

ARTICLE

TOTAL IMAGINATION AND ONTOLOGY
IN R. G. COLLINGWOOD*

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οὐδέποτε νοεῖ ἄνευ φαντάσματος ἡ ψυχὴ
(the soul never thinks without an imagining)
(Aristotle, *De Anima*, 431 a 13)

In *The Principles of Art*, R. G. Collingwood pursues, on the one hand, a ‘definition’ of art, and, on the other, a ‘metaphysics’.¹ The *Principles* is divided into three Books. Book I is devoted mostly to craft, while Book II pertains largely to metaphysics. The fact that Book II is twice the size of Book III, where the discussion of ‘art proper’ takes place, is proof enough that the metaphysical part of the *Principles* is not a mere excursus. Collingwood’s ontology is indispensable for understanding his aesthetics, and vice versa. The crucial link is the imagination. What Collingwood calls ‘total imaginative experience’ is described in the *Principles* as the *sine qua non* of both thought and sensibility.

The aim of this article is to examine the ontological import of Collingwood’s conception of the total imagination.² This task involves

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¹R. G. Collingwood, *The Principles of Art* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1938). I use the following abbreviations for in-text references to Collingwood’s writings:

PA: *The Principles of Art*;

SM: *Speculum Mentis* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1924);

EPM: *An Essay on Philosophical Method* [1933] (Bristol: Thoemmes Press, 1995);

RI: ‘Central Problems of Metaphysics: Realism and Idealism’ [1935], unpublished ms., Bodleian Library, Oxford, dep. 20. I am grateful to Prof. James Connelly who sent me a transcript of RI. Instead of page numbers, I refer to Book, followed by section and then paragraph;

A: *An Autobiography* (London: Oxford University Press, 1939);

NL: *The New Leviathan: or Man, Society, Civilization and Barbarism* [1942], revised, edited and introduced by David Boucher (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992);

EM: *An Essay on Metaphysics* [1940], revised, edited and introduced by Rex Martin (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998).

²Collingwood actually uses the phrase ‘total imaginative experience’. The term ‘total imagination’ is employed in this article in order to make clear the distinction between Collingwood’s imagination and the sensible and creative imaginations.

linking the discussion of aesthetics in *The Principles of Art* to Collingwood's other books. The criticism that the *Principles* ignores the materialization of the artwork is mistaken as, according to Collingwood, it is superfluous to prove their existence. This position stems from Collingwood's understanding of the relation between realism and scepticism, and is thus linked to his metaphysics. I show how this evolves out of Collingwood's conception of thinking as a search and of experience as a circle of the self and reality. Collingwood's total imagination facilitates access to the circle because it is prior both to sensation and thought. Thus, the total imagination is distinct from the sensible and the creative imaginations. An examination of the manuscript 'Realism and Idealism' shows that the total imagination makes it possible to move beyond epistemology and into an ontology of reality. Further, the total imagination reveals the importance of art to ontology. A comparison between Collingwood and the philosophy of Heidegger and Gadamer shows that Collingwood's ontology overcomes the idealist demand for autonomy and moves towards an hermeneutics.

I. THE UNQUESTIONABLE

Richard Wollheim's attack on the 'Ideal theory' of art is often taken as a resolute refutation of Collingwood's aesthetics. The 'Ideal theory' makes two claims: first, that art is an internal process that does not need to be externalized, and, second, that the art medium is irrelevant. The two claims are connected: if art is solely a mental activity, the means with which it is materialized are purely accidental and secondary. The irrelevance of the medium results from the distinction between art and craft. The upshot is that Collingwood's aesthetics both deny any importance of art to the public and are inconsistent in that even mental images are linked to their possible or actual manifestations.³

Wollheim fails to realize that the phrase, 'the work of art proper', does not deny any connection between the 'works of art', i.e. paintings, books, compositions etc., and the 'mental process' in the artist. On the contrary, the phrase refers to the work in the sense of *die Arbeit*, i.e. as the activity, an action and a reaction, that is characteristic of art. Compare the contention in *An Autobiography* that 'no "work of art" is ever finished, so that in that sense of the phrase there is no such thing as a "work of art" at all' (A 2). Collingwood is not concerned with the objects as such but with the way the objects are intended both by the artists and the audience. Yet, this does not imply the absurd conclusion that the work of art can have no

³Richard Wollheim, *Art and its Objects: An Introduction to Aesthetics* (New York: Harper & Row, 1968) 30–7. See also Wollheim, 'On an Alleged Inconsistency in Collingwood's Aesthetic', in *Critical Essays on the Philosophy of R. G. Collingwood*, edited by Michael Krausz (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972) 68–78.

materialization, or that any element of craft spells the end of art. Instead, Collingwood clearly states that art and craft ‘overlap’ (PA 43) – and the term ‘overlap’ is used in *An Essay on Philosophical Method* to mean two concepts that share common properties.⁴ Craft is instrumentalist as it uses a certain technique to achieve a preconceived purpose. Craft’s concentration on the means to produce a specific end is different from the free or creative activity of the artist, just as the work of the stage manager differs from the director’s, or of the mechanic from the architect’s. The distinction between art and craft comes with the warning that ‘subject without style is barbarism; style without subject is dilettantism. Art is the two together’ (PA 299).

When Collingwood argues that art is not merely perceptible, he does not mean that art is something imaginary or unreal. Collingwood immediately provides an example: in the puppet show, the expression of the puppets remains unchanged, yet one ‘sees’ their emotional expressions. What one ‘sees’ is not there, but, also, one would not have been able to ‘see’ anything unless something was there (PA 142). The thought about art that starts with a distinction between art and non-art, assumes that there are objects of art. Thought about art is nonsensical unless there are artworks. Collingwood does not discuss something whose existence is in question: ‘The aesthetician . . . is not concerned with dateless realities lodged in some metaphysical heaven, but with the facts of his own place and time’ (PA 325).

