

Expressiveness. A methodological approach

Marco Franceschina

franceschina.marco@gmail.com

The debate on expressiveness is one of the most relevant in contemporary aesthetics. In fact, the possibility of an emotional linguistic expression referring to artistic objects or natural situations crosses a number of themes of classical and analytical aesthetics. The aim of this essay is therefore to enucleate what the presuppositions of a theory of expressiveness should be, starting from their historical genesis in the «expression theory» elaborated by Dewey. In particular, through the critical examination of two contemporary orientations on this issue – the Wollheim projectivist theory and the profile one by Kivy –, the aim is to bring attention to two indispensable aspects of a theory of expressiveness, which, although in need of revision, were already recognizable in the expression theory: a. a theory of intentionality and b. the dialectical consideration between *Leib* and *Körper*. In particular, the direction sketched at the end would suggest that it is this dialectical experience of the body that could be considered as the intentional condition for the existence and recognizability of expressive phenomena.

Keywords: Expression theory; Expressiveness; Body; Merleau-Ponty

Expressiveness. A methodological approach

Marco Franceschina

franceschina.marco@gmail.com

1. Some important remarks about the contemporary debate on expressiveness.

In the late Sixties, in the Anglo-American philosophical context, the issue of an artistic performance, object, or natural situation *being expressive of* has risen clearly: the recognizability of the *melancholy* of a sunset, the *joyfulness* of a musical passage, the *aggressiveness* of a red shade has the aesthetic debate asked *whether* and *how* should we consider expressive phenomena as properties such as object shape or colour¹.

Over the last few decades, many different theories have therefore attempted to justify such linguistic expressions which, although they attest to a phenomenon with strong intuitive traits – we immediately understand what we are talking about when we refer to the melancholy of a sunset – also seem to be an improper speech, at least on further reflection – it does not seem appropriate to console a sunset, even if it seems particularly melancholic.

¹ We mentioned here the classical distinction between primary and secondary qualities, as it was elaborated in the XVII century. Briefly, primary qualities are measurable qualities, such as shape and quantity (completely objective), while secondary like colours or perfumes are *dispositions* or *powers* that affect our sensibility and have been rooted in the objects themselves (partially subjective). Classical text on this topic remains J. Locke, *An essay concerning the human understanding* (1690), Oxford University Press, Oxford 1998. Nowadays, the debate is taken up by a 2011 published book with several contributions, providing a great historic and thematic approach with further bibliography: L. Nolan (ed. by), *Primary and Secondary Qualities: The Historical and Ongoing Debate*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2011. Although, talking about expressive phenomena means enquiry the set of the so-called *tertiary* qualities, i.e., qualities that were interpreted as completely subjective – whereas *primary* and *secondary* ones are completely or partially objective. Specifically, expressive qualities are tertiary qualities that always *express* a specific – moral or emotional – character, as not all the set of *tertiary* qualities does. A concise but complete contribution on this topic is provided by M. Sinico, *Tertiary qualities from Galileo to Gestalt Psychology*, in “History of the Human Sciences”, XXVIII/3, 2015, pp.68-79. A great overlook of *tertiary* qualities is provided by P. Bozzi, *Tertiary qualities*, in I. Bianchi and R. Davies (ed. by) *Paolo Bozzi’s Experimental phenomenology*, Routledge, New York 2019, pp.345-367 and F. Forlè, *Qualità terziarie. Saggio sulla fenomenologia sperimentale*, Franco Angeli, Milano 2018.

The investigation of such phenomena, however, has also always required at least a prior declaration of intent, on account of their vastness. Indeed, it does not seem to be the same thing to speak of artistic or natural expressiveness: the melancholy of a sunset does not seem to present itself according to the same perceptive configuration as the melancholy aroused by music. Budd² has indicated the difference between the two types of expressiveness, distinguishing them clearly and saying that they cannot be considered according to the same justification. The intentionality present in the artistic process would make artistic expressiveness incomparable with the spontaneity characteristic of natural phenomena. Artistic expressiveness is aroused according to the will, natural expressiveness is not. And this would make them incomparable.

Yet, it is perhaps more interesting to consider another perspective, which makes the phenomena of expressiveness unitary, and which touches the real heart of the matter. In fact, it seems that to focus on the mystery of expressiveness is not to question whether it stems from an intentional process or not, but to recognise that we spontaneously tend to describe the world in emotional terms, attributing to things – sounds, colours, words, landscapes, objects – predicates of our inner world description. And if this is the case, it is when we say that expressiveness arouses astonishment not by its being intentional, but by its being *a phenomenon among phenomena*, found – so to speak – in the world. It is on this basis, then, that this essay seeks to move, indicating spontaneity as the common character of all phenomena of expressiveness, regardless of whether they are intentional.

So, I would therefore like to state from the outset that this contribution will consider expressive phenomena referring to both natural and artistic objects, moreover stressing at the very end of the essay the idea that the link between natural and artistic expressiveness should not only be maintained but also regarded as essential to the understanding of the phenomenon itself.

² As will be seen, this point is clearly noted by M. Budd who emphasises the difference between artistic and natural expressive phenomena, criticizing the projectivist approach by Wollheim. In particular, Budd attributes to the former an intentionality that is not present in the latter and that would turn out to be the true core of expressive phenomenality. M. Budd, *Wollheim on Correspondence, Projective Properties, and Expressive Perception*, in R. van Gerwen (ed. by), *Richard Wollheim on the Art of Painting: Art Representation and Expression*, Cambridge University Press. Cambridge, 2001, pp.101-111. If Wollheim's theory is to regain credibility – says Budd – it must focus on explaining firstly artistic expressiveness alone (*Ivi*, pp.108), because it would be only the expressiveness of the artistic creation that can well fit with the theoretical proposal by Wollheim (*infra*, p.9).

a. Expression theory

Made this point, I can start by addressing the origins of the expressiveness issue. A recent book published by *Mimesis*³ helps to show that the debate on expressiveness started when the so-called «expression theory» presented by Dewey, Collingwood and Croce had been criticized⁴.

This story is largely known, leading to the consideration of «expression theory» as belonging to the past. Yet, here I would like to try a different approach, checking if this theory can provide at least an interesting direction in looking at this issue.

Expression theory holds that «to express» is an action composed of two indivisible parts and, for that, by a sort of ambiguity⁵. Dewey states it clearly: «Expression – says Dewey – is both an *action (process)* and a *result (product)*». Thus, when a painter paints or a composer writes music, both their actions and their artistic products are *expressions of*. Taking the example given by Dewey, in *Le Pont de Trinquetaille* by Van Gogh, the emotional movement caused by the sight of the bridge, which Van Gogh describes in his letters, is an expression of a sort of «languor» as well as it is the painting itself *because the painter a. has organized his feelings, b. putting them in his masterpiece*⁶. Briefly, «to express» is something we do in a transitive manner when we are referring to our behavioural mood – I express *something* – and in an intransitive one when we discover in objects or situations the signs of this process – the painting *is expressive of* something. In more contemporary words «expression theory» brings together expression and expressiveness: the former as the transitive way to express emotion – with some gesture, for example – the latter as the object or situation that is intransitively *being expressive of*.

³ M. Benenti, M. Ravasio (ed. by), *Espressività. Un dibattito contemporaneo*, Mimesis, Milano 2017, in part. pp.7-18.

