Expressiveness without Expression?
Lopes and Robinson on Pictorial Expression*

Francisca Pérez Carreño†

University of Murcia

Abstract. The paper claims in favour of a theory of artistic expression as expression, contesting other approaches to artistic expression as expressiveness. In particular it analyses Lopes “impersonal theory” of pictorial expression, trying to show the insufficiency of an approach that avoid the connection between expression and the self. First it argues for the necessity that a concept of the expressed emotion is involved, and not merely indicated, in the perception of the expressive content of a picture. It also criticizes Lopes’ notion of expression-look as independent of an expressive perception. In the same way it maintains the necessity to distinguish between the depicted expression of a figure or scene and the picture expressiveness, to which the figure may contribute. It suggests that expressiveness of the picture is attributable to the artist’s activity. Finally it challenges Robinson’s attempt to maintain expression and expressiveness separated, and holds that expressiveness is to be perceived as the outcome of an expressive activity, and therefore artistic expressiveness as the result of the artist’s expression.

1.

A theory of artistic expression aims mainly to explain expression in art as the expressive content of works of art. What was once the chief theme of expression, namely, the artwork as an expression of the artist, or the expressive content of the work as a manifestation of the author’s mental conditions, occupies now a much less relevant place in the philosophy of

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† Email: fpc@um.es

art, if it holds any position at all. Criticism of the Romantic theory of art is responsible for the situation. On the one hand, it is obvious that artists do not need to be in the mental state that their work expresses, that they may work under contract, that it is unlikely that their state of mind is the same throughout the whole writing of a novel, a symphony, or the termination of a painting, and it is unlikely that their work is dominated by strong emotions of the soul. On the other hand, understanding artistic expression is not supposed to involve the spectator being moved by an actual feeling. At least that was the predominant view in the formalist context of the philosophy of art in the fifties and sixties, when maintaining a contrary position was blamed for committing the intentional and pathetic fallacies of artistic meaning.

Arguments about the priority of the artwork –its meaning and intrinsic value over the intentions of its creator, and its effects on the viewer– led to the idea of works of art as being expressive of an emotion instead of actually expressing an emotion. So the work is meant to show a form somehow linked to expression, rather than giving form to some artist’s mental states. Consequently, to the extent that their authors need not make manifest their own mental conditions, and viewers need not react emotionally to the actual expression of a genuine emotion, works of art are not expected to properly express, but rather to be expressive of an emotion. More to the point of the primacy of expressiveness, only if the artist succeeds in endowing her work with expressiveness, can the interpreter understand the work as an expression of her emotions. Indeed, sometimes the emotion may be the artist’s own, even though that will make no contribution to the work’s meaning and value.

To consider that expression, and expressive content in art, consists of the expressiveness of the work instead of the expression of someone’s mental condition allows us to speak of expression as a property of the work, and stands for the public and normative character of artistic meaning, subject to different traditions, genres, and styles. According to this account, expressive works of art may possess the appearance of genuine expression without properly manifesting or conveying any emotion, even if finding something expressive of an emotion seems to be dependent on being able

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to identify genuine expression. Perceiving expressiveness for the sake of itself permits so to say to disconnect the last step of human emotion, or the showing through body movement and behaviour of inner changes, from its causes.

By highlighting a common ground of the perception of expression and expressiveness, Peter Kivy held that the ability to perceive expressiveness implies a previous capacity to perceive a visual or aural “pattern as a vehicle of expression” (Kivy 1989, 59). In fact, it is the same psychological capacity that enables us to see emotions in human bodies and faces of dogs, or to hear emotions in human speech and in music. There is more than merely to distinguish a form disconnected from its usual link to emotions. When we perceive expression in non-sentient beings, like clouds, drawings, or music, we find expressiveness in them because we tend to “animate our perceptions” (Kivy 1989, 59). So the link between pattern and meaning conserves the memory of a movement from inner to outer. In spite of this, when we perceive expressiveness in unanimated objects, instead of being emotionally affected, as we probably are in front of someone who actually expresses an emotion, the character of our experience is merely perceptive or cognitive: “...there is no reason in the world, however, to think that because something is phenomenologically sad it must infect me with the emotion” (Kivy 1989, 255).

