



InterPARES 2 Project

International Research on Permanent Authentic Records in Electronic Systems

Domain 2

Authenticity, Accuracy and Reliability: Reconciling Arts-related and Archival Literature

DISCUSSION PAPER

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This paper represents a preliminary attempt to address the following questions: are the definitions of the terms *authenticity*, *accuracy* and *reliability* developed in archival theory to describe characteristics of administrative records applicable to documents created in the course of artistic activities? If so, what obstacles to the productive application of these terms are posed by the nature of artistic practice? What further obstacles are posed by the diverse colloquial usages of the terms by artists? Is there common ground between the usage of these terms in archival and art-related scholarly literature?

This paper is divided into three sections. The first section summarizes a terminological framework that inter-relates these terms as they are defined in archival theory. A simple example of document used in an everyday situation is explored throughout the description of the framework. The second section of the paper attempts to apply the archival usages of the terms to two documents created in the course of artistic activities: a publisher's proof corrected by Beethoven in his own hand, and a sketch originally thought to be drawn by Delacroix but more recently presumed to have been drawn by one of his students. The third section of the paper takes as its starting point John Roeder's review of the uses of the terms in arts-related literature, and raises questions as to the applicability of the terminological framework to a broad range of artistic activities.

A. Authenticity, Accuracy and Reliability in Archival Theory

In the InterPARES 2 (IP2) Detailed Proposal to the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) of Canada in 2001, the terms *reliability*, *accuracy* and *authenticity* were provisionally defined in the following way:

The concepts of reliability, accuracy and authenticity of records are at the root of records and archives management decisions. **Reliability** refers to the trustworthiness of a record as a statement of fact. It exists when a record can stand for the fact it is about, and is established by examining the completeness of the record's form and the amount of control exercised on the process of its creation. The records forms generated using new information technologies make increasingly difficult to determine when a record is complete and whether the controls established on its creation are either sufficient or effective for anyone to be able to assume its reliability. **Accuracy** refers to the truthfulness of the content of the record and can only be established through content analysis. With administrative and legal records, it is usually inferred on the basis of the degree of the records' reliability and is only verified when such degree is very low. The volatility of the digital medium, the ease of change, editing, and the difficulty of

version control, all make it harder to presume accuracy on the traditional bases. **Authenticity** refers to the trustworthiness of a record as a record. An authentic record is one that is what it purports to be and has not been tampered with or otherwise corrupted. Authenticity is established by assessing the identity and the integrity of the record. It must be possible to ascertain at all times what a record is, when it was created, by whom, what action or matter it participated in, and what its juridical/administrative, cultural, and documentary contexts were.¹

The primary sources of the above definitions were *Diplomatics: New Uses for an Old Science* (Duranti 1998), “Reliability and Authenticity: The Concepts and Their Implications” (Duranti 1995), and *Trusting Records* (MacNeil 2000).

Of the three concepts, accuracy is the most straightforward, referring to the truthfulness of the content of a record. For example, if a child presented a note to his teacher that indicated that the child had been absent the previous day due to illness, the note would be accurate if the child had in fact been absent due to illness. If the note is in fact a note to the teacher written by the child’s parent, the note would be considered genuine. The accuracy and genuineness of the note could be verified in any number of ways, including consulting the child’s parents, looking for lingering signs of illness, further interrogating the child, etc. Of special concern to our study is how the teacher could *trust* the note to be accurate and genuine without resorting to such investigations. Here is where authenticity and reliability enter in.

Note that in the IP2 Proposal, reliability and authenticity are implied to be aspects of the higher concept of **trustworthiness**. A trustworthy record is both reliable and authentic. To quote Heather MacNeil, “When something is said to be trustworthy it means that it deserves, or is entitled to, trust or confidence. When a record is said to be trustworthy, it means that it is both an accurate statement of facts and a genuine manifestation of those facts. Record trustworthiness thus has two qualitative dimensions: *reliability* and *authenticity*. Reliability means that the record is capable of standing for the facts to which it attests, while authenticity means that a record is what it claims to be” (MacNeil 2000, xi). Both concepts require further clarification.

