

Note on “The Art of Time Travel: An Insoluble Problem Solved”

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ABSTRACT

In their contribution to the first part of this special issue Craig Bourn and Emily Caddick Bourne claim to have solved a puzzle I put forward in my ‘An Insoluble Problem’ (2010). Here I argue that their attempt fails.

On p. 2 of my paper I ask, in the case of the works of the fifth-rate 20th century artist, “Where is the artistic creativity to be found?” And I say that this problem has no solution. Caddick Bourne and Bourne say, at the bottom of p. 306 of their paper: “The role which artworks play in McCall’s story would not raise any question we could not already ask about, for instance, the plans for a time machine in a version of the information paradox in which the time traveller delivers the plans for her time machine to her younger self, who uses the plans to build the time machine which is used to deliver them. No act of designing the plans

takes place, which raises the question: what brings the plans into existence?”

However, the so-called “information paradox” just quoted is not a clearly defined paradox at all. The Bournes say, at the bottom of p. 307, “No act of designing the plans [of this alleged time machine] takes place.” So, do the plans magically jump into existence from nowhere? The role of artworks in my article is crucial. The creation of a genuine artwork, as opposed to plans for a time machine, requires artistic creativity. And where is this to be found in the Bournes’ example?

I conclude that in their example of designing a time machine (as opposed to creating a work of art in my example), the Bournes have not solved the puzzle of explaining where the element of ARTISTIC CREATIVITY comes from. In my example the time traveler from the 21st century who visits X, the fifth-rate artist living in the 20th century, brings with him a portfolio of reproductions of magnificent works by X which are exhibited in the 21st century and are the source of X’s fame. X steals the portfolio and spends the rest of his life making copies of them in paint on canvas. No artistic creativity is needed for this. So the question remains. What is the source of the artistic genius that the 21st century works exhibit? The Bournes’ example of designing and building a time machine does not answer this question.

References

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