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Imaginative Understanding, Affective Profiles, and the Expression of Emotion in Art

ABSTRACT

R. G. Collingwood thought that to express emotion is to come to understand it and that this is something art can enable us to do. The understanding in question is distinct from that offered by emotion concepts. I attempt to defend a broadly similar position by drawing, as Collingwood does, on a broader philosophy of mind. Emotions and other affective states have a profile analogous to the sensory profiles exhibited by the things we perceive. Grasping that one's feeling exhibits such a profile is to understand it. That understanding differs from any involved in conceptualizing the affect in question. And, I argue, engagement with the expressive character of works of art (and other artifacts) is one way to gain it.

Despite its recent popularity as a whipping boy among theories of expression in art, R. G. Collingwood's ([1938] 1958) account of the phenomenon retains considerable appeal. The source surely lies in one factor above all. Collingwood's view gives a powerful answer to a question that flummoxes most rivals: why do expression and thus art matter to us? Collingwood's answer is that expression offers us understanding of our emotions. That understanding is distinct from any offered by conceptualizing them. Acquiring it alters our relations to our feelings, replacing subjection to them with mastery over them. That mastery is the only basis for a life well lived, and the understanding that grounds it offers the only solid foundation for a purchase on reality. Failure to express means a corrupt consciousness, and that (in a phrase Collingwood clearly intends seriously) is the root of all evil (1958, 285).

Of course, a powerful answer is not necessarily correct. Collingwood's theory of expression, and his related account of art, face various challenges. Much has been written in criticism of the view, and much, if less, in its defense.¹ However, critics and defenders alike tend to take Collingwood's

views of expression and art in isolation from the wider account of the mind that grounds them. Of the three "Books" comprising *The Principles of Art*, attention is paid only to the first ("Art and not-Art") and third ("The Theory of Art"). The second ("The Theory of Imagination") is usually ignored. This is a mistake. Collingwood is a highly systematic thinker. His account of art is rooted in his account of the mind. To take the one in isolation from the other is to remove the soil in which alone it can flourish.

In what follows, I do not attempt to defend every aspect of Collingwood's view. In particular, I set aside what is perhaps his most contentious claim, that expression defines art. Nor do I defend the view that understanding emotion is the basis for a life well lived. Furthermore, the defense I do offer involves significant additions to and deviations from Collingwood's explicit position. My account amounts to reconstruction as much as reiteration. Some may prefer to think of it as a novel position. Nonetheless, the view expounded remains thoroughly Collingwoodian in spirit. Moreover, it promises much. It describes one central form of understanding of emotions. It tells us how art is one way to promote such understanding.

Since it also reveals why that understanding is valuable, it explains why expression matters—both in art and outside it.

My specific goals are three: first, to expound and revise Collingwood's theory of the mind so as to yield a satisfactory account of what it is to become aware of one's emotion; second, to explain how the outcome of that process counts as a form of understanding of the emotion, distinct from understanding it through concepts, and that is plausibly the ground of a certain kind of freedom with respect to it; and third, to show that art can play an intelligible role in the generation of this understanding, and thus that doing so might indeed be where a significant part of its value lies.

I. EXPRESSION FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF COMMON SENSE

Collingwood expounds his account of expression in two stages, a brief examination from the perspective of common sense (Book I) and then an analysis using the resources of a wider philosophy of mind (Book II). At the heart of the first lies the following familiar passage:

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 his 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 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. (1958, 109–110)

So expressing an emotion is becoming conscious of it. (We will see later that "conscious" here is something of a term of art.) Elsewhere in the chapter from which the passage comes, Collingwood makes clear that to become conscious of emotion

is to gain an understanding of it (110). And he devotes a section (§3) to explaining that the understanding in question is distinct from that offered by concepts. Conceptualizing a phenomenon (or, in the terms he takes to be equivalent and prefers, describing it in words) is generalizing, as the understanding offered by expression is not. The former locates an emotion with others of the same type, whereas the latter, he claims, captures it in all its individuality.

Whether or not these claims really are common sense, they raise as many questions as they answer. What is this nonconceptual form of understanding? How can anything count as understanding unless it places the phenomenon that puzzles us in some larger grouping? And how exactly does coming to stand in this relation to our emotions rid us of a sense of oppression? To answer, we must turn to the second, generally neglected, stage in Collingwood's exposition, his account of the mind.

II. EXPRESSION FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF COLLINGWOOD'S PHILOSOPHY OF MIND

Collingwood claims that there are three levels on which mental phenomena occur: the "psychic" level, "consciousness," and "intellect." The first is the level of what he calls "mere feeling": sensation through which we cognize the world (and our own bodies), coupled with affective charge upon that sensation. His suspicion is that every sensation brings with it such a charge (162). That charge might be a full blown emotion, such as fear, or something more diffuse, whether longer-lived (a mood) or shorter (a passing nameless affect). We can set aside whether the suspicion is right, limiting our discussion to those "mere feelings" that do combine sensation and affect. But we should follow Collingwood's cue in taking our topic to be affect in all its various forms: though for convenience below I will sometimes talk of "emotion," I intend what I say to cover all affective phenomena. The key features of the psychic level are two. First, sensation and affect (where present) are not separated: sensation of the world and affective response to it are inextricably intertwined. How things are and how we feel about them form an undivided whole: nothing in psychic experience marks the distinction between them. Second, the subject's awareness is entirely filled by this affective-sensational complex. Where a

mental state is purely psychic, sensing and affectively reacting exhaust its nature.

