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ARTHUR C. DANTO

The Transfiguration of the Commonplace

IN THE PRESENT STATE of the artworld, it is possible that a painting be exhibited which is merely a square of primed canvas, or a sculpture shown which consists of a box, of undistinguished carpentry, coated with a banal tan chemtone applied casually with a roller. Such works may be scored as largely empty, as indeed they are when we contrast the former with *The Legend of the True Cross* by Piero della Francesca, or the latter with the *Apollo Belvedere*. Yet the painting is not empty in the way in which a square of primed canvas, indiscernible from our work, may be: an empty canvas awaiting an Annunciation, say; or the way in which a crate indiscernible from our sculpture may be, which awaits a cargo of bric-à-brac and a bill of lading. For "empty" as applied to our works is an aesthetic and critical judgment, presupposing that its subjects are artworks already, however inscrutable may be the differences between them and objects which, since not artworks, reject such predicates as a class.

Our works are titled "Untitled." This is a title of sorts rather than a mere statement of fact, as it sometimes is when an artist neglects to give his work a title and it enters the *catalogue raisonné* unbaptized. So are those mere objects untitled which happen not to be discernible from our works, but

this by dint of an ontological classification: mere things, in contrast with artworks, are unentitled to titles, even such churlish ones as "Untitled." Titles, of course, are frequently directions for interpretation, which may not always be helpful, as when a painting of some apples is fantastically titled. *Annunciation*: but here, with our square, the title is somewhat more directive, saying about the thing it is to be applied to that no interpretation is intended. And predictably the artist upon being asked what his work is about will say that it is about nothing. I am certain that he is not telling us that nothing is what it is about, after the manner of Chapter Two of *L'être et le néant*. But I can imagine a work, indiscernible from his by virtue of art-historical accident, that happens to be about nothing: a picture of the void, less a case of vacuous mimesis than mimesis of vacuity. The mere empty canvas, like the unfilled crate, also can be said not to be about anything, but only in the sense in which mere objects are logically exempt from interpretation. Our artist has produced something which is of the right sort to be about something, but in consequence of artistic fiat it happens only not to be about anything. Thus I may raise my arm "for no reason." But saying it was not done for a reason does not refuse application of the question why I did it: it merely refuses the question. I may refuse application of the question if my arm had gone up without my having raised it, by external percussion or

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internal spasm. Mere bodily movements are not done, hence not done for a reason or for *no* reason. Artworks may indeed reject interpretation, but are of the right sort to receive them.

So we, in any case, now have three indiscernible objects, one about nothing, one not about anything, and one, because a mere thing, neither about nothing nor not about anything. So which of the three are artworks, or which of the artworks has content, are clearly not matters to be settled from scrutiny of their faces. To settle the matter of their differentiation, accordingly, we must go outside the objects and into the atmosphere of their ontological status, and seek criteria underdetermined by retinal indiscriminate. I should like to indicate one such factor in the course of aborting an objection that my difficulties arise only because I have begun with the eviscerated works the artworld now enfranchises, where only the concept of art keeps art from collapsing into reality. Consider, then, *The Polish Rider*, where a solitary horseman rides in visible silence past a mysterious architecture toward some profound destiny: a work of vision, depth, and meaning. Now I throw a lot of paint, varnish, standoil into a centrifuge, give it a spin, and allow it to splat against a canvas: and *that splat*, by one of those freaks of statistical mechanics, is indiscernible from *The Polish Rider*. Nelson Goodman has argued that no two works can be so alike that protracted educated peering will not in time discriminate between them, but I am supposing indiscernibility as a logical possibility or, if I must give Goodman his point, let us imagine that Julius Held, applying morellian techniques, draws my attention to the fact that the "drawing" of the left front hoof cannot be by Rembrandt. I put "drawing" in quotes, for the question I would raise is whether we can speak of drawing, given the information of the causal provenance of marks which admittedly would look like drawing if we lacked this information. More deeply, I am asking whether anything with this sort of causal history can have the same meaning as *The Polish Rider* with its assumed history, or meaning of the relevant sort at all. If a nest of vipers in its

