SYMPOSIUM: EXPERIMENTAL SCHOLARSHIP

OK; OR, HANDEL WITH CARE

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EUREKA!

cύρηκα! [I have found it]—Archimedes, naked, uttered this famous word when he finally figured out how to determine whether the actual weight and purity of the king’s gold crown was equal to its stated weight and purity.

A couple of years ago, I attended a conference hosted by a Chicago foundation whose fabulous wealth came from an eccentric billionaire who had made his fortune in the 1930’s selling real estate and insurance policies.

One afternoon, while sauntering through a working-class suburb in Chicago, I unexpectedly came across a curious object in the corner of a dusty bin. It was a canvas, or a wooden plank—I could not be sure which—overpainted with visual designs and alphabetic signs. There it was, discarded in a deserted heap of yellowing etchings, old postcards, antique ticket-fragments, vintage pawnshop tokens, and torn and painted curtains and veils.

At that moment, I felt like Legrand in Poe’s short story “The Gold-Bug,” in which detective tale that eccentric Franco-American comes across an abandoned scrap of paper with a fantastic design and some fragmentary words on it. His was a paper whose design of a gold bug he managed, Midas-like, to turn into solid gold.

To me, this objet trouvé in the dust at the deserted corner was a foundling—a ἐνδύματα, found like Oedipus in the desert more or less by chance, without known provenance or name.

What to do?

“Arise, pick up the child.” I remembered the command, spoken to Abraham’s concubine Hagar, that she should pick up the son Ishmael, whom she had abandoned to die in the sun-baked desert: “Adoption” is one way to understand the Hebrew [עֵיטֶר, יִשְׂמָע]. It is a word that Saint Jerome had translated into Latin as "adlatus" and Luther

1Genesis 21:18.
into German as Aufhebung. Both the Latin and the German became terms with critical significance for philosophy in Judaism-Christianity—as in Kant’s *modus tollens* and Hegel’s *Aufhebung*. And in the Bible, Hagar’s “pick-up” amounted to the transformation of Hagar’s natural child into a child-of-adoption by her. This sublation of kinship was the effective foundation of Islam as a world religion. 

So, I picked up the object to take a look.

(The English term *to pick up* means “to get possession of as chance or opportunity offers; to come upon and possess oneself of.”) In German-American—or “Germerican” (a theme of this essay)—the term *aufheben* came to mean “to cash in a canceled bond during the various elevations or pick-ups of dialectical reasoning.”

I knew that one day I should have to come to terms with this appropriation.

**Being and Seeming**

**What is this object? (plate 1)**

This question seemed to me to break down into two equal parts. First, what is the object made of, materially speaking? And second, what does the object represent, ideally speaking?

*Materially* speaking, the object was composed of oil paint on canvas affixed to wood. It measured thirty inches wide by forty high. The depth of its oil paint, canvas, and wood, taken together, was one inch. And it weighed four pounds.

*Ideally* speaking, the object represented various combinations of paint, canvas, and wood. These combinations varied depending on how one viewed the over- and under-layerings, both of the object’s material surfaces (the paint, canvas, and wood from which it is made) and of its ideal surfaces (the surfaces of paint, canvas, and wood that it represents).

*Church Fathers* drew an analogy between Isaac, who was nearly sacrificed by his father, and Ishmael, who was nearly abandoned by his mother, and then applied the Roman term *sublation* to the salvation of both sons—sometimes to the point of insisting that Isaac and Ishmael were the same foundation, or *antu* (Hebrew). According to the story, Abraham expels Hagar, mother of Ishmael, and Hagar despairingly “sells down” Ishmael to die in the desert. But God orders Hagar to “pick up” her abandoned son: “Arise, pick up the lad, and hold him fast by the hand; for I will make of him a great nation.” The Christian Vulgate uses the word *sublation*—from the verb *sullo, sullo*—to translate the Hebrew *si-y. Sublation*, a technical term from Roman philosophical and legal discourse, indicates either a parent’s recognition of a child’s consanguinity (as when a father picks up a newborn child in the ground in the process of the formal Roman rite of acknowledging consanguinity) or his agreement to adopt a child regardless of consanguinity (as when anyone, including a consanguineous parent, picks up a child as the sign of his intention to adopt, or adopt, the child). Either translates the term as *Aufhebung*, which word in Hegelian Christian dialectics always involves arguing by the *modus tollens*; and it suggests both the erasure of the standard of consanguinity and the raising of that standard to a spiritual level. Cf. the liturgical *agnus dei*—the Christian “Lamb of God, who sublates [greg tole] the sins of the world”—in the Catholic Mass. For bibliographical information on the kinship meanings of this term, see my “Roman Sublation and Christian Oblation,” in my *Children of the Earth* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 119-42, 259-60.


See the discussion of the monetary meanings of *Aufhebung* in my *Money, Language, and Thought: Literary and Philosophical Economies from the Medieval to the Modern Era* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), 146-47 (hereafter cited as *MLT*).
Plate 1. OK, Handel With Care. Trompe l’oeil, oil on canvas on wood, 30 X 40 in., 1935. Collection Selechonek. All rights reserved. For reproduction information, write Collection Selechonek c/o Common Knowledge.
Plate 2. Rembrandt Harmensz. van Rijn (or follower), Dutch, 1606-1669, Young Woman at an Open Half-Door, oil on canvas, 1645, 102.5 × 85.1 cm, Mr. and Mrs. Martin A. Ryerson Collection, 1849. 1022. Photograph © 1996, The Art Institute of Chicago. All Rights Reserved.


Plate 7. Patrick McDonnell. Le Visage. Strips away the surface of La Joconde in order to show to anatomy students and cosmetic artists her facial muscles, lymphatic ganglions, age lines, and arteries. 23 X 28 in. Maloine Esthetique Edisem.


Consider, on the ideal level of resemblance, the way in which the young woman appears sometimes in front of the wooden billboard and sometimes behind it—depending on how we see the various roughly torn edges (fig. 1), razor cuts (fig. 2), and Möbius-strip-like "borders" or curls (fig. 3) separating—or are they joining together?—the representation of the young woman and the representation of the wooden billboard. According to the first of these appearances, we have a fragment of a torn portrait affixed (somehow) to the front of a wooden billboard. According to the second, we have a whole portrait partly hidden behind a torn canvas representing a wooden billboard.

From these two visual presentations, several hypotheses might arise. One hypothesis is that this work is materially an actual old portrait, in the Dutch seventeenth-century style (plate 2), partly overpainted with—"violated" by, some would say—an ideal representation of a wooden billboard of the traditional American late nineteenth-century, money-board type—the sort of painting seen often in saloons of the period (plate 3). The anti-thesis would be that this work is materially an actual painting in the American nineteenth-century, illusionist money-painting style, partly overpainted with a representation of a Dutch portrait.

Whatever the illusion of symmetry, the object represents—or misrepresents—

1 "Violent" was the adjective used by Martha Wolf, Curator of Old Masters at the Chicago Art Institute, when I showed her a picture of the object a couple of days after finding it.
original things collage-like in life-size and living color. The etched papers supposedly created by the treasurer of the United States and likewise the painted canvas supposedly created by the Dutch artist—money and art—are precisely life-size. Measuring is important here, for the visible part of the portrait of the young woman is precisely the same size as its Dutch counterpart. That counterpart is Young Woman at a Half Open Door or at an Open Half-Door, which was, as I knew, the famous "Rembrandt" at the Art Institute of Chicago. Since 1894 it had served as the valuable idol of that city's proud art world and was often reproduced on cards, like the one represented in the objet trouvé itself as pinned to its palette (fig. 4), or the one in its newspaper fragment (fig. 5).

Chicago's Young Woman had been known formerly as The Orphan, or The Foundling—L'Enfant trouvé.\footnote{Other names have been An Orphan Girl at an Open Window, An Orphan of the Municipal Orphanage, Amsterdam Portrait of a Lady, Portrait of a Female Young Woman, Girl at a Window, and Orphan Girl at an Open Window.}

The synthesis of our thesis and anti-thesis would be that the object is both "American" and "Dutch" at the same time. Mutually infolding and overlapping, both are glued, or collé, to the same backboard or picture-board in such a way that each is two, or both is one, or that we get two for one.

This notion of the synthetic marriage of two halves into one might be borne out by the fact that the surface area of the Dutch section and that of the American section of the twin-like object are precisely identical to each other (fig. 6). In this stripped
décollage-like work, as in certain kinds of Parmenidean and German idealist dialectic allegorized, the two are incorporated and transcended by the one.

'It is a compelling statistic about the objet trouvè that its two Siamese-like twins, when measured together as one rectangular whole, are precisely the same size as Young Woman at an Open Half-Door. Put otherwise, the American-style half-painting stood in relationship to the Dutch-style half-painting as a coequal pendant.'

Now, by observing the overlap between the material construction of the objet trouvè (for example: that it was partly made of wood) and its ideal representation (it partly represents wood)—that is, its "natural" aspects or material constitution and its "man-

"Pendant is defined as "a thing, especially] a picture, forming a parallel match or companion to another; a match, companion piece" (OED, s.v. "pendant," s.1.2).
made" aspects or representation—I remarked that the work tended to conflate the economic realm with the aesthetic one. (Haply and happily for me: I was just then under pressure to find somewhere a dust jacket illustration for a book to be published that year in Chicago.)"

