

FAKE AT STAKE: SEMIOTICS AND THE PROBLEM OF AUTHENTICITY

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The essay provides a critical assessment of the debates concerning the concepts of fake and original (authentic) in the context of semiotics (Ch.S. Peirce, T. de Lauretis, U. Eco, M. Bal), philosophy (N. Goodman, J. Baudrillard, S. Zizek), art theory (W. Benjamin, I. Haywood, N. Bryson), history (C. Ginzburg). It is an attempt to represent the problem of reproduction of cultural artefacts as a multifaceted issue which embraces the whole series of related notions (fake, forgery, imitation, reproduction, replication, remake, copy, pastiche, etc.) along with their different meanings and implications for various cultural practices (fine arts, history, architecture, cinema, social and cultural 'apparatuses' of identification). The main aim of the text is to provide an interdisciplinary frame of interpretation of the phenomenon of forgery, to reveal how aesthetic judgments on the originality (and aura) of the work of art are determined by economical and political factors and to show how the 'ideology of original' is related to the power-knowledge system and the issues of political economy in contemporary Western culture. Semiotics (particularly, in U. Eco's version) is chosen here as the most promising and efficient tool for the analysis of this complex phenomenon.

Keywords: *Semiotics; fake; original; representation; ideology.*

Imitation as a Cultural and Semiotic Paradox

The dichotomy of fake and original seems to be omnipresent and ineradicable in our culture. The problem of reproduction of cultural artefacts is one of the key problems of modernity which embraces the whole series of related phenomena – such as fake, forgery, imitation, replication, remake, copy, pastiche, etc. Various cultural practices (ranging from fine arts, history, architecture, cinema, religion to socio-economic

relations and dominant ideology) worked out their own strategies of dealing with this problem. For a long time the topics of imitation and reproduction were studied separately by each discipline. Classical aesthetics and art theory elaborated sophisticated procedures (the so called 'attribution') for identifying and discerning copies from originals; philologists worked out their own instrumental criteria for identification of 'original' texts; philosophers meditated on the issues of difference and repetition (J. Deleuze), identity and the Self, copy and simulacrum (from

Plato to Baudrillard), whereas police and courts prosecuted counterfeiters and state apparatus kept upgrading their methods for control and governing through the multiplication of identification documents. What is common to all of these practices is the intention to *identify*, to ascertain the authenticity, to free the 'grain of truth' from the weeds, and tis need (as well as the very belief in the necessity to do so) is shared by ordinary people, art experts and most of all... by the state bureaucracy.

Forgery is relatively late (recent) phenomenon, it was 'born' in the XIX century and it is directly related to the notion of *intellectual property*. Due to the boom in art collecting, "there has been a tendency to equate the financial value of a work of art with its aesthetic value. The art market has become a place for lucrative investment".¹ Yet the artists whose name seems to be crucial in commanding a high price, was often at the bottom of "the money-making chain", whereas the dealers, auctioners and collectors are the main actors on this scene. For them the only way to ensure good returns was to elevate the cult of the original artist: the elaboration of the mythology of uniqueness and originality of the work of art was and still is a very efficient market strategy.

Art theory, having once "discovered" and articulated the problem of forgery, seems to have forgotten the prosaic foundations of the cult of originality, replacing it with aesthetical judgements. It provided a sort of 'universalistic' scheme for its interpretation: fakes and forgeries were set in opposition to the highly respected notions of originality and authenticity. In 19th century "faking" was proclaimed an illegitimate practice that menaces the very existence of (*high*)

art as a social, economic and cultural institution. Despite the fact that forgery has *history*², art history even nowadays often takes the notion of forgery for granted and ignores its ideological framing together with the material conditions of the production and development of the discourses on authentic and faked. M. Bal and N. Bryson make a valuable remark on this: "Because of the theoretical scepticism of semiotics, the relationship between contemporary semiotics and art history is bound to be a delicate one": semiotics challenges some fundamental tenets and practices of art history³, which is quite reluctant to give up the hope of reaching positive knowledge.

Avant-garde artists, contemporary mass media and communication arts in 20th century seem to have essentially transformed the common stakes towards the phenomenon of reproduction. The first theoretician who had initiated discussion on multiple meanings (and layers) and various forms of imitation and replication, was German philosopher Walter Benjamin. He pointed out that the phenomenon of mechanical reproduction of a work of art is something unknown for previous cultural periods. But in principle "a work of art has always been reproducible. Manmade artifacts could always be imitated by men. Replicas were made by pupils in practice of their craft, by masters

² Originally the word *forgery* had a literal meaning: the product of the blacksmith's forge – "a meaningful act of creation." According to Haywood, at the time of Renaissance the concept was abstracted from the concrete world to apply to the mind's creative faculties. By the XIXth century the concept of forgery was moralised, and "a fissure opened up between permissible 'fiction' and reprehensible 'fraudulent artifice'. [...] So what was once a valuable act of creation for society's use had become bastard, 'spurious production' (See: Haywood I. Op. cit, p. 6.

³ BalM., Bryson N. 'Semiotics and Art History', in *The Art Bulletin*, June 1991, Vol. LXXIII, Number 2. P. 174.

¹ Haywood I. *Faking It. Art and the Politics of Forgery*. The Harvester Press, 1987, p. 105.

for diffusing their works, and finally, by third parties in the pursuit of the gain".⁴

Contemporary culture did not eliminate the hierarchical relations between fakes and originals. On the contrary, this binary opposition has proved to be of great vitality. Thus, attribution did not lose its meaning and maintains the status of respectable art practice; the originals of modern art (the pioneers of which can be ranked among the most successful 'serial fakers'⁵) get more expensive on the auctions; tourist industry and museum collections as long before are based on the cult of authenticity while theorists did not cease debating over impossibility to define 'what is the difference between fake and original', getting more and more entangled in the linguistic maze of definitions. Hence, it would be very useful to investigate some philosophical and semiotic paradoxes, that are specific for this phenomenon and could shed a light upon its existence.

At first glance the problem of fakes and forgeries occupies rather modest place in the theoretical work of Umberto Eco. However, scrupulous analysis would reveal that 'a taste for the

apocryphal" actually has inspired many of his theoretical texts and literary writings. He himself is a well known master of falsifications⁶. Furthermore, it is present, using the words of Teresa de Lauretis, at all "three registers of discourse – the literary-historical, the theologico-philosophical and the popular-cultural – which are not only the major areas of Eco's critical work but also the field of his writing practice"⁷. On the one hand, Eco shows us that scientific discourse as well as everyday practices of culture are saturated by the fake-original antinomy. On the other, through deconstructing certain axiomatic 'truths' of common sense concerning the definitions of faked and authentic, Eco uncovers a fresh prospective to well known philosophical and semiotic problems such as, for instance, the concepts of identity, authenticity, iconicity, similarity and simulacrum; he reinstates the faded pathos of semiology as an ideological critique; he disavows the metaphysics of Truth and Lying and so on.

Thus, my task here is to look through different texts of Umberto Eco (published between 1975⁸ and the mid of 1990s) that confronted the issues of 'fakes and forgery' in one way or another and, thus, to pull out the threads of never-fulfilled-project (let us call it here 'Imitation as a Cultural and Semiotic Paradox'), interlacing

⁴ Benjamin W. "The Work of Art in the Age of Its Mechanical Reproduction", in *Illuminations* (Pimlico, 1999). P. 212.