How does a record stand for the facts to which it attests? “As [a record] takes part in some action, it is seen as evidence of it, that is, as its mirror and proof. The value of such evidence, in terms of validity and weight, depends on the RELIABILITY of the record. A record

¹ Luciana Duranti (2001), “International Research on Permanent Authentic Records in Electronic Systems (InterPARES): Experiential, Interactive and Dynamic Records,” SSHRC MCRI InterPARES 2 Project Proposal, 412-2001, 1.1-11 (emphasis in original). Available at http://www.interpares.org/display_file.cfm?doc=ip2_detailed_proposal.pdf.

is considered reliable when it can be treated as a fact in itself, that is, as the entity of which it is evidence” (Duranti 1995, 6). Further, the reliability of a record rests on its completeness and the rigour of the procedure by which it is created. The crux of this definition is the relationship between a record and its content, specifically, that a record is created in such a way that the likelihood of the record being inaccurate is minimized. It follows that the record should be complete (that is, able to generate the consequences for which it was made) and that procedures be followed in its creation. To return to the example of the note of absence: the note is reliable if it is able to satisfactorily excuse the absence and was created according to a procedure: perhaps the school requires that a note of absence be delivered to the teacher immediately upon return of the child to school, perhaps the school further requires that the note be dated and bear the signature of the child’s parent, and perhaps the note must include the date of absence and a reason for the absence. All of these procedural requirements increase the reliability of the note; if the note is submitted months after the absence, or is not signed by the parent or is missing pertinent information, it is less reliable as a statement of fact.

It follows that a record can be reliable and not accurate, or accurate and not reliable. In the above example, a note that contains true information but is not signed by the child’s parent or delivered in a timely fashion would still be accurate; conversely, a note with the proper signature delivered the next day (and thus reliable) could still contain false information. (Perhaps the parent does not want the school to know the real reason for the child’s absence.) In bureaucratic environments, reliability tends to encourage (but not guarantee) accuracy because it is generally in the interest of records creators to create accurate records, and the establishment of detailed formal procedures to regulate records creation is significant in ensuring their accuracy.

Authenticity is the most difficult of the three terms. In *Diplomatics*, Luciana Duranti distinguishes between diplomatic authenticity and legal authenticity. “Diplomatically authentic documents are those which were written according to the practice of the time and place indicated in the text, and signed with the name(s) of the person(s) competent to create them” (Duranti 1998, 45-6). By contrast, “[l]egally authentic documents are those which bear witness on their own because of the intervention, during or after their creation, of a representative of a public authority guaranteeing their genuineness” (Duranti 1998, 45). Official documents of certain kinds (licenses, certificates, etc.) are much more likely to be legally authenticated; in our example of the note of absence, perhaps an official doctor’s note would be analogous to legal

authentication. However, the vast majority of records are not authenticated in this way. To ensure that the authenticity of a record will not be doubted, record creators often incorporate special signs and seals, formal language and specific phrases as well as signatures and countersignatures as elements of their records. These elements make records difficult to forge or tamper with, and thus make records more trustworthy as records. Thus, “[a] document is authentic when it presents all the elements which are designed to provide it with authenticity” (Duranti 1998, 46).

While the presence of a handful of elements of a record may allow one to presume its authenticity (think again of the note of absence discussed above), experts may make recourse to a more formal method of diplomatic analysis if the authenticity of a record is in doubt. Diplomatic analysis considers a wide variety of a record’s formal elements ranging from the medium, script, seals and signatures to the disposition of the text and the function and status of the record in question. A diplomatic analysis of our note of absence might include studying the handwriting of the text, the paper and ink, the manner in which the note is written (language, sentence structure, vocabulary, etc.), and the signature below the main body of text. If one can identify the handwriting and signature of the child’s parent, and the note is written in such a way as to suggest the parent as the author, then one could conclude that the note is authentic.

