

Editorial

The value of forgery

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Art historians usually present theoretical ideas through the concrete analysis of specific artworks; in some circumstances, though, theoretical abstraction can provide an alternative and more effective approach to a problem. Forgery, the subject of this essay, raises issues of art historical significance so remote from art history's normal concerns that the analysis of specific artworks would necessitate theoretical discussion at almost every point. Faced with the choice between narrowing the focus of the essay to accommodate concrete analyses or abandoning the discussion of specific forgeries in order to explore the full implications of the overall argument, I have opted for abstraction. With this decision have come both benefits and challenges. A plus, from my point of view, is that theoretical abstraction permits some procedures that art history hates; above all, it allows one to make axiomatic assumptions and to invent concepts. A challenge, however, is that the absence of concrete analysis raises the bar in terms of the internal coherence of the argument (which is presented naked, so to speak). More importantly, one is also making a bet that the argument will be sufficiently compelling in terms of its conceptual pertinence to inspire readers to test it out against their own experience of forgeries. If this essay leads the reader to see forgeries differently, then it will have succeeded.

I want to make a case for seeing forgeries as art. I shall be arguing that this is both possible and desirable, but that it requires us to conceptualize artistic value differently from usual. A further theme of the essay is that the framework within which forgery makes sense as art can be extended to any kind of art, potentially decentering our understanding of the history of art in general. Invention emerges as an alternative to innovation in the assessment of artistic value—this, I believe, is one of the theoretical shifts that will be necessary if the discipline of art history is to move beyond its founding Eurocentrism. The present essay is related to several other theoretical pieces of mine, which I cite at various points. Although I did not start out with this goal in mind, I eventually saw that a discussion of forgery could serve to draw together the different strands of my larger theoretical project,

which is centered on relationality. I see relationality as a fundamental organizational feature of contemporary life; correspondingly, I believe that art history needs to acknowledge relationality methodologically in order to be fully relevant. In a recent essay in *Art Bulletin*, which was constructed around the analysis of a single Chinese ink painting, I argued for a relational theory of the artwork in terms of the many kinds of mediating work that art does.¹ I develop that argument further, for a different type of artistic production, in a forthcoming book on Chinese decorative arts.² Other of my essays have argued for relational approaches to diachronics—the history side of art history—and to the problem of the intercultural, as well as to the historiography of art history.³ Forgery first drew my attention in the diachronic context when I realized that forgeries of African sculpture intended for the Western market could usefully be described as a paramodern phenomenon, in the sense that they operate at once inside and outside conventional Western ideas of modernity.⁴ Here, however, I make a general theoretical argument on forgery, bringing the discussion back to the art side of art history and to the core issue of value.

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1. Jonathan Hay, "Interventions: The Mediating Work of Art" and "The Author Replies," *Art Bulletin* 89, no. 3 (September 2007): 435–463 and 496–501.

2. Jonathan Hay, *Sensuous Surfaces: The Decorative Object in Early Modern China*, forthcoming from Reaktion Books.

3. Jonathan Hay, "Toward a Theory of the Intercultural," *RES: Journal of Anthropology and Aesthetics* 35 (Spring 1999): 5–9; "Toward a Disjunctive Diachronics of Chinese Art History," *RES: Journal of Anthropology and Aesthetics* 40 (Autumn 2001): 101–111; "The Diachronics of Early Qing Visual and Material Culture," in *The Qing Formation in World-Historical Time*, ed. Lynn A. Struve (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Asia Center, 2004), pp. 303–334; "The Functions of Chinese Painting: Toward a Unified Field Theory," in *Anthropologies of Art*, ed. Mariet Westermann (Williamstown, Mass.: Sterling and Francine Clark Institute of Art, 2005), pp. 111–123; "Double Modernity, Para-Modernity," in *Modernity and Contemporaneity: Antinomies of Art and Culture after the Twentieth Century*, ed. Nancy Condee, Okwui Ewenzor, and Terence Smith, forthcoming from Duke University Press.

4. Hay, "Double Modernity, Para-Modernity" (*ibid.*).

The forgery: classically, an artwork that fraudulently passes itself off as genuine. Forgery: deceit in the space of art. Art history has never been comfortable, though, with the corollary of the second proposition—that forgery is art in the space of deceit. The discomfort shows in the ambiguous status that it attributes to the forgery, treating it as a kind of aesthetic pornography or deviance—attractive, of course, to a few adventurous souls.⁵ Pornographically, so to speak, the forgery defines in negative the territory of proper concern to art history—the history of genuine art. But there is a fly in the ointment. The understanding of the artistic past that artists and artisans possessed has often been contaminated by the unrecognized presence of forgeries in the artistic archive. This happened all the more easily because not all forgeries start life as such: forgery is a fraudulent *claim*, and the claim may be made on behalf of an artwork long after it comes into existence, sometimes by altering it physically. Moreover, this interference of the forgery in the history of genuine art is doubled by forgery's interference in modern understanding of that history. Despite art history's best efforts to exclude forgeries from its narrative, they refuse to stay out, finding their way into publications and museum displays more often than most would like to admit. This double problem, small perhaps in terms of the overall shape of art historical narrative, is less small in terms of the narrative's internal consistency at any given point. To a greater or lesser degree, depending on the area, the coherence of the modernist history of genuine art depends on elision of the feedback loop through which forgery intervened and continues to intervene in the space of the genuine. The largely unacknowledged role of forgery in the history of art recurrently places a parallax at the center of art historical narrative—a parallax that is one of the necessary blind spots of current art historical practice. To embrace forgery's status as art in the space of deceit, then, is to imagine an art history that could accommodate the parallax.

The empty set of art

Is it possible to think of forgery differently, outside the frame of criminality (the false original) or deviance (the copy's "evil twin," in Alexander Nagel's memorable characterization)?⁶ To do so would require a different

starting point from either the original or the copy. Here's one: the forgery, once it is recognized as such, has no author; more precisely, *it has no author function, no authorship*. The purported author is the author of a genuine work, not a forgery; that illusory authorship evaporates the moment the forgery is recognized for what it is. The producer or producers of the artifact, for their part, have only performed authorship. As long as the forgery takes people in, the forger does not exist; once it is unmasked, there is a forger but not an author, because to be an author the forger would have to be himself. In rare cases—Han van Meegeren in Europe and Zhang Daqian in China come to mind—there has been a scholarly attempt to recognize retrospectively the forger as an author. But turning the forger into an author comes at the price of stripping the artwork of its status as forgery. A forgery, it seems, cannot be recognized to be a forgery and also have authorship.

In this it differs from the many forms of *apparently* authorless art. The miraculous icon, for example, lacks a human author, yet it is not devoid of authorship: The divinity represented has authored the icon as a potential receptacle for itself. Similarly, in a copy culture that replicates and disseminates miraculous icons, there is room for coauthorship, the artist functioning as a medium of divine revelation. More generally, without regard to historical period or cultural context, I will claim that every explicit copy is coauthored. It makes no difference whether the copyist is unknown, can be identified, or made his identity known. Coauthorship is equally indifferent to whether the original artist is known, unknown, or misidentified. Nor does it matter where the copy is located on the spectrum that runs from replica to free copy. "Copyist," like "artist," is a potential fulfillment of the author function, and the only feature that separates copy cultures where artworks reiterate a rare artistic event from cultures in which such events have become the norm is that copy cultures

characterizing it as the copy in "metastasized" form, the copy's "evil twin." For Nagel, the history of the forgery shadows the history of genuine artworks, but stays separate; the feedback loop goes unmentioned. In Nagel's argument, the forgery is by definition modern, a collateral effect of a new emphasis around 1500 on performativity and the uniqueness that resulted. Previously, there was a copy culture in which there had been no function for forgeries because there was no concept of the work as an event. Once art became associated with performativity, the forgery became inevitable. Yet, as Nagel acknowledges, the art forgery has a far longer history in China (which had its own copy culture). In China, forgery was a byproduct of collecting, which is why it started so early. If that were not also the case in the West, it would be a remarkable cultural difference.

