Multiples of One:

A Partial History of Experiencing Art through Reproduction

by

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Art is one of the greatest cultural signifiers we have of ourselves and our understanding of the world. However, those works we value as emblematic of high artistic creation and cultural import are also most often confined in time and space by their stubborn uniqueness—an attribute that assists in both establishing the value of works of art and effectively limits their available audience. Consequently, there has long been a desire to share works of art across audiences through the creation and use of reproduced images.

Arguably, our most frequent exposure to art is by means of art reproduction, not direct encounters with original works. And though we are likely to perceive reproduced images of works of art as simple representational objects, the complexity of their creation and use reveals these images to be pedagogical, commercial, political and social objects as well. The key to the multitude of uses of reproduced images is the reproductive medium; the medium not only influences how we "see" the work of art, it also engages us in varying dialogues of context and use.

This thesis is an historical and contemporary critical analysis of reproduced images of works of art. In chapter one, I first address ideas around authentic objects and authentic experience, authority, and the conceptually sticky relationship between the original and the reproduction. This discussion echoes throughout the following three chapters as I trace the history of art reproduction in its increasing availability and representational and technological sophistication. My partial history of art reproduction is divided into three primary media: engraving, photographic reproduction, and digital imaging technology. For each medium I focus on the visual and experiential qualities, including context and manipulability, of reproduced images in the medium and the concomitant interpretive possibilities. The thesis concludes by discussing digital imaging technology, particularly as it pertains to the World Wide Web as a medium that both expands upon previous visual and experiential conventions and also engages us in the possibility of establishing personal curatorial realms of authority.

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Introduction

I.

James Ensor's painting *Christ's Entry into Brussels in 1889* is one of my favorite works of art. I had studied an image of the painting in a monograph on Ensor, which I purchased at the Portland Art Museum library book sale; later I viewed a digital image of *Christ's Entry* online. I felt familiar with how this painting looked—the color, the composition, and the subject.

Two years later I visited the Getty Museum in Los Angeles. I wandered the large rooms, filled with famous paintings, fighting against the fatigue particular to museum visits. I entered a final room, and suddenly an enormous riot of color hung before me. It took a second before I recognized Ensor's masterpiece. I laughed out loud at the pleasure of my surprise; its presence, size, and color were unexpected. Before leaving the Getty for the day, I made a single purchase in the museum gift shop: an eleven by fourteen inch printed reproduction of *Christ's Entry into Brussels in 1889*. This print now hangs on my wall, an image that will now always remind me of my experience viewing the original.

II.

Most office jobs have busy times and slow times. For a few years a good friend and I worked in an office marked by slow time. During the slow days we often pursued our personal research on art using the World Wide Web. Although our desks were only thirty feet or so apart, we emailed back and forth links to digital images of

artworks, museum collection Web sites, URLs of online art magazines, or art databases like Artchive.com and Artcyclopedia.com. We frequently discovered artists who were new to us, or we visited images of a favorite artist's work across multiple sites. This process was very fluid; we always found something to look at, even if it was not what we initially searched for. If a particular artist really caught our attention, we would search for her name in the local public library catalog, and we would carry home a book, hopefully full of printed reproductions of the artist's work. The odds of our seeing the original artwork, either before or after viewing its digital or printed reproduction, were slim.

III.

I was impressed by Lance Letscher' s exhibit at the Austin Museum of Art (AMOA). I wanted to remember him and his work, but could not afford to purchase the exhibition catalog offered by the museum. Upon returning home from the exhibit, I went to AMOA's Web site and downloaded a few of the digital images of Letscher's work onto my laptop. I resized the images in Adobe Photoshop, and then uploaded the images to my blog. Now Letscher's collages are displayed between digital journal entries on a conversation with my sister and a passing fascination with sea urchins.

I share these three anecdotes because I believe they reveal experiences common to many of us with an interest in art. We discover works of art by discovering their reproductions. We study art in illustrated art history textbooks or

exhibition catalogs. We buy images of art we like and hang them on our walls. And, increasingly, we manipulate and appropriate images of distant works of art for personal use. Arguably our most frequent exposure to works of art in our daily lives is through reproductions, not original pieces; therefore, our experiences with art are predominately formed by the mediation, the varying context, and the appropriation of reproduced images. While these experiences are often quite different from our experience of original works of art, we should not discount them as mundane or insignificant.

My experiences with art through reproduced images and my appropriation of these images for my personal use inspired this two-part question: What role is art reproduction playing in our experience of art? And how is this role shaped by the medium of reproduction? Little did I realize how quickly this question would become complicated by the myriad of theoretical and practical concerns around art reproduction. The seemingly everyday existence of art images is a knot of intertwined relationships involving art objects, technology, communication, perception, and the creation of cultural value.

A variety of perspectives on the reproduction of art and the practices around its production and use in Western culture are necessary to this thesis. My research is interdisciplinary: cultural theorists; historians of art, media, and technology; and information professionals have developed interests in the creation of reproduced images of art, their circulation, and use in our culture. Art historians clearly have a strong investment in the production and pedagogical use of these reproduced images.

Mass media researchers are concerned with the use of images as communication devices and the proliferation of images in daily life. Cultural theorists, most famously Walter Benjamin, examine art reproduction as representative of class dynamics.

The goals of this thesis are to outline a historical and social context for art reproduction and to present a picture of the development of these images, the visual experiences they provoke, and how we shape meaning from these images in a variety of contexts across media. To accomplish these goals I first discuss ideas around authentic objects and authentic experience, authority, and the conceptually sticky relationship between the original and its reproduction. This discussion echoes throughout the following chapters as I trace art reproduction in its increasing availability and representational and technological sophistication. My partial history of art reproduction is divided into three primary media: engraving, photographic reproduction, and digital imaging technology. For each medium, I emphasize the visual and experiential qualities, including context and manipulability, of reproduced images and the concomitant interpretive possibilities. The thesis concludes by discussing digital imaging technology, particularly as it pertains to the World Wide Web and the increasing ease and rapidity with which images are gathered and manipulated.

The history of art reproduction reveals commonalities across media: the context of the production and display of images and the ability to arrange, group, or appropriate art images ferment our understanding of discrete works of art and the art world as a whole. Also, we employ reproduced images of works of art in seemingly

contradictory ways: reproduced images are used to either challenge or perpetuate the art canon, and used to both valorize the work itself as a static, unique object or to establish personal curatorial realms of authority, representative of our taste and, by extension, our identity.

This thesis will not address the influence of art reproduction on artists' practices. In modern and contemporary art, mass media technology is perhaps as frequently utilized by artists as the more traditional artistic media such as painting and sculpture. Photography—initially thought of as a documentary medium that lacked its own aesthetic qualities—has been fully integrated into the art world as a robust artistic medium; video and digital technologies followed. More to the point is the example of collage, a medium that involves the appropriation of pre-existing materials or images, often demonstrating an artist's skill in linking disparate items to create a new whole. Photographic prints, whether images of art, advertising, or current events, abound in collage. Postmodern artists play with de-contextualized images from every imaginable source, juxtaposing and harmonizing visual signifiers that have lost their signifieds but gain new meaning through proximity to one another. Also, artists occasionally push the line of appropriation of images through reproduction to its farthest edge to reveal our attachments to authenticity or originality. Artist Sherrie Levine gained recognition for her reproductions of the works of many artists, including reproductions of the photographs of Walker Evans

titled *After Walker Evans*.[1] Reproduced images themselves become an artistic medium in these instances.

Of course, artists are not the only group to collage or appropriate images. Reproductive media technologies avail themselves to broader, public use; think of the ubiquity of the photocopies, teenagers cutting images from magazines to decorate their lockers, or uploading digital images to Web sites. These intentional actions of appropriation on the part of individuals as users or consumers—not self-defined artists—are of interest in this thesis, although I restrict my discussion to documentary images of works of art (and, in one instance, objects presented as works of art) in the media of engraving, photography, and digital images. My final chapter on digital images of art explores the use of the reproduced image as a means of self-expression and a means of valuing art outside of institutionalized authority and formalized hierarchies.

[1] See Siegel, J. (1985). "After Sherrie Levine." *Arts Magazine, 59*, 141-144 and Singerman, H. (1994). "Seeing Sherrie Levine." *October, 67*, 78-107.

Chapter One: The Original and Its Reproduction

1.1 Authentic Objects, Authentic Experience

Art is one of the greatest cultural signifiers we have of ourselves and our understanding of the world. For those of us whose home is contemporary Western culture, defining a work of art seems intuitive at first. A work of art is a prized object; it has aesthetic, historical, and monetary value or some combination thereof. Often a work of art has a completely unique existence, sometimes it does not. A work of art might be displayed either in a museum where visitors can see it or in a wealthy man's house where very few see it. A work of art might also be in a cave, or maybe in your lonely apartment waiting to be discovered by the landlord, as in the case of Henry Darger.[2] Wait, this just got more complicated.

Defining a work of art is actually quite difficult once you begin thinking of the variables involved. The question "what is art?" is often asked and seldom answered. One answer I have heard is that art is something made special. This answer is satisfyingly simple: it gets at an elemental truth, but is ambiguous enough to not rule anything out. The special-ness could be manifest in the *something* itself or it could be an *anything* made special by another agent. While one could argue that a work of art has at least an inherent aesthetic quality, many works of art challenge any aesthetic based in culturally defined norms of beauty or even social decorum. In fact, defining

[2] See Cohrs, T. (1987). Henry Darger, artist, outsider, naïve, folk, autistic, or genuine find. *Arts Magazine, 61*, January, 14-17; and Homes, A. (1997). Inside out: The art of Henry Darger. *Artforum International, 35*, May, 92-97.

art and its value (aesthetic or otherwise) is largely dependent upon context within the art world itself.

Modern and contemporary artists in particular have exploited the contextual nature of what may be defined as art by challenging conventional standards of aesthetics and artistry; Duchamp's 1917 signed urinal *Fountain* is an example of an object's transformation into an art object by means of context. The art history canon has also expanded from within, laying claim to relics of the past or objects of "primitive" cultures—works of art that were in fact created outside of the Western art world. Anything can be art if the right people argue for it in the right place at the right time. In his essay "The Historical Genesis of a Pure Aesthetic," Pierre Bourdieu described value making in the art world to be a series of struggles among many parties:

> The "subject" of the production of the art work—of its value but also of its meaning—is not the producer who actually creates the object in its materiality, but rather the entire set of agents engaged in the field. Among these are the producers of works classified as artistic (great or minor, famous or unknown), critics of all persuasions (who themselves are established within the field), collectors, middlemen, curators, etc. …who confront each other in struggles where the imposition of not only a world view but also a vision of the artworld is at stake, and who, through these struggles, participate in the production of the value of the artist and of art. (1993, p. 261)

The result of these struggles creates the value of the art, and the separation of the work of art from everyday life. Through this process art is made special, different from common objects commonly seen, even if the art is an everyday ceramic urinal.

Walter Benjamin provided another approach to assigning value to a work of art. Like Bourdieu, Benjamin also emphasized context as an element of value, but

Benjamin ascribed more agency to the art object itself as a marker of its worth. Benjamin's essay "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" is a common basis of discussion about an art object's value in modern times. Walter Benjamin defined art as an object with ritual or fetish value: "the unique value of the 'authentic' work of art has its basis in ritual, the location of its original use value. This ritualistic basis, however remote, is still recognizable as secularized ritual even in the most profane forms of the cult of beauty" (Benjamin, 1969, p. 224). Benjamin posits the ritual or fetish value of art is derived from its traditional context; what we now call works of art were formerly objects and images that performed some function while embedded in magical or religious spaces like the shaman's cave or the church. The ritual function or value of works of art has survived to contemporary time as part of the secularized cult of beauty that Benjamin says developed during the Renaissance.

Ultimately, the cult value is manifest as the authenticity of the object. Authenticity was very important to Benjamin: "The authenticity of a thing is the essence of all that is transmissible from its beginning, ranging from its substantive duration to its testimony to the history which it has experienced" (p. 221) Authenticity is vital in determining the value of the work of art; in fact, in a secularized context authenticity is the primary source of distinction (p. 244). Authenticity is derived from the actuality of the object's aging over time, implying historical continuity. Benjamin famously described works of art exhibiting authenticity as having an *aura*. Objects with aura are unapproachable; they produce

"a unique phenomenon of a distance however close it may be" (p. 243). The aura is the sum of that which cannot be reproduced.

Benjamin's concern with defining what makes art authentic and valuable was a response to the increasing production and use of reproductions; it is this concern of Benjamin's that makes "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" relevant today as the production and access to images increases. Mechanical reproduction, namely photography, posed a threat to previous cultural paradigms centered upon the value of authentic objects. To maintain a cultural agreement on determining value for art in the midst of images multiplying its representation works need to be distinguished as original and authentic. The transformation of ritual use value to authenticity ultimately leads to a means of creating value in which reproduction is an integral part. The reproduced image symbolically distributes the work of art and its defined value across cultural and economic hierarchies, in effect diffusing the power of the original.[3] Therefore, a consequence of reproduction for the work of art is that the work is now designated as an *original*, a designation that, in John Berger's opinion, assumes primacy in the cultural negotiation of value:

> Having seen this reproduction [of the Virgin of the Rocks], one can go to the National Gallery to look at the original and there discover what the reproduction lacks. Alternatively one can forget about the quality of the reproduction and simply be reminded, when one sees the original, that it is a famous painting of which somewhere one has already seen a reproduction. But in either case the uniqueness of the original now lies in it being *the original of a reproduction*. It is no longer what its image shows that strikes

[3] This is not to say that Benjamin was necessarily mourning the use of reproductive media technologies that reached larger audiences; the complexity of Benjamin's position is explored later in this chapter.

> one as unique; its first meaning is no longer to be found in what it says, but in what it is. (1972, p. 21)

The tension between the original and the reproduction inherently shapes our experience; now we are destined to make comparisons between the two images—original and reproduction—in a new schema based in perceived difference rather than the aesthetic or historical value of the work of art alone.

Although works had been reproducible by other means before photography, Benjamin believed that photographic reproduction removes the historical testimony from a work, robbing it of authenticity by photography's level of representational accuracy. Photographic reproduction replaces uniqueness with plurality and by "permitting the reproduction to meet the beholder…in his own particular situation, it reactivates the object reproduced" (p. 221). The idea that reproduction reactivates the work of art in differing contexts is important to this thesis; the following chapters will demonstrate that context significantly informs our understanding of the reproduced image and the work of art it represents.

