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# How Artistic Creativity is Possible for Cultural Agents<sup>1</sup>

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## 1. Introduction

Joseph Margolis holds that both artworks and selves are “culturally emergent entities”. Culturally emergent entities are distinct from and not reducible to natural or physical entities. Artworks are thus not reducible to their physical media; a painting is thus not paint on canvas and music is not sound. In similar vein selves or persons are not reducible to biology and thought is not reducible to the physical brain. Both artworks and selves thus have two ongoing and inseparable “evolutions”—one cultural and one physical. Rather than having fixed “natures” that remain stable for any purpose other than numerical identity, artworks and selves have “careers” due to their cultural evolution that change with the course and flux of history, interpretation and reinterpretation.

The question for this essay is how a Margolisian encultured artist, who is also an individual “self”, can construct an identifiable “career” that is both from culture and that develops culture constructively in a way that involves an individual, as well as collective, contribution. In answering this question I will provide a theory that shows how Margolis’ work on the artist as cultural agent leaves room for creative innovators within

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<sup>1</sup> A shorter version of this paper was presented on May 21, 2013 in Helsinki for the conference, “The Metaphysics of Culture—the Philosophy of Joseph Margolis” entitled, “The Artist as Cultural Agent: A Theory of Artistic Practice Extrapolated from the Philosophy of Joseph Margolis” sponsored by the Helsinki Collegium for Advanced Studies, The Philosophical Society of Finland, The Finnish Society for Aesthetics and The Nordic Pragmatism Network.

a cultural context. In short, I claim that Margolis' idea that a person is a thinking-and-doing practitioner that emerges from and works within a cultural context does allow for the agent to use that same context to acquire the tools and skills necessary to make something new. I will then consider how this innovation might be possible by making recourse to some theories of creativity from neuroscience and psychology.

This essay will focus on Margolis' theory of the creative artist as cultural agent as supplemented with an account of the nature of the human being as a raw set of genetic materials and capacity for acquiring cultural competence. My claim is that this is the site for an adequate account of how some encultured persons are able to create exceptional innovations in artistic domains and others are not. I agree with Margolis that it is true that innovation is not possible by any pre- or non-encultured self but I also think that extremes of cultural mastery and innovation, as in the case of highly creative and innovative artists, are not possible without an inborn potentiality to develop to a high level of cultural ability under the right conditions. This is not to deny Margolis' theory of artists as cultural agents. Indeed, I accept Margolis' view of the deep importance of culture to the development of the self and to the creative artist wholeheartedly. I also agree that this is a crucial aspect of artistic agency and creativity that has been given short shrift in analytic aesthetics. My intention here is only to answer one question that is still left unanswered after understanding and acknowledging the importance of culture: How do we account for the disparity in ability in cultural agents and artists that cannot be attributed to cultural training and socio-historical factors? How do we account for the existence of the exceptionally creative artist in a situation where the cultural and socio-historical factors are roughly equivalent for others who demonstrate lesser amounts of creativity?

Indeed, Margolis himself is a philosophical analog for such an exceptionally creative artist, being both a product of his culture and historical era and a master craftsman and inventor. He has woven strands from both analytic and continental philosophy into philosophy that is at once made of culture and emergent from it in a way that can be construed as a development rather than as a restatement of what has gone before. In continuing his work into the realm of artistic innovation this essay thus aims at both cultural (philosophical) emergence and Margolis-emergence: it is an exercise in both interpreting Margolis and reinterpreting Margolis in an attempt to carry his philosophy of art, and of culture, into what I hope will be the next historical era in the philosophy of art. One in

which the activity of the artist, not just the artistic product and not just the appreciation of the spectator, will come to the fore.

I will begin with a synopsis of Margolis' view of the artist as cultural agent. I will then follow with an exploration of how the artist as cultural agent creates. This will include both Margolis' view on this and the supplementation of his view suggested above, one that includes two additional components: 1) an account of natural endowment in the sense of raw materials from which an encultured, agentive self develops and emerges as found in the work of neuroscientist, Nancy Andreasen; and 2) an account of the environmental conditions that are favorable for the development of a high level of culturally-development creativity as identified by psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi and others. These supplementations allow for there to be a role for science in a full picture of what it means to be a cultural agent. One can do this in a Margolisian way as long as one recognizes the extremely limited role such accounts play in the picture of cultural agency that Margolis has provided. In short one must understand that the raw materials for the self's capacities can never operate on their own without cultural development and that once they are culturally developed they are transformed into something that is no longer reducible to these materials in any of the intentional actions or decisions of these encultured selves. It also brings in an account of how differences in the environment in which the enculturation process takes place can make a difference in the level of creativity an artist ends up having. The whole picture, then, will be one in which certain natural endowments, in conjunction with culturally trained capacities, in certain environmental conditions, operate to allow an encultured self to make the most of the opportunities for becoming master cultural agents who can innovate in exceptionally creative ways.