⁵ In fact, it relates to the artists of previous centuries as well: almost all Renaissance artists themselves were perfect 'serial' fakers. The master would have his own 'factory' of forgery (i.e. the workshop), where he acted as a manager whereas his apprentices would do much of the essential 'brushwork'. It is not surprising then, that Rubens's works were even categorized into six grades: (1) pictures entirely made by Rubens; (2) works that he sketched for his assistants; (3) works in which a formal division of labour took place; (4) workshop pictures painted in the 'spirit of Rubens' by his followers; (5) school copies without Rubens's personal participation; (6) copies executed by other scholars. (See: Haywood I. *Faking It. Art and the Politics of Forgery*. The Harvester Press, 1987; Arnau F. *Three Thousand Years of Deception in Art and Antiques*. Jonathan Cape, 1961).

⁶ It does not sound strange when he suggests: "We could react to the falsification only with other falsifications, spreading false news about everything, even about falsifications: and who knows? – perhaps the article you are now reading is only the first example of this new trend toward desinformation" (Eco U. "Falsification and consensus", in *Faith in Fakes. Travels in Hyperreality* (Minerva, 1996). P. 176).

⁷ De Lauretis T. «Gaudy rose: Eco and narcissism», in *Technologies of Gender* (Indiana University Press, 1987). P. 55.

⁸ Starting from Eco's *Trattato di semiotica generale* (Milano: Bompiani) that came out in 1975.

them into a coherent interpretation with multiple outcomes and interesting collateral effects. Such a 'project' may include the following stages of analysis (which are presented in a series of questions):

- (1) *Are we able to provide firm and positive definitions?* One should start with the theoretical definitions of 'fake' and 'original' as well as of their 'family members', i.e. related concepts. Are they intelligible without each other?
- (2) *what can and cannot do semiotics?* "Everything you wanted to know about semiotic status of fake, but were afraid to ask Umberto Eco" (along with N. Goodman, Ch.S. Peirce, C. Ginzburg and some others. Not to forget Žižek, of course...).
- (3) *How does aesthetics relate to ideology?* Does 'original' guarantee 'aesthetical' pleasure by the virtue of its physical properties (what can be described as a materiality of 'aura' and refers to colour, light, paint)? Or pleasure of beholding results from what we know about both kinds of objects?
- (4) *What can be said of the political economy of original?* What are the economic reasons for the existence of the above-mentioned dichotomy? How culture and economics mutually support each other defending and insisting on the priority of originals?
- (5) *What is 'fakeable' and what is not?* Why there are certain kinds of 'forgery' that are sanctioned and legitimate (like Christian relics, for instance) and others which are not (counterfeiting, etc.)?
- (6) *How do the notions of fake and original relate to the philosophical concepts of Truth and Lying, of Reality and Fiction?* Both notions – 'fake' and 'original' seem to

be the natural products of modern culture, yet they have very intimate relations with some classical or more global problems: such as truth and lying, reality and fiction, but also identification and identity.

- (7) *What practical solutions exist in different scholarships for identification of fakes?* Every cultural institution and scientific discipline uses its own models, criteria and definitions of fake and original (in addition - for its own purposes). Thus, it would be interesting (however, not in the framework of this article) to look at the practices of attribution and identification in art, history, religion, mass media, philology and literary tradition, architecture, etc.
- (8) *How identification relate to power and legitimation?* Obviously, society is not and has never been totally indifferent to the problem of identification (the latter should not be approached as a 'private' affair of art history, for instance). On the contrary: it remains one of the most efficient tools of surveillance and control over individuals.

... This list of questions may seem too long or redundant. We should not feel ourselves obliged answering them all. Sometimes it is useful to ask simple questions even in weak voice. Just meditating aloud. It would be enough for exciting doubts and escaping the complacent ignorance. Such was and has to be the task of any philosophical investigation.

Semiotic solutions to non-answerable questions

The problem of forgery is traditionally considered to be the subject of professional interest of art experts who deal with attribution of the work of art. The main objective of attribution is to

determine the authorship, age and location of the master and his school. Eventually attribution leads to reappraisal of economic value of the work of art.

Ideally, in their work art experts combine 'objective' and 'subjective' methods. The procedures should include both "scientific" (i.e. physical and chemical analyses – X-rays, spectroscopic analysis, cryptography) and interpretive methods of attribution (the analysis of style and narration, technologies used, iconographic motives, etc.). To a great extent attribution depends on certain paradigm of interpretation that is implied by both the process and the outcome of attribution. As a result, there are no incontrovertible decisions. Despite perpetual improvement of the techniques of attribution, the amount of dubious decisions that depend on the ever-changing interpretations surprises not only deceived collectors but the specialists themselves. Mieke Bal and Norman Bryson argue that attribution in art history involves such operations that lead far away from science and technology into subtler, and more ideologically motivated, considerations concerning quality and stylistic standardization.

Undoubtedly, art expert should 'train the eye' in order to be able to discern even the slightest variations in the works he deals with, but attribution is first of all social and cultural practice. To be precise, 'training of eye' implies not so much the exercises of the organ of seeing as the learning of cultural and textual conventions. Hence, attribution depends very much on the idea that the Author (painter) was coherent and unchangeable subject, who developed the same themes in all his canvases and worked in a single manner. The master's identity should not change with age and training, it does not depend on circumstances of life and acquired skills. His style remains idiosyncratic. Such a position (implic-

itly shared by many art historians) looks very weak from the point of view of poststructuralism, psychoanalysis and some other theories: in contrast to the idea of invariability and coherence of Author's Ego they speak of fluid and unstable identity, suggest that our subjectivity is being under permanent construction. Paraphrasing Jonathan Culler, one could say that the authorship is not given but produced; what counts as authorship is determined by interpretive strategies⁹.

The philosophical dimension of the problem that is to be discussed below, has little importance for the art experts, they may prefer not to know about it at all. Despite the severe criticism elaborated by poststructuralism and psychoanalysis the theoretical concept of authorship remains unshakeable being protected by dealers, auctioners and the whole industry of production and consumption of 'high art'. In other words, art market and cultural industry holds on the dichotomy of 'fake-original' even stronger than art history. What follows from this analysis is that the practice of attribution reinforces the status of original through the concept of 'Authorship' and rejects forgeries as defective 'works of art'. Attribution is usually considered to be a matter of aesthetic judgment and professional competence whereas in fact it should be analysed as a practice of power ("power of discriminating among works of art¹⁰") and as a product of certain ideology.

The negative attitude towards fakes and forgeries is often implied by the attempt to discern the difference between fake and original at the level of aesthetic perception though aesthetics seems to be far-out of the problem in question.

⁹ Bal M., Bryson N. Op. cit. P. 181.

¹⁰ Goodman N. *The Languages of Art* (Indianapolis: Bobbs, Merrill, 1968). P. 112.

There is a suspicion, however, that negative judgment concerning the aesthetic properties of fakes is implicitly based on the ideological prejudices and has nothing to do with the poor artistic quality of the given work. Eco points out, that “the lust for authenticity is the ideological product of the art market’s hidden persuaders; when the replica of a sculpture is absolutely perfect, to privilege the original is like giving more importance to the first numbered copy of a poem than to a normal pocket edition”¹¹.

American philosopher Nelson Goodman suggests to make a simple test – to compare two canvas that look identical but are presumably different from each other in terms of authorship, chemical structure and age. The question is whether there can be any aesthetic difference between the two pictures. According to Goodman, we must begin by inquiring whether the distinction between what can and what cannot be seen in the pictures by ‘merely looking at them’ is entirely clear. Does ‘merely looking’ mean looking without the use of any instrument? Does this faculty depend only upon native visual activity (of ‘innocent eye’) or upon practice and training as well? Speaking of ‘instruments’ he means mostly mechanical instruments: Goodman treats ‘microscope’ or ‘looking glass’ as a sort of prosthetic appliances that gives more perfection to our organs of senses. Misinterpretation originates from ‘fabric of our common nonsense’¹².

