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The Semiotics of Emotional Expression

Trip Glazer

1. Introduction

Charles Sanders Peirce famously distinguishes between three types of signs, depending on how the sign refers to its object. An “icon” refers by resemblance (CP 2.276 1903). An “index” refers by a physical connection (CP 2.248 1903). And a “symbol” refers by habit or convention (CP 2.307 1903). Peirce allows for signs to refer in more ways than one—onomatopoeias (e.g. “buzz” and “hiss”) refer both by resemblance and by convention, for instance (EP 2.307 1904)¹—but he insists that there are no further ways in which signs can refer to their objects (CP 2.243, 304 1903).

In this paper I shall argue that emotional expressions—e.g. cries of sadness, laughs of amusement, and scowls of anger—refer to emotions neither by resemblance, nor by a physical connection, nor by habit or convention. Instead, they refer to emotions by *manifesting*—or by *enabling the perception* of—them. Thus, a cry signifies sadness because an observer who hears a cry can hear sadness, a laugh signifies joy because an observer who hears a laugh can hear joy, and a scowl signifies anger because an observer who sees a scowl can see anger.² Expressions make emotions, which are otherwise imperceptible, perceptible.

¹ Joseph Ransdell (1997, ¶17; cited in Andacht 2013, 519) argues that signs typically refer in all three ways, but that we categorize signs as icons, indices, or symbols depending on which mode of reference stands out to us.

² To be clear, this is a thesis about the semiotics of emotional *expression*, not the semiotics of *emotion*. On the latter topic, see Savan (1981), Harrison (1981), Stephens (1981), Short (1986), and Beeson (2008).

This analysis of emotional expression challenges a common understanding of Peirce's theory of signs, since expressions appear to be neither iconic, nor indexical, nor symbolic. However, I shall argue that this common understanding is limited, and that a deeper understanding of Peirce's theory of signs can accommodate my analysis of emotional expression. Furthermore, I shall argue that this analysis is consistent with Peirce's views on emotion and perception, and thus that Peirce has no independent reason to reject it. A consideration of the semiotics of emotional expression is not only valuable in its own right, but leads us to a deeper understanding of Peirce's philosophy.

The paper is divided into three main parts. §2 presents my analysis of emotional expression. §3 argues that emotional expressions refer neither by resemblance, nor by a physical connection, nor by habit or convention. And §4 argues that my analysis of emotional expression is ultimately consistent with Peirce's views on signification, emotion, and perception.

2. The Nature of Emotional Expression

I begin with an analysis of the concept of emotional expression. After specifying the range of behaviors that I am including within this concept, I shall argue that these behaviors express emotions by enabling the perception of them.

2.1. The Concept of Emotional Expression

Philosophers often distinguish between three types of emotional expressions. *Natural expressions* (or "causal expressions") are physical behaviors that occur spontaneously as parts of emotional episodes (Sellars 1969, 520-521; Davis 1988, 286; Griffiths 1997, 77; Green 2007, 88-90; Bar-On 2004, 216, 248). Examples include facial expressions (smiles, pouts, scowls), gestures (waving one's hands, covering one's face, clenching one's fists), postures (puffed chest, slumped shoulders, hunched back), vocalizations (hoots, sobs, snarls), and tones of voice (high-pitched, brittle, stentorian). If a person feels

joy and spontaneously smiles, then her smile would be an expression of her joy. Three clarifications are in order.

First, because natural expressions must occur as parts of the emotions that they express, it is not possible for a natural expression to be insincere (Davis 1988, 287). We may mistake an insincere expression for a natural expression, of course, but as long as the behavior does not occur as part of an emotional episode, it cannot be a natural expression of that emotion.

Second, natural expressions may or may not be “communicative” in the sense that they occur for the sake of indicating an emotion to observers (cf. Green 2007, 5-6). According to one recent theory of the evolution of emotional expression, some natural expressions evolved to serve as social signals, whereas others evolved to serve non-communicative physiological functions (Shariff & Tracy 2012). Thus, I disagree with the view of some philosophers that emotional expressions are essentially communicative behaviors (Green 2007, 26-27; Bar-On 2004, 267).³ A blush can *express* embarrassment, on my view, even if it doesn’t *communicate* it, in the above sense (cf. Davis 1988, 287; Green 2007, 27).

Third, natural expressions may or may not be “recognizable” in the sense that observers will be able to correctly judge what emotion (if any) has been expressed. Smiles are widely recognized as expressions of joy, pouts are widely recognized as expressions of sadness, and scowls are widely recognized as expressions of anger (Elfenbein & Ambady 2002), but it is also possible for people to spontaneously express their emotions in ways that no one will be able to recognize (Green 2007, 140-141). If I spontaneously cough as part of experiencing anger, for instance, then my cough naturally expresses my anger regardless of whether anyone—myself included—is able to identify my cough as an expression of anger. (I shall refer to such unrecognizable expressions as “idiosyncratic expressions.”)