## 2. Margolis' view of the artist as cultural agent

Margolis' ontology of artworks and of selves awards pride of place to culture. An artwork, and a self, is above all a culturally emergent entity, one that emerges in a *sui generis* way from the physical and biological world (see 1999, 68, 2001, 35 and 134 and 1995b, 255). A person, a *self*, is not reducible to his or her physical biology, is not adequately described as a *Homo sapiens*, even though s/he is physically embodied, because s/he has emerged from culture (1995a, 224; see also 2015, 14–15). Culture here can be broadly understood as human culture, although it is also affected

by the natural, environmental influences in which a person develops and lives. *Homo sapiens* alone can be understood to refer to a person's biological natural capacities to do, make and act that are conceived in abstraction away from the capacities of any particular person, or self, who is born as a hybrid of nature and culture who then continues to interact with others and develop competencies and understandings based on that interaction (see 1999, 97, and 1995b, 236–7<sup>2</sup>).

Enculturation is the process by which a *Homo sapiens* acquires language, along with the ability to make him- or herself understood to others by use of that lingual capacity and other non-verbal, language-like capabilities that may or may not have a formal grammar, such as dancing, making love and baking bread (2001, 139; see also 2010b, 5). This enculturation process is captured in a number of different ways in Margolis' work. Sometimes he refers to it as the process of acquiring a "second-natured self", following Marjorie Grene's usage of the term. Here, a self is construed as a "natural artifact" that is "evolutionarily endowed with the capacity to acquire further capacities that cannot be developed by purely biological processes" (2010b, 7, citing Grene, 1974, 10, 90, and 120; See also Margolis 1999, 35 and 130, and 2001,3). Margolis also characterizes the self as one that has "second-order powers," although he reminds us that first-order and second-order cognition are not separable in the human person (1995a, 238). As Margolis cogently remarks in *Interpretation Radical But Not Unruly*, "The' self is not just another specimen for an expanding zoo of observable things, it is the site of the aptitude for conceiving any such zoo" (1995a, 237).

In his later books Margolis says that his theory of the encultured self is an effort to "Darwinize Hegel" (see 2010a, 11, and 2012, 119–20). Specifically he separates Hegel's idea of *Bildung*, which he defines as *Geist's* progressive self-discovery, into what he calls "internal" and "external" *Bildung*. *Internal Bildung* refers to the process of explicitly instructing a person in a mode of cultural practice (such as teaching a young person the codes of cultural morality). *External Bildung* refers to a person's stage in a situated, human evolutionary and culturally developed process which enables him or her to be a "'second-natured' site of linguistic and cultural competence" (2009a, 33; see also 39–42, 2010a, 10–11, 2009b, 103–4

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<sup>2</sup> Here Margolis cites C.S. Peirce 1934 and 1932 for holding the idea that persons and words (or signs) constitute the self and that the human being and the self reciprocally educate each other.

and 2012, 119–23<sup>3</sup>). It is *external Bildung*, an evolutionarily and culturally derived competence, Margolis points out, that makes *internal Bildung*, the learning of a specific cultural practice, possible (2012, 131). It is the human primate's capacity to reinvent itself while growing and developing that allows for new forms of neural and agentic fluency, such as that needed to create art (2015, 2–4).

Culture is thus a deep and inseparable part of our selves. Responding to Daniel Dennett on this point, Margolis explains that

The cultural world cannot be the mere effect of any interpretive or self-referential or rhetorical flourish applied externally to the things of the physical world or, worse, projected as a fictive description by the brain itself "reflecting" on its own mode of functioning.

2010b, 93 and footnote 2 at 195; for more critique of Dennett see 76–89

In short, this means that culture cannot be conceived as a separate add-on to the human person. Margolis also faults Jaegwon Kim for providing a philosophy of mind that acknowledges the cultural world without adequately addressing how it is connected to the physical world (2010b, 11–2). Margolis maintains that all our conceptualizing and cognizing powers are themselves culturally emergent parts of ourselves, "*incarnate* in the biological structures to which our *innate* mental capacities are directly ascribed" (1995a, 229). As such there can be no dualism between the physical and cultural worlds for two main reasons: 1) Human agency is irreducible to any kind of natural causality, and 2) Human agency is *dependent* on powers of interpretation that are only available by means of immersion in the cultural world (see 2015, 38). By "agency" here we can assume a minded sort of thinking and doing that Margolis calls "Intentional", an idea to be fleshed out further below.

