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Is Reality a Fake?

The aim of this paper is to investigate some semiotic problems on the production and recognition of copies and fakes. We will deal with the notions of resemblance and identity, the notions of purport, substance, form, expression and content (from Hjelmslev), in order to find a reasonable way to confront the problem of fakes, avoiding as much as possible any ontological commitment to existence and reality.

1. What is a fake object?

A fake object (like a fake painting, or a fake coin) is an object we have some cognitive relation with. We can observe some of its properties (call them *evident* properties), and we know from our previous experience that every object having those properties has some other properties too (call them *hidden* properties). We argue therefore that our object has also those hidden properties. Actually, our object does not have those hidden properties, or, to say it better, we could *discover* (we will see later how) that our object does not have those hidden properties.

Take the following story. We observe in a painting a lot of properties (characteristics of style) shared by most of the paintings of Jan Vermeer. We believe therefore that Vermeer was the man who actually painted it. Some time later, a man called van Meegeren makes known that *he* is the real painter. Nobody believes him. Painting like Vermeer used to do is so difficult that it is really hard to believe that somebody else could do the same. So van Meegeren is asked to prove his declaration, and he paints another perfect fake, while we are present. This is not even a definite proof, because he could still lie, by declaring an authentic Vermeer false. The end of the story comes when a chemical analysis proves that the blue color used in the painting is not older than ten years: its chemical composition was unknown before that date. (Usually van Meegeren was very careful in the chemical color composition for his paintings, but that time he too was victim of a fake).

A first, partial definition of a fake object could be the following one (it is not yet concerned with all the problems involved, but even without being a *sufficient* definition, it is still a *necessary* one). A fake is an object resembling the authentic one, being nevertheless not identical.

This definition raises two kinds of problems: problems on what resemblance is and what identity is, and problems concerning the existence of the authentic object. We will deal with the latter ones further on.

2. Resemblance, identity and pertinence

If we try to define *identity* as *absolute identity* it is quite easy to see that we have no possibility of meeting any absolute identity during our whole life. Even the same person, or the same object is not absolutely identical with himself/itself in two different instants. *Absolute identity* means you cannot find *any* different property; but, all the rest being the same, the same object in two different instants has different temporal properties, i.e. before it used to have the property of *being before*, and now it has the property of *being now*: therefore it is not *absolutely identical* with itself.

You can say that temporal properties are not pertinent for identity, but this is exactly the point. We need to fix a pertinence criterion to have the possibility of observing identity: identity is never absolute, it is always relative to a pertinence criterion.

We give therefore the following definition of *identity*: we can say that the object A is *identical* with the object B – in other words, *A is B* – every time they have no different pertinent property. To make it more specific, we can guess that there is at least one property that is (almost) always pertinent (for what we use to call “objects”), that is space-temporal continuity. Every time we can observe space-temporal continuity among A and B, we will not have any problem in identifying them as the same object. In any different case, we will try to find properties in both A and B, that prove the existence of the continuity. More difficult problems arise in contexts involving the so-called “trans-world-identity”, or in (science-) fictional contexts, but we are not going to deal with them.

For *resemblance* we give the following definition: we can say that the object A resembles the object B every time they share at least one pertinent property. Of course we can have levels of resemblance, depending on how many, or, rather, how pertinent, are the shared properties. It is obvious that in general an object resembles itself, for it shares at least one pertinent property with itself. Nevertheless one accepts cases of “non-resemblance” with oneself, that is cases of “identity without resemblance”. Also in this case, it is a matter of pertinence: in a case like the latter, the properties that are pertinent for identity are not the same properties pertinent for resemblance. We are probably focusing the case of a strong visual transformation of an object: we stress identity when space-temporal continuity is pertinent, and we stress non-resemblance when some visual properties are concerned.

We are more often concerned with the case of deciding on identity when only resemblance is observable. This is the most general case. First, we cannot always observe space-temporal continuity. When meeting my friend Steve, whom I left yesterday, I can observe resemblance, and *infer* identity. The decision about identity – when assimilated to space-temporal continuity – is always a matter of inference: you can never

observe identity. Secondly, even space-temporal continuity is an assumption, based on our beliefs on regularity in nature. In general, our beliefs on regularity are the basis of our concept of identity.