The level of consciousness differs from the psychic level in both respects. To take the second first, when a psychic state is brought to consciousness, the “field of view” of our awareness expands, beyond the mere feeling itself, to include our relation to it, as the subject whose feeling it is (222). But, more than this (and despite Collingwood’s somewhat misleading emphasis on it), we also discern sensation from affect. What was an undifferentiated whole is now divided into that through which we cognize the world and our affective response. Thus three terms are now before us: (1) ourselves as subject, both sensing (2) the sensation and feeling (3) whatever affect it provokes.² Yet the awareness we thus have of these terms is not conceptual. Recognizing what we perceive or the feelings it provokes as falling under concepts of those things/feelings occurs only at the third level, intellect: the domain of conceptual thought. Collingwood further claims that the levels are ordered. Nothing can be conceptualized until it has been brought to consciousness, and nothing can figure in consciousness unless it first occurs at the psychic level.

All three levels are properly mental: none, not even the psychic, is supposed to be the subpersonal basis of sentient life. (Collingwood describes the psychic level as one in which “the mind . . . exists only in the shape of sentience” [205], offering a “more elementary kind of experience which [consciousness] presupposes” [206].) Thus it is very natural, in today’s parlance, to describe all three levels as within *consciousness*, broadly conceived. Collingwood’s narrower use of that word and its cognates to describe only the second of his three levels is thus best treated as establishing terms of art. In what follows, I adopt this narrower usage.

Our description of bringing an emotion to consciousness has thus far concentrated only on its ‘theoretical’ aspect, on our changing epistemic relations to the affect in question. But that theoretical shift brings with it a practical one. When not conscious of our feelings, we are what Collingwood calls “dominated” by them. Being unaware of them, we are unable to prevent them from shaping our conduct. The result is that we *betray* our emotions: they alter our actions and comportment in ways we do not control. For instance, my irritation may lead me to snap at you, and I will be

incapable of preventing it doing so as long as I remain unaware of it. With consciousness of feeling comes the possibility of control. Aware both of ourselves as feeling something and of that feeling’s nature, we can decide whether or not to let it determine our behavior. Rather than being dominated by affect, we are now in a position to dominate it. And this amounts to a primitive form of freedom, a form lacked by the person wholly absorbed in the psychic level. (The freedom here is only primitive, since it is not yet the full-blown freedom consisting in choice among alternatives. For that, Collingwood says, we need to conceptualize our possible motivations and the actions they promote. Full freedom thus arises only at the intellectual level.) It is this shift from being dominated to dominating one’s feeling that is itself marked affectively by the easing of oppression. (See the long quotation above.) We cease to feel oppressed by our emotion in bringing it to consciousness because we thereby gain control over its influence on action.

To describe bringing to consciousness in terms of its theoretical and practical upshot is not yet to say anything about how the transition is brought about. Moreover, we as yet lack a positive account of the form of awareness of emotion that consciousness offers us and how it constitutes understanding of a nonconceptual kind. At this point, however, Collingwood’s own account begins to give out.

True, he does offer sketchy answers to these questions. Collingwood says that mere feeling is fleeting: sensation is always being replaced by new sensation (210). Presumably the same is true for affect. To keep it in view, and thus to become aware of it, he says we must deploy attention. There are hints that he thinks that attention holds the key to the features of expression (bringing to consciousness) noted above. Perhaps attending to a psychic-level state is enough to make us aware of it and of ourselves as those whose feeling it is. Perhaps we can direct attention in such a way as to distinguish different aspects of that state and thus separate sensation from affect. And Collingwood sometimes (207) talks as if our power over attention is the source of consciousness’s control over emotion. Once aware of the affective aspect of our state, we can choose whether to attend to that affective character or not, thereby moderating its influence over our behavior.

However, this sketch is hardly satisfactory. First, how can we attend to our sensation or to the affective charge on it unless they are *already* distinguished in experience? Selective attention to one or the other seems to presuppose a purchase on the difference between them and so cannot be the source of that purchase. Second, how is attending to something a way of understanding it? Attention seems to offer access to phenomena, on the basis of which we might by other means develop a grasp of them, rather than itself constituting such a grasp. Finally, until we know what form of understanding consciousness offers, it is hard to see how control over attention can constitute proto-freedom. For without understanding we cannot intelligibly decide whether to attend to a given emotion or not. All we can do is to respond to its basic valence (as, for instance, pleasant or otherwise), and that hardly advances our position from that involved in feeling the emotion at the psychic level alone.

Thus it seems we must supplement Collingwood's account, if we are to integrate his various claims in a coherent and satisfying way. To that task I now turn.