How so, this conflation? The word money names the ideological link here between the material and ideal realms. In Poe's "Gold-Bug," you recall, the detective Legrand's maniacal bug for gold led him cryptically to a work of "art," to the design of a gold bug, and hence to the designated gold. Would I be able likewise "to cash in" the signatures and signs of this work?

**WHAT'S WHAT**

What to call it?

I proposed then tentatively to call this found object by one of the shorthand nominal "handles," or names, that the work itself seems to propose by means of the message "HANDE . . . WITH CARE" (fig. 7). We will call the object, Handel With Care.

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The terms of "HANDE . . . WITH CARE," in Chicagoan Germerican, might draw us to certain facets of the work.

First, Handel (trade). The principal meaning here would be something like, "Handler, beware!" or "Caveat emptor." In this regard there are several things to watch out for. The Augentäuschung (or eye-trumpery) suggests an exchange, or Tausch, of material with ideal. That warning should lead us to be wary:

- of the hand as artist's or treasurer's signature;
- of the hand as artist's touche, namely the aspect of brushwork, involving the material resistance of the paint on the canvas, that contributes to the ideal impression so important to Impressionist theorizing;
- of the hand as corporeal manus or appendage;
- of the right- or left-handedness of this oddly looking-glass-like picture; and
- of the various bearings of the pencil and brush handles.

In much the same vein, we should care for the presence or absence of various handles, or fastening agents—the pin holding the postcardlike photograph of Young Woman (fig. 4), the canvas supporting the seamstress's (or the restorer's) needle by means of the thread (fig. 8), the unused nail (fig. 9), the screw holding the string (fig. 10) and

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"For the term Germerican, see Kurt M. Stein, The Lands of Michigan Sea: 33 Gedichte in Germerican: "Die schönste Längste." (Göttingen: B. Schleider, 1966). Germerican was a linguistic mix of German and American spoken by millions of German-speakers in the United States. By 1910 there had been for a century or more a good deal of German-English interlinguistic exchange. There was a fascination with di-glossia. This included an interest in the theory of translating German texts that contain English words into English, and vice versa; a concern with the role of so-called transijig writers; a movement to increase the number of German-language anthologies of American writers; a focus on publishing bilingual journals; and so on. In such a setting, Germerican-speaking people had to decide whether they wanted to think of their "bilingualism" as a temporary "way station" along the road to total monolingualism or as an end in itself. Already in 1930 in the Chicago area, the political and linguistic implications of such questions were considered from several angles, as in Albert W. Aron's monograph on colloquial American German ("The Gender of English Loan-Words in Colloquial American German," Language Monographs, 7 [December 1930]), which came out of the local University of Illinois. H. L. Mencken, in the fourth edition of his The American Language: An Inquiry into the Development of English in the United States (New York: Knopf, 1937), gives an example from one of the seventeen German-language daily newspapers still being published in the United States in 1935: "Was machst du denn in Amerika?" fragt der alte Onkel. "Well, der Kuno war sehr onest. Ich bin e Stiefleger," sagt er. "Bist du verrückt geworden?" ruft der Onkel. "Was is denn das?" "Das," sagt der Kuno, "is a Anwaltsgeschäfteconstitutions verbessergungsfirmenwarenhändler." (Heinrich Reinhold Hirsch, "Der Charlie," Staats-Zeitung [New York City], 28 March 1935). See my "Babel in America: The Politics of Linguistic Diversity in the United States," Critical Inquiry 20.1 (Fall 1993): 19–38."
the glue (perhaps presumably) holding all three stamps (11) (fig. 11), and so on. Some means of fixing are missing or invisible: one of the stamps on the blue envelope, for example.

We are also cautioned about card-handling by sharpers and about reading or misreading the minute or hour hands of the timepiece.

On a more general level, the (anglophone) message "Handle With Care" is the standard one on American shipping labels. And this suggests that *Handle With Care* depicts

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(11) The upper stamp in *Handle With Care* is a superficially exact replica of a U.S. stamp of 1933 with the inscription "Century of Progress, Chicago." There is probably no way to know whether this particular stamp is that is, is meant to be thought of as being gummed or ungummed (that is, is part of a collage, or "gumming"). Chicago philatelists would know that many, though not all, the Treasury Department's "souvenir" stamps from the Exhibition were not gummed and hence would need an additional agent to stick them to such paper as the envelope depicted in *Handle With Care*. See Max J. John, *The United States Postage Stamps of the Twentieth Century*, vol. 1, *Commemoratives 1933-37* (New York, 1980).
the painting Young Woman in the process of being unwrapped after transportation. (The wrapping material would be part of a canvas, painted on one side in American trompe l'oeil style, partly torn and cut away. There is a well-known relatively recent counterpart by Cadiou about this subject\(^\text{12}\) : plate 4). The label, thus viewed, would indicate that the work should be remitted only into the care of careful people: here, for good or ill, it was sent "c/o," or "in care of," one Otis Kaye, at the "Old Master Restoration Company" (fig. 12).

OK

"O', t'is Kaye." So we may have a nominal handle, or name tag, for the artist or restorer of this work as the manufacturer of this work represents him or her to us.

And, indeed, this "OK" might be a good indication about the name of the manufacturer if we could say for sure what a "signature" is, whether there is a signature in Handel With Care, and whether that signature is authentic, or genuine.

Well, the moniker "Otis Kaye" has a quintuple presence in Handel With Care:

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as a piece of the story in the newspaper clipping (fig. 13);

• as part of the “address” on the blue envelope (fig. 12);

• as the graffito—“O. Kaye”—carved into the trompe l’œil backboard (to the left of the timepiece), in such a way as to reveal the “canvas” beneath (fig. 14);

• as the initial letters of the first and last words of the message “Out with the kids” (emphasis added) on the charges bill (fig. 15); and

• as the literal visual shape of the letter “O” (etched into the billboard) considered together with the initial “K” (on the King of Clubs) (fig. 16).

But whether any of this is enough for us to say, to quote the visiting card at lower right (fig. 17), “PAINTING BY” OK—or, “O, t’is Kaye”—is another issue, almost.

Whatever, it usually does make sense to look for some sort of signature in such visual works as portraits and paper money.
First, signing such artworks is a common practice. Our expectation of a signature in Rembrandt's Young Woman, for example, even helps make the Chicago icon what it is. The signature changes the artwork in the same way that the name carved into a real wooden statue, or plank, changes the actual physical shape of the wood and hence is part of the statue as statuary. That link between material and ideal is the subject of both aesthetic and economic epigrammatology. 

Second, signing such money-tokens as "paper-mones," is essential to them. Consider here the first known inscribed coin, minted in Ephesus around 600 B.C. (fig. 18). On one side was punched the verse "Phanes eimi sêma" ("I am the sêma of Phaneos"; or,

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"I am the appearance of the sign"). This is the essential talk of money. The Ephesian inscription transforms the ingot into a σήμα, or coin. Φανεροσ εἰμὶ σήμα is twice semiotic: it is a σήμα on a σήμα.14

Who signs, or ought to sign, the sign that is a coin? In more than one instance it is the artist who made the coin who signs it. Thus, the ancient Greek Theodotos stamped Θεοδοτος αποικ ["Theodotos made it"] on the coins he fashioned.15 Kings and tyrants, fearing the appearance of aesthetic authority, soon put a stop to that!

It is in this antagonistic spirit that in many works our OK pretends to the status of "Secretary of the Treasury of the United States." In 2 for 1 he puts "OK" on the paper money where we would expect to find the nominal handle of the Treasury Department (plate 5).

I mean here to stress two aspects of the term OK. OK both means nominal handle and, in the case of Handel With Care, OK is the nominal handle.

First, OK is the particular proper name that, qua signature, "authenticates" the artwork.

Second, the term OK is an authenticating sign, or visible σήμα of the invisible. And in the verb form, "to OK," it means "to authenticate" generally. That is to say: in American English—and now, some two hundred years after its likely introduction, in the world at large—the verb "to OK" is synonymous with making a "visible sign" of "acknowledgment."16 Mumford thus writes of James Monroe that he was "the . . . president of the United States, whose name or O.K. sets the final seal of responsibility on an action."17

And it is worth reporting that theories of electronic money—that is, of dematerialized money, which would be the economic parallel to the minimalist and nonmaterial art of the late 1960's—rely on the "OKAY," as in the theory supporting David Chaum's "Digicash" corporation (fig. 19).

The beguiling philology of the quintessentially American OK would bear us out here. Just ask:

Some scholars suggest that OK is an American "initial language" term based on non-English names or words: the Amerindian chief Old Keokuk; the Greek βόλα καλά (meaning "all good"); the Germerican Ober-Kommando or Oberst Kommandant (German—


15On artists' signing coins—especially those of Euclidas—see "The Language of Character," 64.

