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Negotiating Authenticity: Reproducing the Past for the Present

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NEGOTIATING AUTHENTICITY: REPRODUCING THE PAST FOR THE PRESENT

by

David William Janson Stock

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Partial Fulfillment of the
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NEGOTIATING AUTHENTICITY: REPRODUCING THE PAST FOR THE PRESENT
by
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*Negotiating Authenticity: Reproducing the Past for the Present* explores how reproductions connect us to the past. From Rembrandt restrikes to plastic souvenirs, reproductions occupy an important chapter in an object’s biography. This exhibition considers the complex relationships between “original” artifacts and their reproductions, which historically has been the focus of scholarly debate. Walter Benjamin, in his 1936 essay *The Work of Art in the Age of Technological Reproduction*, highlights the intrinsic questions posed of this relationship – when an original work of art (or object) is reproduced, what relationship does both the reproduction and its model (the original) have with each other as well as the past, people, and places they represent? By utilizing reproductions to engage two foundational approaches to understanding authenticity – the materialist, which emphasizes the importance of inherent and measurable traits in determining an object’s authenticity, and the constructivist, which emphasizes the importance of context and the social networks in determining an object’s authenticity – *Negotiating Authenticity* challenges the materialist/constructivist dichotomy and highlights the complex and convoluted ways objects and their reproductions help us form connections between the past and the present.
To Mikayla
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We acknowledge in Milwaukee that we are on traditional Potawatomi, Ho-Chunk and Menominee homeland along the southwest shores of Michigami, North America’s largest system of freshwater lakes, where the Milwaukee, Menominee, and Kinnickinnic rivers meet and the people of Wisconsin’s sovereign Anishinaabe, Ho-Chunk, Menominee, Oneida and Mohican nations remain present.

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Introduction

People have been replicating objects, in the most general sense, for a long time. However, as pointed out by Walter Benjamin in his quintessential work, *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, technological advancements (e.g., woodcuts, lithographs, photographs, and film) increased the accuracy, speed, and capability of the reproduction process (Benjamin 2008[1936]: 20-21). These accurate, efficient tools of reproduction heralded a growth of discourse around the importance of “originals” and the capacity of reproductions to facilitate connections between people and original works. For Benjamin, contemporary technological advancements spurred questions of "authenticity" in reproduced artworks and encouraged observations of how technology impacted expectations or questions of uniqueness. Almost a century later, the rise in computing technology (scanning, data storage, digital modeling, Artificial Intelligence, etc.), alongside the global accessibility of digital reproductions of art and material culture, has brought some of these same questions back into the foreground of contemporary research (Garstki 2017; Di Giuseppantonio Di Franco et al. 2018; Jones 2010; Holtorf 2013).

Acknowledging that there are myriad avenues of exploration to understand the capacity of reproductions to help us build connections to the past, this exhibition, *Negotiating Authenticity: Reproducing the Past for the Present*, showcases a collection of objects, both originals and reproductions, that encourage us to consider some of the foundational, and often subconscious, concepts that drive our curiosity and desire for reproductions to provide an authentic connection to the past. Furthermore, by unraveling the layers of pastness within these objects, the exhibition invites visitors to explore the innate complexities inherent in
reproductions. In doing so, it offers an opportunity to ask why some objects captivate our attention and inspiration more than others. *Negotiating Authenticity* thus explores the complex relationships between original artifacts and their reproductions. The exhibition considers how this ongoing dialogue blurs the boundaries between materiality and authenticity and, in the process, manifests our desire to build bridges between the past and the present.

The exhibition is organized into four main sections that introduce the visitor to some of the key concepts and considerations surrounding reproductions. Objects on display, which include both originals and reproductions in a variety of media, help prompt these discussions by offering opportunities for both reflection and, ultimately, participation. The exhibit’s first section, *Reproductions*, presents a small selection of reproduced objects, both digital and physical, which offer interesting and, perhaps, overlooked ways that reproductions act as proxy for an original and, as such, constitute a chapter in that original object’s biography. Reproductions connect us to the past through the representation of an original object’s tangible and/or intangible qualities. In order to peel back the layers of what draws us to reproductions in their role as conduits to the past, the exhibition next highlights two foundational concepts of authenticity: the so-called materialist and constructivist perspectives, which continue to be discussed and revisited in contemporary scholarship. Accordingly, the next two sections, *Is it Real? A Materialist Perspective* and *Is It Valuable? A Constructivist Perspective*, introduce these two engaging perspectives on the relationship between reproductions and their originals. The former considers some of the inherent markers that define an object’s physical properties and, in doing so, examines how material, iconography, and other details reflect the essence of an object’s authenticity. Conversely, the latter section
explores intangible markers of an object’s life, as well as the contexts within which the object has been experienced and consumed either in the past or the present. Here, the constructivist approach not only brings into play the background experiences and knowledge that viewers bring with them when experiencing an object, but also extends deeper to consider the processes and people that influenced (and continue to influence) the life of an object from manufacture and use through to its final resting place.