Assuming the existence of the art object is connected to Collingwood’s overall ontological position. It is simply unnecessary to justify the existence of external objects, as, for Collingwood, such a justification is entangled in the fruitless debate between metaphysical realism and scepticism. According to the *Autobiography*, the distinguishing mark of realism is the assertion that the objectual world exists in itself. The realist denies any influence of knowledge to the object. This implies in effect *to know* what is taken as *unknown*. The realist, on the one hand, presumes that he can compare the

⁴Aaron Ridley directly challenges Wollheim, when he invokes the example of Cézanne (‘Not Ideal: Collingwood’s Expression Theory’, *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 55 (1997) 266–7; see also Ridley, R. G. *Collingwood: A Philosophy of Art* (London: Phoenix, 1998), 17–25). Collingwood stresses the importance of the application of the pigment on the canvas for an appreciation of the post-impressionist: the materialization and the media of production, therefore, are not incidental to the work of art. Collingwood, Ridley concludes, does not hold that the medium is irrelevant to art. The second claim attributed to the ‘Ideal theory’ by Wollheim is not made by Collingwood at all. Effectively the whole argument about the ‘work of art’ as a nonexistent object is undermined. For Collingwood’s example of Cézanne, see PA 144–5. The interpretation that craft is irrelevant to art does not originate with Wollheim. There are earlier examples, e.g. *Art and Philosophy*, edited by William E. Kennick, (New York: St. Martins, 1964) 142–4. Also, there are philosophers before Ridley, such as Charles B. Fechte, ‘Hand and Eye: The Role of Craft in R. G. Collingwood’s Aesthetic Theory’, *British Journal of Aesthetics*, 22 (1982) 37–51, who have criticized Wollheim’s ‘Ideal theory’ reading. Cf. also Louis Mink’s discussion of art in *Mind, History, and Dialectic: The Philosophy of R. G. Collingwood* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1969).

object of knowledge both with and without the act of knowing; but, on the other hand, the realist also presumes that the latter is what is impossible to know, since he denies that the act of knowing makes any difference to what is known (A 44; cf. EPM 140). This *mutatis mutandis* is the same argument that Collingwood uses against the sceptic: in order for the sceptic to deny the possibility of knowledge of the external world, he must be able to know that the external world is not what it is claimed to be. However, the sceptic denies not only this or that knowledge of the external world, but *any* knowledge of it. So scepticism refutes itself (SM 42). The realist and the sceptic both fail because they bifurcate the world into subjects and objects. Whereas the realist accepts the object as unchanging, but thereby implicitly asserts the change that he wants to deny, the sceptic accepts the object as ever-changing, but thereby implicitly asserts the unchanged he wants to deny. Scepticism is therefore the obverse of realism.

Collingwood's argument does not apply solely to art objects. It is also a mark of his ontology. The objects of philosophical thought in general are also real. This should not be taken in the strong sense that a 'centaur' is real if one thinks it; rather, it means precisely that a thinker does not have to counter the sceptical objection. Unlike the natural sciences, philosophy is not committed to establishing 'matters of fact and real existence'. The most obvious and unquestionable fact of philosophy is that there are external objects. In the language of the *Essay on Philosophical Method*, philosophy presupposes the existence of its object or subject matter because philosophy is categorical thinking. Thus, philosophical thinking is, on the one hand, related to life, and, on the other hand, not empirically verifiable. Philosophical thinking, then, is synthetic a priori. However, unlike the Kantian synthetic a priori, Collingwood's is not the basis of the true cognition of every possible experience. Rather, Collingwood's insistence that philosophical thinking is categorical is the reason for upholding the unity of theory and praxis, of thought and action. Because thinking is categorical, philosophy is ontology. However, it is not a substantialist ontology, because substance or pure being, in Collingwood's vocabulary, are meaninglessly extreme abstractions (EM 14). It is an ontology in the sense that it poses a relation between thought and being.

II. TENSION AND CIRCULARITY OF THINKING

Collingwood discusses the correlation between thinking and being in the *Essay on Philosophical Method*, the book preceding the *Principles*. The *Essay* pursues a comparison between the social and the human sciences. Ostensibly, Collingwood is entering the debate of the methodology of the *Geisteswissenschaften* that shaped that direction of modern hermeneutics in the nineteenth century. However, there is a crucial difference. Whereas Wilhelm Dilthey was ultimately unable to extricate himself from an idealist

ontology, whereby completion is a defining feature of science in general, Collingwood explicitly rejects this position.

Thus, regarding method, Collingwood insists that finality, completeness, objectivity, and unity are not a-priori characteristics of philosophy; thinking does not aim towards them as if they are the necessary and sufficient conditions of its possibility. Instead, these concepts are relevant to philosophy only in so far as they apply to human beings: they become meaningful to a philosopher as responses to concrete philosophical pursuits. Collingwood's statement that thought is 'a single sustained attempt to solve a single permanent problem' is meaningless if thought is understood qua finality, completeness, objectivity and unity (EPM 195). There is a 'single common spirit' that determines the method of thinking as an ideal, 'but it is not an ideal imposed on his [the philosopher's] subject-matter by his thought; it is the way in which he must apprehend his subject matter if he is to apprehend it correctly' (EPM 197). The ideal is determined by the *tension* that it generates between itself and the finite human being who cannot attain a final knowledge, who does not have enough power to grasp completeness, for whom the problem of thinking becomes personal, and who is free to explore the problem in its multifariousness. Thinking, therefore, is grounded on an immanent standpoint, on the human being who strives to 'be at home' in a concrete situation.

In the last chapter of the *Essay*, Collingwood contends that philosophy and literature share something essential. This can be expressed in two different ways: first, philosophy and literature are both a wandering, a search, a path. In this sense philosophy is not impersonal. Collingwood talks about the philosopher as taking a 'road' and the reader as having to follow him (EPM 211, 212, 215 and 225). Kant uses the 'road' metaphor in the concluding paragraph of the first *Critique*, but with an important difference: Kant contends that transcendental idealism turns the 'path into a highway' towards the attainment of knowledge.⁵ Instead of the idealist optimism that the self's representation can cohere with the world, Collingwood's emphasis is on the *search*, which is grounded on the human being. A leitmotif of his thought is the Socratic principle that philosophy starts with the acceptance that one will not discover something that one does not already know. Philosophy is the self-reflective and self-critical activity of mortals. Emphasizing the existential import that knowledge is *self*-knowledge and not cognition removes the spectre of mentalism. Thinking is 'a confession, a search by the mind of its own failings and an attempt to remedy them by recognizing them' (EPM 210).