Despite Benjamin's notion that reproduction withers the aura, original works of art have retained their value, if only for the reason John Berger cited. The power of the original or authentic object now lies in its being just that. In this schema, reproduction fetishizes the authentic object by reinforcing its designation as a valued object. The work of art (in a traditional medium) is incapable of advertising itself across time and space whereas the reproduced image may be repeated over and over again in many contexts. Auction prices demonstrate increases in the monetary value

of works of art popularized through the multiplication of their images. In her critique of Benjamin's essay, Jacquelynn Baas argued that the loss of aura through reproduction has had the opposite effect of what Benjamin predicted:

> For reproductions of works of art also have been utilized to promote fetishism of the original in ways that have not only led to prices that are wildly out of line with the relative value and rarity of art objects, but also to absurdist claim about the inherent value of originality and authenticity. (1987, p. 345)

One wonders if a Monet, for example, would fetch the same selling prices without the painter's ubiquitous presence in popular culture. However, the fetishism of the original is not only represented monetarily, it is also represented by an experiential ideal.

Inherent in the value of the authentic object is the belief in authentic experience. Standing face to face—so to speak—with the original work of art is believed to provide the fullest, most rewarding encounter we can have with the work. I do not disagree with the importance of unmediated experience of art; however, I do feel it is important to deconstruct elements of the authentic experience with the authentic object. Viewing a work of art—particularly one canonized by the art world—rarely happens in everyday places or during everyday activities. With the obvious exceptions of public art, our local galleries, and coffee shops, most experiences with works of arts of established cultural value take place in museums or other institutional spaces (or, increasingly, overtly commercial spaces like the Bellagio in Las Vegas). Art is made special to some degree by its removal from everyday life and, arguably, the higher the value of a work of art the less likely it is to

be available to the larger public. Practical reasons also influence the availability of works of art: a work's rarity, authenticity, and designation of cultural value demand a high level of security and provokes many preservation concerns from the institution the work is housed in.[4]

As Benjamin expressed, our reverence of art objects stems from the objects' incorporation with ritual; if so, what part does the ritualistic atmosphere of the museum or gallery have upon our viewing of the work of art? The answer is likely to vary. When we stand in a museum we have more than a visual experience of the art object; we also experience the surrounding architecture, light, smell, and sound. Perhaps we are solitary, or we are sharing the experience with family, friends, or a lover. Undoubtedly, these additional experiential elements might heighten the psychological impact of the authentic work of art, or these elements might detract from the experience of the work, similar to the frustrating distraction of talkative audience members at the movie theater.

Bradley Taylor's doctoral study *The Effect of Surrogation on Viewer Response to Expressional Qualities in Works of Art* tested the hypothesis that participants would be able to identify the expressional qualities of a work of art from different sources: the original works of art displayed in a gallery setting and reproduced images of the same works in a variety of reproductive media. A secondary hypothesis was that participants would identify differences between the experience of

[4] The glass case around the Mona Lisa that serves as a preservation device also effectively acts as a visual reminder of its assigned value.

viewing the original work and viewing the reproduced images. Taylor grounds his definition of the "expressional qualities" of art in the common idea among cultural theorists and art historians that a work of art has an aura or essence that is beyond replication:

> Bearman, Benjamin, Bronner's symbolic analysts and others, then, point to the existence of some irreproducible force, spirit, or animating quality that resides with works of art, something tied to the act of creation, informed by the passage of time, and linked to an awareness of time and place. (2001, p. 11)

As hypothesized, the participants were able to identify similar expressional qualities in all media but strongly favored the visual and psychological experience of viewing the original work in the gallery setting compared to viewing the photographic prints, slides, and digital images of the same works of art. Taylor states that the participants' qualitative responses to the study's questions clearly determined a preference for the original, and suggested the importance of what Taylor calls the "gallery effect." Taylor defines the gallery effect as "a complex combination of physical stimuli, personal memories, and the unique ability of works of art to touch the human spirit" (p. 142). Despite the poetics works of art inspire, it seems the art object in and of itself is not entirely responsible for the viewer's preferred experience. Elements of our preference for the original object include the stimuli experienced in the gallery that are separate from the art object; also the gallery effect might stir—or inspire—personal memories and emotions within the viewer, vital elements of the experience of which the original work of art is not necessarily the root source.

Still focused on the experience of the original, Taylor surmises that "surrogation also reduces a vividly multisensory experience to one that artificially emphasizes the visual sense" (p. 9). However true, it seems difficult to judge the experience of viewing reproduced images as inferior on the grounds that they emphasize the visual sense. How different is this emphasis on the visual sense in reproduced images from that of the highly controlled museum environment where the art object itself is often removed from availability to any other senses? Tim Dant observes that "the art object is protected from wear and abuse by being put in a gallery, screened with glass, protected with ropes, attendants and 'do not touch' notices. The only form of interaction with it that is allowed is looking at it" (1999, p. 156). If Taylor were to point to the mulitsensory experience of installation art, rather than focus on paintings, his argument would be clearer.

I would argue that another contributing element to the gallery effect and the preference for viewing the work of art in the gallery is the planned construction of a sacred space. Museums do not hang artworks willy-nilly; careful consideration by curators guides the placement of works of art to emphasize relationships between or among works, or isolate a work to demonstrate its grandeur. In contrast, the reproduction may be viewed in non-ritualized spaces, the spaces of everyday life where museum curators exert little influence:

> A gallery or museum constructs a space or environment to view art work. How one constructs that space determines in some degree perceptions or assumptions about the work: its value, accessibility and importance. Work that is not seen, or only seen by a limited number in a gallery at a specific time, has little influence (or the influence is with a small audience). If artwork is

> reproduced, little or no control over the environment is possible, except with the framework of the reproduction. (Hall, 1999, p. 270)

So the influence of the reproduction may be stronger than that of the work of art because the reproduction can engage larger audiences, but the authority exerted by the institution may be weaker. The framework or context of the reproduced image is variable according to its publisher or user who may or may not be part of a formal art institution. Of course, the reproduced image may also be used in a context that asserts institutionalized preferences, as in the case of art history textbooks.

Taylor's addition of personal memories as an element of the gallery effect also raises an interesting dilemma. Memories of works of art are bound to be connected to all sorts of other memories within us. Our memories of reproduced images are frequently just as powerful as those of the original work because, as demonstrated by the gallery effect, the context in which we view the image shapes the experience. The problems of memory and experience present an opportunity to move my focus to the qualities of the reproduced image itself.

1.2 Intervening Images

In this section I would like to briefly address a few aspects of reproduced images that seem to be consistent across media: the influence of the reproduced image in memory, elements of original works that do not translate well into reproduced images, and the reproduced image as an authoritative object in the absence of the original. Like many people, there is an abundance of art that I have

seen only in reproduced images, and many works of art that I viewed first as reproduced images and only later as originals. My anecdote of visiting the Getty and being surprised by Ensor's painting is one example of how powerful not only the original work is but how powerful reproduced images are. If I had less faith in the reproduced image I might not have reacted so strongly to the difference between the original and its reproduction. Helene Robert's informal study of friends and colleagues expressed remarkably strong personal associations with reproduced images, whether viewed as slides in darkened lecture halls, illustrations in art history textbooks, or prints present in the home. In these instances, it seems the experience of the original is secondary to the viewer's experience of the reproduced image, even when the image misrepresented the original to a large degree. "Often, it was remarked" writes Roberts "the slides shown were pink, faded, blurred, dirty, crooked, cracked, backwards, upside down, mis-identified, or otherwise defective, and the work of art was remembered in this flawed state" (p. 335).

The flawed state of the reproduced image might also be one of less than ideal context. I confess that despite the fact that I have admired Seurat's *Sunday Afternoon on the Island of La Grand Jette* hanging in the Art Institute of Chicago in person, my stronger memory of this painting is that of repressed high school student Cameron Frye contemplating all those dots in a scene of the 1980's movie *Ferris Bueller's Day Off*. This memory is one I would hesitate to share in the art history classroom. Museum curators and art historians often work to control interpretations and experiences with their realms of authority; arguably this is part of their professional

duty. Peter Walsh, speaking at the Thirtieth International Congress of the History of Art, discussed the futility of art academics' attempts to separate art from the viewer's tendency toward idiosyncratic interpretations and sentimentality:

> [The personal experience is] an essential quality of art as it is truly lived. This is a quality that art museums and art history in general has worked for decades to repress—namely, the messiness of art, its quality of attracting the clutter of personal meanings, bad taste, desiderata, and gross misinterpretation. Moreover, the meaning human beings *themselves* attach to objects—whether they are great paintings by recognized geniuses, relics of a deified celebrity, or souvenirs of romantic vacations—trumps everything else. In the antique shop, the auction gallery, the museum, or the boudoir, such 'sentimental' value outweighs everything else. (2000, ¶4)

Reproduced images only exacerbate the dilemma of personalized experience and interpretation. My vivid memory of a painting as presented in a film is most likely not what an art historian would prefer because the film re-contextualizes the painting as a visual symbol or narrative device, not a work admired as a unique historical and aesthetic object. But memories are memories nonetheless, and notoriously difficult to shuffle into some hierarchical order of academic quality.

The role of reproduced images in our daily experience of art cannot be underestimated. As Roberts points out, reproduced images enable our initial contact with works of art, and these images are stubborn and sticky. However, few of us would mistake a reproduced image for the actual work of art. Reproduced images are rarely produced with the pretense of complete accuracy. False dimensions and inaccurate colors are accepted limitations of reproduced images in every medium. Images in each reproductive medium generally share similar, standardized dimensions: printed images are likely to vary in size only within the boundaries of the

book page or the dimensions of standardized printing, slides are normally projected to fit the size of the screen, digital images are *ideally* displayed within the simulated edges of their simulated window—scrolling through an image in the metaphorical window is also a common experience. Colors are notoriously difficult to replicate in any medium; like the differences in each painter's palette, each medium builds color by its own equations, producing varying results.

The visual experience of the reproduced image differs from that associated with the original in other ways as well. For example, the viewing of reproductions alters our experience of art that relies upon the viewer's perspective in specific relationship to the work. Barbara Savedoff explains that looking at a reproduction in a book, for example, involves looking downward, whereas the artwork represented assumes its viewer to be looking up. She describes the clash of intended perspectives as a "contradiction between what we see and our body's orientation" which "robs us of the intended effect" (2000, p.169). Images of the Sistine Chapel do not demand we throw back our heads to see the ceiling, or give us the sense of awe in being surrounded by painted space.

The final aspect of reproduced images I wish to mention here is that of reproduced images as cultural preservation and authoritative documentation. In the strange logic of our all too physical existence, occasionally the image of a work of art is all we have; original works disappear quietly—or violently in some instances. As an undergraduate, I took an art history seminar class on the art of Central Asia. I remember admiring the slides and printed photographs my professor showed us of the

5th century Buddhas carved in the cliffs of Afghanistan's Bamiyan valley, both of them standing over a hundred feet tall. In February 2001, the Taliban packed explosives around the Buddhas, and proceeded to blow these monuments of ancient culture into rubble. Other works of art might simply succumb to the deterioration of their support, or damages wrought by their environment. The existing slides and other reproduced images are the only survivors and, by default, are now the most authoritative representations of these works.

Another case in which images of art survive their source is the use of documentary photography of ephemeral works. Artists often exploit reproductive media, primarily photography and digital images, to both preserve their work and have a product to sell. Andy Goldsworthy creates works of art with purposefully limited life spans; his ice sculptures melt, his arrangements of leaves rot. The photographs he takes of his work, often created in solitude and in remote locations, are the only evidence of their existence. The photographs, endlessly reproducible, are also the only works you can buy from the artist. Goldsworthy's work poignantly addresses the evitable changes of the physical world and also demonstrates the power of images to keep those things that cannot be saved. In Susan Sontag's words: "All photographs are *memento mori*. To take a photograph is to participate in another person's (or thing's) mortality, vulnerability, mutability. Precisely by slicing out this moment and freezing it, all photographs testify to time's relentless melt" (1977, p. 15).

1.3 Art, Reproduction, and Cultural Theory

Like most everything in life, our experience of art as an authentic work in the museum or as a reproduced image in the context of the everyday may be read as a political act. Historically, works of art are made valuable by a series of agreements among those who hold some participatory power in the art world. Remember the earlier quote from Bourdieu: artists, critics, collectors, curators all play a role in determining what is art. The artist has likely created the work of art with the idea it be exhibited and in its exhibition the work is cordoned off from everyday experience. Those of us outside of this process participate as well, we are the audience who attend gallery shows and museum exhibitions, in effect affirming the value of the work, the expertise of those who created it and those who chose it for display.

Images of works of art, however, are part of the everyday. The image of *Christ's Entry into Brussels in 1889* purchased at the Getty is less than five feet from me as I write. I can pick up a book up off the floor and look at images of German Expressionist prints. I could cut the images from the book, but I fear the resulting library fine; more likely I would search for the image online and download or print it. The, image would be, in practice at least, mine. How may these everyday experiences be reconciled with the privileging of the authentic work in the museum? Are authority and authenticity subverted by reproduction? Is the reproduction of works of art an assertion of proletariat power or possibly a form of noblese oblige in an effort to educate the masses while still maintaining the class distinction? To explore these questions, I return to Walter Benjamin and Pierre Bourdieu.

Benjamin's "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" is regularly cited in the field of visual culture, perhaps because Benjamin's ambiguous stance supports a variety of readings. For example, Benjamin's concern for the authentic work of art and the withering aura as a consequence of reproduction initially seems to support established cultural hierarchies, but his praise of new reproductive media such as film to "bring 'things' closer spatially and humanly," (1969, p. 223) to an increasingly powerful proletariat is also read as an endorsement of the technological changes Benjamin was witness to in the 1930's. Benjamin was, in fact, interested in proposing a Marxist interpretation of his contemporary world of social, visual, and technological upheaval, particularly as a defense against fascism. In the work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction Benjamin found a suitable vehicle for the exploration of pre-World War II culture and politics. The tension between the unique work of art and its reproduction exemplify the tension between the elite and the proletariat in a Marxist reading of cultural production. Ultimately the proletariat must fight against the rising fascist state—represented, in his essay, by the Futurist art movement that Benjamin claims cultivated an aesthetic of war—by politicizing art.

In "Reconsidering Walter Benjamin," Jacquelynn Baas criticizes Benjamin's essay as purposefully misleading in its details to create a more persuasive political argument. Baas cites Benjamin's motivation behind writing "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" as his wish for an "activist aesthetic" and the "transformation of art from a humanist individualism to a collective usefulness" (p.

339). Politics, Baas claims, drove Benjamin to dramatize the technological developments of his time by figuring the product with an equation of quantity and speed:

> It appears that Benjamin saw his task as applying the Marxist concept of the mode of production to the history of art. Here 'the auratic' identified the commodity high art specialized in reproducing for elitist consumption, ironically mystified by associations of originality, difficulty, and strangeness. Benjamin defines aura as 'the unique phenomenon of a distance, however close it may be.' An entirely different product, he assumes, should result from combining the Renaissance concept of quantity with the modern concept of speed. Organized into a new mode of production, they have the power to counter the production of auratic distance through the infinite multiplication and rapid dissemination of the formerly unique or rare image. Thus, in art as in life, familiarity can be expected to breed a liberating contempt. (p. 342)

Baas goes on to cite varying level of exaggeration and omission on Benjamin's part, particularly his neglect of the printing press as a vital technological development that led to an increase in reproducible visual communication as dramatic as the increase after photography, in Baas' opinion. What I am most intrigued by in Baas' argument is her interpretation of Benjamin's idea of the withering aura as synonymous with the idea of familiarity breeding contempt. Benjamin does imply that the power of a work of art, or at least the power of its authenticity, is lessened by its familiarity through reproduction. By seeing something multiple times and in multiple places, do we grow to disdain it? Or worse, ignore it?