The second type of emotional expression, *speaker expression* (or “action expression”), occurs when someone performs one of the above behaviors intentionally for the sake of communicating an emotion (Alston 1965, 18;

³ I also disagree with the view of some psychologists that if so-called emotional expressions evolved to signal something other than an emotion, such as an intention, then they cannot be expressions of that emotion (e.g. Fridlund 1994). Because I do not classify all emotional expressions as signals, the fact that a smile evolved to signal something other than joy does not disqualify it from being an expression of joy.

Sellars 1969, 520-521; Davis 1988, 280-282; Bar-On 2004, 216). A person who intentionally pouts performs a speaker expression of sadness, for instance, regardless of whether or not she feels sad. Thus, unlike natural expressions, speaker expressions can be insincere (Davis 1988, 280). It is important to distinguish speaker expressions from two related types of intentional behaviors.

First, there is a difference between *expressing* an emotion and *reporting* an emotion, which roughly tracks the distinction between showing and telling (Green 2007, 24). A person who calmly and unemotionally asserts “I am angry” has reported her anger, truly or falsely, but she hasn’t expressed it.⁴ To express anger, she’d need to scowl, snarl, fume, or otherwise *show* her anger. Thus, on my view, all speaker expressions involve some sort of physical behavior that is fit to be a natural expression of emotion. In the case of speech acts, this means an expressive tone of voice or gesture.

Second, there is a difference between *expressing* an emotion and *coping* with an emotion (Dewey 1934, 61; Koch 1983). We cope with emotions by intentionally engaging in behaviors that we believe will fuel, extinguish, or otherwise alter our feelings. Thus, a person may cope with disgust by pinching her nose, cope with anger by closing her eyes and counting to ten, and cope with grief by clutching a picture of the recently deceased. These behaviors may be performed intentionally, and it may be possible to infer a person’s emotions from them, but as long as they are not performed with the intention to communicate emotions, they do not “express” those emotions either (Davis 1988, 281).

The third type of emotional expression, *artistic expression*, includes any and all artifacts that convey emotions to observers (Tormey 1971, 106-109; Kivy 1980, 12-17; Green 2007, 40-41). What I have in mind are not artworks that depict natural or speaker expressions of emotion, such as Auguste Rodin’s *Shame (Absolution)* or Edvard Munch’s *The Scream*. Rather, I have in mind artworks that express emotions independently of depicting natural or

⁴ Many philosophers do not share my intuition on this point (Alston 1965, 16; Davis 1988, 283; Green 2007, 26; Bar-On 2004, 245). They insist that even the calm, unemotional assertion ought to count as a speaker expression of anger. However, I worry that construing “expression” this broadly stretches the concept too thin, and thus I choose to construe it more narrowly. In my usage, a speech act “expresses” an emotion if and only if it is accompanied by a facial expression, a gesture, or a tone of voice that shows that emotion.

speaker expressions, such as Samuel Barber's *Adagio for Strings* or Vincent Van Gogh's *Starry Night*. An entire literature in aesthetics is dedicated to determining how artworks such as these convey emotions to their audiences. My favored theory is the "contour theory," which holds that artworks express emotions by resembling, in one way or another, the natural expression of emotion (Kivy 1980, 50-52; Budd 1995, 133-154; Davies 2006, 182). To clarify, these artworks do not signify the natural emotions that they resemble; rather, they signify the emotions that are also signified by the natural expressions that they resemble. Thus, *Adagio for Strings* doesn't signify a brittle tone of voice; it signifies sadness.

We have, then, three types of emotional expression: natural expression, speaker expression, and artistic expression. Despite the many differences between them, there is something that holds them all together—something that makes them all "expressions" of emotion. What is that common element? I shall now argue that behaviors and artifacts express emotions by *manifesting*—or by *enabling the perception* of—them. Thus, a spontaneous laugh expresses joy by enabling observers to hear joy, a deliberate snarl expresses anger by enabling observers to see anger, and Samuel Barber's *Adagio for Strings* expresses sadness by enabling audiences to hear sadness. The enabling of the perception of emotion is what makes something an expression of that emotion.

2.2. The Perceptual Analysis of Emotional Expression: A Brief History

The idea that emotional expressions make emotions perceptible can be traced back at least to Ludwig Wittgenstein. In his *Remarks on the Philosophy of Psychology*, he writes:

"We see emotion." – As opposed to what? – We do not see facial contortions and *make the inference* that he is feeling joy, grief, boredom. We describe a face immediately as sad, radiant, bored, even when we are unable to give any other description of the features. – Grief, one would like to say, is personified in the face. (Wittgenstein 1980, §570)

One could read Wittgenstein as making a strong conceptual claim here—i.e., that emotional expressions *essentially* enable the perception of emotion—but it is more plausible to read him as making a weaker modal claim—i.e., that emotional expressions *sometimes* enable the perception of emotion (Glazer 2016). A number of philosophers, including Tormey (1971, 47-48), Hampshire (1976, 74-75), Bar-On (2004, 271-274), Green (2007, 84-93), and Zahavi (2007), have endorsed the weaker modal claim without endorsing the stronger conceptual claim.

