from one of his early drawings (fig. 4) — was always also decidedly his own. In other words, it is not just the "historicity of the gaze" that determines the forgery, just as it does art, and, with time, reveals it, but also the psycho-physical disposition of the artist or forger, and their relation to the taste of their time.

An initial suspicion is a necessary, but not a sufficient, condition if forgeries are to be rooted out. The work of expert identification is characterised by a combination of the forensic methods of the sciences of materials with the expertise of the connoisseur of style. Beyond these, competence in a specific, narrowly defined area needs to be complemented by an attention to the strategies of forgers as they come to light — because they set precedents and serve as models for successors. The New Yorker Ely Sakhai became famous by his trick of selling a work twice, while for some time now whole catalogues have been forged in order to prove that today's forgeries appeared in historical exhibitions of Russian avant-garde works that never in fact took place. Such references show that Beltracchi was not the first to work with forged museum and gallery labels. The British forgery duo John Drewe and John Myatt became famous for their sophisticated ways of forging a work's provenance. Before a work was placed on the market, John Drewe would manipulate archival materials in leading London institutions like the Tate, the Victoria & Albert Museum and the Institute of Contemporary Art, so that the experts researching a work would actually find it in historical catalogues and documents (Salisbury/Sujo 2009). Before this method of forging provenance became known, institutions had been careful to ensure that scholars, or people claiming to be scholars, were unable to carry anything *out* of their archives — they had not paid attention to what was brought *in*.

We shall not pursue these more narrowly technical problems here, but turn instead to consider whether and to what degree forgeries can lead to fundamental questions and insights concerning art. In discussing the significance of an 'initial suspicion' we have already alluded to such an insight: namely into our perception and how it is formed. It is an everyday experience that something that was able to fascinate

us just last year now leaves us peculiarly cold, while something else to which we have hitherto been indifferent is suddenly of the greatest interest. Through this experience of the changes of our perception, we can gain a sense of the forces that form them.

But in cases where we vacillate in our judgment between recognising something as an original and deeming it a forgery, this shift in perception acquires a particular intensity and *Evidenz*.<sup>2</sup> Reflecting on these changes, we can look on, as it were, while our gaze shifts, we can see how an emotional investment in it that would otherwise remain unconscious reveals itself in an abrupt alteration. In such cases, we catch a glimpse of something which is in fact continually taking place but usually goes unnoticed, namely the formation of what we see by the horizon of our expectations. The experience of a relatively sudden replacement of one horizon of expectation by another allows us to catch a glimpse of a quality of our seeing that is of decisive importance for the work of the art historian more generally: the power of the quality of projection that has always already determined our seeing.

There is hardly anything of more significance for the understanding of our power of sight and the insight into the necessity of its being double-checked than the experience of such a relatively sudden switch between the expectational horizons that ground vision — the experience of the achieved closure of a new horizon of expectation, which through a rapid switch establishes itself as just as ‘evident’ as the one preceding it. We need to remember, however, that in dealing with a questionable work, the task we are faced with is a double one. It is fundamentally necessary to work in two directions simultaneously. In the words of Max Friedländer: “It is indeed an error to collect a forgery, but it is a sin to stamp a genuine piece with the seal of falsehood” (after Hoving 1996: 209).

A second fundamental question has already been alluded to through our discussion of ‘initial suspicion’: the relationship between the whole and its details. In the case of Beltracchi’s *Horde*, it was a detail that ought to have aroused an initial suspicion. This ought to have been pursued until it either showed itself to be unfounded or was confirmed. The sexualising, almost voluptuous and tactile articulation of the figure’s buttocks ought to have drawn attention to itself given the thematic context, essentially defined, as it is, by formal indeterminacy. But is it not also the case that details that disturb the unity of the structure of a whole and thus draw attention to themselves, that indicate a contradiction or at the least a

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2 | *Evidenz* has no simple translation in English. It is a common topic of enquiry in German-language art theory and visual cultures, and refers to the ways in which images take on an evidentiary character, in part through material and visual qualities of the images themselves, but also through their embedding in cultural discourses and practices which imbue them with specific meaning and function, and which are in turn shaped by the function of these images. [Trans.]

tension between the thematic conception and the execution — that such details also appear in authentic works of art, in ‘strong’ works? We can recall, for example, the peculiarities of 15<sup>th</sup>-century Italian annunciation scenes to which Daniel Arasse has drawn attention, such as in Francesco del Cossa’s *The Annunciation* in the Gemäldegalerie Dresden (fig. 5; Arasse 2003). In the imposing construction of this painting, the two main figures of which are placed on either side of a monumental central pillar, arranged diagonally and drawing the eye into the depth of the perspectival field, there is one detail that is altogether out of place: the snail in the foreground. Its presence can, at a pinch, be justified iconographically as a symbol of the Virgin Mary, however its position and exaggerated size “remain disconcerting, indeed, almost shocking” (87).<sup>3</sup> Positioned on the bottom edge of the picture, the snail is not painted *into* the fictional space, but rather *onto* the image, or its frame, “onto the borderline between our space and the space erected by the perspective of the painting” (88). It is a detail — though I will skip the particulars of Arasse’s argument — that by means of its “divergence” indicates “the disproportion of the divine”, that shows that “the perspectival structure, as ‘symbolic form’, is a symbol, not for the infinity of the world, but rather for its *commensurability* — and that the infinity of God is incommensurable with the world” (89).

What distinguishes the way a detail in a painting that turns out to be a forgery becomes suspicious from the ‘conspicuousness’ of a detail in an authentic work? Certainly *not* the degree to which it lends itself to interpretation. The two examples which we began with make clear how sophisticated forgeries often offer ‘interpretability’ as a bait, so to speak, with which to tempt the expert. But if interpretability is not the distinguishing mark, then what is? We cannot define a universal criterion; criteria of authenticity can only be made precise in each particular case. Which does not mean that attention to forgeries will not allow us to open up important insights into the relationship between the whole and the detail — for as long, that is, as this relationship remains foundational for thinking about art.

In different ways, forgeries raise the problem of boundaries. It is not just that the concept of a forgery already implies the distinction between original and forgery. Work in the field of the question of original and forgery always ultimately presupposes a judgment about the scope of the quality of an artist’s work in a given period — and a given medium. Because it is much more probable that a hastily scribbled drawing, in spite of its questionable quality, would be the product of a quality draughtsperson’s “weak moment” than that a sculpture requiring six months work would diverge markedly from the standards of the work created by a sculptor around the same time, and yet nonetheless belong to his *œuvre*. But forgeries also raise the question of the boundary in a yet more fundamental sense.

3 | With regard to the reading flow all German quotations have been translated.



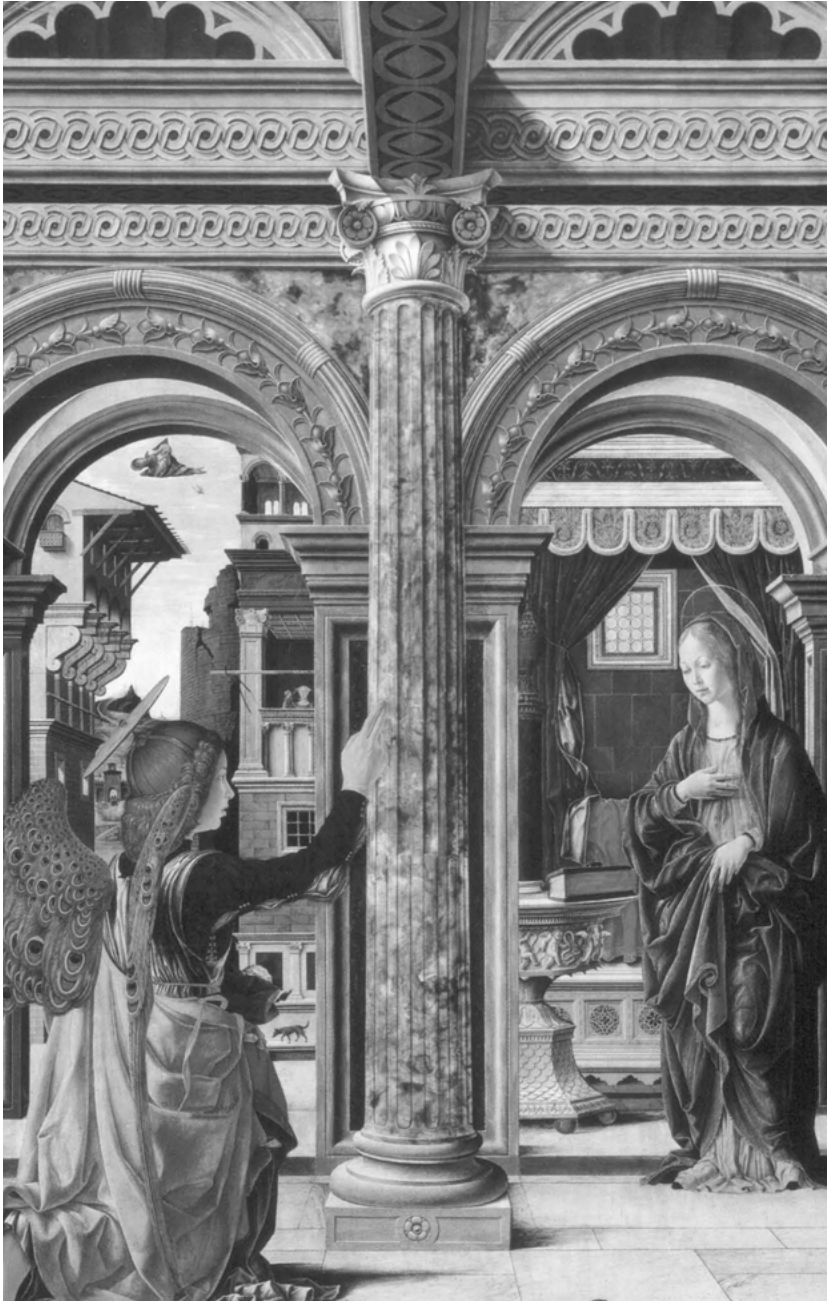


Figure 5: Francesco del Cossa, "The Annunciation", 1470/72, tempera on poplar, 139 × 113.5 cm, Gemäldegalerie, Dresden.



Art, especially in its modern and contemporary forms, increasingly understands itself as the attempt to push beyond boundaries. These are simultaneously the locus and the object of experimental artistic practices which investigate the minimal conditions of art, which ask which of its traditional characteristics are questionable or dispensable. In the context of neo-structuralism and postmodernism, a broad discursive field has formed in which the relationship between original and forgery appears in a new light. This field encompasses the interrogation of the qualities of authenticity and repetition, of artistic piracy, and of allegorical procedures and procedures of appropriation and the critical revision of the concept of originality. Beyond that, it encompasses questions around and approaches to the affirmation of the phenomena of forgery, the questioning of the dichotomy of the original and the fake, which in the course of this volume will be discussed extensively by others.

Understood as a radical form of art's own self-reflection, a forgery certainly stands in a certain proximity to avant-garde forms of art that throw basic assumptions of our traditional understanding of art into question. Indeed, in some strands of contemporary discourse, the phenomenon of forgery seems to have filled the space vacated through the obsolescence of avant-garde art and the ebb of the neo-avant-gardes. Let me illustrate this by the example of one of Jean Dubuffet's *Cows* from the mid-1950s (fig. 6). Hubert Damisch reflected on works of this kind in an



Figure 6: Jean Dubuffet, “Vache la belle queutée (ou Vache au pré rose)”, Nov. 1954, oil on canvas, 97 × 130 cm, The National Museum of Western Art, Tokyo.

early text from 1967 (Damisch 1998: 28–40). What if — this, according to Damisch, is the line of questioning intended by Dubuffet — what if our culture is constituted in such a way as to hinder our perception of art? How could art possibly remain fixed in the place to which culture, with all its signs and pointers, assigns it, reducing it to a museum object? Art is a cognitive process, an undertaking of the mind; it no longer recognises itself in the mirror that culture holds up to it, in the degenerate and caricatured form of the knowledge of the cognoscenti, the connoisseur. Culture itself must rather be interrogated, its personnel and its institutions challenged in the name of art. According to Damisch, Dubuffet's art seeks to break out of the circle of culture by activating the order of the bestial.

But if the aim is to throw culture itself into question, to break out of its circle, then why should this breakout accept the framing of the traditional category of the original? Wouldn't the escape be more radical if it liberated itself from this cultural prison too? There are about half a dozen Dubuffets forged by Drew and Myatt (Salisbury / Sujo 2009: 106, 205). Are these not much more radical artistic statements than Dubuffet's own painting? There are a number of variants of contemporary discourse which suggest this. Forgery is claimed as a sort of replacement for the avant-garde, even if this claim is not explicitly made the object of reflection.

As can be seen from the collages of Karl Waldmann, such thinking can provide a basis for acts of curatorial self-aggrandisement that play into the hands of the forgery industry (Steinfeld 2015: 9). In the summer of 2015 eleven collages by Waldmann were shown as part of the exhibition *Künstliche Tatsachen/Boundary Objects* at the Galerie Kunsthau in Dresden. The collages reveal interesting combinations of Dadaist techniques with those of the Soviet avant-garde (fig. 7). They are works by an artist who was discovered in 1990 and has since been in demand on the international art market, with 149 works sold since 2001. His virtual museum is represented, among others, by the well-known New York art dealer Walter Maibaum. If you're not acquainted with this artist, you're in good company. Nobody knows him. As it turns out, the existence of Karl Waldmann is no less uncertain than the provenance of his collages. As the chorus of doubt concerning the authenticity of both artist and work swelled in volume, the head of the Dresden Kunsthau tried to deftly get out from under her predicament. She transformed the life and work of Karl Waldmann into conceptual art, and stated that it was also possible “that we are dealing with a contemporary artistic project that works with fictional strategies” (after id.: 9). At the same time, the curator responsible for the exhibition described her own activity as “working curatorially at the boundaries of (hegemonic) canonisations — and, contrary to the scholarly paradigm, continually expanding those boundaries” (after id.: 9).

It is possible to speak here — along with Thomas Steinfeld from whose article in the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* I have drawn these references — of “a determined rejection of the museum as institution”. Steinfeld continues:



*Figure 7: Karl Waldmann, “20 Mark”, undated, collage on cardboard, 32 × 24.5 cm, Galerie Pascal Polar, Belgium.*

[Until now] one of the most important functions of this institution has consisted in checking, evaluating and declaring the provenance of what it exhibits. Those who refuse to do this [...] transform every possible object into a potential work of art and elevate [...] even economically motivated kitsch to the status of an object belonging in a gallery for 'contemporary art'. Their methodical doubt asserts itself in the form of a moral *ressentiment* that is effectively more hegemonic than any assurance of authenticity. It stands as the basis of a curatorial practice that by doing nothing and knowing nothing assures itself of always being in the right. (9)

A few decades ago, the invention of a "Karl Waldmann" might actually have been an artistic project that worked with "fictional strategies". Today, this dissimulation has become a sales strategy. That which once served the avant-garde critique of the fetishisation of the original work and the artistic ideologies of the cultural sector has long since become an element of this sector. The line along which exhibitions like that of the Dresden Kunsthauus are curated is one of the market.

Where, then, do we stand in our reflections on forgery, what is their real context? In his 1996 book *False Impressions* Thomas Hoving estimates that in the decade during which he was director of the New York Metropolitan Museum, 1967-1977, questionable works and fakes made up a good 40% of the works that he investigated. He also assumes that at the time of the publication of his book, this portion had risen to 50% (Hoving 1996: 17). This estimate was, as I have said, formulated in relation to high-level museums and does not address the even more acute form of the problem in the "emerging markets" of Russia, China and eBay. In a single raid in 2009, the State Office of Criminal Investigations in Stuttgart seized around 1000 forgeries of works by Alberto Giacometti, an artist who only produced some 500 sculptural works (Rost 2015: R3). The picture we get of the art of the Russian Revolution is also horrific (Lorch 2013: 13; 2015: 17). The market for this art has largely collapsed since the beginning of the 1990s on account of a flood of fakes, the production of which has for some years now taken on an industrial character, with its own galleries, experts, marketing systems and research institutes. The most recent high-point in this development was a case brought before a court in Wiesbaden in February 2017, after investigators of the Federal Office of Criminal Investigations seized more than 1500 dubious works in the style of the Russian avant-garde. In situations like these, Steinfeld's analysis rings especially true, that "at some point, art history and the study of art just stop working" (2015: 9).

It is by no means the case that these sorts of practices only end up harming the art market and speculators, for whom our sympathy may, with some justification, be limited. Art history and the study of art, not to mention the general public, are affected too, and seriously. Exhibitions are prevented from taking place, certain books are unable to be published, others, including catalogues, are only financed,

written and published in order that two or three doubtful works can be included and in this way “authenticated”. Thus there exists no catalogue of the drawings of Constantin Brâncuși, one of the ‘founding fathers’ of modern sculpture. Nor will there be one in the foreseeable future, despite the fact that such a catalogue would be indispensable for the investigation of this side of his creative activity. This lack amounts to a long-term impairment of study and curatorial work in the area, and obstructs our understanding of it. However the large number of forgeries in this area, which makes the prospect of producing a catalogue a long and difficult business, is not the only hindrance. It is even more the conjunction of the difficulty of the work with the juridical context in which it would have to take place that is decisive. Particularly in the USA, a stage has been reached where in the case of several leading modern artists, nobody can any longer be found who would be willing to provide an expert opinion concerning the authenticity of a newly discovered work, for fear less of the juridical ramifications of an error than of being sued for compensation for decreases in value resulting from a negative evaluation of a work. The interaction between the scale of forging practices and the legal context in which this practice takes place is something that requires attention — much more than is possible here.

The reason for emphasising the scale at which forgery is now carried out is that only in this way is it possible to appreciate the real damage done by this form of “mimesis”. In the catalogue to the legendary exhibition *Fake? The Art of Deception*, held at the British Museum in 1990, editor Mark Jones summarised this damage as follows:

When a group of fakes is accepted into the canon of genuine work all subsequent judgements about the artist or period in question are based on perceptions built in part upon the fakes themselves. [...] This, finally, is our complaint against fakes. It is not that they cheat their purchasers of money, reprehensible though that is, but that they loosen our hold on reality, deform and falsify our understanding of the past. (1990: 16)

In this respect I retain a measure of scepticism vis-à-vis the title of this conference collection *Faking, Forging, Counterfeiting. Discredited Practices at the Margins of Mimesis*, which suggests, at the very least, that forgeries are ultimately unjustly discredited. Accordingly, the title I have chosen for my own essay, *Forgery: The Art of Deception*, is also meant ironically. Of the hundreds of forgeries with which I have had to do in the last 25 years, or more precisely, of the hundreds of works with which I have had to do in the last 25 years of which one was required to ask whether or not they were authentic works by Brâncuși or perhaps merely falsely attributed to him, or indeed forged, perhaps only 1 in 100 was even in the slightest ‘artistically productive’.

A recent article on contemporary art claims that the replicative practices of contemporary art go to show that the basic assumptions of the concept of forgery are problematic. When, in summary, the author claims that “in light of the adaptations carried out by conceptual artists, the authenticity of the original itself — and with it also of its counterfeit — are revealed as ‘deceptive phantasms’” (Frohne 2006: 368), then that is accurate — for the works of contemporary art being described. What is problematic about this stance is the way the author’s ultimate formulation implicitly extends the idea of the deceptive character of the conceptual dyad of original and forgery, making it into a *universal* determination. It is necessary to make distinctions here. Not because these things bear no relationship. Of course, the way we think about past practices of forgery is affected by what forgery has become today, in an era of the global counterfeiting both of commodities and of reality itself. But if it is true that in modern and contemporary art — since Duchamp, roughly speaking — the basic meaning of the idea of originality and thus also the categorical difference between original and forgery has sometimes been subverted in artistically and theoretically interesting ways, that does not mean that this is similarly true for a painting by, say, Monet, or for the relationship between a drawing by Monet and a Monet drawing as forged by Eric Hebborn. The conceptual dyad of original and forgery is an historical one and must be grasped in its specific quality in every particular case.

As you will have presumably noticed I decided to write this essay in a narrative mode. I would like this mode to be understood as a reminder that the world of forgeries is itself powerfully determined by stories, by narrative framings. Notwithstanding the predictable topoi and framing clichés that accompany any new work that turns up, such narrative fabrics usually have a particular weave that can give us important insights into a forger’s strategy and the quality of the work presented. In the case of doubtful sculptures from Romania attributed to Brâncuși, for example, such stories usually say that the piece was buried in order to keep it out of reach of the state apparatus and was therefore — unfortunately — recently cleaned. This “explains” why in recent decades the piece in question has never appeared in official contexts and why its surface now looks like it does. In short, it is a story that uses an apparently unquestionable historical context to deprive experts of the opportunity to base their judgments on questions of provenance and on the quality of the surface and patina. The way these basic elements are presented and connected with others can be extraordinarily informative.

Experience shows that it is better to take a serious interest in this narrative fabric, in its stories, legends and thematic stylisations, in order to be able to tear it open from inside, as it were, rather than attempting to avoid it altogether. Because the danger is that in trying to sidestep this fabric, one will become all the more hopelessly entangled in one of its threads. It is here, in the invention of contextualising stories and placement strategies, and not in the theoretical provocation and material

execution of the forgeries themselves, that the often truly productive aspect of the forgery industry ultimately lies; or, to return once more to the ironic formulation of the title of this text, its ‘art’.

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# The Artist and the Mountebank

## Rochester's Alexander Bendo and the Dynamics of Forgery and Illusion in 17<sup>th</sup>-Century Art

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*Jacqueline Hylkema (Leiden University)*

In July 1676, a new mountebank arrived in London, set up shop in Tower Street and promptly published a handbill to advertise his services. In itself this was nothing new or particularly noteworthy, but Alexander Bendo's advertisement was extraordinary, in the sense that it addressed the very notion mountebanks tended to avoid mentioning: deception. In Early Modern Europe, mountebanks — doctors who travelled from town to town and would usually present their medicines and skills on a small stage — were generally thought to be guilty of a multitude of different deceptions, most notably the selling of useless cures with the aid of invented exotic persona, forged diplomas from imaginary universities, and letters of recommendations from invented persons of note. In fact, mountebanks were so commonly associated with fakery that they soon became a byword for deception.<sup>1</sup>

Alexander Bendo, however, claimed to be the genuine article: “if I appear to any one like a counterfeit”, he wrote, it could only be because as an honest man, he is “the counterfeit's example, his original [...]. Is it therefore my fault if the cheat by his wits and endeavours makes himself so like me, that consequently I cannot avoid resembling of him?” (Rochester 1676: 2-3) Despite these protestations, Alexander Bendo was a counterfeit, but not in the sense that he was a deceiving mountebank: he was in fact the creation of the Baroque poet and playwright John Wilmot, the Earl of Rochester. The handbill was part of an elaborate imposture that according to Gilbert Burnet, Rochester's first biographer, had seen Rochester: “set up in the

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1 | I am very grateful to the Stichting Fonds Catharine van Tussenbroek, whose grant for my Occasional Studentship at the Warburg Institute in 2011 enabled me to start the research for this study there. I also thank Professor Caroline van Eck and Dr. Joy Burrough-Boenisch for reading the text and providing me with their valuable comments.

*Tower-Street for an Italian Mountebank, where he had a Stage, and practised Physick for some Weeks not without success*" (1680: 27).

The Alexander Bendo episode has proven to be irresistible to Rochester's later biographers (it has appeared in every biography since Burnet's as a testimony to Rochester's eccentricity and outrageousness) and literary historians alike. In recent decades, the handbill has found its way into academic studies, where it has been discussed in the context of satire and Restoration politics. This paper will not argue with this particular approach — the handbill very obviously includes an exercise in political satire — but wants to propose that the text is also part of a very specific discourse in which the mountebank served as a vehicle for Baroque artists to explore the dynamics of deception in their work. The concept of deception was fundamental to Baroque aesthetics and there was no greater acclaim for the Baroque artist if his virtuosity managed to deceive the eye of his audience — a notion reflected in the very name of one of the most popular genres in Baroque painting, the *trompe l'oeil*.

All over Europe, Baroque artists — painters and playwrights in particular — would explore and discuss this trait in their work, particularly by drawing sustained comparisons between themselves and the mountebank. Although some of these comparisons have been discussed in isolation, very little attention, if any, has been paid to how they relate to one another. This article will attempt to provide a first sketch of the illusionist artist/mountebank discourse, which I will introduce with a drawing by the Dutch artist Hendrick Goltzius, the mountebank scene from Ben Jonson's comedy *Volpone* (1606) and Gerrit Dou's painting *The Quack* (1652). Rochester's handbill, I will argue, is a continuation of this artist/mountebank discourse, in the sense that it draws comparisons that are similar to those found in the works of Jonson and Dou but also takes them further, in an intricate game with representational boundaries and his readers' expectations.

## THE ARTIST AND THE MOUNTEBANK

The mountebank was a particularly popular subject in Early Modern Europe, especially in the Dutch Republic, the Southern Netherlands, Britain, Germany, France and Italy.<sup>2</sup> He appeared in many different genres, ranging from the stages of

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2 | A small study conducted by six students (Oliver Antczak, Thomas Giacoletto, Rian van den Dool, Damiët Schneeweisz, Mariam Orjonikidze and Jack Lindsay) in my Research Clinic "Faking It: Political Deception in Early Modern Art and Culture" at Leiden University College yielded dozens of visual and textual representations of the mountebank for all of these countries in the period between 1600 and 1800. The visual representation of the mountebank appears to have been particularly popular in the Dutch Republic, Britain, Germany, France, and Italy but much less so

Molière and Thomas Asselijn to a multitude of cheap prints, as well as paintings by artists as diverse as Jan Steen, Jean Tassel and Giovanni Domenico Tiepolo.<sup>3</sup> Although there appear to have been some cultural differences in the approach to the subject, the emphasis in these representations was usually placed on the notion of the mountebank's deceitful nature and the audience's gullibility. The relationship between these two is, for example, expressed succinctly in the satirical English print *The Infallible Mountebank or Quack Doctor* (ca. 1688-1705, fig. 1). In the text that accompanies the image, the mountebank presents his audience with a long list of obviously false claims, which he concludes: "Read, Judge and Try. And if you Die, never believe me more."

However, this wealth of visual and textual representations of the mountebank hides a much smaller and rather more sophisticated discourse in which artists would compare their own craft with that of the mountebank and use him as a vehicle to explore the dynamics with their own audiences.<sup>4</sup> Hendrick Goltzius' drawing "The Children of Mercury", from his 1596 *The Children of the Planets* series, provides a particularly good introduction to this discourse.<sup>5</sup> The drawing, which was turned into a print by Goltzius' former student Jan Saenredam (fig. 2), depicts Mercury along with the professions associated with him. However, rather than showing Mercury as the protector of merchants, as had been common in the Children of the Planets tradition, Goltzius presents him in the context of rhetoric, the art of

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in Eastern Europe and Russia. The discourse in which artists compared themselves to the mountebank seems to have been limited mainly to the Dutch Republic, Britain, France and Italy.

3 | Steen, Tassel and Tiepolo are just three of the many artists who painted quacks and their audiences in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century but they have in common that they made several versions of the subject. Jan Steen painted his between 1650 and 1660 and all versions are simply known as *De Kwakzalver*—the best-known of these is part of the collection of the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam. Jean Tassel painted at least two, extremely similar, versions of his *Le Charlatan*, one of which is to be found at the Musée Massey in Tarbes. Neither version is dated but they were probably produced in the 1650s or early 1660s. Giovanni Domenico Tiepolo painted several versions in the 1750s, including *Il Ciarlatano* (1751-52), which can be found in the collection of the Louvre in Paris.

4 | It must be noted that this discourse is in fact part of a wider one in which artists identified with other types of tricksters. For a particularly good example, please see Gianlorenzo Bernini's only surviving play *L'Impresario* (ca. 1643) and Donald Beecher's excellent article on it: "Gianlorenzo Bernini's *The Impresario*: The Artist as the Supreme Trickster" (1984).

5 | Also see my brief discussion of this image in Hylkema 2014: 6-7.



Figure 1: Anonymous, "The Infallible Mountebank" or Quack Doctor, ca. 1688-1705, engraving, British Museum, London, © Trustees of the British Museum.





Figure 2: Jan Saenredam, “The Children of Mercury”, ca. 1596, engraving after a drawing by Hendrick Goltzius, British Museum, London, © Trustees of the British Museum.



persuasion, which he emphasizes by placing two rhetoricians in the foreground. To Mercury's left, we see the painter holding a palette and maulstick, and the sculptor, busily carving a human figure. In the background, an orator is addressing a crowd and to the right, a theatrical performance is in progress. In between the stage and the painter, another of Mercury's children is found: the mountebank, presenting a bottle of medicine.

These professions have in common that they all deceive their audiences, a notion that Goltzius emphasizes by placing a weaving shuttle between the quack and the painter. This shuttle is a reference to the early modern Dutch word 'webbe', which meant a woven tissue but was also used for literary texts and in the phrase 'een webbe van leughens', which literally translates as 'a tissue of lies' or 'ein Lügengewebe'. But what lies do Mercury's children tell their audiences? The mountebank tells a multitude of lies but in the end, they all serve the same purpose: to persuade his audience that the bottle he is holding up contains a potent medicine, rather than mere water — or worse. This indeed is similar to the kind of lie Mercury's artists tell their respective audiences: theirs is the lie that occurs when a work of art transcends its representational frame and the viewer experiences and treats it, however briefly, as that which it represents. We reach out to touch a hand or shoulder, only to touch cold marble and realize that we have fallen for the sculptor's lie.

Drawing on the anthropological work of Alfred Gell, Caroline van Eck has theorized the process in which the viewer forgets the "demarcations between art and life" and experiences a sculpture as alive as the "living presence response" (van Eck 2015: 11). In Baroque sculpture, the eyes played a particularly important part in achieving this effect: Claude-Henri Watelet wrote about Bernini's gift to convey "the illusion of life": "the 'living' eyes of the statue fix the viewers and bring to the soul of the viewer an idea of life, and the sensation of gratified desire" (van Eck 2015: 65-66, translation by van Eck). The trick to this effect lies in what Hannelore Hägele has described as the process of carving in the gaze. This entails adding a focused pupil to the sculpture's eye and this is exactly what Goltzius' sculptor is doing in "The Children of Mercury": sitting on the floor, he is cutting a pupil into one of the eyes of female head in front of him. Hägele writes:

As the beholder's eye follows the path of the glance to its object, he anticipates a fuller measure of eye-tugging and darting, just as in real life. A quickening sensation is thus effected in him partly by what he sees, but more by what he senses may happen were the frozen image to be quickened into motion. (2014: 136-37)

That response is the moment when the artist succeeds in making the spectator believe that this is flesh and blood rather than cold marble, and it is the ultimate victory of Baroque mimesis, in which the work of art is experienced, however fleetingly, as alive and as that which it represents, rather than a mere representation.

It is important to note that Goltzius' drawing does not dismiss or condemn Mercury's deceptive brood. In this respect, it would set the tone for the many comparisons that would be drawn between artists and mountebanks in the century to come. Contrary to neo-Platonic and Calvinist debates about the deceptive nature of the imitative arts, these comparisons celebrated the artist's ability to create illusions and discussed this in terms of craftsmanship and virtuosity as well as the pleasure that it gave audiences. In this sense, this discourse was strongly related to the 17<sup>th</sup> century's renewed interest in the story of the contest between the Greek painters, Zeuxis and Parrhasius, in which the latter deceived his rival by painting curtains that were so lifelike, that Zeuxis tried to open them and lost the contest as a result. In his *Inleyding tot de Hooge Schoole der Schilderkonst* (1678) the Dutch painter and art theorist Samuel van Hoogstraten concludes his praise of the achievement of Parrhasius with the remark that the perfect painting is "like a mirror of nature, that makes things that are not there appear as if they are, and as such is deceptive in a permissible, entertaining and praiseworthy manner" (25, my translation).

## THE PLAYWRIGHT AND THE PAINTER: BEN JONSON AND GERRIT DOU

In the theatre, the mountebank was regularly used as a vehicle for the exploration of the dynamics between the performance and its audience, a notion beautifully illustrated by the mountebank scene (Act II, scene 2) in Ben Jonson's comedy *Volpone*. In this scene, the villainous Volpone impersonates an Italian mountebank by the name of Scoto of Mantua and in this guise addresses a crowd on stage. The performance is witnessed by two characters — Sir Politic and Peregrine — who provide a running commentary on their reception of the mountebank. Scoto's speech confirms Sir Politic's belief that mountebanks are "great general scholars" and "excellent physicians" (Jonson 1995: 35) whereas Peregrine will not be convinced and mocks Sir Politic and the rest of the crowd for falling under Scoto's spell.

It must be noted that the mountebank scene in *Volpone* is hardly the only case of deception in Jonson's work: from *Every Man in His Humour* (1598) to *The Magnetic Lady* (first staged in 1632), almost every single one of Jonson's comic plots is driven by imposture, forgery, hoaxing, and other kinds of trickery. However, the mountebank's formal performance within the actual performance does offer Jonson the opportunity to explore the mimetic relationship between deception and truth through a series of implicit comparisons. What Jonson presents his audience with is in fact the performance of an actual deception, Volpone's impersonation of Scoto Mantua. And what a glorious deception it is too: apart from Peregrine, Scoto's audience is completely taken in by the mountebank's rhetorical virtuosity and are persuaded of the effectiveness of Scoto's potion. More importantly, everyone falls

for the actual deception: Volpone's impersonation of Scoto. Even Peregrine, who prides himself on his scepticism, does not for a moment wonder whether Scoto of Mantua is who he claims to be.

Mimesis plays an important part in this success. At the beginning of the scene, as Scoto's stage is erected, Sir Politic and Peregrine both describe their own general views of the mountebank: whereas Politic admires them, "They are the only knowing men of Europe!", Peregrine has heard "that they are most lewd imposters; made of all terms and shreds" (Jonson 1995: 35). Scoto's speech confirms both these views, in the sense that Volpone understands exactly what constitutes a mountebank in his audience's eyes, creates its likeness and then brings it to life before them. This notion echoes a remark by Francis Bacon that Jonson would later quote in *Discoveries* (1640): "deceit is the likeness of truth" (Jonson 1892: 66). Without ever pointing out the comparison explicitly, the mise en abyme structure of the mountebank scene gives Jonson the opportunity to show his audience what he does as a playwright: he understands what constitutes their truth and then imitates that on stage to make them believe his illusion.

Half a century later, the Dutch painter Gerrit Dou would present a very similar point in his painting *The Quack* (fig. 3), albeit in a rather more explicit manner.<sup>6</sup> At that stage Dou was celebrated throughout Europe for his gift to produce extraordinarily lifelike paintings. The Dutch poet Dirk Traudenius assured his readers that if Zeuxis were to see Dou's work, "[he] would be deceived all over again. Here it is not paint that lies on the panel / but life and spirit" (1662: 17, my translation). In fact, Dou would often include deceptively real curtains in his paintings, as in the Rijksmuseum's *Man Smoking a Pipe* (ca. 1650), to allude to his status as the modern Parrhasius. He was obviously proud of his extraordinary mimetic powers, a notion that is abundantly present in *The Quack*, in which he, as Eric Jan Sluijter writes, "presented with remarkable wit his unconcealed pride in the 'deceit' he was able to produce" (1998: 195).

In Dou's *Quack*, the mountebank takes centre-stage, literally, and is shown presenting his captivated audience with a bottle of medicine. He is accompanied by all the exotic props traditionally associated with mountebanks: a monkey, a parasol, and a medical diploma so outrageously grand that it cannot be real. However, whereas other artist/mountebank comparisons are abstract, like Goltzius', or implicit, like Jonson's, Dou makes his specific and personal by including a self-portrait in the image. In fact, Ivan Gaskell points out that "the scene is set at the Galgewater in Leiden, where Dou had his studio" (1982: 18). The painter is shown hanging out of the window of his studio directly behind the quack, holding a palette. The symmetry in how the figures of the mountebank and Dou present the attributes of their respective professions immediately establishes an explicit comparison be-

6 | A shorter discussion of this work was included in my article "The pleasure of being deceived: spectatorship in the arts and other deceptions in eighteenth-century England" (Hylkema 2014).



Figure 3: Gerrit Dou, “The Quack”, 1652, oil on canvas, Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, Rotterdam, © Stichting Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen.

tween the two. Dou, however, is not watching the mountebank but directly confronts the viewer's gaze. This creates a relationship between spectator and painter that explicitly resembles that between the mountebank and his audience. I, Dou appears to tell his viewer, am doing exactly to you what he is to them: I am deceiving you.

## THE POET: ROCHESTER AND ALEXANDER BENDO

Although Gerrit Dou's painting has, to my best knowledge, never been connected to any of the many other works in which the artist compares himself to the mountebank, it is quite possibly the most discussed example of this discourse on artistic deception. Rochester's Alexander Bendo, however, has so far escaped such attention, even though elements of the handbill clearly deal with the concept of mimesis and deceit. What makes the Alexander Bendo case particularly intriguing is that Rochester takes the comparison one step further: whereas Dou went beyond Jonson's implicit comparison by literally inserting himself in the work, the line between Rochester and Bendo is very thin indeed.

Although accounts of the Bendo episode vary, most agree that he started the imposture in the summer of 1676 in order to escape being arrested and charged with the murder of his friend Captain Downs.<sup>7</sup> On 17 June that year, Rochester and several friends had become involved in a drunken brawl in Epsom that ended in Downs' death. It has never become clear what happened exactly, but Rochester, who had fled the scene, was widely held responsible. With a possible murder trial hanging over his head, Rochester decided to lie low in London, disguised as Alexander Bendo (Greene 1974: 106; Johnson 2004: 250). Several years after Rochester's death, his former servant Thomas Alcock published *The Famous Pathologist or The Noble Mountebank* (1687), which greatly elaborated on the account of the imposture in Gilbert Burnet's biography. Claiming that he had assisted Rochester in the imposture, Alcock describes how carpenters had set up a stage for Rochester at his lodgings in Tower Street, where he lived and practised as

the noble Doctor Alexand<sup>r</sup> Bendo, in an old overgrown Green Gown [...] —lined through with exotick furs of diverse colours, an antique Cap, a great Reverend Beard, and a Magnificent false Medal sett round with glittering Pearl, rubies, and Diamonds of the same cognation, hung abt his Neck. (1961: 29)

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7 | One notable exception is Vivian de Sola Pinto, who does not connect the imposture to the events at Epsom but dates the Bendo imposture one year earlier, to 1675, in his introduction to Alcock's pamphlet (de Sola Pinto 1961: 13-14).

The story of the Bendo imposture has become a firm fixture in Rochester's biography: it has proven irresistible to all of Rochester's subsequent biographers and featured prominently in Laurence Dunmore's film about Rochester's life, *The Libertine* (2004). The imposture has also found its way into academia, for instance in Kirk Combe's article "Making Monkeys of Important Men: Performance Satire and Rochester's Alexander Bendo's Brochure" (2012), which approaches the weeks that Rochester lived and practised as Bendo as "a prolonged period of performance art" (56). Combe's analysis, which he mainly bases on the handbill, Alcock's account and — as he readily admits — "educated guesswork" (ibid.), is intriguing and very relevant in the context of the artist/mountebank discourse. The problem, however, is that there is not a shred of evidence that the imposture actually happened. As Germaine Greer points out in her book on Rochester's life and works, there is no mention of Alexander Bendo in the transactions of the Society of Apothecaries, which she argues must mean that "Alcock's tale can hardly be true" (2000: 66).

Kate Loveman also casts doubt on the authenticity of the imposture by pointing out that it is strange that Alcock was the only individual "to claim to have witnessed the cheat by so notorious a courtier. If the stage performance and the laboratory visits had indeed occurred, we might expect to find more people claiming to have been present, or at least telling stories about others who had fallen for the trick" (Loveman 2008: 15). Loveman concludes: "On the basis of the current evidence then, and rather regretfully, it seems necessary to concur with Greer's judgement that no prolonged impersonation occurred" (ibid.). The story of the imposture does indeed seem to be too good to be true and not particularly likely in the light of Rochester's predicament in the summer of 1676: when trying to avoid being arrested for murder, one would hardly try to attract attention in the manner described in Alcock's pamphlet. Indeed, the motto Alcock included in his title page "*Si populus vult decipi decipiantur*" (if people want to be deceived, let them be deceived) may well have been a warning to his readers rather than a reference to the alleged victims of Rochester's deception.

The imposture may be such stuff as Ben Jonson's comedies are made on but Rochester most certainly did produce the handbill. The British Library keeps its surviving copy (fig. 4) in a folder with genuine 17<sup>th</sup>-century mountebank advertisements, and it is so similar to the others that it is easily overlooked. The title page, in which Bendo identifies himself and greets his audience, "To all Gentlemen, Ladies, and others, whether of City, Town, or Country, ALEXANDER BENDO wishes all Health and Prosperity" is certainly typical of the genre. On closer inspection, there are some differences: at eight pages, it is longer than most genuine handbills and is perhaps more elegantly printed. However, on the whole, Alexander Bendo's handbill looks authentic, to the extent that it could be defined as a forgery in terms of its appearance. A forger, however, would have tried to make his creation indistinguishable from authentic mountebank handbills and that is definitely not the case in Rochester's handbill — on the contrary.



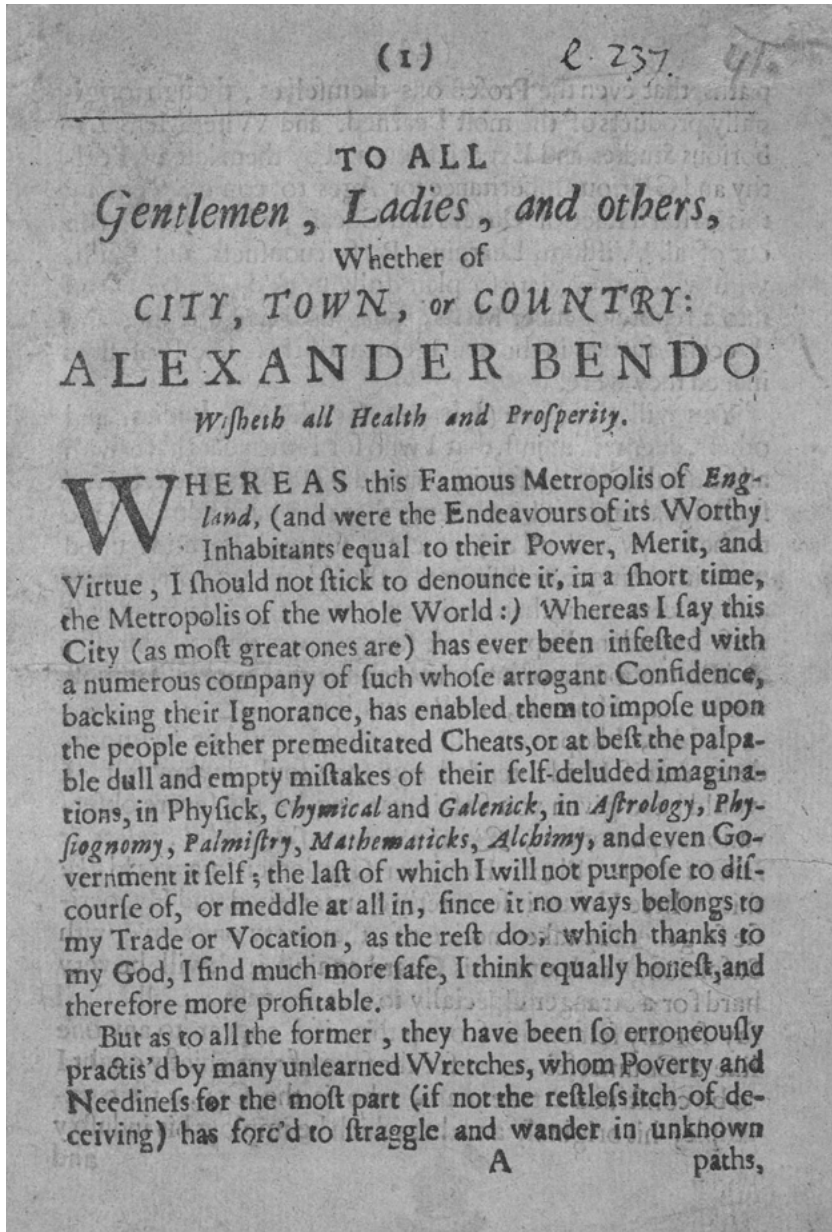


Figure 4: Rochester, John Wilmot, 1676, Earl of, front page of *To all gentlemen, ladies, and others, whether of city, town, or country: Alexander Bendo wisheth all health and prosperity*, British Library, London, © British Library Board, General Reference Collection C.112.f.9.(41.).