16OED, s.v. "OK."

speaking officers of the revolutionary army supposedly signed orders as OK) or *Ohne Korrektur* (meaning “without correction”).

Others say OK comes from a nonanglophone word: the Haitian port *Aux Cayes*; the French-American term *au quai* (meaning “at the dock” in the sense of “ready to go”); a Wolof term brought to the United States by slaves transported from west Africa; the Choctaw dialect *oke* (meaning “it is” in the eighteenth century “Mobilian [or Chickasaw] trade language,” which served as the lingua franca for Amerindian-, Spanish-, French-, German-, and English-speaking Handlers along the Gulf of Mexico). Hence “to OK” is to acknowledge that a transaction is.

Certainly the financial rather than ontological acknowledgment of Handlers’ discharge of debt received a historical booster shot in the late 1830’s thanks to initial-language sloganeering during the Van Buren presidential campaign of 1836. At that time, the apparent “abbreviation” OK indicated both “Old Kinderhook” (the name of Van Buren’s birthplace and hence, by extension, Van Buren himself) and “all correct” (a colloquialism for “all [or only] correct”). OK’s “Democratic theory [of money] denied the power of Congress to make [paper money but only] gold or silver coin.” During the Great Panic of 1837, it is worth recalling, several states utterly repudiated their promises to pay, or to restore the “original” for which paper stood. That is, they committed.

Some decades later, the fabulous popularity of Benjamin E. Woolf’s drama *The Mighty Dollar* (1875), with its cryptic “initial language,” emphasized further the fi-

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nancial connotations of the term OK. By 1933 the term was already internationalized: even Russian writers were associating the term okay with cycles of financial success and disaster; Boris Pil’niak’s OK: An American Novel is one example.

**SIGNATURE**

In *Handel With Care* whose are the authorized or authorizing names or handles, hands, or signatures—the okebs—we might expect to find? This question contains two others. The first would concern signatures for the money (that is, the banknotes). The second would concern signatures for the artworks (that is, *Young Girl* and perhaps *Handel With Care* itself). Whether in this instance the money can be thus disengaged from the artwork is a crux of understanding *Handel With Care*.

Money is signed gold (aurum signaturum), said the ancient Romans. Their language owned up that it was the inscribed signature—the inscription—that confers monetary value on the inscribed metal ingot of which it is a part. This dual status of money—as (signed) thing and as signature, taken together—constitutes money’s elementary epigrammatology. This logic of the relationship between ideal inscription (signature) and real inscription (inscribed thing) is what gives the thing its value as money—or so it seems.

But who signs? Or who should sign?

By way of example, in *Handel With Care*, whose signature should we expect to find on the money bills? That of the secretary of the treasury, or that of the artist OK? The artist or moneymaker does often sign the bills as “O.K.”—as if he himself were secretary of the treasury. Such is the case for the signatory handles on the bills in 2 for 1 (plate 5).

The purported political authority of the money bills derives partly from the expressed signature, or okeb. This is also so in the Germerican cartoonist Nast’s money bill: “This is Money by the Act of Congress” (fig. 20). This bill is attached to the billboard in his *Milk-Tickets for Babies in Place of Milk* (fig. 21). Such money bills as Nast’s tend to raise the question of where resides the monetary authority of the card-playful “sovereign” king with his Archimedian crown of yellow gold. What, or who, makes a cow, or capital (fig. 22)?

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2The monetary connotations of the American term *OK* received a “historical booster shot” thanks to its use in 1875 in Benjamin E. Wool’s successful and long-playing drama *The Mighty Dollar* (Read, “Later Stages in the History of ‘O.K.’” *American Speech* 39.2 [1964]: 91–94; see also George Clinton Densmore Odell, *Annals of the New York Stage*, vol. 10 [1938; New York: AMS Press, 1970], 31–32). This play’s linguistic humor revolved largely around trying to decipher its cryptic “initial language”—a species of spoken shorthand, which is getting into very general use among loafers and gentlemen of the fancy—that had been popular in the United States around the year 1840 and was seeing a revival (Benjamin Park and Rufus Griswold, *Evening Tales* [New York], 27 July 1839, 2.2). One example of this language is “the three Rs.” Another is “OK” (Read, “The First Stage in the History of ‘O.K.’,” *American Speech* 38.1 [1963]: 15).


4*aurum argentumque faction intercepta et signum* (Livy, 34.32.4; cf. Cicero, *Topsia*: 53.)
Fig. 20. "This is Money by the Act of Congress." Detail from Thomas Nast, Milk-Tickets for Babies in Place of Milk.

Fig. 21. Thomas Nast, Milk-Tickets for Babies in Place of Milk, in David A. Wells, Robinson Crusoe's Money; or, The Remarkable Financial Fortunes and Misfortunes of a Remote Island Community, illus. Thomas Nast (1876; New York, 1931). Courtesy Harvard College Library.

Fig. 22. "This is a cow." Detail from Nast, Milk-Tickets for Babies in Place of Milk.
The second question to which we turn our attention here is: Whose signature should we expect to find on the artwork depicted in *Handel With Care* and on the artwork that is *Handel With Care!* This second question is separable from the first only insofar as banknotes are not considered political artworks.

Those who think they know the Chicago painting, *Young Woman at an Open Half-Door* should believe that we ought to find the signature, “Rembrandt [ . . . ],” underneath, or “behind,” the material paint that represents the artist’s palette (fig. 23). So OK, in his *Handel With Care,* is a “brand blotter.” This term is an Americanism indicating a person who obliterates—here, overpaints—the original ownership marks. After this blotting by the palette in *Handel With Care,* all that is left of the signature “Rembrandt” are letters removed and then typeset on the calling card BRANDT.

Not that most people anymore think that the signature “Rembrandt” on the Chicago painting is Rembrandt’s. The signature is in another “hand” than Rembrandt’s—in someone else’s personalized style of pencil writing, or penicil (that is, brush) writing.

**THE PENCIL: SURREALISM AND CUBISM**

*Surrealism depends upon a vigorous, even bourgeois, sense of appropriateness.*

—Stanley Cavell, *The Claim of Reason*

*Trompe l’oeil* wants to make art appear like the real thing in much the same way that surrealist art wants to make the unreal appear real. Surrealism works like “realistic” trompe l’oeil; “in a detailed manner [it] give[s] an hallucinatory sense of reality to a scene that make[s] no rational sense.” It is often work made up of “assemblages” in unexpected juxtapositions of apparently unrelated objects.

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1. *OED* Suppl., s.v. “brand.”

The surrealist crux of Handel With Care is that the pencil points "unrealistically" southwest rather than northwest (fig. 24). (If you did not notice it, that is probably because, as Aristotle might put it, art chances to err more on the side of the probable than the necessary—like chance finds.) The way the punctum-like pencil hangs suspended, dependent on its string, is physically impossible, at least according to the expected laws of gravity: the pencil's eraser end rises to the northeast, but in the "real life" that trompe l'oeil pretends to copy, the eraser end should point to the southeast. (Myself, "I am but mad north-northwest.") Viewers of this still-life piece suspend disbelief in the physically impossible gyroscopics of the pencil's still-life or timeless motionlessness. ("Trompe l'oeil," writes Magritte, "is really a matter of physics.")

So what fastens the pencil point down? (Or, what handles the pencil in such a way that its eraser end is held erect?) Understanding this question requires consideration of one of the ways that Handel With Care, like a collage, pretends to over- and under-layer images and hence seems to build up parts into wholes and break down wholes into parts. That way is sometimes called "cubism."

Cubism was a means "to depict objects as they are known rather than as they appear at a particular moment and place." To this end artists "broke down the subjects they represented into a multiplicity of facets, rather than showing them from a single, fixed viewpoint, so many different aspects of the same object could be seen simultaneously." In Handel With Care the cubist dimension involves the engineering of the subject's shoulder, arm, and hand.

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"In Barthes' thinking about certain kinds of photography, the punctum is the thing that "undoes" the photograph, as when, in a photograph of a perfectly groomed and formally attired man, we were suddenly to notice that he is wearing only one sock. Roland Barthes, Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981).


"Quoted by James Harkness in his endnotes to Michel Foucault, This Is Not a Pipe, illus. and lettres by René Magritte, trans. and ed. James Harkness (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), 62n.

As examples of over- and under-layered planes, consider:

- how the young woman's left shoulder, which is overpainted by the billboard, is replaced by the player-king's shoulder;
- how the player-king's left arm, which is overpainted by the charges bill, is replaced by the pencil; and
- how the left hand belongs as much to the man's visible pencil or the woman's invisible arm, as to some artist-viewer who is set and ready, whether from within or from without the painting, to pick up palette and brush as found objects.

Thus, the pencil in *Handel With Care* hitches the woman's shoulder, or the man's shoulder, with *the* hand of the piece. The pencil is the physical "jointress of this warlike state" as well as its motive spring, or *Triebfeder*.

The pencil can be considered also in terms of political, aesthetic, economic, and sexual authority or desire.

**Politically:** The pencil is the player-king's golden yellow "baton," or sceptrelike baston (fig. 16), which signals, at the "Acme" of this work, the political mastery of the gold-crowned king to make money out of gold or paper.

