

Languages of Art

Chapter III

ART AND AUTHENTICITY

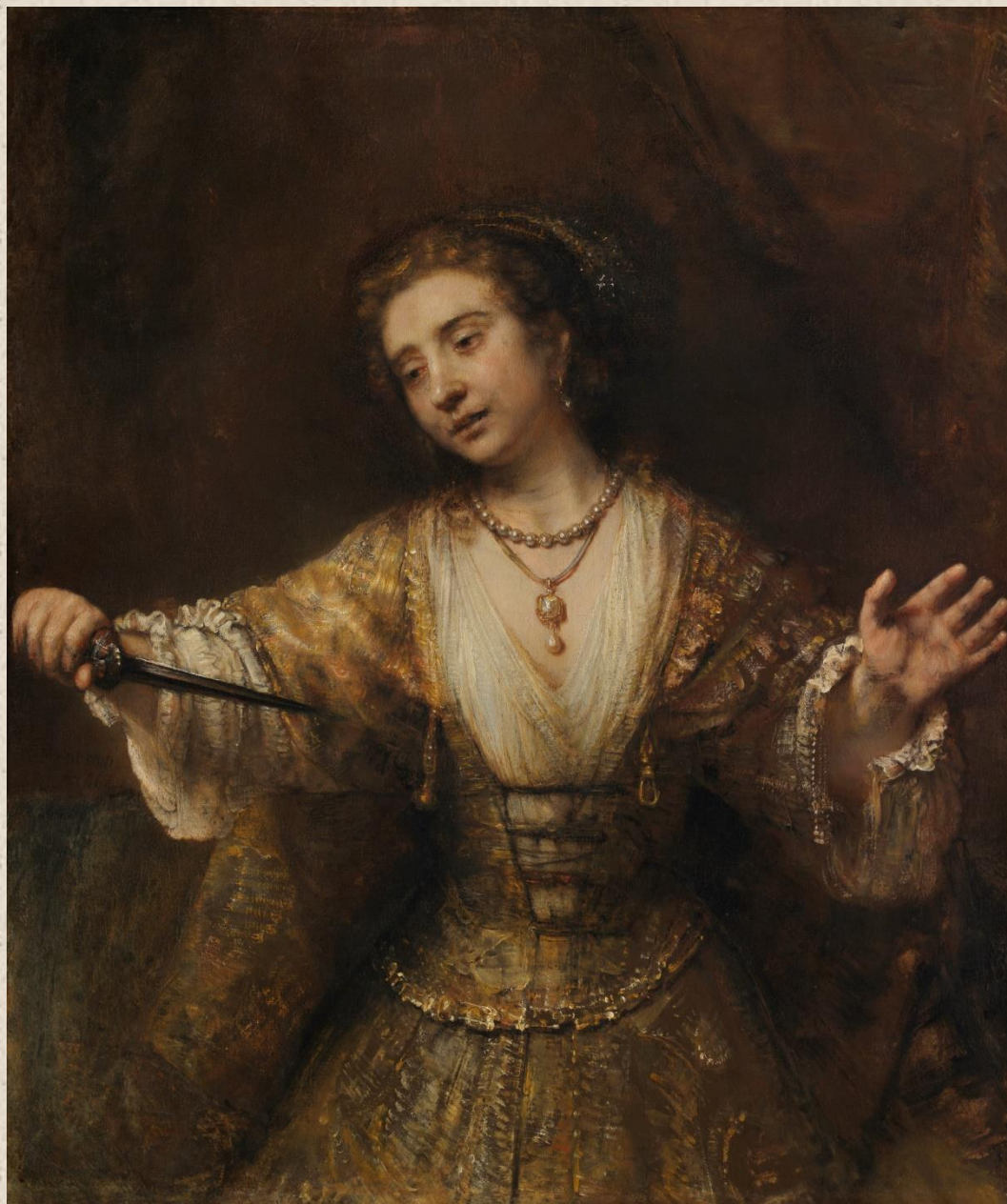
The Problem of Authenticity

- Chapter III of *Languages of Art* is devoted to problems in the **ontology** of art. Ontology is the branch of philosophy that studies Being, and the kinds of entities that exist. (Intuitively, I exist in a different way than the number 3, the character 嘉, a Dürer woodcut, or Sherlock Holmes – if he exists at all...)
- An important task for an ontology of art is to determine **conditions of identity** of artworks. Under what circumstances may two given objects be considered the same artwork – that is, an **authentic** instance of that artwork?

