
PART II

The Copy and Reality

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Always Dealing with Reality but Never Too Close to It: Original and Copy in Modern Aesthetics

Abstract The following essay deals with the idea that 1) the concept of copy is a most basic one in Western epistemology and still forming the ground of artistic and aesthetic notions up to today. Furthermore, the thesis that 2) the discourse of copy is always a discourse on the quality of reality of artistic and aesthetic works. Therefore, the notion of copy can give insights into the precarious but unavoidable relationship between art and the ideas of reality at its basis. While departing from a very contemporary point of view regarding this relationship and taking into consideration new techniques and theories, it can be demonstrated that the question of copy (and original) can be of help to overcome concepts of binarity as, for example, underlying the dichotomy of materiality-immateriality, material-form, thing-representation etc.—an approach dominating discourses throughout Modern aesthetics.

Keywords Original, originality, reality, authenticity, facsimile

Art and reality: Preliminary remarks

The question concerning traits (or the quality and levels) of reality of an artistic object in relation to traits (or the quality and levels) of reality of empirical objects ranks among the most challenging questions in aesthetic theories, representing the hinge which connects—and, at the same time, highlights differences among—realism, idealism, phenomenology, constructivism, avant-gardism, and Modernism.¹ Hans Blumenberg suggests that aesthetic materiality can unfold in an aesthetic existence exemplary of one of many worlds, which thus reveals the structures of a “primordial essence of nature with new persuasive power” (*Urgrundes der Natur in neuer Überzeugungskraft*).² However, Alain Robbe-Grillet’s realism is an alternative possibility. For Robbe-Grillet, the world is neither exemplary, nor meaningful, nor absurd. It simply “is.”³ The material of a film, hence, remains limited and indefinitely repeatable: “It is a world without a past, a world which is self-sufficient at every moment and which obliterates itself as it proceeds. [...] There can be no reality outside the images we see, the words we hear.”⁴ Despite their historical proximity, Blumenberg’s and Robbe-Grillet’s assessments of aesthetic material could not differ more. The dissimilarity of their approaches shows that the position of verbal and pictorial arts can be determined according to how one answers questions pertaining to the quality of reality of the aesthetic as such. After all, the real, nature, and reality have been points of reference for images and texts since before the nineteenth century Realism. An interest in the semiotic relationship between empirical reality and the artistic medium—which also implies an interest in relations of perception and of portrayal—was already ingrained in the classical notion of mimesis, as well as having been pertinent to the invention of central perspective. The interest in this semiotic relationship has provided the basis for aesthetic theories of mimesis since the eighteenth century, as well as for genre- and media-theoretical discussions during the Enlightenment and Romanticism, to name but some points of reference. We are thus concerned with a question of aesthetic theory that has been of relevance until the twenty-first century.

Original and copy are suitable metaphors for scrutinising—analytically and in a historicising manner—these relationships as an interplay of epistemological-ontological and immanently aesthetic issues. In the following, I will restrict myself to outlining this problem.

1 Cf. Knaller 2015, 11–18.

2 My translation, “Nachahmung der Natur”. Zur Vorgeschichte der Idee des schöpferischen Menschen,” Blumenberg 1981, 54–103, 92, and 93. Blumenberg refers to the example of Paul Klee, who sought to escape the contingency of reality through artistic essence.

3 Robbe-Grillet 1963, 18.

4 “C’est un monde sans passé qui se suffit à lui-même à chaque instant et que s’efface au fur et à mesure. [...] Il ne peut y avoir de réalité en dehors des images que l’on voit, des paroles que l’on entend.” Robbe-Grillet 1963, 131.