The first philosopher to argue that emotional expressions *essentially* enable the perception of emotion was arguably Charles Taylor (1979). According to his analysis, an emotional expression must, at the very least, provide what he calls a “physiognomic reading” of an emotion (Taylor 1979, 73-74). Less metaphorically, an observer must be able to perceive an emotion in an expression without having to infer it:⁵

When I know something or something is plain to me, through an inference, there is something else which I know or which is plain to me in a more direct way, and which I recognize as grounding my inference... It is characteristic of expression that it is not like this. I *see* the joy on your face, *hear* the sadness in the music. There is no set of properties that I notice from which I infer to your emotions or to the mood of the music. (Taylor 1979, 74; emphasis added).

But Taylor also notes that there is more to expression than the ability to perceive one thing in another. I can perceive my dog in a photograph, for instance, but this photograph is not thereby an “expression” of my dog. What makes expression special is the fact that it *makes perceptible something that is otherwise imperceptible*. Or as Taylor puts it, “what is expressed can only be manifest in the expression” (1979, 74). I can perceive my dog without perceiving a photograph of him, but I cannot perceive joy without perceiving a smile or some other expression of it (Taylor 1979, 75). Emotions (unlike

⁵ The contrast between perception and inference breaks down if we accept the view of some contemporary vision scientists that perception involves subconscious inference (Fodor 1984). Thus, rather than saying that expressions give *non-inferential* access to emotions, I prefer to say simply that expressions give *perceptual* access to emotions.

dogs) are fit to be expressed because they are perceptible only in their outward expressions.

Taylor's analysis provides a powerful foundation for thinking about the expression of emotion. However, it is only a first step. The next step is to explain how it is possible to perceive an emotion in its expression, especially when we consider the full range of emotional expressions presented in the previous section.

2.3. The Perceptual Analysis of Emotional Expression: An Elaboration

At its core, the Perceptual Analysis of Emotional Expression states that for any x , x expresses an emotion if and only if x *enables the perception* of that emotion.⁶ To flesh out this core idea, I distinguish between two types of perception, sometimes called “object perception” and “aspect perception,” or “perceiving” and “perceiving-as” (Wittgenstein 2006; Hanson 1958; Smith 2015). Wittgenstein (2006, Part II, §xi) illustrates this distinction with the famous drawing of the duck-rabbit. Although everyone who looks at the drawing sees the same object—the same collection of lines—some will see the object as a duck while others will see it as a rabbit. In object perception, the observer perceives just that: an object. In aspect perception, the observer perceives a predicate of an object, or a resemblance between the object one perceives and another that shares the same predicate (Wittgenstein 2006; Hanson 1958; Orlandi 2011). To some, the collection of lines resembles a duck. To others, it resembles a rabbit. Illusions occur when a person

⁶ Dorit Bar-On (2010, 275) points out another way in which the term “enabling” must be qualified. Normally, “enabling” is a transitive relation. If pointing at John's scowl enables you to see that scowl, and if John's scowl enables you to see John's anger, then pointing at John's scowl enables you to see John's anger. But my act of pointing does not thereby *express* John's anger. Thus, in place of a transitive concept of enabling, the Perceptual Analysis relies on a non-transitive concept of enabling, which we might call “direct enabling” (Glazer 2016). A behavior directly enables the perception of an emotion if and only if the perception of that behavior is sufficient to perceive that emotion. Perceiving John's scowl is sufficient for perceiving John's anger, but perceiving my act of pointing is not sufficient for perceiving John's anger, which is why the former is an expression and the latter is not.

perceives a resemblance that leads her to falsely predicate something of the object perceived. In the Müller-Lyer illusion, for instance, we see two lines of the same length, but we see them as two lines of different lengths.

On my version of the Perceptual Analysis, it's possible to perceive emotions both as objects and as aspects (Glazer 2016). Natural expressions always enable the object perception of emotion. The classic argument for this conclusion runs as follows (Hampshire 1976, 74-75; Tormey 1971, 47-48; Bar-On 2004, 272-273; Green 2007, 84-93). Natural expressions are, by definition, parts of the emotions they express.⁷ Furthermore, the logic of perception dictates that in perceiving a part of an entity, one has thereby perceived that entity (Green 2007, 84-93). Thus, if I see my dog's tail sticking out from under the sofa, then I've seen *my dog*, despite the fact that I haven't seen his head or his legs. It follows from these two assumptions that in perceiving a natural expression, one has thereby perceived the emotion expressed. An observer might not *know* that she has seen an emotion—perhaps she is unaware that the expression is a part of an emotion—but as long as she has seen the expression, she has thereby seen the emotion of which it is a part.

Natural expressions can also enable the aspect perception of emotion. In addition to perceiving happiness in a person's spontaneous smile, we may also perceive her *as happy*. This perception paradigmatically involves the subconscious application of the happy concept to her behavior as a result of registering similarities between it and other natural expressions of emotion (Brewer 2011, 121-122; Smith 2015, 15-18). Otherwise put, a person who smiles *looks happy* because that's how people tend to look when they are happy (Smith 2015). Idiosyncratic natural expressions do not enable the aspect perception of emotion, because that's not how people typically look or sound when experiencing that emotion.

