

ARTISTIC EXPRESSION AS INTERPRETATION

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According to R. G. Collingwood in *The Principles of Art*, art is the expression of emotion--a much-criticized view. I attempt to provide some groundwork for a defensible modern version of such a theory via some novel further criticisms of Collingwood, including the exposure of multiple ambiguities in his main concept of expression of emotion, and a demonstration that, surprisingly enough, his view is unable to account for genuinely creative artistic activities. A key factor in the reconstruction is a replacement of the concept of *expression* with that of *interpretation*: what artists do is to interpret, rather than express, their initial emotions, in creative ways that may go far beyond their initial impulses. Thus more broadly the paper attempts to show that the concept of interpretation is just as central to understanding artistic *creativity* as it is in the analysis of the critical *appreciation* of artworks.

In this paper I shall provide some groundwork for an attempt to rehabilitate an expression theory of art, which is similar in some ways to that proposed by R. G. Collingwood.¹

This may seem a quixotic task, in light of the many criticisms of such views.²

Nevertheless, it seems to me that there is much of potential value in Collingwood's theory of art as the expression of emotion, but that equally, much reconstruction is necessary in order to transform the theory into even a minimally defensible and coherent theory of art--as art is conventionally understood, that is. I shall both provide some unusual criticisms³ of Collingwood's theory, and also engage in a novel reconstruction of some of its central claims.

In particular, it will be shown that Collingwood's main concept of expression of emotion is radically ambiguous as it stands, in that it will be necessary to distinguish no less than sixteen different senses or kinds of expression of emotion in this paper (summarized in

Section VIII), all of which have some relevance to his enterprise. Thus, even if there is no general agreement that the resulting, reconstructed theory is a viable or interesting one, the paper may be of some value in exhibiting some of the complexities that would be involved in any adequate analysis of an expression theory such as that of Collingwood.

However, it is only fair to point out from the start that my goals for a desirable theory of art are much more conventional than those of Collingwood himself. He writes that "Every utterance and every gesture that each one of us makes is a work of art" (PA p. 285), on which view all genuinely expressive acts are artistic. My goal is the much more modest one of trying to construct a viable expression theory of art, as art is ordinarily understood--and hence which distinguishes the kinds of creative expression involved in the production of artworks from the more general pool of expressive acts that Collingwood is concerned with. Thus my 'criticisms' of his theory might be regarded as being, strictly speaking, counterfactual criticisms: pointing out defects that his theory would have, were it to be regarded as having the same goals as a conventional theory of art.⁴

In particular, I shall offer a criticism that his theory fails to give an adequate account of the distinctively creative nature of artistic activity, as opposed to other kinds of expressive activity. He might think this a parochial or even misleading distinction,⁵ but I think it nevertheless worth making in any case, whatever one's goals for a theory of art.

The reconstructed theory to be presented makes integral use of several different concepts of *interpretation*, and a general theme of the discussion will be that there is no hope of making sense of the differences and interrelations of Collingwood's various concepts of expression of emotion--let alone constructing a viable theory of art from them--other than in fundamentally interpretive terms.

The discussion will proceed as follows. First I assemble some brief reminders as to characteristic views of Collingwood on expression, and make an initial interpretive point about them. Then a significant dilemma concerning his main view of expression is uncovered, neither alternative of which is fully coherent. Next, in light of this very basic failure in his view, Sections III-V will investigate various aspects of expression in alternative interpretive terms, with Sections VI and VII providing an outline of a novel interpretive theory of art that could potentially serve as a reconstruction of an expression theory.

I. COLLINGWOOD ON EXPRESSION OF EMOTION

To begin, here are some brief reminders as to characteristic views of Collingwood on expression of emotion. Collingwood initially characterizes expressions of emotion thus:

When a man is said to express emotion, what is being said about him comes to this. At first, he is conscious of having an emotion, but not conscious of what this

emotion is. All he is conscious of is a perturbation or excitement, which he feels going on within him, but of whose nature he is ignorant. While in this state, all he can say about his emotion is: "I feel ... I don't know what I feel." From this helpless and oppressed condition he extricates himself by doing something which we call expressing himself. This is an activity which has something to do with the thing we call language: he expresses himself by speaking. It has also something to do with consciousness: the emotion expressed is an emotion of whose nature the person who feels it is no longer unconscious. It has also something to do with the way in which he feels the emotion. As unexpressed, he feels it in what we have called a helpless and oppressed way; as expressed, he feels it in a way from which this sense of oppression has vanished. His mind is somehow lightened and eased. (P.A. pp. 109-110)

He summarizes his account as follows:

Until a man has expressed his emotion, he does not yet know what emotion it is. The act of expressing it is therefore an exploration of his own emotions. There is certainly here a directed process: an effort, that is, directed upon a certain end; but the end is not something foreseen and preconceived, to which appropriate means can be thought out in the light of our knowledge of its special character. Expression is an activity of which there can be no technique. (P.A. p. 111)

One further element in Collingwood's view should be mentioned. It is:

To whatever level of experience an emotion may belong, it cannot be felt without being expressed. There are no unexpressed emotions. ... Thus, what are called unexpressed emotions are emotions at one level of experience, already expressed in the way appropriate to that level, of which the person who feels them is trying to become conscious: that is, trying to convert into the material of an experience at a higher level, which when he achieves it will be at once an emotion at this higher level and an expression appropriate to it. (P.A. pp. 238-239)

Thus Collingwood attempts to reconcile his initial account, in which "...At first, he is conscious of having an emotion, but not conscious of what this emotion is" (first quote) by invoking an account involving different levels of experience: though the emotion must be fully expressed at the lowest level, and hence experienced at that level, nevertheless one can fail at that time to consciously experience it at higher levels, and hence be "...trying to convert [it] into the material of an experience at a higher level, which when he achieves it will be at once an emotion at this higher level and an expression appropriate to it."