It is useful, I believe, to consider another form of culturally valued work that does not suffer in value by its reproduction: text. To clarify, while the value of text is as likely to be based in cultural negotiation as the work of art, the reproduction of a text does not lessen its authenticity. In fact, text represents another form of culturally

created value based not in uniqueness but multiplication. We produce many copies of a text, and—rather than lowering the value—the plurality of copies marks the text as more desirable (at least outside of the rare book trade). I can own, enjoy, and even cherish my copy of a text as an item unique to me in personal context and history while simultaneously knowing that countless others also have a copy that is unique to them. Also, the reproduction of text means that I can discuss the book with any of its other readers, a process which might well lead me to new interpretations of the text.

Although most works of art themselves are not replicated, reproduced images of art conceivably function culturally in much the same way. Reproduced images are employed to disseminate information, establishing a common realm of knowledge in the arts. Images of art allow us to talk to others about art. We also value them as aesthetic works in and of themselves as the connoisseurship of prints testifies. Helene Roberts describes reproduced images as vehicles of cultural exchange: "In the poetics of culture much of this exchange transpires through surrogate images as representations of the original works of art. The surrogates thus become critical players in these cultural exchanges, and often document how these exchanges occur" (1994, p. 344).

Returning to the idea of art and class politics, I return to Bourdieu and his critique of the institutionalized art world. The experience of art is often constructed within institutionalized spaces. Museums are operated as cultural landmarks, representing the wealth of their benefactor, whether the state or private monies. The perceived value of the art collection in a museum lends cultural authority to the

institution. It is this cultural authority that concerned Pierre Bourdieu. Bourdieu argued that institutions of art, by design, served as propagators of class distinction. Rather than alleviate distinctions between classes by making works of art accessible to broader audiences, the institution reinforces the difference between those initiated and uninitiated in the art world:

> If such is the function of culture and if it is love of art which really determines the choice that separates, as by an invisible and insuperable barrier, those who have from those who have not received this grace, it can be seen that museums betray, in the smallest details of their morphology and their organization, their true function, which is to strengthen the feeling of belonging in some and the feeling of exclusion in others. (1993, p. 236)

For example, the sense that one identifies with the selections made by the museum curators and the confidence that one can place the work of art within an established historical and aesthetic context, aligns one's personal authority with the authority of the institution itself. Alternately, the inability to appreciate the work of art with the same critical distance leaves one stranded in the museum, embarrassed by the feeling one's missed something.

Bourdieu does not address art reproduction in "A Sociological Outline Theory of Art Perception," but applying Bourdieu's model to reproduced images results in two somewhat contradictory conclusions: the reproduction may act as an extension of institutional authority by fetishizing the work of art within its assigned hierarchy, or the reproduction may be seen as a means of participating in the art world through the development of "art competence." John Berger chooses the first conclusion, arguing that reproduced images perpetuate established hierarchies in the art world. He writes:

> Because works of art are reproducible, they can, theoretically, be used by anybody. Yet mostly—in art books, magazines, films or within gilt frames in living-rooms—reproductions are still used to bolster the illusion that nothing has changed, that art, with its unique undiminished authority, justifies most other forms of authority, that art makes inequality seem noble and hierarchies seem thrilling. (1972, p. 29)

Here we see the image as valorizing the object and its cultural valuation; by reproduction the work of art becomes unchanging and unwavering in its status.

However, in my reading of Bourdieu's "Sociological Outline" I find a role for the reproduction as a tool in one's participation in the art world. Bourdieu argues that, in order to overcome class distinctions and the feeling of exclusion, one must go through an aesthetic indoctrination. The individual must develop an art competence:

> Art competence can be provisionally defined as the preliminary knowledge of the possible divisions into complementary classes of a universe of representations. A mastery of this kind of system of classification enables each element of the universe to be placed in a class necessarily determined in relation to another class, itself constituted by all the art representations consciously or unconsciously taken into consideration which do not belong to the class in question. (1993, p. 221)

In practice, Bourdieu's emphasis on the ability to classify elements in relation to one another is greatly facilitated by reproduced images. Reproduced images provide available images for sorting, classifying, and determining relationships among "a universe of representations." With reproduced images we can "see" all works of art across place and time, allowing us a god-like power of ordering and classification. Indeed, as my overview of reproduction history will demonstrate, reproduced images are a vital tool within and without the institutions of art. These images of art enable

interaction with the established art canon, whether by challenging it or propagating its authority, as Berger suggests.

The work of art is a complex cultural entity: its value stems from its cultural context, and its historical continuity, or authenticity, as an object. The institutions surrounding works of art have a vested interest in maintaining the cultural value of the works themselves and the concomitant value of our authentic experience with the work. In the meantime, the image reproducing the work may appear in many differing and misleading forms in many places. The tension between the work of art and its reproduced image reflects the tension between our ideal of authenticity and our ideal of access. In the following chapters, I will address the reproduced image more closely in relationship to its reproductive medium. Each medium of engraving, photography and digital images will demonstrate the effects of greater access to, and engagement with, unique works of art through reproduced images within the institutions of art and across the broader culture.

Chapter Two: Printed Images

2.1 In the Press: Wood, Metal, and Stone

In the West, works of art have been copied in some way or another since the classical age at least. As Benjamin briefly mentions in "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," the Greeks practiced metal founding and stamping (1969, p. 218). Coins, for example were marked with stamps, minted as a guarantee of value much as they are today. Also, the Romans replicated the artistic works of the Greeks by creating plaster casts of Greek sculptures used for molding bronze or as guides for marble carving. The Romans, exhibiting what we would now call a postmodernist approach, produced not only exact copies of Greek statues, they also altered the copies to suit their own purposes:

> Some Roman sculptures are a pastiche of more than one Greek original, others combine the image of a Greek god or athlete with a Roman portrait head. The meaning of the original Greek statue often lent beauty, importance, or a heroic quality to the person portrayed. (Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2005, ¶2)

The appropriation of art works as an emblem of prestige and reflective of one's identity would seem to have deep historical roots.

Another form of copying is artistic apprenticeship. Copying the works of master artists is commonly considered part of an artistic education; for example, by replicating the lines and color of another work, one learns the skill of draftsmanship and an understanding of color palettes. Occasionally we still might see art students working diligently on their copies of an artwork in a museum gallery. Historically,

apprentices adept at mimicking a master's work were part of the master artist's workshop, turning out works under his name. Copies produced by apprentices, but ascribed to the master artist, have infiltrated the art market—much to modern curators' consternation. Art forgery is yet another example of copying, but for particularly nefarious purposes that play upon our modern desires for authentic, original work.[5]

The term *reproduction* may be interpreted broadly to include all forms of replication and copying such as the practices mentioned above. However, to begin my partial history I am taking a narrower view of reproduction. I am concerned with images of art produced with the intent of documenting works of art and supplying the market with images of art that are available and relatively affordable to broader audiences than the original can be and how audiences users experience and employ these images. Also, before you object to my leaving out the pedagogical and market value of recasting sculpture as demonstrated by the Romans, I am also limiting this history to that of reproduced images on paper or images displayed electronically. Subsequently, the partial history of experiencing of art through reproduction begins with printmaking.

In the West, the history of printmaking begins a little before the history of printing text with movable type. Very few early woodblock prints have survived, but those that have tell us that creating images from carved and inked woodblocks stems

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[5] See Hoving, T. (1996). *False impressions: The hunt for big-time art fakes*. New York: Simon & Schuster.

from the beginning of the fifteenth century. A key to the development of woodblock printing, and to text printing, was the availability of paper. Although manuscript books were still produced with vellum after the arrival of paper in the eleventh century, paper use steadily increased through the following centuries. Paper could be produced in larger quantities than vellum and in regular sizes, a distinct advantage to its use in the printing press. Paper also took the inks used in printing more effectively than vellum that had a tendency to be too slick to hold printing inks.

Woodblock prints probably stemmed from the workshops of woodcarvers, engraving from goldsmith workshops (Hults, 1996, p. 19). Woodblock printing is a relief printing process: wood is carved away to a raised positive image that will take ink, whereas the carved spaces manifest as the white of the paper. These prints can be made entirely by hand by simply pressing the paper onto the inked block. The woodblock prints of the early fifteenth century were often devotional images sold at shrines and fairs. Printed images of Christ or the Virgin Mary, for example, could be purchased and taken home, perhaps even displayed in private altars in the home for the lower classes—an extension of religious worship outside of the Church. Woodblock prints were also used to make playing cards, illustrations, and political broadsides (p. 21).

Engraving is an intaglio printing process: the ink is rubbed into the incised lines of a smooth metal plate, the surface ink is removed by wiping the plate, and the image is printed by applying pressure to the inked plate and an accompanying sheet of damp paper. Engraving most likely came into practice in the 1430s when

goldsmiths, accustomed to checking their work by inking and impressing metal onto paper, realized the potential of printing images by this very same means (p. 43). Goldsmiths were skilled artisans of their time, and early engravings demonstrate an aesthetic refinement and technical sophistication, particularly in their finely incised lines, in comparison to woodblocks of the same era.

The history of creating reproducible images of existing works of art is deeply connected to the development of the book printing industry in the mid-fifteenth century. The printing of books and the subsequent rise of the book trade across the European continent were both an impetus for and response to a growing merchant class who wished to purchase texts and images, but could not afford illuminated manuscripts. Printers were able to seamlessly integrate woodblock prints with their new type because the block itself was made to be type-high, meaning the press could apply pressure evenly across the inked image and type. The printed book took many cues from its handwritten and hand illuminated counterpart. Printers arranged text in much the same manner as manuscripts, and images were integrated with text similarly. The European market, accustomed to illuminated manuscripts, unbound woodblock prints, and even bound blockbooks of images, would likely have expected there to be images in printed books. The *Nuremberg Chronicle* of 1493 is the most ambitious of the surviving early illustrated texts, boasting well over a thousand printed images.

While woodblocks enjoyed the advantage of being type high, engravers continued to produce images with increasing sophistication. Engravers developed line

work techniques to give the illusion of tone and three-dimensional form. In his book *Prints and Visual Communication*, William Ivins refers to the engravers' line work as a visual syntax, a language constructed of linear elements informed by the artist's particular school (German or Italian, for example) (1969, p. 166). Over time the demand for engraved prints grew, leading publishers and printers to add engravings to their printed texts. These books were more costly to produce because engravings could not be printed alongside the type; instead engravings require printing on a separate rolling press and then manual insertion into the book folio.

By the seventeenth century engravings had usurped woodblocks as the preferred visual print medium, especially for the cultural elites. Unfortunately, copper, the commonly used metal for engraving and the related intaglio technique of etching, is fairly soft and wears out quickly on the press. In the nineteenth century printers looking to accommodate larger print runs and satisfy market demand for engraved images turned to steel plates for engraving because steel is more durable than cooper. The increasing availability of printed images did not necessarily please some buyers who were forming an early sense of print connoisseurship:

> The process [line engraving on steel] was often regarded with contempt, perhaps because of the very fact that it enabled reproductions of pictures and works of art to be circulated cheaply to rich and poor alike. This offended the exclusive attitudes of the well-to-do connoisseur, who was liable to discuss steel-engraving as being so coarse as to debase the whole art of engraving. (Francis Klingender as quoted by Jussim, 1974, p. 247)

It is interesting to note that print connoisseurship here is revealed as valuing reproduced images as works of art, despite their multiplicity; the printing limitation of

the cooper plate was enough to satisfy the desire for something special—meaning something at least not available to the lower classes.

Wood engraving, developed in England at the end of the eighteenth century, was also an important printmaking technique. Wood engravings are a crossbreed of engraving and woodblock printing; they are technically a relief process, but the wood block is carved at a right angle to the grain with an engraving tool. The results could be as detailed as those of metal engraving. Wood engravings, like their woodblock ancestors, were also type-high and sturdy enough for large editions, appealing conveniences for any printer. Particularly in England during the mid-nineteenth century, the wood engraving reigned supreme, and the printing house was likely to be a full-scale, mass production workshop with many engravers. Trevor Fawcett points out that such a system was not likely to turn out works of dynamic artistry: "This mass production, atelier system (sometimes employing specialists in lines, tints, and figures) tended to impose a standardized look on every subject that only the more individualistic engravers avoided" (1986, p. 187).

The last of the printmaking techniques necessary for this history is lithography, also developed at the end of the eighteenth century. The lithographic process is based on oily ink repelling water. A slab of polished limestone is drawn upon with a greasy medium, and then treated with nitric acid and gum arabic. Before being inked, the stone is wet to repel ink from sticking to the surface, with the exception of the previously drawn areas. Paper is laid over the stone and then run through a press that drags a bar across the back of the paper. The importance of

lithography lies in its sense of artistic immediacy; the stone accepts the drawn and painted line much as paper and canvas do. An artist, unfamiliar with printmaking, may work directly on the stone, and the result can look deceptively like an original pencil, crayon, or ink drawing. Stone lithography is not type-compatible, limiting its integration with printed text. It was only with the later development of photolithographic printing processes that lithographic images and text could be integrated.

2.2 Printed Images as Information and Commodity

The reader may have noticed my emphasis on the compatibility of printmaking techniques and the printing of text. Although images were printed autonomously as well as within books, the history of the book assists us in understanding the flow of information through printed materials during the Renaissance and the Enlightenment. The overall impact of printing on the West is great; scholars are still investigating, writing, and arguing about the role of the printed book in the advancement of humanistic and scientific knowledge and systematic study, including the study of art (see Eisenstein, 2002, and Johns, 2002).

The growing number of images representing works of art in unavailable, distant places facilitated the study and comparison of art works. The images, of course, also provided aesthetic enjoyment for their viewers. We understand, or at least believe we understand, all images from within our cultural milieu on some immediate level. Within Western culture, viewing images does not require literacy in

a foreign language, or even one's own for that matter. Dana Arnold argues that this "international currency" of images explains the popularity of images during the Enlightenment:

> By the opening years of the eighteenth century the proliferation of printed images ran ahead of the increased production of the printed word. The printed image became an essential component of the international currency of intellectual ideas that transcended spoken boundaries. These images facilitated the transference of ideas about architecture, antiquity, and aesthetics in the pan-European arena of artistic and scholarly exchange. (Arnold, 2002, p. 450)

We might well expect scholars of the time to be fluent in multiple languages, or at least versed in the academic languages of Latin or French. Over time, however, the demand for reproduced images was much larger than the number of scholars could feasibly generate. Images were desired by the broader public, just as affordable books were.

