



# Copies, Concepts and Time

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## Abstract

Copies are defined by their relation to an original. The understanding and evaluation of this relationship has been changing over time. A main argument of this article is that originals and copies are phenomena with no “natural” or essential meaning outside of their specific historical settings. The idea to be explored is how changing historicity regimes have transformed notions of originals and copies over time and how these differences also are reflected in the intrinsically temporal relation between the two concepts. The discussion will be framed by two theory sets. The first is Alexander Nagel and Christopher Wood’s investigation of two kinds of temporality that vied for dominance in works of art in the late Middle Ages and the Renaissance. The second is Walter Benjamin’s discussion of artwork in the “age of mechanical reproduction”, i.e. the twentieth century. The second half of the article seeks to add to the historical complexity described by both theory sets by introducing a concept of tradition and discussing the early modern ideals of exemplarity, emulation and copiousness.

**Keywords:** Changing notions of originals and copies, *Copia*, Historicity regimes, Temporality

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## Copies, Concepts and Time

Copies are relational. They have to be copies *of* something. The relation that defines them is fundamentally hierarchical as it situates the copy as secondary to the original. It is also temporal because the copy comes after the original. Finally, it is normative, in the sense that the original sets the norms that the copy has to adhere to in order to be a “good” copy and to be successful in the relationship. However, this comparatively simple set of suppositions houses a range of tensions and ambivalences. The relation between original and copy invites negotiation and struggle. Moreover, it has changed over time. If not totally historically contingent, neither the relation between them nor the terms in themselves have been understood in the same way throughout all periods of Western culture. Today, this relation is being challenged by digital copies and new technologies, and, as this article explores, the hierarchy between the original and its copies is certainly not a stable entity that has been handed down unchanged from the past.

In contemporary culture, originals and copies define a semantic field loaded with values – cultural, moral and economic – and norms. Viewed together, the two concepts address distinctions between right and wrong, good and bad, true and false, appearance and essence. Their relationship concerns issues of faith and betrayal, confidence and crime, legitimacy and illegitimacy, honesty and deception. At the same time, tensions and shifts will appear that complicate the structure of the relation as well as the values that define it. A single example can serve to illustrate the potential for ambivalence: A “good copy”, one that is faithful and true to its original, is also one that is honest about its own nature as a copy. It does not seek to pass for the original, but keeps its place in the hierarchy. However, if the copy is too good, i.e. so much like its original that its nature as a copy is hidden or invisible, it is no longer “good” in the moral sense. It becomes a fake – an illegitimate copy – passing falsely as the original. Surpassing itself, it also trespasses on the border between right and wrong. The same object can thus be (visually, technically) good and (ethically, economically) bad at the same time, in both cases as a copy, and in both cases defined by its relative position in the network of meanings and valuations.

The relations that are implied in this play of meaning, values and norms can be approached discursively, with the original as a “nodal point” or privileged signifier that organises and determines the meaning and relations of the surrounding signs (Jørgensen and Phillips 1990). Relevant as this perspective might be to a denaturalisation of the concepts and the values they are allowed to represent, discourse theory will not dominate the following investigation. What will be examined here are the concepts and their relation in a historical context. The original and its copies cannot only be seen as moments in a given discourse (synchronously), they also represent understandings and evaluations that have been produced and tran-

mitted historically. They have been given meaning in specific and different social and cultural contexts. One of the main arguments of this article is that originals and copies are phenomena with no “natural” or essential meaning outside of their specific settings. Shifting historical conditions have produced changes in conceptualisations and evaluations. At the same time, the meaning of the two concepts is in itself based on temporal structures. While temporal changes thus supply a historical context for the changes that are to be investigated, shifting notions of the meaning of time are also intrinsic to the meaning of the concepts.

