

ON MARGOLIS' 'FAREWELL PARTY'

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ABSTRACT. – It was Summer 1998 when Joseph Margolis published an article with a challenging title: *Farewell to Danto and Goodman* in the «British Journal of Aesthetics». He said goodbye to one of the most famous contemporary philosopher of art, Arthur Coleman Danto¹. Ten years have passed and, despite Margolis' assertiveness, his dismissal doesn't seem to have had any concrete effect. Danto continues to be one of the more discussed modern art-theorist even in Europe, notably because he is one of the few to have broken the barrier which divides the Analytic and Continental worlds. Farewell parties, however, are never easy and need more time than one can suppose *a priori*, especially if the involved person refuses to be dismissed. Actually, the vehemence of this article was just the tip of the iceberg for Margolis, and had an underlying biographical reason. A number of Margolis' previous writings² reported the same type of injunctions against Danto, but they haven't initiated any real debate. Criticizing the most influential aesthetic theory of the analytical world wouldn't be easy for anyone, but silence is even worse. In any case, Margolis' 1998 article had greater success, largely because it provoked a reaction from Danto³ himself, who tried to demonstrate that the reprimands were invalid, and the farewells premature. None else, however, has taken a real stand on the disagreement until quite recently, when Serge Grigoriev⁴ and Kalle Puolakka⁵ have taken opposite

¹ J. Margolis, *Farewell to Danto and Goodman*, «British Journal of Aesthetics» 38 (1998), 4, pp. 353-374.

² Id., *The Eclipse and Recovery of Analytic Aesthetics*, in *Analytic Aesthetics*, R. Shusterman ed., Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1989, pp. 161-189 (especially pp. 179-182); Id., *Interpretation Radical but Not Unruly. The New Puzzle of the Arts and History*, Berkeley & Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1995, pp. 255-264.

³ A.C. Danto, *Indiscernibility and Perception: a Reply to Joseph Margolis*, «British Journal of Aesthetics» 39 (1999), 4, pp. 321-329.

⁴ S. Grigoriev, *Living Art, Defending Value: Artworks and Mere Real Things*, «Contemporary Aesthetics» 3 (2005), <http://hdl.handle.net/2027/spo.7523862.0003.004>.

⁵ K. Puolakka, *Interrupting Danto's Farewell Party Arrangements: Comments for*

positions referring to Margolis' criticism in order to defend a corrected form of art-empiricism.

In this article we will not examine Margolis' own theoretical perspective: that would bring us to the complexity of the cultural realism and ontological relativism which he uses against Danto. Instead, we will follow two general lines, both concerning what Danto himself calls the problem of 'indiscernibility' (par.i). First, we will see how Danto's theory, according to Margolis, while involving the non-existence of artworks, can be reduced to the ontological assumption which Andrew Kania calls 'fictionalism about artworks' (par. ii and iii). Second, we will briefly discuss how Danto's theory of a neutral perception is untenable, and brings forth a vision of human knowledge which is almost paradoxical (par. iv). In conclusion, we will verify if possible, as Poulakka says, to give Margolis' 'farewell party', or post-pono it.

1. THE PHILOSOPHICAL RELEVANCE OF 'INDISCERNIBILITY'

Margolis maintains that Danto's theory about art is, in its fundamental constituents: «unlikely, unnecessary, overly complicated, counterintuitive, ultimately incoherent»⁶. His starting point is the problematic nature of Danto's distinction between an artwork and an indiscernible 'mere real thing'. According to him, this distinction has the consequence of making the artworks non-real in Danto's idiom, and the paradoxical effect of casting doubts on all his competence as an art critic *in qua* based on something (the artworks) which doesn't actually exist at all. Thus, there is no objective, neutral, non evaluative criterion to establish this distinction. It could be useful, obviously, in analyzing ready-made and pop-art, but these are just abnormalities, and one can't base a general theory about art on exceptions. On the one hand, it is possible to criticize a similar assumption in two ways. First, ready-made and pop-art don't constitute anything we can call, in the post-modern art scenario, 'exceptions'. Second, the 'revisionaristic' tendencies inside Anglo-American aesthetics, since the 'bad-old Goodman days', have always found a better application in examining problematic forms of art instead of nor-

Grigoriev, «Contemporary Aesthetics», 4 (2006), <http://hdl.handle.net/2027/spo.7523862.0004.010>.

