

FAKE

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It. *Falso*; Fr. *Contrefaçon*; Germ. *Fälschung*, Span. *Falsificación*. The origin of the word is unknown, although it is attested in English criminal slang by the end of the 18th century with roughly its modern meaning. The term possibly derives from the German *fegen* (or Dutch *vegen*), meaning “to polish”, “to wipe clean”, or, alternatively, from the Latin *fac, facio*, that is “to make”. So the semantic core of the word is somehow connected with the idea of an artefact presented in its most favourable light.

The status of fake can concern every kind of object. However, the concept of fake has a particularly remarkable significance in the field of aesthetics and art history, as it entails not only ontological, epistemological and ethical questions, but also raises pivotal issues about the nature of our aesthetic experiences and judgements. From this viewpoint, it is worth distinguishing fake from other partially overlapping concepts, such as forgery, copy or replica. The main distinction depends on both the intentions of the producer (or possibly the user) of the object and the knowledge of the perceiver or addressee about the purported status of that object.

FAKES, COPIES, FORGERIES

An artist might copy the work of another master as a homage or exercise, and a painter might replicate his own works for the use of his pupils, but normally in such cases we are not dealing with fake. By contrast, fake and forgeries are copies made (or used) with the deceptive intention to pass the work off as the original or as the work of someone else, and so entailing a kind of fraud or hoax. This makes of forgery also an ethic and legal normative concept, impinging on the aesthetic dimension of the very notion of fake in a controversial way. The intentional character of deception and concealment is usually taken as an essential feature of fake, but there can also be cases of unintentional or accidental fake, for instance when an innocent copy is misattributed and wrongly thought to be an original.

In common usage, on the other hand, the distinction between fake and forgery is often unclear and the terms are virtually interchangeable, although some authors prefer to distinguish them (Wreen 2002).

According to such an approach a fake object (e.g. a fake plastic fruit) is created with a mimetic but not necessarily fraudulent deceptive intention.

Another closely related category we have to mention here is that of pastiche (or “inventive” forgery), that is an original work counterfeiting not a particular existing work but rather an individual style, some artist’s manner, the style of some artistic school or even a period style. In fact, many of the most famous fakes fall within this category.

THE CONTEMPORARY DEBATE

The real problem of fakes is the critical assessment of their aesthetic status and the ways they affect our experience of artworks. The problem concerns, more dramatically, the so-called autographic art forms, that is, according to the well-known distinction introduced by Nelson Goodman, those kinds of works whose identity depends on the identity of a single physical object, such as a painting, a drawing, a sculpture and the like, since “even the most exact duplication of it does not thereby count as genuine” (Goodman 1968: 113). That is not to say, however, that allographic art forms are absolutely not-forgeable, even though in the case of literature or music the object of fake is not a single material instantiation of the work.

However, one may ask why should an exact duplicate of an original artwork be taken as lacking in aesthetic value, or, more specifically, why should it be taken as lacking the same aesthetic values as the original? We can consider, from an empirical point of view, that usually most people tend to change their aesthetic response to a work when they realize it is a fake, as in the much-cited example presented by Kant in the *Critique of Judgment* (§ 42). If one listens to the song of a nightingale (or, better, to what one believes to be the song of a nightingale) one will probably appreciate its melodious beauty, yet as soon as one discovers that the sound is not actually a birdsong but just a human imitation, or even a mechanical reproduction, the aesthetic attractiveness completely vanishes. However, although we may assume that this is the way people normally behave in such situations (Newman and Bloom 2012), this is still not an argument. After all, many people often act under the influence of unjustified yet widespread prejudices, and, when artistic matters are concerned, the fetishism of authenticity can play a remarkable role (Waetzoldt 1976; Eco 1990; Boon 2010).

On the other hand, it seems common sense to think that if our aesthetic appraisal of an object, say a painting, depends on (and covaries with) a set of perceptual properties of that painting, then an exact copy of the original that instantiates the same set of properties ought to be judged as worthy of the same aesthetic appreciation as the original painting. When I cannot perceive any difference between two objects, it seems there can be no reason to judge them as aesthetically different. Some authors, nevertheless, tried to resist such a conclusion. According to Nelson Goodman, for instance, knowing that one of the two objects is the original and the other the fake is a reason to believe that there may be a difference that I can learn to perceive at a later time, and such a belief “constitutes an aesthetic difference between them that is important to me now” (Goodman 1968: 104; see also Hopkins 2005). However, the

argument contrived by Goodman is not convincing. In fact, we may not know if one of the two is only a fake and if any difference actually exists, as it is often the case. Furthermore, assuming that such a difference *may* exist, and that we can learn to discriminate it eventually, does not entail that a difference *surely* exists (or even *must* exist), unless we think that our belief (or knowledge) does *create* the difference.