The aim of the following discussion is not to present some kind of general over-view of the history of copies and copying. Instead, the investigations will centre on the effects and impact of different historicity regimes on the understandings of originals and copies. The French historian François Hartog, who has coined this term, describes historicity regimes as theoretical constructs that can be classed alongside Weber’s ideal type as formal categories. “Depending on whether the category of the past, the future, or the present is dominant, the order of time derived from it will obviously not be the same. Hence certain behaviors, certain actions, and certain forms of historiography are more possible than others, more—or less—in tune with the times, untimely or seemingly perfectly timed” (Hartog 2015: xvi). The notion of historicity regimes should above all be used heuristically, he argues, and is a good fit for comparative studies. Hartog is emphatic that historicity regimes cannot in themselves be observed empirically. He also underscores that they “do not come in a series, one mechanically following another, whether these are understood as sent from heaven or emanating from the earth” (Hartog 2015:xvii). Thus, he points out, they are not, for instance, identical with the “stages” so often called upon in early modern universal history. His careful omission of references leaves the impression that his term is not intended to be understood as structures like Foucault’s *epistemes*. The experience of temporality that defines the regimes will nonetheless also acquire specific cultural expressions, and Hartog directs his attention to

... the categories that organize these experiences and allow them to be spoken; and more precisely, on the ways in which these universal categories or forms we call “the past”, “the present” and “the future” are articulated. How are these categories, which partake both of thought and of action, actualized at different times, and in different places and societies, and how do they make possible and perceptible a particular order of time? (Hartog 2015: 17)

A certain seriality nonetheless pervades Hartog’s description of the regimes. For many centuries, he claims, the European experience of temporality was domina-

ted by the category of the past. Only during the nineteenth century did a future-oriented temporal experience gain ground. Among other things, this produced the modern academic discipline of source-based, critical history. It can be added that this was also the “classical age” of public museums. In our present world, a new change is taking place, according to Hartog, and a new historicity regime, dominated by what he calls presentism, is emerging.

The perspectives developed by Hartog provide a means to explore and denominate the experience of temporality and its implications in different cultural contexts (cf. Eriksen 2014). The idea which is explored in this article is how changing historicity regimes have transformed notions of originals and copies over time and how these differences are also reflected in the intrinsically temporal relation between the two concepts. This discussion will be framed by two theory sets, presented in the two subsequent sections. The first is Alexander Nagel and Christopher Wood’s investigation of two kinds of temporality that vied for dominance in works of art in the late Middle Ages and the Renaissance. The second is Walter Benjamin’s discussion of artwork in the “age of mechanical reproduction”, i.e. the twentieth century. Between them the models discussed by these authors describe the beginning and the peak of modernity in the Western world, respectively. They might, therefore, be taken to represent the two poles of one coherent development. However, none of these authors has the intention of contributing to simple linearity. Nagel and Wood take a decided stance against the traditional Panofskian idea of Renaissance art as a break with the past and the beginning of new progress, and insist on presenting a more complex and nuanced picture of the period. Benjamin describes a development initiated by modern technology – through his terminology “mechanical reproduction” – but remains ambivalent in his interpretation of this as liberating or destructive for art. The final sections of this article seek to add to the historical complexity that both theory sets describe. To do this, a concept of tradition will be introduced and the early modern ideals of exemplarity, emulation and copiousness will be discussed.

## **I. Substitution and Performance**

What is an original? Or rather, what is its history? The art historians Alexander Nagel and Christopher Wood locate the emergence of the idea of the original in a process that took place over a long period of time, from the Middle Ages and into the Early Modern period (Nagel and Wood 2010). An expressed aim of their work is to question the traditional idea in art history of the Renaissance as a rupture, and as the birth of a truly modern understanding of art that included the use of the central perspective and a corresponding temporal perspective based on an understanding of time as style. This implied a new concept of the anachronism. As

an alternative to this model, Nagel and Wood present the idea that two different understandings of a work of art, and the way it relates to time and incorporates temporality, existed more or less as parallels over a considerable span of time. The one, which they call substitutional, goes back to the Middle Ages and beyond, while the other, called performative, only slowly and gradually emerged. It was this performative mode that generated the idea of the original as we still think of it today. Consequently, the model presented by Nagel and Wood is not only relevant to the history of art in the period they discuss, it also has a more general significance. The model does not only emphasise the historical specificity of the idea of the original artwork, it also insists on the longevity of the substitutional mode and consequently on the dynamic relation between the two.

