

|

ORIGINALS, COPIES AND FAKES

Catherine Z. Elgin

ABSTRACT I argue that attribution is a mechanism for locating paintings in bodies of works whose interpretations shed light on one another. Since they are bound to diverge from their originals somewhere, forgeries corrupt those bodies of works, increasing the likelihood of misunderstanding. This raises the question: why is it acceptable to use slides and reproductions in studying art? I argue that because slides and reproductions are recognized as pictures *of* their originals, they are not mistaken *for* the originals. I discuss the semantic and epistemic functions such copies perform and show how they advance understanding.

Things are not always what they seem. Paintings purporting to be by Rembrandt get disattributed. Works ascribed to Vermeer turn out to be forged. Do such changes in attribution matter aesthetically? Or is it, as Arthur Koestler charges, sheer snobbery to care who painted a given work?¹ The painting is, after all, the same painting it always was, whether it was painted by Rembrandt or Droste, Van Meegeren or Vermeer. If we really care about art, we should attend to the painting itself, and not let peripherals distract us. This last claim is uncontroversial. But it does not tell us whether, as Koestler implies, authenticity is peripheral. It is aesthetically irresponsible to look at the caption rather than the picture, to care about the attribution instead of the work, to let the reputation of the artist determine the value of the painting. But we should not too quickly conclude that authenticity is aesthetically irrelevant. Even if it is wrong to focus on the artist instead of the work, it may be right to allow considerations of authorship to inform our responses to the work. The question is then whether it is appropriate to look at a work differently, or see different things in it, if we understand it to be or not to be

¹ Arthur Koestler, *The Act of Creation*, New York: MacMillan, 1969, p. 404.

by Rembrandt.

Koestler's concern is no doubt fueled by the recognition that disattributed paintings typically plummet in value -- not just in financial value, but in what purports to be aesthetic value as well. People seem to think less of *Anna and the Blind Tobit* as a work of art once it is attributed to Dou rather than Rembrandt. This does not seem fair. Nor does it seem inevitable. Rather than thinking less of the painting, perhaps we should think better of Dou. Indeed, one side-effect of the reattributions of the Rembrandt Research Project may be a major reassessment of the general level of talent in Rembrandt's circle. The question I want to focus on, though, is not primarily a question about value. I do not want to argue that we should think less of *Anna and the Blind Tobit* once we conclude that it is not by Rembrandt, only that we should think differently about it.

It would be nice if my argument began with uncontroversial premisses and led inexorably to the conclusion I favor. Unfortunately, it does not. Little in aesthetics is beyond dispute. Presuppositions tend to be tendentious. Arguments branch, and the attractiveness of alternatives varies with the background commitments used in assessment. None of this is surprising, but it does suggest that there is no hope of conclusively solving any one problem in aesthetics without developing and successfully defending a comprehensive philosophy of art. I am not going to attempt anything nearly so ambitious. Rather I will argue from Goodmanian premisses and attempt to show the attractiveness, if not the inevitability, of particular choices, when choices must be made. My goal is not so much to show what Goodman's theory contributes to aesthetics as how aesthetics, as Goodman conceives it, contributes to epistemology.

My efforts might seem superfluous. Anyone who has read Chapter III of

Languages of Art knows that Goodman thinks authenticity matters and has a pretty good idea why he thinks it matters. Anyone inclined to accept Goodman's account might consider the matter closed. But the account faces a pair of potentially devastating objections. The first is that it does not evade Koestler's criticism. If authorship is aesthetically irrelevant, then the fact that one mistake about authorship is apt to engender other mistakes about authorship should be aesthetically irrelevant as well. The second is that Goodman's reasons for rejecting forgeries seem to discredit the practice of using reproductions and copies in studying art and art history. Since this widespread practice appears pedagogically valuable, the tension between theory and practice, if unresolved, would seem to tell against Goodman's position. I will argue that Goodmanian aesthetics has the resources to rebut these objections. But my aim is not just to save Goodman from a pair of embarrassing gaffes. That would be of limited interest. I suggest that the payoff is considerably greater. For a proper understanding of how misattributions mislead, and why copies and reproductions do not, shows something of the rich texture of the epistemological conception of aesthetics, and provides additional reason to take it seriously.

Discussions of the aesthetic importance of authenticity are often cast as worries about forgery. But forgery *per se* should not be the locus of concern. Let us call someone who is qualified to tell whether a work of art is authentic an authenticator. A work of art is a forgery just in case an authenticator purports that it is authentic, knowing or having good reason to believe that it is not. The authenticator need not be the artist who painted the forgery. As I am using the term 'forgery', a work can be a forgery even if the artist was no forger. A dishonest dealer or curator or collector who passes off a copy as an original, or passes off the

work of one artist as the work of another converts the picture in question into a forgery. A forgery is in effect a lie. It conveys false information with the intent to deceive. All misattributions convey false information, but not all are intended to deceive. Whenever an authenticator purports that a work is authentic, and in fact it is not, that work is misattributed. Authenticators are not infallible. Many misattributions are honest mistakes. Ethically, the difference between lies and honest mistakes is crucial. Epistemologically, it is not. For both misinform. Whatever the intent behind them, unrecognized misattributions impart false beliefs.

