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**Introduction.** Two woodcuts, done by Danto towards the end of the 1950s, are probably the indicators of a crucial turn in his life, at the same time pointing out to inevitable, providential events that bestow meaning to a vital impulse that was not yet fully shaped at the moment of their creation: the former, representing the profile of a great French thinker, is entitled *Study in a Head of Descartes* (1958). Let us first draw attention to the connotation: Danto does not seem interested in creating a portrait that could belong to any given representational canon, but is rather more concerned with immortalizing a certain state (singled out from the multitude of possible facial representations of the modern philosophy's founder); it is for this reason that Danto uses the indefinite article. But what the American philosopher is trying to suggest is that the facial representation he chose to represent carries the greatest meaning, as it represents Descartes's profound and essential physiognomy: as such, the fact that those looking at this woodcut should immediately identify the face of one of the most illustrious representatives of philosophy is not important, as the purpose of this work is not that of an accurate, mimetic representation that should truthfully immortalize the features of a profile. What impresses our senses and stimulates our intellect lies elsewhere, in the absence of a natural contrast between the imaginary half-circle that encloses the philosopher's facial features and the other half-circle remaining after the graphic outline of the head that contains Descartes's hair. What could have been Danto's intention in choosing this manner of representation (which is realist to a large extent) that excludes the natural contrast we have mentioned? One plausible explanation springs to mind: it is no secret that the American philosopher had a good knowledge of Descartes's works; this being the case, his suggestion is illustrative and accessible for an interpretation that is based precisely on a thorough knowledge of Descartes's philosophical works. Thus, it is easy to see that, besides the black mane of hair that crowns the French philosopher's head, other parts of his face also appear in darker colours; it should have been natural that only the philosopher's beard to appear darker, while the nose, the mouth or the eyes should have been more clearly depicted: for who else but Descartes doubted more the cognitive value of the information our senses provide? This is probably the deep meaning that Danto transmits: in Descartes's case, at least, the testimony

of our senses cannot be equated to a serious theory of representation; forcing an analogy, the artistic representation of their characteristics does not appear essential to pictorial representation either.

The latter of Danto's works is entitled *Kant* (1957). In this case, in what probably is a more subtle manner of representation by comparison to Descartes's profile portrait, Kant's representation is, if not mysterious and ambiguous, at least surprising: the German philosopher's bust, as it appears represented in Danto's woodcut, is depicted in dark colours, the figure being discernible against an external outline of a predominantly lighter colour. The facial features and lines are not easily guessed. The Königsberg philosopher's clothes are only hinted at; the mode of representation as such reminds one, at least in the lower half of the frame, of late impressionistic works; this however, is but an illusion, as this is not a painting. Nevertheless, there are other significant details: on the one hand, the framework in the upper half of the work, above the outline of Kant's head, bears some resemblance to the architectural structure of a Shinto temple roof; on the other, right above Kant's head, a circular outline of lighter colour gives the impression (in a three-dimensional approach of the work) of Kant trying to escape from the darkness, as if emerging from a tunnel. The first suggestion points to the commitment of the American philosopher for the oriental thinking, with a particular focus on the Indian and Chinese philosophies; the second is an image that Kant himself puts forward to describe the state of the sciences and metaphysics in his time, at the beginning of the *Critique of Pure Reason* first edition preface, something that Danto is likely to have been impressed by:

(...) thus, metaphysics fell back into the same old worm-eaten dogmatism, and thus into the same position of contempt out of which the science was to have been extricated. Now, after all paths (as we persuade ourselves) have been tried in vain, what rules is tedium and complete indifferentism, the mother or chaos and night in the sciences, but at the same time also the origin, or at least the prelude, of their incipient transformations and enlightenment, when through ill-applied effort they have become obscure, confused, and useless.<sup>1</sup>

More often than not, Danto employs such an approach to begin either his art critical essays and commentaries or his most important philosophy books: for instance, a work belonging to his early analytical period (*Analytical Philosophy of Action*) suggestively starts with a comment on a series of paintings by Giotto that would later serve as basis for Danto's

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<sup>1</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. and edited by Paul Guyer and Allan W. Wood, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998, p. 100.

theory of action founded upon the concept of *basic action*; in any case, the large-scale use of narration, the recourse to metaphor and meaningful analogy to illustrate a philosophical thesis, the sometimes individual analysis of the components that make up the structure of a reasoning or the philosophical digression (especially in his art criticism) are defining markers of the American philosopher's style. In addition, it is probably reasonable to observe that, just as Descartes used the method of hyperbolic doubt in order to be able to formulate later true, clear and distinct knowledge of the world, Danto's recourse to the method of indiscernible objects or the central place of the concept of representation within his entire philosophical work are the undeniable characteristics of his mode of thinking. Just like his illustrious French predecessor, throughout his entire philosophical work, Danto embarked on a search for certainty: a non-dogmatic certainty, open to revision but inconceivable in the absence of a philosophical commitment to search for the truth; it is no accident that Descartes's work is the one most cited by the American philosopher, with a special mention of his philosophical meditations; as Danto himself confessed, this is the philosophy book from which he had the most to learn. The comments made at the beginning of this introduction are meant to illustrate yet again that the American philosopher was always in search for the conceptual truth, for a real discovery of authentic philosophical issues. Our proposed interpretation of the *Kant* woodcut, supported by a relevant fragment from the German philosopher's work, is probably suggestive by deepening the argument: the dogmatism of traditional science that Kant deplored stemmed from indifferentism, namely in the absence of the critical and responsible analysis of our knowledge faculties that enabled the existence of such a scientific model; the same indifferentism can be invoked as source for one of the most prolific interrogations in Danto's art philosophy: indeed, the question that is repeatedly encountered in the American philosopher's work on art is addressed to *a* something that conditions, enables and generates the work of art by distinguishing it from its apparently indiscernible pair, a mere thing. Ultimately, *this* something refers to an escape from the indifference that a dogmatic understanding of art history, of the aesthetic works and the canon that validated them rooted in the cultural mentality of understanding artistic events; only an adequate interpretation of art works, based on a thorough knowledge of art history and on a natural inclination towards the appreciation of art works, is the path towards an adequate interpretation of aesthetic facts.

These introductory remarks open up – and this is all the more so in Danto’s case – the way to the legitimate interrogations concerning the conceptual intersections between art and philosophy or the journey from art to philosophy. As far as the issue of the relationship between art and philosophy is concerned, the traditional aesthetics or art philosophy formed, in the American philosopher’s opinion, a certain type of metanarrative discourse related to the conceptualization of a progressive temporal evolution of the techniques and models of representation or of an magnanimously admissible restrictive standard regarding the legitimacy of expressing oneself through art. The issue of a profound and complex affinity between Danto’s early analytical period and his overall theoretical conception on art developed in his later years is, from the standpoint of the reflexive commitment this paper has, the cornerstone that directs the entire exposition and the foundation upon which the proposed critical viewpoint is based; I believe, unlike the majority of the American philosopher’s critics and commentators who give primacy to his analytical aesthetics to the detriment of his early analytical philosophy, that the understanding of his theories on art can be massively flawed by placing between parentheses a philosophical creed to which Danto committed himself in his youth and that he, in my opinion, never abandoned. This does not necessarily mean to say that one can postulate an indestructible unity between the two philosophical stages in Danto’s thinking: rather, assuming a major shift concerning the philosophical goals taken up by the American philosopher, I will insist on the fact that a superficial reading or the disinterest towards his early analytical work may lead to a distorted appreciation of his aesthetic theory, one that is not in agreement with the author’s intentions; briefly, ignoring the analytical model of philosophy put forward during the first stage of his work may lead to a flawed interpretation of Danto’s philosophy on art and even to major misunderstandings concerning his theoretical purposes, the validity of his aesthetic arguments or the legitimacy of the methodological means he employs.

Thus, we insist upon the fact that analytical thinking is the leading assumption that directs the present critical study on Danto’s work, and that, unflinchingly following his philosophical creed, Danto gave meaning to an often inspired and equally controversial model of reflection so that the analytical methodological rigor lays the foundation for and systematically brings together a set of conceptions covering a wide range of topics, from the philosophy of history and action, from epistemology and moral philosophy to crucial issues

in the fields of art philosophy, mind and science. The analytical model of thinking was a kind of *organon* for all of these: Danto considered analytical philosophy as the only viable alternative to the well-known models of thinking of the 20<sup>th</sup> century which claimed to establish real and meaningful connections to the world: pragmatism, neopositivism and phenomenology. Danto's view on analytical philosophy assimilates this practice to a therapeutic orientation, to an attempt to lay knowledge on firm foundations, to an eliminativist procedure or to an orientation that lays logical formalism at the basis of the model of approach. Armed with the arsenal of analytical philosophy procedures, Danto first manifested the intention of writing a five-part monumental work that would comprise his overall vision on the issues of history, knowledge, action, art and representation; his analytical orientation was to be completed by developing a comprehensive theory of representation from which all the ontological realities of the world that his philosophy would elucidate could be deciphered, as is in a complex puzzle, through an integrated narration whose functionality would become visible precisely as a means of interconnecting an intentional activity with the realities of its external world. In our view, Danto's philosophical position is the expression of a *positional realism*: I will bring arguments for this taking into account the insistence with which the American philosopher conceives two distinct types of connections between the mind and the external realities, inside or outside the world, as the case may be. This is probably the central thesis of his entire philosophical work, so that its thorough explanation is a precondition for a clear outlining of his epistemological and ontological view.

Briefly, the present study divides the analysis of Danto's philosophy into two parts, thematically distinct, but homogeneous from the point of view of the approach: the first part is dedicated to an ample study of the philosophical concepts in Danto's early analytical work: the critical analysis of the historical narrative in Danto's view, the parallel examination of the fundamental concepts that make up his epistemology or praxeology, the comparative analysis of knowledge and action, the evaluation of his conception on morality or the means for translating Nietzsche's and Sartre's philosophical works in an analytic vocabulary are the subsections of the first part. It goes without saying, the first part cannot end without a detailed exposition of the American philosopher's ontological view. As far as the second part of the present study is concerned, the approach here is three-fold, starting out from the

assumption that Danto's art philosophy contains relevant suggestions for the precise outlining of an aesthetics, an art criticism or a general view concerning the evolution of art history. Each of these subsections will be dealt with by means of a details critical analysis that calls upon a bibliography that surpasses the limits of Danto's philosophy in order to be able to highlight the completeness or the incompleteness of the American philosopher's theses, the profoundness and the ambiguities of Danto's system of thinking, as the case may be.