random several coils should fall into a shape which resembles the imperative "Buy Ampex!" I might consider this a Communication through the medium of serpents. But have I a right to speak of their ordinary and more typical collective disposition of their bodies as Nonsense? My own view is the splatted disposition of colors, though it resembles a deep and searching work is neither deep nor searching in its own right, nor has it any meaning, nor is it of the right sort to have one. It is after all possible for two things to resemble one another with radically different meanings: a quotation is about an utterance, not about what the utterance is about: and the echo of an utterance is not about anything at all. So one sort of condition for something to be in candidacy for an interpretation, title, and structure will be certain assumptions with regard to its causes. And causes are not the sorts of things we can read off the surfaces of alleged effects, all the more so since indiscernible objects, as we just have seen, may have radically divergent causal histories. Something is an artwork, then, only relative to certain art-historical presuppositions, failing which it *can* prove merely to have been a thing, with no importance for art save what importance the confusion between it and an artwork may have for the philosophy of art. So everything I shall be concerned with in this paper will have to be general enough to cover without discriminating between my two 'Untitled's at one extreme, and *The Polish Rider* or *La Tempesta* at the other. So all that may be pertinent to enjoyment of the latter, to appreciation of style and touch and the delectation of paint and form, will have to be put to one side. What separates 'Untitled' from its commonplace counterpart which merely is a real thing, is of vastly greater philosophical importance than whatever may divide it under the perspectives of connoisseurship from its immeasurably richer ontological peers.

II

The central question in the philosophy of art is why art should be the sort of thing of which there should be a philosophy, for not

just anything admits of philosophical treatment; and if art is one of the things that does so, this has to tell us something about art and philosophy at once. I am implying that it is not accidental that from the beginning philosophers have felt constrained to address themselves to art, as though they intuited that art has those conceptual properties philosophically relevant subjects share. Reference to shared properties sounds provocative to the Wittgensteinian, who at least with games and works of art has failed to find any and suggests there may be none. We could, he argues, imagine an art-historical tradition in which the class of artworks indeed shared common traits—say if artists produced nothing but icons—but the icon-defining characteristics only by grace of historical accident may serve as art-defining traits: and revolutions are conceptually entertainable in which artworks no longer satisfy the traits of iconicity. So for each proffered trait: definition is incompatible with revolution, and it is analytical to the concept of art that the class of artworks may always be revolutionized by admission into it of objects different from all heretofore acknowledged artworks, “Untitled” being the latest instance, resembling to the naked eye a mere real object more than it resembled the *Transfiguration* and the class of things which resemble it (to restrict ourselves to the genre of painting). So much the worse, one may say, for the naked eye: there may *be* no set of one-place predicates true of all and only artworks, without it following that there is no set of predicates adequate to the purpose. Our original triad of indiscernibles suggests that the elusive definiens might be found somewhere in the range of relational predicates, since induction over their *manifest* properties has by the construction of the case to fail. Thus we would fail to find something which would distinguish the true from the false propositions were we to restrict our search to the manifest properties of propositions, without it following that a definition of truth might not be found were we to widen our compass enough to include the relational predicates. If, for instance, the expression theory of art were correct, being an expression would require

standing in a certain relationship to an artist, and there could be no nonaccidental foreclosure of which things could be expressions: some of them might exactly resemble non-expressions so far as their manifest properties went. Still, a property does not become immediately germane to philosophy through its relationality. “Is an uncle,” for example, is relational without having obviously philosophical interest, so that even should it be clear that “is an artwork” were covertly relational, this would not show its immediate relevance to philosophy, and the central question in the philosophy of art would stand unanswered.

