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BRITISH IDEALIST AESTHETICS

Collingwood, Wollheim, and the Origins of Analytic Aesthetics

1. INTRODUCTION: BRITISH AESTHETICS IN THE 20TH CENTURY

Although Great Britain is the country of some of the earliest contributors to aesthetics as an independent philosophical discipline, from Lord Shaftesbury to Edmund Burke, and the country of John Ruskin, who was probably the greatest and most influential art critic of the 19th century,¹ the subject attracted little interest in philosophical circles towards the turn of the twentieth century. Of course, one must distinguish here aesthetics as a philosophical discipline from art criticism, where the English made many important contributions at the beginning of the 20th century; one need only recall here the names of members of the Bloomsbury group such as Roger Fry or Clive Bell.² As John Passmore once pointed out, the journal *Mind* published only a handful of papers in aesthetics over the twenty-eight years (1892-1920) of G. F. Stout's editorship (Passmore 1976, 35). British philosophy was then divided between 'idealists' and 'realists'. Within the 'idealist' school, which was then dominant, only four men were ever interested in aesthetics.³ Of these, John Alexander Smith, who was Waynflete Professor of Metaphysics at Oxford (thus a predecessor of Collingwood, Ryle, and Strawson), did not publish his essays – they remain unpublished to this day – and another, his student Arthur Ritchie Lord moved to South Africa, and seems to have played only a very minor role. The other

two, Bernard Bosanquet and Robin Collingwood appear, therefore, to be the only idealist aestheticians of significance in the first half of the twentieth century.⁴ Of the two, Collingwood knew more about art⁵ and was by far more original, as he produced a philosophy of art that truly engaged with the artistic preoccupations of his days in *The Principles of Art* (Collingwood 1938). Among the 'realists', the topic was hardly more popular: only Samuel Alexander and E. F. Carritt showed any interest. While Alexander defended a 'realist' account in *Beauty and other Forms of Value* (Alexander 1933) and in some shorter pieces collected in *Philosophical and Literary Pieces* (Alexander 1939), according to which "artistic experience is not so much invention as discovery" (Alexander 1939, 228), Carritt, who taught at Oxford until the late 1940s, gave up his 'realism' under the influence of the aesthetics of the Italian neo-Hegelian, Benedetto Croce, but never reached an original position of his own.⁶ As an illustration, one may quote from one of his last papers, on Croce:

I am sure that in my unregenerate days when I called a flower or a picture beautiful, I meant that it had that quality as truly as it had its shape. But I have come to think, with Croce's help, that I was wrong, and that all I am entitled to say is that it stimulates in me and perhaps others the kind of experience I call aesthetic: to call a thing beautiful is for me a statement about my experience; to make or imagine a beautiful thing, or the appreciation of one, is to express my experience. (Carritt 1953, 455)

In this paper, I shall focus on Bosanquet and Collingwood. Today, they are rarely read, especially outside the English-speaking world, where Collingwood still makes an appearance in undergraduate courses and in anthologies. For example, if one opens the *Encyclopaedia of Aesthetics* published in 1998, one will find an entry on Collingwood (Anderson 1998), but there is no trace of Bosanquet. The very few who know their names usually dismiss them as 'idealists' or 'neo-Hegelians'. As we shall see, Collingwood is often dismissed as having held an indefensible, outmoded 'ideal' theory, according to which the work of art is primarily 'mental', while his potential role in current debates is simply ignored. To give one striking example of the latter, the late art historian Michael

Baxandall is often praised for his view of the work of art as, to put it briefly, a solution to a problem arising from the particular situation caused by the implementation of a set of conventions in a given context; Yves Michaud even describes his work as the “most concrete illustrations” of Wittgenstein’s position (Michaud 1999, 85). The truth is that Baxandall took his lead from Collingwood, not Wittgenstein.⁷ Michaud also attributes to Richard Wollheim the idea that art should be defined not merely from the artist’s point of view, or the audience’s point of view for that matter, but through the recognition that the artist and the audience can exchange their positions (Michaud 1999, 12). Again, the position is actually Collingwood’s.⁸ There is some irony in the fact that it is attributed to the man who did most to insure that Collingwood’s books would never be read again, as we shall presently see.

After the Second World War, British aesthetics was hardly in a better shape than during Stout’s days as editor of *Mind*. As Gary Kemp noticed (Kemp 2003, 171), aesthetics suffered greatly from widespread scepticism concerning substantive theorizing (e.g., in (Weitz 1956), (Kennick 1958) or (Passmore 1959)), the ‘ideal’ theory being a case at hand.⁹ Aesthetics was also often seen merely as a source of ‘confusions’ in need of ‘clarification’;¹⁰ the ‘confusions’ under study being inevitably those of the ‘idealists’, especially those of Croce, apparently relayed in the English-speaking world by Collingwood or Carritt. As for the few philosophers of that era less averse to theorizing, such as Russell, they had simply nothing to say on aesthetics.¹¹

Analytic aesthetics is now thriving, and this renaissance is in large part due to the publication in 1968 of Richard Wollheim’s *Art and its Objects*¹² and Nelson Goodman’s *The Languages of Art* (Goodman 1968). While Wollheim’s preoccupations are markedly different from those of his distant ‘idealist’ predecessors, whose books remained mostly closed since the 1940s, he sought nevertheless to criticize them.¹³ The target of Wollheim’s critique is a ‘theory’, for which he uses the label ‘Croce-Collingwood’,¹⁴ and which he described in these words:

First, that the work of art consists in an inner state or condition of the artist, called an intuition or an expression: secondly, that this state is not immediate or given, but is the product of a process, which is peculiar to the artist, and which involves articulation, organization, and unification:

thirdly, that the intuition so developed may be externalized in a public form, in which case we have the artefact which is often but wrongly taken to be the work of art, but equally it need not be. (Wollheim 1980, 36-37)

One key feature is the ‘subjective’ or ‘ideal’ character of the work of art:

[N]ot only can the artist create a particular work of art without in point of fact ever externalizing it, but his capacity in general to create works of art, or his attainment as an artist (as we might put it) may flourish quite independently of there being in existence any means of externalization. The artist is an artist solely in virtue of his inner life [...] we must appreciate that it is an essential feature of the Croce-Collingwood thesis that not only can the artist make works of art to himself, but that he may be in the situation in which he can only make works of art to himself. (Wollheim 1980, 114-115)

Paraphrasing him, the ‘ideal’ theory is said to have three features:

- (a) The work of art consists in an inner state or condition of the artist, called an intuition or an expression.
- (b) This state is not immediate or given, but is the product of a process peculiar to the artist.
- (c) The intuition so developed may be externalized in a public form, but equally it need not be.

Wollheim then proceeded to argue against this theory with the following two points (Wollheim 1980, 40). First, by making the work of art something ‘ideal’, i.e., inner or mental, there is no object to which both artist and the audience can have access:

- (d) The link between the artist and the audience is severed,

Secondly, that a sculptor, for example, must carve a piece of marble to produce a statue to be seen by the audience is by no means a minor, almost irrelevant aspect of the production of the work of art. In other words,

(e) The ‘ideal’ theory totally ignores the significance of the medium.

Wollheim has also a further argument related to (d), to which I shall return in due time.¹⁵ For the moment, it suffices to note that agreement with Wollheim on these two points is now almost universal. As a matter of fact, as an objection, (e) is not even original: it was already levelled against Croce, as far as I can tell for the first time, by Samuel Alexander in the 1930s (Alexander 1933, 57-59; 1939, 230), and it was debated in the 1950s (Hospers 1956, 293) (Gallie 1959, 18). Furthermore, the case for the intrinsic limitations of the medium was already made forcefully, in the case of painting, by E. H. Gombrich in chapter I of *Art and Illusion* (Gombrich 1961, 32-62).¹⁶ The problem I have with Wollheim’s critique is rather that he utterly misrepresented Collingwood’s views when labelling his target the ‘Croce-Collingwood theory’.¹⁷ That Collingwood did not hold the ‘ideal’ theory has been shown already by Aaron Ridley (Ridley 1997, 1998),¹⁸ and I do not wish to reduplicate his arguments,¹⁹ especially those against the use of argument (e) against Collingwood, for whom engagement with the medium is indeed an essential part of art. Indeed, Collingwood has some wonderful pages on Cézanne, Bernard Berenson and Vernon Blake in which he clearly affirms the importance of engaging with the medium in a *physical* manner (Collingwood 1938, 144-148), pages that would contradict the claim that (e) applies to his position. Since Wollheim does not provide a textual basis, if anything the presumption (re-enforced by Ridley’s analyses) is that it is he who is guilty of misreading Collingwood.