My first comment on this account is that it cannot succeed without at least covertly invoking some appropriate concept of *interpretation*--or, alternatively put, that Collingwood's concept of 'conversion' from a lower level to a higher one is itself an interpretive concept. For compare the situation with a perceptual one. The perceptual

analogy of Collingwood's view would be a view that we directly perceive sense-data, of which we are aware--no unsensed sense-data, just as no unexpressed emotions--and which we also "try[ing] to convert into the material of an experience at a higher level", so that we can also perceive physical objects. But that account of perception is an irreducibly interpretive one, on which the sense-data, which are not themselves physical objects, have to be somehow interpreted as physical objects as part of the 'conversion' process.

On the other hand, a direct realist theory of perception, which denies that there are any lower-level conscious perceptual experiences of sense-data, would not be an interpretive theory, because it does not postulate distinct levels of perceptual consciousness, the linking of which would require some kind of interpretation or conversion.

Thus my initial concern with this 'conversion' part of Collingwood's account is that what he is offering us seems to be an account of a higher-level *interpretation* of lower-level emotions, rather than of a higher-level *expression* of those emotions. For the 'expression' part of his concept of 'conversion' expression is, to all appearances, no longer doing any work in his analysis (see the last quote above) since he mentions expression as such only in connection with *same*-level expression of emotions (in claiming that all emotions occur only in a same-level expressed form in experience). Thus the entire explanatory burden shifts to whatever is the appropriate concept of a higher-level interpretation of lower-level emotions.

In the next Section I shall raise further problems about this 'conversion' aspect of Collingwood's views.

II. COLLINGWOOD'S CONVERSION DILEMMA

I shall now argue that the 'conversion' aspect of Collingwood's theory of expression—*C-expression*, or conversion of a lower-level to a higher-level expression of emotion--involves him in a crippling dilemma (which dilemma is further discussed in Section VII).

The dilemma concerns two possible but incompatible analyses of the concept of C-expression of emotion X, evidence for both of which analyses may be found in his writings, but neither of which alternatives is fully coherent relative to the general goals of his theory. (Any references simply to 'expression' rather than C-expression in this Section will be to same-level expressions--*S-expressions*--of emotion).

In summary form, the dilemma is that either emotion X retains its precise qualitative identity through the process of its being C-expressed, or it does not. But if X remains ontologically unchanged by its C-expression, then Collingwood lacks any account of what makes an artist's activities creative; while on the other hand, if X is changed by its C-expression, into a distinct emotion X', it then becomes entirely mysterious how the relevant C-expression is of the initial emotion X itself, rather than merely being an

expression of a new and distinct emotion X'. Here now is a more extended description of the dilemma.

The first horn of the dilemma may be introduced with the aid of the following logical and metaphysical argument. If there is some specific emotion X that an artist C-expresses, then it must be *that* emotion X, with its precise qualities, and no other, that ends up being fully expressed by the artist, on pain of her failing to fully C-express that specific emotion X. Hence ontologically there can be no difference--either numerically or qualitatively--between the emotion in C-unexpressed form--as a low-level emotion--and in fully C-expressed form as a higher-level emotion.

On this account, the only possible change that could occur during the process of C-expression in question is a change in the artist's *epistemic* relation to that single precise emotion X. The initial quotes provided from Collingwood seem to conform to this horn of the dilemma: the ontological point is implicit in his discussions, while the epistemic point is explicit.

But if only the artist's epistemic relation to that emotion X changes, in what sense is this a genuine case of artistic creativity? For pre-theoretically, artistic creativity, if it is to be genuinely creative at all, must involve the bringing into existence of something that did not exist before. Yet on this epistemic account of C-expression of emotion X, strictly speaking C-expression involves only a personal discovery of, or new knowledge about, the nature of one's prior emotion--not a creation of anything.

Ontologically speaking, at best only the initial emotion X would qualify as a newly existent entity, created by the artist; but on the current interpretation of Collingwood, it is not that low-level emotion X itself that is supposed to be the newly created art, but instead it is the higher-level C-expression of that emotion that is supposed to be the newly created art. Hence, it may be concluded, this specific 'conversion' account of creative artistic activity is incoherent, in that it fundamentally confuses ontological with epistemic changes. Call this Collingwood's *epistemic C-expression* or EC-expression concept.⁶

Thus, on this EC-expression interpretation of Collingwood, a strange irony would result--that he of all philosophers, with his central insistence that 'art proper' cannot be planned, intended or envisaged in advance of its actual expression, would nevertheless be wedded to a kind of ontological conservatism regarding emotions, that would permit no genuine artistic creative development of an emotion by an artist during her expression of it.

Turning now to the other horn of the dilemma, suppose that emotion X is changed by its C-expression into a qualitatively or numerically distinct emotion X'. This would at least initially seem to address the previous creativity problem, in that on this account expression would actually change an emotion--or it would replace it with a distinct one--hence ensuring that there has been an ontological as well as an epistemic change, as a result of the artist's expression.⁷ Call this Collingwood's *ontological C-expression* or OC-expression concept.