Second, the orientation of thinking towards the self does not contradict the notion of philosophy as a 'single permanent problem' that has a 'single common ideal'. On the contrary, these two notions are complementary,

⁵Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, translated by Werner S. Pluhar (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1996) A 856/ B 884.

since the impetus for the search of self-knowledge is the conviction that thinking has to enquire into truth. Thinking thinks truth and, if this is forgotten, thinking as a path or a search ceases to be self-critical (EPM 219). Further, thinking is not a 'private' affair. Thinking as *search* is historical. Thinking is not a creation *sui generis*. Instead, the same path has been taken by other thinkers of the past. The task at present is only to find further pathways along the already trodden path. Collingwood stresses the fact that philosophy is the 'audible voice of tradition' and that the philosopher is a collaborator with past thinkers (EPM 225 and 182).⁶

The objection might be raised that this description of philosophy is circular: is thinking determined by the self or by the truth? Is thinking justified by the past or by the present (cf. EPM 160–1, 224–6)? It is at this juncture that the importance of origin comes to light. Philosophy, says Collingwood, is a 'poem of the intellect':

What is expressed in it is not emotions, desires, feelings as such, but those which a thinking mind experiences in its search for knowledge; and it expresses these only because the experience of them is an integral part of the search, and that search is thought itself.

(EPM 212; cf. PA 297–8)

The hermeneutic circle does not need to be broken. Rather, the circle needs to be entered at the right place: at the point where experience becomes expression, where the imagination reveals the self in language, and where emotion is not mere fancy but the mood that links the self to its world. Collingwood's conception of art occupies the place where one enters the circle. As such, it is the *terminus a quo* of thinking. Since thinking originates in the circle of imagination and language, the interaction of the self's existence and historicity, the justification of philosophical method revolves entirely around the level of art. Further, the problem of the content of thinking is transformed to an inquiry into the human being. Thus, the question of the end of thinking is meaningful only if the end is given at the beginning.⁷ The upshot of this position is that the circularity of thought cannot be resolved by striking a balance between polarities such as part and

⁶See also PA, ch. XIV, §7. Cf. Benedetto Croce, *An Autobiography*, translated by R. G. Collingwood (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1927) 112.

⁷What becomes obvious here is a very important difference between Collingwood and Hegel. In spite of Collingwood's admiration for Hegel, and of the obvious dependence especially early on (e.g. *Speculum Mentis* is modelled on the *Phenomenology*), the finitude of the subject that participates in the circle of thinking announces a crucial departure from the Hegelian dialectic. The dialectical movement of Collingwood's philosophy does not propel itself inexorably to a philosophico-historical conception of *Geist* that subsumes everything else (cf. the remark on Hegel in PA 312). Unlike Hegel, Collingwood's dialectic is not a 'one way street'. This departure is, of course, mediated by the 'Italians' who exercised a formative influence on Collingwood. The most interesting work on this influence has been done by Rik Peters; see, e.g. Peters' 'Collingwood on Hegel's Dialectic', *Collingwood Studies*, 2 (1995) 107–27.

whole, or the given and the product. The circularity has to remain in suspension, which, as will be shown later, is grounded by what Collingwood calls ‘the unity of being’.

The purpose of the *Essay on Philosophical Method* is to argue that the methodological principle underlying the social sciences is the circularity of thinking. From the onset, Collingwood indicates that he is pursuing a discussion of the method of philosophy only by means of contrast to the method of the natural sciences, warning that the reader should not expect to find a general metaphysics (EPM 8–9). As Collingwood reminds the reader in the closing pages of the book, there is no argument in the *Essay* for the legitimacy of this contrast. Indeed, from the point of view of natural science, everything that is given, be it a thought that forms part of tradition or a factual observation, can be examined under the rubrics of rationality, that is, under a single method. Collingwood has assumed from the beginning of the book that this is not the case, and that the social sciences have a different methodology. However, this will remain an assumption until the existence of this assumption is argued for, or in other words, until Collingwood presents an ontology that is able to account for the significance of what is given.

Collingwood excuses himself with the enigmatic remark that this problem is ἄλλης σκέψεως οἰκειότερον (‘belongs to a different domain of thought’, EPM 225). It has already been shown that thinking as a ‘poem of the intellect’ is ontologically connected to art. It is not surprising, then, that after the *Essay*, Collingwood turned his attention to aesthetics. The book that followed the *Essay* was the *Principles of Art*, whose second part, it should be recalled, is devoted to metaphysics. If the enigmatic remark at the end of the *Essay* is really referring to the *Principles*, then Collingwood’s aesthetics must develop an ontology that construes the given in a way that it is neither merely discovered within rationality, as the scientist would argue, nor is it the product of the mind, as idealism would conclude.

III. TOTAL IMAGINATION

The ontological significance of art revolves around Collingwood’s conception of the imagination. The theory of the imagination denies that the given is discovered or created. According to Collingwood, imagination is, on the one hand, the precondition of thought, and, on the other, ‘heterogeneous’ to sensibility (PA 171, 148). This is Collingwood’s ‘total imagination’ that has received scant attention in the secondary literature.⁸

The total imagination can only be understood as a reaction against the two traditional imaginations. The first imagination is associated with sensation, as in Aristotle’s *De Anima* Book III, ch. 3. The Greek for

⁸The total imagination is usually confused with the sensible imagination (see, e.g., Ridley, ‘Not Ideal’, 272, n7).

imagination is φαντασία and, as the word signifies, it is formed from φάος (light) and it is tied to perception: φαίνεσθαι means to appear (*erscheinen*, to affect the senses). The function of Aristotle's imagination is to remember and to recombine images. This is the αἰσθητική φαντασία, the sensible imagination that is subordinate to the senses and distinguishable from thought.⁹ The second imagination refers to the creative activity of the artist and does not appear in Aristotle. Usually, the creative imagination is said to originate in the seventeenth century and to have been theorized at the beginning of the eighteenth century, for instance in Vico (PA 138). It is characterized by its power to conjure up the unknown or the unfathomable.