⁴ J. Dewey, *Art as experience* (1934), Perigee Book, New York 1980; R.G. Collingwood, *The principles of Art* (1958), Oxford University Press, Oxford 1968; B. Croce, *Estetica* (1902), Adelphi, Milano 1990. A great overlook of the «expression theory» as it was elaborated by Croce and Collingwood is provided by G. Kemp, *The Croce-Collingwood Theory as Theory*, in “The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism”, LX/2, 2003, pp.171-193. Criticisms of this theory were elaborated in the late sixties among the most important exponents of the analytical aesthetic. Goodman, Tormey and Sircello provided various criticism with a common speculative centre: expressiveness does not necessarily entail the expression of a feeling having mostly a *public* significance. N. Goodman, *Languages of art* (1968), Hackett, Indiana 2022, in part. pp.80-89; A. Tormey, *The Concept of Expression: a Study in Philosophical Psychology and Aesthetics*, Princeton University Press, Princeton 1971; G. Sircello, *Mind and Art: An Essay on the Varieties of Expression*, Princeton University Press, Princeton 1972.

⁵ J. Dewey, *Art as experience* (1934), cit., p.60.

⁶ *Ivi*, p.69.

However, Dewey's argument does not merely emphasise the ambiguity inherent in the notion of expression, investigating first the idea of a human expression and secondly the expression of the artistic product. The author also goes so far as to argue how these two poles of the notion of «expression» are connected.

In particular, it would be the presence of an expressive process that leads spontaneous feelings overflow towards the creation of an artistic product⁷. For Dewey, it is not enough to maintain that there are objects that can be correctly described according to emotional predicates, nor it is enough that these expressive products are inseparably linked to the common way of expressing feelings and emotions. One must go so far as to argue that the cause of the existence of the expressive product lies in the process which leads an author to the choice and creation of that very product. Reading the pages of *Art as experience*, one can thus realise that between expressing understood in the habitual sense of «expressing an emotion with specific behaviour» and expressing understood as the very quality of a given product, there is the notion of expression in the sense of «expressive process»⁸. That is, the process by which a given feeling is processed through specific conceptualisations and technical abilities, leading from the spontaneity of the feeling itself to the completed expressive product. Dewey, to validate this hypothesis, takes Wordsworth's compositional process as a model: the poet is called upon to «recollect in tranquillity» the sentimental experience he had from the vision of a field of daffodils, transforming that first and spontaneous expressive-sentimental experience into a true expressive artistic product⁹. Thus, thanks to the process of conceptual reflection put into play by the author, the necessary condition of «spontaneously feeling an emotion» becomes the sufficient one of reflexively being seen on a cultural (and public) product. A new kind of experience is born: the aesthetic one, where «to express» means to link a previous spontaneous feeling to an expressive product, with the necessary mediation of a conceptualisation process. So, the idea is that *the expression process leads to the selection and creation of the artistic product*: the process of organizing our feelings through concepts and technical abilities creates the expressive product.

⁷ *Ivi*, pp.58-81, in part. pp.75-81.

⁸ *Ivi*, pp.63-64

⁹ *Ivi*, p.75. For a great insight into a comparison between Dewey and the poetry of the romantic age, I suggest the reading of D. Granger, *Expression, Imagination, and Organic Unity: John Dewey's Aesthetics and Romanticism*, *The Journal of Aesthetic Education*, XXXVII/2, 2003, pp.46-60.

Thus, after talking about an original equilibrium between *process* and *product*, Dewey unbalances it on the side of the process¹⁰. He stresses the necessity of providing a criterion for recognizing a truly expressive object, finding it in the artists' feelings. *It is the expressive process that creates the expressive product*, linking the recognition of expressiveness to the current feelings of the author or user of the artistic work. From here, then, Dewey's theoretical proposal broadens, taking into consideration the idea that the phenomena of expression become such when the expressive products are inseparable not only from the expressive process experienced by the artist but also from that experienced by the spectator or user of the work of art. The theoretical point becomes then that the expression proper to aesthetic experience is such when the expressive product – further than arising from the expressive process of the artist – involves the spectator, arousing in him an expressive process analogous to that of the artist: the artist's expressive process leads to a reflection on his feelings, but in such a way that the expressive and artistic product he creates is an objective and public product. Hence, for Dewey, a very special experience is configured: what takes place in the experience of expression is a clarification of one's spontaneous flow of feelings using their becoming public¹¹. Through the use and transformation of materials belonging to our common natural and cultural world, an artist would allow the viewer to grasp what the expressive process was that led to the creation of that product. That is to say, the expressive product would act as a medium between the artist's personal experience and that of the viewer who wishes to observe the expressive production itself, intentionally arousing understanding of that expressive process experienced by the artist himself. Thus, the expressive process corresponding to an (expressive) product would allow for a reference both to the artist – as a process leading to the creation of the product – and in reference to the spectator – as a process causing the spectator to decode that same expressive object. That is, the spectator could recognise and experience feelings analogous to those experienced by the artist in the creation of the artistic product, by the essential mediation provided by the material objectivity of that same artistic product.

Summarizing, the «expression theory» has two main steps:

¹⁰ Ivi, pp.67-70.

¹¹ J. Dewey, *Art as experience* (1934), Perigee Book, New York 1980, pp.88.

1. «To express» refers to a process and a product, as well.
2. The process side of expression – that is., the recollection of our feelings – is the one that shapes the product itself.

Put in these terms, «expression theory» has attracted various criticism, mostly because it was also transformed into one simple idea¹²: «art expresses emotions». The argument that suggests the unification of 1. and 2. is quite simple: if an expressive product is the effect of an expressive process, and an expressive process is a process throughout which an author recollects his feelings – as Dewey holds –, then the artistic product is something that *reveals* this kind of reflection about certain feelings, expressing them.

However, this idea of expression as «expression of feelings» has at least a great breakdown point: it is impossible to see any *necessary link* between certain material properties and their associated feelings¹³.

How is it supposed to find a link between a specific curved line and an anxiety feeling? We must admit that a material property has certain features so that so it can express a feeling *and* that the feeling expression is what makes those properties exactly what they are. So, we would have here a circular argument.

Of course, it is a common experience to admire an art masterpiece, or a breathtaking natural situation and be emotionally involved. We say that a sunset is melancholic, an *Allegro* is joyful: art expresses something that affects our emotional life. *But this common experience is not enough for an expressiveness theory.* A cause must be found that a curved line or a particular yellow nuance is *intrinsically* expressive of anxiety because in this manner we found them in the world: something inherent to a specific object, and not to another. Why Yellow would be more joyful than Grey? And why

¹² G.F. Todd, *Expression without feelings*, in “The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism”, XXX/4, 1972, pp.477-488.

¹³ Moreover, it could also be the case that an author does not want to express feelings, as he would like to express a rational concept. For example, it would be difficult to say that *The well-tempered clavier* expresses Bach’s feelings: feelings would be, at least, secondary to the rational implant of that masterpiece. In any case, I tend to consider this critique of the expression theory a weak one. It is certainly true that an artistic product can not only express feelings; but the point of the expression theory is the idea that we reflexively recollect feelings; J. Dewey, *Art as experience*, cit., pp.95-96: expression theory would not ever admit that an artistic product is something like a spontaneous overflow of feelings. Instead, concepts we have learnt, significant experiences we have had, technical abilities we have practised etc.... mediate the current experience of the author. Thus, also according to the expression theory, art could express rational concepts and show technical abilities.