However, the problem now is that on this OC-expression account, the artist ends up having C-expressed this new and (at least qualitatively) distinct emotion X', instead of having C-expressed, as was her original intention, the initial emotion X. But on this interpretation of Collingwood, his account is incoherent for a different reason than before, namely because there has been an explanatory breakdown: one cannot explain what it is to C-express emotion X by saying merely that it is a matter of C-expressing a distinct emotion X' instead.

To be sure, the concept of C-expression itself assumes a rough structural account of how emotions X and X' are related, namely as lower and higher-level forms of an emotion. But my point is that that relatedness cannot be explained simply in terms of any concept of expression, without further supplementation by appropriate interpretive concepts. And indeed, as noted at the end of the previous Section, the concept of expression itself, as employed in connection with C-expression, seems potentially to be completely replaceable by some appropriate concept of inter-level or C-interpretation.

Thus, to sum up this Section, two incompatible variants of Collingwood's C-expression concept have been investigated--*epistemic* C-expression versus *ontological* C-expression--and each has been found to fail in its explanatory function at a very basic level.

In light of this explanatory failure, Sections III-V will investigate various aspects of expression in interpretive terms.

III. THE POSITING OF UNEXPRESSED EMOTIONS

The interpretive concern raised in Section I regarding Collingwood's account of expression arose at least partly because of his view that there are no unexpressed emotions--that all emotions are S-expressed, or expressed at the same level as that of the emotion itself. However, even if this S-expression requirement were dropped, some interpretive issues would still arise, in all but the most prosaic cases of expression of emotion--such as those of expression, in words or some other medium, of some high-level emotion of which one is already fully conscious.⁸ In such basic cases of expression--of *B-expression*--there is no room or need for interpretation, but in any less trivial cases of translation or 'conversion' from an emotion to its expression, clearly interpretive issues would become relevant, such as those of whether there is some single 'correct' expression of an emotion, as opposed to several distinct but equally valid or appropriate expressions of the same emotion, or even of whether there could be objective criteria at all for success or failure to express a given emotion.

To be sure, such interpretive issues would not necessarily completely usurp the role of the concept of expression itself, as they might if there were no S-unexpressed emotions, as previously discussed. Nevertheless, as the title of this paper suggests, I shall argue that

in artistic contexts the concept of expression is best understood as a fundamentally interpretive one.

As to the issue of how there could be any unexpressed emotions, potential explanations are available, such as Freudian views that would invoke unconscious emotions of some kind. But perhaps it is clear enough that any such views potentially raise even more contentious issues of interpretation than Collingwood's original 'no S-unexpressed emotions' view did, so that there is at least an initial plausibility to the current developing interpretive view of artistic expression, whether or not one accepts the possibility of unexpressed emotions.

IV. REAL, FREE AND VIRTUAL EXPRESSION OF EMOTION

So far it has been assumed that any case of expression of emotion by an artist in creating her work involves some real initial emotion that the artist has, which she then proceeds to express--real or *R-expression* cases. However, the apparent logical possibility of (what could be called) 'free' expression--*F-expression*--should not be overlooked, in which an artist interacts with a medium in some way without having any prior emotions that help to control her actions, nor with any intentions to express emotions. Further, it might be suggested that a complete artwork could be produced in such a way, which would be an expressive artwork that in some sense is an expression of emotion--or which might at

least naturally be interpreted by critics as being so--even though there were no real or virtual (see below) intentional emotions of the artist that the work expresses.

A more sophisticated kind of case should also be distinguished, in which an artist does set out to produce an artwork that expresses some specific emotion, but which emotion is not an emotion that she herself actually feels--or, even if she does feel it, her personal emotion is not allowed by her to guide her production of the finished artwork. Such cases could be described as cases of virtual or *V-expression* of emotion (though of course it is the emotion that is virtual, rather than the expression of it).⁹

Returning to the concept of free or F-expression, it seems likely that cases of completely free expression, in which at no stage in the development of a work does the artist attempt to express an emotion, whether deliberately or spontaneously, and whether of her own or of some virtual kind, would be exceedingly rare or vestigial. For if we provisionally adopt the point of view of traditional expression theories of art such as that of Collingwood, according to which any kind of creative artistic intention would qualify as an intention to express an emotion, then free expression would have to be completely spontaneous or improvisatory--not simply unplanned, but not even qualifying as genuinely intentional action on the artist's part. Thus for current purposes it is legitimate to ignore any such 'fringe' F-expression cases (if there are any) as mere accidental novelties,¹⁰ and thus to regard all central cases of artistic creativity as involving the expression by an artist of some specific emotion, whether the emotion is real or virtual.

V. NON-AMPLIATIVE VERSUS AMPLIATIVE EXPRESSION

In this Section two basic categories of expression will be discussed. As an initial and rough characterization of the two kinds, *non-ampliative* expression covers those cases in which the substantive content or information provided by a full expression does not go significantly beyond the content or information already present in the original emotion, whereas with an *ampliative* expression, the substantive content does go beyond that contained in the original emotion. I shall argue that the concept of 'ampliative expression' must be given an interpretive analysis.

An example of non-ampliative expression would be provided--if psychoanalytic theory may be believed--by the case of a couple who have built up much unconscious resentment and hostility toward each other over many years, and who, perhaps with the aid of psychoanalysis, become able to express their mutual hostility. This is, at least in its broad outlines, a non-ampliative case, because according to psychoanalytic theory, all of the content or information that is eventually expressed by each is already present in unconscious form in their unexpressed but highly developed emotions. (Putting aside any novel hostilities that might arise between them in the psychoanalytic sessions themselves). In Collingwood's terms, this would be a *conversion* kind of expression, in which lower-level information is expressed at a higher level.

