

Six Degrees of Separation

The Foax as More

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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.¹

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.² 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.

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'].³ 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'.⁴

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.⁵

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

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.⁶

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’.⁷ 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.⁸

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 Im mendorff-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 16th 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-

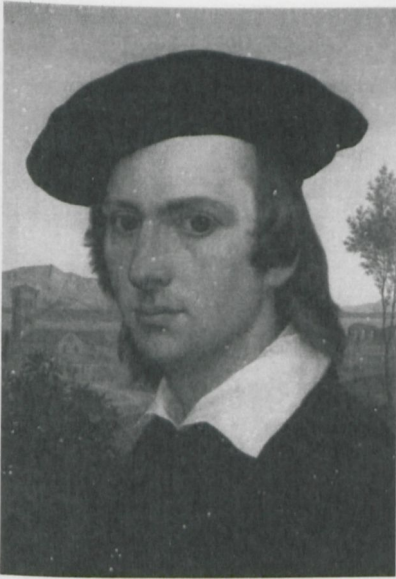


Figure 2: Johann David Passavant, "Self-portrait in Front of an Italian Landscape", Frankfurt am Main, Städelsches Kunstinstitut, 1818.



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.⁹ 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 coloured 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.



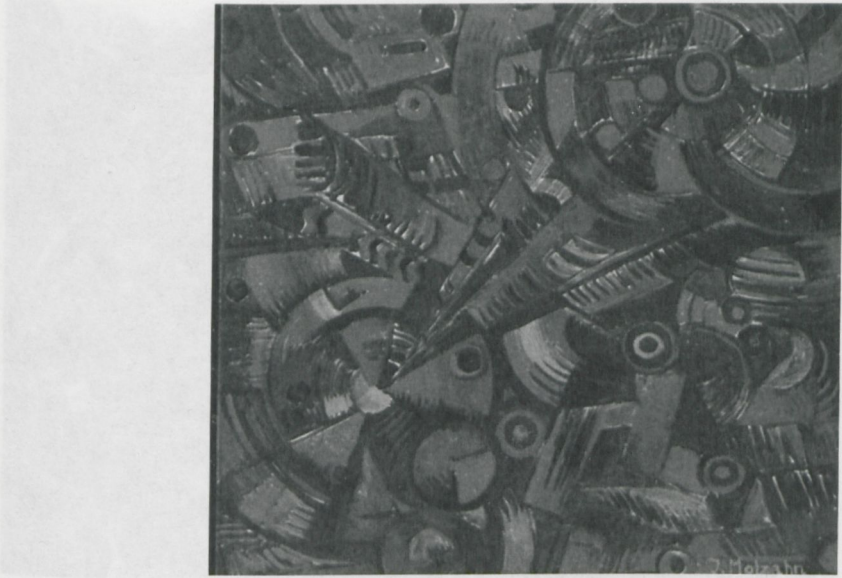


Figure 7: Wolfgang Beltracchi, "Energie entspannt" (1919), forgery in the style of Johannes Molzahn, 1985.

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



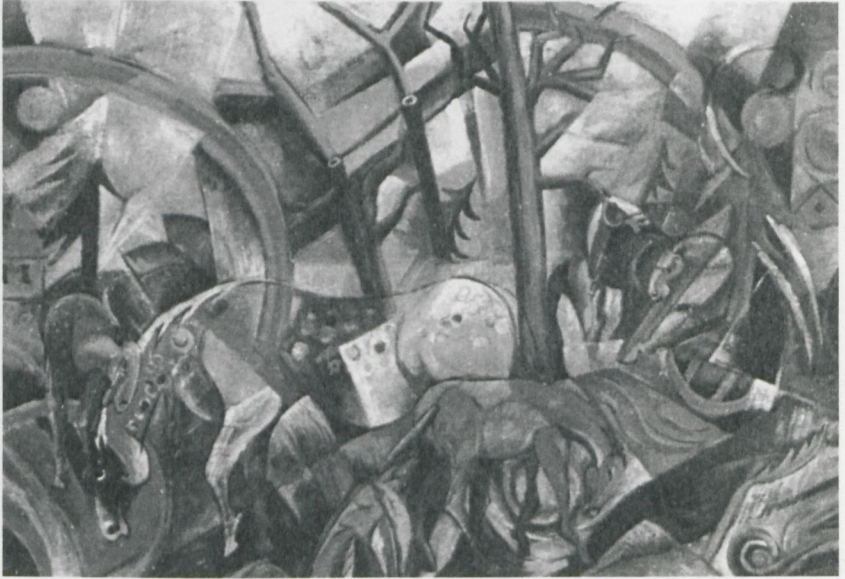


Figure 9: Wolfgang Beltracchi, "Rotes Bild mit Pferden" (1914), forgery in the style of Heinrich Campendonk, 2005.

