
Ontology and Art

Types, Tokens, and Forgeries

Artworks: Universal or Particular?

- ❖ When thinking about the definition of art (or the definability of art), we have been skating past an important metaphysical question:
 - ❖ What *kinds* of things are artworks?
 - ❖ Are they universals or particulars?
 - ❖ Perhaps some are universals and others are particulars?

A Preliminary Distinction

- ❖ Let us say that ϕ is a universal *iff*:
 - ❖ ϕ is an abstract, mind- and language-independent entity (AMLIE) which: (i) has all of its intrinsic properties essentially; and (ii) if ϕ is able to be spatially located at all, then ϕ is able to be fully present in more than one spatial location concurrently.
- ❖ So, let us say ϕ is a universal only if:
 - ❖ ϕ is something other than a material particular
 - ❖ N.b. that this is a necessary condition, so that as far as we are concerned at present, there may be particulars beyond the material particulars (gods, numbers, propositions. . .)
 - ❖ ϕ is multiply *exemplifiable* or *instantiable* or *predicable*

Universals?

- (1) The property *being a two-dollar bill*, is wholly present in more than one place at one time.
- (2) No material particular can be wholly present more than one place at one time.
- (3) So, the property *being a two-dollar bill* is not a material particular.
- (4) Every particular is either a material particular or an abstract particular.
- (5) So, if the property *being a two-dollar bill* is a particular, then it is an abstract particular.
- (6) No abstract particular can be multiply predicated.
- (7) The property *being a two-dollar bill* is multiply predicated.
- (8) So, the property *being a two-dollar bill* is not an abstract particular.
- (9) Every abstract entity is either a particular or a universal.
- (10) So, the property *being a two-dollar bill* is a universal.

First Hypothesis

- ❖ Artworks are particulars.
- ❖ They are like other artefacts, produced in a time and place. . .
- ❖ . . . not the same as, for instance, a table or a podium, but like that: once produced they occupy some quadrant of space, can be moved around, and can be bought and sold, inherited, donated, borrowed, and in general, they behave like other artefacts.

One Particular Artwork

- ❖ Portrait of Giovanni Arnolfini and his Wife (1434)
- ❖ Jan Van Eyck (Dutch, fl. 1420s, d. 1441)
- ❖ Dated and signed by the artist
- ❖ Currently in the National Gallery, Room 63
- ❖ Oil on oak, 82.2 × 60 cm



Another Particular Artwork

- ❖ Cloud Gate, by Anish Kapoor
- ❖ Located in Millennium Park, Chicago
- ❖ Installed in 2006, it weights 110 tons and is 33' x 42' x 66'
- ❖ Affectionately called 'The Bean'—a name for which Kapoor did not care.
- ❖ This seems to be a clear instance of a material particular.



Or?

- ❖ Kapoor has some higher ambitions with this piece.
 - ❖ To see them, note that some aestheticians, such as Croce and Collingwood, agree that artworks are particulars, but defend the initially odd-sounding thesis that artworks are mental particulars, namely ideas in the minds of the artists which create them.
 - ❖ Kapoor may provide grist for their mill: he thinks of this work, as others, as having no fixed spatial boundaries.
 - ❖ He promotes his works as 'in between' realms.
 - ❖ He looks to both Buddhism and Einstein's conception of a 4-D space-time continuum as ways of characterizing his work.
 - ❖ In this work he aims to evoke both solidity and emptiness; reality and reflection; flesh and spirit; male and female; internal and external.
 - ❖ For instance, the space beneath he terms the *omphalos*, which reflects the viewer, placing the viewer herself into the work.

Heading to the Abstract Realm

- ❖ Perhaps, then, we should not take as given the plausible sounding suggestion that works of art are, like other artefacts, material particulars.
- ❖ What else, though, might they be?
- ❖ Perhaps universals are *types*.
 - ❖ What is a type?
 - ❖ To start, in is an AMLIE.
 - ❖ This sort of AMLIE: one that can be multiply betokened.

The Identity of Types

- ❖ Consider the following minimalist poem by Aram Saroyan:

Silence

Silence

- ❖ Query: how many words are there in this poem?

Types and Tokens

❖ Consider the following sentences:

(1) They were a bit chagrined to find themselves wearing the same garish jumper to the office Christmas party.

(2) When they discovered this fact, they blushed at the same moment and ended up wearing the same shade of red as well.

❖ Notice the difference here:

❖ (1) *might* be true, when said of the same token.

❖ (2) can only be true when said of a type of which there are distinct tokens.

How many?

- ❖ Two answers seem possible: one or two.
- ❖ Deflationary: There is no single answer to this question. It depends on whether you mean *types* or *tokens*; here we have one type twice betokened.
- ❖ So, we have one type and two tokens. Case closed.
- ❖ What, though, is the *one* type twice betokened?
- ❖ A crucial question: what is to for two or more tokens to be instances of the *same* type?
- ❖ In large measure, the question of realism about universals is a question about the existence and character of types.

Artworks as Types

- ❖ Perhaps, despite our initial inclinations, we should think of artworks as types: what we see, hear, experience with our senses are simply tokens of the type—the work is itself a type.
- ❖ After all, this makes ready sense for musical compositions, operas, novels, photographs, prints, dances, plays. . .
- ❖ One might say that a play is an instance of the artwork *Julius Caesar*, by William Shakespeare, just in case it betokens that type, namely that abstract entity constructed or indicated by William Shakespeare.
 - ❖ What we have here is simply a larger, more complex type than we had in Saroyan's minimalist poem.

Tokens of a Type

- ❖ One purist view (owing to Peter Kivy among others): a token of a musical work, a type, is simply a matter of how something sounds.
- ❖ The score of Mahler's 2nd Symphony is a notation indicating a sound structure: certain notes in certain relations of pitch and time and order, and anything which conforms to that sound structure is an instance of the work.
- ❖ Similarly as regards novels: a novel is an abstract entity betokened in various printed or electronic formats.
 - ❖ We read the tokens (or, in some cases we hear the tokens), and thereby experience the type, the novel, the work of art.

Autographic and Allographic

- ❖ A distinction owing to Goodman suggests that there is no one answer to our question:
 - ❖ x belongs to an *autographic* art type *iff* even the most exact duplication of x does not count as a genuine instance of the work
 - ❖ So, e.g, painting, sculpture, drawing, water colors, etchings, wood carvings, graffiti art
 - ❖ x is an *allographic* art type *iff* every exact duplicate of x counts as an instance of the work
 - ❖ So, e.g., novels, poems, plays, symphonies, operas, dance, film

Fakes, Forgeries, and Autographic Artworks

- ❖ Is there any aesthetic, as opposed to moral or commercial reason, to prefer originals to copies or forgeries—provided that they are perceptually indistinguishable?
- ❖ On the ‘Appearance Theory’—the theory that all of a work’s aesthetically relevant features depend exclusively on its appearance—it seems not.
 - ❖ More exactly, all of a work’s aesthetically relevant features supervene on its intrinsic properties.
 - ❖ (This theory, as we will see, marries well with Formalism.)
 - ❖ Should we not say that *originality* is aesthetically relevant?
 - ❖ If so, then the Appearance Theory is just false.