## **PART ONE.**

### **An analytical trilogy**

*The analytical philosophy of history.* The first of the works that make up Danto's analytical trilogy is concerned with the investigation of the limits and conditions under which historical knowledge is possible. In order to achieve his proposed aims, Danto distinguishes between two distinct ways of dealing with the object of history, putting forward the general distinction between the substantive philosophies of history and the analytical philosophy of history. Although Danto suggests that the substantive philosophies of history comprise a series of metaphysical interpretations of history, among which Marxism or of the project of civilisation history are explicitly mentioned, Danto is of the opinion that the distinction between the substantive philosophies of history and the analytical philosophy of history is reducible to an epistemological controversy. Consequently, Danto's aim is that of going beyond the substantive philosophies of history by denouncing not only the metaphysical orientations, but also a certain way of considering history according to a certain methodology supposedly able to ensure its scientific character. Thus, in turn, the methodological dualism of the neo-kantian thought, the methodological monism of neo-positivism and the metaphysics of history are rejected in order to make way for a narrativist option regarding the authentic historical knowledge. The methodological dualism, from the neo-kantians to Dilthey, insisted upon a distinction between the natural sciences and the theoretical sciences, the former explaining and describing the phenomena they were concerned with, the latter putting forward the methods of understanding and comprehending the deeds that serve their

aims. Especially in the case of Dilthey, the science of history becomes a comprehensive science distinct from the explicative natural sciences in terms of a synthesis between psychology and hermeneutics. The epistemological foundations of history are perceived as a fusion between the subjective horizon of the living with the comprehension act which is attributed universal objectivity and validity. For Danto, such an epistemic foundation of history, to which Collingwood also subscribes to a certain extent, is unrealistic, as it is rather circumscribed to an idealist and intuitionism view.

The epistemological dualism view is replaced, in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, by the thesis supporting the epistemological unity of all sciences: the neopositivist formalism, following the Hempel-Oppenheim-Ernest Nagel and even Popper's line of thought, considers that the ultimate foundation of the historical explanation and understanding is the method later termed by William Dray as the "general covering laws explanation model". Danto is evidently seduced not only by this perspective, but also by another emerging at the beginning of the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in Hanson's and Kuhn's writings, namely the necessarily historical character of all sciences. Consequently, his perspective is somewhat reversed: is Hempel and his followers considered that the method of history needed to be borrowed from the natural sciences, Kuhn and the thinkers following him considered that the intelligibility of science depended upon the historical method of research of their results. It was this latter view in particular that triggered Danto's analytical philosophy of history. As I have mentioned, Danto opposed the analytical philosophy of history to the substantive philosophies of history; but, Danto's view on the cognitive meanings of the analytical approach in the philosophy of history represents an original version of the analyticity concept. In my view, there are four distinct directions in the analytical conception of history, all deriving from the way in which the analytical tradition itself was formulated in a bipolar manner: on the one hand, the group of analytical philosophers focused upon the methodology of theoretical sciences, while the other directed its attention on the logical analysis of language. In light of this double orientation, the analytical philosophy of history takes up two methods of approach: the former impressed upon the methodological procedures needed so that history could rightfully claim the status of science and was supported by the neopositivists; the latter, the hermeneutic approach, supports a historiography that uses the method of explanation to the detriment of logical positivism through methodological monism



(i.e., the adoption of the descriptive-explicative method by recourse to general covering laws by all sciences, be them experimental or theoretical). Briefly, the epistemological orientation supported by the representatives of logical positivism (Carl Gustav Hempel, Ernest Nagel, John Passmore) stands in contrast to the antinaturalist orientation of hermeneutic inspiration focused on the conceptual analysis of the historiographic language (William Dray, Peter Winch, Alan Donagan, G.H. von Wright, Michael Scriven, Norman Malcolm, Patrick Gardiner). This theoretical dispute provides the foundation for a classical dispute in analytical philosophy; however, one should mention that, following the rich initial debate, the analytical philosophy of historiography evolved in two other, somewhat complementary directions: the narrative (linguistic) direction heightened the dispute between logical positivism and antinaturalist hermeneutics in the spirit of anti-positivists who put forward the method of narrative explanation as an adequate epistemological solution to deal with the issues of historiography. The prominent representatives of this orientation are considered nowadays W.H. Walsh, W.B. Gallie, Hayden White, Arthur Danto, Louis Mink and Frank Ankersmit. On the other hand, we speak of an analytic-theoretical direction that denounces the premises of methodological monism and stands in opposition to the narrativists' camp, numbering Donald Davidson, Alvin Goldman, Thomas Nagel, Fred Dretske, John Searle and Hilary Putnam among its representatives.

However, Danto will not be content with the conception that the narrative orientation in the analytical philosophy of history imposed on the reality of historical knowledge and on the meaning of knowledge in history; consequently, neither his predecessor, Walsh, nor his successor, Hayden White will escape Danto's criticism. In particular, it is sentence 4) of Ankersmit's synthesis of the philosophical narrativism objectives that can be considered the Achilles heel of the narrativist perspective, something that Danto will try to disprove in his *Analytical Philosophy of History* by putting forward an epistemology of history and an attempt to lay the historical knowledge on certain basis. For instance, the analysis of the concept of explanation in history and its status as narrative explanation science enable Danto to formulate an interrogation on the conditions under which historical knowledge is possible and a reconsideration on the ways of writing history and conceiving its scientific nature. In Danto's view, the core of the historical narrative is its meaning. The central thesis of the *Analytical Philosophy of History* is thus the foundation of

history as a science of meaningful narrative explanation. Danto's assumption is supported by his attempt to provide satisfying arguments for two subsequent theses: a) an attempt to synthetically encompass the concept of *explanation* in historiography together with the critique of historical epistemologies may lead to the adequate reconsideration of the concept as such and b) an analysis of *historical narrative* from the viewpoint of its types of meanings and the conditions that enable its existence may lead to the understanding of history as an achievable narrative model through the explanation of the events it refers to.

The explicit aim of the present section is that of highlighting the instances of the concept of explanation that allow Danto to formulate a critical position against the various orientations in the philosophy of history; the epistemological model put forward by the neopositivists is the element that triggered the entire debate, each of the points of view formulated offering valuable suggestions in order to constructively surpass what was synthetically termed as *Methodenstreit*; I will briefly illustrate the critical arguments formulated by Danto against six conceptual orientations in the philosophy of history, thus summarising the perspective present in his work, *Analytical Philosophy of History*: the critique of romanticism, the critique of determinism, the critique of relativism, the critique of historicism, the critique of idealism, hermeneutics and the concept of *Verstehen*, the critique of pragmatic theories.

In *Narration and Knowledge*, Danto puts forward a series of positive aspects of his epistemology; thus, sharing a realist perspective from a logical and philosophical viewpoint, Danto *stricto sensu* assumes that language (and especially historical language) should be in a correspondence relationship with external reality if it is to represent genuine knowledge. Considering this theoretical assumption, the epistemic characteristics of language are: i) historical sentences correspond to historical beliefs in a pragmatic sense; ii) as far as knowledge is concerned, historical sentences should be assessed from the point of view of their meaning; iii) historical sentences have truth value if and only if they refer to an obsolete period; iv) it is essential that historical sentences be in a definite historical relationship with the events they describe and v) historical sentences point to a precise reference in order to emphasise the temporal relationship with the historical event they refer to.

In order to represent a real historical narration, a certain approach of historical events and facts should be essentially meaningful; meaning derives from the accurate and truthful

narration of the facts belonging to historical explanation and assumes a distance that the explanation as such travels between a past historical fact and the present that relates to that particular event. But the complete historical narration has a set of additional meaningful characteristics usually employed in the practice of historiography. Danto enumerates them and provides a justification of their presence in the historical narration.

(1) The pragmatic meaning refers to the fact that the historian sometimes recounts historical events using arguments that entail moral sentiments or point to a moralising sense. One of the representatives of pragmatism in the philosophy of history, Joseph Margolis, argues that the pragmatic approach moves back and forth between a pluralism that cannot be easily expressed in a conceptual manner and relativism; this means that the historians' position on significant moral issues is an instance of pluralism. Danto argues that bestowing a moral dimension on the historical narration can significantly improve the practice of narration as such is beyond any doubt; but, the truthfulness and the completeness of narration do not include such moralising attitudes on the part of the historian.

(2) The theoretical meaning was often present in historiographic approaches. The historicists' assumption is that the historical exposition serves to validate or invalidate a theory. Danto rejects the fact that the historical narration aims to be in agreement with a speculative theoretical framework; the theoretical observations in the narrative historical text are possible if the historical material as such contains an organised and structured exposition.

(3) The consequential meaning limits the historical narration to the meaningful succession of the events and moments it is made up of. In simpler terms, there is no reason to include a historical fact or event in the structure of a narration if it has no meaning towards clarifying subsequent events. Danto considers that consequential meaning is essential and constitutive for narration; I will insist more on the characteristics of consequentiality later, upon dealing with the temporal dimension peculiar to historical narration.

(4) The revelatory meaning intervenes in a narration when the historical employs an abductive method, or, in the sense used by Peirce, to introduce an explanatory hypothesis. This means that the historical narration, in order to meet the criterion of completeness Danto speaks about, might need an interpretation that falls outside the scope of evident and unmediated interpretations. This type of meaning in the case of a historical narration derives

from the fact that a narration must achieve a full description in order to be complete, namely to elucidate some possible uncertainty in the exposition of the narrative sequences.

The types of meanings analysed above point to the interpretation given by Danto to a complete and meaningful narration. In addition, Danto establishes the conditions that make possible a historical narration in relation to the nature of description, the structure of the narration and the limits of causality in a narration requiring completeness and force of meaning.

(1) Fulfilling these two requests of historical narrative also points to the necessary character of a *complete description*. In Danto's view, a complete description does not mean the inclusion of all the historical moments that make up any given historical narration, as this is not possible; rather, a description is complete if i) it presents dynamic changes and transformations of the events it recounts, in the sense that narrative completeness is done following a logical and relevant explanation, so that the issue of completeness does not refer to the number of historical events we explain (not to *what* we explain), but to *how* we explain; ii) it avoids the explanation of coherent change strictly from a causal point of view and iii) it assumes that the legitimacy of explaining a historical transformation is possible if the identity of the subject who transformation is explained be preserved.

