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# The Definition of Art and the Legacy of Joseph Margolis

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# The Legacy of Joseph Margolis

## This is not a farewell

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*Feng Peng, Peking University\*\*\*\**

The death of Joseph Margolis inspired this special issue. Joe, as he was fondly known, was a towering figure whose work influenced several fields of philosophy for nearly seven decades, beginning in the 1950s. Though he is perhaps best known for his work in aesthetics, which we honour here, he contributed to nearly every discipline and subfield of philosophy, from metaphysics to philosophy of language, and from philosophy of medicine to feminist philosophy.

He was perhaps the best modern embodiment of the Socratic ideal: a philosophical trickster, if you will, capable of turning the philosophical tables upside down with deft moves that left the majority of his interlocutors perplexed, if not speechless at times. His fiery debates with the most prominent thinkers of his generation and beyond have become legendary, lending mythic quality to his life. Among those who have fought Margolis in the philosophical arena are Arthur Danto, Nelson Goodman, Richard Rorty, and John Searle.

Margolis was a truly original thinker who had no sworn allegiance to any school or tradition. He was initially trained in the philosophy of Dewey and the early pragmatists. However, that was an ageing approach that was quickly losing ground to analytic philosophy. After completing his PhD at Columbia in 1953, Margolis had to retrain himself in what would become the dominant approach in Anglo-American

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contexts. He was never a faithful disciple, though, and he began flirting with continental thinkers early on, who shared with him a deeper sense of historicity, which captured in terms of the Heraclitan flux would become a central theme in his philosophy. In the last few decades of his life, he found a more suitable home in a return to pragmatism, which he helped to rescue from philosophical obscurity.

Perhaps Margolis' lack of a faithful philosophical allegiance, likely combined with his polemical vigour and a lack of proclivity in pushing his students to follow his philosophical agenda, has made him an outsider despite his high regard in all circles. Surprisingly, his work is frequently overlooked in recent developments of philosophical debates that he helped to create. His writings are rarely found in anthologies or readers nowadays, and his arguments are frequently set aside or ignored.

The way we commemorate Margolis' legacy here aims to correct for these unfortunate circumstances. Though we are focusing on a narrow topic in philosophy of art, that of definition, we hope that this will snowball, reviving interest in his work as a whole. We are certain that Margolis' lessons contain much to be learned, and the philosophical landscape that ignores him is much drier. His radical ideas are frequently effective antidotes to the dogmatism that generally plagues academic philosophy.

The question of demarcation has been a pivotal problem in philosophical discussions about the arts, and it had the lion's share in analytic aesthetics for decades – arguably even today. Morris Weitz' "The Role of Theory in Aesthetics" (Weitz, 1956) is still listed as the most popular article published in *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, and it still regarded as the starting point of analytic theorizing on matters of definition – if not of analytic aesthetics *tout court*.

Margolis was one of Weitz' early critics, proposing counter-arguments and alternatives to Weitz's well-known scepticism about art demarcation. Margolis' position has had a significant impact on the debate – but his contribution is nowadays often overlooked. Consider Thomas Adajian's entry in the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* on the definition of art, which is arguably the most comprehensive and well-written retrospective analysis of the entire debate. Of course, the entry mentions Weitz' famous claim that art is indefinable in the sense that it is constantly changing. Following that, it is claimed that "change does not, in general, rule out the preservation of identity over time, that decisions about concept-expansion may be principled rather than capricious, and that nothing bars a definition of art from incorporating a novelty requirement" (Adajian 2018). Although no author is mentioned, readers familiar with Margolis' 1958 article "Mr. Weitz and the Definition of Art," originally published in *Philosophical Studies* and translated here, will recognise that those points echo Margolis' rebuttal of Weitz's position. More gen-

erally, Margolis' contribution is never mentioned in Adajian's entry, not even in the references.

Margolis returns to the issue of art's demarcation repeatedly in his later works. And, while his position naturally evolved over the decades, as he candidly admitted in conversations over the years, his ideas never changed fundamentally. Margolis (2010), for instance, rehearses some of the arguments and objections that can be found in the 1958 paper. In this regard, we have decided to make that early article the starting point for the special issue. Though some may find it problematic to focus on such an early contribution, it has the advantage of being a good entry point into Margolis' philosophy because it does not require familiarity with nearly 70 years of his writing, as much of his later work does. At the same time, the ideas expressed in that paper remain pertinent.

The special issue sparked more interest than we had anticipated. As a result, we received a large number of high-quality papers, many of which came from scholars who knew Margolis personally. It seemed a shame to lose some of those contributions due to space constraints, which unfortunately every journal must deal with. The special issue was then divided into two parts. This is the first of a pair. The second will appear in one of the issues of EAJP Volume 3 soon. We are confident that our decision will be supported by our readers and the philosophical community as a whole.

As previously stated, we decided to focus on Margolis' 1958 article "Mr. Weitz and the Definition of Art" in order to give the issue a focus, avoiding both the risk of hagiographic or impossibly heterogeneous papers. It is translated into Chinese and Japanese here. The Korean version will be released in the second part of the special issue. We are extremely grateful to Wayne Davis, the current editor of *Philosophical Studies*, who campaigned tirelessly on our behalf so that Springer would waive the hefty fee normally required to obtain copyright over the original paper. Many thanks also to our translators, Naoaki Kitamura and Kazuko Oguro (Japanese), Jiachen Liu (Chinese), and our co-editor, Haewan Lee (Korean).

The essays included here clearly demonstrate the philosophical mileage of Margolis' ideas. Roberta Dreon's essay sketches a historical evolution of Margolis' views on demarcation issues, emphasising the increasing importance that historicity and contingency play in his later views. Tom Rockmore draws on Margolis' critical engagement with Parmenides to suggest a sense that, echoing the Eleatic poet-philosopher, allows us to recover an idea of art as deeply true. Julie Van Camp's critical note addresses a pressing issue in demarcation, which has resurfaced with Dom Lopes' work, namely the relationship between a general definition of art and the definition of specific art forms. Aili Whalen delves into the disagreement between Margolis and Weitz, claiming that their differences over how

Andrea L. Baldini, Peter Cheyne, Haewan Lee, Feng Peng

to define art stem from deeper contrasts in their metaphysical worldviews. Finally, James Young discusses persuasive approaches to define art using Margolis' essay and its engagement with real and essentialist definitions.

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## 韦茨先生与艺术定义

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莫里斯·韦茨 (Morris Weitz) 先生最近就艺术定义问题撰写了一篇极具误导性的文章。<sup>1</sup> 在这篇文章中, 他请求, 如他所说, “拒绝为艺术提供一种真定义, 或一组充分必要属性。”<sup>2</sup> 韦茨认为, 在讨论艺术定义问题时, 我们不应该从 “什么是艺术?” 这个问题入手, 而是必须从 “‘艺术’ 这个概念是何种概念?” 这个问题入手。<sup>3</sup> 韦茨本人承认, 现在看来, 他的早期著作《艺术哲学》<sup>4</sup> 所预设的理论前提, 在方向上就是错误的,<sup>5</sup> 而他目前所持有的观点, 在论证策略上应用了路德维希·维特根斯坦 (Ludwig Wittgenstein) 在《哲学研究》中所提出的一个区分。<sup>6</sup> 韦茨将维特根斯坦的相关讨论拓展到他自己所探讨的话题 (即艺术定义问题), 并对文中的核心主张做出如下总结:

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<sup>1</sup> 莫里斯·韦茨:《理论在美学中的作用》,《美学与艺术批评杂志》,1956年9月,第27-35页。这篇文章是1955年的梅切特奖获奖论文之一。

<sup>2</sup> 同上,第27页。

<sup>3</sup> 同上,第30页

<sup>4</sup> 剑桥:哈佛大学出版社,1950年版。

<sup>5</sup> 《理论在美学中的作用》,第29页。译者注:在《艺术哲学》中,韦茨提出了一种“有机论”(Organic Theory)的艺术定义,认为艺术在本质上是一种独特的、由内在相互关联的不同部分所组成的有机体。在《理论在美学中的作用》一文中,韦茨承认,自己曾经认为这种“有机论”的艺术定义是对艺术的真定义。不过,在该文中,韦茨认为已有的艺术定义(包括“有机论”定义)都是失败的,艺术是不可定义的。

<sup>6</sup> G. E. M. 安斯康姆译(纽约:麦克米兰出版社,1953年版);请参见,第一部分第65-75节。(转引自韦茨)

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“关于艺术的本质的问题就像关于游戏的本质的问题一样，至少在以下这些方面是这样的：如果我们真正去睁眼看看（look and see）那些被我们称为‘艺术’的东西是什么，我们也会发现，在它们之间并没有共同的属性（common properties），而只有一些错综交叠的相似之处（strands of similarities）。<sup>7</sup> 知道什么是艺术，并不在于理解某些外显的或潜隐的艺术本质，而在于能够凭借这些相似之处去辨识、描述和解释那些被我们称为“艺术”的东西。

“但这些概念（如“艺术”和“游戏”）之间具有基本的相似之处，即它们的开放结构（open texture）。在阐明这些概念时，我们可以给出某些范例（paradigm）——它们可以被毫无争议地称为“艺术”（或“游戏”），但我们无法给出任何一个有限集合以穷尽所有的案例。我可以列举出某些案例和某些条件，在这些案例中/这些条件下，我可以正确地应用“艺术”这个概念；但我无法列举出全部的案例和条件，其最重要的原因在于，无法预见的条件或新的条件总会出现，或者被设想出来。

“如果一个概念的应用条件是可以修改的，那么这个概念就是开放的；也就是说，就某个概念而言，如果可以设想出某种情况或某个案例，使得若将这个概念应用于这个案例，则要求我们在如下两种选择中做出决定：到底是对这个概念的用法加以拓展，使其涵盖这个案例；还是将这个概念封闭起来，并发明一个新的概念以应对这个新的案例及其所具有的新的属性。那么，这个概念就是一个开放概念。相反，就某个概念而言，如果这个概念的充分条件和必要条件都可以被给出，那么，这个概念就是一个封闭概念。但是，封闭概念只能出现在逻辑学和数学中，因为逻辑学和数学中的概念都是被构建（construct）出来且得到完备定义（completely defined）的。在经验领域的描述性概念（empirically-descriptive concepts）和规范性概念（normative concepts）中，不可能存在封闭概念，除非我们通过规定概念的使用范围从而武断地将它们封闭起来。”<sup>8</sup>

<sup>7</sup> 译者注：在韦茨的原文中，本段引文的前一段介绍了维特根斯坦对游戏的本质的刻画。在维特根斯坦看来，不同的游戏并不是因为共享某种属性，才被称为“游戏”，它们之所以都被称为“游戏”，是因为它们之间具有错综交叠的相似之处（criss-crossing and overlapping similarities）。

<sup>8</sup> 《理论在美学中的作用》，第 31 页。

接下来，我将系统地考察韦茨对艺术定义的指控，并给出相应反驳。我相信，无需额外的评论，这些反驳将表明，定义艺术并非在逻辑上不可行。

1. 根据韦茨的观点，定义艺术所涉及的错误（参见上述引文第三段）适用于所有经验领域的描述性概念，因此并非为艺术理论所特有。由此观之，对“人”、“树”和“石头”等概念的定义也都出现了同样的错误。但这无疑是一个奇怪的观点。对此，我认为，韦茨想要表达的意思并不是，在每一个经验-描述性概念和每一个规范性概念中都存在这种错误，而是说如果出现了这种错误，那么它只出现在经验-描述性概念和规范性概念所应用的领域中，但从不出现在逻辑学和数学中，因为逻辑学和数学中的概念“都是被构建出来且得到完备定义的”。

2. 韦茨认为“艺术”这个概念具有“开放特征”，对此，我表示认同；韦茨确实令人信服地指出，一个过时的小说定义，可能会把乔伊斯的《芬尼根的守灵夜》(*Finnegans Wake*)、多斯·帕索斯的《美国》(*U.S.A.*)以及弗吉尼亚·伍尔夫的《到灯塔去》(*To The Lighthouse*)等作品排除在小说之外，<sup>9</sup>尽管这与我们的意愿相背。因此，我们决定对这个定义做出调整，从而使其涵盖这些作品。<sup>10</sup>

3. 如韦茨所言，那些我们希望称之为“小说”的对象，它们可能确实并不共享任何可以被列举出来的、应当被我们称为“充分必要属性”的属性，而只是（如维特根斯坦所言）具有一些所谓的“错综交叠的相似之处”（在韦茨看来，在美的艺术中的任何门类都是如此，甚至艺术本身也是这样）。然而，我所必须要坚持的观点是，要决定事实是否如此，这是一个经验领域的问题，而不是逻辑领域的问题。把这个问题作为一个经验领域的问题，这一点似乎符合上述第一段引文的意图（这也符合维特根斯坦所给出的建议，即决定这个问题需要我们真正去“睁眼看看”）；它也算是部分地符合上述第二段引文所表达的模棱两可的意思，因为，韦茨提到了“我无法列举出全部的案例和条件”；但是，它不符合上述第三段引文的意图，因为韦茨使用了“只能”这个字眼，<sup>11</sup>它也不符合该文其他部分的意图——韦茨清楚明白地表述了自己最极致的观点：“我所要论证的是，艺术具有丰富性和冒险性的特征，在艺术中始终存在着变化与新的创造，这使得从逻辑上来讲，不可能确保任何关于艺术的定义属性 (*defining properties*) 是正确的。”<sup>12</sup>显然，这句话倾向于强化反驳 1 中所提出

<sup>9</sup> 同上，第 31 页。

<sup>10</sup> 同上，第 32 页。

<sup>11</sup> 译者注：此处，马戈利斯是指上述第三段引文中“但是，封闭概念只能出现在逻辑学和数学中”这句话。

<sup>12</sup> 同上。

的观点，即，尽管韦茨所感兴趣的概念定义问题出现在经验领域，但并非经验领域中的每一个概念都必然存在这个问题；正是因为艺术具有特殊的属性（比如，按照韦茨的说法，丰富性和冒险性），才让我们在定义“艺术”这个概念时遇到了问题。

4. 在论证“艺术”是一个开放概念时，韦茨似乎混淆了逻辑上的理由和实践上的理由。因为，当韦茨解释为什么“艺术”是一个“开放的”概念时，他说到：“我们当然可以选择把概念封闭起来。但是，把诸如“艺术”、“悲剧”和“肖像画”等概念封闭起来，这是很荒唐的。因为，这样会阻碍艺术的创造力。”<sup>13</sup> 就这个论断而言，韦茨或许是对的，尽管我怀疑并非如此。毕竟，我们并不希望对“生物体”的定义，会阻碍生物体的进化，但同时，我们又有合理的理由去定义“生物体”这个概念（按照韦茨对定义概念的理解），从而使这个定义帮助我们理解那些“新的和可被设想出来的”生物体。然而，除此之外，更重要的是，韦茨为反对艺术定义所提供的理由显然是一个实践上的理由：他只是担心，要定义像艺术这样纷繁复杂又富有创造性的事物，这很可能超出了任何人的能力，以至于任何尝试很可能都会失败（尽管，他没有任何逻辑上的依据认为任何定义艺术的尝试都会“必然地”（necessarily）失败），因为艺术理论家们通常都仅仅致力于探索自己所研究的艺术门类和艺术传统中的特征，而这往往会使得他们为“艺术”这个一般性的概念所提供的定义难免有所偏颇和疏漏。

5. 韦茨为反驳艺术定义所提供的理由仅仅是实践上的理由，这一点可以从如下说法中再次显而易见地得以印证：韦茨承认“艺术中存在着合理的、可用的封闭概念”，因为这些概念“是出于某种特殊的目的而被封闭起来的。”<sup>14</sup> 他继续以令人信服的方式指出，“我们至少可以对现存的希腊悲剧给出一种理论或真定义”，只是实际上亚里士多德所给出的定义是错误的。<sup>15</sup> 但是，如果我们承认这一点（而且，很难看出它如何能够被合理地否认），那么究竟在何种意义上，“悲剧”、“喜剧”和“艺术”这样的概念不能被给出真定义呢？现在，我们可以看出，当韦茨提出那个最极致的观点（即反驳3中所引用的观点）时，他已经不知不觉地踏入了一个隐含的循环中。因为，当他谈到“艺术的冒险性特征”时，他想说的其实是：人们现在希望某些东西被承认为艺术品，然而，一个过时的艺术定义，很可能（在这里，又一次，韦茨没有逻辑上的依据来使用“必然地”一词）无法将这些东西界定为艺术品。<sup>16</sup> 总

<sup>13</sup> 同上。

<sup>14</sup> 同上。

<sup>15</sup> 同上。

<sup>16</sup> 译者注：马戈利斯之所以说韦茨的论证存在循环的问题，在于韦茨用艺术具有冒险性的特征，来解释

之，韦茨对艺术定义的反驳，在论证上混淆了经验层面和逻辑层面的理由：对于任何一种艺术定义而言，如果我们想要把某些特定的东西接纳为艺术，而这些东西并不满足该定义为艺术品所给出的充要属性，那么，在经验层面上注意到该定义的不足是一回事，在逻辑上证明无法为任意一组已经被承认为艺术品的东西列举出充分必要属性是另一回事。而且，正是因为不满意任何经验层面上（已有的）艺术定义，所以我们才要去修正对艺术的定义，去做出一个（韦茨所谓的）“决定”。<sup>17</sup>

6. 韦茨否认在数学和逻辑学中也会存在如上所述的概念定义问题（如他在上述第三段引文中所说），而这肯定是错误的。因为，可以设想的是，即使数学和逻辑学中的概念是被“构建”出来的，但如果我们去检验这些概念的用法，我们依旧可以“决定”（仍然是出于实践上的目的）去改变特定概念的定义。而这已经满足了韦茨对“开放”概念所提出的标准（参见上述第三段引文）。例如，我们可以设想：在数学发展的早期阶段，人们为数构建出某种定义。然而，在数学发展的后期阶段，某些新的对象被创造出来，使得过去对数的定义无法应用于这些新的对象。可以想见的是，在此情况下，我们可以有两种做法：我们可以“决定”，发明一个不同于“数”的、新的概念，用这个新的概念来应对这些新的对象，或坚持认为在“数”这个概念所指涉的对象之间只存在家族相似；或者，我们也可以“决定”修改原有的对“数”的定义，以适应数学在后期阶段的发展，从而接纳这些新的对象。在这两种做法之间，显然，后者是更合理的做法。我们清楚地认识到，这种修改是出于实践上的原因。而且，某个领域中的某种情况出现了修改，并不意味着这个领域中的每一种情况都会出现类似的修改。<sup>18</sup>

7.（在上述第三段引文中）韦茨声称，我们无法在“经验-描述性”领域中提供封闭概念，“除非我们通过规定概念的使用范围从而武断地将它们封闭起来。”然而，这个说法有些奇怪。因为，这似乎暗示出，除了这种规定性的方法之外，还有另一种方法来确保获得封闭概念。然而，仔细想一想，其实并没有这样的方法。一方面，按照韦茨的观点，即使在数学和逻辑学这种“享有特权”的领域中，我们也是通过这种规定性的方法确保获得封闭概念。也就是说，在确保获得封闭概念的方法上，经验领域与数学和逻辑学其实并没有什么不同；另一方面，如我们在反驳5中所见，实

艺术无法被定义。然而，根据马戈利斯的解读，艺术的冒险性特征就体现为，某些被人们希望当作“艺术品”的对象却无法被（已有的）艺术定义所界定的。也就是说，待解释项已经被解释项所预设。所以，在论证上构成循环。

<sup>17</sup> 译者注：这里的“决定”，指第三段引文中，韦茨在解释“开放概念”时所提到的决定，即要么拓展这个概念的用法，使其涵盖和接纳新的案例；要么把这个概念封闭起来，并发明新的概念来应对新的案例。