Furthermore, Wollheim’s account leaves no room for Collingwood’s claim, which will become crucial later on, that in the ‘expression of an emotion’, there is no such thing as an emotion existing prior to and independently of its expression:

Until a man expresses his emotion he does not yet know what emotion it is. The act of expressing it is therefore an exploration of his own emotions. He is trying to find out what these emotions are. There is certainly here a directed process: an effort, that is, directed upon a certain end; but the end is not something foreseen and preconceived, to which appropriate means can be thought out in the light

of our knowledge of its special character. Expression is an activity of which there can be no technique. (Collingwood 1938, 111)

[...] the expression of an emotion is not, as it were, a dress made to fit an emotion already existing, but is an activity without which the experience of that emotion cannot exist. Take away the language and you take away what is expressed. (Collingwood 1938, 244)²⁰

One may again insist that Collingwood just contradicts himself, since he held (a) and (c). After all didn’t he write:

[...] a piece of music is [...] something which may exist solely in the musician’s head. (Collingwood 1938, 151)

Setting aside ‘ontological’ issues about the work of art,²¹ this is simply to overlook the plain fact that, when Collingwood was speaking of ‘expression of emotion’, he meant *linguistic* expression. Anyone can compose a tune expressing an emotion by whistling it in one’s head and keep it for oneself, but how could a tune be thus whistled ‘in one’s head’ without any appeal to any musical language? And, since what is expressed in language is already *in principle* shareable, one may keep one’s thoughts for oneself, but they are in principle *accessible* and *shareable* (at least if you are agreeing with Wittgenstein, to whom Collingwood is indeed very close):

A man may, no doubt, speak to himself and be his own hearer; but what he says to himself is in principle capable of being said to any one sharing his language. (Collingwood 1938, 317)

As a matter of fact, it is very clear that the principle of Wollheim’s characterization and critique of the ‘Croce-Collingwood’ theory is to deny this very possibility, but not only is it ridiculous to assume that this was not what Collingwood had in mind given what he actually wrote (passages such as this one are conveniently overlooked by Wollheim), it is also on this very point that Bosanquet criticized and rejected Croce, a rejection in which, I shall claim, Collingwood followed Bosanquet, going a few steps further towards a more satisfactory theory. I shall argue

now in a more historical fashion, providing links with Bosanquet, who rejected Croce's aesthetics on grounds that he works with a woefully inadequate view of language and also by emphasizing at the end of the paper that Collingwood's move towards a 'community view' of the work of art was essential to his rejection of the 'ideal' theory.

Before moving on, however, I should add two small but important exegetical points to my rejoinder to Wollheim's reading of Collingwood (as I do not intend to linger on this issue). First, as Richard Sclafani pointed out already some time ago (Sclafani 1976, 353-357), Wollheim misreads Collingwood because he does not distinguish between two uses of 'imaginary' and 'imaginative' in Collingwood's text. Indeed, these words might be understood as meaning something like 'in the form of a mental image', as in Collingwood's discussion of the engineer's 'imaginary bridge' (Collingwood 1938, 131) or as meaning, as the Oxford English Dictionary has it (as one of meanings of 'imagination'): "The mind; thinking; thought, opinion". This more general meaning might be obsolete – one finds it, e.g., in Hobbes or Hume – but it clearly fits Collingwood's uses in the section on 'imaginative expression' (Collingwood 1938, 235f.) as well as in passages such as this, where 'language' and 'art proper' are equated with 'imaginative activity':

The aesthetic experience, or artistic activity, is the experience of expressing one's emotions; and that which expresses them is the total imaginative activity called indifferently language or art. This is art proper. (Collingwood 1938, 275)

Wollheim's reading can only make sense when one recognizes only the first meaning and then misreads all passages concerning the 'total imaginative activity' or 'imaginative experience of total activity' of the artist or of the audience.²² To claim that Collingwood collapsed both meanings implies that he must have held some sort of 'picture theory', but he emphatically rejected such theories (Collingwood 1938, 172-194). In fairness to Wollheim, however, it must be said that Collingwood is himself confused at times, including in passages on which Wollheim's reading is based.²³ However, it should become clear from the following section that Wollheim's reading is appropriate for Croce's

aesthetics, my point being that Bosanquet and Collingwood rejected this sort of view for that very reason.

This point is of importance, since some of the most valuable arguments in Collingwood's *Principles of Art* concern his critique of the idea that the experience of a work of art is purely sensual and that it is purely passive. His analogy in this context between understanding a work of art and the hearing of a science lecture (Collingwood 1938, 140-141), which cannot be fully understood if the audience is said merely to hear sounds, has been misread, because Collingwood suggests that "we must reconstruct" – he might as well have said 're-enact' – the lecturer's ideas "in our minds" (Collingwood 1938, 141), and this looks as if he is 'doubling-up'²⁴ the 'total imaginative activity' of the artist in the audience's mind. There are many reasons why one would want to see this as plainly wrong. For example, Collingwood argued in *The Idea of History* and *An Autobiography* that 're-enactment' of someone else's thought results not in thinking a copy of her thought which would be at best numerically different from the original thought, but exactly the same thought (one of his arguments for this is simply that numerical identity does not apply to thoughts).²⁵ So Collingwood was never in the business of 'doubling up' thoughts. Below I shall give further reasons to see this as a misreading.

Secondly, I think that one should take seriously the fact that Wollheim's reading is almost entirely based on excerpts from Book I of Collingwood's *The Principles of Art*, as if what he wrote elsewhere in the book was irrelevant to the proper interpretation of his thought.²⁶ This is particularly problematic since Collingwood tended to fit his arguments within a thesis-antithesis-synthesis mould typical of British Idealists. He was quite clear about this in *An Essay on Philosophical Method*:

The philosophers who have had the deepest instinct for style have repeatedly shrunk from adopting the form of a lecture or instructive address, and chosen instead that of a dialogue in which the work of self-criticism is parcelled out among the dramatis personae, or a meditation in which the mind communes with itself, or a dialectical process where the initial position is modified again and again as difficulties come to light. (Collingwood 2005, 210)

There is of course no reason to believe that these words, especially the last clause, do not apply to his own writings. In fact, Collingwood's true views in *The Principles of Art* are only expressed adequately in Book III, once remarks from Book I are corrected through considerations found in Book II.²⁷ Collingwood is quite explicit about this in a number of places in the book, including at the end of Book I, where he points out that the theory in Book III results from the "union" of the lines of enquiry of the previous Books (Collingwood 1938, 153), and in a telling footnote to the section from which the above quotation was taken:

The reader understands, I hope, that everything I say in Book I is avowedly provisional, and that my theory of art is not stated until Book III. (Collingwood 1938, 136, n.1)

Accordingly, Book III opens with this remark:

The empirical and descriptive work of Book I left us with the conclusion that art proper, as distinct from amusement or magic, was (i) expressive, (ii) imaginative. Both of these terms, however, awaited definition: we might know how to apply them [...] but we did not know to what theory concerning the thing so designated this application might commit us. It was to fill this gap in our knowledge that we went on to the analytical work of Book II. (Collingwood 1938, 273)

Note that Collingwood explicitly states that up to that point he has not defined what he means by art proper being 'expressive' and 'imaginative'! He had already warned the reader at the very end of Book I, when introducing Book II, which is entitled 'The Theory of Imagination':

In Book II therefore, I shall make a fresh start. I shall try to work out a theory of imagination and of its place in the structure of experience as a whole, by developing what has already been said about it by well-known philosophers [Croce? C.K.]. In doing this I shall make no use whatever of anything contained in Book I. (Collingwood 1938, 152-153)

Collingwood is therefore perfectly coherent and transparent in his strategy. But all of this undermines Wollheim's reading because he draws only on quotations from Book I.²⁸

2. GROCE AND BRITISH IDEALIST AESTHETICS

There is plenty of evidence that many British philosophers of the first half of the 20th century, such as E. F. Carritt, read Croce and were deeply influenced by his views. But the older Bosanquet discovered Croce late in his career and the Italian could not have had any formative influence on his thinking. Furthermore, Bosanquet strongly rejected just about every premise of Croce's aesthetics, as we shall see (Bosanquet 1920a,b). As for Collingwood, the very idea of a 'Croce-Collingwood' theory has its origin in the view, expressed as early as 1953 by Carritt that Collingwood's *Principles of Art* is "mainly an implementation of Croce" (Carritt 1953, 453). Collingwood himself wrote to Croce about his book that "the doctrine taught in it is in all essentials your own" (Collingwood 1964, xiv). There is ample evidence that Collingwood knew very well and appreciated Croce's philosophy, which he discovered rather early in his career because of his interest in Vico: he translated a lot of Croce, including his book on Vico (Croce 1913) and the second English edition of his *Aesthetics* (Croce 1922), which should be attributed to him, not Douglas Ainslie, whose name appears on the cover.²⁹ As Alan Donagan points out, evidence of this sort shows that it is not only a question of priority but one of influence (Donagan 1972, 266). It is clear that Collingwood owes some of his key ideas to Croce, but it is also clear that he reformulated them. The question arises therefore of the extent of this reformulation: can we still speak of a 'Croce-Collingwood' theory, as some still do today,³⁰ or does Collingwood's reformulation modify essential points in a way that undermines the idea that there is a 'Croce-Collingwood theory'. The latter is what I aim to show, arguing that the often criticised 'ideal theory' is in Croce but not in Collingwood.

One should recall that, for all his professed admiration, Collingwood did not share the presuppositions of Croce's philosophy of history (nor those of Croce's follower Gentile) and published an extensive critique of it (Collingwood 1965, 3-22). In what follows, I shall argue that he rejected some key presuppositions of Croce's aesthetics too. Further-

more, my point will be that his critique of Croce was already in essence that of Bosanquet. Both argued on the basis of what they perceived as a wrong conception of linguistic meaning, but, I shall claim, Collingwood did it on the basis of an explanation of meaning which is not only different, but much more interesting than Bosanquet's. This led him to argue for a 'community view' of the meaning of the work of art that has, incidentally, no antecedent whatsoever in Croce.