⁶ *Farewell to Danto and Goodman*, quoted, p. 353.

mal ones. On the other hand, Margolis' goal is to raze to the ground Danto's art ontology, thus he starts from the heart of it. During all Danto's extremely long philosophical and critical career, the distinction between artworks and 'mere real things' has definitely been crucial. Since the publication of his seminal article *The Artworld* in 1964, until the recent issue of *Andy Warhol* in 2009, this distinction has represented one of the most important themes in Danto's philosophy of art, a kind of *leitmotiv*. As Grigoriev reminds us, in *The Artworld* paper Danto asks us to visualize two identical paintings, two white canvases traversed by a single black line in the middle. The first canvas is entitled 'Newton's first Law', the second 'Newton's Third Law'. The two are visually identical, but the different ways in which we interpret them depends, according to Danto, on the information we acquire from the title. In one case, we envision two white masses colliding along a straight line, in the other, a lonely particle traveling in a straight endless line through a white emptiness. While the perceptual properties of the two paintings coincide, the two are distinct, but this difference emerges only when we take into account the knowledge of art theory and the atmosphere of the art world. In the same way, two objects, like the famous Andy Warhol's Brillo Boxes can be visually indiscernible from one another, but still they have different proprieties since one is seen as an artwork, and the other as just a mere real thing. In other terms, the visual properties of the object alone cannot constitute an object as a work of art. The difference, one might say, is invisible. According to Danto, Warhol did not simply replicate a commodity (as Brillos were) he made the distinction between a piece of colored cardboard and a piece of high art «at once invisible and momentous»⁷. That means that he didn't change the way we look at art, but the way art is understood.

Warhol planted, between the Fifties and the Sixties, the seeds of a cultural and visual revolution that philosophy has now to deal with. Indeed, according to Danto, Warhol has been the first one who has raised, «in its most radical form»⁸ the question of art. Philosophy of art

⁷ A. Danto, *Andy Warhol*, New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 2009, p. 2.

⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 23.

has always been interested in the subject of the nature of art, but it has never conceived this inquiry the way Warhol has put it. He has redefined the form of the question and no longer asked: «What is art», but: «What is the difference between two things, exactly alike, one of which is art and the one of which is not?»⁹. It's worth pausing a moment on the 'transcendental character' of this distinction, as Noel Carroll calls it¹⁰. It is almost surprising how this aspect is commonly disregarded. The general task of philosophy, according to Danto, is to comprehend the questions that emerge from the distinction between appearance and reality. As Kalle Puolakka notes, this is an almost universal question, and it even has some enlarged implications. The problem, indeed, extends to the fields of metaphysics, epistemology, philosophy of mind, ethics. On the one hand, it is the old Shakespearian/Cartesian problem: how can we separate dreams from reality if there are no perceptual criterion? But it is also, more or less, the Platonic one: how can we distinguish the material world that seems to us the real world as only an image or copy of it, if they cannot be told apart by visible principles? On the other hand, the same scenario of Danto's art-problem is shared by Hilary Putnam's thought-experiment of the *Brains in The Vat* and of the *The Twin Earth*, or Donald Davidson's *Swamp Man* and generally by a wide tradition of examples in the analytical philosophy of mind and language: rather, the distinction has continued to resurface on a regular basis in philosophical literature. More surprisingly, the question of *indiscernibility* has also some theological implications Danto himself admits. In his most recent book he confesses that:

In its own way it is like a religious question. Jesus is at once a man and a god. We know what is to be a man. It is to bleed and suffer, as Jesus did, or the customers whom the ads address. So what is the difference between a man that is and a man that is not a god? How would one tell the difference between *them*?¹¹

⁹ *Ibidem*.

¹⁰ N. Carroll, *Essence, Expression, and History: Arthur Danto's Philosophy of Art*, in *Danto and His Critics*, M. Rollins, ed., Cambridge, MA, Blackwell Publishers, 1993, pp. 79-106; ref. on p. 80.

¹¹ *Andy Warhol*, quoted, p. 23.

Apparently, the spiritual halo of the «*indiscernibility problem*» seems to be strictly connected to the metaphysical importance he gives to it. However, if his assumption is taken into account, it shows that the distinction between art/real thing is not concerned with a value judgment and does not imply any normative principle, as for example, Greenberg's art-commodity distinction. It is not, as Grigoriev thinks, a question destined to «became operative at the periphery of the *artworld* where it makes sense to start distinguishing between inside and outside». It is rather a radical ontological question and, according to Danto, it reveals, to some extent, the way philosophy works. That allows us to suppose that Margolis' criticism implies a totally different *Weltanschauung* not only for what concerns art and aesthetics, but, instead, for what concerns the very role of philosophy itself.