5. See, for example, Alexander Nagel, "The Copy and Its Evil Twin: Thirteen Notes on Forgery," *Cabinet* 14 (Summer 2004):102–105.

6. Nagel (*ibid.*) bypasses the frame that opposes the forgery to the genuine original. Instead, he sets the forgery against the copy,

did not make a clear distinction (or sometimes any distinction) between these two contrasting conditions of authorship.⁷ In Chinese painting, where there was a joint regime of copying and performativity from an early date, the category of “substitute-brush” works provides a distinctive example of unstable but never voided authorship. Where the role of the substitute brush is not recognized, authorship goes to the artist in whose name the work was executed and who may or may not have signed it; where it is recognized, the assumption is that the author is potentially identifiable. As for the related category of the workshop product, here without regard to cultural context I would argue that it has merely been deprived of its original authorship by modern connoisseurship (potentially to be given a new one). At the time of its production, the author of such a work was the artist from whose workshop it came—a case in which it is perhaps useful to speak of authorship at a weaker degree of intensity than in an autographed work or, exceptionally, at an equal degree. The anonymous original is a further and more obvious example of the author-deprived work, a work in search of its lost authorship. Finally, contemporary conceptualist withdrawals from, or disavows of, authorship come closest to true authorlessness in the sense that the final work lacks an author. But to the extent that the meaning of the work depends on the audience making the connection to a prior stage in which authorship was still potentially in play, such interventions succeed only in problematizing authorship (which is already a lot).⁸ In short, then, the forgery *qua* forgery alone institutionalizes the possibility of art without authorship, and it does this by making the author function *structurally* impossible.

The absence of a dependable author function helps to explain further art history’s institutional resistance to

the idea of art in the space of deceit. Art history may welcome the death of the author when it knows that there is still an author function; not so when authorship remains from first to last out of sight and out of reach. The fact that in production terms “the forger” may be a composite of several people, not necessarily working together, or even living at the same time, is nowhere near as troubling as the impossibility in the end of assigning authorship to a recognized forgery. The absence of an author function destabilizes because it deprives the beholder of the possibility of situating and recognizing herself in the artwork. If art can float free of authorship, not only does the humanist expectation that encounter with the artwork has an interpersonal dimension dissolve, but also art can no longer be assumed to function as communication on a straightforward transmitter-receiver model. Deprived of authorship, the art historian finds herself staring into a void that is most easily filled with questions: Is this really art? And if it is, who cares? After all, was not one’s response to the work as art just a delusion from which one has now awoken?

A first answer to these questions would take into account the way in which the discovery that an apparently genuine artwork is in fact spurious reconfigures one’s response. It can be viscerally unpleasant to reencounter a work by which one was fooled, but this may have more to do with the embarrassment that it now triggers than with the new configuration of formal characteristics to which one has been educated. One of the lessons of a connoisseur’s apprenticeship is to learn, by accumulating experiences of being duped, that a work does not lose its capacity for affective interest on this side of its ontological transformation from genuine to fake. A good forgery retains the capacity to beguile even in the face of being unmasked. To invoke Alain Badiou’s subtractive approach to ontology, could forgery, then, be considered to be something like the *empty set* of art, a zero-degree relation in which the void of authorship nonetheless produces artistic value?⁹ (I write “something like” because otherwise the question would be a strictly philosophical one, whereas here I want to pose it art-historically, which is to say, pragmatically.) There is much at stake in the question, because if forgery is, metaphorically speaking, that empty set, then it points toward a different horizon of value than the one with

7. I borrow the term “copy culture” from Nagel (see note 5).

8. Thomas Crow notes with regard to one conceptual artist, Christopher D’Arcangelo: “D’Arcangelo’s obscurity as an individual creator was willed by him from the start. In one important group exhibition at Artists Space in 1978—which helped to launch his co-participants toward wide acclaim—his contribution consisted in the removal of his name from the installation, catalogue, and publicity. No intervention could have caused greater difficulties for the critic and historian, in that any precise citation of D’Arcangelo’s piece would destroy the grounds of its existence; indeed, it is probably impossible to cite the contributions of the other three artists in light of his participation without doing the same (silence will be maintained here).” Crow, “Unwritten Histories of Conceptual Art,” in *Art after Conceptual Art*, ed. Alexander Alberro and Sabeth Buchmann (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press; and Vienna: Generali Foundation, 2006), p. 62.

9. For Alain Badiou’s extension of the mathematical concept of the empty set into philosophy, see his text “The Question of Being Today,” in *Theoretical Writings*, ed. and trans. Ray Brassier and Alberto Toscano (London and New York: Continuum Books, 2004), pp. 39–48.

which art history usually operates—an implication I shall explore at the end of this essay. Short of considering forgery to be the empty set of art, the only coherent alternative, it seems to me, is to refuse outright the forgery's claim to artistic value by refusing the idea that art can have an empty set (art without authorship) at all. Modern art history's treatment of the forgery, however, is revealingly incoherent in this regard. It shrinks from declaring forgery to be non-art while still allowing the taint of non-art status to attach to it—a taint renewed by each ejection of an uncovered example of forgery as if it was an unwanted heckler. In these circumstances, it is worth making an explicit case for forgery as art in the absence of authorship. Whether the attempt succeeds (as I believe it can) or fails, it should in any event contribute to a more rigorous position than the current consignment of the forgery to a limbo state of deviance.

For art history, value, as I understand it, has classically consisted of the capacity of the artwork to transcend, first, its instrumental function and, second, its historical and cultural circumstances. (I am avoiding the term "aesthetic value" because its deference to philosophy obscures the specificity of art historical thinking on value, which is rarely articulated at a theoretical level.) Art history interprets transcendence prosaically, making the assumption that the artwork's capacity to speak to audiences far removed in time and space *passes by way of* its fulfillment of instrumental function and adequacy to its originating circumstances. In other words, value is not an autonomous aesthetic excess that can be floated free of function and circumstances, enabling its infinite variants to be captured and made available in, say, an unreflective version of the encyclopedic museum. Instead, it is the simultaneous operation of transhistoricity in historicity and of historicity in transhistoricity, a simultaneity that repeats itself in the relation of the infracultural to the transcultural. Consequently, artistic value—to give it its own name—can be difficult to ascertain, requiring the hard work that justifies the existence of a separate discipline of art history. Art history's pragmatic understanding of artistic value seems to me to possess a continuing validity and usefulness, even as the discipline's understanding of the historical and cultural specificity of art changes, and with it value's terms of reference. In the following discussion of the forgery as a limited case of value, I shall axiomatically assume art to be at once mediated communication and invention (the modification, moulding, or making of an affective world), each dimension enjoying a relative autonomy from the other. The communicational parameters of art, I shall further

assume, provide the conditions under which invention produces value.¹⁰

(Para)medium and (para)mediation

"Paraworld," Rachmael said, after what seemed to him an almost unendurably protracted interval, due to the drug.