Again, it is worth noting that a record can be simultaneously accurate, reliable, and authentic, or any combination of these. Accuracy relates to the truthfulness of a record’s content, while a record’s reliability and authenticity serve in different ways to establish trust that a record’s content is true and that the record is genuine.

In exploring the nature of the authenticity of records, InterPARES 1 researchers focused on two aspects of authenticity: a record’s identity and a record’s integrity. Integrity here means whole and essentially unaltered; if a record has been changed in some way (either intentionally or inadvertently) that compromises its effectiveness it can no longer be considered to have integrity, and by extension, can no longer be trusted as authentic. Identity is more complex. There are a number of critical aspects of a record’s identity, many of which are usually easily ascertainable as they form part of the content of the record. “From an archival-diplomatic perspective, such attributes include: the names of the persons concurring in its formation (i.e., its author, addressee, writer, and originator); its date(s) of creation (i.e., the date it was made, received, and set aside) and its date(s) of transmission; an indication of the action or matter in

which it participates; the expression of its archival bond, which links it to other records participating in the same action (e.g., a classification code or other unique identifier); as well as an indication of any attachment(s) since an attachment is considered an integral part of a record” (MacNeil et al. 2005, 20). Further, a record has contextual identity beyond the archival bond that is its documentary context, including a juridical-administrative context, a provenancial context, a procedural context and a technological context. To return one last time to the example of the note of absence: the note could be presumed authentic if the critical aspects of its identity were known and if it was verifiably whole and essentially unaltered. The author (and writer) is presumably the parent of the child; the addressee is presumably the school; the date it was made should be evident on the face of the note; the action or matter in which it participates is evident in the content of the note, and should the note be placed in the child’s file, the note would have a larger documentary context within which its identity could be understood.

To summarize, InterPARES research has built a terminological framework that is based on traditional diplomatics and archival science; this framework has expanded and clarified this vocabulary to some degree to better cope with the challenges raised by authentically preserving electronic records. The central concepts of this framework are: **accuracy** (the truthfulness of the content of the record), **trustworthiness** (deserving of trust or confidence), **reliability** (the trustworthiness of a record as a statement of fact, created by the completeness of a record’s form and the amount of control exercised on the process of its creation), **authentication** (guaranteed genuine by a public authority), **authenticity** (trustworthiness of a record as a record, exhibiting all of the formal elements designed to provide it with authenticity), **identity** (persons, dates, matter and archival bond), and **integrity** (whole and unaltered). It is these definitions that I propose to carry forward into an examination of the usage of the term *authenticity* (and other related terms) in regard to documents created in the course of artistic practice.

B. A Preliminary Application of the Terminological Framework to Artistic Documents

Before embarking on a more thorough analysis of the use of the terms authenticity, reliability and accuracy in various artistic disciplines, it would perhaps be useful to subject the terminological framework outlined above to the consideration of two paper documents created in the course of artistic activities. The first is the publisher Artaria’s proof of the first edition of Beethoven’s *Sonatas for Piano Op. 2* corrected by Beethoven in his own hand; the second is a

sketch entitled *Seated Lion*, once attributed to Delacroix but now believed to be the work of an imitator of Delacroix.²

Does the term *accuracy* pertain to the Beethoven proof or the sketch in the style of Delacroix? If accuracy depends upon the truthfulness of the content, it would be difficult to see how the term could be profitably applied to either the annotated proof or the sketch, as neither document relates or attests to facts in the normal sense of the word. All the same, if one assumes Beethoven's purpose in annotating the proof to be indicating to his publisher errors that needed to be corrected, then the document could be considered accurate insofar as it accurately represents Beethoven's conception of how the music should appear on the page. Indeed, in discussing the incorporation of Beethoven's corrections into the first published edition, Stroh uses the term accuracy: "By overseeing no fewer than three proof stages, at least one and probably two of them also reviewed by the composer, Artaria had good reason to trust the accuracy of its edition" (Stroh 2000, 296). In the case of the *Seated Lion*, the truthfulness of the content does not seem to be of issue, unless one were primarily concerned with the sketch's verisimilitude.³ In fact, Hawkins uses the term *accurate* when describing the rendering of the lion's physiognomy (Hawkins 1973, 65).