It is very tempting though to read the metaphor of ‘glasses’ as an allusion to ideological presupposition. In any case, to specify what is meant by ‘merely looking at the pictures’ is thus far from easy: we have to consider the factor of ‘informed looking’ when physiology is being

replaced by ideology. Knowledge prescribes us to look at the two pictures differently, even if what we see is the same¹³. Hence, to *see* the difference is almost unattainable task even for the most skilled expert (not to mention ordinary viewers): our organs of seeing along with long-term training and professional experience are often helpless in such situations. This skepticism is brought about by multiple stories of unsuccessful expertises. One could refer, for instance, to the notorious case of Hans Van Meegeren’s forgeries which eventually confronted the authority of the Dutch court in 1947. The charge was that during the war he had sold a painting by Vermeer to Nazi leader Hermann Goering for £165,000, and therefore, he was accused of treachery and collaboration. Van Meegeren came up with a remarkable defence. The act of forgery was not visible to the experts up until Van Meegeren himself confessed that he was selling to Nazis his own works and not the original works of Vermeer. Hence, “he had duped rather than co-operated with the Nazis”. Thus, he needed his charge to be commuted to an offence against culture rather than the state.¹⁴ What is interesting is that later the “difference” became *obvious* even to the “observant layman”. Nelson Goodman argues, that we see the pictures and we may even know that we see original and its faked relative but we are unable to see *the difference*.

The phenomenon of attribution may be examined in a broader context: the search for an absolute idiosyncratic details that allows to discern the copy from original, the ‘hand’ of the Master from the ‘hand’ of his forger represents just one out of thousands other practices of identification and control that the state power has

¹¹ Eco U. *A Theory of Semiotics*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1979. P. 179.

¹² Goodman N. *Ibid.* P. 112.

¹³ Goodman N. *Ibid.* P. 104.

¹⁴ See: Haywood. I. *Op. cit.* P. 113–114.

exercised towards individuals. Those practices produced the wide range of documents certifying and identifying name, age, nationality, social, marital and other statuses. Such 'documents' as passport, social security number, driver licence, signature, monthly pass, finger-prints, library card and many other certificates that are supposed to be authentic. Their falsification is prohibited in that system of power-knowledge which constitutes our culture. Umberto Eco is deeply convinced, that certain forms of consensus are so essential to community life that they reestablish themselves despite every attempt to shake them. "To destroy the opposition 'fake-original' in the whole of culture (i.e. at all its levels – from political to aesthetic) would be truly revolutionary gesture since it challenges the hierarchy of values and the structure of symbolic power: it undermines the the very ideology of difference – which is undoubtedly the core of social order"¹⁵. Eco draws this conclusion from his reflection on what would happen with the publishing industry in case the photocopying develops unlimitedly. Hence, the forgery of a work of art in case of its legitimation and the recognition of its aesthetic impeccability jeopardizes the institution of property and the mechanisms of power – for this simple reason it is the subject for taboo and persecution. It should be disavowed despite the fact that we do not know exactly how and what for we should discern original from its faked double.

Eco's interest to the problem of forgery has very little in common with the approach of art curators, dealers and experts who face the problem of 'authenticity' in their practice and need to think pragmatically without interrogating themselves 'harmful' and complex questions – 'why is the attribution so important?' or 'what

does the 'original' mean?' All cases of forgery are implicitly based on the axiomatic belief in that there is *an* Original and every other object that looks identical should be a fake. If to destroy this metaphysical believe into the existence of Original, that would lead to a catastrophe for our cultural universe.

Umberto Eco is certainly not the only theorist who looks for the 'truth' of fake. Helson Goodman agrees that forgeries of works of art present a 'nasty practical problem' to the collector, the curator, and the art historian, but, as he says, the theoretical problem is even more acute. "The hardheaded question why there is any aesthetic difference between a deceptive forgery and an original work challenges a basic premiss on which the very functions of collector, museum, and art historian depend. A philosopher of art caught without an answer to this question is at least as badly off as a curator of paintings caught taking a Van Meegeren for a Vermeer».¹⁶ Only philosopher could afford himself asking the questions that seem to satisfy only his idle curiosity. It is similarly important for a semiotician whose main concern is to detect conventions, codes and ideology in every cultural artifact. Eco used to say that any 'natural' phenomenon is in fact a cultural construction, a product of history. Likewise, the idea of "nature" represents a myth or a mystification of the workings of culture and history, as Roland Barthes demonstrated forty years ago. All we need to do now is to deconstruct the european myth of 'Original', and following Eco's meditations – to translate Natural into Cultural.

Not everybody can recognise forgery as such (that is the matter of professional "competence"), though everybody seems to be able to

¹⁵ Eco U. "Falsification and consensus". P. 178.

¹⁶ Cm.: Goodman N. The Languages of Art (Indianapolis: Bobbs, Merrill, 1968), p. 99.

give a definition of fake, copy or false document proceeding from common sense. However, Eco points out that it is extremely difficult to give a self-sufficing definition to such terms as “fake”, “forgery”, “pseudo”, “falsification”, “facsimile”, “counterfeiting”, ‘apocryphal’, “similar”, “copy”. And the real headache for theorist is to decide what one means by ‘authentic object’¹⁷. Any of these terms is ‘obviously crucial for a semiotic theory and all together they depend on a ‘satisfactory’ semiotic definition of Truth and Falsity’¹⁸.

Last thesis needs some clarification. Placing the notions of Truth and Falsity in such context, Eco goes on for a deliberate provocation. First of all, because the whole course of Western and Eastern philosophy did not manage to work out single satisfactory (i.e. acceptable for every one) definition of both concepts. Secondly because the definitions of Truth and False themselves need further analysis – at least for a semiotician: where common sense hopes to find its last resort via reference to the Absolute Truth, the semiotic inquiry is just about to start. Whenever we face the problem of representation, we know that there could be a *lie* uttered about that object (if ‘the truth’ means a congruence between the object and its – mental, verbal or visual – representation). We have no means to disapprove this statement. When Eco says that possibility of lying is the “*proprium* of semiosis”, he suggests that possibility of lying is inseparably connected to the work of sign-function which is “to signify (and then to communicate) something to which no real state of things correspond. <...> Every time there is signification, there is the possibil-

ity of using it in order to lie’¹⁹. From this point of view, forgery is not “an instance of lie through objects”, the habitual schemes of reasoning through Truth and Lying do not work here at all.

Thus, Eco seems to be willing to kill two birds with one stone: to look beyond ‘common-sensical’ definitions of presumably indeterminate notions of fake and original, and then to ‘cast in doubt’ some of the definitions of Truth and Falsity together with concepts of ‘identity’ and ‘difference’ – key terms of contemporary philosophy.

Semiotic analysis of faked and authentic must begin with some basic, ‘primitive’ concepts – such as similarity and resemblance (since original and fake give impression of complete similarity). The classical interpretation of identical objects asserted that “two supposedly different things are discovered to be the same if they succeed in occupying at the same moment the same portion of space”²⁰. However, such a definition of identity is useless for the analysis of forgery because the latter acts only in the absence of its ‘original’ – if both objects were perceived at the same time and were placed in the same place then (a) either the difference between them would become obvious; (b) or the problem of difference between them would have not been discussed at all (if they are really identical). There should be a relation of genealogical succession, or better of chronological hierarchy: thus, objects are not identical because original was the *first* and only later it became the prototype for the production of fake. Hence, “if Raphael’s painting seems beyond duplication, this is because he *invented* his rules as he painted,

¹⁷ Eco U. «Fakes and Forgeries», in Eco U. *The limits of interpretation*. (Indiana University Press, 1990). P. 191.

¹⁸ Eco U. «Fakes and Forgeries». P. 176.