Imparting false beliefs is epistemologically objectionable, regardless of motive. Since, like Goodman, I construe aesthetics as a branch of epistemology, I suggest our concern should be with misattributions generally, not just with those that are intended to deceive. But even if we adopt this stance toward aesthetics, it does not immediately follow that misattribution is an aesthetic mistake. To show that misattribution matters aesthetically, we have to demonstrate not merely that it engenders false beliefs or inhibits true beliefs about works of art, but also that at least some of those beliefs concern aesthetic properties or functions of the works. Not all false beliefs about art do so. The false belief that a given painting once passed through the Gare du Nord has, as far as I can tell, no aesthetic import. Perhaps the identity of the artist, like the route to the gallery, is a matter of aesthetic indifference. I will not try to settle that question here. For whether or not misattributions are themselves aesthetic mistakes, if they lead to mistakes that are manifestly aesthetic, we have good aesthetic reasons to care about authorship.

A belief is misleading to the extent that it occasions misunderstandings. It is aesthetically misleading to the extent that it occasions misunderstandings about works of art functioning as such. So to show that misattributions are aesthetically

misleading, we need to show (1) that they engender misunderstandings, and (2) that some of those misunderstandings bear on the aesthetic functions of works of art -- either the misattributed works or others. The first part is relatively easy. The second is not, for there is wide disagreement about how works of art function. As a result, there is disagreement about which misunderstandings qualify as aesthetic misunderstandings. Rather than trying to settle that issue, I will attempt to show that some of the misunderstandings misattributions engender concern matters that are widely conceded to fall within the aesthetic realm.

Faced with a work of doubtful provenance, the problem of authentication is a problem of projection. Given a precedent class consisting of works acknowledged to be by *N*, an authenticator identifies features that she takes to be distinctive of *N*'s work. She then attempts to project those features onto the work in question. If the work shares enough of the distinctive features, and lacks features which the precedent class shows to be decidedly uncharacteristic of *N*, it will be counted as an *N* and incorporated into the precedent class against which further cases will be judged. The constitution of the precedent class is thus crucial. If the precedent class is corrupt, features that are not features of *N*'s work, or that are not distinctive features of *N*'s work, may be used as a basis for projection. Projection from a corrupt precedent class is apt to lead to further misattributions.²

This might be doubted. It assumes that the misattributed picture either lacks the distinctive features of *N*'s work or that it has distinctive features that are not distinctive of *N*'s work. The mere fact that the picture is not by *N*, one might argue, is insufficient to show that. Deceptive forgeries and other unrecognized misattributions owe their acceptance to the fact that they evidently have the

² Nelson Goodman, *Languages of Art*, Indianapolis: Hackett, 1976, pp. 109-110.

requisite features. That is what makes them deceptive. I want to set this worry aside for now. Unless we can rebut the charge that authenticity is aesthetically irrelevant, we need not address it. Let us then provisionally concede that a corrupt precedent class increases the likelihood of further errors.

The problem is not just that one misattribution increases the probability of a second. Errors compound, for each accepted work alters the precedent class against which further pictures will be judged. The greater the number of Van Meegerens that we accept as Vermeers, the more likely it is that the next Van Meegeren will be accepted as a Vermeer.³ Eventually, Van Meegerens could dominate the precedent class, making new Van Meegerens more likely to be accepted as Vermeers than that newly discovered works by Vermeer. This, no doubt, is a serious practical and epistemological problem. The question is whether it is an aesthetic problem. Goodman takes for granted that it is. But if, as Koestler's challenge implies, it makes no aesthetic difference who painted one work, it is hard to see why the fact one misattribution leads to other misattributions should concern aesthetics.

In matters of attribution, we try to be as precise as we can responsibly be. But not all attributions are maximally precise. A glance at imprecise or unspecific attributions sheds light on how attributions function. The attribution of the Flemish Altarpiece to the Master of the Flemish Altarpiece is utterly uninformative. The caption simply tells us that whoever did it did it. But to learn that a second panel was also painted by the Master of the Flemish Altarpiece is far from uninformative. Once we know that the two works were painted by the same artist, we can look from one to the other for interpretive cues. We can investigate how a particular

³ Goodman, p. 111.

artist approached his subjects, what his concerns were. We can learn about his technique, his talents and limitations, his imaginative range, and so forth. By playing the works off against each other, we often discover aspects that we would otherwise overlook. Features that initially seem insignificant acquire salience when we find or fail to find resonances in other works by the same artist. As more pictures come to be accepted as by the same artist, we gain access to evidence for increasingly nuanced, more highly textured interpretations of individual works. Whether we know the name of the artist makes no difference.