The notion of the original

In the context of modern aesthetic theory, the term “original” is highly ambivalent.⁵ On the one hand, it denotes a unique, evidently authentic object, attributed with so high an actual value of reality that it can also be regulated by a strict legal and economic framework. On the other hand, the original has to be constantly redefined as to its quality of reality: what determines the status of a fine-art photograph, a film, an installation, a performance, a painting from a fifteenth- or sixteenth-century workshop, or a multiple-times restored oil painting as “original?” Despite being frequently dealt with in economic and legal discourse, the idea of original and copy has an extensive impact on the nature and function of all the levels and traits of reality within and outside of an art work. That this is not least due to the fact that the notion of original and copy is dependent on general concepts of reality shows the example of early modern aesthetics and its notion of original. The eighteenth-century concept of modern art as “originality/original” was specified by a metaphysical notion of nature, which for the artists and authors served as an “original” model. Yet, the artistic interpretation and representation of this model, the art works, engender new models of originality which, in turn, encourage *imitatio* by other works of art. This is a key to any understanding of classicism or idealism—that is to say, art for them always implies a copy. To sum up, art in general involves questions of traits of reality on various levels. Two of these will be dealt with in detail:

- a) The conceptual level, between art and general models of reality which unfold through different terminologies, conceptualisations, and modes of procedure; this is the field of the epistemological purpose of original and copy and
- b) The practical level of artistic and literary artefacts with their periodically changing modes.

In said contexts, traits of reality for one thing play a part insofar as the relevance of a work as an original or a copy—which is informed by artistic programmes and aesthetic theories—strongly depends on the epistemologically marked metaphors of original and copy discussed under point a) above; and for another, traits of reality are of relevance in that they also channel attributions, rejections, or acceptance.

5 Cf. Knaller 2015, 162–163.

The epistemological purpose of original and copy

The postulate of mimesis (*imitatio naturae*) is certainly the most prominent concept of copying in Modernism. In the eighteenth and also in the nineteenth century, nature's character in terms of originality was still undisputed and art was always (strictly speaking) nothing but a copy. The value of art resided in the influence it wielded on areas of cognition and action predetermined by nature. This postulate to imitate goes beyond specific aesthetic and artistic positions, as Friedrich Schiller shows in his description of "sentimentalischer Dichtung" and "naiver Dichtung"—sentimental as idealistically and naïve as realistically copying poetry—when both—their differences notwithstanding—are held up to copy human nature as such.⁶ Original, originality and copy bear a close relation to one another. All modern forms of realism and all media with strong representative and realistic features, such as photography or film, deal with this model of the copying original and artistic originality.

Twentieth century modernism's attribution of an autonomous and constructive quality to art that exceeds a representative, referential, or realistic character obliterates (or at least renders precarious) the qualitative difference between original and copy, between a model and its representation. In that sense, despite their constructive characteristics, the arts' quality of reality can be only gradually differentiated from that of empirical, non-artistic dimensions. In their most radical form, art's quality of reality is identical to those of non-art. This is the aim, for instance, of "pure" modernist art; art that only knows "originals" when it comes to the relationship of art to reality, insofar as artistic originals are meant to engender ever-new, autonomous forms. Also in the context of the avant-gardes and their idea of the de-differentiation between art and reality—or rather between art and life—the opposition of original versus copy does not apply. Both modernism and avant-gardism only know originals. However, this approach has been consistently upended since the 1950s in the wake of new media, cultures, and notions of signs, images, and language. It appears more apt to speak of copies as lacking an original. Art plays with mediality, reproduction, and seriality (of which Pop Art and Photorealism may serve as examples).

6 As an example: "Dem naiven Dichter hat die Natur die Gunst gezeigt, immer als eine ungeteilte Einheit zu wirken, in jedem Moment ein selbstständiges und vollendetes Ganzes zu sein und die Menschheit, ihrem vollen Gehalt nach, in der Wirklichkeit darzustellen. Dem sentimentalischen hat sie die Macht verliehen oder vielmehr einen lebendigen Trieb eingeprägt, jene Einheit, die durch Abstraktion in ihm aufgehoben worden, aus sich selbst wieder herzustellen, die Menschheit in sich vollständig zu machen, und aus einem beschränkten Zustand zu einem unendlichen überzugehen. Der menschlichen Natur ihren völligen Ausdruck zu geben ist aber die gemeinschaftliche Aufgabe beider, und ohne das würden sie gar nicht Dichter heißen können;" Friedrich Schiller, "Beschluß der Abhandlung über naive und sentimentalische Dichter nebst einigen Bemerkungen einen charakteristischen Unterschied unter den Menschen betreffend," Schiller 2008, 776–791, 776–777.