¹⁹ Eco U. *A Theory of Semiotics*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1979. P. 58.

²⁰ Eco U. «Fakes and Forgeries». P. 176.

proposing new and imprecise sign-functions and thereby performing an act of code-making”²¹.

Semiotician may also ask himself: what kind of semiotic object represent the fake? Is it a sign? If yes, then does it correspond to the definition of iconic sign, for instance? Before we answer these questions we must give definitions of sign and iconic sign which Eco borrows from Peirce. According to Peirce, “a sign, or *representamen*, is something which stands to somebody for something in some respect or capacity”²². *Icon* refers to the (second) trichotomy of signs that includes three types of signs having some existential relation to the object - icon, index and symbol. Peirce defined it as a sign that “may represent its Object mainly by its similarity, no matter what its mode of being”²³, or ‘sign that represents its Object in resembling it’²⁴. The category of iconic sign is relevant here since both (icon and fake) are linked to the Object²⁵ (which they represent or refer to) by similarity. The degree of likeness between fake and its original may vary²⁶. The degree of similarity can be evaluated on the scale of iconicity (if we ask the question how much does the fake differ from its pro-

totype). What follows from Eco’s analysis of iconicity is that ‘similarity’ is likewise a matter of cultural convention. One should make a decision on whether a double or a replica is a perfect iconic sign of ‘original’ as its object? Similarity does not concern the relationship between the image and its object but between the image and a previously culturalized content²⁷.

In Eco’s view, the ‘complete iconism coincides with indiscernibility or identity’, and semiotic definition of the phenomenon of identity involves the idea of ‘complete iconism’²⁸. However, assuming the object and its sign to be similar in all respects (= identical) the situation turns to be logically absurd, as Peirce would point out here: the ultimate interpretant, which is able to encompass the Object entirely, should be the object itself. Since this is impossible by definition – let us consider the notion of ‘complete iconism’ to be a useful model for our investigation and nothing more. If total similarity cannot not be achieved under any circumstances, then fake represents for us a very curious kind of sign: ‘it would succeed in being a sign insofar as nobody takes it as a sign and everybody mistakes it for its potential denotatum’²⁹.

In principle, we should not bother too much about to which extent the reproduction (copy) differs from original (object), or do we have ‘perfect’ or imperfect iconic sign of the original. The discussion has nothing to do with *ontological properties* of the objects. The difference between fakes and originals is a matter of *interpretation* and of pragmatic choice. They set up the rules for identification of both originals and fakes. It can be that ‘forgeries’ are simply the cases of

²¹ Eco U. *A Theory of Semiotics*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1979. P. 204.

²² Peirce Ch.S. “Logic as Semiotic: The Theory of Signs”, in *Philosophical Writings* (ed. by J. Buchler. Dover Publications, 1955). P. 99.

²³ Peirce Ch.S. “Logic as Semiotic: The Theory of Signs”. P. 104.

²⁴ Peirce Ch.S. “A Neglected Argument for the Reality of God”, in *Peirce on Signs* (ed. by J. Hoops). The University of North Carolina Press, 1991. P. 270.

²⁵ Suppose, ‘Original’ corresponds here to the notion of Object.

²⁶ Semiotician must take a clear distinction between absolute duplicative replicas which produce a *double*, and partial replicas, which will simply be called *replicas*. (For more detailed semiotic analysis of replicas and doubles see: Eco U. *A Theory of Semiotics*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1979. P. 179–205).

²⁷ Eco U. *A Theory of Semiotics*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1979. P. 204.

²⁸ Eco U. «Fakes and Forgeries». P. 188.

²⁹ Eco U. «Fakes and Forgeries». P. 188.

false identification: “the web of misunderstandings and deliberate lies, whereas any effort to make a ‘correct’ authentication is a clear case of semiotic interpretation or of abduction, - concludes Eco”³⁰. It the user who makes decision concerning the correspondence between the rule and the object, he determines whether two objects are ‘objectively’ similar and interchangeable. Hence, the problem of doubles that seemed to be an ontological one, is in fact a pragmatic problem, that depends on the ‘competence’ of the user and various cultural assumptions³¹.

The trouble with Original: “cet obscur objet du desir”

“The presence of the original is the prerequisite to the concept of authenticity”, – Walter Benjamin once wrote³². In the given context it means that we are able to recognise ‘fake’ only if we know its prototype which is supposed to be *original*. This is true not only in relation to practical matters but towards theoretical definitions as well. The definition of original causes endless problems for the researcher: on the one hand it functions as a *source* for re-production, as the prototype for any imitation, on the other, it is unattainable as such.

Eco argues that many objects displayed in museums have lost their ‘originality’ long time ago. Original has predisposition to natural aging: it can lose certain parts (arms, heads, etc.), its colours alter, the texture may change too. One day it must disappear at all. In order to avert the aging, most works of art are subject to restoration. The signs of ‘aging’ as well as an attempt to

preserve original object through restoration imply that original loses its uniqueness (naturally or artificially), its authentic features. Following this logic, its economic and symbolic value should decrease, however it does not.

Any restoration is in fact the re-construction, the re-creation of the copy that is being perceived and respected as original. There are many cases when the works of art after restoration look much *better* than before but nobody would call them a forgery. Yet the ‘originality’ of beautiful and renewed canvas or statues often turns to be highly problematic even for specialists, for those to whom the restoration was actually confided. All this causes multiple confusions, such as neoclassical utopia of ‘white’ Ancient Greek art, mentioned by Eco: everybody knows today that originals had bright colours. Nevertheless, the remains of authentic objects are all preserved in white. Whiteness connotes ‘originality’: any other colour makes us suspect that we face the forgery.

Furthermore, it is not always clear what exactly should be restored and what ‘archeological layer’ in the long life of the works of art is taken for criterion of originality. Why is it so that Venus had lost its arms forever while almost destroyed by fanatics Danae has been renewed entirely? Is it because time (as something ‘natural’) is not taken into account by experts and thus it does not harm original properties? But many half-preserved buildings or statues that we consider to be ‘natural olders’ were destroyed artificially in their time because of wars and intentional vandalism. May be, original setting plays key role in the definition of original? And therefore American Parthenon is a fake simply because it was constructed in another country? But why then should works of art and statues in all museums of the world be considered original if they can be easily bought, sold and relocated?

³⁰ Eco U. Ibid. P. 192–193.

³¹ Eco U. «Fakes and Forgeries». P. 178.

³² Benjamin W. “The Work of Art in the Age of Its Mechanical Reproduction”, in *Illuminations* (Pimlico, 1999), p. 215.

It should be also mentioned that art forgery has not been clearly defined in law: the problem lies in the legal status of artistic authenticity. One can, perhaps, say that ‘forgery’ is “a piece of work created or modified with an intention to deceive”³³, but this does not work when it comes to the court – for art was always and essentially based on fiction, illusion, remaking and so on, and so forth, it is imitative *per se*. Of course, the concept of ‘forgery’ keeps alive the idea of artistic theft, but when it comes to individual cases it is not an easy task to provide a satisfactory solution, to mark the boundary which divides a creative work (“original forgery”), even based on imitation, from plagiarism (the phenomenon of *remake* in cinema would be a good example to this). According to Eco, in a certain sense all works of art which have survived from Antiquity till nowadays should be considered forgeries³⁴. As a consequence, every object should be seen as ‘an instant forgery of itself’ since there are no objects in our material culture that are not subject for chemical or physical alteration. We have to deal with identity of the object that does not have the essence; its ‘hard core’ is being under permanent construction in the given culture.

In Lacan’s language, one could perhaps compare ‘original’ with *petit objet ‘a’*: it represents the object of desire, it is a sort of the specular image produced by our fantasy, but simultaneously it is the object of anxiety. What if original is indeed the object that can never be attained if it exists at all?