Even if the way in which the interpreter responds emotionally to works of art has today become an important issue in the philosophy of art tout court, and even if this response is often taken as necessary to grasp the meaning of the works -especially narrative works-, expressiveness instead of genuine expression is mainly considered the appropriate way for pictorial works of art to sustain expressive content. Contrary to defenders of expression as expression (Vermazen, Levinson), who find that, for a work of art to express, an expresser (real or imagined) is required, Dominic Lopes and Jenefer among many maintain that expressiveness without expression is the proper way of artistic expression. Expressiveness is not only held to be a necessary condition, but also a sufficient condition of artistic expression.
2. 

In this vein, Lopes endorses “an impersonal theory of pictorial expression” (Lopes 2005, 70 [my italics]). Following contour theories of expression in music, he tries to avoid what he calls the “missing person problem”, or the question about the agent of expression in works of art. His minimal contour theory states that:

“the physical configuration of a picture’s design or the figure or scene a picture depicts expresses E if and only if

(1) it is an expression-look that
(2) has the function, in the circumstances, of indicating E.” (Lopes 2005, 78).

A picture may indicate emotions through different mechanisms, such as a resemblance to natural expression, convention, psychological correspondences, and so on, as contemplated by other contour theories. Same as Kivy spoke about animating perception, Lopes acknowledges that to recognize some configuration as expression – that is, to recognize an expression-look – implies perceiving it as being connected to a mental condition, and not merely as a physical configuration. So in order to defend an impersonal theory that still solves the “connection problem”, Lopes moves on to consider that a connection between expression and emotion need not imply the emotion having a self. Thus after disconnecting the expression to agent link, it is postulated a connection between expression-look and emotion. He thinks equally that since the emotion is just ‘indicated’, it depends on the viewer and his or her relationship to the picture whether the response is more or less “dry-eyed” or “wet-eyed” (Lopes 2005, 88).

To indicate an emotion seems to be a very broad notion, which may include all kinds of situations in which the interpretation of a picture requires the concept of an emotion. We may think on the depiction of central cases of expression, such as facial gestures or body movements in humans, in which angst, surprise or whatever mental state can be seen in a depicted figure. We may also think on emotions conventionally associated to objects, scenes or formal elements –for instance, red to passion-, or intimated by them –for instance, innocence by children, or drama by
Or we may think on pictures with an emotional atmosphere or mood, like landscapes.

Since indicating an emotion is such a broad condition, Lopes contour theory seems to want more precise a concept of expression. In fact, he differentiates between “richer”, and “more impoverished” cases of pictorial expression. Only in “richer” cases do we come to see “expression as an expression” (Lopes 2005, 87), while in poorer cases “you see a physical configuration that has the function of indicating an emotion, but you don’t see it as an expression” (idem). When we look at the ground for the distinction, Lopes adds that in physical configurations that merely indicate an emotion “... no emotion concept is part of the content of expressive seeing” (idem).

My first contention here is that a theory of pictorial expression needs to account precisely for those cases in which an emotion enters the perceptual content of the picture, allowing an expressive seeing of it. They are the most interesting cases according to Lopes himself. But they are also those cases in which we can properly speak about pictorial expression as a kind of pictorial meaning. Same as the representational seeing of a picture involves entertaining the concept of the objects seen in the picture, the expressive seeing of a picture should consist in a seeing that involves the concept of an emotion. Merely indicating the emotion does not suffice for the picture to have an expressive pictorial meaning. A Vanitas, for instance, may represent a bouquet of flowers, and symbolize the fugacity of life (See, for example, Rachel Ruysch’s Still-Life with Bouquet of Flowers and Plums, 1704). The former representational meaning is pictorial to the extent that a bunch of flowers, some of them withering, are to be seen in the picture. But the latter symbolic component is not a pictorial meaning even if it is part of the content of the picture, basically because life’s fugacity is conventionally associated with flowers, and is a conventional meaning of still-life, but even though life’s fugacity is not a perceptual content of the painting.