I shall claim further that Bosanquet and Collingwood both tried to establish a less 'subjective' and thus more 'objective' view than Croce. They both wanted to emphasize the social role of art. On this point, they sometimes wrote strikingly similar remarks. However, their claims are, as we shall see, only superficially similar, because they are based on different premises: on the one hand, Bosanquet either mentions this social role of art without trying to explain it, or, at best, his explanations are based on his metaphysics of the Absolute, which is derivative from Bradley's. On the other hand, Collingwood in his later period moved away from his earlier idealist view and began to develop an original linguistic philosophy which is very similar to that propounded by the later Wittgenstein, as a basis for his explanation of the social role of art. In a nutshell, if art is to play a social role, its meaning must be in principle accessible to all in a way that leaves no room for scepticism, and Collingwood argued that aesthetic meaning is, like meaning in language, already social or communal. These views of Collingwood's are strikingly original and I believe that they are still valuable today.

Since much discussion of these issues consists of attributions of claims to various authors without any textual basis, and since I cannot presume extensive knowledge of the authors concerned, in what follows, I shall cite at length Croce, Bosanquet and Collingwood, whenever I attribute a claim to them.

In 1920, Bosanquet published a thirty-page analysis of 'Croce's Aesthetics' in the *Proceedings of the British Academy* (Bosanquet 1920a). As a Hegelian philosopher, Bosanquet appreciated some aspects of Croce's aesthetics, namely its ability to explain "the rank of beauty among the experiences of the spirit" and to do justice to the "spirituality" and "simplicity", in other words, the autonomy of the beautiful (Bosanquet 1920a, 1). But he could not accept just about anything else in Croce's aesthetics; his rejection is not wholesale because he does accept that

art and beauty could be among 'forms' or 'activities' of 'spirit'.³¹ His main arguments are against two claims by Croce: first, that 'intuition' – this being Croce's peculiar concept of *intuizione* – is prior to conceptual thought, and, secondly, that it corresponds to a distinct phase or level of language. Croce's *Aesthetics* opens indeed with a sharp distinction between 'intuition' and 'concept'. Since 'intuition' is almost synonymous here with perception (Croce 1992, 3), one should note that he argues there are pure 'intuitions' free from any concepts: this shows that the presence of conceptual content is not a necessary condition, from which he infers strangely that, when present in 'intuition', concepts

[...] are no longer concepts, having lost any independence and autonomy. They *were*, indeed, once concepts but have now simply become components of intuitions. (Croce 1992, 2)

An 'intuition' will be, for example, an "impression of moonlight, depicted by the painter" (Croce 1992, 2) or a "tinge of colour in the sky" (Croce 1992, 5). What Croce meant by the fact that 'intuitions' are at the same time pre-conceptual while possibly including conceptual content is not clarified, and this is the point against which Bosanquet will inveigh. Furthermore, 'intuition' precedes the distinction between what is and what is not real (Croce 1992, 3) and in 'intuition' not only is there no subject-object distinction, the subject is literally *generating* or *constructing* objects of the external world out of impressions or sensations:

Intuition embraces, without distinction, both the perception of what is real, and the representation of what is simply possible. In intuition we do not situate ourselves, as empirically existing beings, before an already existing external world, rather we make mental objects out of our impressions, whatever these may be. (Croce 1992, 4)³²

According to Croce, therefore, in perception the 'spirit' produces, through a process that is left unanalyzed (except for a short critical discussion of associationist psychology (Croce 1992, 7-8)), 'representations' or pictures of the objects of the external world out of the stimuli it receives. And this happens at a stage which is distinct from and prior to any truly

‘conceptual’ activity of the ‘spirit’, which is called ‘Logic’, as opposed to ‘Aesthetics’ – these being the two theoretical activities of the ‘spirit’, to which Croce adds later two further practical activities. Although Croce is not specific about this in his opening paragraphs, the ‘conceptual’ activity of the ‘spirit’ consist in the ability to make judgments; the distinction between what is real and what is not real will be drawn only at this ‘conceptual’ stage.

There are some obvious difficulties with this view that are picked up by Bosanquet. It is clear that he could not follow Croce. Like Bradley, he was an ‘objective’ and not a ‘subjective’ idealist, and Croce’s position certainly appears as a variant of the latter: if there is a distinct stage for ‘intuition’, in that stage there is no distinction between what is real and what is not real, only pictures produced by the spirit. So it all begins with a purely subjective state (while for Bradley and his epigones, there is no such thing) and one is justified to ask if it makes sense to speak of a picture at a stage where one is not yet in a position to distinguish between a picture and what it depicts. In typical fashion, Bosanquet argues that the whole approach is “a nest of contradictions” (Bosanquet 1920a, 8):

The position of art and beauty among the forms of the spirit is, I believe, a flat self-contradiction. They are essentially prior to conceptual thought; that is the main point of the whole arrangement. But this is really impossible. There is no such prior stage. The image may be free from any explicit judgment; but to call it an image means that it is discriminated by thought and referred to objective conditions. How else could it be an image of anything? The intuition is thus at once pre-thought and an object of thought [...] Croce’s examples leave no doubt, “The intuitions are this river, this lake, etc.” How can this river be other than an object of thought having identity, diversity, and all the rest? (Bosanquet 1920b, 214)

But Croce compounds his problems by adding here the most distinctive element of his aesthetic theory, namely that this ‘intuition’ is ‘expression’:

Everything that is truly intuition or representation is also

expression. That which is not brought before the mind as an object by expression is not intuition or representation, but sensation or something merely natural. The spirit only intuits by making, forming, expressing. Anyone who separates intuition from expression will never be able to put them together again. Intuitive activity intuits only insofar as it expresses [...] To intuit is to express and nothing else (nothing more but nothing less) than to express. (Croce 1992, 8-9)

To this, one must now add that Croce conceives this expression as intrinsically aesthetic: “poetic material runs in all our souls: only expression, that is, form, makes a poet”.³³ However, since Croce recognizes that “there can be no thought without words” (Croce 1992, 25), he has to recover the independent, prior stage of ‘intuition’ within language itself:

Poetry is the language of feeling: prose of the intellect; but since the intellect, in its concrete reality, is also feeling, every piece of prose has its poetic side. (Croce 1992, 28)

Therefore, there is a poetic dimension to all linguistic expression, and aesthetics becomes the science of language or linguistics.³⁴ One is reminded here of another Neapolitan philosopher, Vico: this last quotation is almost a paraphrase of *Scienza Nuova*, Book I, LIII, § 219 (Vico 1984, 75-76). This point is crucial for our understanding of the ‘ideal’ theory or the very possibility of a ‘Croce-Collingwood’ theory. Indeed, it is clear from the above quotations that Croce has distinguished an independent stage or phase, prior to any conceptual activity, where ‘spirit’ expressed itself through the production of pictures. Even if that expression is linguistic and therefore ‘conceptual’, it retains an aesthetic layer. One ought now to recall Wollheim’s description of the ‘ideal’ theory in terms of (a)-(c). Let us drop for the moment (b) and note that, clearly, Croce is committed to (a). He is also committed to (c):

In fact, of the many expressions and intuitions to which the spirit gives form, not all are fixed in an external form by us: not all our thoughts and mental images are spoken aloud, or written, or printed, or drawn, or coloured, or exhibited to an audience. Between the crowd of intuitions, formed

or at least sketched out in our spirits, we choose. [...] having formed an intuition, there is always the question to be pondered, whether it is worth communicating to others, and to whom, and when, and how [...] (Croce 1992, 130)

Croce actually has a lot to say about what he considers the crossing of the “*pons asinorum* of expression” (Croce 1992, 11), but there is no need to get into this here, one merely needs to register commitment to (c). To come back to our original question, if (a) and (c) describe Croce’s aesthetics, do they describe Collingwood’s? As mentioned above, my answer is no. We can see why by enquiring further into Bosanquet’s critical reaction to Croce.

Indeed, Bosanquet rejects Croce’s identification of ‘intuition’ and ‘expression’. This means rejecting the very possibility of a distinct and fundamental ‘poetic’ phase in language. We saw that Bosanquet already denied the possibility of a distinct phase for ‘intuition’, arguing that the very idea is self-contradictory. Now Bosanquet argues that there could not be any language without a ‘conceptual’ aspect:

The primary function of language, to communicate to a mind what it does not know in terms of what it already knows, could not possibly be achieved. The primitive mind, so far from being purely contemplative and imaginative, is immersed in practice; and at every moment it must demand communication through definite and separable elements of speech. ‘Cross two rivers and turn upstream by the third.’ How could primitive life be carried on without such communications as this? And how could such a sentence convey useful advice if the points at which error is possible were not distinct and recognizable references? (...) It is an extraordinary contradiction to appeal, as Croce does more than once, to the contrast, already remarked by Aristotle, between the logical assertion or proposition and the sentence used to utter a wish or command. Croce takes this to mean that the former alone had a significance based in agreement, while the latter could be seen as a type of the primitive poetry which he thinks of as free from such meaning and prior to it. But both kinds of sentence alike, though one of them is not assertory, have of course ‘conventional’

or logical significance, and it was to clench this point that I used an imperative as my illustration. Language, in short, is not language without its conceptual side; and to equate language with intuition, and treat intuition as prior to thinking, is to shatter and overthrow the whole conception of a unity of the human mind. (Bosanquet 1920a, 8-9)

One should note that Bosanquet relies in this passage on a crude view of language as means of communication, i.e., as a *vehicle* for thoughts. He does not discuss this view further but simply assumes it is less absurd; I shall come back to this point. Bosanquet further believes that, with language shorn of the means to communicate, it is simply not possible to talk about ‘beauty’:

If expression, beauty, and language are taken in principle as prior to thought and explicit meaning, then the problem of beauty is treated as if it were solved, when in truth it has not yet been raised. (Bosanquet 1920a, 6)

More interestingly in the context of this paper, he ponders about whether, on Croce’s theory, the meaning of the work of art is reduced to what amounts to a ‘private’ picture. In other words, Bosanquet is pointing out that Croce ignores the role of the artefact or medium in art:

Croce rejects, we said, the reality of the external world. With this rejection, the singleness of the intuition-expression is forcibly intensified. In art, it is usually felt and held, there is in some sense an inner and outer. True, beauty lies in imagination and not in physical character, but yet the striving for expression seems to be a striving to give outward reality to something from within. To any such feeling of an inner and an outer in art or beauty Croce will not yield a hair’s breadth. The external world is not real at all; art is the most real of things. How then can art become a part of the external world, or be in any way connected with physical process or media? (Bosanquet 1920a, 10)³⁵

Here, Bosanquet is in effect rejecting (c) using an argument that prefigures Wollheim’s use of (e). For this reason, it seems to me inappropriate to attribute the ‘ideal’ theory to Bosanquet. This is not to

say that I would deem his views acceptable, simply that it would be hasty to stick this label on his views without actually looking at what he wrote. The problem with Bosanquet's critique, however, was pointed out by Alexander: it is "to say what is true without assigning a reason" (Alexander 1939, 220).³⁶ Indeed, Bosanquet does not explain why "the embodiment is necessary to feeling".

As I pointed out, Bosanquet assumed in his critique a model of language, according to which, to put it crudely, the speaker forms an intention and then expresses it in language using conventional meaning, and the hearer deciphers the conventional meaning of the words used in order to form a picture of the speaker's intention. According to Bosanquet, Croce's notion of 'intuition' does not fit this model. Wollheim has a related point, where he bungles his interpretation of Croce (forgetting for a moment the 'Collingwood' of the 'Croce-Collingwood' theory), by claiming that Croce distinguishes art from language: in the case of art, we are told, the artist

[...] may be in a situation in which he can make works of art only to himself: in other words, it is possible that he could have the intuitions and there be no way in the society of externalizing them. (Wollheim 1980, 115)

Wollheim then contrasts this with the case of language: when one forms thoughts in the medium of language it is true that one might refrain from sharing them or "employing them externally", but it is always in principle possible to do so. So the theory is not about "the thinker who has a medium of thought which he uses only to himself", but about "the thinker who has no medium of thought" (Wollheim 1980, 116). This is clearly not fair to Croce, who identifies art and language. As we saw in our last quotation, any intuition formed is in principle employable externally, to use Wollheim's jargon. As a matter of fact, this even forces Croce to claim that the difference between Raphael and any incompetent painter is not in the ability to render on canvas one's 'intuition' but the quality of the 'intuition' itself (Croce 1992, 9-10)! As this last point shows, Croce's theory is not without grave difficulties, as it is clear that he runs afoul of (e).

Now, if we apply the view of language crudely presented above to the case of art, Bosanquet's claim amounts to this (of course not in his own words): Croce thinks that we have something like the intention-

in-the-head-of-the-artist, its (contingent) externalization in a physical object, and the replica-of-the-artist's-intention-in-the-head-of-the-audience, formed by contact with the physical object. This is exactly what was meant by 'doubling up' at the end of last section. But, according to the above view, this could *not* be if there is no prior set of conventions for communication in language, for the externalization of the intention-in-the-head-of-the-artist in a physical object, conventions that are shared by the audience, whose members are then in a position to form in their heads replicas-of-the-artist's-intention. So Croce cannot explain how we could communicate through the work of art. This last point is important for Bosanquet since he claims in his *Three Lectures on Aesthetics* that

[...] the aesthetic attitude is that in which we have a feeling which is so embodied in an object that it will stand still to be looked at, and, in principle, to be looked at by everybody. (Bosanquet 1915, 6)

Furthermore, Bosanquet believed that it is essential to the aesthetic feeling that it is a 'common feeling'. Thus, he says that "you can appeal to others to share it; and its value is not diminished by being shared" (Bosanquet 1915, 5). The reasons for Bosanquet's appeal to a 'common feeling' are rather complex; they have to do with Bosanquet's belief that art leads to an expansion of the self, both that of the artist and that of the spectator.³⁷ If art were to play such a role in the development of character or consciousness, it would then need to appeal to 'common feelings'. We reached here the social motivations behind Bosanquet's aesthetics, but we need not enter into them, only notice that, as we shall see, Collingwood's theory was also motivated by the social role he imputed to art.

One should notice, however, that Bosanquet does not clarify what he means by the 'embodiment' of 'feelings' in the work of art, nor does he apparently feel any need to justify the model of language he assumed here. This model involves 'doubling up' meanings and it is not without its own set of difficulties. For example, this 'doubling up' naturally generates scepticism, since there is no guarantee that the replica-of-the-artist's-intention-in-the-head-of-the-audience actually corresponds to the intention-in-the-head-of-the-artist, because there is no direct access to it, only access through the 'encoding', so to speak,

of it in the physical object; and any cases of misunderstanding seem to lend support to this ‘in principle’ scepticism, which also besets our contemporary ‘intentionalist’ theories, such as Wollheim’s or Levinson’s.³⁸ (Notice that this means that Wollheim’s own positive theses do not entirely avoid the difficulty he raised himself as (d) above.) At all events, the problem with Bosanquet’s position has to do with the fact that he did not explain how it is that the aesthetic feeling or emotion can be shared, since he appealed in his criticism of Croce to a view of language where ‘meanings’ remain essentially private. I think that Collingwood consciously devised his aesthetic theory, which has recently been called, rightly, a ‘performance’ theory,³⁹ to avoid this pitfall (showing that it successfully avoids it would be another story).

In *The Principles of Art*, Collingwood never discussed openly Croce’s aesthetics so that one could see clearly what he took from it and what he rejected. As I read Collingwood, however, his aesthetic theory is consonant with Bosanquet’s criticisms of Croce’s. Even his old teacher Carritt, who had become enamoured with Croce, pointed out that the Italian’s concept of expression is “not communication” and that, with it, we would remain “confined to ourselves” (Carritt 1932, 90-91). The worry would then be – not a ‘post-modern’ one for sure – that one would not be in a position adequately to explain how the artist and her audience could share anything through the work of art. Collingwood was acutely aware of this and expressed himself very clearly in *The Principles of Art*:

The aesthetic experience in itself, we are assuming, is in both cases a purely inward experience, taking place wholly in the mind of the person who enjoys it. But this inward experience is supposed to stand in a double relation to something outward or bodily. (a) For the artist, the inward experience may be externalized or converted into a perceptible object; though there is no intrinsic reason why it should be. (b) For the audience, there is a converse process: the outward experience comes first, and this is converted into that inward experience which alone is aesthetic. (...) if aesthetic experience in the artist is something wholly independent of such outward things, but in the audience is something dependent upon them and derived in contem-

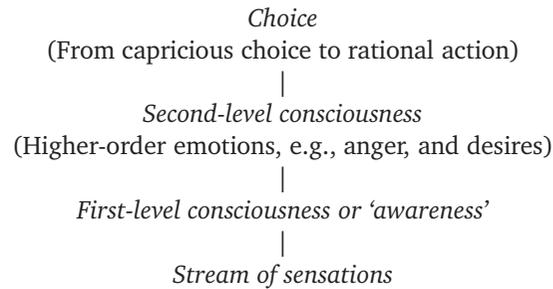
plation of them, how is it an experience of the same kind in the two cases, and how is there any communication? (Collingwood 1938, 301-302)

His own view on this matter was, on the contrary, that, in the case here of painting, the audience’s experience is “identical with that of the painter” (Collingwood 1938, 308). Clearly, the English were ill at ease with certain aspects of Croce and were not buying it wholesale. That meant, however, that one would have to provide the theoretical underpinnings necessary for sharing. The whole of *The Principles of Art*, Book II is indeed devoted to ‘imagination’, and this sounds rather Crocean, but he develops in that book a philosophy of language, further improved later on in his last book, *The New Leviathan*, which is not only decidedly *not* Crocean, but also more interesting than the model of language appealed to by Bosanquet in his criticisms of Croce. In other words, the basis for Collingwood’s theory is *not* lifted from Croce, and the difference is, again, an essential one, since it amounts to a repudiation of the ‘ideal’ theory set forth in (a)-(c). What follows involves a lot of silent reconstruction of Collingwood’s thoughts on these issues, which were still evolving at the time of his early death at the age of 53 in 1943, so the reader should beware not to try to find it fully developed in earlier works such as *The Idea of History* (Collingwood 1994), mostly written by 1936, or even fully developed in *The Principles of Art*, completed in 1938.⁴⁰