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

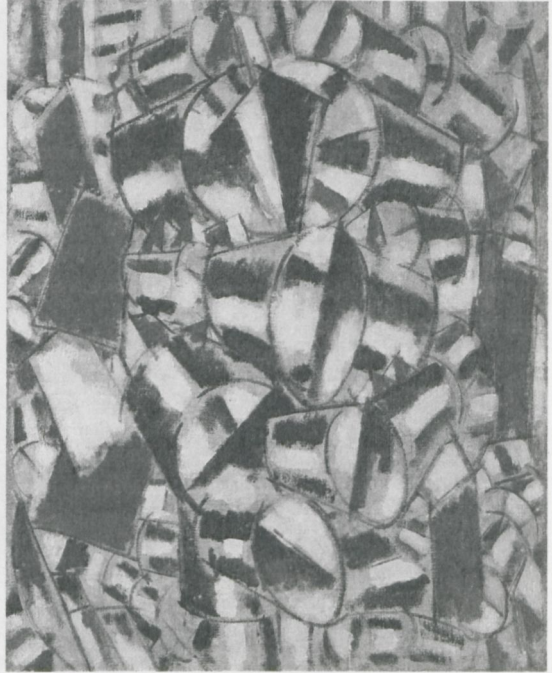


Figure 11: Wolfgang Beltracchi, "Kubistisches Stilleben" (1913), forgery, combining elements from paintings by Fernand Léger, before 2006.



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 Rouchomosky, had allegedly been conceived by its author as a pure stylistic imitation with no intent to deceive. According to Rouchomovskiy, it was only the merchants who had commissioned the *Tiara* who then passed it off — without his knowledge — as an original.¹⁰ However, the *Tiara* is not only a stylistic imitation, but also a pasticcio of different motifs taken from antique artefacts.¹¹ 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 Rouchomovskiy, 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). Rouchomovskiy claimed that he had been told by his clients to put these pegs into the *Tiara*, but one could then ask why Rouchomovskiy 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 overpainted 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 overpainted at the end of the 19th 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 1935.¹²

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 15th or early 16th 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 19th 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.

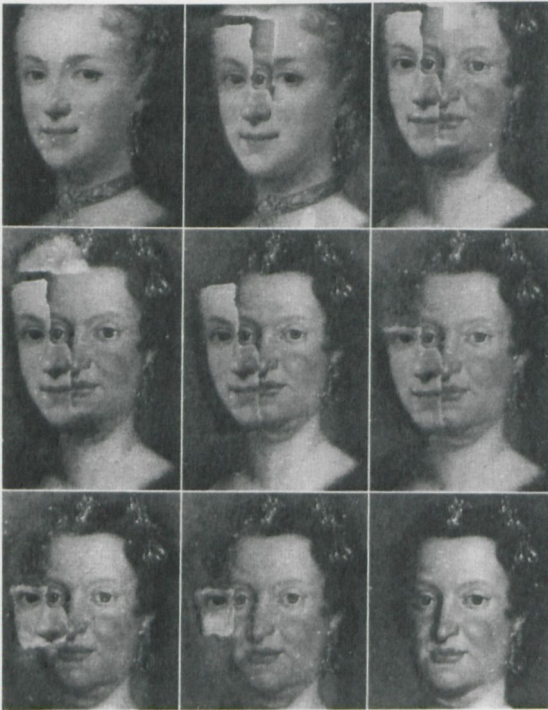


Figure 19: The painting, illustrated in Fig. 17 and 18 in the process of cleaning and restoration.

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 labelled 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 20th 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.¹³ 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 Catholic 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”.¹⁴ 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.¹⁵ 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.¹⁶ 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 1971.¹⁷ 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.¹⁸

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*.¹⁹ 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.²⁰ 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)²¹ — 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,

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, *Forgery 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 *Forgery* also does not further specify what kind of records the book (described by *Forgery* 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.²² 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.²³ 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

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 foax 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 2000.²⁴ 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 foax.

The fake, the hoax and the foax 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).²⁵

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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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