Yellow seems an *anxious* colour in *The bedroom* by Van Gogh, while it does not seem so when I buy yellow garlands for a party?

Unfortunately, neither Dewey, Collingwood nor Croce provides a solution to this problem, saying that some sights or sounds could have *some* emotional charge¹⁴ and that all these perceptual features are intrinsically connected with the emotional process that shapes the artistic product¹⁵. But they could not say much more than that, presupposing expressive phenomena in their very justification: if the process shapes the product, it is missed how specific perceptual features could *previously* affect the expressive phenomena. In other words, expression theory (at least at this stage) misses the main point of the whole question, how *certain perceptual properties* could be *correctly described* in emotional terms.

b. Expressiveness as objectual problem

From the idea above, the contemporary debate starts, sharing the same starting point by all the scholars: *expressiveness is something that concerns an object or a situation property, and this is exactly why we should split the process/product dichotomy*. Expressiveness is something that concerns the sad being of a *string quartet*, the melancholy of a *sunset*, and the anxiety of a *painting*: it concerns the public recognizability of peculiar object properties. And we should not confuse their investigation with the psychological investigation of the expression process, scholars claim. Expressiveness appears every time we emotionally describe the world, *pretending to give a real and trustable description of it*. So, when we talk about a sunset or a melancholic string quartet, we would miss an important aspect of that sunset or that quartet if we do not mention their specific melancholy, independently from any psychological movement. what matters from a philosophical point of view is the *description* of the expressive product – a world emotionally described.

For example, let's think of a simple occasion: I have just finished listening to a poor performance of a Mozart's quartet. I am very disappointed about it because the orchestra ruined a great masterpiece, and so I feel a sense of sadness about that. However, let's imagine that I refer to a specific passage of that masterpiece as a joyful

¹⁴ R.G. Collingwood, *The principles of Art* (1958), cit., §§161-162.

¹⁵ J. Dewey, *Art as experience* (1934), cit., pp.114-120.

one, as I am talking to a friend of mine: «*the passage* from bar x to bar y is itself joyful» – I say. If I say so, my friend not only will understand what I have said but, at the same time, he will not have any suspicion I didn't understand what I had said to him: I'm talking about properties, regardless of my inner state. I am sad in talking about that specific passage exactly because I recognize the joyfulness of *the passage itself*.

So, expressiveness has less to do with the subjective world than with the objective one and that is why we should not consider the expression process a necessary condition for the recognizability of the expressive product¹⁶. Moreover, this philosophical position does not entail a prior investigation of our inner world, and *this* should be considered the very strong proposal coming from the Anglo-American theoretical setting: *dividing process and product means focusing on the idea of the existence of an object described according to emotional predicates*.

Made this point, I would like to underline a consequence of it: it should be also clear that the justification of expressiveness must go through the reallocation of the role of emotion. In fact, although there is a differentiation between the expression of an emotion and the expressiveness of an object, we must nevertheless try to understand why we use predicates inherent to the emotional sphere to describe artistic objects.

This attempt gives rise to two schools of thought, both attempting to justify the link between the expressiveness of an object and our common way to express a feeling. Briefly, how the expressiveness of the object turns out to be influenced by our way of *talking* about emotions?

The two philosophical positions I am going to consider are both based on the idea that the expressiveness of the object derives from the expression of our emotions. The first one stresses the idea of the existence of a *projection* of an inner state onto an object, while the second one claims that there is a *similarity* between the behavioural expression and the properties of the material. Obviously, the debate that animates the question of expressiveness is far more varied than any possible categorisation. And yet, I believe that these two tendencies of thought largely serve to interpret it, providing the

¹⁶ Barely all the contemporary contributions share the idea that expression is not a necessary condition for expressiveness. For this, I just mention some notable articles where this idea is made explicit by the author. G.F. Todd, *Expression without feelings*, cit., in part. pp.483-488; J. Hospers, *The concept of artistic expression*, in "Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society", LV, 1954-1955, pp.313-344, in part. pp.317-324; J. Robinson, *Expression and Expressiveness in Art*, «Postgraduate Journal of Aesthetics», IV/2, 2007, pp.19-41.

idea that the whole question is now a matter of reuniting two separate worlds: the expressive object and the habitual way of expressing emotional predicates. In this respect, then, the following discussion of projectivist tendencies on the one hand and object-analogical tendencies on the other will serve not so much to give a complete picture of approaches to the problem of expressiveness, but to provide two notable examples of the contemporary tendency to talk about expressiveness¹⁷. First, then, let us turn to the two lines of interpretation that run through the contemporary debate, in order to subsequently show that their critical point is methodologically derived from the prior splitting of process and product.

2. Outlining the roots

a. Projectivist theories: Wollheim

A projective theory holds a fundamental idea: *it is our feelings that are projected onto certain qualities of the object*. There has been a moment in which a particular property of the object has been invested with emotional meaning. In particular, Wollheim – among the greatest exponents of a projective hypothesis – distinguishes between «projective property» and «projection». The former would be the product of the latter and would also be what we properly recognise as expressive: it is the projective *property* that makes a certain object expressive of some feeling¹⁸. But how can this happen?

Wollheim explains this by saying that «projective properties» are properties a. identified through their affective character b. referred to the history of their projection. A projective property is so recognised by its affective character which *refers to the moment it was transferred from human expression to an object*¹⁹. Thus, the projective property is a *rule* for the recognition of its history: it is a possible example of a first projective experience.

¹⁷ A recent and great overview of the recent development of expressiveness issue is provided, with further bibliography, by M. Benenti in M. Benenti, *Expressiveness. Perception and Emotions in the Experience of Expressive Objects*, De Gruyter, Berlin 2020, in part. pp.7-54.

¹⁸ R. Wollheim, *Correspondence, Projective Properties, and Expression in the Arts*, in R. Wollheim *The mind and Its Depths*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge Massachusetts 1993, pp.144-158.

¹⁹ *Ivi*, pp.148-150.

Let's take an example: if a particular colour used by an artist seems threatening to me – let's say a threatening black –, according to Wollheim, it is because we have learned to recognise it that way: it exemplifies how a particular human experience once formed a link with certain perceptual configurations of the world: «projective properties» *are examples of* «older and more dominant experiences»²⁰. This approach is decisive in overcoming the impasse that the theory of expression ran into. In fact, Wollheim's hypothesis is that expressive objects do not stimulate our affectivity in the sense of *currently* feeling an emotion. Rather, they stimulate it throughout its revealing signs. It would thus be a question of *recognising* emotion throughout the signs which normally reveal it, instead of experiencing it directly. And although this process of expression is linked to an initial projective moment, this process is no longer involved in the creation or enjoyment of object expressiveness: the «projective properties» would only be rules and exemplifications of that projective event in which emotion was projected onto certain features of the world.

However, what does Wollheim mean with the word projection, to which a «projective property» refers?