Whereas natural expressions always enable the object perception of emotion and only sometimes enable the aspect perception of emotion,

⁷ Many psychologists characterize emotions as complex psycho-physiological processes, which include perceptions, cognitions, and expressions as component parts (e.g. Tomkins 1964; Izard 1977; Ekman 1994; Russell 2003; Scherer 2005). On the theory that I favor—the Component Process Model—an expression must be a coordinated change in the subject's somatic nervous system to count as a component of an emotion (Izard 1977, 48-49; Scherer 2005, 698).

speaker expressions always enable the aspect perception of emotion and only sometimes enable the object perception of emotion. To successfully perform a speaker expression of emotion, a person must intentionally perform a behavior that others will perceive as happy, sad, angry, etc. Compare a good actor with a bad actor. Both contort their faces in ways that they intend to convey sadness, but the good actor succeeds in expressing sadness while the bad actor fails, since audiences will see the good actor, but not the bad actor, as sad (Glazer 2016). Speaker expressions enable the object perception of emotion when they also qualify as natural expressions. We can often inhibit spontaneous expressions of emotion when we want to, and so by allowing a spontaneous expression to occur, we can intend for it to communicate our emotions (Green 2007, 27-29). In such cases, the expression would be both a natural and a speaker expression, and would enable both the object and the aspect perception of emotion.

Finally, artistic expressions always enable the aspect perception of emotion and never enable the object perception of emotion. A song expresses sadness if and only if it *sounds sad* to observers; a painting expresses awe if and only if it *looks awesome* to observers (Kivy 1980, 50-52; Budd 1995, 133-154; Davies 2006, 182). We do not mistake these expressions for parts of actual emotional episodes, but that does not prevent these expressions from “personifying” those emotions. These artworks exploit our tendency to subconsciously apply emotion concepts to entities that closely resemble natural expressions, and indeed they are produced with the intention of giving us particular perceptual experiences.

I’ve suggested that the Perceptual Analysis of Emotional Expression accounts for the intuitive similarities and differences between natural, speaker, and artistic expressions. All of them are emotional expressions insofar as they enable the perception of emotion, but they differ based on the kinds of perception that enable. Some philosophers reject the Perceptual Analysis insofar as they want to include other behaviors within the concept of emotional expression, which do not enable the perception of emotion. For instance, some have argued that even calm, unemotional utterances of “I am angry” ought to count as expressions of emotion (e.g. Alston 1965, 16; Davis 1988, 283; Green 2007, 26; Bar-On 2004, 245). My own intuitions are that such utterances “report” emotions without “expressing” them, but I acknowledge that the concept of expression is flexible enough to allow for

multiple incompatible analyses, which may serve different philosophical purposes. For the purposes of this paper, I am interested in a concept of emotional expression that includes all and only those behaviors that enable the perception of emotion, since this concept highlights an unexplored semiotic category.

3. The Semiotics of Emotional Expression

I've just argued that emotional expressions signify emotions by enabling the perception of them. How do emotional expressions, so construed, fit into Peirce's theory of signs? I'll begin by reviewing a common understanding of Peirce's famous trichotomy of icon, index, and symbol. I'll argue that if this understanding is correct, then emotional expressions turn out to be neither iconic, nor indexical, nor symbolic. This conclusion poses a serious challenge to the completeness of Peirce's theory of signs. However, I'll then come to Peirce's defense in §4, arguing that the common understanding is limited, and that on a deeper understanding of his theory of signs, emotional expressions turn out to be a special kind of symbol.

3.1. Icon, Index, Symbol

Peirce is perhaps best known for his account of icons, indices, and symbols. And although his theory of signs evolved considerably over the course of his career, his definitions of "icon," "index," and "symbol" remain remarkably consistent throughout (Savan 1977; Liszka 1996, 34-35; Short 2004, 27-59; Atkin 2013). Compare the following formulations, taken from texts written decades apart:

“On a New List of Categories” (1867)

[T]here are three kinds of representations. (CP 1.558)

First. Those whose relation to their objects is a mere community in some quality, and these representations may be called *likenesses*. (CP 1.558)

Second. Those whose relation to their objects consists in a correspondence in fact, and these may be termed *indices*. (CP 1.558)

Third. Those the ground of whose relation to their objects is an imputed character, which are the same as *general signs*, and these may be termed *symbols*. (CP 1.558)

“What is a Sign?” (1894)

There are three kinds of signs. (EP 2.5)

Firstly, there are *likenesses*, or icons; which serve to convey ideas of the things they represent simply by imitating them. (EP 2.5)

Secondly, there are *indications*, or indices; which show something about things, on account of their being physically connected with them... (EP 2.5)

Thirdly, there are *symbols*, or general signs, which have become associated with their meanings by usage (EP 2.5)

***Elements of Logic* (1903)**

[A] sign may be termed an *Icon*, an *Index*, or a *Symbol*. (CP 2.247)

An *Icon* is a sign which refers to the Object that it denotes...in so far as it like that thing and used as a sign of it. (CP 2.247)

An *Index* is a sign which refers to the Object that it denotes by virtue of being really affected by that Object. (CP 2.248)

A *Symbol* is a sign which refers to the Object that it denotes in virtue of a law, usually an association of general ideas, which operates to cause the Symbol to be interpreted as referring to that Object. (CP 2.249)

In short, icons refer by resemblance, indices refer by a physical connection, and symbols refer by use. Drawing on these passages and others, scholars have assembled the following account of each type of sign.