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, new challenges have to be confronted. This can be demonstrated by comparing the ground-breaking *Documenta 5* of 1972 with the no less provoking *Documenta 11* of 2002.⁷ While the first dealt with the reality of ever-present mass media and its enormous production of overall images,⁸ the latter confronted globalization, postcoloniality, and the post 9/11 era with a strong artistic impact on documentary and realistic forms borrowed from non-artistic contexts. The curator Okwui Enwezor wanted to face the following problem:

In the past, institutional forms of exhibition practices à la Documenta were employed to devise a narrative context which was meant to either provide the backdrop for a homogenous understanding of art or to come to conclusions concerning the visual arts' distinctive formal features which set them apart from all other practices. This was a vital aspect of understanding the institutional parameters of modern contemporary art. [...] If there is one thing to be stated about Documenta 11's spectacular quality of being different, it is this: The exhibition's critical spaces have no aim to normalise or to make uniform all artistic visions on their way to institutional beatification.⁹

The modes of institutionally, economically, and politically domesticated avant-gardes are meant to be replaced by postcoloniality's model of opposition: "In postcoloniality we are constantly confronted with counter models used by those who are marginalised, that is those who are practically excluded from comprehensive global participation and who utilise counter models to shape new worlds by generating experimental cultures."¹⁰

On the occasion of *Documenta 11* (2002) and its prevalence of documentary art, Boris Groys discusses the possible twenty-first-century relationships between and validity, respectively, of original and copy: in documentary art, a relationship between original and copy would indeed exist.¹¹ The copy, however, is endowed with the value of an original in that it need not become a reflexive "work" but instead remains or becomes a thing or object which is dependent of narratives and medial modes. Documentary installations offer an example of this necessity to perceive the relationship between reality and art in terms of materiality and not of ontology. Like in bio-politics,¹² the differentiation between original and

7 Cf. Knaller 2015, 158.

8 Brock 1972, 2.1–2.19.

9 Enwezor 2002, 43.

10 Enwezor 2002, 45.

11 Groys 2002, 107–113.

12 Michel Foucault, who invented this notion in lectures at the Collège de France in 1978/79, describes—among other things—the control over biological life and sexuality with the help of economical and political measures and manipulations. For Groys, bio-politics is embedded in the present discussions about artificial life, artificial creation, and the artificial maintainance of life (Foucault 1997, 73–79).

copy—or between reality and construct—no longer characterises the differentiating metaphor of fiction (an ontological quality); rather it indicates a modal dissimilarity: “The documentation inscribes the existence of an object into history, endowing such an existence with a life span and thus, in turn, giving life as such to the object—regardless of whether said object “was originally animate or artificial.”¹³ A precondition for this concept is a willingness to abandon the idea of a basic opposition between reality and art—which was still the case with *Documenta 5*—or between original and copy while at the same time accepting the differentiation as an everyday tool and to play with it.

The practical level of original and copy

The arts' quality and traits of reality also determine intra-systemic relationships in the sense of relations between original and copy, which are situated within the specific context of production and reception. A notion that is essential for the aesthetic value of original and copy and which therefore helps to elucidate the relationship between a) and b) is authenticity. In the following, I will give a very short historical overview of the changeful history of original and copy in the context of authenticity.

The meaning of the term “original,” in its earliest documented occurrences (in the twelfth century), was that of “not derivative” or “that [which] existed at first.” At the same time, it also means “archetype,” which presupposes the process of copying and denotes the notion of a model.¹⁴ In Latin, the term “authentic” was used synonymously, while an original (*authenticum*) was also an authenticated, certified document as well as an autograph, a manuscript. The term “original,” furthermore, refers to the model depicted in a painting—for instance, a real person or an object. As of the end of the seventeenth century, the term was occasionally used in the arts, while it became permanently established in the artistic context as of the end of the eighteenth century.¹⁵ Thus the original is a constructed as well as an autonomous entity. Unsurprisingly, in the course of historical development, the terms “originality” and “original” (as an adjective), derived from the noun “original,” have additionally reinforced the elements of novelty, individuality, and ingenuity independent of a model. Here, the French language, where the term has been documented since the end of the seventeenth century, holds a pioneering position.¹⁶ Denis Diderot's *Encyclopédie* states a connection between *original* and *génie*, which makes apparent the semantic field of the term original, spanning

13 Groys 2002, 109.

14 *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. “original”; *Allgemeine deutsche Real-Enzyklopädie für die gebildeten Stände*, s.v. “Original, Originalität, Originell”.