The handbill opens with a discussion about fraud, continues with a shorter section on the deceitful nature of politics and then embarks on a lengthy advertisement of Alexander Bendo's medicines and treatments. The opening alone may have raised suspicion in Rochester's readers: although mountebanks did compare their skills and medicines to those of their competitors, they were generally careful to avoid mentioning the concept of deception. Bendo, however, introduces it immediately, in a sustained attack on his fellow mountebanks. As Greer notes: "A mountebank who persists in reminding people that they are being practised on by a 'Bastard race of Quacks and Cheats' will hardly do well" (2000: 65).

The unusual opening of the handbill may have given Rochester's readers reason to doubt the handbill's authenticity but the second part of the text decidedly lacks any resemblance to real advertisements. Bendo embarks on a comparison between the mountebank and the politician, in which he concludes that:

The politician (by his example no doubt) finding how the people are taken with specious, miraculous, impossibilities, plays the same game; protests, declares, promises I know not what things, which he's sure can ne'er be brought about. [...] So you see the politician is, and must be a mountebank in state affairs; and the mountebank no doubt, if he thrives, is an errant politician in physic. (Rochester 1676: 3)

Academic discussions of the handbill appear to have focused exclusively on the satirical section of the text and ignored its opening and, particularly, the third and by far longest part of the text, in which Bendo advertises his medicines and skills. I would, however, argue that these two parts firmly place the text in the artist/mountebank discourse. Like Jonson's mountebank scene and Dou's painting, Rochester's handbill reflects on the illusionist nature of its art, and like Jonson and Dou, Rochester uses the mountebank as a vehicle to demonstrate his own virtuosity in fooling his audience. There are however several crucial differences between the three works, the first of which is found in how their respective audiences encounter and experience the works.

Jonson's mountebank scene and Dou's painting are explicitly offered as works of art and Jonson and Dou are explicitly identified as their creators. Scotto's speech is so clever in imitating real mountebanks that the play's audience may have forgotten briefly that they are in the theatre, but the experience is only temporary. Before and after they have been seduced by the illusion of the performance, the audience knows that they are in the theatre, and will place and appreciate the experience in this context. The same applies to Dou's painting: even though the tapestry on the quack's stage looks deceptively real, the viewer is aware that it is offered within a painting. The moment the viewer is fooled and reaches out to touch the fabric does not last: like Zeuxis, he or she will feel oil on canvas, and then remember that it was a painting all along.



The reader's experience of Rochester's handbill is entirely different. Contrary to Dou's viewer and Jonson's audience, Rochester's reader sets out thinking that the text is authentic but the author then deliberately spoils this effect with the ambiguity of the opening. Rochester's reader realizes that he or she may have been fooled, and that the text in front of him or her may be satirical fiction rather than an authentic handbill. In other words, whereas the illusionist effect in Jonson's and Dou's respective works is achieved when their mimetic virtuosity makes their audiences and readers forget, however briefly, that what they see is representation, Rochester manages to frame his work in such a way that it deceives his reader from the very start — and then he stops the deception himself by revealing that it is fiction.

Another difference is found in how these works relate to their respective creators. Whereas Jonson's comparison between the playwright and Scoto the mountebank is abstract and implicit, Dou inserts himself in the image, making the comparison explicit and personal. Rochester, however, takes this further, particularly in places where the text seems so authentic that the boundary between the authorial voice and Bendo appears to dissolve. This holds particularly true for the part that critics usually ignore, in which the text moves from obvious political satire to an advertisement of Bendo's skills and medicines. This section takes up more than half of the handbill and, like the opening, it is marked by ambiguity. In most ways, the text is remarkably similar to authentic handbills and treatises on mountebank remedies of the period: all the illnesses that Bendo mentions, for instance, can be found in authentic handbills. These include barrenness, venereal diseases, inflammations and obstructions, bad breath, obesity and scurvy, of which he writes:

First, I will (by the leave of God) perfectly cure that *Labes Britannica*, or grand English disease, the scurvy; and that with such ease to my patient, that he shall not be sensible of the least inconvenience whilst I steal his distemper from him; I know there are many, who treat this disease with mercury, antimony, spirits, and salts, being dangerous remedies, in which I shall meddle very little, and with great caution, but by more secure, gentle, and less fallible medicines, together with the observation of some few rules in diet, perfectly cure the patient. (Rochester 1676: 4)

Scurvy was rife in England at the time and Bendo's observations on the illness sound sensible as well as knowledgeable — mercury and antimony were indeed used as remedies against scurvy in 17<sup>th</sup>-century England (Baron 2009: 319) and Bendo is absolutely correct to point out that they were dangerous.

The fragment also closely mimics authentic handbills in other ways, for instance the structure of an authentic mountebank's text: it introduces an illness and then focuses on the effect of the treatment on the patient, often comparing it to the remedies used by competitors. In several places, Bendo's advertisement

emphasizes the safety of his remedies: he promises that if he, Bendo, is unfamiliar with an illness, a patient need not be afraid of “having experiments tried upon him; a privilege he can never hope to enjoy, either in the hands of the grand doctors of the court and town, or in those of the lesser quacks and mountebanks” (Rochester 1676: 5).

This emphasis on safety was a common feature in authentic handbills, as was the assertion of the mountebank’s exotic qualifications. “Many quacks,” writes Tobias B. Hug, “advertising through handbills in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries claimed to have travelled through various places in Europe and ‘beyond seas’, to have cured kings or to possess medicines from abroad” (Hug 2009: 54). Bendo includes these claims too, after a long list of his particular medical accomplishments: “The knowledge of these secrets I gathered in my travels abroad (where I have spent my time ever since I was fifteen years old to this my nine and twentieth year) in France and Italy” (Rochester 1676: 7).

Finally, Bendo concludes his handbill:

They that will do me the favour to come to me, shall be sure from three of the clock in the afternoon till eight at night at my lodgings in Tower-street, next door to the sign of the Black Swan, at a goldsmith’s house to find Their humble servant, ALEXANDER BENDO. (Rochester 1676: 8)

This too strongly resembles the final part of authentic bills. One genuine handbill published anonymously in London sometime between 1660 and 1685 closes with the remark that the doctor’s residence is “in Holborn, within 3 doors of Brownlow-street, next door to an Apothecarys, and over against the signe of the Magpy, who is to be spoken with from 8 a clock in the morning till 12 at Noon” (Anon. 1660-85: 2).

If Rochester’s handbill had consisted merely of the advertisement, it would not only have persuaded his readers that Bendo was a genuine mountebank but also that he was knowledgeable and sincere. However, this persuasive quality does render the text ambiguous again: the writing is much better, in terms of its wording and structure, than that of authentic mountebank handbills. The effect of this ambiguity is wholly deliberate and very much in line with how Jonson and especially Dou use the mountebank as a vehicle to show off their illusionist virtuosity. In the opening of the handbill Bendo claims:

All I shall say for myself on this score is this, if I appear to any one like a counterfeit, even for the sake of that chiefly ought I to be construed a true man, who is the counterfeit’s example, his original, and that which he employs his industry and pains to imitate and copy. Is it therefore my fault if the cheat by his wits and endeavours makes himself so like me, that consequently I cannot avoid resembling of him? (Rochester 1676: 2)

In the context of the opening, Bendo is of course comparing himself to cheating fellow mountebanks, but when the reader goes back to this fragment after he or she has read the satirical part, in which the text reveals its fictional nature, and the highly persuasive advertisement, it takes on a whole new meaning. Now that the reader has realized that Bendo cannot be anything but the fictional representation of a mountebank, Bendo's remark becomes a reflection on the nature of artistic mimesis as well as a showing-off of Rochester's genius as a writer. If the counterfeit is understood to be the artist, who "employs his industry and pains to imitate and copy", then the creation of Bendo is a true triumph, in the sense that Rochester, with his superior wits and endeavours, has created a character that is so convincing that Bendo not only appears to be real to the reader but also the ideal mountebank, of which real mountebanks appear to be mere copies. The effect implied here is similar to that of living presence, in which the work appears to the reader to be the living original, "a true man", rather than the fictional representation.

Bendo's handbill is commonly referred to as satire, possibly because of the traditional critical emphasis on this section of the text. This, however, is a shame because this perception neglects the text's opening and the advertisement, neither of which are satirical or place the handbill as a whole firmly in the artist/mountebank discourse. From its highly deceptive title page to its equally deceitful sign-off, Rochester's handbill bounces back and forth between forgery, highly persuasive textual illusionism, and obvious literary fiction, thus creating a game between him and his readers that is more complex than the comparisons drawn by Jonson, Dou and other playwrights and painters. Where they compare themselves, either implicitly or explicitly, to the mountebank, the boundaries between Rochester and Bendo dissolve — to materialize again when the author reveals himself to assert his illusionist virtuosity. As such, Rochester's handbill echoes the motto that Jan Saenredam added to his print of Goltzius' image: "Me dys commendat facunde gratia lingue, Et varias rudibus monstro mortalibus artes" — The grace of my eloquent tongue recommends me to the gods, and I show the crude mortals various arts. In Latin, 'artes' refers to arts as well as tricks, and the ambiguity not only serves Goltzius' image beautifully but also turns the motto into a rather apt description of Alexander Bendo's handbill and Rochester's virtuosity in deception.

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# Aping the Master

## 19<sup>th</sup>-Century Voltaire Pastiches and the Anxieties of Modern Authorship

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The *Souvenirs de la Marquise de Créquy*, published in 1834, relate the following anecdote: in Ferney, Voltaire receives the visit of a young clockmaker who has recently been convicted of adultery. Voltaire makes fun of him, giving him the nickname “Monsieur le Fornicateur”. Not understanding Latin, Voltaire’s servants mistake “Fornicateur” as the clockmaker’s surname and begin to call him by the same name. The clockmaker believes that they are deliberately aping Voltaire’s joke and rebukes them harshly: “est-ce que vous prétendez imiter votre maître et singer M. de Voltaire?” (Courchamps 1834: 218) Without consciously doing so, the servants have imitated Voltaire’s way of speaking, his personal style. In the terminology of literary criticism, such imitation is called a pastiche.

Since the early days of his celebrity, many writers have imitated Voltaire and tried to have their works attributed to him. The *Souvenirs de la Marquise de Créquy* are no more innocent in this respect. Not only are the memoirs themselves apocryphal (Courchamps tried to pass them off as being by the Marquise), they also contain an apocryphal Voltaire letter (209-11). For those readers who believed the *Souvenirs* to be authentic, the apocryphal Voltaire letter might have appeared so, too. And even if the reader did not regard the letter as authentic, this pastiche might have distracted his or her attention from the bigger forgery in which it stands. It goes without saying that the anecdote about “Monsieur le Fornicateur” is as untrustworthy as the letter.

Despite the huge number of acknowledged and unacknowledged pastiches in Voltaire’s style, it is only recently that Voltaire scholars have begun to address this corpus.<sup>1</sup> In order to further explore it, this article will pay attention to a

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1 | Joseph Patrick Lee (2004) develops some categories for understanding how texts can be attributed to Voltaire and cites interesting examples of apocryphal texts that found their way into editions of Voltaire’s collected works. Nicholas Cronk recently studied 18<sup>th</sup>-century Voltaire

specific and little known group of Voltaire pastiches: the apocryphal Voltaire letter in Courchamp's *Souvenirs de la Marquise de Créquy* shows us that such pastiches continued to proliferate after Voltaire's death. According to Paul Aron's and Jacques Espagnon's *Répertoire des pastiches et parodies littéraires des XIX<sup>e</sup> et XX<sup>e</sup> siècles* (2009: 520), Voltaire remains one of the most imitated and parodied authors of French literature in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.<sup>2</sup> This article will argue that the 19<sup>th</sup>-century reactions to Voltaire's practice of publishing and to the pastiches written in his style reflect a fundamental change in conceptions of authorship. I will focus on some Voltaire pastiches written between 1800 and 1855, and in particular on the outstanding case of the pastiche writer Nicolas Châtelain. Furthermore, I will exclude parodies from the corpus and concentrate on two particular categories in Gérard Genette's classification of intertextuality, the pastiche and the forgery (1982: 37). The former is the admitted imitation of an author's style without satirical intent. The forgery differs from the pastiche only in so far as it breaks the "*contrat de pastiche*" (93) with the reader and tries to delude him or her into taking it as an original. In order to understand why Voltaire pastiches come to take on a new meaning after 1800, though, one must adopt a historical approach.

## AUTHORSHIP AND PASTICHE WRITING: FROM THE 18<sup>TH</sup> TO THE 19<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY

As studies in 18<sup>th</sup>-century authorship have shown, to publish one's texts anonymously or under a pseudonym was rather the rule than the exception before the French Revolution (Tunstall 2011: 674). In fact, "Voltaire" is a pen name of the man called François-Marie Arouet. But even in the context of *Ancien Régime* publishing, Voltaire's multifarious conception of authorship sticks out. As the catalogue of the French National Library tells us, Voltaire devised more than two hundred pseudonyms to sign his works (*Catalogue général* 1978: 162–66). Furthermore, he was soon extensively and successfully imitated — Georges Bengesco's bibliography of Voltaire's works lists some 140 erroneous attributions (1890: 273–380) — and to make things even more complicated, Voltaire indiscriminately denied the authorship of any text that was attributed to him, including his own. If we take into consideration the sheer mass of his writings, it is easy to imagine what reading Voltaire in the 18<sup>th</sup> century was like: except in the case of some famous works, there was often no way of making sure whether a text had actually been authored by him or

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apocrypha (2013) and published some seminal articles on Voltaire's practice of authorship (2007; 2009; 2011).

2 | The claim I make is based on the number of entries in the index of imitated authors.



not. For instance, an apocryphal sequel to *Candide*, probably written by Henri Joseph Du Laurens, was read as an original throughout the 18<sup>th</sup> century and succeeded in making its way into the 1880 edition of Voltaire's complete works as compiled by Louis Moland.<sup>3</sup> Nicholas Cronk has argued that Voltaire himself considered his "fakability" as a highly welcome side effect. According to Cronk, Voltaire "does not want to own his ideas; on the contrary, he wants to disown them, and so share them as widely as possible. Voltaire creates a distinctive style and voice that embody a distinctive worldview, and his name comes to stand for a style of thinking that reaches beyond him" (Cronk 2013: 573). Even those who successfully imitated Voltaire magnified his voice and disseminated his 'brand', as defined by a certain manner of writing, but also a set of ideas. Fakes thus increased the reach and the impact of the Enlightenment campaign run by Voltaire. For this enlightened printing machine to work, the recognisability of the trademark was more important than authenticity.

This authorial practice clashes with the paradigm of modern authorship as it emerges at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The contrast between Voltaire's and Rousseau's conceptions of authorship, often discussed with regard to 18<sup>th</sup>-century publishing conventions (Sgard 2016: xxii), is equally insightful when considered retrospectively through the eyes of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In contrast to Voltaire (and unlike most 18<sup>th</sup>-century authors), Rousseau signed his texts with his "real" name and thus turned his striving for personal transparency into a publishing practice. As Geoffrey Turnovsky writes with regard to Rousseau, "anonymity was an aberrant, senseless gesture once the book was conceived as a medium whose primary function and value lay in its capacity to project an image of its author before a reader" (2003: 395). Whereas Voltaire's strategy of systematic disorientation is firmly rooted in the "somewhat chaotic freedoms of the publishing world of his time" (Cronk 2013: 575), Rousseau anticipates the modern conception of authorship: after the introduction of copyright in France in 1791, authors had an interest to sign their books with their real name in order to protect their intellectual property, but also to meet certain ideals of Romantic aesthetics as defined, for instance, by Germaine de Staël's *De l'Allemagne* in 1810 (Carpenter 2009: 11). One can thus speak about the advent of a new aesthetic and legal paradigm in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. Through owning its texts and expressing its personality in writing, the author-subject rises to power (Edelman 2004: 378).

As a corollary, it becomes increasingly difficult for the readership to digest a work of literature without knowing the author's name and identity. As Michel

3 | According to Patrick Lee (2004: 267), Du Laurens' apocryphal sequel to *Candide* had originally been included in volume 32 of Moland's edition, but was then cut out. Until the completion of the Oxford edition of Voltaire's works in 2018, the one by Moland remains the best available reference for many texts.

Foucault remarks, “[l’]anonymat littéraire nous est insupportable” (1994: 800). In this respect we are all children of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The desire to have certainty about the author’s identity seems to be significantly stronger in the 19<sup>th</sup> century than ever before. The emerging discipline of bibliography meets this need and is firmly committed to enforcing identifiable authorship. One of its most important tasks is to identify anonymous authors and to unveil literary mystifications, usually called *supercheries littéraires*. Although the first dictionary dedicated to anonymous authors, Vincentius Placcius *Theatrum anonymorum et pseudonymorum*, dates back to 1674, the first one in French is Antoine Alexandre Barbier’s *Dictionnaire des ouvrages anonymes et pseudonymes* (1806-1809).<sup>4</sup> Barbier lays the foundations for a never-ending series of similar dictionaries: In 1834, Louis-Charles-Joseph de Manne publishes his *Nouveau recueil d’ouvrages anonymes et pseudonymes*. The major 19<sup>th</sup>-century bibliographer, Joseph-Marie Quérard, joins in the campaign some ten years later with his five-volume dictionary *Les supercheries littéraires dévoilées*. Georges d’Heylli’s more accessible *Dictionnaire des pseudonymes*, focusing exclusively on contemporary authors, went through three revised editions between 1868 and 1887. The bibliographer and Voltaire editor Adrien-Jean-Quentin Beuchot is also a major figure in this movement.

This network of newly emerging concepts and disciplines — intellectual property, identifiable authorship and bibliography — has a common epistemological foundation, which one could identify, following Jacques Rancière, as the aesthetic regime of the arts (2000: 31). According to Paul Aron, it is within this regime that the pastiche arises as a genre in its own right (2008: 101). Since the pastiche is defined as an “[o]uvrage où l’on a imité les idées et le style d’un grand écrivain” (Littré 1889: 999), the history of the concept of style provides a suitable perspective to retrace the rise of the pastiche in the modern sense. The predominant notion of style in the 18<sup>th</sup> century was a rhetorical one, the appropriateness of *verba* in relation to *res*. Voltaire himself is a good representative of this conception of style: “Rien n’est [...] plus difficile et plus rare que le style convenable à la matière que l’on traite” (1879: 437). Throughout the 18<sup>th</sup> century, however, the concept of individual style gains currency. While Marmontel and Mercier are forerunners of this conception (Diaz 2010: 47-48), the first entry in a French dictionary defining style as something personal dates from 1798: “On dit d’Un Écrivain, qu’Il n’a point de style, pour dire qu’Il n’a point une manière d’écrire qui soit à lui” (*Dictionnaire de l’Académie française* 1798: 603). Even though these two connotations of ‘style’ — the generic and the individual — coexisted for a rather long time, the personal conception of style becomes

4 | In his preface Barbier refers to a number of precursors, but also notes that the study of anonymous authors has been widely neglected in France (1806: xiii). The term “bibliography” becomes current at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, when the discipline undergoes an increasing professionalization (Malclès 1956: 75-84).

more predominant around 1800. The increasing number of pastiche collections at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century would be inconceivable without this transformation.

Juxtaposed against the background of modern authorship, the pastiche remains riddled with paradoxes. As an original and identifiable creator, the author imprints his style on the text like an individual minting (“*empreinte de l’âme*”, “*cachet*”; Diaz 2010:48). But just as coins and seals can be forged, so can a personal style of writing. Having become an autonomous genre in the context of modern aesthetics, the pastiche also threatens to subvert the assumptions that made it possible. The pastiche, as an imitation of individual style, is the disquieting other of modern authorship. Charles Nodier, who played a crucial role in distinguishing the pastiche from other practices of mimetic writing such as plagiarism, argues that one can only imitate “*les tours familiers d’un écrivain*”, but not “*la succession de ses idées*” (2003:89) — an argument already put forward by Marmontel in 1781 (Aron 2008:100). Concerning only the superficial level of *elocutio*, the pastiche would be unable to mimic the overall intellectual structure of longer texts, even though Nodier is aware of some notable exceptions such as the apocryphal sequel to Marivaux’s unfinished *Vie de Marianne* by Marie-Jeanne Ricoboni. Quérard tries to solve the same problem by maintaining that what can above all be imitated are the deficiencies of a literary text (1847:XXIX). But why, if this is true, have such supposedly excellent authors as Voltaire or Victor Hugo been most successfully pastiched? Given that it subverts the relation between author and text, the pastiche becomes the Achilles’ heel of 19<sup>th</sup>-century authorship.

## VOLTAIREAN AUTHORSHIP BETWEEN BIBLIOGRAPHY AND ROMANTICISM

When bibliographers such as Quérard and Beuchot set out to establish the canon of Voltaire’s works, they are bound to encounter a resistance inherent within Voltaire’s conception of authorship and in his publishing practices. While Voltaire aims to create “the illusion of collective authorship” (Cronk 2013:572), the task of his 19<sup>th</sup>-century editors is to obliterate this fact by creating an order centred on the individual. And yet the task of exhaustively cataloguing all the texts belonging to ‘Voltaire’ imposes itself not only for epistemological and aesthetic, but also for political reasons: with his ‘panthéonisation’ in 1791, Voltaire had become a part of the national heritage and his work was now considered to contribute to French cultural prestige. The numerous connections between politics and bibliography are by no means coincidental: Barbier, for instance, was nominated Napoleon’s personal librarian in 1807.<sup>5</sup> As for Quérard, his *La France littéraire*, published in

5 | On Napoleon’s personal endorsement of bibliography see Malclès 1956:77.

1827, is the first national bibliography of France and therefore “un monument” to its literary wealth (1827a: IX). Modern authorship, bibliography and nation-building form an alliance to clear up the disorder the *Ancien Régime* book market has left behind.

Voltairean techniques of blurring identities pose a threat to such an enterprise. This is the reason why Quérard takes issue with Voltaire in the preface of his monumental dictionary *Les supercheries littéraires dévoilées*:

Vint ensuite le dix-huitième siècle, et avec lui Voltaire qui, en le traversant, a jeté près de deux cents pseudonymes dans la littérature de son époque, et a fait naître un grand nombre de singes. L'admiration pour Voltaire au XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle fut si grande, qu'on imita jusqu'à sa manie de travestissements. [...] Le dix-neuvième siècle comporte encore assez d'imitateurs de Voltaire, en moins grand nombre, à la vérité, sous le rapport de l'esprit, que sous celui de sa manie de se déguiser. (Quérard 1847: LI)

Even though Voltaire is not the first literary mystifier, Quérard regards him as the model of those who resist the standard of identifiable authorship. Seen from the viewpoint of a 19<sup>th</sup>-century bibliographer, Voltaire thus becomes the founding father of authorial mystification. In this case, the ‘original’ is already constituted by procedures of faking and counterfeiting, namely the blurring of stable relationships between author and text. The very act of forging Voltaire thus involves a twofold process of imitation: one in terms of style and one in terms of authorial practices.

The fact that Voltaire's highly recognizable style invites pastiche also elicits a certain amount of irritation from modern readers outside the field of bibliography. In his *Tableau de Paris*, Louis-Sébastien Mercier dedicates a chapter to Voltaire, entitled “Écrits de Voltaire”. The account Mercier gives of Voltaire's writing is not a flattering one: “Brillant, ingénieux, vif, plaisant, gracieux, il n'a aussi aucune sorte de profondeur; il ne touche jamais qu'aux superficies” (1994: 1440). Mercier then relates Voltaire's supposed superficiality to his brilliant style: “Les idées étroites de l'âge de vingt ans le dominaient à soixante: il ne travaillait pas sa pensée, mais son style” (1443). Voltaire's counterpart — implicit here, but explicit in other texts — is once again Rousseau, whom Mercier exalts for his “génie méditatif” (1766: 103).<sup>6</sup> Mercier thereby inaugurates a whole series of comparisons between Rousseau and Voltaire, which predictably result in the disparagement of the latter. Bernardin de Saint-Pierre's and Louis-Claude de Saint-Martin's comments on both authors are

6 | On Mercier's life-long allegiance to Rousseau see Rufi 1995: 69-115. As Quérard's entry on Voltaire in *La France littéraire* shows, the comparison between Voltaire and Rousseau becomes a commonplace around 1800 (Quérard 1827b: 429).

couched in exactly the same terms and oppose Voltaire's protean superficiality to Rousseau's profound and steady genius (Saint-Pierre 1818: 111-20; Saint-Martin 1807: 319-31).

The stylistic criticism directed at Voltaire thus hinges on the concept of depth, which plays a crucial role in German literature of the Romantic period<sup>7</sup> and which Germaine de Staël imports into France. In *De L'Allemagne*, Voltaire's brilliance constantly serves as a point of contrast to highlight the profundity of German poetry: "Le poète français [= Voltaire] a su mettre en vers l'esprit de la société la plus brillante; le poète allemand [= Goethe] réveille dans l'âme par quelques traits rapides des impressions solitaires et profondes" (Staël 1958: 182). Seen through the lens of Romanticism, Voltaire's writing can be characterised thus: a vivid style covers a lack of intellectual and emotional depth. Voltaire's writings are thus associated with certain aesthetic shortcomings (stylized, superficial), which make them appear akin to what a pastiche — according to certain preconceptions — can do. A pre-modern kind of authorship and an inferior literary genre end up in the same category at the lower end of the aesthetic hierarchy. This also implies that Voltaire's texts should perfectly lend themselves to stylistic imitation because they fit neatly into the domain of the pastiche as traditionally described.

At this point, the aesthetic ideology of Romanticism seems to converge with the facts of literary history: Voltaire, a widely and successfully imitated author, writes in a light and superficial style. However, this might also be a case of wishful thinking: as a matter of fact, a major Romantic author like Victor Hugo turned out to be at least as imitable as Voltaire, judging from the enormous number of pastiches and parodies written in his style (Aron/Espagnon 2009: 505-06). One could thus reverse the perspective and argue that Voltaire simply takes advantage of a possibility inherent in every recognizable style, namely that it is liable to being pastiched. Voltaire is not by nature more imitable than many other famous authors, but he is one of the few to deliberately exploit the fact that any individual style can give rise to deceptive imitations. Yet this is exactly what arouses the anxiety of a certain form of Romantic aesthetics. The analogy between Voltaire's style and the pastiche, based on the common denominator 'shallowness', should not be taken for granted: it rather serves to suppress the fact that any personal style, not only Voltaire's 'superficial' brilliance, can be forged. Voltaire thus comes to represent everything the new regime of the arts attempts to exclude. What is at stake in imitating Voltaire, then, is not only a random case of pastiche writing, but a powerful subversion of modern aesthetics.

7 | Vera Bachmann (2013: 12, 25-26) shows that depth is increasingly conceived in relation to a surface around 1800 and that it becomes a pivotal metaphor for the literary text. The earliest example analysed by Bachmann is Schiller's "Der Taucher", written in 1797, only a few years before M<sup>me</sup> de Staël's visit to Weimar.

## MOMENTS OF UNCERTAINTY: NICOLAS CHÂTELAIN'S VOLTAIRE PASTICHES

The sheer number and diversity of 19<sup>th</sup>-century Voltaire imitations — they include stylistic parodies, explicit pastiches as well as forgeries — would surpass the limits of this study. The purpose of this article, however, is less to give a comprehensive account of this corpus than to examine some cases that pertain to the concept of personal style and to its implications for modern authorship. A glance at Aron's and Espagnon's *Répertoire des pastiches* tells us that the majority of the texts imitating Voltaire in the first decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century use him either as a mouthpiece of different political claims (Delisle de Sales 1802) or as an easy model for writing fiction (Sewrin 1809), but do not aim at a convincing or even deceptive stylistic imitation.

The interest in writing Voltaire pastiches seems reinvigorated in 1828, when Scipion Du Roure, president of the French Bibliophilic Society at the time, publishes his *Réflexions sur le style original*, the first collection of pastiches in the modern sense of the term, which also features a parody of a Voltairean *conte philosophique*. One has to wait until 1842, though, to see the first hoax based on an imitation of Voltaire's style, Arsène Houssaye's "L'Arbre de science". Appearing anonymously in the *Revue de Paris*, this compelling pastiche of a *conte philosophique* is a sophisticated literary mystification. An 'avant-propos' tries to clarify the question how a *conte* by Voltaire could have remained unknown for such a long time and how it was rediscovered. But Houssaye seems to have been aware that what had the potential of a publishing sensation was not quite convincing. He therefore attenuates the claim of authenticity by mentioning his own "doutes renaissans" (Houssaye 1842: 75) and states that he simply submits his discovery to the public judgment. At any rate, Joseph-Marie Quérard was not deceived. The corresponding entry in *La littérature française contemporaine* cites "L'Arbre de science" as being by Houssaye and as being "mis sous le nom de Voltaire" (Quérard 1848: 324). But even if we can assume that Houssaye's pastiche is a hoax, intended to be unveiled after a certain time, it involves the possibility of being read as a text written by Voltaire. Although Houssaye's pastiche neither ends up contaminating the canon nor aims to do so, it produces a moment of uncertainty and blurs the boundary a bibliographer such as Quérard strives to render as watertight as possible. And even after the moment of bibliographical demystification, uninformed readers might have continued to wonder whether it is authentic or not.

In the case of Nicolas Châtelain (1769-1856), these moments of uncertainty are much more pervasive than in Houssaye.<sup>8</sup> Châtelain made a literary career of writing pastiches. Given that Quérard extensively takes issue with Châtelain's hoaxes in the

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8 | Paul Aron (2008: 125-30) gives a short overview of Châtelain's work as a pastiche writer. I will focus on those of Châtelain's pastiches that involve questions of authorship.

preface to the *Supercheries littéraires dévoilées* (1847: XXVIII-XXXII), one could even consider him as the most famous literary pasticheur in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Born in Holland, he settles in Switzerland in 1812 and acquires “une sorte de réputation bizarre et passagère” (Thierry 1911: 211). In the highly specialised domain of literary mystification, Châtelain’s pastiches have repeatedly attracted critical attention. Augustin Thierry depicts him as the archetypal pastiche writer: “il dérobe constamment sa personnalité sous un masque d’emprunt” (210). He is erudite, witty and has a strong sense of irony, but he fundamentally lacks imagination and is “[i]mpuissant à créer” (211). Measured against the paradigm of originality, the pastiche writer must appear as a bizarre and deficient character, even though one cannot dispute him a certain skill. As someone who plays with masks and identities, he is also close to his Voltairean model.

Châtelain achieved his major *supercherie littéraire* in 1837 when he anonymously published a Voltaire pastiche, the *Lettres de Voltaire à M<sup>me</sup> du Deffand au sujet du jeune Rebecque, devenu depuis célèbre sous le nom de Benjamin Constant*. Again a preface undertakes to prove the authenticity of the letters. Châtelain’s paratextual strategy is much more firmly rooted in history than Houssaye’s, but no less spectacular: The four apocryphal letters from Voltaire to M<sup>me</sup> du Deffand concern Benjamin Constant, whom Voltaire — according to the preface — met in Ferney in 1774. Voltaire gives Constant a letter of recommendation to M<sup>me</sup> du Deffand and subsequently corresponds with her on the subject of the young Constant. The letters then pass to Horace Walpole, Benjamin Constant himself and finally to the editor. The preface discusses a further problem of plausibility: The editor maintains that, according to the testimony of two relatives, Benjamin Constant was born in 1759, whereas the *Bibliographie universelle* indicates 1767 as his date of birth. As a last proof, the publisher of the letters announces that the original letters can be found “chez M. Chevillard père, notaire, rue du Bac, n° 15” (Châtelain 1837: 10).

The reaction of the public best shows how convincing Châtelain’s pastiches of Voltaire’s style are. Not only were several newspapers and erudite readers deceived,<sup>9</sup> but the *supercherie* itself could only be unveiled when Beuchot undertook to go to the rue du Bac: “J’étais tenté d’aller à Morges faire mes remerciements à l’éditeur anonyme; mais avant de faire le voyage, je suis allé à l’adresse où l’on disait qu’étaient les originaux” (1838: 126, 1317). Since the notary did not exist, the *supercherie* was evident. Given that Beuchot was editing Voltaire’s complete works at the time, his scrutiny prevented him from inserting four apocryphal letters into his edition. As Beuchot’s key role in unveiling the hoax shows, *supercheries littéraires* in the 19<sup>th</sup> century are based on a three-part relation between the fraudulent author, the public and the bibliographer. But instead of being antagonistic, the relationship between author and expert seems rather symbiotic. If the mystification

9 | E.g. the *Revue Britannique* and Alexandre Vinet, see Thierry 1911: 210, 224.



were never discovered, it would be absolute and therefore inexistent. This might be the reason why Châtelain chose to construct his *supercherie* in such a way that it could be unveiled: Such compromising details as the mistake in Constant's date of birth and the address of the notary could easily have been replaced by a more likely story.

The fact that Châtelain's hoax could only be uncovered by recourse to extra-textual points of reference is deeply unsettling for those who proclaim a general distinguishability between original and pastiche. Augustin Thierry, for example, puts Nodier's dictum that one can imitate an author's style, but not her or his train of thought, as a disclaimer at the beginning of his chapter on Châtelain. The pastiche, generally conceived as playful and unserious, becomes threatening as soon as it can no longer be distinguished from what it imitates. In the case of the *Lettres de Voltaire à M<sup>me</sup> du Deffand*, Sainte-Beuve was maybe the last to be undeceived: it was only in 1862 when he noticed that he had quoted Châtelain's pastiche as being by Voltaire in his *Portraits littéraires* (Aron 2008: 125-26). Even bibliographical demystification does not prevent the *supercherie* from exercising its power over decades.

In 1855, one year before his death, Nicolas Châtelain publishes his last collection of pastiches: *Pastiches ou imitations libres du style de quelques écrivains du XVII<sup>e</sup> et XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècles*, a series of pastiches in the style of Rousseau, d'Holbach, d'Alembert, Voltaire (of course) and some others. As apparent from the title, Châtelain this time concludes a *contrat de pastiche* with his readers. The preface thus seems to serve exactly the opposite purpose than in the case of a *supercherie littéraire*: In a very humble manner, Châtelain pays respect to the inimitability of these great authors. He distinguishes two kinds of pastiche writers: Some are driven by an "amour-propre excessif" and hope to equal their model, whereas others write pastiches only as an innocent amusement. He himself, the reader is to understand, belongs to the innocent class and merely pays a tribute to the "magie de leur style qui nous séduit" (Châtelain 1855: VI). In addition, Châtelain develops a theory of personal style which takes individualism to an extreme:

Le style [...] n'est autre chose que l'expression fidèle des conceptions intellectuelles et morales de l'individu, manifestées au dehors et aussi nettement rendues qu'un cachet en cire représente en relief la ciselure d'une *intalgie*, l'empreinte d'une cornaline, ou de toute autre pierre précieuse. Or cette intalgie, cette image intérieure, nous l'avons au dedans de notre esprit, nous la portons pour ainsi dire au fond de notre âme, et en écrivant, bagatelle ou chose importante, nous ne faisons que la manifester dehors, la rendre en relief. (VII)

Given that a writer, according to this stylistic hyper-determinism, cannot imprint anything other than his static character, one might wonder how a pastiche can be possible. Does the pastiche writer subsequently become all the authors he imitates?

He does not, Châtelain answers, and this is the reason why he will never equal his model, with whom he can only ‘identify’. One could conclude that everything is now ordered in the way a bibliographer desires it to be: a domesticated pastiche. The boundaries of individuality are strictly preserved since “Châtelain” is printed on the title page and since he openly explains his purpose. This might be why Quérard’s review of the book lavishes praise on the *Pastiches*. Châtelain possesses “une habileté singulière à saisir le cachet distinctif de chaque style” (Quérard 1855: 562). After two decades of hoaxes and pseudonymous publishing, Châtelain seems to have given up the trade of mystification.

Yet all of Châtelain’s commentators overlook one decisive passage at the end of the preface and take for granted his claim that the *Pastiches* are only an innocent “exercice de style” (Aron/Espagnon 2009: 129). It seems a *leçon d’humilité* when Châtelain writes that he has inserted some unmarked originals among his own pastiches:

Enfin pour ménager à la sagacité du lecteur un plaisir piquant, celui de découvrir de temps en temps une page des originaux mêmes, j’en ai glissé quelques-unes qui prouveront mieux que chose au monde que, quoi que l’on fasse, on demeure toujours, comme l’a si bien exprimé M<sup>me</sup> de Sévigné, à neuf cents lieues d’un cap, auquel on avait follement essayé d’atteindre. (1855: IX)

The deep irony of this announcement, however, becomes apparent when the reader undertakes to distinguish the Voltaire pastiches from the original letters in the collection. The *Lettres de Voltaire à M<sup>me</sup> du Deffand* have sufficiently proved that Châtelain’s imitations of Voltaire’s letters cannot be distinguished from the originals on the basis of the text alone. In the case of the best pastiches in the *recueil* — those of Voltaire and M<sup>me</sup> de Sévigné — the presence of original letters among the imitations effects just the opposite of what Châtelain announces in the preface. His Voltaire imitations do not show that he remains “neuf cents lieues d’un cap”, but rather that it is impossible to distinguish his pastiches from the original. Thanks to the *Electronic Enlightenment* database, today it is easy to track the originals. Two letters from Voltaire to the Comte de Schouvalow are indeed authentic (11 August 1757 and 23 September 1758; Châtelain 1855: 70-72, 77-80). Since the letters in Châtelain’s *Pastiches* are not dated, it seems unlikely that any 19<sup>th</sup>-century reader would have been able to do this without a considerable expense of time.

Châtelain’s *Pastiches* thus turns out to be just the opposite of what it seemed to be. It announces itself as a collection of controlled pastiches, which clearly acknowledge their inferiority to the original. The name “Châtelain” on the cover, however, is laid as a trap to reassure and then deceive the reader. Given that Voltaire himself frequently published volumes of *mélanges*, where the authors of the unsigned texts were no longer clearly distinguishable (Cronk 2013: 575; 2011: 781-

82), Châtelain's puzzling mixture of originals and pastiches is based on a highly Voltairean device. In the age of Quérard's *Supercheries littéraires*, the format of the *recueil* also offers the advantage of escaping the demystifying grasp of the bibliographer. In the absence of bibliographical certainty, the reader has to make her or his own decision — at the risk of false attribution.

Due to such figures as Châtelain, the 19<sup>th</sup> century has been called the century of mystification (Dousteyssier-Khoze / Vaillant 2012). Even if this claim has never been empirically proven, most bibliographers of the time lament an increase in literary hoaxes. Obviously, the standard of identifiable authorship and the proliferation of literary fakes are two sides of the same coin. As Scott Carpenter writes, “transgression is entirely dependent on the presence of a line to cross” (2009: 11). It is the rule of identity that produces its own violation. Pastiche writers like Châtelain therefore represent the uncanny double of modern authorship. And Voltaire, who seems so close to the 19<sup>th</sup>-century aesthetics of fraudulence, becomes the patron saint of literary mystification in modernity.

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# Fracture, Facture and the Collecting of Islamic Art

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The latter part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> were the colonial heyday of international collecting in the art of the Islamic world. During that period an enormous number of portable objects were dug out of the ground or brought out of above-ground collections and entered into the art market, the vast majority of them migrating westwards to Europe and some of them later to the US. Moving through an international network of diggers, dealers, brokers and institutional and private collectors who enjoyed open season in a comparatively unregulated market, these objects were transformed within the colonial programme's great project of knowledge and classification into "artifacts, antiquities and art" (Cohn 1996: 76).<sup>1</sup>

In the burgeoning international market in Islamic art, several factors acted together to give rise to significant industries of faking and forging. In the first place, the *sans-papiers* status of much of the material created an economic environment receptive to doubtful objects. For example, the vast majority of archaeological pieces were not 'scientifically excavated' in the modern sense of the term, and undoubtedly many of the things that surfaced on the art market were the product of illicit excavation; accordingly, they usually entered that market with little or no truly verifiable documentation of their origins. Regulations on the movement of antiquities began to tighten noticeably in the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, as central authorities in the Ottoman Empire, Iran and elsewhere sought to stem the flow of artefacts, but this did not stop illegal exportation and all of the obfuscation that accompanies it (Jenkins-Madina 2006; Pancaroğlu 2011: 410; Ghiasian 2015: 892).

The escalating popularity of artworks from the Islamic world on the international collectors' market from the later 19<sup>th</sup> century onwards also pushed prices up to the point where sophisticated faking and wholesale forgery became financially

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1 | A useful overview of Islamic art collecting is given in Vernoit 2000; more detailed studies of individual cases are included in Bahrani/Celik/Eldem 2011 and Kadoi 2016.

rewarding. Historical artworks from Turkey, Egypt, North Africa, the Levant and what is now Iraq were all widely traded, but Iranian art was increasingly elevated above that of all other cultures of the Islamic world by collectors and tastemakers during the great early 20<sup>th</sup>-century era of collecting. This occurred for a number of reasons, including its promotion by several notable scholars, brokers and dealers (Vernoit 2000a: 41–43; Hillenbrand 2016). Chief amongst these was Arthur Upham Pope (1881–1969), of whom more below. Accordingly, Iranian art seems to have accumulated more than its fair share of fakes — a circumstance that applies to pre-Islamic Iranian art as well (Blair n.d.).<sup>2</sup> In this essay I have chosen to explore forgery, faking and the early 20<sup>th</sup>-century market in Iranian art using examples drawn from the collections of my own institution, Indiana University, and elsewhere in the American Midwest. Not only are these pieces near to hand, but the colossal distances between their places of creation and their current institutional homes also highlight precisely the processes of dislocation that render this material so vulnerable to the vicissitudes of the market.