Now, the Vanitas will express a sombre feeling of transience and insignificance of life just in case it prompts an experience involving such a concept. It is a recurrent issue in art history whether one still-life must be considered a vanitas or not. And not only still-life: is the bouquet of flowers that Olympia’s servant offers to her mistress expressive of transience? Does the
painting express a sense of transience? Or on the contrary do the flowers contribute to the celebration of sexuality that seems to be content of the painting? It is a difficult question to answer since a bouquet could always indicate the passage of time and only inferential criticism may point to the correct seeing of the painting. But one way or another the expressive look of the bouquet depends on seeing it as a melancholy or a splendorous bunch of flowers.

The importance of a concept of the emotion belonging or not to the perception of the expressive motive leads us to a second question for the contour theory. As stated in the definition, (i) having an expression-look; and (2) indicating an emotion; are two different conditions for a picture to express an emotion. Only eventually, there is a narrower class of pictorial expression that includes those pictures in which expression is seen as expression, that is, whose perception involves a concept of the emotion. However, a concept of the emotion seems to be already required in order to perceive something as (i) having an expression-look. Seeing the expression-look of something seems to entail at least the thought of an emotion, and rather that the thought of an emotion belongs to the seeing. It seems necessary to have the concept of an emotion in order to identify the look as expressive. As we saw earlier, Lopes assumes that the connection expression – emotion is required to see a configuration as something different from a ‘mere physical’ configuration. The connection may be thought not to be perceptual, but it is unclear what does it mean referring to expression-look.

Lopes may have in mind the fact that sometimes expression-looks may be faked or ambiguous expressions. In life, one may look sad without being sad, just pretending, or maybe due to a headache. In such cases, the look does not come out of genuine expression, but the look is one of sadness. When someone looks sad, and she is not, but has a headache, she may be taken the wrong way. Now, relating to a picture the difference seems not to make sense: the figure may express either sadness, or pain, or is an ambiguous figure\(^2\). Contrary to the interpretation of expression in human intercourse, in art figures express that what they seem to express. There is

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\(^2\) In relation to ambiguity the difference between expression in life and pictures, see Gombrich, Ernst H. (1966).
Francisca Pérez Carreño

Expressiveness without Expression?

no inner hidden state they possess that may render interpretation incorrect. In this context Gombrich (1966) stressed the importance of ritualization and context for the representation and interpretation of gesture in art; but also in the happy occasions in which ritualization does not prevent the representation of spontaneity or ambiguity, adequacy of expression is for art adequacy of expressiveness. Shortly, ambiguity cannot be resolved in art; when it is rightly perceived it is represented, not the outcome of an impossibility to choose among different options.

The issue, however, is not so much ambiguity of expression as the connection between the concept of an emotion and the expression-look. One may be wrong about the emotion connected with an expression-look, but the way to be wronged is to have the wrong seeing, that is, the wrong concept involved in the perception. In art and in life, if someone looks sad, the concept of sadness is not merely indicated, but belong to the perception of hers. And similarly if she looks in pain, or if she shows an unclear, complex, or even inexpressive attitude, the perception of hers will be of a complex, unclear or inexpressive attitude. The difference does not arise from the form in which the concept of the emotion connects with the look, but from the fact that expression-looks sometimes are ambiguous, sometimes are not expressions at all.