For example, an ambiguous light source is often considered a weakness in a genre painting. But if the other works the artist painted in the same period reveal that he is adept in his treatment of light, we might hesitate to draw that conclusion. Knowing that he usually provides a clear indication of where the light is coming from, we wonder why he fails to do so in this work. This prompts us to attend to the function of light in the painting. We may conclude that the ambiguity plays a metaphorical role that converts it from a weakness to a strength. We discover the metaphor then only because the artist's other works give us reason to question the seemingly obvious reading of this one. Still, one might argue, knowledge of the artist's other works is only of heuristic value here. If we seriously attended to the role of light in the painting in question, we would have ample resources for our interpretation. This may be so. But even if we could vindicate our interpretation without appeal to the artist's other works, it does not follow that the painting's membership in a particular body of work is aesthetically irrelevant. Knowing that the work was painted by the artist who painted certain other works equips us to formulate and test interpretive hypotheses that might otherwise never come to mind.

In other cases, the relationship among the various works of a single artist is even more intimate. Cross references or thematic links sometimes connect distinct works. Suppose, for example, that like other religious artists of his time and place, an artist painted saints with halos. There would be nothing remarkable about that. But as we consider his works in light of one another, we realize that not all his halos are alike. They vary in color, intensity, and definition. We may come to understand that the variations are not idle. Nor are they just separate commentaries on the characters of the particular saints who wear the different halos. Rather, they constitute a sustained meditation on variations in the strength, stability, and intensity of virtue. Although all saints are holy, the artist's oeuvre suggests, the depth of their holiness varies and their hold on holiness is not equally firm. Taken in isolation, no one of the pictures suggests or sustains such a reading. But seen in the context of the other works, each one admits of, and gains resonance from this interpretation. If we insist that each painting be considered only in isolation, we rule out in advance this sort of understanding of an artist's works. We do something similar in philosophy as a matter of course. When interpreting a passage from Kant, we consider it in light of relevant passages in Kant's other works. If we had to consider each work in isolation, we would have a far more impoverished and tentative understanding of both the individual works, and Kant's entire oeuvre. I suggest that the same holds in the interpretation of works of art. It is, I believe, no more reasonable to demand that we interpret each of Rembrandt's works in isolation, than it is to demand that so interpret each of Kant's.

As I have stated them, the examples highlight the significance of the fact that several paintings are by the same artist. With minor revisions, they could be used to show the significance of works of the same period or the same school.

Attributions like 'School of Caravaggio', or 'Fourteenth Century Siennese' inform our readings of the works that bear them. If we know what artists in those groups were up to, what techniques they employed, what issues gripped them, what resources they had, and how they adapted, rejected, or positioned themselves with respect to one another's works, we have some idea how to look at their paintings. So do more specific attributions. Knowing where a work fits in an artist's oeuvre may contribute to our understanding of it and of his other works. We see how his style develops, what is gained and lost and modified along the way.

One could grant everything I have said about the cognitive value of knowing what artist, school, or tradition a painting belongs to, and still deny that I have demonstrated the *aesthetic* relevance of attribution. Why not say that my points only show the importance of attribution for art history? After all, a variety of facts about when and where and why a work was done are historically significant. But that does not make those facts aesthetic. The price of canvas in sixteenth century Ghent may figure in the explanation of a painting's dimensions, but that would hardly show that the price of canvas functioned aesthetically. The difference is this: knowing the oeuvre, school, or tradition a work belongs to aids us in interpreting the symbols that constitute the work.

An example may bring this out. Although *The Polish Rider* has long been attributed to Rembrandt, many art historians expect the Rembrandt Research Project to disattribute it. The central figure in the painting is a young, vibrant rider on a moribund, skeletal horse. There are many ways of interpreting the painting. Some are viable regardless of who painted it; others, I suggest, are not. Despite the uncertainty about its authorship, art historians generally agree that *The Polish Rider* was painted in about 1655, a time of personal turmoil, financial difficulty, and great

