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## Geiger and Wollheim on expressive properties and expressive perception

### Abstract

*The aim of this paper is to reconstruct Geiger's realist and Wollheim's projectionist accounts on expressive properties and expressive perception by considering them within the larger contexts from which they emerged, by using as far as possible a common language and by focusing on the questions of the nature of expressive properties and of how we grasp them. My aim is to show that it is possible to put into dialogue phenomenological and Anglo-American aesthetics and that this dialogue might lead to new insights about how we engage with art.*

### Keywords

*Aesthetics, Realism, Projectionism*

### 1. A dialogue between phenomenological and Anglo-American aesthetics

In recent years, philosophers working in the field of aesthetics have become increasingly interested in explaining how we are able to perceive qualities expressing emotional states in both nature and works of art. We speak of the cheerfulness of a landscape, the serenity of a poem, the melancholy of a painting, the sadness of a film, and so on. These examples do not refer to the emotional expressions of particular humans, or human-like figures or animals appearing in these works, but to properties which seem to be expressed by natural objects and by art works themselves. Contemporary philosophers employ different names to refer to this phenomenon. On the one hand, authors inspired by the phenomenological tradition deploy the concepts of “moods”, “atmospheres” and “characters”; they also speak of “quasi objective feelings” and of “half-things”. In this context, the works of Gernot Böhme and Tonino Griffero have received wide at-

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tention (Böhme 2001; 2006; Griffero 2014; 2017). Both authors develop their respective accounts within the conceptual frame of the *Neue Phänomenologie* – a line of thought inaugurated by Hermann Schmitz, for whom emotions are to be understood literally (and not metaphorically) as atmospheres (Schmitz 2005: 343; 2007a: 32; 2007b: 269). More recent accounts attempt to focus on Heidegger’s theory of “moods” (*Stimmungen*) to explain this phenomenon (see Trigg 2018). Yet long before these developments, the realist phenomenologist Moritz Geiger dedicated one of his most impressive studies to the problem of “feeling characters” (*Gefühlscharakteren*, 1911), while Dietrich von Hildebrand examined the nature of “expressive qualities” (*Gefühlsqualitäten*) in the two volumes of his master work *Ästhetik* (1977; 1984)<sup>2</sup>. On the other hand, and more in line with the analytical tradition, Anglo-American authors refer to these qualities as “expressive” or “emotional properties”, and less frequently as “atmospheric properties”. The nature of such properties has been the subject of a lively and ongoing discussion (especially in the field of music) between Peter Kivy, Stephen Davies, Malcolm Budd, Jerrold Levinson and Paul Noordhof, to mention but a few (Kivy 1990; Davies 1994; Budd 1995; Levinson 1996; Noordhof 2008). Part of this discussion has been articulated as a critique of a singular proposal presented by Richard Wollheim during the eighties (1987). However, despite this common interest in explaining “expressive properties”, both discussions – the phenomenological and the Anglo-American – have developed in parallel, without really coming into contact with one another. Against this background, this paper seeks to bring the two aesthetics into dialogue by focusing on the work of Moritz Geiger and Richard Wollheim, whose early accounts of this phenomenon paved the way for later discussions in their respective traditions.

The focus on these two authors is justified by the following reasons. First of all, both of these authors, in different ways, influenced the debate on expressive properties within their respective traditions. Geiger’s work can be regarded as representative of the phenomenological approach. The spirit of his realist account of “characters” remains alive in more recent developments on “atmospheres” in the sense that these phenomena are considered to be things which are

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<sup>2</sup> For an insightful account on expressive properties in the tradition of Austrian philosophy see Mulligan 2015. In this paper, Mulligan points to the difference between values and atmospheres in the phenomenological tradition.

present and which can be experienced by the subject independently of one's present affective state. Wollheim's work, on the contrary, is not representative of Anglo-American aesthetics, but it has been highly influential since it questions many of the assumptions of analytic philosophy. Wollheim introduces a psychoanalytical mechanism to explain expressive properties as resulting from our ability to project our emotions onto the world. This account was subject to critique, and in the process new and different forms for understanding expressive properties were produced. Secondly, at least at first sight, the explanations they give concerning the nature of expressive properties could not be more different: while Geiger offers a realist approach, Wollheim explains expressive properties as the result of a projection. However, behind these differences, I will show that a careful reading reveals important analogies between both authors. These analogies are derived from their shared interest in offering a careful description of experience.

In order to establish this hypothetical dialogue between authors (and traditions), a reconstruction of both theories is needed. One important caveat for this reconstruction is needed here: the authors it puts into dialogue are from different time periods and different intellectual backgrounds. We should certainly not lose sight of this fact. Indeed, at first glance, the two authors seem to have little in common. Moritz Geiger (1880-1937) developed his account at the beginning of the last century and within a specific intellectual framework. He was a psychologist and a phenomenologist; at that time the division between the two disciplines was not clear, so it was usual for philosophers to work on empirical research, and Geiger was not alone in this enterprise (other good examples are Stephan Witasek and the authors of the Graz School). He was influenced by Husserl, and also by Pfänder and Lipps, who were two crucial figures of the Munich Circle of early phenomenology. As a phenomenologist, his main aim was to "go back to the things themselves", and to examine how different phenomena (such as emotions, empathy, attention, consciousness, etc.) are given in experience. Geiger had a strong interest in aesthetics and as a follower of Lipps he focused part of his research on "empathy" (*Einfühlung*). Like many other early phenomenologists, Geiger endorsed a realist account of expressive (and other) properties. Unlike Geiger, Richard Wollheim (1923-2003) was not a phenomenologist in the sense in which this term is used to refer to an author be-