III. SYNTHESIS IN IMAGINATION

The problem facing Collingwood's subject, if she is to become conscious of her emotion, is to factor out, from the undifferentiated morass of sensation and feeling at the psychic level, the three terms identified above: sensation, emotion, and herself as the sensing/feeling subject. While describing a complete solution to this problem lies well beyond the scope of this article, we can at least rough out some of the main elements in a promising approach. In doing so, let us consider sensation first.

Sensation is that part, within the complex phenomenology of her psychic state, that is at least apparently due to the world beyond the subject. Suppose our subject is, in fact, seeing a cube (one too far away to explore through touch). If she sees one of the faces head on, her sensation will be consistent with various ways the world might be. She might indeed be seeing a cube, but she might equally be seeing a flat square object, or a cuboid, or a trapezoidal object so tilted as to match the visible figure of a cube, or one of many other possibilities. More radically, she might not be seeing

anything at all. Perhaps her visual system is being stimulated by electrodes placed in the brain, so as to present her with a square-shaped stimulation of phosphenes, or perhaps her state is just one of raw phenomenology, similar to that of seeing a square, only nothing is seen or even seems to be.³

What distinguishes these various cases? While our subject's current state is consistent with any of the possibilities above, they differ in their implications for other states she might come to be in. If she is seeing a cube, then, were she to move in relation to it, her sensory state would alter in distinct ways. As she viewed the facing surface more obliquely, her sensation would shift, so that what we might (with marked but tolerable crudeness) initially describe as square would become more trapezoidal. Moreover, as other faces reared into view, that deformed square would be supplemented by other shapes. If, in contrast, she is seeing a cuboid or a square facade, a different sequence of stimulations would result. And if she is not seeing anything at all, but merely having a square presented to her in "phosphene vision," her own movement would leave her visual state unchanged. To each of the possible ways things might be, there thus corresponds a *sensory profile*: a distinctive way in which sensation would shift, with alteration in other factors, such as (and most importantly in this case) the subject's location.⁴

The situation is closely analogous with the affective aspect of her state. The pure phenomenology of that state, at any given moment, is hardly sufficient to identify it. The raw feeling may be the same whether she is anxious, irritated, or simply has had too much coffee. To identify which affective state that feeling manifests, she must place it in a larger pattern of such feelings and the factors they depend on. Of course, the affective and sensory cases differ, not only in terms of the element to be fitted into a pattern (visible figure, raw affective feeling) but also in terms of the factors responsible for that element. In the affective case, those factors are not all directly due to her environment. While the nature of her surroundings (or her world more generally) will certainly have a bearing on how she feels, so will other factors of a quite different nature, such as her desires, her personality, and her current susceptibility to emotion. Nonetheless, since particular affects shift in particular ways with changes in these other factors, there are affective profiles broadly analogous to sensory profiles. Fear, for instance, increases as

distance from the threat diminishes and decreases as the subject's confidence in her powers grows. Frustration has a different profile, peaking as the desired object moves just beyond reach, diminishing as it vanishes off the horizon of the subject's current sphere of influence, and waxing and waning with her desire for that which she seeks.

A sensory or affective profile is a pattern within possible psychic states. While the subject's current psychic state may be compatible with the presence of many possible sensed situations or many possible affective responses, if she can associate her current state with the right sensory or affective profile, she can correctly identify the sensory and affective aspects of that state. She would separate her psychic state's sensory and affective aspects by recognizing them as the particular sensations or affects they are. And she would do that by identifying them as manifestations of particular patterns within possible psychic states. Moreover, if she can link her current psychic state to sensory and affective profiles in this way, she can simultaneously factor out her own role as subject. In the sensory case, since the visible figure the cube presents depends both on what shape it is and on the position from which it is viewed, implicit in the cube's sensory profile is the subject's own role, at least qua spatially located perceiver. While matters are more complex in the affective case, something similar is true there. In the affective profile of frustration, for instance, the subject's role is implicit both as the locus of those desires ebb and flow in which determine the emotion's intensity and as the agent whose limitations also contribute. An ability to associate her current state with affective and sensory profiles thus promises our subject the core of a solution to the factoring-out problem, for all three factors. But what might she draw on to do that?

If we seek an answer in Collingwood's terms, we should say that what does the work is the imagination. To detect sensory or affective profiles, our subject needs a sensitivity to other possible states of "mere feeling," and 'imagination' is a traditional name for the faculty that enables us to engage with possible states of sensation and affect. Perhaps this is why in Book II Collingwood himself gives the imagination a central role in expression.⁵ There are questions, of course, about how informative such faculty psychology is. Perhaps 'imagination' names various mental phenomena, and using the term in this context merely

labels whatever does the job described in the preceding paragraph, rather than tells us anything about it. However that may be, there is one feature Collingwood ascribes to imagination that we certainly want here. Whatever the means by which we are sensitive to sensory and affective profiles, the upshot of that sensitivity takes a particular form. When I see what is before me as a cube, I do not have distinct presentations of how it would look from other angles: seeing its square visible figure while simultaneously picturing to myself its appearance from various other locations. Rather, my sense of the alternatives is compressed into a unified experience of the present visible figure. And this is a feature Collingwood finds in imagination. As he puts it, using "idea" for the actual and possible psychic states:

If, while I am thus enjoying one idea, I proceed to summon up another, the new idea is not held alongside the old, as two distinct experiences, between which I can detect relations. The two ideas fuse into one, the new one presenting itself as a peculiar colouring or modification of the old. Thus imagination resembles feeling in this, that its object is never a plurality of terms with relations between them, but a single indivisible unity: a sheer here-and-now. (223; compare 252–253)

If it is indeed imagination that constitutes my sensitivity to other possible states with which this one belongs, then the result of its operation is a synthesis, transforming the current state by relating it to those alternatives. It is the deployment of imagination to enrich my psychic state through such synthesis that, on the Collingwoodian view here proposed, brings its elements (sensation, affect, and oneself as the sensing/feeling subject) to consciousness.⁶

IV. IMAGINATIVE UNDERSTANDING

This account of what it is to bring something to consciousness enables us to make sense of the idea that the result is a distinctive understanding of what is brought there. Bringing sensation or affect to consciousness is placing aspects of one's current psychic state in a sensory or affective profile, a pattern of possible such states. We grasp what is before us as something that would undergo certain changes were other factors different in certain ways. Grasping how these aspects of our condition would vary with context is precisely to

have an understanding of their nature. We understand, in taking the 'square' visible figure before us to be (sensation of) a cube seen head on, that it would alter in various ways were we to shift our position in relation to the seen object. That is to understand something about cubes and the ways they are presented in visual experience. Similarly, in identifying the affective charge on our psychic state as that aspect of it which would increase with certain changes in our relation to sensed objects or would decrease with certain shifts in our desires, we understand key features of our feeling—frustration, fear, or whatever it might be.

This understanding is manifested in the state of consciousness (in Collingwood's terms) that synthesis in imagination produces. To experience my current condition as a sensation of a cube or a feeling of frustration is already to experience aspects of my condition as having the capacity to alter in certain ways, given certain changes in other aspects of my condition. But this understanding has other manifestations too. In particular, while, as noted, becoming conscious of my sensation or emotion need not involve forming a mental image of other ways it might be, it can be the basis for such explicit imaginings. Seeing the object as a cube, I am able to picture how it would look from over there. Taking the feeling for frustration, I am able to conjure imaginatively how it would alter, were its object to retreat hopelessly beyond reach, or the desires that drive it to weaken or mutate.

This is a good point to offer two clarifications. First, we do not, of course, in general think of such relatively basic achievements as seeing something as a cube as exercises of "understanding." Such accomplishments are available to a wide range of creatures, many of whom lack capacities to operate on information that even approximate to the most sophisticated abilities we enjoy. Nonetheless, such perceptual achievements, at least if grounded in the capacities described above, should be considered forms of understanding.⁷ Any reluctance to accept as much may depend on the fact that what looks like understanding in the context of a larger set of mental abilities looks rather less worthy of the name when it forms the limit of the creature's cognitive capacities.⁸ And in the affective case the claims of synthesis to yield understanding are rather stronger. Grasping how my feeling will alter given possible changes in my circumstance or inner condition gives me the sort of purchase on it that can help me decide whether to allow

it to influence my conduct. This purchase, which is just what is required to make sense of Collingwood's idea that bringing to consciousness yields proto-freedom, surely counts as understanding.

Second, 'understanding' is a success term. We understand how the cube's appearance will shift with our movement only if we have not only associated current sensation with a sensory profile, but if the profile in question is the right one. (Perhaps we are in fact before a square facade that we have misidentified as a cube seen head on.) Nothing said above explains how we get things right, when we do. To that extent what is offered here is an account not of a kind of understanding but of a candidate for that status, the vindication of which as the real thing turns on further factors. Nonetheless, the core work has been done. The account explains how bringing to consciousness involves what we might think of as hypotheses about aspects of our psychic state. Those hypotheses offer putative understanding, and real understanding if they turn out to be right. I have not explained how we get things right, when we do. But that at most shows that the task here divides: explaining how bringing to consciousness offers putative insights into the nature of what is brought and explaining how those insights are sometimes genuine. It is the first part we have tackled here. If we have made progress with that, we have done a good deal.

Let us call the understanding furnished by synthesis *imaginative understanding*. Crucially, it is distinct from any understanding in intellectual terms. Whether or not it is usefully described as the work of 'imagination,' associating current psychic phenomena with sensory or affective profiles is not plausibly done by the intellect or the concepts with which it operates. And since the understanding in which it eventuates lies in the associations thus made, it depends on categorizations quite different from those that concepts impose. (Thus the "hypotheses" of the preceding paragraph are non-intellectual in form.) It is true that Collingwood, with his talk of individualizing, overstates the differences here. Placing an aspect of one's current psychic state in a pattern of wider possible states does in one way involve understanding it in more general terms. We grasp the sensation of a cube by seeing it as of a piece with the other sensations in the cube's sensory profile and as apart from all the other psychic aspects (both other sensations and affects). A parallel point holds of identifying the affective aspect of our current state, when we