On the other hand, artistic creativity cases are usually quite different. They may involve little or no conversion between levels, while also typically being cases where some quite limited initial emotional reaction or impulse starts an artist out on a creative path, which path may involve various complex developmental stages, so that what is finally expressed by the artist has a content that goes far beyond the original emotional impulse. And even if much of an artist's work is the result of a few pervasive, life-long emotional obsessions, her need to creatively distinguish each of her works from all of the others will inevitably result in those cases too being ampliative expressions. Thus overall, though some small percentage of artworks--those, perhaps, where some unusually rich initial 'emotional vision' provides the whole content of what is eventually expressed--might be produced by non-ampliative expression as applied to that initial vision, the great majority of creative artworks must involve ampliative expression.

To be sure, some conversion cases might themselves be ampliative, in that the artist might ampliatively interpret an emotion in some way that goes beyond what would be involved in a strict expression of, or a making explicit of, the content of that emotion. But it is a contingent matter as to whether a given case of conversion is ampliative or not, requiring further discussion or evidence--on which see more below.

This basic ontological kind of ampliative expression--*OA-expression*--should be distinguished from an epistemic variety, *EA-expression*, which concerns subjective rather than objective information. For example, the couple discussed above with unconscious

hostilities toward each other might well achieve an epistemic ampliative expression (EA-expression) of their hostilities through psychoanalysis, in that they come to explicitly understand what previously they did not, even though no OA-expression was achieved, because the very same objective information concerning the emotions was cognitively present, in some form, in each person both prior to and subsequent to their psychoanalysis.

Applying these concepts to Collingwood, the dilemma discussed in Section II is relevant as follows. Clearly his epistemic conversion expression--EC-expression--will typically be a case of EA-expression, but not, as there argued in effect, a case of ontological ampliative (OA) expression, since EC-expression does not allow for any ontological changes that could support a claim that OA-expression had occurred.

But what is more, most if not all of his level-conversion examples are arguably ontologically *non-ampliative*, independently of whether he attempts to analyze them as involving EC or OC expressions. For a mere difference in level of S-expression, as the psychoanalytic example shows, is not sufficient to show that OA-expression has occurred. Indeed, Collingwood seems vulnerable to a fundamental criticism that almost all of his examples of expression are mere conversion examples,¹¹ which examples cannot automatically count--without specific arguments in each case, which he does not provide--as being ontologically ampliative.¹² Thus Collingwood's general theory of expression provides, remarkably enough, only a very tenuous level of theoretical support

for the significant ontological changes required for normal cases of genuine creative artistic expression.¹³

Here is some further discussion of ontological ampliative or OA-expression (which kind is being discussed if no epistemic qualifier is specified). My first point about the fact that most artworks are the products of ampliative expression, or are 'ampliative' for short, is that it serves to strongly reinforce the claim that artistic expression involves, at least in typical cases, a significant element of interpretation. For now, in addition to the initial kinds of 'translational' or conversion interpretation uncovered--that depend on non-trivial but relatively technical or philosophical issues of translatability between different levels or forms of an emotion--there is the additional fact that artworks are typically ampliative in substantive ways, so that a more substantive concept of ampliative interpretation (specifically, OA-interpretation) will also be a required theoretical tool in an adequate analysis of artistic expression--whether of conversion or non-conversion kinds.¹⁴

This concept of ampliative interpretation by artists may be parallel in several respects to a more familiar concept of interpretation, namely that in which literary critics 'interpret' a given literary work when they provide a commentary on it. Though the matter is controversial, if it is possible to have various different but equally acceptable interpretations of a single literary work, this could be taken as suggesting that they too are ampliative interpretations, each of which extends a single work in a different direction.¹⁵ While in the performing arts, there is general agreement that individual performances of a work will typically have aesthetic properties that go beyond those occurring in the work

itself, so that, if this view is correct, performances may also be, or involve, ampliative interpretations.¹⁶

Nevertheless, there is still an important difference between various kinds of interpretation as involved in the *creation* of an artwork, from whatever kinds are relevant to the interpretation of already complete artworks, whether by critics or performers. To mark this difference I shall describe the relevant creative interpretations by artists as being *constitutive interpretations*, in that these interpretations determine the very nature or constitution of a given artwork, prior to any critical or performance-related interpretations of it.¹⁷

Thus overall my thesis is that cases of creative artistic expression involve constitutive interpretations, which typically are ampliative, and in which conversions, even if ampliative, play at best only a minor part--indeed, typically artworks are multi-level from their initial conception onward, with later stages in the evolution of a work normally including same-level developments from each of the multiple levels of earlier stages of the same work.

As for what nevertheless unites both non-ampliative and ampliative cases as both being 'expressions of emotion': since even non-ampliative conversion cases are at least epistemically ampliative, some form of *interpretive ampliativity* could be regarded as the definitional core or essence of a reformed general concept of creative artistic expression of emotion.

VI. A RECONSTRUCTED INTERPRETIVE EXPRESSION THEORY

I shall now briefly outline a general interpretive view of artistically creative expression of emotion. The view to be presented could be regarded as a reconstruction of what is theoretically correct about 'expression' theories of art such as that of Collingwood, and it will be discussed in those reconstructive terms, though my primary aim is to arrive at an adequate theory of art rather than to provide an exercise in historical exegesis.