longing to the tradition inaugurated by Husserl and Pfänder, and further developed by Scheler, Heidegger or Sartre. Nevertheless, Wollheim's work aims at offering a phenomenological account of our experience of art and it does so by appealing to a distinctive phenomenology that we find in paintings and by focusing on subjective properties of the experience of art. Thus, it is not surprising that Richard Eldridge described Wollheim's work in *Art and its objects* as an enterprise of "descriptive phenomenology" (Eldridge 1980: IX). Wollheim's main influences are Wittgenstein and psychoanalysis, especially the work of Freud, but he was also familiar with Sartre and Merleau-Ponty. One of his main goals was to explain the importance of art for human nature and his work aims at explaining the phenomena of "expression" and the "correspondence" between our mind and some aspects of the world (Budd 2008: 239; 2012: 181). As we can see, the intellectual contexts in which these authors worked are extremely different and some effort is required to bring them into dialogue. I will employ three strategies in this paper to counter this problem. First, I will consider their works within the larger intellectual and historical frameworks in which they were developed, and I will point to their respective interlocutors. This will enable the reader to contextualize both approaches, but also to realize that, despite their differences, both authors shared a common interest in developing an accurate description of our engagement with art.

Second, to enable the dialogue and for the sake of clarity, a common language is needed. For this, I will make some terminological decisions and use the terms "expressive properties" for what Geiger calls "feeling characters", "characters" or "atmospheres" and for what Wollheim calls "projective properties". More generally, I will use the term "expressive property" to refer, for instance, to the cheerfulness, melancholy, serenity, sadness, or gloom, etc. of an object (the term "object" is used here in a broad sense and it entails things, persons, creatures, events, states of affairs, etc.). The expression "expressive property" is adequate because it underscores that we are dealing with qualities, aspects, shapes, i.e., properties which seem to be expressed by the object. In a similar fashion, I will refer to our capacity to grasp, disclose, sense or become aware of such properties as "expressive perception". Wollheim defined this term as follows: "By expressive perception I mean – for I shall restrict myself to vision – that capacity we have which enables us, on looking at a painting, to

see it as expressing, for instance melancholy, or turbulence, or serenity" (1987: 80). I borrow this definition from Wollheim because it reflects the immediacy and spontaneity with which the disclosure of such properties takes place and their intimate bond to our perceptive capabilities. But while my paper draws on this expression, I do not commit myself to Wollheim's other claims, according to which expressive perception is the result of a complex projection of our emotions onto objects of the world.

Finally, I will articulate the reconstruction of these positions by focusing on a question shared by both authors: do expressive properties depend on the mental states of the subjects who experience them or do they have a reality of their own? To put it differently: are the cheerfulness of the landscape, the serenity of the poem, the melancholy of the painting, the sadness of the film, etc. qualities which are to be objectively found in the landscape, the poem, the painting and the film, or are these qualities mere projections of our own emotional states onto these particular objects? The question is thorny and, as I will show, Geiger and Wollheim offer quite different answers to it, all the while sharing the assumption that we experience these properties as belonging to the world. As I have already advanced, Geiger is a realist, while Wollheim argues for a projectionist theory. What is important here, however, is that despite their fundamentally different answers to this question, both authors take as their point of departure two important intuitions of our experience. First of all, there is a linguistic fact, the significance of which has not gone unnoticed. We speak of psychological states such as cheerfulness, serenity, melancholy, sadness, etc. and we employ exactly the same terms to speak of expressive properties (whether we call them atmospheres, moods, characters, emotional or atmospheric properties), such as the cheerfulness of the painting, the serenity of the poem, etc. Rather than being a mere vagary of language, this linguistic fact suggests some kind of connection between affective states and expressive properties. The second intuition goes in another direction. Despite employing the same terms to refer to both psychological states and expressive properties, we are reluctant to assimilate one phenomenon to the other. That is, the landscape is not cheerful just because we feel cheerful in contemplating it, the poem is not serene because we are serene while reciting it, etc. Geiger and Wollheim will also offer an answer to this, i.e., they try to explain how it is possible that

such cheerfulness, serenity, etc. are experienced as belonging to the world and as such are independent of our present mental state. The point at issue here is that such qualities cannot be simply reduced to mental states: they are experienced as having a life of their own.

These three strategies provide a common ground for presenting and discussing Geiger's realist and Wollheim's projectionist accounts. In what follows, I will reconstruct both approaches by considering them within the larger contexts from which they emerged, by using as far as possible a common language and by focusing on the question of the nature of expressive properties. My main aim is reconstructive and therefore I will not enter into a discussion about the validity of each theory. This would serve as material for another paper, but here I am pursuing a different goal: namely, to show that it is possible to put into dialogue phenomenological and Anglo-American aesthetics and that this dialogue might lead to new insights about how we engage with art.