<sup>18</sup> 译者注：此处呼应反驳1中的结论。

实际上，韦茨并非总是以贬低的姿态来看待经验领域中的规定性定义，他只是坚持要求，对这种规定性定义的使用，一定要出于某种实践上的理由（即服务某种实践上的目标）。这会使得我们不得不接受一个更令人惊讶的结论：韦茨的整个论证隐秘地预设了，在某种意义上，我们可以把握事物的永恒形式。<sup>19</sup>也就是说，在不诉诸任何定义的情况下，我们先辨识（recognize）出《芬尼根的守灵夜》是一部小说，正如福楼拜的《包法利夫人》也是一部小说一样，因此，我们拒绝任何将《芬尼根的守灵夜》排除在小说之外的关于“小说”的定义。<sup>20</sup>韦茨本人当然不会同意以这种方式来解读他的观点。但除此之外，我们很难找出其他的方式来合理地解读以下两段引文：

“如果我们按照字面意思来理解这些美学理论（即把它们理解为对艺术的真正定义），那么如我们所见，它们都是失败的；但是，如果我们根据它们各自的功能和主张对它们加以重构，使它们为确立艺术质量的评判标准提供严肃的、有理有据的建议，那么我们会发现，美学理论并非毫无价值。”<sup>21</sup>

“在将某物辨识为艺术品的标准中，没有哪一条是可以充当定义的标准，它们都既不充分也不必要。因为，我们有时可以断言某物是艺术品，进而否认已有的任何一条标准……”<sup>22</sup>

从上述引文来看，对于一组给定的对象（艺术品），和一个关于这组对象的定义（艺术定义），要么（a）从经验事实来看，这个定义是不恰当的，因此我们需要完善它；

<sup>19</sup> 译者注：结合下文马戈利斯对 (a), (b), (c) 三种情况的分析，此处，“把握事物的永恒形式”可能是指，通过把握事物的形式来理解事物的本质。

<sup>20</sup> 译者注：马戈利斯这个例子似乎并不恰当。在韦茨的原文中，我们需要实践上的原因来合理地封闭一个概念，此时这个概念是可以被给出真定义的，如“现存的希腊悲剧”；在马戈利斯的例子中，他的意思似乎是：我们有一个实践上的理由（即，我们辨识出《芬尼根的守灵夜》是一部小说，而且想要把它接纳为一部小说），出于这个原因，我们拒斥那些未能把《芬尼根的守灵夜》接纳为小说的定义。结合下文 (c) 所提供的思路，马戈利斯认为，我们要尝试找出《芬尼根的守灵夜》和之前被我们承认为小说的对象之间所共享的充分必要属性，从而为“小说”这个概念提供一个新的真定义。乍看起来，两个例子似乎是可以类比的，但是，仔细比较，或许它们存在差别。问题的关键在于，如何理解“实践上的理由”？在原文中，韦茨并没有对“实践上的理由”给出清楚的解释，不过，在韦茨看来，之所以“现存的希腊悲剧”可以有真定义，而“悲剧”或“小说”没有真定义，就在于前者是对一组已经确定（即不会有新成员加入）的对象做出定义，而后者是对一组依然不断有新成员加入的对象（并可能无法被原有定义所界定）做出定义。因此，一种合理的解释是，无论韦茨所谓的“实践上的理由”究竟指什么，但是它实际上预设了被定义的对象是确定的，即不会有新成员加入。如果这种解释是正确的，那么，马戈利斯其实误解了韦茨所谓的“实践上的理由”。正因如此，马戈利斯给出的《芬尼根的守灵夜》这个例子是不恰当的，因为“我们先辨识出《芬尼根的守灵夜》是一部小说，所以我们想要把它接纳为小说”，可能并不构成韦茨所要求的“实践上的理由”。

<sup>21</sup> 同上，第 35 页。

<sup>22</sup> 同上，第 34 页。

要么 (b) 一些新的对象被武断地挑选出来, 并被称为“艺术”, 在此情况下, 任何艺术定义都对它们束手无策; 要么 (c) 出于实践上的原因, 我们现在希望对这组对象进行扩充, 以接纳一些新的对象, 在此情况下我们必须尝试找出它们所共享的充分必要属性, 从而对它们下一个新的定义 (而且我们无法事先决定这个尝试是不可能实现的)。也就是说, 要么 (b) 是正确的, 即所有的定义都存在规定性的成分, 要么 (c) 是正确的, 那么我们必须持有某种版本的形式主义艺术理论<sup>23</sup> (即使我们只能隐约地通过事物之间的“家族相似”辨识出这种形式)。<sup>24</sup> 我要尽快指明, 即使韦茨对艺术定义所做出的经验观察是可辩护的, 即使我们只能列举出艺术品之间的“家族相似”, 这也并不意味着定义“艺术”这样一个“经验领域的描述性”概念, 在逻辑上是不可能的; 据我所见, 斯蒂文森 (C. L. Stevenson) 就在“家族相似”这个概念基础之上为定义艺术提供了一种方案 (而且, 这种方案看起来在逻辑上是正确的)。<sup>25</sup>

8. 需要注意的是, 当韦茨和维特根斯坦谈及“家族相似”时, 他们都认为绝对无法列举出这些被谈及的对象所共享的充分必要属性。而这是毫无根据的。韦茨所做的工作只能说明, 一些特定的、著名的艺术定义无法恰当地解释某些已经被确定为艺术品的东西。韦茨转而诉诸“家族相似”这个概念, 这充其量只是一种经验层面上的妥协而已: 由于很多已有的 (艺术) 定义都未能成功, 因此我们倾向于 (至少在归纳的意义上) 认为, 任何对艺术的定义都不可能成功 (比如, 韦茨对自己之前提出的

<sup>23</sup> 译者注: 因为, 按照 (c), 我们并非要武断地把《芬尼根的守灵夜》接纳为小说, 而是出于一个“实践上的理由”才做出“决定”把《芬尼根的守灵夜》接纳为小说。这个“实践上的理由”就是“我们先辨识出《芬尼根的守灵夜》是一部小说”。但是, 我们如何能先辨识出《芬尼根的守灵夜》是一部小说呢? 显然, 诉诸之前的“小说”定义是行不通的: 一方面, 韦茨认为将某物辨识为艺术品的标准并不是定义艺术的标准; 另一方面, 如果诉诸之前的“小说”定义可以辨识出《芬尼根的守灵夜》是一部小说, 那么我们就不需要 (采纳马戈利斯的说法) 拒绝并修改这个定义了。因此, 马戈利斯认为, 如果我们能够不诉诸“小说”定义而先辨识出《芬尼根的守灵夜》是一部小说, 那么我们就只能从形式入手, 通过理解事物的形式, 把握事物的本质或辨识出事物的身份。这就意味着, 如果 (c) 成立, 那么“我们先辨识出《芬尼根的守灵夜》是一部小说”构成一个“实践上的理由”, 那么我们就需要持有某种版本的形式主义艺术理论 (至少是一种能够从知识论的层面上回答“理解某物的形式与辨识某物是否是艺术品”这个问题的形式主义艺术理论)。然而, 结合脚注 20, 如果“我们先辨识出《芬尼根的守灵夜》是一部小说”并非韦茨意义上的“实践上的原因”, 那么, 我们至少有理由认为, 马戈利斯在反驳 7 中提出的论证是存在问题的。

反驳 7 是本文中较难理解的内容, 译者根据自己的理解, 在脚注 20 和脚注 23 中对马戈利斯的论证给出了解释和反驳, 仅供参考, 如有错误之处, 还请批评指正。

<sup>24</sup> 这是一个有趣而又奇怪的观点: 对“艺术”一词的日常用法的呼吁背后, 竟然隐藏着一种简朴版本的形式主义艺术理论。译者注: 马戈利斯之所以认为这个观点是“有趣而又奇怪的”, 可能是因为, 在该文中, 韦茨通过对“艺术”一词的日常用法进行分析, 从而论证艺术不可定义, 辩护了一种反本质主义的立场, 而形式主义艺术理论代表了一种本质主义的立场。所以, 如果马戈利斯的说法成立, 韦茨为反本质主义立场的辩护, 竟然预设了一种本质主义的艺术理论, 那么这确实可以算是“有趣而又奇怪的”。

<sup>25</sup> 请参见, 《论“什么是一首诗?”》, 《哲学评论》, 1957 年 7 月, 第 329-362 页。尤其见第 340 页-第 347 页。

“有机理论”也感到失望，而这正印证了这一结论)。但是，这种操作是把经验领域的发现（而且是否定意义上的发现）转换为最强劲的逻辑上的反驳。实际上，使用“家族相似”这个概念只是现阶段不可避免的权宜之计而已；我们可能会在之后找出一个合适的（艺术）定义，这在逻辑上并非是不可能的；否则，这种所谓逻辑上的反驳也同样会适用于那些在用法上符合“家族相似”模型的概念。比如，我们之前也认为在不同类型的能量（energy）之间只存在“家族相似”，但是这种理解已经逐步让位于一种对能量的充分必要属性的定义，而这种定义在经验层面上是恰当的。

9. 当韦茨做出如下论断时，他的论证就已经沦为了极端的狡辩。韦茨讲到：“在将某物识别为艺术品的标准中，没有哪一条可以充当定义的标准，它们都既不充分也不必要。因为，我们有时可以断言某物是艺术作品，并且否认已有的任何一条标准……即使是我们一直公认为最基本的标准，即艺术品必须是人造物。比如，让我们来看看这句话：‘这块浮木是一件可爱的雕塑。’”<sup>26</sup>

毫无疑问，在日常语言中的确存在像韦茨所给出的例子这样的话语。但是，即使在日常语言中，我们也并不需要按照字面意思把这样的话语理解成对事实的陈述。如果请一个人来解释这句话的意思，他当然不会按照字面意思来解释，而是很可能会解释成：这块浮木看起来很像一件雕塑，就仿佛大自然是一位雕塑家一样，面对这块浮木，我们甚至可以设想，它可能实际上就是被某位人类雕塑家雕琢成了现在的样子。由此来看，按照日常语言中我们对这句话的理解，当我们说“这块浮木是一件可爱的雕塑”时，我们并非想要否认，“是一件人造物”是某物成为艺术品的必要条件。那么，这句话究竟应该按照字面意思来理解，还是按照隐喻意思来理解呢？诸如此类的争论向我们提出了一个问题：要支持或反驳韦茨的观点，我们需要提供何种类型的证据呢？<sup>27</sup>在我看来，是否真地有人（比如韦茨本人）更偏向于按照字面意思来理解这句话，对于我们判断这句话是否可以用来支持或反驳韦茨的观点，其实是无关紧要的。因为，一方面我们可以接受，在日常语言中，这句话存在某种隐喻意思，也就是说，我们可以把一块浮木称为一件雕塑；另一方面，我们也认识到，在隐喻意思上把某物称为艺术品，与在字面意思上把某物称为艺术品，是不一样的；

<sup>26</sup> 《理论在美学中的作用》，第 34 页。

<sup>27</sup> 译者注：“这块浮木是一件可爱的雕塑”这句话有两种意思，一种是字面意思，另一种是隐喻意思（尽管马戈利斯没有引入“隐喻意思”这个概念来加以解释）。如果这句话要用来支持韦茨的观点，那么就必须按照字面意思来理解，即“这块浮木真地是一件可爱的雕塑”；然而，在马戈利斯看来，根据我们对日常语言的使用，按照隐喻意思来理解这句话至少是可以说得通的，即“这块浮木看起来像一件可爱的雕塑。”因此，马戈利斯所提出的问题，其实是：上述的例子，如果按照字面意思来理解，能够充当支持韦茨的观点的证据吗？如果按照隐喻的意思来理解，能够充当反驳韦茨的观点的证据吗？

尽管，我们可以在隐喻意思上把一块浮木称为一件雕塑（在日常语言中，这是说得通的）；但是，这块浮木，与我们在字面意思上使用“雕塑”或“艺术品”一词时所指涉的那些对象，存在着根本上的差别。正因如此，我们可以跳出日常语言（尽管，我们并非没有考虑到日常语言中的隐喻意思），做出一个“决定”，让“艺术品”的外延不包含这块浮木。如果说，这种“决定”体现了艺术定义的规定性，那么，我实在想不出如何把这种规定性从任何定义中消除掉（因为，任何定义都涉及这种意义上的规定性）。所以，即使有人问，在归纳的意义上，如何定义艺术；而且，即使我们发现，“家族相似”很可能是我们能够列举出来的唯一特性；这也并不影响我们借助“艺术”概念对与艺术相关的经验性知识进行甄别。因为，我们可以构建一个“艺术”概念，使它至少能够涵盖“艺术”一词在日常语言中的绝大多数用法，并且使它与其他区分一起，廓清我们关于艺术的经验性断言，使它们免于矛盾。关于这一点，我们可以在日常语言中找出类似的例子。在日常语言中，当我们使用“鱼”这个词的时候，有时候我们所指的对象是海豚或鲸鱼，但是这并不妨碍我们在科学意义上准确地使用“鱼”这个词。

10. 现在让我们重新考虑反驳 3 中的引文，指出韦茨的观点中最根本的问题。如韦茨所说，艺术的创新性特征“从逻辑上来讲，不可能确保任何关于艺术的定义属性 (defining properties) 是正确的。”我用斜体字把关键字眼标识出来了。然而，紧接着这句引文，韦茨又承认我们“可以……选择把概念封闭起来”。所以，在他看来，一个这样的概念并不是自相矛盾的。<sup>28</sup>也就是说，在逻辑上，我们并非不可能构建出一个可被给出真定义的、封闭的“艺术”概念，只是我们无法确保任何关于“艺术”概念的真定义是正确的。如果我们去仔细阅读韦茨所引用的维特根斯坦的原文，<sup>29</sup>我们会发现，维特根斯坦的目的是让我们注意到，凭借“家族相似”来刻画的概念和被有意地封闭起来的（即凭借充要条件来刻画的概念），在用法上既有相似之处，又彼此不同（有趣的是，与韦茨不同，维特根斯坦承认，即使是数学中的概念也可以在一种“开放的”意义上来使用。）换句话说，维特根斯坦区分了对概念的两种用法（一种是“封闭的”意义上的用法，另一种是“开放的”意义上的用法），并且按照“家族相似”的模型对“游戏”这个概念的用法做出了检验。他明确地说，

<sup>28</sup> 译者注：此处，“这样的概念”指的是，一个被封闭的开放概念。马戈利斯对韦茨原文的解读可以理解：一方面，我们可以选择把一个概念封闭起来，使得这个概念可以被给出真定义；另一方面，在逻辑上，我们不能确保任何对这个概念的真定义是正确的。根据前者，这个概念是封闭的；根据后者，这个概念是开放的。但是，二者并不矛盾。

<sup>29</sup> 《哲学研究》，第一部分，第 68 节。

数学中的概念同样既可以在“封闭的”的意义上使用，又可以在“开放的”的意义上使用。但他坚称（虽然他的论证并非确定无疑），我们是在“开放的”意义上使用“游戏”这个概念，仿佛“游戏”这个概念只能在“开放的”意义上得以使用一样。而韦茨则随之认为，我们无法在逻辑上确保任何在“封闭的”意义上对“艺术”这个概念的使用是正确的，尽管实际上他的意思只不过是：就“艺术”这个概念而言，其“封闭的”意义上的用法与“开放的”意义上的用法有所不同；以及在使用“艺术”这个概念时，没有人有理由更偏向“封闭的”意义上的用法。然而，反过来，我们不禁要问：在使用“艺术”这个概念时，为什么“开放的”意义上的用法更加优先、更受偏向呢？对于这一点，韦茨并没有给出解释。<sup>30</sup>

11. 我们还可以进一步论证，韦茨对开放概念和封闭概念的讨论，并不能实现预期的论证效果，甚至是适得其反的。因为，他未能顾及到，即使是通过“家族相似”界定的概念，也存在“封闭的”意义上的用法和“开放的”意义上的用法的区分。让我们来看看“游戏”这个概念。求爱是一种游戏吗？爱情是一种游戏吗？人生是一种游戏吗？<sup>31</sup> 因此，即使是“游戏”这种凭借“家族相似”刻画的开放概念，也要求有某种规定性的要素对其用法加以约束，即也需要有“封闭的”意义上的用法；否则，在语言的使用中，我们就将面临混乱无序的局面。但是，如果经由“家族相似”所刻画的概念也可以有“封闭的”意义上的用法，那么为什么通过充分必要属性所界定的概念不能有“封闭的”意义上的用法呢？<sup>32</sup> 简单来说，在韦茨的论证中，“开放”概念似乎有两种含义，而韦茨在使用这个概念时存在着混淆。有时候，“开放”概念指凭借“家族相似”所界定的概念；有时候，“开放”概念是相对于“封闭”概念的概念。<sup>33</sup> 这两种含义是彼此独立的，而且后一种含义更符合这里的论证要求。总结起来，维特根斯坦所关注的是，通过“家族相似”所刻画的概念本身是可以作为“家族相似”概念被使用的（即，可以在“开放的”意义上被使用的）；但是，他有时会

<sup>30</sup> 译者注：在马戈利斯看来，韦茨的工作最多只能说明，在使用“艺术”这个概念时，我们不应该更偏向“封闭的”意义上的用法。但是，这不能说明，我们为什么就要（如韦茨所说）偏向“开放的”意义上的用法，甚至认为“艺术”这个概念只有“开放的”意义上的用法。

<sup>31</sup> 译者注：列举这三个例子，马戈利斯的意思是，它们与游戏之间未必不存在家族相似，但是，我们似乎并不认为这三者是游戏。

<sup>32</sup> 译者注：此处马戈利斯的论证可能存在问题。因为，韦茨并不反对经由充分必要属性所刻画的概念可以在“封闭的”意义上使用，相反，他恰恰是认为当我们根据概念使用范围人为地把一个概念封闭起来的时候，才可以用充分必要属性来界定这个概念，比如前述的“现存的希腊悲剧”这个例子。

<sup>33</sup> 译者注：在马戈利斯看来，“开放”概念中的“开放”，有时指界定概念的方式，如概念是凭借“家族相似”来界定，还是通过“充要条件”来界定；有时指概念的用法，任何概念都可以有“开放的”意义上和“封闭的”意义上这两种用法。

把论证拓展出去，以至于似乎认为，有一些概念（比如“游戏”）只有作为凭借“家族相似”来刻画的概念才可以被使用（或者说，只有“开放的”意义上的用法）。这显然是不对的。而且，即使我们只在后一种含义下使用“开放”概念，概念本身的“开放性”也并非自动生成的。因此，仅仅说“艺术”概念不是通过充分必要属性而是通过“家族相似”得以刻画的，并不能避免韦茨对艺术定义所提出的反驳：因为，经由“家族相似”界定的概念也有“封闭的”的用法，而这样就还是会阻止艺术的创新和发展。（如果韦茨不想接受这个结果，那么按照同样的逻辑逆推），当我们用充分必要属性来界定“艺术”概念，并且在“开放的”意义上使用这个概念时，也不必承担韦茨所提出的“阻碍艺术的创造力”之类的反驳。

我认为，上述对韦茨的论证的反驳是成立的。由于，定义“艺术”并非在逻辑上自相矛盾，而且定义“艺术”和定义其他概念（这些定义既有意义又取得了成功）相类似，因此，我认为我们应该继续尝试为“艺术”提供定义。

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## ワイツ氏と芸術の定義\*

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芸術の定義という問題に関するモリス・ワイツ氏の最近の論文は、きわめて誤解を招くものである<sup>1</sup>。彼の主張は、彼自身の言葉によれば「芸術の真なる定義、すなわち、芸術にとって必要かつ十分な性質の集合」を与えるという問題に取り組むのを「拒否しよう」と訴えるものである<sup>2</sup>。われわれは「芸術とはなにか」ではなく「〈芸術〉とはいかなる種類の概念であるか」という問いから始めなければならない、と彼は論じている<sup>3</sup>。そして彼の現在の見解——彼の前著『芸術哲学』<sup>4</sup>は

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<sup>1</sup> 「美学における理論の役割」、『美学・芸術批評雑誌』15: 27-35 (1956年9月)。この論文は、1955年のマチェット財団賞の受賞論文の一つである。

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 27.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 30.