2. MARGOLIS ON DANTO'S NEGATIVE ONTOLOGY

According to Margolis, in Danto's idiom there is no chance to distinguish art from mere real things in terms of perceptual or sensitive means. It is just through a rhetorical imputation of certain non-visible qualities that we are justified in treating some objects as artworks. Thereby it is possible to conclude that, according to Danto, nothing really exists as an artwork, *in qua* there is no way any work of art can be perceived. Speaking about a physical object as an artwork is, for Danto, imaginatively assuming it has some intentional attributes it doesn't have *in qua* physical object. Consequently, Danto has in some way lost the possibility of recognizing the artworks' reality. In any case, he doesn't suppose that the representational and expressive qualities we generally assume for artworks can be directly reduced to physical qualities: Danto is not a reductionist. He infers that 'artistic' properties (as, for example, style) are linked to real things only 'imaginatively'. Is not the real wooden thing we call table that has a 'Louis XIV style' but we 'imaginatively' assume this characteristic for it. According to Danto 'to have a Louis XIV style' is not a real feature of the object nor it is a property derived from the physical structure of it, as, for example, 'to be red-colored' that derives from the manner in which the object's electrons react to the light photons' stimu-

lus. Thus, we can also admit Danto is neither a *'physicalist'*. Artworks cannot be reduced to physical objects because they have additional characteristics. But, following Margolis' argument, we reach a very problematic point here: Danto is talking about two objects perceptually indiscernible which are still in some way diverse. This diversity, anyway, does not show itself visually or perceptually. It is something the eye (or the ear) can't see (or hear), but which is connected to our knowledge, to the atmosphere of artistic theory and to the mysterious concept of 'artworld'. According to Danto, when we experience an artwork, we are always in physical contact only with the qualities of the mere real thing. Senses can't decide the actual difference between an artwork and a mere real thing therefore we can't recognize any artwork as real: *indiscernibility* stops being a problem. If artworks aren't perceptually discernible from mere real things, but they actually exist, they must be, for argument's sake, in some way discernible. Alternatively, if there are no perceptual differences between them, we are obliged to admit that there are no artworks. It is, according to Margolis, a question of the Leibniz's identity law: in order to be different, two objects must have different properties. If they don't, they are the same thing. As a result, Danto's ontology is a fundamentally negative ontology, because it concludes 'there are no artworks'. This could be considered Margolis' checkmate against Danto. Indeed, how to rescue an art critic whose philosophical conception of art is based on the assumption that works of art don't exist at all?

3. FICTIONALISM?

There are some good reasons why there seems to be the possibility to interpret Danto's conception of art as ontologically similar to a perspective recently introduced in aesthetics by the works of Andrew Kania: *'fictionalism'*. We will see how fictionalism could represent the best way to revenge Danto against Margolis. In a recent article published in the «British Journal of Aesthetics»¹² Kania introduces 'fictionalism' by quot-

¹² A. Kania, *The Methodology of Musical Ontology, Descriptivism and its Implication*, «British Journal of Aesthetics» 48 (2008), 4, pp. 426-444.

ing George Rey's studies¹³ about standard linguistic entities (SLE): words, phrases and paragraphs. According to Rey, SLE are something he calls 'intentional inexistent': 1) they do not exist out of our mind, in an abstract or concrete kingdom, nor in our mind; 2) but there is a quite strong representational system we all share about them. As a matter of fact, in Rey's point of view, the real existence of SLE is totally unnecessary for normal communication's success, or for linguistic theories. It could be useful to transpose Rey's argument about SLE to Danto's conception about works of art. Indeed, there would be no difference if there weren't artworks at all, as long as we continue to act as if they were. That could seem paradoxical at first, nevertheless it is widely accepted that if one is doing ontology, he is not talking about things (as, for example, works of art), but about our conception of things. The real existence of artworks won't almost change anything in our artistic theories. We are able to explain the majority of our references to artworks, without postulating their concrete existence. So why should one be quietist about the existence of artworks instead of maintaining their absolute inexistence? Following Rey's path, we can assume that there is a very good reason to prefer atheism to agnosticism about works of art which synthetically derives from Occam's razor. If there is no need to suppose the existence of artworks as we conceive them in order to account the data our ontological theory has to explain, then we shouldn't. This could be also a practical alternative to post-Kantian idealism: if there is no theoretical need to think that things are different from the way they appear phenomenically to everybody, then we shouldn't. On the other hand Danto's hypothetical *fictionalism* about works of art, here briefly described, should not be applied to other ontological theories with which it could be confused. As a matter of fact, fictionalism is an alternative to nominalism and idealism¹⁴.