For some while I have been urging the view that philosophy is concerned *au fond* with what I metaphorically characterize as the space between language and the world. The metaphor is intended to dramatize the fact that words, though plainly parts of the world in the respect that they have causes and effects, may nevertheless be regarded as external to the world in the respect that the world (themselves included in their intraworldly capacity) may be represented (or misrepresented) by means of them, and that the world is what makes them true or false, or, for the matter, empty. Taken as having representational properties, and hence subject to semantical assessment, there exists an essential contrast between language and reality, the latter being logically immune to such assessment since devoid of representationality. Things stand to words in a quite different relationship than that (or those) in which they stand to one another, as words stand to one another in very different sorts of relations than things do: it is not as a thing, for instance, that one sentence *entails* another. We have a class of terms which I speak of as our semantical vocabulary, for characterizing the modes of liaison between expressions of various sorts and reality—inference, denotation, satisfaction, exemplification, and the like—and a further class of words for registering the success or failure of such liaisons—“true,” “exists,” “empty,” and many others, along with their appropriate antonyms: and my claim has generally been that all and only philosophical concepts require in their analysis at least one of each

sort of term. I shall not here attempt to defend or even support this claim, but I add that these semantical notions may be extended to vehicles of representation other than words as narrowly construed: to maps and graphs and diagrams, to images, concepts, and ideas, to gestures, beliefs, and feelings—to cite only some exemplars of things it makes sense, as it does not with mere real objects, to ask what they are *of* or are *about*, what is their content or meaning, and whether, in a slightly stretched but logically faithful sense of the terms, they are true or false. It may be objected that we apply such predicates to real things: we speak of true friends and false pregnancies, for example: but the crucial test for the semantical predicate is this, that a false x is an x , whereas false pregnancies are not pregnancies, nor false fronts fronts (since they lack backs). It may be claimed, of the imperative randomly coiled out by the vipers of section I, that it is a false sentence, meaning that it is no sentence at all: only if it is in *that* sense truly a sentence do truth or falsity in the semantical sense arise at all, so far as they may arise to begin with for imperatives.

What I wish provisionally to propose on the basis of these highly schematic and vulnerable remarks is that artworks, in whatever further sense in which it may be asked whether they are linguistic (whether Art is a Language), are linguistic to the extent of admitting semantical assessment and in contrasting in the required essential way with reality. We can ask, for instance, under appropriate interpretations, for synonymy classes of artworks, which will be those artworks about the same thing, e.g., the class of Diderot portraits, though identification of something as belonging to a given such class is not automatic, or programmable as a simple recognitional skill, as our examples will have shown. Thus of our triad, questions of aboutness are appropriate only for two of its members, though rejected from within is the application of the concept for one of them. Understanding something as an artwork gives rise to two possible mistakes of ontological mislocation: taking something as an artwork when it is not one, and taking something as a real object when

it is an artwork. These mistakes, of course, are of a different order than mistakes in interpretation as such, e.g., taking something as about nothing when it is merely not about anything, for the latter are possible only when the interpretanda are taken already as artworks.

That they stand at a distance from reality, and that they accordingly locate those who understand them in their own terms at a distance from reality, begins to be an explanation of the philosophical pertinence of artworks. Indeed, I would venture the reckless hypothesis in conceptual archeology that a culture has a concept of art only so far as it has that sort of concept of reality which depends upon the sort of contrast I have been drawing: and that it has the latter only so far as it has philosophy (which not all cultures have). This leaves the problem, of course, of further distinguishing artworks from the other vehicles of representation, but it will have sufficed my immediate aims to have shown the space in which the distinctions must be drawn. In the remainder of this paper I would like to establish the pertinence of these semantical considerations to paintings. "Suppose a person were to ask us: In what wise things are the painters knowledgeable?" Socrates himself asks, rhetorically, at *Protagoras* 312-d, "We should answer: In what relates to the making of likenesses." Obviously, not all paintings are likenesses, and not all even artistic likenesses are paintings: so it will not hurt to draw examples from other genre in which likeness is relevant, and to see what we can do with paintings when it is not.