## 2. *Geiger's realist account in the context of early phenomenology*

### 2.1. *Moods, feeling characters and feeling tones*

Geiger's main aim in *Zum Problem der Stimmungseinfühlung* (*On the problem of mood empathy*, 1911) is to offer an account of how we experience "life" in inanimate objects in nature and, particularly, in art. The specific phenomenon he has in mind is what I describe above as expressive properties, but which he terms as "feeling characters" (*Gefühlscharakteren*), or, more frequently, just "characters" (*Charakteren*) or, occasionally, "atmospheres" (*Atmosphären*). His examples are clear in this regard: we claim to feel the cheerfulness of a landscape, the tranquility of the color blue, the festivity of the violet, the joviality of music, etc. Geiger offers a realist approach to the nature of expressive properties and the way in which we "grasp" them, but he also attempts to link these questions to a crucial concept in his aesthetics: the concept of empathy<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup> At that time, empathy was mainly used to explain how we engage with non-human objects in art and nature. Only later the term was used to explain a form of apprehending the mental states of other human beings. In his *Ästhetik* (1903), Lipps distinguished four main types of empathy: empathy of activity, empathy of mood, empathy into nature, and empathy into the sensuous experience of other

Geiger's paper begins by presenting two theories which were discussed widely at the time: the "effect theory" (*Wirkungstheorie*) and the "animation theory" (*Belebungstheorie*)<sup>4</sup>. According to the first, to say that a landscape is cheerful is to say that we feel cheerful. In these cases, there is a projection of my feeling onto the landscape. Given this description, we could, in my view, also call this theory a "projection theory". According to the "animation theory", we believe that we find some kind of feeling in the landscape. The theory presented by Geiger in his paper, however, does not fit into either of these paradigms.

Geiger proceeds by focusing his analysis on the expressive properties of colors<sup>5</sup>. One of his main findings is that the subjects of his study described the expressive properties of colors not as a projection of their own emotional states onto the color in question, but as something independent of their own mental states. The cheerfulness of the color is experienced as something found in the object, i.e., as a property of the object (Geiger 1976: 24). In fact, this property is described as spreading over the objects, as a glow (*Schimmer*) that appears to be part of the color. To refer to this property, Geiger coins the term "character" (*Charakter*, 1976: 26).

Interestingly, Geiger also finds that the cheerfulness of the color is described in different terms from the cheerfulness of a face. In his view, expressive properties cannot be assimilated to bodily expressions of an emotion. The main difference is that the cheerfulness of the color (its character) is experienced as a property of the color in terms similar to the intensity and the quality of the color, which are its properties. However, the cheerfulness of a face has an expressive function, i.e., it reflects a moment of the emotional state of the other person, and it would be a mistake to describe this cheerfulness as a

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human beings. Geiger, in his text on *Stimmungseinfühlung*, focuses on the second type of Lipps' taxonomy (1903: 96-223).

<sup>4</sup> Geiger's study masterfully combines conceptual analysis with empirical research. However, in this paper, I will focus on his philosophical findings and leave aside questions about the validity of the empirical method employed.

<sup>5</sup> For the sake of clarity, he starts his analysis by focusing on colors (in comparison to the complexity of analyzing a landscape painting, for instance, colors are much easier to examine). In the later part of his study, Geiger applies his findings to the expressive properties of words and art objects. See the second volume of Dietrich von Hildebrand's *Aesthetics* for another early phenomenological analysis of the "expressive qualities of words and expressions" (Hildebrand 1984: 268-74).

property of the face. Notice that I say similar here, because the expressive property as a property of the color is not identical to the properties of the intensity and the quality of the color. While intensity and quality are integral parts or elements (*Bestandteile*) of the sensation of color, the “character” of the color is not an integral part of its sensation, but something that “spreads over” the color, i.e., it is somehow experienced as being more independent of the sensation of color than its intensity and quality.

Both findings are important to understand the nature of characters. In Geiger’s view, characters are not to be conflated with feelings, emotions or moods (Geiger refers here to different types of affective states, but mainly he speaks of “moods”: *Stimmungen*). That is, the cheerfulness of a color is not an affective state, as when we claim to be cheerful. In adopting this position decisively, he rejects the claim shared by the effect and animation theories, according to which such characters are feelings. Indeed, the effect theory – or, as I have called it, the projection theory – claims that the color is cheerful because I am cheerful. And the animation theory somehow attributes life to the color, so that the experience of the cheerfulness of the color is explained in the same terms as the experience of the cheerfulness of other persons. Geiger’s argument against these views goes as follows: the cheerfulness of a color is not experienced as something pertaining to the self, but as something that is objectively present in the color. Thus, this cheerfulness cannot be regarded as an affective state (feeling, emotion, or mood) because affective states are states of the self and as such are subjective in nature (Geiger 1976: 30). As a result, characters (such as the cheerfulness of the color) and moods (such as my cheerful psychological state) are different phenomena and should not be conflated.

In this argument, Geiger’s realism about characters becomes clear. Characters are presented to us as having an objective reality. This realist approach toward expressive properties (in Geiger’s terms: characters, feeling characters or atmospheres) is not surprising if we consider this claim within the broader context of early phenomenology. Indeed, it was quite common among early phenomenologists belonging to the Munich and Gottingen circles to embrace realist positions on properties. An illustration of this shared realist view on properties is the doctrine of value realism (also called axiological realism), according to which axiological or evaluative properties (in early phe-