<sup>4</sup> ケンブリッジ、ハーバード大学出版、1950年。

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現在では間違いだと考える前提に立っていたと彼自身が認めている<sup>5</sup>——を支える議論の材料が認めている<sup>6</sup>——を支える議論の材料は、ルートヴィヒ・ウィトゲンシュタインが『哲学探究』において提案した一つの区別を適用するところからもたらされている<sup>7</sup>。ワイツ氏はウィトゲンシュタインの言説と彼自身が扱う論点との関連性を、次のように要約している。

芸術の本性という問題は、少なくとも次の点において、ゲームの本性という問題に似ている。われわれが〈芸術〉と称するものがなんであるかを実際に見ると、そこに共通の性質はなにも見あたらず、ただ一連の類似性が見つかるだけだろう。芸術とはなにかを知っているということは、なにか顕在的な、あるいは潜在的な本質を理解しているということではなく、〈芸術〉と呼ばれるものを、そうした類似性によって識別し、記述し、説明することができるということなのである。

しかし、〈芸術〉の概念と〈ゲーム〉の概念の間の基本的な類似点は、それらの開かれた織り（open texture）である。それらの概念を明確にしてゆくとき、まさしく〈芸術〉あるいは〈ゲーム〉と呼ぶことにまったく疑いの余地がないような特定の（範例的）事例は提示できるが、事例を網羅的に集めることはできない。芸術という概念が正しく適用されるような事例や条件をいくつか挙げることはできるが、すべてを列挙することはできないのだ。その最も重要な理由は、予見不可能な条件が現れることや、新奇な条件を予想することが、常に可能だということである。

ある概念の適用条件が改定・修正可能であるとき、その概念は開かれたものである。すなわち、われわれの側である種の「決定」をくだすことが求められるような状況ないし事例——それが含まれるように概念の使用法を拡張するのか、それとも、もとの概念を閉じたうえ

<sup>5</sup> 「美学における理論の役割」、29頁。

<sup>6</sup> 「美学における理論の役割」、29頁。

<sup>7</sup> G・E・M・アンスコム（訳）、ニューヨーク、マクミラン出版社、1953年。第一部65-75節を参照。ワイツによる引用。〔ウィトゲンシュタイン『哲学探究』、鬼界彰夫（訳）、講談社、2020年、74-78頁を参照。〕

で新しい事例とその新しい性質を扱うための新しい概念を作り出すのか、という決定を要求する状況や事例——を想像できるか、あるいは実際に取り出すことができる、という場合がそうである。ある概念を適用するための必要十分条件が言明可能であるとき、その概念は閉じられたものである。しかしこれは、概念が構成され完全に定義されている論理学や数学においてだけ起こり得ることである。経験的-記述的な概念と規範的な概念に関しては、使用法の範囲を規約として定めることによって概念を恣意的に閉じないかぎり、それは起こり得ないのである<sup>8</sup>。

本論では、ワイツの主張に関していくつかの意見を系統立てて述べようと思う。それによって、注釈を加える必要もなく、芸術を定義するという試みの論理的な適切性が示されることになるだろうと、私は確信している。

1. ワイツの考えでは、芸術を定義するという事に含まれる誤りは（上に引用した第三のパラグラフを参照）、すべての「経験的-記述的」概念にあてはまるものであって、芸術論において特有に見られるものではない。このことに基づくと、〈人〉や〈木〉や〈石〉の定義も同じ誤りに陥ることになる。ただこれが奇妙な見解であることは間違いない。私の考えでは、ワイツが言いたいのは次のことだ。すなわち、問題の誤りは、「経験的-記述的」な領域と「規範的」な領域のすべての事例に生じるわけではないが、見つかると思えばそれらの領域においてだけだということ、また、「概念が構成され完全に定義されている」論理学や数学においてはその誤りは決して生じない、ということである。

2. 私は、〈芸術〉の「開かれた性格」に関するワイツの見解には賛同する。ワイツは、小説の古めかしい定義が、私たちの希望に反してジョイスの『フィネガンズ・ウェイク』やドス・パソスの『U.S.A.』、ヴァージニア・ウルフの『灯台へ』<sup>9</sup>などを除外しうるものであるということ、それゆえわれわれは、これらが含まれるようにその定義を調整しようと決定するのだということ、たしかに説得的に示している<sup>10</sup>。

3. 私たちが〈小説〉と呼びたいものは（芸術の他のいずれの下位分類も、さら

<sup>8</sup> 「美学における理論の役割」、31頁。

<sup>9</sup> Ibid. p. 31.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid. p. 32.

には総称的な類としての〈芸術〉も)、その類全体にとって「必要かつ十分な性質」とわれわれが呼びたくなるような性質を一つ一つ取り出せる仕方を持っているわけではなく、たんに(ウィトゲンシュタインが言うところの)「一連の類似点」を持っているだけだ、ということは事実かもしれない。ただし私が強調したいのは、これが正しいか否かに決着をつけることは経験的な問題であって論理的問題ではない、ということである。それが経験的な問題であることは、上に引用した第一の段落が言わんとしていることであると思われる(「見よ」というウィトゲンシュタインの忠告<sup>11</sup>が言わんとしていることもこれである)。またこのことは、「すべてを列挙することはできない」とワイツが述べている上記第二の引用段落の趣旨にも多義的な仕方でも含まれているが、その一方で、ワイツが「だけ」という言葉を使っている第三段落の趣旨ではなく、彼の論文の他の部分の趣旨でもない。彼は自らの最も極端な見解を次のようにはっきりと述べている——「つまり私が言いたいのは、芸術が非常に拡張的で冒険的な性格を持ち、変化や新しい創造が芸術に常に存在するがゆえに、芸術を定義するようないかなる性質の集合を確保することも論理的に不可能である、ということだ」<sup>12</sup>と。ワイツのこの見解はもちろん、本稿の第一節で私が述べた論点を強化することに資するものである。すなわち、ワイツが関心を持つ定義の問題は経験的な領域において現れるが、それは必ずしも経験的な概念のすべてに適用されるとは言えない、という論点である。定義しようとするわれわれの努力を困難にするのは、芸術が持つ特殊な性格なのだ。

4. ワイツはその論述のなかで、論理的な理由とたんに実践的な理由とを混同しているように見える。というのも彼は、〈芸術〉がなにゆえに「開かれた」概念であるかを説明するに際して、次のように言うからである——「われわれはもちろん、芸術という概念を閉じることを選択することはできる。しかし〈芸術〉や〈悲劇〉や〈肖像画〉などに関してそれを行うのはばかげたことだ。なぜならば、それは諸芸術における創造性の条件そのものをあらかじめ封じてしまうからである」<sup>13</sup>と。彼が正しい可能性はあるが、実際のところ正しくはないように私には思われる。そもそもわれわれは、〈生物〉の定義が生物学的進化を「あらかじめ封じる」

<sup>11</sup> 訳者補注: ウィトゲンシュタイン『哲学探究』第66節(前掲訳書75頁)に「考えるのではなく見るのだ」という言葉がある。

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

とは予想していないにもかかわらず、有機体の「やがて来るべき予想可能な」タイプを包含するように（ワイツの言う意味で）その用語を定義しようという理にかなった希望を持っているからだ。しかしこれよりもさらに重要なことは、定義することへの異義に対して彼が与える理由が、明らかに実践的な見地からのものだということである。彼が懸念しているのはたんに、芸術のような非常に複雑で創造的な領域を定義するという努力がおそらく誰の能力をも超えたものであるということ、理論家は自らが学んだ狭い芸術伝統の特殊な特徴に近視眼的に専心しているのが普通であるため、いかなる努力もおそらく（「必ず」と言うだけの論理的基盤を彼は持っていないのだが）失敗するだろうということ、定義にかかずらうことが芸術の実践そのものに不幸な結果をもたらす可能性があるということなのである。

5. ワイツの反論がたんに実践的なものであることは、概念が「ある特別な目的のために境界づけられている」場合には「正当かつ有用な閉じられた概念が芸術においても存在する」、と彼が認めていること<sup>14</sup>からも明らかである。彼は続けて、しかも説得的に、「理論、つまり実在的定義は [.....] 少なくとも現存のギリシア悲劇に関しては」与え得るだろうということ、実際のところアリストテレスの与えた定義は間違っているということを論じている<sup>15</sup>。しかし、もしこのことが認められるならば（もっとも、これを否定する根拠がありうるのかを考えるのは困難だが）、そうした定義を〈悲劇〉、〈喜劇〉、〈芸術〉に与えることが不可能であるというのがどのような意味においてなのか突如としてわからなくなるのである。われわれはいまや、先に引用した極端な見解をワイツが述べたときに彼が意識せずに陥っていた暗黙の循環論法を見てとれる。というのも、「芸術の冒險的性格」について語るときに彼は、従来の芸術の定義が、芸術作品であることが認められてほしいと彼がいま望むものにはおそらく——ここでも、「けっして」と言うだけの根拠は彼にはない——あてはまらないだろうと言いたいからである。混乱は要するに次の点にある。すなわち、仮に、ある定式化された芸術の定義に挙げられている必要十分な性質を共有していない特定の対象を芸術のなかに含みたいとしたとき、その定義の不十全さを指摘するということが、（また他方で）芸術作品であることがすでに合意に達した対象のなんらかの集合をうまく説明すべく必要十

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

分な性質を列挙することの論理的不可能性を示すということ、これら二つの間には相違がある、という点である。この種の経験的定義に対するわれわれの実践上の不満こそが、その定義を改変すること、(ワイツに言わせれば)一つの「決定」をくださすことを、われわれに促すものなのである。

6. 定義に関するこれと同じ問題は数学と論理学においては起こらないという(上に引用した第三の параグラフで論じられている)ワイツの考えは、どう見ても誤りであると思われる。というのも、これらの分野における諸概念がたとえ「構成された」ものであるとしても、それら構成された概念の経験的用法の検討に基づいて、われわれが(これも実践的な理由によって)ある概念の定義の変更を「決定」する、ということが考え得るからである。そして、ワイツの「開かれた」概念の基準をみとすに必要なのはこれだけなのだ(上に引用した第三の параグラフを参照)。例えば、数学の歴史の比較的初期の段階で与えられた数の定義で、その後の発展の段階で考案された他の対象には適用できないようなものが想像可能であることは間違いない。場合によっては、そうした構成された対象の操作によって「数」以外のなにかがいじくられているだけなのだと言「決定」することもできるだろうし、また、「数」という語は諸々の「家族的類似性」だけを指示するのだと言「張ることさえできるだろう。あるいは、数学の新しい発展に適合するように定義を改変しようと「決定」することもできるだろうし、実際、それが最も理にかなったやり方であることは間違いないだろう。しかし、その変更は実践的な理由からのものであるということ、また、なんらかの特定の場合にもたらされた変更が、一定の領域でのあらゆる革新について同様の変更がもたらされなければならないことを示すわけではないということは、明言しておかなければならない。

7. ワイツの(上に引用した第三の параグラフで提示された)主張にはどこか奇妙なところがある。その主張は、「経験的-記述的な領域」において閉じられた概念をあてがうことは「使用法の範囲を規約として定めることによって概念を恣意的に閉じないかぎり」不可能である、というものだ。この主張は、閉じられた概念をもたすための他の代替的な手続きが考え得ることを示唆しているように思われる。しかしよく考えれば、そのような手続きは一つもないことがわかる。まずワイツの見解では、数学・論理学という特権的分野ですら上記のような規約的な定義を用いるのであり、この点において経験的領域の論理は数学や論理学の領域の論理に類似していることになる。また本稿第五節で見たように、ワイツは実際

のところ、経験的領域におけるそうした規約的定義を必ずしも軽蔑的に扱っているのではない。彼はたんに、そうした定義を用いるための実践的な理由が特定可能でなければならないということを強調しているのだ。われわれはかなり驚くべき結論を導かざるをえない。すなわち、ワイツの議論全体が、ものごとの永遠不変のアイデアをわれわれがある意味で把握し得るということを密かに前提している、と言えるのだ。例えば、われわれはジョイスの『フィネガンズ・ウェイク』をフローベールの『ボヴァリー夫人』と同様に小説であると認めるべきで、したがって『フィネガンズ・ウェイク』を除外するような小説の定義は間違いとして却下すべきだ、ということになる。もちろんワイツ自身は、彼の見解に対するこのような解釈には同意しないだろう。しかし、次のような主張を他の仕方でも理解し得るとは考えがたい。

美学理論を文字通りに捉えるならば、すでに見たように、それらはみな失敗である。しかしもし、美学理論の機能と眼目の観点からそれらを再解釈し、芸術における卓越性に関する特定の規準に注意を集中することを勧めるような、論証に支えられた真剣な推奨として捉え直すならば、美学理論はけっして無価値ではないことがわかるだろう<sup>16</sup>。

識別の規準はいずれも、必要条件としてであれ十分条件としてであれ、定義を構成するものではない。なぜならば、われわれはときに、あるものについてこれは芸術作品だと主張しながら、そうした条件のうちの任意の一つについて、当該の作品がその条件をみたすことを否定することができるからだ [.....]<sup>17</sup>。

次のうちのいずれかが成り立つ。(a) 芸術作品であることが合意に達したある一群の対象に与えられた定義が経験的に十全ではない。この場合、われわれはその定義を改良することに努めなければならない。(b) もとの一群の対象——それに対しては経験的に十全な定義が与えられている——と同じ名前で呼ばれるべき新しい対象が任意に選ばれる。この場合、いかなる定義も破棄される可能性がある。(c) 実践的な理由からわれわれが、同種のものとして分類されるべき対象の集合を拡

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p. 35.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p. 34.

大することを望む。この場合われわれは、それらの対象の必要十分な性質の定義を提示することを試みなければならない（それが不可能だと前もって判断することはできない）。つまり、あらゆる定義になんらかの規約的基盤があるか、あるいは、アイデア論をなんらかのかたちで受けいれなければならないか——たとえアイデアが「家族的類似性」を通じてぼんやりとしか認められないものだとしても——のいずれかなのである<sup>18</sup>。急いで言うておくと、たとえ芸術の定義に関するワイツの経験的発見が擁護可能だとしても、また、たとえ諸々の「家族的類似性」しか列挙できないのだとしても、経験的な定義が論理的に不可能だということにはならない。C・L・スティーヴンソンがまさにこの「家族的類似性」に基づいて芸術を定義する手続きを提案していることも注目されてよいだろう（その手続きは論理的に健全であると思われる）<sup>19</sup>。

8. 「家族的類似性」について語るときワイツとウィトゲンシュタインがともに、必要十分な性質を列挙することの可能性を無条件に否定している点に注目しなければならない。これはまったく正当性を欠くことである。ワイツはただ、よく知られた特定の定義が、ある一定の対象群に関して十全ではないということを示しただけである。「家族的類似性」という考えはせいぜいのところ、経験的な妥協である。つまりわれわれは、満足のゆく定義に到達できなかったとき、いかなる定義も定式化不可能であると考えがちなのだ（ワイツがかつて用いた芸術有機体論について彼自身が感じた失望は要を得ている）。しかしこれは、経験的に発見されたこと（しかも否定的な発見）を最も強力な論理的反論に変換してしまうことなのだ。「家族的類似性」を用いるのは急場凌ぎであることを免れない。将来われわれが一つの適切な定義で合意に達するということが論理的に不可能であるようなケースは存在しない。さもなくば、「家族的類似性」を用いることに対しても当然の論理的反論があてはまることになるだろう。実際、例えば〔物理学においては〕異なった種類のエネルギーどうしの「家族的類似性」から、エネルギーの必要十分な性質の経験的に十全な定義へと徐々に移行せざるをえないような状況になってきていることは間違いない。

9. ワイツは次のように主張するとき、自らの議論を極端に不誠実な仕方

<sup>18</sup> 日常的用法に訴えることの背後にアイデア論の萌芽が隠れている可能性があるというのは、興味深い奇態である。

<sup>19</sup> C・L・スティーヴンソン「詩とはなにか」について、『哲学評論』66: 329-62（1957年7月）。特に、340-47頁。

し通している。

識別の規準はいずれも、必要条件としてであれ十分条件としてであれ、定義を構成するものではない。なぜならば、われわれはときに、あるものについてこれは芸術作品だと主張しながら、そうした条件のうちの任意の一つについて、当該の作品がその条件をみたすことを否定することができるからだ。芸術作品にとって基本的であると伝統的に考えられてきた条件、つまり「人工物である」という条件でさえ、否定しうるである。「この流木の一片はみごとな彫刻作品だ」という言葉を考えてみよ<sup>20</sup>。

日常言語では、ワイツが取り出してみせたような言い方ができることは確かである。しかし、日常言語を使うときであっても事実を文字通りに述べたものとしてあらゆる言葉を解釈する必要がある、などということはない。もし誰かがこのような言い方の意味を説明せよと迫られたら、その人はもちろん次のように言うだろう——「この流木はまるで彫刻のように見える。あたかも自然が彫刻家であるかのようだ。この流木は実は人間の彫刻家によって現在の形に作りあげられたのだと想像することもできる」と。そしてこのことが意味するのは、上記のような言い方をするときわれわれはけっして、あるものが実際に芸術作品であるための必要条件とされるもの、「つまり「人工物である」という条件」を否定したいと思っているのではない、ということだ。この種の論戦は、ワイツの提示するテーゼを支持ないし論駁するためにどのような種類の証拠を持ち出すべきか、という問題を提起することになる。誰か（例えばワイツ自身）が、上記の言い方についてワイツが提案する解釈を本当に良しとするかどうかは、証拠としてまったく的はずれなことに思われる。一片の流木が一つの彫刻作品と呼ばれるその意味を受けいれつつ、通常用法で彫刻とか芸術作品とかと呼ばれる膨大な対象群とその流木がどのような意味で根本的に異なったものであるのかについて合意を取りつけ、そのうえで、限界事例としてのその流木を除いて膨大な対象群に適用されるように——日常的用法を無視するわけではないが、あくまでもそれとは独立に——「彫刻」という用語を定義しようと「決定」することは、可能であると思われる。定義の持つこの規約的な特徴がどのようにして除去され得るのか、私にはわからない

<sup>20</sup> 「美学における理論の役割」、34頁。

い。われわれが、人々は芸術をどのように定義しているかと——帰納的な意味において——尋ねられたとしよう。そのとき、たとえ「家族的類似性」がわれわれの列挙できるおそらく唯一の特徴であるとわかったとしても、その発見は、われわれの知識を分類しようとするいかなる体系的な努力にとってもまったく関わりのないものだろう。なぜなら、そのような場合であってもわれわれはたんに一つの概念を——（上記の例では）日常的用法の少なくとも重要な一部に適合する概念であり、かつ、他の諸々の区別と組み合わせられることで、関連する他のどのような現象についても矛盾なく経験的言明を分類するのを可能にするような概念を——構成することになるだろうからだ。すぐにそれとわかるアナロジーとしては、ネズミイルカやクジラを変った魚だとする日常の言葉づかいと、科学における「魚類」の用法とを考えてみるのがよいかもしれない。

10. 本稿第三節で引用した文章を再考するならば、ワイツの見解の根本的な弱点を正確に指摘することができる。ワイツが言うには、芸術が創造的本性を持つがゆえに、「芸術を定義するようないかなる性質の集合を確保 (ensure) することも論理的に不可能である」という。私はキーワードを強調した。そのすぐ次の文でワイツは「芸術という概念を閉じることに決めることはできる」と認めている。このことは、閉じられた概念というものが彼にとって自己矛盾してはいないことを示している。そのような概念を構成することは論理的に不可能ではなく、それを手放さずに保ち続ける [=確保 (ensure) する] ことが論理的に [原文ママ] 不可能であるだけだ。ウィトゲンシュタインの著作で対応する箇所<sup>21</sup>を検討すると、彼のそこでの目的が、「家族的類似性」のもとで概念の用いるのは普通のことであり、故意に閉じられた概念を用いるのとは異なるという事実に注意を引くことにあった、ということがわかる（興味深いことに、ウィトゲンシュタインが強調している部分では、ワイツが（上に引用した第三の параグラフにおいて）強調しているのとは反対に、数学の概念ですら「開かれた」意味で用いられ得ることが認められている）。言い換えれば、ウィトゲンシュタインは二つのタイプの用法を区別したうえで、実際には、「家族的類似性」のもとで用いる場合の意味において「ゲーム」という語の用法を検討しているのである。ウィトゲンシュタインは、数学的概念を「開かれた」意味でも「閉じられた」意味でも用いることができるとはっきり述べる一方で、同時に——そこでの彼の論証が決定的でないのは確かだが——われ

