

Ananta Charan Sukla (ed.)
Art and Expression

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Art and Expression

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in the Occidental and Oriental Traditions

Edited by
Ananta Charan Sukla

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In the Sacred Memory of my Late Teachers

Professor Sisir Chatterjee (1922 – 1974)

and

Professor Jagannath Chakravorty (1923 – 1992)

at the Department of English

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The present volume forms a part of the series devoted to contemporary explorations in some of the conceptual issues of art, aesthetic theory and philosophy of art in their various intercultural perspectives. The first three volumes published during the last decade of the present century concern three major issues such as Representation, Experience and Essence. This fourth volume got me engaged for half a dozen years during the course of which scholars around the world have participated in various ways for its completion. Professor Michael Mitias formerly at Millsaps College and Kuwait University has been a great source of inspiration at the initial stage of this project. Professor John Llewelyn of the University of Edinburgh co-author of my previous volumes on Representation and Experience provided me with some valuable suggestions for studying the theory of Expression in the phenomenology of Husserl and Merleau-Ponty. My sons Ambika Nrusimha and Viraja Varaha, wife Indulata have cooperated with me, as they do always, in letting me remain free from the household responsibilities during my research. My friend and assistant Mr. Jagannath Dalai has prepared the index. I express my sincere gratitude to all of them.

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Ananta Ch. Sukla

INTRODUCTION

Ananta Ch. Sukla

Expression is an ambiguous and heterogeneous phenomenon that manifests the complexities of mental states in varieties of ways constituting meaningful signs in man's cultural behaviour both linguistic and non-linguistic. In its linguistic form expression is a highly codified system within a cultural context whereas in its non-linguistic form it evades the disciplines of a system involving an infinite range of behavioural signs, which, in their innumerable combinations and permutations, promise an immense source of creativity.

Notwithstanding the sophisticated efforts for its interiorization, the term, with its derivational strength, denotes an externalization of mental phenomena that can be experienced publicly in principle whether intended or unintended by the subject. Most appropriately, therefore, expression is a phenomenological phenomenon that crosses the boundaries of subject-object dichotomy that troubles both the idealist and the realist wings of philosophy.

Expression as manifestation of mental states might be spontaneous, involuntary, instinctual bodily changes, including facial gestures such as trembling, tremor, crying and sweating in case of expressing fear, or it might be voluntary actions such as running away or other efforts for escaping the object of fear. But these modes of expression are not so simplistic or clear-cut. Smile might be expression of appreciation, happiness, hope as also of satire, envy and revenge. Running away or getting back upon an object might also be expression of disgust and hatred. Signification of expression is therefore contextual.

Expression as voluntary performance of appropriate and proportionate action is still more complicated. Sometimes it is genuine being sincere or transparent, sometimes it is also pretensive or just formal without any sincerity. One offers a gift to a friend expressing sincere love, the other might do it just formally. As a public phenomenon, expression is, therefore, subject to explanation and interpretation. Sometimes, out of courtesy, one, desirous of taking more food, refuses to take any more on the host's dining table. A beloved, actually desiring to have a gift from her lover refuses to take any. A politician applauds the speech of his rival diplomatically. Expression of anger is performed by several actions such as throwing out the enemy's photograph, burning his effigy. But tearing away the letters of somebody might express either anger or sorrow

(due to the writer's betrayal or unbearably sad demise respectively). There are normally two ways of interpreting or explaining these expressions: by applying reason and appealing to belief. In interpreting the burning of letters one has to believe that the person concerned is shocked by either betrayal or death of the writer, and therefore he burns away the letters reasonably. Similarly, by applying his reason the host must interpret the guest's refusal to take more food as an expression of his shyness. Linguistic expressions, on the other hand, are not as complicated as the non-linguistic ones because of the highly structural character of language. Linguistic competence needed for interpretation of linguistic expressions can be attained by educational training, although it cannot be said that the heuristic endeavour is sufficient for linguistic competence—one's presence of mind and inherent or cultivated flash of intuition are equally required. But in case of the non-linguistic expressions, because of their highly unpredictable modes and modulations, explanations and interpretations are highly risky.

Finally, expressions might be intended for communication to an audience for impressing him with a purpose where both the gestures and actions are voluntary, or they might be non-communicative, self-expressions in their spontaneous responses to the mental states. A child cries aloud and rolls on the ground for demanding an instant fulfillment of his desire by the parents. The father similarly chides the child while forbidding him from such expressions. Each one can understand and behave each other in dialogic expressions.