3. COLLINGWOOD’S AESTHETICS

Perhaps the best way to understand Collingwood’s late views on language and art is to understand them in the broader context in which they are inserted, contrasting them with the theory from which they evolved. My overall understanding of the evolution of Collingwood’s philosophy is that, after being schooled in ‘Oxford Realism’ prior to the first world war, he became an ‘idealist’, but that in the late 1930s, he gradually shed a good deal of this ‘idealist’ heritage, moving to his mature views (which he never fully developed before his untimely death).⁴¹ Thus, *Speculum Mentis* (Collingwood 1924) and *An Essay on Philosophical Method* (Collingwood 2005) provide the best expression of his ‘idealism’. The precise nature of the latter is still a matter of de-

bate, but it is clear that it was of a highly original form. For example, his ‘dialectic’ of the mind as a ‘scale of forms’ in *Speculum Mentis* was an ambitious system, moving from the pure ‘stream’ of sensations to rational action, and integrating as stages art, religion, science, philosophy and history. A simplified version of its ‘psychological’ side would look like this:⁴²



In a nutshell, out of the ‘stream’ of sensations, the agent becomes aware of her surroundings and her own emotional reaction to it, in turn, she might develop her own higher-order emotions (or ‘emotions of the intellect’ as Collingwood put it), e.g., feeling angry because of her own feeling of shame, and her own desires. Then comes time to choose of all of these which to pursue, given her understanding of her own situation. In order to assist in moving from one level to another, one finds theoretical activities. For example, *The New Leviathan* contains a lengthy discussion of the use of philosophical and historical thinking in order for the agent to choose, of the possibilities offered, one’s ‘duty’, i.e., the ‘rational’ action *par excellence* (Collingwood 1992, chap. XIII-XVIII). The original place of art is at the first-level consciousness or ‘awareness’, where ‘imagination’ is needed in order to achieve ‘expression’ of one’s feelings with regard to the events one is living through. The idea seems to be that the agent becomes ‘aware’ through ‘attention’ of parts of her total ‘stream’ of sensations, but that these sensations always come with an emotional charge,⁴³ but the latter, however, might be too painful for the agent fully to recognize and accept as her own, so she would disown it. So the process of becoming aware of one’s basic emotional response to events in one’s life might fail, and result in a strange situation in which the agent feels some emotions but disowns them, i.e., she

refuses to recognize that she feels what she feels. Collingwood calls this situation the ‘corruption of consciousness’. He describes it almost using Hume’s terms for the passage from sense-impressions to ideas:

First, we direct our attention towards a certain feeling, or become conscious of it. Then, we take fright at what we have recognized: not because the feeling, as an impression, is an alarming impression, but because the idea into which we are converting it proves an alarming idea. We cannot see our way to dominate it, and shrink from persevering in the attempt. We therefore give it up, and turn our attention to something less intimidating . . . I call this the ‘corruption’ of consciousness; because consciousness permits itself to be bribed or corrupted in the discharge of its function, being distracted from a formidable task towards an easier one. (Collingwood 1938, 217)

Collingwood considered ‘corruption of consciousness’ unhealthy and potentially dangerous:

Unless consciousness does its work successfully, the facts which it offers to intellect, the only things upon which intellect can build its fabric of thought, are false from the beginning. A truthful consciousness gives intellect a firm foundation upon which to build; a corrupt consciousness forces intellect to build on a quicksand. The falsehoods which an untruthful consciousness imposes on the intellect are falsehoods which intellect can never correct for itself. In so far as consciousness is corrupted, the very wells of truth are poisoned. Intellect can build nothing firm. Moral ideals are castles in the air. Political and economic systems are mere cobwebs. Even common sanity and bodily health are no longer secure. [. . .] Just as the life of a community depends for its very existence on honest dealing between man and man, the guardianship of this honesty being vested in any one class or section, but in all and sundry, so the effort towards expression of emotions, the effort to overcome corruption of consciousness, is an effort that has to be made not by specialists only but by every one who uses language,

whenever he uses it. Every utterance and every gesture that each one of us makes is a work of art. It is important to each one of us that in making them, however much he deceives others, he should not deceive himself. If he deceives himself in this matter he has sown in himself a seed which, unless he roots it up again, may grow into any kind of wickedness, any kind of mental disease, any kind of stupidity and folly and insanity. Bad art, the corrupt consciousness, is the true *radix malorum*. (Collingwood 1938, 284-285)

(As I said, I shall come back to the social dimension.) Thus, one needs to recognize one's own emotions in order properly to cope with them and avoid disastrous consequences. Perhaps Benjamin Constant's *Adolphe* could serve here as a literary illustration of Collingwood's ideas, although he does not mention it; his references here are the obvious ones: Spinoza and Freud.⁴⁴ He probably got the idea, however, from Croce, who wrote:

By working on our impressions we liberate ourselves. By bringing them as objects before our mind, we detach them from ourselves and raise ourselves above them. The liberating and purifying function of art is another aspect of its character as an activity. Activity is a liberator precisely because it drives out passivity. (Croce 1992, 22)

The distinction between activity and passivity is already here a reference to Spinoza on *passio* and *actio*, as Collingwood makes clear:

This corruption of consciousness has already been described by psychologists in their own way. The disowning of experiences they call repression; the ascription of these to other persons, projection; their consolidation into a mass of experience, homogeneous in itself (as it well may be, if the disowning is systematically done), dissociation; and the building-up of a bowdlerized experience which we will admit to be our own, fantasy-building. They have shown, too, the disastrous effect which these corruptions of consciousness have, if they become habitual, on the person suffering from them. The same lesson was taught long ago by

Spinoza, who has expounded better than any other man the conception of the truthful consciousness and its importance as a foundation for a healthy mental life. The problem of ethics, for him, is the question how man, being ridden by feelings, can so muster them that his life, from being a continuous *passio*, an undergoing of things, can become a conscious *actio*, or doing of things. The answer he gives is a curiously simple one. [...] As soon as we form a clear and distinct idea of a passion, it ceases to be a passion. (Collingwood 1938, 218-219)

For Collingwood the role of art is to help in the fight against this 'corruption of consciousness' through the imaginative expression of one's emotions.⁴⁵ Here, I can do no better than to quote the beautiful concluding paragraph of *The Principles of Art*:

[Art] must be prophetic. The artist must prophesy not in the sense that he foretells things to come, but in the sense that he tells his audience, at risk of their displeasure, the secrets of their own hearts. His business as an artist is to speak out, to make a clean breast. But what he has to utter is not, as the individualistic theory of art would have us think, his own secrets. As spokesman of his community, the secrets he must utter are theirs. The reason why they need him is that no community altogether knows its own heart; and by failing in this knowledge a community deceives itself on the one subject concerning which ignorance means death. For the evils which come from that ignorance the poet as prophet suggests no remedy, because he has already given one. The remedy is the poem itself. Art is the community's medicine for the worst disease of mind, the corruption of consciousness. (Collingwood 1938, 336)

I shall come back in the concluding remarks to Collingwood's conception of the social role of the artist, a conception that prefigures nicely Iris Murdoch's views in *The Sovereignty of Good over other Concepts* (Murdoch 1967).⁴⁶ For the moment, I should point out that Collingwood could never be in a position to tell us that art could play a fundamental social role if he did not have a credible explanation of the possibility

for members of a community to share emotions through art; this thesis about the social role of art thus re-enforces the above point about the need to provide an explanation of art that shows how the artist and the audience share something through the work of art. This is precisely the main task of Books II and III of his *Principles of Art*, a book seldom read by those who have taken for granted Wollheim's characterization and critique of the 'Croce-Collingwood' theory, whose sole textual basis is, as we saw, Book I.

One should note further, that Collingwood did not define art as 'expression of emotion'; not just as an *activity* (as opposed to a state) but as a *cognitive* activity, i.e., as

... an activity by which we become conscious of our own emotions. (Collingwood 1938, 292)

Theoretically, the artist is a person who comes to know himself, to know his own emotions. (Collingwood 1938, 291)

The activity which generates an artistic experience is the activity of consciousness. This rules out all theories of art which place its origin in sensation or its emotions. (Collingwood 1938, 273)⁴⁷

This is a key difference easily overlooked by hasty critics.⁴⁸ Incidentally, this last quotation is but a silent repudiation of Croce. Again, one must recall the above overall system in which the philosophy of art is embedded: this embedding defines the primary focus of art for Collingwood's theory as a *cognitive* one.⁴⁹

To come back to Collingwood's overall system, one might comment generally on the foregoing by pointing out that there is hardly any 'Hegelian' orthodoxy here; as a matter of fact, the influence of Croce over the overall structure of this system is clear. What about the details? Of course, this is not the place for a full investigation, nor for a discussion of the numerous questions it raises. But some details are worth highlighting. First, a small point concerning the movement from the 'stream' of sensations to the 'first-level of consciousness', through 'attention'. The idea is of course lifted from psychology,⁵⁰ but one should note that Collingwood went over his whole system in a compressed manner in Part I of *The New Leviathan*, making substantial modifications that indicate a move towards a more fully linguistic standpoint:

[...] fix your mind on the point at issue, and you see that the practical act of naming your feeling is what sets you off being conscious of it. (Collingwood 1992, 6.27)

There could therefore be no pre-linguistic level other than the pure 'stream of sensations', and all consciousness is already of a *linguistic* nature. Therefore, there is no room for an emotion of which one would be conscious without it being also expressed linguistically. A particularity of Collingwood's notion of language is rather broad and covers not only speech but

[...] any system of bodily movements, not necessarily vocal, whereby the men who make them *mean* or *signify* anything. (Collingwood 1992, 6.1)⁵¹

This is why he called dance "the mother of all languages" (Collingwood 1938, 244 & 246). Placed as it is at the earliest stage of levels of consciousness presented above, art becomes ubiquitous, and if the 'artistic activity' is one of 'expression of emotions' (in the peculiar sense explained above), then it is simply co-extensive with language as just defined (Collingwood 1938, 273 & 275). This is also as clear as any indication that Collingwood's views leave no room for a conception of art for which the work of art is, to compress (a) and (c) above, an inner state of the artist, which need not be externalized: this is clearly impossible in the case of dance. As Collingwood himself pointed out, this does not mean, of course, that there could not be any case in which the work of art is at first a purely internal state, e.g., in the case of a poem imagined by the poet only in thought. But that only shows that Collingwood is *not* making a claim of an *essentialist* nature about art. He is not claiming, e.g., in passages such as (Collingwood 1938, 151) quoted above, that the work of art *is always*, only that it *may be* at first an inner state of the artist.