Maybe Lopes understands expression-look in a wider sense, including body movements or postures that are taken to be expressive by convention. May be when a gesture means conventionally, the body points to the emotion without making it visible. Let us consider the very ritualized gesture of hands folded for prayer, for instance (Gombrich 1966, 397ff). The gesture may be expressive of devotion and may be used for begging, requesting, imploring; and of course may be performed without expressing anything. In many religious painting the Holy Virgin adopts the posture. The gesture serves initially as a “sign of surrender, delivering oneself more or less ‘bound hand and foot’, or at least ready to be bound without offering resistance” (Gombrich 1966, 397). It is in this sense that the Virgin is sometimes represented, answering with the gesture to St. Gabriel’s words in the Annunciation: “Behold the handmaid of the Lord. Be it done unto me according to thy word”. So the gesture conventionally indicated submission or humility. And sometimes it also serves to make manifest an attitude of submission. In the former case the thought of submission does
not enter the perception, but comes to mind, let’s say, externally, while in the latter, we see humility in the gesture submission—expression as expression.

Now, where humility is not the content of an expressive seeing, should we say that the Virgin expresses it? Gestures are not necessarily or mainly expressive; they may be representative (folded hands for praying) or imperative (folded hands for begging). In the quoted article Gombrich commented about an unsuccessful Zurbarán: *The Virgin child* (Metropolitan Museum of Art). We may say that the painting represents the virgin as a child praying, just as it represents her purity by picturing a vase with madonna lilies. The flowers are indicative of purity, and humility may be also by indicated by gesture of folded hands. But the painting failure consists in being expressively incorrect, being impossible for the spectator to perceive the child as emotionally occupied as she is expected to be. Gombrich compares the painting with the Rembrandt’s etching, *David in prayer*, in which the ritual gesture is accompanied by the perception of what he calls expressive spontaneity.

The emotion may not enter the perceptual content for two reasons: (i) the painter does not intend the figure to express humility, or (ii) she failed in providing the picture with an expression—look. Neither (i) nor (ii) are cases of genuine expression. In relation to (i) it may be that Zurbarán was concerned with depicting ecstasy rather than humility. In relation to (ii) he could have failed in providing the figure with the aspect of entertaining a feeling of submission. What Lopes calls impoverished cases do not seem to be cases of expression, either because they are not meant to be, or because they fail to integrate an emotion as the perceptual content of the picture. The distinction drawn between richer and impoverished cases may be reworded, I think not perversely, as pictures ‘indicating an emotion expressively’ or pictures ‘indicating an emotion non expressively’.

As it stands, contour theory seems to me too weak a theory of expression, which should account for the differentiation between faked expressions (and faked meant expressions), ambiguous expression, and failed expression; for these distinctions are key for the interpretation and appreciation of pictures. For a represented person to express an emotion, and not merely to allude to the emotion, a concept of emotion must enter the perception of the person. That is to say, the emotion must be hers, and
must be visible in her. It may be unfair to blame Lopes for not doing the
distinction between genuine and faked expression, when he draws ‘an im-
personal theory’ precisely to avoid the difference. After all, according to
him, also Zombies “can smile” (Lopes, 74). My idea is that even though
there is not proper expression in these cases, we cannot avoid seeing zom-
bies (and dogs) happy when we see a smile in their face; uncanny smile,
uncanny happiness, however.

3.
So far, following Lopes, I have focussed on expression as depicted in pic-
tures, and mainly as expression of represented human figures. I have not
considered expression of the artist or expression of the work. Lopes hold
that expression in pinture is attributable to depicted figures, scenes, or the
design of the painting. So Lopes draws a distinction between figure, scene
and design expression, depending on whether expression “is attributable
to a depicted person or persons” (Lopes 2005, 51), “attributable at least
in part to a depicted scene” (Lopes 2005, 52) or “to a picture’s design or
surface and not to any figure or scenes it depicts” (Lopes 2005, 57).