Objects that represent the substitutional model are described by Nagel and Wood as ones which are able to retain “[their]its identity despite alteration, repair, renovation, and even outright replacement” (Nagel and Wood 2010: 8). They explain that the substitutional model

proposed the perfect interchangeability of one image or work for another. Under this model, the work did not merely repeat the prior work, for repetition proposes difference, an altering interval. Rather, the work simply *is* its own predecessor, such that the prior is no longer prior, but present.” (Nagel and Wood 2010: 11)

Their book *Anachronic Renaissance* elaborates on this understanding through a series of investigations of artworks that have set this model into play, each work having been understood simultaneously as unique and as a token and a link in a chain unbroken by time despite fundamental material change:

To perceive an artefact in substitutional terms was to understand it as belonging to more than one historical moment simultaneously. The artifact was connected to its unknowable point of origin by an unreconstructible chain of replicas. That chain could not be perceived; its links did not diminish in stature as they receded into the depths of time. Rather, the chain created an instant and ideally effective link to an authoritative source and an instant identity for the artifact. (Nagel and Wood 2010: 30)

One central example in their book is icons, where modern copies of ancient paintings long were understood as surrogates for lost originals. They also investigate the case of new buildings which were understood as re-instantiations of prior, ancient structures. Their argument is that the apparent “misdating” of these build-

dings during the medieval and early modern times and the corresponding understanding of them as very ancient, did not stem from ignorance or lack of historical knowledge. Rather, it was based on specific ideas about how art incorporates time. Nagel and Wood underline that “there is a mystical dimension to substitutional logic, a conviction of the real, and not merely symbolic, link between event and event, and between artifact and artifact” (Nagel and Wood 2010: 33). They argue that this substitutional logic was not a superstitious or primitive way of thinking, effectively uprooted and replaced by more advanced understandings in the Renaissance.

As they describe its complexity and capacity to weave together separate points of time, the substitutional model appears not only as powerful, but also as elaborate and refined in the ways it makes authority materialise in time and independent of time. The model also renders how the uniqueness (or originality) of an object will reside in the unbroken identity and in the capacity of the substitutional chain to keep original qualities and meanings alive in a constant presence – rather than in the material object itself. In the present context, it is also highly important that this model has no place for copies, nor really for originals, as the concept is commonly understood today. On the one hand, each physical object or structure is a copy of the lost original type. On the other hand, each copy *is* at the same time this original, kept afloat in an eternal present. By collapsing the temporal hierarchy that is fundamental to the modern understanding of an original and its copies, the substitutional model also cancels the relationship that defines them to us. The substitutional logic demonstrates that other temporal bonds between the objects can be historically possible.

Parallels can easily be noted between the substitutional model described by Nagel and Wood and the figurative or typological thinking identified by Erich Auerbach and shown by him to have been developed in early patristic literature: The entire Old Testament was interpreted to prefigure the New. Auerbach writes that this method of interpretation, elaborated on in abundant detail, represents an approach to human and historical phenomena that is radically different from our modern approach:

The typological interpretation combines two events, causally and chronologically remote from each other, by attributing them a meaning common to both. [I]n order to explain the significance of a single historical event, the interpreter had to take recourse to a vertical projection of this event on the plane of providential design by which the event is revealed as a prefiguration or a fulfillment or perhaps as an imitation of other events. (Auerbach 2014:116)

Auerbach goes on to emphasise that in this process of interpretation, “neither the prefiguring nor the prefigured event lose their literal and historical reality by their figurative meaning and interrelation” (Auerbach 2014: 117). The typological model is thus not one of allegories or symbols. As is the case with the substitutional model in Nagel and Wood, both elements remain fully real, while they at the same time stand in for each other. In both cases, moreover, the temporal dimension is of another kind than that of modern historical thinking, which makes it possible to link objects and phenomena together in other ways. It should be noted, however, that the substitutional model in its way is still chronological: It is an explicitly ancient object that is maintained in a constant present. The typological thinking goes even further in sidestepping historical causality, weaving meanings, objects, figures and events back and forth through time.