15 Antoine Furetière, in his dictionary of 1690. Cf. Häselser 2002, 640.

16 “Diesen Einfluss des Französischen bestätigen alle gängigen Wörterbücher.” Cf. Häselser 2002, 640.

connected terms important for the arts such as “derived from nature,” “exemplary,” “new,” and “creative”: “It is used for things one copies. It is said that nature is my original; this drawing, this painting, despite being a copy, is my *original*. *Original* also denotes a drawing, a painting which a painter creates from imagination, from genius. Even when all of its parts are copied after nature.”¹⁷

This combination of creativeness, uniqueness, and exemplariness makes the paradoxical relation of original to mimesis justifiable. This is the case in Immanuel Kant’s famous dictum that “*Genius* is the *talent* (or natural gift) which gives the rule to Art. Since *talent*, as the innate productive faculty of the artist, belongs itself to Nature, we may express the matter thus: *Genius* is the innate mental disposition (*ingenium*) through which Nature gives the rule to Art.”¹⁸

Despite its quality of copy, art then becomes unique in the sense of being matchless and inimitable. Or, as Umberto Eco puts it, art is its own original.¹⁹ In that sense, the original work of art has to be validated multiple times. Hence the act of authentication is divided among several authorities: the author/artist, the connoisseur, art history, the art market, the media, and scholarship. However, it was only toward the end of the nineteenth century that a stricter opposition between original and copy developed; namely when the postulate of imitation (of both nature and artistic models) was abandoned, the autonomous, creative artist gained complete acceptance—also in the legal and economic field—and new technical means of reproducing artefacts (such as photography) had been invented. As long as the notion of imitation justifies art, original and copy are not mutually exclusive. The eighteenth and nineteenth centuries still distinguished between a bad copy and a good copy, between the mere reproduction of a model and an imitation which came close to the ideal. At the same time, the nineteenth century is considered—and often also considered itself to be—an age of copy and reproduction. Despite all criticism levelled against technological innovations and their application in the arts, photography, for example, caused the enthusiastic incorporation of reproduced images into everyday life. In the face of these developments in the media-related context, original and copy needed to be re-discussed.

17 My translation, “On dit: la nature est mon original; ce dessin, ce tableau, quoique copie, est mon original. Original ce dit encore d’un dessin, d’un tableau qu’un peintre fait d’imagination, de génie, quoique chacune de leurs parties soit copiée d’après nature,” Diderot and D’Alembert 1777, 29–30.

18 Kant 2007, 112. “Genie ist das Talent (Naturgabe), welches der Kunst die Regel gibt. Da das Talent, als angeborenes produktives Vermögen des Künstlers, selbst zur Natur gehört, so könnte man sich auch so ausdrücken: Genie ist die angeborene Gemütsanlage (*ingenium*), durch welche die Natur der Kunst die Regel gibt,” Kant 1991, 235.