The case of attributing a painting to an author is not different from the case of deciding that the man I’m meeting is Steve. In both cases there are some properties I hold pertinent for attribution or identity; for example, in the case of the painting, there is the space-temporal continuity with one of the very objects painted by that author; while in the case of Steve there is the space-temporal continuity of him with his previous appearance. However in both cases I cannot observe the continuity, and I must infer it.

In order to make the necessary inferences from resemblance to identity, I need some rules to add to the general assumption of the regularity of nature, and some additional rules in the case of the painting. Had I never seen the authentic painting this would be particularly true (of course the authentic painting would only be the one I *saw* painted by the author himself). These rules are based on the individuation of properties, e.g. features of style, founding a semantic link between those properties and the property of having been painted by that author.

A fake is just an object with evident properties, and these properties have semantic links with a hidden property being very pertinent for us, e.g. the property of having been painted by Jan Vermeer. Actually, the object does not have the latter property, but it is very difficult to give a reason for this. We are going to see later the criteria for proving fakery.

We need however now to digress from the main topic in order to confront and make clear an embarrassing philosophical notion, the one of *space-temporal continuity*, and its ontological commitment. This digression is necessary for the following discussion about reproducibility and type/token relation.

3. Substance, form and perception

Recall the classical scheme from Hjelmsev:

	(purport)
EXPRESSION	<u>substance</u>
	form

	form
CONTENT	<u>substance</u>
	(purport)

We intend to argue for the following points:

1) the notion of “purport” is useless, for it can be defined only in terms of *form*;

- 2) the notion of “substance” can be used only if spoiled by any ontological commitment, and only as a *negative* notion;
- 3) the notion of “form”, bound to the notion of system, can be seen as a richer equivalent of the notion of “property” and it is the only really semiotic notion of the three;
- 4) no conformity of systems exists, but only conformity of use, depending on pertinence (and therefore on context);
- 5) no privilege exists in verbal language (as in any language) for the existence of a double articulation: every language can be mono- or pluri-articulated depending on pertinence (and therefore context).

As regards the first three points, and as regards perception, there is nothing else than *forms* in our perception, like there can be nothing else than *forms* in our mind. In this perspective, any reasonable purport cannot be other than a form itself. Furthermore, according to this approach, nothing like *substance* could even exist, as opposite of *form*, because everything we could perceive would be form, and *substance* would take no place in the process. Nevertheless, since we never perceive every perceivable aspect (form) of a chunk of reality (because we perceive only the forms being pertinent for our present purposes) we could give to the *substance* the role of the non-semiotic *ground*, of the *unperceived* residue of reality. Of course, this residue is of great importance: in fact, first, even if it is unperceived, it is perceivable under observation with different pertinence (in different context) and sometimes with different instruments; and second, it is the warranty of the existence of a reality not reducible to our present knowledge about it. In other words: the *substance* is our guess about the existence of reality.

Of course, all that we perceive and think of are only forms, and nothing else. But a form can never be an absolute entity: it can only be defined by means of relations with other forms. If our mind could contain unrelated forms, we would never have the opportunity to recognize similarity and resemblance, because every form perceived in our life would dwell in a monad, and we would not recognize even our friend Steve, for the Steve of today is not the same form as the Steve of yesterday. The Steve that I see face to face is quite another form from the Steve seen in profile. We must therefore accept the idea that the set of our knowledge is structured like a system of forms, and that knowing and recognizing something is just adding or finding a form in the system. The notions of *form* and *system* are therefore dual: no form is out of a system, systems are systems of forms.

We must not however think of a form as only a physical shape. Relations are forms also, everything that can be put in a system is a form; whatever is not in a system is not in our mind. The notion of *form* appears so as a richer equivalent of the notion of *property*, as generally used in semantics: “equivalent” because they match the same matter, “richer” because the notion of *form* involves the notion of *system*, and avoids the

arising of problems about individuals and properties (individuals are just forms, like everything else).

But, if everything is a form, what logically distinguishes an individual from one of its features? The answer is: what is pertinent at the moment. According to the context, we can perceive the individual as a form, or otherwise some feature of itself as a form. In the former case, the feature would be a simple part of the percept, partially responsible for the possible recognition, not at all meaningful by itself; in the second case the feature would be the very percept, fully meaningful.