In order to avoid the paranoia caused by the situation when everything is a subject to change and thus authenticity of various things becomes a matter of consensus without any objective cri-

teria, our culture invented some rules concerning the problem of physical integrity of the object. These rules are rather flexible, if not to say precarious. Eco gives us few examples: the book in the bookstore continues to be a new exemplar, though opened many times by customers until the moment in which it is obviously worn or crumpled. In the same vein, there are certain rules for defining the time for restoration of the works of art even though every restoration case is accompanied by endless debates over the legitimacy of the work done.

There many different rules that are applicable to the analysis of fakes and forgeries. Sometimes they may contradict each other. Thus, formal-aesthetical criterion of authenticity presupposes that a work of art is recognisable as such if it maintains its basic integrity and formal structure. ‘Archeological’ criterion asserts the importance of origin and ‘archeological genuineness’. If we take into consideration both criteria simultaneously, we may never find the solution. A concrete example (Eco’s favourite) would be useful here. The above-mentioned Parthenon of Athens lost its colors, a great deal of its architectural features and part of its stones, but the remainings are authentical from archeological point of view. Parthenon (in Nashville) that was built according to the Greek model as it looked, which is formally complete and even colored as the original supposedly was at the time of its splendor, – is regarded to be an exemplar forgery. But from the point of view of formal and aesthetic criteria it is rather Greek Parthenon, says Eco, “should be considered an alteration of a forgery of Nashville’s one”. Instead, it is considered to be not only more ‘authentic’ but even more ‘beautiful’ than its American counterpart³⁵. We clearly

³³ Haywood J. Op. cit., p. 8.

³⁴ Eco U. «Fakes and Forgeries». P. 184.

³⁵ Eco U. «Fakes and Forgeries». P. 185.

see that archeological criterion has 'won' the battle in the definitions of original and as a result the matter of aesthetic pleasure becomes secondary and subjective.

European culture has outlined certain criteria, more or less satisfactory, for proving authenticity and for falsifying false identifications. According to Eco, there are, at least, four kinds of proofs provided by modern scholarship: (1) proofs through material support; (2) proofs through linear text manifestation; (3) proofs through content; (4) proofs through external evidences (referent). *Proof through material support* envisages verification of origins of the material remainings (paper, linen, wood, etc.). The procedure implies physical or chemical techniques for determining the age and the nature of a medium. These techniques are considered fairly 'objective'. *Proof through linear text manifestation* is based on the scrupulous analysis of the form of expression in a given period together with so called 'personal style' of the author. The idea of determining the credibility of a text from its linguistic characteristics was discussed by medieval philosophers and theologians in relation to sacred texts, but the first demonstration of the method of philological analysis was provided only in 15th century by Lorenzo Valla when he revealed that the use of certain linguistic expressions was impossible at the beginning of the fourth century³⁶. There are many other specific (and not only philological) techniques of analysis – paleographic, grammatical, iconographic, stylistic criteria that can be included in this group. *Proof through content* analyses the form of the content, which means that conceptual categories, taxonomies, modes of argumentation, iconological schemes should correspond to certain semantic structure of the given cul-

ture. This method also appeared in the Middle Ages and was improved in the age of Renaissance. Eco seems to be rather sceptical towards the 'credibility' of this kind of proof, because such things like interpretation of the world views prevailing in different historical periods are very dependent on suppositions, modes of reasoning and one could add – ideology. *Proof through external evidences* relies upon the knowledge of the context: reference to the events, facts, dates and other historical data that text may report about, may be false or true if this information contradicts or conforms to external History. Whatever faithful the representation of historical realities is, this 'proof' cannot serve as an ultimate manifestation of that a text itself is not a fake.

These are the main criteria elaborated by our culture for proving or disapproving authenticity of certain artefacts. Closer analysis could reveal that all of them (or almost all) depend very much on the choice of interpretive scheme and on the availability of sources that could provide external verification. Eco confines their usefulness to the case of 'imperfect' fake: he says, that if there is a 'perfect forgery' (in terms of N. Goodman) then any given philological criteria lose their efficiency³⁷. Thus, both fake and original are subject for serious investigation and none of them is free of suspicions. The circle gets closed: in order to disguise the fake, we should first compare it with original, but we are unable to verify the 'originality' of 'original'. We have but to apply the same procedures for defining both fake and original.

What does Eco want to show us here is that all criteria for deciding about authenticity are insufficient from the point of view of semiotics: there is no 'truth' in the last instance that cannot

³⁶ Eco U. «Fakes and Forgeries». P. 195.

³⁷ Eco U. «Fakes and Forgeries». P. 197.

be deconstructed by a semiotician. “Such concepts as Truth and Fake, Authentic and Fake, Identity and Difference circularly define each other”³⁸. There is no ontological guarantee for the definition of identity – all our procedures and techniques are more or less conventional and depend on different social assumptions. In our everyday practice we never refer to such sophisticated procedures, neither to ‘high theories’ matching them. For recognition of familiar things and persons (in order to *identify* them) we rely upon our intuition that is, in its turn, based on certain social agreements. Once again Eco resorted to *the common sense* that he uses as an antidote (or antipode?) from semiotic interpretation.

Thus, it is the inertia of cultural conventions compels us to go to Academy of Fine Arts in Florence, to spend some time queuing in line and to buy the ticket in order to see the original of David, the beautiful copies of which we can see for free on the Piazza Signoria or Piazzale Michelangelo... We do this without questioning ourselves: does the *difference* matter indeed?

America: the Paradise of Fake or Faked Paradise?

The discourse of classical aesthetics is far from being totally disavowed. To reject it means to discard the common values of our culture related to the concept of authenticity all together with its connotations of historicism and uniqueness. Many of us experience a bunch of feelings standing in front of the ruins of Colosseum or Notre Dame de Paris - precisely because of their genuineness. Let us imagine what would happen to European cultural industry and tourism in case if postmodernism would have come “down

the street”? Fortunately for everybody, postmodernism after having buried the ‘master narratives’ and laid away the pretensions to the explanation of the world, eventually bared its own epistemological status – as a linguistic game, as an elegant theory that explains nothing... without losing its intellectual aura.

Baudrillard, Lyotard, Jameson and other ‘fathers’ of postmodern theory are sometimes accused to have ‘packed’ the contemporary perception of world into the magic formulae that may not have anything to do with the Real World, but any layman can unmistakably identify today as ‘postmodernist’ (whenever it comes to ‘simulacrum’, ‘pastiche’, ‘semantic catastrophe’ and other keywords). Postmodernism is being often perceived as a refined theoretical product of French philosophy whereas in reality it was born far away from Europe. As a theory it does give a satisfactory interpretation to the outer world, but not in Europe and least of all – in the countries of so called ‘third world’.

As a matter of fact postmodernism appeared long time ago as a ‘practical’ philosophy of American history. What can be more ‘postmodernist’ (‘kitchy’ in terms of modernist aesthetics) than gathering the pieces of ancient, medieval and Renaissance cultures in the same place (Hearst Castle)? What can be more postmodernist than sky-scraper conceived as a mixture of constructivist fantasy and the aesthetics of gothic church? What can be more postmodernist than the eclecticism of museum space where the paintings of European avant-garde artists neighbour the Renaissance art and the hand-made articles of blacksmiths from Philadelphia (Barns Foundation)? The row of examples of the ‘nostalgia for lost referent’ (Baudrillard) can be continued ad infinitum and all of them dated long before we got to know about postmodernism.

³⁸ Eco U. «Fakes and Forgeries». P. 201.