"What is that?"

"That's what a weevil sees."¹¹

One way of describing the conceptualist turn in contemporary art is that it rethought the artwork as low-tech software. Although materiality has continued to be fundamental, its relevance has necessarily taken new forms, because on another level an effective dematerialization resulted, exposing visually perceptible objecthood to be an effect, not a property—an effect that moreover might not even be the major part of the artwork.¹² In a longer historical perspective, though, one might argue that by putting the conditions of art making on view, the conceptualist turn made explicit what had always been true; art was software from the beginning. Art has always plugged human beings into the world—the world conceived not as something entirely separate from us, but as a networked phenomenon to which we already belong. The software view of the artwork (not under that name) has been most thoroughly conceptualized by Niklas Luhmann in his theory of art as a social system, which is to say as a system of communication.¹³ Luhmann's systems theory characterizes artistic communication not on the closed-circuit transmission model but instead as an open, autopoietic system of differential functions. The artwork mediates communication through the systemic mechanism of functional self-differentiation. As a historical singularity, each artwork specifies its systemic character to the point of uniqueness—in my computer metaphor, a unique piece of software ready

10. The argument here modifies the one that I make in "Interventions" and "The Author Replies" (see note 1), where invention is subsumed under mediation. It would be equally possible to construct a corresponding argument in which mediation was subsumed under invention. It seems to me more useful to multiply than to unify vectors of analysis.

11. Philip K. Dick, *Lies, Inc.* (Vintage Books, 2004), p. 95. In Dick's novel, weevils are human beings in whom the brainwashing process accompanying their transfer to another planet has not been successful, leading to their criminalization and treatment with hallucinogenic drugs.

12. For the latter point, see Crow (note 8).

13. Niklas Luhmann, *Art as a Social System*, trans. Eva M. Knodt (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000).

for situational actualization. It is a precondition of meaning that the infinitely different programs of artwork incorporate a potential connectivity actualizable in different ways and at different degrees of intensity.¹⁴

Modifying Luhmann's argument in an art historical direction, I will suggest that, schematically, there are three basic ways to mediate communication, which together establish the terms of the artwork's functional self-differentiation. First, every artwork is a material intervention in the world, instituting a cut that marks it off as a system from its environment; at this level of function, it has some sort of thingness but also a relation to this thingness. This relation is the objecthood of the artifact; objecthood, in other words, is a kind of two-sidedness. Second, artworks are also presentational; that is, they institute a self-referential presence either indexically through the incorporation into a form of traces of their genesis or through the calculated institution of a perceptual (not necessarily visual) immediacy. Presentationally, artworks institute a second kind of two-sidedness, where the artwork is not only an object but also has a relation to its own objecthood. This relation might be characterized as one of embodiment, not only because it is directed to and sensed by the body, but also because the artwork itself becomes a kind of body. Third, artworks also refer, at which point we are in the realm of representation, where (in Luhmann's terminology) self-reference is joined by heteroreference. Representation, in this context, is a very broad function (analogous to discourse) that runs the gamut from diagrammatic signs to forms of illusionism that double the artwork's embodiment with a virtual presence, and may include nonvisual components as well. Here a third kind of two-sidedness operates in which the artwork is not simply an embodied presence but establishes a relation to its own embodiment. This relation is not necessarily one of re-presentation: in an early Chinese formulation, for example, here standing for a larger field of possibilities of cultural difference, it involves resemblance based on resonance between categories.¹⁵ In software terms, therefore, any artwork is a field of relations of two-sidedness, which in turn interfere with each other constructively or disruptively; that is, they institute a second order of relations among themselves.

14. For an attempt to rethink a specific artwork in these terms, see Hay, "Interventions" (note 1), *passim*.

15. Kiyohiko Munakata, "Concepts of Lei and Kan-lei in Early Chinese Art Theory," in *Theories of the Arts in China*, ed. Susan Bush and Christian Murck (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), pp. 105–131.

Forgery's special relation to the artwork's three functions of material intervention, presentation, and representation is best approached at the level of medium as art history understands this term.¹⁶ The mediational perspective on medium makes possible a more dynamic understanding in which, to extend the software analogy, mediums function as codes rather than programs; they provide parameters.¹⁷ Mediums stabilize themselves by prioritizing experientially the basic modes of the artwork's mediation of communication—mediations, for short. As I have argued elsewhere, mediation has its own autonomy that has relativized the materiality of medium since art began, even if one is especially aware of it today due to the dematerialization of contemporary art practice.¹⁸ The mediums I will cite as examples here come from my own area of specialization, Chinese art, and they will be described using the mediational concept of "scape," which I have introduced elsewhere to denote the crystallization of potentiality ("ground") in form.¹⁹ It is the situational primacy of a given type of scape that defines the family of mediations to which any given medium belongs. Freestanding architecture, for example, usually has a minor representational dimension, being primarily a material intervention (building) that is at the same time presentational (a palace hall embodies the imperial presence) and thereby creates what, for lack of a better word, might be called a *builtscape*. Yet not all builtsapes exclude representation: in the parallel tradition of subterranean mortuary architecture, for instance, the tombs often represent above-ground structures. This allows mortuary architecture to function as an extension of the depictive *imagescape* (two- and three-dimensional) of the tomb interior. Situationally, depending on how such architecture was experienced, it could be either builtscape or imagescape. The decorative arts are by and large similar to freestanding architecture in being independent on representation. True, they often incorporate depictive images into their surfaces, but what makes decoration its own specific mediation is the primacy of the artifact's topography of sensuous surfaces,

16. The qualification is necessary because Luhmann uses the term medium in a completely different way. See Hay, "The Author Replies" (note 1), pp. 496–497.

17. The code-program distinction is a mobile one that operates at different levels of the artwork. It is not specific to medium as art history understands it. See Luhmann (note 13), pp. 185–210. I have discussed the usefulness of the code-program distinction for art history in a review of Lothar Ledderose's *Ten Thousand Things: Module and Mass Production* in *Art Bulletin* 86, no. 2 (June 2004):381–383.

18. Hay, "Interventions"; "The Author Replies" (see note 1).

19. *Ibid.*

its *surfacescape*. Decoration is most fundamentally presentational, molding the space-time of the here and now.²⁰ In ink painting, in contrast, the presentational *surfacescape* may defer to the depictive *imagescape*, or the two may establish a dynamic tension. In literati ink painting, however, the *surfacescape* component may become instead an inscriptional *signscape*.²¹ In the last case, the model was calligraphy, which bequeathed to literati painting the *signscape's* underpinning—the indexical brush trace—though after about 1700, painters found ways to divest the *signscape* of the trace and merge it more directly with the *imagescape*.