First, expression theorists clearly believed that a very wide concept of emotion is possible, wide enough to encompass any kind of creation of artworks.¹⁸ The nearest I can come to this is to concentrate only on representational art, which has some representational content or subject matter,¹⁹ and to argue that what artists do is to provide some sort of interpretation of their chosen subject matter.²⁰

An interpretation on my account is any kind of function of, or operation upon, a given content--anything, that is, except a mere reproduction of that content in its original form, which would not be creative or interpretive at all. Thus interpretations include attitudes, stances, approaches, evaluations, affective states including emotions and feelings, formal or substantive commentaries or comments (whether in words or other medium), and so

on: anything that *does something* with a content or subject matter, rather than merely reproducing it untouched.

A recovery of the view that, in artistic contexts, all of these are in some sense expressions of emotion is possible as follows. Creative artists could not be so without feeling passionate about the importance of the interpretations of subject matters that constitute the core of their originality as artists. They must feel deeply about these interpretations that they are attempting to provide, or their work would be merely trivial or superficial. Hence their works must be an expression of emotion, in that they are an expression of their passionate involvement with the specific kind of interpretation that they are attempting to provide for the relevant subject matter.

This account could be ontologically deepened in terms of the unique nature of each artist. It is not a generic passionate commitment to a given kind of interpretation X of subject matter S that is expressed, but rather a unique passion that derives from the singular character and personality, or emotional core, of a particular artist that is expressed.

Thus on this account there are initially two kinds of artistic expression of emotion. The first applies universally: genuine artists must be emotionally committed to the interpretations they provide, and in a uniquely characteristic way, no matter what kinds of interpretations those are, and hence in that sense they must express their emotions about their subject matters. And secondly, some kinds of interpretation are themselves

inherently affective, such as an emotional and cognitive stance of outrage--whether actual or virtual--at some political atrocity, such as with Picasso's Guernica.

But thirdly, the more prosaic sense in which the subject matter of art may itself include the emotions of certain persons, such as characters in a play--whether or not the artist has her own affective attitudes toward those emotions--also needs to be considered--*Content expression*. Thus, in sum, all genuine art is expressive of the individual artist's unique emotional commitment to the importance of her chosen interpretation, and in addition, the interpretations provided by some artists in some works are themselves affective interpretations of their subject matters, while the subject matter of a work may itself include affective elements.

Next, we need to reconstruct the central expressionist claim that art is an expression of emotion, in the sense that each artwork starts with an initial, not fully expressed emotion, which is subsequently fully expressed by the artist in her finished artwork, as a result of her expressive activities. And the reconstruction needs to be general enough to cover both non-ampliative cases, as well as more creative ampliative cases--whether of a conversion or non-conversion kind--that show an ontological development or expansion from the initial to the finished form.

The key to doing so is to postulate two *distinct* interpretations--though of the same general kind--that can serve as the initial and final stages in the expressive process. In an ampliative case, one of the interpretations would be a more fully developed, ampliative

version of the other. (As previously, only ontologically ampliative cases are being discussed, in the absence of an explicit epistemic qualifier). Thus in an ampliative case, an artist first has an initial interpretation X1, of kind X, of subject matter S, which prompts her to attempt to ampliatively expand that interpretation into a more fully developed form X2, which can indifferently be regarded either as an ampliative interpretation of subject matter S, which is more ampliative with respect to S than was X1 itself, or as an ampliative interpretation of the initial interpretation X1.

Clearly the latter view provides a more historically faithful reconstruction of the view of expression theories that it is the initial emotion itself--interpretation X1 of subject matter S--which is what the artist expresses, which is why the initial introduction of the concept of ampliative interpretation in Section V was described in those terms. But once the concept of a specific kind, or 'line', of interpretation of a subject matter S is introduced, that has enough coherence so that there could be a sequence of related interpretations of S--at least two in number, as in a conversion case--of the same kind, from sparse or initial to comprehensive or fully complete interpretations of that kind X of S, then it is theoretically unimportant whether one regards them as interpretations of earlier members in the series, or as interpretations of their common subject matter S.

Thus, to sum up this portion of the discussion, on the current view all genuine artistic creation can be regarded as an expression of emotion, that involves an artistic movement between two limiting stages of interpretation of a subject matter--an initial or sparse stage of interpretation, in which the artist first grasps the possibility of a kind of interpretive

approach X to subject matter S in the form of a specific sparse or sketchy interpretation X1 of S, through zero or more intervening stages of interpretation (which intervening stages are cases of Intermediate expression), culminating in a comprehensive interpretation X2 of S which is 'maximally ampliative' of the chosen line of interpretation of S--for example, because it is as specific as possible in its interpretation, or uses the medium as comprehensively as possible, given the artist's chosen medium in which she interprets S.

Thus overall the current interpretive theory of expression potentially provides a theory of ampliative expression of emotion, appropriate to artistic creativity contexts in which there is a substantive difference in content in the final comprehensive interpretation, as opposed to the initial sparse interpretation--and it provides a genuine explanation of that concept of ampliative expression, in that the concept of expression itself plays no part in the interpretive analysis given. While at the same time the theory is also capable of explaining any non-ampliative cases of expression, such as some conversion cases, but without making the mistake of regarding them as necessarily being explanatorily primary in a discussion of creative expression.