ART AND AESTHETICS

There are thus two conflicting intuitions about the aesthetic value of fake and the extension of what constitutes, and should constitute, the proper object of our aesthetic appreciations. And the problem is both a descriptive and normative one. On the one hand, we might commit to a formalist approach, sometimes also called "Appearance Theory", according to which we should try "to make a pure aesthetic judgment, unbiased by all our knowledge of the history and criticism of art" (Lessing 1983: 64). From such a viewpoint, if two works have the same (or nearly the same) formal features, no matter their status of original or copy, then they have the same (or nearly the same) aesthetic merit. The argument can extend to pastiches too. A painting made by a forger in the style of Vermeer might have the same aesthetic values of Vermeer's style, even though the painting has not the exact formal features of any particular work painted by Vermeer.

On the other hand, however, many authors claim that our judgments about works of art depend (or should depend) not only on the formal properties of the works but also on the extra-formal information we have about the history of the work, the artist identity, his or her brief, agenda, heuristic path and so on, in a word about the context of the work. So, even if the original and its fake are actually perceptually indiscernible, their necessarily different histories of production make a difference that is important to our aesthetic appraisal. This is not to say that we cannot appreciate the copy in its own right, but its aesthetic values, if any, are of a completely different kind and unrelated to the values of the original.

One may ask now whether the historical facts about artworks are properly constitutive of a categorical aesthetic evaluation or whether there is a sort of dualism (Kulka 2005). The real question at issue between formalists and contextualists is thus the cognitive penetrability of aesthetic judgment and the proper role played by knowledge in passing it. There are different and yet connected problems here. First, it is hardly plausible that an allegedly pure aesthetic judgment could be completely independent of the recognition of the category to which the object belongs (Walton 1970; Wollheim 1993). Second, and conversely, even though we establish that our historical or critical knowledge not only affects but also shapes the perception of aesthetic values, we have still to determinate the relevance of the historical information available to us, since it would be simply unreasonable to assume that every piece of historical knowledge about the work is equally relevant. But which are, then, the criteria to make such a distinction? Third, the idea that "a work's historical context is part of the work", to the extent that we should abstain from judging when we do not know the specific contextual circumstances pertaining to the work (Rowe 2013: 173-174), leaves us with the problem of the works we normally consider aesthetically and artistically noteworthy despite the fact that we are uncertain about their author, date and original context (e.g. the famous Horses of St Mark in Venice or the much-debated frescoes of Castelseprio). Furthermore, it should

also be noted that the contextualist or historicist approach has to face another difficulty, that of the forgeries which share the same production context with the originals. If, for instance, we discovered that Shakespeare's works were actually written by Francis Bacon, we probably would consider them as fake, as far as the author's individual identity and intentions are concerned, but we should also acknowledge that they are not a historical or contextual fake. So, what about their aesthetic values?

The question of the cognitive penetrability of aesthetic judgments can also be assessed in connection with the above-mentioned distinction between autographic and allographic art forms. In other words, we might ask whether even the types of works traditionally ascribed to the autographic category are, at least in principle, best interpreted as allographic forms. For their customary classification might be merely contingent, depending on the reproductive techniques available at a certain time, but if such limitation did not exist, and "as far as the deeper logic is concerned", there would be "no reason for regarding the members of some classes of works of art as essentially particulars, rather than types", indeed all works of art would be types and not particulars (Strawson 2008: 202; see also Ralls 1972; Currie 1989: 85-125).

If so, our understanding of the status of fake changes, as well as the role we assign to knowledge in aesthetic judgments. Knowing that a work is a perfect fake might affect my judgment in a positive way, because I am sure that the aesthetic properties experienced through the copy are exactly those instantiated (also) by the original. In this sense we might think of the exact copy as a transparent vehicle, suitable for an instrumental use, as it were, through which we actually look at the features of the original work, whose aesthetic uniqueness is "mirrored" by the copy (Hoaglund 1976: 50). Obviously, the peculiar nature of that "uniqueness" depends also on the ways we understand the ontological structure and identity of the work of art, for instance on the possibility that the original and its copies can count as one and the same work, as "an object functioning very much like a Platonic form" (Meager 1959: 54). And here aesthetics meets metaphysics.

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