As a first consequence of the above, we see that the definitions of identity and resemblance we gave in 2. can be reformulated in new terms. So form A can be said *identical* to form B (“A is B”) when they share every pertinent subform; and form A can be said *resemblant* to form B when they share at least one pertinent subform. A subform is a form we regard as constitutive of the main form; but the main form too can be a subform of itself. The former involves that the definition of *identity* is actually closed, because we need the notion of identity of forms itself to define the expression “to share a (sub)form”. At the lowest level, I think that recognition of identity of forms is a primitive which constitutes the main part of our perception, perhaps the only part. When the pertinent form has no pertinent subforms, identity is just the matching of the percept with the mental representation.

As regard points (4) and (5), take the word “dog” and the image of a dog. We usually say that both word and image refer to the dog, i.e. that the dog is the content of both expressions. We also say that when changing the initial “d” with an “f”, we obtain “fog”, the content of which has nothing to do with the content of “dog”; instead with images when changing the dog’s color to white we obtain the image of the statue of a dog (ignore the oversimplification), the content of which is different from the content of the previous image in a way that depends on the modification that has been applied. Hjelmslev would say that the former is a case of non-conformity between the planes of expression and content, while the latter is a case of conformity; and therefore the former case would show a double articulation of the semiotic system, while the latter case would show a single articulation.

There is a mistake in this argument. In the manner the image of the dog refers to the dog, the word ‘dog’ does not refer to the dog, but refers only to our mental representation of the word “dog”. The first semiotic step in every act of perception is always recognition of forms: therefore, in the case of the word we recognize the form “dog”, and in the case of the image we recognize the form /dog shape/. No following development would be possible without this first step. It is possible to argue: “But the word ‘dog’ is the word itself, while the image *represents* the dog. In the former case there is no referring to the word itself, and therefore there is no parallelism between the two cases”. We can answer: recall

the definition of "is", that is the definition of *identity*; identity is bound to pertinence and "dog" might perfectly not be perceived as a word but just as a strange arabesque, in case the pertinent forms would be different from the ones generally pertinent during the act of reading. Suppose that while rock climbing you cross a zone where clefts were formed by coincidence in a shape like the word "dog". Would you perceive it as the word itself? Probably not, especially if you are being very careful for fear of falling. You would just consider whether the clefts are a good hook or not. On the other hand, the case of recognition of a painted dog is not different from the case of recognition of a real dog: it is always a matter of matching between pertinent forms. If the context makes pertinent forms like brushwork, or speedness, in both the image and the real case we may not even perceive the dog as a dog, but just as a painted shape or a running shape; exactly as in the case of the rock we do not perceive the word but just the clefts.

Taking a step forward, at the level of recognition of forms both the word system and the image system have conformity of planes; for example the modification from "dog" to "fog" is of the same type of the modification from the dog image to the statue image. But what happens when we step toward that part of the meaning that is not involved anymore with recognition? Safely we see a non-conformity and a double articulation in the word system, as stated above. But what happens on the other side? Let our picture represent a man in a forest with a dog on the side. The dog represents *safety* to us, but if the dog changes into a statue, the statue could mean something completely different, say *classicity*. Is there any conformity between the transformation of color and the transformation of meaning? Is there any relation between *safety* and *classicity* more than the relation between *dog* and *fog*? In both case there is only a similarity in the form of expression. In both cases the change in the form of expression has an effect that is a completely unrelated change in the form of the content.

Hjelmslev's objection would probably be: "Your argument is incorrect. In the case of words you are working on the plane of *denotation* while in the case of the images, you are working on the plane of *connotation*. Things are different on the two planes: you cannot mix them". I do not agree. In standard definition *connotation* is like *denotation*, but its expression plane is already a relation between expression and content, as the famous scheme shows:

Expression	Content
Expression	Content

Now we face a dilemma. First horn: if we hold that the image of the dog is the expression and the concept of the dog is the (denotative) content, then we are forced to hold that the *word* "dog" is the expression, and the concept of the word "dog" is the (denotative) content. Following this point of view, the concept of dog would be the *connotative* meaning of the word, as *safety* would be the *connotative* meaning of the image. Second horn: if we hold that the *denotative* content of "dog" is the concept of dog, then 1) *safety* is the denotative content of the image, and 2) the relation between the image of dog and the concept of dog does not enter the scheme of expression/content.