VII. EXPRESSION AND INTERPRETATION

Given the above, reconstructed interpretive expression theory--or just 'interpretive theory' for short--here is a brief further criticism of Collingwood's own theory in interpretive terms.

First, Collingwood is wrong to identify art with any and all kinds of expression of emotion.²¹ For art proper can be concerned only with ampliative interpretations of emotion--other than in those rare cases where an initial emotion, i.e., an initial interpretation of a subject matter, can itself count as being artistically creative.

Nevertheless, non-ampliative interpretations are still interpretations, which may well be experienced as epistemically ampliative by the person doing the interpreting. Thus Collingwood's standard epistemic points about expression, such as that one cannot know what one will express before one has expressed it, and that successful expression is experienced as making explicit or manifest what was before only felt at a lower level, will apply to all interpretations of emotion, whether or not they are ontologically ampliative. Hence, in the current terms, he confuses some general epistemic features of any kinds of interpretation with what is essential to creative art as such--which creative features, because they are ontologically grounded, are highly resistant to such simple epistemic tests, and hence are much harder to discover or recognize.

Indeed, his discussions of how an artist can come to recognize the failure of their artistic efforts²² are also wide of the mark, because he equates artistic failure with failure to express certain emotions,²³ whereas many artistic failures are clearly failures to creatively interpret emotions--emotions are expressed, but only in trite or uninteresting ways.

Second, the basic problems in Collingwood's view, such as the dilemma discussed in Section II, may be viewed as arising for the following logical reasons.

Concepts such as those of expression, translation, level conversion and communication are, in their simplest form, concepts that define *equivalence relations* between items of content under ideal conditions of correctness or literalness. A correct or literal translation, or conversion, or communication, or expression of content item X will map it onto an equivalent content item X', which has the same content, or at least an equivalent content, as does X itself.

Such relations of equivalence could themselves be explained further with the aid of the concept of representation. Any content X will be represented in some medium, such as in cognitive, brain-state terms. Insofar as different representations of the same (or equivalent) content are possible in different media--such as in language, or non-verbal media--it is possible to set up relations between pairs in distinct media that define the extensions of the concepts of literal or correct translation, conversion, communication and expression.

This basic logical picture gives rise to no issues of interpretation at all as long as the differences in representational media are trivial differences--such as with two distinct symbolic expressions of a single underlying formal system. However, as is notoriously the case with natural languages, issues such as that of translational synonymy, or sameness of meaningful content, give rise to various interpretive issues in spite of our general confidence that, for example, 'schnee ist weiss' expresses, in some sense, the same propositional content as 'snow is white'. Thus one class of non-ampliative interpretations is provided by such basic translational cases.

But level conversion cases are more complex. As the history of phenomenalism shows, even if reliable conversions were available between sense-data statements and physical object statements, there might be no clear sense in which the content of such paired lower-higher statements was the same--since one is about sense data, while the other about a material object. So deep interpretive issues arise in such cases.

Nevertheless, in some pragmatic sense the languages are still 'expressively equivalent' for most ordinary purposes, in that either member of a pair of statements could be used to convey the same useful information to someone--so that these cases would still be non-ampliative conversion cases in my sense, in that no specific extra information is given by either, beyond the same kinds of difference in content that all pairs share because of the general differences between sense-data and material object statements.

The case would be similar with high-level expressions of low-level emotions: characteristic differences in content common to all such pairings are to be expected, but those by themselves would not show that a particular high-level expression was ampliative relative to the particular low-level emotion in question. A genuinely ampliative interpretation of the emotion would have to provide more distinctive content than simply that which could routinely be expected from the basic differences between such pairings.

Thus in this way too, Collingwood's tests for artistic expression will inevitably produce too many 'false positive' results, because even if the relevant contents are objectively and hence ontologically different--as in the case of the second horn of Collingwood's dilemma--this is not sufficient for the higher-level one to be an ampliative interpretation of the lower one, that is, one that creatively rather than routinely interprets it.

Applying these points to the 'Collingwood's dilemma' situation of Section II, the problem is that, since expression is fundamentally an equivalence relation, strictly speaking an 'expression of emotion X' can only produce some content X' that is equivalent to that of X--and hence not ontologically different from it, as in the first horn of the dilemma.

While on the other hand, any expressed content X' that is distinct from content X could not count as an expression of X--which is the other horn of the dilemma.

The way to resolve the dilemma, of course, is to recognize that extra interpretive concepts are required to deal with these complex situations. A relatively abstract and theoretical

concept of conversion interpretive expression--*CI-expression*--or simply of conversion interpretation, is needed in such conversion cases, which in non-ampliative cases is still pragmatically an equivalence relation, hence maintaining an abstract link with the ordinary concept of expression. But the concept of ampliative interpretation breaks that link: it is no longer, strictly speaking, an expression concept at all, but rather a replacement for Collingwood's supposed concept of 'creative artistic expression' that has turned out to be illusory--though, once these issues are understood, it is harmless enough to re-use that phrase 'creative artistic expression' as convenient label for the replacement concept of ampliative interpretation itself.

VIII. CONCLUSION

To begin, since a subsidiary goal of this paper has been to exhibit the various concepts or kinds of expression of emotion involved in a discussion of Collingwood's theory, here is a summary list of them, in the order of their introduction. Several of these have been argued to be interpretive rather than expressive concepts, or to have interpretive aspects, but those distinctions are ignored here, unless they are already implicit in the terms used.