Figure expression is the simplest case of pictorial expression (as it is
up to a certain point mimesis of natural expression). Lopes refers partic-
ularly to pictures in which a person or persons are depicted expressing an
emotion. It is possible too that the expressiveness of the whole painting
is attributable to a depicted person but that the person does not express
a condition of hers. So the concept of an emotion may form part of the
perceptual content of the picture, without being an emotion entertained
by the person. Let’s see, for instance, Berthe Morisot, *Children with bowl*,
(1886). In the painting two girls are playing with a bowl with fishes. It
seems as if they are trying to catch a fish. It is the manner in which they
are engaged in their activity, completely absorbed in the occupation, what
makes us to see the girls conveying a sense of innocence, spontaneity, and
at the same time, seriousness, perseverance, and also cruelty, of which they
are completely ignorant. Like authority, innocence is a condition which is
not directly expressed, but is perceived to belong to the person who posses
it, and permeates her perception. Now the painting’s expressiveness is not
the children's expression, as the emotion indicated by the children is different from that indicated by the whole scene, and the painting. The figures contribute decisively to the painting expression, and expression is in this sense attributable to them, but not in the sense that it is their expression.

Let us consider Rembrandt's late self-portraits. According to Malcom Budd, Rembrandt's self-portraits “give the spectator a vivid sense of having been painted by a man who is capable of looking at himself without vanity or illusions, and who was prepared to show himself as he was. In presenting this unvarnished appearance they are free from the self-deception, wishful thinking, posturing, affectation or glamourizing intent that so readily enter the representation of the self” (Budd 1995, 71-72). The expressive representation of Rembrandt makes it possible to recognize sincere expression in the figure, and, moreover, in the whole painting, and to go beyond the painting to its creator. It is not just the depicted person who is seen as expressing a mental condition, but also the whole painting as an expression of the painter's inner condition. It is the whole representation and the way in which it represents the figure that supports the expressivity of the whole and makes it possible to attribute the emotional content to Rembrandt himself.

Obviously self-portraits are a special case of figure expression, but they point to what is more interesting about expression: that the connection between look and emotion be made by an act of someone expressing herself. Self-portrait represents a person with certain expression, but also, by necessity it expresses something about its author: the attitude he has towards herself. *Children with a bowl's* expression is attributable to the children just as they have been contemplated and depicted by Morisot.

3.1. Non Human Figures' Expression

Lopes identifies figure expression to expression attributable to persons. But there is also the possibility of non-human expression—looks. It could be maintained that in these cases the emotion forming part of the perceptual content is not an emotion experienced by the figure but still perceived in it. This is the case of a tree in *Jeffrey Pine—Sentinel Dome* in Ansel Adams' photograph (1938). Here the picture represents a tree that can be seen as a
figure of struggle and resistance. The expression look may indicate the will to resist and survive. But now it is not so easy to identify an expression-look independently of an expressive seeing. How could the Jeffrey Pine be expressive without being seen as an individual gesticulating in struggle against the environment? We see the tree in Jeffrey Pine as a person struggling and resisting against the adverse circumstances of life. Expressive seeing seems to be the key to the figure’s expression, rather than previously or conventionally given expression-looks. In order to see trees as expressive we need to perceive them expressively. As Kivy held, we need to animate them, or to perceive them under the aspect of central cases of expression; human expression. Wollheim provides a description that fits in with the experience of seeing expression in non human natural beings, and other objects: “...no physiognomic perception will be independent of what is for us the supreme example of the relationship between inner and outer: that is, the human body as the expression of the psyche. When we endow a natural object or an artefact with expressive meaning, we tend to see it corporally: that is we tend to credit it with a particular look which bears a marked analogy to some look that the human body wears and that is constantly conjoined with an inner state” (Wollheim 1980, 32-3).