It is this communicative expression which concerns a philosopher of art who presupposes that the artist deliberately communicates an audience, present or absent, by linguistic or non-linguistic expressions, and obviously, also presupposes that the audience will interpret, explain, understand and enjoy his communication. The central issue that concerns this presupposition has built up a huge body of debate over two questions: whether this communication of the artist can be called an "expression" in the sense discussed above, and secondly, if so, then whether this expression is the manifestation of his mental states. The present volume enters into this debate by inviting a distinguished team of international scholars from various fields of knowledge who focus on this central point from multifarious perspectives, and instead of closing the debate finally, they rather open up new avenues that might encourage the scholars for reflecting on this extraordinarily vital issue exercising their own intellectual insight.

Among the scholars contributing to the Western wing, Ananta Sukla, in his prologue to the volume, surveys the critical concept of expression in its historical perspectives, since its emergence in the 19th century Romantic parlour to the contemporary postmodernist debate over the rejection of subjectivity through the highways and byways of several intellectual movements such as analytic phi-

losophy, linguistic structuralism and phenomenology. The first part contains nine chapters representing contemporary Western views on the role of expression in art, whereas the second part examines the notion of expression in the classical and contemporary theories of art in the Oriental traditions – Indian, Japanese and Chinese.

Rob Van Gerwen explores an avenue for shedding a fresh light on the relevance of the issue of expression in the contemporary society that emerges from the practice of aesthetic surgery. The issue that warrants our immediate attention is the legal, social, moral and even aesthetic validity of aesthetic surgery that recasts not only the physical injury as such, but also tends to recast the appearance of a person with a view to attributing it an expression that impresses the public aesthetically. The approach of Gerwen, therefore, covers the various intellectual issues concerning those of natural expression and artistic expression in their relationship with the phenomenology of representation. He examines the views of the critics such as Richard Wollheim and Gregory Currie who have contributed substantially to this debate, and concludes that the application of aesthetic expression in aesthetic surgery commits a major theoretical error that fails to appreciate the differences between natural expression and artistic expression, to appreciate the basic theoretical position that it is a persona who bears aesthetic expression not a person. Aesthetic surgery is therefore a perversion in all its aspects—social, legal, moral and aesthetic—that spread narcissist virus in society.

Dale Jacquette outlines the fundamentals of a philosophy of expression that correlates language and various forms of art since the inception of human culture, taking account of the progress of this correlation by various schools and individuals of the Western critical tradition. Jacquette approaches the issue of expression from phenomenological perspectives highlighting the intentionality of cultural entities that include everything directed toward and imbued with human purpose.

Drawing upon John Searle's division between two kinds of intentionality—*intrinsic* and *derivative*, Jacquette defends expression and expressivism in considering a three-part philosophical ontology that includes physical (percepts), abstract (concepts) and the mind's qualia-bearing intentional entities. The *intrinsic* intentionality might be individual or collective referring to a single mind or many minds whereas the *derivative* intentionality refers to all the percepts and concepts derived from this *intrinsic* one by way of expression. Jacquette believes that this intentionalist ontology of culture, proposed by Heidegger and others, explains varieties of cultural products including language and the arts, and their reception by the audience or consumers for whom these productions are in-

tended, this process of reciprocation being an active (not passive) perceptual experience that constitutes the dynamics of artworks. This intentionalist ontology helps us overcome the puzzles of the subjective/objective dichotomy in such cultural phenomena as beauty, taste and etiquette.

Jack Bender is a pictorial artist as also a philosopher of art. He presents, with the illustrations from his own paintings, his critical experiences of the conceptual and logical correlations of several aesthetic notions that are apparently either antagonistic or unrelated such as expression, representation, reference, depiction, denotation and exemplification. Reference is the key-term in his thinking which, he thinks, correlates both expression and representation in so far as both these functions are different modes of reference, and realistic representation, abstract formalism and abstract expressionism are correlated in the common ground of reference. Thus, for Bender, expression is not the metaphorical denotation of a painting by an expressive predicate. Although he believes in the semantic and semiotic functions of art broadly, he does not subscribe to the linguistic view of the pictorial reference as advocated by philosophers like Nelson Goodman.

David Goldblatt proposes a link between the Platonic theory of inspiration and the theory of expression that the modern philosopher of art advocates. He agrees with Arthur Danto that all gestural manifestations are not expressions unless they are meant for/ media of communication: “expression is actually the communication tokens.” Expression may have a source or sources of inspiration either religious or secular, but the expressed is not exactly the inspired: “what is specifically expressed in art need not be caused by the same type of thing inspiring it.” The efficacy of inspiration is resultant in an individual expression “in a mythical process of un-selving”—so that the expression ceases to be individual as it is “already delivered from individual will.” Goldblatt correlates Plato with a number of modern thinkers such as Hegel, Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, Valéry, Collingwood, Wollheim, Derrida, Goodman and Danto.