Margolis includes the making of art among the encultured capacities of the self, with an artwork serving as a culturally emergent utterance or expression that is not limited to the expression of emotion (see 1999, 61, 1995b, 134–42, and 2010b, 7, 57 and 60). An artwork, as a product of a self, thus acquires what Margolis calls "Intentional properties", which are the properties of artworks and other culturally emergent entities that bear the mark of culture. "Intentional" with a capital "I" is a neologism that is meant to capture both the sense of 1) "intentional" with a "t" in the middle and with the lower-case "I" that Edmund Husserl and Franz Brentano used to signify a thought that is "about" something or directed outward

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<sup>3</sup> For Hegel's usage of the term *Bildung* see Hegel 1977 [1807].

and 2) "intensional" with an "s," in which a property has a meaning due to its internal structure (1999, 92).<sup>4</sup> Combining both the intentional (with a "t") and the intensional (with an "s") into Intentional (with an upper-case "I") thus gives us both an utterance with a meaning directed to something in the world and imbues it with the cultural meaning provided by competent speakers of a language who understand the meanings provided by the internal structures of that language's utterances.

The mark of Margolis' Intentional properties with a capital "I" is that they have semiotic significance, available in the public world as part of an utterance like an artwork, which can be understood and interpreted by speakers of the lingual system or society of which it is part (see 1999, 92, and 2010b, 34 and 49). Like human selves, Intentional properties are not reducible to the physical, which means that even when embodied in an artwork they emerge from the artistic materials or medium but are not reducible to them (see 1999, 76). For example, stylistic (such as Baroque) properties, aesthetic properties (such as elegant or graceful) or artistic properties (such as representational or expressive) all count as Intentional properties. If we say that "symmetry" and "proportion", for example, are features of the Classical style of architecture then those features might be in the structural arrangement of a Greek temple, let us say, but they would not be identical to the marble of which they are made even though they undoubtedly emerge from marble. If all you had was marble you would not have a classical temple—at best all you would have is the raw material for building such a temple. Neither is "harmony" to be found by investigating the chemical composition of a marble block. What counts as "harmony" is culturally constructed.

Thus, like selves and artworks as a whole, Intentional properties within artworks and other utterances are inseparable and hybrid artifacts of nature and culture (see 1999, 119–21). Artworks exist only as embedded in and relative to human culture, with Intentional properties demonstrating what Margolis calls the "*geistlich*" features of the intelligible world (2010b, 48 and 188, fn 3). Again, in a world without culture, without lingual utterances of culturally competent selves, no classical temples (or classical music for that matter) would exist. When they do exist, however, they are available in the world for discussion and interpretation, and they contain both intentional meanings of the artist and have semiotic meanings that encultured appreciators can understand. Thus Margolis has not only Dar-

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<sup>4</sup> For more on Margolis' view of intentional and intensional meanings see Margolis, 1977.

winized Hegel but he has perhaps Wittgensteinized Hegel as well in the sense that human self-constructed meanings and their relationships and interconnections are what constitute the cultural world.

An artwork is thus a vehicle of inter-human-cultural utterance and communication, although each artwork also bears some connection and relation to the individual artist who uttered it, having come from the artist's particular thought, intentions, training, and both cognized and non-cognized activities and decisions.<sup>5</sup> An artist is thus a cultural crafts-person and agent who communicates something to others by uttering an artwork that, like the self, is also a living, embodied entity that exists and develops and changes over time (see 1999, 68, 2010b, 42, 44, 56 and 121, 1995a, 88–9 and 245, 1995b, 233, and 2001, 31–4). What this means is that even though an artwork is originally uttered by an encultured artist with a particular purpose at a particular place and time in history the meaning of the work itself, an artwork's career is not limited by the time, place or artist/parent of its creation—it can gain or lose meanings, values and interpretations over time in conjunction with what its Intentional properties come to mean as human culture develops and changes (see 2010b, 56 and 2001, 149).

One of the features of the Intentional, then, is that it is understood as marking the "flux" inherent in history and cultural life (see 1999, 65). Intentional properties are thus grounded and entrenched in what Margolis sometimes calls the "life-world" or *Lebensformen* (following Wittgenstein 1963) of human beings, but as this world changes the Intentional properties in culturally-tied entities like artworks change as well (see 2001, 149–50, 1995a, 109 and 205, 1999, 98, and 1995b, 234). This explains why neither the life-world of human beings, nor selves, nor artworks, have fixed "natures", but instead have ever-changing "histories" or "careers" (1995a, 142 and 190; see also 1999, 129).