(2) Conventionally, the following structure of historical narration should be accepted as valid: [(1)  $x$  is  $F$  at  $t-1$ ; (2)  $H$  affects  $x$  at  $t-2$ ; (3)  $x$  is  $G$  at  $t-3$ ]. Two restrictions should be mentioned for an adequate understanding of this model of narrative explanation formulated by Danto rather as methodological direction than as standard procedure: i) the model can be accepted as causal explanation only if we speak of a possible species of historical explanation; in other words, not all explanation is a causal explanation; ii) Danto's proposed model should not be assimilated as a deductive-nomologic procedure. The analogy with the Hegelian dialectic procedure stands in contrast with the Hempelian deductive model precisely because the role of historical narration is to explain changes, not to be in agreement with a theoretical model aiming at universality.

(3) Danto introduces an additional distinction regarding the analysis of causality, when causality is supposed to function in the case of historical narration. Thus, it is legitimate to put forward a model of causal explanation if and only if it makes reference to two past events whose connection is necessary. Danto reconsiders the classical theory on causality proposed

by David Hume, mentioning its correctness: the Scottish philosopher notices that the causality of two events is observable as a mental phenomenon of causal connection between them, as it cannot be found in reality. In this point, Danto makes a clear-cut observation that does not greatly differ from Hume's conception. Moreover, Danto goes beyond the concept of the classical philosopher's natural causality concept, in the sense that Hume's famous example of the billiard balls does not completely exclude natural causality: if the historical narration refers to mankind's facts and events, then the classical model of causality should be considered incomplete as it ceases to be relevant for the explanation of men's natural facts; the mechanical impulse of a billiard ball cannot be explained similarly to impulse human action.

*Analytical philosophy of knowledge.* At this point, I would like to anticipate and consider Danto's general epistemological view as *semantic cognitivism*. This evaluation requires a double clarification: first, I will circumscribe Danto's cognitivism by calling upon its double definition and separating it, first of all, from non-cognitivism and second of all, from the cognitive options that Danto regards as flawed for knowledge. Second of all, I will define Danto's semantic option by distinguishing it from the descriptive orientations that Danto argumentatively rejects. To begin with, Danto considers that the most coherent non-cognitivist view in analytical philosophy was formulated by John Austin: according to him, knowledge does not aim at a gnoseologic clarification of our sentences, but is rather reduced to the meaning that certain sentences have for action; in this sense, the traditional challenge of epistemology to theoretically deal with issues pertaining to the limits and nature of knowledge is dissolved within a performative view according to which the meaning of an sentence is reduced to its use in language; language is, in its turn, an act of behaviour among others.

Starting out from a crucial distinction between descriptive and semantic, Danto denounces the varieties of epistemologic descriptivism. The first of them is naturalism which is descriptive precisely because its preferred methods are characteristic to experimental sciences: Danto's suggestion is that descriptivism in philosophy is inadequate since philosophy as science should be considered in an Aristotelic sense as their organon. Epistemologically speaking, philosophy does not have a descriptive nature; the error of

naturalism comes from the fact that it describes all facts and events as essential parts of external reality; it thus falls upon philosophy to semantically explain the connections between the world and what is external to it, namely the sentences referring to it. Philosophy is precisely the subject that enables the disappearance of this distance. In a comment on Danto's criticism addressed to epistemological naturalism, Jerrold Katz observes that Danto's possible decisive objection refers to the monism of such an orientation, in accordance to which any external object (i.e., non-natural) of world reality should be rather considered as non-existent; naturalism thus excludes philosophy as a semantic approach to clarify the correspondence relationship between sentences and the external reality. Descriptive naturalism is denounced by analytical epistemology as lacking philosophical interest; naturalists defend themselves by arguing that, on the one hand, the analytical descriptive approach is not at all less naturalistic, in the sense that it puts forward normative and evaluative epistemological prescriptions, and on the other, that the epistemic justification of analytical descriptivism is not very adequate for our subjective epistemic judgments. Essentially, epistemological naturalism should be considered reductionist because of its insistence to discuss human existence strictly in the terms of a physicality that restricts the ways in which beliefs are formed and justified in a natural space.

A version that is probably stronger than the naturalistic one also takes the form of epistemologic descriptivism: according to Danto, phenomenalism is difficult to clarify doctrine because of the plurality of expressed opinions that can be assimilated to its comprehensive formulation. Strictly speaking, phenomenalism takes up a position according to which the semantic aspect is to be analysed strictly under the conditions of possible experience; Roderick Chisholm synthetically assumes phenomenalism as a metaphysical conduct that capitalises on the so-called "myth of the given in experience"; actually, Chisholm considers phenomenalism as a version of the doctrine of the given in experience. Fundamentally, this doctrine assumes two premises: i) there are several stages of our knowledge that are coherent and interdependent, equally founded on a foundationalist support; ii) the foundation of knowledge as such consists in apprehensions on the sensations and impressions affecting our sensory organs, appearances of phenomena. These two premises give birth to a consequence according to which the only apprehension underlying the structure of knowledge is our apprehension concerning what is given in experience or

what appears to us as being given in experience; properly speaking, this is the essence of phenomenism. The major difficulty deriving from accepting the phenomenist view primarily derives from the absence of the descriptive force of justifying the apprehension as such.

This being the case, the phenomenist doctrine is a composite made of various stands of diverse phenomenisms: starting with the theory of perception formulated in the modern age by George Berkeley and continuing with Russell's theses of definite descriptions or with Lewis's experientialism in the 20<sup>th</sup> century analytical philosophy, as we are confronted with phenomenist orientations that Danto rejects one by one. A central issue in the descriptive analysis of knowledge is connected to the justification of the content of knowledge as such. Any content of knowledge can be formulated in sentences and our assertions or sentences are faced with the obstacle of their justification, so that, until the moment of legitimating knowledge based on providing a justification in its favour, we deal with a mere claim to knowledge. In a certain sense, the critique of epistemological realism is related to the issue of knowledge from a foundationalist viewpoint: justifying a sentence that claims to be knowledge is thus reduced to a form of its foundation. Danto admits the possibility of founding our knowledge on the so-called basic sentences, arguing that, on the one hand, accepting such sentences eliminates the objection of justifying *ad infinitum* some complex sentences, and on the other, one might identify such basic sentences as direct knowledge or unmediated correspondence between sentence and experience. Both epistemological foundationalism as the ultimate justification of our sentences and the possibility of direct knowledge are still weak spots of epistemological criticism; generally speaking, one admits now that there are many sources of knowledge: among them, contemporary epistemology emphasises the internal sources of knowledge (perception, memory, rational inference) and on the external sources (testimonies, evidence and proofs that imply the truthfulness of an external source in relation to the subject formulating a claim for knowledge). A moderate epistemological position brings together the foundationalists that emphasise the need to epistemologically justify our sentences with those who categorically reject the importance that justification has for knowledge.

One of the most crucial elements for elucidating knowledge in a descriptive sense is the search for certainty, something that, in Danto's view, influenced the traditional

philosophical thought from Plato to Wittgenstein. The need for certainty took over the traditional epistemological thinking, fuelling both sceptical objections against the possibility of knowledge in general and serious misunderstandings regarding the meaning and nature of knowledge. Danto's analysis on the search for certainty in philosophy is not a comprehensive one; he considers that the three most important three occurrences of the traditional epistemology of this kind that have decisively contributed to the emergence of the profound misunderstandings regarding the nature and meaning of knowledge are i) the confusion between knowledge and understanding; ii) the flawed deductive procedure of the ontological argument and iii) Descartes's entire philosophy. The whole structure of the *Analytical Philosophy of Action* is founded upon Danto's explicit epistemological commitment aiming to demonstrate the presupposition according to which the theory of knowledge is possible in a semantic rather than a descriptive sense. The distinction between factual knowledge as a procedure of experimental sciences achievable through description and the theory of knowledge as such is reducible to the observation that, on the one hand, knowledge has an ontological reality inside the world where we live and can be achieved by formulating descriptive sentences, and on the other, a theory applied to knowledge as a human reality is only intelligible at a semantic level. Thus, any epistemology is semantically comprehensible: if descriptive knowledge expresses a relationship between sentences as realities of the world and something external to them in a mundane context, meaningful knowledge is a relation between a descriptive sentence about the world and the world as its external reality. Danto starts out from considering that the entire western philosophical tradition puts forward an ambiguity of the philosophical approach between descriptive notions and semantic notions. Danto's central assumption is that, except for philosophy, all the other sciences employ descriptive notions. Philosophy, whose purpose is to elucidate the possible relations between descriptive notions and something external to them, needs to call on semantic vehicles and values. The semantic values relevant from a philosophical point of view are *sentences, ideas, concepts, terms and representations (images)*; the thinkers belonging to any given tradition in the history of philosophy called on specific semantic values when formulating a coherent worldview. But, from a semantic point of view, the semantic vehicles should clarify the truths of the world we live in, so that their correspondence with the contents of the real world could be expressed through semantic values: thus, sentences can be *true* or *false*, ideas can



have *formal reality or not*, concepts can be *instantiated or non-instantiated*, terms can *denote or fail to denote*, and images can *represent or fail to represent*.

Semantic knowledge is the philosophical species dealing with knowledge of the world, in relation to which descriptive knowledge is only an alternative species. Semantic knowledge can be formulated as distinct semantic orientations, Danto taking up the semantic model whose fulfilment is conditioned by the truth value of the semantic vehicles. One might consider Danto's semantics influenced by the criterion of semantic vehicles meaning, so that they becomes analytical if they have a positive truth value. Generally speaking, there are three types of semantic theories: structural semantics, theoretical model semantics and semantics conditioned by the absolute truth value that meaningful sentences might acquire. None of these types of semantic theories falls within the scope of the present research. Nevertheless, one should mention that Danto supports the third theoretical orientation, while his semantic theory should be considered rather modest or moderate.

In a certain sense, one of Danto's explicit aims in *Analytical Philosophy of Knowledge* is that of demonstrating that, from a semantic point of view, the challenges of scepticism cannot be understood. Danto seems to be influenced in his overall view of scepticism by two major theoretical options, the former rejecting it completely and the latter conceiving it so that its observations could be relevant for the issue of knowledge. Following Moore and his thesis according to which there is evidence based on reasons and justifications in favour of claiming the existence of an external world, Danto assumes the impossibility of radical scepticism: the theory of immediate perception forms the basis of claiming the possibility of direct knowledge, so the theses of logical empiricism establish a connection between direct knowledge and the possibility of unmediated inductive inferences rather than between direct knowledge and the argumentative deduction of the proofs that support the existence of an external world. The second essential suggestion for understanding Danto's view on scepticism is provided to him by Edmund Gettier: he questions the possibility of knowledge founded upon justified true belief because this would meet a double objection; first, there is the possibility for formulating inconclusive evidence that does not guarantee the truth of conviction; then, one can epistemologically justify a conviction by deducing it from another false conviction.