The point is that Wollheim does not provide a precise theory of how this projection occurs, because this aspect seems secondary to him: enquiring about the projection is only necessary to the extent that we can recognise that *it has taken place*. It does not affect the actual recognition of an expressive property, at least going so far as to suggest that there must be a *coherence* between a particular environment and a particular emotion. And this would be the most a philosopher could do: question expressiveness as an object property born of a psychological correspondence between emotion and environment. Philosophically interesting would be the mere fact that we would improve our knowledge of a certain projection, while how this came about is perhaps more a matter of psychology than philosophy. Wollheim suggests that one would have to think that at a precise moment in the evolutionary stage there were formative experiences that made an emotion correspond stably to a certain perceptive configuration of the world: this perceptive configuration manifests itself, therefore, as coherent with a given emotion and it is just a matter of an evolutionary theory enquiry this correspondence.

²⁰ *Ivi*, p.149.

Nevertheless, as expressiveness needs the existence of a past projection, it must be stated clearly that expressive phenomena *are completely explained by the ontological status of projective properties*: rules for the recognition of older formative experiences. In this regard, art would only add certain intentionality to the expressive process: the artist would be the one who intentionally succeeds – through technique and conceptualisation – in recreating perceptive configurations understood as *expressive of*²¹. The artist would be the one who manages to recreate perceptual structures that are rules for deepening a past emotional projection. Take, for example, the second movement of *Sonata* no. 1 from op.5 by Corelli. It is expressive of a festive joy because it would provide us with a rule for recognising that we have once projected our joy onto certain perceptual configurations now intentionally organised in the piece – wide intervals, chordal successions, fast and pressing rhythms etc. In this way, according to Wollheim, the phenomenon of expressiveness, even if it does not question the moment of projection, is necessary for a better comprehension of it: it is by listening to and seeing expressive works of art that we deepen what our emotions mean, what it means, for example, to feel a festive joy.

This is Wollheim's approach. His discourse had important criticisms even from within the same projectivist orientation²². However, they all shared the central point: to recognise expressiveness as the product of a projective correspondence between the external environment and certain psychological conditions of the subject. The nature of the projective property is certainly debated, and it is felt that its ontological status should be better explained; however, the point stands: expressiveness means the expression of emotions penetrating objects. And it is precisely this that gives us the

²¹ *Ivi*, pp.150-158.

²² The most important ones come from F. Carreno and M. Budd, both arguing for a strong revision of Wollheim's thesis, to better shape the idea of what a «projection» is. Specifically, where Budd's contribution is largely critical, Carreno tries to elaborate a new concept for *how to better conceive the integration between a perceptual configuration of the world and a psychological state*. In fact, she claims the idea that emotion can *cognitively* penetrate our perceptual experience: so, Carreno argues that the perceptual experience does not have new qualities like projective ones, but it simply could have qualities *under an emotional light*. Emotion has a «cognitive content», something we know about a specific emotion, and this content is exactly what can metaphorically penetrate our experience: so, we invest *metaphorically* and *imaginatively* some perceptual structures of the world with the cognitive value of some emotion, with something we had learnt about how to *recognize* that emotion – a linked gesture to a specific emotion, for example –, even despite our actual feeling. M. Budd, *Wollheim su corrispondenza, proprietà proiettive e percezione*, cit.; F. Carreno, *La percezione espressiva della Natura e dell'arte*, in Benenti e M. Ravasio (ed. by) *Espressività. Un dibattito contemporaneo*, cit., pp.93-116, in part. pp.114-116.

measure of the question because enquiring expressiveness means to know exactly what Wollheim's theory avoids questioning: *why precisely those perceptual configurations must be linked to an emotional description*. That is, while we do not deny the fact that the experience of expressiveness deepens our habitual way of feeling emotions, we ask more specifically how it is possible that emotional predicates can be used to describe public situations and objects in the world around us.

It is precisely here that the greatest misrecognition lies. Once again, we are not able to justify the union between perceptual configurations and the subject's psychological movement. The projective theory encounters the problem of having to justify a union that seems to be completely arbitrary: an attempt is made to unite two worlds that have always been separate, but it fails. Neither the clarification of the ontological status of any «projective properties», nor the existence of a «cognitive meaning²³» of emotions seems to provide an adequate response to that founding act which must still be considered the origin of expressive experience. As P. Spinicci²⁴ underlines a projectivist theory presupposes expressive phenomena, while we must recognise something as *expressive of*, before any emotional projection can arise precisely concerning those perceptual characteristics.

In this aporia, the origin of the debate on expressiveness re-emerges. We now see that the contemporary strategy seems to share the same fate as the theory of expression: we still cannot explain the binding between certain perceptual properties and other psychological movements. Of course, it stands that the division between expression and expressiveness develops with greater clarity the sense of the problem of expressiveness itself; and yet, when it is claimed that expression is not necessary to the recognition of expressiveness, this misunderstands that we speak of it *in terms of our experience of emotional expression* linking an expressive process (expression) to an expressive product (expressive). Here, projection theory does not seem to provide a promising perspective: it certainly realises that the division between process and product must be stitched up because there must have been an original moment of projection that justifies the existence of projective properties. But, according to Wollheim, there is no more than

²³ *Supra*, footnote 22.

²⁴ P. Spinicci, *Dieci lezioni sulle proprietà espressive*, Lezioni del corso di Filosofia teoretica, a.a.2016-2017, in part. pp.43-54. Web address: <https://bibliofilosofiamilano.wordpress.com/2020/09/17/ebook-di-filosofia-p-spinicci-dieci-lezioni-sulle-proprietà-espressive-2/>, last consultation 17.04.2022.

a *coherence* between these two worlds, moreover, refusing to investigate what he means by this term.

Admittedly, it seems that expressive phenomena first and foremost require us to recognise them without experiencing the very emotions we then recognise in them: in this sense, expression is not necessary to expressiveness. Yet, we should certainly reflect that the way we talk about expressiveness requires us to interrogate the relationships between expression and expressiveness, in an intrinsic link to the object. The melancholy of the red of a sunset is not only intelligible to us, but it prohibits us from referring to it by talking about a possible melancholy *of the green*. Melancholy appears in the shades of red, and it would make no sense to look for it in those of green: it is intrinsic to the shades of red, and a cause for this must be given. In other words, it must be the objects themselves that in some way present perceptive configurations that must legitimately be described in emotional terms.

b. Objectivist theories: Kivy

At the origin of an objectivist position, there is the idea that the use of emotional predications is neither inaccurate nor improper referred to the object. *The perceptive conformation* of certain characteristics of the world would be describable in expressive terms, without a recall of any projection: so, if one of Schoenberg's quartets *op.16* appears disquieting for its use of another harmonic system such restlessness would capture the perceptive giving of that quartet. It is not necessary to explain what a dodecaphonic series is nor it is necessary to refer back to a specific moment in which that series took the place of the human restlessness: there would be a restlessness *proper* to music because, just as we perceive a person as disturbing when he goes out of our schemes of interpretation, so the music can communicate that same «going out of the schemes» of the harmonic system of reference. There is only the recognition of the *similarity* between perceptual configurations proper to the artistic-natural product and the signs of the normal process by which emotion is experienced.

In this respect, one of the most interesting theories is the one by Kivy, known as the «profile theory»²⁵ and based on the similarity we would perceive between our behaviour

²⁵ The two most important books where Kivy explains his «profile theory» are P. Kivy, *The Corded Shell – Reflections on Musical Expression*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 2018 and P. Kivy,

and the course of a certain melodic line, for example. There would thus be an analogy between transitive human behaviour and specific passages of a certain artistic work – how certain rhythmic-chordal relations are structured. We would therefore say that a piece by Mozart is expressive of joy, because we recognise in its unexpected melodic leaps, chordal texture, rhythmic composition, *a similarity* with the human way of expressing emotions, their very structure.