The final section, Is It Meaningful? Negotiating Authenticity, draws together and problematizes the materialist and constructivist perspectives, presenting objects that challenge us to consider both the tangible and intangible aspects of objects and the complex role that reproductions play in debates about value, authenticity, and connecting the present to the past. This section explores the problems of assigning “authenticity” and develops a more nuanced understanding of how we relate to objects, both old and new, in different ways. As part of the culminating experience of the exhibition produced alongside this thesis, visitors participated in their own reproduction of the past – linking themselves with an ancient object’s layered biography as they produce a 3D digital model that they could take beyond the walls of the Negotiating Authenticity experience.

Defining Authenticity

It is useful to clarify a selection of key terms that are used in this study, primarily because such terms take on multiple meanings depending on the context and the audience.

The definition of authenticity can be complex and is subject to debate. For the considerations of this study, authenticity refers to the capacity of an object to represent a particular event or the experience of a specific time and place. Siân Jones (2010: 181) provides a particularly helpful definition:
“... authenticity refers to the quality of being authentic, that is, real, original, truthful, or genuine ...” For Jones, “being authentic” is reflected in tangible, measurable, ways, such as through diagnostic iconography and biological markers of age (e.g., surface patinas like the marine encrustations found on Fig. 7), as well as through intangible, often sociocultural, ways, which influence how an object is consumed, whether in its own time or in the present moment. Jones (2010: 181-182) succinctly points out that authenticity is not only linked to heritage preservation concerns, education about the past, and academic research, but also to broader interests in the commercial production and sale of objects, whether a reproduction is openly presented as such (as can be the case with souvenirs) or not (as is the case with fakes and forgeries). Regardless of presentation or context, how and why we find some reproductions more or less authentic than others is still at the core of the conversation; it is the “how”, in this case, that Negotiating Authenticity aims to explore.

What then constitutes an original? The Oxford English Dictionary (OED) provides several definitions for the term. The OED makes a distinction between “original” as an adjective (“an original object”) and as a noun (“the original”), and while there are myriad ways to define the term, for the purposes of this discussion, the following definition provides the most clarity: “a writing, picture, or other work produced first-hand by the author or maker; a work of literature or art that is not a copy or imitation; an original portrait (OED 2023: B.I.4.a.).” In 1985, a symposium jointly organized by the Center for Advanced Study in the Visual Arts and Johns Hopkins University (“Retaining the Original: Multiple Originals, Copies, and Reproductions”) tackled the impact of the authorship-work relationship on notions of originality. The resulting essays, as well as those from a subsequent College of Art Association meeting in 1988, were published together in a volume edited by Rosalind Krauss (1989). In her introduction, Krauss (1989: 8) identifies how the conference approached authorship as a means of “... uncover[ing] all those traces through which the author registers his individuality, a set of marks that only the original object can bear” noting as well how “... poststructuralism tends to overturn the
conventional art-historical hierarchy through which the original’s value is secured as superior.” In this sense, Krauss highlights how authorship and original are intimately intertwined, whether that relationship is absolute or fluid for any given work of art or object. In this same collection of essays, Brunilde Ridgway (1989: 14) offers yet another defining facet of the original. In her discussion of Greek sculptural reproduction, Ridgway further emphasizes the connection between authorship and original, defining originality as:

the unique expression of an artist that defines a personal style ... Insofar as it is unique, personal style cannot be duplicated and its creations are limited in time and number ... these conclusions are based on the premise of artistic personality and imply not only individual talent but also a striving for personal expression. The focus is, therefore, on the artists as much as on their productions.

Charles Lindholm (2008: 2) has taken a slightly different approach, suggesting that “authentic objects, persons and collectives are original, real and pure; they are what they purport to be, their roots are known and verified, their essence and appearance are one.” Though one might challenge the particular usage of terms like “roots” or “verified” as ill-defined by Lindholm, his interest in authentic objects provides a clear definition of original: originals are the objects that “they purport to be, their essence and appearance are one (2008: 2).” This is to say, for the purposes of understanding originals in relation to both their reproductions and the sociocultural times and spaces they represent, an original is an object with a unique history with respect to its manufacture, material, and social circumstances that is also inherently connected to the relationship it holds with its maker (Boon 2019: 253).

Recent research, however, is challenging the notions of both authenticity and originality – particularly in light of the proliferation of digital reproductions. Sattler and Simandiraki-Grimshaw (2019: 100) offer a simple, yet effective, definition of reproduction (or replica): “... a faithful imitation of the original.” They touch on an aspect of reproductions that past scholarship had considered an inherent value of an original object – a reproduction’s inability to engage in dialogue with original objects. This is an especially provocative way to clarify the relationship between originals and reproductions since the
authors acknowledge that reproductions, no matter how well they are executed, are obviously not the original object itself. Still, Sattler and Simandiraki-Grimshaw suggest that while reproductions embody different contexts, makers, and materials, they nevertheless reproduce aspects of the original and are thus not fully removed from their original counterparts—reproducing, to some extent, the "time" and "place" of the original, components that Benjamin asserted could not be reproduced precisely because they delineated the boundary between original and reproduction. This inherent connection between original and reproduction allows for a more engaging relationship between the viewer and the original object through reproductions.