Danto's entire view on the meaning of sentences for knowledge implies an explicit perspective on the concept of truth. His cognitivist option on truth moves away from two widely-circulating convictions in the analytical philosophy of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, one emphasising the essence of truth as property of a sentence on account of the predictive nature of the formula "it is true", the other denying the predictive characteristic as such, but instead emphasising on the non-cognitive essence of truth and giving precedence to the performative element susceptible of bestowing truth value to sentences. Danto explicitly expresses his affiliation to a cognitive theory of knowledge, rejecting, in the first case, the linguistic consideration of the nature of truth as a property that can be ascribed to a sentence, and in the second, the anticognitivism of the performative conception. The criticism of these two orientations indicates Danto's profoundly realist orientation.

***Analytical philosophy of action.*** Danto starts with the presupposition of a parallelism in the standard analysis of knowledge and action; by standard analysis, Danto aims to establish if a fact of knowledge or an action, as the case may be, imply a set of specific connections between the elements that compose knowledge and action in any possible situation. In the case of knowledge, there are three specific elements that define a fact of knowledge, so that characteristic connections are possible among each of these three elements: in the case of a fact of knowledge, its elements are the knowing subject, the sentence that postulates a claim to knowledge and the object the sentence refers to. Thus, I argue that a psychological connection is established between the knowing subject and the sentence, so that the subjects' personal beliefs enable the subject to formulate the sentence; second of all, there is a semantic connection between the sentence and its object, so that the semantic value of the sentence (as semantic vehicle) is given by its correspondence between it and an external object-reality; one last type of connection is susceptible of being established between the justifications that the knowing subject can call upon to support his claim to knowledge and the sentence that shows the presence of a claim to knowledge: this type of connection is founded upon an explicative basis. Similarly, although Danto does not explicitly conceive it, there is a presumptive model of standard analysis of action; I will formulate that model following Danto's conception of the standard analysis of knowledge. Thus, the standard analysis of action could be taken apart as follows: i) first of all, there is an intentional

connection between the individual who acts and the action being carried out, so that the intentional element provides the content of this connection; ii) there is a connection between the action an individual carries out and its object, so that an event enables the connection between an action and its object; iii) there is a connection between a mediated action and another basic action, so that a causal connection allows one to link the mediated action to the basic one that an individual calls upon in order to carry out the mediated action. Thus, in agreement with the analytic interpretation of the analysis that Danto himself employs, there are three concepts whose explanation is essential for clarifying Danto's theory of action: the concepts of intentionality, event and causality emphasise the types of connections that exist between the element of a generic human action.

Danto analysis the issue of intentionality starting from the presupposition than an intention is the sign of an individual's internal state; but, the conditions for satisfying an intention lie in actions that imply a so-called escape from the internal intentional state. Thus, when the action triggers a change in the world in agreement with the original intentional state, we speak of a satisfied intention; when it does not, only failure to act in agreement with the initial intention can bring about a change in the world that does not conform to it. Danto emphasises the intentional distinction between the cause of an action and the reason according to which the action is carried out. The realism of Danto's theses evidently derives from the argument claiming that, in order to bring about a change in the world in agreement with an initial intention, an event should be conceived causally in relation with the intention rather than a reason that determines it; actually, in this case, the causal intention and the rational intention are logically equivalent, in the sense that the reasons determining an action can be reduced to the intention that causes the action. In any case, the beliefs in knowledge, as well as the intentions in the theory of action can be understood as deriving from a model of world representation, so that both beliefs the intentions are attitudes aiming at the truth of our representations. The concept of world representation introduces major complications as far as the analysis of the semantic value of knowledge or the analysis of events within the theory of action are concerned; according to Danto, an adequate representation of world connects, in the case of knowledge, a belief in something with the real external existence of that something independently of belief, and in the case of action, an intention to carry out something with an occurring event that is, in principle, external and independent in relation

to the intention to act. In the absence of such an understanding of the concept of world representation, the theory of knowledge fails as representationalism and the theory of action as behaviourism. As far as the concept of world representation is concerned, knowledge and action are susceptible of a reversed logical approach. Danto's understanding of the concept of world representation is identical in this case with the concept of world interpretation; in an act of world interpretation, there is a procedural difference between knowledge and action: in the first case, interpreting the world means, in a realist sense, an agreement between our representations with external reality. In the case of action, the interpretation of the world implies a previous understanding of the meaning of an event, first by placing it within an action and later by identifying the action within which it is situated.

The concept of causality is one of the foundations for the theory of action analysis in Danto's view; in analysing the concept of causality, he starts out from the suggestion provided by Roderick Chisholm who employs the scholastic distinction between immanent causality and transitory causality; by taking up this distinction, Danto is opposed to the classical view on the concept of causality in David Hume's philosophy, according to which the causality relation is an exclusive way of connecting two contiguous events from the point of view of how our minds operates. Consequently, a causality relation, be it immanent or transitory, does not exist in reality: the causal construction of the events is only a consequence of the activity of our mind. Hume assumes the fact that if causality should exist in nature as a relation between two events, it remains independent of our mind because it cannot be conceived. As such, Hume seems to have admitted at most the reality of transitory causality in the sense that, although possible, this is conceivable only by observing the fact that two distinct events occurred successively, without any causal relation being evident. The validity of the Scottish philosopher's conception on causality led Danto to a fundamental inconsistency as far as the possibility of existence of basic action: if the causality relation were at most possible between two separate events, then the basic action would lost its meaning as intentionally caused action, in the immanent sense of conceiving the individual-agent as cause of any given action. Thus, Danto's view appears closer to an immanent conception.

## **Analysis of oriental morality**

Danto's work, *Mysticism ad Morality. Oriental Thought and Moral Philosophy*, is not a treatise of morality, ethics or virtue, as the analytical tradition in this field usually includes; on the one hand, the European tradition of moral thinking started from approaching moral values from the perspective of the Christian world on the possibility of formulation moral judgments in agreement with the traditional understanding of human nature: in this sense, one can speak about a general tendency of western moral thought to derive moral norms and values from a national understanding of human nature and the general sense of life. In simpler words, the tradition of European moral philosophy is based on the foundation and thorough construction of moral concepts. On the other hand, analytical philosophy has moved away from the European thought tradition regarding the issues of moral philosophy and ethics primarily through the explicit orientation of rejecting the idealist metaphysics and the conceptual essentialism; especially in the case of George Moore and his work, *Principia Ethica*, analytical philosophy attempted to reformulate the issues of moral thought starting out from the premise that moral concepts needed an epistemological justification or foundation, so that the connection between the moral beliefs and judgments and the body of factual beliefs that we share as a result of our internal psychological mechanism for understanding the world becomes necessary. Considering this general distinction between analytical thinking and European philosophy concerning the content and nature of moral judgments, Danto subscribes to the latter orientation starting from a premise that triggered his only work on morality, namely the thesis that the objectivity of our moral beliefs can be asserted following an analysis of the general content of our factual beliefs about the world and the sense of human life.

A series of four theoretical considerations predetermine Danto's commitment regarding moral philosophy: i) Danto follows a classic model of approaching morality that can be derived from a specific epistemological view or, conversely, from applied epistemology; ii) he considers that an ethical theory can be formulated as a result of clarifying the relation between moral language and the world it describes; iii) apart from the western metaphysical tradition that approaches the issue of morality in connection with general considerations on human nature in a specific context of understanding the individual

in the Christian western tradition, it is possible to make an analysis of the moral beliefs in the non-western space so that the objectivity of these beliefs could be expanded to refer to human nature in general. This assumption that Danto makes calls, in my view, for a brief clarification of a distinction between the theoretical and practical contents of the western and eastern philosophies respectively; iv) finally, given Danto's methodological conception, one should probably insist further on the distinction between facts and values in both a western and an eastern context. One should note that Danto did not write a treatise of moral theory: the explicit aims of his work can be reduced to illustrating only one thesis, namely that, assuming a presupposition of the reality of factual beliefs, one can assert the objectivity of moral beliefs; the corollary of this thesis Danto's idea that the language postulating the objective existence of moral values has semantic value in the sense that it establishes a meaningful connection with the reality of the external world: this thesis has deeply realist roots.

### **Analytical interpretations of European philosophy: Nietzsche and Sartre.**

*Psychologism and cognitive perspectivism in Nietzsche's philosophy.* Danto's analysis of Nietzsche's work is focused on the most important concepts that philosophically define his work, but his interpretation is probably organised around two pillars that could determine the overall reconstruction of Nietzsche's philosophy: firstly, Danto observes that Nietzsche's philosophical view is a profoundly psychologist one; secondly, the German thinker's views on language, reality or truth are illustrative for elucidation a certain theory of knowledge that Nietzsche seems to support more or less strongly, although he does not develop it explicitly and systematically.

Nietzsche's psychologism is visible in terms of a general attitude that spans his entire philosophical work: paradoxically, the exegesis of Nietzsche's work points to a surprising fusion between the vitalism of his considerations and his philosophical nihilism. The philosophies of existence regard Nietzsche as one of the prominent forerunners of such a model of philosophy; on the one hand, it is not so much his inner nature, as his consciously assumed position as fervent critic and opponent against the traditional cultural diseases that

turn Nietzsche into one of the most radical voices that deny and dispute all that was considered legitimate and pre-established. For Nietzsche, every human deed or cultural fact is strictly reducible to a psychological issue, so that nothing that is supposed to have its own reality can be considered true; the German thinker clearly rejects the existence of deeds and facts situated outside our conscience, so that his view is marked by an exclusive psychologist character. Nietzsche denounces the entire philosophical tradition that preceded him precisely because this is guilty of rejecting the presuppositions characteristic to commonsense, starting from considerations arguing that the particular and subjective opinions of commonsense cannot claim to be science; Nietzsche radically disproves this conception by arguing that traditional science turned against commonsense because it wanted to preserve a status quo favourable to the development of a certain dominant view: we recognise here a thesis developed in the postmodern thinking of Michel Foucault, for instance. By considering commonsense as the only condition that enables human life, Nietzsche is inclined to create a true psychologist ontology of subjective individuation, something that, in Danto's view, definitely separates the German thinker from the commonsense tradition supported by some representatives of logical positivism. In Nietzsche's case, denouncing the traditional history of philosophy is synonymous with disproving the western rationality and excitedly arguing for the role of passions and intense feelings as preconditions of true living. As such, it may well be that Nietzsche is inclined to value the role of art in human life, a conception that moves away from the view of traditional aesthetics that denied the autonomy of art; for Nietzsche, art is not a manifestation whose value for life is questionable, but precisely the condition for its fulfilment; art acquires a privileged place within Nietzsche's overall view. Assuming the fact that Nietzsche's psychology is one of the main pillars of his entire philosophical work, Danto approaches it in a pluridimensional manner, in the sense that Nietzsche's vitalism, nihilism, criticism of mores or the will to power concept are elements that bestow meaning to the German thinker's psychologist conception.