19 Eco 1988, 13–18.

Therefore, twentieth century aesthetic theories were in need of a category for legitimation, which could be found in authenticity: On the one hand the term denoted a trait of reality which depended on the work's status of original or copy and which was legitimised through various instances of authentication/certification like the law, science, or expert opinion. On the other hand, authenticity expressed a reality and validity peculiar to art. Clement Greenberg, the theoretician of American Modernism, for instance, locates the peculiar authenticity of art in its peculiar historicity: "Nothing could be further from the authentic art of our time than the idea of a rupture of continuity. Art *is*—among other things—continuity, and unthinkable without it. Lacking the past of art, and the need and compulsion to maintain its standards of excellence, Modernist art would lack both substance and justification."²⁰ This concept can be termed *Kunstauthentizität* (art-informed authenticity).²¹ The latter is based on the idea of a creative, autonomous subject and does not face opposition, even in Andy Warhol's artistic coup, which is to employ the copy as a provocation in the face of the differentiation between art and non-art, in that it excludes neither subjective artistic nor conceptual authenticity. The concept of authenticity retains its validity even when craftsmanship and creativity no longer constitute any basis for art.²² In spite of the delegation of manufacturing work from the artist to professionals and industry (Jeff Koons, for example, has an enormous workshop hall with numerous assistants in New York), the demand for the work and the artist to be unique and original is upheld. A group of Minimalist artists who worked with industrial materials rejected the replication of their works, which were collected for an exhibition at the Guggenheim Museum at the beginning of the 1990s, with the following argument: neither the objects themselves nor the plans were sufficient to create replicas equal in value to the originals because circumstances can unexpectedly change the appearance of a piece during production. Therefore the materiality of the individual work has significance and the necessary authenticity is only attributed by the artist.²³

This authority of the artist can be supplemented by the contextual authenticity of the convention, the attribution whereby a work is made into a work of art. Arthur C. Danto confronted the dilemma of art criticism in the face of an art that is no longer determined by external characteristics such as technical accomplishment, material, and objects, and internal characteristics such as genre and style, in response to Andy Warhol's

20 Greenberg 1993, 93.

21 As proposed in Knaller 2007, 8–9, 21–22.

22 Cf. Knaller 2012, 51–75.

23 Tietjen 1998, 31–43. "dass weder die Objekte selbst noch die Pläne ausreichen, um den Originalen gleichwertige Repliken herzustellen, da bei der Produktion der Zufall das Erscheinungsbild unvorhergesehen verändern könne, damit die Materialität des einzelnen Werkes Bedeutung habe und sich die notwendige Authentizität deshalb allein vom Künstler zuschreiben lasse."

exhibition of the *Brillo Box*, in 1964.²⁴ Given the perceptually indistinguishable difference between art and everyday objects, the philosopher is confronted with a previously neglected philosophical question about art, namely, what is it that constitutes art and how are completely identical objects to be distinguished in terms of art and non-art? This question stands in the same problematic context as questions about falsification and the original: to design a Brillo box means nothing for the art market (although the designer was an artist who accepted the contract due to financial exigency), but to exhibit one may impart lasting renown.

This dissolution of classifications is further radicalised in multi-media performances of situations and actions, as in Daniel Spoerri's eating-actions, for which galleries are turned into restaurants. The work is a series of specific events, an "excerpt from a situation of direct day-to-day living,"²⁵ that is neither original nor copy, nor is it falsifiable.²⁶ Art is actionist in all kinds of ways, a search for traces in everyday life, playing out patterns of actions, and performing and documenting everyday situations.²⁷ The extent to which the art expert too can cling to the longstanding division between original and copy is demonstrated by Francis V. O'Connor:

It used to be that an "original" work of art was understood to have been created by the artist, its originality proved with documents, signatures, and the informed opinion of experts. [...] More recently, there has been a disturbing tendency to denigrate the authority of both artist and expert, to confuse truth with dogma, and to treat all created objects as "texts" which can be used as pretexts for new texts based on the free associations of their relativistic authors. [...] Taken to extremes, such a point of view denies the objectivity of historical truth, and would deem a fake to be as culturally significant as an authentic object.²⁸

24 Danto 1981. Arthur C. Danto takes the most important innovations in art since Duchamps Ready-Mades, Pop Art, Conceptual Art and Minimal Art as the starting point of his inquiry. He therefore neither presumes a creative genius nor a closed character of the work of art (*geschlossenen Werkcharakter*) that demands originality. At a time when the copy/reproduction of everyday items and the use of industrially produced material admit of art, for Danto the artistic character of works can no longer lie in the perceptual, but rather only in the conceptual (Danto 1981, 44). Cf. Knaller 2012, 51–75.