III

It would be an exercise in Austinian fastidiousness to lay out the differences within the class of mimetic concepts: replication, duplication, imitation, counterpart, fake, copy, and the like. I shall concern myself only with a subclass, which I shall term *mimemes*, which is to include imitation. Inclusion in the class clearly requires more than standing in the relationship of resemblance to some other thing, for a pair of identical twins (or just two crows) will re-

seem one another without either being a *mimeme* of the other, not least of all because mimesis entails an asymmetrical relationship with an "original," while resemblance, as Goodman has emphasized, is symmetrical. In part the asymmetry may be due to causal factors: the original has to be invoked in causal explanation of a *mimeme*. But this is insufficient, since a child may resemble its father to an uncanny degree without being its father's *mimeme*. The child may in time impersonate his father, but then the way in which a father enters into the causal history of his impersonator(s) differs from the way in which he enters into the causal history of his child, even if child and impersonator are one, since a man's impersonators may stand in no biological relationship to him at all. The original of a *mimeme* is not the latter's *mimeme*, though cases may be imagined when it becomes one: O's *mimeme* may get lost, only to be replaced with O himself—as when a father, say a prime minister, takes over his son's role in a political skit when the son falls ill and the play must go on, and by impersonating his impersonator come by weird circumstance to impersonate himself. Let us forego consideration of such logical nightmares and stick to simpler cases, though we shall shortly see perplexities epistemologically as well as ontologically in the complex one. I mean there can be a problem when a person uses a real object as a *mimeme* of a *trompe-l'oeil* painting of the very same real object it is.

Imagine a man who dresses and acts the way women in a given society dress and act. Mere resemblance in habit and gait will not as such make of him a female impersonator, for he may by accidental circumstance believe that this is just the way one dresses and acts, perhaps because, like the young Achilles, he is brought up with the women and affects their dress and manner the way any of us affects the dress and manner of those with whom we are brought up. We all imitate our models, but we do not *impersonate* them unless our imitating is also *about* what is imitated: a child voicing words he has heard is repeating those words, but not necessarily impersonating his teacher. In any case, aboutness is the feature which surely

elevates feminine behavior to the level of impersonation, and now our understanding and evaluation of what the man does will depend upon whether it just replicates female behavior, or whether female behavior is what it is about. This would mark a difference, too, between the female impersonator and the transvestite, though each is aware of his own sexual identity: the transvestite is not *representing* the opposite sex, and his case lacks any significant semantical features. So in general we will say that A is a *mimeme* of B if, in addition to resembling and causally explainable relative to B, B is what A is about. It is consistent with this that B and A share all manifest properties, like the two spheres sometimes enlisted in discussion of Leibniz's principle of indiscernibility: a common property-set allows for an invidious difference in ontological status if sphere A is sphere B's *portrait*. Then B has a semantical feature A lacks, by virtue of which we can speak of B as real in relation to A, though nothing intrinsic would allow for such a distinction. This, incidentally, is why reality should seem so difficult a concept for philosophers, paralyzed by the request to show some *intrinsic* difference between a real thing and a nonreal one, impossible in the case at hand. Of course we sometimes do employ "real" other than in contrast with semantical notions, as in the domain of illusions: but a genuine illusion involves a difference, surely, in the manifest properties at least, though this is probably not the main basis for the difference. I shall return to illusions in a moment.

IV

Aristotle speaks of the pleasure men take in imitations, and I think it true that there is a special order of pleasure here, quite different from the pleasure they may take, if they take any, in the originals of these: as I may take a (mild) pleasure in the imitations someone gives of the animal noises, though I take none to speak of in the noises animals make. And if there is no difference in the pleasure, then it is the noise in either instance which pleases me, rather than the fact that one is in imitation of the other. I may