**Economically:** "Clubs" (or bastons), the suit of the king, is the polar opposite to the traditional money suit and hence also its definitive element.

**Aesthetically:** The pencil points where one might expect to find the signature, as we have seen.

**Sexually:** What manipulates, or manhandles, the unbalanced pencil at the articulating moment of *Handel With Care* is sexual desire. The pencil points where anyone who knows anything about human corporeal beings, at least, would expect to find the "sex" of the young orphan. In this gender-partial view of *Handel With Care*, the motive spring of the work is sexual desire. No wonder male art experts at the Chicago Art Institute still use the X-ray machine to see through the paint, or under the dress, in order to find, they say, the real signature.

In any case, the amatory allure of the portrayed young woman in Rembrandt’s painting recalls how certain painters, including Leonardo da Vinci, who left his card here, used courtesans or prostitutes as models for their beautiful counterfeit representations of wives, angels, and goddesses. In this view, the pencil in *Handel With Care*

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2 *Hamlet*, 1.2.9.

3 One of the four "suits" in many sets of older Italian playing cards is called "Money." The suit of Clubs both opposes and matches that of Money. "The Inventor of the Italian cards . . . put the deniers or monies and the Bastons or clubs in combat together" (Anthony Munday, *The Defense of Contraries* [Amsterdam: Theatrum Orbis Terrarum, 1593], 49). On playing-card money more generally, see A.M. 82, 167–68.

4 See Julia O’Faolain: "The men were terrifying; she remembered their eyes X-raying her clothes" (No *Country for Young Men* [London: Allen Lane, 1980], 102).
points away from the signs of a chaste and domestic bourgeois family life—wife, money bills, children, schedules, and so on—toward manhandling a prostitute.

Portraiture as such plays a key role in the institutional presentation of sexual possession and prostitution in Dutch painting. In Rembrandt’s day, many models were prostitutes, and painters often depicted women in the pose of courtisans. Several Dutch painters used sexually alluring portraits to help in their pimping business. Dirick Bleeker, for example, sold the sexual services of his models to the purchasers of the paintings for which they had posed. Willem Drost, Rembrandt’s apprentice, may have done the same. The deal was: purchase the likeness of the woman in order to “cash it in” [aufheben] for the original woman. Brothel paintings as such were “portraits . . . displayed in the brothels of Amsterdam.” Customers made their choice from portraits. Only after paying were they introduced to the model. As a visiting francophone commented in 1681: “If she doesn’t match up to the picture, it’s your bad luck.” So much for blind dates.

In this context, OK’s Handel With Care draws to our attention the role of framing. Dutch seventeenth-century painters, including Rembrandt, sometimes suspended their unframed portraits inside wooden window-frames facing the outside of their studios. The trompe l’ceil life-size portraits came thus, from streetside, to resemble living bourgeois housewives or servants at a half-open window or door. It was (and is) the custom of prostitutes in Amsterdam’s red-light district to display themselves as potential “pick-ups” within the frames of open half-doors and windows.

So it is that the monetary traits in Handel With Care have to do with the promise suggested by Georg Simmel, author of the Philosophy of Money and Rembrandt: A Philosophical Investigation. He defined beauty as “a promise of happiness” [promesse de bonheur] in much the same way that money is a creditable promissory inscription.

SYMBOL: TWO KINDS OF MONEY

If an English word could wrap up the dual focus in Handel With Care on money and art, that word would be bill, or symbol. This term suggests the symbolism of the charges bill, money bill, billets, and wooden billboard. Moreover, Handel With Care as a whole
is suffused by quandaries of symbolism—a term linked both with the Latin term *bullata*, or "sealed, curtained, or closed document" (including a drawer or a drawing) and with the ancient Greek *symbolikos*, or "fragment awaiting restoration to wholeness." 46

The "symbolology" in *Handel With Care* involves centrally the basic difference between two kinds of monetary deposition, or promises to pay. First there is the national currency of 1929, which is exchangeable (or restore-able) for specie. Second there are the silver certificates of 1933, which are not exchangeable.

In *Handel With Care*, the first kind of paper money, which can be "cashed in," is suggested by the five-dollar money bill at the top, inserted halfway into the partly torn sleeve of the blue paper envelope (fig. 25). As a half-inserted object, the five-dollar money bill presents a perfect pendant to the painting *Young Woman at a Half-Open Door*. In *Handel With Care*, the counterpart to *Young Woman* is thus the money bill. (Likewise, one might note that precisely half the portrait of Abraham Lincoln is "hidden" behind the torn glue material.)

The 1929 bill was issued by the controversial Federal Reserve Board in the year of the Stock Marker Crash. 47 It reads:

**THE FEDERAL RESERVE BOARD . . . WILL PAY TO THE BEARER ON DEMAND FIVE DOLLARS.**

And below that:

**OR BY LIKE DEPOSIT.**

The lower money bills in *Handel With Care* are the silver certificates. One of these claims:

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46 On *symbolikos* and *symbolikos* in numismatic context, see "The Ring of Gylas," *EL*, 40, 49–66, 77–79.

47 The Federal Reserve Bank was already the target of cranks and artists. Thus, the New York City publishers Kasper and Horison published A Study of the Federal Reserve Bank (by Eustace C. Mullins, 1932) under Ezra Pound's guidance for Pound's "Square Dollar Series" of books. Americans—sometimes of a dangerously "right-wing," apocalypse-minded, paranoid sort, much like certain American "militias" in the 1990's—were complaining that "the Federal Reserve Bank is a fount of credit, not capital" (*New York Times*, 18 January 1920). See Eustace Mullins, *Secrets of the Federal Reserve: The London Connection*, 2nd printing, dedicated to George Scribner and Ezra Pound (Staunton, Va.: Bankers Research Institute, 1984), 119. The complaint was not that some money was counterfeit and some was not, but rather that all state-issued money was *essentially* fraudulent. "Money is the worst of all contraband," said William Jennings Bryan during the "Cross of Gold" debates of the 1890's (quoted in Mullins, *Secrets*, 82).
THIS CERTIFICATE IS LEGAL TENDER FOR ALL DEBTS PUBLIC AND PRIVATE.
And this bill
CERTIFIES THAT THERE IS ON DEPOSIT . . . THE UNITED STATES . . .
In the cases of both bills, the terms pay, like, and deposit suggest the symbolic restoration of what is due, or what is "OVER DUE." In Handel With Care, the salient feature is this ought, or ought not, restoration.

In the visual realm, restoration is the business of the "Old Master Restoration Co."

In the literary realm, the storyteller restores or brings out, by way of imitation, what was already there—the "best" or the "typical." He restores things, or picks up on the "original." (In the dialectics of Goethe's Faust the process is described in gold-miners' terms as the Aufhebung of gold from below, or its being drawn up. Mining it to make it mine.)

In the monetary realm, restoration is the business of the banker. When presented with money bills, he restores from his storehouse the specie that was originally deposited with him. It is the perhaps politically needful myth that the substance is always there: under the ground waiting to be mined; under the sea waiting to be dried out (as for the Dutch); across the ocean waiting to be developed (as the Mississippi-based monies of France); or in the pawnee's basement at Fort Knox waiting to be removed (as for Germericans in 1929). These are all "national" holdings of the "imagination." These "stores" serve to define a nation as much as its language and national debt: they are the proper focus of the field of comparative literature.

But what if nothing is "there?" Neither an aesthetic "ORIGINAL" nor an economic one. Can the public and private "bug for gold" be "reduced" thus to a "humbaggery" that is beyond the reach both of philological etymology, which often seeks out real origins, and of entomology, which seeks to define special bugs?

This possibility helps to define the difference between the two kinds of bills depicted in Handel With Care. (The "found object" was probably made in 1935.) In the case of the second kind of money, payment is theoretically always past due or "over-due." The payment is never materially discharged. It is a never ending compromise.

So the second kind of money bill is a "counterfeit" of the first kind. It is counterfeit,
not in the sense that it is a purposefully misleading visual replica, but in the sense that it is a systematically misleading replica of what money supposedly really is. The position that the second kind of money is phony is what led President Roosevelt's budget director to exclaim that the second kind of paper money amounted to "the end of Western Civilization." For him, taking the United States "off gold" in 1933 was the crucial moment in world history. Spengler might well have agreed.\textsuperscript{12}

**COUNTERFEIT AND ACKNOWLEDGMENT**

Now, the artist known to us as OK is not yet well known or recognized in America because he was no artist-Handler. He sold no "artwork" of his own in the United States during his entire life, 1886–1974. Since art historians, critics, and auctioneers usually handle only known sellers, and OK apparently gave his works away gratis to family and friends, his work remained unknown to the public—until recently.

Why did OK not handle his art? Perhaps OK lacked the artist's customary need for money or fame. Perhaps, a little like Plato, OK had too much suspicion of trade (Handel) to make merely commercial disputation (Händelsucht) in the marketplace. Maybe he lacked the commonplace longing to trump others.