When I first encountered Margolis' work on art, which happened before I entered graduate school in philosophy, I was at the point in my own cultural development in which I had far more years of training as a ballet dancer behind me than I had training as a philosopher. The particular kind of ballet I had spent ten years learning was George Balanchine's neo-classical style; one he had developed as co-founder and director of

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<sup>5</sup> Margolis' use of the word "utterance" can be attributed to his idea that the making of an artwork is a lingual, culturally communicative act akin to (but not identical to) speech. I say "lingual" rather than "linguistic" because for Margolis lingual refers to communicative activities like dancing, making love and baking bread and notto speech alone.

The New York City Ballet and its attendant ballet school, The School of American Ballet. My ballet training focused on learning this style and incorporating it into my repertoire of performable movements. At the time of my training I understood the deep debt that I owed to both Balanchine and to the teachers who helped me to incorporate his style and method into my tastes, my abilities and my capacities as a dancer and performer. And yet I somehow also believed that any artistic contribution I made as a performer was exclusively *mine*, from *my* effort, my talents, my work, my thought, my blood, my sweat, and my tears. I believed in an individual agency. So what of this? Was I simply mistaken?

After reading Margolis' theory of the artist as cultural agent that I encountered in his books I tried to salvage this sense of individual agency. I set out to prove Margolis wrong through demonstrating that I could make something entirely unique that was not fully a product of my "enculturation". Alone in my apartment I tried to make up an entirely "original" dance. I then realized immediately that I was using dance vocabulary, in some places imitating patterns that I had learned in ballet class. I then tried to write a poem. And what happened? Iambic pentameter—another form learned in culture. Then I got angry. Slam Poetry! Even more distressing was the reflection that on Margolis' theory even that rebellious instinct that belief in solitary personal achievement, can be construed as nothing more than an attitude inherited from my cultural upbringing. Truly, this was a moment of crisis: How could I reclaim the individuality of the artist and her ego? How could I justify all of the ways that I had celebrated greatness in those artists and philosophers who I held in the highest of esteem as singular paragons of excellence?

There is no doubt that my encounter with Margolis' theory of the primacy of culture in the creation of art ended my romantic visions of the artist as demi-god or as conduit for the gods or the Muse. No person exists in a vacuum, or is who he or she is apart from the deep-seated influences of culture, teaching and learning, and the shared life of a community. At first it seemed that something important had been lost, the truly unique and individual "I". And yet, creativity in the arts does not seem to follow rote cultural patterns or schools of thought even where there are historical trends and styles that can be seen and traced. There is still an astounding disparity in both kinds and levels of artistic production, and exciting growing and changing diversity. The good news is that accepting that excellence in the arts involves becoming a master cultural agent does not mean that now we must see the creative work of

the artist as limited to the refining of technical prowess only along certain historically and culturally-mandated lines. History and culture instead changes as a result of group dynamics and trends but also as the result of innovation by exceptional individuals.

This leads us to the question asked in the next section of this paper: How can a culturally emergent self who is understood as an "agent" of that culture "create", by which I mean make something novel, or new, that advances culture rather than just reflecting what has come before? As mentioned in the introduction to this paper here I will suggest with the help of neuroscientist Nancy Andreasen that we might consider that the individuality identified can be attributed to biological genetic differences that precede and that underlie enculturation. I will follow this with the idea developed by psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi and others that a person's having optimal environmental conditions in which this enculturation takes place can also account for the development of individual capacities into cultural competence that can develop in exceptional and novel ways. I will re-emphasize here that my claim will *not* be that there is some sort of activity that is outside of culture, understanding as I do through my Margolis enculturation that no intentional human activity lies outside of culture in the adult person.

### 3. How can the artist, as cultural agent, "create"?

Let us begin by first looking closely at a couple of examples that Margolis has given of the process of artistic creation and performance.

In *Selves and Other Texts* Margolis uses the example of Michelangelo's creation of the sculpture, "Moses", in order to explain how artists make artworks emerge from what was hitherto nothing but physical material prior to the artist's involvement. He explains that "Moses" is "instantiated" by Michelangelo's artistic activity, thereby giving the artwork intentional properties it would not otherwise possess (2001, 134). This is not unlike the example given in the previous section of building of the classical temple. Michelangelo's work is not reducible to his building materials, and the "agency" of the artist here both comes from and produces a culturally emergent artifact.

When we are dealing with something that we can encounter in the physical world through touch and sight, like a temple or a sculpture, it is often easier to see how the cultural is distinct from the physical. So let us consider another example, this time from music, in which Margolis

claims that the “physical” material is sound but where the “music” produced is not reducible to sound and is instead instantiated in a musician’s performance. In *The Cultural Space of the Arts and the Infelicities of Reductionism* Margolis tells the reader about an experience he had listening to a performance by violinist, Joshua Bell:

I had never heard Bell play before; his way of penetrating the music bowled me over. What struck me was that in Bell’s hands, the score might almost have been a disembodied “utterance”, a performance waiting to be brought to life by the breath of a magician who transforms himself at will into an incarnate voice that sings that particular song as if giving expression to his own soul—and does so altogether effortlessly again and again, moving from one inert piece to another across the entire expanse of Western music. I’m aware of course, that this way of speaking is too purple to be trusted, though it’s hardly inapt applied heuristically to individual artworks, whether at the point of individual creation or composition or performance [...]