take pleasure, thus, in how well he “takes off” (striking phrase!) a crow, but the pleasure here is available only if I know what he is imitating and that he is imitating it, and the latter will depend upon my belief that the noise in question is not the real thing it rather is of, and in the former case that these are not just the noises the poor man makes, lacking a normal larynx. It is here that imitations must be distinguished from illusions, for the latter depend upon causing *false* beliefs, namely that one is seeing or hearing something different from what in fact one is seeing or hearing, and though there may be men who take pleasure in illusions—I refer to illusive experiences rather than experiences of illusion—such necessarily are retroactive and lie in the discovery that they have been fooled, or could have been. Obviously, there can be illusionistic components in imitations: Plato in part based his condemnation of art and of the senses on their suspectability to the provocation of false beliefs, and he had in mind such cases as that in which the head of a statue is enlarged when the figure is to be shown on a column and intended to be seen from below, in order that it not look disproportionately small in that perspective. But those who see it, while they may believe they are seeing a normally proportioned figure, will not believe they are seeing a *man*. Realizing something to have been an illusion is like seeing the point of a joke or being taken by surprise: they involve a cognitive transformation in the audience which imitations as imitations never do, unless they are misperceived, which is irrelevant to their logic. That is to say, they must be initially appreciated as imitations and hence not real.

These cognitive factors rule out as sources of such pleasures the sorts of *simulacrae* advanced by Socrates at a critical point in the *Republic* as on a footing with the likenesses artists aspire to, namely mirror-images: for the latter are rarely in their own right sources of pleasure. A vain person takes no pleasure in (to use a sexist pronoun) her own reflection as such: she takes pleasure in the way *she* looks, and supposes it to be her features she is confronting. Com-

parably, it is the voice of Claudia Muzio which gives us pleasure when we hear a recording of it: the recording is not an imitation of her voice but her voice itself, though we may wish to draw a distinction between hearing it in person (alas impossible) and through the compromised medium of gram-aphony. Guardedly, this may be extended to photographs, as we shall see. The best case of someone who takes pleasure in mirror-images would be the mirror-grinder, possessed for technical reasons with an interest in undistortedness. Mirrors *may* play a special cognitive role in that we are enabled through them to see what we logically are unable otherwise to see, namely our faces and hence ourselves (if the eyes are mirrors of the soul): which is why Hamlet’s image of a play as a mirror is apt in the context, rather than an interesting theory about dramatic art to be generalized beyond it. *His* play is intended specifically for the king, who is meant to see himself in it, see his own acts from without, and hence have his *conscience* trapped. So he stands to the play in a very different relation from some sundry member of the audience, who views it merely as the imitation of an action (if Aristotle is right). Of course any of us might find ourselves reflected in a work of art, and so discover something about himself, though only in a stretched sense was that archaic torso of Apollo the mirror image of the poet who resolved to change his life on the basis of it: I suppose he saw his *softness* reflected in the statue’s strength.

I think that with human beings—and this is a mark of humanity—pleasures, or at least those pleasures to which we attach any special importance—are dependent upon certain cognitive presuppositions, and will not survive discovery that the relevant beliefs are false. Sexual pleasure, for instance, will ordinarily not survive the discovery that one is having that pleasure with the wrong partner, or at least the wrong sort of partner. Someone’s pleasure in food similarly presupposes beliefs about the nature and provenance of the food: the ragout turns to ashes in the mouth of an orthodox muslim when he discovers its main constituent to be of pork, or in any of our mouths, upon infor-

mation that we have been relishing human flesh, unless we are cannibals, in which case the reverse of this is true when we discover we have been handed veal instead of missionary. These are illusions of sorts, and what specially marks the pleasure in mimesis is that what we are witnessing is nonreal: that one is seeing men play at dueling, or couples in a stage embrace. Here, I think, the pleasures of mimetic art are like the pleasures of fantasy, where it must be plain to the fantasizer that it is the imagined episode he is enjoying and in part because it is imagined. Fantasists are notoriously subject to a certain guilt, thinking they must be morbid because their fantasies are, or brutal if their fantasies are sadistic, when in fact it is almost a psychological certainty that they would be horrified to witness, much less participate in episodes delicious in reverie. But the pleasure then requires beliefs which imply a grip on the distinction between day-dream and reality and if they are like Plato's despot instead, their pleasure is no longer that of the fantasist but rather of one who believes himself really to be doing or undergoing some forbidden thing. There are primitive people, and this may be a criterion of primitivity, who do not distinguish between dream experiences and waking ones, having no concept of reality, since all their experiences are of a piece as they view them, any differences in discontinuity being explained with reference to the belief that in what *we* call dreams, the spirit has vacated his proper body and is lodged in another one in which the things are really being done. In our scheme, of course, dreams differ from fantasies in that we do not believe them to be dreams while having them: which is why fantasies are closer to art than dreams are.