The Problem of Forgery

“Although there are many differences between the two – e.g., in authorship, age, physical and chemical characteristics, and market value – we cannot see any difference between them; and if they are moved while we sleep, we cannot then tell which is which by merely looking at them. Now we are pressed with the question whether there can be any aesthetic difference between the two pictures; and the questioner's tone often intimates that the answer is plainly no, that the only differences here are aesthetically irrelevant.”

(Goodman 1968, 99)



Rembrandt, *Lucretia* (1664)



Paolo Veronese, *The Wedding at Cana* (1562-63)



Replica of Veronese's *The Wedding at Cana*, Basilica di San Giorgio Maggiore, Venice

Referential vs. Inventive Forgeries

- Jerrold Levinson (1980) distinguishes between **referential** and **inventive** forgeries.
- **Referential forgeries** are deceitful copies of an existing work.
- **Inventive forgeries** are works purporting to be an original of a work that does not exist, either by an existing or non-existing artist.
- Goodman hints at the distinction (1976, 99): he starts discussing Van Meegeren's forgeries, which are inventive, but then asks us to focus on cases such as that of a forgery of Rembrandt's *Lucretia* (a referential forgery).

Referential vs. Inventive Forgeries

“[...] forgeries are of two main types. We can call the first type *referential* forgery and the second type *inventive* forgery. Something is a referential forgery if it falsely purports to be the or an original of a particular *actually existing* work of art. [...] A referential example in painting world be a forgery of Giorgione's *The Tempest*. In referential forgery, there always exists some genuine work which the forgery *is of* (and thus, in a loose sense, refers to). Something is an inventive forgery if it falsely purports to be the or an original of a work which *does not exist*, and whose ascribed artist may not exist either. [...] A well-known inventive example in painting would be the numerous 'Vermeers' of Van Meegeren.”

(Levinson 1980, 377)



Han Van Meegeren, *The Supper at Emmaeus* (1937)

The Problem of Forgery

“Thus the critical question amounts finally to this: is there any aesthetic difference between the two pictures for x at t , where t is a suitable period of time, if x cannot tell them apart by merely looking at them at t ? Or in other words, can anything that x does not discern by merely looking at the pictures at t constitute an aesthetic difference between them for x at t ?”

(Goodman 1976, 102)

Skepticism about “merely looking”

- In line with his constructivist position, Goodman does not believe that aesthetic appreciation can be based on “merely looking” at pictures, that is, on way of looking at pictures that isn’t conditioned by what we know about them, and by our discriminatory abilities.
- In fact, even the impossibility of a perceptual discrimination between two apparently identical pictures cannot be determined by merely looking at them.
- What we can determine by looking at two apparently identical pictures, is that *we* are unable to distinguish them *now*.

Seeing and Knowing: the Question

- Goodman asks us to consider the differences in the way we would look at two pictures we cannot distinguish (in the sense he specified), knowing that one is the original, and the other is not.
- Note that Goodman uses examples from the domain of sight (looking at pictures), but what he is saying is valid for perceptual experience in general.

“The more pertinent question is whether there can be any aesthetic difference if nobody, not even the most skilled expert, can ever tell the pictures apart by merely looking at them. *But notice now that no one can ever ascertain by merely looking at the pictures that no one ever has been or will be able to tell them apart by merely looking at them. [...]*

“Thus the critical question amounts finally to this: is there any aesthetic difference between the two pictures for x at t , where t is a suitable period of time, if x cannot tell them apart by merely looking at them at t ? Or in other words, can anything that x does not discern by merely looking at the pictures at t constitute an aesthetic difference between them for x at t ?”