nomenological terms: value qualities) exist independently of the emotional reactions of the subjects who experience them. Value realism was embraced in one version or another by all early phenomenologists. Its most prominent defense was offered by Scheler, who defended a robust version of this doctrine. For instance, in his *Formalism* book, Scheler considers the “perception” of values to be prior to the perception of their bearers (Scheler 1973). Husserl’s position is different, because he attributes a constitutive role to the subjects who experience values; however, in his theory “values are disclosed rather than created” (Drummond 2002: 8). Different versions of value realism were also embraced by Edith Stein, José Ortega y Gasset, and Dietrich von Hildebrand, to name but a few. However, value realism was not the only form of realism embraced in the context of early phenomenology and Geiger’s text is a good example of this. In the text analyzed in this paper, Geiger is not concerned with values, but with characters. Put otherwise: he is not concerned with axiological or evaluative properties, but with what I have called expressive properties<sup>6</sup>. What Geiger does in this text is to defend a realist position on characters, according to which they are present in the world as they are experienced<sup>7</sup>. We find a similar account in von Hildebrand’s *Aesthetics*, where he argues that the cheerfulness of the sky is an objective property of the sky given intuitively to us (von Hildebrand 1977: 174). A similar position seems to be held by Stein, for whom moods have objective correlates. Following the vocabulary of Husserl, she speaks of the objective correlates of moods as “colorations” (*Färbungen*, Stein 1989: 92)<sup>8</sup>. However, Stein does not delve into the nature of such “colorations”.

Geiger’s main focus is to show that the character (expressive property) is one thing and the mood which we are in is another. In his account, it is possible to experience expressive properties without be-

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<sup>6</sup> The examples used by Geiger in his text allow one to interpret characters as expressive properties. However, I leave aside here the question of whether all characters can be regarded in this way and whether all expressive properties would be characters.

<sup>7</sup> Paul Noordhoff (2008: 330) observes that in contemporary aesthetics there is no similar realist defense of expressive properties. He is right in claiming that the majority of accounts are today inspired by dispositionalist and projectivist accounts. However, his diagnosis ignores all the contributions on atmospheres developed within the paradigm of the *Neue Phänomenologie*.

<sup>8</sup> See Ziri6n 2018 for a detailed study of Husserl’s account of colorations.

ing in an emotional state. Moreover, we are in fact able to experience such properties despite being in an affective state which contrasts with the property experienced: we see the cheerfulness of the color, despite being depressed. However, despite the force of this realist argument, Geiger must still explain the above-mentioned linguistic feature whereby we employ the same terms for both expressive properties and affective states (mainly moods), i.e., we speak of the cheerfulness of the color and of the cheerful mood. For this phenomenon, Geiger offers two explanations:

a) the Causal Explanation. First, Geiger observes a causal connection between both phenomena. It is often the case that a cheerful landscape puts us in a cheerful mood. This kind of causal relation helps us understand why the character has the same name as the mood that we are predisposed to feel when experiencing it.

b) The Explanation of the Qualitative Similarity. The second explanation is more complex. According to Geiger, the link between the expressive property and the affective state goes even deeper and he points to what seems to be an intrinsic link between the two. In order to explain it, he distinguishes two sides, or moments, of the affective state:<sup>9</sup> a subjective side and an objective side, for which he coins the name “feeling tone” (*Gefühlston*, Geiger 1976: 35). Notice that this distinction is introduced only for analytical purposes, since for Geiger the mood is experienced as a unitary state. In sadness, in joy, in hatred, etc., we feel ourselves sad, joyous, hating, etc. (this is the subjective side), but these affective states have the ability to “color” the objects they target (this is the objective side because it has its effect on our perception of the object, see Geiger 1976: 33). Thus, when we experience an affective state, this state dyes, tinctures or impregnates with a coloration (*Färbung*) the targeted objects, giving them a brilliance (*Glanz*). The reason why we do not usually notice the objective side of an affective state is that we normally feel overwhelmed by how our feelings, emotions and moods affect us (the subjective side). As Geiger puts it: “the subjective moments of anger and cheerfulness, enthusiasm and love are so pronounced that one tends to overlook that in these experiences there also belongs something given in the object, that these experiences do not leave the objects they are di-

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<sup>9</sup> Here, for instance, Geiger speaks of *Gefühle*, a polysemic term that encompasses feelings, emotions, and also moods.

rected toward unaffected, but spread a specific brilliance on them” (my translation, 1976: 35).

Now, the question is how the objective side of our affective state relates to the expressive property, i.e., how the “feeling tone” (*Gefühlston*) is related to the “feeling character” (*Gefühlscharakter*). Geiger, whose analysis focuses largely on colors (and later also on words and expressions) puts the question in the following terms: “How does the cheerfulness of the color relate to the objective side of my cheerful mood, to the glow that my cheerful mood spreads over the objects?” (my translation, 1976: 36). Remember that both terms refer to different phenomena. The feeling tone is something that belongs to the affective state of the subject (the objective side of the affective state, to be more precise), while the feeling character is experienced as being objectively present in the object; how then do the two phenomena relate to one another? Geiger’s answer is that there is a qualitative similarity between both, which makes it unsurprising that we employ the same term for both phenomena. My mood projects a specific glow, light or brilliance onto the objects it targets, and this glow, light or brilliance is, in terms of its qualitative feel, similar to the feeling characters.