Each of the two imaginations finds a place in the Kantian system. The first is the reproductive imagination of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, which mediates between receptivity and spontaneity for the cognition through concepts. As such, it is distinct from sensation and subordinate to the understanding. The second is the productive imagination of the *Critique of Judgement* that is not involved in concept formation. It is the free activity of the creative artist that operates independently of perceptions. The large number of permutations that the imagination has undergone in the history of philosophy are all guided by the central distinction between the sensible imagination, tied to perception and subordinate to thought, and the creative imagination, the free activity of the artist.

Collingwood does not want to separate sharply the cognitive and the artistic functions of the imagination. If the sensible imagination is subservient to perception and understanding, that is, if its role is empirical, then it is hard to see how it could have a parallel role to play in art. Whereas a creative imagination conceived merely as the free-play of the artist has to be separated from any epistemological questions. Conversely, Collingwood sees that it is necessary to reconfigure the imagination within ontology so that it encompasses both everyday and artistic acts. The theory of the total imagination has then deep consequences for the overall structure of Collingwood's 'system'. Distinguishing carefully the total imagination from the sensible and the creative imaginations directly aims to explicate the Subject–Object relations in Collingwood's ontology and its connection to aesthetics. What is also indirectly at work here is Collingwood working himself out of the idealist economy of representation – a concern that will re-surface at the end of the article.

In what way is the total imagination distinguished from the sensible and the creative imaginations? Collingwood's solution is to assert that total imagination is the root of both perception and understanding. Thus, imagination ceases to be purely epistemological. It is not concerned with how we arrive at the concept of an object. This has repercussions for the creative function of the imagination: what is prior to knowledge must be situated in the human being. The orientation of philosophical interest away

⁹Aristotle, *De Anima*, 434a6.

from the relation of the Subject (the perceiving 'I') and the Object (the 'thing') annuls the immutable contrast between the two imaginations. The sensible imagination 'took orders' from the Object, while the creative imagination 'took orders' from the Subject. Collingwood's imagination 'takes orders' from no one (PA 297). This third imagination underwrites knowledge and is self-generating. The ambiguity of the term 'self-generating' points to the essence of Collingwood's imagination: it is both 'coming from' the self, it is creative; and it also creates the self, it is formative. Collingwood, therefore, does not so much strike a balance between the two imaginations as transfigure them to a 'third' one. Book II of the *Principles of Art* engenders Collingwood's ontological significance of the theory of the total imagination.

The 'total imaginative experience' is first mentioned at the very end of Book I. Collingwood is emphatic that total imagination is not sensible imagination: 'So remote is this experience from the specialism of its sensuous basis, that we may go so far as to call it an imaginative experience of total activity' (PA 148). In the experience of a painting, we do not merely use our eyes to perceive colours; we also 'disimagine' our perception, that is, we need to move beyond the realm of sensation (PA 143). Significantly, the same 'disimaginative' process is also part of the artist's experience. Cézanne paints 'like a blind man', Collingwood argues, in the sense that the muscular activity of the experience of painting and the tactile elements in his still-lives and landscapes are even more important than visual perception.

His [Cézanne's] still-life studies... are like groups of things that have been groped over with the hands; he uses colour not to reproduce what he sees in looking at them but to express almost in a kind of algebraic notation what in this groping he has felt.

(PA 144)

Cézanne's experience is neither a reproduction of the imagination, since it does not hinge on the perception of an object, nor a free creation, since its 'groping' quality makes it empirical.

Exactly the same is true of the audience: 'What he [the spectator] experiences does not consist of what he sees' (PA 146). The total imaginative experience cannot be split into two parts, one that is the given, the other that is the combination of the given. Collingwood explicitly rejects the notion that the audience objectively finds something sensual, the picture, to which it brings something subjective, an 'aesthetic experience' that validates aesthetic value (PA 147–8; cf. also 116–7). What characterizes total imagination is the element of potentiality: one paints what one is capable of painting and one sees in a picture what one is capable of seeing (PA 149–50). The total imaginative experience is an active involvement with the situation one is in. Total imagination does not presuppose a pre-fabricated world that a pre-formed self apprehends; on the contrary, total imagination is what creates both the

world and the self. Or, more accurately, the total imagination creates the circle from which world and self originate. The rejection of the autonomy of the subject also influences the conception of the object. The object is no longer an effect of the various mental faculties. Instead, subject and object are in a dynamic relation that is mediated by the total imagination. Because so much hangs on the total imagination, it is vital to explicate very clearly how it differs from the creative and the sensible imaginations.

IV. CREATION AND REALITY

It is tempting to say that Collingwood's total imagination is similar to Maurice Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of art. Merleau-Ponty is fascinated by Cézanne because 'the instant when his [Cézanne's] vision becomes gesture' it assumes a metaphysical significance.¹⁰ There are, indeed, passages in Merleau-Ponty that seem in full accord with Collingwood's evaluation of Cézanne:

Cézanne does not try to use color to *suggest* sensations which would give shape and depth. These distinctions between touch and sight are unknown in primordial perception. It is only as a result of a science of the human body that we finally learn to distinguish between our senses. The lived object is not rediscovered or constructed on the basis of contributions of the senses; rather, it presents itself to us from the start as the center from which these contributions radiate.¹¹

Yet there is a difference between Collingwood and Merleau-Ponty which is much more important than any phraseological affinity.

In 'Cézanne's Doubt', Merleau-Ponty makes the distinction between reality and imagination twice. Initially, Merleau-Ponty argues that Cézanne wants to return to the object, to the reality *abandoned* by the abstractions of imagination. Here, reality takes precedence over the sensible imagination: reality is more important than memory and the recombination of images using traditional perspective. Cézanne 'was pursuing reality . . . with no other guide than the immediate impression of nature . . . abandoning himself to the chaos of sensation'.¹² Later on, Merleau-Ponty argues that Cézanne's expression, which has access to reality, cannot 'be the translation of a clearly defined thought . . . "Conception" cannot precede "execution" . . . The meaning of what the artist is going to say *does not exist* anywhere'.¹³ Clearly,

¹⁰Maurice Merleau-Ponty, 'Eye and Mind', translated by Carleton Dallery, in *The Primacy of Perception*, edited by James M. Edie (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1964) 178.

¹¹Merleau-Ponty, 'Cézanne's Doubt', in *Sense and Non-Sense*, translated by Hubert L. Dreyfus and Patricia Alen Dreyfus (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1964) 15.