I do not think we could accept the solution on the second horn. It would involve the creation of a new kind of relation, that is different from expression/content relation. It is perhaps more simple to accept the idea that the denotative level always has conformity between the planes. And this emphasizes the idea that all that we perceive are forms, we perceive the forms that have some content for us.

Of course we do not intend to argue for the non-existence of differences between verbal language and other languages. What we mean is that the difference does not lay in (non)conformity or in the number of articulations. We think that the difference lays in the fact that the inferential rules between expression and content are much more explicit, and have been much more formalized in verbal language than in other languages. Even the mechanisms involving changes in pertinence are clearer and stronger in verbal language than elsewhere. However, there is no formal difference in recognizing the letter "d" and the color white, as there is no difference of meaning, in suitable contexts: they both can have no connotative meaning at all, while denoting the concept of their form.

What then about "space-temporal continuity"? Is it a form, or something else? Of course, space-temporal continuity is a form, for it could be nothing else. But it is strictly connected with the notion of *existence*, a complex notion we are going to deal with a little later. At the moment it is sufficient to think of space-temporal continuity as a subform being often pertinent for the recognition of particular kinds of forms, namely those forms we usually call *objects*.

4. Proving falsity

We can prove the falsity of an object in two alternative ways:

1) We could examine the object under new pertinence, and therefore perceive forms we had not perceived before. We know some rules stating an inferential link between the new *evident* forms and some *hidden* forms that are not compatible with the hidden forms we used to attribute to the object. If the inferential rules bound to the newly discovered

forms are *stronger* than those bound to the old known forms, we will then believe the former more than the latter. This is the case of the discovery of the fake blue color, having a too modern chemical composition. The rule connecting the form *new chemical compound* with the form *not ancient* is stronger than the rule connecting the form *painted in this and this way* with the form *painted by Jan Vermeer*. Of course we can also meet cases of an unsuccessful attempt of proving falsity, in every case the newly discovered reasons are weaker than the older ones.

2) Without having any new cognitive relation with the object, i.e. without discovering in it any new form, we could still prove its falsity, either in a weak or in a strong manner:

a) We could prove that the rules connecting evident and hidden forms are not valid. We do not prove that the object is a fake in this way, but that (part of) the reasons of the attribution are incorrect. This the case of van Meegeren who paints, in front of witnesses, a perfect Vermeer style painting. In this way, he proves the weakness of the rule that connects that style with that authorship. He has not yet proved that the discussed painting is a fake; he has simply proved the weakness of the reasons for that attribution;

b) We could prove not only that the rules are not valid, but that the same pertinent evident forms are actually bound to hidden forms not compatible with the presently accepted ones. In other words, if until today it was accepted that *if A then B*, we prove that *if A then not B*. This case is similar but stronger than case (a): we are definitely proving fakery now. And it is quite different from case (1): we have no new direct knowledge of the object. This is the case of the fall of a general believe about e.g. the style of a not well known period. In "Les fleurs bleues" by Raymond Queneau, all the primitive paintings in caves have been actually painted by a modern man. If we suddenly discovered that a modern man used to paint in caves, with such colors and such styles, and that he lived for sometime in Altamira and in other similar places; so to prove that everything painted in caves with that style was actually painted by him, we would have no need to look at the paintings again because we already know enough to attribute every primitive painting in Europe to him

5. Fake and existence

How can we prove the fakery of an imaginary object? Take the following easy riddle: "While digging, a man finds a coin that appears to be an ancient Roman coin, with the image of the head of Caesar, and the note '44 B.C.'. He shows the coin to an archaeologist, who laughs and says that the coin is counterfeit. Why?". Of course the answer is

that before Christ no one had the possibility of knowing that the year was a "B.C." year, but this is not at all obvious. In general, people must contemplate to give an answer. But what is interesting for us is the way in which we can prove that the fictional coin is counterfeit.

Of course, we have no possibility of directly observing the coin, and therefore the method we use is method two, sub-section (b). We have intuitively a rule saying that "44 B.C." entails "Roman age"; but we found a stronger rule saying that "B.C." entails "produced by somebody who lived after Christ".