Vinjamuri K. Chari stresses the etymological origin of the term “expression” in explaining its conceptual status constituted by the totality of five factors such as the act of expressing, the “inner” pressed out, the agent that presses out, the intention of the agent in pressing out and the medium distinct from and external to the thing to be pressed out. The “inner”, according to him, is the emotive rather than the cognitive aspect of human mind. He further considers that any one-sided approach to the concept is insufficient and argues for an integral approach consulting a number of philosophers who have contemplated on the issue during the last century. Taken in isolation, no causal connection between the “inner” and its gestural or verbal expression is ascertained because there is no

invariable concomitant between the two. The integral complex provides the necessary inferential linkage to the “inner” that is expressed. The anthropomorphic predicates called “expressiveness” would be correctly attributed to the represented content (characters or elements) in an expressive situation, whereas by extension this predicate may be attributed to the artwork as a whole.

In pinpointing the five-factor complex of expression, Chari concludes that the natural objects are not expressive in themselves unless the anthropomorphic expressive properties are ascribed to them as resemblance properties. “There should be no disjunction between the expressive act and the expressive quality, because an artwork... is an object of perception and comes to us as qualified in a certain way... that is possessed of certain qualities. The art-object and its qualities are grasped simultaneously...” Considering the literary art in particular, Chari holds that like the natural objects the purely formal or phonological features are not expressive, in themselves since they carry no meanings in themselves. The expressions symbolized in literature are “fundamentally causal in nature inasmuch as they are the effect of what they express and therefore are natural signs of feelings which they signify.”

James Manns suggests “an adjustment to the age-old theory that the music makes feel what the composer intended to express ... music, when effective, does make us feel. Yet this feeling is invariably and essentially a response to the music itself.” By intentionality he does not mean the “biographical data” as the anti-intentionalists like Wimsatt and Beardsley did. According to Manns, intentionality is a relevant factor in our responses to and evaluation of artworks.

Drawing upon Gestalt psychology, Manns demonstrates that perception is not a passive act, the mind being actively involved with the data of sensation. Thus aesthetic activity is basically a perceptual experience both on the parts of the artist and the audience. This active participation of the minds of both the artist and the audience rejects the emotionless accounts of emotion in music. All expressions (in the sense of mere externalization or publicisation) are not expressive that necessarily involve intentionality, and these expressive expressions called artworks, are necessarily meant for communication: “works of art,” Manns quotes John Dewey, “are the only unhindered communication between man and man ... that occur in a world full of gulfs and walls that limit community of experience.” The effectivity/affectivity of this musical expression/communication might arouse/evoke emotions/feelings in the audience, a truth, practically experienced by Manns in listening to Beethoven’s Opus III Piano Sonata.

Julie Van Camp offers a precise history of dance theory and criticism from the classical times to the postmodern period through the modernism of the twentieth century. She observes serious disagreements on several aspects of ex-

pression in course of her historical survey: (i) is dance expression a subspecies of expression involved in all other art forms? (ii) should expression be confined to conveyance or metaphorical representation of emotions or should this be extended to expression of ideas and linguistic contents? (iii) what is a successful expression—authentic communication of inner feeling by the dancer/aesthetic communication actually understood by the observer/symbolic representations understood by the observer regardless of inner feelings of the performer?

In answer to such questions, Van Camp offers a pragmatic understanding of expression resisting any urge for an “essence” or singular explanation of expression for dance, which she thinks, suits all purposes and perspectives. Expression refers to a number of phenomena in our verbal and non-verbal activities depending on our context and purposes. An approach such as this tends to include varieties of dance expression instead of confining it to any specific theory-bound concept of expression. A dancer, for example, might say that she pursues the art for expressing herself. Others might say that their dance expresses their inner emotions for an effective communication to the audience. Some others, the sophisticates, might propose an expression of the symbolic form of emotions that have no referee to the actual emotions experienced either by the artist or by the audience. Postmodern dancers might understand expression as communication of intellectual ideas, but no emotions: “There is room for everyone on the dance floor”. There is indeed, Van Camp observes, a complex structure of overlapping dance worlds depending on the role and context of the dancer, the choreographer, the audience, critic and the theoretician that enhances and enriches our understanding of expression.

The central issue in the theatrical performance is the relationship between the actor and the character of the dramatic text. Does the actor represent the character mimetically or re-present the character as interpreted / understood / experienced by him or by the director? If both the character and the performance of the actor are fictional, then what are the criteria of the Real that the early Russian realism of Stanislavsky wanted to present? The whole world of the theatre, as that of any other art form, is fictional where there is no representation, only re-presentation of reality, each presentation being independent of each other. The issue of realism in theatrical performance is, therefore, a relative one, and this relativism of presentation might, otherwise be called “expression” where the gaps between the actor and the character, and between the play and its on-stage performance are dissolved. Roderick Nicholls and Robert Scott Stewart examine this central issue with references to the dramatic theories and performances as adopted by a galaxy of artists during the twentieth century from Stanislavsky to Brecht and Beckett.

