



Fakes and Forgeries

Peter Knight and Jonathan Long (eds)

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The possibility that works of art and literature might be forged and that identity might be faked has haunted the cultural imagination for centuries. That spectre seems to have returned with a vengeance recently, with a series of celebrated hoaxes and scandals ranging from the Alan Sokal hoax article in *Social Text* to Benjamin Wilkomirski's fake Holocaust memoir. But as well as creating anxiety, the possibility of faking it has now been turned into entertainment. Traditionally these activities have been dismissed as dangerous and immoral, but more recently some scholars have begun to speculate, for example, that all forms of national identity rely on forged myths of origin. Recent cultural theory has likewise called into question traditional notions of authenticity and originality in both personal identity and in works of art. Despite critical pronouncements of the death of the author and the substitution of the simulacrum for the original, however, making a distinction between the genuine and the fake continues to play a major role in our everyday understanding and evaluation of culture, law and politics. Consider, for example, the fiasco surrounding the forged Hitler diaries, law suits against auction houses for failing to detect forgeries in the art market, or the problem of plagiarism at universities. It still seems to matter that we can spot the difference, especially in the historical moment when we are capable of making copies that are indistinguishable perhaps even better than the original. This collection of essays considers the moral, aesthetic and political questions that are raised by the long history and current prevalence of fakes and forgeries. The international team of contributors consider the issues thrown up by a wide range of examples, drawn from fields ranging from literature to art history. These case studies include little-known subjects such as Eddie Burrup, the Australian aboriginal artist who turned out to be an 81-year-old white woman, as well as new interpretations of familiar cases such as faked Holocaust memoirs. The strength of the collection is that it brings together not only a wide range of cultural examples of fakes and forgeries from different historical periods, but also offers a wide variety of theoretical takes that will form a useful introduction and casebook on this growing field of inquiry.

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