<sup>21</sup> 『哲学探究』、第一部第 68 節。〔前掲訳書 77-78 頁。〕

われは「ゲーム」という語を「開かれた」意味において現に用いているのだと——「開かれた」意味においてのみ、と言わんばかりに——強調している。それを受けてワイツは、〈芸術〉のいかなる「閉じられた」意味を確保することも論理的に不可能であると判断するのだ。もっとも、彼が言わんとするのはたんに、そのような「閉じられた」意味があるとすればそれは「開かれた」意味とは異なっているだろうということ、また、われわれはその「閉じられた」意味を「開かれた」意味よりもなんらかの仕方で優位に置くような権利を持たないということだけである。「開かれた」意味の優位性がどこにあるのかは、説明されていない。

11. さらに、ワイツが（ウィトゲンシュタインに従って）導入した新たな道具立ては自滅的だと言えるかもしれない。「家族的類似性」によって定義された概念であっても「閉じられた」意味と「開かれた」意味を区別する必要があるかどうかを——そもそもこの区別がそのように成り立つかどうかということも——彼は検討していない（ウィトゲンシュタインの『探究』からの引用文においても検討されていない）。〈ゲーム〉という概念を考えてみよう。求愛はゲームか？ 愛はゲームか？ 人生はゲームか？ こうした例においてさえ、用法に秩序を与えるような規約的要素が要求されるのであって、それなしには言語的アナキーに陥る危険性がある。しかし、「家族的類似性」のもとで「閉じられた」意味が認められるなら、「必要十分な性質」のもとで「閉じられた」意味がなぜ認められないのだろうか。つまり、「開かれた」概念という考えが多義的に用いられているのだ。それは、「家族的類似性」によって定義される概念を意味していることもあれば、「閉じられた」概念の反対を意味していることもある。ワイツの提示した論証においては、この二つの意味での「開かれた」概念は互いに独立した考えであり、「開かれた」という表現は後者の意味に限定されるとき最も有用なものとなる。いま述べたことも含めてのまとめとして、以下のように言える。ウィトゲンシュタインの関心は、「家族的類似性」に基づいた概念はそれなりに有用だと論じることにあるが、「ゲーム」のようなある種の概念について「家族的類似性」という点からのみ有用だと主張しているように見える箇所、彼はときに自らの論証の射程を超えてしまっている。そうした主張が正しくないことは明らかだが、ウィトゲンシュタインの主張する限定を認めたとしても、当該の概念が「開かれていること」が自動的に確定するわけではない。またそれゆえ、「必要十分な性質」の代わりに「家族的類似性」を用いるだけでは、もともとワイツが提起していた問題——すな

わち、芸術における革新を「あらかじめ封じる」のを避けるような仕方では芸術概念を用いるにはどうすればよいかという問題——が取り除かれることにはならない。同様に、なんらかの「必要十分な性質」を定式化し、それを開かれた意味において用いても、芸術における革新が損なわれるとはかぎらないのである。

本稿で列挙した反論によってワイツの論証は破綻することと思う。ここで問題としている定義づけの努力は自己矛盾したものではないし、意義深くかつ実際に成功している他のそうした努力と類似したものであるから、私はこう言いたい——そのままもう一度やってみよう。

(1957年9月5日受理)

# On the Meanings and Implications of Joseph Margolis' Definition of Art

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**ABSTRACT** | This paper develops an inquiry into the meanings and implications of Joseph Margolis' definition of artworks as physically embodied and culturally emergent entities. It starts from the *pars destruens* of his theory, by comparing two different texts criticizing Morris Weitz' denial of the possibility to define art. While in an early essay Margolis is ready to accept a constructivistic conception of necessary and sufficient conditions, six decades later he seems to have dropped the attempt to maintain a deflationary version of enabling conditions in view of a more coherent form of contingentism and pluralism. Secondly, the paper focuses on the "generic" character of Margolis' definition, namely its being too inclusive, insofar as it fits any kind of cultural entity. The author suggests that the first implication of Margolis' "generic" definition is the idea of continuity between artworks and the things and events of the cultural world. A second implication is that according to Margolis differences between artworks and other things can only be traced a posteriori, by looking at collective practices and at habitual uses of the term. Finally, the author argues that Margolis' radically historicist and contextualized approach to the arts should be integrated through a coherent historicizing and contextualizing of the very issue of the definition of art. A similar step could have strengthened his transition to a more inclusive philosophy of culture and philosophical anthropology.

**KEYWORDS** | Joseph Margolis; Definition of Art; Morris Weitz; Continuity; Contingentism; Pluralism

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As is well known, Joseph Margolis' definition of artworks as physically embodied and culturally emergent entities has been very influential within the analytical philosophy of art, where his view on the definition of art and his use of the conceptual pair type-token still remain a subject of intense debate (see Rohrbaugh 2003). Less known is his criticism of Morris Weitz' argument against the definition of art (Weitz 1956), which is unanimously considered to be the seminal work giving rise to the debate within the analytical philosophy of art (Davies 2006, Carroll 2000, D'Angelo 2008). The editors of the present issue of the *East Asian Journal of Philosophy* should therefore be praised for having recovered Margolis' 1958 essay, which was published a few years after Weitz' paper and almost twenty years before Margolis himself published his answer to the question of the definition of art in (Margolis 1974). This is not the only occasion on which he discussed Weitz' argument against the definition of art, because he returned to the subject more than 60 years later (Margolis 2010), as I have already noted elsewhere (Dreon 2019). The formulation of a similar, albeit not identical, criticism strengthens the claim of a basic continuity in Joseph Margolis' thought, notwithstanding some important changes. The most notable is his transition to philosophical anthropology and a philosophy of culture that was deeply inspired by pragmatism and was able to combine radical historicism with a form of non-reductive naturalism (Margolis 2008 and Margolis 2017).<sup>1</sup>

In section 1, I will compare the two writings in which Joseph Margolis attacks Morris Weitz' denial of the possibility of providing a definition of art by drawing on Ludwig Wittgenstein's reflections on the grammar of the word "game" in his *Philosophical Investigations* (Wittgenstein 1963). My aim is to emphasize the main continuity in Margolis' thought – essentially revolving around his strongly anti-essentialist stance – as well as some differences between the two formulations of criticism. Indeed, it must be recalled that the two texts in question are more than 60 years apart and that in the intervening period a series of capital events occurred in philosophy. Arthur Danto published his groundbreaking paper *The Art-world* in 1964 (Danto 1964) and further developed his thesis in the following years (Danto 1981); Margolis himself formulated his definition of art in 1974 (Margolis 1974) and later advanced the claim for philosophical anthropology as the most comprehensive field to understand the emergence of culture and the arts within the human world, denouncing the inadequacies of an autonomous philosophy of art or aesthetics (Margolis 2008, xii).

Section 2 will tackle the problem of how to interpret Margolis' definition itself, given his statements in support of a plurality of definitions, the extensibility

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<sup>1</sup> For a continuistic reading of Margolis' philosophy, see Pryba (2021) and Dreon-Ragazzi (2022).

and/or correctability of each definition to suit the context, and finally the claim about each definition's radically historical, non-teleologically oriented character. A potential objection is that Margolis' definition of artworks fits any cultural artifact, human beings included, according to Joe Margolis himself; consequently, this definition could be considered too inclusive and not specific enough to distinguish artworks from other cultural artifacts. My suggestion is that one should read Margolis' definition as involving the denial of *a priori* enabling conditions for defining art, such as those laid out by Danto (1992).

Finally, in section 3 I will argue that Margolis' radically historicist and contextualized approach to the arts requires us to historicize the very issue of the definition of art. Joe Margolis did not abandon his answer to the definition problem, but his later philosophy can be understood as involving a shift from the question "what is art?" to the question "what are the contributions of culture and the arts to the emergence of human beings?" This shift is quite reasonable and I personally endorse it. However, I believe that it should be integrated through a coherent historicizing and contextualizing of the very issue of the definition of art. Joe Margolis argued for a radical historicizing of any definition of art, involving the denial of linear, teleologically oriented readings of art history, as happened in the case of Greenberg and Danto (Margolis 1999). Nonetheless, I also wish to argue – from a sympathetic perspective, with the aim of integrating Margolis' view – that a further step should be taken, namely an explicit problematization of the very arising of the problem: when did the question about the definition of art arise? In what historical circumstance, cultural context, and form of life did 'Art' – as a singular term written with a capital letter – become a problem to be tackled and solved philosophically? This is a point that John Dewey (1981, 1989) clearly noted, as did Hans-Georg Gadamer (2004), Paul Oskar Kristeller (1951, 1952), and – many decades later – Larry Shiner (2003). Probably, Joe Margolis did not focus as much as he could have done on the reasons why the question had only arisen in a specific cultural-historical context because he had to adopt the terms through which the issue had been posed within the analytical philosophy of art, where it was largely taken for granted.

Let me add a personal note at the end of this introduction: contributing to this issue devoted to Joe Margolis' aesthetics is a way for me to pay homage to his brilliant mind as well as to remember him and his sincere generosity, always laced with a bit of irony.

## 1 Morris Weitz' Shortcomings (According to Joe Margolis)

Many years before formulating his thesis on works of art as physically embodied and culturally emergent entities, Joseph Margolis harshly criticized Weitz' denial of the possibility to provide a definition of art on the grounds of his application of Wittgenstein's reflections on the meanings and uses of the word "game" to the case of "art". Morris Weitz famously claimed that no definition of art was possible for logical reasons, namely because the concept of art is an open one, while only closed concepts, such as those of mathematics and logic, can be defined by enlisting the necessary and sufficient conditions that a specific item must satisfy in order to be a member of the class (Weitz 1956). Art is an open concept because artistic creativity entails that the concept can or must be continuously re-defined, by including new properties and excluding previously posited ones. Margolis' main objection against Weitz' argument in 1958 is that it takes empirical difficulties for logical reasons and ultimately confuses "logical and merely practical reasons" (Margolis 1958, 90); to a certain extent, Margolis extends this criticism to Wittgenstein himself (Margolis 1958, 92). However – and this is a crucial point – the criticism is not formulated from the point of view of a supporter of a rigid dichotomy between the empirical level and the logical one. What Margolis is claiming is that there is no alternative way to close concepts except by stipulation, unless one assumes that there are essential, unchangeable forms of things and that these can be intuitively grasped. Conversely, he observes, there are open concepts even in mathematics and in logic, i.e. there are cases in which some concepts must be extended in order to welcome new cases. Margolis suggests that once one assumes, say, a constructivistic and deflationary view of closed concepts, one should admit that even family resemblances can be closed for certain reasons and in specific contexts of use or remain open, depending on the circumstances. The very difference between concepts and family resemblances should be disambiguated, Margolis argues, by doing away with the idea that the former cannot involve necessary and sufficient conditions: family resemblances are implicitly assumed in common use and are not explicitly deliberated; nonetheless, they perfectly do their job in the specific contexts in which they are used – as emphasized by Wittgenstein – either in an open or in a closed way – according to Margolis' corrective integration. Instead of a binary opposition between closed concepts and family resemblances, according to Margolis, we should assume a range of possibilities: closed concepts and open concepts, as well as open and closed family resemblances. Finally, this time, Margolis seems to claim that there are no reasons why one should deny the possibility to come up with a concept of art involving necessary and sufficient conditions of use, i.e. a concept that is closed through some kind of explicit stipulation. The

reader can already perceive here Margolis' inclination toward a non-binary logic, his acknowledgment of a constructivist dimension in meaning, and his strong rejection of any form of essentialism – even an unwitting one, as in Weitz' case.

In a text published more than sixty years later, Margolis returns to this topic by strengthening his contingentistic and pluralistic view of the definition of art, while abandoning the polemic against Wittgenstein, as well as his previous insistence on the possibility of providing art definitions in terms of necessary and sufficient conditions. In the period between these two texts, a series of significant events occurred. Most importantly for our current purposes, in the Seventies Margolis formulated a definition of artworks as physically embedded and culturally emergent entities that, while positing some necessary conditions for something to be an artwork, did not set these conditions as sufficient, on the grounds that they are shared by all cultural entities – including human beings, as Margolis himself explicitly states.<sup>2</sup>

By contrast, Arthur Danto had largely pursued his search for an essentialist definition of art from a traditional, "Platonist" (in Margolis' words) perspective in conflict with his own followers, especially Dickie: Danto (1992) pointed out the possibility, or even need, to identify the *a priori* conditions enabling something to be a work of art. Hence, Margolis' previous attempt to interpret closed concepts in deflationary terms – that is, to present even essential definitions as referring to "a special purpose" (Margolis 2010) – might seem weak from the point of view of Danto's transcendental stance.

Margolis (2010) argues that Wittgenstein's stance in the *Philosophical Investigations* did not rule out any possibility of defining art in general. On the contrary, according to Margolis, the Austrian thinker acknowledged a wide variety of contextual definitions, while strictly making sure not to generalize or systematically extend any one of them. In a few words, Wittgenstein's legacy should have consisted in tolerance toward the considerable informality and vagueness characterizing our ordinary ways of dealing with concepts, rather than in the effort to censor any definitional attempt because all of them fail to be clear and distinct. Margolis says that Weitz and the whole debate on the definition of art misunderstood Wittgenstein; and what he is referring to is their assumption that either a definition is possible in terms of necessary and sufficient conditions, independently from specific purposes, or we have to reject any definition game. It is this simple dualistic alternative that Margolis wants to criticize as unfaithful to Wittgenstein's spirit. According to Margolis, while illustrating the different uses of the word "game", the Austrian philosopher was endorsing a different idea of language that was basi-

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<sup>2</sup> On Margolis' early works in the aesthetic field, see Pryba (2021).

cally tolerant toward more or less informal or vague definitions as well as toward the often only approximately envisaged contexts of use. Wittgenstein was fighting against the ideology according to which language is ideally perfect, as “favoured by Frege, Russel, Wittgenstein himself (in the *Tractatus*)” (Margolis 2010, 8).

Consequently, the lesson aestheticians should have learned from Wittgenstein is not to simply abandon the aim of defining art. One can search for a definition of art – indeed, sometimes ordinary discourses already involve one – whose boundaries are more or less precise depending on the specific purpose we are pursuing. Margolis’ explicit preference for a kind of “robust relativism” (Margolis 1976),<sup>3</sup> involving a wider, more complex series of possibilities than simply “false” and “not false”, leads him to interpret Wittgenstein as favouring a tolerant, pluralistic, and practice-specific use of linguistic definitions with reference to the variety of artistic games that humans share. The point is that we cannot neglect the connections that our definition has with a specific context and a particular aim we are pursuing – even when the particular situation we are dealing with is represented by the philosophical venture of defining art, as I will claim in the final section of this paper.<sup>4</sup>

To conclude this comparison, in the new millennium Margolis no longer insisted on a deflationary – explicitly stipulated or constructivist – version of a closed definition, one that is grounded in necessary and sufficient conditions, although it is formulated for a specific purpose. He preferred to support an interpretation of Wittgenstein’s legacy that sees it as favoring a more tolerant, pluralistic view of already given definitions of art and artworks, insofar as an interpretation of this sort could better serve a coherent form of contingentism.

## 2 Continuity and Radical Contingentism

How should Margolis’ definition itself be interpreted, given his declared tolerance toward a plurality of definitions, his emphasis on the revisability of each definition to fit the needs of a given context, and his radically historicist stance?

Before answering this question, at least a few brief words are needed to explain the meanings of the two components of Margolis’ definition, although this is not the primary goal of the paper.

The first part of the definition regards the physical embodiment characterizing works of art. A work of art is always physically embodied, although the degree of

<sup>3</sup> On Margolis’ relativism see Margolis (1976); on the specific connection between “cultural realism” and Margolis’ “robust relativism”, see Baldini (2011).

<sup>4</sup> I have drawn and adapted the last two paragraphs of this section from Dreon (2019), with the editors’ permissions.

embodiment can vary significantly: from stone and marble to the sounds of music and poetry, or actors' gestures on stage. As Margolis explains in his 1974 essay, this condition fulfills two interconnected functions: on the one hand, the notion of embodiment establishes that a work of art is a real thing, part of the real world; on the other hand, it individuates an artwork and identifies its extension, to put it in the analytical vocabulary that Margolis used in those years. However, it may be helpful to spell out the criticism involved in Margolis' emphasis on embodiment: an artwork is not a changeless form that finds concrete expression in a material occurrence; it is not a Platonic idea or type, whose earthly counterpart is contingent or at least attributed *a posteriori*. Instead, an artwork is constituted by the real materials, energies, and activities it is effectively made of, insofar as these are part of specific cultural practices and of a specific form of life. So, even the word "type" in Margolis' definition of an artwork as the "token of a type" (Margolis 1977) must be understood as an "abstract particular" having no life apart from the token of which it is made, and having a history: it emerges at some point, changes through the web of habits and uses it is a part of, and comes to an end when the resources of which it is made – either the materials or cultural practices – are lost in one way or another (Dreon-Ragazzi 2022).

The other side of the coin, cultural emergence, has already been introduced. It is only within a cultural context or through specific cultural practices<sup>5</sup> that already existing materials are reorganized and become meaningful or intentional. In other words, this occurs without the intervention of extra-empirical resources, such as invariant forms constituting an alleged realm of Art, as Schopenhauer thought, or an *a priori* space of reasons, as claimed by Danto (1992). Already existing materials become intentional, in Margolis' words, that is they become meaningful through collective practices and not in a solipsistic way or by means of intentionality considered as a quality of thought *per se* (Steiner 2020); they become interpretable and determinable in a variety of ways, within the constraints of the collective practices that are shared in a specific lifeworld (Margolis 1999).

Now, this definition raises some questions that are in need of an answer, as recognized by Joe Margolis himself (Margolis 1999). One of the main problems, I believe, concerns the use of the word "entity", considering that many artworks consist of events and performances, rather than entities (Wolterstorff 1980). Given Margolis' closeness to the pragmatists, he could have relied on their relational ontology (James 1976; Tiercelin 2019; Ryder 2020) in order to argue that works of art are not only physically embodied and cultural emergent entities, but also phys-

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<sup>5</sup> Margolis also uses expressions borrowed from other traditions and other authors, such as form of life, *Lebenswelt*, and *sittliche Ethos*.

ically embodied and cultural emergent events, situations, relations, or gestures (Maddalena 2015), without ceasing to affirm their reality. Famously, the claim that relations and entities are both real is one of William James' main contributions to the development of a radical form of empiricism, as opposed to classical empiricism (James 1976). I think Margolis would have been open to this integration and partial correction of his definition. He overtly acknowledged that definitions can and should be modified or extended to fit the context – or to accommodate a more inclusive set, in this case.

However, in what follows I wish to focus on the “generic” characterization of Margolis' formulation, as stated by the philosopher himself (Margolis 1999). The point is that this definition is broad and fits any cultural artifact – even human beings, if they are understood as “natural artifacts” (Margolis 2017). Consequently, the definition could be considered too inclusive and not specific enough to distinguish artworks from other cultural artifacts. How are we to deal with this issue?

Of course, it must be noted that Margolis placed less and less emphasis on the definition of art over the years. His transition to philosophical anthropology involved a shift from the question “what is art?” to a different one, namely: “what is the role of artistic and cultural practices in the making of the humans?” (Margolis 2008; Dreon 2019). However, he never rejected his previous work on the definition of art; rather, he reframed it within the broader background of a philosophy of culture. He explicitly affirmed that there was a basic continuity between his exploration of what it is to be a cultural entity and his previous reflections (Margolis 1999, 68). So, what is the significance of Margolis' definition of artworks, given its generic traits? First of all, I believe that, according to this definition, artworks are continuous with other cultural entities and “utterances” – human gestures, verbal communications, symbols, monuments, etc. – and cannot be isolated by placing them in a separate bracket such as “the artwork”, if not for practical purposes. Margolis ends the introduction to his essay *What, After All, is a Work of Art?* by saying that “language” and “thought” are abstractions derived from the lives and behaviors of enculturated subjects. Hence, it is completely misleading to speak of “language” or “thought” as something autonomous that only at a later stage is spoken or worked out, either privately or in a community (Margolis 1999, 71). I think that Margolis leaves it up to the reader to complete the simile: “art” is an abstraction derived from human lives and behaviors and it is misleading to consider art and artworks independently from the broadly cultural practices surrounding them and the interchanges occurring between them and their world. Incidentally, this conclusion sounds Deweyan (Dewey 1989), although – curiously enough – Margolis never referred to Dewey when speaking of art (as far as I know).