Why cannot we use method one? The definite reason is that our fictional coin has no *substance of the expression*, and therefore it is impossible to observe new forms in it. The fictional coin has no residue; it is entirely in his verbal description. The only thing having substance is the group of words describing it, but this is quite another matter, having nothing to do with the coin.

Now we can face the problem: is existence a form? Of course it is, otherwise we could not even think of it. Nevertheless, it is a special form, for it entails the possibility of perceiving new forms related to the form that is related to existence. In other words: saying that something called *A exists* means saying that *A* has a *substance*, i.e. *A* is not exhausted in our knowledge about it.

What then about an *historical* or just an *absent* object? How can we prove it is a fake? As it is for the fictional object, method two is good; but, unlike the case of fiction, we attribute existence to these kinds of objects, and therefore method one is also available. Documents and reports are used as telescopes, telling us unknown forms related to the object. We know nevertheless that documents and reports themselves can have problems of falsehood or fakery and so problems with absent and historical objects are greater than those with *here-and-now* objects. The problems of authenticity are relative both to the object and the reports: this makes everything more complex, but not different when theory is concerned.

As regards *here-and-now* fake objects, we need not distinguish the case when an authentic object exists (which we face a copy of), from the case the authentic object does not exist. In both cases we believe that an object having such and such a *form* exists (we are thinking of forms like "being painted by Jan Vermeer", and not of physical shapes) and that the object we are facing is identical with that object, i.e. *is* that object. No matter that in the former case there exists an authentic object, while in the latter there is not. Actually, we do not know this fact, and we need not know it in order to prove fakery. The only difference is that in the former case we have one more possibility to apply method two, sub-section (a). It is the case when we know there can be only one true object (e.g. a painting) and we face both objects, the fake and the authentic one. The rules that used to give us a reason to believe that

our object was authentic are not valid anymore, because they are perfectly applicable to both objects, one of which is surely a false one.

6. Types, tokens and reproduction

It should be quite evident that we consider *perception* a semiotic phenomenon. The reason is that you do not even perceive what is not pertinent for you at the moment; in order for a form to be pertinent it must have some sort of meaning, it must be bound in the net of forms constituting our knowledge. Only meaningful forms can be perceived: for instance, have you ever perceived the form formed by the corner of the window, the wall close to it and their shadows? If you have, it is surely because you have suddenly had something to do with it, but in general you do not perceive that form. It is part of the faint background whence our percepts jump out; it is part of the substance of the expression, ready to be perceived, but unperceived at the moment. Perception is therefore a phenomenon fully involved with the notion of meaning.

Following this approach, we have a first way to deal with the type/token relation. Namely, tokens are just those pertinent forms of expression matching the types that are forms of the content. According to the different pertinence, the same substance can therefore be seen as a token of different types, because under a different pertinence different forms are going to be perceived.

But, just making this observation a little broader, we obtain a second and better way; we can in fact see that the type/token relation matches the *predication* relation perfectly. When saying e.g. "Steve is a man" we state that the form /Steve/ is a token of the type form /man/, and that we could take the form /Steve/ to instantiate the form /man/. When saying "The man is a political animal", we state we could take the form /man/ to instantiate the form /political animal/. And so on. Of course we can also say "Steve is affectionate" and "The man is a spiritual being": pertinence changed, and the same forms are tokens of different types.

About copies, our approach has as consequence that there is no difference, by principle, between perfect copies and partial copies, i.e. copies with variants. Actually, no perfect copy exists at all, as we saw in 2. It is pertinence that allows to decide what type a form is a token of. After this, all the tokens of the same type are of course interchangeable; no matter, for instance, if they are completely different under a diverse pertinence. A real plant and a plastic made one can be perfectly interchangeable in many contexts: it is the shape to be pertinent, and not the chemical internal organization; under that pertinence they are perfectly identical copies of the same type.

About *interchangeability*, it is important to notice its position between

identity and *resemblance*. Actually, *interchangeability* is closer to *identity* than to *resemblance*: it is just like *identity*, but space-temporal continuity is never concerned with it, but in negative form. We say – in general of objects – that *interchangeability* is involved every time we cannot distinguish each other the two (or more) forms, under the present pertinence; but, as space-temporal continuity is never pertinent, we have no problem in cases of compresence – as we would have with *identity*.