Collingwood's official concepts, as outlined in Section I, include *Same-level* expression, *Conversion* expression (from lower to higher levels), and related concepts of *Initial* and *Final* expression--which he seems to think apply only in conversion cases, but which I later broaden to non-conversion cases.

Section II argued that Collingwood is faced with a conversion dilemma in which he either has to choose *Epistemic conversion* (EC-expression)--that entails non-Ontological conversion (non-OC-expression)--or he has to choose *Ontological conversion* (OC-expression) instead; while Section III introduced *Basic* expression, which is the 'plain vanilla' version of expression of emotion, a simple equivalence relation with no interpretive aspects.

Section IV discussed *Real*, *Virtual* and *Free* expression, while Section V introduced new concepts of Ampliative versus Non-Ampliative expression, whose specific forms (along with their converses) are *Ontological Ampliative* expression (OA-expression) and *Epistemic Ampliative* expression (EA-expression). That Section also distinguished artistically creative *constitutive* interpretation or expression from more familiar concepts of critical interpretation. Section VI introduced a subsidiary concept of *Intermediate* expression, applicable to non-conversion cases. And finally Section VII introduced a concept of *conversion interpretive expression* (CI-expression), along with a more peripheral concept of *Content* expression--for a total of sixteen distinct concepts of expression of emotion in all.

Before concluding, two related objections to my attempted rehabilitation of an expression theory should be considered.²⁴ The first objection is that the concept of interpretation has no essential connection with the concept of emotion, and so it is inherently ill suited to

explain, or to capture the spirit of, artistic theories of expression of emotion, which do view emotion as being inseparable from expression.

The second objection is that (what some consider to be) the radical implausibility of expression of emotion theories of art, which suppose that even bored portrait painters were somehow 'expressing their emotions' about their rich patrons, is likely to infect an interpretive theory too, even if it can overcome the first objection.

In reply to the first objection, it is clear historically that the relevant concept of emotion for Collingwood was very wide and highly theoretical,²⁵ which both explains its integral connections with his concept of expression, and which also guarantees (against the second objection) that mere everyday, anecdotal uses or non-uses of the term 'emotion' do not conclusively count against it.

But parallel points can be made in favor of the current interpretive reconstructed concept, as presented in Section VI, which adopts an equally broad basic concept of emotion, as any kind of attitude or interpretive stance toward a subject matter, in the particular context of the passionate involvement of artists in their chosen artistic subjects and interpretive stances. Thus in this broad sense specifically artistic interpretations must always involve emotion.

As for the second objection, the current view has a resource unavailable to Collingwood, in that its analysis of the concept of emotional expression into multiple interpretive

concepts assumes that no one paradigm case, such as that of an artist expressing her own spontaneous feelings, can adequately capture the full range of cases of artistic expression. For example, the portrait painter who feels nothing but indifference for her subject could still undertake a *virtual* expression of emotion (see Section IV) with respect to him--and thus express the emotions of a hypothetical painter who was enthusiastic about the subject. Nor, *pace* Collingwood, need this involve any insincerity, since an intention to fake or conceal one's own emotions is quite different from an intention to sincerely delineate the emotions of a hypothetical admirer of a portrait sitter.

Also, this account is still compatible with the basic 'passionate involvement with an interpretation' view of expression of emotion of Section VI, in that there is nothing to prevent the relevant interpretation from being a virtual rather than a real one, as in the present case. The account is also intuitively plausible, in that, in the absence of any passionate involvement by the artist in her picture, the resulting painting would likely be formulaic and *inexpressive*—a point which accords well with Collingwood's general views about expressive failures.

In conclusion, though my account has been quite critical of Collingwood in various ways,²⁶ it is nevertheless an initial attempt to rehabilitate or reintroduce a viable expression theory of art into contemporary discussion--surely a goal of which he would have approved. Of course there are several other significant problems facing expression theories,²⁷ none of which have been discussed here for reasons of space--but at least some initial groundwork has been laid for the attempt. More broadly, the paper has attempted

to show that the concept of interpretation is just as central to understanding artistic *creativity* as it is in the analysis of critical *appreciation* of artworks.²⁸

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NOTES

¹ R. G. Collingwood, *The Principles of Art* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1958), first published in 1938, hereafter PA. Of course much of Collingwood's book recapitulates themes developed earlier by Croce, but investigation of that relationship would take us too far afield—for a recent account see Gary Kemp, 'The Croce-Collingwood Theory as Theory', *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* vol. 61 no. 2 (2003), pp. 171-193.

² Such as those provided by Haig Khatchadourian, 'The Expression Theory of Art: A Critical Evaluation', *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* vol. 23 (1965), pp. 335-352, and by Richard Wollheim in *Art and its Objects* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980). My reconstruction here avoids the main thrusts of their arguments against Collingwood's kind of expression theory.

³ See footnote 26.

⁴ Also my analysis in this paper largely ignores the details of his broadly Humean psychology, as being irrelevant to the main issues discussed here.

⁵ For example, in that he argues that many conceptions of fine art are not of art *proper*, but instead only of various technical, amusement or 'magical' activities: see the early chapters of PA.

⁶ See Collingwood, PA Ch. 7 for his arguments that artistic making is indeed a genuine kind of *creating*, and p. 275 for his claim that "Every genuine expression must be an original one"--so that the incoherence in question is one inherent to his own views as thus interpreted, rather than merely being a disagreement with others as to whether or not artists are creative.