creativity in Rembrandt's life. The church was criticizing the artist for his irregular relationship to Hendrickje Stoffels, he was going bankrupt, and he was painting masterpieces.⁴ A young, vital rider, full of promise and looking for adventure, astride a horse nearly dead on its feet is a powerful metaphor for Rembrandt's situation. It is even more powerful if we read the picture as a self-portrait. *The Polish Rider* admits of such readings if it was painted by Rembrandt. If it was not, then clearly we ought not construe it as a Rembrandt self-portrait. Our understanding not only of *The Polish Rider*, but also of Rembrandt and his other works is affected by whether we think he made that metaphor. For that metaphor, if Rembrandt made it, affords insight into his conception of himself as an artist. Inasmuch as many of his works are profoundly self-reflective, insights about his artistic self-image should inform our interpretations of these other works as well. Either way there are dangers. If we wrongly think he did, or wrongly think he did not paint *The Polish Rider*, our understanding of Rembrandt's oeuvre will be skewed. It would not be enough to show that *The Polish Rider* displays the distinctive features of a Rembrandt. The appropriateness of the interpretation I have suggested depends on whether or not Rembrandt actually painted the work.

Although telling, the example may seem too limited to be helpful. Something is a self-portrait only if it is painted by its subject. We cannot then know the identity of the subject of a self-portrait and know that it is a self-portrait without knowing about who painted it. Authenticity plainly matters in such cases. Still, this seems to be a special feature of self-portraits that does not extend to still lifes, genre scenes, landscapes or abstracts. But as we have seen, the consequences of taking a work like *The Polish Rider* to be or not to be a self-portrait spill over to affect the

4 Anthony Bailey, *Responses to Rembrandt*, New York: Timken, 1994, p. 106.

interpretations of other works. So the point may be less narrow than it looks. Moreover, if the important question is whether Rembrandt made a particular metaphor at a certain point in his life, then the issue of putative self-portraits is peripheral. One could ask of any symbol in any work, whether a particular artist's having used that symbol in that work affects how his other works should be interpreted. Whenever the answer is 'yes', the authenticity of the work containing that symbol matters aesthetically.

I have not yet shown that the answer is generally 'yes'. So let us extend our discussion of *The Polish Rider*. Suppose, for the moment, that *The Polish Rider* is not by Rembrandt, but is a metaphorical portrait of Rembrandt by one of his followers. Call the actual artist X. X was evidently steeped in Rembrandt's style, and was knowledgeable about and sensitive to Rembrandt's circumstances. He used his knowledge, sensitivity, and skill to paint an extraordinarily empathetic portrait. He has, as it were, feigned the first person perspective, painting the metaphorical portrait "as though from the inside". The fact that experts are undecided about whether the work is by Rembrandt shows that he did an extraordinarily good job. Those who consider undetected misattributions aesthetically equivalent to originals might argue that he did a good enough job that it makes no aesthetic difference whether the work was painted by X or by Rembrandt, hence that it makes no aesthetic difference whether it is a genuine self-portrait or a successful pseudo-self-portrait. Since it is close enough to Rembrandt's work in all relevant respects, the insights we glean about Rembrandt and his work are exactly the ones we would have gleaned if Rembrandt had painted *The Polish Rider*.

The problem, as Goodman makes clear, is that we have no standard of *close*

enough. Because paintings belong to syntactically and semantically dense symbol systems, there is no lower bound beyond which further differences do not matter. In principle, any difference between symbols and any difference between referents, no matter how small, may be significant. Because paintings belong to relatively replete symbol systems, we can never purport to have identified all the dimensions, literal and metaphorical, along which a given symbol functions.⁵ A Rembrandt self-portrait is a vivid illustration, since both the self-understanding and the ways of exhibiting that self-understanding seem infinitely nuanced in Rembrandt's portrayals of himself. But the same point applies to other paintings. In a dense and replete system, there is no standard for being close enough to the way Monet painted water lilies or to the way Mondrian painted squares that further differences do not matter. If we wrongly incorporate a picture of water lilies into Monet's oeuvre, we increase our vulnerability to misunderstanding Monet's works, and the works of other artists he was reacting to or who were reacting to him. The point is not that we need to know the name of the artist who painted a particular picture. What we need to know is the bodies of work the picture belongs to.

Languages of Art contends that works of art belong to symbol systems that are similar in structure to languages. Goodman details the syntax and semantics of such systems. I want to focus on pragmatics, for context affects the functions of non-linguistic symbols as well as linguistic ones. I contend that attributions function aesthetically because (a) attributions locate works in an aesthetic context, (b) the context within which a symbol functions influences its interpretation, and (c) interpretation of works of art is an aesthetic activity.