The increase in image production during the Renaissance and Enlightenment influenced the development and growth of the art market as well. The market for art and art appreciation as a marker of cultural taste and distinction grew especially strong in the eighteenth century:

> Regular public exhibitions, and the development of criticism and public discussion of art, were instrumental in forming and consolidating a public for art in both England and France. Consumption of culture increasingly went beyond purchasing works of art. It could include attendance at events, *buying reproductions*, or buying and reading critical and historical writings. Jürgen Habermas argued that the eighteenth century witnessed nothing less than the invention of culture per se, as a commodity to be consumed ostensibly for its own sake, through the medium of rational discussion. (Seiberling, 1998, p. 142)

The consumption of reproduced images of works of art disseminated information across larger audiences, and assisted in developing more inclusive dialogues on art. Art, already culturally significant, was transformed into a cultural commodity.

To form a clearer sense of the printed image as an informational entity, I return to the fifteenth century and the work of William Ivins. Ivins enthusiastically credits reproducible images with a capability to disseminate information not only greater than that of the printed text; he draws a straight comparison to writing itself: "It is hardly too much to say that since the invention of writing there has been no more important invention than that of the exactly repeatable pictorial statement" (1969, p. 3). Ivins finds his first example of a pictorial statement that satisfies his definition of a "deliberate communication of information and ideas" in Vaturius's *Art of War* of 1472 (Ivins, 1969, p. 31). So, for Ivins, early communication through reproducible visual images is more rationalized illustration than artistic statement. Indeed, the ideal of "objective" documentation might have been present in these early centuries of reproduced images, but engravers were known to take liberties and editorialize their representations of works of art.

It is very difficult to create an illusion of three-dimensional form or tonal ranges in woodblock prints. For this reason, engravings were the preferred medium for the representation of existing works of art, despite the expense involved with their printing as discussed above. By the seventeenth century, engravers and printers were supplying images of paintings, sculptures, and architecture for the (mostly elite) public to admire and study. These prints provided either the "spirit" of the original

work or a simplified rendering of composition or structure. The viewers of engraved reproductions did not believe, or more importantly expect, the image to be an entirely faithful representation of the original. The clear influences of the copyist's and engraver's preferences and techniques were accepted elements of the engraving. Also, any viewer familiar with the process of producing prints from an engraved plate likely recognized the possibility that the image was a mirrored representation of the original composition.

Early metal engraving production happened in many different stages, just as wood engraving production did centuries later. William Ivins describes the multiple translations an image was likely to go through:

> In the course of this [engraved printing] commercial development a curious thing happened. Functions that had been filled by one man got split apart in a specialization of labour. The printer painted. The draughtsman for the engraver copied in black and white what the painter had painted, or the Roman view, or ancient statue. The engraver rendered the drawings of these draughtsmen. The engravings in consequence were not only copies of copies but translations of translations. (Ivins, 1969, p. 67)

Any ideal of faithful representation that might have been in place during this time was easily disrupted during the production process. However, the reputations of the publisher and the printer were at stake if too many mistakes were made, so there was likely some form of quality control practiced in the workshops.

In early art historical study and criticism engravings representing works of art were often additional, not primary, sources of visual information (of course, for non-elites without access to educational institutions, this was probably not the case). Engraved reproductions acted as mnemonic devices to support the critic's spoken or

written description and opinions of the work. But we do know that reproduced images were used as trusted informational objects in the absence of the original. Helene Roberts cites Vasari's use of a reproductive engraving to remind himself of Raphael's *Parnassus* when writing the *Lives of Painters*, published in 1550, evidenced by Vasari's description of the work including an element not present in Raphael's work but rather in an engraving of the work by Raimondi (1994, p. 340).

Raimondi himself is an interesting character in the history of reproduction, well worth spending a moment on. As one of many engravers and businessmen involved in the production of engraved images of works of art, Raimondi demonstrates the power that reproduced images held in the market and among artists and scholars. The Renaissance saw an increasing market for engraved images of works of art. Travelers who came to Rome wished to have images to take back with them, whether printed singly or in collections (Ivins, 1969, p. 67). Across Europe the growing middle class wished to satisfy their interest in Classical and Italian works with engravings of these works (Hults, 1996, p. 165). In 1506, Marcantonio Raimondi had already made a name for himself by copying a series of woodcuts by Dürer as engravings, complete with Dürer's monogram; this act led the German artist to file a complaint against Raimondi in the Venetian senate (p. 162). It is important to note that Dürer was a prominent printmaker himself, making profit by selling multiple editions of his own work. Raimondi went on producing engraved reproductions of existing works of art, most famously those of Raphael. Raphael hired Raimondi to make engravings based upon his drawings, ensuring a widespread, yet vicarious,

distribution of Raphael's work across Europe. Representational accuracy suffered under the high level of production in Raimondi's workshop, but he and his pupils provided both the general public and scholars with prints of contemporary Italian and Classical works, including Vasari—considered to be the father of art history. Raimondi, initially chastised by the senate for infringing upon Dürer's print market, capitalized on the market for images of unique works of art with the cooperation of Rapael, who saw the arrangement to be beneficial.

Clearly, despite their limited potential as wholly accurate representations of works of art, engravings were vital to the development of art history. From Vasari on engraved reproductions were used as reminders of the original work, but they also spurred new considerations on the part of their viewers. With representations of original works spread before them, scholars began arranging the images according to time, place, or style; such arrangements essentially build narratives and meanings that are unavailable from the authentic works themselves. It is with engraved reproductions that we can begin to trace the importance of arranging disparate images to create narrative and meaning. In Ulrich Keller's opinion:

> The highly hypothetical operation of breaking them [artworks] out of the spatial continuum and rearranging them in temporal order required a very particular frame of mind which emerged only in the course of the eighteenth century, and I would argue that the availability of an experimental, archival arena of easily manipulable reproductions was the key precondition for this development (2001, p. 179).

The necessity of reproductions for the practice of symbolically manipulating works of art is clear. Unique works of art in diverse locations do not lend themselves to collection and comparison by the individual.

Keller continues his argument through a study of image arrangement in the picture atlases of the mid-seventeenth century. Picture atlases, portfolios of engraved reproductions, were research and pedagogical tools used in eighteenth and early nineteenth century art history classes at the high school and university levels. The engravings were not lavish, rather "the atlases emphasized factual details, measurements, comparativity, not mood and evocative presence; dry knowledge, not exciting impression" (Keller, 2001, p. 190).

The images did, however, articulate a conceptual understanding of the artwork that was an alternative to what Keller calls "normative, antiquarian, and itinerary discourses" (p. 180). Picture atlases brought together multiple images of works of art on a single page. A reproduction from Séroux d'Agincourt's *History of Art by it Monuments*, published in 1823, shows a page of twenty-seven architectural facades remarkably varied in appearance. The spatial organization is even, with six to eight facades spaced across four rows of a single plate. No text or labels interrupt the progression from one image to another. Comparisons between works could be made easily and separately from the guidance of the associated text:

> Moreover, they [picture atlases] preserve autonomy opposite the scholarly texts. Instead of being placed next to the relevant paragraph, the 5-20 engravings per page create their own frames of reference, with a myriad of planned and unplanned comparative possibilities opening up in every

> direction, not rarely wreaking havoc with the text's carefully constructed chronological progression. (Keller, 2001, p. 192)

The separation between image and text necessitated by the printing process (remember engravings were not printed with the text, they were inserted into the folio) opened a cognitive gap between image and text. The viewer was left on her own to construct a visual narrative of the works. Whereas text demands linear thought—we ordinarily follow an author's thought by sequentially reading the words presented to us—visual statements may be read in any order (with the obvious exception of film). In contrast to the picture atlases of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Keller cites the later developments of photography and the halftone printing process: the merging of image and spoken word in the slide lecture, and art history texts and illustrations printed in one smooth page encouraged art historians to develop a "seamless discourse" of "atrophied…subconsciously internalized stereotypes" free of the creative challenges posed by engraving (2001, p. 192). In Keller's view, the merging of image and text in presentation reinforces established hierarchies, whereas their separation encourages visual exploration, unguided by an authoritative voice.

A second valuable examination of early reproduced images as vehicles of art information and discourse is Dana Arnold's "Facts of Fragments? Visual Histories in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," a case study of printed images as information and the formation of history by means of images in the eighteenth century. Arnold focuses on the engraved images of the temples at Paestum in southern Italy; the temples were relatively difficult to get to and the area lacked the comforts most

travelers desired, so information about the temples was primarily based upon their images. A southern Italian, Count Gazola, originally commissioned images of the temples in the 1750s; these images were recycled and added to over time—in effect becoming the primary source material for the temples:

> These views [of the temples], based on Gazola's drawings, provided a core of plates, complemented by reconstruction, sections, and detail of the temples, for the many volumes on Paestum which appeared in the third quarter of the eighteenth century. Each of these volumes provided more of an assemblage of images of different sizes, produced by different hands at different times, than a systematic survey of the ruins (2002, p. 454).

The re-use of pre-existing images for new images certainly would have made economic sense for print publishers. Why commission new images of remote temples when there is an available and recognized set already printed? While our modern day sensitivities to intellectual property *might* shy us away from such a practice, the continued appearance of the engravings of Paestum is only one of countless of examples of copies of "original" reproductions.

Arnold builds a compelling argument for the role of engravings in constructing visual histories that either run parallel to or against written and verbal histories. The multitude of images of Paestum, published at different times and by different publishers, exemplify images offering vicarious access to a unique object, as well as a means of incorporating the distant and "fragmentary" into our present (p. 456). In the case of Paestum, engravings of the temples may be seen as elemental to eighteenth century debates about the supremacy of Greek civilization over Roman or vice versa:

> The aesthetic practices evident in these various visual representations stands [sic] distinct from the constraints of verbal taxonomies. This reveals a pan-European currency of printed images of antiquity which relied on a common visual language, which in turn reveals how mass-produced studies of the antique were used as facts of fragments of knowledge which became histories. (p. 456)

The common visual language of prints, however, is itself split down the middle: it portrays both fact and fragment—visual elements of rational analysis and the "unruly" imagination, respectively.

Visual rationality as a strategy of representation orders, squares, and dissects the object. It removes extraneous distractions; whole buildings float in the empty white space of the paper:

> This method of representation relies on imagination as the construction of this artificial composition is the creation of something other than the object under scrutiny. The abstraction of detail…became a system of standardization akin to the dictionaries and encyclopedias which proliferated in the eighteenth century. This produced a legible language of signs which could be subjugated to verbal argument and could, if desired, follow linguistic systems. (Arnold, p. 460).

Through this type of representation, works could be incorporated into the positivist approach of empirical study and classification more easily.

Arnold contrasts the rationalized image with Piranesi's engravings of Classical ruins which exemplify unruly images that evoke a very different sense of the same type of subject. Piranesi details the decay of a structure: stones lay fallen aside half survived walls, weeds grow through cracks, local residents pick through the ruins for stones to use elsewhere. Such representations play up a romanticized view of

the Classical monuments, while reminding us that the monuments are very much part of the past (p. 464).

Arnold concludes that engraved prints united the rational, systematizing drive of the Enlightenment with artistic and imaginative impulses. This union alters the image twice over by removing it from its original context and simultaneously demanding a new context (2002, p. 466). Printed images created by many different hands and possibly many times over were subject to editorializing, artistic inspiration, and mistakes. But perhaps the variety of representation was also part of their value. In Arnold's words, "prints came to represent what was not visible" (2002, p. 466), the political and cultural context of their time.

In the first half of this chapter, I provided an overview of the development of relevant printmaking processes used as reproductive media from the early 1400s to the early 1900s. I specifically focused upon the printed image's compatibility with printed text. While the production and distribution of reproduced images was not entirely dependent upon a compatibility with type, I believe that the relationship between image and text in the printer's workshop reveals historical trends of visual experience and market demands. For example, the rise of engraving as the key reproductive medium, despite the extra labor and cost in its production, signals a demand for more sophisticated images, capable of rendering finer detail and tonal values.

For the second half of the chapter, I discussed printed images as sources of information and interpretation, as well as products to be bought and sold. Reproduced

images of works of art are both representations of other objects and representations of their context. The intended, or unintended, use of reproduced images to vicariously collect, compare, and otherwise arrange works of art was primary activity in the early practices of art history. As I move into the photographic world, the use of reproduced images to form understanding and construct narratives of art will grow in strength, as will the dissemination of images across larger and larger audiences.

Chapter Three: Photographic Reproduction

3.1 Early Photography

After centuries of printmaking media, the development of photography in the nineteenth century shifted our cultural interpretation of visual representation to one of perceived scientific objectivity. All printmaking media shared the commonality of creation by the artist's hand on the block, plate, or stone, whereas photography removed visual evidence of human artistry from the image entirely. Describing the cultural impact of photography is difficult; like the printing press, photography's effects on communication and the shaping of knowledge are far-reaching and complex. Photographs as a documentary medium, perhaps more than any other medium, are culturally charged with presenting us truthful, observable fact.[6]

As an art reproductive medium, photography is frequently credited as a key element in the development of the art history discipline as we know it today. Photography supported teaching art history to larger groups, opened the study of art across previously unexamined cultures by increasing the availability of images and by legitimizing non-Western works, as I shall discuss later in this chapter. The consequences of photographic reproduction were also felt outside of academia. Like engraved prints, photographs popularized works of art previously unavailable to

[6] I do not wish to disregard the early and ongoing uses of photography outside of normative documentation. Early photography was used an artistic medium and as a medium able to capture the unseen (ghosts, souls, auras, and so on), presumably through photographic manipulation. However, my concern here is with photographs as documentary representations of works of art.

broader audiences; photographic images of works of art were produced and sold in many formats. As buyers of art books, postcards, and posters, or as students in higher education, most of us are very familiar with the ubiquity of photographic reproduction of art. Due to our familiarity with photography today, I will briefly discuss the historical and technical aspects of photography in the nineteenth century and some of the twentieth, followed by a look at the more experiential and theoretical aspects of photographic reproduction.

The development of photography and photomechanical printing was a long and varied process. Both William Talbot and Louis Daguerre announced their separate discoveries of photographic processes in 1839. From that point both men and others continued to experiment with chemical processes to capture images "drawn by the sun." Photography and photomechanical printing underwent many permutations through remainder of the 1800s; some early photographic processes were developed and expanded upon, others were abandoned. Talbot's photographic process survived that of Daguerre primarily because Talbot's process included the creation of a negative from which many prints could be made, despite the many years it took for Talbot's process to create an image as sharp as that of Daguerre's.[7] It seems that early on in the history of photography there was a recognition or expectation that an image's value increased with its multiplication. In the post-Enlightenment,

[7] For a much more thorough discussion of the multitude of photographic developments in the early and mid-nineteenth century, particularly photomechanical printing, see Jussim (1974).

industrialized West, the reproducibility of photographic documentation was imperative in the development of photography as a commodity.

