

Introduction – On Joseph Margolis’ Aesthetics. A Symposium

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The second part of this issue hosts a symposium dedicated to the American philosopher Joseph Margolis (1924-2021).

Margolis received his PhD from Columbia University in New York, where he met Arthur C. Danto. And, like Danto – with whom he experienced a relationship of theoretical suspicion, when not of open contrast – Margolis is the author of seminal works in philosophy and ontology of art. Among his most important writings in this field are “The Mode of Existence of a Work of Art” (1958), “The Identity of a Work of Art” (1959), “Describing and Interpreting Works of Art” (1961), “Works of Art as physically Embodied and culturally Emergent Entities” (1974), “The Ontological Peculiarity of Works of Art” (1977), “Farewell to Danto and Goodman” (1998) and *What, after all, is a Work of Art?* (1999). In the first essays cited above, Margolis introduces and develops arguments that will be taken up, expanded and discussed in the decades to come, namely: the application of the type/token model to the ontology of art (recalled, with due differences, by Wolsterstorff 1975), the idea that works of art are culturally emergent entities, and the view that artworks are embodied in mere physical things but are not identical or reducible to them. Moreover, the type/token model adopted by Margolis would later lead him to clash with Arthur Danto himself. According to Margolis (1998), the paradoxical result of Danto’s thesis is that nothing really exists as a work of art, since the properties that make a work of art such cannot, in principle, be perceived. This conclusion is fundamentally unacceptable to Margolis.

Nevertheless, Margolis' work does not only concern the ontology of art but embraces almost all areas of philosophical research. However, as the title of the symposium suggests, the essays presented here have to do with his work in the field of aesthetics, or rather they start from aesthetics in order to propose a unified vision of Margolis' thought.

The main goal in David Hildebrand's "Art, Artifacts, and Margolis' Recovery of Objectivity" is to define the connection between objectivity and aesthetics. According to Margolis, it is impossible to do philosophy of art without also addressing the other major philosophical issues. Hildebrand therefore analyses how Margolis connects art with the human self in order to understand that they inform and shape each other. How, then, can we improve our understanding of the relationship between these two elements? Margolis proposes the recovery of objectivity, which Hildebrand defines as a pragmatic objectivity, which must take into account the so-called intentional properties of artworks and selves. These properties are culturally relative, since "objectivity is constructed and endlessly reconstructed in the flux of history" (Margolis 1999, 13).

In their "Why Joseph Margolis has never been an Analytic Philosopher of Art", Roberta Dreon and Francesco Ragazzi exploit two fundamental cornerstones of Margolis' philosophy of art to support a continuistic and coherent view of his philosophy. These two cornerstones are: (1) the type/token model, rooted in Peirce's semiotics and pragmatism; (2) the notion of cultural emergence. Types and tokens are conceived by Margolis as dependent on each other and linked to an ineliminable historical, social, and cultural dimension, while the concept of cultural emergence leaves the confines of the philosophy of art to become the focus of a highly personal anthropological reflection. Dreon and Ragazzi aim to demonstrate that the philosophy of art's questions addressed by Margolis in the 1970s - and usually framed within the framework of analytic philosophy - should in fact be interpreted in the light of a more general pragmatist path that permeates all his writings on art. From this perspective, Dreon and Ragazzi argue that the non-reductive naturalism and historicism embraced by Margolis informed both his ontology and his philosophy of art. These two factors ultimately lead to a complete reconsideration of his analytical beginnings.

The last essay in the symposium also proposes a unified view of the American philosopher's thought. In "Margolis, Historicism, and the History of Aesthetics", Russell Pryba argues that historicism and intentionality play a central role in Margolis' philosophy, and one way to understand this argument is by analysing the way Margolis reads the history of aesthetics (and philosophy). A starting point, according to Pryba, is the text *On Aesthetics: An Unforgiving Introduction* (Margolis 2009). For Margolis, historicism does not only mean

that thinking has a history, but that it is a history. Likewise, as artifacts of contingent social history, the human selves are histories. Thought, selves, and art possess, as Hildebrand also points out, intentional properties. Thanks to these properties, the human selves and works of art do not coincide with their physical envelopes. Similarly, historical time is not reducible to physical time. Historical time is interpretable, and this interpretation is always guided by the 'best lights' of the present.

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