To be an icon, a sign must resemble the object it denotes by sharing properties or relations with it (Savan 1988, 33; Liszka 1996, 37; Ransdell 1997, ¶54). Icons resemble their objects regardless of whether anyone recognizes this resemblance, but an icon is only *used* as a sign by someone who has recognized this resemblance. Peirce distinguishes “pure icons” from

“hypoicons.” Pure icons are, technically speaking, mere possibilities: properties that could be predicated of objects (CP 2.276 1903). Here we shall be concerned with hypoicons, or material signs that refer iconically—that is, by resembling their objects (CP 276 1902; Ransdell 2005, §5). There are three kinds of hypoicons. *Images* share “simple qualities” with their objects (CP 2.277 1903), which is to say that they enjoy a “sensuous resemblance” to their objects (CP 2.279 1903). A wanted poster represents an infamous outlaw, for instance, insofar as the sketch on the poster resembles the outlaw’s face. *Diagrams* have parts that are arranged analogously to the parts of their objects (CP 2.277 1903), even if they do not sensuously resemble their objects (CP 2.279 1903). Peirce illustrates this category with algebraic formulae (CP 2.279 1903). Finally, *metaphors* share properties or relations in common with some third thing, which shares other properties or relations in common with the object denoted (CP 2.277 1903). Thus, a picture of a lion might denote a courageous person insofar as the picture resembles a lion (in shape) and the lion resembles that person (in character) (cf. Anderson 1984, 457; Lattmann 2012, 545).

To be an index, in turn, a sign must exhibit three characteristics (Savan 1988, 33; Goudge 1965, 53-54; Liszka 1996, 38; Atkin 2005, 163-164). First, it must stand in a physical relation to its object. Peirce discusses two types of physical relations. Some signs are *caused* (or *affected*) by their objects (let’s call these “*symptoms*”). Thus, smoke means fire because smoke is caused by fire (CP 2.286 1903). Other signs *ostend* to their objects (let’s call these “*deixes*”). Thus, a guidepost represents the location of a town by pointing to it (CP 2.285-287, 305 1903). Second, the object of an index must be an “existent individual,” since only existent individuals can stand in a physical relation to a sign (CP 2.283-284, 306 1903). Third, the sign’s physical relation to its object must hold independently of whether anyone believes it to hold (CP 2.299 1903), although an index is only *used* as a sign by someone who believes it to be physically connected to its object. Thus, a symptom functions as a sign when an observer actually infers cause from effect, and a deixis functions as a sign when it actually “focuses the attention” of an observer (CP 2.285 1903).

To be a symbol, finally, a sign’s significance must be established by usage, whether habitual or conventional (Savan 1988, 33-34; Legg 2008, 208; Liszka 1996, 39; Ransdell 1997, ¶51). In other words, there must be a lawful

or regular association between the sign and its object, which exists entirely in the minds of symbol-users (CP 2.249, 292, 299 1903). The association between a symbol and its object is typically arbitrary (CP 2.307-308 1903), and this association must typically be learned, although Peirce grants that it could be inborn (CP 2.297 1903). Finally, whereas indices take individuals as their objects, symbols take kinds as theirs (CP 2.293 1903).

In what follows, I shall argue that emotional expressions signify emotions in none of these ways—not by resembling emotions, not by being physically connected to them, and not by being habitually or conventionally associated with them either.

3.2. Expressions Do Not Refer by Resemblance

Emotional expressions do not refer to emotions by resemblance, I argue, for the simple reason that they do not share properties or relations in common with the emotions they express. They are not *images*, since emotions have no appearance independently of their expressions, and thus there can be no sensuous resemblance between them. In order for two things, A and B, to sensuously resemble each other, there must be some way that A appears, and some way that B appears, such that an observer may regard these appearances as similar. The problem is that while there is some way that an expression of, say, joy appears, there is no way that joy appears independently of its expression, and thus nothing to which we can compare the appearance of the expression.

Emotional expressions are not *diagrams* either, since the arrangement of the parts of an expression is not analogous to the arrangement of the parts of an emotion. To begin, it's not clear what the parts of emotions would be such that their arrangement could be analogous to that of, say, the muscles contracted in a standard facial expression of joy. But even if there *were* an analogy here, rearranging the parts of an expression would not necessarily affect its capacity to denote an emotion, and thus this capacity is not grounded in an analogy of relations. Suppose that we were to inject a paralytic agent into the left side of a person's face. When this person smiles, only the right side of her face would smile. The arrangement of parts is now different from a full-faced smile, but the half-faced smile still expresses joy in exactly the

same way that a full-faced smile expresses joy. Therefore, smiles do not express joy in virtue of an analogous arrangement of parts. That being said, there is one diagrammatic aspect of expression, namely intensity. People express more intense emotions by contracting their facial muscles more intensely (Ekman & Friesen 2003, 55, 92), such that the degree of muscular contraction diagrams the degree of emotional feeling. But even if the expression of the intensity of emotion is diagrammatic, the expression of the type of emotion (anger vs. sadness) is not.