Reproductions

Reproductions are particularly important for our understanding of authenticity because of their distinct, layered relationship with an original. This relationship between a reproduction and its original can be utilized to consider how authenticity is constructed. Reproductions, through the transfer of various material and contextual properties of the original, become intricately intertwined within the original object’s biography. Although we associate the idea of “biographies” with people, objects also experience a series of events over their lifetime that imprint upon them the marks of time and use, from their initial manufacture and circulation to a range of final roles from destruction and burial to discovery and museum display (Burström 2014: 66-67). Moments within these biographies can manifest themselves in the tangible qualities of an object such as its physical form, material, and design, but also the intangible aspects related to an object’s role in the lives of those who have come into contact with it in the past, as well as in the present. When viewed within the broader arc of an object’s life, reproductions are thus more than just reflections of the original they represent and offer a dialogic
means through which to engage with these various elements of an original object’s life (Sattler and Simandiraki-Grimshaw 2019: 100-101).

Archaeology serves as a particularly useful lens with which to explore the varying modes of reproduction. The documentation and visualization of artifacts from the field to the lab and museum has always been central to the work of archaeology. The field utilizes a variety of tools (illustration, photography, casts, 3D visualization, etc.) to document and reproduce material culture and preserve key pieces of historical and, thus, biographical information (Garstki 2017: 727-729). Early forms of archaeological reproduction included plaster casts, which continue to be discussed in modern scholarship in the context of accuracy and faithfulness to the original (Di Giuseppantonio Di Franco et al. 2018). Other forms of recording, such as mapping and hand-drawn illustration, have always served as cornerstones of archaeological recording and reproduction, albeit rendered in 2D and subject to artistic agency (Counts et al. 2020: 255). The 19th century witnessed the emergence of photography as a key method for documenting sites and material culture (Marvin 2008: 139-141; Hamilakis and Infantidis 2015). Finally, since the late-20th century, modern computing technology along with associated capacities for recording, analyzing, and engaging with born-digital data, has allowed for a new type of reproduction—3D visualization and creation of accurate, photorealistic digital models. 3D digital models add yet another medium by which objects of the past can be reproduced. Significantly, these digital models have the capacity to be printed and thus replicate physical artifacts that can be touched, displayed, and altered in innumerable ways. 3D visualization technology has also presented museums and other institutions that house and display cultural heritage with more sophisticated avenues for reproducing the past for the present, while also making objects more accessible to the public.

The variety of methods of reproduction (plaster casts, illustrations, photography, 3D visualization, etc.) offer a diverse set of ways in which reproductions, while not the original, can still provide authentic connections to the past. In some cases, physical, visible qualities (such as color,
texture, material, weight, etc.) are emphasized and in others iconographic or culturally representative elements (such as text or images) are the focus of the reproduction. While each reproduction merely represents the original, they each provide, and make accessible, different dimensions of authenticity.

The 3D printed model of the “Under Life-Size Head of Cypriot-Herakles” (Fig. 1) and the digital model of the same artifact (Fig. 2), both reproductions of an original sculpture excavated by the Athienou Archaeological Project at the site of Athienou-Malloura in Cyprus, offer two different examples of how reproductions, especially 3D models, fit into the broader conversation.

On the one hand, the ceramic 3D model occupies space within the physical world, offering not just a visual reproduction of an original object but also other tactile aspects of the original – particularly traits indicative of age, production and craftsmanship, scale – providing an immediate contextual experience in a familiar (i.e., real world) space (Garstki 2017: 730-731). On the other hand, the 3D digital model offers opportunities to explore aspects of the original object in high resolution and from a variety of vantage points that are available via visualization software or to analyze the object remotely without needing access to the original (or any printed model) (Garstki 2017: 740-741). In these two cases, the printed reproduction (Fig. 1) offers connection to the original object through its materiality and presence, whereas the digital reproduction (Fig. 2) provides virtual access and offers opportunities to manipulate and analyze features of the original object remotely and far removed from its physical location in museum storage in Cyprus.

These models also offer a further connection to the original model through the very process of their reproduction. While the social connections between objects will be discussed in detail in a subsequent section, it is important to highlight here that reproductions, like originals, represent the relationship between the object and the maker. In short, the creation of reproductions – even in the case of sophisticated, computer-driven processes like 3D scanning—is not as objective a process as it
may appear. For example, Fig. 3 shows the same object (Under Life-Sized Head of Cypriot-Herakles) scanned in identical lighting conditions but with the camera’s white-balance settings slightly adjusted between each scan (Garstki 2018: 78). The variation in results highlights how choices made can drastically affect the resulting reproduction. Any given production process is subject to the limits of the available resources and technology, thus resulting in a reproduction of the original that also reflects the choices, environment, technology, and technical knowledge of the maker (Garstki 2018: 77-78; Counts et al. 2020: 275-277). 3D models, thus, offer an opportunity to connect to a broader scope of an original object’s past – both the past visible in its materiality, as well as its ongoing social biography.

Other examples of how reproductions can facilitate these connections include a copy of the Egyptian faience hippopotamus in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York better known as “William” or “William the Hippo” (Fig. 4), or diagnostic artifacts, such as a Sumerian cuneiform tablet that reproduces an original now in the Penn Museum (Fig. 5). These reproductions serve to both represent the material qualities of the original (such as the blue of faience and black of stone) as well as the key features that identify the original object (such as iconography or inscriptions). While clearly not the originals, the level of detail and accuracy allows reproductions like these to convey information and serve pedagogical, research, or recollective functions. The reproduction of quintessential markers of the original object’s biography (both past and present) allows reproductions to create a meaningful connection between us in the present, and ideas, people, and places of the past.