Or, perhaps OK did not seek to make his work known because he counterfeited money in more commercially, or militarily, profitable ways than by selling trompe l'oeil money-paintings. These ways would include counterfeiting as a means to make his personal fortune or as a tactic to help the Axis powers in the 1930s (fig. 26). These ways were and are illegal, secretive by their very nature. And, indeed, this very painting, *Handel With Care*, violates the laws laid down by the U.S. Department of the Treasury and the Secret Service forbidding the construction of life-size, living-color...


\textsuperscript{12}On Oswald Spengler's *Decline of the West* (English trans., 1926) has special sections devoted to the forms of money. For many intellectuals and artists of the period, modernist and cultural history went together. People born in the 1880s had much the same experience with boom and bust. Among those discussed in my OVER DUE are Luigi Cracca, Marcel Duchamp, Robert Euler, Max Ernst, Raoul Hausmann, John Heartfield, John Maynard Keynes, Pablo Picasso, Ezra Pound, Kurt Schwitters, Oswald Spengler, Ernst Wiechert, and William Carlos Williams. Each of these men faced much the same aesthetic and economic problematic and tried to take his fellows from "Shakespeare to "profit inflation"—as L. C. Knights used to say on "Shakespeare and Profit Inflation," in *Knights, Drama and Society in the Age of Jesus* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1977).

\textsuperscript{13}On counterfeiting as a war strategy, see Murray Teigh Bower, *Money of Their Own* (New York: Scribner, 1957) and Peter Bower, "Economic Warfare: Banknote Forgeries as a Deliberate Weapon," in *The Banker's Art: Studies in Paper Money*, ed. Virginia Hewitt (London: British Museum, 1993), 46–65. See also Kurt D. Singer's *Confidential Report on 1936 Pro-Nazi Firm Who Declared You Could Do Business with Hitler* (New York: News Background, 1943) 1–1. There is some issue as to whether OK may have conspired with the German side. See also n. 34 below. On "Operation Bernhard," see again n. 34; on OK's dealings with Germany in the 1930s and 1940s, see my OVER DUE.
imitations of paper money. Even in the 1990's the Secret Service defines intentional likenesses of paper money like those in *Handel With Care* as "genuine counterfeits" and still confiscates such artworks and imprisons their artists and dealers.

The Secret Service must speculate about the political or economic purpose of such likenesses, and likewise it must put such artworks into dusty basement vaults. The aesthetic realm comes here—obviously and inevitably—to become the political.

Is the portrait in *Handel With Care* a representation of half of Young Woman at a Half-Open Door? Or is it a representation of the young woman who modelled for that portrait? Or might we be looking instead at a "real" Rembrandt onto half of which someone has made an overpainting? What difference does it make? Since the 1930's, such questions have come to inform the definition of what a "Rembrandt" is and hence also how to appraise and price a "Rembrandt." Moreover, the case of "Rembrandt" has come to suffuse contemporary historiography of art and aesthetic theory so thoroughly that many people take for granted its historically idiosyncratic grounds.

What means the question, "Did someone other than Rembrandt make the Young Woman?"

First, it might mean that someone other than Rembrandt made Young Woman in
the seventeenth century. The likelihood that some other seventeenth-century painter made the original Young Woman has now been accepted as “fact” by many art historians—although, in my view, with less than adequate evidence.

Second, the question might mean that the Chicago Young Woman has been over-restored, so that another—maybe OK—has had too much of a hand in it for us to be able to say rightly that it is by Rembrandt.

Third, it might mean that in the 1920's someone painted a very good copy of the Chicago Young Woman and then substituted it for the “original” work. Confidential records at the Art Institute from the 1920’s suggest that Young Woman was carelessly handled both in shipment and in restoration. And one interpretation of those records suggests that a local Chicago art-restoration company may even have had a hand in it. 39

None of this is to say, for certain here or now, that the Chicago Art Institute has or has not been the dupe of duplication.

In any case, there is a crucial, if apparently rudimentary, political difference between the aesthetic and monetary types of trompe l’oeil fabrication. On the one hand, it is legal to sell a counterfeit artwork (an "unacknowledged" copy), just so long as one does not claim, explicitly or implicitly, in the presence of the buyer or of his agent, that the counterfeit or copy was made by someone other than the person who actually did make it. On the other hand, it is illegal for anyone but the presidentially-appointed secretary of the treasury—who stands in the American Republic for the boston-wielding sovereign—to make any sort of accurate representation of money, regardless of whether or not the maker intends to pass on that representation to someone else.

The sovereign law of the United States thus comes to bear, inevitably, on (and in) the aesthetic realm of representations. The blunt opening of Knapp’s Germanic State Theory of Money is relevant here: “Money is a creature of law.”40 The Secret Service is obliged to protect the “integrity” of the sovereign dollar no less than the life of the

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40 See my OVER DUE (forthcoming).

sovereign president. The king's image, at once public and private, "lives" on coins.50

"To Counterfeit is Death."51

What's wrong with counterfeiting? It boils down to this: introduced to the general monetary fund, counterfeit papier money tends to lower the value of other monies and hence to "rob" the holders of those other monies of some of their purchasing power. Counterfeителей "steal" from those who have money, especially from those who have lots of money.

The introduction of counterfeit money tends to lower the value of other monies; but all other things being equal, the introduction of counterfeit money does this only if an equal amount of money is not at the same time withdrawn from circulation. That is to say, if a person were to withdraw genuine banknotes from the marketplace at the same rate and in the same amount that he introduces counterfeit monies, then he would not be taking any thing or any power away from the holders of genuine bills.

I do not want to argue that there are or have been many counterfeiters who operate in this way. But it would be foolish to argue that no counterfeiter ever benefited his country by increasing the money supply at a time when the national economy would improve thanks to the increase.

Proof is not easy one way or the other. The United States does not keep close enough tabs on the quantity of its money supply to detect econometrically the general presence of counterfeit money and hence measure its potential effects. Second, the "best" counterfeiters are by definition undetectable. (Nowadays, they often come from Syrian-controlled Lebanon.)

More important, the psychological quirks and aesthetic ambitions of artist-counterfeiters are delicate and unpredictable. What if the basic goal of the counterfeiter were not commercial profit but aesthetic pleasure—not at all the useful but only the pleasant. (Utile dulce is a common coin inscription.)52 The files of the Secret Service are filled with tales about people who enjoy counterfeiting.53


51There is the inscription on many U.S. colonial banknotes, "'Tis DEATH to counterfeit," as on a three-pound note issued in New Jersey on 25 March 1776 (illustrated in Robert E. Schafrick and Sara E. Church, "Protecting the Greenback," Scientific American [July 1995]: 40-46).


53Many fakes are not made in order to deceive others. See Fakes: The Art of Deception, ed. Mark Jones, Paul Craddock, and Nicolas Barber (London: British Museum Publications, 1990), 130. One must take into account the purely aesthetic ambition of the counterfeiter-artist. Consider the particular case of the American artist-counterfeiter Dick Brown, about whom one can read in Secret Service files: he "engraved his plates . . . on both sides, strangely enough, contrary to the usual counterfeiting procedure." Why would he do this? Not to save a little copper (which might be only a little "useful," at best), but rather in order to
But to return to our question: insofar as counterfeiters manipulate the quantity of money or diminish the people’s “trust” in the national currency, they are always potentially in conflict with the state, either with their own state, in which case counterfeiting takes on an aspect of “treason, or with other peoples’ states, in which case counterfeiting can be viewed as an instrument of international war,” as perhaps it was for OK. During the late 1930’s, when OK was traveling frequently between the United States and Germany to visit with engineering firms in Munich, German as well as “fifth-column” German-American counterfeiters were flooding the United States with near-perfect counterfeits. The sums were fabulous. These counterfeits were the second-best ever made of American currency. And they did destabilize the war economy.

The national confidence is easily challenged—not so much by the fact that counterfeiting is taking place as by the public revelation of the fact. It is the revelation that leads to financial scandals, runs on banks, domestic inflation, and—perhaps worst of all—to non-Americans in third-world countries lending to Americans at zero percent interest less money by stashing away more German and Swiss cash and less American. So, the question of what to do with counterfeiters—that is, besides stopping their activity of counterfeiting—can be a tricky problem. Public prosecution and punishment may have the “positive” effect of deterring some other people from becoming counterfeiters, and hence from accelerating the devaluation of the currency. But the very same prosecution may have the “negative” effect of diminishing popular confidence in the national currency, and hence devaluing that currency, which was the very thing that prosecution was presumably intended to prevent in the first place.

Here professional “deontology,” as the French sometimes call “business ethics,” has to recognize that the creditability of money can depend more on the public authority’s secrecy (about what it does to the criminal) than on what it actually does to the criminal (whether it be incarceration, hanging, or liberation). The fiction that there is no counterfeiting is often better for a country than the public attempt to deter actual counterfeiting. This is the real suspension of disbelief, of which Coleridge’s contemporary, Peacock, wrote in his Paper Money Lyrics.15

scarcely the aesthetic pleasure of “mirroring” in copper the two-sided form of the paper money that the plate would be used to make. Consider too the case of the counterfeiter Jim Miller, who began with trying out a “new kind of business card” (Irving Crump, Our United States Secret Service: How the Agents of the Treasury Department Carry on War Against Counterfeiters in Their Protection of the Nation’s Currency [New York: Dodd, Mead, 1942], 101–3). It is worth remarking here that Rembrandt apparently enjoyed being trumped by coin-artists. See Houbraken’s memorable statement “that Rembrandt’s pupils painted coins on the studio floor (in order) to tease him, knowing how much he loved money” (Schwartz, Rembrandt, 365).