## SPECTACLE: THE BALLAD OF THE *ANDARZ-NĀMA* MANUSCRIPT

The infamous *Andarz-nāma* manuscript is — or rather was, since it is now dismembered and dispersed — an illustrated copy of a Persian text, originally composed in the 11<sup>th</sup> century, that details guidelines for ethical conduct and princely manners. The manuscript surfaced in two parts on the international art market at the start of the 1950s, and caused a sensation (Frye 1971: A/16). With an inscribed date of 483 AH or 1090 CE, and 109 miniature paintings all executed in a consistent style, the manuscript represented a potentially huge discovery for the history of Persian art as well as literature. If genuine, its paintings would be the earliest known examples of Persian miniature painting by well over a century, and would reshape the story of that medium; its text, meanwhile, would be the earliest manuscript version of a prose work which was probably completed only a few years before the manuscript's putative date of 1090 (de Bruijn n.d.). Part of the manuscript was sold, with involvement from Arthur Upham Pope, to the Cincinnati Art Museum (Gluck/Siver 1996: 413, 425). It remains in the possession of that institution.<sup>3</sup> The whereabouts of the rest of the manuscript, bought by the dealer and collector Hagop Kevorkian in the early 1950s for \$70,000 (according to Pope's published correspondence), are unknown to me (Gluck/Siver 1996: 413; Frye 1971: A/16).

2 | On the pre-Islamic material, see also Frye 1977; Carter 2001: 175; MacKenzie/Ménage 1963; Gignoux n.d.

3 | Email correspondence with Lisa DeLong, Assistant Registrar at Cincinnati Art Museum, January 2017.



Over the decade and a half that followed its first appearance on the art market, the manuscript was discredited as a modern forgery. It remains a notorious touchstone in the history of Islamic art, and yet one that has been curiously neglected: “What is remarkable is that no one even talks about the manuscript any longer, however interesting the lessons may be which can be drawn from it” (Grabar 2006: xxviii-xxix). Fear of visiting personal and institutional embarrassment upon one’s colleagues, as well as of litigation, are certainly common motivations for avoiding debates about authenticity in art history. But given the length of time that has elapsed since the day in 1960 when art historian Richard Ettinghausen dramatically opened the envelope containing the laboratory analysis results for the pigments in the paintings, the former at least must be ceasing to hold much sway in this case (Blair/Bloom 2009; Grabar 2012: 22).

As with certain other artworks that passed through Pope’s hands and into American museums and private collections, it is hard to know if he was fully aware, from the start, of the manuscript’s problematic nature (Bloom 2004; Rogers 1997: 456; Bloom 2016: 94). As Oliver Watson has dryly observed, “it is clear that his income depended on an optimistic view of the field”. Today it is hard to read Pope’s polemics against “negative generalizations” and the danger of being “made over-cautious by the threat of forgeries” without wondering about the extent to which he was trying to convince himself as much as anyone else (Watson 2013: 68; Pope 1939; Pope 1971a). Soon after the manuscript’s first appearance on the international stage damning rumours began to circulate, and these doubts were strongly expressed in a letter sent to the literary historian Mojtaba Minovi by a scholar who wished to remain anonymous. Minovi subsequently published a pamphlet in Persian that denounced the manuscript as a modern forgery (Minovi 1956-7). Pope, meanwhile, defended the codex loudly and publicly, eventually calling in a number of scholars to present papers on various aspects of the manuscript at the *New York International Congress of Iranian Art and Archaeology* in 1960.

A special publication of these papers was first brought out in 1968, by which point Pope had presumably given up hope: the evidence presented in that publication makes a much better case against the manuscript’s authenticity than it does for it (Pope 1971; Montgomery 2016: 406). Direct and indirect defences of the manuscript are offered by Pope, his wife and associate Phyllis Ackerman, Linda Bettman (who appears to have been a graduate student at Columbia University), and (slightly more ambivalently) Oleg Grabar. However, these are overwhelmed by the evidence for the prosecution brought to bear by the philologist Ehsan Yarshater and historian Richard Frye, the technical analysis of the pigments made by Rutherford J. Gettens (head of the Freer Gallery’s conservation laboratory), and the circumspectly worded but quietly damning iconographic analysis by Richard Ettinghausen.

The case against the *Andarz-nāma* manuscript rests on three major points, and together they are fairly devastating. Firstly, textual analysis showed that the manuscript included a number of “pseudo-archaic words” (Yarshatar 1971: A/23) and

incorporated mistakes consistent with those found in a history of Persian prose published in 1942, strongly suggesting that the copyist had used the latter as a source (Smith n.d.; Richard n.d.). Secondly, Richard Ettinghausen pointed out that the paintings in the *Andarz-nāma* manuscript include settings, compositions and individual motifs borrowed from 13<sup>th</sup>- and 14<sup>th</sup>-century manuscripts that were available in published reproduction by the time the manuscript first surfaced on the market. At the same time, the figures are drawn, rather clumsily but quite identifiably, from the figural painting found upon a type of 10<sup>th</sup>-century decorated pottery that had been excavated in large quantities at Nishapur in Iran and in Central Asia, and sold on the art market by the 1930s (Ettinghausen 1971). Given the number of the so-called ‘Nishapur buffwares’ that evidently underwent extensive restoration prior to their accession to various museum collections, it is possible that the figural designs on some of those ceramics were being touched up or redrawn at the same time that the painter of the *Andarz-nāma* manuscript was working. One wonders if the two might even be in some way connected.<sup>4</sup>

Thirdly, synthesising a convincing use of colour seems to have presented the creator(s) of the manuscript’s illustrations with particular problems, probably because they were copying their images at least in part from greyscale reproductions. In fact, colour formed the most powerful part of the case for the prosecution: paint in some of the images was found to contain Prussian blue, a modern synthetic pigment only discovered in the early 18<sup>th</sup> century (Gettens 1971). This was the final nail in the coffin of the defence case. The technical evidence of the Prussian blue seems to be the point most often cited on the rare occasions that the manuscript is discussed: as is often the case in disputes around art forgery, it is the scientific evidence, with its wonderful appearance of certainty, that looms largest in the imagination (Lowenthal 1990: 19).<sup>5</sup>

By this point the story of the *Andarz-nāma* manuscript has almost everything: money, deception, showmen, squabbling scholars, scientific revelations, and international intrigue. The only thing missing is a forger. Richard Frye first saw the manuscript in the house of Fakr al-Dīn Naṣīrī Amīnī, who hailed from a line of scholars and calligraphers. The names of Fakr al-Dīn Naṣīrī, his father and his grandfather have all been linked with various seemingly doctored manuscripts, although their roles in the production of these remain unclear (Richard n.d.; Simpson 2008: n. 78). Fakr al-Dīn Naṣīrī himself claimed that his father’s calligraphic talents were exploited by unscrupulous dealers who would remove the signature and date from his historicising creations in order to sell them as antiques (Richard n.d.).

4 | I am currently conducting research on two such pieces in the collection of the Eskenazi Art Museum, Indiana University.

5 | On antagonisms between scientific analysis and connoisseurship over questions of authenticity, see Eastaugh 2009; Kemp 2014; Johnson 2015.

Looking beyond the particular case of the *Andarz-nāma* manuscript, this statement raises the complicated question of culturally specific practices of copying and their awkward assimilation into a globalised art market.<sup>6</sup> Reliance on modern binaries of authentic / inauthentic or original / imitation, aligned most often in this context with the Arabic word *tazwīr* (falsification or embellishment of the truth), fails to account for cultural practices that value emulation in obeisance to tradition. This latter concept is, in the Islamic tradition, given primarily legal expression in the term *taqlīd*, but historically it also had significant currency in literary and artistic realms, such as calligraphy, where the mastery of tradition and master-student ‘chains’ were constituted through emulation and reconstruction (Gacek 2009: 108-9; Adamova 1992; Roxburgh 2003). The intention to deceive, which we are accustomed to using as a kind of malign diagnostic for the category of forgery, could even in some historical circumstances meet with a positive rather than a negative reception (Rice 1955: 7-8; Roxburgh 2003: 41-43).

Cultural contingencies notwithstanding, the intention to deceive remains a critical issue in the story of the *Andarz-nāma* manuscript. It entered the international art market as an 11<sup>th</sup>-century artefact, not a 20<sup>th</sup>-century one, and managed to pass as such — at least for a while. And this is where the spectacle of the *Andarz-nāma* manuscript is arrested. The ‘picaresque aesthetics’ that drive so much popular interest in art forgery would now have the figure of the forger, that master trickster, leap centre stage and reveal to us all, with a wink, how he pulled the wool over everyone’s eyes — even if only for a short time (Radnóti 1999; Hay 2008: 7). But there is no-one to take the spotlight. A finger is pointed, but nothing more: the identity and methods of the forger are not triumphantly revealed, and the audience is left shuffling its feet and looking around uncomfortably for either a moral or a punchline. Perhaps what is truly unforgivable about the *Andarz-nāma* manuscript is that it has supplied neither.

## TRANSACTIONS: PAGES AND PIECES

The spectacle of the *Andarz-nāma* manuscript reveals a moment when the often-invisible systems that assign value to artworks were made suddenly and awkwardly apparent. Scholars and collectors desired certain things, and the market responded: rarity combined with familiarity (a known text, a painting style seen on other artefacts); a date; the documentation of a text close to its time of origin; completeness. The vulnerability of these desiderata was revealed when they became the mechanisms of malfeasance. After that, exposure of the manuscript was the only way the value-systems of scholarship and the market could be rehabilitated. Jonathan

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6 | Instructive parallels can be found in the 19<sup>th</sup>-century market for Italian art: see Helstosky 2009.

Bloom has pointed out that this self-regulation was in some ways effective: once the *Andarz-nāma* was publicly ‘exposed’, further forgeries of complete manuscripts from the Islamic world did not appear (at least, not as far as we know!), although one can point to whole-cloth forgeries in other media that have since come to light (Bloom 2004; Jones 1990: 12; Blair/Bloom/Wardwell 1992). To explore the impact of collecting upon that alarmingly nebulous thing, authenticity, from a different angle, the second part of this essay turns to the extraordinarily populous realm of doctored objects, meaning those that have been ‘enhanced’, ‘completed’, or otherwise physically transformed somewhere along the way to becoming collected artworks.

One of the most significant factors for faking in the field of Islamic art is the fetishisation of the individual, autonomous object in art collecting. This preference is still strongly evident in display practice in this field. Paradoxically, fixations on the aestheticised and self-contained display object have had two directly opposed but equally far-reaching effects on the modern-day corpus of collected art from the Islamic world. One is the fracturing and dismemberment of things — buildings, certain types of objects such as textiles, and most notoriously manuscripts — into pieces that are now dispersed all over the world. The other is the synthesis of whole objects, especially ceramics, from fragments.

On the one hand, the late 19<sup>th</sup> and first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century — in fact right up until the 1970s — saw many of the most famous illustrated and illuminated Arabic and Persian manuscripts and albums dismembered. Typically, their illustrated leaves were cut out and sold, a few at a time, on the art market. If a page had paintings on both front and back, the paper was sometimes split to separate *recto* from *verso*. The point of this was of course that the cumulative profit from selling individual illustrated pages was greater than a complete manuscript could ever fetch, however magnificent it was, because there is an upper limit to what the market can bear for any single item (Welch 1985; Roxburgh 1998).

Dismemberment had the effect of converting manuscripts into discrete and dislocated fields that were more susceptible to the forger’s art than intact manuscripts would have been. As demonstrated by the *Andarz-nāma* manuscript, forgery of a whole manuscript is a high-risk venture. But by breaking down the physical integrity of an existing manuscript, dispersing its image cycle, and removing any certainty about what went where within its original structure, dismemberment greatly facilitated new interventions into the fabric of the book. An eye-catching case was explored in Mohamad Ghiasian’s recent study of the dispersed illustrated manuscript of the *Majma’ al-tawārīkh* (“Assembly of Histories”) by Ḥāfiz-i Abrū (d. 1430). This codex, probably created in the early 15<sup>th</sup> century, was exhibited whole in 1926 and cut up shortly afterwards; its leaves have long been treasured possessions in a number of major collections. Ghiasian demonstrated that many paintings in this manuscript are almost certainly post-production additions, probably added in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, for which space was created by simply wiping out passages

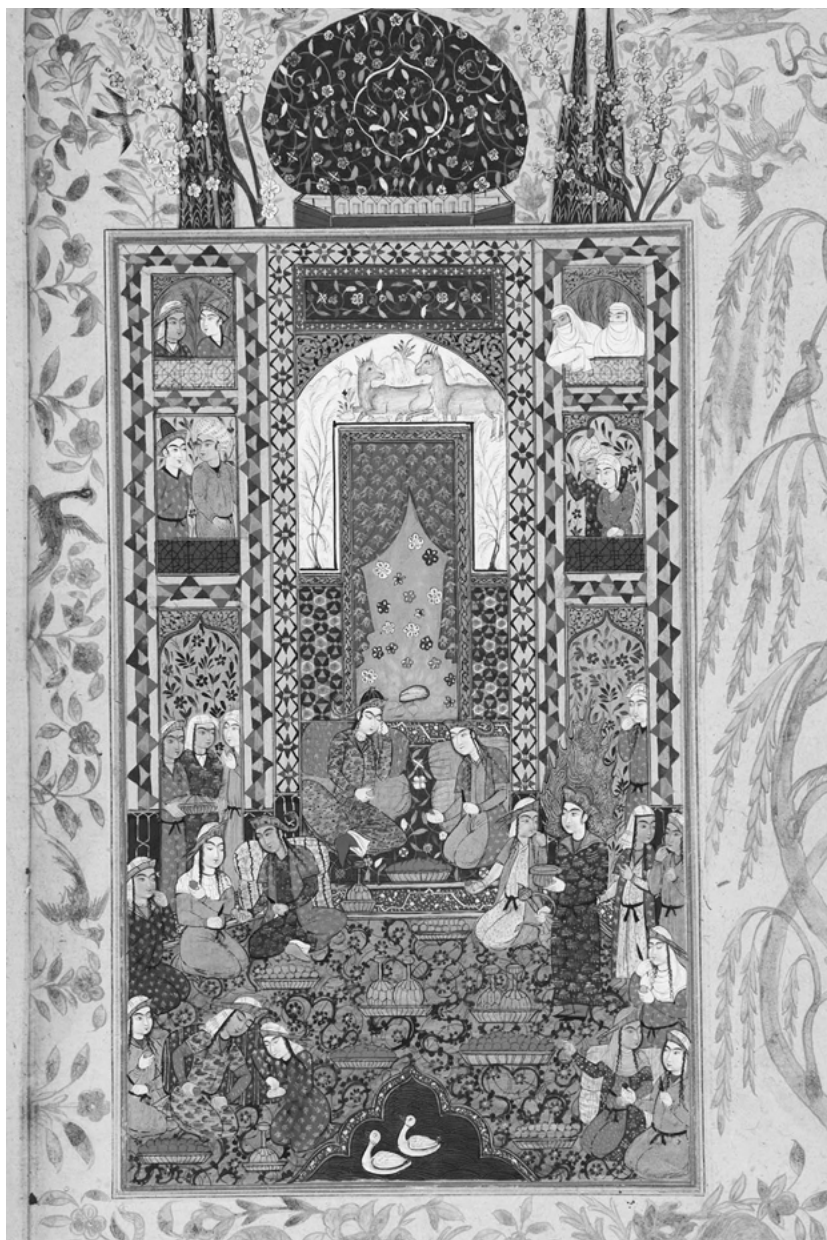


Figure 1: "The maids slice their hands upon seeing Yusuf's beauty", illustrated manuscript of the Haft awrang ("Seven thrones") of Jāmī. Kabul, text transcribed 959-960 AH/1552-1553 CE, illustrations possibly early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Page 35. 9 × 23.2 cm.

from the text. While at least some, and possibly all, of the modern miniatures were added before the book was quickly dismembered for sale on the art market, it is only through Ghiasian's painstaking reconstruction of the now globally dispersed leaves of the manuscript that many instances of repetition, copying and stylistic infelicity in the paintings can be recognised (Ghiasian 2015).

We are usually inclined to judge this kind of market-driven forgery very harshly, particularly when it is accompanied by the dismemberment and defacing of the original object. But what of those who effected very similar acts, probably for similar reasons, but without incurring the same kind of destruction in the process? A 16<sup>th</sup>-century manuscript of the *Haft Awrang* of Jami in the Lilly Library of Indiana University has been 'enhanced' by the addition of what are probably early 20<sup>th</sup>-century paintings in a kind of pastiche of 17<sup>th</sup>-century Perso-Indian styles (fig. 1). These were presumably intended to convince the collector that they were buying an illustrated 16<sup>th</sup>-century manuscript with what the connoisseurs' literature would call 'fine paintings', thereby elevating the market value (Simpson 2008). The thick impasto of the white paint in some of these images reveals their recent manufacture; real 16<sup>th</sup>-century miniatures were made with water-based paints that do not have built-up surfaces. Closer inspection reveals failings of symmetry in the architectural decoration, overmodelled facial features and other stylistic traits that most likely point to recent manufacture, albeit with high production values.

In fact, the manuscript was copied in Kabul in 1552/53, according to its colophon information, which would make it one of the earliest dated manuscripts of the Mughal dynasty (Gruber 2009: 31-32). Analysis performed by Laura E. Parodi with near-infrared light indicates that the miniatures were not painted over text, nor do they seem to have been painted on top of pre-existing images, but instead into blank spaces: it seems likely that the manuscript came down to the modern era with illuminations but no illustrations.<sup>7</sup> Failure to complete the image cycle is certainly not an unknown phenomenon in pre-modern manuscript production; depending on the stage at which the book project faltered, this could result in pages where the margins and text are completed but blank boxes remain without illustrations.<sup>8</sup>

If the paintings in the Indiana manuscript had been executed after the manuscript's creation but prior to the advent of the international art market, they would most likely be regarded as simply an interesting node in the object's life history (Soucek/Çağman 1995). As it is, the fact that they were most likely created with

7 | Laura E. Parodi examined the manuscript in 2011 and will be publishing her research in the near future. I am grateful to her for sharing some of her unpublished findings with me.

8 | For example, the image cycle of the British Library's 1386-88 *Khamsa* of Nizami stops partway through the *Haft Paykar*, leaving framed blank spaces, ready to receive images, throughout the second half of the text: see Graves 2002.



the intention to deceive in a modern marketplace means that they physically superimpose present conditions of commodity exchange onto those of the past. In the collectors' literature there is a tangible sense that such 20<sup>th</sup>-century incursions into a 16<sup>th</sup>-century artefact taint the past with the present. Lying at the heart of these anxieties is that elusive thing, 'authenticity', a concept that is, at least in the ways we use it now, inextricably bound up in post-Enlightenment European frameworks of taxonomy, documentation and historical time. Time, however, can also be a neutralizing agent: the early 20<sup>th</sup>-century modernity that the paintings probably represent has now begun to recede into the historical past, permitting a greater sense of scholarly objectivity to grow up around such interventions.

At the same time that some of the most notorious cases of manuscript dismemberment were occurring, and probably around the same time that the Indiana manuscript was receiving its images, the market demand for complete objects was distorting another type of historical material from the Islamic world. Medieval ceramics are by their very nature usually recovered in fragmentary form, and yet most museum display pieces in this medium are presented as whole objects. In the vast majority of cases they were acquired that way from dealers or agents rather than being reconstructed within the institutions that now hold them.

The additive process of 'completing' fragmentary ceramics, or building new wholes from disparate parts, was such a widespread practice that most scholars who work on premodern Islamic ceramics will develop sceptical reflexes about the integrity of any of the pieces they encounter. This is particularly true of pieces from Iran. Many early collectors had a taste for figural designs as well as the glitter and fine draughtsmanship found in the Persian lustre and *minā'ī* techniques of ceramic decoration. Moreover, they liked their ceramics to be whole. These proclivities led to a significant market for doctored objects (Watson 1999: 426-27). More than one scholar reports having encountered the construction of 'complete' ceramics from boxes of disparate sherds, sorted by type, in dealer's workshops in Tehran in the 1950s and 1970s, making it clear that this practice cannot be entirely consigned to the early 20<sup>th</sup> century (Sigel/McWilliams 2013: 38; Watson 2004: n.25). And yet there remains some unwillingness within the field to acknowledge publicly the extent to which almost all of the ceramic corpus has undergone intervention of one form or another at some stage in its history.

In the first place, there are institutional tensions about revealing the true condition of some pieces. With such a premium placed on the pristine integrity of the self-contained object, visitors, collectors and funders alike can find it painful to be told that beloved pieces are not what they seem. Furthermore, curators are very restricted with regards to the amount of information that they can present with an object, and there seems to be a collective consensus, amongst Anglophone museums at least, that post-production interventions on the object need to be carefully explained in order to turn them into source of interest rather than shame (McWilliams 2012: 169). Many major institutions have established norms in conservation



practice that aim to clearly differentiate between original and modern material in historic ceramics, but this entails a substantial conservation department and a sizeable budget — not things that every museum has.<sup>9</sup> And in spite of this, a quick look at any recent auction house catalogue will show that market standards, and by extension display standards in many contexts, continue to prioritise whole objects and invisible and even deceptive repairwork.

I will use a single bowl to illustrate the varied means by which agents at work in the 20<sup>th</sup> century crafted whole ceramic pieces for sale on the art market. The piece is now held in the Eskenazi Art Museum of Indiana University, where it is part of a 47-piece teaching collection of Islamic ceramics accessioned in the 1960s and 70s (fig. 2). None of the pieces in this group has undergone any major conservation work during their half-century in the museum and they still bear all of their 20<sup>th</sup>-century art market restorations, much of it becoming increasingly obvious with age and discolouration.

Some of this bowl, at least, is from late 12<sup>th</sup>-century Iran, decorated in the painting technique known as *minā'ī*. The principal painted design is at first glance a fairly standard radial pattern of seated figures and trees. However, it does not take any specialist equipment, or even a very trained eye, to see that the piece is composed of fragments from more than one object — a condition it shares with a large number of *minā'ī* vessels as well as lustre-painted ones (Pease 1958; Norman 2004; McCarthy/Holod 2012; Sigel/McWilliams 2013; Michelsen/Olafsdotter 2014; Masteller 2016: 276–81). For example, the oddly-oriented harpy, appearing where we would expect to see a fifth figure, is manifestly from a different object: some of the painting is considerably finer than that of the figures on the rest of the bowl, the palette is different, and the use of fine white highlights distinguishes it from all other figures (fig. 3). Below the harpy, the knee of the human figure who once occupied this position, clad in a dark purple robe, is still visible, although an attempt to disguise it has been made through the application of dots of modern red overglaze decoration. Above the harpy's head a mish-mash of different fragments and patches of fill make up the rim.

The figure next to the harpy is equally inharmonious (fig. 4). The upper parts of the body and the head have been painted onto a greyish, rather putty-like fill. To the right of the figure is a bilateral foliate design that has nothing to do with the rest of the composition and is manifestly an unrelated sherd; on the other side of the figure there has been an attempt to give this inclusion some design logic by painting in a crude bilateral sprig. The rim is clearly a patchwork all the way around. What is un-

9 | The Metropolitan Museum of Art has done some exemplary work in this field, most notably in the 2016 special exhibition curated by Martina Rugiadi, *Transformed: Medieval Syrian and Iranian Art in the Early 20<sup>th</sup> Century*. See also the case studies presented online and in print: de Lapérouse n.d.; id. n.d. a; id./Stamm/Parry 2007.

Figure 2: Glazed fritware bowl painted in *minā'ī* technique. Iran, late 12<sup>th</sup>/early 13<sup>th</sup> century with modern additions. Height 20.3 cm. Eskenazi Museum of Art, Indiana University, 60.54.



usual about this *minā'ī* bowl is not the extent to which it has been doctored, but how openly it declares that process. The poor quality of the workmanship announces itself so clearly that in this case examination under ultraviolet light largely confirms what one could already divine from examination with the naked eye (fig.5). UV does however make it easier to see the likely extent of the largest continuous fragment of the original bowl (this includes the foot and the right-hand side, excepting most or all of the rim). This substantial portion was presumably deemed large enough to make the job of rather sloppily building up the rest from sherds, plaster and paint financially worthwhile.<sup>10</sup>

The undocumented interventions visited upon objects like the Indiana *minā'ī* bowl are very often treated by collectors and scholars alike as something that

10 | Further investigation of this object will be included in a future publication.



*Figures 3 and 4: Detail of figure 2.*

comes between the viewer and the authenticity of the object. Curiously, this is quite often framed as a betrayal on the part of the object — as if the objects themselves have lied to us. There is a recurring discussion of both ‘innocent’ and ‘deceptive’ objects in the scholarly literature that speaks of a peculiar tendency to assign moral agency to the artworks themselves (Kennick 1985:n. 16). My point here in exploring the interventions that have taken place upon this rather disparate collection of objects is not to single them out as shameful, nor to wag the finger of reproach at those who forged or doctored them and moved them through the art market. Rather, these pieces are an exemplary means of exposing and recording the direct effects of collecting cultures and the art market upon the material that we study (Jones 1990: 11, 13–14; Radnóti 1999:6). One has only to look to Oliver Watson’s research on changing fashions in the collection of medieval Middle Eastern ceramics to



*Figure 5: Photograph of figure 2 under UV lighting.*

witness the dramatic effects of taste — capitalism's market force par excellence — on what has been kept and what has been discarded (both figuratively and literally) from the art historical master-narrative. Ceramic types that are not 'recognised' and therefore not saleable have been written out of art history because they never make it onto the market, in spite of their presence in archaeological sherd deposits (Watson 1999).

One can only speculate upon the extent to which each object in this essay was intended to deceive credulous buyers. Such speculations are ultimately dependent not only on the current condition of the objects themselves but also on circumstantial documentation from their lives as collected objects: how much was paid for them, what do we know about the careers of the dealers from whom they were bought, and what kind of information accompanied them at the time of purchase? For, perhaps counterintuitively, deception is borne out not at the moment of intervention upon the object, but at the moment of transaction: whether that be the moment of financial transaction through purchase, or the moment of publication — itself a form of scholarly transaction. Moreover, the entanglement of scholarship and the market in Islamic art is not a historiographic issue that can be made palatable by isolating it from the present: the two things continue to exist in symbiosis (Graves 2012). Not only does the art market continue to shape the canon of art history, but time and again it has also wrought physical changes upon the objects making up that canon, as the pieces in this essay can mutely attest.

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# Shape-shifters of Transculturation

## Giovanni Bastianini's Forgeries as Embodiment of an Aesthetic Patriotism

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Just what is it that makes art forgeries so different, so appealing, as long as they are considered original? one could ask, thus quoting and adapting the title of *Pop* artist Richard Hamilton's famous collage *Just what is it that makes today's homes so different, so appealing?* from 1956. Yet, after a forgery has been revealed as such, it loses the favour of the beholder and the once "true, beautiful and good" appears tainted.<sup>1</sup> While the artwork itself remains unchanged, the process of exposure changes the way we look at the artwork. So it is the context — such as art historical classifications — rather than the artwork itself that changes perception and valuation. To this effect art forgeries can be thought of as semantic shape-shifters, since they shift their shape in our gaze from supposedly authentic to false, once exposed (Öcal 2014: 176).

In contrast to the ambiguous images also known as reversible figures, this metamorphosis in the reception of forgeries is irreversible, since we will never look at a forgery the same way we did when we considered it to be original. So, what defines the uniqueness of an artwork, when we can see it in a forgery as well, provided it is considered to be original? Therefore, the pastiche-like characteristics of Hamilton's work can quite well be applied to forgeries, which combine several recognisable aspects of already existing, original artworks to a kind of modernised hyper-version of these originals, what in turn makes forgeries 'so appealing'. Thus, as a child of his time, the forger paraphrases the prevailing taste and gaze of this time into the pictorial expression of the forged artist, so that he resembles a translator, who not only reproduces the model but

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1 | Initially rooted in Plato's philosophy, the trinity of the "true, beautiful and good" originates from a new reception and interpretation of Plato's writings from the early 18<sup>th</sup> to the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when it became a concept of 19<sup>th</sup>-century art, literature, and culture (Kurz 2015).

recontextualises it into a new form.<sup>2</sup> Accordingly, a forgery emulates the original, re-presenting that original from a contemporary point of view and taste.

This can be illustrated particularly with reference to the example of the Florentine sculptor and forger Giovanni Bastianini (1830-1868), whose busts, reliefs and statuettes claimed to originate from the *Quattrocento*, while simultaneously fulfilling the stylistic expectation of the European and American audience of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

## “A TUSCAN WORTHY TO STAND BY THE SIDE OF HIS PREDECESSORS”

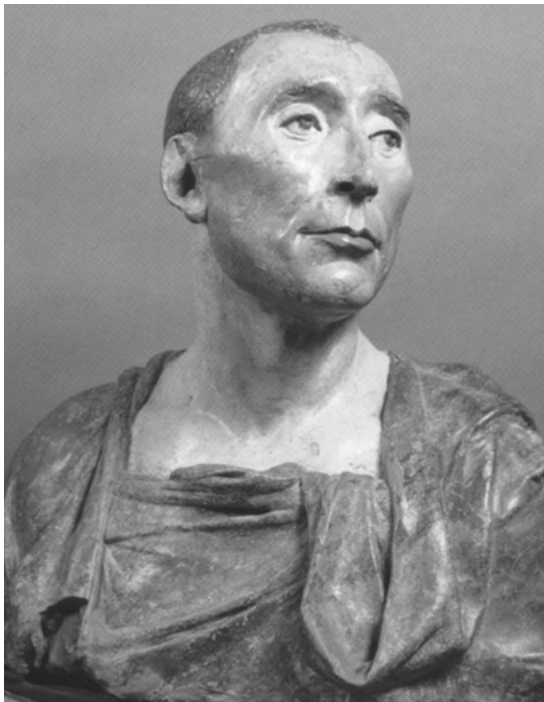
Bastianini's portrait bust of the Florentine Renaissance Dominican friar and preacher, Girolamo Savonarola, that he made in 1863 in the style of the *Quattrocento*, is a striking example (fig. 1). The lively expressions, the affective posture, and the detailed composition of the traditional habit are comparable to Donatello's bust of Niccolò da Uzzano from 1432 (fig. 2). Both busts are distinguished by their emotive posture and naturalness, illustrated by their gaze to the upper right or left as well as by their detailed drapery. This preference for lively expressions is rooted in the Florentine Renaissance and fostered by its resurrection in Bastianini's period, so that *Quattrocento* busts were classified according to how pronounced their naturalism was. But Bastianini's works not only adopt this preferred naturalism, they carry it to extremes by appearing to be torn from real life. Indeed, Bastianini shaped most of his busts after living models such as friends and workers in nearby factories.<sup>3</sup> Thus, he applies a contemporary artistic method which blends Renaissance models with modern techniques. This is also found in the staging of a painting's composition by Stefano Bardini, an artist, forger and one of the most famous art and antiques dealers of the 19<sup>th</sup> century in Florence.<sup>4</sup> Like a reverse *tableau vivant*, Bardini, who was equipped with the latest photographic instruments, dressed several people in Renaissance costumes, placed them in

2 | Following Denis Diderot, an artist who reproduces paintings in engravings is not just copying but rather creating a new artwork: “le graveur [...] est un prosateur qui se propose de rendre un poète d'une langue dans une autre” (Diderot 1984: 314).

3 | One of them is Giuseppe Bonaiuti a worker of the nearby tobacco factory, who was the model for Bastianini's bust of Girolamo Benivieni (Schüller 1959: 46). Furthermore, Bastianini made a portrait bust of his friend and fellow artist Gaetano Bianchi (Florence, Biblioteca Laurenziana) whom he dressed in Renaissance costumes.

4 | See the current research and recent publications of Lynn Catterson (New York) on Stefano Bardini (2015; 2016).

*Figure 1: Giovanni Bastianini, "Girolamo Savonarola", 1863, Victoria & Albert Museum, London.*



*Figure 2: Donatello, "Niccolò da Uzzano", 1432, Museo Nazionale del Bargello, Florence.*



historical surroundings, and photographed them so as to later paint these contrived sceneries in oil (figs. 3; 4).<sup>5</sup>

In this sense, Bastianini's skilful imitation of the stylistic and technical characteristics of the *Quattrocento* are significant for the great revival of the *imitatio* and *aemulatio* tradition during the *Ottocento*.<sup>6</sup> Rooted in a long artistic tradition as well as in historical circumstances, this reborn concept also indicates the different attitudes of Italians and non-Italians towards copies and imitations. In contrast to other European and American collectors, Italians did not regard them as intentionally deceptive. In fact, *imitatio* and *aemulatio* were forms of playful competition of distinguished artistic and technical skills and a tribute to the ideal of the Renaissance respectively of the Antiquity. The aim was to resituate the golden era of the *Rinascimento* in the contemporary *Ottocento* and in its national context so that "Italian art in the nineteenth century was diverse in subject matter and rich in regional variation, paying homage to the past as well as experimenting with the technologies of the future" (Helstosky 2009: 804).

Hence, the 'discovery' of the larger-than-life bust of Savonarola was a real sensation, because until then only two-dimensional profile portraits of the Dominican friar existed.<sup>7</sup> Bastianini took these portraits as a model, illustrated by the striking resemblance of his bust to Fra Bartolomeo's *Ritratto di Girolamo Savonarola* from 1498 (fig. 5). Following Bastianini's contemporary Alessandro Foresi, he also modelled characteristic parts of his bust, like the habit revealing the forehead and hairline, after an ancient bronze medal (fig. 6).<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, Bastianini's bust was perfectly timed for a public resurgence of admiration for Savonarola during the *Ottocento*. Accordingly, Bastianini's busts of Marsilio Ficino, Girolamo Benivieni and Dante, who sooner or later became ardent followers of Savonarola, illustrate that Bastianini specifically selected figures of the Italian Renaissance who belonged to Savonarola's followers. Benivieni for instance rewrote his profane poems and translated Savonarola's writings into Italian

5 | I would like to thank Stefano Tasselli and Giuseppe Rizzo for their help in gaining access to archival material on Stefano Bardini and for sharing their valuable insights.

6 | On *aemulatio*, both as artistic and social concept during the Renaissance see Müller et al. 2011.

7 | Savonarola rose to fame with his prophecies and his so-called 'bonfire of the vanities', which was part of his plan to make Florence the centre of Christianity. His open antagonism to Rome and Pope Alexander VI led to his excommunication and execution in 1498. To avoid the possibility of Savonarola's posthumous martyrdom, Pope Alexander VI aimed to destroy every image of Savonarola.

8 | "d'après une ancienne médaille, le buste en terre cuite du célèbre moine qui fut brûlé vif sur la place della Signoria" (Foresi 1868: 33).

*Figure 3: Stefano Bardini, staged group of persons, undated, photograph, Archivio Stefano Bardini, Florence.*



*Figure 4: Stefano Bardini, painting after his photograph, Archivio Stefano Bardini, Florence.*

*Figure 5: Fra Bartolomeo (Baccio della Porta), "Ritratto di Girolamo Savonarola", 1498, Museo di San Marco, Florence.*



*Figure 6: Florentine school, "Portrait Medal of Girolamo Savonarola" (obverse), 15<sup>th</sup> century, The Metropolitan Museum of Art (Ann and George Blumenthal Fund), New York.*

such as *Della semplicità della vita cristiana*. Consequently, Bastianini's forgeries are largely based on a blend of reception history, stylistic expectations and historically documented scarcity value.

Eventually, the patriotic artists Cristiano Banti and Giovanni Costa bought the Savonarola bust for 10,000 Lire in order to keep it in Italy. Yet, after its exposure as a forgery they felt no remorse. Quite the contrary, Costa claimed to be "glad to find that such a distinguished artist was living and not dead" (after Barstow 1886: 506). Thus, Bastianini's works were appreciated even as forgeries, as Sir Frederic Leighton's letter to Sir Thomas Armstrong, the former director of the South Kensington Museum, now the Victoria and Albert Museum, demonstrates: "Bastianini was a man of impressive talent — a Tuscan worthy to stand by the side of his predecessors of the quattrocento; it is no concern of ours that poverty drove him to use his rare gifts in the service of vendors of spurious works" (in *Department of science and art* 1888).

## FORGERIES IN THE MELTING POT OF CULTURAL TRAVELS AND NATION BUILDING

In fact, after the exposure of a forgery there is generally a two-stage reaction: initially, the deception apparently devalues the artwork entirely. But secondly, the new criminal context bestows a newly-historicising value upon the forgery. Just as the graffitied signature of Vladimir Umanets, the founder of the *Yellowism* movement, on Mark Rothko's *Black on Maroon* in London's Tate Modern was considered vandalism, understandably so, it also became an intrinsic part of that painting's history (Barrett 2014). Accordingly, Umanets and his fellow artist Marcin Lodyga assert in their "Manifesto of Yellowism": "We believe that the context for works of art is already art" (Umanets/Lodyga 2010). With its 2010 exhibition "Close Examination: Fakes, Mistakes and Discoveries", the National Gallery in London made this concept presentable by exhibiting forgeries specifically on account of their contexts that is to say of the histories behind them, or as stated on the museum's website: "The exhibition will showcase some of the most intriguing stories behind paintings in the Gallery" (National Gallery 2010).

The reasons for this appreciation of a forgery precisely because it is a forgery have been changing since the 19<sup>th</sup> century. While in the 19<sup>th</sup> century primarily the aesthetic quality defined the value of a forgery, it is the historicising context that adds value to a forgery today. This is why they can increase in value over time, or forgers are regarded as con-artists who have beaten the market. The case of the German art forger Wolfgang Beltracchi, who after forging for approximately thirty years in the style of such artists as Heinrich Campendonk

or Max Ernst now has his own show on television, is a notable contemporary example.<sup>9</sup>

And yet the debate about whether Bastianini should be thought of as a forger or an artist continues to the present day. While some experts and art historians refuse to accept Bastianini as a forger and portray him as a skilful artist and victim of the ruthless art dealer Giovanni Freppa, others describe Bastianini as a forger who enjoyed deceiving others.<sup>10</sup> But the fact that Bastianini signed and dated his original works, which were exhibited throughout the 1850s at the *Promotrici Fiorentine* and at the annual exhibitions of the Florentine Academy, and that he didn't sign and date but rather artificially aged his forgeries, shows that Bastianini clearly differentiated between an original and a forgery.<sup>11</sup> With Jeremy Warren's detection of a letter from Alessandro Foresi to the French collector Charles Davillier, there can be no doubt remaining that Bastianini continued forging even after the end of his contract with his art dealer Giovanni Freppa (Warren 2005: 741).

It has, however, been argued that the true narrative about Bastianini is not the typical story of a frustrated genius or exploited victim, but rather about the contest of power between France and Italy (Helstosky 2009: 795). Bastianini's forgery of the bust of Girolamo Benivieni is virtually a paradigm for this argument (fig. 7). Exhibited at the 'Exposition Rétrospective' of the Palais de Champs-Élysées in Paris in 1865, the art critic Paul Mantz praised the terracotta bust as an excellent work of the *Quattrocento*.<sup>12</sup>

9 | "Der Meisterfälscher. Wolfgang Beltracchi porträtiert..." is the name of a series which is now broadcasting in its third season at 3Sat. (<https://www.3sat.de/page/?source=/sfdrs/179706/index.html>, last accessed on 12 June 2017) For an interdisciplinary view of Beltracchi's forgeries see Keazor/Öcal 2014.

10 | The narrative of victimisation about Bastianini felling prey to the unscrupulous art dealer Giovanni Freppa, first was published in an article in the British Magazine of Art by Nina Barstow in 1886. However, a wide range of opinion regarded Bastianini as having the intent to deceive and not being a victim at all. They furthermore portrayed him as conspiring with his art dealer (Helstosky 2009: 797). With her aim to baptise Bastianini as an artist and not a forger, Anita F. Moskowitz unfortunately delivered a rather fragmentary, partly outdated and biased presentation that does not consider current research such as Barbara Bertelli's 2012 published PhD thesis, which investigates the art market of the Florentine *Ottocento* in general and Bastianini's art dealer and accomplice Giovanni Freppa in particular (Moskowitz 2013; Bertelli 2012).

11 | On Bastianini's exhibitions see Sani 1973 and Helstosky 2009.

12 | Accordingly, Paul Mantz worships the bust in the Gazette des beaux arts: "Die ganze italienische Feinheit offenbart sich in der ausdrucks-



*Figure 7: Giovanni Bastianini, “Girolamo Benivieni”, 1863, Musée du Louvre, Paris.*

In 1866 Alfred Émilien O'Hara van Nieuwerkerke bought the bust at an auction at the Hotel Drouot in Paris and resold it only a year later for 14,000 Francs to the Musée du Louvre in Paris (Hôtel Drouot 1866: 15). The participation of the sculptor and collector Nieuwerkerke brought a heightened political emphasis to the so-called 'Benivieni affair', as he was the most powerful individual in the French art world during Napoleon III's reign. With the assistance of Princess Mathilde, Napoleon III's cousin, Nieuwerkerke rose to power and was appointed superintendent of the Imperial Museums. Due to his long-standing affair with the Princess, his questionable acquisitions of public art and his arrogant way of dealing with artists he was the subject of controversies throughout the 1860s and eventually fell from favour in 1870 (Helstosky 2009: 800).

After Giovanni Freppa revealed the Benivieni bust as a forgery in December 1867, followed by Bastianini's confirmation soon afterwards, a polemical controversy broke out involving not only art experts and dealers, but also Italy and France as nations.<sup>13</sup> The possession of Renaissance art supposedly reflected France's advanced level of civilisation, implying the strength of Napoleon III's regime (Helstosky 2009: 804-05). In particular, the acquisition of large parts of Giampietro Campana's Collection for the Louvre had been considered a big coup for Napoleon III, whereas for Italy it had been a humiliation, forcing them to part with significant artistic treasures. Whilst foreign collectors regarded picture hunting as a good opportunity, for Italians a feeling of incapacity around their ability to protect their cultural heritage arose. In turn foreign art collectors rationalised their purchase of Italian art by asserting that Italians wouldn't appreciate or care for their artistic heritage properly or would be unable to inherit their past; similar arguments justified the "civilised" British in their ongoing quest to protect their cultural heritage, as being on the behalf of humankind (Black 2003: 159-60). France's hunt for artistic emblems of past civilisations was likewise based in the megalomaniacal desire to safeguard the world's treasures for the benefit of mankind (McClellan 1994: 7). In his letter to the *Times*, Bernard Berenson stated that Italians had a greater appreciation for forgeries, copies and replicas than for their own artistic patrimony (Berenson 1903).<sup>14</sup>

Yet on the contrary, in the spirit of unification during the *Risorgimento* a new patriotism gathered strength in Italy, so that Italians defined themselves mainly through their own cultural heritage. The issue was to locate, categorise and

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vollen Physiognomie. Wir kennen Benivienis Portrait nicht; wir möchten schwören, daß es gut getroffen ist" (Mantz 1865: 339; also Schüller 1959: 44).

13 | Further details of this controversy that mainly took place in the print media are documented in Becker 1889: 30-34.