Reproductions can also aid in connecting the present with these aspects of the past in ways that go beyond materiality. Namely, reproductions do not necessarily need to match the material, scale, or even physical attributes or dimensions of their original in order to provide authentic connections to original objects. While the heads of Cypriot-Herakles recreate with computer-aided precision physical aspects of their original – the small, molded plastic pieta reproductions (Fig. 6) offer an opportunity to explore the ways in which a reproduction can connect the viewer to an original without consideration
for the material or physical aspects of the original. Michelangelo’s original, Madonna della Pietà/La Pietà (marble, ca. 1500 CE) currently housed in St. Peter’s Basilica, Vatican City (see Jurkowlaniec 2015 for a brief history of La Pietà) was executed in marble in over life-sized scale at 195 cm (H) x 174 cm (L). The reproductions, on the other hand, are hollow plastic, mass-produced, copies sold on Amazon measuring a mere 9.5 cm (H) x 8 cm (L). The primary connection between the original and the reproductions is thus not any physical marker (material, size, etc.) they possess, but their iconography and their ability to recreate for the viewer the overall impression of the original masterwork. The sculpture (and reproductions) depicts a particularly significant moment in the history of Christianity (especially linked to Roman Catholicism) when Mary, the mother of Jesus Christ, mourns as she holds her dead son across her lap after his crucifixion. The sorrowful contemplation of Mary, the limpness of Christ’s body, and the realism of the interaction between the figures, flesh, and drapery illicit individual responses to the imagery. The poignancy of this sculpture, for Christians, also serves as a reminder of a quintessential theological element – that, in Christian tradition, God sacrificed his son, Christ, to redeem humankind. Thus, La Pieta reminds Christian viewers that “this is God’s sacrifice for mankind, my sacrifice of my son, that makes possible your redemption” (Harris and Zucker 2015). This specific imagery marks the Vatican Pieta as both an important artwork by Michelangelo but also as a religious, culturally-charged object. The Pieta reproductions (Fig. 6), in reproducing the same iconography, recall both the Vatican Pieta and Christian religious tradition – connecting viewers of the reproductions with the historic original and its cultural contexts. In this way it is not the materiality of the reproduction (or how faithful its execution to the original) that serves as the connecting factor but its imagery.

At their most basic level, the modes of reproduction we encounter vary greatly in terms of their relationship to the original (e.g., material, scale, color, but also emotional, sensorial, or ideological responses). For many of these reasons, discussing the relationship humans hold with objects and the degree to which “authenticity” matters becomes so vital. What capacity does a reproduction have to
produce an authentic experience and connection between people and the past? What factors drive how we view and experience reproductions (and their originals)? Are there “dimensions of authenticity” within museum or other contexts that condition our response to an object? Thus, reproductions, as copies of originals, offer a particularly helpful lens through which to unpack and explore the variety of ways and degrees to which people attribute authenticity to objects – and by extension the past that the objects reflect. As Sattler and Simandiraki-Grimshaw (2019: 111-112) concluded, reproductions serve as filters through which some features of an original are maintained at the expense of others ultimately entwining themselves within the life of the original, while simultaneously adapting and building on that biography. Thus, through considering reproductions in relation to their originals it is possible to understand better the fundamental approaches to constructing authenticity and the nature of complicated and convoluted social interactions transacted between viewer and object.

Is It Real? A Materialist Perspective

Among the competing discourses on the relationship between authenticity, reproductions, and original objects, the materialist perspective is probably one of the more prominent approaches. At the core of Benjamin’s work is a concern with the effect of reproduction on the inherent authenticity – or what Benjamin refers to as the “aura” – of an object. For Benjamin (2008[1936]: 21), the original held a sense of its time and place — elements that reproductions fail to capture or emulate. In his discussion on authenticity and reproduction he points out that technology, more than hand-made reproduction, provides access to different viewpoints and moves the original across locations to “meet the viewer halfway”. Benjamin (2008[1936]: 22) illustrates his idea of removal from time and space by highlighting how, “... [via a gramophone] a choral work performed in an auditorium ... [is also] enjoyed in a private
room.” The recording, according to Benjamin, transfers the specific moment of a choral performance in an auditorium to a time and place separate from its original context. It is the removal from time and space that Benjamin is concerned with and, applying his choral analogy to objects, what he suggests results in a reduction or removal of a work’s authenticity. He goes on to make his primary point regarding authenticity:

The authenticity of a thing is the quintessence of all that is transmissible in it from its origin on, ranging from physical duration to the historical testimony relating to it. Since the historical testimony is founded on the physical duration, the former, too, is jeopardized by reproduction, in which the physical duration plays no part. And what is really jeopardized when the historical testimony is affected is the authority of the object ... (22).