As outlined in the terminological framework, the trustworthiness of a record depends upon its reliability and authenticity. *Reliability* derives from the completeness (and thus effectiveness) of the record and the rigour of the procedure within which the record is created. The term *reliability* may apply only if the term *accuracy* applies; a record can only be trusted as a statement of fact if there is a fact that the record can accurately represent. In the case of the Beethoven proof, one could assume the record to be reliable to a reasonably high degree as it is capable of representing Beethoven's intentions in regard to error correction and is clearly embedded in a procedure (the preparation of the proof is followed by the composer's annotations of the proof which is followed by the correction of the proof by the publisher). To recall Stroh's comment cited above, the first edition of the Beethoven Sonatas is reliable because of the rigorous procedure followed in producing the edition (three proof stages); the reliability of the printed edition allows us to "trust" its "accuracy." The term reliability would not seem to apply

² The following discussion is based largely on information provided in Patricia Stroh's "Evolution of an Edition: The Case of Beethoven's Opus 2" and Harriette Hawkins' section of "Problems of Authenticity in Nineteenth- and Twentieth-century Art."

³ See Roeder 2004. If one imagines the purpose of creating the sketch to be rendering the conception of the artist onto paper, then the artist could perhaps deem the sketch to be an accurate or inaccurate rendering of his/her conception. I think however, that considerations of the purposes of creating artworks is beyond the scope of this discussion.

to the *Seated Lion* as the sketch does not accurately attest to a fact nor is it embedded in an administrative procedure.⁴

Can we apply the term *authenticity* to these documents in the sense defined above? Considering that the terminological framework was developed to be applied to records, it follows that term *authenticity* so defined applies to the Beethoven sketch (inasmuch as the Beethoven sketch is a record) but does not necessarily apply to the *Seated Lion*. Still, are there aspects of the definition of authenticity outlined above that nonetheless apply to the *Seated Lion*, and perhaps correspond to more generic uses of the term? To answer these questions requires a more thorough consideration of each document in turn.

As noted above, authenticity refers to the trustworthiness of a record as a record, and an authentic record is one that is what it purports to be and has not been tampered with or otherwise corrupted. Why do we trust the Beethoven proof to be what it purports to be? Few steps were taken to ensure that the authenticity of the corrected proof would never be in doubt, but this is the case with most records that serve an administrative function but are unlikely to be of legal consequence. If one were to question the authenticity of this record, a careful (diplomatic) analysis would reveal that the annotations are in Beethoven's hand, that the paper is of a quality and watermark consistent with that used by Artaria to print proofs in 1795, and that the russet crayon used by Beethoven to note corrections is typical for Beethoven.⁵ A comparison of the corrected proof with the first edition shows that Artaria incorporated almost all of Beethoven's corrections in the published edition. On the basis of all of this evidence one can presume the authenticity of the corrected proof.

Can the InterPARES 1 focus on the identity and integrity of electronic records be productively applied to the Beethoven proof? The emphasis on identity and integrity is well-considered in light of the bureaucratic environment in which most records are created. Electronic records management systems typically generate a profile of each record as it is created; the record profile makes explicit the critical aspects of the record's identity outlined above. Integrity becomes of heightened concern when records are migrated from one technology to another, and records preservers must take care to implement and document strategies for ensuring that the

⁴ It becomes clear that from an archival perspective, there is a fundamental difference between the two artistic documents, specifically that the Beethoven proof is a document *and* a record while the *Seated Lion* is a document but not a record.