2010b, 47–8

In referring to the expressive properties of Bell’s performance Margolis is referring to what he would call Intentional properties, uttered by a culturally competent musician for culturally competent listeners. I think the reason that Margolis uses the word “uttered” rather than “created” here to signify the nature of artistic making as something that comes from a person’s self and that communicates with others. Since utterances are learned in and derived from culture it also is used to underscore how the making of artworks and performances is communicative cultural activity. Artistic activity is therefore not “creating” for Margolis in the sense of making something separable from cultural training and communication. It is also semiotic. But I ask here, are these expressive properties creditable in their *entirety* to the culture from which Bell emerged? What of the “soul” that Margolis uncharacteristically mentions above? Of course Margolis means nothing like a “real” eternal, fixed, unchanging “soul” but is using this as a metaphor for Bell’s “self”. But the question remains: How can we account for whatever it is that Bell has “added” to his cultural training in order to produce this singular, exceptional experience?

Margolis’ theory seems to leave us hanging at the idea that Bell is just a very good cultural agent, a master agent. However, it says nothing in answer to any question one might have about why Bell was able to become such a master agent when others with similar cultural influences and training did not rise to his level. Margolis has spent a lifetime estab-

lishing the validity and importance of the cultural influence and agency he describes. This is certainly a major contribution. But once we adopt his view here, once we learn it and adapt it and accept it as a coherent view of the cultural world and of the communicative nature of art the question of how the artist as cultural agent can be exceptionally creative remains.

Here I want to first point out that there is no contradiction between an artist's activity of instantiating an artwork, or performance, through the skilled mastery of cultural competence, and the same ability by that artist to do so in an extraordinary, and dare I say it, "transcendent" way that leads to the sort of blissful appreciation that Margolis described in the Joshua Bell passage above. We need not find that the performance is an expression of anything that could be called a "soul" in any traditional sense but we can acknowledge that unique contribution to the arts is possible, even while ingrained and entrenched in culture.

So, again how, precisely, can we account for the Michelangelos and Joshua Bells of the world, the Joseph Margolises, while still maintaining that these exceptional creators are properly conceived as cultural agents? Here is where I will suggest that enculturation provides enough uniformity to allow for communication and understanding, but not so much that it disallows an encultured self from interpreting and employing those cultural competencies in innovative ways. Further I claim that this creative ability is due primarily to two things: 1) natural, genetic endowment in conjunction with cultural competency and 2) ability to develop that endowment through fortunate environmental (cultural) and societal opportunities and support.

Let us begin with the first component.

### 3.1 Natural endowment in conjunction with cultural competency

It seems unlikely that anyone would contradict the idea that there are some people who demonstrate an extraordinarily high level of creativity. Indeed, many of these highly creative people have been labeled "geniuses" throughout history, criticism of the term's being applied unfairly and primarily to wealthy, white men notwithstanding (see, e.g., Bloom 2002).<sup>6</sup> Indeed, everyone who is familiar with the creative activity of spontaneously or deliberately constructing new sentences while speaking a learned language understands that some people are better at this than others (see Andreasen 2005, 63; see also Chomsky/Foucault 2006, 19). It follows from

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<sup>6</sup> For a feminist critique of the term "genius" see Battersby 1990 and DeNora 1997.

this that the same can be said of different levels of natural ability that inform the creation and performance of art.

This does *not* mean, however, that one must construe cultural agency as some sort of "add-on" to the natural. To acknowledge the natural endowment basis for the hybrid of nature and culture that comprises the human self and artist does nothing to violate Margolis' theory of the artist as cultural agent. Indeed, one can pay attention to the natural substrate of the artist, just as one might pay attention to the quality of the marble to be used in a sculpture, without reducing the artist or the sculpture to that substrate. As Margolis has put it:

[T]he ontological strategy of permitting an individual thing of a more complex level of analysis to be indissolubly embodied or incarnate in an individual thing of a less complex level accommodates a clear distinction between the physical (or biological) and the culturally significant, without invoking any dualisms at all. 2015, 19

I thus gingerly offer some empirical evidence from the research of Nancy Andreasen, a neuroscientist and psychiatrist who was also a literature professor that might explain how the physical substrate from which the artist emerges in conjunction with his or her cultural agency works. My goal here is to use this research *not* in the way the Andresen undoubtedly intended it to be used (not in order to provide a causal explanation for artistic and other forms of creativity). Instead my goal is to suggest how a Margolisian theory of the artist as cultural agent might use scientific research in a way that supplements the account of the crude materials from which a person emerges. More specifically, we can take note of what is happening neurologically when an artist is "creating" through his or her culturally emergent capacities.