Let us look briefly at language. Utterances and inscriptions are interpreted in

⁵ Goodman, pp. 252-255.

context. To understand a linguistic token, we typically need to know something about who produces it, for whom it is produced, what is presupposed, and what is at issue. Context informs content, even for simple declarative sentences like 'The cat is on the mat'. Which cat? Which mat? Why are you saying this to me now? How does this utterance contribute to the ongoing discussion? Is it, for example, a description, a warning, an apology, or a threat? Contextual factors affect whether the extension assigned to this token of 'cat' consists only of house cats, or includes lions, tigers, panthers, and so on. In deciding what extension to assign, the hearer or reader needs to know what extension the speaker assigns to the term, and what extension the speaker thinks the hearer assigns to it. A decontextualized token, even if syntactically and semantically unproblematic, is apt to yield a sparse and tentative interpretation.

We do not necessarily need to know the name of the person who produced the token. But we often need to know that it was produced by the same speaker who produced various other tokens, that it was produced in a linguistic context where certain linguistic resources were available, certain issues were in contention, certain presuppositions were in place, and certain other claims had already been made and accepted or challenged. We may also need to know that it was produced in a particular natural and social milieu. Obviously, merely knowing the name of the utterer is not enough. It would hardly help me to know that Ralph uttered 'The cat is on the mat', if I did not know Ralph. But if I already know a good deal about Ralph, about his background assumptions and linguistic proclivities, the news that he uttered the sentence could be useful, not merely for assigning responsibility for the utterance but also for supplying valuable interpretive cues. Attuned to Ralph's interests, circumstances, assumptions, and tendencies, I have resources to draw on

to make sense of the utterance. He cannot tell a possum from a house cat, so we should not assume he has identified the species correctly. He would never call a prayer rug a mat, so we can be reasonably confident that he is right on that score. He is not given to idle asides about of the distribution of wildlife in the neighborhood, so we should take it that he takes it that his comment is relevant to our present concerns. If the literal semantic content is not relevant, we should look for metaphors or implicatures. This is familiar in the study of language. It also applies to the study of symbols of other kinds. Knowing the oeuvre, school and tradition a painting belongs to equips us with resources for understanding what symbols it contains, and how they function.

Granted, the brute fact cited on the caption does not do much to advance understanding. If I know nothing of Vermeer, then the fact that a painting bears the caption 'Vermeer' is no more helpful than knowing that Ralph said 'The cat is on the mat', when I am unacquainted with Ralph. But if I have some understanding of the artist, the tradition, or the school, I can activate that understanding, and interpret the painting in light of it. I know what sorts of presuppositions were apt to be made, what sorts of techniques were available, what sorts of aesthetic options were considered live options, and so on. When we consider a work like *The Girl with a Pearl Earring* against the background of the work of Vermeer's contemporaries, we find that using fine lines to define forms was a live option. We may not only notice that Vermeer failed to exercise that option,⁶ but begin to understand what effect this had. We come to realize that Vermeer achieved his pellucid clarity by means of blurriness, and begin to wonder why and with what effect he did so. Considering

⁶ Arthur K. Wheelock, Jr. *Jan Vermeer*, New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1998, p. 118.

Vermeer's paintings in light of the works of his contemporaries does not dictate an interpretation, but provides resources for interpretation. Such a stance may suggest metaphors, motifs, or themes to be found in the work. In language, a great deal goes without saying, being presupposed by all parties to an exchange. But exactly what goes without saying varies from one linguistic context to the next. Similarly, in painting, much goes without showing. But exactly what remains tacit varies from one tradition, artist or school to the next. Attribution, I suggest, is a mechanism for locating a work in aesthetically significant classes: the class of works by the same artist, by artists in the same school, by artists in the same studio, and so on. There are good reasons for wanting to know which such classes a work belongs to, for it is by reference to common assumptions and points of disagreement within and across such classes that we begin to make sense of what functions the work performs and how it performs them. The information that attribution supplies to someone knowledgeable about such classes informs and enriches interpretation of a work.

My emphasis on the importance of context is not a claim that the way a work functioned in its original context determines how it is to be interpreted now. Nor is it to claim that an interpretation that accords with its original functions is preferable to other interpretations that might be given of it. But if we know the context, we have some idea what the artist was trying to do, what parameters he was working within, what obstacles he faced, and so on. This may give us some purchase on the work. The same thing holds in language. People sometimes say things that they do not mean. But to recognize that an utterance is irrelevant or out of character, or is a slip of the tongue or a malapropism, or to recognize that the speaker said something more or less or different from what he intended, we need to know what

the speaker would be apt to say in that context. That requires an understanding of the speaker and the context. My claim then is not that context dictates the correct interpretation of a work of art, or that the interpretation that fits best with the context in which a work was produced is always to be preferred. Rather it is that context supplies potentially valuable resources for the interpretation of works of art, resources that we would -- or at least very well might -- otherwise lack. If this is so, and if attribution is a vehicle for providing information about aesthetically relevant features of context, then attribution is aesthetically relevant.