## 2.2. *Grasping characters, immersion and empathy*

In respect of the nature of expressive properties (feeling characters, characters or atmospheres in Geiger’s terms), Geiger defends a realist position. However, he has still to explain how we grasp such expressive properties. Geiger puts the question as follows: “we have not yet spoken of how we grasp (*erfassen*) this object in our consciousness, the cheerfulness of the color, the melancholy of the landscape” (my translation, 1976: 41). Translated into the language of contemporary aesthetics, this is the question of how expressive perception occurs. Note that this translation is only appropriate if we use the term “perception” in a very broad sense. Geiger does not speak directly of a “perception”, he employs the term “grasp” (*erfassen*), which suggests a *sui generis* form of disclosure that is irreducible to perception in the ordinary sense in which we employ this word (that is, for the perception of objects in our environment). Moreover, this translation of “grasp” is only justified in those cases where “expressive properties” are grasped, but in Geiger’s view we are able to grasp not only expressive but also evaluative properties (in the latter case, where we

grasp a value, it would be incorrect to speak of expressive perception). That being said, there are important reasons justifying the use of the term “expressive perception” to describe what Geiger has in mind. First, with the use of the term “grasp”, Geiger refers to exactly what Wollheim has defined as expressive perception, i.e., a capacity that enables us to see a work of art as expressing melancholy, or turbulence, or serenity. Secondly, the term “perception”, like the term “grasp”, suggests an immediacy and spontaneity in accessing aspects of the world. Finally, by using this term, Geiger’s realist position is presented in a language that enables a dialogue with authors with a background other than phenomenology.

Like the other realist phenomenologists before him, Scheler and Reinach, Geiger takes for granted that we have a capacity to disclose, grasp, experience or feel properties (for evaluative properties, see Scheler 1973: 259; Reinach 1989: 295). This is a *sui generis* capacity that is irreducible to emotion or belief. We do not say that the landscape is cheerful because we grasp this cheerfulness as an emotion (as I have already said, we can see the cheerfulness of the landscape despite being depressed), nor do we say it because we judge the landscape to be such (we do not apply general categories to a specific case in order to evaluate it). Now, to return to the question of how expressive properties are experienced, Geiger’s answer is that characters can be grasped, and this grasp is a kind of (non-propositional) form of “knowing” which makes aspects of the world accessible to us. To put it another way: expressive properties are given to us in expressive perception.

For the disclosure of expressive properties, the attitude in which we find ourselves is not irrelevant. In fact, Geiger observes that feeling characters can be apprehended in different attitudes (1976: 41). He primarily distinguishes between, on the one hand, a “contemplative attitude” (*betrachtende Einstellung*), in which we contemplate the cheerfulness of the color and experience it as something objective and external, and, on the other, an “immersive attitude” (*aufnehmende Einstellung*), in which we not only perceive the feeling character but are also immersed (*versenken*) in it<sup>10</sup>. His main concern

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<sup>10</sup> For a discussion and critique of Geiger’s account, see Griffero (2014: 109, 132, 134). However, note that Griffero employs a different terminology from that proposed in this paper. Griffero’s criticism of Geiger is motivated by a different

is with this latter attitude, which, for the sake of clarity, I will refer to as “immersion”, and he offers an elaborated taxonomy of its different types. According to this typology, there are four forms of immersion:

a) Objective Immersion. In this attitude we open ourselves up to the feeling character (i.e., the expressive property), but we remain passive towards it. Despite grasping the character, we do not actively adopt an attitude towards it. In these cases, we experience the feeling character as an “atmosphere” (*Atmosphäre*, Geiger 1976: 45) spreading within us. For this reason, it is possible that we interpret this atmosphere as a feeling, although in fact it is not our feeling, but something objective.

b) Position-Taking Immersion. Here we grasp the character (i.e., the expressive property) but we also adopt a stance towards it. We see the character of a landscape and we see it as depressed and hollow, and this impression differs from the one we have when the landscape is cheerful and lovely. We then enter into an interplay with the landscape. We grasp the feeling character of the landscape, we adopt a stance towards it, and in turn this stance influences the way in which we perceive the character of the landscape. Thus, when I experience the landscape as depressed and hollow, I am able to experience something of these qualities in myself. The boundaries between the feeling character and my affective state are not clear; rather, there is an interdependence between them.

c) Sentimental Immersion. While the last two attitudes share an interest in the object, this is not the case with the sentimental attitude. Rather than grasping the feeling character of the landscape, this attitude relates to how this character influences our own affective states. This attitude is characterized by an active search for resonance, that is, for recreating in one’s own consciousness the character of the landscape. Hence, our attention is directed not at the object, but rather at the affective state elicited by it. The object is just a pretext for letting a mood arise in us. In cases of sentimental immersion, the feeling character of the landscape and my affective state converge, making it difficult to draw a line between the two phenomena.

d) Empathic Immersion. Finally, it is also possible that we empathize with the feeling character. Empathy (*Einfühlung*) is not employed here to mean a form of social cognition, but a state in which a total

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conceptualization of the notion of “atmosphere”, one which is inspired by Neue Phänomenologie as well as Gestalt psychology.

absorption by the other has taken place. In empathic immersion we are completely absorbed by the character and become one with it (*eins warden*, Geiger 1976: 53). However, this form of immersion differs from the sentimental immersion in a crucial respect. In sentimental immersion, the object is regarded as simply a means to elicit affective reactions, and we care about it only because it produces affective states in which we can indulge. By contrast, in empathic immersion, we are able to grasp the character at the same time that it produces in us a corresponding mood. Nevertheless, character and mood are not presented as two separate phenomena. It is not the case that on the one hand we have a character and on the other we have a mood. Geiger describes what happens as a situation in which a single mood has its origins in two different places: the object and the self are not the same thing, but they converge by virtue of a shared mood (1976: 54). The focus is on the mood rather than the object; we are aware that we experience a mood, but we are also aware that this mood is a form of re-experiencing an aspect or property of the object.