One needs to mention that Nietzsche did not develop a theory of knowledge proper; in fact, the German philosopher did not like the idea that a generic theory could solve anything or would have minimal utility. If one applied a relative interpretation to Nietzsche's philosophy and managed to formulate a theory of knowledge, then this theory would be non-standard, dissident and unconventional; anyway, a philosophical theory of knowledge (i.e.,

epistemology, in its classic understanding) should be abolished and replaced with a profoundly original view. Generally speaking, the idea of this original view could result from the separate consideration of the three major structures that comprise it: perspectivism, Nietzsche's conception on science and his so-called methodology.

In a wider sense, the effective development of a perspective would entail an interpretation; perspectivism describes a general framework of competition among the various kinds of interpretations. Nietzsche's concept of interpretation is distinct from its hermeneutic approach: the German thinker does not conceive interpretation as a subjective mode of comprehension adequate to some meanings external to the interpreter, but instead chooses a simplistic and unmediated understanding of the concept; interpretation is not a reflexive approach applied to the contents of a previous tradition, but it is the sum of the impulses, desires, dispositions and hopes based on which interpretation acquires meaning and utility for life. As such, the interpretations can be metaphors, fictions, myths, creations or innovations, each of them being characteristic descriptive acts for understanding man's vital energy. No other perspective can be considered more truthful more meaningful or more useful in relation to other possible perspectives. Nietzsche's perspectivism can be thus considered as an attempt to legitimise commonsense and to reveal the inner individual resources; any perspective would reveal particular experiences and fictional manifestation in the construction of the world. Danto emphasises that any perspective is a purely subjective interpretation, an external projection of one's inner vital energy, a means of representation similar to a painting. Nietzsche's perspectivism distances itself both from the Kantian thesis of knowledge objectivity derived from a correspondence between the sensitive facts and the categories of the intellect and from Schopenhauer's view according to which the experiences of subjective wills represents an objectification of the external world; being in opposition with this double vision, Nietzsche's perspectivism is a criticism against the concept of objective knowledge.

***The phenomenology of conscience and the issue of ontological commitment in Sartre.*** At the beginning of his work, Danto summarises his analytical interpretation of Sartre's work by stating his aim to reveal the explicit connections in the conceptual structure of the French thinker's work: i) the connection between reality and the nature of our representations about it; ii) the connection between conscience and language from the perspective of ontological



commitment; iii) the connection between the external world and the existentially committed individual; iv) the conceptual interdependence between one's self and the selves of others and v) the connection between factual beliefs and value systems. Essentially, Sartre's philosophy is one of the most coherent examples of existentialist philosophy; one of his major works, *Being and Nothingness* has a controversial subtitle; the subtitle of *Essay in Phenomenological Ontology* can be properly understood if one considers that the existentialist humanism of the 20<sup>th</sup> century is, at least in Sartre's view, a conception that fuses Husserl's phenomenology and traditional ontology; from this point of view, Sartre seems to have been profoundly influenced by Heidegger's ontology. Danto tries to untangle the content of Sartre's philosophy, whose ambiguities and difficulties stem from a part metaphoric, part mystical and cryptic use of conceptual language; Danto undoubtedly understood Sartre although, in my view, some fragments of Danto's text would require further clarification. In any case, Danto brings clarifications pointing to the fact that not the deficiency of the analytical option, but rather the lack of clarity of Sartre's formulations is to blame wherever the logical interpretation of Sartre writings would rise questions concerning the rigorism and the coherence of the approach. Central to Danto's analysis is the idea that Sartre's existentialist perspective can be ontologically assimilated as a perspective on the individual self and the human conscience, a vision that is based on a phenomenological foundation of the existential stages of conscience. This thesis, highlighted by the analysis of conscience that Danto carries out, needs some clarifications for all the three dimensions synthetically present in Sartre's philosophy: existentialism, phenomenology and ontology.

### **Danto's ontology.**

Within the limits of the present interpretation, I will try to argue that Danto's explicit analysis of certain traditional binary oppositions in the traditional philosophical thinking (i.e., between knowledge and understanding, reality and appearance, mental and corporal, essence and existence, substance and accident, etc.) points to a precisely formulated ontological view and that, moreover, the very aim of philosophy result as a natural consequence following this comprehensive theory of existence first of all as general theory of representation that conceives the world as being external to it (so, *outside* the world as such), and later on as

ontological reality of world (i.e., as an *internal* part of it in relation to another constitutive reality of the world, namely science). I will return to Danto's distinction between *inside and outside the world*, to use his recurrent formulation.

The distinction between reality and appearance as philosophical issue belongs to ontology; for Danto, the genuine philosophical endeavour is marked by the explicitation or description of the way in which appearance was considered as reality or aporetically appears as being indistinct from the structure of external reality, as least in a non-reflexive approach specific to a form a realism characteristic to commonsense. Thus, in Danto's view, the most profound exercise of philosophy would be to clarify an ontological imprecision: Descartes's aim was to philosophically conceive the ontological reality of certain ordinary sentences that appear indistinct in our dreams and in our waking hours, the philosophical endeavour itself being responsible for clarifying the issue through disproving the ontological entities present in our dreams; Kant was preoccupied by formulating a strong philosophical distinction between behaviours whose moral value can be objectively asserted and behaviours that appear to be morally objective, but are in fact neutral from this point of view; Hume, in his analysis on causality, imagined two worlds whose ontological reality would be indistinct in the absence of philosophical exercise, one characterised by a profoundly determinist order and another, logically indistinct one, in which things would occur completely random; Turing drew attention to the fact that, apparently, there is no discrepancy between the artificial intelligence of a machine and human intelligence; Putnam, using both the example of Earth and a twin Earth or that of the brain a tub, imagined the possibility of conceiving two apparently indistinct ontological realities that become distinct through a philosophical endeavour that discredits their presence in our sensitive experience as realities that cannot be differentiated in light of the perfect coincidence of their internal structure; Duchamp suggested that, in the absence of a philosophical endeavour, one cannot distinguish between two perfectly identical objects, one being an aesthetic object and the other not. In simpler terms, according to Danto, the philosophical reflection is related to the need to differentiate between apparently indiscernible pairs of objects. This fact points to the idea that philosophical reflection should annul the sensitive experience that enables indiscernibility itself: this is tantamount to saying that experience would possess intelligibility and reality in itself, outside any correspondence with other reality outside it; Danto's analogy between

experiences and sentences as being intelligible, but lacking objective consistency (i.e., experiences as appearances and sentences as false) is illustrative in the above-mentioned sense. Here, Danto defends a reflexive ontological realism to the detriment of the commonsense realist position according to which objective realities and appearances (illusions) have the same consistency as real entities precisely as we can speak about a phenomenal existence (i.e., as content of our sensitive experience) of the objective realities and illusions.

Danto conceives the theory of representation in an integrative sense: from a structural point of view, the theory of representation contains a set of precisely determined elements, has an intelligible structure and describes a set of relations among precisely determined structural elements; second of all, the theory of representation describes the human being through what seems to essentially define it; finally, Danto reaches the conclusion that the theories of representation form the basis of the intelligibility of human history and the evolution of its cultural products. As such, Danto's theory of representation becomes an all-encompassing concept that synthetically unites nature and culture, experience and thought, appearance and reality, subjectivity and objectivity.

The cognitive dimension of Danto's concept of representation needs to be considered when the intelligibility of the system that shapes the theory of representation implies a descriptive nature: as such, the description of the theory of representation aims at the stability of the conceptual structures that make it up (subject, representation and external world), of the relations between the structural elements (subject and world, subject and representation, representation and world); finally, specific categorical concepts elucidate the possible relations between the above-mentioned elements (the concept of cause has a categorial function within the system, as it describes the conditions in which the relation between subject and world is possible, in the sense that Danto assumes that a reality external to the subject brings about a certain type of representation; also, the concept of truth describes the condition in which a relation between a certain representation and the external world is possible, in the sense that the very relation between a representation and something external to it can be conceived as true or false). From an ontological point of view, the relations between subject and world and, respectively, our representations and world are nothing but means of defining the philosophical connection between man and world; the relation between

the subject and its representations is the philosophical expression of conceptualising a certain relation we have with ourselves, something that, in a certain sense, points to an analytical reconsideration of Kant's concept of transcendental apperception.

This conception that regards the theory of representation as a system that describes a set of relations among three specific and distinct elements reveals Danto's overall epistemological view that I have called, not without a trace of ambiguity, "*positional realism*": on the one hand, Danto conceives three types of relations among the three structural elements in the theory of representation, which he organises according to their intelligibility from the point of view of a sui-generis realism that was already traditional in the analytical tradition inspired by Russell; this means that the relations between subject and world and, respectively, representations and world creates an essential break that could be surpassed by the analytical clarification of the concepts and causality and, respectively, of truth; Danto's favourite and recurrent expression, used to describe these ontological relations is that of an *outside* positioning of the subject and, respectively, of representations in relation to one and the same entity – world. On the other hand, a certain type of relation defines a view that can be assimilated to what I have called *positional realism* in Danto: the relation between the subject and its representations defines an internalist issue that cannot be conceived in the absence of considering the subject himself as a determined entity of the world from an ontological point of view, so that Danto speaks in this case of the subject's positioning *inside* the world as such. This is the conception that spans Danto's entire early philosophy, so that one could argue that the world as ontological reality is a variable depending on its explicit relation with the other elements in the theory of representation.