In the mid-1800s, photographs of art began appearing on the European market. One of the first was William Stirling's *Annals of the Artists of Spain*, published in 1847 in a limited run of only twenty-five copies; this publication included sixty-six Talbotype photographs. The photographic images of Greco, Velasquez, and Goya in Stirling's publication are credited with introducing these Spanish artists to English scholars (Ivins, p. 124), yet most of the photographic paper prints were images of *engravings* of paintings, not images of the paintings themselves.[8]

The reasoning behind photographing engravings of the works of art rather the works of art themselves laid in the limitations of the photographic chemical process at the time. Early photographic emulsions were not sufficiently sensitive to a broad spectrum of color: yellow, green, and red registered as black, blues faded to white. Photographs of paintings, therefore, had to evolve over time; early photographs of paintings were often not as satisfactory in representing the tonal qualities of a work as engravings were. Many early photographers directed their energies in photographing architecture, sculpture, and the black ink engravings of original paintings.

Photography as a reproductive medium in the mid to late 1800s had other limitations as well. In addition to the needed improvements in the initial photographic

[8] Both Freitag (1987, p. 352) and Jussim (1974, p. 246) state that all sixty-six images in the Stirling publication are of engravings, whereas Hamber (2003, p. 218) cites the publication as having six photographic images produced directly from the original works.

processes, the technological capability to mass produce photographic prints also posed difficulties. Photographic prints were printed separately from text, and then manually pasted into the book—just as engravings had been. The labor and expense of this additional work was initially a deterrent for publishers producing less expensive publications. This should sound familiar: engravings presented the same dilemma when pitted against woodblock printing two centuries earlier. The transition from engraving to photography as the primary medium for reproduced images of art, especially in popular publications with large print runs, took place gradually over the length of the nineteenth century; for decades engravings and photographs were in use simultaneously, occasionally within the same publications.

Despite the problems cited above, Anthony Hamber (2003) describes printed photographic reproductions art as slowly growing in number from the 1840s to the 1870s, by which time the usefulness of photographic images, particularly in Renaissance art scholarship, was acknowledged (p. 215). Photographic prints were sold in a variety of formats including loose prints that could be collected within portfolios, cartes de visite (images of a work or collection of works, similar in dimension and simplicity to contemporary postcards and postcard books), stereoscopic cards, and printed illustrations in art books. As the necessary developments in photographic emulsions and printing processes took hold, photographic images of art increased dramatically in the early twentieth century, challenging engraving's dominance as the art reproductive medium.

Photographs, like prints before them, were a valuable industry in the nineteenth century. By the 1870s, photographs were available commercially through dealers throughout Europe, and presumably the United States as well. Trevor Fawcett (1986) found that in the late 1800s "various archives were in existence, and indeed most European countries had signed an international convention on art reproductions which envisaged national collections of photographs, casts and electrotypes as well as the international exchange of duplicates" (p. 206). Individual institutions appointed photographers to document their collections; as early as 1855 the British Museum hired its first official photographer Robert Fenton to photograph its collection of classical sculpture (Freitag, 1987, p. 354). Often photographers were contracted to photograph collections or assist in the creation of *catalogues raisonnés* of individual artists locally and abroad.

3.2 Interpreting Photographic Image of Art

As stated, our use of photography reflects a continued interest in the photograph's ability to represent the world in a manner that implies objectivity. We ascribe representational truth to the photographic image. Photographs provide a registration of light in a manner that is similar enough to our own experience of sight that we can easily imagine the image as true—meaning we identify with how the camera "sees" objects, and with our understanding of photographic processes, we feel some confidence that the camera registers only (and every) object in front of its lens.

Cara Finnegan, paraphrasing Don Slater, describes the attribution of photographic realism to three factors:

> Representational realism, the way a photograph corresponds to perspectivalism's sense of what a 'realistic representation' looks like; ontological realism, where the viewer knows that what appears in the photograph must have existed in order for it to have been captures by the camera; and mechanical realism, the transformation of light reflected from an object into a visual representation of that object. (Finnegan, 2001, § 3, ¶ 6)

The intersection of representational, ontological, and mechanical realism produces a very powerful illusion, an illusion that is supported by our experiences with photography both as viewers and photographers. Try imagining how different your understanding of the world might be if you could not ascribe some fundamental truthfulness to the photographs you see. Much of what you know now would be called into question. Even our memories are subjected to photographic intervention, as we insist on photographing those people, places, and things we wish to capture and keep.

We have culturally integrated photographic realism to the degree that it operates on a near subconscious level. The attribution of photographic realism is relative to our individual and cultural conditioning. Even William Ivins, in the midst of his enthusiastic support of photography as a "pictorial communication of fact," (1969, p. 136) must admit that adjustments must be made on the viewer's part:

> At first the public had talked a great deal about what it called photographic distortion—which only meant that the camera had not been taught, as human beings had been, to disregard perspective in most of its seeing. But the world, as it became acclimated, or, to use the psychologist's word, conditioned, to photographic images, gradually ceased to talk about photographic distortion, and today the phrase is rarely heard. (p. 138).

What Ivins ignores here is that the public was just as likely to be accustomed to photographic distortion and perspective due to perspectival drawing and painting developed centuries earlier. The single point perspective of the lens produces an image similar to artists' images whose perspectives rely upon the location of the singular position of the viewer to be properly seen.

Ivins also proclaims photographic reproduction, particularly in its printing, as a medium free of syntax. Whereas the networks or webs of lines in prints—the syntax—manifests as a constant awareness of the medium, Ivins proclaim photography to be free of representational distraction. In general, photography's matrix of tiny particles lie below the threshold of human sight, leaving us to instead contemplate the photograph as a transparent window onto the represented object. Estelle Jussim took Ivins to task for his overestimation of photomechanical printing and his underestimation of prints' ability to communicate representational information subliminally (Jussim, 1974, p. 76). Photographs did not always print well, and the resulting image quality could be very unsatisfactory. Newer printing technology has made this argument moot in the present day, but the debate reflects the messiness of media transition, a process that is often oversimplified, especially in popular discourse.

In the more specific relationship between the original work of art and its photographic reproduction, elements of the original are lost. There are copious discussions in the field of art history of the deceptive qualities of photographic

reproductions. Texture, dimension, and accurate color are the most bemoaned victims of photographs of works of art. Texture may be only implied through visual cues, like visible shadows in the reproductive image. Barbara Savedoff worries that photographic reproductions alter painting's texture to the extent that the physicality of an artist's application of paint is lost and that, in the case of more contemporary work, the dialogue between photography and photo-realist painting is completely suppressed (2000, p. 161). The work of art's physical dimensions are not only eliminated from reproduction (unless the original is sufficiently size-friendly to media formats like printed books), but they become strangely standardized, resulting in misleading viewing experiences. My own experience with Ensor's *Christ's Entry in Brussels in 1889* demonstrates the powerful shock of disillusionment when faced with the true dimensions of a painting previously seen within the dimensional confines of a book or screen. In this instance, the disillusionment was a positive one; I was happily surprised by the size of the original work. The opposite has been true in other experiences; I have been unimpressed by original works that I had thought to be much larger.

Color, or the absence of color, is another consideration in our interpretation of the reproduced image. The inevitable visual abstraction of black and white photography and our simultaneous acceptance of black and white photographs as satisfactorily representational demonstrate a level of cultural and visual conditioning similar to that of photographic distortion. Historically, we are long accustomed to black and white images—prints were mostly black ink and white paper, unless they

were hand colored. Although black and white photography is now seen with an element of romance (perhaps similar to the present-ness of the past found in Piranesi's engravings), black and white photographs were, and still are, commonly found in service of representing works of art.

The effect of black and white photographs upon interpretation of the image is palpable; without color, line and form receive a large part of our visual attention. Viewing most Impressionist works in black and white is almost aesthetically useless, but not yet uncommon. Malraux attributed the absence of many works, and even the work of entire civilizations, to the dominance of line in black and white reproduction:

> The reason why the impression that Byzantine art was paralysed so long prevailed is, simply, that its drawing was conventional—whereas its life force, genius and discoveries were recorded in its colour. …Until quite recently its history was the history of its drawing—and in it drawing counted not at all! We may be sure that drawing will ultimately lose the supremacy conferred on it by black-and-white photography. (1949, p. 32)

Finally, I would like to consider the photographer herself as an interpretive force in photographic reproduction. Upon reflection it is obvious that a photographer cannot point her camera "objectively." The photographer must make choices in how the work of art is to be represented, and often these choices are infused with the photographer's aesthetics or politics. In 1913 art historian Hans Tietze expressed his concerns about the aesthetic subjectivity of the photographer:

> Anyone who has ever photographed a building has consciously influenced the psychological impact of the object, be it through a foreshortening of some unsightly lines, through a loss of depth and the apparent crossing of architectural lines or through the inclusion of "mood inducing" elements such as foreground detail, etc. Clearly, our innate artistic preferences often get the upper hand when we have set out to take a documentary picture of a piece of

> architecture. These interpretative manipulations can, if worst comes to worst, result in the complete falsification of the artistic message of the original. (Hans Tietze as quoted by Freitag, 1987, p. 355)

The photographer of works of art, or in this case, architecture, would seem to be in the problematic position of both documenting the work in a manner that is removed or emotionless, while also needing to create an image that represents the perceived value of the work. Two competing ideals are at work: photographic "objectivity" and the romance of the original work.

Besides aesthetic considerations, photographic images of works of art are also subject to the political and social contexts of their times. Mary Bergstein examines the political influence on photographic documentation in her essay "'We May Imagine It': Living with Photographic Reproduction at the End of Our Century." Many photographs of ancient art in Italy were commissioned in the mid-nineteenth century under Pope Pius IX. The ancient sculptures were photographed in a manner that visually signified a romanticized Roman civilization, reflective of the contemporary Classicist aesthetic (Bergstein, 1995, p. 17). Bergstein parses the visual meaning of the 1867 photograph of *Head of a Statue from Ostia*:

> The semiotic structure of this photograph, which seeks to represent a simultaneity of past and present, is easily read. The disembodied head is elevated (as if in coincidental *situ*)…The moment of excavation and that of visual documentation are seamlessly fused…Depth of field is expressive: the heavy-lids and raise, drilled pupils of the head and the clear brow art the top of the head are in focus…A nimbus of seven-rays—almost certainly not excavated intact but attached *post facto* as a prop—are perceived as delicate streaks of light emanating for the head in tremolant chiaroscuro (p. 16)

The images of these ancient artifacts acted as quasi-propaganda; the pieces were photographed as luminous and romantic ambassadors of the past and the contemporary glory of Pope Pius IX who linked his authority back to the Roman empire.

Despite the inherent flaws of photography in representing important visual and physical aspects of the original work of art, in the twentieth century photographic reproduction became, in Barbara Savedoff's words, the "paradigmatic art experience" (2000, p. 157). Savedoff attributes the reproduction as the paradigmatic art experience as a result of comfort and convenience; why battle the crowds of a blockbuster museum show when an exhibition catalog allows you to see the works of art "wherever we like and for as long as we like" (p. 157). I would add that without widely available photographic reproductions the crowds at blockbuster shows would be significantly thinner. The social complexity of the reproduced image is in its possible divergent paths: augmenting the value of the work of art and lessening the power of the work's aura by distributing its image.

3.3 The Photographic Reproduction as a Social and Associational Object

There is little argument that the development of photography in the mid-1800s changed the character of visual information, its production and dissemination. While reproduced images created by artists, craftsmen, and printers were certainly valued as informational and artistic objects, photographs removed the tangible sense of the human hand in the image's creation. The development of the Kodak hand-held

camera in 1888 enabled photography to be popularly practiced. The mechanized reproduction of images fit nicely with other nineteenth and early twentieth developments in industrial production, and the rising power of the lower and middle classes.

In *Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century*, Jonathan Crary turns to Baudrillard's description of the shifts of the nineteenth century in order to situate Crary's nineteenth century observer. Baudrillard describes the breakdown of bourgeois social power as partly a result of available techniques of copying and "a proliferation of signs on demand" (Crary, 1990, p. 12). This theory echoes Walter Benjamin's Marxist interpretation of mechanical reproduction, namely photography and film, as an assertion of proletariat power as was discussed in chapter one. Photography inspired a new visual and cultural landscape by acting as extensions or embodiments of a formerly precious and guarded world. Unique works of art, formerly the visual property of the bourgeois (to some extent still), are pulled into the larger circulation of images. Photography enables a new medium of mass communication, a unifying and "totalizing" system of value, synonymous with money:

> The photograph becomes a central element not only in a new commodity economy but in the reshaping of an entire territory on which signs and images, each effectively severed from a referent, circulate, and proliferate. Photographs may have some apparent similarities with older types of images, such as perspectival painting or drawing made with the aid of a camera obscura; but the vast systemic rupture of which photography renders such similarities insignificant. Photography is an element of a new and homogeneous terrain of consumption and circulation in which an observer becomes lodged. To understand the "photography effect" in the nineteenth

> century, one must see it as a crucial component of a new cultural economy of value and exchange, not as part of a continuous history of visual representation…Photography and money become homologous forms of social power in the nineteenth century. They are equally totalizing systems for binding and unifying all subjects within a single global network of valuation and desire. (p. 13)

The production and consumption of photographic equivalences and their impact on the viewer is significant. The observer is found in this new system where there is "a new set of abstract relations between individuals and things" and the prevailing culture determines the abstract relations to be real (p. 13).

Drawing Crary's analysis into a more specific and experiential contrast of photographic representations and engraved representations of the nineteenth century, it is possible that an element of the photography's effect on visual communication is its alteration of the interpretive process. Engravings were representative of works of art, but there was also imaginative room for the copyist, engraver, and viewer. Photographs, on the other hand, demonstrate representational capabilities so powerful that they inhibit a similar level of questioning or criticism in their production and viewing. Ironically, however, the authoritative character of the photograph also allows for new forms of participation in interpretive and critical inquiries, as well as the new form of social power as discussed by Benjamin and Baudrillard. Photography as a mass medium tends to equalize its subjects—everything becomes a visual statement of fact—and with popular photography, more people are engaged in the production and interpretation of "fact."