Conceptual explication that was developed into a theory of postmodernism few decades ago, represents an attempt to justify and legitimize properly American cultural landscape. 'Legitimize' – because from within European frame of reference American culture cannot be recognised as if the latter would not exist at all. At best it was perceived as an ersatz of continental culture re-created from the fragments exported from Europe and belonging to its history. American culture has deserved a right to be named 'the cradle' of postmodernism. Its mesmerizing hyperrealism lacked proper interpretation for too long. Eventually it has got it in a theory of postmodernism. Speaking of America as a postmodern culture, many would refer to the well-known essay of Jean Baudrillard *America* (1986), others would mention Fredric Jameson's *Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (1991) but some people would put on the first place the works of Umberto Eco.

Among the texts of Umberto Eco, dedicated to the problem of postmodernist culture (including its American 'roots'), our attention is compelled to an essay dated 1975 and named *Travels in Hyperreality*. The text is often said to have 'an anomalous quality', considering the date of publication³⁹ and its volume (approximately sixty pages). It reads today as a "strange combination of postmodern philosophy and something out of Sunday travel section, full of sardonic descriptions and exaggerated denunciations that focus on the cultural shortcomings of America"⁴⁰. Surprisingly, this particular text has been rarely discussed in intellectual com-

munities as a postmodernist text⁴¹. In a similar way, it has almost never been mentioned in semiotic, art historical and philosophical contexts relating to the problems of fake and authenticity, original and reproduction. Certainly, this text *is* about America, it *is* about postmodernism, but in the given context it is first of all an introduction into the 'semiotics of apocryphal', which one could treat as *the postmodernist contribution into a semiotic theory of representation*.

This essay is an attempt to understand America by the European intellectual who arrives to the country and in a short while realizes that habitual schemes of interpretation seem not to work here. Eco begins with the often pronounced panegyrics to 'America' as the Promised Land. The very word *America* sounds magic for thousands of immigrants, it is like a signifier of the heaven on Earth where all the species and things are much *better* than you have ever seen before (the myth was actually created in the times of Ch. Colomb). This illusion is even more powerful for those who live in America. The rest of the world is perceived by them as a bad 'copy' of American culture, as its pale shadow (if they notice it at all by peripheral vision, on the screens of their TVs). It is not by accident that Slavoj Žižek commenting events of September 11

³⁹ It should be noted that the essay was written few years earlier than the classical works of Jean Baudrillard (*Simulacres et simulation*, 1981) Jean-François Lyotard (*La condition postmoderne. Rapport sur le savoir*, 1979).

⁴⁰ Sanes K. *Travelling Through Hyperreality With Umberto Eco* (<http://www.transparencynow.com/eco.htm>).

⁴¹ At least, this is true towards Russian-speaking community that is most familiar to me, – due to the lack of translations of Eco into Russian. It is also worth mentioning, that the peripeteias of reception of Eco's works in Russia consist in that he is treated predominantly as a *writer* and not a semiotician or philosopher. However, his observations of postmodernism have been referred far too often because of the popularity of the 'Postscript to the *Name of the rose*' (translated into Russian in 1986). To approach Eco's notes on postmodern literature as a 'high-level theory' of postmodernism would be rather bizarre undertaking for those (westerners) who read first Jameson or Lyotard. Such a situation would be similar to 'putting the horse behind the cart'.

points out that terrorist attack put the end to the ultimate American paranoid fantasy of average american who thought “the world he lives in is a fake, a spectacle staged to convince him that he lives in a real world, while all people around him are effectively actors and extras in a gigantic show”. In reality, he says, America’s ‘Holyday from history’ was a fake⁴².

America created and consolidated its illusory and ‘perfect’ world in advertising (the unfailing machine for reproducing mythology and selling American Dream), architecture (be it neoclassical reproduction of Parthenon, faked city of Las Vegas or mirror ‘wrapping’ for luxury hotel in San Francisco), politics (with its *mediated* wars) and even economy (with its virtual banking). According to Baudrillard, America, that exorcised the question of origin, itself gave birth to something new and original: “America is the original version of modernity”⁴³, Europe is a dubbed copy of it.

American landscape is described by Eco as an embodiment of fake history, fake art, fake nature and fake cities. He defines this world of Absolute, Ideal Fake as a world of Hyperreality that does not simply reproduce Reality but tends to improve it, that produces illusion and stimulates the desire for it⁴⁴. Still, America is a country that is mad about *realism*, about ideal iconic representations and ‘authentic’ copies of reality. It is, therefore, not accidentally, that ‘the first, widely used by Coca Cola but also frequent as a hyperbolic formula in everyday speech, is ‘the real thing’⁴⁵.

⁴² See: Žižek S. “Welcome to the desert of the Real!”

⁴³ Baudrillard J. *Amerique*. Editions Grasset, 1986. P. 33.

⁴⁴ Eco U. *Travels in Hyperreality*, in *Faith in Fakes* (Minerva, 1996). P. 44.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

Now the paradox consists in that American imagination, being obsessed by the ‘real thing’ wants to attain it at any cost; eventually the only solution is to fabricate the absolute fake’. Among typically american and, thus, hyperrealistic phenomena there are holography, Disneyland, ubiquitous museums of wax figures (where one could find such cultural mutations as a wax statue of the Mona Lisa and a ‘restored’ copy of Venus de Milo, with arms), houses of american ‘nouveaux riches’ and architecture most of all. America itself is a huge hologramme; Fiction that dominates the world. For the sake of authenticity there were falsified even the most sacred documents of american history (that Eco discovered during his journey in the States): for instance, in the bookshop of the Museum of City of New York they sell reproductions of historical documents exhibited in Museum – from the bill of sale of Manhattan to the Declaration of Independence. These are described as ‘looking and feeling old’, they are scented with old spice, penned in pseudo-antique characters, but the bill of sale is written in English whilst original was in Dutch. Eco concludes with his own neologism: so it is not a facsimile, but – a fac-different.⁴⁶

The museums of wax figures are ranked by Eco among the attractions of major importance. What is most surprising about them it is not a quantity, but that real historical characters here neighbour fictional ones: the characters from banal costume drama may be as legitimate as historical figures. Imaginary worlds of novels or science-fictions films are faked with ‘maniacal chill’. Cultivated visitor at some point gets totally confused for ‘the logical distinction be-

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

tween Real World and Possible World has been definitely undermined'.⁴⁷ Such a faithful reconstruction of reality seem to ignore the problem of *referent* (which may be bad for classical semiotics but obviously natural for postmodern theory).

Reality presenting itself as a sign can be found in America even in the zoo. "The theme of hyperrealistic reproduction involves not only Art and History, but also Nature"⁴⁸: such a conclusion was made by Eco during his visit to San Diego: on the one hand, animals behaved as if they lived in an authentic environment without seeing people at all; on the other, they were 'cultivated' to such an extent that visitors got strong impression of seeing the humanised nature, the 'natural'.

Thus, the philosophy of American cultural industry, according to Eco, is very seducing: "We are giving you the reproduction so you will no longer feel any need for original"⁴⁹ (instead of '...so that you will want the original'). Reproduction here is undoubtedly better than original whereas the reproduction of reproduction is merely impeccable. When leaving this world 'you risk feeling homesick for' it, since reality is not so appealing, it can be even disappointing, – concludes Eco. Does anybody still want to see armless Venus or nearly ruined Last Supper by Da Vinci in Milan? Yet in order to make the reproduction so desirable, there should have existed cherished and adorable Original, elevated to the pedestal by both civilizations – on this and other sides of the ocean: there should be authentic (though in poor condition) 'Last Supper' with its symbolic value before its wax copy would be considered a kind of masterpiece.

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 14.

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 49.

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 19.