Calligraphy itself is a special case, because although it is not visually representational, representation nonetheless does play a part via the text that is transcribed, which itself has a complex relation to orality. Today, calligraphy is considered to belong solely to the history of art but it is actually characterized by a more complex functional self-differentiation that escapes the modern (Western) division of the arts. Like the more complex phenomenon of literati ink painting, which combines text, calligraphy, and painting in a single fused system-environment, calligraphy is a medium in “para,” a *paramedium*. As J. Hillis Miller has put it, “A thing in ‘para’ . . . is not only simultaneously on both sides of the boundary line between inside and out. It is also the boundary itself, the screen, which is a permeable membrane connecting inside and outside. It confuses them with one another, allowing the outside in, making the inside out, dividing them and joining them. It also forms an ambiguous transition between one and the other.”²² *Paramediums* like calligraphy and literati ink painting cohere at the interface of the visual-material and textual-oral realms.

Forgery is neither a medium nor a *paramedium*; rather, it belongs to the other, mediational side of the equation. Yet it is not a straightforward mediation, either. Forgery is always, if it is possible to use the word in an unpejorative way, parasitical on the mediations that are operative in a given medium or *paramedium*;

as such it is a *paramediation* existing at the interface of different prioritizations and orders. The functional specificity of forgery comes most clearly into view in relation to representation, and more specifically, illusionistic representation. As noted earlier, illusionistic representation doubles the artwork's embodied presence with a virtual presence; in other words, it produces a second-order reality effect, a virtual reality. By extension, one way of specifying forgery's character as a mode of *paramediation*, therefore, is in terms of reflexivity—the reflexive virtualization of an apparently original artwork, producing an effect of authenticity. This authenticity effect functions as the basis for any other presence that the artwork establishes representationally or presentationally, whereas in a medium or a *paramedium* it would be the other way around. This kind of inversion of mediational priorities is a characteristic of *paramediation*. It is the reason why the forgery as a genre can be classed with the replica and the free copy, but not with an equally reflexive genre such as *trompe l'oeil*, given that the latter does not ultimately challenge the prioritization of functions in the mediums where it appears.

It is also possible to define forgery's *paramediation* without reference to reflexivity, by drawing on another of the key concepts of systems theory—orders of observing. For Luhmann, observation is understood to be a functional operation—the making of a distinction—that should not be reduced to the psychophysical act of attention as seeing or touch that mediates it. In fact, to the extent that observing as distinction-making is embodied in a form, the form can function as an observer, too, which can then be observed in its turn.²³ To the extent that second-order observation of a form is embodied in representation, the representation then functions as a higher-level observer, which is observed in its turn by the beholder. The two-sidedness of representation, its doubling of presence, can be restated in these terms as a system of relations between orders of observing. The temporary displacement of first-order observing (form) by second-order observing

20. I explore the decorative *surfacescape* in *Sensuous Surfaces* (see note 2).

21. Like all artworks, an ink painting is also a material intervention, though we lose all sense of the thingness of a painting when we see it in reproduction, cropped to its *imagescape*, rather than seeing it hanging as a scroll against a wall.

22. I owe this citation to Mark C. Taylor's *The Moment of Complexity: Emerging Network Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), p. 98. Cited by Taylor from J. Hillis Miller, “The Critic as Host,” *Deconstruction and Criticism* (New York: Seabury Press, 1979), p. 219.

23. “The forms of possible distinctions are innumerable. But when several observers select a certain distinction, their operations are attuned to one another. What they have in common is generated outside of the form in a manner that remains unspecified. (To call this shared space ‘consensus’ as opposed to ‘dissent’ would require another observer who employs just this distinction.) This common ground entails the prospect of a formal calculus that leads all participating observers to the same result. We can therefore say that the form is the observer.” Niklas Luhmann, *Art as a Social System*, trans. Eva M. Knodt (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), p. 54.

(representation) is the suspension of disbelief that makes fictionality possible. For fictionality to have artistic potential, though, a productive tension has to be created between the two orders of observation that will prevent second-order observing from taking over completely. The observation of this process at work is third-order observing (or meta-observation), which itself may perfectly well be incorporated into an artwork, rendering the system of observing even more complex. This is the case, for example, wherever an artwork is characterized by theatricality or irony, both of which have the capacity to vitalize whatever mode of mediation is in play, be it building, depiction, decoration, or inscription, and so on. In the cases of conceptual art and forgery, the incorporation of third-order observing becomes structurally fundamental. In the former, it is used disjunctively in a declared fashion in order to problematize the mediational dimension of the work. In forgery, on the other hand, third-order observing is left undeclared, in order to take priority over second- and first-order observing in secret. The disjunctiveness only appears when the forgery is recognized as such. Nonetheless, by virtue of the latent disjunctiveness of its orders of observing, forgery is, like conceptual art, a paramediation practice. Although the mode of paramediation certainly differs, from a historical point of view the forgery, along with the replica, may be said to be part of the prehistory of conceptual art (hence the appropriateness of appropriation as a conceptual art strategy).

Immanation

The void of authorship in forgery is thus filled by something increasingly familiar in the contemporary world: an effect of authenticity wedded to disjunctive third-order observing.²⁴ The paradox of the forgery is to be able to produce feeling from alienation, an affective potential that points to a modern context for forgery. In order to root the forgery more deeply in macrohistory, however, one has to look beyond the authenticity effects associated with alienation and take a detour in order to consider the *unalienated* conjunctions of authenticity effect and disjunctive third-order observing that on their face might seem to share little in common with forgery.

24. I am thinking of such developments as the internet virtual world known as "Second Life," identity theft, digitally altered photography, invented journalism and resumé, and Pixar animation. All of these have their prehistories, of course.

During a four-millennium history of mortuary art and architecture in China, the concept of the tomb as portal to an afterlife existence led at different times to the use of sculptural and pictorial representations, actual and substitute three-dimensional objects; the architecture of the tomb itself; and the corpses of animals and human beings, including the tomb owner(s), in varying combinations, to create—with astonishing historical continuity despite the differences in realization—the potential conditions of an afterlife environment partly modeled on the tomb owner's life before death.²⁵ Although it is not known exactly what means were used to ensure the ontological transformations that activated the afterlife environment as a properly populated and furnished home for the dead, the ritually conducted sealing of the tomb would presumably have been one of the most important. Until recently, modern art history has tended to discuss the components of tombs of any historical period as sculptures, paintings, ceramics, architecture, etc. fulfilling particular instrumental and semiotic functions. Mediationally speaking, it has privileged, to the extent that it registers them at all, straightforward mediations (depiction, decoration, building). More recent work, however, has acknowledged—without using this terminology—that the functional basis of mortuary art was not mediational but paramediation.²⁶ For the participatory viewer, a properly prepared and presented corpse was not just the embodiment of a first-order observation (distinguishing the dead from the living), for it also embodied the second-order observation distinguishing the future inhabitant of the afterlife from both the living and the merely deceased. Similarly, the fact that a first-millennium pottery mortuary copy of a ritual bronze vessel cannot be visually confused with the object for which it substitutes suggests that its representation was not meant to be judged in realist terms (fig. 1). In addition to the acts of observing that they embody, the corpse and the pottery vessel solicited further, contrasting observations from different publics. In one direction,

25. Tombs were more complex than I am making them seem here. They not only functioned as afterlife residences but also narrativized a journey of the soul that led far from the tomb.