## **PART TWO**

**Preliminary considerations.** First of all, one should say that, of the three elements that make up the complex theory of art (philosophy, history, criticism), one is rather non-explicit: Danto never wrote a treatise of art history proper, at least in the traditional understanding of the word; he does not employ the vocabulary usually belonging to art historians in order to describe one age or another in art's temporal evolution. It may well be that Danto should reject his inclusion among the category of well-known art historians: in my view, his aim is

not to provide a history of art as chronological evolution of artistic currents and figures, but rather to articulate a convincing meaning of the complete narration that any history implicitly entails. Consequently, it is rather difficult to distinguish between Danto as art philosopher and Danto as art historian: an interpretation of the historical evolution of art is undistinguishable from a philosophical endeavour proper.

My interpretation on Danto's art philosophy, history and criticism starts from the premise that he remained unflinchingly faithful to the analytical creed of his youth, each of these three components of his art theory revealing his ontological realism and epistemological cognitivism. Anticipating, art philosophy, art history and art criticism becomes vehicles in a comprehensive theory of art representation thus: art philosophy occupies the interval between language and art, having cognitive value in relation to the way in which language reflects art; art history is the vehicle of representation that connects the art narrative with the artistic practices belonging to distinct time periods; finally, art criticism is situated in the interval between art and life, becoming a vehicle of representation with descriptive and/or cognitive value for the possible interconnections between art and life. Each of these interpretations will be dealt with in a separate section below.

**Danto – art philosopher.** In Danto's view, the analytical philosophy of art should express in meaningful terms the way in which the conceptual language is an appropriate representation of art; strictly speaking, the fulfilment of this project implies both an essentialist and ahistorical definition of art and the formulation of an ontology aiming to establish the identity of art objects in agreement with the theses of realism. It goes without saying that such an endeavour is not free from the danger of putting forward a metaphysical view that the very claim to analyticity tries to replace: this is probably why Danto also formulates a historicist conception that should legitimise the opportunity of an analytical endeavour; as far as the possibility of reconciling the analytical essentialism and the narrativist historicism with speculative aspects is concerned, this is probably the major difficulty that should be thoroughly clarified.

This very search for a real definition from an essentialist point of view, which has animated the whole range of Danto's theoretical research, points to the possibility of a conjunction between art and philosophy. His critics observed that this conjunction is rather

problematic, if not downright unacceptable within his overall theoretical framework. In my view, the connection between art and philosophy undergoes a narrative process that marks the succession of three distinct stages: first of all, the philosophical discourse tried to deny art the possibility of being considered an authentic spiritual dimension, something that Danto believes happened within the history of philosophical aesthetics from Plato to Hegel; but, art as sensitive cultural practice had to wait more than a century after Hegel's death in order to reclaim its legitimacy and authenticity, becoming a practice with significant philosophical connotations around 1965; finally, in the third stage, shaping its own status, art is completely freed from the domination of philosophy, manifesting itself in innumerable sensitive ways outside the narrative that historically connected art and philosophy. Thus, the history of art reveals throughout its course a progressive articulation of certain internal energies whose aim has been its affirmation as something that is aware of its own spirituality. That is why, before becoming liberated from aesthetic domination, artistic practice needed to simultaneously become a profound philosophical exercise. This is in fact the reenfranchisement of artistic practice, a moment when the spiritual dialogue between philosophy and art is ended, art becomes free to decide on its own manifestation and the narrative uniting them in the field of traditional aesthetics is exhausted for good. Considering this, art and philosophy are linked either by competitive or complementary interconnections, so that their current status as components of reality results after they overcame three dialectic stages of history: the first moment is marked by the philosophical tendency of art disenfranchisement, from Plato until around 1880; the second is a process spanning almost a century, during which art tried to acquire ontological status by separating itself from traditional philosophy; finally, once this ontological status is acquired, art is forever liberated from any philosophical and even historical burden. The liberation of art from these confines marks the aim of constantly purifying its contents, to that artistic expression could finally become liberated of any philosophical basis. Critics notice that this is probably the reason why Danto repeatedly highlights Duchamp's merits: the French artist observed that, in order to reenfranchise itself, art had to be free of the philosophical deadweight precisely by becoming oversaturated with philosophical contents; this is probably the ideological claim of contemporary art. Aware of the fact that it might be freed from the domination of philosophy, art adopted a philosophical strategy, so that an insistent philosophical reflection on its destiny became a *necessary*

*component* of art manifestations. This does not mean that art, in the new ideological context, claimed a stronger dependence on philosophy; on the contrary, the very fact of calling on the philosophical interrogation of its meanings might represent its break with philosophy in order to have wider possibilities of expression beyond the limits imposed by philosophical aesthetics.

**Is there a future for aesthetics?** The majority of Danto's critics and commentators observe that his analytical approach employs a separation between aesthetic and artistic, in the sense that the aesthetic corresponds to a traditional model of assessing works of art in general, while the artistic calls on a deeper understanding of what assessment comprises; actually, the analytical tradition clearly moves away from the aesthetic thinking of the Enlightenment, in the sense that identifying the artistic features of a work of art requires an assessment time that surpasses the way in which the work of art appeals directly to sensory organs. Strictly speaking, the epistemological procedure that separates the aesthetic from the artistic in Danto's case takes the form of a means of founding and even forming the ontological identity of an artwork; the work's formal properties, which formed the assessment framework of traditional aesthetics, become irrelevant in relation to the theories and practices within the artworld.

Danto's view on the analytical philosophy of art needs to eloquently clarify the way in which traditional philosophical aesthetics legitimised itself throughout history using a series of terms in order to establish the place of arts within the system of traditional sciences and the ontological nature of art; in fact, all these theories bear witness for the failure to accomplish the ontological aims that only a philosophy of art could turn to account. In turn, Danto wishes to reveal all these theories that have mistakenly claimed to reflect the essence of art, illustrating the way in which each of them was misleading: I am referring here to the considerations scattered throughout Danto's entire philosophical work which serve the basis for the reconstruction of the theoretical puzzle that legitimised the traditional philosophical aesthetics: imitation theory, reality theory, progress theory, expression and/or institutional theory represent such theoretical points of view that should be amended from the perspective of a more comprehensive theory on the ontological reality of art.

Danto's ontology of art is a philosophical exercise whose components refer to the possibility of deciding on whether an object belongs or does not belong to artworld, on the

issue of the reality of artworks, on establishing the necessary condition so that an object could be considered an artwork, on the analytical clarifications of the concept of artworld, on the essentially historical nature of art, on the ways in which an ordinary object could become an artwork following a process of conceptual transfiguration, on the status of perception within contemporary arts, on the need to provide an analytical definition that should comprise the totality of art manifestations, as well as on other possible ramifications and interpretations of his ontology within the various conceptualisations present in his work. Considering such a complex endeavour, it is evident that Danto's ontology is not free from ambiguity, traps and certain paradoxes: Danto himself was aware of the impossibility of avoiding any flaws, this is why he revised, reprised and completed throughout his work the main themes that came under frequent criticism. Nevertheless, one should mention that Danto did not revise almost anything of his 1964 essay on the analysis of the artworld or of his 1981 principal art philosophy work, *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace*.

The first step is that of convincingly clarifying the issue of indiscernibles in art: one should mention that the identity of indiscernibles allows Danto to develop his philosophical reflection; his view on the perceptual indiscernibility of two apparently identical objects is applied to not only to Warhol's Brillo boxes which, as commercial objects, were James Harvey's creation, but to other artworks as well precisely so as to expand the meanings that Danto gave to the philosophical issue of indiscernibles. The ontological individuation of artworks has many meanings revealed throughout Danto's philosophical work: i) first of all, as I have mentioned, one speaks of an ontological distinction between an art object and his perceptually indiscernible counterpart lacking any artistic content and meanings; ii) then, the issue of bestowing ontological reality to two artworks similar to be point of being indistinguishable, in the sense that one needs a foundation that would ontologically legitimise both of them as artworks; iii) there are also situations in which certain works of art have a certain ontological identity as objects belonging to the artworld, but whose identity is reversed in the sense that they are ontologically considered mere objects; the contrary situation points to a real and true situation (i.e., mere real objects are considered artworks without having this ontological status). Strictly speaking, in Danto's case, an analytical endeavour focused on epistemological foundations of an artwork status has certain ontological implications; beyond the possibility of establishing the identity of an artwork by



distinguishing it from its non-artistic counterpart, the issue to be decided upon is that of mere ontological indiscernibility: Danto observes that, throughout history, many thinkers have been oddly blind towards the ontological approach of the perceptual indiscernibles.

The philosophical exercise applied to the clarification of art's ontological nature should be aimed at formulating the conditions necessary so that an object in the real world could acquire artistic status: Danto characterises this exercise as formulating an essential definition of art. Two fundamental criteria underlie the foundation of an art ontology, which necessarily condition the possibility of considering of object from the perspective of art reality: first of all, the artwork must have a content, some sort of reference to themes and motifs belonging to the artworld; second of all, the artwork needs to embody that meaningful content. The essentialism of his ontological view regarding the necessity of a definition of art should leave room for an explanation regarding the historical necessity of such a definition; thus, his essentialism is not an obstacle in the face of formulating a historicist thesis according to which a genuine historical reflection should determine the necessary character of any given historical fact. A genuine ontological exercise goes beyond the interrogation on the conditions of possibility for the real specific existence of a historical fact or an object in order to highlight the impossibility that the respective historical fact or object should have any other form of existence, which means going back to determining its necessary character. Thus, Danto might belong to the ontological contextualism orientation, which regards the historical placement of an artwork in necessary terms, establishing a conditioning from the point of view of art theories and art history in order to argue for the real and objective existence of artworks.

The distance ontologically separating any given objectual reality from an artistic reality could be considered in terms of what Danto calls transfiguration; evidently, Danto preferred the profoundly religious term “transfiguration” in order to emphasise that the real ontological essence of art does not exist on its own, but rather as the result of profound mutation in meaning. Meaning by deep interpretation can bestow spirituality to a real object to which our senses remain indifferent. Danto justifies his deliberate choice for the term “transfiguration” to the detriment of transformation based on the assumption that a transfigured reality actually exists simultaneously in two orders of reality, the objectual and the meaningful; by contrast, transformation refers to a certain type of metamorphosis, either

from the real to the symbolic or vice-versa, from the symbolic to an order with symbolic connotations; but, the transformed object does not retain a simultaneous double dimension. Moreover, Danto also reflected, after the reactions to the 1981 publication of his art philosophy work, *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace*, to the possibility of completing his definition of art with a third condition: most probably, this third condition should specify that the artworks is simultaneously a real object and an art object, on condition that whatever separates them should take place within the horizon of significant transfiguration from the real object towards the art object. Essentially, the following distinction could be employed to tell apart a transformative process from a transfigurative one: within the former, the artwork, through its very nature, is both a real object and an implicit text; transformation merely refers to that fact that an objectual content subjected to a textual interpretation could be assimilated to an artwork. Consequently, transformation is a process which occurs gnoseologically; conversely, transfiguration possesses certain ontological connotations regarding the way in which the real object essentially changes its ontological status.