(Goodman 1976, 101-2)

Seeing and Knowing: the Answer

- Goodman mentions three main differences:
 - (1) We look at the two pictures knowing that we may in fact come to see how they differ.
 - (2) The experience of looking at the two pictures assumes the role of discriminatory training: we look at the two pictures trying to find out how they differ from one another.
 - (3) Knowledge about the two pictures determines a set of relevant associations that have an impact on our experience of these pictures.
- “This knowledge instructs me to look at the two pictures differently now, even if what I see is the same. Beyond testifying that I may learn to see a difference, it also indicates to some extent the kind of scrutiny to be applied now, the comparisons and contrasts to be made in imagination, and the relevant associations to be brought to bear. It thereby guides the selection, from my past experience, of items and aspects for use in my present looking.” (Goodman 1976, 104-5)

Imperfect Copies

- Why are copies that are almost indiscernible still not acceptable substitutes for an original?
- According to Goodman, this is because even the slightest difference can have a bearing on the aesthetic properties of an artwork.
- If we do not have a principled way to determine whether a feature is essential or not to a work of art, then we cannot rely on copies of it, no matter how close these may be to the original.

“Indeed, the slightest perceptual differences sometimes matter the most aesthetically; gross physical damage to a fresco may be less consequential than slight but smug retouching.”
(Goodman 1976, 108)

Goodman against Formalism

- Formalist views hold that the appreciation of art should not be mediated by concepts or other cognitive resources (knowledge about a work's production process, awareness of other works from the same artist or period, etc.)
- Goodman reject this view in light of the considerations he develops in the first part of Chapter III: what we know about a work of art shapes considerably the way we look at it.

“[...] since the exercise, training, and development of our powers of discriminating among works of art are plainly aesthetic activities, the aesthetic properties of a picture include not only those found by looking at it but also those that determine how it is to be looked at. This rather obvious fact would hardly have needed underlining but for the prevalence of the time-honored Tingle-Immersion theory, which tells us that the proper behavior on encountering a work of art is to strip ourselves of all the vestments of knowledge and experience (since they might blunt the immediacy of our enjoyment), then submerge ourselves completely and gauge the aesthetic potency of the work by the intensity and duration of the resulting tingle.”

(Goodman 1976, 111-112)

Originality vs. Value

- Goodman is careful in distinguishing issues related to the **identification** of artworks from those related to their **evaluation**. To say that a work is an original and another a copy is not to say that the former is artistically more valuable than the latter (though this may often be the case.)

“All I have attempted to show, of course, is that the two pictures can differ aesthetically, not that the original is better than the forgery. In our example, the original probably is much the better picture, since Rembrandt paintings are in general much better than copies by unknown painters. But a copy of a Lastman by Rembrandt may well be better than the original. We are not called upon here to make such particular comparative judgments or to formulate canons of aesthetic evaluation.” (Goodman 1976, 109)

Autographic vs. Allographic

- Goodman notes that artworks belonging to some art forms seem impossible to forge (for example, music and literature).
- The impossibility of forgeries in these cases is not a practical or technical one. Rather, it depends on how these art forms determine the identity of artworks.
- If an art forms admits of forgeries, it is **autographic**, otherwise it is **allographic**.

Autographic vs. Allographic

“Let us speak of a work of art as *autographic* if and only if the distinction between original and forgery of it is significant; or better, if and only if even the most exact duplication of it does not thereby count as genuine. If a work of art is autographic, we may also call that art autographic. Thus painting is autographic, music nonautographic, or *allographic*.”