26. This is the general direction of the numerous articles on tombs by Wu Hung, including "Art in a Ritual Context: Rethinking Mawangdui," *Early China* 17 (1992):111–144; "Beyond the 'Great Boundary': Funerary Narrative in the Cangshan Tomb," in *Boundaries in China*, ed. John Hay (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994), pp. 81–104. See also Joy Beckman, "Layers of Being: Bodies, Objects, and Spaces in Warring States Burials" (Ph.D. diss., University of Chicago, 2006).

they addressed themselves to the spirits inhabiting the beyond, for whom, already conducting a second-order existence, observing took a first-order form. The body and the vessel were to be distinguished by the spirits as belonging to their own afterlife world. To living viewers, on the other hand, the *fact* of this solicitation was visible, but they were not expected to respond to it themselves except in extraordinary circumstances such as when a tomb robber entered a tomb; in this situation it was expected that the robber would be confronted not by



Figure 1. Replica of a bronze *hu* vessel, pottery with red painted decoration, height 71 cm., Warring States period (476–221 B.C.), from Songyuan tomb, Changping County, Hebei Province. After *Zhongguo meishu quanji: taoci* (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin meishu chubanshe, 1988), vol. 1, pl. 102.

guardian representations but by “real” afterlife guardians, for the magic field of the violated tomb interior would force the robber to see like a ghost! But when, under other circumstances, the living viewer recognized the representational dimension of the prepared corpse or the pottery vessel and assessed their capacity to enter the afterlife effectively, a third-order or meta-observation came into play. Meta-observation of this kind must have existed from very early times in order for tomb specialists to do their job properly and for patrons to judge their work. Indeed, texts embodying meta-observations of mortuary art can be found as early as the late first millennium B.C.²⁷

A second comparison is afforded by Buddhist cave temples at Dunhuang—for the most part, family chapels—created over a period of several centuries from the fifth century onward. These offer hundreds of examples of the combination of painting and sculpture in altar displays that in turn belong to articulated environments coextensive with the temple interior. Perceiving each overall altar display approximately as the unity that it was meant to be requires the beholder to suppress the difference of material medium involved. The artists, who were clearly preoccupied with this viewing challenge, found a number of ways to render it less difficult. Of these, the most important was stylistic: in many cases, the painters conceived pictorial figures as if they were sculptures, while the sculptors modeled sculptural figures as if they were paintings, creating an equivalence that served as a visual bridge between the two mediums (fig. 2). If one treats the coherence of the overall iconic manifestation in stylistic terms as a question of illusionism, one is forced to categorize the illusion as aggregative; there is then no way to account for the fact that the illusion effaces the difference between painting and sculpture, beyond an acknowledgment of the similarity of sculptural and pictorial style. But in terms of inverted prioritization and added orders of observing, it is clear that the altar display is not simply an aggregate of pictorial and plastic modes of depiction at different scales; rather, these collectively create a paramediation potential that is parasitical on both the pictorial imagescape of painting and the plastic imagescape of sculpture. In fact, the *parataxis* of each cave temple as a whole, like each tomb, produces a complex elastic and mutational field of possibility, involving not only shifts of medium but also radical shifts

27. See Martin Powers, *Art and Political Expression in Early China* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1991), pp. 59–62; and Beckman (*ibid.*).

of scale that potentially engage the viewer in immense imaginative displacements across time and space and in awarenesses of the arrivals of deities from equally vast distances. Again, it is only the most recent studies that grapple with this fundamental fluidity.²⁸ Like tombs, temple environments require ritualized actualization. Along with the second-order observation inherent in representation, and third-order, meta-observation of the representation as representation and/or as art, the temple interior also solicited a different kind of observation that activated much of the painting and sculpture as paradise manifestations. This involved the suppression of meta-observation to create a new kind of first-order observation as religious vision. But in contrast to the tomb interior, here the solicitation of this new first-order observation distinguishing the space as a paradise in full actuality was directed toward a living viewer. The capacity to observe in this first-order fashion required technical practices of visualization that were mastered by committed monks and lay Buddhists; these produced a temporary subjecthood that incorporated the divine in the human. For the credulous, of course, no such techniques were necessary; they could, if sufficiently affected by what they saw, pass directly from observation of what was depicted to the perception of paradise. For the artists and for students of Buddhist scriptures, in contrast, meta-observation of these orders of observation was a preliminary condition of escape from its system; in Tang times this was even acknowledged visually through the depiction in the borders of paradise scenes of believers practicing the necessary ritual visualization.

For both tomb and temple interiors, ritualized actualization collapses one order of observing/sight into another, one order of presence into another, though the tomb does so on behalf of the dead and the temple on behalf of the living. The process of actualization, in both cases, voids authorship in favor of immanence (of the beyond, of the divine). Many Chinese ritual texts attest to this expectation. The voiding of authorship, then, has existed for millennia, as the moment when art surrenders itself to immanence, when the artwork stops being art. The forgery, however, takes the void of authorship not as a goal but instead as a starting point.

28. See Wu Hung, "What is Bianxiang?—On the Relationship between Dunhuang Art and Dunhuang Literature," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 52, no. 1 (1992):111–192; Sonya Lee, "Nirvana Imagery in Medieval Chinese Art" (Ph.D. diss., University of Chicago, 2004). Eugene Wang's *Shaping the Lotus Sutra: Buddhist Visual Culture in Medieval China* (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 2005) explores these issues at the greatest length, though for this reader Wang's treatment of the material evidence is problematic.

It accepts the condition of making art in secret, stripped of any expectation that its real achievement will be appreciated. Whereas the void of authorship in mortuary art and temples is at the same time the immanence of the beyond or the divine, the forgery by contrast invents an immanence of the genuine. Although the actualization that the forgery solicits is not a ritualized one, this is



Figure 2. Detail, west wall altar niche, Dunhuang Cave 328, eighth century. After *Zhongguo shiku: Dunhuang Mogaoku* (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1981), vol. 3, pl. 117.

not to say that there is no connection with religious art. For surely the art forgery solicits its own kind of belief in the "aura" of the authentic artwork that is associated with its purported age or authorship. Forgery is the assertive presence of the secular at the heart of the institution of art. If one conceptualizes modernity not in evolutionary terms but instead as a narrative written from the standpoint of the ever-changing present, whose prehistory it traces, then forgery is part of this narrative, extending back centuries before the modern world, perhaps as far back as the practice of collecting.²⁹ It is in this sense that forgery is modern.

The inversion of the prioritization of orders of presence and observation, and the collapsing of them into each other, thus jointly define a communication function of artmaking that is just as fundamental as depiction, inscription, decoration, or building. Yet, like all modes of paramediation, this one largely lies outside the discursive field of modernist art history. The word that would describe it may not, in fact, exist. Could one say that forgery, like the tomb and temple decoration, is a mode of *immanation*?