Andreasen studies the neural bases of creativity in highly creative people. In her book *The Creating Brain: The Neuroscience of Genius* Andreasen claims that the seat of creativity is not just in conscious thought, but that it also lies in the capacity of the unconscious mind to freely associate, thus developing novel ideas that can form the basis for artistic and other kinds of creative inspiration (see 2005, 67–78). In this book Andreasen consults the testimony of "geniuses" Neil Simon, Samuel Coleridge, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky, and Henri Poincaré about the experience of what happens to them during the creative process. All of these people at various times described situations of having an exceptional creative insight occur to them suddenly, unbidden,

as if a gift from the gods, during periods of time in which they were not aware of conscious, effortful thought (see 2005, 75–77).

Andreasen then connects this testimony with a study that she conducted where she used neuroimaging technology (positron emission tomography or “PET”) to measure the cerebral blood flow of people in “free association” brain states when they were daydreaming, brainstorming, or letting their minds wander freely (see 2005, 70–73). The neuroimaging results showed that the most active parts of the brain during free association are the frontal, parietal, and temporal lobes (the “association cortex”), the areas that “gather information from the senses and from elsewhere in the brain and link it all together—in potentially novel ways” (Andreasen 2005, 73). These are the parts of the human brain that are particularly complex and “human” (they are much larger than those found in other highly intelligent primates) and they are the last regions to finish developing in human beings, developing new connections into early adulthood (2005, 73).

From here Andreasen hypothesizes that the difference between extraordinarily creative people (geniuses) and ordinarily creative people (regular folks who can learn and speak language) is twofold: 1) extraordinarily creative people are able to access their unconscious states in ways that others cannot through intense focus and dissociation; and 2) geniuses have a “discontinuous trait or group traits that occur uniquely in a few extremely gifted individuals”—in short, they have brains that are better at creating free associations (see 2005, 26–27, 37 and 78). Andreasen does not say that this is the sole factor that accounts for exceptional creativity—she acknowledges environmental factors similar to the ones I will provide in the next section as well—but that the “natural” component to exceptionally creative people is one that she also finds significant.<sup>7</sup>

If we accept Andreasen’s hypothesis here we can apply it to Margolis’ theory by suggesting that artists and selves, hybrids of nature and culture who are not reducible to physical matter or brain activity, can be seen to include people who are simply born with better physical materials from which to culturally emerge. While their “intense focus and dissociation” might be culturally derived it cannot come from culture alone. An innovative artist might be unusually creative due, at least in some measure, to having been born with exceptional materials with which to create.

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<sup>7</sup> See 2005, 108–132 for Andreasen’s list of the cultural conditions that she says help to encourage and nurture creative brains.

This neurological account might also explain some of the phenomena explored by the philosophical tradition on artistic genius and creativity beginning with Plato, extending through Kant and the Romantics and continuing even today.<sup>8</sup> Perhaps it is the free-associative brain state that Andreasen mentions, for example, that creates the experiential feeling of the "Muse", the "God within" or the feeling of "free play" of creativity and understanding unencumbered by forefront consciousness. A natural capacity of the subliminal sort might feel like a god is "channeling" through us, as if we are creating effortlessly with a force not our own. In Plato's dialogue, *Ion*, for example, Socrates attributes the ability to create exceptional poetry to either a madness that overtakes the poet ("a Bacchic frenzy"), possession by the Muse, or both. In either case the poet is "not in his right mind (see Plato 380 B. C. E., §§533e–534a, 941–2). Could this be a philosophical account of the free association activity of the brain?

Harold Bloom, a literature professor at NYU and self-professed "Bardolator" (referring to "The Bard", William Shakespeare) locates genius not in "the gods" but in us (2002, 814). This account, too, fits with Andreasen's account of how creativity is evidenced in the brain. Ralph Waldo Emerson, Bloom points out, also viewed genius as the God within, or the Self (2002, 11). In addition Bloom quotes Victorian Scottish author Thomas Carlyle, who said in *On Heroes, Hero-Worship and the Heroic in History*, "If called to define Shakespeare's faculty, I should say superiority of intellect, and think I had included all under that" (2002, 9).