Expressive perception does not entail anthropomorphism. We do not attribute mental life to trees, but that does not entail the missing person problem. We do not believe the Jeffrey pine to be anguished, or voluntarily moving and struggling, but its form, modelled over time growing isolated in adverse conditions of wind and aridity, is rightly perceived as being connected to a human being’s resistance and struggle in life. The connection between configuration and emotion is not external but penetrates the perception of the figure. The configuration is not an expression-look unless the tree is perceived as having the force and determination needed to survive and to challenge life’s adversities. That is not to say that the look does not support the expressivity of the figure. It absolutely does. Pointing to the twisted trunk, the direction of the branches, the rock from where it grows, or the crystalline and relentless atmosphere that surrounds it may help the expressive perception, that is, the perceptual experience affected by the thought of these emotions.

To sum up, in expressive non-sentient figures it is hard to identify a previous expression-look out from an expressive seeing that involves the
concept of the emotion.

3.2. Scene Expression, Whose Emotion?

Lopes proposes the contour theory to account for figure expression, scene expression and design expression. However, he suggests that in figure expression the connection between emotion and expression is stronger than that the theory requires: “The conception of expression as part of emotion applies quite smoothly to figure expression” (Lopes 2005, 58). That is, when we see a depicted human person expressing an emotion, we see it as the outcome of the process of entertaining such emotion. And therefore the thought of emotion penetrates “quite smoothly” the vision of the gesture or body movement. It is expression as expression.

For Lopes, it is scene expression that provokes initially the missing person problem, as in expressive scenes humans do not bear the weight of expression, or are not represented at all. In these cases expression may be attributed to the creator of the work or other some other implicit person. At this point Lopes challenges three accounts of expression as expression, which he finds mistaken or not inclusive enough, to conclude that in artistic expression the expression-look to the agent connection is not required, unlike the look to emotion connection, which is needed. In order to defend his impersonal theory, he criticizes (1) personalism; (2) hypothetical personalism; and (3) arousalism, as attempts to explain artistic expression in personal terms.

In what follows I will examine (1) and (2), as I agree with Lopes’ criticism of (3).3

3.3. Personalism

Personalism holds that an expresser is required to perceive the expressiveness of a represented scene. It coincides with the Romantic theory of art in that it is the artist’s emotion that is expressed in scene expression. Lopes proposes Van Gogh’s *Wheatfield with Crows* as a paradigmatic example of the conception of an artist who under the influence of a feeling makes a work expressive of the feeling. Lopes admits that something like

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3 Lopes’ critique stands on the idea that an object prompting an emotion needs not to be expressive in itself.
Francisca Pérez Carreño  

Expressiveness without Expression?

that may happen on certain occasions, but that “the proposal is not far-fetched” (Lopes 2005, 60). As it stands I agree. However, I think more complex theories of expression do not fit in with that description (an actual artist’s feeling that is expressed and has become the work’s expressed feeling). For instance, Collingwood’s conception held that the feeling is not completely formed before the termination of the work, so that the artist’s work gives form – defines, gives depth and nuances – to an emotion that he could not feel in advance. That fits in with the idea that expressing an emotion forms part of the very emotion. Jenefer Robinson has also tried to make sense of the Romantic conception, as we will see shortly.

Lopes’ amendments to personalism point to very weak and much criticized ideas. First, that the artist’s work is incompatible with the feelings of an emotion. And he quotes Richard Wollheim in his favor: “pictorial expression is ‘controlled, and boosted, by reflection upon, and by recollection of, the emotion’ (Wollheim 1987, 87).” (Lopes 2005, 61). Now, granted that the artist’s work is often incompatible with the actual feeling of the emotion, what is not granted is that the artist’s emotion does not form part of his work. Indeed, Wollheim points to the artistic work as one of reflection upon, and recollection of emotion. Assuming that reflection is neither only nor mainly theoretical reflection, but introspective work in what it is and what it is like to experience the emotion, and that recollecting implies having the emotion present, the least that can be said is that the artist’s mental conditions do not so easily disappear from the stage. In Wollheim’s account these thoughts inform the artist’s action of painting to the extent that they give content, expressive content, to the artwork.