Disjunctive affect

Am I in a paraworld now? she wondered. Whatever they are. Perhaps that would explain the twisted, strained wrongness which the world around her now seemed to possess throughout.³⁰

If paramediation is the condition under which forgery, by my argument, produces value, it remains to be seen *how* value might be produced. There is no better place to start from than connoisseurship, as the subspecialty of art history that concerns itself most narrowly with value and has most to do with forgery. Between the moment it enters circulation and the moment it is unmasked, the forgery may live a long life under its assumed identity. Because the world changes around it, the same visual effect that once seemed convincing may later feel entirely wrong.³¹ But the evolution of judgment is usually less dramatic. The visual effect of a forgery is by definition always at least slightly off; connoisseurs often register this "off" quality as puzzling or as grounds for doubt without being able to demonstrate immediately

where the problem lies. Only as *œuvres* come to be understood in greater detail does it eventually become possible to pin down inconsistencies and prove the work to be a forgery. The connoisseur registers visual effect as affect, *sensing* a gap between the claim of affect that the work makes and its actual affect. This gap is a consequence of a further inversion, in this case of the normal relation between expression and affect. Instead of affect being generated by expression, in the forgery a preconceived affect generates "expression" whose falseness or fictionality feeds back as interference into the artifact's actual affect. The result is an undeclared affective disjunction.³²

The celebrated or notorious connoisseurial eye is in a sense misnamed. The term suggests that the connoisseur assesses authenticity symptomatically, by recognizing visible clues. In this lies a trap for the unwary into which many have fallen, most spectacularly the historian Carlo Ginzburg.³³ Connoisseurs themselves have often encouraged the misunderstanding, especially when called upon to justify or explain their working methods. In reality, the most accomplished connoisseurs work in part instinctively, paying extreme attention to their first, raw impression of the artifact. The only importance of the first impression—but it is crucial—is as a registering of affect, as much at the level of conceptual craft as of *techne*. Is the affect disjunctive or not? Visible clues come both before and after this. Before, because the connoisseur's instinct is based on the internalization of a long experience of visible clues of authenticity and forgery; after, because the connoisseur uses the examination of visible clues as a check on the first impression and as a means to explain his or her conclusion to others. But the first impression itself is instinctive, a precognitive reaction.³⁴ The instinctive recognition of a forgery is not only fundamental to connoisseurship, it is also much more significant for the understanding of forgery's artistic value than the labor of examining visible signs

29. Hay, "Toward a Disjunctive Diachronics of Chinese Art History" (see note 3).

30. Dick (see note 11), p. 146.

31. It is a trope of writing on the Vermeer forger, Han Van Meegeren, that it is now hard to see how people were originally fooled by his creations.

32. This relates forgeries once again to genuine works that declare their disjunctive affect as theatricality or irony.

33. Carlo Ginzburg, "Morelli, Freud, and Sherlock Holmes: Clues and Scientific Method," *History Workshop* 9 (1980).

34. The practice of instinctive connoisseurship is inevitably limited by the experience, talent, and preconceptions of the connoisseur. For an unusually cogent discussion of the need (in the case of Rembrandt) to pursue "much more widely conceived research into the use of canvases, grounds, painting technique, signatures and several other features" as a check on instinctive judgments, see Ernst van de Wetering, "Connoisseurship and Rembrandt's Paintings: New Directions in the Rembrandt Research Project, Part II," *The Burlington Magazine* CL (February 2008):83–90; the quotation comes from p. 85.

which is so much more easily given discursive form. Borrowing terminology from Brian Massumi's theory of affect, the connoisseur's first impression can be said to establish a direct relation between the superempirical (the indeterminacy and potential that is channeled into form by the artifact) and the infra-empirical (bodily perception, nonconscious sensation).³⁵ It brackets out empirical observation and conscious perception as such, even as it makes use of them. What the connoisseur registers affectively is a mismatch between the superempirical that she senses infra-empirically and its channeling into form that she sees empirically.

Connoisseurship as such frames affective disjunction in forensic terms, looking no further than the forgery's identity theft, which it exposes. End of story for art history normally, but potentially the beginning of other stories if art history were to frame affective disjunction differently. The forgery itself always exceeds the connoisseur's forensic frame, and it does so by making use of disjunction to create a nonmetaphorical, affective "as if." Out of the void of authorship comes the fictionality of affect. Here, fine distinctions need to be made. The modes of immanation characteristic of tombs and temples, to return to those contrasting examples, *anticipate* an actuality of affect. Although they could and can be viewed prior to or outside of that actualization, their affective fictionality always retains an anticipatory character. However moved a beholder was or is by a tomb or temple as an artistic achievement, from the point of view of the artwork this effect is merely a glimpse of the potential for a greater, future intensity that belongs to another, nonartistic order of value. The forgery's fictionality of affect, in contrast, has a specifically historical temporality, and this is true whether its immanation involves assuming the identity of a work of the past or a work of its own present. The forgery introduces an affective "fact" into the history of art—either the past history of art or the history-in-becoming of the present. By doing so, the forgery invents history, renders history malleable and fictive. The forgery has in this sense much in common with historical fiction; it also resembles the branch of science fiction which specializes in alternative presents, and the recently emerged genre of "what if" history-writing provides a third parallel. Nagel suggests that "in serving the cult of the authored artifact the forgery aims to subvert it: it is out to prove that an artifact *can* escape its historical moment, and its author. It claims that the singular *can*

be repeated."³⁶ This may be true for the forgery that is at the same time a copy, but for forgery in a more general sense, including pastiche, it would make more sense to say that the forgery is out to add singularities to the world, not repeat them. From this point of view, the forgery is the artifact that can escape its historical moment by not having an author. This is another way in which the forgery is always narratologically (as against evolutionally) modern, whenever in history it was produced. For by introducing affect retrospectively into the past or by affirming the affective malleability of the historical present, it embodies once more the narratological structure of modernity as the prehistory of the ever-changing present moment from which its story is written. Yet its modernity is not a straightforward one but rather, corresponding to its paramediation character, it is a *paramodernity*, in which the present is smuggled out of view and into history, across a fictional version of which it is articulated. Already during the Early Modern period, but above all under colonial and postcolonial conditions, the paramodernity of the forgery has further lent itself to the affective exploration of the West's projection of expectations on to the Other.³⁷

"Affect," writes Massumi, "is *the virtual as point of view*, provided the visual metaphor is used guardedly."³⁸ Earlier I suggested that the forgery's immanation virtualizes authenticity, producing genuineness as a virtual reality effect. Massumi, however, is employing the concept of the virtual in a more rigorous way that places the forgery's virtualization of authenticity in perspective (again provided the visual metaphor is used guardedly). The virtual, as such, is the level of abstraction inherent in experience—here understanding abstraction to be "not the subtraction of potential, but its unleashing." Massumi: "Something that happens too quickly to have happened, actually, is *virtual*. The body is as immediately virtual as it is actual. The virtual, the pressing crowd of incipencies and tendencies, is a realm of potential. . . . The virtual is a lived paradox where what are normally opposites coexist, coalesce, and connect; where what cannot be experienced cannot but be felt—albeit reduced and contained."³⁹ In these terms, the forgery, in

35. Brian Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2002), p. 16.

36. Nagel (see note 5), p. 105.

37. On paramodernity in an intercultural perspective, see Hay, "Double Modernity, Para-Modernity" (note 3).

38. Massumi (see note 35), p. 35.

39. Massumi (ibid.). Massumi's concept of the virtual comes close to Jean-Luc Nancy's concept of ground. See *The Ground of the Image* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005). See also Hay, "Interventions" (note 1), pp. 448–452.

yet another inversion, reverses the normal expectation that art moves us from the actual toward a glimpse of the virtual (the force of the beyond, the divine, the Real). The forgery is thus doubly a virtualization, first in the earlier sense of an intangible actuality (authenticity as effect), and now also in the sense of art produced *from* the virtual, stabilizing a shard of virtuality as affect. "Affects are *virtual synesthetic perspectives* anchored in (functionally limited by) the actually existing, particular things that embody them. The autonomy of affect is its participation in the virtual," Massumi writes. Forgery is the demonstration, in the domain of art, of the autonomy of affect, its capacity to "escape confinement in the particular body whose vitality, or potential for interaction, it is."⁴⁰ For the forgery, the body in question would be that of its assumed identity whose affective force it is able to approximate by drawing on the desire and expectations of the beholder, that is, through the alchemy of pleasure.⁴¹