Finally, emotional expressions are not metaphors, since there is no third thing whose resemblance to the expression grounds a resemblance to the emotion. Artistic expressions (e.g. sad melodies) may seem to qualify as metaphors of emotion, given that they express emotions by sensuously resembling the natural expressions of those emotions. However, we have seen that natural expressions do not resemble emotions, and thus we still need an account of what makes them “expressions.” In sum, there is no genuine relation of resemblance between emotions and their expressions to justify the claim that emotional expressions are essentially icons.

What about Joseph Ransdell’s claim that the distinctive function of an iconic sign is to make its object directly perceptible (Ransdell 1997, ¶ 50)? He writes that “when a sign represents something iconically it does so transparently, enabling direct perceptual access to the object as it is in itself” (Ransdell 2005, abstract; see also Ransdell 1997, ¶51; Andacht 2013). Given that emotional expressions enable the direct perception of emotions, we may be tempted to categorize them as iconic. However, Ransdell also argues that “iconicity presupposes likeness of sign and object” (Ransdell 1997, ¶54), and my arguments have shown that expressions and emotions are not alike. Furthermore, there is a crucial difference between icons and expressions. Icons aren’t icons because they allow the perception of their objects; rather, they allow the perception of their objects because they are iconic—that is, because they share properties with their objects and hence can be substituted for those objects (CP 3.362 1885; Ransdell 1997, ¶56). By contrast, expressions are expressions precisely because they enable the perception of emotions. And while it’s possible to perceive the object of an icon without perceiving an icon (e.g. I could look at *my dog* instead of looking at the *picture* of him), it’s not possible to perceive the object of an emotional expression without perceiving an expression. In sum, Ransdell is right that

the epistemic function of iconic signs is to allow the perception of their objects, but he is wrong to think that this function is *distinctive* of iconic signs. Expressions serve this function too, yet are not iconic.

3.3. Expressions Do Not Refer by a Physical Connection

It is perhaps most tempting to classify emotional expressions as indices. Peirce holds that effects “indicate” their causes (CP 2.286 1903), and since natural expressions are caused by the emotions they express, these expressions would then indicate those emotions.⁸ Whereas natural expressions would be “genuine” indices, on this view, speaker and artistic expressions would be icons of indices, or “degenerate” indices (CP 2.283-284 1903; Maddalena 2006, 28-29). In other words, they would refer to the emotions they express by resembling natural expressions, which, in turn, are genuine indices of emotions.

I grant that natural expressions are indices of emotion. However, it does not follow that a physical connection with an emotion is what makes a natural expression an “expression” of that emotion in this first place. Let’s consider an analogy. The word “buzz” refers to buzzing both by resembling it and by being the word that is conventionally used to refer to it. However, suppose that the word “buzz” had never entered the English lexicon. A creative speaker could invent this word and use it to refer to buzzing solely in virtue of its resemblance with it, without in any way relying on habit or convention. Conversely, suppose that buzzing sounded like hissing, and thus that the word “buzz” did not resemble buzzing. If the word is conventionally used to mean buzzing, then it would mean buzzing despite not resembling it. In sum, the fact that something refers in one way does preclude it from referring in another way. Natural expressions may be indices, but this fact does not prevent them from being another kind of sign, and as we shall now see, natural expressions are “expressions” in virtue of being another kind of sign.

I argued in §2 that behaviors express emotions insofar as they enable the perception of emotion. It follows that in the absence of perceivers, there can be no expressions. Cries, sobs, and scowls may still occur as parts of

⁸ Savan embraces this line of reasoning: “So expressions of joy, pain, anger, feat [sic], etc. ...are indexical” (1988, 38).

emotional episodes, but without enabling the perception of emotion, they would cease to be “expressions” of emotions. Alan Tormey makes a similar point in his *Concept of Expression*. He argues that “Explosive laughter, a facial grimace, a shudder, or a periodic tic are, in themselves, neither expressive nor nonexpressive, and only if we have reason to connect the behavior inferentially with some [emotion] are we entitled to treat it as an expression” (1971, 44-45). Tormey’s use of the word “inferentially” appears to contradict my analysis of emotional expression, which holds that we perceive emotions in their expressions without inferring them, but further considerations lead Tormey to agree that expressions provide non-inferential—indeed perceptual—access to emotions: “jealous behavior is not merely *evidence* for the presence of jealousy but, in an important sense, a constituent part of the complex referent of the predicate ‘jealous’... Obviously, we can *see* jealousy in a man’s behavior, if that behavior is itself a constituent in the referent of ‘jealousy’” (1971, 47, 50). The key insight is that a natural expression would cease to be an “expression” as soon as there were no longer perceivers who could perceive the emotion in its expression. These behaviors would still be physically connected to emotions—and hence would still be indices of emotions—but they would no longer be expressions of them.