Of course, there is also a simpler way in which an expressive passage is expressive: when it imitates the human way of expressing emotions²⁶. Music is expressive because it imitates the specific way we express emotions. So, one piece will be melancholic because it lingers on subdued tones, while another it is cheerful because, just as we usually do, it will use louder tones.

Although, this aspect of the profile theory turns out to be easily criticized: there seems to be no similarity between a dominant seventh chord and the behavioural structure of a tense state. Yet, hearing a dominant seventh chord puts us in tension, and we would rightly describe it as tense. Hence, the discussion about similarity must be played out on another level. Precisely, we will have to inquire what the «profile» is. And so, Kivy thinks that it is an *analogon* between behavioural expression and expressiveness.

More clearly: Kivy thinks of expressiveness on the basis of the analogy that exists between a. the relation of ordinary emotional expression and the profile of our body *and* b. between musical expressiveness and the «profile» of music, its «figure of sound»²⁷. It seems to be that three elements of this analogy are known, allowing us to infer the fourth element – the profile – from them: a. the ordinary expression of emotions, b. the fact that expressing transitively means to behave assuming some bodily profiles, c. the expressiveness itself. Thus, we can infer from that the existence of something like a «musical profile», justifying the phenomenon of expressiveness: it would be, in fact, this «musical profile» to be the analogue of our «bodily profile», modulating on the

Introduction to a Philosophy of music (1998), Oxford University Press 2002, in part. pp.31-49. It is largely known that in the latter text, P. Kivy retracted his thesis, blurring and denying some arguments proposed in his first text. Although, it stands clear that he keeps holding the idea that «despite its criticism the profile theory refuses to die» (*Ivi*, p.47), providing at least a ground to enquire what's the real focus in *Philosophy of music*: the effects that the presence of emotions in our comprehension of the musical event (*Ivi*, p.48).

²⁶ P. Kivy, *Introduction to a Philosophy of music* (1998), cit., p.48.

²⁷ *Ivi*, p.50.

latter the ways in which music can present itself as expressive of emotions, just as if we were expressing it with our bodies.

In other words, expressiveness is a matter of grasping that structure, and music is expressive because it would have, so to speak, a body: its own course with specific rhythmic-melodic characteristics that, in turn, manifest the structure of emotions. Based on this structural presence, of this formalism enriched by the emotions' comprehension²⁸, we understand a piece as *expressive of*.

Undeniably, Kivy's theory presents the possibility of justifying the phenomenon of expressiveness in a way that is unknown to theories of projective origin: that is, we can speak of expressiveness because an emotional predication is not improper. There is a link between the behavioural expression and the melodic course of a piece. The body offers itself as an expressive *medium*, legitimizing emotional predication even in contexts that are of intransitive expressiveness. Thus, to grasp the joyfulness of a *Vivace* movement is *to recognize* that *Vivace* has a structure, which certainly needs to be recognized rather than experienced, but that does not make the emotion expressed improperly: we grasp a structure that we can recognize in a human body expressing itself, as well as in the melodic trend of a piece of music – proceeding by jumps, by thick and ringing passages, by insisting and tense chords. In other words, the expressiveness of objects is justified because their perceptual conformation presents a structure that recalls the human way of expressing the feelings of which they are expressive.

Criticism of this approach resides at the level of content and method used by Kivy. With regard to the first aspect, P. Spinicci²⁹ has provided considerable insights regarding the partiality of Kivy's discourse. Briefly, Kivy's approach would fail in justifying the complete intransitivity of expressive phenomena. The expressiveness phenomena *are intuitively found* in the world, making it definitely too pretentious to see always a structure in every one of them. Let us think, for example, of the image that opens the second canto of the Comedy: Dante sees the mountain of Purgatory and so describes the surrounding environment: *dolce color d'oriental zaffiro* (tender colour of oriental sapphire) – he writes. There is nothing more suitable to express the hope that the vision of Purgatory brings with it: the tenderness of light blue, with its reassuring

²⁸ *Ivi*, pp.88-109.

²⁹ P. Spinicci, *Dieci lezioni sulle proprietà espressive*, cit., pp.67-74.

clarity. We all understand what Dante is pointing to here, so much so that we would find it inappropriate to say something like *dolce color d'oriental rubino* (tender colour of oriental ruby): red does not appear tender to us, it cannot be reassuring in its brighter hues. And yet, we would not have any analogy of structure to explain such a case of expressiveness: what behaviour would be analogous to the lightness of blue that appears so intuitively reassuring and tender? Even if we moved into the field of music, the question would arise again, at least in one specific case: although it is may possible to identify, within Kivy's hypothesis, the corporeal analogy of a *chord*³⁰, it would be more difficult to transport the theory of the profile within the contemporary music: with Messiaen, for example, it is evident that what matters is expressive material itself. It is a quite heterogeneous series of chords that, in *Vingt regards sur l'Enfant Jésus* (1944), provides the pretext for their development. That is, it would be the intrinsic qualities of the chords that would express a sense of calm and tenderness themselves to the listener, not a defined melodic idea. Tenderness is given by their *sonority*.

Thus, a singular paradox occurs in Kivy's theory. We would explain expressiveness, only up to the point where there is no question of how emotions are in the expressive material. Emotions would be found, in fact, for Kivy, only in the *profile structures* that link art to human structures of behaviour, arguing *de facto* that only to the extent that art or nature brings to light certain profile trends, does it make those materials expressive.

We are, thus, back to the starting point, unable to achieve what we promised at the beginning: to grasp why precisely materials manifest themselves as expressive of certain feelings. It is the structure that reveals expressiveness, not the material; and yet, this is not always what characterizes our experience of expressiveness: sometimes, it is just a particular sound, or a particular shade of colour that appears calm, melancholic or aggressive.

Made this point, I believe that also the origin of the objectivist theory criticism can be found in the separation of process and product. In fact, while Kivy's theory brilliantly managed to reunite expressiveness and expression – there is an analogy between the two – nevertheless, it still has a relevant problem, methodologically dependent on the functioning of an analogical argument: for an analogy to exist, there must be a *substratum* for having the analogy proceeded. Evidently, in Kivy's case, this

³⁰ P. Kivy, *Introduction to a Philosophy of music* (1998), cit., pp.44-46.

third term of comparison is identified in the experience of the *expressing body*: it justifies the passage from the behaviour to the musical profile. The body is so placed as a model that underlies the transitive expression of emotions and to which the intransitive expressiveness of expressive phenomena can be referred. From the human behaviour, Kivy claims to identify by analogy the musical profile which would be nothing but the hypothesis of the existence of a «musical body».

And yet, despite its importance, this peculiar experience of the body remains unexamined by Kivy, as if it were immediately intelligible. Only, in doing so, the author conceives *the experience of the body as if it is the experience of human behaviour*, coming across into a significant aporia. The coincidence between body and behaviour forces us to find the justification for the expressiveness of expressive materials *in structures*, just as certain bodily configurations would only make sense in certain structures of behaviour. I frown, and this gesture is meaningful of perplexity only if it is within a wider behaviour expressive of perplexity, says Kivy. In the same way, a musical passage would be expressive of perplexity if the series of chords closed on a fifth-degree of the reference tonality and the melodic line followed that harmonic succession with some rhetorical device.