Nagel and Wood contrast the substitutional model with the performative, which, they argue, treats temporality in a different way. The performative mode lets objects derive all their meaning from their anchorage in time. These are works “credited to an author, an individual who ‘originates’ or ‘founds’ (Latin *auctor*, from *augere*, ‘to increase’), that were most tightly tethered to a point in time. Such works testified to their author” (Nagel and Wood 2010: 14). Nagel and Wood point out that

the painting, like its talented author, has one body that can never be duplicated. The painting’s resistance to duplication allows it to dominate time. The author intervenes in time by performing the work [...] To describe the authored work as a performance is to emphasize its punctual, time-sensitive quality.” (Nagel and Wood 2010: 15)

Their argument shows that a work whose authenticity and authority resides in this kind of temporal specificity can only be copied, not substituted. The other work will always come after, and for this reason its creation can never be identical with the original performance. Trying to appear so will make it a forgery. Humbly admitting its secondary character may make it a respectable copy. The structure of the performative mode is what creates the hierarchy that was described in the introduction to this article.

Nagel and Wood’s main argument is that in Renaissance art these two competitive models of origins and temporality were held in suspension. A large number of images and buildings from the late medieval and early modern period were built on a paradox, they claim: “the possibility that a material sample of the past could somehow be *both* an especially powerful testimony to a distant world *and* at the same time an ersatz for another, now absent artifact” (Nagel and Wood 2010: 31, italics in original). The two authors are reluctant to say that the performative

model finally conquered or that it represented a kind of watershed in European art history. What is important in the present context is, nonetheless, that this model supplies the fundamental structure of the understanding of the original and its relationship to copies that is being taken for granted today. As it is described by Nagel and Wood, time and temporality are at the very core of this structure.

What defines the original itself is the way it relates to time and incorporates time. It is its fixity in time that makes the original original and it is the unique performance of a specific individual in a specific context that creates originality as well as authority. Hence, all other objects, however much they might look like the original, will not share this position, and therefore be reduced to copies, replicas, models and so on. While the chain of objects suggested by the substitutional model stretches out across time and space making each object an equally valuable rendering and at the same time making copies an irrelevant issue, the performative model does the opposite: Temporal fixity defines the original as unique. This structure is also what defines both specific and generic fakes. Seeking to pass for an original, a specific fake will claim to be an outcome of the very performance that gave birth to the original in question. A generic fake, on the other hand, presented as an unrecognised work of some great artist, will not attempt to seize upon a point in time that is already occupied by another work. Instead, it will claim a temporal fixity of its own, passing as the result of another, but as an equally unique performance by the same artist.

## II. The Auratic Original

It is not difficult to see that the defining qualities of the performative model as described by Nagel and Wood strongly resemble Walter Benjamin's definition of his term *aura*. To Benjamin, what gives an original work of art its unique auratic qualities is precisely its "here and now", which "has no replica" and is fundamentally tied to its situation of origin. To explain his term Benjamin proposes a comparison between the auratic uniqueness of historical objects and that of natural objects, and defines it as "a strange weave of space and time: the unique appearance or semblance of distance, no matter how close it may be." The examples given with this definition are mountains and a branch observed "at rest on a summer's noon ... until the moment or the hour becomes part of their appearance..." (Benjamin 1999).

The aura, then, is defined as a unique quality given by distance and fixity. It is also this aura which, according to Benjamin, is threatened in the "age of mechanical reproduction". The numerous and easily accessible copies that are made available through modern technology of mechanical reproduction do away with both the distance and the uniqueness of the object. It is no longer fixed in time and

place, but can move around seemingly freely. The more copies, and the easier the accessibility, the less remains of the aura.