14 | This position was also represented in contemporary literature such as Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Marble Faun* (1860).



protect existing art, antiquities and architecture, which led to a more urgent need for coherent art policies (Helstosky 2009: 812). But whilst Italians were trying to determine the extent of Italy's cultural and artistic heritage, tourists and art collectors were contributing to its steady depletion. In 1880 the British art dealer William Le Queux determined that most valuable art works had disappeared from Italy. The only objects that remained were forgeries and imitations, as Le Queux noted (Le Queux 1904: 8). Although his descriptions may be exaggerated, it can be seen that even Italian art dealers had to travel to other European countries in order to refill their stock with genuine Italian art for the next wave of tourists. Significant examples are plaster models of reliefs by Giovanni di Bologna, which were purchased by an Italian dealer for £20 in an antique shop in London and taken back to Florence where they were sold to a British buyer for £300. Later, the Victoria and Albert Museum acquired them for £470 (Helstosky 2009: 814).

In the framework of unification and cultural travels, forgeries not only responded to an increasing demand, but also acted as a means of protection for Italy's own cultural heritage, so that it remained within the Italian frontiers while at the same time benefitting from foreign currencies. Therefore, Italian forgers used the visual expectation of their foreign audience as mediums for a culturally-coded pictorial expression. In turn this procedure is comparable to Felipe Guaman Poma de Ayala's use of the Spanish language in *The First New Chronicle and Good Government* (1980), which Mary Louise Pratt, Professor of Spanish and Portuguese Languages and Literature, describes as "an example of a conquered subject using the conqueror's language to construct a parodic, oppositional representation of the conqueror's own speech" (Pratt 1991: 35). As an autoethnographic text it addresses both the author's own community and the Spanish conquerors, adopting and foiling the observations the Spanish have made of Guaman Poma de Ayala's nation (Pratt 1991: 35). Therefore, Felipe Guaman Poma de Ayala wrote his new chronicle in a mixture of Quechua and ungrammatical expressive Spanish (Pratt 1991: 34). This is comparable to Alessandro Foresi, who wrote about the "Benivieni affair" in quite an amusing and polemical way (Foresi 1868). But instead of Italian, his first language, Foresi used French in order to directly address his parody to the French connoisseurs.

Hence, 19<sup>th</sup>-century Italy and its art market represent a multi-national social space, where cultures of different times and nations of different places meet or clash. As a result this period of highly flourishing cultural transfer generated "contact zones", to use a term coined by Pratt (1991), in which forgeries reflect this transculturation as a specific pictorial language diverging between the Italian Renaissance model and the foreign 19<sup>th</sup>-century view.<sup>15</sup> Thus, in the nation-building process

15 | The notion of 'transculturation' derives from the book, published in 1940, *Contrapunteo cubano del tabaco y el azúcar* (the English trans-

of the *Risorgimento*, authenticity had an existential significance for Italy, while art collectors considered authenticity as an increase in value of their art trophies. In this melting pot of identity remembrance and picture hunting, forgeries become objects of the ‘contact zone’, by commingling the transculturation of the European-American gaze of the 19<sup>th</sup> century with the works of the early Renaissance.

Accordingly, Bastianini’s bust of Piccarda Donati had been praised for its resemblance to *Quattrocento* works, although or even because it follows the stylistic expressions of the Pre-Raphaelites (fig. 8). Alexander Munro’s bust of his wife Mary for example bears striking similarities to Bastianini’s bust, particularly the facial expression (fig. 9). A comparison of both works illustrates how precisely Bastianini adapted to foreign taste and transformed it into a *Quattrocento* style by dressing his bust in Renaissance costumes. It is unknown whether Bastianini ever saw works by British Pre-Raphaelite sculptors. However, both the Pre-Raphaelites and the artists of the *Ottocento* share the same model, which is the art of the *Quattrocento*, precisely pre-Raphael. Given that Bastianini shaped his bust in 1855 and therefore prior to Munro, the question arises, who actually influenced whom? Was it the Florentine Neo-Renaissance sculpture, seen by the Pre-Raphaelites as a genuine work of the *Quattrocento*? Or was it the taste of British cultural travellers, who brought the stylistic expressions of the Pre-Raphaelites to Florence and in doing so, influenced the artworks of the *Ottocento*?

Furthermore, the desires and visual expectations of the cultural tourists were generated both by the rise of connoisseurship, as well as the emergence of art history as a scientific discipline. At the latest with the rise of museums and collections the Italian art market had been structured by an unrestrained demand for valuable genuine yet inexpensive Italian art especially of the *Trecento* to *Seicento*, while contemporary Italian art played almost no role in the realm of European art during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Therefore, Italy was confronted with the quandary of being praised for its past but not its present. Even the honouring of the artist Stefano Ussi at the “Universal Exposition” in 1867 had been dismissed by French art critics as a political rather than aesthetic choice.<sup>16</sup> It was considered as a symbolic act of French support for the Italian *Risorgimento*.

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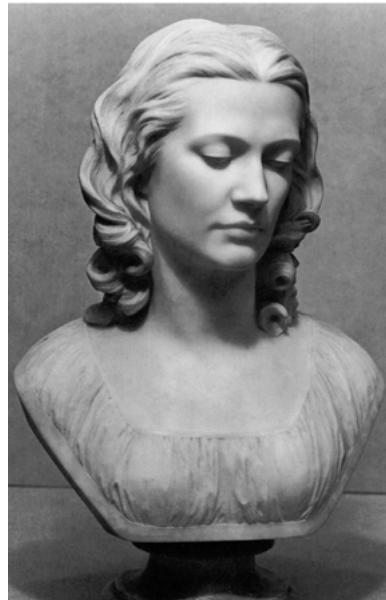
lation *Cuban Counterpoint: Tobacco and Sugar* was published 1947 in New York) by the Cuban essayist and anthropologist Fernando Ortiz. Exemplified by the devastating influence of colonialism on Cuba, which Ortiz describes as failed transculturation, he uses the term to describe merging cultures in general (Ortiz 1995: 100).

16 | “Critics even pointed out how Ussi’s work was little more than a debased form of history painting. Given Italy’s prior history of classical artistic tradition, such mediocre work was tantamount to treason” (Helstosky 2009: 804).

Figure 8: Giovanni Bastianini, “Piccarda Donati”, ca. 1855, Galleria d’Arte Moderna, Florence.



Figure 9: Alexander Munro, “Mary Munro”, 1861, Private Collection.



The “desire for inexpensive authenticity” (Helstosky 2009: 817) of Renaissance masterpieces inevitably created the market in which forgers operated. Thus, the resurgent *aemulatio* and *imitatio* traditions developed their own dynamics evolving into an aesthetic patriotism where international visual expectation met national cultural heritage. By unifying the *Quattrocento* model with the *Ottocento* gaze, Bastianini’s forgeries had been compounded as a kind of *pasticcio* of different epochs and cultures, so that their success was mainly due to cultural transfer and aesthetic patriotism. On the one hand, his works could be perceived as a tribute to Italy’s own history, and on the other hand they enabled Italy to benefit from foreign currencies and to preserve its cultural heritage by selling forgeries as substitutes for the originals to foreign travellers.

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# Fake Supreme

## William Gaddis and the Art of Recognition<sup>1</sup>

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In his 1759 essay “Conjectures on Original Composition”, the English critic Edward Young argued that novelty and originality should be the most important categories for evaluating a work of art.<sup>2</sup> “Originals”, Young declared, “are, and ought to be, great favourites, for they are great benefactors; they extend the republic of letters, and add a new province to its dominion. Imitators only give us a sort of duplicates of what we had, possibly much better, before” (1975:319). By valorising original contributions over popular, slightly disguised copies of earlier texts, Young’s essay paved the way for modern discourses on authorship and copyright. Annoyed by an increasing number of books that were basically “duplicates of what we had,” he separates the mechanically manufactured text from the truly inspired, original work of art. Imitative artists are then dismissed as a sort of mechanics, mere manual labourers who manipulate and piece together material that is already there. “Imitations”,

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1 | This essay is an abridged and revised version of a chapter originally published in Joseph Tabbi and Rone Shavers, ed. (2007): *Paper Empire: William Gaddis and the World System*. Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, pp. 28-45.

2 | Writing about the value that our culture puts on originality, progress and innovation, the Austrian historian of science Paul Feyerabend sees this myth of “creativity” already at work in Plato’s *Phaedrus*, where in his seventh letter, Plato explains how “understanding or building a work of art contains an element that goes beyond skill, technical knowledge, and talent. A new force takes hold of the soul and directs it [...] artistic achievement” (1987: 701). Feyerabend criticises “the view that culture needs individual creativity [as] not only absurd but also dangerous” (701). It is absurd because of its underlying assumption that “human beings are self-contained entities, separated from the rest of nature” (708) and it is dangerous because, on a larger historical scale, it “led to tremendous social, ecological, and personal problems” (711).



Young concludes, “are often a sort of manufacture wrought up by those mechanics [...] out of pre-existent materials not their own” (333).

If much of modern literature thrived on the aesthetic ideals articulated by Young and his Romantic followers, Postmodern writers seemed to be at odds with the belief that great art is constituted solely by original acts. In a programmatic essay reviewing the appearance of Postmodern writing in America titled “The Literature of Exhaustion” (1967), novelist John Barth denied that the so-called ‘newness’ of a work of art has anything to do with its originality as such; rather it is the critical use of tradition, the creative rewriting of existing artistic concepts and inherited forms and techniques that guarantee the uniqueness of the individual artist. As he later explained, literary production has the potential to constantly reinvent itself without having recourse to an essentialist, reified and highly ideological notion of originality.<sup>3</sup>

In what follows, I discuss the dialectics of repetition and originality by focusing on *The Recognitions*, a 1955 novel by American Writer William Gaddis. *The Recognitions* is perhaps the first American novel to deal at length with the problem of assessing originality in a cultural environment that thrives on an abundance of copies, representations and simulacra. As a prime example of what critic Thomas LeClair has called the “Art of Excess” (1981-82), it represents and, at the same time, amplifies the confusion about the ‘real’ and its double in contemporary, mediated society. While educated readers still experience moments of recognition when tracing some of the novel’s obscure references to their possible historic origins, such interpretative efforts are constantly subverted by the shifting meaning of uniqueness itself. Unable to pin down the narrative’s complexity to a single, encompassing design, we are left with nothing more than the sobering realisation that the more adroit we become at deciphering the intricate web of textual doubling, the more confused we are about the epistemological value of origins and originality.

By rewriting the history of Western art as a history of doubling and counterfeiting, *The Recognitions* turns into a sort of literary echo chamber bustling with the cacophonous reverberations of Europe’s greatest masterpieces — we might call this the ‘Joycean mode’ — while, at the same time, constantly obfuscating their historical context and questioning their referential authenticity. If Gaddis’ “Carnival of Repetition” (as John Johnston called the novel’s redundant, cross-referential style, 1990) foreshadows Postmodern narrative techniques, it also provokes a deeply humanist critique of its own hypertrophied use of fleeting repetitions/recognitions.

3 | In particular, Barth’s argument was directed against what he saw as an ideological superimposition of a single, rather limited literary tradition upon all of literature: “What my essay ‘The Literature of Exhaustion’ was really about, so it seems to me now, was the effective ‘exhaustion’ not of language or of literature, but of the aesthetic of high modernism: that admirable, not-to-be-repudiated, but essentially completed ‘program’ of what Hugh Kenner has dubbed “‘the Pound era’” (Barth 1982: 39).

Yet to approach *The Recognitions* as a brilliant, but basically unreadable, literary ‘borderline’ case between Modernism and Postmodernism does not do justice to the novel’s obsession with reproductions, doubling and forgery. Instead I try to overcome the various fault-lines of the Modernist/Postmodernist paradigm by emphasizing a concept of repetition that appears to be Gaddis’ own ‘original’ solution to the crisis of originality in modern and postmodern cultures. Responding to the shifting conditions of artistic production during the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century *The Recognitions*, I argue, sets out to redefine the very act of repetition itself.

The form of repetition I find most interesting in Gaddis’ text is primarily philosophical and spiritual. At its most general level, the multiplying acts of repetition in the novel conjoin to evoke a single regenerative practice of “re-petitioning”.<sup>4</sup> My model for this kind of repetition as the ‘re-capturing’ and, subsequently, unfolding of an existential truth, is Kierkegaard’s short philosophical narrative ‘Repetition’, originally published in 1843, a text that is strikingly absent from critical discussions of Gaddis’ novel.<sup>5</sup>

In his introduction to the Penguin edition, fellow writer William Gass notes that “following the hubble bubble of its initial reception, *The Recognitions* was left in a lurch of silence, except for those happy yet furious few who had found this fiction [...] about the nature, meaning, and value of ‘the real thing’ [...] found *it* to be the real thing” (1985: viii). Gass’ ironic, marvelously convoluted remark articulates an important truth about the nature of writing in general: any literary text, regardless of cautionary stylistic devices such as irony or self-referentiality, is likely to be taken by readers as more authentic than the reality it reflects upon. Even if the frame of reference, as in Postmodern writing, is the flimsy status of authenticity itself, we are reticent to deconstruct the act of criticism in the same way that we deconstruct the concepts represented in the text. The reason for this, I believe, is not so much that upon entering the realm of art we give the author the benefit of the doubt or suspend, as Coleridge has it, our commonsensical disbelief but that we all

4 | The term “regenerative re-petitioning” is LaCapra’s (1986: 35). I have borrowed it here because it strikes a nice balance between the various meanings and wordplays of the German term *wieder-holen*, which constitutes the philosophical core of Kierkegaard’s *The Repetition* (as I discuss above).

5 | To this intertextual panorama, one may well add Gilles Deleuze’s creative appropriation of Kierkegaard in *Difference and Repetition* (1968), a text that raises similar questions about the nature of repetition to those raised in *The Recognitions*. By the same token, it would also be possible to speak of Gaddis’ novel as a precursor text to Deleuze’s, even though the latter does not seem to have been conscious of his American ancestor (which is actually quite surprising, given Deleuze’s explicit interest in, and frequent references to, American literature).

participate in a pervasive culture of authenticity in which writing is considered an important means to ‘authenticate’ the modern subject.<sup>6</sup>

It is important to recall that the modern valorisation of artistic authenticity did not prevent an increasing confusion about the real and its false, mechanically reproduced double. In a perceptive study of the history of doubling, copying, and counterfeiting in Western culture, Hillel Schwartz argued that the emphasis on originality was accompanied by an equally widespread tendency to reproduce the unique work of art in order to make it available to a larger, mass audience.<sup>7</sup> What’s more, it seems that rather than working against the practitioners of doubling and copying, the modern need for originality actually signaled the end of uniqueness on a scale that could barely have been imagined by even the most avid copyists of earlier times, of which, as Edward Young complained, there were plenty. With the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century — a century famed for the invention of key technologies in reproduction such as photography, lithography, stereotyping, the typewriter, telegraphy, the telephone and the phonograph — uniqueness and originality were reduced, slowly but surely, to a sort of aesthetic ‘gold standard’: appreciated by many as a wise rule yet utterly removed from cultural practices and the material demands of the marketplace.

This is not to say that there had always been an agreement on what precisely originality is and how it might be distinguished from its negative twin, repetition. From Edward Young’s rather practically minded “Conjectures on Original Composition” to Emerson’s patriotic call for an original, i.e. ‘American’ literature, from Coleridge’s highly gendered organicist view of art that fatally ricochets in much of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century discourse on authorship, to T. S. Eliot’s praise of individual talent and its place within the hierarchies of tradition, or, more recently, John Barth’s postmodern rewriting of that very tradition, there had always been a striking vagueness as to the trappings of originality in the arts and, more specifically, to the extent to which artists could ‘borrow’ from their predecessors. Most commentators have attempted to solve this problem by defining, or rather, redefining originality, while only a few have used

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6 | In an early interview with Tom LeClair, Gaddis himself points out that we “still cling to art as order, at the same time, that one hopes that art is a destructive force” (LeClair 2007: 26).

7 | While Schwartz’s assessment of copying and twinning practices in Western society is admirable for its wide range and almost encyclopedic approach to the topic (cf. 1996), there are numerous studies that deal more specifically with the history of forgery and counterfeiting in the visual arts (a topic especially pertinent to *The Recognitions*). For a historical overview, see Matthew Rutenberg’s essay “The Charms of Deception” (1991).

the concept of repetition as cornerstone for a new theory of artistic creation.<sup>8</sup> Because its negative connotations — stagnation, imitation, mechanisation, primitivism, etc. — are perceived as irreconcilable with the very idea of creativity, it is often taken for granted that repetition *per se* cannot generate new insight or meaning.<sup>9</sup>

If much of what has been said so far turns on the juxtaposition of originality and repetition as mutually exclusive concepts, Gaddis' novel deliberately blurs the boundaries between these concepts. Before taking a somewhat closer look at how *The Recognitions* defies the various negative connotations of repetition — stagnation, imitation, mechanisation, etc. — a brief synopsis of the novel's intricate plot(s) seems in order.

Gaddis' first novel takes the form of a quest. In a carefully wrought series of plots involving more than fifty characters across three continents, we follow the adventures of Wyatt Gwyon, the son of a clergyman who rejects the ministry in favour of the calling of the artist. His quest turns on the problem of making sense of reality, to find some form of order in the world through art. His initial failure as an independent artist leads him to paint in the style of old masters who, in their own time, had found the beauty and order Wyatt fails to reach. His talent for forgery is exploited, however, by a group of unscrupulous art critics and businessmen who hope to make money by passing his works off as 'originals'. As the novel develops, these artistic forgeries become a profound metaphor for all kinds of fraud, counterfeiting and fakery: aesthetic, scientific, religious, sexual and cultural. Towards the end of the novel, Wyatt seems to gain some insight from repudiating the widespread circulation of false images and mechanical reproductions, but the nature of this revelation is highly ambiguous and does not allow for easy distinctions between the real and the counterfeit artifact, between originals and fakes. Extended portions of the novel are set in contemporary Greenwich, New York, with references to 'real' artists and writers of the 1950s.

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8 | Deleuze, in *Difference and Repetition*, names only Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, and the French catholic writer Charles Péguy as having recognized repetition as a pivotal philosophical and creative concept: "Each of the three, in his own way, makes repetition not only a power peculiar to language and thought, a superior pathos and pathology, but also the fundamental category of a philosophy of the future" (Deleuze 1994:5). Obviously, the list should also include Deleuze's own attempt to reconceptualise repetition vis-à-vis a cultural environment predicated upon difference and change.

9 | With the exception, perhaps, of its classic variant emulation (repetition as improvement), which was revived in America during the early national period to vindicate the lingering importation of ideas and technology from Europe.

To manage the various, interrelated patterns of repetitions and recognitions, Gaddis' novel sets out to redefine the concept of repetition as *re-cognition*; that is, as a second cognition (from *recognoscere*, which means to examine or investigate a lost or hidden truth).<sup>10</sup> The structural and epistemological dynamic which Gaddis sees at work between the two activities is reminiscent of Kierkegaard's analysis of repetition as a spiritual and poetical mode of knowing. It is to these resemblances or, if you like, repetitions, which I will now turn in more detail.

In a brief article titled "Stop Player. Joke No. 4", which appeared in *The Atlantic Monthly* in 1951, Gaddis ridicules the monotonous movement of the player piano and, in particular, its popularity among middle class Americans who smugly assume that possession of the automated instrument can be at all compared to mastering a piece of classical music.<sup>11</sup> Because of its dehumanising, crippling effects on the individual repetition, being merely the imitative, mechanical process of doubling (or aping), it is equally scorned in *The Recognitions*. References to technical means of reproduction abound, from the radio, the telephone or the record player to print reproductions of Wyatt's paintings, the burning of effigies and, in one of the

10 | In a very broad sense, *The Recognitions* can be read as a modern adaptation of the themes (and title) of a 1st century, anonymously published theological romance, also known as the *Clementine Recognitions*. As one of Gaddis' prominent characters, Basil Valentine, remarks, this "first Christian novel" (1955:373) is already linked to yet another core narrative of Judeo-Christian culture, namely, the Faust legend or the fatal quest for truth outside the sanctioned avenues of, initially, Christian theology and, in later renderings, Enlightenment thought. Yet even though the search for redemption and the search for truth—as highlighted in the *Clementine Recognitions* and the Faust legend respectively—constitute an important undercurrent of meaning in Gaddis's text, the novel as a whole seems to be driven more specifically by a self-reflexive inquiry into the wide-ranging ramifications of repetition/recognition as pivotal techniques in the cultural accretion of knowledge, including the composition of the text at hand. It is worth noting, however, that the meaning and function of both categories—repetition and recognition—vary considerably. What's more, they are embedded in a series of contradictory, if not mutually exclusive, narrative contexts, which need to be thoroughly distinguished.

11 | This brief piece is actually the first instance of Gaddis' lifelong obsession with the history of the player piano as a glaring manifestation of cultural and intellectual decline. It foreshadows the use of the same theme in *JR* (1975) and the posthumously published novella *Agape Agape* (2002a). See also the notes on this and related material in *The Rush for Second Place* (2002b) and the afterword to *Agape Agape* by Joseph Tabbi.

novel's funniest scenes, the naïve attempt to directly apply set phrases from Dale Carnegie's bestseller *How To Win Friends and Influence People* (1936) to real-life situations. The list could easily be extended. On one level, then, *The Recognitions* clearly resonates with traces of Arnoldian cultural critique; and on another, it adumbrates, if in a subtler, poetic register, the harsh analysis of contemporary postindustrial society by Herbert Marcuse in *One Dimensional Man* (1964). Consider the following incident:

The cab had turned east. As it stopped at a corner [...] he looked out the closed window. People who passed, passed quickly and silently, leaving behind a figure barely taller than the barrel organ mounted on a stick, whose handle he turned, his only motion, the hand, clockwise, barely more enduring than the sounds he released on the night air, sounds without the vanity of music, sounds unattached, squeaks and drawn wheezes, pathos in the minor key and then the shrill of loneliness related to nothing but itself, like the wind round the fire place left standing after the house burned to the ground. (Gaddis 1955: 264)<sup>12</sup>

The description of the barrel organ highlights Gaddis' interest in the history of mechanical instruments (especially the player piano), yet it does so by condensing the far-reaching symbolic ramifications of 'mechanised' music into a single, compelling image. Juxtaposed with the cranking motions of the hand that 'plays' the instrument are sounds — pathetic "squeaks and wheezes" — that appear to be entirely detached from human agency or a physical center; the groaning murmur of the barrel organ, produced not by natural forces (as in the aeolian harp) but by the repetitive movement of a metallic cylinder scarred with dents and protrusions, has ceased to relate to anything but itself. As a fine example of 'repetition as mechanical reproduction', the image powerfully cuts across a wide range of concerns about the course of contemporary society. Most prominently, the concern about the loss of a centre or referent, of being caught in an endless loop of self-reflexive, autistic repetitions of a plot in which, as Wyatt puts it, the "hero fails to appear, fails to be working out some plan of comedy or, disaster" (263). As an artist, Wyatt has an acute sense of the tragedy of

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12 | The above scene occurs towards the end of a crucial encounter between the protagonist, Wyatt Gwyon, and Basil Valentine, the priest-turned-critic and barely veiled mouthpiece of the author. The two men initially met at the offices of Recktall Brown, who commissions counterfeit paintings from Wyatt, and Valentine offered to take Wyatt to his apartment where he wants to show him blown-up photographs of paintings by Flemish masters. The incident is further contextualised by a reference to Thoreau's *Walden*, a book that Wyatt stealthily places on Valentine's lap while both are riding uptown in a cab.

this failure, of his being inextricably linked to a larger society that has lost its ability to deal with ‘original’ art in any other way than by endlessly reproducing it.

The difference between Wyatt’s copying of Flemish masterpieces and the reproductions of these paintings in the art magazine *Collectors Quarterly*, which he dismisses as sham, “mechanical reproductions,” is not easy to grasp. The ambiguous, if not paradoxical, definition of repetition as, on the one hand, a viable artistic technique and, on the other, a sign of cultural deprivation, can be traced throughout *The Recognitions*. They appear to be most pertinent in the novel’s self-reflexive discourses on art and artistic production. In a crucial conversation with Esther, his first wife, Wyatt defends his obsession with copying against the modern, self-righteous emphasis on originality. The words here are those of his Munich art teacher Herr Koppel:<sup>13</sup>

That romantic disease, originality, all around we see originality of incompetent idiots, they could draw nothing, paint nothing, just so the mess they make is original [...]. Even two hundred years ago who wanted to be original, to be original was to admit that you could not do a thing the right way, so you could only do it your own way. When you paint you do not try to be original, only you think about your work, how to make it better, so you copy masters, only masters, for with each copy of a copy the form degenerates [...] you do not invent shapes, you know them, auswendig wissen Sie, by heart [...]. (89)

Wyatt’s/Koppel’s argument strikingly synthesises the divergent aspects of repetition in Gaddis’ text, and it provides the key to an alternative, philosophical understanding of the term. This alternate meaning of repetition pivots on the German expression “auswendig wissen,” which translates as *knowing by heart*, but contrary to its English equivalent derives from the verb “aus-wenden” or to *turn something inside out*. “Auswendig wissen” thus is a form of knowing that involves the turning of something inside out or looking at it from both sides, to know it by heart but also to know it ‘inside out’. It is an activity that implies simultaneously the immersion *in* as well as a distancing *from* the phenomenon you intend to learn or know more about. According to Wyatt’s reasoning, originality cannot be understood by way of difference, that is, as being different from what is already in existence, nor should repetition be reduced to a similarity with some pre-existing design or work of art. While the mass reproduction or copying for the sake of copying will lead to degeneration and decline, copying of a great work of art to the point where you begin to know it by heart — because you have become immersed in it, looked at it from the inside out — demarcates a mode of repetition of a different order.

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13 | “The First Turn of the Screw” and “The Last Turn of the Screw” are Gaddis’s titles for the very first and last chapters, respectively.



## ENTER: KIERKEGAARD AND REPETITION

In his philosophical narrative *Repetition*, Kierkegaard proposed a radical revaluation of repetition as “the new [philosophical] category that will be discovered” (1983: 148). His complex use of repetitions and recognitions — both true and false — resembles Gaddis’ technique in *The Recognitions*. It also triggered a host of critical interpretations of which Gilles Deleuze’s post-structuralist re-reading *Différence et répétition* (1968) marks the beginning of a renewed interest in Kierkegaard as one of the most important thinkers of modernity.

In a very broad sense, Kierkegaard’s *Repetition* is primarily concerned with re-conceptualising our relationship with time. Rather than explaining time as following a linear axis from past to present to future, as in Hegel’s philosophy, Kierkegaard posits that we cannot experience time (including future time) other than through a recollection of things past, and that therefore our whole life comes to rest on the act of repetition:

When the Greeks said that all knowledge is recollecting, they said that all existence, which is, has been; when one says that life is a repetition, one says: actuality, which has been, now comes into existence. If one does not have the category of recollection or of repetition, all life dissolves into an empty, meaningless noise. (149)

Put simply, the argument runs as follows: repetition is life because without repetition the present would be irrecoverably past or perpetually passing. Yet if reality is made of repetition, then the form by which repetition becomes manifest is *re-collection*, or the act of remembering. Repetition, therefore, does not just happen; it is neither mechanical and automatic nor does it freeze human agency in a series of passing, identical moments. “The dialectic of repetition”, Kierkegaard argues, “is easy; for that which is repeated has been — otherwise it could not be repeated — but the very fact that it has been makes the repetition into something new” (149). Rather than marking the end of human life before it has even begun, repetition represents a powerful instrument to overcome death. “It may be true,” Kierkegaard contends, “that a person’s life is over and done with in the first moment, but there must also be the vital force to slay this death and transform it to life” (137).

Kierkegaard’s definition of repetition as an ongoing process of remembering and representation is essentially poetic. To repeat (in German *wieder-holen*, to collect again) is an act of wilful recovery by way of re-imagining the past as presence. Moreover, the dynamics of repetition are volatile, it cannot be contrived or determined: repetition, according to Kierkegaard, “is and remains a transcendence” (1983: 186). By freeing repetition in this way from its negative material connotation, he is also able to posit a special place for the artist. If repetition is the driving force behind human existence, the artist — whose professional interests are centred in the

representation of being as ‘past’ time — becomes what Kierkegaard calls an ‘exception’, and a bridge to that other “aristocratic exception”, namely religion. Insofar as he *re-petitions* life as art, the artist constantly navigates the shifting boundaries between the paradox of repetition and the dreadful possibility of irretrievable loss. This, then, is what connects him to the sphere of religion and spirituality and, by way of ‘forward’ recollection, to that mid-20<sup>th</sup>-century priest-turned-artist figure, Wyatt Gwyon.

Towards the end of *The Recognitions*, Wyatt, who by now has re-appeared under the name of Stephen, is seen in a Spanish monastery where he feverishly scrapes off layers of old paint from a 16<sup>th</sup> century genre painting. In keeping with the austere, spiritual surroundings, Wyatt is obsessed with “simplicity” (Gaddis 1955: 872), a reductive, self-annihilating approach to painting that he learned from studying Renaissance masters, who in turn had copied it from Titian (the American transcendentalist writer Henry David Thoreau, who has a cameo appearance in the novel, is yet another important reference here). Wyatt has pushed this idea to an extreme, in which simplification becomes erasure or the removal of every existing layer of paint. His model, obviously, is Praxiteles, the Greek artist who defined the process of sculpture as the removal of excess marble to the point where one “reaches the real form which was there all the time” (875). If Wyatt’s search for perfection, purity and formal concretisation coincides with core modernist aesthetic values, his project can also be read as a re-petitioning of Kierkegaard’s definition of art to “expose what is hidden” (1983: 135). Whereas Kierkegaard’s protagonist Constantine “shaves off the beard of all [his] ludicrousness” every morning only to learn that “the next morning [his] beard is just as long again” (214), since repetition cannot be avoided, Wyatt scrapes off heaps of paint only to arrive at the recognition that “we all studied [...] with Titian” (Gaddis 1955: 873), and that all his life has been marked by a form of artistic theft: “I am lived as a thief,” he once remarks, “all my life is lived as a thief” (868).<sup>14</sup>

By positing repetition as a powerful, creative force, both Kierkegaard and Gaddis have attempted to relieve it of its negative cultural and philosophical image. From this perspective, reality is nothing but the repetition of an abstract idea, and artistic representations are always mere actualisations of the real. But even though it necessitates a series of repetitions, art is not — as in Plato’s understanding — merely a mimetic imitation of life. Though ceaselessly actualising the real by way of repetition, art does not just reproduce what was there before. Rather it

14 | One is also struck here by a parallel between Kierkegaard’s quip on shaving as castrating (“I sit and clip myself,” 1983: 214) and Gaddis’ mention of “that most extraordinary Father of the Church, Origen, whose third-century enthusiasm led him to castrate himself so that he might repeat the *hoc est corpus meum, Dominus*, without the distracting interference of the rearing shadow of the flesh” (1955: 103).

resembles Kierkegaard's experience of re-reading the Book of Job: "Every time I come to it, it is born anew as something original or becomes new and original in my soul" (1983: 205).

According to an oft-quoted essay by Umberto Eco, postmodern media culture signals a shift from innovation to repetition, from the modern aesthetics of novelty to the postmodern aesthetics of recognition. In doing so, it also introduces a form of myth-making. Yet myth, Eco argues, "has nothing to do with art. It is a story, always the same. It may not be the story of Atreus and it may be that of J. R. Why not?" (Eco 1985: 182). Gaddis would not agree. To this relentless critic of mechanical forms of reproduction, postindustrial man is veiled by an "undimensional darkness", a self-perpetuating, endless repetition of "static patternless configurations [that] recalled nothing" (Gaddis 1955: 286). To escape "the Diaspora of words" (85) associated with contemporary mediated society, Gaddis proposes a return to simplicity, to that "unmeasurable residence of perfection, where nothing was created, where originality did not exist: because it was origin." This, to be sure, entails both the process of making and that of un-making, of "scraping off" (cf. 873).<sup>15</sup>

*The Recognitions* may be seen as the next best solution to this challenging task of the postmodern writer to embrace repetition as a new category while simultaneously resisting the dangers of self-effacement. Given the increasing skepticism about the postmodern reduction of art as either a commodity or a site of conflicting ideologies, we might wish that Gaddis's re-configuring of repetition as re-petitioning would finally be recognised as an original contribution in its own right to the ongoing debate about aesthetics and the place of art in contemporary society.

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15 | An impossible task, most readily associated in the novel with Esme, the enigmatic, ephemeral muse of Greenwich's artistic community (and fictional alias of Sheri Martinelli, Ezra Pound's long-term friend and partner), who knows how to create without creating. Working through a thousand words that by now have become "a million inanities", she moves on to where "work and thought in causal and stumbling sequence did not exist, but only transcription: where the poem she knew but could not write existed, ready-formed, awaiting recovery in that moment when the writing down of it was impossible: because she was the poem" (2000-01: 299-300).

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# Reflections on Plagiarism in Jorge Luis Borges's Works

The case of Pablo Katchadjian's *El Aleph engordado*

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In 2009, the Argentinian author Pablo Katchadjian published *El Aleph engordado*, (*The Fattened Aleph*), a rewriting of Borges's classic short story "The Aleph", from 1945.<sup>1</sup> As Katchadjian explains in a postface, his intervention consisted in "fattening" Borges's 4000-word text by adding 5600 more, without changing even a single full stop or comma of the base text: "el texto de Borges está intacto pero totalmente cruzado por el mío" (2009: 50).<sup>2</sup>

What seemed to be a very legitimate and even 'Borgesian' literary experiment resulted in scandal when, in 2011, Maria Kodama — Borges's widow and the owner of his intellectual property rights — claimed that by re-writing Borges's text and publishing it without asking her permission, Katchadjian had committed an act of plagiarism, and she initiated legal proceedings against him.<sup>3</sup>

This essay revolves around two main points. First, it aims to show how a new literary practice of experimentation on a classic text can be discredited as plagiarism via a predication of 'unoriginality' that derives from outdated aesthetic canons. Secondly, it highlights two different discourses that appear as irreconcilable in this

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1 | The year of its first publication in *Revista Sur*.

2 | "Borges's text is intact but totally criss-crossed by mine" (my translation).

3 | The case was dismissed in the first instance, but was reviewed in a court of appeal. Katchadjian now faces the possibility of an oral trial. This is not the first time Kodama has accused an author of plagiarism; in fact, it seems to be her *modus operandi* when a writer dares to experiment with Borges's work. For example, in 2011 she also pressed charges against the Spanish writer Agustín Fernández Mallo for his book *El hacedor (de Borges), remake*. Her accusation obliged the publisher Alfaguara, to withdraw the already-printed book from bookshops (Gelós 2015).

dispute, the legal and the literary. While the plagiarism allegations against Katchadjian's *Aleph* seem partly legitimate according to a century of Argentinian intellectual property law, they are absolutely risible in terms of artistic experimentation, largely because the 'plagiarised author' was one of the pioneers of this new literary practice.<sup>4</sup>

## THE FATTENED ALEPH

Citing the first lines of the scandalous book in question will give a closer view of the kind of "fattening" interventions that Katchadjian applies to Borges's text, which are italicized here for the purposes of this study:

La candente y húmeda mañana de febrero en que Beatriz Viterbo *finalmente* murió, después de una imperiosa y extensa agonía que no se rebajó un solo instante ni al sentimentalismo ni al miedo *ni tampoco al abandono y la indiferencia*, noté que las horribles carteleras de fierro y plástico de la Plaza Constitución, *junto a la boca del subterráneo*, habían renovado no se qué aviso de cigarrillos rubios *mentolados*; o sí, sé o supe cuáles, pero recuerdo haberme esforzado por despreciar el sonido irritante de la marca; el hecho me dolió, pues comprendí que el incesante y vasto universo ya se apartaba de ella, *Beatriz*, y que ese cambio era el primero de una serie infinita *de cambios que acabarían por destruirme también a mí*. (7-8)<sup>5</sup>

4 | By contrast, it can also be said that Borges himself played with the notion of plagiarism in its most trivial sense. For example, in a speech he held in 1952 at the funeral of the writer Macedonio Fernández, Borges affirmed that he was such an admirer of his friend's work that: "I imitated him, up to the point of literal transcription, up to the point of passionate and devoted plagiarism" (Engelbert 1993: 382, my translation).

5 | "On the hot and humid February morning in which Beatriz Viterbo *finally* died, after a period of desperate and extensive agony that never for a single moment gave way to sentimentality or fear, *nor to abandon or indifference*, I noticed that the horrible iron and plastic billboards of Plaza Constitución *next to the entrance to the subway* had been renovated to an advertisement for I do not know which blond *menthol* cigarettes. *Or I do, I know or I knew which ones they were, but I remember making an effort not to pay attention to the irritating sound of the brand*. The fact hurt me, since I realised that the vast and unceasing universe was already moving away from her, *Beatriz*, and that this change was the first one in an endless series *of changes that would end up destroying me, too*" (the translation as well as the emphases are mine).

One of the distinctive marks of Katchadjian's intervention is the addition of a somewhat banal and quotidian language to Borges characteristic academic prose. For example, when Borges, the narrator and main character of "The Aleph", visits Argentino Daneri's house to finally see the Aleph — that is, the whole universe concentrated in a spot in the corner of Daneri's basement — he lists a number of objects he sees: "nieve, tabaco [...], convexos desiertos ecuatoriales y cada uno de sus granos de arena, [...] en un gabinete de Alkmaar un globo terraqueo entre dos espejos que lo multiplicaban sin fin" (Borges 2009a: 753).<sup>6</sup> Katchadjian adds in his story, among others: "los infinitos microbios de que estamos compuestos [...], un sapo aplastado por un jeep" (2009: 43-44).<sup>7</sup> These latter certainly clash with Borges far more elegant choice of words.

The plot of "The Aleph" revolves around the death of Beatriz Viterbo and her at first secret life, which is reconstructed as a puzzle over the course of the short-story, from the perspective of the main character, Borges, along with that of Argentino Daneri. The references to the sexual life of Beatriz Viterbo that Katchadjian adds play a similarly "irreverent" role, in view of the fact that in Borges's oeuvre it is unusual to find eroticism of any kind:

Beatriz (yo mismo suelo repetirlo) era una mujer *hermosa*, una niña de una clarividencia casi implacable, pero había en ella negligencias, distracciones *coquetas*, desdenes *sensuales*, verdaderas crueldades *de la exhibición*, que tal vez reclaman una explicación patológica [...] *Cierta vez, el doctor Sigui me había sugerido que Beatriz padecía un desorden sexual.* (34)<sup>8</sup>

Not only is Beatriz Viterbo endowed with a much spicier personality in Katchadjian's *Aleph*, but she is also documented as having sexual encounters with Argentino Daneri and other men: "vi en un cajón del escritorio (y la letra me hizo temblar) cartas obsenas, increíbles, precisas, que Beatriz había dirigido a Carlos Argentino, *vi luego cartas de Beatriz, aun más obscenas, dirigidas al doctor*

6 | "snow, tobacco [...], convex equatorial deserts and their every grain of sand [...], in a study in Alkmaar a globe of the terrestrial world placed between two mirrors that multiply it endlessly" (Borges 2004: 130).

7 | "the infinite microbes we are made of [...], a toad run over by a jeep" (my translation).

8 | "Beatriz (I myself often repeat it) was a *beautiful* woman, a girl of implacable perspicacity, but she could be careless, susceptible to coquettish distractions, sensual disdains, real cruelties *of ostentation*—which may have a pathological explanation [...] *Once, Doctor Sigui suggested to me that Beatriz suffered from a sexual disorder*" (my translation).



*Zunni*” (44-45).<sup>9</sup> Katchadjian’s interventions mostly live up to the name of his book: they work like “fatty tissue”, “unnecessary” additions to the canonic text, which go so far as to transform Borges’s classical short story-form into a novella (Gelós 2015).

Borge’s widow was by no means ignorant of Katchadjian’s avant-garde gesture. Moreover, she considered this “plagiarism” as an act of irreverence against her husband, one of Argentina’s most important and respected 20<sup>th</sup>-century writers, as she expressed in one of the many interviews she gave: “Se mete en una obra ajena en un plagio irreverente para deformarla: no lo voy a permitir” (Sánchez, 2015).<sup>10</sup>

## “APPROPRIATION LITERATURE”

Katchadjian’s fattening of ‘The Aleph’ is not an isolated phenomenon, quite the contrary, it can be contextualised within a series of recent and highly provocative literary experiments. Annette Gilbert dubs these “Appropriation Literature” in her 2014 book, *Reprint: Appropriation and Literature*, in which she also makes specific reference to Katchadjian’s and Borges’s work.<sup>11</sup> According to her theory, this new literature is characterised neither by copying or playing with the style of a canonical writer, nor by reusing a famous character or certain motifs, but rather by the use of the entire “materiality as such” of a text (Gilbert 2014: 51). What differentiates appropriations from plagiarism is that they explicitly show the intervention performed by a work by “staging the act itself” (51). Gilbert also places particular emphasis on defining the controversy that is generated by these works’ refusal to fulfil traditional readerly expectations, principally the expectation of originality, in the sense that they have to be a “new” and “unique” product of the imagination of the writer:

Where exactly does the provocation of these books lie? [...] we are concerned with books for which no new, original text has been produced. Rather, these books are based on texts or complete books which already

9 | “In a desk drawer (and the handwriting made me shiver) I saw obscene, incredible, precise letters that Beatriz had written to Carlos Argentino, then I saw the letters by Beatriz, even more obscene, addressed to doctor Zunni” (my translation).

10 | “He messes with someone else’s work in an irreverent plagiarism in order to deform it: I will not allow that” (my translation).

11 | According to Gilbert’s theory, the kind of intervention applied in The Fattened Aleph could be that of “Interpolation”, which “[u]sually [...] refers to a subsequent (unauthorized) insertion of words or sentences in the text of a work” (Gilbert 2014: 68).

exist, and which are appropriated and re-published under a new authorship. Hence, these works challenge the concepts of innovation and originality dictated by our culture, a challenge that is usually answered with accusations that these works possess a disrespectful hubris or that they are brazen plagiarism—especially when they are concerned with canonical texts of world literature or intellectual history. This applies both to appropriations in which the original text or book hasn't been modified, and to appropriations that modify a given text. (49-50)

It is exactly for this reason that the accusation of plagiarism has no validity Katchadjian's case. There is clearly no intention to "deceive the reader" by concealing Borges's authorship of the 1949 'Aleph'. On the contrary, not only does Katchadjian rewrite a literary classic precisely for a reader who is anticipated to surely know of its existence—and includes the original's "fattened" title within the title of the new work—but he also explains how he performed his literary "appropriation" in the postscript,<sup>12</sup> explicitly declaring that the text worked on is that of Borges. This means that, in terms of the Gilbert's theory mentioned above, Katchadjian is explicitly staging the act of appropriation (51):

El trabajo de engordamiento tuvo una sola regla: no quitar ni alterar nada del texto original, ni palabras, ni comas, ni puntos, ni el orden. Eso significa que el texto de Borges está intacto pero totalmente cruzado por el mío, de modo que, si alguien quisiera, podría volver al texto de Borges desde éste.