Secondly, I believe that the significance of his definition can better be under-

stood by comparing it with Arthur Danto's essentialist, aprioristic approach to the issue. This approach is very clear in *The Artworld Revisited*, where Danto stiffens the extra-empirical character of his claims in order to preserve the distance between his own theory and George Dickie's "sociologized" work (Danto 1992, 38). Even if Danto is willing to recognize that the attribution of the state of being a candidate for appreciation is deeply connected with social prestige and is *de facto* attributed by art experts, he strongly stresses the fact that this is not part of the philosophical work he believes should be performed. According to him, when searching for a definition of art itself, the philosopher of art must focus on the "system of reasons" (Danto 1992, 39) that can justify – in the aprioristic sense of Kant's "Rechtfertigung", I will add – the difference between an artwork and an ordinary object that could be perceptibly identical to it. Enabling conditions are necessary and sufficient insofar as they are given previously or, better, on a different level from empirical, contingent reasons, and circumstances. In a nutshell, theory for Danto evidently comes before practice, circumscribing its perimeters and legitimacy.

Margolis' definition of works of art as culturally emergent involves precisely a denial of this double level: to see if a Brillo box or a Madonna is an artwork rather than a commercial product or a cult object, one has to look at the practices through which humans engage with it. Both the former and the latter are Intentional artifacts in Margolis' sense and one can only draw a distinction between these objects, if necessary, by looking at the broader cultural and radically historical interchanges occurring by means of them. This is a point where, I would argue, Margolis comes closer to Wittgenstein's legacy: do not say that "a work of art must be so and so", but "look at what humans do with artworks, when and how they use the word, which are the meanings they habitually attribute to it". To conclude this section through an insightful quotation from Margolis himself:

We must begin with the socially entrenched practices of the various inquiries we habitually pursue, shorn (if possible) of the pretensions of the invariantist philosophies (Margolis 1999, 87).

There are no *a priori* enabling conditions for establishing what is art and what is not art. This fact does not leave the interpreter in a "seeming vacuum": he has to take into account the consensual practices that, although not resting on prior rules are "internalized by mastering [...] the language and practices of our native culture" (Margolis 1999, 87).

### 3 Calling the Question Itself into Question: Some Concluding Remarks

In the previous sections, I considered the criticism of Weitz' denial of the possibility to define art, which constituted the negative complement of Margolis' definition of artworks as physically embodied and culturally emergent entities. I did so by comparing two different texts on the issue: the early essay translated and published in the current issue of this journal and a more recent paper, published in 2010. While in the early essay Margolis is willing to endorse a constructivistic conception of necessary and sufficient conditions, six decades later he seems to have dropped the attempt to maintain a deflationary version of enabling conditions in favor of a more coherent contingentism and pluralism.

In the second section, I focused mainly on the "generic" character of Margolis' definition, namely its being too inclusive, because it fits any kind of cultural entity – including the human being – and consequently one could object that the definition cannot work as a criterion for distinguishing artworks from other cultural objects. I have argued that the first implication of Margolis' "generic" definition is the thesis of a continuity between artworks and the things and events of the cultural world, which according to him ultimately means the human world as a whole. A second implication is that, for Margolis, the differences between artworks and other things can only be traced *a posteriori*, by looking at the collective practices and habitual uses surrounding the term "artworks". There is no separate space for *a priori* reasons, justifying such distinctions in principle.

I now wish to conclude my argument by providing some final thoughts on Margolis' radically historicist claim. I will focus on an aspect that is missing in his philosophy and which might further justify his transition from the definition problem to the anthropological issue, centered on the question of the role of culture and the arts in the emergence of human beings. As hinted above, I believe that this shift should be integrated through a coherent historicizing and contextualizing of the very issue of the definition of art. I believe that Margolis' move toward a philosophy of culture would have found a better justification if he had set the question of the arising of the definition problem in a specific historical and cultural context: when did the question of defining art arise? In what cultural context did it become significant to introduce the very concept of an "artworld", distinct and autonomous from the ordinary world? In what circumstances did it become important to be able to differentiate between artworks and ordinary objects on the basis of some principle?

Before dealing with questions of this kind, it must be acknowledged that Joe Margolis did an important job in emphasizing that a radical historicizing of defi-

nitions of art involves the denial of any linear, teleologically oriented reading of art history, such as those provided by Greenberg and Danto (Margolis 1999). In his essay on *The History of Art after the End of the History of Art* (in Margolis 1999), Margolis showed that, notwithstanding his criticism of modernism as a false narrative, Arthur Danto shared Clement Greenberg's idea of art history as a fixed sequence of periods running toward a final goal. Both these philosophers offer a teleological narrative, pointing either to the final concentration of each art on its own medium (Greenberg 1993) or to the enfranchisement of art by means of philosophy, which is to say to the opening up of all artistic possibilities, once the previously linear sequence has been completed (Danto 1997).

According to Margolis, Danto fails to consider that even "the conviction of having eclipsed all possible 'periods in some master narrative of arts'" could itself be "a characteristic mark of our own contemporary period within the same narrative" (Margolis 1999, 17). Danto's mistake is twofold: firstly, he ignores that his own point of view – namely, his thesis that the periods of art history have come to an end – could simply constitute a further period in the sequence. Secondly, he fails to consider that even the idea of the alleged end of art history is historically situated and not a view of history from the outside. The point, for Margolis, is that "fixedly periodized or essentialized history is not really history at all but a punctuated span of time within a frozen, changeless space – a teleologized evolution posing as history" (Margolis 1999, 16).

Radical historicism entails recognizing that there is no interpretation, categorization, or periodization of history outside history itself. This does not mean denying the validity and appropriateness of periodization, but it does mean explicitly admitting: (1) that the work of the art historian or art theorist is historically situated; (2) that periodization and interpretation fulfill specific purposes and fit particular contexts; (3) that there can be more than one periodization and/or interpretation of art history, each serving specific goals and responding to the constraints of a practical context; and, finally, (4) that the objectivity of a certain interpretation is "a function of consensual life" (Margolis 1999, 93).

So what is still lacking in Margolis' radical historical approach to the definition of art? In a nutshell, an answer can be provided by quoting a passage from Hans-Georg Gadamer that is deeply influenced, I think, by one of Margolis' philosophical heroes, Hegel (purged of his metaphysical tendencies):

At any rate, it cannot be doubted that the great ages in the history of art were those in which people without any aesthetic consciousness and without our concept of "art" surrounded themselves with creations whose function in religious or secular life could be under-

stood by everyone and which gave no one solely aesthetic pleasure.  
(Gadamer 1975, 70)

Could we ask for a definition of art when dealing with these artistic objects and practices of the past without forcing the contexts in which they emerged? The embarrassment that someone like Danto feels when confronted with a situation of this sort is evident from his famous exclusion of cave paintings from the world of art, based on the fact that the people who produced them lacked an artistic theory that could make an artworld possible.<sup>6</sup>

Of course, Margolis did not ignore that the issue of the definition of art became a pressing one in the analytical philosophy of art because of the long series of disruptive works and events characterizing artistic developments in the 20th century. Indeed, he emphasized that Duchamp's ready-mades were definitely more challenging than Brillo Boxes (Margolis 2010). The question of the difference between a work of art and a snow plough became pressing when the products of refined art could no longer be immediately recognized as such, and neither the imitation nor the creation of new forms and objects could help people perceive them as works of art. However, it should be noted that the philosophical issue of the definition of art arose out of the specifically European cultural background of the Eighteenth century, which was characterized by a unitary concept of Art, used both as an umbrella term covering a wide variety of diverse artistic practices (Kristeller 1951, 1952) and as a honorific term, insofar it became opposed to craftsmanship in the same cultural context (Shiner 2003). The question of the definition of art should thus be situated within the process of progressive "differentiation of the aesthetic", whose fundamental categories were laid out by the new discipline of aesthetics between the Eighteenth and the Nineteenth centuries (Gadamer 1975). As is widely known, ancient and medieval literature includes a variety of treatises dealing with poetry, tragedy, painting, and other specific fields, but there is no evidence of any writings devoted to art in general. Within philosophy we find nothing comparable to what we call aesthetics today until the mid-Eighteenth century: philosophers dealt with the beautiful in strict connection with the true and the good, rather than treating it as a separate subject matter. Philosophical reflections on poetry and painting, as well as on mimesis, are frequent; however, it is not until the Eighteenth century that aesthetics emerges as a distinct discipline and not until the Nineteenth century that we find a metaphysics of art such as the one provided by Schopenhauer and the young Nietzsche. Although Kristeller's interpretation of Batteaux's role in the establishment of a unitary concept of art has been disputed (Porter 2009),

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<sup>6</sup> "It would, I should think, never have occurred to the painters of Lascaux that they were producing art on those walls. Not unless there were Neolithic aestheticians" (Danto 1964, 581).

as Joe Margolis noted (Margolis 2010), it has been ascertained that ancient Greek culture, as well as the Latin world, did not have a concept of Art equivalent to the current one. The use of the unitary and honorific word "Art" seems to have developed through the introduction of the term "Beaux Arts" or "Fine Arts", which is to say that it derives from a restriction of "art", which is still considered a broad term in Kant's *Critique of Judgement*. Here, "schöne Kunst" (beautiful art) is a subset of "ästhetische Kunst" (aesthetic art), which is in turn a subset of art – together with "angenehme Kunst" (pleasant art) – distinguished from "mechanische Kunst" (mechanic art), which is not concerned with pleasure (Kant 2000, §44). Art in general, for Kant, is defined negatively, by opposition to production by nature. The contrast with science and craftsmanship appears immediately afterward in Kant's text and can be considered the marker of a modern sensibility, although the restriction of the term is still in progress (Kant 2000, §43).

Moreover, as Dewey already emphasized in *Experience and Nature*, both the Greek term *téchne* and the Latin word *ars* had different meanings, expressing a capacity, ability, competence, or expertise in doing something through some tools – these terms were applied to carpentry, navigation, and politics, as well as to painting and sculpting (Dewey 1981). The crucial point is that both words were used in strict connection with more or less ordinary activities and even the so-called "mimetic arts" were perceived as existing in continuity with other human activities.

Along much the same lines, anthropologists of art and culture (Boas 1911; Geertz 1973; Jackson 1996; Gell 1998) teach us that the kind of artistic autonomy we find almost obvious – e.g. the idea that an artwork must be judged primarily on the basis of artistic rather than moral criteria and even our perception of the work of a genius as something foreign to the professional world and the market – is not obvious at all for other cultures, both past and present.

All this does not mean that the question of the definition of art is not a genuine one or cannot find any answer. Definitions are possible and needed in many practical situations, but they are inherently historical: they become meaningful and useful in specific cultural contexts, but may become obsolete if they no longer fit the situation or agree with current sensibility. In many contexts, artistic practices are so closely intertwined with other activities – religious, political, and social, as in the case of psalms, national anthems, and rock music festivals – that applying a definition of art in the proper sense (whatever this means) seems like a bit of a strain and applying an essential, i.e. non-historical, definition seems wrong. More specifically, acknowledging the need to historicize and contextualize the question itself would help bring into focus the view of art as something essentially autonomous through which the issue of its definition arose – consequently, it would

highlight the analytical philosophy of art's indebtedness to classical aesthetics.

Finally, circumscribing the question of the definition of art to a cultural context reinforces the opportunity to move from a self-referential conception of aesthetics (which the young Margolis regarded as limiting and then explicitly rejected) to a philosophy of culture and a philosophical anthropology capable of setting artistic practices within the framework of behaviors, linguistic games, and the naturally cultural experience of the world characterizing human beings.

In other words, recognizing the cultural-historical limits of the emergence of the need to define art could have strengthened Margolis' argument in favor of a "non-compartmentalized" approach – to echo Dewey's expression – to the arts.

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## Remarks on Art and Truth

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**ABSTRACT** | The importance of Parmenides for the ensuing debate is often overlooked, in part no doubt because of the difficulty of formulating an acceptable interpretation, which overlooks the importance of his position. Joseph Margolis takes a starkly negative view. He suggests the meager outcome of the classical phase of Western philosophy lies in abandoning what he describes as Parmenides' constraint. A number of observers think the Eleatic is the father of Western philosophy. I have suggested, on the contrary, that Plato's rejection of the view that non-philosophical art is true gave rise to a debate later traversing the entire Western aesthetic tradition. I have further suggested that the post-Platonic Western aesthetic tradition can be reconstructed as an effort by many hands to come to grips with and if possible overturn the Platonic judgment. I have finally suggested that Hegel, in disagreeing with both Kant and Plato, presents an interesting anti-Platonic argument useful for reformatting as it were the ancient link between art and truth. For in the final analysis, art, or at least some kinds of art, is not only beautiful but also in a deep sense true.

**KEYWORDS** | Parmenides; Plato; Aesthetics; Parmenides's Constraint

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The importance of Parmenides for the ensuing debate is often overlooked, in part no doubt because of the difficulty of formulating an acceptable interpretation, which overlooks the importance of his position. Joseph Margolis takes a starkly negative view. He suggests the meager outcome of the classical phase of Western philosophy lies in abandoning what he describes as Parmenides' constraint.<sup>1</sup>

A number of observers think the Eleatic is the father of Western philosophy. According to Parmenides, thought and being are the same. Directly or indirectly this claim influences a long list of thinkers up to the present, crucially including Plato, Kant and Hegel as well as many others. Plato thinks Parmenides is the father of philosophy, but the meaning of this claim is unclear.

In relying in his poem on Fragment 2, Parmenides has long been read in different but related ways. One is the view that, as he writes, thinking (or thought) and being, are the same. In that case what is (or ontology) and what we know (or epistemology) would coincide. Another is the view that we know what is, which is held by realists of all kinds. And, finally, there is the anti-realist skeptical view that we cannot and do not know what appears.

Plato, who long ago was influenced by Parmenides, is a post-Parmenidean. He suggests we know that know the mind-independent real in several places. In the *Meno*, Plato briefly sketches a simple but effective geometrical argument as follows. Socrates asks the slave if he knows what a square is (82b). He answers in defining a square as having four equal sides, each of which measures two feet (82e) and then examines that claim. Now twice 4 feet is 8 feet (83e). A line double that length is four times bigger (83e). And a line twice this length is four times as long (83c). Now putting together four four-foot squares yields 16 square feet. The slave goes on to agree with Socrates that the diagonal that bisects the 8 foot-line yields a square with an area of 8 square feet (85c).

In the *Meno*, Plato maintains a constructivist view. A similar view is formulated much later by Kant in the *Prolegomena*.<sup>2</sup> In the *Meno* he believes that we do not know what we do not make since we know only what we make. The mature Plato later seems to have second thoughts about endorsing any form of constructivism. In the *Republic*, when he has already worked out one and possibly more versions of the notorious theory of forms (or ideas), he understands it as any of a limitless number of types of imitation, more specifically a single form that applies to many things which have the same name. In the last book of the dialogue, Plato describes the relation between a single form which is not and cannot be made by a human

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<sup>1</sup> See Joseph Margolis, *The Critical Margolis*, Edited and With a Preface by Russell Pryba, Albany, NY, pp. 263-255.

<sup>2</sup> See Immanuel Kant, *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics*, Gary Hatfield, trans., New York: Cambridge University Press, para. 38, p. 68-72.

being and the many things that human beings can and do make. Socrates differentiates three kinds of cognitive object, including one that cannot be made by a human being but that is made by the gods, another that is made by a carpenter who imitates what he makes, and a final one made by a painter who imitates what the carpenter makes.

In the *Republic*, Plato maintains that the Parmenidean view, or the identity of thinking and being can be stated both positively and negatively, positively as the suggestion that we know what we make and negatively as the suggestion that we do not know what we do not make. Left unclear is the point Plato is trying to bring out. One possibility is the identity of thinking and being that goes back at least until Parmenides. If thinking and being are the same, then an individual, who knows only what he makes, cannot know what he did not make. For we can only know if we can grasp directly the mind-independent object made, for instance, by a god or nature. It follows that a carpenter cannot know a bed he makes nor a painter know the bed he paints. Knowledge is necessarily reserved for the god who, according to Plato, alone makes the world. It follows that for the mature Plato the view that we know only what we make that applies in the early Plato no longer applies in the later Plato. In that case, Plato, who is not a Parmenidean, is an anti-Parmenidean, committed to the view that we do not and cannot know the mind-independent real.

The difficulty which arises is that the identity of the original object and what appears in its instantiation can be asserted. But it cannot be demonstrated. According to Plato we can only know that the object resembles its instantiation, but not that it imitates correctly. In other words, Parmenides suggests that we do not and cannot know that an object made by a person correctly imitates the form or idea since, as Plato shows, we cannot know a mind-independent object but can only know a mind-dependent object. This leaves unresolved the problem of the identity between the imitation and what it imitates that much later becomes Kant's problem.

## Remarks on Art, Truth and Culture

"Art" suggests a related problem. What "art" means is culture specific, hence not universal at all. In the West, until roughly the 17th century "art" referred, as the Greek term *techné* suggests, to skill or mastery, which was viewed as continuous with crafts and science. But more recently the term "fine arts" has come to refer to aesthetic considerations, as distinguished from so-called decorative or applied arts.

In some cultures and at some times art is accorded a cognitive dimension. The Western concern with knowledge central to the entire philosophical tradition is atypical in three ways. To begin with, there is the attention to beauty. Second, there is the link between beauty and truth, which is forged very early in the tradition. Finally, there is the characteristic view of truth as universal and necessary.

On some readings Plato can be taken to suggest that the ideal state incarnates all three characteristics. Yet it is not clear that the true is good, nor the good beautiful, nor even that the beautiful is true. The relation of the art and truth however understood echoes through the post-Platonic tradition. Plato inaugurates aesthetics in suggesting two points: as he understands them, art and art objects of the most varied kinds and truth are inseparable, and artists do not and cannot know the truth.

The theme of art and truth continues to attract attention. Opinions are divided among artists, who think philosophers know little of artistic relevance, and philosophers, who think artists do not understand what they do. For every Cézanne, who claims there is truth in art and intends to show it, there is a Picasso who insists art is a lie. Plato's view that non-philosophical artists do not and cannot know is supported much later by Kant's conviction that art depends on taste, which is unrelated to knowledge. Yet such surprising bedfellows as medieval thinkers, Marxists and in our own time Heidegger share the anti-Platonic view that art, or at least a certain kind of art, can tell us about reality.

The Western artistic tradition can be reconstructed as a series of responses to the theme of the relation of art and truth beginning in the Eleatic tradition. The Platonic view can be reconstructed as a series of related claims: first, art must grasp what is, not merely as it appears or seems to be, but rather as it really is. Second, art is, hence, inextricably linked to cognition. It follows that there is no difference, none at all, between aesthetics and philosophy. Third, cognition is understood here on a quasi-Parmenidean model ultimately based on the identity of thought and being. Fourth, there is a basic distinction between appearance and reality. Fifth, artists cannot know since no cognitive inference is possible from appearance to reality. Sixth, if there is knowledge, then there is direct, intuitive knowledge of what is. And, seventh, some selected individuals, call them philosophers, have direct, intuitive knowledge of what is. Hence they satisfy the criterion of knowledge of the real as a prerequisite to art, which is both beautiful as well as true, hence presumably useful for the good life.

It is sometimes claimed that aesthetics only begins much later, say in Kant. Yet clearly early in the tradition Plato puts forward an aesthetic theory, which deserves our attention and which continues to reverberate throughout the later debate. This complex series of related claims justifies Plato's criticism of the art of his

time, which he rejects as falsely mimetic since it cannot know what it depicts. It is perhaps less widely known that Plato's critique of the art of his time presupposes a positive conception of art as well as his notorious theory of forms.

Plato's objection consists in claiming that art falsely claims to represent what it cannot know, hence cannot represent. The art of Plato's time was mimetic. Mimesis is a particularly rigorous form of representation, which reaches its high point in reflection, or the so-called reflection theory of knowledge. The reflection theory of knowledge, which later became a staple of Marxism, was already anticipated in Plato's time by Socrates. In anticipating the later theory of reflection Plato attacks mimetic art and by implication all representational approaches to cognition.