place it in the profile that characterizes (some particular kind of) frustration.⁹ To that extent, imaginative understanding, like conceptual, proceeds by generalizing—and Collingwood’s promise that consciousness offers an understanding that proceeds in wholly individualizing terms is not one we can redeem. But to place a psychic aspect in *some* wider grouping is not yet to place it in a grouping defined by a concept. Moreover, the groupings under which imaginative understanding brings its objects will in general be much finer-grained than those offered by conceptualizing. There are as many sensory and affective profiles as the range of possible differences in sensation and affect allow. (It is enough for two sensory profiles to differ that there be some point in the series of possible sensations composing the two where they diverge.) And, while it is a further question whether we are sensitive to every possible difference in profiles, it seems at least plausible that imagination (or whatever does the work of association) can tap many differences that concepts do not. (Think of the many more shapes we can see before us than we have the concepts to capture.) Thus imaginative understanding is both distinct from and in general more discriminating than its conceptual cousin. If the former does not capture things in all their individuality, it at least understands them in terms more finely tuned to the details of their nature.

Now, there is controversy over where the boundary of the conceptual lies. Some consider the categorizations effected by deploying sensory profiles to be themselves conceptual.¹⁰ They would presumably take a similar line on the affective case. Thus the preceding paragraph perhaps moves too fast in assuming that three distinctions align: that between coarser and finer-grained categorization, that between categorization effected by the intellect and by something more primitive (Collingwood’s ‘consciousness’), and that between the conceptual and the non-conceptual. However, for our purposes, the assumption is harmless, and the controversy can be ignored. Even if placing in affective profiles yields categorizations that are conceptual, those categorizations remain distinct from any effected by the intellect (that is, sorting under emotion terms). The former are both finer-grained and draw on very different mental resources. There is no reason to assume that these finer-grained categorizations even align with the coarser ones of the intellect: perhaps some of the former

cross boundaries marked by the latter. And the finer-grained categorizations bring with them, as the coarser need not, an understanding of the emotion as the result of various factors in systematic interplay. What is on offer here is thus a form of understanding of feeling that is distinctive, regardless of whether it is nonconceptual.

As a final observation on imaginative understanding, note that in principle it offers to capture many aspects of our affective states. Collingwood’s emphasis on bringing things to consciousness through attention alone can appear to leave him hamstrung in this respect. We can attend to the occurrent aspects of our feeling, but are they more than a matter of its phenomenal feel (what we metaphorically describe as the bitter taste of disappointment or the heat of anger and so on)? Appeal to synthesis in imagination allows us to do better. Many aspects of an affective state might be captured in its profile. Examples above already illustrate this: think of the way fear might decrease as its object retreats or frustration might be undercut by loss of desire. Thus both the objects of our emotions (where they have them) and their roots in the wider psychological economy might be aspects of their nature that consciousness, on this account, allows us to grasp. Again, what the space of possible profiles provides our capacities may not be able to exploit. However, at least the resources are there, and we can treat it as a broadly empirical question how far the operation in us of imaginative synthesis allows us to tap them.¹¹

V. APPLICATION TO ART

We now know what it is to bring a feeling to consciousness, how doing so involves understanding that feeling, and how that understanding takes a distinctive form. To bring something to consciousness is to express it. According to Collingwood, expression is advanced by art. But how exactly does art do this? Here Collingwood faces two challenges. First, since he defines expression in mental terms, he needs to explain what role is played by the nonpsychological objects that art involves. Collingwood himself famously redefines the “work of art” as the mental activity of bringing emotion to consciousness. But even granting him that usage, something must be said about the worldly (if sometimes abstract) entities central to our artistic practices—the painted

canvases, collections of words or musical notes, and so on that vulgar speech identifies with paintings, novels, and musical works. (I will use ‘work of art’ in this vulgar sense.) Second, since the most obvious process of expression is within the artist, from whose struggle to bring feelings to consciousness these nonpsychological objects presumably emerge, Collingwood also needs to say how others fit in. How does the work further expression in the audience, given that it was made to enable it in the artist?

A familiar response to these challenges is to take them to show that Collingwood simply begins in the wrong place. The proper starting point for an account of art’s relation to emotion is not expression, the psychological process in artist and audience, but expressiveness, the emotion-directed character of the work itself.¹² To handle the challenges, we need to concede something to this criticism. It will indeed prove hard to accommodate the role of either work or audience without saying something about the expressive character of the former. However, rather than change the topic, we should simply add one. We should use our Collingwoodian theory of expression to develop an account of expressiveness and thereby make sense of how work and audience fit in.