¹²Merleau-Ponty, 'Cézanne's Doubt', 12–3.

¹³Merleau-Ponty, 'Cézanne's Doubt', 19.

Merleau-Ponty is referring here to the creative imagination as on a par with the reality that Cézanne is striving to express. Merleau-Ponty and Collingwood are in agreement that the sensible imagination is not an adequate aesthetic and ontological foundation. Yet, contrary to Collingwood, Merleau-Ponty's creative imagination that reveals the non-existent presupposes an all-too-plain notion of reality. The *real* that Merleau-Ponty's primordial perception transcends is the world of scientific objects, determined by laws, reproduced by the photographic lens, and perceived by a 'normal eye'. Castoriadis criticizes Merleau-Ponty's conception of reality as an 'incoherent philosophical fabrication', because it chooses to exclude as ontologically imaginary or unreal states like dream and delirium.¹⁴

Collingwood does not have such a simple conception of reality. Philosophy as categorical thinking presupposes reality. Further, an experience is both thought and feeling. However, the understanding and perceptions are neither segregated nor identified. Rather, Collingwood insists that the mediating term between feeling and thought is imagination: 'Intellection is impossible' without imagination, which 'forms the link between sensation and understanding' (PA 171). Collingwood claims that the naive conception of reality stems from an equivocation of the word 'experience':

the major premiss [states] that all knowledge is derived from experience (where a thought, no less than a sensation, is implied to be an experience), the minor premiss that a thought is not an experience, and the resulting inference that thought of the second order [philosophy], which in fact is based on the experience of thinking, is either knowledge in a different and mysterious sense of the word or not knowledge at all.

(PA 168)

The naive conception of reality takes two guises: The 'mysterious sense' of knowledge refers to Kant's notion that the principles of understanding are independent of all experience. On the contrary, Collingwood holds that synthetic a-priori judgements are founded on the experience of the human being.

The denial of 'real' knowledge is the assumption of realist philosophy. According to the realists, knowledge is the correspondence (*adequatio*) between the objects and the perceptions. If a realist starts from the acts of perception, the 'real' acts are those which are stronger and livelier than imaginary ones. However, Collingwood observes, in cases of mental disease hallucinations are both strong and lively (PA 179, 184). A realist might argue instead that real *sensa* conform to laws of nature, while imaginary *sensa* are disorderly and wild. Again, this leads to the unpalatable conclusion that mental illness is not governed by any rules (PA 181–2). Identifying reality

¹⁴Cornelius Castoriadis, 'Merleau-Ponty and the Weight of the Ontological Tradition', in *World in Fragments*, translated by D. A. Curtis (Stanford: Stanford University Press 1997) 279.

with ‘normal’ perceptions or *sensa* makes nonsense of clinical psychology. Such a conception of reality is incompatible with Collingwood’s theory of the creative and formative power of the self’s imagination.

Collingwood’s total imagination embraces the equivocation of the word ‘experience’. A visual experience consists of the *sensum*, the act of perception, and the awareness with which consciousness attends to the perception. What Collingwood calls ‘the totality of my seeing’ thus accounts for the ‘total’ of experience. It includes the feeling, the thought, as well as the imagination that connects sensation and thinking and makes them possible (PA 204). As an act of freedom, the total imaginative experience is also an assertion of selfhood (PA 208). The bifurcation of experience into the given and the spontaneous creates a conflict between Object and Subject. Through the lens of the total imagination ‘we obtain a new kind of experience . . . so that the self and the object are . . . at rest with each other’ (PA 210; cf. EPM 214).

Yet, the question arises whether this ‘rest’ is achieved by equating thought and reality. The consciousness that functions in the total imaginative experience ‘is thought in its fundamental and original shape’ (PA 216). Collingwood argues that the ‘imaginary *sensa*’, which embarrass a realist epistemology, can be accounted for by Kant. The principles of the understanding are a priori and this means that appearances fall under their jurisdiction. Thus, the difference between real and imaginary becomes a difference between the correct and the mistaken use of the categories (PA 186–90). Does this mean that the total imagination is the reproductive imagination in disguise?

V. IMAGE AND REALITY

The central function of language in a total imaginative experience is a sufficient mark of difference between total imagination and the reproductive imagination. What is still unclear is the way Collingwood avoids transcendental idealism. This issue is not tackled directly in the *Principles of Art*. The ‘Central Problems of Metaphysics: Realism and Idealism’ that contain a critique of Kant and a programmatic exposition of Collingwood’s own metaphysics are crucial at this point.¹⁵

¹⁵‘Realism and Idealism’ was written shortly before the *Principles of Art*. It is one of the most multivalent of Collingwood’s unpublished manuscripts. For an important discussion of ‘Realism and Idealism’, see Guido Vanheeswijck, ‘Collingwood’s Metaphysics: Not a Science of Pure Being, but Still a Science of Being’, *International Philosophical Quarterly*, 38 (1998) 153–74. James Connelly’s *Metaphysics, Method and Politics: The Political Philosophy of R. G. Collingwood* (Exeter: Imprint Academic, 2003), Part One *passim*, should also be mentioned here. Although Connelly does not engage directly with ‘Realism and Idealism’, there is a detailed and clear examination of the issues raised therein. Connelly provides extensive references to other unpublished manuscripts. His book is the most synoptic overview to date of Collingwood’s unpublished material dealing with metaphysical issues.

In 'Realism and Idealism', Collingwood distinguishes between subjective idealism and objective idealism. The chief characteristic of subjective idealism is that it is an epistemology: 'Subjective idealism begins with a theory of knowledge, and works round to metaphysics from that starting-point' (RI B, IX, 1). However, subjective idealism's epistemology is too mentalistic, since it bases knowledge on the mind: '[Kant] overcome[s] the dualism between nature and mind by suggesting that the very same reality which appears, from the point of view of a detached observer, as nature or matter, really is, when experienced from within, mind' (RI B, V, 7). The impartial observer is a crucial concept in a subjective idealist theory of knowledge: 'For the subjective idealist, the only essential relation between nature and mind is that nature is the spectacle of which mind is the spectator: it is a subject-object relation' (RI B, VII, 1). Kant's concept of the mind, exemplified by the detached observed who witness the spectacle of the Subject-Object interaction, is, for Collingwood, an unsatisfactory foundation of philosophy.