Lopes’ second criticism of personalism states that the emotion from which a picture may originate needs not be the one the picture expresses. Obviously Constable or Cézanne’s love for the Stour county and Provence, which are frequently represented in their painting, is not the expressive content of the landscapes. On each occasion different emotions, such as melancholy, despair, optimism, or hope, are invested into their work.

Equally, when the expression is of a depicted figure, the third point in Lopes criticism, the emotion does not belong to its creator either. The figure expresses an emotion of its own. But more importantly, an emotion of the artist may be expressed at once. For instance, Picasso’s characters during his Blue Period were often unarmed and sad. Besides, painting them
in such a way, Picasso expressed a sentimental compassion towards them, and this feeling spreads on the whole painting. Again the depicted figures contribute decisively to the expressiveness of the painting without the expression being attributable to them, but to a compassionate gaze required by the way of representing the sad and unarmed characters. Here it would be necessary to appeal to the bluish tone of the painting, or the absent looking of the figures.

Lopes’ criticism does not rule out the thesis that an emotion can in certain cases be attributable to the artist. But he states that personalism does not explain the nature of expression in the different cases. However, that is something that can also be directed against the contour theory, since identifying a connection between an expression-look and an emotion does not explain those cases in which the emotion is rightly attributed to the artist. And these are very relevant cases as Rembrandt’s and Picasso’s examples show.

In this context Lopes refers to the most serious defenders of a Romantic conception, and to Robinson (2005). Let us consider Robinson’s proposal in relation to Lopes’ second amended account of scene expression.

3.4. Hypothetical Personalism

Hypothetical personalism accounts for scene expression as the expression of an unrepresented person inside the picture, whose presence is responsible for the expressive look of the scene. In other words the expressive look of the scene is thought to correspond to the emotion of an implicit person seeing the scene. Lopes’ criticism of the conception seems right to me. Unless the presence of a person inside the picture provides the scene with features different from the features it possesses for a person outside the picture, there is no need to postulate the former. It does not add anything to the experience of a person outside the picture, that is, the spectator. The criticism recalls the debate about internal spectator in painting⁴ (Wollheim 1987, Hopkins 2001). When it is not possible to at-

tribute the expressive look of the scene to a particular person inside the painting, the expressive features of the scene by themselves serve to sustain the expressive content, and the experience of an external spectator. That is, only when it is necessary to attribute the expressive features of the painting to the presence of a fictional person, with a particular mental repertoire. The internal spectator provides "a distinctive access to the content of the picture" (Wollheim 1987, 129); otherwise it is merely *ad hoc* to postulate the existence of such a person.

There are, however, paintings in which the imagination of an internal spectator helps to explain the expressiveness of the represented scene. One way of attributing expression to an implicit person is held by Robinson, who making a difference between visual and manual devices writes: "the artwork is said to express an emotion e just because the artist expresses an e-ish point of view in the work, or paints it in an e-ish way" (Robinson 2007, 25). In *Deeper than Reason* Robinson contrasts Friedrich, who endows his work with expression by means of an implicit point of view on his landscapes, with Delacroix, who endows his paintings with emotion by the way in which he painted. We understand Friedrich's landscapes once we recognize the elevated point of view contemplating the scene from high; he shows us "a vision of the world from the point of view of one in awe before the spirituality of the universe." (Robinson 2005, 279)

It is the point of view occupied by a Pietist like Friedrich himself, who perceives nature as God's creation from a spiritual distance expressed by a physical distance. At this point, Robinson borrows Wollheim's interpretation of *Enclosure near Dresden*, according to which the painting demands an internal spectator who adopts the suspended point of view from which the whole scene is perceived as being covered by mysteriousness and spirituality.

Again, Lopes’ contour theory is not precise enough to explain the most interesting cases, in which there is an internal spectator whose mental repertoire is responsible for the expressive look of the represented scene.

4.