There is another reason why Wollheim could not be right in his portrayal of Collingwood, which has to do with the fact that 'art is language'.⁵² What this means is that the conditions for linguistic understanding apply *mutatis mutandis* in the case of the interpretation of the work of art. This is why *The Principles of Art* contains a lengthy chapter on language and understanding (Collingwood 1938, 225-269), providing him with an account of the possibility of sharing an emotion through

art. In this chapter, Collingwood develops a highly original conception of language, pointing out that self-consciousness emerges along with the consciousness of others and thus a discovery is the discovery of the self as a speaker and a hearer:

Consciousness does not begin as a mere self-consciousness, [...] and then proceed by some process [...] to construct or infer other persons. Each one of us is a finite being, surrounded by others of the same kind; and the consciousness of our own existence is also the consciousness of the existence of these others. [...] the child's discovery of itself as a person is also its discovery of itself as a member of a world of persons. [...] The discovery of myself as a person is the discovery that I can speak, and am thus a persona or speaker; in speaking, I am both speaker and hearer; and since the discovery of myself as a person is also the discovery of other persons around me, it is the discovery of speakers and hearers other than myself. Thus, from the first, the experience of speech contains in itself in principle the experiences of speaking to others and of hearing others speak to me. (Collingwood 1938, 248-249)

Understanding thus takes place as the result of a re-centring of the hearer as the speaker, which is possible because language is devoid of any asymmetry imposed by some first-person privilege:

The expression [of emotion] is speech, and the speaker is his own first hearer. As hearing himself speak he is conscious of himself as possessor of the idea which he hears himself expressing. [...] we describe [...] our situation as hearers of what we ourselves say. The person to whom speech is addressed is already familiar with this double situation. [...] The hearer [...] conscious that he is being addressed by another person like himself [...], takes what he hears exactly as if it were speech of his own: he speaks to himself with the words that he hears addressed to him, and thus constructs in himself the idea which those words express. At the same time, being conscious of the speaker as a person other than himself, he attributes that idea to this

other person. Understanding what some one says to you is thus attributing to him the idea which his words arouse in yourself; and this implies treating them as words of your own. (Collingwood 1938, 249-250)

The hearer understands the speaker in the same way she understands herself and, at the same time, she attributes the idea which she understands to the speaker. The conceptions expounded in these rich passages certainly deserve commentary and critical assessment. But it suffices for the purposes of this paper that the reader realizes that Collingwood's position is underpinned by a highly original view of language. This highly original conception has been praised by contemporary analytic philosophers as varied as Simon Blackburn, who saw in it a forerunner to the modern simulation theory in psychology (Blackburn 1992), and Donald Davidson, who saw in it a forerunner of his own 'triangulation' (Davidson 2001, 219). Who is right is of no importance here, but one thing is sure: one could *not* say of it that it was *retrograde* for the 1930s. It is exactly the contrary, so much so that, as a matter of fact, it fell on deaf ears. In the context of this paper, one should insist here on the fact that there is no equivalent in Croce's conceptions (or Bosanquet's). Not only is it clear that (a)-(c) do not characterize his position, it would be just wrong to claim (d), i.e., that with Collingwood the link between the artist and the audience is severed. I shall insist on this in my concluding remarks.

4. CONCLUDING REMARKS: THE SOCIAL ROLE OF ART

To conclude, I would like to come back to the social role of art. As I pointed out, Collingwood wanted art to play an essential social role, that of the "community's medicine for the worst disease of mind, the corruption of consciousness" (Collingwood 1938, 336). Historians of philosophy often operate with the erroneous idea that philosophers, reasoning as they do in some ethereal, eternal medium, are never conditioned by their context. Collingwood, who rightly thought the idea absurd, tells us in the preface to *The Principles of Art*:

Everything written in this book has been written in the belief that it has practical bearing, direct or indirect, upon the

condition of art in England in 1937. (Collingwood 1938, vi)

The book was published on the eve of the Munich agreement in 1938, at a time when Collingwood, who had until then lived the secluded life of an Oxford don, became much more politicized (some of the ‘appeasers’ were his colleagues at Oxford, and that gravely upset him).⁵³ The context of “the condition of art in England in 1937” is also the condition of a country that could not see that it was its duty to react to the rise of Nazism and fascism. He believed that one of the gravest defects of democracies was, in contrast with the totalitarian states, their inability to raise emotional support and this is what he expressed by talking about a “corruption of consciousness” at the level of the community. British citizens appeared to him to be incapable of the sorts of emotions needed for a healthy democratic life and he believed that the defect was partly due to the sorry state of the arts in his own country. If anything art should have but did not bring out into the open the sorts of emotions needed for support of democracy as a decisive conflict was drawing near. He thus believed that it is the artist’s task to take the lead here and to succeed in expressing an emotion, which will be shared by the community, a ‘common feeling’ as Bosanquet would have said. At bottom, therefore, Collingwood’s philosophy of art is intimately related to his political philosophy. This remark illustrates my point:

It is clear, then, on my own premises, that an artist with strong political views and feelings will be to that extent better qualified to produce works of art than one without. (Collingwood 1938, 279)

As I pointed out, in order simply to have a story to tell, he needed a credible explanation of how it is possible for members of a community to share an emotion through a work of art. He first argues in a rather *realist* manner that the emotion put into the work of art by the artist and the emotion felt by the audience are *identical*:

If the artist paints his picture in such a way that we, when we look at it using our imagination, find ourselves enjoying an . . . experience . . . like that which he enjoyed when painting it, there is not much sense in saying that we bring

this experience with us to the picture and do not find it there. The artist, if we told him that, would laugh at us and assure us that what we believed ourselves to have read into the picture was just what he put there. (Collingwood 1938, 150)⁵⁴

This is certainly a controversial claim, anti-post-modern as it is, which needs to be buttressed by arguments that Collingwood developed within his philosophy of history, about the possibility for the historian of ‘re-enacting’ a thought *identical* to that of the historical agent she studies.⁵⁵ (Perhaps an ‘identity theory’ of truth is presupposed here.)⁵⁶ More interestingly perhaps, there is a related argument derived from his philosophy of language, which was briefly outlined above, with the help of a few quotations. As we saw, Collingwood saw language as free from any form of asymmetry between speaker and hearer, so that they could trade places. This view is simply extended to art, where the exchangeability of perspectives between the artist and his audience is made into a precondition for understanding. Collingwood’s position on emotions has become truly ‘linguistic’:

The relation between speaker and hearer, as two distinct persons, is one which, because of its very familiarity, is easily misunderstood. We are apt to think of it as one in which the speaker ‘communicates’ his emotions to the hearer. But emotions cannot be shared like food or drink, or handed over like old clothes. [. . .] independently of language neither he nor I nor any third person can compare his emotions with mine, so as to find out whether they are like or unlike. If we speak of such comparison, we speak of something that is done by the use of language; so that the comparison must be defined in terms of speaking and hearing, not speaking and hearing in terms of such comparison. (Collingwood 1938, 249)

And the same goes for art:

If what [the artist] wishes to do is to express his emotions intelligibly, he has to express them in such a way as to be intelligible to himself; his audience is then in the position of

persons who overhear him doing this. (Collingwood 1938, 111)

If some one says ‘Twice two is four’ in the hearing of some one incapable of carrying out the simplest arithmetical operation, he will be understood by himself, but not by his hearer. The hearer can understand only if he can add two and two in his own mind. Whether he could do it before he heard the speaker say those words makes no difference. What is here said of expressing thoughts is equally true of expressing emotions. If a poet expresses, for example, a certain kind of fear, the only hearers who can understand him are those who are capable of experiencing that kind of fear themselves. Hence, when some one reads and understands a poem he is not merely understanding the poet’s expression of his [own] emotions, he is expressing emotions of his own in the poet’s words, which have thus become his own words. As Coleridge put it, we know a man for a poet by the fact that he makes us poets. We know that he is expressing his emotions by the fact that he is enabling us to express ours. (Collingwood 1938, 118)

This conception has far reaching consequences. Foremost is the idea that artist and audience *collaborate* in the work of art, i.e., as with linguistic meaning, the experience of sharing an emotion is never fully belonging to only one of the two. This view, which is still very much *avant-garde* today, is clearly a consequence of his philosophy of language:

The aesthetic activity is the activity of speaking. Speech is speech only so far as it is both spoken and heard. A man may, no doubt, speak to himself and be his own hearer; but what he says to himself is in principle capable of being said to any one sharing his language. As a finite being, man becomes aware of himself as a person only so far as he finds himself standing in relation to others of whom he simultaneously becomes aware as persons. And there is no point in his life at which a man has finished becoming aware of himself as a person. [...] If he has a new emotion, he

must express it to others, in order that, finding them able to share it, he may be sure his consciousness of it is not corrupt.