Here, then, lies the origin of the criticism that concerns the impossibility of justifying the intransitivity of expressive phenomena: making the experience of the body coincide with behaviour, means considering a human expression significant only within a certain behaviour, and so providing the foundations on this ground. Kivy reminds us of this with his famous example of the snout of Saint Bernard: it is expressive of sadness because it is a «complex object» and refers «as a whole» to the human characteristics of sadness, so accentuating individual aspects – sad eyes, a furrowed brow, etc. – that make sense *within* the behaviour of sadness³¹. The author is so forced to consider expressive intransitivity justifiable only in its inherent structure, even when it would seem illogical to presuppose it – the sweetness of a light blue, as the tenderness of a chord.

In other words, Kivy provides a partial expressiveness theory: he accepts the split between process and expressive product, in order to regain virtuously it on the ground of analogy. However, the failure to investigate more closely the experience of the body,

³¹ *Ivi*, pp.37-38.

which acts as a medium for that analogical reasoning, leads the author to say implicitly that an expressive manifestation is significant only within certain behavioural practices, failing to justify the possible intransitivity of expressive phenomena. It is so a failed attempt to consider the expressive process that leads the author to a partial miscomprehension of the expressive product. In fact, as we have seen, this last idea leaves out of the analysis some essential experiences of expressiveness that rely on the pure intransitivity of expressive phenomena: sometimes, but significantly, is the materiality itself that is expressive, without any reference to an expressive *structure*. This is how the world appears to us, with certain properties that must be described through emotional predicates. Thus, as Kivy's attempt might have developed a great theory, it would still have been destined to remain somewhat incomplete.

In the face of this, what it might be useful to do, then, is to start from the two points that the contemporary debate on expressiveness takes for granted, trying to better reformulate the Deweyan approach. In other words, it is now a question of understanding how we can think about the whole question of expressiveness by considering its specificity only with regard to its being objective and public, but without forgetting the fact that it is precisely our common way of talking about emotions that is inseparably intertwined with this dimension of objectivity.

3. Sketching a different manner of thinking “expressiveness”.

Having come this far, it is, therefore, necessary to propose which methodological assumptions a discourse on expressiveness should respect. In fact, the two main contemporary approaches to the question get entangled in some fundamental problems whose origins have been found in the methodological division between process and product. Specifically, the projectivist and profile theory, while both underline that experiencing an emotion is not a necessary condition for decoding an expressive object, both achieve this goal by also unhinging the dichotomy between process and product. But as we have seen, splitting this dichotomy leads the debate to lose the very centre of expressiveness issue, directly in the projective proposal, and indirectly in the profile's one. So, what could be methodologically helpful to the discourse on expressiveness, is

not to split the dichotomy process/product, but to think it differently, replacing the role of the body as distinguished from the behaviour.

Specifically, I think that the expressiveness debate should focus on the dichotomy process/product as *a condition* for the recognizability of expressive phenomena: and that is as far as to say that we cannot have any expressive phenomena if we do not even have a prior know-how (*savoir-faire*) about talking and expressing emotion. If we did not have this *condition* – the link between expression and expressiveness –, we wouldn't even have recognition of expressive phenomena. The Deweyan proposal is so reduced to its original intuition, without the imbalance towards the expressive process. Briefly, we should read the Deweyan proposal as it is the enquiry of a condition for the recognizability of expressiveness, not of a substance composed of two intrinsically connected aspects, of which one of the two is the expressive product. But how to think about such a condition?

The theoretical proposal I would like to look at is the idea that *corporeality is this condition, as it is the first place where process expression and product expressiveness are melted*, along the lines already traced by Merleau-Ponty³². The point is indeed to grasp that the body cannot coincide with the manifestation of human behaviour *because its nature lies somewhere between the expressive process and product*: the expressive body is not only the one that «expresses a feeling», but also the one that it is «expressive of» certain feelings. So certainly, the visage will be that through which I

³² Merleau-Pontian reflection is crossed by the inquiry on the relationship between corporeality and expression. As L. Vanzago claims, Merleau-Ponty has enquired about this theme from the beginning of his thought, until the end. L. Vanzago, *Metamorfosi. La questione dell'espressione nella filosofia di Merleau-Ponty*, in "Lebenswelt", 9, 2016, pp.31-47 and, with a specific insight on the embodiment issue F. Frattaroli, *Corpo della parola, corpo del senso: espressione e pensiero in M. Merleau-Ponty*, in "Studi di estetica", XLIX/2, 2021, pp.51-69. In fact, Merleau-Ponty since his beginning texts like *The structure of the behaviour* and *Phenomenology of perception* claims for analysis between the perceptive expression, and the linguistic one. For example, in M. Merleau-Ponty, *Phénoménologie de la perception* (1945), Gallimard, Paris 2001, pp.VIII-XII. Later, his reflection will enlighten the idea that the body has a symbolic function throughout this process: it is the body that allows us to look behind the perceptual expression and forward to the linguistic one. For example, in M. Merleau-Ponty, *Résumés de cours. Collège de France, 1952-1960*, Gallimard, Paris 1968, p.12. Particularly, in 1959, Merleau-Ponty claims for analysis that would bring to light the transition between the so-called *cogito tacite* and *cogite langagier*; that is between the perceptive expression, and the linguistic one. In M. Merleau-Ponty, *Le visible et l'invisible*, Gallimard, Paris 2016, pp. 222. As F. Colli and A. Prandoni underline precisely on the basis of the analysis of that passage, this transition is possible only considering the perceptive body as the first place (*site*) where the word can bear and, so, establishing between the two a *reversionary* relationship. In F. Colli and A. Prandoni, *L'essere a due facce*, Mimesis, Milano 2002, pp.97-99 and, with a specific focus on the *reversibility* issue, S. Capra, *Il problema del linguaggio in Merleau-Ponty*, in "Rivista di filosofia neoscolastica", LXIV, 1972, pp.446-470.

transitively express my anger, but at the same time, there are cases in which we consider the face as *expressive of* anger, for example considering it in its very components.

This communication, which coincides with what the phenomenological tradition has indicated as the dialectic between *Leib* and *Körper*, can become a solid ground from which to methodologically set out the theme of expressiveness. In fact, we could properly use emotional predicates to speak of perceptive configurations of the world because this possibility has always been *inscribed in our body*, considering it *as* belonging to the world and *as* the ultimate surface of manifestation of the inner world. It would be the experience of our body that would manifest an original connection between the transitivity and intransitivity of expressive experience, becoming a condition of possibility for the description of the expressiveness of the world. This is as much as to say that expressive phenomena are certainly encountered in the world and, therefore, do not require a justification for their existence; however, it is certainly possible to identify the *cause* of their occurrence: the original relation between the body and the world, whereby «original» means that this relationship must be considered as insuperable with respect to the substantiality that we can *subsequently* attribute to the expression of a certain emotional experience or an expressive phenomenon encountered in the world.