Let us begin by making an assumption: that what it is for a work to be expressive is (in key part) for it to be found to be so.¹³ We can then in turn analyze what it is to find a work expressive using the ideas developed above: appreciating the expressive character of the work involves the same resources we deploy in expressing our own emotions. If a work *W* is expressive of an emotion *E*, then recognizing that character requires us to undertake a synthesis in imagination very like that which would be involved in recognizing *E* as the emotion we feel. Of course, the two acts of synthesis cannot be exactly alike. When I identify my own emotion, synthesis operates on aspects of my psychic level mental state. When I engage with *W*’s being expressive of *E*, synthesis must instead operate on features of something outside my own mind, the work *W*. Moreover, whereas inner synthesis of one’s own emotion can be primary, in the sense that it need not be preceded by synthesis of anything else,¹⁴ any synthesis directed at *W*’s expressive character must presumably depend on a prior recognition of *W*’s nature (for instance, that it is a painted surface marked with such and such colors or a collection of sounds

ordered in such and such ways). If that prior recognition involves synthesizing *W*’s nature out of the sensations it induces, and thus involves identifying those sensory aspects of my psychic state, any synthesis constituting recognition of *W*’s expressive character can only be secondary. Nonetheless, the thought is that, these important differences aside, synthesis of one’s own emotion and synthesis of *W*’s expressive character match. In each, we make the identification (of my feeling *E*, or of *W*’s being expressive of *E*) by placing what is before us in a wider pattern, the affective profile of the emotion *E*.

We have good reason to think secondary synthesis possible. Consider what it is to grasp that what we see is not a cube but a picture of one. To do so is, very plausibly, to place the *marks* currently before one in a pattern of possible such marks, corresponding to projections onto the picture plane of a cube presented from different angles. Finding the cube pattern in the marks is a task analogous to finding the cube pattern in the visible figures in the possible sensory states that a cube, seen face to face, would induce. Yet in the case of the picture, we can recognize the cube in it only once we have recognized the marks before us. The case thus involves secondary synthesis, albeit of a purely sensory kind.

Still, it is perhaps rather less clear how an *affective* form of secondary synthesis can be engaged by something external and, in particular, by a work expressive of the affect in question.

The cube-picture engages our sensitivity to a cube’s sensory profile by itself being, in ways that repay investigation but are at least intuitively appealing, somehow cubelike. What about the expressive work enables it to engage our sensitivity to affective profiles and, in particular, that profile characteristic of *E*? Is the work somehow similar to *E*? If so, how? In answering, we need do no more, I think, than to give some plausibility to the idea that the work triggers secondary affective synthesis. A comprehensive theory of how it is able to do that is not needed for current purposes, any more than is a similar theory in the case of the secondary sensory synthesis triggered by the picture of the cube. So here is a little, of a somewhat provisional nature, to try to meet that modest goal.

Consider first something that forms just one aspect of many affective states, their occurrent phenomenology or “raw feel.” There is a long

tradition in philosophy of art of placing great weight on the possibility of shared structure between these aspects of emotion and features of works.¹⁵ The possible forms through which the occurrent feel of an affect can modulate form an ordered space, with dimensions, structure, and routes within it. For instance, the pangs of jealousy might grow or diminish; they can perhaps be transformed into the calmness of resignation; but it is hard to see how they could transition to, as opposed to merely be superseded by, euphoria. Features of art works might also admit of variation and abrupt or smooth transition, so as to form a space isomorphic with the quality space of some range of affects. In abstract painting, for instance, that role might be played by the colors on the canvas or perhaps by some higher-level organizational properties emergent from the colors and the shapes they trace. (To illustrate very crudely: red is continuous with orange, but not with green.) Where there is such isomorphism between possible features of the work and the quality space of phenomenal feels accompanying some affect, it becomes comprehensible how secondary synthesis might occur in affective form. After all, one of the terms here, the quality space of the affect's phenomenal feel, is just part of the affective profile of that emotion. If the work draws on features that form a space isomorphic to that quality space, it might well engage the very processes by which the emotion is identified. The features that the work actually exhibits are experienced as fitting a pattern, within the range of features possible for such works, that matches the pattern imposed on the feel of some affect, when it is identified in synthesis as E.

The point thus far is explicitly restricted to one feature of affect, its phenomenal feel, and implicitly limited to one kind of feature of art works, their 'configurational' or medium properties. (As I use these terms, works of all kinds have such properties, and not just those in the visual arts.) However, the idea admits of ready expansion. There is more to most affects than mere feel: if nothing else, they are often responses to the world, embodying representations of features of the situation that make the feeling appropriate. And there is more to many works than medium properties: if nothing else, they often have content, describing, depicting, or otherwise representing things. That content is often crucial to a work's expressive character. Both sides of the isomorphism

thus admit of elaboration, by adding content to the noncontent features appealed to above. And since what is added is in each case the same, that is, content, we might hope that the addition of these features, and their interaction with the noncontent features already present, might be sufficiently parallel across the two cases to result in an expanded and amplified set of isomorphic relations. At least, the hope that this is so is not obviously misplaced. It fuels optimism that the thought that W can be synthesized as exhibiting the affective profile of E will be coherent for a wide range of works and a wide range of affects of which they are expressive.

So for W to be expressive of E is (in key part) for it to be found expressive of E. And for it to be found expressive of E is for W to trigger synthesis, albeit secondary, that results in W's features being subsumed under the very pattern that, in inner synthesis, characterizes E. What is the relation between all this and expression—that is, anyone's becoming conscious of their own feeling E?