¹³ G. Rey, *The Intentional Inexistence of Language - But Not Cars*, in *Contemporary Debates in Cognitive Science*, R.J. Stainton ed., Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 2006, pp. 237-256.

¹⁴ R. Ingarden, in *The Ontology of the Work of Art*, transl. by R. Meyer with J.T. Goldthwait, Athens (Ohio), Ohio University Press, 1989, has also defended a similar position: he sustains that works of art are intentional entities, thus invoking an intermediate form between realism and eliminativism. See also A. Thomasson, *Ontology of*

First, we must distinguish *fictionalism* from *eliminativism*¹⁵ in its *reductionist* form. As we have already tried to demonstrate, Danto is not a reductionist. Eliminativism or reductionism on entities maintains that we should stop talking about A, and start talking about B. Indeed, ontologically, ‘A is nothing more than B’, intangible proprieties, universals, types and, generally, metaphysical ‘abstracta’ are just names or labels synthetically applied to sets of concrete things. This approach finally tends to demonstrate how our ordinary way of speaking about art is unfounded. It tries to find out what we are really saying when we talk about art, and verifies its compatibility to certain theories about art. Somehow, it is the same perspective of extreme naturalism for questions like: ‘Do moods truly exist or they are only neuro-physiological configurations?’, ‘Should psychology be totally reduced to neurology?’, ‘Are feelings just chemical-mechanical reactions?’. *Eliminativism-reductionism* aims to removing some everyday expressions by replacing them with more precise ones. According to fictionalism, on the contrary, while there is nothing which is actually A, still there is nothing which is B. We shouldn’t substitute our pronouncements about art with pronouncements about physical things, because that wouldn’t have more sense or add anything more to our knowledge of art.

Second, Danto’s *fictionalism* should be separated from *nominalism*. Strictly speaking, nominalism about works of art is similar to eliminativism and reductionism. Nominalists (as Goodman) try to reduce the artworks into their physical properties, as, for examples, strips of canvas and pieces of clay. This is what Wollheim¹⁶ calls *the physical object hypothesis*: if artworks are mere amounts of matter, their ontological status isn’t more awkward than that of rocks, sand and paper. From this point of view, artworks are physically embodied into objects the way human beings are embodied into flesh and bones without being *only* that. As

Art, in *The Blackwell Guide to Aesthetics*, P. Kivy ed., Malden (Mass), Blackwell 2004.

¹⁵ See for example: R. Rudner, *The Ontological Status of the Aesthetic Object*, «Philosophical and Phenomenological Research» 10 (1950), pp. 380-388. For a general introduction about «*eliminativism*» see also W. Ramsey, *Eliminative Materialism*, in the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/materialism-eliminative/>.

¹⁶ R. Wollheim, *Art and its Objects*, New York, Harper and Row, 1968, pp. 11-12.

Davies has noted ¹⁷, a number of arguments have been raised against this conception which we can't analyze here. What matters is that whereas nominalism dismisses every abstract object, fictionalism doesn't. According to *fictionalism*, the argument about the intentional inexistence of works of art shouldn't be generally extended to all metaphysical 'abstracta'.