There have been many heated discussions on Benjamin's theory and its implications. It can be read as part of a more general critique of modernity, or as a comment on the totalitarian regimes of his time, and their production and use of mass culture. It can also be regarded as an expression of more or less romantic nostalgia, a lamentation of the loss of common traditions and magic – a disenchantment of the world. On the other hand, Benjamin also discusses the gradual loss or dissolution of aura as a liberating process, emancipating objects and people alike (Benjamin 1999). Without their aura, the objects also lose much of their traditional authority. Their position as ideals or models is no longer uncontested. In this way, the waning aura opens for the emergence of new cultural expressions and for new agents to announce their presence.

Even Benjamin's model includes temporal processes and relations. On the one hand, it describes a development that takes place in time, a gradual decline from an idealised state in the past to a historical change in the present, regardless of whether this decline is understood as lamentable or liberating. On the other hand, it also identifies the auratic state with the object's fixity in (distant) time. This is what defines the original in contrast to the mechanical reproductions, which for their part are not defined by their moments of creation. They are not seen as the products of a specific point in time and could be said to lack the unique "here and now" which defines the original. Benjamin does not go into the more precise reasons for this, but it seems probable that the sheer multitude of copies, made possible by the mechanical reproduction, is in some way thought to obfuscate their actual moment of production, or at least deprive it of its defining implications.

Despite the central role temporality plays in Benjamin's model, he does not seem to regard the original in itself as a historical concept, but rather as a natural – albeit threatened – species. In contrast to Nagel and Wood he does not consider the idea of the original to be historically conditioned or contingent. The auratic original may be in the process of disappearing from the world, but in Benjamin's argument it does not ever seem to have been in the process of *entering* it. Its own origin is relegated to a timeless "before".

Benjamin's presentation of the auratic object may thus appear as the ultimate triumph of the performative model as it is described by Nagel and Wood. The auratic object steps forward as an original that has now become a fully naturalised species, liberated from any processes of historical change. Nonetheless, between the early modern notions discussed by Nagel and Wood and Benjamin's auratic objects there is no straight and unidirectional development. One of the main reasons for this is the lasting artistic practices of imitation, emulation and elaboration, not least of classical forms and ideals. The following sections will contribute

to the discussions in Nagel, Wood and Benjamin by exploring these practices and ideals and examining their implications for the understanding and evaluation of originals and their copies.

### **III. Imitation, Tradition and Exemplarity**

For many centuries in European history, learning to become an artist meant spending years copying the works of one's predecessors and classical art. Despite the importance of the performative model, as described by Nagel and Wood, and the respect and position gained by the great masters, whose names fill the textbooks in the art history that we read today, a place in the workshop or studio of one of them long represented a respectable and far more common career path, even for well-schooled painters and sculptors. In our modern museums, labels with "school of" or "after" attached to artworks still reflect this practice. Such works are in some ways exempt from the logic imposed by the performative model. If a name is stated on these labels, it is most often not that of the actual painter or sculptor, but of the one whose "school" has produced it, or whose work it has been made "after". Moreover, if the work is dated, this is often somewhat approximate. In a world of auratic originals, works of this kind fail to correspond fully to the valid categories, which makes them confusing and obscure. They may not be exact copies and they are not fakes, but neither can they be recognised as fully performative creations. They are the products of another logic of artistic performance and another historicity regime than that of the modern world.

The logic behind "school of" and "after", and similar phrases, is that of tradition and exemplarity. It represents a way of thinking that recognises the authority and value of the original. The original still represents a unique creation and an intrinsic temporal fixity. It is a specific work made by a specific person at a particular moment in time, and it cannot be changed for another. However, ascribing exemplary value to this work also provides it with a far-reaching agency and great powers to shape the works that come "after". Consequently, these works do not only follow the original in time, they also seek to follow it as an example, as a model to learn from, to imitate and emulate. Doing so, they constitute a link in a chain of tradition and are, at the same time, a tribute to that tradition.