In making W, the artist devises something that exhibits the same pattern as characterizes the emotion that she feels. To identify the emotion, she must subsume aspects of her psychic state under that pattern. In making W she makes something that must also be subsumed under that pattern. Thus in making W she articulates for herself the very pattern she must find in her feelings in order to recognize them for what they are. It is thus perfectly comprehensible how making W might be central to her bringing her own feeling to consciousness. And things are much the same for the audience, V. They do not make W, but they must understand it. To understand its expressive aspect, they too must subsume its features under the pattern characteristic of E. Thus engaging with W is as naturally suited to bringing their emotion E to consciousness as it is in the case of the artist.

Of course, the audience might not themselves feel E. Certainly, Collingwood's insistence that works express highly particular emotions seems to make it less likely that what W is expressive of (and the artist felt) the audience will also feel. This worry is not a product of the account here offered but besets any version of Collingwood's view. Moreover, the current proposal allows us to sidestep it. If the audience members do not feel E, they cannot become conscious of themselves as feeling it, whether through interacting with the work W or otherwise. But W can still offer them something of real value: a purchase on the nature

of E in the form of familiarity with the pattern that characterizes it. That counts as understanding the emotion, whether or not they currently feel it, or ever come to do so.¹⁶

Thus the account offers to spell out how the work of art can advance expression and in such a way as to offer understanding to artist and audience alike, thereby meeting both challenges to Collingwood's view. However, at this point, we encounter a potentially fatal difficulty. Imaginative understanding is supposed to be (1) a genuine form of understanding that is (2) distinct from the understanding offered by (intellectual) concepts. This suggests a simple test for when it is present: the subject should have an understanding of the phenomenon that she cannot adequately put into words. But if, as suggested, a work expressive of an emotion offers its audience an understanding of the emotion itself, it might seem there should be *two* phenomena to which we can apply the test: W's expressive character and the emotion E itself. The problem is that applying the test yields only one positive result. Expressive character passes. We often feel acutely aware of some expressive aspect of a work while finding quite inadequate any description of it we are able to offer. But what passes is expressive character alone. What else do we thereby grasp that we cannot adequately describe? If nothing, how can engaging with W's expressive aspect *also* yield imaginative understanding of E?

The solution to this problem lies in one final strand in Collingwood's thinking: the thought that expression is intimately bound up with language. Much of what Collingwood says about language (see in particular chap. XI) is highly eccentric, comprising the hardest of his claims to swallow. The overall shape of his thinking on the matter is, however, both much more plausible and all that is needed here. The key idea is that bringing things to consciousness and articulating the result in some form of language go hand in hand. Consider language in the narrow sense, the literal use of words to express one's conceptually structured thought. If a speaker successfully puts his thoughts into words, there are not two things for him and his audience to grasp: what his words mean and the thoughts they express. Rather, to grasp the one just is to grasp the other. Similarly, then, in the case of expression in the stricter sense, in which what is articulated lies at the level of consciousness, rather than intellect, and the articulation is a

matter of producing something expressive, rather than a literal description. Here also there are not two things for the audience (or artist) to grasp—the import of the expressive item and the emotion it expresses—but one. The work expressive of a given emotion is thus not a mere aid to imaginative understanding of that emotion but its vehicle. Grasping it as expressive of E by finding its features to exhibit the pattern characteristic of E just is to grasp that pattern, and so to gain imaginative understanding of E. The simple test for the presence of imaginative understanding is indeed only passed once, but that is precisely what the Collingwoodian view, properly developed, predicts.

Perhaps it will help to end with an example. Consider a painting, de Chirico's *Mystery and Melancholy of a Street* (1914). If we were to try to capture its expressive character in words, we might speak, as the title more or less does, of an unsettling melancholy. That character is determined by various features of the work, features both of content and configuration. These include the subject matter (the girl playing with a hoop, the deserted street, the open wagon), the details of how that is represented (the blankness of the depicted surfaces, the way the edges of the boards on the wagon have been picked out so as to make it resemble an open cage), and the jaundiced palette and inconsistent perspective through which the scene is rendered. Appreciating the expressive character of the work requires us to be sensitive to these features. It also requires us to be sensitive to the interactions between them. And we need to appreciate their bearing on the expressive character, that is, to be sensitive to the fact that had they been different, so would the character have been—unless suitable adjustments were made to the others. (To give a toy example: had the palette been sweeter, preserving the character would require the threat implicit in the depicted scene to be marked more strongly.) Thus expressive character emerges as a constant preserved through various possible variations in the work's features: a pattern in the features the painting does have and might have had. But, the proposal goes, that pattern matches another: the pattern in the various psychic elements (raw feeling, the way the world is presented, the objects and causes of one's affective state) that characterizes the emotion, mood, or atmosphere expressed. The unsettling melancholy (as we inadequately termed it) that subjects might really feel is a constant preserved across

certain constellations of those shifting psychological factors. The expressive character of the work is a constant preserved across certain constellations of the factors that determine that character. And the pattern the constant in question forms in those two sets of factors is one and the same.