It is Benjamin’s concern with the physical aspects of an object that helped to form the materialist perspective within discussions on authenticity. The separation of the object, Benjamin implies, from its capacity to transmit the essence of its origin is where the reproduction breaks down and loses its capacity to be authentic and, by extension, authoritative. He further suggests that the more an object is reproduced the further away it becomes from the original and, by extension, the further removed it is from the original’s authenticity (24). Benjamin placed an object’s authenticity squarely within the materiality of the original object – equating the physical duration of an object (represented by the qualities of existing in the past) with an object’s capacity to be authentic and historically authoritative. Reproduction, as the process of making a copy, Benjamin thus suggests, removes the physical duration component (essential for authenticity) and likewise, the more an object is reproduced, the more this physical duration is removed. For Benjamin, authenticity was embedded in the physical characteristics of the past present in an object and thus, as objects of the present, reproductions were, for Benjamin, incapable of holding authenticity.

This emphasis on the physical elements of originals and the capacity with which a reproduction is able to replicate such elements was codified in the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) Venice Charter (1964), which in its attempts to promote the conservation of monuments
including the sculpture, painting, and other artistic creations), emphasizes that an original is, “... inseparable from the history to which it bears witness and from the setting in which it occurs (Article 7)” and that the process of restoration is based on, “... respect for original material and authentic documents (Article 9)” . In this sense, the materiality of the originals is of particular importance for achieving a proper restoration. This particular approach was further applied, beyond monuments, to objects insofar as reproductions of original objects also ought to retain the materiality of the original. This extrapolation led to a more particular discussion on materiality and authenticity in relation to material culture (particularly archaeological objects) resulting in - as defined by Jones (2010: 182) - a materialist perspective of authenticity which relies on, “... objective and measurable attribute[s] inherent in the material fabric, form and function of artefacts ...” (see also Holtorf 2013: 428).

This particular approach emphasizes how an object’s materiality speaks to its age through obvious traces of wear and tear, decay, and disintegration. Patina, cracks, and missing bits are hallmarks of an object’s pastness that evidence the passage of time (Holtorf 2013: 423). The perceptions of such pastness based on perceived biographical markers, such as evidence of use, wear, and disintegration, are the primary factors that determine an object’s authenticity (2013: 430). While this may be particularly convincing in relation to material culture (e.g., the Roman transport amphora [Fig. 7] and Cypriot Bichrome oinochoe [Fig. 8]), such approaches beg the question of whether reproductions can translate these qualities from the original object and, consequently, impart these markers of pastness, which Holtorf deems quintessential to an object’s authenticity.

In response to the question of whether a reproduction can embody pastness, Holtorf (2013: 431) offers an example counter to the materialist perspective: “... [visitors to] museums experience authenticity and aura in front of originals to exactly the same degree as they do in front of very good reproductions or copies – as long as they do not know them to be reproductions or copies ...” This is a particularly intriguing comment as it suggests that we can construct authentic narratives of, and
experiences with, the past through both original objects and reproductions. However, the process of constructing such authenticities might still be seen to lie in particular markers that can be deduced in an original rather than a very good reproduction. These markers, or as Jones (2010: 182) puts it “... dimension[s] of ‘nature’ with real and immutable characteristics that can be identified and measured,” are often value-attached implications of use over time. For example, in understanding the Cypriot Bichrome oinochoe (Fig. 8) as an authentic historic artifact, we attribute a certain level of value to the object’s cracks, patina, and even associated Cypriot governmental antiquities export documentation (Fig. 9); similarly, when considering the Roman transport amphora (Fig. 7), marine encrustations, damage on the rim of the vessel, and use-wear on the handles seemingly offer tangible evidence of its life and its pastness. In attempting to understand the relationship between the value of these features and our determinations of age (and, by extension, authenticity), Holtorf refers to Alois Riegl’s term “age-value.” This term suggests that an object’s pastness can be directly inferred from a perception of the value of wear and tear (Holtorf 2013). The patina and cracks on the Cypriot Bichrome Oinochoe (Fig. 8), exemplify this term as we associate such damage with the passage of time, equating a certain level of damage with an equivalent amount of time. In so doing, the term “age-value” expresses how an object’s degree of authenticity is linked to its past through visual clues that can be studied and evaluated, the essence of the materialist perspective.

Is It Valuable? A Constructivist Perspective

Developed in response to the materialist perspective, constructivist perspectives suggest that it is the applied contexts of an object that instill authenticity. For example, returning to the notion of visitors being unable to ascertain the difference between an original object and a reproduction, Jones
(2010) suggests that this exemplifies the constructivist approach in illustrating that authenticity can be applied to any object, irrespective of its material qualities or uniqueness.

Historically, constructivist perspectives reached prominence in 1994 when, after the ICOMOS Nara Conference of Authenticity, *The Nara Document on Authenticity* was published. This document outlined directions for ICOMOS member signatories regarding appropriate treatment of cultural objects as it pertains to conservation (an activity deeply rooted in acknowledging and preserving authenticity) (Jones 2010). Within this document are a number of key sections to which the constructivist approach relies – namely that authenticity can rely on more than just material qualities but also external cultural factors (ICOMOS 1994: Sections 11 and 13).