This leads to the second problem. I have argued that forgeries and other misattributions are aesthetically objectionable because they are misleading. They are misleading because they inevitably diverge from the originals, and no divergence is small enough to be aesthetically negligible. In that case it seems, copies, slides, and other reproductions should be even more objectionable. They too inevitably diverge from the originals they purport to reproduce. Indeed they diverge far more than deceptive misattributions do. If the practically imperceptible differences between the *Mona Lisa* and a deceptive forgery are grounds for rejecting the latter, shouldn't the glaring differences between the *Mona Lisa* and its reproduction in Jansen's *History of Art* be even better grounds?

The difficulty is that copies, slides, and other reproductions have long been regarded as pedagogically valuable tools in the study of art. Throughout history, art students have learned technique by copying acknowledged masterpieces. Students of art history and criticism spend their formative years staring at reproductions and slides. Connoisseurs, collectors, and curators pore over transparencies and photographs of works they are interested in. Major museums unblushingly display their collections of Roman copies of Greek statues. If Goodman is right, these

behaviors may seem benighted. If a deceptive forgery of the *Mona Lisa* inevitably engenders misunderstandings, it would seem that slides and other reproductions should do so as well. If, on the other hand, such reproductions afford epistemic access to the ideas embodied in the *Mona Lisa*, then it would seem that the forgery should do so too. Can we in good conscience continue to disparage forgeries and other misattributions on epistemological grounds and maintain that reproductions of various sorts provide insight into works of art?

I think we can. The most glaring difference between a deceptive forgery and a slide of the *Mona Lisa* is that the forgery is practically indistinguishable from the original, while the slide obviously is not. The important difference, however, lies elsewhere -- in the symbolic functions of the two images. Since the forgery pretends to be the original, it purports to perform all and only the symbolic functions of the original. If it were successful, it would function as the *Mona Lisa* does -- as a picture of a woman with an enigmatic smile, not as a picture of a picture. The slide, on the other hand, is and presents itself as a picture of the *Mona Lisa*. Since the *Mona Lisa* does not denote itself, the slide thus performs at least one referential function that the original does not. The difference is even more vivid in the case of non-representational works. Mondrian's *Broadway Boogie-Woogie* does not denote. Neither does a forgery of *Broadway Boogie-Woogie*. But a slide of *Broadway Boogie-Woogie* denotes the painting. It is a picture of the painting. Whatever else they do then, slides and other reproductions denote the works they reproduce.

The difference is real. But is it relevant? Goodman's objection to forgeries concerned the possibility of performing all the symbolic functions of the original, not performing only those functions. Because paintings are dense and replete,

Goodman maintains, a forgery's aspiration to perform all the symbolic functions of the original cannot be met. If a reproduction shares that aspiration, then whether or not it performs additional symbolic functions, it inevitably fails to achieve its goal.

But we need not think that merely because a reproduction is expected to look like the original it either does or purports to perform the same symbolic functions as the original. Clearly such is not the case. The slides, transparencies, and photographs that connoisseurs and students study are images that differ in obvious ways from their originals. Normally there are significant differences in size. The image projected in the lecture hall is typically vastly bigger than the original; the image in the art history text is apt to be significantly smaller. The slide differs from the original in luminosity, tone, and texture as well. Books about art contain black and white photographs of colored paintings. There is no pretense that slides and photographs are pictorial equivalents of their originals. Whatever we mean in saying that they look like the originals, we do not mean that they are visually indiscriminable from the originals. The goal of such images is not to duplicate but to depict the works of art they denote. They do so, not by performing either all or only the symbolic functions of the originals, but by performing a range of symbolic functions that afford avenues of epistemic access to the originals.

Reproductions function in art in the way that paraphrase functions in language. Both *re-present*, that is, present again, the material they concern. Let us look briefly at the linguistic case. Not every description of an utterance or inscription constitutes a paraphrase. If I report that Ralph said something foolish or that he said something in French, I describe his utterance but do not paraphrase it. A statement is a paraphrase only if it affords information about what is said. A paraphrase conveys content. Similarly, a picture of a painting is a reproduction of it

only if it conveys the painting's content. That being so, in what follows, I use the term 'paraphrase' in an extended sense to comprehend both linguistic paraphrases and pictorial reproductions.

Many philosophers believe that one locution paraphrases another only if the two express the same proposition. In that case, they are analytic equivalents. Exactly what propositions are is far from clear. So it is hard to know whether two locutions express the same proposition or two similar ones. Nor is analytic equivalence a particularly perspicuous notion. But we need not enter into debates about such matters here. For it is obvious that many acceptable paraphrases do not contain anything like analytic equivalents of the passages they concern. This is what makes paraphrase a useful device for explication, clarification, disambiguation, and diplomacy. Moreover, in the arts at least, equivalence of literal descriptive content (which is what the standard criteria purport to deliver) is not enough. A paraphrase of a poem that failed to reflect dramatic tension or emotional tone would normally be unsatisfactory.