25 "Ausschnitt aus einer Situation unmittelbaren Lebensvollzugs"

26 Metzger 1995, 11.

27 Schmidt-Wulffen 1995, 29–36.

28 O'Connor 2004, 4.

The original in the digital age, or, the perfect copy: Paolo Veronese and Adam Lowe's *Le Nozze di Cana* (1562–63 and 2007)

As a contemporary example for a further stage of the original-to-copy relation, I would like to examine the digitally-produced facsimile of Paolo Veronese's large painting, *Le Nozze di Cana*, and the discussion concerned with it.²⁹

Veronese's original painting, executed between 1562 and 1563, has been exhibited at the Louvre since 1798, when it was brought to Paris by Napoleon as war loot. It was originally kept in the refectory of Isola San Giorgio Maggiore, a building designed by Palladio, where it was exhibited in such a perfect manner that it soon became famous and was frequently visited. Over the centuries, various attempts to return it to Italy were undertaken.³⁰ On September 11, 2007—exactly 210 years after the Veronese painting had been removed—a facsimile was installed in San Giorgio Maggiore's refectory, which since Palladio had also undergone extensive reconstruction (fig. 1).

The facsimile created by Adam Lowe is a technically elaborate piece, which takes into account the conditions from which Veronese's painting originated, as well as Palladio's spatial construction, that is the conditions of light and materials. Lowe's piece, executed in the artist's Madrid studio *Faktum Arte*, has not only made it possible to re-stage a historical situation, it also allows for the animation of the painting's particular history, in which we find united a congenial artistic cooperation between architect and painter, combined with political rivalry (Napoleon and Venice) and matters of loss and restitution. Bruno Latour focused on this complex situation in the essay "The Migration of the Aura."³¹ With Lowe, Latour elaborates on the modifications determined by digital media and comes to the conclusion that attributing, as well as differentiating between, the status of original and copy ultimately depends on the given technical means and situation. This is because those factors determine an artwork's history, which is always one of reproduction and reworking. To describe this process, Latour uses the term "trajectory," that is, the line/abstraction which permits tracing a sequence of events, changes, etc. in the history of a piece—in short, a biography of the work. It is such a line that the "perfect copy" of Veronese's painting exhibited in Venice supposedly draws. The fact that it is a highly accurate reproduction, which considers both matters of colour and of three-dimensionality, is merely one aspect of its overall success. In Latour's and Lowe's view, there is a version *n* of artistic and literary artefacts, which is succeeded by respective versions *n1*, *n2*, etc.

29 Cf. Knaller 2015 184–188.

30 During the twentieth century, André Malraux, Vittorio Branca, and Vittorio Cini were involved; Pasquale Gagliardi and Bruno Latour have recently taken up this endeavor.

31 Latour and Lowe 2010, 2–18. On Latour's position in this, see Neubert 2012, 53.



Figure 1: Paolo Veronese / Adam Lowe: *Le Nozze di Cana*, 1562–63 and 2007.

However, the configurations in which the latter appear, as well as the consequences they have upon the original, depend upon the given technical situation and conditions, and on how those are dealt with. The conceptual authenticity of an image is thus a quality that cannot be diminished in terms of its distinctiveness when art works are being copied, transformed, or even when they reproduce everyday objects. This is, for instance, the case when Rubens considers black-and-white drawings or engravings of paintings legitimate media to enable the beholder to understand the image, when Diderot in his *Encyclopédie* distinguishes between the copy of an original as original and the copy of a copy as copy, or when Arthur C. Danto declares Andy Warhol's *Brillo Box* to be "art," due to its unconditional conceptuality.

In its turn, digital technology is able to play with, simulate, and produce all kinds of medial formats. For Latour, dividing the arts into repeatable and unique forms or classes³² becomes obsolete in light of the dissolution of analogue image semiotics caused by digital technology. Like a play or

32 The division into repeatable and unique forms is the base of Nelson Goodman's widely cited categorization of art into autographic and allographic systems "Let us speak of a work of art as autographic if and only if the distinction between original and forgery of it is significant; or better, if and only if even the most exact duplication of it does not thereby count as genuine," Goodman 1976, 113.