The constructivist approach focuses attention on the sociocultural networks that individuals ascribe and relate to objects – the intangible qualities of connection between an object and a person (e.g., social, religious, economic, aesthetic). Jones (2010: 195) argues that authenticity is “… linked to the networks of inalienable relationships [that objects] have been involved in throughout their social lives … [the networks] vary according to who is engaging with a particular object in what context.” This is echoed by Gareth Beale (2018: 92) who states, in relation to digital images: “however accurate an image might be … its authenticity is always contingent on the perception of the viewer.” When considering this perspective in the context of reproductions, there is an acknowledgement that the extent to which an object is perceived by the viewer (in turn based on their background and experiences) has a determining effect on the authenticity of an object, whether original or reproduction.

The deep, rich tradition of Christian Orthodox icon painting offers an especially illustrative data set to think about constructivist approaches to authenticity. Historically, icons are handcrafted, holy objects painted with religious iconography (including Jesus Christ, Mary, and other saints), executed by skilled painters who often held religious positions—these icons included material and technical features that project a sense of originality, authority (and authenticity) in their creation (for example, the
Byzantine icon of Christ Pantokrator in the UWM Art Collection, Fig. 10). However, Amy Slagle’s (2019: 296) important ethnographic research has argued that practitioners engaging with mechanically or digitally reproduced icons (such as printouts on wood – like the modern icon of Saints Constantine and Helen (Fig. 11)—ascribed these objects the same spiritual potency (and attendant authenticity) as the originals upon which they are based. Slagle acknowledges that within the Orthodox establishment there is an ambiguity as to the authenticity of icons in relation to their materiality. According to iconographer Silouan Justiniano (2016:34), something essential seems to be lacking in mechanically (mass) produced icons, “It is an icon and yet somehow not fully an icon.” Justiniano’s more conservative definition is contradicted by Father Andriy Chirovsky (2017: 175) who says, “the point is that icons are mainly about prayer ... if the only thing available, as you try to live your Orthodox faith to its fullest, is a wall calendar with a second-rate rendering of the Man of Sorrows, throw yourself into it. The Lord is still there.” In fact, this discussion mirrors the materialist/constructivist debate (respectively) as presented in Negotiating Authenticity and the purposeful juxtaposition of the traditionally crafted, hand-painted icon of Christ Pantokrator and the 20th century mechanically produced icon of Saints Constantine and Helen.

Returning to Slagle, however, we see that the general negotiation of authenticity in icon reproductions, in which practitioners navigate a series of both "authentic" and "performative" images of Orthodoxy, is conditioned by the practitioner themselves, “... distinguishing for themselves precisely which mechanically produced images ... to regard as objects of devotion over and against the mass of illustrations simply signaling the potential ‘Orthodoxness’ (Slagle 2019: 299)”. Slagle also discovered that there appears to be two necessary components, iconographic similarity to a traditional icon and personal intention, that determine whether an individual considers a reproduction of an icon as authentic as a traditionally handcrafted one (2019: 299). Altogether, Slagle’s study shows that it is ultimately the user who parses out whether a particular reproduction holds the authenticity necessary to be considered a theologically valid image of veneration, or just a picture of something Christian.
Furthermore, this interesting relationship illuminates how determining value and authenticity of a reproduction involves a complicated social relationship between object and person that extends beyond just its materiality.

Is It Meaningful? Negotiating Authenticity

More recent scholarship on authenticity has built upon both the materialist and the constructivist approaches in an attempt to reconcile the two, understanding that both material and social aspects of objects influence perceptions of authenticity and that our relationship with objects—whether original or reproduction—involves a complex integration of both tangible, observable, traits and the intangible, applied, experiences.

Jones (2010: 181) highlights some of the key concerns with the dichotomic aspect of the earlier approaches to understanding authenticity: “neither [materialist nor constructivist theory] explains why people find the issue of authenticity so compelling, nor how it is experienced and negotiated in practice.” In this sense, recent approaches to authenticity have both acknowledged the impact of material representation of the past within an object as well as the multiple social networks tied up in an object’s biography. Jones (2010: 186) continues, summarizing contemporary approaches nicely: “authenticity is not simply a facet of the internal essence of discrete isolated entities as modernist discourses would have us believe, but rather a product of the relationships between people and things.” It is this intersection of materiality, past networks, and present interactions that contemporary approaches to authenticity aim to engage. This is also precisely where reproductions can help unpack multiple components of object authenticity: as copies and replicas of originals, reproductions blur what might otherwise be considered strict theoretical boundaries of concepts like real, old, valuable, etc., encouraging new ways of seeing and engaging with the past.
Holtorf (2013: 432-435) exemplifies contemporary developments in theoretical approaches to authenticity. Responding to Jones, Holtorf suggests that object authenticity can be best explained through aspects of pastness, for which he defines three parameters: 1) Pastness requires material clues (the materialist approach), 2) Pastness requires correspondence with expectations of the audience (the constructivist approach), and 3) Pastness requires a meaningful narrative then and now. In his discussion, Holtorf (2013: 430-431) argues that the constructivist approach merely replace[s] the materialist concept of authenticity with a constructivist one ... that authentic objects of the past really are cultural constructs of the present. This is either trivial, insofar as any object of the past relies on contemporary perception and cultural concepts/classifications in order to be recognized, or it is ... awkward to imply that ancient objects are actually new or that any object is of the past as soon as people in a given cultural context take it to be of the past.