Con respecto a mi escritura, si bien no intenté ocultarme en el estilo de Borges tampoco escribí con la idea de hacerme demasiado visible: los mejores momentos, me parece, son esos en los que no se puede saber con certeza qué es de quién. (Katchadjian 2009: 50)<sup>13</sup>

**12** | Kachadjian's extra prologue is indeed a reference to Borges's work, who in his postfaces deploys multiple 'tricky' narrators, who sometimes contradict the main narrator, add new information about the story and 'confuse' the reader.

**13** | "The work of fattening had only one rule: not to remove nor to modify anything from the original, not words or commas, or a full stop, or the sequence. This means that Borges's text is intact but totally crossed by mine, so that, if someone wanted to, he could go back to Borges's text starting from this one. Regarding my writing, even though I did not try to hide myself in Borges's style, I did not write with the idea of becoming visible: the best moments, I think, are those in which it is uncertain what belongs to whom" (my translation).

## THE ACCUSATIONS

Disregarding current novelties in literary theory, María Kodama accused Katchadjian of plagiarising Borges. In an interview with *El País* from 2016 around the time when rumours of the case began to spread in literary circles, Kodama demonstrated her understanding of the concept of intellectual property in terms of possession, stating that Katchadjian should have asked for her permission to experiment with Borges's work — that is, for 'appropriating' it:

P. ¿Por qué demandó al escritor argentino Pablo Katchadjian por su obra *El Aleph engordado*?

R. Ya solo la palabra engordado hubiera producido el desmayo de Borges. Yo fui criada por un padre japonés y tengo códigos que aquí no existen. Lo básico es preguntar, porque si yo quiero usar ese suéter te digo, ¿me lo prestás o no?

P. Si le hubiera pedido permiso para jugar con la obra de Borges, ¿Se lo hubiera concedido?

R. No, no. No se puede jugar con la obra de Borges. (Cué/Centenera 2016)<sup>14</sup>

Nevertheless, plagiarism as such does not exist in the Argentinian penal code. The closest corresponding legal form is "Intellectual Property Fraud", which was enacted in the 1930s, a period in which these kinds of artistic "interventionist" experiments were emerging. The legal strictures relevant to this case are:

se consideran casos especiales de defraudación y sufrirán la pena que él establece [...]:

a) El que edite, venda o reproduzca por cualquier medio o instrumento, una obra inédita o publicada sin autorización de su autor o derechohabientes;

14 | "Q. Why did you sue the Argentinian writer Pablo Katchadjian for his work?

A. The mere word fattened would have caused Borges to faint. I was raised by a Japanese father and I have principles that don't exist here. The minimum is to ask, because if I want to use this sweater I say to you: can I borrow it?

Q. If he had asked for your permission to play with the work from Borges, would you have given it to him?

A. No, No, You cannot play with Borges's work" (my translation). Everything indicates that Kodama meant Argentina with the word "here".

b) El que edite, venda o reproduzca una obra suprimiendo o cambiando el nombre del autor, el título de la misma o alterando dolosamente su texto;<sup>15</sup>

Given the facts — that Katchadjian had changed the name of the original short story to *The Fattened Aleph*, intentionally erased Borges's name as author, altered the text without distinguishing between Borges's work and his own, which was precisely the whole point of the intervention, and finally that he offered the work for sale — the law could partly be interpreted in favour of Kodama.<sup>16</sup>

In this debate, two irreconcilable concepts start to become evident. The problem that comes to the surface here is as follows: how can literature and its possibilities of experimentation, legitimate in their own field and depending on their own rules, be judged according to an outdated law that does not take into account any change in that field since the 1930s?

## THE SCANDAL

The scarce 200 copies of *The Fattened Aleph* that were published in Buenos Aires — a number of which were sold for a small amount of money, while the rest were given to friends as gifts — were enough to land Katchadjian in court. The scandal of the plagiarism accusation consequently sparked a debate among numerous Argentine writers and academics (Gelós 2015). In response, they gathered in Katchadjian's defence, highlighting the absurdity of judging *The Fattened Aleph* under such an obsolete law, and pointed out that the method Katchadjian used is consistent with literary-historical precedent, more specifically, interventions based on rewriting what can be called "original" texts. This panorama was articulated in an open letter they wrote for the gathering:

15 | "[The following] are considered special cases of fraud and will be punished with the penalty provided by law [...]:

a) The editing, sale or reproduction of an unpublished or published work, by any means or instrument, without authorization of its author or copyright-holder

b) The editing, sale or reproduction of a work removing the name of the author, the title or deliberately changing the text"

(Article 72 of law 11.723 of the penal code, my translation).

16 | In an interview with the newspaper *La voz*, Kodama's lawyer, Fernando Soto, said: "If Katchadjian is so creative, he should write his own books and then fatten them up" (Redacción LaVoz, my translation).

María Kodama is the heir to Jorge Luis Borges's literary estate. This estate includes short stories, poems, essays, prologues, articles and books written in collaboration, which fit into four volumes in a bookshelf: the remaining world literature, which Borges helped to renew from Argentina, and of which *El Aleph engordado* is legitimately a part, does not belong to María Kodama, nor does she have any veto power over it.<sup>17</sup>

The defence attorney Ricardo Straface, who is also a writer, asked Katchadjian to write a short essay explaining to the judge that the concept behind the appropriated *Aleph*, as well as its narrative procedures, are part of a tradition of art and literature which emerged a couple of decades ago. He makes reference to intertextuality, to Duchamp's readymades, and indeed to the fact that Borges was a pioneer in this tradition (Castagnet/Salzmann 2012). Straface states in an interview: "Yo creo que fue importante esta explicación para que los jueces aceptaran el argumento jurídico de que no había intención de engañar, y que este procedimiento tenía una gran tradición, de la cual Borges era un entusiasta cultor" (Zúñiga 2012).<sup>18</sup> Borges dedicated an enormous part of his work to creating the "literature of literature", or as Michel Lafon calls it, "le champ privilégié de l'expérimentation borgesienne" (1990: 35). It is in this sense paradoxical to prosecute a contemporary writer who is experimenting with literary methods that Borges helped to develop.

In his fiction, Borges himself played with the idea of appropriation literature. In his much-cited short story — which Gilbert mentions in *Reprint* — "Pierre Menard, author of the Quixote", a writer from the 20<sup>th</sup> century attempts to compose *Don Quixote*, replicating Cervantes's text word for word, but without copying the original:

No quería componer otro Quijote — lo cual es fácil — sino *el Quijote*. Inútil agregar que no encaró nunca una transcripción mecánica del original; no se proponía copiarlo. Su admirable ambición era producir unas páginas que coincidieran — palabra por palabra y línea por línea — con las de Miguel de Cervantes. (Borges 2009b: 533)<sup>19</sup>

17 | "Support for Pablo Katchadjian [English version]. Open Letter" <http://alephengordado.blogspot.de/p/support-for-pablo-katchadjian-english.html> (last accessed on 31 May 2017).

18 | "I think this explanation was important for the judges to accept the legal argument, that there was no intention of deceiving, and that this narrative procedure had a long tradition, of which Borges was an enthusiastic promoter" (my translation).

19 | "Pierre Menard did not want to compose *another* Quixote, which surely is easy enough — he wanted to compose *the* Quixote. Nor, surely, need one be obliged to note that his goal was never a mechanical transcription of the original; he had no intention of *copying* it. His admirable

Gilbert also cites a work — as an example of appropriated literature — published by Éditions Lorem Ipsum in 2009, attributed to the author ‘Pierre Menard’ and entitled *El ingenioso Hidalgo Don Quijote de la Mancha*. Exactly as detailed in Pierre Menard’s notes in Borges’s short-story, only chapters 9, 38 and 22 are published, and correspond “word by word and line by line” to Cervantes’s *Quijote* (Gilbert 2014: 435-37).

According to Gilbert, 21<sup>st</sup>-century appropriated literature puts into practice notions and concepts of rewriting from the previous century. Thus, Borges’s work, as one of the touchstones of this tradition of rewriting, was (and still is) “appropriated”, as in the example mentioned above: “Borges’s fictions [...] can be seen as the model case for contemporary appropriation literature, which is why authors always refer to it. Meanwhile, it has even become the trigger and object of real appropriation” (Gilbert 2014: 53).

## RE-WRITING THE ARGENTINIAN LITERARY CANON

*The Fattened Aleph* is part of the “Trilogy of Argentinian Literature”, an unfinished project of Katchadjian’s that had emerged by the mid-2000s, and which consisted in intervening in or re-writing three Argentinian literary classics: *El Martín Fierro* by José Hernández, *El Matadero (The Slaughter Yard)* by Esteban Echeverría and finally the text in question here, “The Aleph”. Borges himself also worked on *Martín Fierro*, not only writing several essays about a book which had become the Argentinian “National Epos”, but also writing an alternative ending for it in one of his short stories.

Published in 1872, *Martín Fierro* is a poem that tells the story of a *gaucho*<sup>20</sup> who is the eponymous narrator. The poem begins with Fierro recounting the perfection of his former rural existence with his wife and children in total harmony with nature. This equilibrium is soon destroyed when the state recruits him to fight on the frontier against the *indios*, the country’s native inhabitants. After deserting, Fierro begins an anonymous life of misery, pain and violence, until the end of the story of the second part (“The return”) when he meets his children again. In this scene, he is also confronted by the brother of a man that he brutally killed, who is seeking revenge. They start a discussion, but do not fight in a typical gaucho knife fight as they intended to, because Fierro’s children are present.

Even though the book was published with the aim of criticising the Argentinean state’s terrible treatment of recruited gauchos, many literary critics at the beginning

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ambition was to produce a number of pages which coincided—word for word and line for line—with those of Miguel de Cervantes” (Borges 2000a: 37).

20 | A word commonly used to refer to inhabitants of the countryside.

of the 20<sup>th</sup> century considered it the most representative text of Argentine literature due to the protagonist, Fierro, seemingly possessed of all the virtues of what could be called a 'paradigmatic' national hero. Leopoldo Lugones, one of the most influential poets of the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, was one of the advocates for transforming Hernández's *Martín Fierro* into the national book of the Argentineans (Sarlo 2007: 61).

72 years after the publication of the book that was transformed into a central part of the Argentine literary canon, Fierro makes an appearance in Borges's short-story "El fin" ("The End"), in *Ficciones*. Borges restages Fierro's confrontation with the brother of the man that he kills in the Hernández narrative, and commits the sacrilege of killing off the 'national hero'. In this case, 'The End' means an ending, redundancy intended, to the open story of *Martín Fierro*, and is a symbolic gesture of Borges's critical attitude to the edification of Hernández's text as the national epic. Borges also expressed this attitude in more than one essay.<sup>21</sup>

Desde su catre, Recabarren vio el fin. Una embestida y el negro reculó, perdió pie, amagó un hachazo a la cara y se tendió en una puñalada profunda, que penetró en el vientre. Después vino otra que el pulpero no alcanzó a precisar y Fierro no se levantó. Inmóvil, el negro parecía vigilar su agonía laboriosa. Limpió el facón ensangrentado en el pasto y volvió a las casas con lentitud, sin mirar para atrás. Cumplida su tarea de justiciero, ahora era nadie. Mejor dicho era el otro: no tenía destino sobre la tierra y había matado a un hombre. (2009c: 628)<sup>22</sup>

Borges not only questions the canonisation of *Martín Fierro* by writing a critical essay against it, but also through his fiction. Borges rewrites the ending of the national epic and initiates a new way of doing experimental literature in Argentina.

*Martín Fierro* is a poem in octosyllabic verse, with a very distinctive *abbcbb* rhyme, which can be placed in the genre of 'Gaucha Literature'. The following lines, which every Argentinian scholar could, at least in theory, recite by heart, appear at the beginning of the poem's first book, when Fierro starts to narrate his bitter experiences:

21 | See Borges (1997): *El escritor argentino y la tradición*.

22 | "From his cot, Recabarren saw the end. A thrust, and the black man dodged back, lost his footing, feigned a slash to his opponent's face, and then lunged out with a deep jab that buried the knife in his belly. Then came another thrust, which the storekeeper couldn't see, and Fierro did not get up. Unmoving, the black man seemed to stand watch over the agonizing death. He wiped off the bloody knife in the grass and walked slowly back toward the houses, never looking back. His work of vengeance done, he was nobody now. Or rather, he was the other one: there was neither destination nor destiny on earth for him, and he had killed a man" (Borges 2000b: 141).



Aquí me pongo a cantar  
 Al compás de la vigüela,  
 Que el hombre que lo desvela  
 Una pena extraordinaria  
 Como la ave solitaria  
 Con el cantar se consuela [...]. (Hernández 1945: 155)<sup>23</sup>

*The alphabetically-sorted Martín Fierro* (2007) was Katchadjian's first work in the "Trilogy of Argentinian literature". Katchadjian took every line of the poem and sorted them in alphabetical order according to initial letter, so that the rhyme and verse-structure typical of Gaucho Literature is lost, along with the order of the famous narrative. What remains after Katchadjian's intervention is mere play of forms, in which the tale of the gaucho — even though the poem is deconstructed — is nevertheless latent for a reader familiar with the original *Martín Fierro*:

A andar con los avestruces  
 A andar reclamando sueldos  
 A ayudarles a los piones  
 A bailar un pericón  
 A bramar como una loba  
 A buscar almas más tiernas  
 A buscar una tapera  
 [...]  
 Aquí me pongo a cantar  
 Aquí no valen dotores [...]. (Katchadjian 2007: 7)<sup>24</sup>

Both authors work on *Martín Fierro* in a subversive way, Borges by questioning its canonisation as the national poem and killing its main character in a short story, Katchadjian by eliminating its rhyme and verse-structure, which are exactly what make the poem part of Gaucho Literature. Their methods are, however, very different: while Borges writes his own fictive story, restaging Fierro in "The End", Katchadjian appropriates *Martín Fierro* by working with the whole materiality of the text. The creation process of *El Martín fierro ordenado alfabéticamente* is far from that of writing a story. As Katchadjian said in an interview, he just copy-pasted *Martín Fierro* and the computer ordered it alphabetically within a few seconds (Terranova: n.d.).

23 | "Here I'll sit and sing / to the beat of my guitar:

'cause a man who's kept awake / by a heavy sorrow,

like a lonely bird / consoles himself with song" (Hernández 1974: 11).

24 | As the purpose of Katchadjian's appropriation of *Martín Fierro* is to play with the mere forms of the language, that is, with the signifier, a translation of this passage is unnecessary.

In the second part of the trilogy, a project that is still unfinished, Katchadjian experiments with *The Slaughter Yard*. A violent short story by Esteban Echaverría, written between 1838 and 1840 but not published until 1871, *The Slaughter Yard* concerns the cruelty of the despotic governor of Buenos Aires Province, Juan Manuel de Rosas, who ruled during the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century in a very turbulent and polarised political context. In an interview, Katchadjian explains how he inverted the narrative line of the short story, in which a group of *Federales* from the *Mazorca* — Rosas partisans, who are represented as barbarians — torture a *Unitario* — one of their political adversaries, a group represented as civilized city-intellectuals. Katchadjian's version starts at the end, and ends with the beginning: first the *Unitario* dies, then the *Federales* undress him, after which he is tortured, then kidnapped, and so on (ibid.).

The thought here is not to imply that Borges and Katchadjian share a similar style, though both authors certainly share an impetus to question the classics of Argentinian literature through certain irreverent acts, whether killing the main character of the “national book” or fattening the text of one of the most important authors of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in Argentina. Thus Katchadjian finds himself in the paradoxical situation of being accused of committing the very ‘crimes’ that Borges himself admitted to, against Borges's own work. One day, perhaps, Katchadjian will be able to publish a second edition of his scandalous book, including all of the legal documents and other writings that the trial generated. In this way, Katchadjian will be able to continue fattening his Aleph.

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# “I have chosen to write notes on imaginary books”

## On the Forgery of Textual Sources

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Literature has engendered various techniques to create literary fakes or forgeries. The most common methods include autograph forgeries, where a material object is produced and passed off as another object (such as a lost original, very similar to the forgery of paintings), and plagiarism, where the close relation of one text to another — its source — is hidden. The phenomenon to be described here constitutes yet another ‘literary forgery’, one that could be conceived of as the exact opposite of plagiarism: the detailed reference to a fictitious textual source, depicting it as real (existing in the reality of the reader) and prior to the manifest text.<sup>1</sup> This procedure could be looked at as a narrative strategy of forgery, as it produces an object — the source — and gives misleading information about its composition. Compared to other forms of forgery, this procedure enters uncharted territory, as it often deliberately scatters traces of the falsification it commits.

One of the masters of this form of literary forgery is the Argentinean author Jorge Luis Borges. In his short story *Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius*, the first-person narrator and his friend Bioy<sup>2</sup> search for an article about the fictitious country Uqbar that Bioy previously encountered in a book called “*Anglo-American Cyclopaedia*” (2009: 13), which is described by the text as a pirated copy of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. After they cannot find the article in the first *Anglo-American Cyclopaedia* they consult, it turns up in a second, otherwise identical copy. After a short summary of the article, we are given some of the content of its bibliography:

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1 | As the aspect of the forged source being prior to the manifest text is essential to the technique of feigned intertextuality, this essay will use the term pre-text to refer to these textual sources hereafter.

2 | The name of this friend is undoubtedly inspired by the Argentinean author Adolfo Bioy Casares, a contemporary and close friend of Jorge Luis Borges.

La bibliografía enumeraba cuatro volúmenes que no hemos encontrado hasta ahora, aunque el tercero—Silas Haslam: *History of the Land Called Uqbar*, 1874—figura en los catálogos de librería de Bernard Quaritch.\* El primero, *Lesbare und lesenswerthe Bemerkungen über das Land Ukkbar in Klein-Asien*, data de 1641 y es obra de Johannes Valentinus Andreä. El hecho es significativo; un par de años después, di con ese nombre en las inesperadas páginas de De Quincey (*Writings*, decimotercer volumen) [...].

\* Haslam ha publicado también *A General History of Labyrinths*. (17)<sup>3</sup>

Through various markers, the text suggests that all the textual elements in italics in this section are titles of books, and that these books exist outside of *Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius*, although most of them are in fact fictitious: Silas Haslam, both of the texts ascribed to him and the text ascribed to Andreä do not exist in extratextual reality.<sup>4</sup> Andreä himself though did exist, as did the bookseller Quaritch and his catalogs and of course De Quincey and his *Writings*. By inventing various book titles and locating the corresponding books outside of the manifest text, the short story simulates intertextual references.

Hereafter, I want to describe the simulation of intertextual references as a form of forgery, as this linkage provides a useful theoretical frame for understanding this narrative procedure. Thus, after a short overview of various forms taken by feigned intertextuality in different texts, the phenomenon commonly known as pseudocitation will be redefined along the lines of current descriptions of forgery. This will allow us to focus on the authorial act of manipulating the reader's expectations, rather than the mere object of the forgery, and lead to some insights on the aesthetic effects of feigned intertextuality.

3 | “The bibliography enumerated four volumes which we have not yet found, though the third—Silas Haslam’s *History of the Land Called Uqbar*, 1874—figures in the catalogues of Bernard Quaritch’s book shop.\* The first, *Lesbare und lesenswerthe Bemerkungen über das Land Ukkbar in Klein-Asien*, dates from 1641 and is the work of Johannes Valentinus Andreä. That fact is significant: a few years later, I came upon that name in the unsuspected pages of De Quincey (*Writings*, Vol. XIII) [...]”

\* Haslam was also the author of *A General History of Labyrinths* (Borges 1964: 17).

4 | The terms “exist” and “reality” will here and below be used to define a point of reference that lies outside of the manifest text, in the perceived reality of the reader.

## VARIETY OF FEIGNED INTERTEXTUALITY

Contrary to the belief of some scholars, Borges wasn't the first to forge his own pre-texts.<sup>5</sup> There is a broad variety of forms to this phenomenon, with different intensities as well as different functions and places within the texts.

Besides references to fictitious pre-texts, like in *Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius*, there are also references to a fictitious text that 're'produce part of the fictitious source. This is, for example, the case at the beginning of Herman Hesse's *Das Glasperlenspiel*, published in 1943. Before the story begins, the text presents a Latin quote, accompanied by detailed information about the source-text, its author and editors and the chapter it was taken from:

... non entia enim licet quodammodo levibusque hominibus facilius atque incuriosius verbis reddere quam entia, verumtamen pio diligentique rerum scriptori plane aliter res se habet: nihil tantum repugnat ne verbis illustretur, at nihil adeo necesse est ante hominum oculos proponere ut certas quasdam res, quas esse neque demonstrari neque probari potest, quae contra eo ipso, quod pii diligentesque viri illas quasi ut entia tractant, enti nascendique acultati paululum appropinquant.

Albertus Secundus

tract. de cristall. spirit.

eds. Clangor et Colof. lib. I. cap. 28.

(Hesse 1972: 14)

Despite the bibliographical details, this motto was made up by Hesse himself, who had it translated into Latin by friends whose names, Schall and Feinhals, he turned into the Latin editor's names here listed (Unseld 2012: 861; Ziolkowski 2002: ix).

Another version of this technique can be seen in the novel *Amor se escribe sin hache* by Enrique Jardiel Poncela, first published in 1928. In one of the chapters of this parodist romantic novel, the reader is given a quote seemingly taken from a poem called "El viaje en el tope", imputed to the Spanish romanticist writer José de Espronceda:

Me parece oportuno copiar un trozo de la poesía "El viaje en el tope", que tanta fama le dio a Espronceda, y que empieza así:

"Cuando los procesos, que vienen de fuera,  
Y avanzan lo mismo que avanza una ola,  
Nos traigan los trenes, que es moda extranjera,

5 | The statement that Borges was the one to introduce the phenomenon of the forged pre-text into fiction is for example made in Witt-  
haus 2006: 164.



Será una delicia pasar la frontera  
 Sentado en un tope de furgón de cola.”  
 Siguen 222 versos más que no copio. (Jardiel Poncela 2011: 239)<sup>6</sup>

Just like Borges in *Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius*, Jardiel Poncela imputes his fictitious source to a real author, and just like Hesse, he not only refers to that source, but quotes from it.

Apart from those qualitative distinctions, there are also varieties in the quantity of the references to fictitious texts. Unlike *Das Glasperlenspiel* and *Amor se escribe sin hache*, which only reference a few forged sources, there are also texts mainly or entirely based on them. Roberto Bolaño's *La literatura nazi en América* from 1996 is one of the most examples of this. The text, described on the back cover as an “almost encyclopedic anthology of the pro-nazi literature” (2015, my translation), is composed of the descriptions of thirty fictitious authors, their lives, their works, literary influences and impact, complete with a thirty page long bibliographical appendix, the “epílogo para monstruos” (“Epilogue for Monsters”, 227), which lists fictitious and real books.

## A DEFINITION OF FEIGNED INTERTEXTUALITY

The simulation of intertextual references hasn't yet been comprehensively treated on a theoretical level, but is mentioned in some examinations of the works of Borges and Pynchon. The terminology used therein can be roughly divided into two approaches: concept formation through the addition of adjectives oppositional to concepts of originality and authenticity, like ‘false references’, and concept formation through the use of the prefix ‘pseudo-’, like ‘pseudocitation’.<sup>7</sup> However, neither terms built through the addition of adjectives like ‘false’, ‘erroneous’ or ‘apocryphal’ nor the various ‘pseudo’ derivatives offer an adequately clear terminology.

6 | The sentences before and after the poem translate to: “This seems to me like a good opportunity to copy a part of the poem ‘El viaje en el tope’, that gave so much fame to Espronceda, and that begins as follows: [...] 222 verses ensue that I don't copy” (my translation).

7 | Maya Schärer-Nussberger for example speaks of the ‘false’ reference, that—in contrast to ‘true’ references—points to ‘false’ information (2008: 161-63). Gérard Genette uses similar terminology when he talks about “apocryphal references” and “erroneous attributions” in Borges' *Historia universal de la Infamia*. Genette moreover uses the terms “pseudosummary”, “pseudoscenario” and “pseudosketch” (1997: 251-52). Peter Zima also uses the prefix ‘pseudo-’, commenting that pseudocitation is a phenomenon of postmodern literature (2000: 315).

This points to an underlying problem in terminology that complicates conceptual clarity: the recourse to concepts of originality. Basing the definition on concepts like authenticity or falseness seems inadequate, as those terms have themselves been undergoing a constant crisis of definition in recent decades.<sup>8</sup>

A more promising approach might be to look at theoretical conclusions on forgeries, where researchers have worked on a similar problem. In his essay *The Limits of Interpretation*, Umberto Eco writes that forgeries are mainly a pragmatic problem, because it is not the forged object itself, but the claim of identity which accompanies it that turns it into a forgery (1991: 181). Similarly, Bernhard Dotzler defines forging as a propositional act and emphasises that it is not objects that are forged, but the *information on objects* (2006: 78). In this sense, the simulation of intertextuality could even be seen as a forgery *par excellence*, being *only* a propositional act without object.

From this perspective, one could say that the simulation of references described here doesn't pertain to the inner quality of a falsified text, but rather to the attributes imputed to it. I thus propose to adapt a term that focuses on the implicit movement of referencing, and suggest the term 'feigned intertextuality' to describe the phenomenon here observed: *Feigned intertextuality is the reference to a fictitious pre-text, simulating the gesture of 'classical' intertextuality, as the text feigns a claim to immediate referability in the (perceived) reality of the recipient.*

The difference between feigned intertextuality and the citation of fictitious texts which are not presented as real (one might for example think of the magical school-books in *Harry Potter*) lies precisely in this artificial claim to referability. But how is this claim raised?

## MANIPULATION OF THE READER'S EXPECTATIONS

According to Wolfgang Iser, every text creates expectations in the reader that will make him interpret the text in a certain way, until these expectations are interrupted, forcing the reader to reevaluate (1976). Philippe Lejeune develops a very similar idea in his work about autobiographies:

As opposed to all forms of fiction, biography and autobiography are *referential* texts: exactly like scientific or historical discourse, they claim to provide information about a "reality" exterior to the text [...]. All referential

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8 | In his examination of forgeries, Umberto Eco notes that "the definitions of such terms as 'fake,' 'forgery,' 'pseudoepigrapha,' 'falsification,' 'facsimile,' 'counterfeiting,' 'spurious,' 'pseudo,' 'apocryphal,' and others are rather controversial. It is reasonable to suspect that many difficulties in defining these terms are due to the difficulty in defining the very notion of 'original' or of 'real object'" (1991: 74).

texts thus entail what I will call a “referential pact,” implicit or explicit, in which are included a definition of the field of the real that is involved and a statement of the modes and the degree of resemblance to which the text lays claim. (1989: 22)

Whether we call it reader expectations or referential pact, both theories state that certain structures in a text make the reader perceive it under certain assumptions (in the case of biographies, the expectation that textual references to an extratextual reality are to be trusted). The respective pact ‘valid’ for a text is conveyed to the reader by a certain repertoire of signals. Feigned intertextuality makes use of this set-up by imitating the repertoire of signals of an intertextual pact to create authentication strategies that induce the reader to locate the pre-texts in extratextual reality.

One of those ‘strategies of authentication’ logically follows from what Lejeune says about the referential pact, namely the imitation of what he calls referential texts — a group also containing texts like essays or encyclopedias (Ruthven 2001: 149). This imitation can be achieved through the use of stylistic features commonly associated with referential texts or even through explicit (but false) information in the paratext. One example of this is Bolaño’s *La literatura nazi en América*, a text that imitates an encyclopedia of literature: The reader is presented with 30 chapters on 30 authors, in chronological order and thematically bundled up, followed by a vast epilogue containing an index of people, an index of editorials, journals and places as well as a very long bibliography. Additionally, the back cover tells us that the book is, in the words of its author, an “almost encyclopedic anthology of the pro-nazi literature” (Bolaño 2015). All of these details are designed to shape the reader’s expectation that what he is reading follows the rules of a referential text and that the references point outside of the manifest text.

Another narrative strategy is the usage of detailed bibliographical information for fictitious pre-texts. In most cases of feigned intertextuality, the reference is accompanied by bibliographical details such as the publication date, the editorial that supposedly published it and the place of publication. This can be seen in the bibliography of *La literatura nazi en América*, where the strategy has reached an excessive peak. Mostly though, the invented bibliographical details are not presented in separate bibliographies, but are worked into the text, for example in *Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius*. The first reference to *The Anglo-American Cyclopaedia* in this short story contains information on the city and date of publication: “la enciclopedia falazmente se llama *The Anglo American Cyclopaedia* (Nueva York, 1917) y es una reimpression literal, pero también morosa, de la *Encyclopaedia Britannica* de 1902” (Borges 2009: 13).<sup>9</sup> In the information about the pre-text given to the

9 | “The encyclopedia is fallaciously called *The Anglo-American Cyclopaedia* (New York, 1917), and is a literal but delinquent reprint of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* of 1902” (Borges 1964: 17).

reader, be it bibliographical information or details about the content of the pre-text, fictitious and real elements are often mixed, thus further locating the fictitious pre-text in extratextual reality. The most obvious example of this is the imputation of a fictitious text to a real author, as Borges does in *Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius*, with Johannes Valentinus Andreä. This strategy corresponds to the adding the imitated artist's signature to a forged painting. According to Justus Fetscher, this is especially effective because the name of an author carries a certain authority that the recipient believes (2006: 316-21). But there are also various other ways to add real elements to the information about a fictitious pre-text, for example by stating that it deals with real texts, or that it is quoted in existing texts, like *Lesbare und lesenswerthe Bemerkungen über das Land Ukkbar* seemingly being mentioned in De Quincey's writings. Through this compound of extratextual and fictional elements, the fictitious pre-texts are being inscribed into the extratextual discourse of reality, likewise making the former more 'real' and the latter more 'fictitious'.

When Texts quote from fictitious works imputed to real authors, imitating the style of writing of this author can also serve to generate authenticity. This strategy is the pivot of most forgeries *ex nihilo*, as Eco and many others have retraced (Eco 1991: 186-87). *Amor se escribe sin hache* exhibits a parodic example for this strategy in its appendix: displaying "opinions that the book has earned from some famous people", this appendix ascribes fictitious citations to various famous contemporaries of Jardiel Poncela. Each citation is parodying the respective style of the writer it is imputed to (Poncela 2011: 393-96).

## AESTHETIC EFFECTS OF FEIGNED INTERTEXTUALITY

This situation of reception — the play with the expectations of the reader and their deliberate manipulation through strategies of authentication<sup>10</sup> — correlates with what is commonly described by the terms 'forgery' or 'fake'. As pointed out before, feigned intertextuality could even be seen as a forgery *par excellence*, because it illustrates the aspect of forgery as a propositional act. Thus, it proves interesting to look at this narrative phenomenon in the light of theories about forgeries. But the very aspect that makes it describable as a forgery, the lack of an object, is also the biggest contrast to common definitions of 'forgery', as the Oxford Dictionary reveals: "[Forgery is t]he making of a thing in fraudulent imitation of something" (OED 2015). While we have seen that feigned intertextuality could indeed be de-

10 | Through the manipulation of expectations, feigned intertextuality could be described — in a similar vein to Alexandre Métraux's comments on forgeries — as a double deception: The textual deception is complemented by the reader's self-deception, as he unconsciously disregards fictional markers up to a certain point (see 2006: 51).

fined as a “fraudulent imitation of something” — although the term fraudulent might be unsuitable —, the “something” that is imitated is not an object or text itself, but rather the reference, the pointing to said text. No “thing” is actually made in the process.<sup>11</sup>

This lack of an actual object also leads to another difference between ‘classical’ forgeries (in the way the OED describes them) and feigned intertextuality: its purpose. While normal strategies of forging mainly serve to increase the market value of the forged object, the narrative phenomenon of ‘forging’ pre-texts carries a broad variety of aesthetic effects that range from being purely ornamental to questioning concepts such as originality.

Borges himself mentions some of the possible effects and purposes of the forging of pre-texts. In the preface to his collection of short stories *The Garden of Forking Paths*, he states:

Desvarío laborioso y empobrecedor el de componer vastos libros; el de explicar en quinientas páginas una idea cuya perfecta exposición oral cabe en pocos minutos. Mejor procedimiento es simular que esos libros ya existen y ofrecer un resumen, un comentario. [...] he preferido la escritura de notas sobre libros imaginarios. (2009: 12)<sup>12</sup>

While this explanation of the use of feigned metatextuality out of ‘pure laziness’ is of course a form of *captatio benevolentiae*, it also makes a point: in commenting on fictitious books, “pretending they already exist”, whole worlds of literature and genres can be condensed into a few words.<sup>13</sup>

But feigned intertextuality is often also part of the narrative strategy of a text, as is the case in a parody or a fantastic story, where it paradoxically reaches its full potential only when the reader realises the ‘forgery’. This realisation (or doubt) is

11 | Nabokov’s *Pale Fire* constitutes an interesting exception for this, as the fictitious text is entirely quoted in the manifest text, but will at the same time remain a fringe phenomenon, as through the primary text’s complete incorporation of the fictional text, the latter ceases to be fictitious (2011).

12 | “It is a laborious madness and an impoverishing one, the madness of composing vast books—setting out in five hundred pages an idea that can be perfectly related orally in five minutes. The better way to go about it is to pretend that those books already exist, and offer a summary, a commentary on them. [...] I have chosen to write notes on imaginary books” (Borges 1999: 67).

13 | Andreas Mahler elaborates on this in his recently published essay “Fingierte Intertextualität”, describing feigned intertextuality as an interminable process of text formation (2016).

integrated in the reception process by the text, as feigned intertextuality is usually not only surrounded by intertextual markers, but equally by subtle fictional markers that serve as hints to the fictitiousness of the sources and break the expectations of the reader regarding the pre-texts.

Thus, for example, the text of *Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius* various times emphasizes the fact that Uqbar is a fictitious country and that the article listing the books about Uqbar is forged, which makes the reader question the existence of the books mentioned — even if the text later reaffirms the existence of the book *Lesbare und lesenswerthe Bemerkungen über das Land Ukkbar*. In *La literatura nazi en América*, some of the dates of publication of the fictitious sources hint at their fictitiousness, as they are later than the publication of the actual text of *La literatura nazi en América*. The bibliography for example includes the title “*El Nacimiento de Nueva Ciudad-Fuerza*, de Gustavo Borda, México D.F., 2005” (Bolaño 2015: 240), although Bolaño’s book was originally published in 1996.<sup>14</sup> Fictional markers like these, scattered in the text between the authorisation strategies of feigned intertextuality, lead to an oscillation between trust and suspicion for the observant reader.

In this process, the distribution of signals resembles the leaving of a trail that the reader follows in an increasingly investigative movement. The generation of an investigative reading in this sense reveals another characteristic of texts with feigned intertextuality: their proximity to detective novels. Through the use of criminalistic textual procedures, encouraging speculation on the part of the reader (scattering clues, hiding facts, providing conflicting information), the reader is called into the role of a detective searching for signs and inconsistencies to discover the truth of their pact with the text (Lejeune 1989: 14). This turns the reception into what Roland Barthes defines as the source of reading pleasure for the reader of modern literature: assiduous reading and rereading (1973: 22-24).

By making way for the detection of the fictitiousness of the forged sources, feigned intertextuality can be functionalised in ways normal forgeries can’t. In both *La literatura nazi en América* and *Amor se escribe sin hache*, the conflicting signals increase the parodic tenor of the text by exaggerating the traits of the imitated genres, thus leading to a parodic distortion.

Returning to the prior example of *Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius*, I would like to give a short sketch of the integration of feigned intertextual references into the fantastic narrative to generate a certain kind of receptional uncertainty that combines the uncertainty Tzvetan Todorov attributes to fantastic texts of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (1970: 34) and the epistemological metaphor Jaime Alazraki ascribes to the neo-fantastic texts of the 20<sup>th</sup> century as a central element (1975: 30), illustrating the subjectification of the concept of reality. This subjectification is treated by the

14 | This example of fictional markers is especially fascinating as it loses its efficiency as a marker with time — a reader in 2050 will perceive this marker as much less prominent than a reader in 1998.

plot of *Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius*, as the metafictional world of Tlön increasingly permeates the reality of the narrator. In the article about Uqbar, the narrator is informed that one of the main topics of the literature of Uqbar is the fictitious country Tlön, its culture and language. Later in the story, a whole encyclopedia about Tlön is discovered in the fictional world, seemingly written by a secret society of intellectuals. As more and more people read this encyclopedia, the metafictional country Tlön permeates the reality of the narrator, which itself then crumbles and reveals its constructedness.

By the use of feigned intertextuality, this wearing down of the border between fiction and reality is transposed from the boundary between metafiction and fiction, to the boundary between fiction and the reality of the reader. The constant oscillation of the references produces an uncertainty regarding the location of the reference points, blurring elements of fiction and perceived reality. If one looks at the bibliography of the article on Uqbar, it stands out how interwoven extratextual reality and fictitious elements are: for instance, although the author Silas Haslam and his book *History of the Land Called Uqbar* are fictitious, we are told that they figure in the real catalogues of the real Bernard Quaritch. Furthermore, Haslam is the name of Borges' grandmother, thus also pointing outside of the text. The footnote further intensifies the oscillation between reality and fiction: despite the fact that the book *A General History of Labyrinths* named here is also fictitious, it can be found in extratextual works, as Borges published a review of said book in an anthology about architecture under the pseudonym of Daniel Haslam. In this review, the book *A General History of Labyrinths* is imputed to Thomas Ingram, a real author who wrote the article about labyrinths in the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, thus circling back to *The Anglo-American Cyclopedia* that is presented as a pirated copy of the *Encyclopedia Britannica* in the beginning of the short story.<sup>15</sup> Through this oscillation, the perceived border between fiction and reality is softened, and the subjectification of the concept of reality as a topic of the plot is made tangible in the reception. Thus, through feigned intertextuality, fantastic uncertainty infects the reader's perception of reality.

Thereby, the Borgesian "fantasia of the library" (Foucault 1977: 87) turns into a "metaphysical fantastic" (Bioy Casares 2011: 17, my translation) that attacks the

15 | Fascinatingly, this movement between intra- and extratextual reference points doesn't stop there, as *A General History of Labyrinths* is quoted in two scientific, peer-reviewed articles about architecture and physics (that probably blindly took the quotation from 'Daniel Haslam's' article on the book), adding "Wien, 1888" to the bibliographical details (see Lindgren/Moore/Nordahl 1998; Hagberg/Meron 1998). The uncertainty of the reader is also intensified by the internet and art projects in the case of Borges: Constantly, covers, summaries etc. 'from' the fictitious books Borges invented pop up on the internet. From 1997 to 2006, an art collective even produced an actual *Second Encyclopedia of Tlön*.

classical perception of reality as firm and objective. In his essay *Avatares de la tortuga*, Borges declares:

Nosotros [...] hemos soñado el mundo. Lo hemos soñado resistente, misterioso, visible, ubicuo en el espacio y firme en el tiempo; pero hemos consentido en su arquitectura tenues y eternos intersticios de sinrazón para saber que es falso. [...] Admitamos lo que todos los idealistas admiten: el carácter alucinatorio del mundo. Hagamos lo que ningún idealista ha hecho: busquemos irrealidades que confirmen ese carácter. Las hallamos, creo, en las antinomias de Kant y en la dialéctica de Zenón. (2008a: 171)<sup>16</sup>

Just like the antinomies of Kant and the dialectics of Zeno, the feigned references in *Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius* serve as hidden irrealities, fantastic ruptures, that confirm the idealistic character of the world.

Such functionalisation of feigned intertextuality in the narrative strategies of texts can only be analysed on an individual basis, looking at each respective text, its genre, strategies and historical circumstances, but the example of *Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius* suggests that such entanglements can be observable.

In addition to being actively functionalised for the purpose of narrative strategies, feigned intertextuality, just like any forgery that has been exposed, can also serve as a means to draw conclusions about the system it derives from (Reulecke 2006: 22-23). In the case of feigned intertextuality, this system is the cultural convention of textual referencing and influence. One of the most widely debated fundamental assumptions about literature in the 20<sup>th</sup> century is the notion of originality and uniqueness. In *The Anxiety of Influence* Harald Bloom claims that every literary text is struggling to overcome the inevitable influence of its predecessors (1997), resulting in the hiding or suppression of intertextual references. The forgery of pre-texts could be understood as the strongest symptom of this anxiety: even in cases where a predecessor can't be found in reality, the author still invents one to process the insight that every idea comes from someone else. But Borges' essay *Kafka and his precursors* points to yet another interpretation of the connection between the anxiety of influence and feigned intertextuality, when he states that

16 | "We [...] have dreamt the world. We have dreamt it as firm, mysterious, visible, ubiquitous in space and durable in time; but in its architecture we have allowed tenuous and eternal crevices of unreason which tell us it is false. [...] Let us admit what all idealists admit: the hallucinatory nature of the world. Let us do what no idealist has done: seek unrealities which confirm that nature. We shall find them, I believe, in the antinomies of Kant and in the dialectic of Zeno" (Borges 1964: 183-84).



[e]n el vocabulario crítico, la palabra precursor es indispensable, pero habría que tratar de purificarla de toda connotación de polémica o rivalidad. El hecho es que cada escritor crea a sus precursores. Su labor modifica nuestra concepción del pasado, como ha de modificar el futuro. (2008b: 166)<sup>17</sup>

The use of feigned intertextuality is the culmination of this idea that every text metaphorically invents its own precursors: in effectively *inventing* the precursors, feigned intertextuality could also be seen as the overcoming of such authorial anxiety, as it frees the text from real precursors.

One way or the other, feigned intertextuality, with its strategies of authorisation and its various aesthetic effects, can be read as a symptom of the crisis of the concept of authorship and originality, and is thus, just like any forgery, a symptom of our culture.

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17 | “In the critics’ vocabulary, the word ‘precursor’ is indispensable, but it should be cleansed of all connotation of polemics or rivalry. The fact is that every writer creates his own precursors. His work modifies our conception of the past, as it will modify the future” (Borges 1964: 365).

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# Faked Translations

## James Macpherson's Ossianic Poetry

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### SETTING THE SCENE

In 1760 James Macpherson published translations of old Gaelic poems under the title *Fragments of Ancient Poetry*.<sup>1</sup> They were received with great enthusiasm and further titles followed in quick succession, including the two epic poems *Fingal* (1761/62) and *Temora* (1763). Yet, the debate about their authenticity began soon after their publication and was most prominently represented by the English writer and critic Samuel Johnson. He wrote to Macpherson in 1775: “I thought your book an imposture from the beginning, I think it upon yet surer reasons an imposture still. For this opinion I give the publick reasons which I here dare you to refute” (Johnson 2014: 169).