Plato's attack on mimetic art, which is not motivated by cognitive skepticism, presupposes cognitive intuition. In Plato's hands, an intuitive approach to knowledge, which maintains the Parmenidean criterion of the identity of thought and being, presupposes direct realism. In the modern tradition, direct realism, sometimes also called naïve realism, is regarded as problematic for a number of reasons. On the one hand, direct realist claims, which are intuitive, are private, not public. The modern debate prefers public over private claims. On the other hand, there is the familiar problem of illusion, which takes many forms, such as the distinction between waking and sleeping discussed by Descartes and others.

In the modern tradition representationalism is widely favored as part of the anti-Platonic revival of a non-Platonic theory of knowledge. The modern debate on representationalism presupposes a two-fold reversal of Platonism. To begin with, it presupposes a reversal of the Platonic interdiction of cognitive inference from appearance to reality. Second, representationalism makes a qualified return to causality as an epistemological principle. In a causal theory of perception, the cognitive object is regarded as the cause of which the idea in the mind is regarded as the effect.

Representationalism is common in different ways to the continental rationalists, especially Descartes, as well as British empiricists, including Locke and Hume. Each of these authors argues for knowledge based on a cognitive inference from an idea in the mind to the mind-independent external world. Each further denies a direct grasp of the surrounding world in avoiding the difficulties of naïve realism in favor of representative realism.

Representationalism in all known versions exhibits a single fatal flaw: the manifest inability to demonstrate that representation, in fact any representation, actually represents. If the access to what is represented is only available through its representation, then there is in effect no way to determine the relation of the representation to what it represents. It follows that any known form of represen-

tationalism fails.

This paper has so far examined two views of the relation of art and truth. In both cases, cognition rests on an inference from the idea in the mind to the mind-independent external world. In different ways, intuitionism and representationalism both attempt to meet the criterion for knowledge proposed on speculative grounds by Parmenides at the dawn of the Western tradition. I use the term “speculative” since I believe that at the dawn of the philosophical tradition Parmenides already advances a form of transcendental argument, or a supposed analysis of the conditions of possibility in suggesting possible conditions of knowledge, which, in his opinion, require a cognitive grasp of mind-independent reality. In Kantian terms, this would amount to knowledge of the thing in itself, hence knowledge of reality.

I turn now to a third view, or non-Platonic alternative, which I will be calling cognitive constructivism. “Constructivism” is any form of the general claim that a minimal condition of knowledge is that the cognitive subject in some way “constructs” the cognitive object. The result is a clear contrast between traditional approaches to knowledge based on finding, discovering or uncovering what is, on the one hand, and the very different, clearly incompatible view that the cognitive object is rather made, produced, or constructed.

This approach is already present in ancient mathematics, notably in Euclidean geometry. It comes into modern philosophy in Hobbes, Vico and Kant. In the critical philosophy, constructivism is a synonym for the often mentioned, but rarely analyzed and little understood Copernican revolution in philosophy. In the famous B preface of the first Critique, Kant outlines a constructivist approach to mathematics, modern natural science and the future science of metaphysics. According to Kant, the cognitive success of modern natural science is based on the insight that the subject can only know what it constructs according to a plan of its own. He explicitly recommends a similar experiment in metaphysics, Kant’s term for cognition, or what is now more often called theory of knowledge.

This lengthy excursus in theory of knowledge is justified by the current focus on art and truth. Constructivism is key not only to modern theory of cognition as well as to the relation of art and truth. In the modern tradition, Kant and Hegel are two of the most important thinkers as well as two of the most important theoreticians of aesthetics.

We can situate the differences in their respective conceptions of aesthetics, more precisely their conceptions of the relation of art and truth, with respect to a constructivist conception of cognition. Kant, who introduces constructivism into modern idealist epistemology, separates aesthetics from cognition. Since he disjoins art and truth, he remains a Platonist. Hegel, who is committed to a view of art

as a source of truth, is both anti-Kantian as well as anti-Platonic. He formulates a constructivist approach to art, hence to the relation of art and truth, in developing the idea of the identity of identity and difference. This leads to a complex analysis of the constructivist point that we know ourselves in what we do. Since we construct the object or, by extension, the social world, we can know it. It follows that a function of art is to tell us who we are. What we know is not a universal constant but a historical variable, embedded in the historical matrix, as witness the famous Hegelian dictum that art is dead.

This idea is often misunderstood. Hegel is not saying art is over. He is rather making the very different point that as society changes the social function of art and art objects also changes. For in a society in which as a result of increasing secularization the transcendent religious dimension has been steadily eclipsed, art can no longer function to reveal it.

I come now to my conclusion. I have suggested that Plato's rejection of the view that non-philosophical art is true gave rise to a debate later traversing the entire Western aesthetic tradition. I have further suggested that the post-Platonic Western aesthetic tradition can be reconstructed as an effort by many hands to come to grips with and if possible overturn the Platonic judgment. I have finally suggested that Hegel, in disagreeing with both Kant and Plato, presents an interesting anti-Platonic argument useful for reforging as it were the ancient link between art and truth. For in the final analysis, art, or at least some kinds of art, is not only beautiful but also in a deep sense true.

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## **A Note on Mr. Margolis and the Definition of Dance**

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**ABSTRACT** | I demur to Margolis' insistence that we form a generalized concept of art before the formation of a definition of specific art forms. I consider the elements proposed for a definition of "dance" by Margolis, including "dance notation, dance style, and dance as the expression of a contingent culture." I note the problems with the third element, especially the blind spot shared by many of us to anything other than Western culture.

**KEYWORDS** | Dance; Dance Notation; Dance Style; Definition of Dance

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Joseph Margolis' early landmark article "Mr. Weitz and the Definition of Art" (Margolis 1958) set the stage for decades of dialogue on how we might define art in general, as well as individual artforms. Just as his thinking about art evolved over his long career, so has the thinking of those of us focusing on individual artforms, in my case, dance.

Margolis' insistence that we need a generalized concept of art before we can have a specific definition challenges us in all the artforms, including dance. I confess that I have never settled on a generalized concept of art overall that I would defend now. As with many scholars of philosophy and dance, I have struggled instead with how to define "dance" (Bresnahan 2020).

I have resisted necessary and sufficient conditions, yet think some elements are essential, most notably, human movement. The notion of "open texture" that we inherited from Wittgenstein has been appealing to Margolis (89) and to many of us today. It seems to be an attractive escape clause to get us out of tangles specifying just what the necessary and sufficient conditions would be. The comfortable metaphors of "strands of similarity" and "family resemblances," which Margolis (89, 92) also finds attractive, are easy to understand and apply to numerous examples of any artform. But all of these alternatives do seem, as Margolis suggests, too-easy compromises.

In critiquing Francis Sparshott's work on dance, Margolis thinks that to distinguish it from other artforms we need to recognize the roles of "dance notation, dance style, and dance as the expression of a contingent culture" (Margolis 1997, 46). The first two on his list (dance notation and dance style) are dissected mercilessly in his "The Autographic Nature of the Dance" (Margolis 1981), which critiques Nelson Goodman's proposals for dance in (Goodman 1968), *Languages of Art*, but does not propose a definition *per se* of "dance."

The third element, "the expression of a contingent culture," plays an increasingly important role in Margolis' later observations on the arts, while not focusing specifically on dance. Margolis' notion of works of art as "physically embodied and culturally emergent entities" (the title of another seminal article by Margolis (1974)) sweeps in many things not encompassed in our concept of art, a problem for those determined to define "art."

But despite Margolis' focus on emergent cultural entities, it was his perceived blind spot toward truly universal cultural understanding of dance that was the focus of a blistering critique by anthropologist Drid Williams (1928-2018) (1982). She is appalled that Margolis (as well as a few other writers of that era) suffers from "intellectual provincialism" (54), and does not seem even "... to be acquainted, if not with some of the developments outside of their specialization, at least with international scholarship within their discipline." I am unaware of any formal re-

sponse by Margolis to this critique.

Williams puts a glaring spotlight on a problem for so many of us working on these issues, viz., our preoccupation with the varieties of western theater dance and failure to even attempt to recognize international dance and scholarship on that dance. Although belatedly, most of us working in aesthetics now are recognizing our lack of attention to the arts outside of western culture. So, while we scramble to catch up with our own shortcomings, we also are cautious about taking concepts and frameworks that have been workable in our concentration on western art and using them as a starting point for our remedial work on non-western art in general and dance in particular.

Thus arises the irony of Margolis' insights on art as culturally emergent and physically embodied. With too-recent awareness of our impoverished recognition of non-western art and scholarship, we shy away from trying to embellish on any of these insights on the arts that we once confidently believed were fair and accurate. We worry that our western "frame" for understanding the arts might itself be a limitation. We wonder what it would mean to be sufficiently well-versed in those other artforms to speak confidently, whether to identify necessary and sufficient conditions or family resemblances or strands of similarities. So, for now, we cautiously try to expand our horizons and continue to explore our understanding of the arts in general and dance in particular. If that means declining, for the time being, to propose sweeping definitions of "art" or particular artforms, so be it.

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# What, After All, is Margolis' Problem with Weitz' Definition of Art?

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**ABSTRACT** | This article analyzes Joseph Margolis' criticism of Morris Weitz' definition of art with an eye to sorting out where, precisely, their differences lie. In particular, it focuses on their differing ideas of what an "open" and "closed" definition of art amounts to and what sort of entity art is. It concludes with the suggestion that differences in metaphysical worldview, rather than differences in how they view what kinds of entities should count as art, account for the discrepancy in their views.

**KEYWORDS** | Margolis; Weitz; Art; Definition; Wittgenstein

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## 1 Weitz' View

In 1950, Morris Weitz provided an initial definition of art in his book, *The Philosophy of the Arts* (Weitz 1950). There he defined “art” as “an organic complex or integration of expressive elements embodied in a sensuous medium” (51). This was Weitz’ initial attempt to define art according to necessary and sufficient properties. The necessary and sufficient criteria were 1) organic, 2) expressive, 3) embodied, and 4) in a sensuous medium (this is an empirical criterion – it must be experienceable by a perceiver).

A mere half a decade later, however, in a seminal article entitled “The Role of Theory in Aesthetics” that was published in the *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, Weitz (1956) eschewed the project of defining art according to necessary and sufficient properties altogether. He criticizes the project of doing so this way:

Each of the great theories of art—Formalism, Voluntarism, Emotionalism, Intellectualism, Intuitionism, Organicism—converges on the attempt to state the defining properties of art. Each claims that it is the true theory because it has formulated correctly into a real definition the nature of art; and that the others are false because they have left out some necessary or sufficient property. (27)

What these great theories were trying to get at, Weitz explains in a later article, is the idea

that concepts are universals, the view held in one way or another by philosophers from Plato to Russell and Moore. This doctrine comprises both an ontological thesis that concepts are either simple or complex, where the latter consist of necessary and sufficient — definitive — properties; and a corollary linguistic thesis that the words that name these complex concepts can be correctly applied to the world only if these words are governed by necessary and sufficient — definitive — criteria. (Weitz 1972, 86)

Weitz then went on to say that the attempt by aesthetic theory to find a real definition for art was fruitless because to find jointly necessary and sufficient properties for art was impossible. “Art, as the logic of the concept shows, has no set of necessary and sufficient properties, hence a theory of it is logically impossible and not merely factually difficult” (1956, 28). A few pages later he reiterates this view again, saying that aesthetic theory tries in vain “to conceive the concept of art as closed when its very use reveals and demands its openness” (30).

Weitz then explains what he means by an “open” concept:

A concept is open if its conditions of application are emendable and corrigible; i.e., if a situation or case can be imagined or secured which would call for some sort of decision on our part to extend the use of the concept to cover this, or to close the concept and invent a new one to deal with the new case and its new property. If necessary and sufficient conditions for the application of a concept can be stated, the concept is a closed one. But this can happen only in logic or mathematics where concepts are constructed and completely defined. It cannot occur with empirically-descriptive and normative concepts unless we arbitrarily close them by stipulating the ranges of their uses. (31)

Art, according to Weitz, is an empirically-descriptive and normative concept so this means that it can only have an open definition (one where necessary and sufficient conditions cannot be stated).

## **2 Margolis' Critique**

Shortly after Weitz published "The Role of Theory in Aesthetics" Joseph Margolis issued an article that roundly rejected Weitz' theory; indeed, 10 out of the 11 points Margolis (1958) made are critical or corrective and one lonely point (point two) is in agreement. I won't canvass every critique that Margolis makes but will focus on the ones that pertain to the question of open definition. I shall start with the agreement. There Margolis says:

I agree with Weitz's view of the "open character" of "art"; Weitz does show persuasively that an old-fashioned definition of the novel may exclude, contrary to our wishes, Joyce's *Finnegans Wake* or Dos Passos' *U.S.A.* or Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* and that we therefore decide to adjust the definition to incorporate these. (89)

Based on this alone, one might think that Weitz and Margolis might have views of art that are simpatico. Both agree that new examples of things we think are certainly art show up repeatedly and continuously that make us have to refine and rethink earlier definitions. This is why both champion open definitions of art; they agree that closed definitions of art that attempt to fix artworks once and for all by unchanging necessary and sufficient conditions don't make a lot of sense for the practice of art, something that changes and evolves over time.

In addition, both were influenced by the later Ludwig Wittgenstein's recommendations that philosophy make recourse to ordinary language in how it describes the world.<sup>1</sup>

So wherein lies the rub? The crux of the difference in their views lies in how they construe the meaning of "open" when it comes to open definitions of art. Margolis believes that art is inseparable from its nature as a cultural artifact. He says that this provides at least one major limiting condition on any definition of art – a necessary but not sufficient condition if you will – that artworks are those that emerge from a human cultural practice (they are artifactual) (93). Since he believes that Weitz says that there *can be no* necessary or sufficient conditions for empirical and normative concepts like art, this would seem to suggest that Weitz wouldn't find artifactuality to be a necessary condition for art.

At this juncture, let us compare Margolis' definition of art (for he has one) which I have described before this way:

A work of art, like a self, is [a type of expressive utterance that is] typically embodied in some material entity or event, which is not reducible to the physical but that is accessible via our concepts, discernible and real in some communicative form that is subject to interpretation and reinterpretation by the appreciators of that artwork. It is that material form that may be classified and individuated as a work of art for purposes of numerical (which is determinate) rather than for metaphysical (which for Margolis can never be determinate as to "nature") identity. (Bresnahan 2014a)

As we can see from the above, Margolis' definition of art has more than artifactuality as a necessary condition – it would seem that Margolis would also count among the necessary conditions its interpretability and its embodied nature – perhaps components of what he means by "artifact" – but it is clear that this sort of definition does not pretend to be sufficient in defining art for all time. This is true because this definition applies to all of what Margolis calls lingual but not linguistic (due to lack of a formal grammar) expressive utterances, such as making love and baking bread (Margolis 1999, 2010b). For Margolis fine art is only separable (as Dewey would have it perhaps) by its particular history of practices and objects

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<sup>1</sup> Despite this point of agreement, Margolis believes that Weitz misunderstands and misinterprets Ludwig Wittgenstein's concept of family resemblances and misapplies it to art (Margolis 1958, at 8 through 11; also Margolis 2010, 218–219; Weitz 1972, 99–100). I won't be discussing that disagreement in this article, leaving it to others to mull over that interpretive point. I also don't think the debate hangs on Weitz' decision to merely say "Wittgenstein got it right" but is instead trying to make an analogy to Wittgenstein's concept of games to support his own claim.

that have previously been identified as art and it is in this aspect that institutional features would come in.

If Weitz did, indeed, believe that art has no necessary conditions at all (not even artifactuality) the conclusion would be extreme and strange indeed. Where could art come from if not from human nature and culture? Are they Platonic eternal structures of the universe? This, it would seem, is the root of Margolis' suspicion that Weitz believes that art could be something apart from human making, and if that is true, then they should be discoverable and subject to closed definitions (like those concepts in math and logic that he describes). One can now see why Margolis believes that Weitz has gotten himself into self-contradictory hot water. Margolis thus concludes the following:

Weitz's entire argument presupposes in a subterranean way that we are, in some sense, able to grasp the eternal forms of things. We are to recognize that Joyce's *Finnegans Wake*, for example, is a novel just as Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* and hence are to reject, as false, definitions of the novel which fail to include *Finnegans Wake*. (91)

Compounding this disagreement, Margolis says that rather than art being a normative mystery that can and does change inexplicably and in a way that evades any attempt at definition, that the nature of change and evolution of art is instead in human nature, culture, and interpretive practices regarding what we wish to consider art. What's more, he ties all other human-created concepts to the same anchor. In point five, Margolis says, "It is our practical dissatisfaction with any empirical definition of this sort that urges us to revise it, to make a 'decision' (as Weitz would put it)." (91) As Cassius observed to Brutus in Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*, "the fault lies not in our stars but in ourselves."

To complicate matters further, Margolis thinks that what we mean even by "necessary and sufficient" is open, since concept-making in language (as well as art) is also a culturally emergent practice that changes as culture changes over time (see additional references at the end of this article, particularly 1995a, 2001; see also Pryba 2021 for more on the development of Margolis' pragmatism). As Margolis points out, if Weitz maintains that there can be no necessary and sufficient conditions for definitions of art then this means that Weitz believes, in error and paradoxically, that necessary and sufficient conditions can close a concept in a way that identifies an essentialist sort of metaphysical truth in other arenas. In his point six, for example, Margolis says that Weitz is wrong that there is never a problem with closed definitions in mathematics and logic as well.

Margolis' point here is that in math and logic too we can "decide" to change the definitions of certain concepts for practical reasons. He takes pains to point

out, however, that this doesn't mean we must always do this whenever we have a change in mathematical understanding.<sup>(91)</sup> This means that Margolis means something different by "closed" definitions than Weitz does as well – he means something like stable over time – not permanent, not fixed, not immutable. Here, too, we see a hallmark of Margolis' pragmatism (in growth, evolution, change, fallibilism, etc.).

The crux of Margolis' criticism against Weitz can thus be reframed as a pragmatist one, seen in context of reflections like the one I made above pertaining to the role of aesthetic feeling in connection with identifying truths about the world. What Margolis does is the following: He simultaneously accuses Weitz of having a definition of art that is *too open* (it denies that art has any perpetual limiting conditions) while also accusing Weitz of essentialism when he attributes appropriate limiting conditions to concepts in arenas like logic and math.<sup>2</sup> It is this that Margolis finds internally contradictory. I suggest, instead, that the dichotomy Margolis is actually rejecting is the idea that some things (cultural, normative kinds) eschew closed definitions whereas other entities (abstract ideas such as those found in logic and math, say) have essences that can be fixed and closed via some procedure of verification other than how we "decide" what is true of art (Margolis 1958, 90–91). If qualitative feelings, if dispositions and predilections, inform our sense of "apt" or "fitting" at the very least (if not "true" in an essentialist way) then art is no different from any other concept in incorporating this kind of normativity into itself. This is what the world is, as constructed and real, according to pragmatists like Margolis.

After pointing out that C.L. Stevenson has a preferable view of open concepts when it comes to literature (something Weitz also hails positively in his 1972 piece on open concepts), Margolis ends his critique with the exhortation that Weitz "simply try again" (Margolis 1958, 95). Margolis then revives his criticism of Weitz theory of art in his 2010 piece "The Importance of Being Earnest about the Definition and Metaphysics of Art", bringing Monroe Beardsley, Arthur Danto, Clement Greenberg, and George Dickie under the umbrella of those he thinks make errors in understanding art for various reasons that can all be boiled down to a failure to recognize the priority of the human self in making both art and the world in which we live. Thus Margolis' criticism, once again, is steeped in the Peircean sort of constructive realism that the positivists have critiqued as inaccurate due to the error of emotivity.

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<sup>2</sup> Here I can't help but note here (as I did in Bresnahan 2014b) that an irony here is that in claiming that art must resist all definitions of the "necessary-and-sufficient-condition" sort, Weitz has provided at least one necessary condition for any such definition: that they must, in all cases, be open.