What is valuable in the familiar accounts is not the appeal to propositions or analyticity, but the recognition that a paraphrase must express, not merely describe or possess, the content it conveys. Both the notions of content and expression need elaboration. A symbol's content consists of what it symbolizes. As we have seen, symbolization can be multifaceted and complex. Literal and figurative, denotational and exemplificational, direct and indirect reference all figure in the contents of verbal and pictorial symbols. To be sure, not every symbol refers in all of these ways. To determine the content of a symbol requires deciding what modes of reference it employs, and for each of the modes it uses, what it refers to. Because verbal and pictorial symbol systems are semantically dense, there are

multiple admissible candidates for the referent of a given symbol. There is no basis for choosing one rather than any of the others as symbol's referent. Because of the capacity of such symbols for repleteness, a given symbol might symbolize along several dimensions at once. Exactly which aspects symbolize may also be undecidable. As a result, a verbal or pictorial symbol admits of multiple, divergent interpretations, each of which assigns it a different content.

The susceptibility to a variety of divergent interpretations might seem to make paraphrase impossible. The goal of conveying the content of a symbol beset with indeterminacy may seem as realizable as that of delineating the precise boundaries of a cloud. But to say that a paraphrase conveys its subject's content is not to say that any single paraphrase exhausts its subject's content. An oral paraphrase of a technical report might slight the mathematical details that the original imparts through complex equations. A paraphrase for a lay audience might eliminate technical jargon entirely, substituting metaphors where needed to convey the gist. One paraphrase might highlight the magnitude of the finding; another, the meticulousness of the methodology. Yet another might focus on matters of style, treating the paper as a model of scientific writing. Paraphrases are interpretations. Each expresses content that it shares with its subject. But a single paraphrase is not, and does not purport to be, comprehensive or unique. So it neither does nor purports to convey exactly what its subject does. Rather, it conveys something of its subject's content. In so doing, it affords epistemic access to the original.

Although accounts of paraphrase say practically nothing about what expression involves, this much seems clear from their examples. To express content, in the sense of 'express' that concerns us here, is to make content manifest

-- to display or exhibit it. To express content is, in Goodman's sense, to exemplify it.⁷ Exemplification is the mode of reference by which a sample refers to whatever it is a sample of. It does so by both instantiating and referring to the features it samples. A commercial paint sample both instantiates a particular color and refers to that color. The sample not only is an instance of the color, it also highlights exhibits or displays the color. In so doing it affords epistemic access to the color. Likewise, I suggest, a paraphrase not only shares content with the symbol it represents, it also highlights, exhibits, or displays the shared content. It thereby affords epistemic access to the content.

Exemplification is selective. A commercial paint sample normally exemplifies its color, not its size or shape. Some such samples also exemplify sheen. Others do not. So interpreting an exemplar involves determining which of its features function referentially. It also involves knowing how specifically or generally they refer. What range of paints count as matching the sample? One might think that the answer is obvious. The color the sample exemplifies is the unique shade that is visually indiscriminable from the color on the card. This proposal faces the usual objections. Colors that are indiscriminable by one viewer are not always visually indiscriminable by others. Two colors that are indiscriminable from each other may be such that only one of them is indiscriminable from a third. And so on. But the real difficulty does not concern color discrimination. It concerns symbolization. The plethora of options that paint manufacturers offer may suggest that the customer chooses the

⁷ Goodman, 52-57; Catherine Z. Elgin, *Considered Judgment*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997, pp. 171-183. Note that the discussion in *Languages of Art* (pp. 85-95), concerns a different, but related notion of expression. A painting that expresses sadness, in the sense that concerns Goodman, expresses sadness metaphorically. A reproduction or other paraphrase that expresses its subject's content, in the sense that concerns me, literally exemplifies its content.

precise shade of color she wants. In fact, paint samples symbolize more generally. They indicate a range within which the sample and all instances deemed to match the sample fall. Anyone who ever neglected to order enough paint to finish a job knows that indiscriminability is not the standard of matching that commercial paint manufacturers use. Two batches of paint that count as matching the same sample are often readily discriminable from each other. Other exemplars symbolize even more broadly. A Monet painting of a haystack can function as an exemplar of the impressionist style. Then the features it exemplifies are to be found in a wide range of works that differ from one another in a variety of obvious respects -- for example, subject matter.