David Fenner correlates expression with representation and interpretation. In interpreting an artwork an audience correlates both its representational and expressive aspects with reference to the artwork as an object as well as to its relation with the artist. He chooses the film as an appropriate medium for illustrating his ideas. Instead of suggesting any specific definition of representation he gathers several of its meanings as offered by the theorists: resemblance, depiction, denotation, symbolization, understanding the world of representation as creation/fiction/make-believe that presents, in the Aristotelian sense, a probable world, not a possible one. On the other hand, Fenner

distinguishes between the two major traditional approaches to Tolstoy's communicative and Croce's cognitive theory of expression. Instead of taxonomizing the art theories as representational and expressive Fenner proposes an integrated approach to understanding and appreciating an artwork.

In the second part of the volume, in its Oriental wing, Ananta Sukla traces a theory of expression in the Indian (Sanskrit) intellectual history by studying the roles of the roots *kāś* and *vyāñj* as they are used in their derivatives *prakāśa* and (*abhi*)*vyakti* meaning shining, revealing and manifesting— for explaining the linguistic functions as dealt with in several branches of knowledge such as grammarology, linguistics and poetics. He further investigates how this linguistic model of manifestation is used for explaining the nature of theatrical performance in both its ontological and epistemological perspectives. Finally he concludes that “expression” can be redeemed of the charges of humanistic subjectivity if interpreted in the light of the Sanskrit concepts of *prakāśa* and (*abhi*)*vyakti*, in a sense, as “ambiguously self-expressive” as some Western critics would propose.

In dealing with the Japanese concept of expression, Jason Wirth strikes straight the very non-representationality of the reality apprehended neither by discursive language nor by determinate perceptual experience—essentially a Buddhist view preached as early as Nāgārjuna (2nd c.) and Diñnāga (5th c. AD) in India. According to the Buddhist epistemology Reality (*paramārtha*) is non-empirical and therefore non-apprehensible by linguistic cognition vitiated by name and form. Thus ontologically it is an evolution from pluralism (*dharmāḥ*) to the underlying essential unity (*dharmatā*) that is non-linguistic—a pure experience (*dharmatā/tatbatā*) as Zenji holds. Brightness of a pearl has been the key image of the self-manifestation (revelation) of Reality in its cosmic (empirical) form, an idea preached as early as the 9th c. AD during the last Tang Dynasty of Japan.

Jason Wirth pursues this fundamentally non-linguistic (non-representational) character of expression (and therefore of communication) of Reality or *Dharma* that emerged in the 9th century and developed till the twentieth century

through the influential philosophers like Dogen Kigen and Nishida Kitārō comparing their ideas of Dotōku and Hyogen relevantly with their Western counterparts such as Spinoza, Schelling and Deleuze. Wirth interprets Nishida’s concept of expression as *Hyō* (to rise to the surface)—*gen* (something like to arise or ontologically appear) that explains the very nature of art (“In art, expression itself is truth”) as exemplified in two art forms—Zen Calligraphy and Rock Garden.

Mary Wiseman assumes a conceptual similarity of “expression” in both the Chinese and Western aesthetic cultures, considering expression as basically a relation between artwork and psychological state or quality, following Beardsley’s observation that “an artwork expresses a psychological state or quality, and that of Arnheim that there is an intrinsic connection “between perceived appearance and the expression it conveyed.” Wiseman then discusses the six principles of painting as advocated by Hsieh Ho (5th c.), the six canons of Chang Yen-Yuan (9th c.), the expressionist credo of Shih-t’ao (17th c.), and while proceeding on analyzing the various environmental, political and social situations in modern China since then, studies Chinese poetry and visual arts developed till date. Considering the sculpture of a current Chinese artist Zhang Huan, Wiseman reflects upon the revision of some of the ideas of both Arnheim and Ho that the art material is significantly expressive as are the dynamic properties of art objects. Thus the expressivity of artworks, as understood in both the cultures—Chinese and Western—is not inherent only in the manifestation of psychological states or qualities but also in the quality and kind of material that the artwork is made of, an idea that strikingly distinguishes the Eastern view of man-nature identical relationship from that of its Western (the Greeks and their followers) counterpart that endows only humans with reason, and ranks them higher than the non-human material world.

Finally, in the Epilogue, Ananta Sukla reviews the arguments presented in the volume so as to evaluate the concept of expression, in its traditional and contemporary perspectives with a view to judging its claim for explaining the nature of aesthetic creation in general by way of setting it against its rival concepts such as mimesis and representation.