When mimetic artists pursue some program of realism, special measures must be taken in order that imitations not collapse into illusions by inducing false ontological beliefs in the audience, though the ancients appear to have been obsessed with the possibility of illusion, thinking him the great artist whose painted grapes were pecked at by duped birds, which is the antithesis of an artistic success. The fact that something is

taking place on a stage is a powerful inhibitor against illusion, since internalization of the conventions of staging makes it virtually impossible for the viewer to believe that what is happening there is happening really, however realistic the enactment: which leaves always a possibility of reverse illusions, as when the man playing Hamlet really is stabbed by the man playing Laertes and left flat on the stage while the players take their final bows, the audience delighting in this as an exercise of thespian wit. Parallel things may be said about galleries and museums, and when nothing in the context determines an artistic space, realism has to be muted if illusions are to be aborted. Thus when theater is taken to the street, masks and costumes acquire the crucial role of establishing the boundaries between art and life. Welles had an easy time in inducing the famous illusion over the radio by violating the conventions which enabled an audience to distinguish skits from newscasts. And painters and sculptors after the Council of Trent were asked to violate the conventions of *apartheid* in order to cause emotional illusions in audiences who were to be made to believe that they were confronting the sufferings of their savior and their saints: which is the explanation of the remarkable expansions of the boundaries of artistic space and the combinations of painting, sculpture, and architecture in the High Baroque. However much we admire this enterprise, it is an abuse of art if the appreciation of art as art presupposes an active awareness of the cognitive boundaries.

v

It seems to me that the importance of art must be bound up with the logical fact that it puts reality at a distance, though I have no good theory to offer as to why this is important, unless it is, as Eliot intones, that humankind cannot bear very much reality, in which case there are two avenues of respite, one dionysiac through obliteration of distinctions and one apollonian through dislocation of the real. Let us at this point think about the remarkable mimetic theory

developed by Nietzsche, according to whom early tragedy evolved from and stood in mimetic relationship to dionysiac rites. In the historical course of this transformation, celebrants were transformed into chorus and thence into an audience, now insulated by an artistic space from conduct which would be highly dangerous were it really taking place. The point of that conduct would have been to elicit the appearance of the god, a charged moment which in dramatic re-enactment became the climax in which the audience perceives a god-appearance. There is a striking and even profound ambiguity in the concept of appearance which, in one of its senses entails the real presence of *x*, as when the president appears at the inaugural ball, and which, in its other sense implies the inverse of this, where the president was not really there but only appeared to be. That it was the second rather than the first sense of appearance must have been an important factor in the pleasure men took in the mimesis of events it would have been barbarous to participate in, or even to witness as really taking place, like Pentheus in the *Bacchae*, all the more so if there was an active memory of the moral price such frenzies demanded. (Dionysian art, as a genre, is apollonian in terms of its distancing of the real.) "That it is not really happening" remains even now an important contribution to our enjoyment of art which manages to distance the real and to disarm it: I think of the singular intoxication the first pop-art exhibits brought to spectators when they saw such crass objects as ironing boards and vacuum cleaners in a space where they no longer *had any power over us*, standing helpless and impotent, like stranded sea-monsters, in the neutralizing space of the gallery. Imitation has always, I think, been dimly felt as a mode of disarming, as witness the fact that children even (or especially) regard something as curiously demoted when aped.

Whatever the merit of these psychological speculations, ones attitudes towards what one is experiencing will differ radically depending upon which of the two senses of appearance applies, or is believed to apply to it, supposing the distinction available.