I thus hold that expressiveness is something that concerns objects but is also grounded on the relationality between body and world. The expressiveness of artistic or natural phenomena does find its cause in similarity to the expression of feelings, but not to the extent that it brings into manifestation a profile structure. This similarity is played out on a much more significant level: the level of the inscription of the world in the flesh of emotional experience, where the body is both the manifestation of emotional process and a product in its very components. It is the experience of the body that can become proper-behavioural *or (vel)* be confused among the world; but it is precisely in this dichotomy that reasoning by analogy finds its own functioning: the expressive phenomenality of the world finds a reference to the experience of the body itself, condition of the transitivity and intransitivity of expression. Griffero³³ stresses this point

³³ T. Griffero, *Condannati al senso (e all'espressione). Otto tesi sulle atmosfere come insiemi espressivi*, in Benenti e M. Ravasio (ed. by) *Espressività. Un dibattito contemporaneo*, cit., pp.169-195, in part. pp.190-192 and T. Griffero, *Il corpo (proprio) rappresentato*, in "Teorie & Modelli", XV/23, pp. 241-257, with further bibliography. Naturally, this idea brings the debate on the embodiment issue. From a psychological point of view, this idea is usefully explained by J. Esrock, in a contemporary resume about

several times: to identify an expressive phenomenon is to read an embodied significance, not in a different way from how a gesture or a look expresses it, where the experience of the body must be considered as that «analogical bridge» that determines the connection between the perceived and the perceiving.

From this perspective, the phenomenon of expressiveness appears in a very different light from the one to which the Anglo-American debate has accustomed us. In fact, it becomes visible that the subdivision between process and product masks the much more substantial division between subjectivity and objectivity, in the subsequent attempt to reunite them. On the contrary, the consideration that closely follows the phenomenological intuitions by Husserl³⁴ and his Merleau-Pontian re-elaborations, provides a different theoretical ground. It is the perceptive world that presents expressively itself, so that the world of *perception would coincide with the world of expression*³⁵, without the need for a subsequent translation. It is already the bearer of meaning by virtue of this world-body communication of which perception is a sign.

six types of *embodiment*, starting from R. Visser. In fact, the point is there to show how it is possible to conceive an embodied experience, without a simply *imitative* theory: we would not just imitate the surroundings with our body, but we would have just *activation* of our body in a *symbolic* process throughout a reinterpretation process that enlightens the structural *engagement* between body and world. In J. Esrock, *Einfühlung as the Breath of Art: Six Modes of Embodiment*, in “Cognitive Processing”, XIX/2, pp.187-199.

³⁴ With no presumption of completeness, at least: H. Husserl, *Idee per una fenomenologia pura e una filosofia fenomenologica. Libro II* (1912-1929), transl. by E. Filippini, Einaudi, Torino 1965, pp.452-484; H. Husserl, *Lezioni sulla sintesi passiva* (1918-1926), transl. by V. Costa, la scuola, Brescia 2016, pp. 243-282; H. Husserl, *Logica formale e trascendentale* (1929), transl. by G.D. Neri, Laterza, Bari 1966, p.356.

³⁵ This idea appears for the first time in a pivotal course at *College de France* in 1953. In M. Merleau-Ponty, *Le monde sensible et le monde de l'expression*, Metis Press, Genève 2011. Here, Merleau-Ponty stressed for the first time the idea that the perceptual world, for its own structural organization, refers to something else that does not stand in the phenomenon as a *datum* (*Ivi*, p.48), that is as much as to say that perceptual world *is expressive*. Moreover, the author in the same course stresses the idea that an artistic product is expressive not only as it is a perceptual phenomenon (*Ivi*, pp.164-170), but also as it is a phenomenon whose essence is to *express the relation world-body*. In this specific sense, artistic expressive phenomena are second-degree references, which allows to thematize the originary link world/body, seeing this latter as a condition for the analysis of expressive phenomena. Henceforth, the aesthetical reflection by Merleau-Ponty will stress this point more and more, until his premature death. Specifically, in his last texts, like *The visible and the invisible* and, mostly, *The eye and the spirit*, Merleau-Ponty will conceive expressiveness as the key to understanding the value of human expression as the originary metamorphosis of the world into the body and vice-versa: finally expressive phenomena allow to see perception not as a neutral and distant ground, but as the ground that makes the world something familiar to us. M. Merleau-Ponty, *Le visible et l'invisible*, Gallimard, Paris 2016, pp. 170-201; M. Merleau-Ponty, *L'oeil et l'esprit* (1964), Folio, Paris 2007, in part. pp.72-87; but also, with specific insight on the artistic side of the expressiveness issue, M. Merleau-Ponty, *Le doute de Cézanne* (1948), in M. Merleau-Ponty *Sens et non-sens*, Gallimard, Paris 1966, pp.9-33 and M. Merleau-Ponty, *Le langage indirect et le voix du silence*, in *Signes* (1952), Folio, Paris 2016. On this point, and specifically on the passage between the course of the 1953 and the last (official) texts, is useful the introduction to the text Italian version edited by M. Carbone and C. Dalmasso, with additional bibliography within it. M.

Thus, the fundamental point of that debate is already resolved: *artistic expressiveness is rooted in the intrinsic expressiveness of the perceptual world*, and so it is not unreasonable to attribute emotional predicates to certain perceptual configurations. The world itself carries its inability to separate itself from the life of the body.

Here it may be necessary to resolve a doubt about a possible misunderstanding of the Merleau-Pontian position. Indeed, the thinker urges us to think that an answer to the problem of expressiveness means not to separate the giving of the world from the presence of the body. Would this then be a new form of projectivism?

The discussion of this issue would naturally require a separate study. However, it is perhaps necessary to emphasise once again the novelty of the Merleau-Pontian approach, allowing us to mark a significant departure of the author's thought from projectivist positions.

In fact, the author's idea is not to move projectivist reasoning onto the corporeal plane: that is, it is not to justify the expressiveness of the world based on gestural expressions that manifest a certain type of emotion, deriving from the sense of the latter the sense of the former. Instead, the idea is much more radical, using different philosophical assumptions than those shared by projectivist positions: in particular, the author argues that there is no ontological priority of the body over the world, nor of the world over the body. On the contrary, the hypothesis is that before being body and world separately, there is the expressive perception of the world *for* a body³⁶. This

Carbone, *Prefazione. Il mondo sensibile è (già) mondo dell'espressione*, in M. Merleau-Ponty *Il mondo sensibile e il mondo dell'espressione*, Mimesis, Milano 2021, pp.9-16.

³⁶ This thesis deepens throughout the course of Merleau-Pontian reflection. If, however, in *The Structure of Behaviour* and *Phenomenology of Perception* it remains unresolved how it is possible to move from the perceptual belief in the world to the linguistic and conceptual expression of it (M. Merleau-Ponty, *Phénoménologie de la perception*, cit., p.X), in the course *Le monde sensible et le monde de l'expression. Cours au Collège de France. Notes 1953*, Merleau-Ponty clarifies the idea that it is the act of perceiving itself that is expressive. In other words, it is a matter of conceiving every gesture as having its own diacritical value, a value of differentiation that makes it expressive by implying the structure of a system of communicability between the body and the world. The sense of the perceived becomes in fact *the gap* between the perceived thing and the imperception of what surrounds it. Merleau-Ponty derives this thesis by studying Saussurian linguistic structuralism and Gestalt psychology, combining the intuition that the sense of a phoneme is denoted by its power of differentiation with regard to the linguistic system in which it is embedded and the idea that a signitive system is already pre-oriented to a sense (M. Merleau-Ponty, *Le langage indirect et le voix du silence*, cit., pp.52-53; M. Merleau-Ponty, *La prose du monde*, Gallimard, Paris 1969; M. Merleau-Ponty, *Le monde sensible et le monde de l'expression*, cit., pp.54-67). Thus, if it is a matter of moving from linguistic to perceptual expression, it is also a matter of conceiving the very act of perceiving as expressive in a manner analogous to the expressiveness of a linguistic system. And this by virtue of the reference it must have to the world imperceptible but present and presupposed in every act of perception. Hence, the author will then proceed in his later writings to think about the ontological implication of this discourse, developing the difficult notion of flesh, which should

becomes, therefore, an attempt to think expressiveness from an ontological presupposition radically different from that which accompanies the projectivist hypothesis: an ontology capable of thinking of the relationality that binds the body to the world as primary, concerning the subsequent substantiality attributed to the two poles in question. Relationality would thus be the prior category, instead of substantiality.