Thus, Holtorf aims to provide a renewed approach to the materialist perspective that addresses concerns about its reliance on physical/material traits that are inherent in an object (its materiality), while also considering a cultural concept of authenticity (429). In this way, while Holtorf considers the intersection of an object’s materiality and contextual authenticity aspects of pastness, they might be better understood as part of an object’s biography. Three parameters Holtorf considers for pastness aim to address how an object’s “life” (its materiality, experiences, etc.) are not set in a singular moment of time, but in fact, like a biography, are responsive to external stimuli that compound and influence subsequent moments in the object’s biography. Holtorf (2013: 441) concludes that the authenticity of an object is both culturally situated in the present yet deeply connected to its materiality. Instead of asking how old an object is, one should ask: is it of the past? And, if so, in what way? Which past is being invoked, and how? Holtorf thus suggests that we move from a question of “Is it Real?” to “Is it Meaningful?”

The relationship between an object’s materiality, its biography, and constructions of authenticity, has been brought to the fore with the increased use of 3D visualization in cultural heritage
contexts. Jones et. al. (2018: 6), through the ACCORD (Archaeological Community Co-production Of Research Resources) project, attempted to explore the intersection of these elements. Specifically, their goal was to understand if, when, and how digital models might acquire elements of authenticity – an exploration firmly grounded in the principles of the constructivist approach and concepts of "migration" of aura from an original to a reproduction. Amongst other intriguing findings, their study reifies prior considerations of how digital reproductions complicate our understanding of how we construct an object’s authenticity. Digital reproductions, as surrogates for the original, physical, object reproduce both the visual and spatial characteristics of the real world (Rabinowitz 2015: 29). However, Jones et al. (2018: 21) note that “whilst digital models may lack the visceral thrill of being in the presence of the original, they can create new sets of relations with their physical counterparts that gives the models ... a partial if limited migration of aura ... acquir[ing] a form of aura in relation to the networks of relations involved in their production ... “. Their study acknowledges that there are elements of authenticity that are mobile, malleable, and dependent upon contextual aspects of an object.

Another exploration of the intersections of materiality and context in the formation of authenticity has been conducted by Liselore Tissen (2020) regarding a 3D print of Rembrandt van Rijn’s painting Saul and David. In particular, Tissen suggests that authenticity is a social construction that is not static—meaning that over time the social contexts for both originals and their reproductions change. Furthermore, Tissen (2020: 38) considers the materiality of the 3D reproduction of Saul and David alongside the reproduction’s ability to highlight experiential elements no longer feasible by the original (due to its age). This lends the reproduction itself its own sense of authenticity, changing with age. Tissen also briefly notes the ability of the 3D print of Saul and David not only to reproduce the visual image of the original Rembrandt but also the response of its materiality to the physical world. Ultimately, Tissen asserts that such reproductions offer a means to understand better the relationship between an "age-value" acquired over time and “memory-value”, a blending of materialist interests in
physical markers of pastness with the constructivist interests in the impact of social contexts. Tissen’s discussion highlights how reproductions are more than just “real” or “valuable” in understanding a precise moment in the past, they also incorporate the pasts they reflect through their biography, serving as meaningful objects to communities in the present.

The complex interactions between materiality, social contexts, and authenticity discussed by Holtorf, Jones, and Tissen (inter alia) are especially well illustrated in prints. In particular, Rembrandt’s Self Portrait with a Velvet Plume (Fig. 12) and its restrike (Fig. 13) offer a useful case study for exploring how authenticity in the present is formed through notions of materiality and context. Rembrandt produced his prints by drawing the desired image onto a copper plate using the techniques of etching, engraving, and drypoint. Ink would have then filled the grooves of the engraved copper plate, any excess wiped away, and finally the inked plate would be run through a press with paper or other printing surface. While Rembrandt, students, and other artists pulled (printed) many prints in Rembrandt’s own lifetime, the material qualities of these plates have meant that restrikes are able to be pulled from remaining original plates in subsequent years all the way up to the present (UWM 2012). Here, Stephen Bann’s discussion of reproductions in printmaking and the various artistic, critical, and public reception of such work helps to elucidate how a pull (print) from the lifetime of the artist (such as Fig. 12) and later restrikes (Fig. 13) blurred the line between “original” and “copy.” In particular, Bann (2001: 36) recounts Horace Vernet’s contention that engravers, in producing prints of paintings, serve to immortalize the painting as both a material object and an intellectual object. Bann (2001) provides additional examples (e.g., Luigi Calamatta’s engraving of the Mona Lisa) of various situations in which reproduced engravings, while acknowledged as replicas, also held a sense of authenticity and retained connection to the originals for viewers. In this sense, Fig. 13 responds to Fig. 12 – while not the original, Fig. 13 retains enough elements of Fig. 12 that it, itself, also becomes a source of an authentic Rembrandt self-portrait. Both the physical features of the original plate but also the social, or contextual, aspects of the original
drawing are transported in the restrike. While both prints were pulled from the same plate, the "age-value" of Fig. 12 (pulled during Rembrandt’s lifetime) provides greater material authenticity to the print than to the much later (c. 300 years) Fig. 13. When considering, however, that both prints are of the same drawing, Jones et al.’s discussion of the migration of aura offers a way to explain the later reproduction’s connection to the past, but also meaning in the present. Furthermore, an object itself, Fig. 13 highlights the continued influence of Rembrandt – reflecting the "memory-value" referenced by Tissen. Thus, the biography of each print is wrapped up in both its connection to the original design and its own ongoing experiences, holding a variety of complex material and social relationships that are at once unique and meaningful.