Concluding this section dedicated to Danto's conception on the philosophical definition of art, one observes that the two pillars on which the construction of his definition is based are essentialism and historicism; according to Danto, essentialism can be conceived extensionally, in the sense that an intensionalist approach is the necessary addition to the insufficiency of approaching art in an extensional manner; this means that, if the extensions of contemporary art do not provide a precise clarification of its inner nature, then only an intensional approach in conformity with the internal essence of artworks could be assimilated to a real definition of art. In one of his art criticism essays, Danto tries to better explain his essentialist choice so that he might not be misunderstood; he argues that, in general, all essentialist theories have an exclusivist nature and that his essentialist should be understood in contrast with what we are intuitively familiar: an essentialist definition should be abstract and general enough so as not to favour certain stylistic options over others. Briefly, his essentialism necessarily implies a pluralist view on arts.

The central aim of Danto's entire analytical philosophy of art is that of providing a satisfactory conceptual clarification of art's essence; certainly, Danto implies the existence of an essential reality of art, namely something meaningful beyond the limits of the objectual content as such. This is why, from an ontological point of view, Danto first puts forward the

philosophical hypothesis of indiscernibles, a sort of philosophical charade in order to draw attention to art's profound meanings and sense; first, Danto chooses the risky and difficult way of searching for a definition that would ontologically shape the reality of the arts in his attempt to reveal the essential nature and the historical nature of arts. The entire endeavour as such can be considered over only when the interpretation of artworks has turned out to be the revealing instrument for elucidating the essentialism and historicity of art; consequently, the necessity of formulating an analytical theory of interpretation to complete Danto's philosophical journey derives from here. The logic of interpretation refers to its procedural peculiarities, as well as to its limits, as follows: i) from a procedural point of view, interpretation is equivalent to an identification through which one establishes which of the components or properties of an object belong to an artwork, through an activity that transfigures the object so that it might acquire the status of an artwork; ii) interpretation is a decisional act directed towards the significant revelation of properties and meanings susceptible of bestowing consistency to an artwork; iii) interpretation, although an intentional subjective act par excellence, confines itself to revealing those meanings that bestow real and ontological consistency to an artwork, so that one cannot speak of just as many interpretations that correspond to an equivalent number of decisions in this respect; iv) interpretation is constitutive to the ontological occurrence of an artwork, not an act applied to an art object already acknowledged as such, something that I will return to; v) Danto's observation that interpretation has exclusive reflexive, not scientific determinations is a direct consequence of the previous assumption; this means that interpretation is applied to an artwork not from outside, but in the very logic of its formation; vi) philosophical interpretation significantly differs from literary interpretation that establishes textual identities, in the sense that the philosophical art of interpretation does not reveal meaningful facts and actions that bestow narrative consistency to an artwork, but it is an integral part of its ontological structure; vii) finally, interpretation is an essential mechanism of the artworld, and interpretation limits can be imposed from outside the interpretation as such, deriving from the intelligibility limits of the artworld system.

**The narrative of art and post-historicity or how to read Danto as art historian.** First of all, one should say that Danto is not an art historian in the traditional understanding of a label

applied to an endeavour that chronologically and, usually, progressively records remarkable achievements in the artworld and paradigmatic mutations that define the evolution of this field. This being the case, the illustrative fragments that could belong to a certain history of art lack any proper historical resonance if we understand history as a positive endeavour that calls on documents and data with undeniable historical validity in order to recount meaningful series of representative currents and directions in the history of art or, as the case may be, visible breaks and discontinuities from which any history derives its form and content. I insist on the fact that Danto is not an historian in the professional sense of the term: what could be understood as his art history is derived from the possibility of putting together some isolated fragments of historical data that point to a certain mode of interpreting art history. It is no less true that Danto proves to have a thorough knowledge of art history; what distances him from hagiography is his rigorously Hegelian assumption that both unmediated history and reflected history should be overcome within a philosophical history of art. In a strict sense, his philosophical narrativism is the expression of a philosophy of art history from which one can derive even a historical narrative proper through systematisation. Danto's critical reflections on some representative artists, remarkable exhibitions or defining stylistic characteristics contribute, among others, to the possibility to retrace the historical evolution of arts together with the explanation that represents the argumentative foundation for the historical evolution of art. Thus, I start out from the following working hypothesis: Danto's philosophical reflection lays the foundation for a certain manner of understanding the evolution of art history; given this hypothesis, the conclusion will have to unequivocally illustrate that art history derives from the philosophical exercise that makes it possible.

Thus, as Danto warns us, the important narrative moments of a story are its beginning, its middle part and its ending; briefly, the ending of Danto's philosophical narrative is placed in a post-historical period characterised by art's freedom and anarchy following the final moments in the troubled history of western art. The questions that triggered the present research are: i) *how* was it possible to reach the stage that Danto speaks about? And ii) *what* exactly of all the artistic manifestations, practices and events played the role of catalyst in the post-historical destiny of contemporary arts. The question "*how?*" can be answered as follows: through the way in which a gradual change occurred in the substance of western art throughout its almost five centuries of existence. The question "*what?*" finds

an answer in that there are three paradigmatic moments in art's internal development that play the crucial role: the artistic Renaissance, the avant-gardes at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and the art of the seventh and eighth decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century with a special focus on the American pop art and Warhol's creation. In the context of the philosophical narrative, the three temporal segments taken from the historical evolution of art represent its beginning, its middle part and its ending, respectively.

***The post-historicity of art.*** According to most critics, Danto's end of art thesis contains profoundly metaphysical influences; moreover, he attempts an analogy between the destiny of philosophy and the destiny of art: he observes that the separate historical evolution of the practices in the two fields is illustrative for putting forward the following verdict: philosophy ceased to exist, in the sense that philosophical reflection on its own disappeared, being replaced with other theoretical approaches which took over the terminology and procedural mannerism specific to traditional philosophy. By contrast, art plenary developed all its potential, exhausting its spiritual resources it enjoyed during its historical evolution; this is why art ended, not in the sense that it ceases to exist, but rather in the sense that its historical spirituality is gone, and the great narrative that historically and theoretically shaped the evolution of art is no longer possible.

Evidently, assuming the thesis of the end of art leaves room for something perplexing: if art is over, what substantially remains beyond this reality? In a strict sense, I stated that the end of art thesis is identical to a certain theoretical commitment according to which artistic practices in itself did not disappear, but rather the narrative that revealed the history of the artistic practices meanings in their entirety. The affirmation of art's post-historicity falls outside the scope of the narrative as such: the artistic practices are post-historical precisely because the historical narrative could call on them from the point of view of an affinity or a disparity with the historical evolution of art is no longer able to encompass them so that the narrative as such could retain its intelligibility and theoretical coherence. What does the fact that art is over mean from an analytical point of view? Moreover, what could be intelligibly said about artistic practices that have lost touch with the historical and philosophical dimension of past art? These are two of the questions that Danto asks himself. Danto provides answers to these two questions, answers whose contrasting simplicity in relation to the complicated formulation of his previous theories becomes outrageous: nothing

can be excluded from being potentially considered art (i.e., the post-historical principle of *anything goes*). Naturally, the next question is inevitable: is Danto inconsistent to his analytical reflection by formulating this position? I first suggest the revelation of the *anything goes* principle: if the historical narrative of art is over, then no historical or theoretical constraint could reflect on the presentation of an artwork; this does not mean to say – according to what Danto assumes rather inexplicitly – that everything can be considered art (*everything goes*), but rather that no ordinary object can be denied access to the artworld, on condition that it fulfils the double requirement stipulated in the definition of art; thus, having a content (i.e., *aboutness*) and deciding whether a meaning could be embodied to its content (i.e., *embodiment*) are the elements of the definition that could ensure the inclusion or exclusion of an artwork, as the case may be; but, until the moment when the definition of art is applied to an ordinary object, one cannot say for certain that, based on perception alone, an object could be raised (i.e., transfigured) to the an ontological status specific to art objects alone. This is the fundamental meaning that Danto attributes to the postulate of *anything goes*: the English relative pronoun “anything” stands in contrast with the meaning of “everything”; the former points to a coincident, not inconsequent, understanding that corresponds to the philosophical premise of Danto’s ontology of art: if “anything” can be admitted because it cannot be perceptually distinguished from anything else, this means that two indiscernibles can both have, at the same time and under the same conditions, the ontological status of artworks. But this stands in contradiction with the principle of sufficient reasoning: how could one call upon an object’s reason for being if one can admit the possibility of an object identical to it? Consequently, there must be a reason why a distinction between two apparently indiscernible objects could be formulated: the contemporary artworld is made up of innumerable such objects, but the decision that an object belongs to the artworld as ontological entity is taken after an act of interpretation (i.e., applying the definition in a particular situation). It is essential that any object could not be excluded in principle from being appreciated from an artistic perspective: this is the sense in which the term of “anything” is used. By contrast, “everything” tells us something else: first, the fact that all the objects in this world are artworks and that, moreover, there is no theoretical possibility for excluding any of them; this is something else altogether. But perhaps the undeniable mark of recent art is the pluralist orientation. Danto often insists that

the natural consequence following the narrative ending of art history is entering post-history: we notice that the term “post-history” – through its very name – does not contain a positive determination, but is rather considered in a privative sense (i.e., a historical horizon outside history). Actually, as Danto writes, two decades had to pass between the narrative end of art history (occurring around 1960) and the post-historical establishment of the pluralist view of art; the tensions generated by the artists’ and philosophers’ feeling that the great historical art odyssey is over were primarily felt at the beginning of the 1980s, when neoexpressionism attempted a rehabilitation of painting, developing considerable energies in this respect and putting forward pictorial representations on considerable large canvasses; this effort revealed one last attempt on the part of art history to continue its evolution inaugurated by traditional art. As was expected, neoexpressionist painting was an isolated manifestation that was not in agreement with the other forces in the field of art; consequently, neoexpressionism disappeared as suddenly as it appeared, leaving behind a feeling of inevitable: the plurality of art manifestations could no longer be obscured by any attempt to rehabilitate the grand achievements of past art. This is the narrative context that announces the establishment of the pluralist view in art.