My appeal to exemplification might seem self-defeating. If one symbol is to exemplify the content of another, it must share that content. Since pictorial symbols cannot be replicated, it might seem that their content cannot be shared. But replication is not required for content sharing. As we have seen, because of their density and repleteness, such symbols admit of multiple interpretations, each assigning different content to the work. A reproduction of a picture is an interpretation that assigns content to the picture, shares the content it assigns, and exemplifies that content.⁸ Although interpretation is flexible and context dependent, there are constraints on acceptable interpretation. A Raphael Madonna cannot plausibly be interpreted as a picture of a Wivenhoe Park. A reproduction, like any other interpretation, is correct only if the work has the content assigned to it.

⁸ This is clearly not sufficient for reproduction. Minimally, I think, the reproduction's exemplification must be literal and must be of literal pictorial properties of the original. Unfortunately, exactly which properties are literal pictorial properties is far from clear. See Goodman, p. 42, and Catherine Z. Elgin, *Between the Absolute and the Arbitrary*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997, pp. 69-70.

There are such things as loose interpretations. One might interpret the Raphael as a Madonna wearing a midnight blue cloak. Granted, 'midnight blue' is a fairly broad color term that comprehends a range of shades. To call the cloak 'midnight blue' by no means tells us exactly what shade the cloak is. But the description is not inaccurate on that account. It is merely somewhat general. Nevertheless, it conveys content. It tells us something about what and how the painting represents. Suppose that a reproduction portrayed the Raphael Madonna as wearing a midnight blue cloak. The shade of the cloak in the reproduction might diverge considerably from the shade of the cloak in the original. But if both fell within the scope of the predicate 'midnight blue', and the reproduction was interpreted as portraying the cloak as midnight blue, rather than as portraying the cloak's color more precisely, the reproduction would exemplify content it shared with the original. If reproductions symbolize generally, their manifest divergence from the originals is unproblematic.

Exemplars, like other symbols, require interpretation. An exemplar must possess the features it exemplifies, but even if the features exemplified are visible features, you cannot tell what an exemplar exemplifies just by looking. For an exemplar does not exemplify every feature it possesses. To determine which of its myriad features a given exemplar exemplifies requires not just looking, but reading.

To interpret a paraphrase, we need to determine what features function referentially, and how specifically they refer. Does the paraphrase purport to convey exactly the same information as its referent or only an approximation thereof? Does it purport to preserve the emotional tone? The idiomatic texture? The literary or pictorial or historical allusions? Answers vary from one paraphrase to the next. A linguistic paraphrase has a grammatical structure. It may, but need

not, exemplify that structure. If it does, it provides insight into the grammatical structure of its referent; otherwise it does not. A pictorial reproduction has some spatial dimensions. It may, but need not, exemplify them. If it does, it provides insight into the size of its referent; otherwise it does not.

Criteria of acceptability for paraphrase are flexible. They depend on purpose and audience as well as on the limitations of their medium or symbol system. A paraphrase of a technical result suitable for inclusion in a newspaper would not be appropriate for inclusion in a scientific abstract. A reproduction of the *Mona Lisa* that is suitable for inclusion in a guide book would not have enough detail or the right kind of detail to be effective in a seminar on Leonardo's style. A black and white photograph of a Matisse might effectively display design, but cannot convey color. A written paraphrase of an utterance cannot convey nuances of timbre or tone. These points are so obvious that we may overlook the fact that we take them into account in interpreting the paraphrases in question. But that we do take them into account shows that we know how to read the paraphrases.

The crucial difference then between a deceptive forgery or other misattribution and a reproduction is that they are read differently. Undetected misattributions mislead. They beguile us into taking any and all of their symbolic features to be characteristic of the original work, artist, or school that they purportedly belong to. A successful reproduction, on the other hand, leads us back to the original.⁹ It is not a replica of the original. It does not have, and does not purport to have all or only the symbolic functions of the original. But if interpreted

⁹ To be sure, not all reproductions are successful. Many are crude, and ham handed, and lead us away from rather than back to the works they set out to illuminate. This is no surprise. To say that a symbol admits of multiple interpretations is not to say that all interpretations of it are correct.

correctly, it affords insight into what and how the original symbolizes.¹⁰

Catherine Z. Elgin

Graduate School of Education

Harvard University

Cambridge, Massachusetts 02138 USA

References

Bailey, Anthony, *Responses to Rembrandt*, New York:, Timken, 1994.

Elgin, Catherine Z., *Between the Absolute and the Arbitrary*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997.

Elgin, Catherine Z., *Considered Judgment*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997.

Goodman, Nelson, *Languages of Art*, Indianapolis: Hackett, 1976.

Koestler, Arthur, *The Act of Creation*, New York: MacMillan, 1969.

Wheelock, Arthur K., Jr. *Jan Vermeer*, New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1998.

¹⁰ I am grateful to Amelie Rorty and Israel Scheffler for comments on an earlier draft of this paper.