

Freeland's *Art Theory*

Chapter 7 – “Digitizing and disseminating”

Chapter overview

- Chapter 7 discusses the role of technology in the production and appreciation of art.
- Modern technology allows us to appreciate art in ways that were unavailable to previous generations. What is the impact of this on the appreciation and value of art?
- Walter Benjamin (1892-1940) was perhaps the first philosopher to investigate these questions.
- Technological changes may affect the way we produce art. Philosophically, this is interesting because it may introduce changes in the kind of objects artworks are. For example, a painting can be only in one place at a given moment, whereas a photograph can be found in two or more different places simultaneously. These are **ontological** difference between art forms.

Technology and artistic reproduction

“Around 1900 technical reproduction had reached a standard that not only permitted it to reproduce all transmitted works of art and thus to cause the most profound change in their impact upon the public; it also had captured a place of its own among the artistic processes.” (Benjamin 1936, I)

- First, Benjamin is interested in the impact of technology on the availability of art to the masses. If art can be reproduced with ease, more and more people can appreciate artworks in a variety of art forms.

Technology and artistic production

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- Second, Benjamin notes that modern technology has also allowed for the development of new art forms, which essentially rely on it. Chief among these are photography and film.

Benjamin on art and technology

- Benjamin observes that technology has eliminated the **authoritative role** of the original artwork.
- For example, on the **reproduction** side, mechanical reproductions of a painting allow everyone to appreciate it, whereas manual copies of it would be poor substitutes for the original.
- On the **production** side, photography allows us to print countless photographs from a single negative, and “to ask for the “authentic” print makes no sense” (Benjamin 1936, IV).

The aura of artworks

- Benjamin calls 'aura' the authority of the original object. He seems to understand this authority in both **ontological** and **appreciative** terms.
- The original artwork is authoritative in the ontological sense, because it makes sense to distinguish between an original and mere copies or reproductions.
- The original artwork is authoritative in the appreciative sense, because only the original provides us with the aesthetic experience of the artwork.
- According to Benjamin, technology has challenged the authority of the original in both of these senses.

“The authenticity of a thing is the essence of all that is transmissible from its beginning, ranging from its substantive duration to its testimony to the history which it has experienced. Since the historical testimony rests on the authenticity, the former, too, is jeopardized by reproduction when substantive duration ceases to matter. And what is really jeopardized when the historical testimony is affected is the authority of the object.

One might subsume the eliminated element in the term “aura” and go on to say: that which withers in the age of mechanical reproduction is the aura of the work of art.”

(Benjamin 1936, II)

Autographic vs. allographic arts

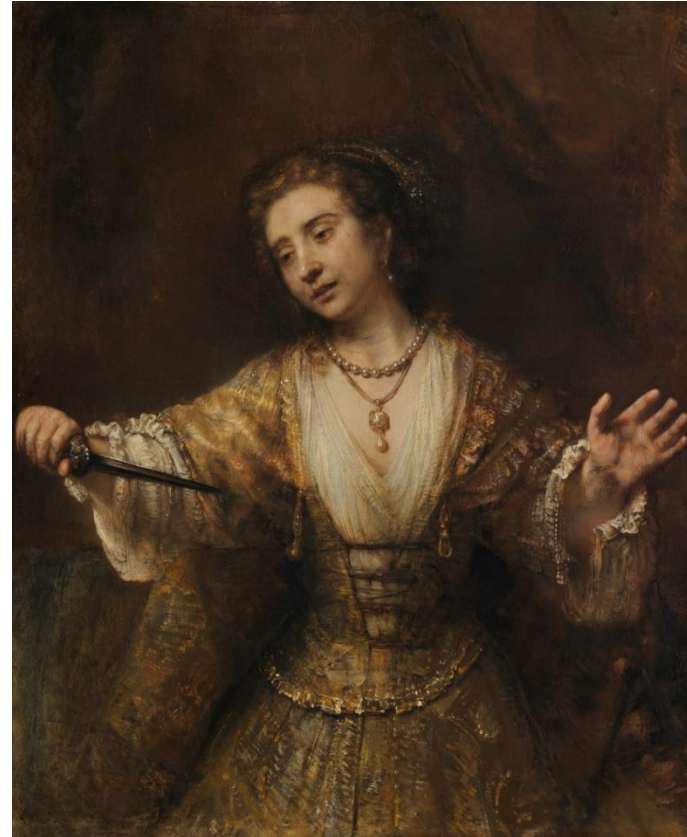
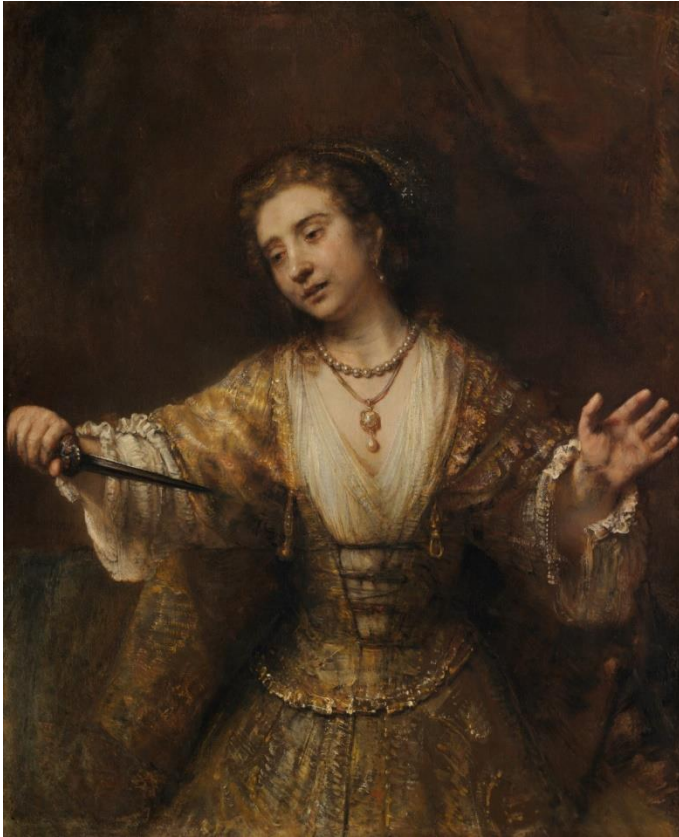
- The American philosopher Nelson Goodman (1906-1998) introduced a distinction between **autographic** and **allographic** arts.
- Goodman noted that it is impossible to produce a **forgery** (贋品) of artworks belonging to some art forms (for example, music and literature). The impossibility of forgeries in these cases is not a practical or technical one. Rather, it depends on how these art forms determine the identity of artworks. In other words, it depends on the **identity conditions** for artworks in a given art form.
- If an art forms admits of forgeries, it is autographic, otherwise it is 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 1968, 113)