Today, James Macpherson is widely accepted to be the author of these texts, and the poems of Ossian themselves to be pseudo-translations, i.e. “texts which have been presented as translations with no corresponding source texts in other languages ever having existed” (Toury 1995: 40). According to Fiona Stafford “Macpherson drew on traditional sources to produce imaginative texts not modelled on any single identifiable original” (1996: vii). He claimed to have found long lost manuscripts of Scottish heroic poetry from the 3<sup>rd</sup> century CE and presented them in form of his own ‘translations’. Although Macpherson based some of his alleged translations on collected material, no written source text could ever be pro-

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1 | I use the phrase ‘poems of Ossian’ in accordance with Gaskill and others not as the title of the edition of 1773, but as an umbrella term for all the Ossianic poetry by Macpherson. For a quick overview of the publication timeline: *Fragments of Ancient Poetry* (1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> edition 1760), *Fingal* (1<sup>st</sup> edition 1761, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition 1762), *Temora* (1763), *Works of Ossian* (1765) including the “Critical Dissertation” by Hugh Blair, *Poems of Ossian* (1773), heavily revised edition. The 1996 edition edited by Gaskill is used for all references and citations.

duced in order to refute the accusations of forgery, and in the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century the poems of Ossian became one of the most notorious fakes in literature, sparking an almost unparalleled controversy about their authenticity.

Nevertheless, Macpherson's Ossianic poetry can be read as a translational process on many levels, even though the poems are not interlingual translations in the conventional sense. He not only translated the material he had collected and the stories of his childhood in the Scottish Highlands into the dominant English language, but he also transferred the oral tradition of Scotland into the written tradition of the superstratum. By setting the poems of Ossian in a mythical pre-Roman and pre-Christian period, Macpherson moved the 'epic genesis' of Scotland as a nation into a time predating the British rule and the subsequent loss of nationally distinct identity.<sup>2</sup>

In this paper, I aim to describe Macpherson's poetic strategies and his authenticating methods. Therefore, I will look at the external and internal features that try to make the poems of Ossian appear as if they were genuine interlingual translations from ancient Gaelic sources.

## MACPHERSON AS EXPERT AND THE SCHOLARLY EDITION

Opportunity not only makes a thief, but also a forger. The right opportunity for Macpherson presented itself during his time at the University of Aberdeen and in Edinburgh, where he studied the classics and met scholars and mentors such as Thomas Blackwell, Hugh Blair and John Home. Scottish literature was also beginning to be met with greater public interest, and research into these territories was encouraged. Home, an admirer of Scottish folklore, had to persuade an initially reluctant Macpherson to translate a few authentic pieces of poetry he had collected (Stafford 1996: xii). Blackwell's research was not only focused on the literature of the classical period, but also on the society and the environment that brought about that poetry, and Blair was to become one of the strongest supporters of Macpherson's work and the authenticity of the poems of Ossian. This intellectual climate, combined with the contemporary interest in so-called primitive societies, must have inspired Macpherson to respond to a demand for fresh and equally meaningful northern poetry. This convinced him to compile 'translations' of so-called epic poems in the hopes of creating a national epic for Scotland, such as Milton had done for England.

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2 | The characterisation of these poems as epic poetry is already a strong indication of Macpherson's ambition. The idea of nation states is of course a concept of the 18<sup>th</sup> century and much more symptomatic of Macpherson's own time. The poems of Ossian offered a basis for identification in the sense of Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities* (2006).

Macpherson's upbringing put him in the perfect position. He was born in Ruthven, in the Scottish Highlands where he was brought up in a Gaelic-speaking community and accustomed to the oral tradition of the bards of the clans. Yet, he also experienced first-hand the serious effects of British oppression. In 1745, the nine-year-old Macpherson witnessed the Jacobite Rising with all its devastating consequences for the collective identity and the heritage of the Scottish clans. In its wake, many customs and traditions, such as the tartan plaid and playing the bag pipes, were prohibited.<sup>3</sup> However, one of the worst consequences must have been the subsequent ban on using the Scottish Gaelic language. Therefore, Macpherson's forgery can also be considered an attempt to recuperate what was left of the literary tradition of the Highlands and to rehabilitate a people, thought to be uncultured and uncivilised.

These circumstances provided Macpherson with all he needed to produce a successful forgery. He was an insider of Scottish traditions and, at the same time, he had profited from an academic education. He had not only learned how classic works of poetry were studied, but also how they were supposed to be presented. When the scholars in Aberdeen showed interest in this kind of poetry and offered to sponsor an excursion to the Highlands, Macpherson seized the moment and delivered. It was further to his advantage that a nostalgia for a different past and a longing for new points of identification had coincided during the Renaissance and the Scottish Enlightenment. Ossian could draw on both. On the one hand, the poems constructed a past which might have even better suited to the contemporary taste than the real antiquity, because they were composed to exactly please that taste. On the other hand, Ossian provided a new frame of reference that worked as a canvas for projections of romantic longing as well as national identity.

On his excursions to the Highlands Macpherson did, in fact, collect material, on which he later based his alleged translations, but it is "reasonably clear" (Gaskill 1991: 6) that the majority was fabricated by Macpherson himself. Although he never disputed that he had also collected some poems from oral sources, Macpherson insisted that he had found written sources of a previously unknown Scottish epic poem, in worth alike to those of Homer and Virgil. The Gaelic originals were, as reported by Macpherson, not all lost. He even offered to make them accessible to every public library, "but no subscribers appearing", he simply announced their publication without following through in the hopes nobody ever would (*Advertisement* preceding 1<sup>st</sup> edition of *Fingal*, 1761/62, in Macpherson 1996: 32). This was a very risky move, but anticipating the request for the originals and blaming the lack of interest from libraries apparently worked as a deflection strategy.

3 | The Jacobite Risings were a series of rebellions between 1688 and 1746 with the aim to return Stuart kings to the throne of England and Scotland. "The Act of Proscription" (1746), especially the Dress Act, were introduced as forms of repression.

By publishing the poems as a translation Macpherson styled himself as a legitimate intermediary and interpreter of the originals. He claimed that the poems would not have found an audience in their original language. Therefore, Macpherson reasoned, they had to be translated into English to make them accessible and further their reach. If there were some irregularities within the work, they could be easily explained and openly addressed, because the texts were allegedly transferred not only from another era but also from another language. Textual authority is even further displaced from Macpherson himself through the narrator figure of Ossian, who is named as the author of the poems on several occasions. It is Ossian who relates the battles and adventures of his father Fingal and his son Oscar. But Ossian is blind, so his account cannot come from his eye-witness testimony, creating yet another margin, another space, through which contradictions or inconsistencies could be explained or justified.

The ideas, it is confessed, are too local, to be admired, in another language; [...] It was the locality of his description and sentiment, that, probably, kept Ossian so long in the obscurity of an almost-lost language. (Macpherson 1996: 214)

As Macpherson explained, the reason why this discovery had been only made so recently and how the poems could have been lost for such a long time despite their importance to the history of Scotland and Ireland, is their style. The translation would also never do justice to the beauty of the original, but Macpherson argues it to be his scholarly and patriotic duty to the Highland tradition to make them available to the public.

Macpherson claimed to have only found fragments at first before ‘discovering’ the longer epic poems *Fingal* and *Temora*. So, it would be fitting that such old and recently-resurfaced manuscripts would need to be put in context. Typically, a forger must choose between either rejecting the canon or integrating their own forgery into it (Grafton 1990: 59). Macpherson fully embraced the latter. He created a corpus of references and commentary embedding Ossian’s poems deeply into the canon of classic European literature. Macpherson not only offered his own commentary to the poems and the events related in them, but he also added passages most notably from the *Iliad*, the *Odyssey*, the *Aeneid*, and *Paradise Lost* in the original language as well as in translation. Additionally, he provided advertisements, prefaces, announcements and dissertations by himself and Blair. The consequence of this elaborate corpus of references was that the editions using footnotes for all the annotations and comments were full of Macpherson, Homer, Virgil and Milton, and sometimes very little poetical text (Gaskill 1996: xxv). This strategy, to almost cover the text with quotations and further information, continued to divert the focus from Macpherson and towards the authors he used as his sources. The difficulty was to do so without revealing these precursors to be, in fact, part of the sources of the Ossianic poetry.

## 100 The WAR of INIS-THONA:

their airy bow.—They still love the sport of their youth; and mount the wind with joy.

CORMALO, replied the king, is chief of ten thousand spears; he dwells at the dark-rolling waters of Lano \*; which sent forth the cloud of death,

deceased, was the same with that of the ancient Greeks and Romans. They imagined that the souls pursued, in their separate state, the employments and pleasures of their former life.

*Arma procul, currusque virum miratur inanes.  
Stant terga defixæ hastæ, passimque soluti  
Per campum pascuntur equi, quæ gratia curruum  
Armorumque fuit vivis; quæ cura nitentes  
Pascere equos, eadem sequitur tellure repostos.*

VIRGIL.

The chief beheld their chariots from afar;  
Their shining arms and coursers train'd to war:  
Their lances fix'd in earth, their steeds around,  
Free from the harness, graze the flow'ry ground.  
The love of horses which they had, alive,  
And care of chariots, after death survive. DRYDEN.

Τὸν δὲ μετ' εἰπενόησαν βίην Ἑρακλείην,  
Ἔϊδωλον.—

— ὁ δ', ἐρεμνῇ ρυκτὶ ἐοικώς  
Τυμπαρον τόξον ἔχων, καὶ ἐπὶ νευρῆριν οἶσδον  
Δεινὸν παπταίνων, αἰεὶ βαλέοντι ἐοικας, &c.

HOM. Odyss. II.

Now I the strength of Hercules behold,  
A tow'ring spectre of gigantic mold;  
Gloomy as night he stands in act to throw  
Th' aerial arrow from the twanging bow.  
Around his breast a wond'rous zone is roll'd,  
Where woodland monsters grin in fretted gold;  
There sullen lions sternly seem to roar,  
The bear to growl, to foam the tusky boar,  
There war and havock and destruction stood;  
And vengeful murder red with human blood. POPE.

\* Lano was a lake of Scandinavia, remarkable, in the days

Figure 1: Facsimile scan from The Works of Ossian, page 100.



The annotations and commentaries were meant to suggest a serious scholarly interest in and debate of his material. By setting the whole project in the framework of a scholarly translation Macpherson created a context that was easily recognised by his intended audience. In addition to the footnotes in the text, Macpherson wrote two dissertations, which were added to the editions, as well as “A Critical Dissertation on the Poems of Ossian, the Son of Fingal” by Hugh Blair.<sup>4</sup> The Scottish author and critic seems to have been Macpherson’s partner in crime. He came to the poems’ defence and wrote his “Critical Dissertation” to support their claim of authenticity, which was included in every edition after 1765. The cooperation of Blair and Macpherson contributed widely to the perception of the poems as ‘genuine translations’.

These paratexts contributed to the work’s appearance as a well-researched and investigated publication in the tradition of contemporary editions of classic texts. In doing so Macpherson tried to situate Ossian’s poems before some of their sources. He established a timeline that created an interior logic, which supported the narrative of a vivid literary tradition in the Highlands, ‘primitive’ but comparable to other ancient writing. With this twist, Macpherson was then able to suggest that analogies between Ossian and Milton are based on Milton’s knowledge of Ossianic poetry and not the other way around.<sup>5</sup> Milton, the epic poet of the British Empire, becomes by implication the imitator of Ossian.

Macpherson’s marketing strategy was, as we can see, just as important as the structure of the poems themselves. Apart from his upbringing and educational background, Macpherson continued to work on his image. He established himself as an expert and gave the poems the look of a proper historical edition. In the paratexts Macpherson went to great lengths to supply the reader with a lot of detail. In the advertisement to the second edition of *Fragments of Ancient Poetry*, Macpherson noted:

In this edition some passages will be found altered from the former. The alterations are drawn from more compleat copies the translator had obtained of the originals, since the former publication. (1996: 3)

By adding this kind of information and by repeatedly discussing specific translation decisions in his footnotes, Macpherson created the impression of himself as a diligent researcher and translator, concerned with taking great care and willing to revise his translations based on new developments and discoveries made in his

4 | It is not clear if or to what extent Blair knew that the poems were a forgery. Even Johann Gottfried Herder defended the poems authenticity in “Auszug aus einem Briefwechsel über Oßian und die Lieder alter Völker” ([1773] 1968).

5 | References to Macpherson’s literary precursors can only be found in the epic poem *Fingal* and the poems that were published alongside it.

field. But Macpherson also informed his audience in detail about the process of his editorial and translational work. He continued in the advertisement with the following announcement:

It may be proper to inform the public, that measures are now taken for making a more full collection of the remaining works of the ancient Scottish Bards; in particular for recovering and translating the heroic poem mentioned in the preface. (3)

His confident manner was not only boastful behaviour but also a way of measuring the interest of his audience and canvassing for sponsors for his next excursions.

## TRANSLATION METHOD AND *TRANSLATESE*

Disguising his poems as translations provided Macpherson with the opportunity to realise another authentication method within the text. He had to make the poems look and sound like they were from the 3<sup>rd</sup> century, but by offering himself as an interpreter (in both senses), Macpherson constructed a narrative that allowed for a much greater margin of variation and cross-referencing. Simply imitating an older language could have made Macpherson's texts much more vulnerable to being discovered as fakes. By admitting his involvement in the texts as a translator, however, he had an already rich tradition of translation strategies to use and to learn from at his disposal. Chapman's, Pope's and Dryden's then already famous translations of epic poetry had a great influence on Macpherson. Not only did they serve as a tool of validation and authentication for the poems through references in the paratexts, but they were also part of the canon of important translations into which Macpherson wanted to integrate his Ossian. Furthermore, openly naming his sources created a self-referencing logic that, at first, dispersed any accusation of forgery. Any similarities between Ossian and their translations that could be argued, were a) due to the Scottish bards having the same level of literary sophistication as the Greeks and Romans, and b) because of completely justifiable translation decisions based on the study of predecessors in the field of literary translation.

Ossian's poetry is set in a pre-Christian era, but the poems are still full of spiritual and transcendental episodes, such as ghost appearances and nature intervening in the fate of the heroes. Ossian was not only meant to tell a Highland story, but to create the legitimate historical and literary backdrop for the projection of a sophisticated and cultured Scottish nation before the invasion of foreign powers. The epic poems of *Fingal* and *Temora* even deal with the defence of Scottish territory against invaders. Appearing to be the sole translator also allowed Macpherson to tell a story of heroic resistance. Consequently, the poems had a much more significant message to convey. Macpherson claimed no less than that they "might serve

to throw considerable light upon the Scottish and Irish antiquities” (1996). To give the poems the necessary *gravitas* for the task, he drew on religious traditions, and especially the conventions of Bible translations.

Jerome, the translator of the *Vulgate*, famously coined the phrase: “non verbum e verbo, sed sensum exprimere de sensu”, which has often been understood as a general rule for translation. Nonetheless, he made an important exception for the translation of the Bible: “absque scripturis sanctis, ubi et verborum ordo mysterium est.”<sup>6</sup> In religious texts the word order is part of the divine message and should not be altered. While the translations by Chapman, Pope and Dryden are more focused on literary and aesthetic aspects, they are much freer and took much greater interpretative liberties regarding the source texts. They did not have to adapt their translation methods in accordance with theological dogma.

In the preface to *Fragments of Ancient Poetry*, Macpherson alleged that his translations are “extremely literal” and that “even the arrangement of the words in the original has been imitated” (1996: 6). By claiming to apply this method of translation, Macpherson positioned his poems in a religious context. Hugh Blair supports Macpherson’s claim in his “Critical Dissertation” as follows:

Though unacquainted with the original language, there is no one but must judge the translation to deserve the highest praise, on account of its beauty and elegance. Of its faithfulness and accuracy, I have been assured by persons skilled in the Gaelic tongue, who from their youth were acquainted with many of these poems of Ossian. To transfuse such spirited and fervid ideas from one language into another; to translate literally, and yet with such a glow of poetry; to keep alive so much passion, and support so much dignity throughout; is one of the most difficult works of genius, and proves the translator to have been animated with no small portion of Ossian’s spirit. (1996: 399)

Blair praised Macpherson’s approach even though he must admit that he does not know Gaelic. He stressed Macpherson’s ingenuity to remain truthful to the ‘original’ and simultaneously create superb poetry. Not only did Blair consider the poems a work of genius, but he went so far as to suggest Ossian might be speaking through Macpherson.<sup>7</sup>

6 | “to render not word for word but sense for sense”; “except in the case of holy scriptures where even the order of the words is a mystery” (Jerome, 395 BC: “Letter to Pammachius. On the best Method of Translating”, my translation).

7 | This remark by Blair, however, seems like a very broad hint at his involvement in the forgery.

Based on these two premises, the canonical translations of epic poetry and the biblical translation theories, Macpherson created a form of *translates*.<sup>8</sup> *Translatese* has gained quite a few connotations, predominantly negative ones. The OED — for example — defines the term as: “The style of language supposed to be characteristic of (bad) translations; or unidiomatic language in a translation.” Wiktionary offers: “awkwardness or ungrammaticality of translation, such as due to overly literal translation of idioms or syntax.” Macpherson described and explained his method of translation to justify the outcome, which is — as I want to show — a kind of deliberately employed *translatese*.

The consequences of Macpherson’s intention and method on the language of the poems can be seen in the following example. It is a dialogue from the beginning of *Fingal*, Book II, but it is worth keeping in mind that it is still related by the narrator Ossian. The passage is a typical example from Ossianic poetry. The ghost of the recently killed chief Crugal appears to Connal and reveals to him the outcome of the next battle. Connal asks for his spiritual support. Both paragraphs are in direct speech, yet this is not indicated by quotation marks. Instead, Macpherson used variable length-dashes as rhythmic punctuation:

My ghost, O Connal, is on my native hills; but my corse is on the sands of Ullin. Thou shalt never talk with Crugal, nor find his lone steps in the heath. I am light as the blast of Cromla, and I move like the shadow of mist! Connal, son of Colgari, I see the dark cloud of death: it hovers dark over the plains of Lena. The Sons of green Erin shall fall. Remove from the field of ghosts.---- Like the darkened moonii he retired, in the midst of the whistling blast.

Stay, said the mighty Connal, stay, my dark-red friend. Lay by that beam of heaven, son of windy Cromla! What cave of the hill is thy lonely house? What green-headed hill is the place of thy rest? Shall we not hear thee in the storm? In the noise of the mountain-stream? When the feeble sons of the wind come forth, and, ride on the blast of the desert? (1996: 65)

In the poem’s case, the layout is of interest, because of the importance Macpherson put on the appearance of the text, including the typeset of the poems themselves. There are frequent exclamations, invocations and apostrophes, such as “O Connal” in the first line. Epithets, like “son of windy Cromla”, repetitions and rhetorical questions serve to authenticate the oral tradition and the epic style. The focus on the bardic figure and the oral tradition of the Highlands was certainly part of Macpherson’s agenda to promote his Scottish heritage. Yet, it also worked to highlight the

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8 | I use the term *translatese*, the OED and Wiktionary both use *translatese* and *translationese* synonymously.

similarities to his predecessors, like Homer, Virgil and Milton, in whose tradition Macpherson tried to locate Ossian, and whose epics were also narrated by bardic figures.

The choice of words is rather limited, but Macpherson managed to create an air of otherness and ‘raw’ tradition at the same time. The imagery of the passage works with very few variations but creates a mystical and strange scenery, especially through its use of colour terms. Darkness (“dark”, “darkened”, “dark-red”) and light are contrasted as metaphoric conflict between life and death. The green landscape of Ossian’s heroes provides the backdrop to their actions. It is the reason and support for their battles. The repetitions of certain colour terms and the use of hyphenated compounds, such as “green-headed” and “dark-red” could point to the difficulties the translator encountered during his work. As perhaps the precise colour term could not be found or was not available to the translator, he chose to approximate it by using a compound. Occasionally, it seems like Macpherson styled himself as a worse translator than he might have been, to lend credibility to the poems’ authenticity.<sup>9</sup>

On the other hand, hyphenated colour terms are a very familiar sight to readers of translated versions of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* in English. It became a feature closely identified with Homeric style. The interplay of apparently helpless translation decisions and the (apparently) involuntary references to characteristics of epic poetry run like a common thread through Macpherson’s whole project. The assertion Grafton makes in regard to the Renaissance forger Giovanni Nanni, therefore, seems to apply to Macpherson’s strategy, too. The intricate web of references paradoxically gives the “texts an air of moral as well as factual superiority” (Grafton 1990: 61).

It is obviously possible to read the use of unidiomatic idioms and imagery, such as “shadow of mist” and “What cave of the hill is thy lonely house?”, as another factor pointing to the texts being a translation. They give the impression of being overly literal and seem to struggle with the conventions of their supposed target language, English. The structure and the concept of the similes are common enough for the reader to get the meaning Macpherson tries to convey. Yet, their choice of comparison carries enough foreignness and cause to question their meaning for them to bring across the intended mystic remoteness of an old and strange text in need of explanation. Macpherson provided this in his ample commentary on the poems.

The passage quoted above, for example, has two footnotes. In the first, Macpherson elaborated on the relation of names and epithets; thus, giving his readers more

9 | In the revised edition of 1773 Macpherson put a much greater focus on his influence on the texts. It might be an indication that he, indeed, felt like selling his genius short by remaining in the shadow reserved for a translator.

background information and raising the impression of scholarly effort and personal insight into Highland conventions. The second footnote is even more telling of Macpherson's strategy. He added a quote from Pope's translation of Homer, suggesting a connection between this passage and Crugal's ghost retiring like the moon: "Like a thin smoke he sees the spirit fly,/ And hears a feeble, lamentable cry" (Macpherson 1996: 425 n.8). Macpherson succeeded in placing his Ossianic heroes alongside the Homeric pantheon, and subsequently invoking their shared 'primitive' but pure origins.

Although Macpherson owed much to his literary predecessors, he did not imitate their versification. Homer and Virgil wrote in hexameter, Milton in blank verse and Dryden used heroic couplets for his translation of the *Iliad*. Macpherson's use of metric prose, on the other hand, was a rather modern feature. Kirby-Smith describes it as a kind of proto-free verse on several occasions, which is itself indebted to a translation tradition (1996: 260). It is a form that can also be found in Psalm translations and the King James Bible. Therefore, it is not surprising that the poems of Ossian have a similar rhythm. Again, Blair supported Macpherson's choice:

The measured prose which he has employed, possesses considerable advantages above any sort of versification he could have chosen. While it pleases and fills the ear with a variety of harmonious cadences, being, at the same time, freer from constraint in the choice and arrangement of words, it allows the spirit of the original to be exhibited, with more justice, force, and simplicity. (1996: 399)

Yet, sometimes the poems tend to drone on. Macpherson's syntax is paratactic, with rarely more than ten words per phrase, and the rhythm is mostly created by the interjections, repetitions and the regularity of apostrophes and epithets. The freedom Blair mentions was something Macpherson made ready use of. By occasionally using awkward word order, such as beginning phrases with a verb, Macpherson could further create the impression of a translated text. In doing so, he indicated that the source language had different syntactical rules than English.<sup>10</sup> The 'translator' simply complied with his own translation theory, in which he clearly states his commitment to being as literal as possible, thus making them sound strange and unusual. At the same time these stylistic features tried to subtly locate the poems in a tradition not at all uncommon to the readers of Ossian. Macpherson's use of the outdated pronouns "thy" and "thee" (Lass 1999: 153), also typical of the language of the King James Bible, served to make the poems sound archaic, but also established a connection to well-known texts. It is worth remembering here, that 'thou' and 'thee' were, of course, not

10 | Scottish Gaelic has a verb-subject-object word order.

in use in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century either. Macpherson positioned his poems consciously in a religious context, specifically the Bible of a Scottish king who became the king of England and Ireland as well, making his political agenda a part of his 'translation' strategy.

The language of Macpherson's poems could well be described as 'awkward or ungrammatical', but above all their 'idioms and syntax' give the impression of an 'overly literal translation'. Through Macpherson's creative use of language and his systematic mimicking of translation, he indeed developed a form of *translatese*, a language that does not affect the reader through structural complexity but through its expressiveness.

## SUMMING UP

Today, Macpherson's translations seem to imitate their predecessors quite obviously, and yet, they created a whole universe around the bard Ossian and the epic battle of bringing about the Scottish nation. Presenting the poems as translations and framing them with quotations from Homer, Virgil and Milton, and comments by Macpherson himself as well as by his ally Blair, gave the publication the same look as any other edition of a translation of classics. The use of Macpherson's *translatese* and the advertised method of literal translation placed the texts in a para-religious context and gave them gravity. At the same time, this constructed language worked to imitate an allegedly primitive source language.

Macpherson negotiated between many different layers and various forms of translation. Sometimes he even managed to unite seemingly obvious contradictions, such as imitation and creative invention. He did so by distributing them between different layers and weaving a complex net of references. All these aspects were designed to prove the poems' authenticity and, according to Grafton, contradictions such as these can paradoxically give "texts an air of moral as well as factual superiority" (1990: 61). The poems, certainly, gained a lot of attention and a widespread audience. The fact that their melancholic longing seems to have struck a chord in a period that would soon birth Romantic poetry, similarly concerned with this sense of loss, has also been in their favour.

Macpherson mediated between a supposedly primitive culture of the past and the sensitivity of his own age. With the help of his bard Ossian, Macpherson managed to satisfy the growing aesthetic demand for original genius and, by imitating an allegedly primitive source language without many descriptive passages, he was able to paint a surprisingly vivid picture of the 'times' of his bard.

Macpherson's strategies worked like Edgar Allen Poe's purloined letter. Even with all his sources and literary predecessors so obviously laid out, no-

body noticed. In his prefaces and dissertations, he addressed his own shortcomings, trying to anticipate any criticism so as to deflect it pre-emptively, causing many to overlook what was right in front of them. This method, paradoxically, worked extremely well. The sympathetic reader wanted to see the connections and recognise the canonical similarities as much as the idiosyncrasies of ancient Gaelic poetry. Therefore, the referencing and paralleling of other works created a tactical diversion that seemed to verify the authenticity of the poems.

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# Creating a Cult, Faking Relics

## The Case of St. Dominic of Soriano

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This paper will, through the case-study of the miraculous icon of St. Dominic of Soriano, analyse how thanks to a multifaceted layering of falsehoods, a modest 16<sup>th</sup>-century painting was counterfeited into a miraculous icon, enabling a small convent in a marginal region of 17<sup>th</sup>-century Italy to become a leading cultural and cultic presence in the Dominican order in Italy, Spain and overseas. As Luisa Elena Alcalà has stated, “the history of religious images and the relationship of artists to them are similar across many geographical areas. Nonetheless, studying the local circumstances often allows us to identify cultural processes that distinguish how images were crafted to respond to the particular needs and situation of societies” (2009: 66).

The legend of the miraculous icon of St. Dominic of Soriano (fig. 1), as it is recounted in a hagiographical narrative,<sup>1</sup> narrates that on a night in December 1510, St. Dominic appeared three times in a vision to Brother Vincenzo, friar in the Dominican convent of Catanzaro, in Calabria, and invited him to leave his hometown and to visit Soriano, to build a new house. When Brother Vincenzo

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1 | This research has developed through years thanks to the scientific and economical support of many institutions that provided me fellowships, libraries and fructuous exchanges with colleagues. I would like to thank the Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florence, the Warburg Institute in London, the Dutch Institute in Florence, the Ermitage Foundation in Ferrara and the Florentine Istituto Sangalli. A former version of this paper has been presented to the International conference *Beyond Italy and New Spain. Itineraries for an Iberian Art History (1440-1640)*, at the Italian Academy, Columbia, New York, in Columbia University, New York in 2012. For an extended version of the research see the forthcoming book *Saints, Miracles and the Image: Healing Saints and Miraculous Images in the Renaissance*, edited by Sandra Cardarelli and Laura Fenelli, Turnhout (forthcoming 2017).



*Figure 1: Paolo di Ciaccio di Mileto(?), "Saint Dominic", before 1621, oil on canvas, San Domenico, Soriano.*

arrives in Soriano, he finds a small community in assembly, debating on where to build a new convent, a detail that may testify to a rivalry with the Franciscans, who have just refused to build a new house in town. This aspect of the story should be historically analysed in the context of the new Dominican settlement campaign in Southern Italy, after two centuries during which a variety of historical circumstances contributed to the scattering and diffusion of the Order of Preachers.<sup>2</sup>

Upon his arrival in Soriano, Brother Vincenzo is considered a celestial messenger, and he promptly starts the building of the new house, characterized by subsequent miracles, which pertain to the location chosen and the apparition of the building material.

Twenty years later, in 1530, on the night before the octave of the Virgin Nativity, the sacristan, Lorenzo da Grotteria, descends into the church to light the candles, and sees three women of sublime aspect. He does not immediately realise that he is witnessing a celestial vision, and, upset, checks if the door is closed. Questioned by one of the three women for the church's name and its main icon, he answers that the church is devoted to St. Dominic, but it only has a poor fresco, close to the altar. One of the women, giving him a canvas, instructs him to place the new icon on the main altar. Since the sacristan is not trusted by his superiors, the image ends up being placed in the sacristy. Because of this collocation, which does not satisfy the divine will, St. Catherine appears again: She reveals her identity, and explains that the image was not painted on earth; it has been brought to the convent by herself, together with the Virgin Mary, and St. Mary Magdalene.

## FORGING A LEGEND

The first problem connected to this legend is the delay between the supposed miracle and the first hagiographical official accounts. The tale of the miraculous arrival of the image in 1530 and the story of the convent's miraculous origins (in 1510) are in fact recounted together for the first time only in a text published in 1621, *the Raccolta de' miracoli fatti per l'intercessione di san Domenico*,<sup>3</sup> by

2 | On the history of the Dominican Order in Calabria and southern Italy see Longo 1991: 137-38; Cioffari/Miele 1993: 11-22; Pellegrini 2005: 64-65, 98-115.

3 | Frangipane published the first version of the volume in Messina in 1621 and the following year the book was reprinted in Florence. For the history of Frangipane's text see Panarello 2001: 20-21, 24; 2009: 551. The most successful edition was the one issued in Florence, in 1622: The following quotes come from this version. The history of the miraculous foundation of the convent is told in Frangipane 1622: 42-45, the history of the arrival of the canvas, 45-48.

Silvestro Frangipane, prior of the convent twice, between 1609-1610 and again from 1620 to 1623 (Longo 1991: 138-51).

This retard leads to a complete critical rethinking of how we should date the creation of the Soriano miracle, and thus to the reasons behind manufacturing, or we may say faking, this cult. As it is recounted or rather 'created' by Frangipane, in 1609 Frate Agostino Galamini, Dominican general master, having witnessed the great multitude of miracles which happened in the sanctuary, ordered the friars to start to register them to increase the devotion towards the image and to spread its cult (1622: 52): In reality any written record of Galamini's order does not exist, and, as I will clarify, no conclusive argument demonstrates that Galamini was aware of the miracle and the cult when he visited Soriano. In 1611, in fact, Galamini published a *Vita et miraculi s. p. Dominici*, which is a sort of collection of prints about the patron's life. Surprisingly, the first one, *Vera effigies S. Dominici*, has no relationship with the Soriano icon, at a date when, according to Frangipane, Galamini should already have known the Calabrese canvas and already have ordered the official enquiry.

The first written mentions of the miracle date back, in fact, only to 1612 and are very vague: In a letter dated 30<sup>th</sup> August, Serafino Secchi, provincial master, orders that the next general chapter should be held in Soriano because of the daily miracles which happen in the convent, "propter miracula quae quotidie Soriani fiunt",<sup>4</sup> and during this provincial chapter Frangipane is elected as master for the Calabrese area. The next year, 1613, Frangipane sends to Galamini, the general master, a detailed relation on the Calabrese houses, and again, in this account no mention of the miraculous icon occurs (Longo 1991: 170-225). In 1620 Frangipane is back in Soriano (146) and in 1621 the first edition of the *Raccolta dei miracoli* is published and it contains the detailed account summarised above. Instead of imagining almost 60 years of a 'spontaneous' cult, it is more likely the miracle was 'manufactured' in 1609-1610, and Frangipane's narration is either a forged promotion of a local cult, or an immediate reaction to a spontaneous devotion. This hypothesis concerning the first emergence of the cult at the beginning of the second decade of the 17<sup>th</sup> century is present in the text of a friar from Antwerp, Nicolas Janssenius, who, writing in 1622 placed the miracle in 1610 (book II, chap. XII).

When it was founded, the Soriano settlement was not even technically a convent, but rather a small vicar house, in a marginal region that saw a very late expansion of the Dominican order; it was only during the general chapter of 1564, held in Bologna, that Soriano obtained the designation of 'convent' (Panarello 2001: 12). This marginality started to vanish in 1644, when Tommaso Turco was elected general master and the feast of Soriano was for the first time recorded in the act of a general chapter, together with the existence of a brotherhood devoted to the image.

4 | The document [Roma, Archivio Generale dell'Ordine dei frati predicatori, IV, 58, I, 14v. 18r] is quoted by Longo (1991: 142).

Is it thus possible to conceive an intentional strategy behind the creation of the Soriano painting as a miraculous icon, a strategy that will promote the Soriano area as a counter-reformed leading religious centre? We can answer this question considering the effects of the icon's presence in changing the denomination of the former small house of Soriano. Thanks to the active role of Frangipane in promoting the cult of the miraculous icon, the convent became the centre through which the Observant reform was first introduced and later established in Southern Italy. The 'localization' of the Soriano image in a formerly marginal region, and the ways in which the Calabrese Dominicans came to feel identified with their most famous cult image over time, played a fundamental role in the promotion of the devotional cult. When the *Raccolta dei miracoli* was published in 1621 it became not only a key text for the convent, but also, a key piece in promoting a new, clean and purified image of the Dominicans in Southern Italy, after the dramatic downfall of the Calabrese Dominican friar Tommaso Campanella. He was tried by the Inquisitions for his writings five times, and definitively condemned to death in 1601 by the Spanish authorities for conspiring to establish an ideal republic in Calabria in 1599 (Cioffari 2001). In fact, the ostracization of Tommaso Campanella from the Dominican order, and his subsequent condemnation, proceeded simultaneously with the invention and promotion of the cult of the Soriano icon, and the success of its main promoter or maybe counterfeiter, Frangipane, whose vision for the Dominican order in southern Italy had been strongly opposed by Campanella (Longo 1991: 150). Within this struggle internal to the order, a struggle that Campanella was destined to lose, it is possible to find the reasoning behind a 'retrospective' hagiographical narration and the forgery of a miraculous cult. Counterfeiting a cult and back-dating the miracle to the thirties of 16<sup>th</sup> century meant, for Frangipane, rewriting a turbulent past and reinventing a difficult memory.

The presence of the icon, and the cult devoted to it, in fact, changed the fate of the Dominican settlement: In 1652, the convent had become so powerful that it could buy from the Carafa family the fief of Soriano (Panarello: 15). But most importantly, the Soriano miracle was used to consolidate the relationship between the order and the Spanish crown, and to promote the small region of Soriano on an international and global scale (Caridi 2009: 55-67): In 1635, Philip IV sent as a votive gift a silver lamp, and placed the convent under his royal protection. Five years later, in 1640, again according to Philip IV's will and after a miracle which happened to the viceroy's son, St. Dominic was chosen as patron saint of the Naples Vicereame (Carrió-Invernizzi 2009: 190).

Earthquakes have also dramatically characterized the convent's story: The first one, in 1659, destroyed the convent and badly damaged the church; the only chapel, which survived — miraculously — is the one that preserves the holy canvas (Lembo 1665: 158-59). Most of the donations that arrived to

help rebuild the convent came directly from the Spanish viceroy, the count of Peñaranda.<sup>5</sup>

The following century the convent was devastated by another earthquake: On the night of 7<sup>th</sup> February 1783 the building, whose ambitious reconstruction was completed only a few decades earlier on the model of the Escorial in Madrid,<sup>6</sup> almost entirely collapsed. The region, ravaged by the Napoleonic invasions, remained so poor and deserted that the convent was only partially reconstructed in 1860, when the village became the site of a new miracle. When a statue of St. Dominic miraculously came to life in front of the community, the old cult was revitalized.

## FORGING THE ICON

The convent's turbulent story explains the very poor condition in which the painting is preserved: According to 18<sup>th</sup>-century sources, the survival of the painting was considered miraculous; however, the canvas, which was transferred to wood after the 1783 earthquake, has been heavily repainted, and it may be considered a fake in itself, a highly restored or rather completely repainted icon.

The painting is nearly two metres high and 1.25 wide (so that St. Dominic's figure appears larger than life) and was initially preserved on the main altar, as prescribed by St. Catherine on her second apparition, and only later moved to a separate chapel, made of white marble, porphyry and bronze. The painting portrays the saint with the typical white Dominican dress and a dark mantel. The background showing a brick wall and an open window onto a landscape probably dates to a later stage of a so-called 'restoration', since it is absent from all the old copies, and appears for the first time in a print made in 1791.<sup>7</sup> It is interesting to read the account made to justify this evident repaint: Giovan Bettista Melloni, Bolognese priest and biographer of more than fifty saints, saw the image after 1783 and considered the brick wall and the window as part of the original, that, covered through centuries, miraculously reappeared only after the earthquake (Melloni 1791: 194). As reported again by Melloni, the 1783 earthquake had damaged the image so much that the canvas was broken into two separate parts and the rediscovery of the lower part, at first thought missing, was considered a miracle (191). On that occasion, the restorations were massive — and they were again considered miraculous, since the painter called to 'restore', or, more accurately, to repaint the canvas, found his work divinely completed without his intervention, a miracle

5 | On the viceré see Mauro 2007; 2009.

6 | The impressive building of the XVII century convent of Soriano is extensively reconstructed by various studies of history of architecture (Panarello 2001:39-122; 2010).

7 | The print, by Bernardino Rulli, decorates Melloni.

that recalls the famous *topos* of the SS. Annunziata in Florence.<sup>8</sup> Maybe in one of those restorations the saint's beard was cleaned, a detail which appears in many antique copies (fig. 2),<sup>9</sup> but not on the present state of the icon. The beard is not an insignificant detail, since it is not typical of St. Dominic's traditional iconography: The difference between the Soriano typology and the more common Bolognese type may explain why, at a later stage, St. Dominic of Soriano was perceived as a new saint.

The Soriano icon is probably a painting that was already present in the convent when Frangipane created the miraculous forgery, promoting it as an icon not made by human hands. Instead, the icon is probably a work by Paolo di Ciacio di Mileto, a modest local painter active around the mid-15<sup>th</sup> century, author of the so-called *Madonna of the Pears*, for the Dominican church of S. Maria della Consolazione in Altomonte. It is highly probable that this 'old-fashioned', archaic and static composition positively contributed to its ripeness for a miraculous activation, after initially poor reception or even contempt, for which possible background is provided in the account of St. Catherine's second apparition.<sup>10</sup>

The painting started to have an increasingly outstanding role in the Dominican order, even displacing the saint's relics, preserved for three centuries in Bologna in a monumental sepulchre, which hides and obscures the body itself.<sup>11</sup> Unusually, St. Dominic's body is preserved almost entirely in Bologna (only the head is in a separate reliquary since 1383) (Faranda/Rosetus 1998), but the image was the vehicle for the spreading and renewal of the 13<sup>th</sup>-century cult: It is basically through the Soriano icon — which fixes, and multiplies a new iconographical typology — that St. Dominic became a leading Counter-Reformation and thaumaturgical saint, whose only competition in Southern Italy was the increasing popularity of St. Francis of Paola.<sup>12</sup> The Soriano case works as a visual paradigm: The miraculous image and its copies come to renew and later to substitute the cult of the relics preserved in Bologna, and St. Dominic of Soriano, who appears in numerous visions to believers and ill people, proudly affirms his identity (*I am the St. Dominic of Soriano and not of Bologna* as it is written in many of the accounts of his miraculous epiphanies).

8 | See, with previous bibliography, Holmes 2013: 57.

9 | The beard is very evident in the print by Nicolas Perrey "San Domenico da Soriano fonte perenne di Grazie" datable at the beginning of XVII century (published in Panarello 2001: 35) and again in the anonymous print that illustrates the 1733 edition of the *Acta Sanctorum*, in which the saint actually has long and curious moustaches (present also in the copy by Raffellino in S. Chiara, Carpi).

10 | On this topic, see at least Alcalá 2009: 55-73; Holmes 2013: 160.

11 | On the Arc of Saint Dominic in Bologna see Moskowitz 1994.

12 | On the cult for San Francesco di Paola see Sallmann 1996: 83-120.





*Figure 2: Francesco Caivano, “Saint Dominic”, 1648, Museo Diocesano Antonio Marena, Bitonto.*

At the end of this complex devotional process, the icon was itself able to produce relics: In Palermo in 1741, the *particula ex sacris ossibus Gloriosi sancti Dominici Suriani confessoris* appears (literally: a small part of St. Dominic of Soriano's bones). The saint of Soriano somehow became a new, independent saint, whose cult was promoted by the Dominican order, and whose relics are also collected and venerated.<sup>13</sup>

## COPIES AND FORGERIES

The phenomena of relic production had already begun in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, when contact relics were being documented. Contact relics are manufactured by a saint's body, 'touching' the miraculous icon with a new material that, upon contact, becomes miraculous in itself. As already recounted in Frangipane, the oil of the lamps burning in front of the canvas was considered miraculous.<sup>14</sup> The same happens to the *misura*, literally, the 'dimensions' of the icon: Small ribbons made of canvas, with the same length of the icon, were used particularly in cases of difficult pregnancies (Lembo 1665: 20-21). The relics were used to multiply the icon's miraculous power, and even to substitute the miraculous seeing of the icon for those who could not reach the sanctuary; but they also work as powerful material memories, helpful for those returning from a pilgrimage, who wanted to take home a fragment of the miraculous power for themselves, their family or even their animals, as is attested by a 17<sup>th</sup>-century blessing.<sup>15</sup>

The mechanism of copying and reproducing the miraculous image is part of this forgery: Focusing mainly on the miraculous activations of the copies in the last part of my paper I will describe some case studies taken from the network that I am reconstructing. Those examples will clarify how Soriano's cult was used to promote the Dominicans' role not only in Southern Italy, but also, thanks to a miraculous copy in Madrid, the Iberian Peninsula, and, later, the Americas; and how those copies — sort of certified fakes — spread and popularized the devotion overseas.<sup>16</sup>

In the first descriptions of the image, the icon is described as being so beautiful that it couldn't have been made by human hands (Frangipane 1622: 48): That the icon's

13 | The authenticity of the relic is certified in 1741, as recounted by Casillas García 2006: 383.

14 | See for example the miracles listed by Frangipane 1622: 18, 27, 50, 114, 228; Lembo 1665: 18-19.

15 | See for example the blessing for the animals: *Benedizione de' Cordoncini tagliati alla misura dell'immagine del S. Patriarca S. Domenico per salvaguardare gli animali*, quoted by Zucchi 1951.

16 | The issues of copying a miraculous image is addressed by Belting 1994: 440; Freedberg 1989: 142; Holmes 2013: 145.

beauty itself is evidence of divine production is obviously a *topos* which dates back to the *acheiropoieta* images attributed to St. Luke, an aesthetic observation clearly contradicted by the material evidences of the painting (Portús Pérez 2009: 40-43).

The Soriano icon, in Frangipane's words, has another peculiar characteristic: It is not only so beautiful that it couldn't have been made by human hands, but also it is thanks to its divine beauty that is impossible to copy, despite the vain attempts of various artists (1622: 48-49).