(Goodman 1976, 113)

One-stage vs. Two-stage

- The contrast between autographic and allographic art forms is not the same as that between **one-stage** and **two-stage** art forms.
- **Two-stage** art forms are those that require some sort of execution or performance for an artwork to be accessible once it is completed. For instance, printmaking requires printing from a plate, and music requires performance. Arts that do not require such a step are **one-stage** art forms.

One-stage vs. Two-stage Art Forms

“One notable difference between painting and music is that the composer's work is done when he has written the score, even though the performances are the end-products, while the painter has to finish the picture.” (Goodman 1976, 113-14)

- Is literature one-stage or two-stage?

Singular vs. Multiple

- The contrast between autographic and allographic arts is also not reducible to that between **singular** and **multiple** art forms.
- **Singular** art forms are those in which there is a single object that is the work of art (for instance, painting). Art forms are **multiple** if more than one object can count as a given work of art (for example, music or literature).
- **Printmaking** is an example of an autographic/multiple art form.



Marcantonio Raimondi, *David and Goliath* (1515-16)

Autographic vs. Allographic Arts

- While useful, the distinctions between one-stage/two-stage and singular/multiple art forms do not help us defining the autographic/allographic dichotomy.
- Goodman observes that autographic arts are “singular in their earliest stage”. (1976, 115). But this isn't helpful, as the problem is exactly to explain why some art forms are singular, rather than multiple.

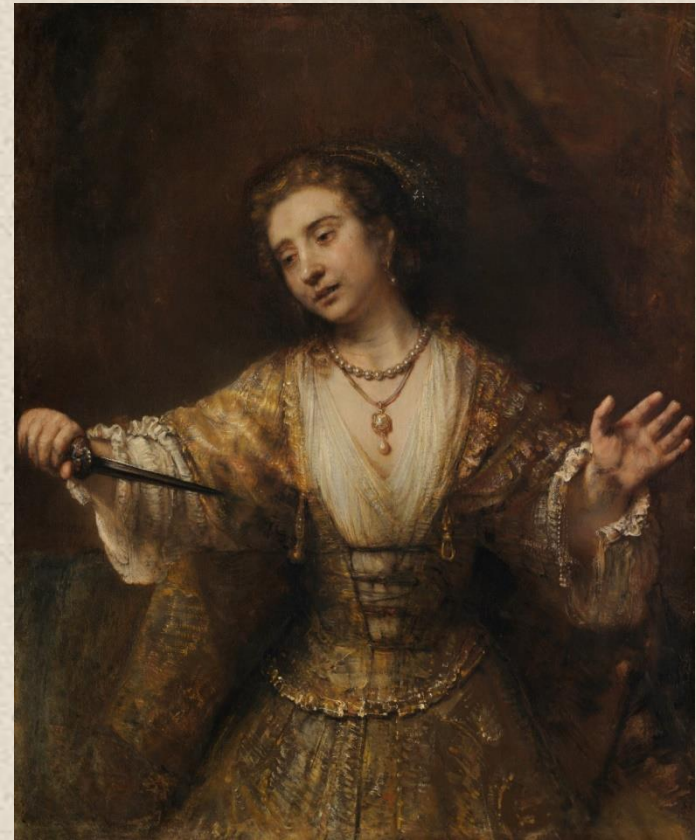
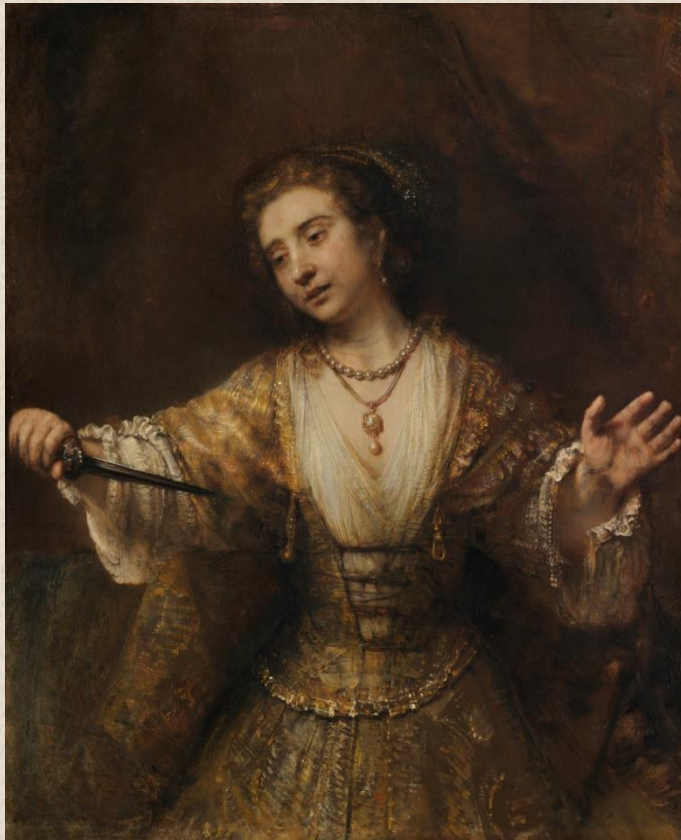
Autographic vs. Allographic Arts