Like certain forms of conceptual art, the affective "as if" of the forgery—its nonmetaphoric fictionality—exposes a contradiction at the heart of modern art history's working model of art. Art, it has been assumed, either possesses a straightforward affective coherence or, alternatively, takes on a disjunctive affect in ways that preserve affective coherence as an ideal. Certainly, the artwork is understood to have the capacity to embrace disjunction, on condition that the disjunction is resolved on another level—as irony, for example, or theatricality. It is also admitted, of course, that the artwork may at the same time, or alternatively, possess a disjunctive affect deriving from a split between its conscious program and the unconscious processes engaged by the pursuit of this program. Under all these conditions, the ideal status of affective coherence is preserved and is premised on its being beyond choice—expression in the sense of the sensible, unforced proof of intentionality. The forgery's affective "as if," however, similar to conceptualist withdrawals of authorship and objecthood, deliberately creates a coherence out of disjunction. In other words, affective coherence emerges as being a matter of invention rather than expression. To the extent that this characteristic is a necessary blind spot of authenticity, forgery might be considered the unconscious of the genuine.

Affect is the concept that makes it possible to think of artistic value in terms of invention. There is value wherever the virtual (in Massumi's sense) and the actual interface as affect in formal inventiveness. To put it another way, value is the measure of the affective intensity of invention. The uniqueness of the forgery as an artistic genre is that it incorporates in itself two separate possibilities of value—the strong affective intensity that it achieves if it is persuasive, and the intensity that it still possesses after it is unmasked, which is not necessarily weak, nor merely residual. As a limit case, the forgery implies a horizon of artistic value, valid for art in general, for which intensity provides the measure.

(In)tensity

"Meaningless theoretically," Miss de Rungs answered, "but not to anyone here in this room. Or in fact anyone in the world." She corrected herself, "Anyone in this world. We have a massive stake in seeing to it that the other worlds, para or not, stay as they are, since all are so very much worse than this one."

"I'm not even certain about that," the middle-aged man said, half to himself. "Do we know them that thoroughly? We're so traumatized about them. Maybe there's one that's better, to be preferred."⁴²

The forgery, excommunicated by modern art history and banished to the limits of the history of art, turns out to have had a place waiting for it at the center all along—except that the center-periphery model does not fit, because it is in a sense responsible for the forgery's occlusion. The center has long been the horizon of artistic value for art history, proving infinitely reproducible across history and culture through the linked concepts of medium, authorship, and innovation; the canon, meanwhile, is the pyramidal extrapolation of centrality. This nexus of concepts has extended into art historical thinking on value the logic of commodity exchange—a logic that characterized capitalism during most of its history, but which has now given way to the logic of differential functions. The horizon of the center has thereby conditioned the assessment of value, which, as suggested earlier, has usually been taken to reside in the capacity of the artwork to transcend its instrumental function and its historical circumstances. Although there have been a number of attempts to challenge this overall approach to value, notably in the

40. Massumi (see note 38).

41. Pleasure is strangely—and revealingly—undertheorized by art history. I explore the mechanism of pleasure in art in *Sensuous Surfaces* (see note 2).

42. Dick (see note 11), p. 105.

name of anthropology and visual studies, these have foundered on their inability to provide a workable means of making distinctions of quality and importance on a basis other than context. A more viable option may be to uncouple value (as a capacity to transcend instrumental function and historical and cultural circumstances) from the horizon of the center, in order to see whether this definition of value can be retained under a different horizon where intensity provides value's measure.

The forgery is particularly useful in this regard, because it contradicts the notion that value crystallizes in form across the continuum of medium, authorship, and innovation. As a relation of nonauthorship to form, the forgery uncouples value from intentionality, by means of which art history has—under the horizon of the center—founded value on a competence of the psychic subject. Intentionality (as against intentions, which cannot be reliably known) has been able to play this role as the underpinning of authorship and innovation (intersecting as originality) because it is inferable from the coherence of the work.⁴³ For the recognized forgery the very basis of value is necessarily different, because no competence of the psychic subject could accommodate nonauthorship. Instead, one may turn to a relation: that of *complexity to closure*. The relation of complexity to closure defines the logic of formal selection through which an artwork's system distinguishes itself from a larger environment to which it belongs and with which it interacts. Its interest in the present context is that it is indifferent to authorship or nonauthorship; the possibility thus opens up that it could be extended to every kind of artwork. In order for this to be a viable option for art history, though, a further step is necessary. The relation of complexity to closure needs to be formulated as situationally determined parameters; only such parameters would make it possible to distinguish qualitatively different possibilities of value. Call such a set of possibilities a potential for tension, tensive potential, or *tensity*. Call the specification of value in an individual artwork second-order tensity, or *intensity*. Call invention the play of tensity under a horizon of the relation, and call intensity the fulfillment of invention's function under that horizon. From this decentered point of view, art history's conventional approach to value takes on a new aspect. The role of intentionality, one might say, has been to redirect tensity toward the horizon of the center, while the role of

originality has been to function as the fulfillment of that redirection.

Every craft-specific tradition of artmaking has its own possibilities of tension between complexity and closure. In artworks that operate between medium and mediation in the narrow sense of these terms, this tensive potential is conditioned by the institutionalized primacy of a particular mode of straightforward mediation.⁴⁴ It is around this type of artwork, and its accompanying tensive potential, that modern art history has centered the history of art, all the time repressing the ground of relationality against which medium operates. Relative to the center established by medium-defined practices, other types of tensive potential have succumbed to a variety of fates in art historical discourse. Practices such as forgery or copying, which operate between medium and paramediation, have found themselves cast to the periphery. Lost from view in the process has been the low tensity of the copy, and the essentially *atensive*, substitutional character of the forgery. Practices such as calligraphy and literati painting, which operate between paramedium and mediation, have generally found themselves stripped of their "para" dimension in order to keep them within the medium-defined center. Thus calligraphy has generally been constructed as the art of writing rather than the art of writing a text, while literati painting's complex mediation of text, calligraphy, and image has become a province of painting. This has been done by eliding what one might call a transcriptive tensity, using the concept of transcription loosely and broadly. A quite different destiny has awaited practices such as the creation of tombs and temples. These combine mediums and sometimes paramediums in operations that, as we saw earlier, achieve coherence only at the level of a paramediation that engages them all and defines their tensive possibilities. Modern art history, however, has found it difficult to avoid reifying tomb and temple as sites and frames for essentially nonartistic operations, obscuring from view their overall heterotensive artistic character, that is, a multichannel tensity that cuts across (para)mediums.⁴⁵

44. Hay, "The Author Replies" (see note 1), pp. 496–497.

45. The same argument may be made for the monument. A first step in this direction was taken by Wu Hung in his book *Monumentality in Early Chinese Art and Architecture* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), which explores the evolution of the monument in early China as a multifaceted intervention in sociopolitical space rather than as a frame for the institutionalization of memory. Given that Wu was concerned with functions rather than properties of artifacts, his choice of the word "monumentality" to center his discussion may have partly obscured the lasting interest of his argument.