So far I have criticized the possibility of identifying expression-looks independently of an expressive seeing, and therefore a concept involved in
the seeing. I have also shown that the contour theory needs to account for those cases in which there is a self of the emotion, those in which there is an expression—look to person connection and not merely an expression—look to emotion connection. Eventually, I would like to briefly examine Robinson’s thesis about the separability of expression and expressiveness, with the aim of suggesting that expression is as necessary for expressiveness as expressiveness is for expression. My hope is to suggest the unviability of an impersonal theory of expression.

Jenefer Robinson (2007) has defended that expression and expressiveness are two separated aspects of artistic expression. The former relates the work to its creator. The latter relates the work to its audience. Now, “although expression is closely related to expressiveness, the two concepts are distinct and, in particular, expressiveness cannot be analyzed in terms of expression” (Robinson 2007, 19). Although Robinson states that in great works of art both aspects tend to collaborate, she has criticized Levinson and Davies’ theories of music for reducing expressiveness to the expression of an imagined person. Thus, Robinson coincides with Lopes in the idea that expressiveness may be sufficient to explain artistic expression. In other words, that it is not necessary to attribute emotion to an agent, but to perceive a certain look related to an emotion.

In life and art, “expression is fundamentally something that agents or imagined agents (…) do” (Robinson 2007, 21), while expressiveness is reserved for the communicative aspect of expression. The independence of expression and expressiveness rests quite nicely in the idea that someone may express an emotion being quite inexpressive. Even if in most interesting artistic cases expression and expressiveness collaborate, expressiveness may by itself suffice to artistic expression. The reason is that, according to Robinson, expressiveness is the iconic aspect of artistic expression, which sustains our understanding and responses to the artwork. The responses are not by themselves reasons to justify the expressive content however. Rather, expressiveness provokes an emotional response in the viewer because it tells us something about the expressed emotion, without necessarily telling us anything about its creator. Expressiveness carries on information about the emotion; it is a “cognitive” notion.

Thus works of art can be expressive without expressing anyone’s emotions. What I find questionable in this view is the idea that we respond to
expressiveness just for its iconic and cognitive character, and not for the link we perceive between the expressive look and the very act of expressing. That is, certainly expressiveness tells us something about emotions, but it is so because of the tie that links emotion to expression, mainly the way in which an agent makes the emotion manifest.

Robinson’s view supposes that it is possible to separate the agent’s action (expression) from the result of her action (expressiveness of the work). However, in central cases perceiving expression includes not only the perception of a look linked to an emotion, but also its perception as the outcome of the activity of a subject. We understand the expressiveness of a movement, gesture or behaviour as caused by an emotion, and in the context of a characteristic way of expressing them. Besides, it is for this reason that we attribute sincerity, truthfulness, or their opposite, to the agent. These features also belong to our way of interpreting and evaluating art. In this paper, following Lopes, I have focussed on depicted expression, but it should be remembered that the recognition of pictures as an expression of their authors’ emotions plays an important role in the understanding and appreciation of art.

If we isolate expressiveness from the creative act we overlook the activity from which it originates, and the attribution of sincerity, authenticity, truthfulness, and so on, stops making sense. In its place we find adequacy and decorum. This reduces expression to representation, in so far as expressiveness (as the aspect of an expression but separated from expression) may be merely represented. I think that is what is present in Robinson’s conception of expressiveness as a “cognitive notion”. An expressive look might tell us which emotion it stands for. Besides, Robinson claims that expressiveness also supports our affective responses to works of art, but I doubt that our affective responses are insensitive to the quality of the activity that makes emotion perceptible. However, if it were possible to identify expression reduced to representation, as mere expressiveness, it would have the undesirable consequence of rendering criticism of expressive qualities, such as truthfulness, originality, or personal style among others, inappropriate. Moreover, expressiveness does not lose cognitive value when it is perceived as the outcome of an expressive act, but it only gains depth when it is related to the context of an individual’s mental life and the personal ways of giving expression to it.
References