André Malraux addressed the power of photographic reproduction in *Museum without Walls*. Malraux celebrated the photograph's ability to remove the work of art from its context and to represent works of art as homogeneous signs. For Malraux, photographic reproduction expanded art history's canon by challenging the tentative and pre-conceived values that had previously shaped the discipline. It is the strange, equalizing quality of photographic reproduction that Malraux praises. Photographic reproduction smoothes over differences, leading to a new type of viewing experience and new ways of thinking about the art represented:

> Black and white photography tends to intensify the "family likeness" between objects that have but a slight affinity. With the result that very different objects of the same epoch—the Middle Ages--: a square of tapestry, a stained glass window, a miniature, a picture and a statue, when reproduced on the same page become members of a family. They have lost their colours, texture and natural dimensions…each, in short, has practically lost its individuality—but their common style is by so much the gainer. (1949, p. 24)

The attribution of a common style or family likeness effectively heightened the aesthetic estimation of previously ignored works of art that resided outside of the Western art history canon. Photography through the democratizing effect or sameness of its images lent dignity to previously disregarded arts and crafts of "primitive" cultures such as those of Native America and Africa. As the aesthetic value of non-Western works were revealed through their reproduction, an increased number and diversity of artworks entered into our cultural sphere. The fragmentary or detailed view of a work also heightened aesthetic qualities of neglected pieces. The fragment romanticizes the particulars of a work, a face, a pleasing contrast or line, and decontextualizes the image from the work itself.

Malraux also focuses on photography's ability to spur the creation of new comparisons, narratives, and the idea of "style":

> Like flotsam brought together and borne forward by time's dark river all these works, diverse though they are, seem moving in the same direction. Thus it is that, thanks to the rather specious unity imposed by photographic reproduction on a multiplicity of objects…[style] seems to emerge as a real entity. (Malraux, 1949, p. 52)

Defining the style of an artist or culture becomes a creative and anthropological endeavor greatly assisted by photographic reproduction. Otherwise isolated works of art could now join larger groups of related works to tell the story of the artist or of a distant culture. The grouping of images creates new valuation based on contrast and comparison within the group.

Malraux's *Museum without Walls* poses an interesting contrast with Benjamin's "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction." Malraux proposes that the original work is heightened by its reproduction rather than lessened. The value of the works of art in the museum without walls stems from the universalizing medium of photography. Rather than an aura based in historical and contextual authenticity, the work is made more by its removal from context. Malraux's modernist aesthetic influenced his stance on photographic reproduction:

> In his view, photography forced objects to acquire significance through the denial of visual and cultural relativity. …The represented object was somehow to be disembodied, cleansed of its local agenda toward a condition of High Art, buoyant in its encounter with the primed intellectual stance of the beholder. (Bergstein, 1995, p. 9)

Mary Bergstein points out that such thinking has fallen out of favor within postmodernist analysis that emphasizes relativity of meaning through a variety of

cultural paradigms (p. 11). However, the use of reproductive media continues in this universalizing vein because images in the same medium are likely to be visually associated with each other or found in the same places, no matter what is represented.

Aby Warburg is another important figure in use photographic reproduction as a tool of discovery. When art historian Aby Warburg died in 1929, he had not yet completed his last project, known as *Mnemosyne*. *Mnemosyne* was to be a picture atlas, originally intended to illustrate "the vicissitudes of the Olympian gods in the astrological tradition and the role of the ancient pathos formulae in post-mediaeval art and civilization" (Gombrich, 1970, p. 283). As it was left, *Mnemosyne* consisted of forty black screens on which were pinned close to one thousand uncaptioned photographic images of art, and many associated boxes of notes. At different points over the years in which Warburg worked on the picture atlas, there were as many as seventy-one screens filled with images. The screens were grouped and photographed for documentation as they continually evolved and shifted according to Warburg's exploration.

Warburg's use and fluid manipulation of photographic images of art to reveal and synthesize unrecognized connections among disparate works, effectively building new art historical narratives, is an important example of the power of reproduced images of art to form our understanding of art on a broad scale. And, like Malraux, Warburg was expansive in his hunt for a universal visual language. Warburg's interest led him to incorporate images outside of the traditional boundaries of art history. The images were various in their intended purpose: photographs of art,

advertisements, and stamps all co-existed on the screens, visual traces of Warburg's internal dialogue:

> For though it was not only the content that interested Warburg, it was the visual image rather than the work of art that he considered the document of human civilization. We have seen that sometimes he hardly appeared to differentiate between the design for a postage stamp and a great painting (Gombrich, 1970, p. 317)

Warburg's screens are an extension of thought similar to written words, and indeed writing was a difficult process for Warburg because it required linearity he did not wish to force upon his thinking (p. 284). The constant shuffling of images upon the screens freed Warburg to represent complex relationships among works of art.

3.4 The Image in the Classroom: Slides Textbooks

The paradigmatic art photographic experiences are those of the art history textbook and the slide lecture. From the early twentieth century until the migration to digital images today, the greatest exposure to images of works of art we in higher education are likely to have is via the art history textbook and the slide lecture. Most art history students and many of their professors have strong recollections of art objects based entirely on viewing reproductive images, especially those projected in darkened lecture rooms and printed in art history textbooks (see Roberts, 1994).

In the art history classroom, photography provided an unprecedented level of representational fidelity in contrast to engravings and supplied the additional capability of being projected as a slide. Whereas the art historian generally referred to a pre-photographic reproduction as a supporting illustrative document, the

photographic reproduction became the center of attention. The photograph commanded the room's attention both as an "objective," authoritative object and visually as a projected slide.

The experience of a slide lecture is surprisingly similar to movie going: in the darkened room, everyone sits at attention facing the front wall (a few might be slumped over, sleeping) as images are projected in large and often bright color—the work of art as eye candy. The voice of the lecturer is ghostly, disembodied; usually she hides below or to the far side of the image, a small penlight making her notes readable. The only other sounds are the whir of the projector fan, and the clack clack of the slides dropping in and out of place. Between slides there is a split second of full darkness and anticipation of what might be next. In a slide lecture, one is likely to see whole buildings and small fragments of paintings at the same size: the Coliseum in Rome and the grotesque figure at the edge of a Bosch painting are perversely equalized in their dimensions. Sometimes, two works of art might join each other on screen for comparison, sharing space like a split-screen effect in a film.

The dramatic nature of the slide lecture was recognized in the medium's forerunner, the lantern slide. Ulrich Keller discusses art historian Herman Grimm's thoughts on lantern slides in 1890:

> Art works projected in a large size onto the screen of the lecture hall, he realized, had a powerfully emotional impact and "explained themselves," permitting the audience to establish a direct relationship with the masterwork represented, and thus diminishing the importance of the mediating scholarly discourse: only as long as students were obliged "to hear statements about sights they could not see" did the professor's word ruled supreme in the classroom (2001, p. 192)

The image took over the source of authority in the classroom; students could now judge the work of art for themselves, maybe even disagree with the professor's interpretation of the work. Knowledge of art in this circumstance is shaped by one's experience of the reproduced image and the resulting dialogue—the original is nowhere in sight.

The slide lecture, supported either by lantern slides or 35mm slides beginning in the mid-twentieth century, has remained fairly constant in its conventions. The lecturer forms a narrative of images, with the occasional detail image to focus attention on a particular aspect of the work, or the occasional comparison between works using dual projection. However, in contrast to images of works of art found in print, the slide is removed from descriptive or interpretive text, freeing the slide lecturer to make a variety of arguments about the work of art (Abel Morris, 1986, p. 24), although for the audience the lecture may still act as form of authoritative constraint.

Other qualities of photographic slides are their ease of processing and their immediate visual accessibility. Many art historians have photographed their own slides to use in lectures. Visual resource collections have often supplemented their image collections by photographing slides from printed photographic reproductions in art history texts and exhibition catalogs. In these cases, students are experiencing the work of art through an image that is removed from the original work many times over. The disappearance of provenance for reproduced images under the murkiness of

appropriation is an interesting contrast to the representational control that many museums practice over their collections. Also, although 35mm slides are fairly small, the medium provides direct accessibility and manipulability of the image. Unlike the digital images discussed in the next chapter that require mediating devices, slides may simply be placed before a light for the viewer to see their images. Art history lectures are often built on light tables, involving a shuffling of images to build meaning through historical, stylistic, or cultural associations, similar to Aby Warburg's engagement with his screens.

I mentioned that slides are free of surrounding text unlike printed images of works of art which are conventionally captioned; this is the most significant quality of the art history textbook I would like to address. The art history textbook is a cornerstone of art history pedagogy, particularly in undergraduate survey classes. Untold thousands of students here in the United States have lugged home the large volumes of either Gardner's *Art through the Ages* or Janson's *History of Art*.[9] Biblical not only in their proportions, art history textbooks cover the world of art from cave painting to contemporary art, creating and replicating their chosen narratives in seeming perpetuity. Although new editions promise to include new artists or past artists ignored in previous editions, the art history textbook has reproduced many of the same images by the same artists many times over. The images of canonical works of art history preserve the status quo of narratives built

[9] Gardner's *Art through the Ages* was first published in 1926; the classic textbook it is now in its 12th edition, printed in 2004. The first edition of Janson's *History of Art* was published in 1966; the 6th edition was printed in 2003.

decades ago. Attempts have been made to lessen the hegemony of the texts and their images by incorporating more non-Western and female artists, but the art history textbook cannot be expected to change dramatically. After all, the printed book has finite, physical limits.

In the art history textbook, the image of a work of art is embedded in an authoritative context displayed with captions and surrounded by interpretive arguments. The viewer is also a reader. Admittedly, there is some disjointedness of experience for the viewer/reader; like the picture atlases described by Ulrich Keller in the previous chapter, images often appear on different pages than their associated text. However, the captioning of engraved images was more difficult at the time of the early picture atlas; image captioning is more easily done with modern printing technology. It is expected that the printed image will have some associated text or caption to label or describe what we see.

Our use of photography to document and interpret works of art represents the complexity of our use of technology. We commonly interpret photographs as a product of mechanical technology free from human subjectivity, although the ways in which we create and use mechanically reproduced images both reflect and encourage cultural norms and individual interpretation. In the history of photography, the promise of the untouched image was to provide an unmediated and irrefutable view of the world, but the images themselves prove to be argumentative in nature and use. Another important aspect of photographic reproduction I hope to have revealed is that photographic images of works of art inspired exploration of works earlier

disregarded. Malraux's *Museum without Walls* and Warburg's *Mnemosyne* demonstrate a willingness to perceive photographic reproductions as heightening and valorizing their represented objects, in effect making objects eligible for consideration and aesthetic appreciation. Images also create arguments according to their context, as demonstrated by the art history slide lecture and textbook. In the next chapter, I will continue with the production, dissemination, and use of images in the digital medium. The easy manipulation of digital images and the "interactivity" of the digital environment extend the value of reproduced images established in other media, and shift more interpretive power to the viewer. The viewer, in fact, is renamed in the digital world, she is now a "user."

Chapter Four: Digital Images of Art

4.1 Digital Images as Transformations

In my introduction, I gave three brief anecdotes of my personal experiences with reproduced images of art; two of which were directly concerned with digital images of works of art. More and more, my viewing and use of images take place in a digital environment. At home and at work I use a high-speed Internet connection to find, view, and sometimes appropriate digital images of works of arts. I retrieve digital images from a variety of sources: virtual museum exhibitions, private gallery Web sites, online art collections, or wherever else a search engine might send me. Just yesterday a friend and I talked on the phone, discussing the images we were looking at on the same Web site at the same time. As William Mitchell said, evoking Warburg's last project: "Mnemosyne has become a digital matrix" (1992, p. 85).

In this chapter, I hope to describe the viewing and use of digital images of art in the larger social context of reproductive media previously discussed, particularly in terms of authority, individual experience and participation. I have previously focused on the qualities of the prints and photographs as physical objects, especially the integration of images with printed text. Digital images may simulate traditional media in many of their forms; for example, these images may be printed on paper that mimics photographic paper. Here, I am less concerned with the digital image as it simulates other media; rather I am focused on the digital image in the digital environment of the World Wide Web.

Digital imaging technology differs from other reproductive media in its visual disappearance within a media device or format, the speed and ease with which its images may be manipulated (or deemed "interactive"), removed and added to varying contexts. But, like photography, digital media inspire new understanding of art through the expansion of an image language such as the one evoked by John Berger, who wrote the following before the advent of the World Wide Web:

> For the first time ever, images of art have become ephemeral, ubiquitous, insubstantial, available, valueless, free. They surround us in the same way as language surrounds us. They have entered the mainstream of life over which they no longer, in themselves, have power. (1972. p 32)

Thus, in this reproductive medium as well as others, the perennial question of what is art continues as authentic works of high art merge into a larger landscape of all sorts of images and new images are in turn integrated into the canon. Centered in this language and process of cultural negotiation is the user who builds her own path through the landscape, possibly developing her own sense of authority and means of expression and identity along the way. First, however, I will address some characteristics of digital images and their presentation.

The digital image is created quite differently than the photographic image, although we have culturally conflated the two processes to a large extent. We attribute photographic truth to digital images; we talk about these images as accurate representations of reality, not dissimilar to photographic images. We consider the two so similar, in fact, that in most discourse "photograph" is now a generic term, no longer specific to the tracing of light onto a receptive surface. The camera itself

influences our sense of media continuity; the design of the digital camera has remained consistent with the design of the photographic camera. An important difference, however, between traditional photographic reproduction and digital reproduction is that photographs, developed and printed, are relatively static and stable compared to digital images.

Digital images introduce high levels of variability in all of their manifestations. For William Mitchell (1992), photographs have well known "representational commitments" whereas digital images lack standards in their production and use:

> These [digital] processes are less subject to institutional policing of uniformity, offer more opportunities for human intervention, and are far more complex and varied in their range of possible representational commitments. …They can also disturb and disorient by blurring comfortable boundaries and by encouraging transgression of rules on which we have come to rely. (p. 222)

The problematic differences between digital images and photographic images are numerous as Mitchell points out. The purposeful creation of images of works of art to disseminate information about the original works is disturbed by the possibilities of unintended alterations or tampering. Photography has its own history of spurious alterations or deletions, but these adjustments took time and some skill. Digital images introduce more variability in their production and potentially in the actions of the end user. The speed and relatively low level of craftsmanship it takes to make significant changes to images in image editing software means that digital images are rarely fixed objects.

Timothy Binkley would rather us consider the more utopian vision of the digital environment, which means abandoning some of our attachment to the stability of previous media. Digital images have different affordances than those of previous reproductive media. While a photographic slide is readable without any mediating device, digital images may remain in electronic form, a "transaesthetic epiphany" (Binkley, 1997, §2 ¶5), their image known only through a process of conversion from discrete numerical units to a more familiar visual image displayed by a computer. For Binkley, the transaesthethic epiphany is a *transformation* of the original work, not its reproduction. The analog work of art is a point of origin for a series of numerical units disassociated from any other analog representational medium. From a digital utopian standpoint, this transformation of the analog world to electronic abstractions is remarkably beneficial; abstraction enables the theoretically endless number of images from the same set of code to be displayed simultaneously for as long as the mediating device may read the abstraction. The abstraction, for the digital utopian, represents a higher state, an existence perfect and unlimited by any particular physicality.