Reproducing the Past for the Present

By highlighting reproductions alongside original objects, Negotiating Authenticity has aimed to unpack the complex and fluid means through which authenticity is ascribed to objects, both past and present. To some extent, beyond the material, social, and experiential elements discussed above, authenticity relies on engagement between the viewer and the object (whether reproduction or original). Di Guiseppantonio di Franco (2022: 18-20) has considered various avenues of engagement, from reading object display labels, to manipulating digital models, to handling physical reproductions of original objects, in order to understand better the performative relationship between people, objects, and the ascription of authenticity. Reproductions, whether digital or physical, provide opportunities to engage with the original object through a physical experience, thus broadening opportunities for museum visitors to encounter past materialities and participate in the negotiation of authenticity (Di Guiseppantonio Di Franco 2022: 20). In this spirit, the exhibition component of Negotiating Authenticity invited the visitor to engage directly with the process of reproduction and consider for themselves how
the part they play in the life of an object imparts or impacts authenticity. Using an Android tablet loaded with Widar (an app that helps create 3D photogrammetric models), visitors generated their own, digital, reproduction of a museum-quality, plaster cast reproduction of a head of a Warrior from the east pediment of the Temple of Aphaia, Aegina (original dated to the 5th century; Fig. 14). Through these digital reproductions, visitors to the exhibition component of the thesis had an opportunity to add a chapter to the life of an object from the past, in their own contexts, and provide a platform to think about the many ways that authenticity is constructed in the present.
Figure 1. Printed 3D Model of Under Life-Size Head of Cypriot-Herakles from Athienou-Malloura. Ceramic with Hand Glaze. 9.5 cm x 13 cm. Created by Tethlon 3D, 2014. Private Collection.


Figure 2. 3D Digital Model of Under Life-Size Head of Cypriot-Herakles from Athienou-Malloura. Created by Athienou Archaeological Project, 2016. Stable URL: https://opencontext.org/subjects/32a68285-ef4c-444d-8112-43239a033394


Figure 3. Three 3D Renderings of Under Life-Size Head of Cypriot-Herakles from Athienou-Malloura. Image by Kevin Garstki, 2016.

Figure 4. Reproduction of Hippopotamus (“William”). Ceramic with Paint and Glaze. 25.5 cm x 10.5 cm. Private Replica Collection, Dr. Jocelyn Boor.


Figure 5. Reproduction of Sumerian Cuneiform Tablet. Molded Resin. 6.7 cm x 6.7 cm. Private Replica Collection, Dr. Jocelyn Boor.


Figure 6. Reproductions of Madonna della Pietà (set of three). Molded Plastic. 8.5 cm x 9 cm. Private Collection.

Figure 7. Transport Amphora Ceramic, Africana IIA Type. Roman, ca. 2nd-3rd c. CE. 45.28 cm x 104.14 cm. UWM Art Collection, 1972.202.01.

Figure 8. Cypriot Bichrome Oinochoe. Ceramic. Cyprus, ca. 6th c. BCE. 15.24 cm x 20.32 cm. Gift of Jane Cohn Waldbaum and Steven L. Morse, UWM Art Collection, 2012.002.02.

Figure 9. License to Export Antiquities, No. 5602. Ink on Paper. 12.7 cm x 20.32 cm. Department of Antiquities, Republic of Cyprus, 1968. UWM Art Collection Archive.
Figure 10. Christ Pantokrator. Tempera and Gold Leaf on Wood. Greek, ca. 16th c. CE. Artist Once Known. 28.58 cm x 44.78 cm. Gift of Emile H Mathis II, UWM Art Collection, 1983.002.02.

Figure 11. Reproduction of Byzantine Icon of St. Constantine and St. Helen. Cyprus, ca. 2000 CE. Printed Page on Wood. 13.3 cm x 21.5 cm. Private Collection.
Figure 12. Self Portrait in Velvet Cap with Plume. Etching and Drypoint. Dutch, 1638 CE (1st state of 3). Rembrandt van Rijn. 10.16 cm x 13.18 cm. Gift of Emile H. Mathis II, UWM Art Collection, 2012.002.0292.

Figure 13. Restrike of Self Portrait in Velvet Cap with Plume. 20th. c. CE (3rd state of 3). 10.16 cm x 13.34 cm. Gift of Emile H. Mathis II, UWM Art Collection, 2012.002.0302.

Original: Etching, 1638. Rembrandt van Rijn.
Figure 14. Reproduction of Warrior from the East Pediment of the Temple of Aphaia, Aegina. ca. Late 20th c. CE. Plaster. 13.5 cm x 33 cm. Private Collection.

Original: Marble. Greece, ca. 5th C. BCE. National Archaeological Museum, Athens, Greece, NAM 1933.
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