Third, *fictionalism* should be considered apart from *idealism*. Danto's ontology of art doesn't reduce artworks to mental entities. What is ideal (mental or psychological) is our thought and knowledge about artworks, not artworks themselves. As we have already said, according to fictionalism there are no recognizable artworks, either ideal or concrete, but we do share a representational system about them. It's the same with our conception about unicorns, mermaids, Greek goddesses: our engagement with them is due to a strong system of beliefs, and to a peculiar imaginative process. Thus, if we can talk about mermaids even though we know they don't exist – really, abstractly, or otherwise – we can do the same for artworks. We have already assumed that accepting the actual inexistence of artworks wouldn't relevantly change our theory of art, as long as we share a common conception about artworks. Debates about ontology can be maintained even if we assume that there are no artworks, as they refer to the way we conceive them. However, we need to wonder if embracing *fictionalism* would have an impact at least on artistic practices. If one believes that there are no artworks, he couldn't seriously think of realizing one. So fictionalism seems to function in theory, but fails in practice? In fact, no. Similarly, philosophers of language who accept the ontological inexistence of SLE can still communicate with other people, even though they know they are producing *non-type* sentences. Moreover, fictionalism could have the advantage of defending artistic ontology from the danger of post-Goodman revisionarism. Following Kania, we can affirm that fictionalism is, indeed, a more democratic choice for our ontology of artworks. In fact, it becomes the starting point for a rehabilitated ontology of art, on a new 'empiricist' basis, as David Davies calls it, and plays a pivotal role for the develop-

¹⁷ S. Davies, *Ontology of Art*, in *The Oxford Handbook of Aesthetics*, J. Levinson ed., New York, Oxford University Press, 2002, pp. 155-181.

ment of a new ‘contestualist’ theory of art. That could seem paradoxical: in order to come closer to a common-sense view of the arts we are brought to recognize artworks’ inexistence. Still, we shouldn’t forget that ontology is about our conception of things, not about things themselves.

All told, Margolis’ injunction against Danto seems to vanish: honestly accepting fictionalism, the argument for artworks’ inexistence can no longer be considered a false move in Danto’s conception of art.

4. DANTO’S THEORY OF PERCEPTION

The second part of Margolis’ criticism of Danto is harder to refute. Margolis implies that Danto’s problem of indiscernibility involves the adoption of a theory of perception based on a supposed neutrality of human senses. According to Margolis, Danto presumes perception as *theory-free* (while it seems more *theory-loaded*).

As we have already said, Danto assumes that works of art and mere real things can’t be identical, because the former have some intentional proprieties the latter don’t have. Yet, those proprieties, which in effect are fundamental for our conception of art, can’t be considered real, or perceptible. Danto seems to believe that our perception, when in front of an artwork, is limited to sensorial feelings as color, shape, structure. What counts as an artistic quality is that something else added to our perception by our knowledge of art. When we look at Warhol’s *Brillo Boxes*, we literary see just some pieces of squared cardboard brightly colored. What makes this common object a work of art does not depend on the way in which the artwork spontaneously enters our perceptual field, but instead on the way its description is positioned within the fields of history and theory of art. An artwork acquires its own identity *qua* artwork in virtue of something which is not linked to our sight or hearing. Indeed, artistic competence, and knowledge of art history are something we should not confuse with the pure phenomenon of aesthetic perception. Danto’s theory demands us to accept an odd scenario in which a thing’s meaning is drastically separated from its physical identity. The fact is that perception, according to Danto, is like digestion: it remains invariable and fixed in spite of the cultural experience to which an

individual is subjected, and, consequently, in spite of the significant impressions that it may deliver. Thus, perceptual education doesn't make sense for Danto, nor does a '*connoisseur's* trained eye'. Everybody is able to see everything that is there to be seen; a person versed in art theory knows why some of the things seen matter and others don't. But are we really convinced this is how it works? According to Margolis, Danto's idea that, in order to see something as art, we need something the eye cannot perceive, something which is not 'sensorial', is definitely false, or very reductive. Danto doesn't recognize the role constantly played by theory within physical perception. Instead, according to Margolis, if he was right, we wouldn't be able to listen to language, we would only hear a continuous flow of sound; in the same way, we wouldn't be able to see someone 'acting' or 'doing something', but just 'randomly moving his body'. Margolis finds the similarity with language genuinely revealing in this regard: actually, we do not hear a mere sequence of sounds to which we attribute *a posteriori* a particular meaning; we hear meaningful utterances in which form is fused with intentional content. As Grigoriev strikes:

The distinction between expression-form and expression-content can be made only *a posteriori*, but insofar as this distinction is itself a product of analytic abstraction, it would be wrong to describe the process of understanding in terms of a synthesis between the perceived form and the rhetorically imputed content.¹⁸

Just think about linguistic jokes, humorous remarks, metaphors: one can find synonymous expressions and give explanations for them, but the effect is destroyed in such a translation. They don't allow for separation between form and content. Equally, imagining perception as totally separated from the phenomenon of interpretation and understanding appears to be a very doubtful statement. We are naturally convinced that perception is something 'theory-loaded'. For example we generally accept without much effort that the sensory organs of a *connoisseur* go through a kind of transformation similar to the one the hands of a violinist go through with years of practice, or the arms of a tennis player with