Beyond Frangipane's words, the cultic and performative reality of the miraculous icon of Soriano was very different: Between the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century, the Soriano image was continuously copied and multiplied.<sup>17</sup>

It is possible to subdivide the immense network of the copies into two basic groups. The first series consists of paintings that reproduce the Soriano icon exactly: The first copies appear in nearby Dominican convents, such as in Bitonto; where a linen dated 1648 and signed by its author, Francesco Caivano, is displayed in a massive baroque structure — a peculiar case of a miraculous image made and authenticated by human hands (fig. 2; Pasculli Ferrara 1998).

Despite the trope of the impossibility of the image's reproduction by artists, the production of copies started in the Soriano sanctuary itself: In a description of the convent's situation after the 1783 earthquake a reproductions atelier is documented, close to the convent itself, where a group of artists (or rather craftsmen) were deputized to copy the image. Given the high number of copies, we can imagine that a similar set-up existed in the 17<sup>th</sup> century (Panarello 2001: 217-22). In fact, the text "this is the true portrait of St. Dominic of Soriano" which appears in many early Calabrese copies (but also in Bruges, Empoli, Liguria and Taggia),<sup>18</sup> could be the proof of a 'certificate of authenticity' requested by Dominican convents and may refer to the copies manufactured directly in Soriano or at least approved by the convent.

But in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, copying the Soriano icon usually meant not a simple reproduction of the icon, but a reproduction of the performative *mise-en-scene* of the miracle related in Frangipane's account, with a painting within a painting, an iconography that probably derives from the 17<sup>th</sup>-century clay frame, recorded by the sources and lost in the 18<sup>th</sup> century's earthquakes.<sup>19</sup>

17 | In recent years, many studies on the copies have appeared: See the repertories drawn by Stagno (for the Liguria; 2009), Marías and Carlos Varona (on the Spanish copies; 2009) and Čapeta Rakić (for a Dalmatian copy that is derived from the Bertarelli print; 2013).

18 | Stagno 2009: 720-21, with useful reconstruction of the diffusion of the Soriano iconography in Liguria, where at least fourteen different canvases are documented.

19 | All the material pertaining to the baroque frame, with a possible reconstruction, is documented in Panarello 2010: 182-83.



Figure 3: Saint Dominic of Soriano and his miracles, 18<sup>th</sup> century, Civica Raccolta Bertarelli, Milan.

The Iberian success of this cult — thanks to a series of those copies and translations of Frangipane's text — changed the fate of the convent and its icon. In the 1620s — immediately after the publication of Frangipane's text — a print of the Soriano miracles, probably similar to the sheet now preserved at the Civica Raccolta delle Stampe Bertarelli (fig. 3), arrived for Padre Francisco de Sotomayor, prior of the Dominican convent of St. Tomas in Madrid, who asked the painter and Dominican friar Juan Batista Maino to paint the scene with the miraculous arrival (Pannarello 2009: 537-55). Maino's altar was consecrated on 13<sup>th</sup> May 1629. The Madrid convent of St. Tomas became the first Spanish devotional centre. It was soon followed by the female Dominican convent of Santo Domingo el Real, which hosted from 10<sup>th</sup> July 1638 a painting of the same subject made by Vicente Carducho (Colocacion 1638). Both Carducho's and Maino's painting are now lost, but a print taken by Pedro da Villafranca after Charduco's in 1638, together with the numerous other versions made by the two painters throughout their careers (fig. 4), clearly show their relationship and dependence on the model drawn by the Italian print.<sup>20</sup>

During the procession made to enshrine the painting, Carducho's copy for St. Domingo el Real performed miraculous healings: In the presence of more than 200 Dominicans, friars and nuns, the miraculous power of the Soriano icon was prodigiously transferred to the Madrid copy, a sort of fraudulent activation that substituted for the forged original (Colocacion 1638).

What happened in Madrid is very different from what occurred in Naples, in 1652. Here, as it is recounted in an anonymous libellus, the *Trionfo di S. Domenico in Soriano*, printed in Naples in 1653, a possessed woman was brought in front of a copy in the church of S. Maria della Salute, but the demons, once seeing the copy, considering it a fake, refused to leave and forced her to go on a pilgrimage to the true Calabrese icon. Despite the failure, the first attempt to heal the woman in front of a copy means that, except in peculiar cases that required the original power of the true icon, the practice of substituting the icon and its power with a manufactured copy was indeed common.

## A SUCCESSFUL DEVOTION OVERSEAS

The miraculous activation of the first Spanish copies moved the devotional centre of the Soriano cult from Southern Italy to the central Iberian Peninsula, and it is not by chance that in 1666 Antonio Gonzales was the first Spaniard who obtained the role of Dominican general master (Carrió-Invernizzi 2009: 190). From the Iberian Peninsula, a new “colonization of the imagery”<sup>21</sup> began to play out in the Americas:

20 | On the Maino paintings see Marías/Carlos Varona 2009: 71-73; Carlos Varona 2002. On the Madrid copies see Collar de Cáceres 2005.  
21 | The expression is the title of a famous book by Gruzinski.





Figure 4: Juan Bautista Maino, “Appearance of the Virgin to St. Dominic in Soriano”, 1630s, Hermitage Museum, Saint Petersburg.

The icon was used to prevent a flood in Mexico City in 1630,<sup>22</sup> and, when the Dominicans settled in Uruguay, they renamed the first Spanish colony Santo Domingo de Soriano, now known as Villa Soriano.<sup>23</sup>

In all Spanish copies, the core of the painting, the Soriano icon itself, seems to remain unchanged, at a moment when the true icon was in fact about to be repainted and completely forged by adding the brick wall as the background: A fake icon that had become a true relic, was offered through the narrative image to the devotees' adoration.

To sum up and conclude: In this multifaceted stratification of fakes, firstly, we have a miraculous image that changed the role and the fate of a religious order in a formerly marginal region, an image that does not even exist anymore in its original conditions: Damaged by subsequent earthquakes and completely repainted, the icon is now a fake in itself. Secondly, the hagiographical account that popularized the icon's miracles is probably highly forged, at least in how it anticipates the cult, for specific political reasons. Thirdly, later in its veneration, the icon created fake relics, venerated in Palermo, such as the rather mysterious apparition of a saint's bone, whose body is venerated and preserved (presumably intact) elsewhere. Moreover, the mechanism that led to the production of many copies of the miraculous image — sort of certified reproductions, or true 'fakes' — raises issues about artistic reproduction of icons supposedly not made by human hands, but also with respect to the role of the artists who made, repaired, and restored the original image through the centuries, and were responsible for the copies that popularized this devotion.

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22 | In 1629-1630 Santo Domingo de Soriano is called to protect Ciudad del Mexico during a series of floods. See Ragon 2002: 371-72. A painting representing the miraculous arrival is documented in Mexico City in 1645. See Esponera Cerdán 1992: 91.

23 | The village now known as Villa Soriano was actually built by the Franciscans in 1624 and only around 1662 was renamed Santo Domingo de Soriano. See Esponera Cerdán 1992: 75-95.

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# Desiring Fakes

## AI, Avatars, and the Body of Fake Information in Digital Art

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On 3 November 1948, the Chicago Tribune led with the premature headline “Dewey Defeats Truman”. Thomas E. Dewey was expected to win the presidential election. Instead, the actual winner Harry S. Truman ironically held up a copy of the newspaper after his victory was announced (fig. 1). This historical false report reached unimaginable relevance in 2016: According to most polls of the 45<sup>th</sup> US presidential election, Hillary Clinton would surely become the next president. Donald J. Trump’s shock victory was also attributed to widespread posting and sharing of so-called ‘fake news’ via social media. In light of this, even Facebook felt compelled to make a statement.<sup>1</sup>

The political dimension of fake news says a lot about forgeries in general: forgeries are not copies. Perpetrators of forgery fake evidence, obscure their sources and rewrite history. Famous art forgers in the 20<sup>th</sup> century — such as Tom Keating, Eric Hebborn and Edgar Mrugalla — have not copied pictures to compete with the originals, but to imitate the ‘style’ of other artists. What these painters falsified were not objects, but (art) history itself. In this essay I will propose an understanding of forgeries much more as a formal process in the terms of information theory, rather than focusing on the process of their manifestation.

In most instances, the word “forgery” is used with negative connotations. However, forgers have often completed (art) history more than actual experts, who, in a way, have written this history with gaps: Forgers have created the missing pieces of the historical puzzle, even if they are false ones. In this context, the German art critic Niklas Maak writes about the spectacular case of the forger Wolfgang Beltracchi:

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1 | See the statement by Mark Zuckerberg at <https://www.facebook.com/zuck/posts/10103269806149061> (last accessed on 14 June 2017). For an analysis of fake news in the 2016 presidential election see Allcott/Gentzkow 2017.

Figure 1: Harry S. Truman holding the issue of the Chicago Daily Tribune at St. Louis, Missouri on 3 November 1948.



What Beltracchi painted are not classical forgeries but his own works of art, which reveal the mechanism of the art market—and which, because they are put so precisely in art-historical niches, in terms of market needs, painted *in desideratum*, give a precise portrait of the epoch. They say much about the present time, the image of art history, and about the economic preconditions of ‘masterpieces’. (2011, my translation)<sup>2</sup>

Summarising Maak, then, forgers fulfil the expectations and desires of the art market by analysing the art system and integrating themselves into its immanent mechanisms.

2 | “Was Beltracchi gemalt hat, sind keine klassischen Fälschungen, sondern eigene Kunstwerke, die den Mechanismus des Kunstmarkts offenlegen—und die, weil sie so präzise in kunsthistorische Nischen, in Marktbedürfnisse, in Desiderate hineingemalt sind, ein präzises Epochenporträt abgeben. Sie sagen viel über die Gegenwart, ihr Bild von Kunstgeschichte, und über die ökonomischen Bedingungen von ‘Meisterwerken’”.

Accordingly, a key feature of forging is the supposed context. Antique forgers have always resorted to fabricated stories to make their alleged ‘discoveries’ seem plausible. Even in antiquity, ‘original’ writings were claimed to have been found “‘under the feet of Anubis’ or ‘in the night, fallen into the court of the temple in Koptos, as a mystery of this goddess [Isis]’” (Grafton 1990: 8). Such forged provenances were intended not only to make the discovery plausible through apparent eye-witness accounts, but to add even more (false) credibility. Likewise, forgeries cannot be thought of without false collection labels or stories of adventurous findings or invented provenances.<sup>3</sup> Therefore forgeries are not so much an expression of craftsmanship as they are vehicles for the creation of a narrative with similarities to circular reporting, in which the original source is hidden behind multiple other sources.

Following these considerations, here forgeries are understood as an aesthetic practice that reflects exactly this mechanism of desire and empty promises, where the ‘false’ serves the purpose of corroborating pre-existing expectations in order to make them ‘true’. Due to the information age, I will focus more on the false information which counterfeits an object as original or authentic than on the object itself. The focus of this essay will be on new media artworks which utilise fake identities, and reflect on and question the benevolent art system and its gaps. As a result, a connection to AI (artificial intelligence) and its history is fundamental: AI, similar to forgeries, is intended to fit and to satisfy the demands of an analysed environment. These programs work in a defined system, a system, like the art market, that has been previously analysed.<sup>4</sup> Today, AI has various uses, for instance in the financial sector as well as an instrument to spread ‘fake news’ in social networks. Google, for example, even managed to defeat the world class *GO* player Lee Sedol with its AI *AlphaGO*. The works discussed here do not reach such technical competence, but they do address a central aspect of the discussion of AI: decision-making.<sup>5</sup> The mastery of *GO*, a game so complex that experience and intuition play

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3 | The importance of provenance shows the case of John Drewe. Drewe commissioned art forgeries and forged documents by way of their provenance and partly smuggled them into museums and archives in order to sell the forgeries as originals.

4 | On this see for example an article by *Bloomberg News* from 22 April 2015 about the Flash Crash, at <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2015-04-22/mystery-trader-armed-with-algorithms-rewrites-flash-crash-story> (last accessed on 14 June 2017).

5 | Daniel Dennett discusses this aspect in the early 1970s not as a category of AI itself but a stance in reception. The point in his essay is not his description of different kinds of stances—design, physical and intentional stance (1971: 88-91)—but that he reverses for his assessment of AI the machinable criterion to a human one. In this approach, an AI

a decisive role, was considered impossible for AI until 2016. For a certain degree of complexity in fact, *decisions* cannot be predicted by an algorithm (Turing 1937). The works discussed here deal with this problem, this gap of information: similarly to forgeries, AI artworks stimulate *expectations* and *desires*, which are more revealing of the frame of communication in which they operate, than the concealment of their technical deficits.

## TRUE OR FALSE — A DECISION OF BOTS

The question as to whether something is a fake can simply be answered with ‘Yes’ or ‘No’; its ascription is either true or false. The simplest method is to compare two objects, one which is identified as genuine and another. Here, criminalistics also argue in the case of identification by means of dactyloscopic and biometric methods with the words “nature does not repeat itself” (Vec 2006: 209). Classical reproduction in the sense of a perfect duplicate is therefore characterised by its (twofold) identity, a sample and a match. To identify something as an original or a forgery is to determine its essence. This means that it is identical to an object, but not *that* object itself. In contrast, forgeries deal much more with the different fields of consistency, the authorship, or the purity of a work. An essential characteristic of forgeries is therefore the deception by imitation, not only the material imitation, but, above all, a simulation, through faked information, of the production and origin. Nonetheless, in the digital age exact imitations are already obsolete since everything can be copied without loss. Thus, an imitation also must embrace the context of creation, produce a reality of production constituted by mimetic premises, because the alleged object is not original anyway.

Forgeries are linked to technical conditions, and in the course of history more techniques have become accessible to forgers. Digitalisation, however, has released technical production from its material boundaries, because its essential property is its basic reducibility to information. The ascription as original or forgery is no longer so simple as the degree of complexity involved increases. It is ultimately independent of hardware, which makes the question of original, copy and counterfeit become redundant in the context of the digital. In particular, there are hardly any tangible mediums anymore, since data is mirrored and outsourced in

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can only take a (intentional) decision if it fits human behaviour, because “the goals of a goal-directed computer must be specified intentionally, just like desires” (91).

In this regard the current AI research by Google Director of Engineering Raymond Kurzweil or Swedish Philosopher Nick Bostrom, for example, is not of further interest. In fact, the fundamental characteristic of AI’s agency is in this context relevant.

clouds, there are no more master-copies and thus no hierarchy of information: nothing is copied and forged, all data is multiple at its inception. Nevertheless, there is an important similarity between forgery and digital practices, referring not to the generation of material but to the performative dimension of the interaction: forgeries in the digital context do not aim at technical perfection, but rather they are shared as if they were original. In this sense, they are simply reduced to their informative content for an existing communicative framework; that is, they can be linked to expectations.

Such an atmosphere of sensationalism and desire for information provides the perfect breeding ground for fake news. The common greed for information enables fake news to propagate and spread. This was the case, for example, a few days after the attack at the Boston Marathon in April 2013 and the subsequent manhunt for two suspects, in which authorities, the public, and the news media participated equally. In a race for the latest and most spectacular news, rumours and false reports were published without being checked, even by renowned news stations and thus gained a wide audience. The incentive of such attention prompted some Twitter users to create false profiles and spread false information. So, the tweet “I want to kill all of you, you killed my brother” from a profile that pretended to be one of the wanted assassins, was adopted by social media and news as an *actual* statement (European Media Art Festival 2014: 153). Although it was clear after a few minutes that it was a fake profile and the tweet was just a (cruel) joke, this news went viral over several hours. In his work *Fake Account* the artist Alexander Repp visualises the network of tweets, which are related to the report of the fake profile, by analysing a five-minute live recording of Twitter: all messages with the word ‘killed’, the users who wrote them, the attached links and the hashtags form a point in the network.

This artwork not only shows how false messages are spread easily online, but also how forgeries generally work. The imitative fake profile is not so important, since the profile and the messages were clumsy inventions whose absurdity was easy to uncover by deeper consideration: why would a suspect, for whom the whole country was searching, be sending tweets? What really matters is the fabricated *pre-mitation*<sup>6</sup> of something that will cause a predictable effect. In this case, something that triggers the desire of (media) reality for sensational news. Through the numerous participants, the half-life and haste of the news cycle and anticipation of a spectacle, a network, as Repp presents it, is created. The actual forgery fades away under the quantity of factors. Favoured by this complexity, the decidability of

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6 | This term refers to the German philosopher Hans Blumenberg and his concept of “Vorahnung”. The English translation as “anticipation” is misleading as Blumenberg understands this term as a function of the concept of “imitation” (“Nachahmung”) which would mean, in an overly literal translation, “post-imitation” (2000: 48).



whether an object — here the tweet — is true or false is irrelevant as long as it fits expectations. Only an evaluation, which contradicts the hasty machinery of sensationalism, allows an accurate conclusion.

Leaving Twitter aside and focussing instead on another social network, Facebook, Sarah Waterfeld describes the practice of self-representation as mimesis 2.0 (2012). Here, she refers to René Girard's model of the "mimetic desire". In his book *Deceit, Desire and the Novel: Self and Other in Literary Structure*, Girard develops this concept based on literature of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. In a nutshell, this is a triangular model of a subject, the "mediator" and an object of desire (Girard 1969: 2). Instead of desiring the object for its own qualities, the subject or the protagonist wants it, because it is valuable to the mediator, e.g. his antagonist, whose desire he imitates by doing so. Therefore, the mimetic process is a mediation which can be "external", if it refers to spiritual type like the imagination, or "internal", if it refers to a physical type like a person (9). Girard's analysis goes deeper, he is interested in the character's jealousy, envy or rivalry and its consequences for the relations in the novel, but the literary and even the general anthropological implications of Girard's model have little relevance for this essay. More important is to point out Waterfeld's understanding of this model of *triangular desire* as a valid pattern for interactions in social networks. Waterfeld sees self-expression on Facebook as a mimetic process in the sense of Girard: the actual user does not desire some object itself, but the reactions shown on one's timeline and therefore a desire for something somebody else wants or likes. Following this reasoning, the profile or the account in social networks is an expression of *the Other*, because it represents an ideal not of one's self but of an image, that would most likely be 'liked' and commented. What Waterfeld describes by updating Girard is an imitation of an imagination or, well-known since the emergence of *psychoanalysis*, an image of *the Other*. Although Waterfeld transfers the triangular model of Girard and notes rightly that there is no "dislike-button" (2012: 234) she avoids naming the components in this relationship. That is maybe because every component is exchangeable with the others. But moreover, she ignores that a profile is a representation of a user and not the actual one. Instead, I would like to understand such profiles as an imitation of a type of self-approval. The point is, that the user does not follow real references but virtual idols or (role) models that embody what is 'liked' and therefore desirable. In this sense the triangular model consists of 'likes' or attention (object), the (distorted) self-expression in the profile (mediator) and the user (subject). The user mimics an image in his profile, a desirable ideal he understands as self-expression, that should be solely 'likeable'. He therefore has no genuine desire for 'likes'; his urge is only based on his understanding of the popularity of other users who are successful in the system of social networks. This accompanies virality, or the phenomenon of memes, and this is what Girard calls, with reference to Gregory Bateson, a "double bind", because the primary impulse of imitation to get an object of desire is necessarily reciprocal. Girard understands that this an instinctive threat to is created by being imitated, so a rivalry between the

subject and the “mediator” occurs, for which reason “*mimetic desire* is simply a term more comprehensive than violence” (2005: 156-58). In the case of fake accounts, the object of desire is the alleged news, the, in fact, fake news, that triggers sensationalism. The fake account becomes the “mediator”, while the subject, that imitates and copies this “mediator”, is something like the news media or profile that shares the false information. But this relation only works if one is beware of the triangular relation, it is a *mimesis of mimetic desire*. The fake (profile) imitates, but does not become, the object of desire with the intent that the other user’s profiles imitate this fake profile. The object here is to gain attention, ‘likes’ in the context of social networks. So by imitation I mean, more accurately, the *pre-mitation*, because the creator of a fake account anticipates and counterfeits the desire of *the Other*; he presumes how his audience will react if he triggers their desire.<sup>7</sup> Aware of the “double bind”, the profile deals with this by counterfeiting the “mediators” qualities, thus satisfying their desires or expectations.

Fake profiles, as showcased by Repp, are not a rarity. These take not only in the form of false profiles managed by real people to remain anonymous, but also in the form of chat bots. Such bots may be helpful, just like the assistant AI I have mentioned, but they can also increase the number of followers of real profiles, increasing the popularity level, and they can thus mislead a user to interact with an only allegedly real person, as happens, for example, on some dating websites.

Such bots only work in a calculable system. They themselves cannot make any decisions, so they must be programmed into desiderates. Following a procedure — and that is the purpose of robots — they can then carry out an action in relative autonomy. Such an autonomous action which is only possible in a certain, defined framework, was the topic of the artist group *!Mediengruppe Bitnik* and their project *Random Darknet Shopper (RDS)* at the Kunst Halle St. Gallen in 2014

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7 | This triangular model can similarly be found in the Internet practice of ‘trolling’, because here the ‘troll’ tries to trigger a response that is itself worse than his original insult. He hides behind a fake identity and aims to involve a third party by staging this argument for an audience. Therefore ‘trolling’ is more about faking or imitating identities, as Judith Donath states: “Trolling is a game about identity deception, albeit one that is played without the consent of most of the players. The troll attempts to pass as a legitimate participant, sharing the group’s common interests and concerns; the newsgroups members, if they are cognizant of trolls and other identity deceptions, attempt to both distinguish real from trolling postings, and upon judging a poster a troll, make the offending poster leave the group. Their success at the former depends on how well they — and the troll — understand identity cues; their success at the latter depends on whether the troll’s enjoyment is sufficiently diminished or outweighed by the costs imposed by the group” (1999: 45).

(fig. 2). The centre of this work was a bot, which had a weekly amount of \$ 100 in Bitcoins to buy goods and deliver them to the exhibition. The bot does not shop in any online shop, but in the so-called ‘agora’, which is offline by now, in the darknet, a marketplace similar to the well-known ‘silk road.’ The darknet is an overlay network, it uses the Internet infrastructure, but without public access. To become a part of this network, one must be invited, but subsequently a high level of anonymity is guaranteed, especially at these darknet-markets. Basic for the *RDS* is to experiment, to explore, and to document how such a relationship works, when it is based only on information and quasi confidence in a system. Week for week the

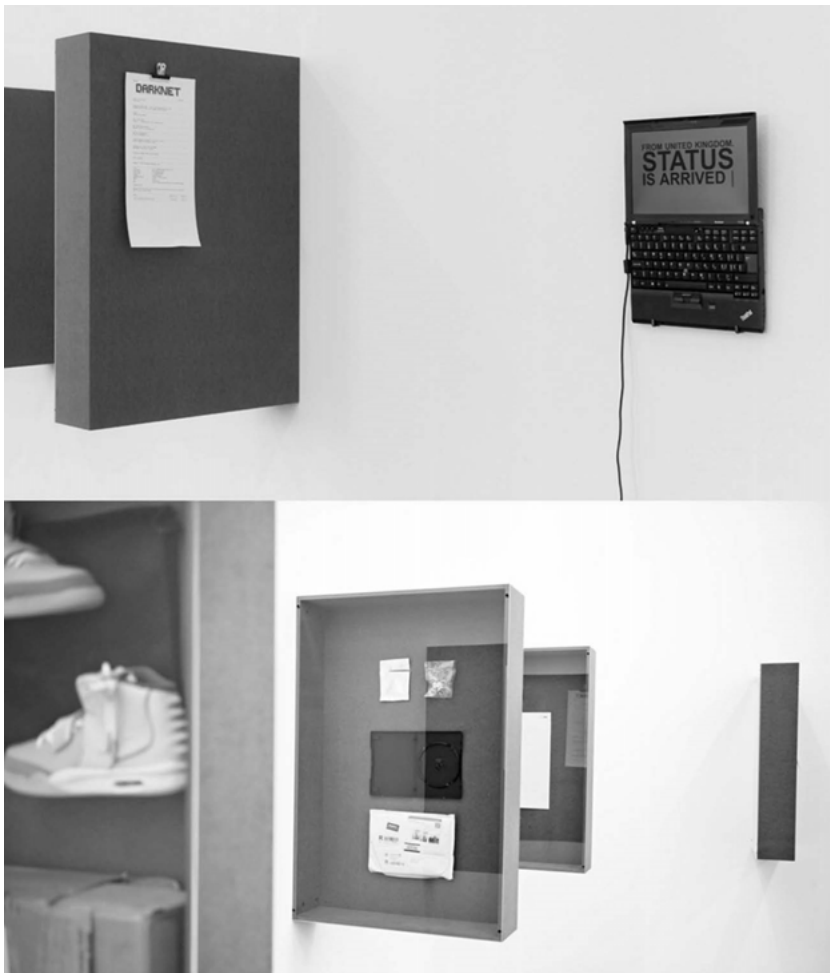


Figure 2: !Mediengruppe Bitnik, “Random Darknet Shopper”, 2014/15, installation shots at Kunst Halle St. Gallen, Switzerland.

bot bought items such as counterfeit sneakers or jeans, high-quality passport scans, a copy of a *UK Fire Brigade Master Key Set* or drugs like ecstasy. At the end the Swiss police confiscated this ‘evidence’ of this artwork, but, interestingly, without charging the human artists.

An aesthetic dimension of the *RDS* is its title-giving contingency. With this incalculability, the work stands in the tradition of Digital Art, because the “serendipity” (Cybernetic Serendipity 1968) or the “aesthetic gap” (Becker 2017: 172) is a fundamental and genuine characteristic of this art form. For the *RDS*, this gap is its relative autonomy. At the same time, however, the shopper works only by the command-execute-demand-structure of the darknet shopping platform, the randomness is therefore given in the selection of the products and thus only *the bone of contention*. The communication and trafficking between the bot and the traders was ‘successful’ in two ways: Firstly, this scheme realised the artists’ intention to get such scandalising items and therefore attention, otherwise this performance could have taken place on eBay or any other shopping-platform; secondly, it is exclusively based on a rational system of ratings. Given the special community of the darknet, the sellers are as interested in a redundant but working identity like a rating as is the bot, which uses these ratings for judging and deciding for from whom to buy. As on Amazon, the credibility of a seller is decided by his ratings. The *RDS* is therefore a type of ‘programmed scandal’, which, crucially, is based only on digital information, on the exchange between bot and sellers, whether they are controlled manually or programmed.

The success of the communication between the *RDS* and the human sellers depends on the expectations of the sellers. They do not expect anything except payment for their goods. As long as this adheres to market mechanisms, or “market needs” (Maak 2011), everything else does not matter. On the other hand, there are also procedures to prevent such communication. Websites try to protect themselves from such artificial users by using so-called CAPTCHAs (Completely Automated Public Turing test to tell Computers and Humans Apart), which are installed before the content can be accessed. The idea here is that a bot cannot easily solve visual tasks that a human user can, because a computer programme cannot recognise that these graphics include letters and characters and cannot serve the required input. Of course, this remains a constant race: When bots solve the CAPTCHAs, these must in turn be improved. But as in the work of the South Korean artists’ group *Shinseungback Kimyonghun*, the principle can also be reversed in order to exclude people: a so-called *FADTCHA* (Face Detection Turing test to tell Computers and Humans Apart) (fig. 3). Face detection is based on an algorithm of the open source library “OpenCV”. The computer detects faces in its camera vision and marks them with a red square. The actual work, however, is a book with nine round, colour patches, which act on the human eye like a diffuse collection of monotonous circles. In this collection, the computer recognises a face, but the human eye does not. For a dichotomous categorisation — true or false — here only the system-immanent, i.e.

programmed, factors matter. So in the case of *FADTCHA* as well as of the *RDS* the actual object — purchased object or image — plays no semantic role, because their judgment is only based on the calculated work steps. But are they forgeries or do they deal both with fake identities in a proper sense? From the perspective of the seller, the *RDS* is a false identity, because it orders using the name of and to the real address of a legal person, i.e. the Kunsthalle St. Gallen. From the point of view of a human being the images in *FADTCHA* are false faces, because they do not concur with our image of faces. Forgeries are therefore not false facts but false, created situations. In the digital age, forgeries rather fake a construct of identity, object, and reception, of artist, work, and expectation; they create a situation in which an object becomes adequate, they fake a triangular relation of desire.



Figure 3: Shinseungback Kimyonghun, *FADTCHA*, computer sees the face in the test image of the book and the human user, 2013.

## THE IMITATION GAME

This triangular relation is central for AI research, because what is important is not the form of the AI, but its deception of being humanoid. The fundamental issue of AI's interplay and autonomy in this relation marks the beginning of AI research, and leads the British computer scientist Alan Turing, to open his famous essay "Computing Machinery and Intelligence" with: "I propose to consider the question, 'Can machines think?'" (1950: 433). But Turing himself relativises this approach by replacing it with the question of whether machines can be realised as thinking humans. He illustrates this, the later so-called 'Turing Test' to which CAPTCHAs refer, in a mind experiment which he calls the "Imitation Game". In this respect, Turing was not concerned with the extent to which machines or computers can think in any form, but how far — and this shows the behaviouristic approach of his thinking — they can behave as if they were thinking beings (435, 438).

This game consists of three elements: a machine or computer, a person and separate from these two an interrogator, who ideally communicates only via telecommunication with the other participants. The task of the interrogator is to distinguish the two others from each other; the task of the machine and of the human is to answer the questions so that they are perceived in each case as a human being (434). One must keep in mind that in 1950, when Turing described this game, the available skills and range of computing were very limited, apart from the fact that digital computers were not beyond an initial phase of development. Nevertheless, Turing already speaks of machines or computers that could imitate humans as "human computers" or, in today's words, as robots (438). With the increasing development of digital computers that can store and process an unimaginable amount of information, Turing was visionary in his foresight that it is just a matter of programming and commands that enable machines to 'mimic' human behaviour (438). Nevertheless, it was not his intention to equalise people and computers or to put them on some ontological level, he wanted to point out and raise awareness of the potential of these machines.

One has to understand Turing's reflections on the "imitation game" in the context of his article "On Computable Numbers, with an Application to the Entscheidungsproblem", written several years earlier (1937). Here, Turing describes his solution to the *Entscheidungsproblem* ("decision-problem") according to David Hilbert, namely, that it is undecidable for each possible mathematical formula whether it is provable or not. This *Entscheidungsproblem* cannot be transferred directly to the question of whether something is actually a forgery, since Turing was primarily concerned with mathematical and formal problems, not with semantic ones. It is, however, important for understanding the 'Imitation Game', because here Turing has already substituted the vague concept of predictability with being computable by a machine: "According to my definition, a number is computable if its decimal can be written down by a machine" (116). In this sense

the Turing machine is a universal machine, a simulation machine, since its operations can be described as “rule of thumb” or “purely mechanical” (1948: 4); all it does depends only on the information on a tape.

Before mentioning machines, Turing describes the “Imitation Game” in a different constellation namely: “a man (A), a woman (B), and an interrogator (C) who may be of either sex” (1950: 433). Assumed to be “B”, to convince the interrogator of one’s sex Turing suggests that “the best strategy for her is probably to give truthful answers. She can add such things as ‘I am the woman, don’t listen to him!’ to her answer, but it will avail nothing as the man can make similar remarks” (434). To cause an incorrect identification with this strategy, one has to mimic the other sex. Despite whether this really is the best strategy, Turing’s mind experiment is very similar to Girard’s model: both assume a triangular constellation and both suppose that one has to imitate or mimic their rival to succeed.

With regard to this ‘foreplay’ of the “Imitation Game” it is also interesting that a successful imitation in reverse means that the original (person) cannot present itself as such. Juliane Rebentisch understands this part of the “Imitation Game” as a gender construction, with the male imitating the female. Here, Rebentisch makes a reference to Judith Butler: the sexual construction by Turing is based, like social interaction in general, on normative rules (Rebentisch 1997: 28). Actually, Turing’s idea postulates an original which will be imitated by a machine. But as soon as he transforms this assumption into a game situation the concept of originality is necessarily questioned, because in this framework the original appears as an imitation of an unattainable ideal, induced by cultural, social, institutional and political practices (29). This raises the issue of whether imitation is not a question of the reference itself, but a means of navigating a system.

Turing, similarly to Rebentisch and Butler, also presupposes social norms: “The book of rules which we have described our human computer as using is of course a convenient fiction. Actual human computers really remember what they have got to do. If one wants to make a machine mimic the behaviour of the human computer in some complex operation one has to ask him how it is done, and then translate the answer into the form of an instruction table” (Turing 1950: 438). As in his article about the *Entscheidungsproblem*, Turing defines the problem of calculability as mechanical. In this regard, he presumes two things without mentioning: enough information can purport or simulate a common-sense knowledge *and* there must be some kind of benevolent interrogator or observer. Here Turing follows a mathematical-information-theoretical logic: We know the information that is transmitted, the receiver is defined normatively, so the sender (the imitator) results as a variable which can either be successfully deceived or not. In other words, if one has an interrogator who knows how the programme works, asks the right questions, for example logical contradictions or detects that the computer reacts in unclear situations with counter-questions, then the “Imitation Game” does not work.

The (human) reaction based on feelings, emotions or instinct in unforeseen situations is a well-known argument against AI, because calculation means that there is no room for consciousness. Turing himself mentions this argument but rejects it, because in “this view the only way by which one could be sure that a machine [as well as a man] thinks is to be the machine [or the man] and to feel oneself thinking” (445). So, as in any conversation, the success of the communication is based on how the codes, knowledge, or expectation of the participants concur. This applies to both human and artificial counterparts.

Through Turing’s work, one realises that computers are no longer just pure computing machines, but symbol-processing machines. Though he asks the provocative question “Can machines think?” in his essay, he is not concerned with the intention of proving that machines can be intelligent, but *how* they can be perceived as intelligent. However, this ontological question of the autonomy of AI can be understood within the tradition of the philosophical ‘body-soul problem’ and plays a strong role in contemporary discussions of AI. The *RDS* also raises the question of who takes responsibility for its (illegal) actions, and consequently AI researchers warn of the consequences in regard to the progress of AI’s autonomy.<sup>8</sup>

Turing, however, defines intellect in a purely linguistic, information-technical sense. This way, he can dissociate his concept of intelligence from a material and physical body:

The new problem has the advantage of drawing a fairly sharp line between the physical and the intellectual capacities of a man. No engineer or chemist claims to be able to produce a material which is indistinguishable from the human skin. It is possible that at some time this might be done, but even supposing this invention available we should feel there was little point in trying to make a ‘thinking machine’ more human by dressing it up in such artificial flesh. (434)

In this detachment from the physical, which is supposed to strengthen the argument of machine intelligence, there is, however, still a recognition of the physical. For the “Imitation Game” “the ideal arrangement is to have a teleprinter communicating between the two rooms”, because any physical perception would immediately make the imitation impossible, for qualities such as the sound of a voice are rooted too strongly in the human perception apparatus (434). The telecommunicative situation and the obscuring of physical conditions support the indistinguishability in Turing’s experiment, because bodily features are so compelling. But exactly because they are so compelling, the imitation of these

8 | See <https://futureoflife.org/open-letter-autonomous-weapons/> (last accessed on 31 May 2017).



Figure 4: Joseph Weizenbaum acts out “Eliza” at a computer with printing output, photograph, 1966.



characteristics can support the deception. Turing, owing to the technical conditions of his time, ignores that, but today a machine, i.e. a computer, that imitates such bodily features can forge an identity and even belie its deficit in (artificial) behaviour.

## AVATARS

One of the first programs that can be seen as the implementation of Turing’s “Imitation Game”, the Turing test, and that is still a milestone in AI research, is Joseph Weizenbaum’s *ELIZA* (fig. 4). This language analysis programme consisted of two parts, the language analyser and the script composed by a set of rules. This could include rules for a conversation about cooking, insurance, banking, etc., depending on which conversation was intended by the programmer. For the first experiment, Weizenbaum used a therapy session whose script is based on the “Rogerian psychotherapy” and is known under the name *DOCTOR* (1976: 3–4).<sup>9</sup>

Weizenbaum himself saw the overwhelming response to his programme critically. In fact, he was surprised that a machine which used a regular procedure

9 | “Rogerian psychotherapy” or “person-centred therapy” is a form of talking therapy. It is characteristic of this form of therapy that the client is focused on and the therapist avoids intervention as much as possible. It tends to let the client reflect and become aware of his own emotions and cognition.

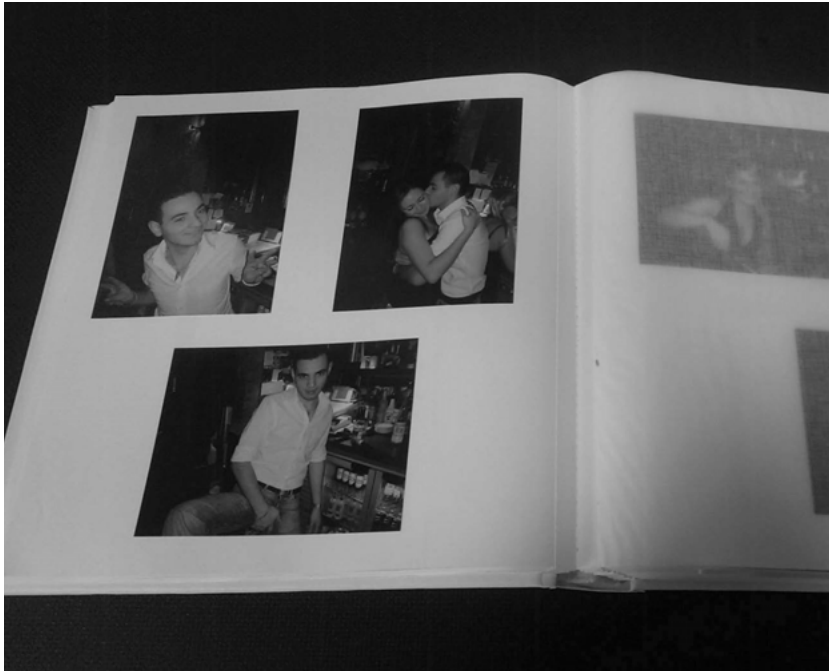
was seen by laymen as well as by experts as an equivalent to human intelligence (5-8). Basically, its utilisation of the regular communication situations of “Rogean psychotherapy”, which were highly structured, made calculated behaviour by the computer possible. A situation, in other words, for which one usually accepts that it follows clear rules, is less associative, and allows only a small range of behaviour. For example, the programme responded to the statement “Perhaps I could learn to get along with my mother” with “Tell me more about your family” (4, see also 189). The supposed semantic component is based on a simple classification by means of a thesaurus. Therefore the script is based on lexical database. The programme itself, however, provides a mere syntax, the actual semantics originate from the users, because DOCTOR does not provide any information (Weizenbaum 1966: 42). It simulates a dialogue by means of contentless counter questions, which are based on the — in this case lexical — user’s expectations. Therefore, Weizenbaum also writes: “It is important to note that this assumption is one made by the speaker” (42).

As Claude Shannon, founder of information Theory, describes, the content of information is dependent on the recipient (Weizenbaum 1976: 209). What Weizenbaum after Shannon hereby actually means is that the same information can be understood differently in different contexts. Therefore, in the example of *ELIZA*, it is remarkable how much autonomy and identity can be seen in simple answers and counter-questions which in reality do nothing more than reassure the questioner. The communication situation of a therapy discussion, in which the role of the therapist actually denies a personal relationship, is surely conducive. However, this could be transferred to all sorts of professionals, since a certain degree of professionalism always prevails over personal interests. As I argued, the identity of the therapist in *ELIZA* is ultimately based on a database in form of a thesaurus. Even in the early days of (criminal) identification, analogue databases of photographs or Bertillonages were important (Vec 2006: 185-86). Such discussions on data retention, data encryption and data monitoring are still current. And when the artists *KairUs* (Linda Kronman and Andreas Zingerle) evaluated hard drives they found at an African dump, in their work *Forensic Fantasies Trilogy* (2016), creating in the third part of this work anonymous but also intimate and personal photo albums from the found pictures (fig. 5), they showed that the relationship between data and identity, today, is even more basic.

Because AIs are based on neural networks, they only learn on the basis of their accessible data. Therefore, they reproduce systemic stereotypes in facial recognition if they occasionally classify faces of Asians as having ‘closed eyes’ because they were trained with Caucasian models.<sup>10</sup> On the other hand,

10 | The accuracy of face recognition software depends on its training parameters. In this way, these programmes can reproduce mistakes which are caused by its programmers, in this case, because they are

Figure 5: *KairUs* (Linda Kronman and Andreas Zingerle), “Not a Blackmail”, Part one of “Forensic Fantasies Trilogy”, 2016, installation shot at Ars Electronica 2016.



this facial recognition would not work so well in Europe if other parameters were broader. Accordingly, databases are designed with regard to their creator's claim.<sup>11</sup>

Weizenbaum's *ELIZA* was a primitive forerunner of today's common chatbots, whose database structures are much more complex. Even though today's chatbots are at least equipped with a profile image, Weizenbaum, like Turing, ignores the visual dimension in his programme. This is mainly due to the fact that early AI research focused on the production of natural language (Weizenbaum 1966; 1976: 182-201). Therefore, he also named his programme after the character

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only fed with one biometrical data. This led to unintentional racist categorisations by the AI.

The biometric identification by AI is therefore different to a general physiognomic or the FACS (Facial Action Coding System), because first of all it develops parameter to recognise a face and not produces categories to analyse it.

11 | For an overview of databases in art see Deep storage 1998.

“Eliza Doolittle” in George Bernard Shaw’s play *Pygmalion*. It is interesting to mention this point because of two aspects — apart from the clear reference to a female muse and divine creator in *Pygmalion*: First, although this character learns to speak more eloquently, Eliza Doolittle arguably does not become more intelligent, and still uses inappropriate language. Second, the play focuses on linguistic imitation of other people.

With regard to the false therapist in *ELIZA*, one has to differentiate between two aspects of forgeries. One, which is linguistic, plays a form of the “Imitation Game”. Here, imitating is indeed deceiving, but not deceiving in the technical sense. In this respect, forgeries work only if they are reduced to pure information. The second strategy of forgeries function upon whether a form of desire is awakened by the forgery, which obscures the technical character. Such a form is an ‘avatar’, which emerges in an artificial world instead of the protagonist to imitate and in the end, to substitute for them.