VI. CONCLUSION

This discussion has covered a good deal of ground at a fairly brisk pace. Important details of the approach here sketched remain to be filled in. No doubt serious challenges to it will emerge.¹⁷ I hope that the above nonetheless suggests that there is far more mileage in a Collingwoodian approach to the problem of expression than is generally acknowledged and to show that, if that approach is to be vindicated, it can only be so by following Collingwood's lead, paying careful attention to fundamental issues in the philosophy of mind.¹⁸

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1. See, for example, in criticism, John Hospers (1954–1955) and Alan Tormey (1971) and, in defense, Aaron Ridley (1998) and Jenefer Robinson (2005, especially 244–250).
 2. “A man *consciuis sibi irae* is not one who simply feels anger; he is one who is aware of the anger as his own, and is aware of himself as feeling it” (Collingwood 1958, 206).
 3. For simplicity's sake, let us suppose that, at least at the psychic level, the phenomenology is the same whichever of these situations our subject is in. After all, if it is a level at which sensation is not distinguished from affect, even the distinction between apparent presentations of the environment and mere stimulation—let alone that between apparent and real presentations—should be absent.
 4. I borrow the term ‘profile’ (though he prefers the qualifier ‘sensorimotor’) from Alva Noë's (2004) influential work developing these ideas. However, Noë's work is just part of a long tradition exploring them. (For a recent example, see Hopp 2011.) And while what follows makes use of the notion of a profile, it makes no appeal to some of the most controversial aspects of Noë's position, for instance, his claim that action is essential to perception.
 5. Though it should be noted that he uses this term (in one of the two senses he recognizes) to refer to the state resulting from bringing things to consciousness, not the process by which that outcome is brought about (Collingwood 1958, 235).
 6. I have spoken as if (a) the sensory and affective must be identified simultaneously, and (b) for each we identify those aspects as such only by further identifying what they are sensations of or which affects are involved. It is, however, possible to have a good awareness of the world around one without being aware to anything like the same degree of one's feelings about it. Indeed, Collingwood thinks this is our condition much of the time—expression matters so much because it promises to liberate us from this state. Thus perhaps (a) is true, but (b) is not. We can distinguish sensation from affect only by finding the border between them, but it is not necessary to pin down the nature of both: doing that for either will suffice. (And often we do it only for sensation, remaining unaware of our affective state.)
 7. Compare Noë: “To experience the figure as a cube, on the basis of how it looks, is to understand *how* its look changes as you move” (2004, 77).
 8. For an analogous thought, see Evans (1982, 158–159).
 9. We do not, of course, identify it as *frustration* any more than we identify the sensation as *of a cube*—these conceptual terms come naturally to anyone trying to describe (at the level of theory) what is going on, but to take them seriously would be to efface the difference between forms of understanding I am trying to articulate.
 10. Indeed, this is Noë's view (2004, chap. 6). For dissent, see Hopp (2011, chap. 5 § 3).
 11. While the above uses many of Collingwood's ideas toward ends he shares, there is one important element he apparently would not accept. For him it is intellect, rather than consciousness, that sifts the materials furnished by consciousness into those reflecting the world and those reflecting only the inner machinations of the mind. At least, this is the obvious reading of certain passages (for example, 1958, 288 and 290). There may be ways to reconcile that position

with the account here. We could, for instance, appeal to the distinction above between hypothesizing (in nonintellectual form) that one's current psychic state manifests a particular sensory or affective profile and vindicating that hypothesis. Perhaps synthesis in imagination does the one, intellect the other. Still, until such moves are properly developed, it is safest to treat the account here as not merely expanding Collingwood's position but significantly revising it.

12. See Tormey (1971).

13. There is no space here to defend this assumption, but it is incorporated into several prominent accounts of expressiveness: for example, Susanne Langer (1953), Stephen Davies (1994), Richard Wollheim (1987, chap. 2), and (much less explicitly) Nelson Goodman (1968, chap. 2).

14. Perhaps it needs to be *accompanied* by synthesis of any sensation on which it forms the affective charge, but that is another matter.

15. See, for instance, Schopenhauer (1969) or Langer (1953).

16. I have developed the view for art's relation to emotion, but the proposal promises to extend to sensation. Art should equally be able to capture the nature of a given sensation by engaging secondary synthesis of the kind that brings that sensation to consciousness. We have already

seen a pedestrian example in the picture of a cube. Other examples, where the sensory profile in question is less familiar and the sensation itself more elusive, will be more subtle and interesting. Extending to sensation in this way is an attractive feature of the view, since the interest of a good deal of art lies precisely in its capturing not affect but the quality of sensation. (And this extension is wholly in sympathy with Collingwood's position, which also aspires to this reach: see, for example, 1958, 307.)

17. While I am hopeful that the view can meet such challenges, even if it cannot, the game is worth the candle. As Collingwood says: "It is part of a philosopher's business to take up and think out hypothetically, . . . that is, in order to find out what they involve, views which he need not either accept or reject" (1958, 296–297).

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