This is not inconsistent with the doctrine, stated elsewhere in this book, that the aesthetic experience or aesthetic activity is one which goes on in the artist’s mind. The experience of being listened to is an experience which goes on in the mind of the speaker, although in order to its existence a listener is necessary, so that the activity is a collaboration. Mutual love is a collaborative activity; but the experience of this activity in the mind of each lover taken singly is a different experience from that of loving and being spurned. (Collingwood 1938, 317-318)

Finally, one should note that Collingwood truly believed that art is an activity that belongs to a *community*, not that of an isolated individual:

[The artistic activity] is a corporate activity belonging not to any one human being but to a community. It is performed not only by the man whom we individualistically call the artist, but partly by all the other artists of whom we speak as ‘influencing’ him, where we really mean collaborating with him. It is performed not only by this corporate body of artists, but (in the case of arts of performance) by executants, who are not merely acting under the artist’s orders, but are collaborating with him to produce the finished work. And even now the activity of artistic creation is not complete; for that, there must be an audience, whose function is therefore not a merely a receptive one but collaborative too. The artist (although under the spell of individualistic prejudice he may try to deny it) stands thus in collaborative relations with an entire community; not an ideal community of all human beings as such, but the actual community of fellow artists from whom he borrows, executants whom he employs, and audience to whom he speaks. (Collingwood 1938, 324)

This view has many controversial implications, some of which are drawn out by Collingwood, e.g., about the need to abolish the copyright law (Collingwood 1938, 325-326), his apology for the *avant-garde* and rather left-wing *Group Theatre* in London (Collingwood 1938, 329), his praise of Louis MacNiece and T. S. Eliot (Collingwood 1938, 332-335),⁵⁷ or this simple comment, which sounds as if written no more than a few years ago:

We must face the fact that every performer is of necessity a co-author, and develop its implications. (Collingwood 1938, 328)

Again, this is not the place for a discussion of these issues, but at least they serve to illustrate the originality, radical nature and modernity of Collingwood's views. And the reader will have at least noticed how far we are now from the so-called 'Croce-Collingwood' theory, as none of this makes any sense on this construal of Collingwood. Not only is it false that with Collingwood the link between the artist and the audience is severed, but rather he argued the contrary in a most original manner! The 'Croce-Collingwood' theory served for generations as a pretext not to read this rather provocative philosopher, who definitely deserves a hearing.⁵⁸

Notes

¹ Recall that Ruskin made his reputation by his early defense of Turner, and that he was through his writings instrumental in the rise and popularity of the 'pre-Raphaelite' movement in painting, the neo-Gothic movement in architecture, and, through his influence on the 'Arts & Crafts' movement of William Morris, the whole of 'Art Nouveau'. But all these were rejected by the 'modernist' movement and Ruskin's reputation faded very quickly. It is quite striking, on the other hand, that the last chapter of Bosanquet's *A History of Aesthetics* (Bosanquet 1904) is devoted in large part to Ruskin.

² For example, see Clive Bell's *Art*, published in 1914, whose concept of 'significant form' (defined as a 'combination of lines and colours') influenced Fry and became a key contribution to 20th century 'formalism', despite the shortcomings of Bell's positions. It is perhaps worth noting in the context of this paper the link between 'significant form' and 'aesthetic emotion' in Bell's original proposal. Indeed, Bell defined 'aesthetic emotion' in a circular manner as the emotion provoked by works of art (Bell 1928, 6), and then defined 'significant form' as the quality possessed by all objects that provoke an 'aesthetic emotion', i.e., by all objects that are works of art (Bell 1928, 7-8 & 12). This view owes much to G. E. Moore's intuitionism, see (Lang 1964) and (Dean 1996).

³ For a survey, see (Sweet 2001).

⁴ Bosanquet's main writings on aesthetics are (Bosanquet 1904, 1915). In this paper, I shall focus on his later critique of Croce in (Bosanquet 1920a) and (Bosanquet 1920b); the latter is a rejoinder to Carr's critique of the former in (Carr 1920). His *History of Aesthetics* is rather narrow in focus, but interesting as a unique English-language treatment of 19th century German contributions. As Bosanquet later remarked about his book: "This was simply Hegel's narrative of the facts. I took it, and still take it, to be obvious and true. I held myself to be merely dotting the i's and crossing the t's of a simple insight" (Bosanquet 1920b, 212). For critical reviews of the 1893 edition that point out this bias as a major weakness, see (Dewey 1893) and (Sully 1893). As for Collingwood, I shall focus on *The Principles of Art* (Collingwood 1938), neglecting the more Hegelian, narrower in scope and less original *Outlines of a Philosophy of Art* (Collingwood 1925). His papers on aesthetics were collected in (Collingwood 1964).

⁵ Collingwood was a pianist and a draughtsman, coming from a remarkably artistic background (his father, who also wrote novels, was Ruskin's secretary). For a biography, see (Inglis 2009).

⁶ See (Carritt 1932, 1949). Carritt had also published an anthology, *The Philosophy of Beauty* in 1931 (Carritt 1931). On Carritt, see (Saw 1963). For Croce, see his *Aesthetics as Science of Expression and General Linguistics* (Croce 1922), to be discussed below. The first theoretical part of that book was translated anew and published as (Croce 1992), the edition that I shall use. It may come as a surprise, but the Italian neo-Hegelians exerted a strong influence at Oxford in the 1920s and 1930s, including on late figures such as E. F. Carritt and H. J. Paton and, only to an extent, on Collingwood.

⁷ It will not be possible to discuss here Collingwood's notion of 're-enactment' as it applies to the interpretation of the work of art. It certainly prefigured Richard Wollheim's view of art criticism as 'retrieval' (Wollheim 1980, 185-204). For the connection with Baxandall, see his *Patterns of Intention*, chapter I, especially (Baxandall 1985, 139 n.1). Baxandall's study of Piero della Francesca's *Baptism of the Christ* in chapter IV is a very good example of 're-enactment' or 'retrieval' at work (Baxandall 1985, 105-137). As for Wittgenstein, it is not clear what sort of influence he could have had on Baxandall.

⁸ The idea was also suggested independently by John Dewey in *Art as Experience* (Dewey 1934) a few years earlier than Collingwood. But, as we shall see, Collingwood, not Dewey, devised an interesting philosophy of language to explain this.

⁹ Collingwood's distinction in *The Principles of Art* between 'art' and 'craft' (Collingwood 1938, 15-41) has been criticized from a loosely 'Wittgensteinian' standpoint as a form of essentialism concerning what is claimed to be a 'family-resemblance' or 'open' concept. (One must recall here that this point was never made by Wittgenstein himself, but originates in (Weitz 1956).) That this is a complete misunderstanding of Collingwood's rather rich discussion (he has six variants for a possible distinction and makes clear that it is porous, so that he is not committed to a form of essentialism), is explained in (Ridley 1998). See (Carroll 1998, 49-78) for an extended critical discussion.

¹⁰ For example, the essays collected in *Aesthetics and Language*, introduced as "attempts to diagnose and clarify some aesthetic confusions" (Elton 1959, 1). One recurring theme in that book is the 'dullness' or 'dreariness' of the old 'idealist' aesthetics. With hindsight, this is bound to appear as a strange comment, as these essays also strike one as hardly less dull or dreary.

¹¹ See (Spadoni 1984).

¹² I use here the second, augmented edition (Wollheim 1980). Again, British contribu-

tions to art criticism must not be ignored, for example, E. H. Gombrich's *Art and Illusion*, first published in 1960 (Gombrich 1961).

¹³ It is worth noting here that, paradoxically, Wollheim began his career with writings on British Idealism. For example, see (Wollheim 1959)

¹⁴ For example, at (Wollheim 1980, 36, 80, 114-117). The expression 'Croce-Collingwood Theory' is not his, however, as it was used already in the 1950s, see (Hospers 1956), (Donagan 1958).

¹⁵ Wollheim also developed a further argument against Collingwood on the basis of the type-token distinction (Wollheim 1980, 74f.), which he sharpened in a later paper, with the introduction of a distinction between 'art-type' (poems, music), and 'art-particular' (sculpture, painting): his claim is that Collingwood did not draw the distinction and that his views are at best applicable only to 'art-type' (Wollheim 1972). As Wollheim points out, Collingwood wrote that "a work of art may be completely created when it has been created as a thing whose only place is in the artist's mind" (Collingwood 1938, 134), and one must grant to him that this claim may arguably fit 'art-type' such as music but does not transfer to 'art-particular' such as painting. A full rejoinder to this argument falls outside the scope of this paper. One should at least note here that Collingwood makes that very claim only for music or poetry, e.g., at (Collingwood 1938, 132, 151), although he is indeed confused at (Collingwood 1938, 134), where he mentions pictures alongside tunes and poems. As for 'art-particular', Collingwood's discussion of painting (Collingwood 1938, 144-148) leaves no room for the view (see below) that the work of art could be at any stage only 'in the head of the artist'. So Wollheim has not shown that Collingwood is confused because he did not draw a distinction between 'art-type' and 'art-particular' (he seems rather to assume it implicitly in most passages), and even less that he held the 'ideal' theory: there is clearly no room for it in the case of 'art-particular' and in the case of 'art-type', it is clear that there is a perfectly legitimate sense in which one can say that a musician can compose a tune 'in his head', that does not lend support to the 'ideal' theory: so to infer commitment to the latter on the basis of claiming the former is a *non sequitur*.