“About the only positive conclusion we can draw here is that the autographic arts are those that are singular in the earliest stage; etching is singular in its first stage – the plate is unique – and painting in its only stage. But this hardly helps; for the problem of explaining why some arts are singular is much like the problem of explaining why they are autographic.”

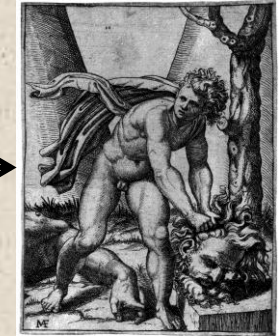
(Goodman 1976, 115)

The Role of Notation

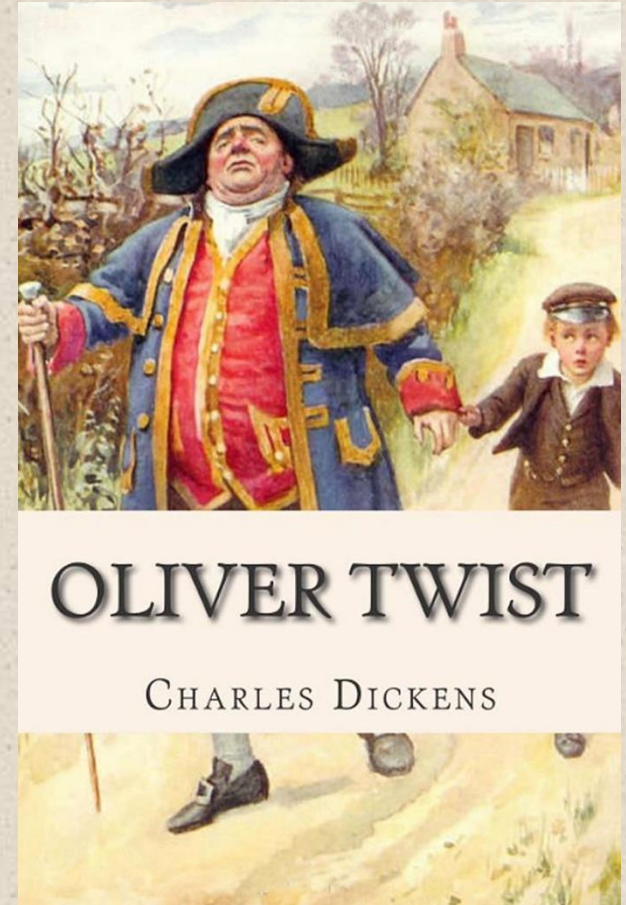
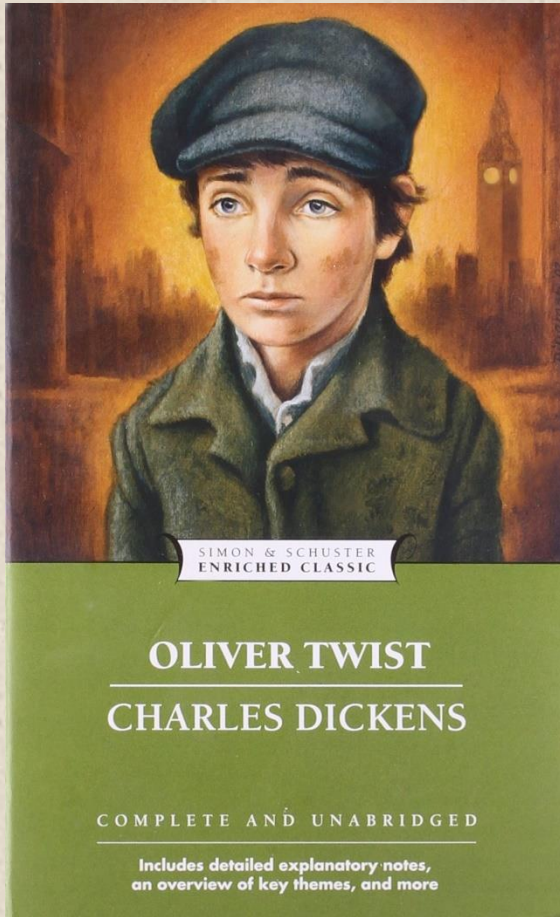
- In the final part of Chapter III, Goodman suggests that the difference between autographic and allographic arts depends on the role of notation.
- A notation has the primary function of identifying properties that are **constitutive** of the work (that is, essential to it), from properties that are **contingent** (a work may or not possess them). (1976, 116) Once an art form develops such a notation, it becomes allographic.
- Autographic arts are those that do not have such a notation. In this case, the identity of an artwork is determined by its **history of production**. (1976, 122)



