

PHIL 4403: Philosophy of Art
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Representation and Expression

*Representation

--Representational Theory (RT)

--As a necessary condition: x is an artwork only if x represents something

*The basic idea of representational theories: Art is always *about* something. It has *content*. An artwork *represents* what it is about.

--Lots of things represent—this condition is obviously not sufficient for art. Something can represent by resemblance or illusion, so imitation is one kind of representation. But, representation is a broader category than imitation.

--Words and languages represent. The connection between a word and what it represents is (normally) arbitrary though. We say that words and languages are *conventional* systems of representation. But the connection between a picture and what it represents does not seem arbitrary in most cases. Right?

--This sometimes seems to be the case even when the picture is not imitative. Perhaps there is a kind of representation, often used in art, that we have not yet identified?

Q: Can art have a wholly conventional system of representation, as do languages? (If an artwork doesn't represent by resemblance or illusion, how else—but merely by convention—could it represent?)

--The following features are required for representation: a communicative intention, a symbol (or representation), and an audience.

--The idea of representation seems to be connected with interpretation. And it is commonly thought that art is open to interpretation.

Hypothesis: Art is a language of representation.

*Expression

--Expression Theory (ET). If art or artists are taken as expressing something, this something is typically thought to be an *emotion*. But what is it for art or artists to express emotion, and which is primary (expression by artists or their artworks)?

*As a necessary condition₁: x is an artwork only if S's creation of x was caused by one of S's emotional states (the one x expresses).

*As a necessary condition₂: x is an artwork only if x was created by S with the intention of transmitting one of S's emotions to an audience.

--This account holds that S must actually have been in a certain emotional state that she then tries to transmit (so, art is essentially social).

--Against the first two conditions: But can't there be "cold" artists? Or commissioned artists who produce artworks with emotional detachment? Or artists who experience emotions (e.g., artistic ecstasy) contrary to those their works express (e.g., sadness)? Also, isn't there purely cognitive art?

*As a necessary condition₃: x is an artwork only if x was created by S with the intention of evoking a certain emotional response in an audience (i.e., the emotion the work expresses).

--This version does not require that the artist actually experience that emotion herself. But one problem is that it seems an artwork can express an emotion without evoking that emotional response in the audience. For example, a song can express sadness without evoking sadness in the audience.

*Versions of ET help show why art is important to us.

*One way to contrast expression with representation: the former shows whereas the latter tells.