a musical score, an image becomes “stageable” and repeatable, and can, time and again, be newly fashioned in its originality, provided the respective copies are of high quality, capable of changing, and offer ever new approaches to the (immaterial) quality of originality. The aesthetic inter-relatedness of materiality and immateriality thus appears as a variable and non-hierarchised form. Lowe’s image becomes as much Veronese’s image as Veronese’s image becomes Lowe’s image. Original and copy are mutually dependant in a constructive way via modal formations (narration, technology/technique, installation, interpretation, etc.). Latour’s conclusion concerning a good copy is that it extends the original in terms of its originality. A good copy “adds originality to the original version by offering it new dimensions without jeopardizing the penultimate version—without ever touching it, thanks to the delicate process used to record it.”³³

Nevertheless, this very aspect of the trajectory is in need of specification. The notion of originality disregards the question as to where and how aesthetic conceptuality (immateriality) arises—or should arise—and as to how it can and should be receptively experienced. The concept of originality privileged by Latour does not embrace the operating modes of newer and most recent arts. For this a short resume of original and copy in their respective relation to authenticity.

Conclusion: Authenticity, original, and copy

The relationship between the arts and reality, which has been defined as a relationship between original and copy since the age of Humanism and the Renaissance, is determined by epistemological-ontological and intra-systemic relations. In mediaeval art and literature, by contrast, it marks a dilemma in need of constant processing, as it touches upon questions concerning the possibilities and the legitimisation of human production, on the significance of authors versus a divine creator, and of creative form versus hierarchically-structured and analogously related *res* and *individuum*. By harkening back to classical models, the Renaissance employs mimesis—the creative production of a likeness (copy) from a model (original)—as the basis for the development of the modern era’s notion of art. Since the nineteenth century, the relational complex of original and copy within the mentioned epistemological-ontological and intra-systemic premises of the modern era has formed the background for the arts while developing the idea of a strictly differentiated relationship between original and copy, a wish that develops alongside the possibility of creating exact reproductions, the emergence of an elaborate art market, and its related legal framework. Since the advent of the avant-garde, and even more so

On the contrary to this allographic arts like music, dance, theater, or literature allow for or even imply repetition.

33 Latour (2010), 11

since the 1950s, the arts have increasingly abandoned strictly binary structures and—to the confusion of audience and critics alike—there no longer appears to be a preference. Adam Lowe writes on this matter: “In a world of genetic modification notions of originality may not be as obvious as they once seemed. It is becoming clear that originality does not exist in a quasi-religious notion of ‘aura’ but it lies in more physical things. It lies in the intrinsic qualities of an object. It is not fixed and it can be bestowed and removed.”³⁴ Like “aura,” “originality” has become a historical term. “Authenticity” is certainly a term which, more aptly than “original,” subsumes the arts’ physical and intrinsic traits of reality as mentioned by Lowe.

Contrary to originality, the notion of authenticity is more comprehensive in operational terms. Like originality, authenticity basically displays a paradoxical structure situated between self-validation and validation through others, between autological and heterological significance.³⁵ However, other than originality, authenticity encompasses normative, evaluative, interpretative, and descriptive modes of application. Moreover, the term is gradable, extendable by attributes, and makes it possible to describe poetics and approaches beyond traditional notions of art; yet, the term primarily refers to the various constellations of empirical and conceptual conditionality of art and literature. What is respectively at stake are sources of certification such as author, witness, media, law, and economy.³⁶ Objects are authentic when they are authenticated by a legitimising source or authority. Subjects are authentic when they are authenticated either as their own authors or creators or through objects, media, and works. Authenticity is shaped by a complex of individual perspectives and objectifying authentication.

This ongoing processuality between various categories of certification and validity, of *mise-en-scène* and notions of truth-determining concepts of authenticity, illustrates that both general and individual moments as well as performative and empirical moments are inherent to the notion of authenticity. Combined, these moments form a complex which, in turn, can fulfil legitimising, interpretative, explanatory, referential, and representative functions. Therein lies the attraction of authenticity in modernity: the authentic is the outcome of a time- and place-specific process of certification that has to be continually reestablished. In their complex facets, copy versus original is but one example of the relevance of authenticity to the modern era, and especially as a term used for defining the relationship between art and reality.

34 Lowe 2007, 113.

35 Cf. Knaller 2007, 21–22.

36 Cf. Knaller 2006, 17–35.

Figures

Fig. 1: © Faktum Arte.

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