Conversely, objective idealism does not rest upon an epistemological foundation:

Objective idealism is not a theory of knowledge; it repudiates the theory of knowledge...and substitutes the theory of reality. Objective idealism is epistemologically realistic...but this is not a mental world, a world of mental activities or of things depending on mental activity, although it is an intelligible world or a world in which mind... finds itself completely at home.

(RI B, IX, 1)

Objective idealism starts with two principles: the object of thinking is real, and the distinction between feeling (the what) and thought (the who) has to be bridged. Thus, objective idealism denies that philosophy is the endeavour of determining objects of cognition. The total imaginative experience leads the self at rest, a state in which the self is completely at home. Collingwood's lectures clearly show that he rejects the epistemological bias of transcendental idealism and that his own objective idealism starts instead with an ontology of reality.

The function that language plays in Kant's reproductive imagination and in Collingwood's total imagination starkly delineates the differences between the two. According to the *Critique of Pure Reason*, cognition has two sources: intuition, which gives unorganized perceptions or the manifold of appearances; and understanding, which produces concepts through the categories. Intuition and understanding are sharply distinguished, so there is the need for imagination to mediate between them. The schemas of the imagination are different from the images of sensibility. 'A schema... is a product... of the pure a priori imagination through which, and according to which, images become possible'. Imagination facilitates cognition since it provides a concept with its image. In this sense, imagination is at the service

of the understanding: ‘a schema is . . . the pure synthesis conforming to a rule, expressed by the category, of unity according to concepts as such’.¹⁶ An example will make clear what Kant means by ‘conforming to a rule’. When one has an appearance of a dog, one cannot say that it is a dog. ‘Dog’ is a concept and as such it is not present to intuition. It is impossible to determine an object through concepts, unless there is a mediating agent, called a schema. The schema holds together the dog-properties in imagination, whose function is to link the schematized image to any one dog, or the concept ‘dog’. There is no cognition without concepts and, therefore, schematism happens for every concept empirically encountered. Take, for instance, the concept, ‘crown’. One will cognize a particular crown if one can recognize its properties: it is a round object, made of precious metals and stones and placed on the head of kings.

The Kantian reproductive imagination can account for the ‘crown’ as such an object. But what if the concept ‘Crown’ is used metonymically, as in the phrase ‘The Crown decrees . . .’? It is not clear at all how the schematism works here. The problem cannot be evaded by saying that ‘Crown’ as a metonymy belongs to the creative imagination, because the ‘Crown who decrees’ is clearly an empirical entity: it is the king. If one tries to explain the formation of the concept ‘Crown’ through the use of the reproductive imagination, it would be hard to conceive of the way that the ‘image’ of the ‘Crown’ is linked to the concept. The reason is that ‘Crown’ is a concept produced by substitution in language. Kant would probably deny that one can schematize ‘Crown’ and would say that the concept is produced by the understanding that unites other empirical concepts (the king and the contiguous object on the king’s head). Whatever the Kantian solution, the point is that the reproductive imagination excludes language from the sphere of its function. Language has no role to play at the meeting point of intuition and understanding. Consequently, tropes are irrelevant to cognition for Kant.

Language is central to Collingwood’s philosophy. In the *Essay on Philosophical Method*, he argues that metaphors are of the ‘utmost value’ for philosophical definitions (EPM 98). The theory of the total imagination includes language at its very core: ‘The aesthetic . . . activity is the experience of expressing one’s emotions; and that which expresses them is the total imaginative activity called . . . language’ (PA 275). The reproductive imagination of Kant’s subjective idealism is concerned with the epistemological question of how an ideal observer cognizes objects. The function of the total imagination is not epistemological. The self of the total imaginative activity is an immanent self who participates in everyday experiences. Collingwood emphasizes the immanent self when he talks of ‘this “original” language of total bodily gesture [which] is thus the one and only real language, which everybody who is in any way expressing himself is using at all time’ (PA

¹⁶Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A 142/B 181.

247). Total imagination, then, makes sensation and thought possible but is also a linguistic activity.

What is the nature of this linguistic activity? The question that arises now can be reformulated as: To what does the expression of the total imagination refer? Is it the particular experience of a particular person at a specific place and time? Or, is it connected to the way human beings relate to reality? Choosing the right horn of the dilemma has serious repercussions for Collingwood's total imagination and ontology. Collingwood's non-epistemological monism and its connection to being emphatically chooses the second option.

VI. MONISM OF ART

Collingwood took the first alternative in *Speculum Mentis*, where he argues that the experience of art is particular:

Art is...immediate and intuitive. It is essentially *discontinuous*....This monadic withdrawing into itself of the aesthetic consciousness, this ignoring of everything factual, even of its own historical nature and situation, is the necessary consequence of its imaginative character.

(SM 71–2)

The conception of art as mere supposal in *Speculum Mentis* makes the imagination a flight of fancy. Art is described as a 'windowless monad' that fixes imagination on any object whatsoever. The artist ignores everything beyond that object. This is a particular experience that is not connected with reality and the world. *Speculum Mentis* emphatically makes the point that the subject and the object are differently conceived within art, religion, science, history and philosophy. Thus, Collingwood needed sharply to distinguish art from the other 'forms of experience', and hence he insisted on the discontinuity and withdrawal of the work of art. Collingwood abandoned the linear progression from art to philosophy when he argued for the circularity of thought in the *Essay on Philosophical Method*. Hence, the aspects of discontinuity and withdrawal are retracted in the *Principles of Art*. Contrary to *Speculum Mentis*, the total imaginative experience is not disconnected: 'The imaginative experience contained in a work of art is not a closed whole' (PA 311). The distinctive characteristic of the total imaginative experience is that it surveys the totality of the situation or the reality that the self finds itself in. The imagination's object of experience is 'never a plurality of terms with relations between them, but a single indivisible unity' (PA 223).