Although, in *Zum Problem der Stimmungseinfühlung*, Geiger does not delve into the value of each of these forms of immersion for our appreciation of art, he presents some firm opinions on the matter in a work published two years later: *Beiträge zur Phänomenologie des ästhetischen Genusses* (*Contributions to a phenomenology of aesthetic pleasure*, 1913). In the *Beiträge*, Geiger distinguishes two forms of participation in art: one is described as “inner concentration” (*Innenkonzentration*), while the other is described as “outer concentration” (*Außenkonzentration*, 1974: 664). With “inner concentration”, the subject addresses herself/himself towards the “inside”, focusing on the affective states aroused by a work of art with the aim of enjoying them. With “outer concentration”, the subject addresses herself/himself to the work, its features, its values and characters. This form of participation is “disinterested”: the subject remains in control of her/his feelings, emotions and moods. Usually our engagement with art involves both kinds of participation, so these terms are in fact an abstraction of how we engage with works of art. However, for Geiger, if we focus on what we feel then we are enjoying our affective states and not the work itself. Thus, the pleasure experienced through “inner concentration” is a pseudo-aesthetic pleasure because the work is used merely as a pretext to feel emotions and to indulge in them.

Genuine aesthetic pleasure requires the “disconnection of the self” as a means of focusing on the object as such: this is only possible through “outer concentration” (see Geiger 1974: 664). The form of participation that Geiger describes in the *Beiträge* as “inner concentration” has strong similarities with the “sentimental immersion” as described in *Zum Problem der Stimmungseinführung*.

Geiger’s skepticism towards the function of our affective states for the participation and appreciation of art works is embedded in a larger intellectualist tradition for which the emotions, feelings and moods, rather than enabling the understanding and valuing of art works, distract us from their relevant aspects. Susan Feagin has coined the expression “the intellectual view of appreciation” to refer to this view, according to which affective states risk taking our attention away from what we ought to be attending to in the work (2013: 636). A similar position was defended by the phenomenologist Ortega y Gasset in *La deshumanización del arte* (2002: 852). Throughout its significant history, however, what this intellectualist view seems to ignore is something which early phenomenologists made us aware of: that emotions might play an important function in indicating to us the evaluative and expressive properties embodied within a work of art<sup>11</sup>.

### 3. *Wollheim’s Freudian account in Anglo-American aesthetics*

#### 3.1. *Expressive perception as complex projection*

Geiger’s realist account represents a radical rejection of projectionist theories on the nature of expressive properties. However, within Anglo-American aesthetics, one of the most prominent and widely discussed contributions on the nature of expressive perception employs the mechanism of projection to explain it. Richard Wollheim’s *Painting as an art* (1987) devotes part of the chapter *What the spectator sees* precisely to this question and uses a Freudian model to offer a projectionist explanation of expressive perception. In his view, expressive perception is a function of projection, i.e., it can be explained as the projection of a mental state onto the world. For Wollheim, the concept of projection is intimately connected to the key concept of his philosophy of art: “correspondence”. Expression, projection and

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<sup>11</sup> I offer a defense of the role of emotions in the appreciation of art in Vendrell Ferran (2018: 204-23).

correspondence are, therefore, three closely linked and interacting concepts in Wollheim's work. First, I will focus on expressive perception, before considering expressive properties in the following section (given the function of projection, it is not accidental that in this section on Wollheim the order of exposition is precisely the reverse of what it was in the case of Geiger, who defends a realist account of expressive properties).

Like Geiger, Wollheim tries to provide answers to two central questions: what is the nature of expressive properties, and how can they be experienced? And, like Geiger, Wollheim takes our own experience as his point of departure. More specifically, he is interested in the phenomenology of pictorial meaning. However, unlike Geiger, Wollheim offers an account in which the artist's intention plays a role in explaining how we come to perceive expressive properties in works of art. In particular, this intentionalist view will be helpful in explaining the notion of correspondence.

In *Painting as an art*, Wollheim poses the question: "What is it then to see a painting as expressing melancholy, or turbulence, or serenity? Is it, for instance, a genuine species of seeing or is the notion of seeing used here in a loose or extended sense as when I say that I see the force of an argument, or the need for disagreeable action?" (Wollheim 1987: 80). Wollheim argues resolutely for the first view, according to which expressive perception is a genuine form of seeing. Expressive perception is for him a *sui generis* form of seeing in the same sense that "seeing-in" – another key concept of his aesthetics (that is distinct from Wittgenstein's notion of "seeing-as") – is also a *sui generis* form of seeing appropriate to representations. Both forms of seeing are species of perception. While expressive perception gives us access to the expressive qualities of art works, "seeing-in" enables us to see something represented in a picture (as when we claim to "see" Napoleon in a painting – i.e., when looking at the surface of a painting we discern the figure of Napoleon)<sup>12</sup>. In describing expressive perception, he writes:

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<sup>12</sup> The concept of "seeing-in" was developed in the second edition of *Art and its objects* (Wollheim 1980: 137). In *Painting as an art* (1987), Wollheim analyzes this concept further and also focuses on expressive seeing as another species of perception.



I believe that expressive perception is a genuine species of seeing, and it is for this reason that it is capable of grounding a distinctive variety of pictorial meaning. However, expressive perception is not a narrowly visual capacity, for not only does it, like all species of seeing, presuppose beliefs, which in turn derive from a certain experience of the world, but it also presupposes a deep part of our psychology, which consists in a mechanism for coping with feelings, moods, and emotions. (Wollheim 1987: 80)

That is, expressive perception is a form of perception in which our feelings, moods and emotions are implicated. In fact, in Wollheim's view, it is a form of perception related to the way in which we deal with our emotional states.