⁵ Interestingly, there are two ink corrections on the score in another hand that were ignored by Artaria and not included in subsequent editions of the sonatas.

integrity of the records in their care is not compromised. But are the aspects of critical aspects of a document's identity the same for bureaucratic records and for documents created in the course of artistic activities? Probably not. Had Beethoven been in the habit of creating profiles for proofs like the one in question, a number of issues relating to the genesis of his works (issues of great interest scholars) would be resolved, but the fact remains that Beethoven's method of handling proofs adequately served his needs. Though much information pertaining to the proof (for example, when it was created) remains unknown, it must be recognized that record creation practices will inevitably be *ad hoc* in unregulated environments.

The issue of the authenticity of the *Seated Lion* is the focus of Harriette Hawkins' article. Her sole concern is to explain why the *Seated Lion* is not an authentic Delacroix, authentic here meaning that Delacroix is the author of the drawing.⁶ As with the Beethoven proof, few steps were taken to ensure that the authenticity of the drawing would never be doubted; most notably the drawing is unsigned. There is a vermillion stamp (E. D.) on the back of the drawing similar to the stamp affixed by executor's of Delacroix's estate to about 6000 of his drawings, but close examination reveals this stamp to be an imitation of the Delacroix stamp. Ultimately, stylistic considerations convince Hawkins that the drawing is not by Delacroix, specifically the motifs used and the approach to form. Investigations such as this are highly reminiscent of diplomatic analysis. If Delacroix had been in the habit of stamping his own drawings *as he completed them* and carefully guarded the stamp and ink, one could fairly easily arrive at a presumption authenticity for his drawings. In reality, the stamps were affixed by Delacroix's executor's after his death to drawings they believed to be by Delacroix. This does not preclude the existence of unstamped drawings by Delacroix nor does it guarantee that a thus-stamped drawing is indeed a Delacroix. Again, it was within the artist's power to clarify these issues for subsequent generations of scholars, but Delacroix's method of creating and storing drawings was sufficient to his needs at the time.

It is my hope that this discussion of these two documents has helped to clarify the meanings of the terms accuracy, reliability, and authenticity as applied in archival science and diplomatics. It remains to explore how these terms are applied in artistic activities, both in theory and practice.

⁶ Again, see Roeder 2004.

C. Accuracy, Reliability, and Authenticity in the Arts

The uses of the term *authenticity* in the literature relating to the arts is the focus of John Roeder's IP2 discussion paper, "Authenticity, Accuracy, and Reliability of Artworks: A Review of the Literature, with Some Notes about the Challenges Presented by Digital Media."⁷ The first common usage of *authenticity* noted by Roeder (citing Levinson 1990, Goodman 1996, Benjamin 1955, Dutton 2003 and others) connects an artwork with the activity of a particular artist in a particular place and time. "For most art audiences, the word "authentic" carries a primary sense of *original*..., [h]owever what constitutes an original work of art varies considerably with conceptions of what the work itself is. The notion of originality is most straightforward, and conforms most clearly to diplomatic conceptions, for artworks that are *artifacts*, that is, enduring, unchanging physical objects—such as a painting..." (Roeder 2004, 4) This usage can be easily applied to both the Beethoven proof and *The Seated Lion* discussed above, as they are both artifacts (autographic, in Goodman's classification scheme), and unique physical objects. According to the terminological framework described in the first section of this paper, this usage corresponds most closely with *genuineness*; an artifact would be *genuine* if it were indeed made by a particular person in a particular place at a particular time. The artistic literature in some cases uses the terms authentic and genuine interchangeably. "Genuineness...is based on and reflects a direct causal relation to the artist" (Levinson 1990, 106, cited by Roeder 2004, 4).