15Adolf Burger, Unternehmen Bernhard: die Falscherwerkstatt im KZ Sachsenhausen (Berlin: Hentrich, 1992), suggests, on the other hand, that the number of American (as opposed to British) banknotes was relatively small.

TROMPE L’OEIL: SURFACE TO SURFACE

The statue is the stone.

—Stanley Cavell, The Claim of Reason

Handel With Care presents a distinct coincidence of two types of over- or underlayings: that of visual surfaces, which involves trompe l’œil; and that of verbal meaning, or punning, which involves trompe l’oreille.

In the visual realm, trompeterny involves a general interaction between polar opposite art forms. On the one hand is trompe l’œil “collage”—an art form, often associated in the 1930’s with surrealism, in which various kinds of fragments, often objets trouvés, are glued (or collé) onto a pictorial surface. On the other hand is trompe l’œil “decolage”—the polar opposite, which results in a striptease of peeling layers away. (Here is a trompe l’œil version: plate 6.) From the outside, at least, one cannot absolutely distinguish an artfully robotic machine from an artificially created life from a life created by God or nature; it is not only the anatomist and torturer who strips away the skin to see what is beneath (plate 7), but also the skeptic.

To begin again, then, we might imagine the painting Young Woman in Handel With Care as a canvas fixed to wooden boards. Narratologically speaking, the story that answers to this perception of Handel With Care—as a whole billboard with a torn fragment of a painting affixed to it—might go somewhat as follows:

A restorer, OK, has left his conservator’s workshop. On a board is a tattered fragment of a portrait. The restorer has been seeing it together. And so on.

But this story does not match up to certain appearances of the work: the inconsistent suspensions, say, or the violent, razor-like cuts.

Now, if Handel With Care is not a representation of half of a Rembrandt painting suspended on a billboard, then what is it? Could that be the whole of Rembrandt’s Young Woman at an Open Half-Door there in the background? If so, is it there in the ideal sense of Young Woman’s being represented there, half-behind a torn canvas painted in American trompe l’œil style, or in the real sense of Young Woman’s actually being there half-behind the material paint? (I leave this to your narratological imagination.)

Yet three observations here are useful: First, most museums try to guard against counterfeiting of their “intellectual property” by means of rules, much like those enunciated in the Secret Service’s booklet Know Your Money, that require that “bona fide” copyists make their work at least 10 percent smaller or larger than the original.

Second, if what we have here is a copy of Rembrandt, then our OK did not finish it. Instead, he painted or overpainted half of the canvas with a trompe l'oeil billboard showing, among other items, a charges bill stamped “OVER DU . . .”. Just why the artist might have done this we shall consider soon.

Third, Handel With Care would seem to lead us to a way of getting “through” its stubbornly two-dimensional representation of three dimensions—that is, to perforate its resolute conjunction of what is represented with what represents it. For the hand of some Doubting Thomas—the New Testament skeptic who doubted the simultaneously ideal and real resurrection of the substance of substances that is the corpus Christi?—seems to try to pass an aberrant hand through the wound- or sheathlike punctures in the work. These are, as it were, like the tears or slots through which a coin might pass outside-inside in a piggy bank, or a god’s body, or a rehabilitated Picasso etching (plate 8).

There was, of course, already something odd about the left hand in Rembrandt’s Young Woman. And in Handel With Care, this hand seems to come out either over the door-board represented in Rembrandt’s Young Woman or over the billboard represented in its American-style twin—or over the two of them taken together: “over deux.” This “coming forth” is, literally, the painterly “pro-venance” of Handel With Care. The hand seems to “come forth” (provenir) from between the painted two-dimensional artificial surfaces, that of Young Woman and that of the American-style billboard painting. It comes out like a humanoid artwork metamorphosed Hermione-like into human flesh and blood.

The material embodiment of the ideal—the astonishing incorporation of the hand’s shadow as its own substance—is the transubstantial visual pun in much pseudosecular art in the Christian world. Certainly here the economic and aesthetic significance of the young woman’s “coming out” from artifice, or two-dimensional painting, into nature, or three-dimensional flesh and blood, is worth marking in terms of a double transformation, into statuary and out of statuary.

And it is just this transformation that summarizes the central events in the life of the young woman who was daughter to the legendary and fabulously wealthy Phrygian king, Midas—at least according to the quintessentially “American” Nathaniel Hawthorne’s version of the ancient legend. First, the ‘touch’ of Midas’s hand transformed

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1) John 20:24–29 is often illustrated in paintings. Thomas was a twin.

2) See Sergey Mikhailovich Eisenstein’s untitled “project for a safe” (pen-and-ink drawing, 28 cm x 22 cm.), illustrated in AM. 112.


this young woman from his flesh and blood into a humanoid lifesize golden *statua* [statue] worth its weight in pure, solid gold. Cavell speaks of the need to imagine "a glass man or woman, and not merely a man with glass skin and muscles, but, as it were, glass through and through."2 [Archimedes would know what he meant]. Second, this veritable pro-*stigma* ["pro-statute"]—in this instance the art both stands for, or ideally pro-*stet, and is really Midas’s daughter—is transformed again: this time, from the quasi-idolatrous status of human gold or living *wegiel*, back into flesh-and-blood form. Not surprisingly, Midas’s wife was said to be the first person to strike coins and her native city Cyme, was devoted to an Amazonian cult of sacred prostitution (fig. 27).6

The transformation from gold to flesh in the Phrygian tale has two heuristically useful analogues. First is the metamorphosis of the ivory statue in Ovid, a statue that warms to the touch or hand of the sculptor Pygmalion. There is all but no difference in this tale between flesh and ivory.6 Second is the metamorphosis that takes place in the Haftorah for the Biblical portion about the pick-up of Ishmael in the desert sun. This Haftorah begins by emphasizing to us that creditors could collect the children of a bankrupt person instead of his coins or other commodities, and it ends when the prophet resurrects a boy from death by sunstroke, then tells the mother to pick him up [וֹשֵׁב, נַפְשִׁי] with her hands.65


6 "Concerning Midas’s wife: Demodoc of Cyme was among those to whom the first coins were attributed. In his *Hymnographia*, Julius Pollux refers to the following statement of Calophon: "Perhaps some would think it ambitious to investigate this question, whether coins were first issued by Phineus of Argos or by the Cymene Demodoc, wife of the Phrygian Midas, who was the daughter of Agamemnon, king of Cyme, or by the Athenians, Erechtheus and Lycon, or by the Lydians, as Xanophon asserts, or by the Naxians, according to the view of Aghistathemis". *Hymnographia*, 9.83; emphasis added. Concerning prostitution: in the same passage where he discusses the origin of courage, Herodotus (*Inquirita* 1.94) points out that the sacred prostitution of Lydia was linked with dowries. See also Archibald Henry Sayce, "Lydia," *Encyclopedia Britannica* (1911 edition), 17:117B-C. Near Cyme were Myrina and Ephesus; Shakespeare probably had those names in mind when he wrote his ‘marine play’ *Pericles, Prince of Tyre*, which concerns broketh life both prose and as in Pericles’s Myrnina) and sacred (as in Pericles’s Ephesus).


62 Kings 4:36. A Haftorah often sheds light on its corresponding *Tora* portion. 2 Kings 3–4 includes stories of child sacrifice and of Elisha’s resurrection of a dead child.
So, in Handel With Care, whose hand is it? And is it the hand of a man or woman?

An *out*-reaching hand, *provenant* from the back, would be the young woman’s, or that of some probably male artist imagined as inhabiting a “plane,” or surface, otherwise hidden between the *front* surface of *Young Woman* and the *back* surface of the torn canvas. An *in*-reaching hand, coming from the front toward the brush and palette, would be mine or yours. Both hypotheses, *out-* and *in-* , might seem possible: the floating penicil in the palette-slot is angled inwards and that on the left is angled outwards.

Let us assume, in heuristically narratological humor, that the would-be artist reaches a hand into the painting from outside it. It would be as if he or she were entering, as through a rabbit- or cunny-hole, "some "Malice in Wonderland" of back-to-fronts, upside-downs, left-to-rights, and inside-outs.

For what would the artist’s left and right hands have to do carefully in order to paint?

On the one hand, the left: in order to pick up the palette from its imagined or presumed easel-shelf, our artist—call him “Thomas” —would have to insert the thumb of his left hand clean through the thumbhole of the palette, from back to front. Presumably he would use the forefinger of this same hand in order to stop gravity—the same physical force that tries to pull down the eraser end of the pencil—to stop it from drawing down through the palette-slot the dark-tufted brush, or penicil, on the right.

