



AUTHENTICITY AND COPY

Handwriting in the Age of
Mechanical Reproduction

Amsterdam March 20 – 21, 2003

Location Universiteitstheater
Nieuwe Doelenstraat 16
1012 CP Amsterdam

Conference Director Sonja Neef
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Handwriting in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction

The Amsterdam School for Cultural Analysis (ASCA) organizes an international symposium on the concepts of authenticity and copy, studied in relation to handwriting as a cultural practice in contemporary arts and media. Writing, in our communication society, at first sight appears to be a standardized, replicable, power-driven, or most recently electronic articulation that refers to a typewriter or a computer rather than to a "human hand." *Handwriting*, however, also occupies an important position. It is used in

many diverse cultural practices, such as in different forms of (literary) writing, private correspondence, diary writing, urban graffiti, to name but a few. Handwriting, moreover, is not only generated by a "human hand," but also (re-)produced by new print and visual media — such as photography, (silent) film, microfiche, Xerox, fax, and the digital media. These new technologies situate handwriting in a new perspective and, thus, ask for a reinterpretation of handwriting.

This symposium focuses on an aspect of handwriting that is dramatically challenged by mechanical and electronic reproduction practices: its claim for authenticity. Handwriting is traditionally regarded as an *autography*, as an un-exchangeable, *unique and authentic "signature"* that claims to guarantee the presence of an individual writer during a historically unique moment of writing. This claim for authenticity distinguishes handwriting from its cultural opposite, *typed* writing. The cultural significance of typed writing, after all, resides in its capacity to be *allographic*, that is, *iterable and reproducible*. The reproduction of an authentic handwriting, on the other hand, risks to be considered a forgery. This view on handwriting has a long tradition in different disciplines, most importantly in jurisprudence, but also in historical studies of original sources, and in art theory, where it delineates the status of the artist/author. Together with the technological development of the last century, the idea of the uniqueness of the signature has been challenged philosophically, most profoundly by Derrida in his famous essay "Signature, Event, Context" (1990).

The idea of this symposium is to rethink the concepts of uniqueness and iteration, of authenticity and coun-

terfeit of handwriting with regard to the practices of reproduction media. By addressing these concepts from different disciplines, this symposium aims at discussing the contradictions between different monodisciplinary views on the concepts of "authenticity" and "copy" and at making the gaps thus created productive for a more differentiated, interdisciplinary theory of handwriting

Program

THURSDAY 20

- 18.00 Sonja Neef, Introduction
- 18.15 David M. Levy (The Information School, University of Washington)
Head, Heart, and Hand: Reflections on Materiality and Authenticity in a Digital Age
respondent: José van Dijck

FRIDAY 21

I. Authority

chair: José van Dijck

- 09.00 Michael Wetzel (University of Bonn)
The Authority of Drawing: Authenticity and Authorship
respondent: Catherine Lord
- 09.50 Robert Zwijnenberg (Arts and Culture, University of Maastricht)
Leonardo's Manuscripts: the Concurrence of Body and Mind
respondent: Sean de Koekkoek

II. Iterating Singularity

chair: José van Dijck

- 11.00 Sonja Neef (Media and Culture, University of Amsterdam)
Exhibiting Authenticity. The True Diaries of Anne Frank and the False Diaries of Adolf Hitler
respondent: Marie-Aude Baronian
- 11.50 Sandro Zanetti (Literature, University of Basel/Switzerland)
Repetition, Reproducibility, Retardation in Marcel Duchamp's Notes
respondent: Raoul Teulings

III. Materiality

chair: Jan Simons

- 14.00 Thomas Fechner-Smarsly (Scandinavian Studies, University of Bonn/Germany)
Fingerprint Files. Ink, Blood and Genetic Codes as Signatures
respondent: Stefan Besser
- 14.50 Catherine Lord (Media and Culture, University of Amsterdam)
The Sorcerer's Graphology: Authenticity between Body and Hands in Jan Svankmajer's Faust (1994) and Orson Welles' Macbeth (1948)
respondent: Esther Peeren

IV. The Digital Signature

chair: Jan Simons

- 16.00 John Mackenzie Owen (Information Science, University of Amsterdam)
Who's Writing is this? Authenticity and Reproduction in the Digital World
respondent: Dominic Petman
- 16.50 Hannelore Dekeyser (Interdisciplinary Centre for Law and Information Technology, Katholieke Universiteit Leuven/Belgium)
Authenticity in Bits and Bytes
respondent: Eric Ketelaar
- 17.40 Sonja Neef: closing