Of course, the mediating device, commonly a personal computer, is one of the concerns. Adjustments to the digital image in its creation and display may be made seamlessly; for example, color saturation and brightness may be changed multiple times within the electronic file itself or by the user adjusting the computer monitor's settings. In photographic reproduction, quality controls were the domain of the photographers and publisher who could regulate the color of the finished product. The

creator or publisher of an image viewed digitally has no way to completely control the way the image appears to the viewer. The same is true for the size and resolution of a digital display: both are determined by an equation involving the image file and the end user's preferences.

Our experience of viewing images in the digital environment is determined by a number of factors besides our monitor settings. Before I move to larger discussions of context and interactivity, I wish to address the conventions of operating systems and Web browsers as "windowed" environments. For personal computer users with a graphical user interface, a digital image resides within a metaphorical window. These windows may be opened, minimized, hidden, and closed; their sizes upon the screen may be altered to make room for other windows.

Computer users are accustomed to the Windows interface in which multiple opaque small screens compete for our visual attention. Anne Friedberg (2003) describes the windowed as a truly fractured space that forms its own interrelationships:

> Now, a variety of screens—long and wide and square, large and small, composed of grains, composed of pixels—compete for our attention without any (convincing) arguments about hegemony. As screens have multiplied and divided, so has subjectivity. As we spend more and more of our time staring into the frames of television, computer, and hand-held screens—windows full of text, icons, 3-D graphics, streaming-images, streaming audio—a new post-perspectival, post-Cartesian subjectivity has emerged. The multi-screen, windowed visuality of Windows software has become as apt figurative trope for this new subjectivity. As the beholder of multiple windows, we receive images—still and moving, large and small, artwork and commodity—in fractured spatial and temporal frames. With this new "windowed" multiplicity of perspectives we can be at two (or more) places at once, in two (or more) time frames in a fractured post-Cartesian cyber-time. (p. 348).

An image of a work of art in the windowed environment is subject to a different type of attention than in other media. Printed photographic images, for example, often compete with text for our attention within a book, but this competition is fixed and relative only to itself. Within the multi-windowed screen, images are relative to the context of their Web page and the larger context created by the user's willingness to divide her attention. On the Web, windows that "pop-up," flash, and move also command our attention—the Web is as much as commercial space as anything else. This distracted attention is not entirely new; the experience of the windowed environment has a parallel in the salon style of display practiced centuries ago: a multitude of pictures hung like puzzle pieces, covering entire walls, filling whole rooms. In such salons, no distinctive value was placed upon any work of art through its distance from other works, as exhibit conventions would dictate today.

4.2 Image Interactive

A primary property of a digital medium is its changeability at the discretion of the end user. Although changeable image display is of concern for producers and users of images seeking the ideal of photographic truth, manipulability at the discretion of the end user is also embraced as being "interactive," a term that has come to represent an ideal of the digital environment. Interactivity is defined in its simplest sense as a computer program that accepts input from a user in real time; any type of word processing or data entry functions are interactive in this definition. More

often the term "interactive" is frequently used in a more conceptual sense, implying a level of give and take between the user and either a software application or available actions across a network, such as the World Wide Web. In the more excited rhetoric around digital technologies, interactivity means active participation on the part of a self-determining, individual user. The user is also a producer: she may manipulate found digital objects to her liking and send them back into the digital environment. Depending on one's cultural politics, such an act is either a violation of copyright,[10] or the operations of a truly democratic medium.

Digital images on the World Wide Web demonstrate compulsions to build upon previous media conventions of presentation, while also shifting control of the viewing experience to the viewer herself. Images on the Web often have descriptive and interpretive captions, they may be presented as a "slide show" that follows a constructed narrative, and so on. But images are frequently displayed without captioning text as well, or they might act as hyperlinks that lead to other images or other pages. In his essay "The Vitality of Digital Creation," Timothy Binkley observes: "digital representations not only possess a power to move us borrowed from their analog predecessors, they also contain a vitality which enables them to engage us in unique and personal interactive experiences" (1997, § 1, ¶ 11). Unique and personal interactive experiences with digital reproductions siphon the authority

[10] My reader might notice that I have neglected the subject of copyright and its application to reproduced images. While copyright is certainly a vital issue in the production and use of images, I believe many of our everyday practices reveal little concern for the particulars of legality—and it is common practice that I am interested in here.

previously given to the original art objects, and the institutions that house them. The art object becomes a component of an experience, not the focus of the experience. We are becoming more and more accustomed to experiencing images through a series of self-selected options.

One set of selected options frequently found on the Web sites of large image collections, such as Mark Harden's Artchive (www.artchive.com) and the Web Gallery of Art (www.wga.hu), is altering the background color and size in the image's display. Any image of a work of art on these Web sites may be selected and displayed with a black, white, or gray background. The selection can be made at any time. This choice is significant because background color is an influential element in our visual perception of color within the image. Individuals viewing reproductions with differing backgrounds potentially understand the image differently. The image may also be displayed in a variety of dimensions within the dimensions of one's monitor. The series of available choices for the user results in viewing art reproductions as an individualized experience, and an experience that has no equivalent in the analog world where images are generally more fixed.

The interactive-ness of digital reproductions often times relies upon the simulation of physical, real world acts. Interactivity might include manipulation of the image with the use of a mouse that mimic a viewer's real life actions of moving either closer to a work of art to observe detail and texture, or stepping back in order to take in the whole effect of composition, color, and scale. In the digital environment, the range and direction of motion are predetermined; we can move only in ways the

programming allows. Within the virtual museum, the user's viewpoint mimics that of the camera moving through an architectural space, works of art positioned on the surrounding walls. The images of the works come into view as we pivot the fixed rectangular frame that constitutes our available scope of sight. The conventions of the simulated viewpoint and movement in the virtual museum is so like that of digital gaming programs that the work of art becomes a visual target, one half expects to be able to open fire upon it.

Occasionally in these digital environments we are allowed to simulate movement in directions unavailable to us in the presence of the original work of art. The desire to document the "unseen" extends far back into the history of photography as does the fascination of capturing new sights unavailable to the human eye. Within the digital environment, animation and filmmaking conventions inform images not previously seen—or made with the intention. With Stanford's Digital Michelangelo Project, for example, we virtually "fly around" the head of David. If we visited the work in person, the top of David's head, being as it is twenty vertical feet away from the viewer standing on the floor, is entirely unavailable for viewing (Salisbury, 1999, ¶ 7).

The availability of previously unseen aspects of a work of art, such as the top of David's head, or the simulated movement through a museum marks a shift of attention away from the idealized relationship between the work and viewer—marked by the viewer's appreciation of the work's authenticity as a ritualized object—to the work of art as one element of a larger experience. The larger experience in which the

work of art is an element rather than the focus encourages new understandings of art through manipulation or play. Luis Arata (2003) came to the same conclusion in "Interactivity":

> What the rise of new digital media has done is to widen the focus of interest beyond the object created, to the participation in a process of playing out a multitude of interactions. …An interactive approach favors the use of multiple points of view that can coexist even if they appear mutually exclusive; it celebrates the creative value of play; it is a catalyst for emergence; and it tends to be ultimately pragmatic. (p. 218)

The digitally mediated environment is designed with a heightened availability of choice for the individual user. Other media tend to be more restrictive by necessity of their production—a photographic print or a book is not easily modified for each viewer or reader. However, it is worth remembering that any range of choices available to the user in the digital environment are prescribed and programmed by the program's author.

4.3 Accessorize Your Art with Context

The idea that works of art might be immediately available in our homes stretches back surprisingly far. I was struck by Paul Valéry's essay "The Conquest of Ubiquity," written in 1928. Valéry, inspired by recorded music, imagined a "company engaged in the home delivery of Sensory Reality" (p. 226), and a world in which:

> It will be possible to send anywhere or to re-create anywhere a system of sensations, or more precisely a system of stimuli, provoked by some object or event in any given place. Works of art will acquire a kind of ubiquity. We shall only have to summon them and there they will be, either in their living actuality or restored from the past. They will not merely exist in themselves but will exist wherever someone with a certain apparatus happens to be. A

> work of art will cease to be anything more than a kind of source or point of origin whose benefits will be available—and quite fully so—wherever we wish (Valéry, 1928, p. 225)

Valéry's vision of the future is remarkably prescient. Although the digital image still lacks the wholeness of representation Valéry imagines, the implied transformation of a work of art to something ephemeral, and yet always available, is similar to our modern experience of digitally mediated art.

How we invite the work of art into our home is a result of context. Digital images do not roam freely; instead we find them in many virtual places, and, if we wish, we move them to into other virtual places. The varying contexts created for digital images are often drawn from the conventions of earlier image contexts. We form our understanding and expectations of a new medium through metaphorical associations to other media. This process, called remediation, allows us to move between media with some continuity. In the case of the World Wide Web, the introduction of digital images popularized the medium by appealing to our familiarity with printed formats and conventions. With the development of the first graphical browser for the World Wide Web in 1993:

> The Web began to engage a much larger audience of users, including most academics and researchers, who were already using email, and soon a large fraction of technically literate people throughout the industrialized world…The second consequence, related to the first, was that World Wide Web could now refashion a larger class of earlier media…it could now remediate the magazine, the newspaper, and graphic advertising (Bolter & Grusin, 1999, p. 198).

Frequently, digital images are found in the context of an online magazine or virtual museum. These contexts are familiar to us as viewers, and they retain some element of authority.

The Museum of Modern Art's Web site, for example, asserts the authority of the museum through a structural context based on the traditional divisions of the museum by era and artistic medium. Each digital image appears within the interpretive schema devised by the museum's curators to educate their audience. Curators order art according to the institution's desired narrative. Certain works of art are highlighted for the viewer; in this case, pre-selected works appear as "highlights" of each collection. Museum control over the inclusion, emphasis, and interpretive possibilities of works of art is at its root purpose: to make sense of art for us.[11] The same is true in within the museum Web site that mirrors its analog institution in an attempt to satisfy the viewer in ways similar to those used to satisfy the visitor.[12] However, challenging the contextual authority of the museum Web site is easily accomplished by the virtual visitor who might well decide to select and save an image elsewhere, the digital equivalent of cutting an image out of a book.

Of course, one may find digital images of works of art in many places besides the virtual museum on the Web, bypassing the museum's authority altogether. While art critics and historians determine which artists, and which of their works, are

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[11] I previously quoted Peter Walsh on this topic on page 17.

[12] Museum Web sites offering digital postcards, digitally delivered to their recipients, are the most amusing example of mimicking the visitor's wishing to send souvenirs of a museum visit to friends and family. The ubiquitous online museum gift store is another example of such mimicry.

preserved in the canon, digital images on the World Wide Web disturb this process. Artists post images of their works on the Web, entering the stream of images alongside critically established artists without any mark of difference. The art history canon would seem to be dissolving around the edges; the art world is expanding beyond the horizons of academic or museum control. Urban street art, an art form that is very purposefully outside of the authority of the museum, is gaining artistic recognition and an increasing following due to the online presence of street art image galleries. These digital image collections are built by artists' and admirers' submission of digital images of street art they create or find in their local spaces.[13] The distinction between high and low culture on the World Wide Web becomes more difficult to pinpoint because the value of a work of art is first negotiated within popular culture, and then within elite culture. This process of gaining recognition within low culture and then filtering up to high culture marks a complete reversal of the historical basis of institutional authority in the arts.

The ability to link images across the Web also represents a continual fluctuation of authoritative context. Digital images of art are within the overall pattern of the user's movement through networked space as opposed to the single authoritative space exemplified by an art history textbook. A user is likely to make

[13] See Wooster Collective: A Celebration of Street Art (www.woostercollective.com) and Street Memes (www.streetmemes.com). The Wooster Collective was recently featured in *The New York Times* for their coverage of Bansky, a street artist who surreptitiously hung his own work in four prominent New York museums (Kennedy, R. (2005). "British artist and prankster says fake beard is enough." *The New York Times*, March 24, 2005.)

many choices in how she gathers images and associated information about works of art, moving through digital spaces suggested by hyperlinks:

> Choices, possibilities and interconnections challenge our definitions of authorship and authority. Hypertext allows for the designation of a word or image to act as a launch pad to another space, image or annotation. A depth and richness can be achieved through connections and directions that may be explored through association. It is worthwhile to think of texture as multiple levels of experience in this new spatial environment where the traditional idea of surface texture is lost. (Hall, 1999, p. 275)

The paths traveled to and from an image necessarily inform our understanding of the work of art. If I link to an image described as my favorite painting, a user who follows that path also follows the thought "this is Kim's favorite painting." Other contexts are suppressed at that moment.

4.4 The Curatorial Era

In a posting titled "Single, Song, Mix, Welcome to the Curatorial Era," *Abstract Dynamics* Weblog author William Blaze writes:[14]

> For a year or two in the late 90's DJ's made serious claims to being musicians. And there are a few "turntablists" worthy of that name. But increasingly DJs are looking more like *curators* and becoming all that more important in the process. The curator essentially engages in an act of filtration as well as an act of recombination. While the recombination must be done well, it's the filtration that is truly valuable in an age of rapidly increasing information. (2005, January 8, post)

[14] I happened upon this posting while doing research for this thesis. I cannot tell you the path I took to it, only that it was linked from another Web site that was linked from another. I cannot tell you anything about who William Blaze might be, or what qualifications he might have. Although Blaze is specifically concerned with the mixing and filtration of music, I was inspired to appropriate his term "the curatorial era" for my own purposes.

The Curatorial Era is a logical next step from the so-called Information Age. The ubiquity of information (in the form of images, text, and sound) forces us to make more choices, to filter out some information and retain other information. But curatorial practice does not simply involve selecting information; the curator also classifies, interprets and displays information within her own created contexts. The curator might echo traditional, institutional practices in her exhibition, carefully labeling images and building an overall conceptual framework for the collection. Or she could collage a new whole out of parts and pieces, combining works with little to no explanation or identification, like the DJ who exhibits her artistry through the recombination of music tracks. And, like the DJ's audience, we may become fascinated not just about the material in the collection (those images we are familiar with and those we are not) but the curator's interpretations, associations, and juxtapositions, and the overall context of display. Centered in the experience—for both the creator and user—are the curator's identity, motivations, and creation of meaning.

Malraux argued that photography culturally equalized its subject; digital media tend to heighten the power of individual collection and display, eroding the distinctions between individual and institutional authority. Digital media have engaged ordinary individuals' participation in the selection, interpretation, and publishing of images on a broader scale than other mass media. Self-publishing on the World Wide Web is a widespread practice today, at least among those who spend time in the digital environment. And the self-publishing Web designer is able to

create pages that are similar in quality of design and display to those of culturally influential institutions. Unlike print publishing that requires a large monetary investment to appear professionally made, digital media design is more a reflection of individual skill. The result of the dispersed and individualized publishing and display environment is a vast space of images and text that empowers non-institutionalized authorship.