To understand how our affective state affects expressive perception, Wollheim suggests that we compare it with two similar experiences.

a) The first kind of experience occurs when we are in the grip of an emotion and this emotional state tinctures, dyes and colors everything in our environment. If we enjoy success, the happiness experienced makes the world appear a wonderful place. According to Wollheim, this happens not because the world is such a place, but because we are in a certain emotional state. In this case "the emotion flows from us to what we perceive" (Wollheim 1987: 82).

b) The second experience is of a different kind. We can experience a landscape as having the mood of aloneness and despair. We are able to perceive such moods independently of our present emotional state. Here "the emotion flows from what we perceive to us", i.e., our emotion responds to what the world looks like (Wollheim 1987: 82). The phenomenon of expressive perception is prefigured by the second kind of experience in which something perceived gives rise to an emotion in us. Wollheim approaches it via the concept of "correspondence".

Notice here a striking analogy with Geiger. Wollheim's first experience, in which the emotions dye everything we perceive, describes the phenomenon that Geiger calls "feeling tone" (*Gefühlston*), i.e., the "objective" moment of our affective experience. The feeling tone refers to the capacity of our affective states to color, dye, tincture the objects targeted. Wollheim's second experience, in which an emotion flows to us from what we perceive, relates to what Geiger calls "feeling characters", "characters" or "atmospheres", and which I have interpreted as the expressive properties experienced as the presence of objective qualities. For Wollheim, as for Geiger, expressive perception

is a question of the second kind of experience. However, as I shall show, unlike Geiger, Wollheim considers that the expressive properties, though experienced independently of our affective condition, are the result of a complex mechanism in which we project our affective state onto the world<sup>13</sup>. Thus, in Wollheim's view, the second phenomenon also implies the first.

According to Wollheim, expressive perception is characterized by the following moments. First, the emotional aspect does not stand apart from the perception through which it is invoked. As he puts it: "In expressive perception it is not enough that what is perceived invokes the corresponding emotion: the emotion must effect how we perceive what we perceive. Expressed emotion and perception fuse" (Wollheim 1987: 82). Secondly, the correspondence between our emotional state and an aspect of the world occurs in a process of projection. As Wollheim understands it, "projection is a process in which emotions or feelings flow from us to what we perceive" (1987: 82). Thus, although expressive perception is prefigured by the second kind of experience in which we perceive a mood in an object in our environment, it also has something in common with the first kind of experience in which we project an emotional state onto the world. As Malcolm Budd has put it, in Wollheim, correspondence is "a relation between some part of the external world and an emotion, mood or feeling that the part of the external world is capable of invoking in virtue of how it looks" (Budd 2008: 241). We experience the world as corresponding to certain emotions and in experiencing this correspondence an emotion can be induced in us.

Against this background, Wollheim seeks to explain expressive perception in terms of projection. Projection is used as a *terminus technicus* in his account, in which meaning cannot be reduced to the mere attribution of our own mental states to objects in our environment. In fact, according to him, projection can come in two forms:

a) in a "simple projection", a person is sad and projects her/his sadness onto a figure of the environment so that s/he no longer believes that s/he is sad, but thinks that what is really sad is the figure in her/his environment.

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<sup>13</sup> Note that despite labeling Wollheim's position as projectionism, his projectionism is more similar to forms of quasi-realism than to emotivism. Wollheim remains faithful to our experience of such properties as belonging to the world. In this regard, projective properties are close to secondary properties.

b) The other form is “complex projection”, which is described in the following terms: “A person is [...] sad; his sadness causes him anxiety; as a result of this anxiety he projects his sadness on to, more generally, the external world; and now, along with no longer believing he is sad, perhaps no longer being sad, he begins to experience the external world as of a piece of his sadness” (Wollheim 1987: 82).

Notice that according to these descriptions, the differences between both kinds of projection can be explained as follows. First, in simple projection, the person ends up with a belief (s/he thinks that what is really sad is a figure in her/his environment), while in complex projection, the person ends up with an experience (s/he experiences the world as of a piece of her/his sadness). Secondly, and more importantly, in simple perception, the person ends up believing that some figure in the environment possesses exactly the same property as the one s/he experiences (in Wollheim’s example the property is sadness, but this is not the only property we are able to project – other negative and positive properties can also be projected), while in complex projection, the property in which the person experiences the world is not the same as the one s/he started off by experiencing herself/himself. For instance, the person does not experience the world as being sad, but as having another property. However, given that this other property cannot be explained without the mechanism of complex projection, Wollheim refers to these properties as “projective properties” (Wollheim 1987: 83). To summarize, for Wollheim, expressive perception involves the mechanism of complex projection. In fact, expressive perception is described in terms of the perception of projective properties.

### 3.2. *Projective properties*

I now turn to Wollheim’s concept of “projective property”, which is used to refer to expressive properties. The concept itself underscores the underlying process of projection in expressive perception. According to Wollheim, who follows psychoanalytical ideas put forward by Freud on this point, the mechanism of projection is an unconscious process, which involves the work of phantasy. There is first an initiating phantasy motivated by an emotion that the subject wants to either retain or get rid of. According to this phantasy, the emotion is expelled from the body and spreads across the environment. Phantasy is also involved in a second sense: the subject who expels the emo-

tion has a disposition to fantasize that the world can be experienced in a certain way. Wollheim describes it in the following terms: “The expulsive phantasy dyes the world, and it is this dye that gives the world its new projective properties” (Wollheim 1987: 84). In his later work *On the emotions* (1999), he will defend a view of the emotions as unconscious dispositions, which fits with this idea.