As a pedagogic principle, imitation was thought to give the skills to work in the style of the great classical artists and the ability to learn from the most admirable models. As a result, the artist would develop his own creative powers and his ability to work independently. As pointed out by Gordon et al. in a study of Protestant humanism in Zürich, imitation was not only training in judgment but also "a means of self-discovery through a method of reading and writing that drew deeply from history and historical contexts" (Gordon et al. 2016: 14–15). Mor-

ever, the aim of this work was not merely mechanical copying. Emulation was as important as simple imitation. Elements of contest and a potential for change were involved and, in principle at least, it was possible to surpass the models that one imitated. They could be reworked and remoulded into something even better and more perfect. Whatever the actual outcome of the practice, the works that were produced represent copiousness rather than copies. Imitation created versions, replicas and variety. As pointed out by Terence Cave, the word *copia* was far more frequently used than copy in early modern writing. In rhetoric, this term was closely linked to the principles of imitation and emulation, and referred to the abundance and variety of arguments that a skilled orator held at his command (Cave 1979). The result of the traditional practices of imitation, and intrinsic to the ideas behind them, was abundance rather than mere copies.

Imitation of ancient models was nonetheless also a debated issue among European humanists. What did it actually imply? Did an exact imitation of Cicero's speeches actually mean imitating Cicero's eloquence when so many centuries had passed? How would Cicero have expressed himself if he had lived in the sixteenth century? The issues raised by Erasmus' *Ciceronianus* (1528) led to passionate discussions, which in turn have been thoroughly explored in later research. The early modern debates have been seen as expressions of an emerging sense of historicity, expressed through a growing awareness of problems of anachronism (see for instance Cave 1979, Scott 2009, Gordon 2016, and for theoretical perspectives, Schiffman 2011). As such, they represent a close parallel to the development of the performative mode, as described by Nagel and Wood. In the present context, it should be noted that the understanding of temporality, and thus of anachronism which structured much of the debate, still differ from our modern understanding. It was not the value of imitation of classical models that was contested, but rather the possibility of achieving it. The models from the past were still ascribed authority and exemplarity. Being aware of anachronism did not imply stopping to revere the past, but the discovery of some fundamental problems in reaching it.

The early modern regime of historicity remained oriented towards the past. Tradition may be a useful concept to explore to understand its temporal dimension and its implications for copies and copying. The term tradition can be understood as designating specific cultural goods that are transferred over time and "passed down" from generation to generation. It can also be defined as a cultural *process* that takes place over time and includes the transmission of cultural goods. This process refers to the past, draws on it and imbues it with authority. Tradition can thus be defined as the normative workings of the past in the present, tending towards cultural stability – real or claimed (Handler and Linnekin 1984; Eriksen 1994; Bauman 2004). In actual fact, the process of transmission most often also comprises reworkings, elaboration, invention and negotiation. Even the "singer

of tales” who most eagerly protests his or her faithfulness to an oral tradition will invariably confer changes upon it, as shown for instance in the now classical work of Parry and Lord (1965) and Walter Ong (1982).

It should be noted, nonetheless, that there is more to the processes of communication or transmission than just the degrees of change – intended or not. Richard Bauman has pointed out that tradition is “a discursive and interpretive achievement, the active creation of a connection linking current discourse to past discourse” (Bauman 2004: 147). He describes this activity in terms of mediation from a source to a target, “processes and routines in which recontextualization is deliberately managed [and] conventionally regimented” (Bauman 2004: 130). The effect of these carefully staged reiterations is an enactment of authority:

The mediator’s replication of the source utterance, by preserving its integrity and displaying special care in its reproduction, amounts to an act of discursive submission, the subordination of present discourse to discourse that emanates from the past. Moreover, I would suggest, submission to the *form* of the source utterance has a concomitant effect on the *rhetorical power* of the text: upholding the integrity of the form opens the way to acceptance of the validity of the message. (Bauman 2004: 153)

The process of transmission which defines tradition thus implies imitating a model from the past that is held in high esteem, and doing so in a way and according to such methods that the authority of the model is transferred to the new work. Even though it is not fully identical with its model, or even claiming to be so, the new work will gain acceptance and be valued both as representing the model and as being different from it. The new work is a version, a variant, a re-phrasing or reworking. Considering it a mere copy would mean reducing its richness as well as the creative vitality that it embodies.