Thus, although natural expressions may be indices of emotions, that’s not what makes them “expressions” of emotion. They are “expressions” insofar as they enable the perception of emotion, which is not itself an indexical relation. And if natural expressions are not essentially genuine indices, then speaker and artistic expressions are not essentially degenerate indices either.

3.4. Expressions Do Not Refer by Habit or Convention

To my knowledge, the only time Peirce mentions emotional expressions in relation to his theory of signs is in the *Elements of Logic*, when he considers the etymology of the word “symbol.”⁹ He enumerates various things that the Greeks referred to as symbols, including nouns, watch-fires, ensigns, church

⁹ Savan also observes Peirce’s silence on this topic, writing, “It is worth noting, perhaps, that Peirce was relatively little interested in ethology or in the study of expression of emotions in man and animals” (1988, 37).

creeds, and theater tickets, and then concludes the list by adding, “Moreover, any expression of sentiment was called a ‘symbol’” (CP 2.297 1903). Now, Peirce does not say whether *he* categorizes expressions of sentiments as symbols, but he offers the list as evidence that he is using the word “symbol” in a familiar and historically-precedented way, the implication being that he likewise views emotional expressions as symbols. However, he offers no explanation or justification for this categorization, and readers are left to wonder why expressions ought to be counted as symbols rather than as another type of sign.¹⁰

I shall now argue that emotional expressions refer to emotions neither by habit nor by convention, and thus do not count as symbols, at least as they are commonly understood. The central reason is that behaviors can express emotions without anyone knowing that they do. Of course, an expression will be *used* as a sign only if users are aware of this association, but an expression is fit to be a sign of an emotion regardless of whether it is ever used as such.

As I noted in §2.1, many emotional expressions are immediately recognizable. Smiles are widely recognized as expressions of joy, pouts are widely recognized as expressions of sadness, and scowls are widely recognized as expressions of anger. But sometimes people express their emotions in unusual, idiosyncratic ways. I might become irritated and spontaneously express my irritation by coughing. No one will recognize my cough as an expression of irritation—indeed, there is no habit or convention according to which a cough signifies irritation—yet my cough expresses my irritation nonetheless. Similarly, scientists might notice that chimpanzees produce a certain facial expression when searching for termites. It’s conceivable that scientists could find out, through careful observation and experimentation, that this face is an expression of frustration. Even if no one—chimp or human—knows what this face expresses, it may still express

¹⁰ Liszka classifies some emotional expressions as symbols, writing, “As an example of what might be called a *natural* symbol, when the dog wags its tail as a gesture of friendliness, there appears to be no similarity...between the movement, direction, and velocity of the tail and the state of friendliness; yet the gesture is a natural indurated habit for most species of dogs” (1996, 39). However, for the wag to be a symbol of friendliness, the relevant habit is the habit of people (or other dogs) to interpret the wag as such, not the habit of the dog to wag its tail when friendly. The latter habit instead supports the classification of the wag as an index of friendliness.

something. In this case, the association between emotion and expression is independent of all habit and convention. It is neither “imputed” nor determined “by usage.” (On my analysis, the association is grounded in *perception*: my cough expresses irritation and the chimp’s face expresses frustration because these behaviors are parts of emotions, and thus in perceiving the behavior one has thereby perceived the emotion, even if one is unaware of having perceived that emotion.)

Furthermore, even recognizable expressions of emotion are recalcitrant to changes in convention and habit. If we were to collectively decide that, from now on, smiles will mean sadness and scowls will mean joy, a spontaneous smile would still express joy and a spontaneous scowl would still express anger. Similarly, if everyone in a linguistic community fell into the habit of interpreting pouts as signs of anger, then this habit would make pouting a *sign*—indeed a *symbol*—of anger, but it wouldn’t make it an *expression* of anger. Pouting would still be an expression of sadness. The fact that habits and conventions cannot change the significance of emotional expressions lends further support to my contention that neither of them binds emotions to their expressions in the first place.

4. The Semiotics of Emotional Expression, Reconsidered

I’ve just argued that emotional expressions signify emotions neither by resemblance, nor by a physical connection, nor by habit or convention. This conclusion seemingly leaves Peirce with a choice: reject my analysis of emotional expression or revise his theory of signs. However, I shall now argue that Peirce must do neither. I will demonstrate first that Peirce has another way of distinguishing icons, indices, and symbols, which accounts for the peculiar way in which emotional expressions signify their objects, and second that my analysis of emotional expression is consistent with Peirce’s stated views on emotion and perception. At the end of the day, the only claim that needs revising is the claim that symbols refer in every case by habitual or conventional use. Some symbols, namely expressions, refer in another way.