History as representation: the sense of historical fakes

Many Europeans seem to share a sort of implicit snobbery towards such a 'barbaric' and somehow naïve approach to culture. This snobbery is grounded to a great extent on the idea that Europe is the place of origins, the homeland to authenticity. Eco holds a different standpoint (as he did once towards mass culture in the discussion between 'integrati et apocalittici'): he looks for 'positive' answers – what all this does mean and what is useful for us in the American cultural experience? He argues that such an attitude towards imitations helped Americans (in XVIII–XXth centuries) to regain the sense of history which is a crucial factor for the construction of national and cultural identities. The neurotic desire to fill in the vacuum of memories and historicity explains such a frenetic worship for the Real as Authentic History. "The Absolute Fake is offspring of the unhappy awareness of a present without depth"⁵⁰.

Eco makes us think of the sense of history in a broader philosophical context: how to regain the contact with our past? What is legitimate and what is not? If one cannot touch it 'alive' and it is accessible only in frozen museum exhibit then which way of 'mummification' one has to choose: to get rid of the last remnants of previous culture in order to clean the site for future history or to create an amalgam of faked and original, of historical and present? There are many different strategies of museum representation in America too – some museums and galleries are 'specialized' on original art works that are placed in contemporary minimalist entourage (if there are copies they are presented as such) which generates contemplative distance

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 31.

with the past and does not pretend to substitute History (such as Getty Museum and University galleries). Why then there are so many museums that adhere to such a bizarre (in European's eyes) mode of representation when even original painting or sculpture is exhibited in faked interior or architectural landscape, not to mention the faked pieces of art? Eco points out that this is happening because of the need to regain the contact with the past and each culture finds its own way to do it. "Archeological respect" ('European' strategy) is only one of the possible solutions; other periods and countries approach the problem differently⁵¹. While in Europe the asceticism of museum space is counterbalanced with authenticity of the street stones and buildings outside museum (History is virtually everywhere in the old towns and cities), in America museum can be the only place for historical reminiscences: it is the modern country with 'much future' and some nostalgic remorse for the past. Eco says: "It is easy to give a neutral setting to visitors who can breathe in the Past a few steps away, who reach the neutral setting after having walked, with emotions, among venerable stones. But in California, between the Pacific on the one hand and Los Angeles on the other, with restaurants shaped like hats and hamburgers, and four-level freeways with ten thousands ramps, what do you do?"⁵²

Eco gives us a brief historical survey in order to demonstrate that not only present historical period and not only American civilisation employs this model of historical memory. Ancient Rome implemented very similar policy towards Greece. One could conclude, that recent relationships between America and Europe resemble very much that – ancient – situation in political, ideological and cultural aspects. In both cases

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 34.

⁵² Ibid., p. 33.

the state that subjugated and humiliated another country reproduced its past grandeur in its ideology and carefully preserves it in historical and art museums. This is the only way to calm the bad conscience and legitimise history at the symbolic level. After all, Greece imitated Ancient Egypt, Rome made 'master copies' of Greece, Christendom assimilated Judaism, Renaissance cultivated antiquity and so on, and so forth. Thanks to these assimilations, imitations and fakes we still capable to reproduce and translate to other generations our feeling of history.

Speaking 'we', I refer to those who live in East European countries where in the 20th century historical feeling and memory underwent serious disruptions. There are no visual referents for common European past (very popular nostalgic myth) in some of our cities. The capital of Belarus - Minsk which was almost entirely destroyed during the Second World War and, therefore, has no 'European history' which would be visible in the city, manages to maintain its connection to the past only through Stalin's myth materialised in the architecture. Thus, its past is predominantly the Soviet one. On the contrary, Warsaw chose another strategy to re-establish the links with its European past: Old Town being an Absolute Fake is perceived nowadays as authentic historical place, the very heart of medieval European town.

And the last but not least: are we sure that *History is Real*, that it is based on the authentic events and facts? After all, history for Eco⁵³ is a product of multiple conventions, it is a *representation* (with all connotations implied by the word). All historical sources are subject to cer-

⁵³ Many contemporary historians and philosophers approach history as a Text and narrative *par excellence*. It would be rather difficult to give the full list of references. I would just mention the works of H. White, E. Ankersmith, M. Ferro, P. Sorlin, V. Sobchak, D. La Capra, E. Wyschogrod and others.

tain rules of narration such as coherence, plot and story development, modelling role of 'prologue' and 'closure', etc. Heyden White once formulated the question: "What would a nonnarrative representation of historical reality look like?" Answering this question one should bear in mind that reality which is not encoded in narration is otherwise inaccessible; narrativity is 'a form for the representation of events construed to be real rather than imaginary'⁵⁴. Fact and fiction are inseparably connected in history. It is not that we live in a fictional world, but neither in real one. 'Reality' is a fictional construction – it is the matter of 'trust' but not of 'truth'⁵⁵. We learn history from the handbooks and newspapers, that were written by other people, who may not even have been present themselves at the event happening. For professional historian any historical source is valuable though their authenticity is often questioned. We watch TV and think that we witness historical events but in fact they have been staged for us by journalists or somebody else⁵⁶. Even our memory is fictional in a way, it is mostly 'retinal and televisual' (P. Nora): very often we remember not the events themselves but the films and photographs we have seen about it. Historical memory is based on the continuity of experience, and visual media (cinema, TV,

photography) are those instruments which are responsible either for providing this continuity, or for favouring collective anomie, amnesia, and repression of the memory. As Eco points out, our everyday experience is 'filtered through 'already seen' images'⁵⁷.

Furthermore, we measure history by years and days but the periodization and calendar (and its 'language') are the inventions of European culture (that knew many other fictional calendars – for instance, during French Revolution)⁵⁸. Eco gives a good example of how our experience is 'packed' into the fictional frame of references: "We think we usually know the real world through experience; we think it is a matter of experience that today is Wednesday, April 14, 1993, and that at this moment I'm wearing a blue tie. As a matter of fact, it is true that today is April 14, 1993, only within the framework of the Gregorian calendar, and my tie is blue only according to the Western division of the chromatic spectrum..." One could get an impression that Eco gives these arguments in order to destabilise our already unsettled belief in the cognoscibility of the world though Eco does not want to play a role of a metaphysical sceptic: he says that 'the world is overpopulated with solypsists'⁵⁹. He simply wants to remind his reader that our knowledge of what is Truth and what is False, what is real and what is fictional are quite conventional and sometimes contradictory. But even if at closer distance History seems to be an Absolute Fake (be it European history or American) it still has sense. 'Faking' memory, narrativising history means creating ourselves, maintaining our identities. Hence, the

⁵⁴ White H. *The Content and the Form. Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation* (The John Hopkins University Press, 1990). P. 4.

⁵⁵ Eco U. *Six walks in the fictional woods* (Harvard University Press, 1994. P. 89.

⁵⁶ Soviet cinema provided us very interesting example illustrating the *fictional character of history* and ideological necessity of *historical fakes* that have to be perceived as the representation of Real History: it 'invented' historical dates and event, buildings. This film culture is particularly notorious for "reflecting" reality that never existed. Such was, for instance, the greatest fiction of October Revolution staged by Eistenstein and his colleagues.

⁵⁷ Eco U. 'A Photograph', in *Faith and Fakes*. P. 214.

⁵⁸ Eco U. *Six walks in the fictional woods*. Harvard University Press, 1994. P. 88.

⁵⁹ Eco U. *Six walks in the fictional woods*. P. 89.

symbolic value of historical fakes consists in the construction of imaginary communities and, consequently, reinforcing of social solidarity.