On the other hand, the right: in order to pick up the handle of the light-tufted brush so that he might paint with it, our would-be brush handler (who we now realize is right-handed) must cross his right forearm over—or, if you like, under—his left. Handling thus, Mobius-like, the brush handle and palette would be, well, nigh impossible.

The polar opposite assumption—that it is the left hand in Handel With Care that reaches toward the palette from *within* the painting—might reinforce certain narratological reconstructions of events, or stories, certain notions about the sequence in time of the construction of the various parts of *Handel With Care*. (Such reconstructions as this would involve questions like: was the Dutch painting made before the American? If so, was it made sixteen days before or one hundred and sixty years?)

Here the paint blotches, globules, and drips on our side of the palette (fig. 28) are critically telling in three ways:

First, OK represents these globules either as having dripped down the palette some time in the past (narratologically speaking, “once upon a time”) or as still dripping in *Eric Partridge’s Dictionary of Sleng and Unconventional English*, ed. Paul Beale (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1984) points out that “to cony-catch” is to cheat. *Cony* means “a counterfeit banknote.”

the present. In the first case, the globules would (likely) be dried out by now. In the second case, crucially, the still wet paint in this supposed representation of "still (or nonmoving) life" would itself materially be moving. (This same opposition between stillness and motion obtains also, as we shall see, in the horological representation and being of time and date in Handel With Care.) As it happens, real or counterfeit pentimenti in the work likewise suggest temporal sequencing linked with problems of over- and underlaying. (As a reminder: "Old paint on canvas, as it ages, sometimes becomes transparent. When that happens, it is possible, in some pictures, to see the original lines. This is called pentimento, because the painter 'repented,' changed his mind.") There are, for example, the pentimenti, or representation of them, in the upper quadrant of the palette, and near the needle and thread repairing either the young woman's dress, or the Young Woman's canvas, or both. (As one might expect, these do not reproduce well.)

Second, the blotches are telling insofar as the color of the paint globules suggests that the American work has been painted over the Dutch, or is here represented as having been. That is because the blue and green paint would have been needed to make the American painting but not the Dutch.

Finally, the blotches suggest what Kandinsky might call the ideal, or Geistige, in art. For we see the paint of the blotchy globules not (or nor only) as ideal representations of something other than what it is materially (which is how we see, maybe even must see, the material paint that represents the paper money, for example, or the young woman or the Young Woman). We can see the paint of the globules (also) as the self-presentation of blotches of paint that both materially are blotches of paint and (or,

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1. Determining the work’s “production in time” is key to some contemporary theories of art. Some writers thus argue that “painting is an autographic artform” and that “an artwork is autographic if its identity must be fixed by its history of production” (see George Bailey, “Amateurs Instant, Professionals Steal,” *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 47.3 (Summer 1989): 222, 227). Cf. Nelson Goodman, *Languages of Art: An Approach to a Theory of Symbols* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1968). One implication is that “there is an aesthetic difference between copies and the painting copied, no matter how alike the two paintings appear to us now” (ibid., 227).


more properly speaking, or ideally represent them. The apparently three-dimensional, perhaps still-moving, and signature-blurring "blotches in Handel With Care (fig. 29) have more in common with abstract, or nonrepresentational art than with the surrealism or realism that stands in apparent polar opposition to it.

**TROMPE L'OEIL: SOUND TO SOUND**

The trompe l'oeil (or eye-trumping) overlayings of the visual surface of *Handel With Care* match in some respects its verbal trompe l'oreille (or ear-trumping) overlayings of verbal significance.2

Just as, in trompe l'oeil, we see one thing for another, or eventually come to think that we do, so, in trompe l'oreille, we hear one thing for another. We get two (or more) meanings from one sound in much the same way that we get two (or more) images from one painting.

That a "Deitsch" work of surrealist trompe l'oeil money-art should rely on multilingual trompe l'oreille is not surprising. Dutch art of the seventeenth century typically involves multilingual inscriptions,3 and much surrealist art of the twentieth century has depended on puns and writing, as in the case of Magritte's *This Is Not a Pipe* (plate 9), even the "Deitsch" Nast's "This Is Money by the Act of Congress" (fig. 20) and

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2The German-Israeli art curator Dorrit Hacken has suggested to me that the drips on the palette recall signatures and marks (Zeichnungen) by Georges Braque.

3We deal here with the verbal quotations in *Handel With Care*. The literary inscription "HANDE..." quotes part of HANDEL, HANDELN, or HANDLE much as the fragment of a painting in OK's Handel With Care quotes part of Rembrandt's Young Woman. Not only the subject of the present essay, but also its method, involves parts and wholes. That method depends initially on certain relationships between parts and wholes as one between more-or-less imperfect imitations, or more-or-less concealed replicas, and "their" originals. Much can be said about the problem of quotation in this context. See, for example, Arthur Danto, *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981), 57 and ch. 7. Finally, however, the interrelated breaking up of parts into wholes and the breaking down of wholes into parts (which Plato took as a fundamental aspect of dialectic) bears comparison both with the picking up, or sublimation, of parts (which the Christian and Hegelian tradition takes as a fundamental aspect of dialectic) and with a historical process involving notions of discovery and appropriation.

“This is Milk by Act of Con.” (fig. 30)—confidence, Congress, and owning. Beyond this, the thematic of Handlung in the visual arts has traditionally involved punning: money seems to provide a measure of value for two (or more) things in much the same way that language can provide a common sound for two (or more) meanings. Likewise, money-art is inherently both declarative and inscriptional. That is to say: money must make, on the ideal plane, a certain claim about and on itself, on the real plane.

Here we focus on the inscription on the Händler’s charges bill in Handel With Care: “OVER DU . . .” (fig. 15). The term OVER DU suggests several readings, among them:

- Over-do (meaning “overlayer”);
- Do over (meaning “repeat”);
- Over Don (meaning “in the style of Gerritt Dou, who was Rembrandt’s first student and an important painter in his own right”);¹¹
- Over deux (meaning “in twain”);
- Over due (meaning “past due”); and
- Over dun (meaning “too much dunned”).

The list amounts almost to a joke on you, over diu. That is because we are overdoing things, or “carrying them to excess.” We have time to pay heed to only a few of these readings.

A charges bill is overdue when the deadline is past due for discharging the charge or debt (Latin debitas). At that point, from the creditor’s viewpoint, the bill should be cashed in, or aufgezogen.

In the realm of public finance, signs of debtors’ failure to meet financial obligation would be the closing of a bank, as in 1929, or the refusal of a national government to make good on a promise to render gold in exchange for paper.

In the realm of the visual arts, the obligation to pay would involve an interpretative slide from the realm of finance toward that of sight: a slide from “obligation” to “seeing,” or from devoir to voir. What is overdue in the visual arts is what has not yet

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¹²In some Germanic dialects, dou would be pronounced like du.
appeared, or what remains hidden or undelivered. The absence may be felt, like some
divine telos, or "cash," always believed to be there: behind building walls, like the
gold in Fort Knox; under the surface of the ground, like a missing daughter in a golden
great or sculpted ingot; or in back of a painted canvas curtain, like the symbolic frag-
ment of *Young Woman* in *Handel With Care*. Seeing is not all that there is to believing.

Now, in *Handel With Care* itself, the demand to receive what is due takes a literary
form, with the artist being understood as *dunned debtor*, and also a visual form, with
the artist understood as *dunning creditor*.

On the one hand, in *Handel With Care* the artist is presented as the *dunned* one. In
this view, the charges bill is a dunning letter. *Brandbrief*, after all, is a colloquial Ger-
man expression for "a letter urgently demanding money, or a payment of debt, or a
dunning letter." And our caller, "Brandt," here wants payment from the artist for the
"Acme" company's delivery of paint and brushes. *Rembrandt* himself, who was an
insolvent bankrupt, had his fair share of dunning letters.

On the other hand, *Handel With Care* taken as a whole is the dunning letter of a
restorer-creditor to be sent to a museum that owes him money. The fragmented news-
paper account that headlines one "Rem-" (fig. 5) suggests that the owner of *Rem-
brandt's Young Woman* hired an artist-restorer to put back together a torn painting. But
then the museum refused him payment, to give him "Moore // money" (fig. 13). In
this view, *Handel With Care* is a threatening epistle implying something like: "Handel
[Your Debt to Me] With Care. Only if you do that will I handle your 'Rembrandt's
Young Woman' with care."

There are two predispositions or prejudices that might hinder our accepting the
view that *Handel With Care* IS, materially as well as ideally, the overpainted "original"*Young Woman* by Rembrandt.

First is a disposition to think of OK as an "art lover." Surely OK would no more
overpaint Rembrandt than Duchamp would have overpainted the genuine *Joconde* by
Leonardo da Vinci when he made his *L.H.O.O.Q.* (plate 10).

Second is a predisposition to believe that we ourselves—or people we trust—have
dependable "expertise" in spotting "originals" and "fakes." (And the original, we are
told, is still in the Chicago Art Institute.)