### 3 Did Weitz Ever Respond to Margolis?

I am not aware of any explicit rejoinder to Margolis' 1958 article by Weitz. Weitz could have chosen to respond to it, for example, in the very journal in which it appears but it seems he chose not to; perhaps he didn't want to issue a response that the JAAC rejected. As a matter of professional practice in philosophy I will reflect here that a failure to respond in this way can mean a number of different things: 1) That the criticism is so stinging, so dead-on, and so true, that the criticized philosopher is simply left speechless; 2) That the criticism is so trivial, so *ad hominem* or so wrong-headed overall that it does not merit a response. I will leave it to the reader to try to imagine which attitude Weitz had here, although of course there may be other possibilities as well.

In the early 70s, however, Weitz wrote a piece that may, if looked at carefully (since he nowhere mentions Margolis in this writing), clarify what he meant by an "open" definition in the essay to which Margolis gave such a withering reply. Here he says that a concept with necessary but without sufficient conditions is still an "open" one:

The basic difference between an open and a closed concept is the absence or presence of sets of necessary and sufficient criteria. The investigation of the logical grammar of certain concepts may reveal concepts with no necessary, no sufficient, and no disjunctive set of sufficient criteria; *or concepts with a necessary criterion but no necessary and sufficient set of criteria*; or concepts with no definitive set as well as no undebatable necessary criteria. *All of these concepts may be said to be open in the sense of having no definitive set of criteria.* (Weitz 1972, 95, italics mine for emphasis)

This emendation of his earlier piece suggests that Weitz' new 1956 view *might* allow that art could have a necessary condition (like artifactuality) and still be an open concept, although his neglect of providing an example of any necessary but non-sufficient conditions suggests otherwise.

This rejoinder to Margolis, however, if it is one, nowhere retreats from his earlier statement that logic and mathematics consist of closed concepts, but instead reiterates it. Weitz cites Friedrich Waismann's 1945 article, "Verifiability," for the point that open-texture concepts apply to the realm of empirical knowledge (not that all empirical concepts are open but Weitz points out that Waismann offers no empirical concepts that are not) "in contradistinction to the closed, completely definable character of mathematics and logic" (Weitz 1972, 92; see also Waismann 1945).

#### 4 What To Make of the Difference in Margolis' and Weitz' Metaphysical World Views?

Weitz is not alone in his idea that there are some completely definable concepts in mathematics and logic. One need only think of Rene Descartes' idea that  $2+2=4$  or that a triangle has three sides are "clear and distinct" ideas precisely because they identify abstract structures in a permanent way.

What this boils down to, then, is a fundamental disagreement over what kinds of entities populate the world. The line of thought that began with Plato, was continued by Descartes, and that carries on in some strands of analytic philosophy today is the idea that there are two sorts of entities in the world: 1) "real" things, discoverable things, things that exist that make our language claims about them true or false and our definitions about those things true or false accordingly, and 2) those things that are merely description and value-laden (what Weitz means by "normative" perhaps) that say more about human inclinations and tastes than they do about the world as such.

Weitz acknowledges that this issue comes to the fore in understanding truth in literature, for example, in an article he wrote a decade before the pieces at issue entitled, "Does Art Tell the Truth?" (Weitz 1943). There Weitz says that there is a traditional view that holds the following:

[W]hen I say "The novel is a form of literature," I am making an informative statement which is either true or false and can be verified by the speaker or hearer of the statement. But if I say "The novel is so thrilling," I am not really telling you anything about the novel but only about my feelings toward the novel in the hope of evoking the same attitudes about the novel in you. (Weitz 1943, 339)

Further, he says the following encapsulates the view of the logical positivist:

This distinction between the emotive and symbolic uses of language is basic to the distinction between poetry and prose or between art and science, to generalize the distinction. To understand the emotive use of language and to use it exclusively is the function of literature. Literature should abandon its quest for knowledge and referential truth. It is not necessary to know what things are in order to express our feeling toward them. It is enough that literature can evoke our multifarious attitudes toward things and can express them in a way that produces pleasure in so many of us. (339-340)

This is the dichotomy between the “real” and the “as lived”, the world of structure and quantitative truths as against the world of feeling and qualitative truths, that classical pragmatists such as C.S. Peirce and John Dewey (and, later, Margolis) de-ided as false. Instead, these pragmatists championed qualitative truths as also real and not imaginary, constructed but not idealist, changing and evolving, but not thereby suspicious as evidence of the real.

In the second half of his 1943 article, however, Weitz shows where and how he departs from the logical positivist on art; he claims that not all claims made in literature are merely emotive and not also symbolic and that this means that some symbolic claims made within literature are true. He says, “The only thing I am saying is that some literary works of art do try to tell the truth, i.e., convey knowledge and that, when they do their aesthetic merit may be enhanced” (342). How they do this, according to Weitz, is in two ways: 1) by first-order claims (such as “X is true”); 2) by second-order claims, which he calls “depth-meanings” – where “X is true” is implied rather than explicitly stated (344).

Weitz offers three examples of what he calls these “second-order” claims, above, in Richard Wright’s novel, *Native Son*.<sup>3</sup> First, he says that “[t]he first thing that we notice is that the story is not about an isolated negro, but about all negroes and racial minorities in America. Bigger’s life and tragedy are symbols of certain conditions existing in America ...” (344). Next, he says that the courtroom scene makes the implicit claim “that socialist reconstruction is the only way out of the present inhumanities of our society” (344). And finally, he says that the main character’s final predicament has the second-order meaning “that the only freedom left to modern man is the freedom to destroy, first others about you and finally yourself” (345–346).

Weitz offers these examples as ones that show that implied truth claims add to the novel’s aesthetic merit but in fact, he has actually shown the opposite – that the aesthetic (emotional) valence of the passages he points to are part of our uptake of the propositions he provides as true. Indeed, when discussing the origin of the phrase “depth-meaning” he notes the following:

...a depth-meaning is one which, psychologically, is suggested by and, logically, is a function of the surface meanings of the work of art. It is here that the emotive meanings of art become symbolic and where one is to look for the truth claims of literature. (344)

I’ll say that again for the people in the back – here Weitz concedes that *emotive meanings of art become symbolic*. This at the very least shows that in 1943 at least

<sup>3</sup> Wright, Richard. 1940. *Native Son*. Harper and Bros.

Weitz was a semiotic formalist, similar in stripe in connecting emotion to form to Clive Bell, Roger Fry and (later) like Susanne K. Langer. This is just a half-step away from C.S. Peirce's semeotics (see his *Collected Papers*) and a bit farther from John Dewey, who prized art as experience rather than form, but who held that the mark of art (a necessary condition if you will) is that art provides *an* experience, a unification and heightening of ordinary experience in a qualitative way (see Dewey 1934).

There is a discrepancy, then, between Weitz' earlier views (from 1943 and 1950) and the view that qualitative response (not limited to primary emotions but ideas like feeling attracted to or repulsed by a concept, or aware of its elegance or awkwardness, for example) is part and parcel of our uptake. Weitz does not explicitly deny the Platonic and positivist idea that emotivity is itself suspect and perhaps it is this agreement that he carries into his 1956 article. He does not there hold, for example, as Peirce and Dewey did, that qualitative attitudes are part of the semiotic meaning of concepts.<sup>4</sup> If Weitz had held anything close to *that* view, he would have clarified in 1956 that aesthetic value is part and parcel of what it means to denote claims about the world as true. Instead, he grabbed on to Wittgenstein's new *Philosophical Investigations* as a way to suggest that art, like games, have putative definitions which have to be "open" to contain the set of things that art shows itself to be over time. (Some explanation for what, exactly, art is then and how we know it when we see it does seem to be missing.)

## 5 Final Reflections

So how does this story end? Can there be any sort of *rapprochement* between Weitz and Margolis when it comes to defining art? What I would say to Margolis if he were still alive and sitting across his office desk from me is this: Do you not advocate, as part of your view of how language and concepts work in philosophy, that we posit claims about phenomena as *façons de parler* (ways of speaking) in a *faut de mieux* (for lack of anything better) way in order to focus the discussion on interesting and relevant properties of the entities and phenomena under discussion? (See Margolis 1999, 2010b) If so, why don't your own inclinations about how these conversations take place point *away from* rather than towards a desire to provide at least necessary if not sufficient conditions for art? The quibble about what Wittgenstein meant by "family resemblances" aside, why do you not em-

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<sup>4</sup> I'll say no more on Peirce and Dewey here but invite the reader to consider Peirce's essay, "Evolutionary Love" (1893) and Dewey's "Ethics" (1932) for how qualitative considerations are part and parcel of how we understand the world.

brace more fully Weitz' desire for an "open" concept in art (understood as you do and as Weitz later clarified as something that allows for necessary if not sufficient conditions)? Why do you not praise rather than deride Weitz for at least a bold attempt to help analytic aesthetics unshackle itself from the chains of the definitional projects expressed entirely in necessary and sufficient conditions? Why do you not at least cheer on the idea of allowing empirical evidence from the world of art-making practice to unseat at least some essential claims about art? You profess to be "radical" (if not "unruly") but perhaps you are not radical enough to yourself abandon the analytic quest for a real definition of art (your weakening of what "real" means notwithstanding).

Here I know full well what Margolis would reply, as he did whenever I asked him to extend more charity to a view with which he disagreed: "You're not going to try to change me now, are you?" This suggests, perhaps, that one necessary (if not sufficient) condition of Joseph Margolis' philosophical disposition is a commitment to finding the best answer to a philosophical question not via compromise or concession but via clear-eyed and non-charitable criticism. It's hard to know whether this is a commitment to truth or simply a personal inclination of Margolis'. Perhaps it's a little of both, if, in fact, those two things can be separated.

One might also question both Margolis and Weitz' commitment to the definitional project itself – open, closed, or somewhere in between. Clearly, they both think it matters that we know, somehow, what art *is* in some way – or at least what kind of thing it is – not just that we can get along with some interesting conversations about features we find interesting or salient on a set of works (and practices and performances) and leave it at that. But this is what, perhaps, makes them both philosophers rather than other kinds of art theorists. One bumps up against the priority of metaphysics and ontology above all else, something both of these philosophers chafe against as too rigid and out of touch with the practice of art and yet, in their separate ways, uphold.

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## Margolis on Defining Art

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ABSTRACT | Joseph Margolis' writings on definitions of art, which often take the form of a debate with Morris Weitz, are under-appreciated. Margolis agrees with Weitz that the concept of art is open in the sense that works can be admitted to the class of artworks when these works do not have all of the properties thought to be necessary and sufficient for membership in the class prior to the time of its admission. Margolis also agreed that we cannot go back to the old project of defining art by determining the real essence of art. Nevertheless, he does not abandon the project of defining art in terms of necessary and sufficient conditions. These conditions are not, however, read off the real essence of art. Traditionally, the process of defining art began by inspecting artworks to determine what makes them valuable. Margolis realised that the only way forward at this point is to decide what is valuable and then decide what is art. Margolis' approach has the consequence that definitions of art are what C. L. Stevenson (1938) called persuasive definitions.

KEYWORDS | Definitions of Art; Joseph Margolis; Morris Weitz; Aesthetics; Persuasive Definition

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## 1 Introduction

Over the course of his long and distinguished career, Joseph Margolis returned time after time to questions about defining art. Often, his reflections on this subject took the form of a debate with Morris Weitz and his oft-cited essay, "The Role of Theory in Aesthetics" (1956). Following in what he believed to be the footsteps of Wittgenstein, Weitz held that the concept of art is an open concept, art has no essence, and the concept of art cannot be defined in terms of necessary and sufficient conditions shared by all works of art. Margolis agreed that the concept of art is open in the sense that works can be admitted to the class of artworks when these works do not have all of the properties thought to be necessary and sufficient for membership in the class prior to the time of its admission. Margolis also agreed that philosophers cannot go back to the old project of defining art by determining the real essence of art. Nevertheless, he does not abandon the project of defining art in terms of necessary and sufficient conditions. These conditions are not, however, read off the real essence of art. Traditionally, the process of defining art began by inspecting artworks to determine what makes them valuable. Margolis realised that the only way forward at this point is to decide what is valuable and then decide what is art. Margolis' approach has the consequence that definitions of art are what C. L. Stevenson (1938) called persuasive definitions. At this point in art history, definitions of art can only be persuasive definitions.

Margolis wrote about definitions of art for well over forty years and a commentator faces a challenge in trying to fit together in a coherent whole everything he says about defining art. This essay is an attempt to identify some themes that run through all of Margolis' work on defining art. The hope is to draw attention to ideas that Margolis has about the definition of art that are under-appreciated. (Under-appreciated they certainly are. For example, Margolis was given short shrift in Stephen Davies' landmark book on definitions of art (1994). Two of Margolis' important works on defining art (1958 and 1980) were not even cited by Davies. At the time of writing, Margolis (1958) has been cited 15 times according to Google Scholar. In contrast, Weitz (1956) has been cited more than 1300 times. This is not an accurate reflection of the relative importance of these works.) Margolis' ideas can assist philosophers in understanding where we are in the project of defining art and how we ought to think about defining art in view of developments in the arts over the course of the past century or two.

## 2 How a Problem Arose

At one time, defining art was a comparatively straight-forward enterprise. The phrase “fine art” had a well-established use in European thought. It referred to five canonical fine arts: poetry (that is, literature), painting, music, sculpture and dance. “Fine art” or, as it came to be known, “art” could simply be given a descriptive definition that captured the established use of the term.

In both antiquity and from the Renaissance until at least the eighteenth century, the fine arts were believed to be imitative arts (Young 2015). The project of defining art was made easier by the fact that there was widespread agreement about what made the fine arts valuable. The fine arts were believed to be the source of pleasure or some other intrinsically valuable experience and, very often, they were also believed to be sources of knowledge. This was, for example, the view of Batteux (2015) and Kant (2000). Others, for example Du Bos (2021), downplayed the capacity of the fine arts to provide knowledge and focused on art as a source of pleasure. Nevertheless, despite some differences, philosophers were in a position to offer a descriptive or, at worst, an explicative definition of art: art was the imitation of nature with a view to providing pleasure and, perhaps, knowledge as well. The imitation of nature and the provision of pleasure (and, perhaps, knowledge) were individually necessary and jointly sufficient conditions of something being a work of art.

Things began to change in the eighteenth century, slowly at first, and then quickly by the beginning of the twentieth century. While the eighteenth century had seen widespread agreement about what counted as art and even considerable agreement about what made works of art valuable, this was no longer true by the early years of the twentieth century. Bell (1914) denied that some things that imitate nature, and are sources of pleasure, are works of art. Famously, he denied that Frith’s *Paddington Station* (1862) is a work of art, though it clearly satisfied the old conditions. Other items that manifestly do not imitate nature or provide pleasure were accepted as works of art, most famously Duchamp’s *Fountain* (1914). As the century unfolded, works of conceptual art and performance art, such as Robert Barry’s *Inert Gas Series* (1969) and Chris Burden’s *Shoot* (1971) were widely accepted as artworks. (Barry released five noble gasses in to the atmosphere in five locations in California and Burden had himself shot in the arm with a .22-calibre rifle) Works that were in no obvious sense beautiful or a source of pleasure or knowledge became accepted as works of art.

Weitz was among the first philosophers to reflect on the philosophical implications of the fact that items were constantly being added to the class of artworks when they lack properties that had previously been thought to be necessary or

sufficient for membership in the class of artworks. On the basis of this fact, he concludes that art cannot be defined in terms of necessary and sufficient properties. He writes that “the very expansive, adventurous character of art, its ever-present changes and novel creations, makes it logically impossible to ensure any set of defining properties” (Weitz 1958, 32). Instead, the concept of art is to be understood in terms of family resemblances.

In making this proposal, Weitz draws on Wittgenstein’s (1958) discussion of open concepts. Wittgenstein’s famous example of an open concept is the concept of a game. Everyone has a concept of a game, but no one has specified necessary and sufficient properties that something must have in order to be a game. Instead, everyone operates on the basis of “a complicated network of similarities overlapping and criss-crossing” (Wittgenstein 1958, §66). Wittgenstein calls these similarities family resemblances. Similarly, when one correctly says of a work that it is a work of art, the work shares bundles of properties with other works that are correctly described as works of art: there “are no necessary and sufficient conditions but there are strands of similarity conditions” (Weitz 1956, 33). When a concept is open, “a situation can be imagined or secured which would call for some sort of decision on our part to extend the use of the concept to cover this, or to close the concept and invent a new one to deal with the new case and its new property” (Weitz 1956, 31).

Margolis’ agrees with some of what Weitz says. He agrees that the concept of art is now open in the sense that the class of artworks (and the subclasses or genres of artworks) can be expanded at any time to include works that do not have properties hitherto considered necessary or sufficient for membership in the class of artworks. Margolis allows, using Weitz’ examples, that Woolf’s *To the Lighthouse*, Don Passos’ *U.S.A.* and Joyce’s *Finnegans Wake* are novels, even though they lack properties that were thought to be necessary and sufficient for membership in the class of novels prior to their admission into the class.

Margolis also agrees with Weitz that when presented with a new candidate for membership in the class of artworks “some sort of *decision*” (Weitz 1956, 31) is required. Margolis also agrees that the word “decision,” italicized by Weitz in the passage just quoted, is the key to understanding how novel works become part of the class of artworks. He writes that “It is our practical dissatisfaction with any empirical definition of this sort that urges us to revise it, to make a ‘decision’ (as Weitz would put it)” (1958, 91). The problem facing philosophers of art is now apparent: how do we make a decision about whether or not something is a work of art? The debate between Weitz and Margolis comes down to the question of how this decision is made. In other words, to borrow a phrase from Danto (1964), the debate comes down to a question about how works become enfranchised as

works of art.

Traditionally, philosophers thought questions about whether something is a work of art can only be answered by determining the essence of art and crafting a definition that captures this essence, that is, states necessary and sufficient conditions for membership in the class of artworks. Questions about whether something is a work of art can then be answered by reference to the definition. If something satisfies the definition, then it is a work of art. If it does not, then it is not an artwork. Weitz thinks that art has no essence and, consequently, he believes that this project is misguided. He believes that decisions about whether something is art can only be arbitrary. Margolis presents a third account of how the question is to be answered. His account has something in common with the traditional approach and something in common with Weitz' views. Questions about whether something is art cannot be decided by first determining the real essence of art and establishing a definition of art. Margolis agrees with Weitz that the open nature of the concept of art rules out this approach to art. Instead, Margolis believes that a decision has to be made about what is to be valued in art (or some genre of art). The decision about what is to be valued establishes what Margolis calls a nominal essence. Anything that has this nominal essence, that is, satisfies some specified necessary and sufficient conditions, counts as a work of art.

### **3 Some Sort of Decision**

One possible way to make the decision about whether to enfranchise some novel work of art is simply to decide arbitrarily whether or not to accept that it is art. Often, Weitz seems happy to embrace this position. Margolis certainly believed that Weitz is committed to saying that decisions about whether or not something is an artwork are arbitrary.

There is a simple reason, not noted by either Weitz or Margolis, why Weitz is committed to saying that novel works are arbitrarily stipulated to be works of art. According to Weitz, the only basis for saying that something is a work of art is that the work in question is similar to works already included in the class of artworks. The trouble is that everything is similar to everything else in some respects. In fact, everything is similar to everything else in an infinite number of respects. If similarity to an existing member of the class of artworks is the only basis for saying that something is a work of art, it follows that any work has as good a claim as any other work to be included in the class of artworks as any other work.

Margolis believes that this is an unsatisfactory position. The trouble with this position is that it looks as though anything at all can be a work of art but that is

a conclusion that we want to avoid. If we were forced to accept this conclusion, the concept of art would be useless. Margolis asks, "Is courtship a game? Is love a game? Is life a game? There seems to be a stipulative element required even here to give discipline to usage; else we run the risk of linguistic anarchy" (Margolis 1958, 94). Similarly, we might ask whether carpentry produces works of art or whether dog grooming does. These practices certainly have features in common with painting and poetry. Nevertheless, we want to exclude works of dog grooming from the class of artworks. If dog grooming produces works of art, then the concept has been stretched to the breaking point. It seems that we have a reason to resist the view that decisions about whether something is a work of art are arbitrary.