As previously noted, in complex projection, the person experiences the world as having a property which is not the same property as that which s/he experienced at the beginning of the process of projection. Nevertheless, as Wollheim observes, it is common to employ the same predicates to refer to a psychological state and to a property of our environment. This happens because a “doubling-up of the predicate” takes place (Wollheim 1987: 84). Unlike Geiger, for whom there is a causal and qualitative linkage between both phenomena, Wollheim believes that this doubling-up can be explained as an example of how language is idealized. The main danger of this idealization is that it leads us to speak metaphorically about the world, and in doing so, we end up misunderstanding our experience and thinking that this doubling-up is the core of expressive perception. The problem with this idealization is that we understand expressive perception as “the metaphorical application of psychological predicates to the world” (Wollheim 1987: 85). The mistake here would be twofold: first, we would overlook the fact that expressive perception is a genuine form of seeing; second, we would embrace anthropomorphism because of the belief that the predicate for an emotional state and for a property of the world are used in the same sense.

As previously mentioned, Wollheim’s account incorporates the notion of artistic intention. In Wollheim’s account, a work of art has certain expressive properties because the artist gave it these properties with the intention that they would correspond to an emotional state. As recipients of art works, we are aware of such correspondence when we experience the work as mirroring certain affective states<sup>14</sup>. The intention of the artist thus plays a crucial role in explaining the correct perception of expressive properties in a work of art. Wollheim will modify these claims in his later work, arguing that the artist should not necessarily experience the emotional condition ex-

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<sup>14</sup> Here I follow Budd’s analysis on the notion of “correspondence” in Wollheim’s work (see Budd 2008: 240).

pressed by the work, nor should the spectator feel compelled to experience such emotion (Budd 2008: 248).

According to this view, there is a relevant connection between emotion and pictorial representation. Wollheim explains this connection in terms of causality. Thoughts, beliefs, memories and emotions cause the artist to paint in a certain way and the artist is responsible for explaining her intentions. However, the causal connection between emotion and expressive property in the case of pictorial representation differs from the causal connection between emotion and the bodily expression of an emotion. In pictorial representation, the emotion in question does not have to be experienced by the artist in the moment of painting, but can be controlled by recollection and reflection. Moreover, with pictorial representation we do not react to something within our environment.

There is a further aspect to the chapter of *Painting as an art* under discussion here, and one to which we should pay attention. Regarding the perception of expressive properties, there are relevant similarities between the perception of pictorial expression and the perception of bodily expression. First, both are forms of expressive perception. Moreover, there is a structural resemblance between the two. In both cases the perception is answerable to the way the object (the picture or the body) looks, how this look corresponds to certain emotions, and what has caused the look. However, in the perception of an expressive picture, the spectator is aware that s/he is trying to do what the artist tried to do in making the picture, but nothing similar takes place in the case of the perception of bodily expression. And here again we find an important point of similarity with Geiger, for whom grasping a feeling character was substantially different from seeing a human face expressing an emotion.

To understand the originality of Wollheim's projectionist account, we need to broaden our perspective by considering the larger context in which it became influential. The majority of analytical accounts explain expressive properties in terms of their power to elicit certain reactions in those who experience them. Expressive properties are interpreted in terms of dispositions to arouse certain emotions. Other approaches underscore the link between the expression in art works and in human faces and explain expressive properties in terms of a structural analogy between the two phenomena (for an overview, see Noordhof 2008: 330). It was precisely the latter view that Wollheim

criticized, while trying to offer an explanation of how these powers are to be found independently of us, within our environment.

What Wollheim's and Geiger's approaches have in common is ultimately the idea that we are able to experience expressive properties as being independent of our mental condition (characters or projective properties are not to be assimilated to affective states). Moreover, both agree in terms of the existence of a *sui generis* capacity or sense that enables us to experience such properties (an ability to grasp, the ability to perceive projective properties). This capacity has a perceptual moment due to its immediacy, spontaneity, and non-conceptuality; it also has an affective moment since it is a form of feeling toward certain aspects of our environment, but it cannot be explained as either a common perception or as an emotion, feeling or mood. The main point of disagreement lies in the explanation of how such properties are presented as independent of us in experience: for Geiger, they are objectively present (realism), whereas for Wollheim, we are the ones who, through a complex mechanism of projection, have imposed them onto our world (projectionism).

#### 4. *Concluding remarks*

This paper has presented and discussed Geiger's and Wollheim's approaches on the nature of expressive properties. While Geiger developed his account within the context of early phenomenology and embraced a realist position about expressive properties, Wollheim developed a projectionist account in the context of Anglo-American aesthetics, which was mainly dominated by dispositionalist accounts. Despite the striking differences between both authors and their respective intellectual contexts and backgrounds, they share a common interest in explaining an important aspect of human experience: namely, our capacity to perceive objects of the world as bearers of expressive properties. This focus on a description of experience allows us to regard both authors as phenomenologists, though this term takes on a different meaning in respect of each of them. In Geiger, it means not only an interest in describing how we experience art, but also a direct connection with the philosophical tradition developed by Husserl, Pfänder, and his followers, while in Wollheim, it means an interest in taking the description of human experience as a

point of departure for philosophical analysis. Both share similar intuitions about how we experience objects of art as embodying expressive properties and both are interested in developing accounts that explain how expressive perception occurs. Hence, there are enough parallels for us to bridge the divide between phenomenology and Anglo-American aesthetics. I hope to have shown here that not only is it possible to build bridges between both traditions, but these bridges can also motivate a fruitful and inspiring dialogue.

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