Yet *Young Woman* presents for us, in this context of spotting counterfeitness, prob-
lems of an especially difficult kind.

There is, for example, the very poor state of restoration of *Young Woman*. Already in
1883, Bode had described the work, *The Foundling Woman*, "... as a ruin because of

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"Charles Malamoud, *Livre de vie, mode mortel: les représentations de la dette en Chine, au Japon et dans le monde

"In 1660, for example, Rembrandt had to leave his house and move into a poorer district of the city."
the restoration and heavy overpainting. A painting with such qualities has already the appearance of a counterfeit—even if it is not one.

In any case, there is some evidence that Young Woman was the object of careless business handling at the Art Institute during the 1920's and 1930's. First, the painting was sent out for cleaning and restoration work in March of 1921—precisely the period when our "Master Restorer" OK was most active. At this time, the painting was likely poorly "patched," or overlaid. Second, according to papers in the confidential files at the Art Institute, in 1929 Young Woman was shipped out of the United States. It bore the cryptic pseudonym "Rembrandt's Sister," was insured for 25,000 US dollars, and was ported secretly to Amsterdam with the collaboration of French handlers. These hints suggest that, whether or not Rembrandt's "hand" made Young Woman, many other people—not only restorers and cleaners but also dealers and handlers—may have had too much of a hand in it for us any longer to call it, by whatever sort of metonymy, a "Rembrandt."

PROMISE AND COMPROMISE

Then he rips open my shirt and snaps off my chest to reveal (I glance down) some elegant clockwork. You cannot imagine my surprise.

—Stanley Cavell, The Claim of Reason

The question arises: does Handel With Care compromise beyond redemption its promise? And if so, would the aesthetic insolvency here be the more general fault of artwork or of poiesis?

If we think now we are in the station of a merchant seeking, like "Brandt," with his Mephistophelian charges bill, for what has been promised us from the bill of

1 Wilmern von Bode, Studien zur Geschichte der hollandischen Malerei (Braunschweig: F. Vieweg, 1883). Bode described The Foundling Woman "as a ruin because of the restoration and heavy overpainting. The painting is indeed in a relatively poor state, having suffered through over-cleaning in the past and the paint layer having been flattened by harsh relining. There is substantial abrasion in the background, the flesh tones, and in the dress" (Brown et al., Rembrandt, n. 9). So in 1883 Young Woman already had something of the appearance of a counterfeit.

2 Gerson implies that the painting may have been poorly "patched" and writes that "the painting is much stiffer and less sensitive than similar subjects of that year. This might be due to the patching work of later restorers..." (Rembrandt Paintings, 498).

3 For further information, see my OVER DUE.

4 Mephistopheles and his servants believe that Faust mortgaged his soul in order to receive from them a short-term loan of power (Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Faust, vol. 3 in Erich Trunz, ed., Goethe Werke, 14 vols. [Hamburg: C. Wegner, 1949–60], 11610). Although he pines Faust, Mephistopheles fully believes that Faust will now have to pay off his creditors, or believers (11611). On this account he takes the "deed written in blood" (11613) from his pocket and waves it before the audience as if it were a mortiim radium, not on visible real estate, but on an invisible soul—as if it were a gage morte, or dead pledge. In most earlier versions of the Faust legend, Faust is carried off to hell. But not in Goethe's version. Mephistopheles is about to seal the soul of Faust with his stamp (11612), when heavenly spirits translate to heaven the soul that Mephistopheles believed to be a treasure that was pledged to him (11825–30).
exchange that is *Handel With Care*, we will be disappointed. We will be disappointed because we will not have properly heeded the restorer's or banker's warning: the storehouse is "CLOSED" (fig. 31).

Closed "UNTIL"—when? In American still-life money works, with their various jokes about the relationship between time and money, clocks (of whatever sort) are always crucial. Now, if the timepiece in *Handel With Care* is a simple "stationer's clock"—and hence suggests that the debtor "WILL RETURN" at such and such a time—then all we expectant creditors have to do (if the debtor is trustworthy) is wait until 2:05 for the restoration of the funds overdue to us. But close inspection of the perimeter of the circle in the blue cardboard reveals that the horological face looks out clean through this hole.

It does so much as an artist's thumb might poke right through the thumbhole in the oval palette; or as a Peeping Tom's spying eye might peer completely through the eyelet-hole that, in this view of things, wholly perforates the combination of wood, canvas, and paint that we might have thought represents the oddly angled eye in the eye socket in the oval face of the young woman (fig. 32); or as a Doubting Thomas's hand might pass directly into the flesh-and-blood wound in that famously spiritual and substantial corpus.

So, on this second watch, what we thought was a trompe l'oeil painting of a stationer's clock—as motionless as is the dry paint in one view of the blotches on the palette—turns out to be a trompe l'oeil painting of a mechanical clock. It is a watch, now, whose minute and hour hands move through time and space, or would if they could. The hands would move through time as surely as wet paint blotches on the palette would drip downwards.

This real clock, or rather its trompe l'oeil version, is set at a determinate "certain time"—2:05—, which numbers, insofar as they suggest the ratio of 1:2, convey the geometric numerology of *Handel With Care* as a whole. And unlike the stationary hands

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*In American monetary still-lifes, with their various comments on the relationship between time and money, there are often clocks of various sorts. See Ferdinand Danton, Jr.'s painting *Time is Money*. Plate 3, above. For a cultural history of time in America, see Michael O'Malley, *Keeping Watch: A History of American Time* (New York: Viking, 1990).*
of a stationer’s clock, the minute and hour hand of a real clock move minute by minute. That is, they indicate a present that is always changing into some indeterminate future “time certain.” (From certain time to time certain.) We should wait at this clock forever, still-life yet still alive. We should wait for Godet, Balzac’s dramatic creditor.\footnote{In Honoré de Balzac’s Mercader, considéré sous cet art et en prose (Paris: Librairie théâtrale, 1831), Mercader has a business partner, Godou, who never appears. That Mercader is “behind” Samuel Beckett’s Godot was suggested by Eric Bentley, What Is Theatre? A Query in Climactic Form (New York: Horizon Press, 1956), 158.} For every minute we waited, the minute hand would advance a minute. There would be no end to it. We would be done over, but good.

**Which is Which**

and imitation, to remind ourselves that, for human beings, being illegitimate, or finding out (εὐρωπήσαντες) that one is so, during the course of the quest or hunt, is always a possibility.\(^\text{4}\) So is being an έφαντριον, a found child, like Ishmael. In Corinth, you recall, Oedipus, the know-it-all pawn, the foot soldier, of the gods was called παιδιστός, or “counterfeit.”\(^\text{5}\)

There are no sons or daughters so wise as to know for sure who their real fathers or mothers are. (That would include the kids whose trompe l’œil photographs—“Out with the Kids,” or OK—figure above the horoscope in Handel With Care [fig. 33].)\(^\text{6}\) And likewise there are no mothers or fathers who know for sure who their children are. This denial of kinship, whether between parent and child or between original and copy, still holds in the age of DNA testing and carbon dating. Many people now regard such tests as having the same pinpoint accuracy in regard to consanguinity and counterfeiting that was once ascribed to the oracle at Delphi. But who, really, ever knows, ever could know, what we say the oracle knows?

Still, there are those astonishing and wonderful cases—at once idolatrous, pro-statuesque, and sacred—where such an adage about human progenitors and their offspring as “like father, like son” (or “like mother, like daughter”) is pushed to the infinitesimally small point of difference, a strip of Möbius. This is where parallel lines meet, or where the curve is squared. Here Midas’s “daughter” becomes, to all intents and purposes, so much “like” her “mother” that she “becomes” her mother. This is also

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\(^\text{4}\) For considerations of “detection” in this context, compare the titles of Frankenstein’s *After the Hour* with James West Davidson and Mark Hamilton Lytle’s *After the Fact: The Art of Historical Detection* (New York: Knopf, 1982).

\(^\text{5}\) One day, says the foundling detective Oedipus as he tells the early story of his life (as he thinks he knows it), someone in the Corinthian court called him πλαστός—meaning “counterfeit” as well as “bastard” (Sophocles, *Oedipus the King*; trans. Thomas Gould [Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1970], I. 780). This is the only occurrence of πλαστός in Sophocles’s extant works.

\(^\text{6}\) And just who are those two kids? With them, someone is (“I have gone out with the kids”); or without them, he wants to be (“Put the kids out”). If these are “genuine” photographic portraits, tucked between the blue cardboard and wooden billboard (fig. 55), then they could be taken as evidence of the kids’ real past or present existence. What came of them and their mother is the subject of a Delpheic foray into the OK family best left for another occasion—my *OVER OUR* (forthcoming).
where our chance of discovery (εὑρημα) becomes necessity, likeness becomes identity, and likelihood becomes certainty.

So it is that we have noted here a tendency, germane to the more general economics of art, to conflate ideal representation with real material. In the 1930's, at least, confusing art with politics was the Germerican and German hallmark.

Is Handel With Care a consequential artwork, like Legrand's golden bug or like Poe's "The Gold-Bug"? "Who can tell?" are the last words in "The Gold-Bug." OK?