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A Reply to Puolakka

Serge Grigoriev

From what I understand, the author agrees that the concerns I raise in my paper are to be reckoned with; however, he thinks that Danto's latest work can accommodate them and, therefore, my critical stance is either outdated or altogether unwarranted. It may be so. Yet, it seems to me that the author is rather oblivious to the nature of the debate (between Margolis and Danto) that sets the stage for our own points of contention.

To begin with, Margolis's argument against Danto does not substantively depend on his relativist commitments. Nor is it "sudden," although it may be "aggressive," as all attacks on the established dogma, by necessity, must be. The argument that Margolis offers is, in fact, very simple, and I am sure that the author will concede its strength regardless of whether he will thereby be inclined to accept my own conclusions regarding the matter. Danto, like so many other philosophers of the last century, takes the physicalist perspective for granted, without much concern for what physics in this last century has come to be. Without the assumption that physics, in its popularized version, provides the basic ground for making sense of things in our world, the whole indiscernibility argument simply doesn't make sense. The artworks are *physically* indiscernible from mere real things. The strength of Danto's argument derives precisely from the observation that physical properties are not enough to account for our appreciation of art. Therefore, Danto proposes that we should supplement our intuitions about the physical with a normative stance deferring to the perspective of the artworld and its institutions.

Normativity, of course, is there simply because we defer to the norms of one institution rather than another. Margolis' point, and mine by derivation, is, I think, a simple one. Instead of privileging one paradigm (a physicalist one) and trying to see what moves will bring it in line with our intuitions about art, we should just change the paradigm and concede that what we see in a work of art is not a "physical object +" but an entity in its own right: a human entity, to be precise. Just as when we see a person on the street, we see a person, not a physical entity to which we may impute certain intentional properties, if we will. I agree with my critic that Danto may come up with sophisticated maneuvers to reconcile his theory with our basic sense of humanity. However, I do agree with Margolis that, if our perspective were centered on human experience to begin with, we wouldn't need the compensating maneuvers.

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