**Danto, art critic.** In the beginning of the second part of the present research, I put forward the hypothesis that Danto conceives art philosophy, history and criticism as parts of a general theory of representation in art; thus, art philosophy should explain what are the mechanism by which, using language, we can say something meaningful about art; art history becomes the vehicle of representation by which the historical narrative of art provides a meaningful recounting of art; finally, art criticism appears as possibility of representing certain facts of life as art. Danto adds that, besides the criticist tendency to organise and classify works of art according to the critic’s preference for a certain aesthetic programme, any responsible art criticism should be non-biased and pay attention to all the meaningful manifestations in the field of arts: indeed, Danto insists on the fact that his critical writings are not subjected to a certain aesthetic programme and not in agreement with a pre-established agenda; generally speaking, Danto’s art criticism remains an authentic reflection on the way in which facts of daily life can be assimilated to art and on the meaningful relations between art and life. In a certain sense, he establishes a series of skills that a true art critic should have: elegance,

experience, openness and lack of prejudice, ability to compare, artistic sense, and evidently, none of these would be possible in the absence of a thorough knowledge of art history; Danto reveals the way in which he managed to embody the ideal of what the Greeks called *ekphrasis*, in the sense that art criticism is the expression of the way in which images become words; procedurally, Danto assumes that he starts out everytime from the description of two or three works of art based on which the reader could form an image by associating them; in its turn, this mental construction of an image acquires discursive potential (i.e., *ekphrasis*). Art criticism is, then, not just a set of theoretical reflections that could establish the connection between an artwork and the artworld, but also a way in which the intelligibility of the work inside the artworld becomes manifest. The approach as such aims at eliminating as much as possible from whatever remains an enigma at a theoretical level: this means that, by description, explanation and exemplification art criticism points to the idea that the role of criticism is reduced to an interpretation to the detriment of evaluation. There is still a serious controversy opposing the supporters of art criticism as a hermeneutic fact and the supporters of the idea that art criticism should be done in light of a certain normativism: for instance, this debate brings face to face two of the most professional art critics, Arthur Danto and Noel Carroll; the later, although influenced to a large extent by Danto's art philosophy, emphasises on the art critical responsibility to produce evaluative judgments; by contrast, Danto is sceptical that the possibilities of classifying and evaluating artworks would lead to a more appropriate understanding of the artworld.

## **EPILOGUE: COGNITIVISM AND POSITIONAL REALISM IN DANTO'S PHILOSOPHY**

The aim of these final considerations on Danto's thinking is that of emphasising once more the realist and cognitivist features undeniably present in his philosophical thinking. I have chosen to name Danto's philosophical realism as *positional realism*. The explanation of this choice lies in that, if philosophy is, before anything, an individual intellectual commitment, this means that the philosophical exercise can be assimilated to a subjective, internal and non-transitive attitude; but, reducing the philosophical reflection to a psychologist, intuitionist, idealist, etc. orientation, this means that particular philosophical



orientations could never express the realities of the world beyond the whims of intelligence or the stylistic refinements of the various particular approaches. In this case, philosophy could not escape fiction, Danto emphasising the fact the pure philosophical internalism is nothing but literature. Nevertheless, a lucid philosophical realism cannot disregard the existence of the philosophical exercise as an intentional and subjective act, first of all: this is why a particular occurrence of philosophical thinking should conceive philosophy from the perspective of an entity's existence, as an entity of the real world among others; consequently, in this case, philosophy has its own objective reality. Danto warns us that such a conception on the philosophical exercise is only a descriptive activity whose truth value is indecidable: philosophy thus lacks the cognitive dimension, in the sense that it fails to explain the real and true/false connection between a particular form of language and its external reality. Consequently, in this case, philosophy is a mere description of the realities of the world, in which case it should be considered as *inside* the world as such. In Danto's view, a strong realist position should amend philosophical internalism: as such, philosophy is more valuable if it relates to the external realities of the philosophical language situated *outside* reality as such. This means that the philosophical exercise should be conceived as a reality situated *outside* the world realities, thus becoming – to use Danto's term – a semantic vehicle that explains the way in which language (i.e., philosophical language) represents reality; strictly speaking, Danto's philosophical realism is a species of the traditional philosophy of representation. I will return later to the concept of representation.

Consequently, the arguments I bring to support my interpretation of Danto's realism as *positional realism* are as follows: on the one hand, philosophy is a reality of the world among others or a real objective existence alongside others, inside the world; in this case, philosophy is a purely explicative and descriptive activity. On the other hand, philosophy can be conceived as an external reality to all the world realities, in the sense that a semantic connection is established between the truth or falsity of philosophical description and its external reality to which the description refers. *Positional realism* derives from the way in which one chooses to conceive the philosophical endeavour: either one chooses a description of world realities outside any semantic considerations, or one conceives philosophical reflection as a method for clarifying the truth or falsity of world realities. Briefly, one chooses to take up a certain philosophical position in relation to reality according to whether

one assimilates philosophical reflection to a description and, respectively, to the establishment of the truth or falsity of the descriptive activity meanings.

Another possibility to delimit Danto's philosophical reflection is to argue that his philosophical realism is more profoundly visible in his ontology, while his cognitivism is his epistemological option par excellence. This argument can be proven as follows: the real and truthful existence of a certain entity is only possible through the mediation of language; moreover, if philosophical language can accurately represent an ontological world reality, then language itself should be regarded as a real ontological entity. In simpler terms, the task of philosophy is to reveal the way in which a linguistic entity can represent an ontological reality of the world; our ideas, notions, terms, images and representations thus become the semantic vehicles mediating the possibility of a connection between two ontological realities that are mutually external to each other. The philosophical approach in this case is a realist one, because a philosophical representation through language should be necessarily matched by an external ontological reality. This means that Danto's cognitivism is not only the necessary condition of his philosophical realism, but also its corollary: the representation relation brings forth the condition that the semantic vehicle that enables it should express the correspondence relation in terms of a real and truthful knowledge; consequently, this cognitivism is essentially relational, this is why naturalism, intuitionism, psychologism or subjectivism are non-cognitive approaches par excellence. Philosophical externalism favours the relation between language and reality, while philosophy should describe the conditions of truth that make the relation between the two distinct identities be a fact of knowledge at the same time. This is why philosophy is not a species of literature, but a model for knowing the world. A special connotation of Danto's ontological realism and his epistemological cognitivism should be observed when one wants to know how he disputes two of the most destructive orientations related to the philosophical exercise: scepticism and relativism. Danto's position with regard to the two orientations can be summarised as follows: scepticism should be rejected as cognitive orientation and accepted only as a constructive descriptive position; scepticism can be employed within a theory of knowledge only inasmuch as it can provide valuable suggestions. Otherwise, scepticism should be rejected from a cognitive perspective because, if it is true that our sentences cannot be judged as true or false, then the sceptical position as such is disproven because, in turn, it cannot claim

something relevant from the perspective of truth. As far as relativism is concerned, Danto's opposition starts from the premise that cultural relativism or the specificity of a dimension of reality are not problematic, while the realist claim according to which the truth of a sentence is not relevant so as to enjoy a privileged status in relation to its falsity is; essentially, Danto is an enemy of cognitive relativism, not of cultural relativism. From a philosophical point of view, cognitive realism is the greater danger; in his view, cultural relativism is something that falls outside the scope of philosophy as such.

Thus, ontological realism and epistemological cognitivism are the defining features of Danto's entire philosophical works; once these features that span his entire philosophical works in a complete way have been revealed, what we are left with is the observation that his philosophical writings on history, action, morality and art are nothing but exercises in applied ontology and epistemology.

Danto's realism and cognitivism are fully visible in his philosophical ontology; philosophy itself is an ontological reality of the world among others, and the way in which the philosophical exercise relates to the other ontological realities is the expression of its being placed inside or outside the realities of the world. Consequently, as I have mentioned at the beginning of these conclusions, philosophy is – as the case may be – in a descriptive and, respectively, semantic relation with the realities of the world: as a descriptive approach, philosophy should explain and bring arguments for the way in which various real entities become engaged in mutual relations, including here the relations of philosophy itself with these entities, by conceiving philosophy as a reality of the world among others. In the second case, Danto considers that the philosophical exercise becomes formative in relation to the realities of world: philosophy attempts to coordinate the ways in which the realities of the world become engaged in relations with one another, and the result of this endeavour is a series of information about the world whose foundations are laid down by philosophy from outside the world. Although the relation between Danto's ontological realism and epistemological cognitivism can be conceived in terms of its strength, in the sense that a comprehensive realism is directly proportional with the sum of postulable knowledge about the external world, I observe a certain paradox in his thinking: although he supports a pluralist ontological view, one should say that the formal complexity of the real world is not the result of a cognitive multiplication of theoretical entities, but rather a type of

reductionism. Thus, Danto's cognitivism is a foundationalist and essentialist one, in the sense that knowledge about the world realities is postulable following a rigorously logicist theory. In order to single out only one example from Danto's epistemology, I argue that the cognitive role of concepts as ontological entities is postulable in a strictly externalist sense, in the sense that the concepts of our mind should mediate between a subjective reality and a corresponding ontological reality; in an internalist sense, the fact that we possess a concept does not guarantee that we also possess knowledge: a concept of the intellect could be only the expression of a relation between a subject's mental state and a subjective belief; consequently, possessing a belief allows the strict accomplishment of a world description act, not the illustration of a semantic relation (i.e., a fact of knowledge) with a reality external to the belief as such. From this perspective, Danto's cognitivism is reducible to an externalist view of knowledge, while his epistemological reductionism appears to be completely compatible with his representationalism. To simplify, his cognitivism is the strict expression of a semantic theory that allows the affirmation of the external world realities through the mediation of a correspondence between a conceptual entity and something that this entity projects in the real external world; but, Danto's conception of epistemological cognitivism and ontological realism is incomplete in the absence of a cognitive theory that facilitates the correspondence relation as such: his theory of representation fills the space between the conceptual entity and the external reality of the world. Danto assumes the fact that man, in his essence, is an *ens representans*, so that, from an ontological point of view, one cannot consider the world entities from a realist point of view in the absence of a theory of representation that should be among the truth conditions of any of these.