Singular vs. multiple arts

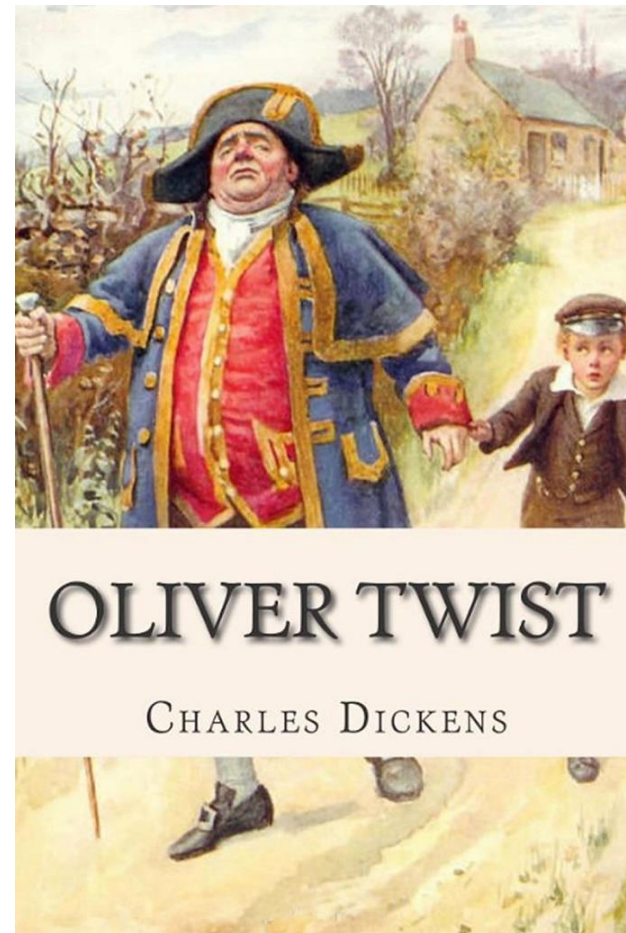
- The contrast between autographic and allographic arts is *not* reducible to that between **singular** and **multiple** art forms.
- **Singular** art forms are those in which there is a single, unique object that is the artwork (for instance, painting). Art forms are **multiple** if more than one object can count as an instance of a given artwork (for example, music or literature).
- For example, **printmaking** (版画) should be considered an autographic/multiple art form. Any of the multiple impressions obtained from the original plate counts as an authentic exemplary of that print, but it is still possible to forge the work by producing a counterfeit plate.



Painting (autographic singular). “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 1968, 116)



Printmaking (autographic multiple). From an original plate, various impressions are produced. An impression counts as original only if it is produced from the original plate.



Literature (allographic multiple). Different copies of a work of literature count as the same work, provided that the text they contain is the same.

Autographic vs. allographic arts

AUTOGRAPHIC

Painting
Printmaking
Sculpture
Dance (?)

ALLOGRAPHIC

Music
Literature
Architecture (?)

The role of notation

- Goodman considered **notation** to be of crucial importance in the distinction between autographic and allographic arts.
- 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** to it (that is, properties a may or may not possess) (Goodman 1968, 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).

“[...] 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 1968, 122)

“In sum, an established art becomes allographic only when the classification of objects or events into works is legitimately projected from an antecedent classification and is fully defined, independently of history of production, in terms of a notational system. Both authority and means are required; a suitable antecedent classification provides the one, a suitable notational system the other.”

(Goodman 1968, 198)

Technology and auto/allographic arts

- The distinction between autographic and allographic art forms has interesting relations to the technological production and reproduction of art.
- Consider **painting**. Although technology has made available high-quality reproductions of paintings, this does not mean that it has erased the distinction between original and copy. One could say that it has expanded our capacity to **appreciate** originals (through their copies), but it has left the **ontology** of painting unmodified.
- Technology may also contribute to the development of notations that enable new allographic arts to emerge. **Digital painting** may be one such case.



Sherri Levine, *After Walker Evans* (1981)