Thus, falsification which is to be considered 'original' is not specifically american phenomenon, it is a common thing in political, cultural and other spheres. In relation to this Eco is warning: 'But we have to distinguish between the kind of consensus and allows the spreading of macroscopic forms of control and that which satisfies what we might call a biological pace and doesn't come close to the establishment of power relationships in the true sense.'⁶⁰

This view on History represents one of many possible interpretations of Eco's analysis of american culture. Another problem, arising from his meditations on America's love to fakes and its obsession with Real, concerns the main goal of semiotic analysis which is to provide *the critique of ideologies*.

Semiotics as the critique of ideologies

It would be too extravagant to rank Eco among those intellectuals whose main interest is to 'theorise Political' yet one could discern the elements of (marxist) social criticism in his analysis of contemporary culture. Eco argues, for instance, that the such a 'mega metaphor' as Disneyland can serve not only as an example of 'total fake' and 'absolute iconism', but also as an allegorical depiction of the society of consumption. It is 'really the quintessence of consumer ideology'⁶¹. When Eco says that Disneyland is a place of total passivity (where visitors must agree to behave like robots) and thus it is a miniature of contemporary capitalist society, it means that

he shares some stakes of the critique of capitalist society given by Frankfurt School without the pessimism of latter. But consumer ideology of late capitalism includes also other important features the main of which is the omnipresence of images as a dominant form of consumption and the 'spectacle' as the main commodity. "Images *do* things, operate for real interests although they are, themselves, struck with unreality"⁶². The term 'spectacle' which was coined by Guy Debord, is not used overtly by Eco here, however this reference may help us to make it more clear what are the targets of Eco's criticism. There is no doubt that Eco actually agrees with Debord in that social relationship between people are mediated by images in our age⁶³. All the features, implied by 'spectacle', namely - passivity, fictional character, conventionality (that is often masked under 'common sense' and nature), the dominant role of visual media and representations in our culture are subject of his interest.

It may seem that Eco and other 'post-modernist' theoreticians got in the trap carefully prepared by themselves. When he admitted that 'the power is elusive, and there is no longer any telling where the 'plan' comes from"⁶⁴ (and thus who is sending the message – the magistrate, the newspaper, the reader?) – he was right and wrong simultaneously. Some of his earlier 'mildly paranoid' ideas (like this one: it could have happened that a small bunch of conspirators (say, people, from Pentagon and various TV channels) orga-

⁶² Blonsky M. "Introduction. The Agony of Semiotics: Reassessing the Discipline", in M. Blonsky (ed.) *On signs*, Baltimore, Maryland: The John Hopkins University Press, 1991, p. XLVI.

⁶³ Debord G. *The Society of Spectacle* (New York: Zone Books, 1995). P. 12.

⁶⁴ Eco U. 'The Multiplication of the Media', in *Faith in Fakes*. P. 149.

⁶⁰ Eco U. "Falsification and consensus". P. 176.

⁶¹ Eco U. *Travels in Hyperreality*. P. 43.

nize a Big Fake⁶⁵...) sound today as prophetic messages, because the “Plan”, a product of conspiracy (Eco’s idea that inspired the writing of *Foucault’s Pendulum*), conceived as a TV event, became True (speaking of September 11). He said long time ago that during last decades live television has undergone dramatic changes in terms of *mise en scene*. From papal ceremonies to political and entertainment events, we know that they would not have been conceived in the same way in the absence of TV cameras. Many events take place because they have been conceived with television in mind⁶⁶ – they are all in a way faked ‘originals’ of events. And this time New York was arranged as a studio, constructed for television.

Being once seduced by postmodernism one could have easily agreed with the statement that the difference between *original and fake, real and fictional* has become (or always was) very ephemeral. Recent events made all of us doubt whether postmodern ‘truths’ are still alive, and whether mass media tell us only ‘the real stories of fictional construction’⁶⁷. We may not know exactly who is the Sender or the Author of the messages but he is no virtual any longer. I do not doubt that falsification is the *raison d’être* of mass media, but thesis on the fictional character of reality somehow lost its attraction: on September 11 the TV audience from all over the world had chance to make sure that violence and death are not only televisual simulacra but are inherent to our reality. Quite another matter that we perceived the real event as a cinematic fake produced in Hollywood, and now we seem

to hear the shouting of the belated referent (that was away for so long) of mass media messages: “... And believe me, this is NOT A DREAM!”

Instead of conclusions it would be useful to explain now why Fake – this “scarecrow” of Western Culture should be subjected to semiotic inquiry. The usefulness of semiotic approach in our case is defined by the fact of ideological construction of the notion of original which is too often disguised under the “cloak” of other interpretations. In his analysis of ideology as a semiotic category, Eco emphasizes that as a message which starts with a factual description, and then tries to justify it theoretically, gradually being accepted by society through a process of overcoding, it is an organised world-vision which must be subjected to a semiotic analysis⁶⁸. After all, it is a conscious code-switching. Semiotics then is a form of (‘genetic’) *social criticism* in as much as a form of social practice (For ‘original’ statement see K.Marx’s works). Once again we seem to find ourselves in a vicious circle of definitions: if ideology is omnipresent and eternal (as Marx, Althusser and others insisted), then how semiotic critique may be free of ideology? Here Eco makes some precisions: he is not trying to smuggle «the common sense *instead of ideology*»⁶⁹, he sees the purpose of semiotic approach in its possibility to destroy an ideology by opposing it to another ideology, the latter showing the falsity of the former (and vice versa). As M.Blonsky points out, “semiotics insists on the failure of the sign’s referential power. [...] It cannot enunciate any kind of truth

⁶⁵ Eco U. Six walks in the fictional woods. P. 92.

⁶⁶ See: Eco U. “Event as *Mise en Scene* and *Life as Scene-setting*”, in *Apocalypse postponed*. Bloomington: Indiana University press, 1994. P. 105.

⁶⁷ Eco U. Six walks in the fictional woods. P. 99.

⁶⁸ Eco U. *A Theory of Semiotics*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1979. P. 289–290.

⁶⁹ This rather ridiculous slogan is often repeated today by newspapers when they discuss, for instance, the politics of British premier-ministre.

about the world”⁷⁰. The choice of the right or of the ‘correct’ bias is not a semiotic matter. Semiotics helps us to analyse different ideological

⁷⁰ Blonsky M. Op. cit, p. xxi.

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ФАЛЬШИВКА НА КАРТЕ: СЕМИОТИКА И ПРОБЛЕМА АУТЕНТИЧНОСТИ

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Резюме

На кону – подделка: семиотика и проблема аутентичности. Понятие оригинала является одним из ключевых для западноевропейской культуры. Понятие это фетишизировано настолько, что все, что квалифицируется как неподлинное/поддельное, как

choices, but it does not and should not help us to chose: the only thing which needs to be done is to uncover conventions and historical constructions in various cultural practices, even if sometimes they pretend to be ‘natural’ and even when their legitimacy seems to be beyond any suspicion.

правило, признается либо незаконным (в случае, например, фальшивомонетничества или контрафактной продукции), либо эстетически ущербным (когда речь идет о подделках произведений искусства). В то же время «аутентичности» существует

в нашей культуре на правах пустого означающего, ускользающего от более или менее универсальных дефиниций. Данная статья нацелена на поиск междисциплинарной аналитической модели, которая позволила бы поместить понятие оригинала в более широкий теоретический контекст и рассмотреть различные культурные практики копирования через призму семиотического инструментария. Конечная цель такого анализа состоит в том, чтобы показать, каким образом эстетические суждения

или рыночная стоимость копии и оригинала детерминированы идеологическими дискурсами и производством власти-знания, ведь в конечном счете способность правильной «атрибуции» (или идентификации) – это, прежде всего, властная практика, позволяющая устанавливать контроль и выстраивать символические иерархии в той или иной сфере социальной жизни.

Ключевые слова: семиотика, подделка, оригинал, представление, идеология.