#### **IV. The End of Exemplarity?**

Hartog emphasises that the historicity regimes that he describes should not to be regarded as models following and replacing each other in some kind of linear development in the Western world. Nonetheless, one of his sources of inspiration is Reinhart Koselleck and his investigation of the European *Sattelzeit*, i.e. the period approx. 1750–1850, and the emerging modernity in this period. According to Koselleck, a new experience of time and temporality was fundamental to the changes that occurred in mentality, society and intellectual life. Koselleck argues that the topos of history as *magistra vitae* – the teacher of life – dissolved during

this period. Going back to Cicero, who is acknowledged to have coined the term, this notion of history as a collection of models or examples to learn from is based on ideas of stability and identity: It is because things do not fundamentally change that past events and persons can work as models for the living and the present (Koselleck 1985). Even if anachronism was “discovered” and discussed in the early modern period, it was towards the end of the eighteenth century that more fundamental problems made themselves heard: The past was not just difficult to reach and the models correspondingly difficult to fully understand – the past lost its relevance. Its authority to shape the present was waning. Koselleck’s theories have been discussed and contested. Did the *magistra-vitae* topos dissolve, change, disappear (e.g. Phillips 2000; Jensen 2003)? Hartog’s concepts offer perspectives rather than definitive answers. He argues that the regime of historicity which came to dominate in the modern world was future-oriented. Of course, the past did not disappear, nor totally lose its meaning. But its significance and authority changed. In Hartog’s investigation, François-René Chateaubriand is the figure to represent these changes. Both as a historian and writer, he embodies the new, romantic ideals (Hartog 2015: 65–95).

The nineteenth century saw the emergence of the modern discipline (or disciplines) of history. This meant critical, source-based studies of the past carried out by means of specific methods developed in the academic world. The same period saw the establishment of public museums, which were not only larger and more generally accessible than older princely or other collections, but which also took much of their pride in possessing objects that were simply old. Much of their acknowledged value stemmed from their age and “period”, which often became more important than their beauty or exemplary character. The objects told a story of development, progress, history and change, of a movement from the past to the present and potentially into an open-ended future. Finally, and just as important, this period was also the age of new artistic ideals that praised individual, erupting and original creativity above the ability to imitate old masters. The past was cherished for its pastness, not for its exemplary value.

This produces another relationship to the past than the renaissance preoccupation with anachronism did. It also creates another type of originals and copies. It can be said to generate the kind of auratic object described by Benjamin. This object is defined through a fixity in time that to a high degree resembles the performative mode of Nagel and Wood. What has changed is the nature of time, so to speak, or rather, the position of the past. An original created within the frames of a performative model is fixed in a past that is in a living relationship to the present. It is endowed with powers that reach beyond its immediate temporal setting. It can work as an example to be followed, a model to be imitated. Even if its temporal fixity defines it and cannot be reproduced in a copy, some of its traditional au-

thority can be conferred to later works through imitation. This is not the case with the auratic originals described by Benjamin. Defined by their “here and now”, such objects are not only fixed in time, but linked to it. In the present – which is their own future – they can be admired for their age, authenticity and aura, but the exact point of all these qualities is that they cannot be transferred into the future. Their very remoteness is their primary nature. They can only be reproduced in a process that is doomed to omit the aura.