And this will be so even if there is no internal way of establishing the distinction, as in the Problem of the External World, where the skeptic challenges us to show that what we take as an appearance in the one sense is not after all an appearance in the other. Let us consider such a transfiguration in connection with a specific object. Malraux has claimed that a certain crucifix of Cimebue would not have been reckoned an artwork by Cimebue's contemporaries. I think the reason may be the following. Those contemporaries may have regarded it as an appearance of the crucified god in the first sense of appearance, rather than, as with us who hold different beliefs, a crucified-god-appearance: *about* the crucifixion rather than the crucifixion itself, and represented rather than present again. Doubtless a different attitude towards the artist will be taken depending upon whether we attribute to him the power to make a charged reality present again, rather than the power to represent reality. In any case, the shift from the first to the second sense of appearance would exemplify just the transfiguration of life into art which Nietzsche describes in his genealogy of attic tragedy. There, the boundaries of the sacred precinct are transformed into the walls of a theater, as, in the case of Cimebue, the altar where the sacred event eternally occurs is changed into an elaborate frame housing a work of art, as the church itself undergoes alteration into a kind of inadvertent museum. And all of this without the object itself being changed at all. Something like this is what marks the difference between two of our squares of primed canvas, but it is time we thought briefly about the matter of aboutness which something acquires when it is construed as an artwork.

VI

At one point in the *Cratylus*, Socrates considers a theory that names might be imitations and naming hence an imitative art, like painting. "A name" he suggests at 423, "is a vocal imitation of that which the vocal imitator names or imitates." This he rejects a line or two later for the following interest-

ing reason: if it were correct, "we shall be obliged to admit that people who imitate sheep, or cocks, or other animals, name that which they imitate." This, I expect, is meant to be wildly counter to intuition, but on my view this is just what imitators do: they name, or at least denote whatever is imitated, so imitations may have a naming function, even if mimesis is dotty as a general theory about names: Socrates' semantical intuitions were largely sound.

The received view in the semantics of names is that names lack any semantical structure whatever, which is pretty defensible, I think, though strange in certain of its applications, as when, for example, one supposes quotations to be names of sentences, which then requires us to suppose quotations lack structure. *Something* more is evidently demanded of a quotation than that it be merely the name of a sentence: for I could name a sentence anything I chose, "Brunhilde," say: and no one would take "Brunhilde" to be a quotation of the first sentence in Proust, or of any sentence save the unit sentence "Brunhilde." But in fact quotations are quite complex structures: what they do is name the sentence enclosed in quotation marks, so they at once *give* the thing they name: and something like this characterizes imitations as well: they show the form they also denote, so that an imitation is a semantical mongrel, consisting of a vehicle, a form, and a denotation of the latter by the former. As bare names, indeed, imitations have no structure: but the entire complex has some structure, namely the structure of the thing denoted. A *Tractatus* proposition thus *shows* the logical form of the fact it denotes when true. And in the case of imitations generally, one might say that what is denoted is the form which is common to the imitation and the original. Lacking this connection with an original, it is not an imitation at all, hence not *about* the original, and its meaning becomes moot. We may see this if we ponder photographs for a moment. Suppose I expose some photosensitive surface to the light, and then out of curiosity develop it, and the result is what, but for knowledge of the fortuitous provenance of its pattern of lights and darks, I

should suppose were a photograph of the Taj Mahal. Indeed, it may be indiscernible from a photograph of the Taj Mahal, without being such a photograph in its own right. It is *of* the Taj Mahal only if caused by the Taj Mahal and if it then denotes because it shows the form of the Taj Mahal. Lacking these complex causal and semantical liaisons with that edifice, it is not about that edifice, and perhaps not about anything, a mere meaningless array of marks which happens to resemble exactly something which is meaningful and about something. This, I think, is a striking case, with remarkable application to a representationalist theory of cognition. For if ones representations are thought of on the model of photographs, then they can only be *about* what we believe them to be about if caused by what we believe them to denote: and they can denote that *only* if caused by it (and then in some straightforward way). So in a way the Problem of the External World might get a suprising resolution, in the sense that we cannot suppose ours to be representations of the world while having doubts about the world, or about the relation between the world and our representations of it. But this carries us well beyond our topic.