The total imaginative experience *is* a whole. The work of art in the *Principles of Art* is not windowless, but it is monistic. This is the element that makes total imagination so important for metaphysics or ontology. This

point is clarified in the manuscript 'Realism and Idealism'. Collingwood insists that 'in order *really* to know any one thing... we must have some general conception of the world as a whole' (RI B, IX, 12). By the concept 'monism', Collingwood means that reality or the world as a whole that objective idealism presupposes is first presented to the consciousness that emerges in a total imaginative experience. 'The monistic tendency is the tendency to take seriously the principle that nothing is irrelevant to anything else' (RI B, IX, 17). The monistic tendency finds meaning everywhere. Everything is important because everything is connected. Collingwood broaches the monism of total imagination with his theory of perception and consummates it with the description of imaginative expression in language.

Reality is given to the self as an undifferentiated substratum of feeling and thought. One function of the imagination is to attend to this substratum. The attention focuses on certain aspects of the experience, while there is a 'penumbra' which is left unattended (PA 204). One looks at a table. Attention is focused on a red apple and the rest is ignored: the scratch on the left corner of the table with a dead fly next to it remain unnoticed. What one attends to is the conscious part, the rest is the unconscious part. Yet the unattended part is only relatively unconscious – it is still a part of the imagination as such. What Collingwood calls the 'totality of one's seeing' encompass the 'focal and the peripheral' field of imagination, as well as the self's awareness that there is an activity of attention performed (PA 205–7). It was noted earlier that Collingwood embraces the equivocation of the word experience by including in it the *sensum*, the act of sensation and self-consciousness. Collingwood finds in this equivocation the meaning of being human. So, from the point of view of the self, experience is something given along with its self-consciousness. There are no objects of sensation independently of the self (cf. NL 5.39). Total imagination takes experience as a whole, it attends to the reality that is the unity of feeling and thought. The reality or the world as a whole is united with the participation of the self.

The manifestation of self-consciousness takes place in language. Collingwood discusses the example of a mother who places a bonnet on her baby. The baby responds by throwing off the bonnet while exclaiming 'hattiaw!' There is a complex situation that the baby takes in as a whole: this includes the present state of affairs, namely, the discomfort and humiliation of wearing a bonnet; it also includes past experience, the fact that the mother had removed the bonnet using the very same expression; and, more importantly, it includes the baby's assertion of selfhood. The exclamation 'hattiaw!' is not grammatically correct, but it is an imaginative expression in the sense that it perfectly fits the situation. By shaking off 'the symbol of its babyhood', the child proves that 'it is not a baby but a real person' (PA 240). As Collingwood aphoristically puts it, 'His [the finite mind's] world is his language' (PA 291).

A total imaginative experience, then, is an interaction between reality or the world as a whole and the self. This is the circle of experience. It is a circle

because neither the world nor the self exist independently of each other. Yet there is no simple parallelism between world and self: there is no one-to-one relation between part and whole, or past and present. If the world is seen as things with relations between them, then the child's assertion of selfhood implies that the self is 'more' than the aggregate of these relations.

The reality that constitutes the origin of experience does not exhaust the whole of experience. Feeling and thinking are a whole that is accessed by the total imagination and from which experience originates. However, there is experience beyond total imagination that, moreover, is enriched with further relations. According to 'Realism and Idealism', objective idealism 'is neither monistic nor pluralistic, but has a place in itself for both these tendencies' (RI B, IX, 17). Objective idealism does not approach experience only from the monism of origin. Experience also includes pluralism, 'which is the tendency to take seriously the principle that nothing is solely constituted by its relation to anything else, but that everything has a being and a nature of its own' (RI B, IX, 17). The whole of the plural beings creates a huge variety of relations that the self is unable to cognize in their totality. According to the *Essay on Philosophical Method*, it is impossible to attain absolute knowledge of the whole of the plural relations (EPM 89). The same point is repeated in 'Realism and Idealism': 'we never actually, in any of our thoughts, attain that complete or final clarity and distinctness that would entitle them to be called absolutely true' (RI B, IX, 6).

What is at issue is to find the way that monism and pluralism are related. Collingwood's answer consists in recognizing that the concept of origin is interconnected with the concept of unity. There is, on the one hand, the monistic unity of the circle between self and reality; and there is, on the other hand, plural unities that exist in the relations between things.

For a sound metaphysic . . . all these kinds of unity are to be found in the real world, and . . . its ultimate unity will be none of them to the exclusion of the others, but will be a unity of them all . . . the ultimate unity of the world will be a unity of being.

(RI B, IX, 18, italics added)

What gives priority to the origin of experience in total imagination is the fact that it is an ultimate or original unity. There is no way of breaking the circle of reality and self. If, from the point of view of origin, the self has priority over the world, from the point of view of unity the priority is reversed. The unity of being is 'more' than the self.

Otherwise objective idealism would lapse into an epistemology and into subjective idealism. If the self was somehow able to grasp or cognize the unity of being, then thought would turn inwards and the world would be the relations bestowed on it by the observing mind. The subjective idealist would have to stipulate a multiplicity of circles according to the cognition performed. There would be a circle between past and present, whole and

part, particular and universal. Objective idealism denies that there are multiple circles. There is the single circle of the self and reality – the undifferentiated feeling and thought. Total imagination gains access to this circle. Thus, total imagination makes experience possible. The origin of experience is underlined by a single unity, the unity of being.

Art is a monad. A total imaginative experience is monistic. Monism according to Collingwood is not an epistemological doctrine. Monism is objective idealism's stipulation of an original unity. The unity is original because it is the root of both sensation and thought. The origin is a unity because it creates the circle of self and reality. The work of the total imagination is to make the circle accessible. A human being who is 'total-imagining' is in the circle. A linguistic expression makes manifest the circle of experience. Art as language has an ontological significance that transcends the objectual presence of the artwork.

VII. COLLINGWOOD'S ONTOLOGICAL HERMENEUTICS

In Book III of the *Principles*, Collingwood makes three very strong claims that will remain opaque if his ontology is not taken seriously. First, Collingwood asserts that the only possible aesthetic judgement is whether a work is good or bad. This claim hinges on whether the self can or cannot express itself (PA 281). There are no objects that can be conged independently by an impartial observer. Instead, so long as subjectivity is relevant to art, the total imagination bridges the gap between sensibility and spontaneity in an act of linguistic expression. Second, the concept of the subject that functions in art is generalized to include the subject that functions in every experience: 'Every utterance and every gesture that each one of us makes is a work of art' (PA 285). There is no formal unity of the 'I think' that requires a different layer of functions depending on whether the content of experience is artistic, religious, scientific, and so on. Third, this experience and the subject participating in it are explicitly given a philosophical value: 'Art... is essentially the pursuit of truth' (PA 288). In relation to the self of the total imaginative activity, the object of art is the same as the object of thought.