## **V. Presentism, Heritage and True Abundance**

Is that really so? Benjamin’s notion of the aura and its implications for the production of copies, facsimiles and new media versions has been vigorously criticised by Bruno Latour and Adam Lowe. They argue that rather than chasing the aura of the original, we should approach copies and new versions with an assessment of whether or not they are well made. If they are, their aura, or rather the feeling of authenticity that they evoke and the aesthetic experience they may produce, can well exceed that of a musealized and scientifically conserved original (Latour and Lowe 2011). Their contention is that the “obsession for pinpointing originality increases proportionally with the availability and accessibility of more and more copies of better and better quality” (Latour and Lowe 2011: 278). This implies that the value of an original is created by the existence of copies, not by the original as such. Copies are proof of fecundity, of abundance, while a work without such offspring or inheritors “is not called original, but rather sterile or barren” (Latour and Lowe 2011: 279). Just as copies are relational, so are originals. Works become originals by being copied. A work of art, for instance a painting, can be ancient, rare, beautiful and well made, but as long as no copies exist, it is just an old image. Insisting on calling it an original seems somewhat odd as long as no copies are known.

Latour and Lowe write in defence of high-quality digital copies, but their line of argument can also be used to discuss more precisely how copies make originals. What defines the relations, and by what means does the copy confer value on the original? It can be inferred that copies work by contrast, by some kind of othering process, but what are the exact mechanisms? Distance, difference and distribution are key concepts. The distance is obviously temporal – the copy does not share the original’s unique moment of birth, but has been created at some later moment. However, this also relates to the quality of the copy. Measuring it against that of the original, and finding it inferior, the copy also enhances the quality of the original-and of course, the distance may be spatial. This can be a matter of pure geography – a copy of the Louvre’s Mona Lisa found in an art museum in quite another part of the world – but it can also be a matter of different kinds of

space. The protected original in the museum appears more valuable if the museum shop is brimming with its reproductions or when its web-pages are frequently visited. This point leads us to the issue of distribution and quantity. The more copies available and in circulation, the more value is assigned to the original. Range of distribution tends to have the same effect. And finally, difference: the copy has to look like the original for the relation to be established at all, but does not need to be the same size or material. A copy of a painting does not need to be a painting itself. It can be a photographic reproduction, and the image may be transferred to t-shirts, tote bags and tea towels rather than to flat surfaces resembling the original's canvas or panel. Once again, increased variety – copiousness – is not only an indication of the great value ascribed to the original but also a means to create it.

As pointed out by Latour and Lowe, this abundance of copies and the corresponding highlighting of originals are the products of modern technology. It may also appear as the ultimate realisation of the future of technological reproduction envisaged by Benjamin. However, large parts of it depend on a development of digital media that Benjamin could not possibly have foreseen. It is equally important that the contemporary abundance of copies can also be said to belong to another regime of historicity than that of Benjamin's period. His ideas seem to correspond well to the experience of time and the future-oriented temporal structure of modernity, which today may have been superseded by a regime of presentism. Hartog defines this as an extreme and immediate historization of the present or the very close past, and describes it as “[t]he contemporary experience of a permanent, elusive and almost immobile present, which nevertheless attempts to create its own historical time” (Hartog 2015: 17f). One of the strategies employed in this effort to create historical time is the construction of heritage, motivated by the experience that it may soon be too late, and that the past – even the near present – is falling apart due to the acceleration of continuous change (Hartog 2015: 166). This argument accords with the more general idea in modernisation theory, interpreting returns to history, traditions or religion as answers to the loss of meaning, or even ‘deprivation’, caused by modernity. However, the presentism of heritage work can also be understood in less negative terms, not as a compensatory response to the experience of loss, but as the genuine expression of an experience of temporality that is distinctive of our own time.

Hartog underscores that the notion of historicity regimes should be used heuristically, not diagnostically. The regimes are not empirical phenomena to be discovered “out there”, but represent perspectives that may bring analytical insights. The present article has set out to argue that copies as originals, as well as the wider semantic field that these terms are parts of, can be best understood historically, in the double sense that their meaning and relations have changed over time, while the terms in themselves also carry an intrinsic temporality. Their relation to each

other, which is fundamental to their respective meanings, is based on temporal positions: They come before or after each other, and they gain their authority or lack of such through a temporal fixity or through fluidity and reciprocal reference. This field of temporal relations, which assigns different values to the different elements that constitute it, is in itself subject to historical change or rather to changes in ways of understanding time and in the ways of connecting time, exemplarity, value and copiousity.

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