⁷ Various passages show this, such as "There is an emotion there before we express it. But as we express it, we confer upon it a different kind of emotional colouring; in one way, therefore, expression creates what it expresses, for exactly this emotion, colouring and all, only exists so far as it is expressed." (PA p. 152); and "...the expression of emotion is not, as it were, a dress made to fit an emotion already existing, but is an activity without which the experience of that emotion cannot exist. Take away the language, and you take away what is expressed; there is nothing left but crude feeling at the merely psychic level." (PA p. 244).

⁸ Collingwood regarded such non-mental forms of expression--of that which, mentally, is already *completely* expressed--as playing at best only a subsidiary or derivative role in his theory of expression.

⁹ V-expression cases would include any cases where the expressiveness of artworks is analyzed in some way *other than* in terms of the actual emotions of the relevant artist--such as in 'hypothetical emotionalism' views, as discussed by S. Davies in his "Contra the

Hypothetical Persona in Music" in ed. M. Hjort, and S. Laver, *Emotion and the Arts* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).

¹⁰ Some might even deny the *logical* possibility of such cases, though that issue will not be pursued here.

¹¹ Other than the example discussed in footnote 13.

¹² For a related criticism of Collingwood's view as not adequately explaining genuine artistic creativity see R.W. Hepburn, 'A Fresh Look at Collingwood', *The British Journal of Aesthetics* vol. 3 (1963), pp. 259-261.

¹³ Indeed, he gives only a *single* example that seems to unambiguously show artistic creative *development*: when he argues that painters paint because the aesthetic experience itself only "develops and defines itself in your mind as you paint", and that "You see something in your subject, of course, before you begin to paint...and that, no doubt, is what induces you to begin painting; but only a person with experience of painting, and of painting well, can realize how little that is, compared with what you come to see in it as your painting progresses." (PA p. 303; see also pp. 307-8) But even this example perhaps could be questioned as being primarily epistemic rather than ontological.

¹⁴ To be sure, arguably *all* interpretation is 'ampliative' in one way or another, since issues of interpretation only arise at all in cases of non-trivial differences of informative

content between items --or differences in ways in which a given content is represented.

But I trust that the current distinction between 'translational' conversions versus more substantive 'ampliative' interpretation is clear enough for present purposes. See Section 7 for more details.

¹⁵ See, e.g., the dispute between Stecker and Krausz on this issue: M. Krausz, 'Rightness and Reasons: A Reply to Stecker', and R. Stecker, 'The Wrong Reasons: A Response to Michael Krausz', *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* vol. 55 no. 4 (Fall 1997), pp. 415-421.

¹⁶ However, in 'Theater, Representation, Types and Interpretation', *American Philosophical Quarterly* vol. 39 no. 2 (April 2002), pp. 197-209, I argue that the case is unproven for performances, since it is usually argued for on type-theoretic grounds that may be disputed.

¹⁷ I briefly discuss a related concept of constitutive interpretation in my paper 'Pictorial Orientation Matters', *The British Journal of Aesthetics* vol. 43 no. 1 (January 2003), pp. 39-56.

¹⁸ Indeed, as already noted, Collingwood regarded *any* kind of genuine expression of emotion as artistic; but I shall not follow him in this.

¹⁹ One might try to argue that *all* art is representational, and hence in that way achieve the full generality of the traditional theories, but that issue would take us too far afield.

²⁰ The works of Arthur Danto, such as *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace: A Philosophy of Art* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1981), can be cited in support of this view.

²¹ At the same time, perhaps because of his Humean psychology, he tends to over-emphasize the significance of *individual expressive acts* or *episodes*, as opposed to more organized, longer-term ampliative artistic creative activities that are more central to the production, and understanding, of most actual artworks.

²² E.g., end of Ch. 12 of PA.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ My thanks to the editor, Peter Lamarque, for a forceful statement of these objections.

²⁵ Kemp, in ‘The Croce-Collingwood Theory as Theory’, supplies much relevant evidence both for Collingwood and Croce.

²⁶ As to the novelty of the criticisms, it has been pointed out before that expression theories in general over-simplify the complexities of the artistic creation process--e.g.,

see Khatchadourian, 'The Expression Theory of Art: A Critical Evaluation', esp. Sec. 2. But the specific way in which the root cause of such problems is located in Collingwood's use of the concept of expression itself--as in the discussion of Collingwood's dilemma--does seem to be new, as is the idea that expression theories should to be reformulated in *interpretive* terms, rather than simply *abandoned* as a result of such criticisms.

²⁷ Aaron Ridley in 'Not Ideal: Collingwood's Expression Theory', *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* vol. 55 no. 3 (1997), pp.263-272, attempts to defend Collingwood against some of these criticisms, but I argue that he misinterprets Collingwood in my reply 'Is Ridley Charitable to Collingwood?', *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* vol. 56 no. 4 (1998), pp. 393-396; I also provide an alternative line of defense for Collingwood against the relevant criticisms.

More positively, I outline a broadly interpretive, expression-based theory of art in two papers: 'Medium, Subject Matter and Representation', *The Southern Journal of Philosophy* vol. 41 no. 1 (Spring, 2003), pp. 45-62, and 'Three Depictive Views Defended', *The British Journal of Aesthetics* vol. 42 no. 3 (July 2002), pp. 259-278.

²⁸ My thanks to the editor, Peter Lamarque, for very helpful comments, and to Jenefer Robinson for her stimulating paper 'The Individuation of Emotion in Art' presented at the ASA Annual Meeting in Miami, Oct. 2002 (on which I commented), which helped to provoke the present analysis and reconstruction.