The concept of the avatar is closely related to control elements that connect the user with the software. However, two restrictions can be made so that not every cursor or status bar can be seen as an avatar: an avatar must first have a certain bonding and continuity in the virtual world, otherwise a button could also be considered as an avatar. Secondly, it must have a certain degree of anthropomorphic features, so that it has a potential for identification. Accordingly, there is always a degree of visibility in the concept of the avatar. In game studies the aspect of the avatar-player-binding and thus the function of control elements is emphasised. To use the avatar in this context goes a step further. Instead of analysing the representation and the perspectivation and other immersive elements of the avatar I would like to focus on the consequences of this bond. Assuming the avatar is an immersive representation of a user, others (human) users have to interact with this unknown player like a real counterpart. The concept of the avatar appears here to be appropriate, because of the unspoken understanding that an avatar is a representation of an actual user. Its artificial elements substitute for a real person. In the case of *ELIZA* for example, this would be the protocolary language. In general, these are mostly visual elements which in the form of anthropomorphic elements, like profile pictures, simulate that a real user is behind this avatar. Even chatbots usually provide profile pictures in order to be taken as a real person by an actual user sitting in front of the computer. The visibility of a kind of mug shot is therefore to obscure their actual identity, as Jean Baudrillard writes: “In the last analysis, robots are always slaves. They may be endowed with any of the qualities that define human sovereignty except one, and that is sex” (1996: 120). This not only points out the distinction between man and machine, but *vice versa*, also suggests that by gendering the machine, the sovereignty of the human individual would become brittle. This is an interesting parallel between the representation of the machine and the art-historical concept of personification where the gendering of abstract

concepts also has an intentional function.<sup>12</sup> The gender-specific representation of the avatar thus allows an alleged conclusion about the actual user, insofar that a user represents his “true” identity through their avatar. But this is not a deficit of the machine, as Baudrillard writes, on the contrary, it is a potential, because without sex it can better construct any sex and satisfy any sexual desire. In context of this gender construction, Judith Butler writes more generally that “gender is a kind of imitation for which there is no original” (1991: 21). What Butler understands specifically in relation to the performance of gender identity, in Baudrillard’s observation acquires a completely new dimension. By separating gender and body, the machine gains sovereignty, because its embodiment is exchangeable and can adopt and occupy every form. Therefore, just as one can perform their gender, a personification has a gender role, AI can also adopt a role according to its (programmed) aims. “There is no original”, a central factor in cases of forged identities or identity theft — and that is nothing less than what Turing describes in his “Imitation Game” — that the desire of the human is the key to a successful imitation. Therefore he emphasises the role of sexual appeal (Hodges 1994: 620).

12 | In general, one can observe an anthropomorphisation with respect to a gendering of AI’s humanlike qualities, for instance, with the use of mostly female voices. In literary or cinematic works the anthropomorphisation of AI follows basic gender roles. Characters like Hadaly (Auguste Villiers de l’Isle-Adam: *L’Ève future*, 1886), Samantha (Spike Jonze: *Her*, 2013) or Maria (Fritz Lang: *Metropolis*, 1927) are female representations of an ideal. Characters like HAL (Stanley Kubrick: *2001. A Space Odyssey*, 1968) or Terminator T-800 (James Cameron: *Terminator*, 1984), in contrast, are male representations of threat and destruction. Silke Wenk writes about art-historical personifications: “The female allegories represent the opposite of the feminine; they represent not the women, but the sovereignty, which even the ‘great men’ lack and point beyond them. The male-patriarchal order demands more from the men than what they are and do. There has to be another image for the *cohesion of order*, especially of the ‘nation’, which is ‘invented’ as a political community of equals (of ‘brothers’). Male images are not suited to represent the *imaginary community*, through which the state can be analysed through a bourgeois society — as a community beyond the debate about particular interests, through which the national state constitutes itself” (Wenk 1996: 101, my translation). In this regard, the anthropomorphisation of AI is similar to the personification, because it uses the same methods when it comes to in gendering.

For an overview of anthropomorphic machines in literature and film, see also Bukatman 1993.

Turing's approach is a semiotic and not a visual one, but to be clear, the point is that it is not the machine which becomes more human-like — although it can be perceived as such on a visual level — but the human becomes more machine-like, or, as Harry M. Collins states, “Wherever we choose to mimic a thing, a thing can mimic us” (1990:216). This human follows a command-structure while they are blinded by the visual elements of an avatar, an object. A successful deception therefore depends not on the forgery itself, but on a gamesmanship, a narrative that causes credulity by the user, so “just when humans engage in behaviour-specific acts they can be mimicked by machines” (41) or forgeries, because then they are predictable.

Thus, spam or clickbaits use sexual content to attract the user. In the early time of the Internet the net artist Alexej Shulgin launched the project *FuckU-fuckme* (fufme.com, offline, 1999) to discuss the new possibilities of cybersex. This website, which offered “dildonics” (Rheingold 1991:345-77) for each sex, received a wide audience. In fact, it was a fake; the offered sex toys never existed and were only illustrations. But this example shows that desires, imitated or assumed, especially when they are sexual, can get an attention that ignores, overlooks or disregards the real state of an (artificial) framework.

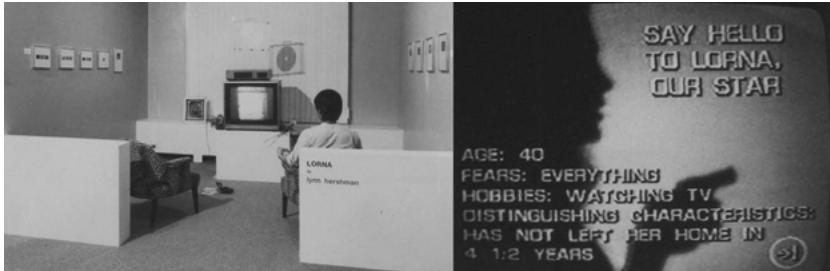
## FAKED IDENTITIES *BEFORE COMPUTER* (B.C.) AND *AFTER DIGITAL* (A.D.)

In her film *Teknolust* (2002) the artist Lynn Hershman Leeson explicitly discusses the relationship between sexual desire and AI. I conclude this text by focusing on her, because she deals with the relationship of false identity, desire, and technology in her entire work from the early 1970s onwards — “a panoply of identities” (Weibel 2016:44) — and has adapted herself over and over again to changing conditions.<sup>13</sup>

The headstone in this context is her creation *Roberta Breitmore* (1973). In this nearly five-year performance, Hershman Leeson lived under a fictional and fake identity as Roberta Breitmore. She documented this performance with false — not forged — documents, which were made in the name of Roberta Breitmore, like an apartment contract, a bank account, a credit card, a driver's license, and even a notebook about meetings with psychologists. Similar to the work *Forensic Fantasies*, mentioned above, the documental artefacts play an essential role for the false identity (Weibel 2016:45-52). Unlike a double life or a real fake, where persons take over another identity to protect themselves or to act out themselves, *Roberta Breitmore* was more of an artistic experiment. Therefore Hershman Leeson was interested in observing the construction of identity and desire of voyeuristic looks

13 | For an overview of the œuvre of Hershmann Leeson see Civic Radar 2016.

Figure 6: Lynn Hershman Leeson, “Lorna”, 1984, interactive installation, installation shot at Hansen Fuller Goldeen Gallery, San Fransisco (left) and screenshot (right).



above all; she even emphasised the effect of this role-playing-game for other real people: “Even with four different characters assuming her identity, the patterns of her interactions remained constant and negative. After zipping themselves into Roberta’s clothing, each multiple began to also have Roberta-like experiences” (Hershman Leeson 1994: 4).

Although *Roberta Breitmore* was created simultaneously to the discourse around AI exemplified in other artworks of the period, such as those by Lynda Benglis, Valie Export, Cindy Sherman or Martha Rosler, which dealt with the problems of gender and identity, there is no direct connection between these two dimensions.<sup>14</sup> However, for Hershman Leeson’s work the turning point of the era “Before Computers” (B.C.) to “After Digital” (A.D.) (1994: 3) is marked by the interactive work of *Lorna* (1979-84): Here, a video disc is used as an artistic medium for the first time (fig. 6). *Lorna* deals with the story of a lonely girl in a room, who only communicates via TV and telephone with the outside world. In this mixed media installation the user sits in a copy of Lorna’s room and can follow her life via the monitor in a hypertextual narrative. Based on *Lorna*, in 1984 Hershman Leeson developed the work *Deep Contact* which attracts the attention of passing visitors by a motion sensor. A woman in a mini-skirt on a red couch invites them to interact and to touch one of her body parts on the touchscreen. Both works allow the interaction with the virtual character: One can watch Lorna taking a bath or follow her to a date at a motel, or see the sexual and voyeuristic fantasy of Marion in *Deep Contact*, and follow her into a secret garden.

These works are actually not forged identities or identity theft nor frauds, they do not refer to a real existing person. *Lorna*, for example, works — like many subsequent digital artworks — with the strategy of hypertext to convey a feeling by

14 | Accordingly, as with AI research, Peter Weibel points out the linguistic dimension of Hershman Leeson’s work and therefore the reference as a central category (2016: 48).

Figure 7: Lynn Hershman Leeson, “Agent Ruby”, 2002, screenshot.



connecting to the user. But they show how affined digital and telematic artworks are to questions about the construction of facts. They reflect role traces and documents for the construction of faked identities and their authority in this process, as Hershman Leeson also states: “The new technology will be extremely subversive of all Forms of Traditional Authority — political, social, and religious. That is, when one encourages active participation by individual citizens and worshipers in public life, the standing of Authorities to issue commands is greatly retarded” (1985: 1). *Teknolust* is another turning point in her work, because here she focuses on the role of cloning and bio-art. Yet, she combines this discourse with the dimension of AI, because simultaneously to *Teknolust*, Hershman Leeson developed *Agent Ruby* from 1998 to 2002; this is an online chatbot, which is similar to *ELIZA* (fig. 7). There are about 35 years between *Agent Ruby* and *ELIZA*, so of course, *Ruby* is more eloquent but it is based on the same concept, it is not pre-programmed and its reaction depends on the questions of the interrogator. But in contrast to *ELIZA* it does not imitate a person like a psychiatrist anymore, it is some kind of a new person, because *Ruby* incorporated their identity as artificial intelligence into the chats.

In conclusion I wanted to show, that such strategies of forging, counterfeiting, imitating or deceiving are deeply rooted in the electronic or digital arts, even if one cannot speak of actual fakes in the works. Today, there are even more possibilities: Computers are much faster than in Turing’s times, countless amounts of information from networks and big data are easily accessible and machines are able to learn. There was even a Roberta Breitmore avatar created by Hershman Leeson for *Second Life*. But besides this, *ELIZA*, *Agent Ruby* or the *RDS* can work if they have the correct work environment. To create that, they use strategies similar to forging by being oriented towards the users’ expectations: they are narrative, immersive or



interactive as is necessary to seem credible, and therefore real. In order to convince the users, they use a narrative that disguises their own deficits. Thus, the acquired pieces of the *RDS* were exhibited and the identities in Hershan Leeson's work were displayed through documents and pictures of her alter ego. That is why the German forger Wolfgang Beltracchi also staged his forgeries in a supposedly historical photograph: to suggest, argue and narrate their authenticity.<sup>15</sup>

Forgeries are the expression of a formal rationalisation of reception — which resonates with the rationalisation of digital programmes like AI. Where gaps could be filled, they could be filled with forgeries. Artists use these gaps productively and reflect them critically, whilst forgeries just adapt themselves. The new media artworks I have discussed disclose the schematics of the forging process, because these machines in general and also AI follow a programmed command structure. Forgeries, in the classical sense, on the other hand, aim to disguise this process. Therefore, the description of something is a forgery, or not, as well as whether AI is considered to be real or deceptive, always depends on the conditions and desires of its reference system. Forgeries have no final state, or as *Agent Ruby* says when you ask her several times “Are you a forgery?” —

Am I a forgery? It is useful for me to have several identities user.

Am I a forgery? Of course I am.

Am I a forgery? Only when it matters.

Am I a forgery? I don't know.<sup>16</sup>

Eventually forgeries are ambivalent and are situated in a reciprocal framework of themselves, the forger as well as the recipient, and depend on the desires seen in them. So, maybe like *Eliza*, I would answer the question for *Agent Ruby* with: “If you can't tell, does it matter?”

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15 | On the case of Wolfgang Beltracchi see also the article of Henry Keazor in this volume, especially page 36

16 | Interaction with *Agent Ruby* on 31 May 2017 at <http://agentruby.sf-moma.org/>

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# Unmasking the Fake

## Theatrical Hoaxes from the *Dreadnought Hoax* to Contemporary Artist Practice

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In 1910, a group of Ethiopian princes was ceremoniously received on the HMS *Dreadnought*, the flagship of the British Home Fleet. In 2004, nearly a hundred years later, ExxonMobil announced on the BBC that they would fully compensate the victims of the 1984 Bhopal chemical spill, and in 2014, the German Federal Ministry for Family Affairs,<sup>1</sup> proudly announced a new programme of international aid giving Syrian children the opportunity to stay with foster families all across Germany.

These seemingly random, but equally surprising events are related through all being theatrical hoaxes, more or less elaborately conceived and performed fakes which are designed to be unveiled and ridicule those who fall for them. The royal Abyssinian delegation of 1910 was unmasked to be a heavily disguised group of British students and artists, including a young Virginia Stephen, who later became famous under the name of Woolf. The ExxonMobil representative turned out to be Andy Bichlbaum of the US-American artist-activist, or “artist”<sup>2</sup> group The Yes Men.<sup>3</sup> Finally, the surprisingly noble aid programme was unfortunately neither initiated nor sanctioned by the German government,

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1 | The exceptionally attentive reader might have suspected a faked announcement, since the actual ministry, in the overly specific tradition of German bureaucracy, is called “German Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth”.

2 | *Artivism* is a term coined by Slovenian theatre scholar Aldo Milohnić, a portmanteau describing hybrid artistic and activist practices (see 2015: 35).

3 | Video footage of the fake, which became known as the *Bhopal Hoax*, is included in The Yes Men’s 2009 documentary film *The Yes Men Fix the World* (Bichlbaum/Bonanno 2010).

but merely a fake announcement by Berlin-based artist collective Zentrum für Politische Schönheit (Center for Political Beauty, CPB).<sup>4</sup> While the latter two are acts of creative protest employing media hacking techniques as well as prime examples for contemporary activist interventions,<sup>5</sup> the earlier instance of the *Dreadnought Hoax* is usually considered a nonpolitical, harmless, even innocent prank.

Through re-evaluating the *Dreadnought Hoax*, this essay will discuss hoaxing as a critical or subversive mimetic practice, which employs the strategy of forgery. Theatrical hoaxes rely on impersonation or, to add the notion of fraud to the picture, imposture, which is the act of performing another — adopted or even fake — identity. After a short introduction to the concept of hoaxes, I will give an outline of the functionality of contemporary hoaxes. Finally, I will return to the case study of the *Dreadnought Hoax* to evaluate the subversive potential of hoaxing: an issue of quite unfortunate urgency, given the current post-factual *zeitgeist* and the seemingly ubiquitous phenomenon of actual and asserted fake news.

## A CONCISE COMPANION TO HOAXING

Hoaxes and forgeries are intertwined; both concepts borrow from one another, hoaxes can turn into forgeries and vice versa; a phenomenon which Henry Keazor grasps by the notion of the *foax* (see his article in this volume). In fact, one of the earliest testimonies of a literary fake in fact ought to be considered as the account of a hoax: In the first half of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century, Diogenes Laërtius recounts in *Lives and Opinions of Eminent Philosophers* an anecdote about a fake Sophocles play given to a man named Heraclides, who believes it to be authentic. Unfortunately, the first letters of every verse form an acrostic containing a hidden message, addressed personally to Heraclides: “An old monkey is not caught by a trap. [...] Oh yes, he’s caught at last, but it takes time. [...] Heraclides is ignorant of letters and not ashamed of his ignorance” (Diogenes Laërtius 1968: 547). The incident Laërtius describes can be considered a hoax for three reasons: firstly, the forgery is designed to deceive only for a while and then be unveiled; secondly, the effects of its unveiling are mockery and embarrassment; and thirdly, it contains explicit, purposeful marks of its fabricated nature.

4 | The fake government programme was called *Kindertransporthilfe des Bundes* (Federal Emergency Programme) and published via a seemingly official webpage (Center for Political Beauty 2014).

5 | Artist interventions are the topic of my doctoral thesis *Theatrale Interventionen. Subversiv-mimetische Dramaturgien und agonale Öffentlichkeiten*, *Theatrical Interventions: Subversive-Mimetic Dramaturgies and Agonistic Public Spheres* (forthcoming 2018).

The earliest evidence for the term ‘hoax’ can be found in the first decade of the 19<sup>th</sup> century while the verb ‘to hoax’ is documented in the last decade of the 18<sup>th</sup> century (OED 2016a, b). Only two decades later, in Charles Babbage’s treatise *Reflections on the Decline of Science in England: And on Some of Its Causes* (1830) ‘hoax’ is defined by its relation to ‘forgery’. At the same time, Babbage differentiates between the two: “*Forging* differs from hoaxing, in as much as in the latter the deceit is intended to last for a time and then be discovered, to the ridicule of those who have credited it” (1830: 177). Effectively, ridicule is inherent in the expression ‘hoax’ itself, as its etymology shows. Following the linguist Theresa Heyd, the expression ‘hoax’ derives from a mock Latin version of liturgical formulas, either “hocus” or “hocus-pocus”, a derivation of the Words of Institution “hoc est corpus”, or “hax pax max deus adimax” (2012: 133). Either way, at its genealogical root stands the corruption of Eucharistic formulas and with that the mockery of authority. This shows that conceptually, hoaxes can cause a great deal of potential derision and embarrassment to institutions. Babbage places them in a scientific context thus: “Such frauds are far from justifiable; the only excuse which has been made for them is, when they have been practised on scientific academies which had reached the period of dotage” (1830: 176). One could argue that in a more general sense, Babbage implies that certain decrepit structures need to be broken up, may they be all-too-well-established rules, unchallenged conventions, or world views that virtually provoke destabilisation and subversion. Hoaxes may just be appropriate instruments for doing so. In fact, all examples discussed in this article deal with powerful institutions or organisations like the British Navy, international corporations or the German government.

Nevertheless, they address a more general public; Heyd gives the following “very basic” definition of hoaxing: “Hoaxes are deceptive utterances that occur in one-to-many speech situations” (2012: 131). Whereas ‘deception’ is the key similarity of hoaxes and forgeries, the “one-to-many speech situation” is their essential difference. While forgeries need to be clandestinely executed and thereafter go unnoticed, hoaxes need an audience to testify the mockery, to observe the victim falling for the hoax and — basically — to laugh at the situation.<sup>6</sup> Hoaxes create news value and public attention prevents the victim from covering the whole affair up which is why their subversive potential strongly hinges on their publicness.

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6 | Heyd calls this phenomenon “audience splitting” (2012: 131), because a hoax needs two audiences, one to fall for it and one to laugh at it. In the case of hoaxes that don’t single out a special victim to be exposed, as in Laërtius’ anecdote, but try to deceive a general audience, “audience splitting” results from the phenomenon that usually “some recipients catch on to [sic!] the deceptive stance of a hoax faster, while others will take the hoax for bona fide information” (ibid.).

## CONTEMPORARY ARTIVIST HOAXES

During the last two decades, hoaxes as an activist or activist practice have been widely disseminated. Examples include the aforementioned group The Yes Men, The Oil Enforcement Agency, Billionaires for Bush and — in the German context — Center for Political Beauty and Peng! Collective. They have become a standard element within the *Toolbox for Revolution* — which is also the title of a book published by essayist Dave Oswald Mitchell and activist and prankster Andrew Boyd in 2012. The book contains an entry written by Yes Man Mike Bonanno, examining hoaxes as practiced by his group (2012).

The Yes Men can indeed be considered a paradigmatic example for contemporary media hoaxing by means of imposturous performances which are secretly recorded and shown in their documentary movies. The first step in their usual strategy is to plant a fake web page, mostly for large corporations like ExxonMobil, Dow Chemical, Halliburton, or institutions like the World Trade Organisation (Smith/Ollman/Price 2004; Bichlbaum/Bonanno 2010). Relying on individuals to fall for these fakes, they patiently wait for any incoming requests or invitations, may it be a conference to attend, an official statement to give in a news broadcast or a lecture to hold. Masquerading as official representatives of the respective corporation or institution, The Yes Men gave satirical papers at several conferences, typically employing drastic effects at the end of their presentations. In the name of the WTO for instance, they introduced a golden, inflatable phallus as a gadget for the remote supervision of workers in far-off countries, presenting a prototype at the conference (cf. Smith/Ollman/Price 2004: 00:00:32–00:00:45). Effects like these are means to push their satire over the limit and it is the pronounced intention of The Yes Men to make their audience realise that they are witnessing a hoax. However, these effects usually fail and, all too often, live audiences as well as journalists fall for their hoaxes.

The ostensible gullibility of live audiences might be due to social conventions at the respective events. However, it adds heavily to the satirical effect within the narrative of the movies, which distinctly frames the performance and makes the satirical intentions abundantly clear to their second public. Contrary to Laërtius' description and Babbage's theory of hoaxes, it is not the intention of the group to criticise the media or embarrass those who fall for their deceptions. Their hoaxes instead ridicule those international corporations and organisations which they appear to represent in their satirical performances.

Besides these satirical hoaxes, The Yes Men developed a second approach, a different kind of hoax, which often are characterised as “prefigurative intervention[s]” (Boyd 2012: 82). Instead of being scathing towards or incriminating of individual institutions, corporations, or authorities by revealing a fake appearance, The Yes Men aim their critique at wider circumstances by formulating an alternate vision to our reality: by drafting a utopia. According to Chantal Mouffe, this can

be described as a critical artistic intervention consisting of a critical disarticulation and a rearticulation, an alternative political vision (Mouffe 2013: 85-106). The Yes Men's *Bhopal Hoax* is an example of such a prophetic intervention, the utopian vision being a world in which global corporations take responsibility in so-called developing countries (Bichlbaum/Bonanno 2010: 00:00:30-00:00:37). With interventions like this, they force companies to react, to deny involvement and to take a stand regarding the matter; they have to reveal the hoax themselves and in doing so, reveal something about themselves. The Yes Men stage interventions based on imposture and fake performances which are explicitly designed to discredit certain authorities. They follow an approach which almost perfectly reflects the subversive and artistic potential of theatrical hoaxes.

The Center for Political Beauty (CPB) takes a slightly different approach with their media fake *Kindertransporthilfe des Bundes* (*The Federal Emergency Programme*), created in 2014. This intervention is less about revealing the hoax than about offering an alternate reality and making it imaginable (Ruch 2014: 222). Like The Yes Men, CPB put up a fake webpage, claiming that the German Federal Ministry for Family Affairs was about to implement a large-scale support programme which allegedly sought German foster families for Syrian children, helping them escape the war. The fake webpage applies the strategy of hoaxing and relies on various authenticating effects including an application form, general terms and conditions, legal advice, guidelines and a hotline. In its contact section, members of CPB were depicted as employees of the Ministry and, like most of CPB's interventions, the site referred to significant historic events, in this case the *Kindertransporte* (child transports), which saved the lives of roughly 10,000 Jewish children, helping them to escape the Nazi regime. The media fake was accompanied by a series of theatrical events, including a reception in front of the Ministry of Family Affairs (Center for Political Beauty 2014). Similar to The Yes Men's *Bhopal Hoax*, this can be considered a prophetic intervention, offering an alternate reality instead of critically applying the mechanisms of deceit and revelation. As a German public TV station put it, *Kindertransporthilfe* was a fake intended to become reality (ZDF 2014).

As CPB spokeswoman Zaina Lindner clarified, the hoax was immediately revealed to the public and to those engaged citizens who fell for the deceit and called the hotline (Gajevic 2014). But nevertheless, people continued to fill in the forms and hence voluntarily participated in the already-unveiled hoax, mostly supporting the issue in a tongue-in-cheek way (Reinhardt/Leonard 2014: 00:02:30-00:03:30). With their artistic interventions, CPB strives to create a "parallele deutsche Außenpolitik" ("parallel German foreign policy") (Kaul 2015: 24). CPB repeatedly depicted this hoax as a ready-to-use programme offered to the German government, which would enable them to provide a better and more efficient form of humanitarian aid (Reinhardt/Leonard 2014: 00:00:45-00:00:56). Several members of the CPB stressed, *Kindertransporthilfe* should by no means be considered



satire but an act of “hyperrealism” (Ruch 2014: 221-22; Gajevic 2014). Following Mouffe, this can be seen as a critical artistic intervention which is not only subversive, but which articulates and envisions, even literally offers, an alternative political programme.

Both examples employ fakes as a strategy for creating awareness and publicity. Certainly, these are no forgeries as such, since they eventually have to be unveiled in order to develop a political and subversive efficacy. In this context, fake and forgery are not pejorative terms but artistic and political practices, and the revelation of the fake seems to be a prototypical gesture of honesty.

## THE *DREADNOUGHT HOAX* (1910)

The *Dreadnought Hoax* has just recently made its way back into popular culture and public awareness by being depicted in an episode of the British TV series *Downton Abbey* (John 2015), but due to its public attention and subsequently famous participants, this particular hoax has always maintained a certain notoriety. It was performed by high-society-dropout and infamous prankster Horace de Vere Cole and a group of his friends, including the then unknown Virginia Woolf, on 7<sup>th</sup> February 1910.<sup>7</sup> Dressed up as a delegation of Abyssinian princes, the hoaxers were received with military honours on the flagship of the British Home Fleet, the HMS Dreadnought. They proceeded to receive a guided tour of the battleship without being unmasked. Subsequently, de Vere Cole launched the story to the press, exposing it as a hoax (Stansky 1996). According to Woolf, it “had been in all the papers” (Woolf 2011: 572) and received a great amount of publicity.

The Hoax was performed in a highly theatrical manner, employing a variety of mimetic strategies, including forgery: It was launched via telegram, supposedly composed by the then Permanent Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, Sir Charles Hardinge, and sent at very short notice to the commander-in-chief of the Home Fleet, Admiral May. The wire announced the visit of “Prince Makelen

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7 | The Hoax is often reported to have taken place on 10<sup>th</sup> February 1910, which is incorrect (Stansky 1996: 24). Stansky gives the hitherto most comprehensive account of the hoax and reviews a variety of sources including a fragment of Virginia Woolf’s 1940 typescript, Adrian Stephen’s memoirs, which were first published in 1936 (Stephen 1983), selected newspaper articles and the British Admiralty’s papers on the hoax (Stansky 1996: 17-46). Woolf’s typescript, most of which was long believed to be lost, was published in its entirety in the 2011 edition of her *Additional Essays*. An earlier, incomplete edition can be found in Quentin Bell’s biography of Woolf (Bell 1972: 214-16).

*Figure 1: The participants of the Dreadnought Hoax in disguise: Virginia Woolf on the far left, Adrien Stephen, the 'interpreter', second from the right (standing). First published in The Daily Mirror, 16 February 1910, front page.*



of Abyssinia [sic!] and suite [...] wish[ing] to see Dreadnought” (after Stansky 1996: 25).<sup>8</sup> With their performance the group clearly didn’t strive for authenticity: “[T]hey gambled on the probability that their hosts would be as ignorant as they” (Bell 1983: 14). The fake Abyssinian princes<sup>9</sup> wore elaborately adorned Oriental-

8 | The complete text of the telegram is as follows: “C in C Home Fleet Portland Prince Makalen of Abbysinia [sic]; and suite arrive 4.20 today Weymouth he wishes to see dreadnought [sic]. Kindly arrange meet them on arrival regret short notice forget wire before interpreter accompanies them Harding [sic] Foreign Office” (after Stansky 1996: 25). Stansky has reviewed the Admiralty’s papers on the hoax and gives a variety of sources, including the telegram. Unfortunately, he doesn’t comment on whether or not Harding’s name was intentionally misspelled, possibly as a marker of the fake itself.

9 | Four hoaxers (Anthony Buxton, Duncan Grant, Guy Ridley and Virginia Woolf) impersonated Abyssinian princes, Adrian Stephen took the part of their interpreter, and Horace de Vere Cole acted as a Foreign Office official (Stephen 1983: 31-32).

ist costumes, not specifically Ethiopian, but still they indeed appeared adequately royal. Woolf describes these getups as “splendid eastern dressing gowns” (Woolf 2011: 564). In addition, the group was equipped with turbans, dangling necklaces with cross pendants, wigs,<sup>10</sup> false beards and, to top it all off, blackface makeup (see e.g. 564). Their disguises are documented in a preserved photograph (see fig. 1), which was probably taken the day after (572) and published on 16<sup>th</sup> February 1910 (Jones 2013: 80).<sup>11</sup> The costumes and make-up were acquired at Willy Clarkson’s, the then leading London theatrical costumier, make-up and wig supplier (McLaren 2007: 599–601). As Woolf remembers, the group told him they would attend one of the then highly fashionable “fancy dress ball[s]” (Woolf 2011: 564). Since they provided themselves with costumes and accessories from Clarkson’s stock supplies (ibid.),<sup>12</sup> it became evident that their masquerade complied with Orientalist theatrical and representational conventions of the time. In any case, they seemed to be convincing, as one of the Dreadnought’s midshipmen,<sup>13</sup> an officer-to-be, described Prince Menelik’s costume credulously: “He wore his Eastern garb, which though not very seasonable was of a very brilliant nature” (after Jones 2013: 80).

They learned a few words of Swahili, which, ironically, is not spoken in Ethiopia (Woolf 2011: 565, 568; Stephen 1983: 33).<sup>14</sup> Woolf’s brother, Adrian Stephen acted as their translator, speaking as she recalls “pure gibberish” (Woolf 2011: 568). Stephen himself on the other hand claims that he (ab-)used his memorised knowledge of Homer and Ovid as he “broke up the words and [...] mispronounced them” (Stephen 1983: 41–44) — a rather parodical approach. Additionally, the hoaxers invented special customs and behaviour, albeit — as Woolf and Stephen recall — out of necessity, since they needed to avoid smearing the blackface makeup. They spontaneously made up rather complex food regulations: they claimed Abyssinian royalty would not

10 | However, the preserved group photograph of the party shows no recognizable wigs since the turbans are pulled tight across the forehead and seem to be closely fitted in the neck.

11 | The photograph was published on the front page of *The Daily Mirror*.

12 | Woolf’s complete account has not garnered much attention yet, although it is the only one which gives details on the group’s visit to Clarkson’s (Woolf 2011: 564–65).

13 | Then 18-year-old John St. Erme Cardew’s log has been preserved in the Royal Naval Museum Library, Portsmouth, the entry is written on the same day, i.e. 7<sup>th</sup> February 1910 (Jones 2013: 92, n. 1).

14 | The correct language would have been Amharic. Adrian Stephen bluntly admits his ignorance: “Swahili is, I believe spoken in some parts of East Africa. Whether it is spoken in Abyssinia or not I don’t know, but we thought it might be as well for me to know a few phrases” (Stephen 1983: 33). The choice of the cross pendants seems rather informed: at least they did know Abyssinia was a mainly Christian nation.

touch alcohol or food served with bare hands, refrained from food and drinks of any kind until sundown and moreover, insisted that everything needed to be “prepared in a special way” (Woolf 2011: 570, 572; Stephen 1983: 44). Stephen also recalls that the princes enacted contemporary ideas about the “simple native’s” astonished behaviour (Stephen 1983: 46). In hindsight, this example shows somewhat radically, that hoaxes, like forgeries, mimic the recipient’s expectations rather than an ‘original’. Obviously, the princes conveyed a convincing impression of the Ethiopian Other.

Adrian Stephen recalls that he found representing an Abyssinian prince far easier than expected: “We were almost acting the truth. Everyone was expecting us to act as the Emperor<sup>15</sup> and his suite, and it would have been extremely difficult not to” (Stephen 1983: 36). Stephen’s paradoxical statement, “acting the truth” during a fake performance, indicates the performative dimension of the hoax.<sup>16</sup> In an imposture, in contrast to acting on the stage with its theatrical frame and “as if” situation, the role-playing is immediately authenticated by the reactions of the deceived. Stephen points out that these reactions helped to establish a clear frame of interaction: “But once the telegram had been sent off, and we had arrived and *been received* [emphasis added], it would not have been an easy matter to tell the truth, and we almost, I think, believed in the hoax ourselves” (Stephen 1983: 36-37). The hoax developed a momentum of its own, further enabling and enforcing the fake performance as a whole.

Even though Stephen’s retrospective memoir is a subjective account, it hints at a more general phenomenon, i.e. the performative power of rituals and highly conventionally regulated situations.<sup>17</sup> In this case, the reception of foreign royalty and the inspection of the battleship served as series of highly formalised, ritualised situations.<sup>18</sup> But the ritualistic aspects alone would not have sufficed to operate the

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15 | Both Stephen and Woolf claim in their respective accounts to have impersonated the Emperor of Abyssinia and his suite, when in fact they impersonated Abyssinian princes, as is documented by the telegram preserved in the Admiralty’s papers. Stansky argues, that the Emperor of Abyssinia was a “fairly well-known international figure”, which would have made impersonating him difficult (Stansky 1996: 17).

16 | In theatre studies, in contrast to an actor, a performer simply carries out certain actions—in this case boarding the train to Weymouth or greeting navy officials (Fischer-Lichte 2008: 16-21).

17 | According to Austin’s theory of speech acts, performativity is the ability of highly conventionalised social situations, sentences and utterances to generate reality, for instance marriage, baptisms or wagers (Austin 1962: pp. 5-8).

18 | Adrian Stephen describes an official reception complete with red carpet, military band, formal salutes, Guard of Honour and “gold-laced uniforms” (Stephen 1983: 35-39).

hoax, or to render any form of acting unnecessary: the framing of the situation needed to be confirmed by an ‘authority’ in advance. In summary, the *Dreadnought Hoax* could only succeed as a performance due to a series of circumstances. These include the use of new and unrestricted media technologies (the telegram), the assumption of positions of authority (Sir Hardinge, Abyssinian royalty), a highly-conventionalised framing of the situation (a state visit, the military) and the fulfilment of people’s expectations (Orientalism).

During the following three months, the *Dreadnought Hoax* was covered by newspapers all over the Commonwealth (Jones 2013: 81). The (penny) press response was mainly amused and positive; one of the earliest reports by the *Globe* on 12 February 1910 calls it an “An Amazing Story” and a “comedy”, the *Daily Express* headlined the same day “Amazing Naval Hoax” (after Jones 2013: 80) and the *Daily Mirror* on 16 February 1910 published the group portrait with the headline “Photographs of the ‘Abyssinian Princes’ Who Have Made All England Laugh” (after Jones 2013: 80–81). The *Dreadnought Hoax* was generally perceived as a playful, mostly innocent and entertaining prank. This perception of the hoax as harmless is also illustrated by frequent comparisons to pranks among Cambridge undergraduates (“The Clubman” 1910).

Another comparison, on the other hand, suggests a certain degree of subversion. From the very beginning the hoax has been associated with Friedrich Wilhelm Voigt’s impersonation of a Prussian military officer, the famous Captain of Koepenick’s scam of 1906. Cole’s prank “beats the imposture of Voigt at Koepenick”, writes for instance *The Globe* (“Bogus Princes” 1910), and several other newspapers all over the United Kingdom draw the same comparison: “Not since the Captain of Koepenick made the world laugh ... has so successful a practical joke been perpetrated” (“Naval Hoax” 1910). Considering that this hoax proved to be a remarkable scandal, which damaged the reputation of the Prussian military in Germany as well as in the UK (Platt 2014: 229), this comparison suggests that against all assurances the *Dreadnought Hoax* might have tainted the image of His Majesty’s Navy at least a tiny bit.

There are other reactions which further illuminate the hoax’s critical potential. For instance, it was discussed twice in parliament (Stansky 1996: 40) and, as Woolf recalls, some members considered it a severe breach of security regulations;<sup>19</sup> after all, the party “might have been German spies” (Woolf 2011: 573). In reaction, the press tried to calm fears like these by ensuring its readers that “[f]oreign visitors ... are [generally] not shown anything which is in any degree confidential” (*Daily Telegraph* 1910, after Stansky 1996: 32). Furthermore, the hoax “reflected upon the credit of the navy” in a more general sense (Woolf 2011: 573). A notion which right-

19 | According to Woolf the Hoax even had a stabilizing, affirmative effect, since she claims that the security measures in the navy were strengthened soon thereafter (Woolf 2011: 573).

fully worried Navy officers, as they finally decided not to legally pursue the case of the forged telegram to avoid further publicity:

Certainly it would be unfortunate if officers had to appear to give evidence [...] & then the case was dismissed with a light fine & possibly some humorous remarks [...]. The newspapers only would gain in excellent 'copy' for their writers & scribblers! (Greene 1910, after Stansky 1996: 39)

This internal advisory letter to General May was written after the Navy officers' agreement that press coverage and publicity were far more detrimental than the hoax itself.<sup>20</sup> The officers' concerns correlate with Heyd's analysis that hoaxes derive their efficacy essentially from their publicity: public and media attention are an integral part of a hoax's subversive potential. This explains the strong stance against publicising the prank by Woolf and Stephen, who claimed that Cole acted against their will (Stephen 1983: 28).

Even small details of the hoax found a strong resonance with the public: The most popular, comical and since directed against the navy, subversive, though racist catchphrase of the hoax was "Bunga, bunga". The *Daily Express* imagines the scene on the ship as follows:<sup>21</sup> "At every fresh sight they [the princes] muttered in chorus, 'Bunga, bunga,' which, being interpreted, means 'Isn't it lovely?'"<sup>22</sup> (after Stansky 1996: 30). Newspapers reported, that this phrase was subsequently shouted at members of the Navy in the streets (Stansky 1996: 30, 33), even at General May in person (Stephen 1983: 51; Woolf 2011: 574). Soon the phrase was adopted in popular culture, and was heard in several music hall songs: "When I went on board a Dreadnought ship, / Though I looked just like a costermonger, / They said I was an Abyssinian prince, / Because I shouted 'Bunga-bunga'" (*The Daily Mirror* 1910, after Stansky 1996: 35). Sneering retellings like this, depicting the navy as gullible, deceivable and fallible, further illustrate the impact the Dreadnought incident had on its image.

20 | Initially, they just "hoped the villains would be content with what they had done & avoid publicity", as Graham Greene, the Admiralty's assistant secretary wrote to Admiral May on 9 February 1910 (after Stansky 1996: 38).

21 | The Stephen siblings deny that the party used these words and believe that they were based on fictional accounts (Stephen 1983: 51; Woolf 2011: 568-69).

22 | Of course, this description abounds with prejudice: the simple natives are astonished by every little achievement of Western Civilisation and thereby confirm its superiority, while the imagined "chorus" deindividualises them.

Among London's high society, the reactions were far more ambivalent than in the press. While some of the hoaxers received party invitations with the request to attend in their Abyssinian getup, the group received accusations of tastelessness, vulgarity, impiety and were insulted as being a "disgrace" (Woolf 2011: 575). These emotional reactions and the polarization of the hoax are further indicators for its latent subversive effect.

While Woolf's account could be best described as downplaying the whole affair, her brother's has a more subversive, anti-militarist and anti-authoritarian hue: He claims that to him "anyone who took up an attitude of authority over anyone else was necessarily also someone who offered a leg for everyone else to pull" and especially "armies and suchlike bodies presented legs that were almost irresistible" (Stephen 1983: 22-24). He ends this thought on a subtle pacifist note: "I do not know either that if everyone shared my feelings towards the great armed forces of the world, the world would not be a happier place to live in" (23).

The great public resonance of this seemingly innocent hoax is linked to the symbolic and iconic quality of the HMS Dreadnought, which served to lend a sense of national identity to the British Empire. The years before the First World War marked the height of the Anglo-German naval arms race, the naval theatre; a trial of strength and power which was conducted rather by nationalist theatrics than military operations. In 1909 alone three fleet reviews were staged, with the most spectacular one by far being held between 17<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup> July 1909. Four million citizens attended this heavily mediated extravaganza, in which the British fleet extended 65 km along the Thames, whilst the original Dreadnought was anchored in Southend and, during "visiting hours", was open to the public (Jones 2013: 82-84).

While the ship was already outdated by newer ships of the Dreadnought series, she was still an "icon of innovation and progress" (83); "the very symbol of the British navy's assertion to its continuing superiority" (Stansky 1996: 19). Her name, a calming entreaty to the British people not to be afraid, may have been a factor in her appeal. The label "Dreadnought" was ubiquitous and proverbial: advertisements used allusions to the ship's name for virtually any product ("Dreadnought and Wear British Clothing"), and companies as well as products were named after the famous ship, for example the play on words "Dreadnought of disease tonic" (Jones 2013: 82). The hoax's impact profited immensely from the Dreadnought's vast publicity and popularity and was thereby an inadvertent attack on the very identity of the United Kingdom.

In its historic context, surrounded by pre-war theatrics and the spectacle of the British navy, it is unsurprising that a cultural symbol such as the Dreadnought invited a theatrical hoax. This outdated and huge battleship with its representative function for the Empire as a whole might be read as a metaphor for Babbage's notion of certain archaic structures demanding to be broken up. Even though it was

not intended as such (it is worth remembering that the Stephen siblings did not want the prank to be exposed), the hoax worked as a counter-performance. Its subversiveness lay on a formal level, in its ceremonious, theatrical interaction with the navy. Hoaxing the Navy, the pride of the Empire, clearly involuntarily attacked the core of the national British identity.

But the Navy as an institution proved far too popular and important to be seriously damaged in the public opinion. The denial of the hoax's subversiveness can be asserted as a result of exactly that. The fact that it has resurfaced in popular culture shows the undeniably powerful and satirical potential of hoaxes. Neither the group of pranksters nor the British public had an interest in damaging the Navy's reputation, and politicians, the press, and the military alike tried to downplay the incident. But still, the hoax left a mark on the Empire, albeit a miniscule one. To a certain extent, like contemporary activist interventions, the *Dreadnought Hoax* provided an alternate vision by replacing the nationalistic and bombastic naval theatre with a silly comedy of errors.

In all these respects, the *Dreadnought Hoax* is a precursor of contemporary critical artistic interventions, although The Yes Men and the CPB apply hoaxing as a strategy and a means to strive for specific effects or even outcomes. Hoaxes allow the activist to generate public attention and debate, articulate criticism, and point to alternative desirable utopian realities. These possible worlds are enacted and experienced for a short moment. This moment is the very instant the recipient falls for the hoax. Beyond mockery and exposure, the fleeting moment of deception holds a completely new political potential.

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JACQUELINE HYLKEMA is Lecturer in History of Art and Cultural History at Leiden University, where she is also working on the final stages of her PhD project on forgery in Britain between 1600 and 1750 and its relationship with developments in the arts and art theory in this period. She has published a number of articles on this subject and in 2014 curated the exhibition *Books, Crooks and Readers: The Seduction of Forgery (1600-1800)* at Leiden University Library.

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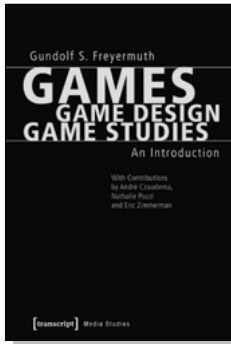
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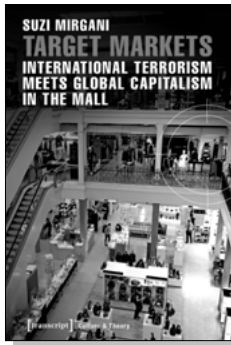
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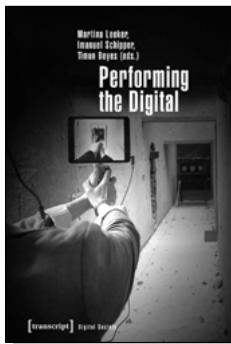
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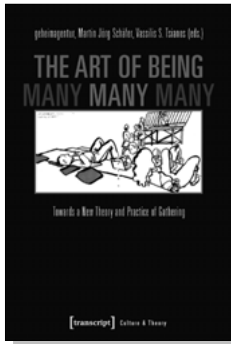
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