ONE-STAGE AUTOGRAPHIC ART. “The only way of ascertaining that the *Lucretia* before us is genuine is thus to establish the historical fact that it is the actual object made by Rembrandt. Accordingly, physical identification of the product of the artist's hand, and consequently the conception of forgery of a particular work, assume a significance in painting that they do not have in literature.” (Goodman 1976, 116)



TWO-STAGE AUTOGRAPHIC ART. From an original plate, various impressions are produced. An impression counts as original only if it is produced from the original plate.



ONE-STAGE ALLOGRAPHIC ART. Different copies of a work of literature count as the same work, provided that the text they contain is the same.

CONCERTO No. 2
in E major, S. 1042
for Violin and Piano*
JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH
(1685-1750)

Edited by WAN GALAMIAN

Allegro.
Tutti

VIOLIN

performance 1

CONCERTO No. 2
in E major, S. 1042
for Violin and Piano*
JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH
(1685-1750)

Edited by WAN GALAMIAN

Allegro.
Tutti

VIOLIN

performance 2

performance 3

performance 4

CONCERTO No. 2
in E major, S. 1042
for Violin and Piano*
JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH
(1685-1750)

Edited by WAN GALAMIAN

Allegro.
Tutti

VIOLIN

performance 6

performance 5

TWO-STAGE ALLOGRAPHIC ART. From different copies of the score for a work W, different performances of W are produced.

Autographic and Allographic Arts

AUTOGRAPHIC

Painting
Printmaking
Sculpture
Dance (?)

ALLOGRAPHIC

Music
Literature
Architecture (?)

The Role of Notation

- The arts may have been all autographic at first, but with time notational systems emerged, establishing which properties were to count as essential for a given work.

“[...] definitive identification of works, fully freed from history of production, is achieved only when a notation is established. The allographic art has won its emancipation not by proclamation but by notation.” (Goodman 1976, 122)

A Theory of Notation

- Goodman has established that the difference between autographic and allographic arts resides in the role play by notation.
- To further examine the differences between the individual arts, a theory of notation is required. This is developed in Chapter IV.