43. On intentionality, see Paul Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory and the Surplus of Meaning* (Fort Worth: Texas Christian University Press, 1976).

A separate set of tensive economies pertain to the translational detour across cultural boundaries, either end of which may be declared or left undeclared. This detour is institutionalized in practices which may intersect with those just described and are similarly devalued under the horizon of the center. In an intercultural register, some such practices involve the declared translation of imported concerns into an autochthonous frame of reference, alongside the undeclared translation in the other direction of indigenous concerns into an imported framework. This two-way translation process and its accompanying tensive possibilities characterize, for example, the art of a world religion such as Buddhism transplanted from India to China, tourist art in all its long and diverse history in China since the eighteenth century, or today the Chinese practice of originally Western modes of modern art. Only recently has art history moved away from privileging a single direction of the process under concepts of diffusion, influence, and derivation that reaffirm the authority of the center as the organizing principle of the artistic field; or from constructing, alternatively and unrealistically, the two-way process as a relation between equal centers through the notion of hybridity.

The conversion of a dynamic relation into either a hierarchical structure or a flattened relativism reproduces itself in a social register as well. Every characterization of folk art or popular/middlebrow art as "low" locates them under the horizon of the center. Whether to dismiss or defend them, this inevitably leads to the occlusion of their translational detours across social and infracultural boundaries and the loss from view of their tensive potential. None of these translational practices is straightforwardly modern in the narratological sense, far less evolutionary: some are specifically paramodern in the terms defined earlier and others have a *doubled* modernity that derives from the multiple genealogies of modernity.⁴⁶ Nor, for that matter, is modernity in its various narrative permutations the only diachronic frame relevant to any of these marginalized genres, which like all artistic genres simultaneously inhabit different diachronic narratives and thus have a relational historicity. To the relational field of art corresponds a relational diachronic.⁴⁷ The complexity of this diachronic is also evident in the way that translation modulates tensity in a historical register, leading to the production of anachronic temporalities. Although it has

been argued for anachronic temporality, as for forgery, that it is a phenomenon of evolutionary modernity, it can alternatively be understood narratologically as the translational interpenetration of different diachronic frames, and as such could be considered to have a much more ancient history.⁴⁸ Equally, one might argue that in our own time conceptual art has extended the possibilities of diachronic translation further in the direction of considered mistranslation; its problematizations of art historical temporality have created distinctively new tensive possibilities.

Needless to say, both mediational and translational economies of tensity intersect in individual artworks in any number of ways. Tensity embodies in its variable parameters the situational character of a horizon of the relation.

The singular artwork specifies tensive potential as intensity, that is, as the tensity of a tensity or as interacting tensities—in short, a quality of second-order tensity. Under the horizon of the relation, intensity plays a role equivalent to originality under the horizon of the center. From a relational point of view, originality has conventionally functioned as a relation of innovation to inherited convention preserving the necessity of both. A practical distinction has been made between the speeds of originality proper to modern and nonmodern contexts (in the evolutionary sense), the former involving a high ratio of innovation to inherited convention and the latter a low ratio (that is, tradition). Recent work on nonmodern contexts around the world, however, has complicated this picture by demonstrating that "fast" originality, though not consistently privileged, was far from absent there, too, and in fact was structurally necessary on a punctual basis. Originality has, nonetheless, survived and prospered as the principal criterion of value because it has always been feared that to dethrone it and to eschew the horizon of the center (institutionalized in the canon) would lead to art historical relativism. The result has been an evolving, transhistorical, transcultural canon, organized around the centrality of Western art since the Renaissance. The whole interest of the situational horizon of the relation is that it offers a way out of this impasse. Intensity functions as the measure of value that, together with the situationality of parameters, ensures that relationality will not collapse into relativism.

46. Hay, "Double Modernity, Para-Modernity" (see note 3).

47. Hay, "Toward a Disjunctive Diachronics," "The Diachronics of Early Qing Visual and Material Culture" (see note 3).

48. See Alexander Nagel and Christopher S. Wood, "Interventions: Toward a New Model of Renaissance Anachronism," *Art Bulletin* 87 (2005):403–415.

But what is intensity, practically speaking, if one is not going to appeal to a psychic subject? If intensity is a relation of complexity to closure, intensity is a relation of complexity to intensity—it constitutes a *density* of relation. Great works of art—masterpieces—are dense nexi of possibility in this specific sense. It is their densities of relation that give them the capacity to transcend both instrumental function and historical-cultural circumstances to an exceptional degree. At the same time, within any economy of (in)tensity, the non-masterpiece does not become simply minor. Intensity is not just a ratio but also a quality. A “minor” work may take the exploration of specific affective possibilities further than any masterpiece.

For an open art history

Art history has been marked discursively, over the last decade or so, by a host of vital and eclectic interventions. It has also seen a welcome institutional shift toward the divestment of a now-crippling Eurocentrism. Art history is not, in my view at least, at a point of stasis that would justify challenge from a “new New” art history, nor in any event does it seem likely that a further reiteration of the avant-gardist ideology of critical innovation would speak to present circumstances. Where the need lies, I believe, is instead for an articulation of the horizon of possibility implied by recent art historical inventiveness, not least in the pages of this journal. To articulate this horizon of possibility is to claim for such interventions, of which the reader will make her own list, a measure of collective coherence with which they were not themselves necessarily concerned. (It is also to suggest, of course, that there is a prehistory to the shift that they announce, which is waiting to be identified.) Any horizon of possibility has many aspects. Elsewhere, I have argued that a key aspect of the one under discussion is a communicational horizon of mediation, an idea that I have reprised here in conjunction with the idea of an affective horizon of (in)tensity.⁴⁹ The main purpose of this essay, however, has been to address the value dimension.

Rather than approach the question through the philosophical problem of aesthetic value, I tried instead to sketch out a theory of value in terms specific to art historical thinking. In order to do so, I had to depart, with a regularity that I realize will have been off-putting to many, from the conventional language of art history

and of art writing in general. I did so reluctantly and only because I was convinced that existing terminology would inevitably have reinscribed the horizon of the center. For all its discursive strangeness, my argument respects the core concern of art historical thinking with regard to value: the relation between the historicity and transhistoricity (and between the cultural specificity and transcultural availability) of the artwork. Together, mediation and affect brought into view a horizon of artistic value that is situational rather than fixed and that is defined by the relation rather than the center. It would have been impossible, though, to articulate a value horizon of the relation without introducing a concept that could relativize what is normally considered to be, in one way or another, central. In my argument, the “para” did this work, dissolving the infinitely reproducible hierarchical structure of center versus periphery in which the vast majority of artistic traditions find themselves at some level marginalized and afforded less value, in favor of a view of art as a relational field in which value is situational. The capacity of the “para” to do this theoretical work, however, depended in turn on the possibility of formulating artistic value itself as a relational concept. This required the identification of an empty set of value—a degree zero of the relation that escapes existing assumptions about the basis of artistic value. I have taken these assumptions to involve a privileging of intentionality across authorship, and it is for this reason that I gave such an important place in this argument to the forgery and its voiding of authorship. The forgery, I hope to have shown, is the empty set of artistic value, from which a value horizon of the relation may be inferred. Together with mediation and affect, the relation articulates the horizon of possibility of an *open* art history that has been in the making for quite some time already.

49. Hay, “Interventions,” “The Author Replies” (see note 1).