The denial of the subject's autonomy, the affirmation that every experience is a reciprocation between subject and object, and the importance of truth to art are the three hallmarks of Collingwood's ontology that are decided anti-idealist. Idealism, in the most general terms, bifurcates between the realms of the subject and nature, grants autonomy to the subject and then endeavours to link the two realms based on that autonomy. The circle of self and world in Collingwood's philosophy denies such a privilege to the subject. Taking this circle as the starting point of Collingwood's ontology implies that the object in general, the object of art in particular and the object of thought are not three different kinds of object that require different faculties for their

cognition. Little wonder, then, that Collingwood was sensitive to be called an idealist. Perhaps, he would have been happy to be called a hermeneutic philosopher. Collingwood's ontology overcomes the idealist epistemology with four moves that align his project to philosophical hermeneutics.

Collingwood presupposes reality as the unquestionable assumption of philosophy. Similarly, hermeneutics does not deem it necessary to infer the existence of the external world. As Heidegger memorably argues, the 'scandal of philosophy' is not that philosophy has not yet found a satisfactory proof against radical scepticism, but that it takes scepticism seriously enough to attempt such a proof.¹⁷ Relating this insight back to art, Heidegger asserts that 'the artwork is something over and above its thingliness'.¹⁸ Like Collingwood, for Heidegger the work of art is connected to the truth of being: or, in other words, any aesthetic judgement hinges on the subject's experience of truth. What is involved here is the ontological claim that there is no sharp distinction between objects in general, aesthetic objects, and objects of thought.

The circle of understanding is, according to Collingwood, the interaction of the self with its reality. This transforms knowledge to a process of self-understanding. The situatedness of the human being creates a tension between the ideal of self-enlightenment and the unattainability of that ideal. Heidegger's radicalization of the hermeneutic circle also concentrates on the interaction of the Dasein and its world. Departing from this insight, Gadamer describes the hermeneutic event as the 'polarity between familiarity and strangeness... The true locus of hermeneutics is this in-between'.¹⁹ This *in-between* creates a tension very similar to Collingwood's. Further, the hermeneutic conception of understanding as self-understanding signals a rupture with the epistemological pursuit of certainty: hermeneutics is not a theory of knowledge.

It was indicated that the first example of the sensible imagination is Aristotle's αἰσθητικὴ φαντασία, in Book III, ch. 3 of *De Anima*. The pedigree of total imagination can also be found in *De Anima*. The βουλευτικὴ φαντασία appears suddenly in Book III, chs 7–8 and 'virtually bursts apart Aristotelian ontology' because it undermines the partition of νοῦς and αἰσθησις, of understanding and sensibility.²⁰ When Collingwood says that 'the φαντασία without which, according to Aristotle, intellection is

¹⁷Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, translated by John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (Oxford: Blackwell, 1962) 249. Heidegger borrows the phrase 'scandal of philosophy' from Kant's footnote on Idealism in the preface to the second edition of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, B xxxix ff.

¹⁸Martin Heidegger, 'The Origin of the Work of Art', translated by Julian Young and Kenneth Haynes, in *Off the Beaten Track* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002) 3.

¹⁹Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, revised and translated by Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (New York: Continuum, 1989) 295.

²⁰Castoriadis, 'The Discovery of the Imagination', in *World in Fragments*, 215; Aristotle, *De Anima*, 434a8.

impossible' (PA 171) he is referring to the βουλευτική φαντασία.²¹ Castoriadis contends that the βουλευτική φαντασία is also the pedigree of Heidegger's imagination in his book on Kant.²² Similarly to the total imagination, Heidegger's imagination is prior to receptivity and spontaneity. Further, by linking imagination to the structure of care, Heidegger signals that language (*logos*) is indispensable to the imaginative activity.

Finally, Collingwood's conceives a dual relation of the self to reality: the self is 'more' than the aggregate of the objectual, and, at the same time, the originary unity is 'more' than the self. This dual relation is based on the distinction between being and the plural beings. Thus, Collingwood has arrived at his own statement of the ontological difference. With regard to Dasein, Heidegger states the ontological difference by saying that the Dasein is factually more than its environment, while its world is factually more than Dasein itself.

Collingwood's theory of the total imagination is the central feature of this aesthetics. In the *Principles of Art*, Collingwood seeks to identify what characterizes a work of art. The chief feature of a work is the total imaginative activity. Since the total imagination is a reformulation of the sensible and the creative imaginations, ontology becomes integral to Collingwood's aesthetics. From the perspective of ontology, the total imagination signifies Collingwood's overcoming of idealism. The total imagination shows that Collingwood has moved into an anti-idealist or hermeneutical ontology as early as the *Principles*.²³ Consequently, an appreciation of Collingwood's ontology starts with a consideration of the total imagination and the *Principles*. The ontology of art, as Collingwood conceived it, is implicated in the art of ontology.

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²¹Cf. Aristotle's assertion in the epigraph that 'the soul never thinks without an imagining' (*De Anima*, 431a13).

²²Castoriadis, 'The Discovery of the Imagination', 215; Martin Heidegger, *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics* [1929], translated by Richard Taft (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997).

²³The numerous references to Collingwood's hermeneutics spring from Gadamer's praise of the logic of question and answer in *Truth and Method*. However, the tendency when discussing the hermeneutics of Collingwood is to concentrate on the *Autobiography*. The suggestion here is that, on the one hand, Collingwood's distancing from Idealism is related to his hermeneutical ontology, and, on the other, that his hermeneutics stems from his theory of the total imagination. I look closely at these issues in terms of Collingwood's conception of history in 'The Vicissitude of Completeness: Gadamer's Criticism of Collingwood', *International Journal of Philosophical Studies*, 12 (2004) 3–19. I examine, also, Collingwood's conception of language and the logic of question and answer in relation to hermeneutics in my "'Clumsy questioners": Questioning and the Meaning of Meaning in Collingwood', *Collingwood and British Idealism Studies*, 11 (2005) No. 1: 39–59.