If reality appears more complex than our examples, it is because we consider in general many pertinences at the same time, and therefore in order for an object to be considered a perfect copy of an other one a lot of proofs have to be passed. Moreover we have physical limits in our perception: when we cannot be sure of the space-temporal non-continuity of two objects – because they are not both present here and now, and non-continuity would be a definite proof of non-identity – not always our senses are powerful enough to observe differences. If the use of more powerful instruments is not involved, the two objects would be interchangeable in every context, because under no pertinence we could discover any different form – and in general we do not even mind doing it, even when less perfect resemblance is involved. This fact does not yet authorize thinking of *absolute identity* or *absolute interchangeability*. Identity and interchangeability are still bound to the pertinence, because under some pertinence we would be forced to use instruments.

7. The problem of substance of content and the reproducibility of art

When speaking of *substance*, we have until now actually spoken of *substance of expression*, and never of content. The problem of what is the *substance of content* is not at all an easy one, because, from a rigidly epistemic point of view, no substance of content is possible. The reason is rather simple: if the content is the mental representation, it can be constituted only by forms, because only forms take place in our mind. No residue at all is conceivable.

We could not even think of *substance of content* in terms of the physiology of brain, for in knowing it we would face problems of substance and form of the expression, not of the content. And for the same reason, we could not even, finally, think that substance of content means the substance of the referred objects, because no such thing exists, and reference is always a mental event, when not helped by perception; but in such a case, again, the problems concern expression, not content.

From an epistemic point of view there is no escape. But the world-mind direction is not the only possible one, and considering the opposite case – mind-world direction – we could find some helpful insight. Namely, we need a *pragmatic* point of view. In a pragmatic approach the substance of content is bound to *action*. Our idea goes as follows: in an

epistemic approach the substance of expression is (the product of) our hypothesis on the unresolvability of the percept in the forms being the result of the perception; in a pragmatic approach, the substance of content is (the product of) our hypothesis on the unresolvability of our action in the forms that informed it. In other words: substance of expression depends on our hypothesis on the existence of a residue of perception, substance of content depends on our hypothesis on the existence of a residue of action.

The residue of action is the hypothesized difference between our internal forms (intentions) and the actual performed act. As this residue is an *output* residue, it is difficult to say how to control it. We might think that we could produce a second action, identical to a first one, with different intentions. But what does it mean “identity” for actions? If we take action as *perceived action*, then identity becomes the same as it is in the case of perception; and the problem becomes an *input* problem, regarding expression, not content. If we take identity as identity of pertinent intentions, then we definitely relinquish any approach to substance of content, because we accept the unattainability of substance of content.

As regards expression, we still have the impression that we do not accept the unattainability of substance, for, as we maintain that reality is stable, we do not expect that the object we are observing is changing in a pertinent way, while we go on in observing it under diverse pertinences. Therefore, we can always think of its *self-identity*, and almost always we can think we can “go down” in its *substance* making pertinent levels and levels of forms of the *very same* object. But, when content is concerned, we have no comparable assumption of continuity and self-identity of actions. If we change pertinence, when perception is involved, we can think we are observing the *same* object, but when action is involved, changing pertinence means changing intentions, without any available assumption of *sameness* of the actions.

Of course we do make assumptions about sameness or identity of actions through changes of intentions, but only when the actions are treated as percepts, i.e. only when it is again a problem of expression, not of content anymore, and the actions (even our ones) are perceived forms like any other.

Nevertheless the problem of substance of content is a chief problem for the interpretation of any non-natural sign. We know, in fact, that we can have perception of every substance in several ways, depending on pertinence; but when we presume that the substance is the product of a communicative act, there is then one more level of interpretation, the one depending on the supposed intention of the producer. The main difference between a natural and a communicative form is that in the former we hypothesize only a substance as substance of the expression of our perception, while in the latter we hypothesize also a second substance, as substance of the content of someone else’s communicative act.