The idea that creative ability is a natural endowment is also found in Immanuel Kant's *Critique of Judgment*. As philosophers Berys Gaut and Paisley Livingston point out, for Kant "... it is nature in the artistic genius that gives the rule to art" (2003, 14, citing Kant 1987 [1790], §46, Ak. v). Kant holds that this nature is innate but "supersensible" (not knowable through experience) (2003, citing Kant 1987 [1790], §57, Comment I, Ak. v). This means that the process the genius engages in when creating a work of exceptional art cannot be an experiential one for the artist (see Gaut and Livingston 2003, 14; see also Guyer 1994, 278). If this means that the artistic genius is not "aware" of her process while she is creating art then this account does seem to fit, in a loose way, with Andreasen's neurological account of exceptional creativity being part of a subconscious, free-associative brain state.

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<sup>8</sup> As I discuss Plato and Kant here I am not following their lead in making claims about the eternal world of the Forms or the conditions of human understanding.

Andreasen's account (again, using the evidence as descriptive of the biological part of the creative process alone and not as the entire explanation) is also compatible with Margolis' culturally emergent self. Margolis acknowledges, for example, that the human infant is born with an "unusual sociability", a biological gift that makes cultural transformation possible (2015, 24). It is a short step from there to the idea that some of these infants may have exceptional biological capacities for cultural transformation and that we might locate this difference in the natural materials of the brain with which the baby was born.

Margolis does nothing to exclude the role of genetics and of the brain in the capacities and resources this self has at his or her disposal. All that Margolis would deny is that the entire story could be explained relying *solely* on causal, neuronal accounts that do not include Intentionality or recourse to the ways this brain is different because of its development within a cultural world. In addition we must remember here that on Margolis' view there are no causal laws that operate without exception in the Intentional world, even though natural causes of course exist within the cultural world (see 2015, 37). A classical temple, for example, could be destroyed as a result of being hit by lightning. In this case Margolis would agree that the temple's destruction by lightning was due to purely causal and natural, rather than Intentional, forces, assuming that he does not believe that lightning is the result of the Intentional activity of Zeus.

In addition, on Margolis' view whatever standards Andreasen used to determine the "geniuses" she identified who created "exceptionally creative work" might give way to cultural changes about how we construe what it means to be exceptionally creative. Further, there is nothing one could discover via the review of physical evidence, such as the PET scans, that can identify the Intentional properties of whatever artworks exceptionally creative people produce. If someone wrote a "powerful" or "devastating" poem, for example, these would be Intentional properties that could not exist in any natural world that lacks language, or in some feature of the soon-to-be-exceptionally creative baby's brain (see Margolis 2015, 34–35). It is this Intentionality I will attempt to capture in the section to follow on cultural choices and opportunities.

We turn now to environmental conditions that can either enhance or restrain the development of the high degree of cultural agency necessary for exceptional innovation and creativity to occur.

### 3.2 The importance of the cultural environment for artistic creativity

On Margolis' view art is created in the cultural context in which a person learns to live, work, play, interact and communicate with others. It is thus as part of a moving, developing system that a person picks up the tools of his or her trade. Here a musician learns the piano scales that will strengthen her fingers for symphonies to come, a dancer conditions his body to spin without dizziness and jump with power and height, a writer learns how to craft stories with dynamic plots and emotional depth and a painter or photographer learns how to articulate a visual scene through stylistic techniques that may highlight such things as use of color, light and perspective.

Psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi has a theory of the cultural conditions for creativity that is consistent with Margolis' theory of how innovative artworks are created. He maintains that all creative work (including artistic work) is produced with training, skill and effort within a particular discipline or domain (see 1997, 8). No one can be an exceptional Odissi dancer, for example, who does not perform any of the highly formalized and ornate structural patterns that belong to this East Indian form of traditional dance. In the same way one cannot say she is a "violinist" if the instrument she is playing is a harmonica. Finally, even in a loose sense even the most innovative art usually "begs, borrows and steals" (to quote a dance teacher I had as a child) from what has gone before (see also Bloom 2002, 6, quoting Emerson: "Only an inventor knows how to borrow".) But there are notable exceptions.

Within any given domain it is possible to produce highly creative work without mastery of the *entire* tradition of the domain at issue or, indeed, may borrow inspiration and training across domains. Thus an "outside artist" like Jean-Michel Basquiat, one who did not develop his skill within the formal training the rules and methods of a recognized art school, can produce exceptionally unique paintings, a dance choreographer like Twyla Tharp might experiment with new kinds of movement that were not learned or developed in a traditional school, or an artist may cross-over from training in one genre to excellence in another. In cases of exceptionally creative work, then, a domain might move back its borders to accommodate innovative, nontraditional art that meets, at least minimally, the criteria of its genre (or at the very least acknowledge the birth of a related genre).