It is because he considers only the semantical portion of representational complexes that Goodman's account of representation is so meagre and unsatisfying. He is right in saying that anything can stand for, hence name, anything. Imagine I have conquered Spain, and am showing the pattern of my campaign, using, because I am a barbarian, paintings I have liberated from Spain's museums rather than pushpins. It happens that I use one of El Greco's *View of Toledo* to stand for Toledo. This is just a strange coincidence: I might for the same purposes have used *Las Meñinas*, since anything can be used to stand for anything: or I might have used a stone. What Goodman leaves out of his account is the fact that pictures show what they denote, and that denotation is only an element in paintings, as it is only an element in quotations. What it shows is the form of Toledo, in the case considered, or something having parity of struc-

ture with Toledo, the latter causing the representation. And this causal element too is part of the concept of quotation, for I merely iterate words and do not quote them if I have not been caused to do so by the words I denote. Rodin realized when he saw them lying at an unfamiliar angle that his *Trois Ombres* for the *Porte d'Enfer* were in effect quotations of Michelangelo's *Adam* from the *Sistine Ceiling*, which he had admired and even copied during an early forgotten trip to Italy. But a painting or a statue stops being a quotation in the absence of a causal tie with an original. The first sense of appearance we noted in the last section presupposes the causal connection to an original which is lost in the second sense of appearance, which involves only the semantical one. And this puts us in a position to appreciate the structure of non-imitative, or even what one might call abstract or non-representational art, on what I shall say a final word here.

Any artwork shows what it denotes, but in non-imitational painting what is shown lacks an original, and so stands in no causal connection with an original. Possibly early tragedy was at once mysterious and protective, in that it showed a reality it also put its audience at a distance from by denotation, where the latter elevates the vehicle to the status of a vehicle of meaning. An imaginary painting shows something which, however it may resemble a putative original, stands in no interesting relationship to an original, or has none. Once we relax the causal side of representation, we are left only with vehicle, denotation, and whatever is shown: and it is then up to the artist what sort of thing he wishes to show. But even the most abstract painting stands at a semantical distance from its content. Needless to say, this complex structure does not meet the eye: the vehicle through which nothingness is denoted looks as much like a piece of primed

canvas as another piece of primed canvas would, and nothing available to naked perception would enable us to know that something were at once shown and denoted, and that the object is in consequence a vehicle incorporating a semantical structure.

Some interesting attempts in contemporary art have been made, pre-eminently, I think, by Jasper Johns, to collapse the distance between vehicle and content, making the properties of the thing shown coincident with the properties of the vehicle, and hence destroying the semantical space between reality and art. Needless to say, I regard all such attempts as logically foredoomed. As for the somewhat empty works with which I launched this discussion, I have this to say: what they are about is aboutness, and their content is the concept of art. The artists might as appropriately have written a paper like this, called it *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace*, and counted their effort a contribution to the philosophy of art, the line separating the two having all but vanished. When *philosophy's* paintings, grey in grey, are part of the artworld, the artworld has shaded into its own philosophy, and by definition grown old.

The title of this essay was the title of the famous book written by Sister Helena of the Transfiguration (née Sandy Stranger) in Muriel Spark's *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*. I have coveted the title, and resolved to steal it the moment I wrote something it might fit. There has always been a question in my mind as to what the book contained, its content's no more being given in the book which mentions it than Fafnir's biology is available to a close reader of Wagner's *libretto*. In personal correspondence, Mrs. Spark informs me "I invented the title because I felt it was a description of creative art as I myself practice it" (Letter, 23 November, 1973). It is also a description of creative art as practiced by me. For earlier relevant works of mine, see "The Artworld," *Journal of Philosophy* (1964), 571-584, and "Artworks and Real Things," *Theoria* (1973), 1-17.