Of course, the issue remains of how we know an artifact is genuine; in other words, on what basis do we *trust* the artifact to be genuine? According to the terminological framework, we trust a record to be genuine because it is reliable (complete in its form and created according to procedure) and authentic (exhibiting all of the formal elements designed to provide it with authenticity, whole and unaltered, its identity is known). A presumption of the genuineness of an autographic artwork may be arrived at in two ways: (1) evidence of the work's provenance (probably in the form of records such as inventories and bills of sale) and (2) analysis of the work itself. This second way is essentially *authentication*⁸ and is fraught with difficulty for a number a reasons (Roeder 2004). The first way takes us back to an examination of records, for which a theoretical apparatus and practical method already exist. Of special interest in such cases

⁷ This paper is still in draft form; references and citations are made to the second draft, posted to the IP2 Web site in June 2005. Available at http://www.interpares.org/display_file.cfm?doc=ip2_aar_arts_roeder_v2.pdf.

⁸ As noted by Luciana Duranti in her commentary within the Roeder paper.

is the necessity of preserving the provenancial record along with the artifact. As Levinson notes, “Chains of thought connect us to particular people and things, all right, but they are not so treasured nor so carefully guarded as chains of material causation” (Levinson 1990, 106, cited by Roeder 2004, 4).

The second broad category of described by Roeder comprises artworks that are ephemeral in nature, here meaning created within a system of symbols and not linked with a single artifact. For artwork (notated music, literary texts, notated choreography, architecture) whose expression is preserved within a symbolic system, application of the term authenticity is problematic. While one can more easily speak of the authenticity of an individual document (artifact) upon which the text is inscribed (manuscripts and publications, musical scores, architectural drawings), the notion of an authentic text independent of a particular physical instantiation of the text is very difficult, especially where multiple versions of a text exist. Applying the terminological framework to such allographic documents is in this case impossible, as the framework was designed to illuminate the nature of the relationship between documents (perhaps extensible to artifacts) and events (persons, dates, and actions).

Roeder suggests an interesting parallel between notated artworks and electronic records; both are encoded and later instantiated according to the specifications of the code. When the meaning of the code is obscured over time, the question of the “authenticity” of the instantiation is raised. This suggests a third broad category of artworks: those that exist as instantiations of a set of instructions. This category includes media art, musical performances, theatrical performances, dance, etc.; this category, like the second category, comprises ephemeral artworks: no physical artifact is co-extensive with the artwork. The relationship between the encoded text and the instantiation is not so much a question of *authenticity*, but *accuracy*: does the instantiation accurately realize the instructions encoded in the symbolic system?⁹

Inevitably, debates over the accuracy (or authenticity) of a performance lead back to the subjective nature of interpreting the symbol system, be it language, music notation, dance notation or architectural drawing. Of course, it has always been thus. The interesting aspect of the parallel between ephemeral artworks and electronic records is in *how an instantiation represents a text and how a record represents a fact*. Or to return to our original question: on

⁹ Note that this is a colloquial usage of the term in relation to music and dance performance.

what basis do we *trust* something (instantiation or record) to be what it purports to be? This is perhaps where archival notions of reliability and authenticity might be profitably applied.

Reliability rests upon completeness and effectiveness, and on the rigour of the procedures through which the record is created. What strategies exist or could be developed that make instantiations of artworks more reliably accurate? To what extent is this the responsibility of the author of the symbolic text and to what extent is this the responsibility of the interpreter?

Diplomatic authenticity is presumed on the basis of the presence of specific formal elements; many of these elements (seals, watermarks, signatures) were historically incorporated into documents specifically to make forgery more difficult. What elements could be incorporated into ephemeral artworks that would make misinterpretation more difficult?

These questions remain to be addressed. It must first be decided whether the terminological framework properly captures the relationships between the various terms. It must then be decided whether proceeding with the terminological framework as it stands will be productive for addressing issues of authenticity in relation to artistic activities. It will then be necessary to address the framework to further specific examples drawn from the literature and from the case studies undertaken by InterPARES 2.

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