¹⁶ The point is even to be found already in (Dewey 1934).

¹⁷ For example, all the possible *clichés* about the 'Croce-Collingwood' theory are re-hashed in (Mulhall 1992), which looks as if written with no first-hand knowledge of these authors.

¹⁸ See also (Grant 1987), which makes similar points, and the more recent (Davies 2008). There is an earlier critique of Wollheim's reading of Collingwood in (Sclafani 1976) but it seems to have had no impact.

¹⁹ One important argument concerns the claim, to put in non-Collingwoodian terms, that the link between the artefact and the artist's intention is, according to Collingwood, necessary, not contingent (Ridley 1997, 265f.). See also (Grant 1987, 244f.) for an earlier defence of that point. If this is the case, then the claim that Collingwood held the 'ideal' theory is largely undermined, since it depends on severing that link.

²⁰ See also (Collingwood 1938, 282). The view was also, prior to Collingwood, Alexander's. See, e.g., (Alexander 1933, 59 & 134), (Alexander 1939, 214 & 219).

²¹ In a nutshell, Collingwood was not so much making an ontological point as he was arguing all along for a theory of the work of art as activity or performance. This point cannot be argued for here but see (Davies 2008).

²² I fear that this sort of mistake is perpetuated again in the most recent attempt at

vindicating Wollheim's reading of Collingwood in (Kemp 2003).

²³ E.g., at (Collingwood 1938, 139).

²⁴ I take this expression from (Ridley 1997, 265).

²⁵ See (Saari 1989) and (D'Oro 2000).

²⁶ As Grant put it, there is a 'trump' in Book III at (Collingwood 1938, 305), on which defenders of Wollheim's reading insist heavily (Grant 1987, 243), ((Kemp 2003, 1983). But a detailed discussion of this passage falls outside the scope of this paper.

²⁷ This line of argument is developed throughout (Grant 1987), only, however, in part against Wollheim's reading.

²⁸ A few years after *Art and its Objects* Wollheim went on to publish a paper entitled 'On an Alleged Inconsistency in Collingwood's Aesthetic', in which he simply refused to recognize the 'dialectical' nature of Collingwood's argument and insisted on taking his remarks at face value, thus claiming to have found an *inconsistency* in Collingwood (Wollheim 1972, 69). Wollheim also claims that "the view that Collingwood advances in Book III of *The Principles of Art* is so very fragmentary" (Wollheim 1972, 77) in order to discount it, and to insist on the claim that only the views expressed in Book I are to be assessed.

²⁹ For the reasons for this strange situation, see (Knox 1969, 165).

³⁰ I have in mind (Kemp 2003).

³¹ In this, Collingwood is indeed closer to Croce, as can be seen from the place already allotted to art in *Speculum Mentis* (Collingwood 1925).

³² See also (Croce 1992, 8).

³³ It is worth noting *en passant* that, if this 'expression' is already 'art', then "each of us, in short, is in some small measure a painter, sculptor, musician, poet, prose writer" (Croce 1992, 11). Indeed, Collingwood also argued for a similar sounding conclusion in *The Principles of Art*, when he wrote: "Every utterance and each gesture that each one of us makes is a work of art" (Collingwood 1938, 172). We shall see, however, that his argument does not rely on such premises.

³⁴ On the identification of language and art see (de Mauro 1965), chapter IV. However, I wish to steer clear here of any discussion concerning the proper interpretation of Croce's philosophy of language and its value for linguistics. Although I doubt that there is any, it is interesting to note with Tullio de Mauro's book that there used to be a Crocean tradition in Italian linguistics, *via* Giovanni Gentile and his students.

³⁵ The same point is made in *Three Lectures on Aesthetics*, (Bosanquet 1915, 67-68).

³⁶ On should note, however, that Alexander's critique of Croce is rather analogous to Bosanquet's, as he also points out the deficiencies in Croce's underlying conception of 'intuition' as being prior to language and purely private (Alexander 1933, 132-134), (Alexander 1939, 219-220).

³⁷ This in turn is grounded in his metaphysics of the Absolute as an infinite completion and fusion of finite minds, but there is really no need to get into this. (See (Lang 1968, 380-382).) Certainly, this 'Hegelian' aspect of Bosanquet's philosophy has been out of date for quite a while. There is no equivalent appeal to an 'Absolute' in Collingwood.

³⁸ See (Wollheim 1987) and the essays collected in (Levinson 1996, 2006). This is, of course, a bold claim to assert without argument, but any discussion would lead us too far afield.

³⁹ See (Davies 2008, 168). Of course, the 'performance' theory of the work of art is controversial, like any other theory, but it cannot be said to belong to a bygone 'idealist' era. For a recent defence, see (Davies 2004).

⁴⁰ There are indeed numerous issues raised here by scholars about which I need to remain silent. For example, Alan Donagan saw a ‘lapse into associationism’ in *The New Leviathan* (Donagan 1962, 54-56), where I claim, below, that Collingwood advanced beyond psychology towards a fully linguistic point of view.

⁴¹ For Collingwood’s own account of his evolution, see his *Autobiography* (Collingwood 1939).

⁴² For a fuller diagram, see (Mink 1969, 117).

⁴³ On attention, (Collingwood 1938, 203sq.), (Collingwood 1992, 4.5-4.6), on sensations and their emotional charges, see (Collingwood 1938, 232), (Collingwood 1992, 4.1 & 4.62). These remarks properly belong to the sphere of psychology. Alas, Collingwood does not cite any source, but he was clearly not a fabulator. For example, the notion of ‘attention’ and the idea that sensations always come with an emotional charge were introduced in British psychology by James Ward in his celebrated entry on ‘Psychology’ to the 9th edition of the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, and are to be found, alongside other ideas about higher-level emotions, etc. in his late *opus*, *Psychological Principles* (Ward 1918). There are also in Collingwood numerous references to William James, e.g., a dismissal of his theory of emotion in (Collingwood 1938, 232-233).

⁴⁴ There are precious few traces of psychoanalysis in Collingwood’s background. However, Herbert Read had already integrated ideas by Freud in *Art and Society*, published in 1936 (Read 1966, 82-95), and it is rather likely that Collingwood read it. He certainly knew about psychoanalysis *first-hand*: in order to comply with his principle that one should not speak about an activity without having practiced it, he underwent a full psychoanalysis. (He was a draughtsman, whose drawings of Latin stone inscriptions of Britain have been published, and a pianist, so thought he could speak with knowledge about art; as for his philosophy of history, he was also the foremost archaeologist and historian of Roman Britain of his generation.) His colleague John Mabbott commented wryly on Collingwood’s “full fifty sessions” of psychoanalysis: “I fear it did him serious harm” (Mabbott 1986, 76).

⁴⁵ One is of course not far from ‘catharsis’. Collingwood was aware of this, see (Collingwood 1938, 110).

⁴⁶ As pointed out in (Davies 2008, 173). On another note, one should also note the connexions with Herbert Read’s views in his 1936 book *Art and Society* (Read 1966, 95).

⁴⁷ It is clear, however, from what he says elsewhere in the book and in *The New Leviathan*, that Collingwood really conceived this “activity of consciousness” to be of a linguistic nature.

⁴⁸ This is pointed out in (Davies 2008, 173).

⁴⁹ It is also the cause of many difficulties raised by (Davies 2008).

⁵⁰ See footnote 43.

⁵¹ See also (Collingwood 1938, 243).

⁵² Incidentally, this is a thesis that Wollheim himself rejects (Wollheim 1987, 44). Recall that, according to him, “The kind of account that has quite rightly been chased out of the field of language, most notably through the influence of Wittgenstein, is at home in painting” (Wollheim 1987, 22). A re-psychologisation of the mind is the topic of books such as (Wollheim 1993, 1999). It would therefore be a trifle unfair to portray Collingwood as ‘outdated’ on this point. If anything, Collingwood and Wollheim are rather ‘in the same ball park’.

⁵³ Collingwood’s political philosophy is expressed in *The New Leviathan* (Collingwood

1992) and in the essays collected in (Collingwood 1989). For a study, see (Boucher 1989).

⁵⁴ See also (Collingwood 1938, 308).

⁵⁵ Again, see (Saari 1989) and (D’Oro 2000) on this point.

⁵⁶ For information, see, e.g., (Baldwin 1991).

⁵⁷ That Collingwood’s theory was meant to support *avant-garde* art was actually used against him in Noël Carroll’s *A Philosophy of Mass Art* (Carroll 1998, 102).

⁵⁸ A French translation of an earlier version of this paper will appear in *Philosophiques*, vol. 35, n. 1, spring 2009. An earlier version was read at the colloquium *Comment être idéaliste? Bradley et Collingwood*, which took place at the Université Blaise Pascal, Clermont-Ferrand in June 2006 and at the meeting of the British Idealism Specialist Group of the Political Science Association at Gregynog, Wales, in December 2007. I would like to thank the participants on both occasions for their comments, as well as David Boucher, James Connelly, David Davies, Giuseppina D’Oro, Sébastien Gandon, Laurent Jaffro and Bill Manders either for their help or for comments, over the years, that made their way into this paper. I would also like to thank Mathieu Marion for help with my English and for many detailed comments that greatly improved my paper; I am indebted to his thorough knowledge of British philosophy. Finally, I would like to thank an anonymous referee for the Baltic Yearbook.

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