¹⁸ *Libidemng Art, Defending Value: Artworks and Mere Real Things*, quoted.

permanent training. In virtue of their cultural experience, certain individuals are transformed in a way that enables them to perceive features others cannot perceive, or perceive only with difficulty. This is not merely the case of art, the same happens with every cultural experience. Indeed, this is what allows a doctor to make a diagnosis by observing the disease's symptoms. The difference between the culturally enriched experience invoked by Margolis and the 'theoretically reprocessed understanding' valorized by Danto corresponds ontologically to the idea that objects may possess different properties when viewed *as* different things by cultured people. In Margolis' view, differently educated individuals, who live in dissimilar cultural *milieus* and have different histories, literally *see* different things. The same block of metal possesses certain properties when viewed *as* a work of art (for example: a statue) by an artist which it doesn't possess when viewed *as* an anvil by a blacksmith. «Thus, if population capable of viewing objects *qua* artworks cease to exist, the physical objects that we treat *qua* works of art may endure, but they will cease to exist *qua* works of art»¹⁹. Appreciation of art derives from recurring encounters with works of art, from talking, reading and thinking in private about art. The process of interpretation always begins with a meaningful substratum provided by the spontaneous operation of a culturally-enriched perceptual experience. We can indeed say that a *connoisseur* transfigures a real thing into a work of art by applying his or her knowledge of theory and history (as Danto claims), but anyway Margolis' claim is that there is no point in distinguishing between perception and theoretical interpretation. On the other hand, the statement that recognition of artworks is a natural process due to certain training or enculturation not a simple one. Margolis is talking about one of the more problematic issues within the entire history of philosophy: that of the limits of perception itself.

At any rate, we can take for granted that understanding what is seen in order to appreciate it (as in Danto's perspective) is not the same as seeing and appreciating it directly (as in Margolis'). Theoretical elucidations enable us to understand what somebody else sees spontaneously; the gratification thus obtained from theoretical elucidations is a second-

¹⁹ *Ibidem.*

hand one: the real pleasure consists in appreciating something without further explanations. According to Margolis, this effortless does not derive from knowledge of theory; instead, it derives from experience and practice. In other words, it comes from 'training', as the one a musician or an athlete experiences daily. One cannot play the piano merely by knowing the rules of music and the anatomy of the hand: one begins playing exactly at the moment when one can stop thinking about that. The same seems to be true for the appreciation of art. There is another way to demonstrate the correctness of a culturally enriched conception of perception. Once you have trained your eyes and ears to recognize painting and musical works you can't go back. Surely, you are not precluded from recognizing the canvas, the pigments and the wooden frame; yet the observation of these real things doesn't eliminate the recognition of the whole picture itself. Alternatively, if cultural experience didn't change perception, as Danto claims, someone who stands before a work he considers a masterpiece could learn to see it again as a mere physical object deprived of any aesthetic value. However, this seems unlikely. It is very improbable that a child who has seen the real identity of Spiderman will ever be able to look at Peter Parker the same way as before.

CONCLUSIONS

For a number of years, Margolis had sustained that Danto's distinction between artworks and mere real things creates dramatic paradoxes concerning the ontology of artworks and the phenomenology of aesthetic perception. On the one hand, we have tried to demonstrate that Margolis' first charge against Danto is invalid, at least if we agree to read Danto's ontological perspective in terms of Kania's *fictionalism* about works of art. On the other hand, we have briefly seen how Danto's theory of perception allows a very implausible conception of human knowledge. To reconstruct, even if we don't have the theoretical means for a full defense of Danto, we can timidly share Danto's feelings that 'the farewells are a bit premature'. Aesthetics isn't yet in a position to go beyond Danto, especially because his works continue to raise questions which seem to be central not only for aesthetics but for philosophy itself.

Indeed Danto's thought is implied, even though not explicitly cited, in the background of many contemporary theoretical discussions. The risk is that philosophers will end up considering Danto's works as a justification to conduct the debate merely on philosophical terms, regarded to be dialectically superior, because finally it is theory that makes an artwork out of a mere real thing. Nevertheless, Danto's theory could also represent an interesting way to engage artists and philosophers in a new kind of dialogue, able to alter both the terms of current philosophical discussion and artistic practice.

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