We can see at least two consequences of this: 1) the relation between substance of expression and substance of content is not at all a matter of single signs (single forms); the only kind of relation we can hypothesize between them is a very complex and indirect one, always involving huge amounts of connected forms. In other words: substance of expression is connected with both form of expression and form of content, and substance of content is connected with both form of expression and form of content; but the former forms are not at all identical with the latter ones, and moreover the relation between them is a truly complex one – I am not at all sure that this remains a direct matter for semiotic analysis (unless we think that psychology is part of semiotics). 2) Since we know there is never a matching between substance and form (for substance is just the absence of the matching), and we know that many forms could have generated the same substance of content, we are then justified in our claim of looking for a variety of different (and often not reciprocally compatible) forms of the content of the communicative act.

Communicative forms would be therefore potentially completely ambiguous, for very many intentions could have been forms for the same substance of content. Actually, pertinence acts as a filter here too, in the double role of making us perceive the forms that presumably have been pertinent for the producer and of making us hypothesize the right intentions of the producer in performing the act: what in general we call *convention*, or *social competence*. Of course a big problem about hypothesizing and inferring intention is involved here, but we are not going to deal with it.

What is important for us at the moment are the problems concerned with the reproduction of communicative substances. We notice so that there are objects defining almost by themselves most part of their pertinence: words are typical example. Chiefly social convention, and then the fact that we are so often concerned with word shapes, used as words, makes very difficult our perceiving them under different pertinences, even if we sometimes do. Words, and other forms, are so easy to be reproduced, and so standard in their pertinence, that we create no problem at all for ourselves in continually reproducing them. Starting from words, we could trace a hierarchy of forms of less standard pertinence. Considering the opposing side, we are going to meet art works, as paintings, sculptures, and any work based on forms of non-standard pertinence.

What does it mean “non standard pertinence”? Every natural form has no standard pertinence: every time we meet one, it gives no indication for pertinence by itself. (This is not true when basic biological necessities are concerned: danger, hunger and thirst make nature “talk by itself”). Creating a convention about a set of forms means giving them a more or less standard pertinence.

But painting is making forms by means of forms having very low or

no standard pertinence. This means that we have no way to define a clear border between pertinent and non-pertinent forms, and therefore we have no way to distinguish forms being part of the content of the author's intention from the rest. In a poem, we know that the typographic shape of letter has no matter, because we know its non-pertinence. In a painting, the only sure border would be fixed by the supposed physic limits of the perception of the author.

This is the basic reason for which it is hard to accept the reproduction e.g. of a painting. But, if so, we should accept at least copies being precise at a level beyond perception limits. If our society actually does not, it is probably mainly for commercial reasons – for a unique original has a greater value than one of the interchangeable copies – but it is also probably for a particular meaning we attribute to properties (forms) like “hand-made”, “having been in direct contact with the author”, and so on. The *direct contact* maintains such a strong importance for us *political animals* that we attribute to it a sort of transitive property; as if being in direct contact with an object having been in direct contact with someone could put ourselves in direct contact with him.

Following this point of view, there is of course a difference between a fake that is a copy of an existing original, and a fake having no original. In the former case we have been deceived as much as many pertinent different forms we can find between the copy and the original. In the latter case there is no original, and we have been lead to attribute to an author intentions he never had.

8. Is reality a fake?

In a weaker sense we also talk often of natural fakes. In some contexts we can talk of a piece of brass as “fake gold”. I do not mean only cases when someone deceive us telling, e.g., of a piece of brass that it is gold. I am not interested in the lie itself, but in the fact that we can call a natural object “fake”, which surely does not pretend to be anything else.

In what sense then, is it a fake? Probably the object is a fake in comparison to the expectations that its most evident properties caused in ourselves, depending of course on our values and general hopes. So, in seeing a yellow metal we can think and hope it is gold, and in comparison to our hopes it can certainly be considered as a fake.

Is then reality a fake? Of course it is, for its hidden forms (properties) are often different from what its evident forms (properties) lead us to think they are. But this is obvious: if we accept that reality is not only form, then substance is just what can deceive us, because it is exactly what is unknown to us.

Otherwise reality would be like an imaginary world, where we might

foresee every form that we could ever know, because we are creating them. Imaginary worlds are completely authentic: they never give a disillusion. Reality is the only world in which falsity we can trust.

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