Any talent, however, no matter how great, can wither or die without proper cultural support and environmental nourishment. Of course an

artist who has died prematurely due to violence, disease or lack of food cannot create art. Some potentially great art was undoubtedly lost when unwanted infants were exposed to die on hilltops in Ancient Sparta, or when people sold into slavery died in the holds of Middle Passage ships between Africa and the United States, or when artists were killed in genocides, wars and holocausts. Less dire cultural circumstances can also prevent artistic innovation, as when a child cannot develop as a ballet dancer because her parents cannot afford the high price of private lessons or of pointed shoes or where a boy's parents will not allow him to study ballet at all for the mere reason that he is a boy.

And yet, psychologist and concentration camp survivor, Viktor Frankl, believes that the will to create innovative art is irrepressible despite such adverse conditions. In short, Frankl holds in *Man's Search for Meaning* that the desire to engage in meaningful work, which may include the creation of art, is needed for our survival, since it is this engagement that makes life worth living at all. He describes the concentration camp cases he witnessed where actual physical survival depended on this sense that life had meaning. When inmates gave up, he notes, their bodies shut down and they succumbed to malnourishment or disease. A prisoner could also "give up" by refusing to work, a decision that in most cases led to his being shot on the spot. Frankl concludes that the people who struggled to survive the hostile conditions of the concentration camp did so if they felt they had something to live for. "A person with a *why* to live", Frankl says, "can bear with almost any *how*" (Gordon Allport quoting Viktor Frankl quoting Nietzsche in Frankl 1985, 12). Thus a person who feels that life still expects something from him or her has a "why" to live. This "something" that life expected could be religion, work, obligations to loved ones or the creation of art (see Frankl 1985, 61–62 and 93–101).

A person's cultural and other environmental influences, then, can profoundly affect her skill-development, including those skills pertaining to artistic creation, but they are not the whole story. That they are not the whole story does suggest the existence of something that one might want to call an individual soul but that one could be persuaded to call, in Margolisian terms, a *particular* second-natured self or career. Perhaps this particularity is due to the sort of biological, neurological, psychological and cultural endowments discussed above. Of course this is just one of many ways in which the question of exceptional creativity might be answered. The point has simply been that empirical work from the sciences, used in the limited way described, can indeed contribute to an under-

standing of how a cultural agent can create something new and not just utter something that has been uttered before. Both physical nature and the good fortune of the right cultural conditions (although these need not be optimal in all cases) may also have a part in cultural agency. To the extent that the sciences can shed light on these components of a human self they might be relevant to a full understanding of how cultural agents can create something new. They may explain how an artist not only utters but creates.

#### 4. Conclusion

In conclusion, there does not seem to be any reason to suppose that a Margolisian account of the artist as cultural agent means that no artistic innovation and creativity is possible. An artist's innovation is certainly encultured but may go beyond any strict dictates of that culture. An artist and self may still be unique, in terms of exceptional natural capacities to conjoin with cultural influences and in terms of his or her particular life experiences and opportunities. And as such the art that s/he creates will bear the stamp of that individuality.

The primary proviso limiting artistic creativity in Margolis' work seems to be, understandably, that innovation, if it is to be understood both for the communicative, artistic features it possesses and *as* a novel contribution, must be couched in Intentional properties with relevance to the interpreting culture.<sup>9</sup> This is what it means for artworks and other utterances to be cultural artifacts in Margolis' view. In some important sense they do not just belong to the individual, particular artist but are what they are because of the interpretive work of the cultural community from which they derived and in which they are embedded. Perhaps it is now clearer just why Margolis does not understand artworks and artistic creativity in any way that specifically recognizes individual natures and contributions. There is no non-cultural place from which to even begin to analyze anything (like material natures) that underlie culture once interpretation of what it even means to be a material nature or novel or particular is culturally embedded. This is the difficulty with which anyone who wants to use evidence from the sciences as part of a Margolisian perspective is faced.

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<sup>9</sup> Much more can and should be said about what is involved in the "uptake" or interpretation of artworks by a community of appreciators and how it is relevant to both our understanding of and definition of art. For Margolis' view on this I refer the reader to 1995a, 1995b, 1999, 2001.

In this paper I have only taken one tiny step towards solving the puzzle of how artists as cultural agents can create, and how these creations are to be understood, and much more remains to be said that cannot be handled adequately here. Suffice it to say in closing that it is often the case that radically innovative creation in art and, indeed, in philosophy, is sometimes so exceptional that it outpaces the understanding of the majority of the interpreters within a particular community. But in that case our task is clear—to exert our best efforts to understand and accommodate the new utterances of those who are outpacing us so that we may fully understand and incorporate the new horizons that stretch out before us as seen through the eyes of these creative masters. This collection of essays, I suggest, is precisely such an endeavor. We are, in this volume, attempting to understand and accommodate Joseph Margolis.

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