At one point, Weitz makes an effort to avoid the conclusion that decisions about whether something is a work of art are completely arbitrary. He recommends that, in making such decisions, we take aesthetic theories "as serious and argued-for recommendations to concentrate on certain criteria of excellence in art" (Weitz 1956, 35). These criteria ought, presumably, to guide decisions about whether to classify something as an artwork. (Of course, many works only marginally satisfy these criteria and still count as works of art.) This, as we shall see, is roughly Margolis' answer to the question of how to decide whether something is a work of art. It is, however, not an option that Weitz can adopt. As soon as he introduces talk of criteria of excellence in art, he reintroduces conditions that works must satisfy in order to count as works of art and he undermines his own position.

#### **4 Closing the Concept of Art**

Unlike Weitz, and like philosophers prior to Weitz, Margolis is in a position to talk about what makes art valuable when defining art and is quite happy to do so. On his view, the key to defining art is selecting desirable features that artworks can share. These features, Margolis recognizes, have been different at different times in the history of art and may even, as we shall see, be different at a single time.

The first point to make is that Margolis believes that nothing that Wittgenstein says about open concepts rules out the possibility of defining art in terms of necessary and sufficient conditions. Margolis charges that "Weitz has completely misunderstood Wittgenstein's distinction [between open concepts and others] and... he has somehow managed to mislead the entire labor of analytic aesthetics thereby" (2010, 218). Wittgenstein never says that concepts, such as the concept of a game, cannot be closed. The concept of a game can be closed by an arbitrary decision about what counts as a game. When it comes to boundaries on a concept, Wittgen-

stein says, “You can *draw* one” (1958, §68). Wittgenstein is mainly concerned with showing that a concept, such as the concept of a game, need not be closed in order to be useful. He does not say that concepts cannot be closed. In particular, nothing he says rules out closing the concept of art.

Wittgenstein not only allows that any concept can be closed. He also grants that we may have a good reason to close a concept: “we can draw a boundary – for a special purpose” (1958, §69). Weitz overlooks this aspect of Wittgenstein’s views and seems to believe that the concept of art ought never to be closed. In contrast, Margolis believes that, for philosophical “special purposes,” it may be useful to define art or some sub-category of art, such as literature or tragedy, in terms of necessary and sufficient conditions and, in this way, draw a boundary.

The next point to make is that Margolis’ position on defining art needs to be understood against the background of his wider philosophical commitments. In his writings on philosophy of art, Margolis makes no reference to his more basic philosophical commitments, but he wrote extensively on relativism (for example, Margolis 1991) and pragmatism (for example, Margolis 1986). His fundamental philosophical commitments shape his thinking about philosophy of art. As a relativist, Margolis believes that it is true that something is a work of art only relative to some background theory. Moreover, as a relativist, he is not concerned with real essences. Real essences of things are objective and independent of any theories and Margolis does not think any such things exist. Consequently, he thinks that Weitz is wrong in believing that any definition of art must capture the “real essence of art” (Margolis 1980, 887). As a pragmatist, Margolis believes that true beliefs about what art is are the useful beliefs about what art is. Pragmatists are, like relativists, disinclined to concern themselves with discovering real essences such as the real essence of art. They instead worry about what is a useful way to think about art. As a relativist and pragmatist, Margolis seeks to establish what he calls the nominal essence of art.

According to Margolis, a definition of art tells us the nominal essence of art. He writes that it

is entirely possible for example that definitions yield (what may be called) nominal essences – formulations in terms of necessary and sufficient conditions linked to our theories and our systematic efforts to explain phenomena – without at all claiming to be discoveries of the real essence of things. Furthermore, *if* there are no real essences, it is obviously preposterous to construe definitions as directed solely or even characteristically toward formulating the real essences of things. (Margolis 1980, 81)

A nominal essence, unlike a real essence, is not objective, not something that an object possesses independently of how anyone thinks of it. Rather, Margolis believes, it is the product of theories. As a result, his view contrasts with the traditional view that our theories of art ought to conform to the real essence of art. Rather, theories of art create the nominal essence of art.

Margolis believes that there is a sense in which a realist definition of art is possible. He would say that a definition is realist “if it claimed to address the ‘nature’ of anything that could be found in the world.” However, Margolis almost immediately adds that “a ‘real’ definition need not be exceptionless, essentialist, cast in necessary and sufficient terms, free of vagueness, ‘exhaustive and exclusive’ while ranging over ‘all’ cases” (2010, 220). While Margolis does not believe that art has an essence that is completely objective, he does believe that art can have a kind of real essence.

As a relativist and a pragmatist, Margolis is free to accept different, competing definitions on different occasions. After all, two definitions can both be useful, albeit for different reasons. For example, he says that, when it comes to definitions of Greek tragedy, he sees no “reason why one must choose, disjunctively, between Aristotle and Nietzsche... The accounts of both are ‘realist’ and ‘essentialist’ yet profoundly provisional” (Margolis 2010, 221). Here, to call the definitions realist and essentialist seems to mean that they can provide insight into Greek tragedy and assist us in understanding why Greek tragedy is valuable. On one occasion adopting Aristotle’s definition can be useful. On another occasion, Nietzsche’s definition may be more useful. In contrast with Weitz, Margolis would insist that classifying something as a work of tragedy (or work of art) serve some useful purpose.

When it comes to the definition of art, Margolis believes, reference to theories about art and reference to what makes art valuable, are necessary. Weitz can only refer to these theories on pain of inconsistency. Margolis writes that “the definition of art is to some extent a reasoned proposal designed to accord closely with theories favored on independent grounds. The relative objectivity of a definition of art, then, depends on its accommodation of standard cases viewed within a reasonably defended larger theory” (1980, 77). In this case the theory enfranchises all works that have a certain sort of value. Again, the contrast with Weitz is that Weitz is committed to the view that works are individually enfranchised and the enfranchisement is arbitrary, that is, it does not require the works to have any particular value.

Margolis rejects a commonly-adopted desideratum of a satisfactory definition of art. Stephen Davies states this desideratum, in a passage quoted by Margolis, when he writes that “a definition must be exhaustive of all art and exclusive of all

that is not art” including art of little or no value (Davies 2006, 44). Margolis calls this “a rather serious mistake” (2010, 219). *Au fond*, it is the same mistake that Weitz made in thinking that anything can arbitrarily be accepted as art and then a definition of art must be crafted on which it is classified as a work of art.

When Margolis came to provide his definition of art it was disappointingly vanilla. He states that “A work of art is an artifact considered with respect to its design” (1980, 89). Margolis analyses the concept of design in terms of “purposiveness we find in the systematic ordering of brush strokes, dance steps, musical phrases, sentences, or the like” (1980, 90). In short, Margolis’ conception of art is that of a mid-twentieth century formalist *à la* Beardsley. Margolis’ conventional view about which theory of art ought to be adopted, and his views about the consequent nominal essence of art, can, however, be separated from his bold proposal about how philosophers ought to think what it is to define art.

## 5 Persuasive Definitions of Art

Reflection on the debate between Weitz and Margolis leads to the conclusion that many definitions of art are persuasive definitions. Talk about the concept of a persuasive definition is not much heard in contemporary philosophy, but in the middle of the last century, during the heyday of analytic philosophy, it was found in every philosopher’s philosophical toolkit. The concept is usefully revived in this context because it helps us to understand what philosophers often do these days when they develop a definition of art. Only persuasive definitions could produce a situation in which works radically different from what had been accepted as art in, say, the eighteenth century, can today count as works of art.

The concept of a persuasive definition was introduced by C. L. Stevenson. He described a persuasive definition as

one which gives a new conceptual meaning to a familiar word without substantively changing its emotive meaning, and which is used with the conscious or unconscious purpose of changing, by this means, the direction of people’s interests. (1938, 331)

Thus described, a persuasive definition has three important features. First, it changes the “conceptual meaning” of a word. Here, the conceptual meaning of a word is just meaning in its ordinary philosophical sense. It is, to use Frege’s (1970) terminology, the sense of a word. Of course, philosophers have a variety of theories of conceptual meaning or sense, but the sense of a word is usually distinguished from its connotations. As a result of a change of conceptual meaning, the denotation of a word is changed. This brings us to the second part of a

persuasive definition. In addition to a sense, a word will often have an emotional meaning or, as it is sometimes called, connotation. A connotation in this context is the emotional penumbra that surrounds some words. The word "art" for example, often has a connotation as well as a sense. To describe something as art is to suggest that it is valuable or praiseworthy. In a persuasive definition, the emotional penumbra of a word is constant. Third, a persuasive definition has a purpose: it is designed to direct attention towards objects which might not otherwise attract attention.

Stevenson illustrates persuasive definition by imagining a society in which the conceptual meaning or sense of the word "cultured" is "widely read and acquainted with the arts" (1938, 331). In this society, the word "cultured" also has a positive emotional meaning or connotation. In particular, it has a positive connotation and cultured people are regarded as, say, sophisticated, praiseworthy and open-minded. Stevenson imagines that, in this society, someone comes along and proposes that "cultured" does not mean widely read and acquainted with the arts. After all, he says, reading books and going to museums are merely mechanical processes and should not earn the praise that is accorded to cultured individuals. Instead, this person proposes, the "real meaning of 'culture,' is *imaginative sensitivity*" (1938, 331). The word had never before been used in this sense. As Weitz would say, a decision is simply made to use the word in this way. The goal of the person making this decision is to get "people to stop using the laudatory term ['culture'] to refer to reading and the arts, and to use it, instead, to mean *imaginative sensitivity*" (1938, 332).

Stevenson observes that a persuasive definition is "not a matter of 'merely arbitrary' definition...nor is any persuasive definition 'merely arbitrary,' if this phrase is taken to imply 'suitably decided by the flip of a coin'" (1938, 334). A persuasive definition is not merely arbitrary but it is stipulative. It is chosen, not at random, but with the goal of directing attention to something selected by the person offering the persuasive definition. In a memorable phrase, Stevenson wrote that "To choose a definition is to plead a cause" (1944, 210).

As soon as the concept of art became an open concept, definitions of art could only be persuasive definitions. The conceptual definition of "art" has kept changing, but the emotional definition has remained fixed. As we have seen, in the eighteenth century, "art" meant something like "an imitation of nature that does not serve an immediate practical end but which is valued as a source of pleasure (and perhaps knowledge)." That was the conceptual meaning of art. In addition to this descriptive account of the meaning of art, there was an evaluative sense of the word "art." Du Bos, for example, writes that only for the sake of brevity does he avoid using "the word 'illustrious' or some other suitable epithet" to refer to

artists (2021, 95). Obviously, the descriptive meaning of “art” has changed dramatically since the eighteenth century, but the evaluative sense of the word has remained stable. The fact that the evaluative meaning of art has remained stable while the conceptual meaning has changed makes contemporary definitions of art persuasive definitions.

Weitz was well aware of the distinction between conceptual meaning and emotional meaning. Weitz distinguishes between the descriptive and the evaluative uses of the word “art.” He believes that when philosophers define art they are concerned with the descriptive sense of the word and they are simply establishing the extension of the word “art.” In its evaluative sense, the word “art” “praises” (1956, 34). The evaluative sense of “art,” he adds, does not establish the basis of praise: “‘This is a work of art,’ used evaluatively, serves to praise and not to affirm the reason why it is said” (1956, 34). In contrast, another way to think about Margolis’ views about definitions of art is that he thinks the evaluative sense of “art” ought to be linked to the descriptive use of the word. Weitz did not recognize that, when a decision is made to change what counts as a work of art, and the emotional meaning of “art” is transferred to new types of objects, the result is a persuasive definition.

Beardsley is one of Margolis’ contemporaries who recognised that art has an evaluative or, as Beardsley calls it, an emotive meaning. He took the next step and recognized that when a definition of art results in the transfer of the emotive meaning of art to objects to which it had not previously been applied, the result is a persuasive definition. Beardsley wrote that “When ‘emotive meaning’ came into view, with all its devious consequences, the term ‘work of art’ seemed to provide a fine example of ‘persuasive definition’” (1961, 175). Beardsley drew the conclusion that philosophers ought to abandon the project of defining art and instead focus on defining the aesthetic. Many philosophers have not, however, followed his advice and continued efforts to define art.

T.J. Diffey is another example of one of Margolis’ contemporaries who explicitly accepts that defining art is a matter of providing a persuasive definition. He observes that “to say that something is a work of art is to imply that it is a thing of interest and worth” and he refers to this as the “emotive meaning” of “work of art” (1969, 148). The term “work of art” he says “has a revisable denotation” (1969, 149). The emotive meaning remains the same when the denotation of “art” is revised. In other words, we are dealing with persuasive definition.

An examination of the history of definitions of art indicates just how common persuasive definitions are. Consider, for example, Clive Bell. In 1914, when Bell wrote *Art*, Frith’s *Paddington Station* was, in both the descriptive and the evaluative senses of the word, art. The typical Persian bowl, in contrast, was art in neither

sense. It would have been relegated to the realm of the decorative arts and excluded from the category of fine art. Bell develops a theory of what makes a work of art valuable: it has significant form. This then both excludes Frith's painting and includes Persian bowls. Frith's painting no longer has the emotive meaning associated with the word "art" but Persian bowls acquire this emotive meaning. Arthur Danto (1964) developed his theories about art specifically to enfranchise Warhol's *Brillo Boxes* (1964). That is, he wanted to transfer to *Brillo Boxes* the emotional meaning of art.

Of course, philosophers do not admit that they are developing persuasive definitions of art. They represent themselves as presenting a conceptual definition of art. Nevertheless, they are engaged in persuasive definition.

Dominic Lopes (2014) is an example of a recent philosopher who has offered a persuasive definition of art while claiming to offer a conceptual definition. Lopes sometimes slips up and says the quiet part out loud, admitting that defining art is all about getting people to think highly of certain classes of objects. This has been the way, Lopes believes, from the very beginning of talk about art in the early modern period. He writes that

Kristeller identifies some of the factors that, over the centuries, may have driven the innovation, and a brief survey conveys a picture of the culminating event in the eighteenth century. Attention from the humanists gave poetry "honor and glamor" and a place in their new curriculum. Having gradually gained prestige in Italy from the fourteenth century onwards, painting, sculpture, and architecture came to be classified together as the *arti del disegno*. (Lopes 2014, 26)

Notice that, according to this story, identifying some art as a fine art is all about assigning it honour, glamor and prestige. This is persuasive definition in its most unabashed form.

Lopes' calls his definition of art the buck passing theory of art. He makes no attempt to define art beyond holding that to say that a work is a work of art is to say that it is a work of some K, where K is an art. The individual arts, painting, music, literature, and so on can then, one hopes, be easily defined and we get a definition of art for free. According to Lopes, "An advantage of the buck passing theory of art is that it frees us to consider theories of the aesthetic independently of theories of art" (2014, 164) and in a later work Lopes (2018) develops just such a theory of the aesthetic. The evaluation of makeup, craft beer and Imari porcelain is, on his view, as much an aesthetic activity as appreciation of Mozart or Shakespeare. While Lopes may not have a theory of art that drives his theory of the aesthetic, his theory of the aesthetic, as usual, drives his definition of art. Lopes is a woke

aesthete and wants a definition of art that does not privilege so-called high fine arts of (Western) music and easel painting over arts such as Imari porcelain or hip hop music. His account of the aesthetic ensures just such a result. Like other persuasive definitions, then, his definition art, a byproduct of his theory of the aesthetic, is designed to focus attention on works that are usually excluded from the class of artworks. In Lopes' case, these are works not recognized in the Western artistic canon.

The intellectual heirs of Weitz are advocates of institutional theories of art. Dickie is an example of such a philosopher. He states that "For something to be a work of art it must have had this status conferred upon it, and this status is conferred by the judgement of the public" (1974, 147). The public need not have a basis for conferring art status, that is, transferring the emotional meaning of art to some new objects. Dickie does say that to call something a work of art is to imply that it is a thing of interest or worth. He does not say that the public can only confer art status on things that are actually interesting and worthy. Apparently he believes, like Weitz, that something that just needs to catch the eye of some member of the artworld and then it can be arbitrarily enfranchised.

Persuasive definitions have had some bad press. Richard Robinson wrote that a persuasive definition is "at best a mistake and at worst a lie, because it consists in getting someone to alter his valuations under the false impression that he is not altering his valuations but correcting his knowledge of the facts" (1954, 170). In the realm of the arts, however, the fact that the class of artworks is open, in the sense identified by Weitz and Margolis, leaves philosophers with little option but to offer persuasive definitions. Defining art was once, in the eighteenth century, a matter of determining the valuable features of artworks and then defining art with reference to these features. Now, defining art is a matter of deciding what is valuable and then defining art. The days of offering a descriptive definition of art are long gone. Now defining art is all about persuading audiences to transfer to works a status that they did not previously enjoy. The choices available to philosophers are (a) to arbitrarily alter the conceptual meaning of art and transfer the emotive meaning of art to some new objects, even if for no good reason or (b) to alter the conceptual meaning of art and transfer the emotive meaning of art to some new objects on the grounds that they have valuable features. The first option is Weitz' while the second is that of Margolis.

Margolis can be seen as recommending that philosophers offer persuasive definitions of art. The "special purpose" that philosophers have for closing the concept of art is almost always drawing attention to works that, they believe, are deserving of recognition as works of art. They can draw attention to the works in question in one of two ways. They can arbitrarily decide that a given work is a

work of art, in the manner of Weitz, or they can, in the manner of Margolis, adopt a theory of art that enfranchises as artworks whole classes of works on the grounds that they are worthy of attention. Margolis' way to make decisions is preferable since it only enfranchises works which are valuable for some reason.

## 6 Conclusion

Margolis accepts that the concept of art is open, but unlike Weitz and some other philosophers, he does not want to allow that something is a work of art when it has little or no value. Definitions of art are now persuasive definitions, but Margolis would encourage philosophers to offer only definitions of art that draw attention to objects that deserve to be accorded the emotive meaning of art.

Obviously, a range of (persuasive) definitions of art have been presented. Moreover, as we have seen, as a relativist, Margolis accepts that a variety of definitions can be useful. At the same time, he believes that, in time, philosophers may converge on a definition of art. In his final published reflections on definitions of art, Margolis writes that

the philosophical definition of art (in all its informal diversity) provides a memorable sense of a kind of “open-ended convergence” on the concept, deliberately fitted to a set of important, strategic, relatively systematic, claims about the arts writ large, meant...to test the relative strength and adequacy...of all contending alternatives conceptions in *that* context of reference that we signal as relevant to the arguments we provisionally invite. (2010, 222)

This passage is a bit of a mouthful, but it suggests that we may hope that philosophical inquiry will converge on a definition of art. (Margolis' talk of convergence in this context probably contains an echo of the pragmatist Charles Saunders Peirce, and his belief that the ideal point where inquiry converges is the truth.) This definition, Margolis tells us, needs to be based on important and strategic claims about the arts. In particular, it needs to be based on what the arts have, historically, been able to provide that is of most value. On the basis of important and strategic claims about the arts, philosophers may one day converge on the conclusion that it was a mistake to admit certain objects into the class of artworks. On the basis of these claims, philosophers may decide that Kurosawa's *Ran* (1985) and Shakespeare's *King Lear* (1606) do not belong in the same category as *Shoot* or a flower arrangement.

Maybe one day – that day is unlikely to be any time soon – some theory of art will become universally, or virtually universally, adopted. At that point, member-

ship in the class of artworks will be as uncontroversial as it was in the eighteenth century and a descriptive definition of art will once again be possible. This will be a description in terms of necessary and sufficient conditions and the concept of art will be closed once again. In the meantime, the best that anyone can do is offer a persuasive definition of art that encourages audience members to focus on works that are valuable in certain sorts of ways. This is what Margolis encourages us to do. The alternative is to arbitrarily enfranchise objects as works of art. This is what Weitz leaves us to do. Margolis' proposal seems like a much better option for people who are interested in encouraging the production of valuable works of art.

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The death of Joseph Margolis inspired this special issue. Joe, as he was fondly known, was a towering figure whose work influenced several fields of philosophy for nearly seven decades, beginning in the 1950s. Though he is perhaps best known for his work in aesthetics, which we honour here, he contributed to nearly every discipline and subfield of philosophy, from metaphysics to philosophy of language, and from philosophy of medicine to feminist philosophy.

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