There would not be, as is assumed by projectivism, two positive and pre-constituted poles of meaning (the self or the world) in which to see the experience of expressiveness justified, but a body-world system that creates through constant differentiation the emergence of particular senses. From here, we would then be led to think of the expressiveness of the world as inherent to gestural expression, *not because it is derived from it but because one is reciprocally inscribed in the other*.

We would thus go beyond any prior separation between subject and object, standing on an ontologically different ground from that which guides the projectivist hypothesis: since it would be a matter of thinking of basic communicability between the expressiveness of the world and emotional expression, developing this communicability based on reversibility of the world concerning the body. Our perceptive faith in it, our «grasp» on the world, is placed before we are aware of each of the two poles in question: the world, as L. Vanzago notes, rather than veiling itself, does not dissimulate. It is therefore from this ontological hypothesis that Merleau-Ponty develops a reflection on the notion of expression, albeit in a more general sense than that of gestural-body expression alone. And it could not be otherwise: starting from the hypothesis of reversibility between body and world, even the notion of expression must inevitably be understood differently than in the projective hypothesis.

Hence, the author's original hypothesis, starts from the consideration that it is precisely the act of perception that indicates this reversibility between the body and the

capture the idea of materiality of the world and the body common and antecedent to both, and which should therefore become the ontological substratum on which to base the thesis of a horizon of worldly imperceptibility in every bodily perception (M. Merleau-Ponty, *Le visible et l'invisible*, cit., pp.279-306). Such a notion would thus provide the condition of possibility for thinking the expressiveness proper to the phenomena of the world intertwined with the expression proper to the body. In other words, the notion of the flesh would be an attempt to think of the differentiated multiplicity of perception of the world in the identity proper to corporeal perception: or, with the particularly effective terms adopted by R. Diodato, a notion that attempts to express an ontology where the differentiation of the real is considered as such, indicating the priority of the category of relationality over that of substantiality (R. Diodato, *Logos estetico*, Morcelliana, Brescia 2012, pp.174-175.).

world: perception is already expression. In other words, what has just been saying is as much as to say that in the act of perception, when we recognise its priority over the substantiality of the body and the world, we experience its intrinsic signification that interweaves our bodily experience with the life of the world. Not a new form of projectivism, since its ontological presupposition is not shared, but a new form of ontology that forces us to rethink the very question of expressivity on a different basis.

And the question of *specificity* is also resolved on the same ground: kinaesthetic and chromatic expressive suggestions are *isomorphic to the body*, making us recognise them as expressive. In other words, it would be by this resonance that some characteristics and not others of the world appropriately enter into relation to the transitive expression of emotional experiences, becoming in themselves intransitively expressive. It is the emotion itself that expands into the surrounding environment through the body's own belonging to the world. More concretely, we could say that Merleau-Ponty's approach to expressiveness provides the phenomenological-ontological foundations for understanding that expressive phenomena should be considered *as certain expressive manifestations*. That is, manifestations are characterized as a certain perceptual configuration both called upon *to explain* the attribution of an emotional state to someone and *to describe* that same emotional state. In particular, expressive phenomena must be considered as expressive manifestations in the phenomenological mode of appearance (Spinicci³⁷).

Functioning intentionality – this primary link between body and world – allows us to consider certain phenomenal manifestations not only as signs or structures that stand for emotion but as themselves part of that same emotion. For it is precisely those configurations of the body, those expressive manifestations, that are both what stands

³⁷ P. Spinicci, *Fenomeni e manifestazioni espressive*, in M. Benenti e M. Ravasio (ed. by) *Espressività. Un dibattito contemporaneo*, cit., pp.145-168. On this idea about expressive phenomena as an expressive manifestation *in the phenomenological mode of appearance*, I would like to point out two useful texts by C. Rozzoni. There, is provided a great insight into what does Husserl means with the expression «in the mode of appearance», both from an axiological point of view – Husserl claims that whereas I am not interested *per se* in the existence of what is presented by the work of art, so I am from an *axiological* point of view, *perceiving* beauty as a *value* – and from an emotive one – the emotion I can perceive throughout work of art have specific ontological status, being quasi emotion because they are structurally dependent from their mode of appearance. In C. Rozzoni, *A Husserlian Approach to Aesthetic Experience: Existential Disinterest and Axiological Interest*, in “Phenomenon”, 29, (2019), pp.115-133 and C. Rozzoni, *Am I Truly Feeling This? Quasi-Emotions and Quasi-Values in Cinematic Experience*, in Thiemo Breyer Marco Cavallaro Rodrigo Y. Sandoval (ed. by) *Phenomenology of Phantasy and Emotion*, WBg, Darmstadt 2022, pp.181-206.

for emotion and what that emotion properly is. In short, it is a question of conceiving the experience of the body as a complex experience that allows an analogy with the world thanks to the inscription in the very existence of corporeality and, therefore, in its capacity to be read in the two directions of its own property (*Lived body*) and its belonging to the world.

Thus, if the question is set out in this way, the debate on expressiveness also takes on an entirely different light and, having forced us to touch on the question of functional intentionality first, can now address the question of artistic-natural expressiveness differently. It will be a matter of keeping this theoretical horizon open in any specific investigation of the aesthetics of artistic objects. Here, too, Merleau-Ponty marks an important path with his latest work, where he reaffirms that genuine artistic expressiveness is recognised not because it is qualitatively different from the phenomenon of expression *tout court*, but because it is capable of bringing to light the body-world bond that allows the expression itself: that is, it is capable of bringing to light a vision of the functioning intentionality itself. This is also the meaning of examination of Cézanne's work³⁸ by Merleau-Ponty: «to be looked at by things» or «to be born to things» would be exactly the access through the phenomenon of artistic expression to the vision of the functioning intentionality that binds our body to the world. It is thus the very question of expressiveness that must be transformed from being only a specific problem of philosophy and aesthetics into a gateway to philosophizing itself: to identify in expressive phenomenality the signals *per speculum in aenigmate* for a vision of that condition of possibility that allows our very experience of the world, in general.

This, then, could be the figure of the questioning about expressive phenomenality: to find, in the questioning of a specific aspect of aesthetic experience, the possibility of putting the experience itself into question, in an effort of rigour that must be methodologically sought not in the decomposition into minimal units of the phenomenon of expression, but in the consideration of an insuperability of the complexity of the experience itself, which starts from its intrinsic relationality.

³⁸ M. Merleau-Ponty, *Le doute de Cézanne*, cit.