Digital curators are likely to appropriate the language and display practices of the art institution as well as its images. The "gallery" and "museum" are ubiquitous in the World Wide Web, but art historical hierarchies and high-culture distinctions associated with these words are likely to be turned inside out. One manner in which institutional conventions are appropriated is the display of non-art objects as aesthetic objects, works of art that we passed over in our preference for institutionally sanctioned works. Digital image collections as galleries or museums demonstrate an imaginative range of possibility: everything from images of works of art to found grocery lists may comprise a digital gallery or museum.[15]

At Stoveburner.com, artist Raymon Elozua describes the moment he noticed the aesthetic qualities of gas stove burners while salvaging scrap metal:

> In one particular building I came across in the basement an old "laundry" stove, a 3-burner cast iron stove top more like a large hot plate. Taking it out to my truck I noticed the burner (stovetop #024). It was unusual and seemed iconic when separated from its function. I saved it and in that moment this collection began. (2002, Statement, ¶2)

[15] See Keaggy, B. (2005). *The New York Times* recently published an article discussing the variety of online collections: Boxer, S. (2005, March 30). Critic's notebook: Online, anything and everything can be a museum piece. *The New York Times*.

Elozua displays the burners in a manner consistent with the conventions of reproduced images of works of art and archeological relics. The burners are entirely separated from their context of use; they instead stand upright like crosses and alien icons in pure white space. Patinas of rust add rich color and visual dimension to each burner.

The consistency and quality of Elozua's digital images lend the Web pages an overall aesthetic similar to that of an official museum catalog. The distinction between sanctioned art objects—represented in images within a culturally authoritative context such as the museum Web site—and unsanctioned art—represented in images within an individual context arguing for new aesthetic value—becomes more and more difficult to make. William Mitchell described this collapse of distinction as one Duchamp, the creator of *Fountain*, would have appreciated:

> It is a condition that Marcel Duchamp surely would have relished: digital images are the ultimate readymades—manufactured objects of little intrinsic value that are given meaning through appropriation and contextualization rather than inherent meaning from the expressive craft with which they are fashioned. (1992, p. 85)

Thus, in the digital environment we see an expansion of the negotiations and struggles around the question "what is art?" For those who wish to enter into this dialogue, the digital medium allows a voice potentially as powerful as that of the art institution.

Returning to Bourdieu's concern that institutions maintain class distinction both in their conception as cultural authorities and the use of that authority to separate

high and low culture, we now see in the digital environment some weakening of the ability of those institutions to guide the public's taste toward canonized works of art. The strange chimera of the personal/public Web site or blog asserts its own influence in the visual world, unguided by the traditions of aesthetic evaluation. What the dispersion of aesthetic authority might mean for us culturally is yet unknown:

> If there are no objective criteria of evaluation and if aesthetic hierarchies simply reflect the arbitrary values of the dominant classes, nothing distinguishes a Shakespeare play from a comic strip or a pair of boots. Whether the equalizing of all hierarchies should be celebrated a the triumph of democracy and the end of all cultural domination, whether it should be lamented as a failure to reach beyond cultural particularities and to tap into truly universal aspects of human existence…remains a pressing issue in societies increasingly shaped by economic and cultural globalization (Ollivier & Fridman, 2001, p. 15446)

Another example of the collapse or appropriation of authority is the personal Web site that directs its user through images of works of art according to the author's preferences. Peter Walsh provided a few examples of the appearance of personally constructed art Web sites in "The Web, the Millennium, and the Clerks of Nostalgia: Effects of Electronic Media on Visual Studies," one of which was the Web site ArtRoots.com. The author of ArtRoots.com, Brigitte Lloyd, classifies her self-selected images of works of art by a taxonomy that resembles art historical distinctions in tone, but are entirely idiosyncratic: "Impressionism: Deceased Individual Artists," "Works of International Deceased Women Artists," "Upper Bavarian Fine Artists Portraits," and so on. As Walsh points out, Lloyd has created the site as a personal expression of interest in art, supporting Walsh's thesis that the

digital medium is fostering the development of personal meaning of works of art outside of institutional authority:

> Here is where the Web comes closest to Berger's bulletin board. It is just one example of thousands that mingle art, private thoughts, obsessions, categories, and commercial imagery in a way that reflects private meanings and values rather than "official" ones. (2000, ¶28)

On the public bulletin board, we are able to express ourselves in any combination of created and appropriated images, texts, and sounds. And rather than curate according to established standards or hierarchies of the subject, we curate according to our interests and as a means of self-expression.

Designing Web sites like those of Stoveburner.com and Artroots.com is an activity that immediately assumes the creation will be displayed publicly. Therefore, we not only create the site for our own satisfaction, we create the site as a means of sharing something with others. However, our online audience (if we have one) is not immediately apparent; it is an audience of Internet Protocol addresses. The lack of a defined audience is perhaps one reason for the personal and eclectic nature of self-representation in the digital environment. We must represent ourselves in some way that communicates our identities and interests; then our audiences, often based on some shared characteristic, finds us. Of course, we may also create multiple identities and gain multiple audiences—and just as easily abandon these identities and audiences by abandoning our Web page.

A possible context for our motivations in creating and displaying these digital self representations is Fredric Jameson's idea of late capitalism. As information

selection and the consumption of cultural products becomes more and more tailored to individual preferences, a number of fragmented subcultures result. These subcultures are based in members' commonalities of consumption, as opposed to a commonality based in being recipients of authoritative messages from culturally elite institutions. The development of fragmented subcultures would support Jameson's theory of late capitalism as a system relying on the equal right of consumption and the endless production and proliferation of new groups (1991, p. 325). The World Wide Web enables the development of many small and fragmented groups networked together within the larger whole. Within these small enclaves we establish our personal authority by constructing digital identities that communicate (directly or metaphorically) our identities to others. These identities are built by what we choose to display and with what and whom we have affiliations:

> The logic of hypermediacy, expressed in digital multimedia and networked environments, suggests a definition of self whose key quality is …'being interrelated or connected.' The hypermediated self is a network of affiliations, which are constantly shifting. (Bolter & Grusin, 1999, p. 232)

This process of communication is the digital equivalent of our looking at other people's book and music collections, and talking to their friends to get an idea of who they are. We are represented as individuals, or as members of any number of subcultures, by what we like.

Whether we choose to view the meaning of what we like (and the act of displaying what we like) as a reflection of an established identity or the performance of mutable identities, the idea that these chosen items do, in fact, *mean* something

about us is not new—it is the cultural construct of taste. Taste is "the ability to make discriminating judgments about aesthetic and artistic matters" (Ollivier & Fridman, 2001, p. 15442), and one's taste often identifies one's social status. Bourdieu's model of class distinction argues that taste is specific to class hegemony (Korsmeyer, 1998, p. 361), but taste within the digital environment of the World Wide Web seems to be more a marker of cultural and social adeptness than one of class:

> Combined with the availability of a wide range of styles conveyed by mass communications, this [multiplicity of grouping which do not necessarily coincide] expands the possibilities of experimenting with self-construction in various social circles. …In this context, the ability to *manipulate a diversity of cultural symbols becomes a crucial resource in social interaction*. (Ollivier & Fridman, 2001, p. 15445, emphasis mine)

The reproduced images of works of art, which I am taking to be cultural symbols, have long been a resource for social interaction. Through the course of this thesis I have discussed the value of reproduced images as elemental in the growth of the art world and as a point of departure for understanding art in differing contexts. I propose the same is true in the Curatorial Era, but with the additional possibility that the reproduced image also acts as a representation of us as well as of the work of art.

For the most part, curators in museums are invisible; their names are not prominently placed at the exhibit entrance, the descriptive and interpretive labels next to the works of art are not signed with their names. The curator's voice and the authoritative voice of the institution are deceptively one—somewhat like the Wizard of Oz who seems more powerful when speaking from behind the curtain. In the museum, all of our attention is to be focused on the works of art within their

presented context. In contrast, the curator in the digital environment exhibits the reproduced images of works of art in a self-constructed context. If we believe that meaning is generated from context, then the display of images of works of art within personal Web pages reverses the focus of meaning to the publisher herself, and not the represented object as a precious object within a traditional, authoritative institution. Or, as in the case of Stoverburner.com, we insert our own images into the larger flow of images, gaining personal satisfaction and cultural recognition in the process.

Benjamin's argument that changes in the technology of reproduction evokes congruent changes in the mode of participation in art is clearly applicable to contemporary use of digital imaging technology to reproduce works of art. Users of the World Wide Web are able to create distinct viewing experiences through a level of interaction with the digital reproductive medium; they can remove the image from its context and place it in a new context; they can create paths from text to image, image to image, Web page to Web page. As the quantity and variety of works of art presented in the digital environment grows, users are capable of appropriating images to their own uses, interpretations, spaces and audiences. I believe the Curatorial Era is an era inspired by an expansion of meaning-making possibilities and venues that are centered in the individual and not in the authentic work.

Conclusion

The reproduced image of a work of art can be practically invisible—it is just a picture of something else we want to see. The reproduced image is often not regarded at all. Indeed, I am not exactly sure what led me to begin regarding the reproduced image as an object unto itself: perhaps it was my background as a printmaker, my education as an information professional, or maybe the moment when I found myself in front of Ensor's painting and realized the power of that reproductions had held for me as a viewer. For whatever reason, I found myself over the last year exploring these images that float around us in the everyday, ubiquitous and unassuming.

To explore reproduced images of works of art, I found it valuable to begin making distinctions between images based on their reproductive medium, a process that fit relatively nicely within an historical framework. This history of reproduced images across media revealed an unexpected level of complexity in the creation and use of these images. Reproduced images are social, political, historical, aesthetic, material, and ephemeral. So, in an attempt to answer my initial question—what role does art reproduction play in our experience of art?—I threw myself into the literature of a variety of disciplines. In addition to the literature on the topic, I felt my lived experience with reproductions to be important as a form of anecdotal evidence, evidence that I believe many readers may recognize as similar to their own experiences of these images as well.

In order to properly address the creation and use of reproduced images, I first deconstructed the valuation of works of art themselves. Initially, a work of art must be defined as such by the agents and context of the art world. The process of determining value for a work of art is assisted by the accepted idea that the work is a unique, authentic object—so much so that our experience of the authentic work, usually within the context of a museum or specially designated space, is considered to be the ideal experience. The reproduced image does, however, intercede between the work of art and us. The image is likely to shape our perception of the authentic work of art. Even our distinction of the work as the "original" presupposes reproduction. The context in which we view the reproduction is powerful as well; we might continue to remember the work of art in the form of its reproduced image and not its true state. The incorporation of these images and their represented works of art into our everyday lives concern cultural theorists who frame art experiences in terms of class distinctions. Reproduced images make available to larger audiences (read: non-elite classes) those things that are, by definition, not widely available.

Within each reproductive medium, the technological capability to disseminate reproduced images has expanded, and the representational ability of reproduced images has become increasingly sophisticated. Printmaking was the first reproductive medium that was used to disseminate images of art. Artists, craftsmen, and printers created prints to satisfy a growing public interest and market demand for images of works of art in distant places. These printed images tend to exhibit the interpretation or editorial statements of their creators as much as they display the work of art. For

example, the representations of a work of art might demonstrate different concerns: either portraying the work as a rational statement of empirical study, or as a romantic ideal. In their presentation, printed images assisted in the development of an art historical narrative by engaging the viewer in vicarious comparisons and classifications. It is with printed reproductions that we begin to see the complexity of the reproduced image in shaping our understanding of works of art discretely and holistically.

The advent of photography in the mid-nineteenth century is often cited as a key moment in our visual culture. The mechanized process of photography and its representational promised to remove interpretive bias from reproduced images. Of course, this new "objective" medium is subject to the vagaries of creation and interpretation. The aesthetic or political leanings of the photographer, and the inherent removal of information about the work of art (texture, dimension, and color accuracy) shape the viewer's interpretation of the work. Also, photographic reproductions were employed to represent the detail image (the romance of fragmentation), to decontextualize "primitive" objects, to heighten previously disregarded works, and to develop a sense of an artist's "style"—uses that Malraux praised as equalizing forces that expanded the art history canon beyond its cultural biases. The expanding language of images continued the use of reproduced images as tools for shaping visual associations and perhaps even internal dialogue, as in the case of Aby Warburg and his screens filled with images.

Photography's impact on the teaching of art history was profound. Photographic reproduction lent an authority to the reproduced image that was not available to engraved prints. As documentary evidence, the photograph of the work of art began to dominate the classroom; the common experience of the slide lecture is representative of the power of reproduced images to captivate their viewers. The art history textbook is another important consideration in the experience of photographic reproductions; in these textbooks the authoritative voice of the art historian is clear, the images following the predetermined narrative established by the discipline. According to their context, reproduced images in the photographic era are both agents of change (as Malraux argued) and agents of the institution, employed in perpetuating the canon.

There is a large amount of continuity between the media of photography and digital imaging; we assign much of the same idea of representational "objectivity" to digital images. Digital images, however, introduce a higher level of variability than images produced in other media, particularly within the digital environment. In the digital environment the end user may exert her power seamlessly, swiftly, and publicly; as a result, traditional notions of authorial control are often disrupted. Digital images files may be downloaded, altered, and uploaded into new contexts, completely disassociated from where they were initially found. And because context informs experience and meaning of both works of art and their reproductions, the availability of these images for multiple contexts allows for multiple possible meanings.

The continual growth in the number and variety of images, including images of objects contextualized as works of art, evokes John Berger's parallel of images to language. The complexity with which we create, manipulate, and publish these images reveals our attachment of personal meaning to works of art, formerly in the institution's interpretive domain. One possible result of the variable and public character of digital images on the World Wide Web is a shift toward individual representation of which reproduced images become a part. Here, reproduced images have a new role as objects in personal curatorial realms of authority—gathered, arranged, and classified by our own idiosyncratic wishes.

While I have neatly divided my history of reproduced images into chapters, I also hope to have exposed the complexity of our use of technology, in this case reproductive media. Technology is not deterministic—we develop and use technology within social contexts. And old technologies do not disappear when a new technology is touted as its replacement. When we successfully develop a new reproductive medium all the images in previous media do not disappear. Instead, we are engaged in hybrid visual culture that capitalizes on diversity. Kevin Robins proposes that:

> Rather than privileging 'new' against 'old' images, we might then think about them all—all those that are still active, at least—in their contemporaneity. From such a perspective, what is significant is precisely the multiplicity and the diversity of contemporary images. In working against the grain of progressivist or evolutionary models, we can try to make creative use of the interplay of different orders of images. The coexistence of different images, different ways of seeing, different visual imaginations, may be seen as an imaginative resource. (1996, p. 165)

Not only is there a multiplicity of images, the reproduced image generates value in a multiplicity of directions and guises, rooted in the unique work of art. The reproduced image demonstrates vitality as an "imaginative resource." Similar to our tendency to present ourselves differently according to whatever context we might be in, so does the reproduced image: these are the multiples of one.

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