4.1. Peirce on Signification

Peirce hangs a great deal on his triadic division of signs. When distinguishing among icons, indices, and symbols, he insists repeatedly that there is no other way in which signs can possibly refer to their objects (CP 2.243, 304 1903). To understand why Peirce takes these three categories to be exhaustive, however, we must look beyond the familiar formulations. In the *Science of Logic*, Peirce offers an alternative formulation of his famous trichotomy, which can account for emotional expressions.

For Peirce, signification is in every case a three-place relation between a sign, an object, and an “interpretant,” or “a response to the sign that the sign elicits and in which that sign is taken to be a sign of an object” (Short 2007, 18; see also Fitzgerald 1966, 40, 65-66; Savan 1988, 15-16; Liszka 1996, 18-19). Peirce argues that the three categories of signs differ formally based on whether a sign’s fitness to refer to its object depends on one, two, or three of these elements (Fitzgerald 1966, 44-46; Short 2007, 215-222). Thus, the representative quality of an icon is *monadic*: it is fit to be a sign because of properties that it possesses independently of both its object and its interpretant (CP 2.276 1903). The representative quality of an index, in turn, is *dyadic*: it is fit to be a sign because of its physical connection to its object, but independently of its interpretant (CP 2.283 1903). The representative quality of a symbol, finally, is *triadic*: it is fit to be a sign because the interpretant associates the sign with its object (CP 2.292 1903). To be clear: icons and indices do not actually signify their objects until they generate an interpretant that associates them with those objects, but icons and indices differ from symbols in that they are fit to signify independently of the interpretant (Savan 1988, 17). Another way of putting this point is to say that icons and indices are “potential signs” before generating an interpretant and “actual signs” after generating one (Ransdell 2005, §6). Peirce concludes from these considerations that there is no further way in which a sign could possibly refer to its object (CP 2.304 1903).

Rather than asking whether expressions refer by resemblance, by a physical connection, or by habit or convention, we could instead ask whether an expression’s fitness to signify an emotion depends on one, two, or three elements of the signification relation. Expressions, we learned in §2, are fit to be signs insofar as they enable the perception of emotion. Or as Peirce

might have put it, expressions are fit to be signs insofar as they generate an interpretant—a state of perception—that associates the expression with its emotion. It follows that without perceivers—more specifically, without the interpretants generated by expressions in perceivers—there could be no emotional expressions in the first place. Examined from this perspective, expressions, like symbols, are essentially triadic.

If that's right, then there is a tension between the two ways that Peirce characterizes symbols. We find this tension even within Peirce's treatment of symbols in the *Elements of Logic*. Compare these two formulations, written only paragraphs apart:

- (1) A symbol is a sign which would lose the character which renders it a sign if there were no interpretant. Such is any utterance of speech which signifies what it does only by virtue of its being understood to have that interpretation. (CP 2.304 1903)
- (2) A symbol is constituted a sign merely or mainly by the fact that it is used and understood as such, whether the habit is natural or conventional, and without reference to the motives which originally governed its selection. (CP 2.307 1903)

Emotional expressions clearly fall under the first definition. Without an interpretant—a state of perception that associates the expression with its emotion—an expression loses its fitness to refer. So it is a symbol. But when we turn to the second definition, we find that emotional expressions do not count as symbols, since (as we saw in §3.4) they do not refer in virtue of being habitually or conventionally used as such. To resolve this inconsistency, I suggest that we take the second definition to pick out a subclass of symbols, which are fit to be signs in virtue of being habitually or conventionally used as such (cf. Ransdell 1977, 175). Expressions make up another subclass of symbols, which are fit to be signs independently of habit or convention. But how can an expression generate an interpretant without at the same time being habitually or conventionally used as a sign?

An answer may be found in one of Peirce's earliest writings. In his *Logic of the Sciences* of 1865, he describes signification as follows:

What is, and has a *ground*, since it has also an *object*, has in the third place a *subject* [i.e., interpretant]. This [interpretant], *which must not be supposed to be a mind though it may be a human representation*, and which is only that which is determined by the representation to agree with it in its reference to the object on that ground,—this subject is an abstraction which philosophers have left too much out of account. (W I:335 1865; emphasis added)

Savan (1988, 16, 40) interprets this text to allow for the possibility of interpretants that are not mental representations, or representations to which a thinker has immediate epistemic access. The interpretant of an emotional expression is, I have suggested, a state of perception, yet one to which perceivers may not have immediate epistemic access.¹¹ Think again of the chimpanzee’s facial expression of frustration (§3.4). Even before scientists discover that this face expresses frustration, it enables the perception of frustration (via object perception), which is to say that it generates an interpretant in perceivers that associates the face with frustration. But as long as perceivers lack epistemic access to this interpretant, they won’t be able to understand or use the face as a sign of frustration. (We could think of this expression as an *inert* sign; it signifies frustration to observers, but as long as they are unaware of this fact, they will not be able to do anything with the sign.). Perceivers gain epistemic access to the interpretant—as well as the ability to use the expression as a sign—only once scientists discover that this face expresses frustration. Crucially, the expression is a symbol of frustration both before and after this discovery, and in neither case is the association between emotion and expression grounded in habit or convention. It is a symbol of frustration because it enables the perception of frustration. Prior to the scientific discovery, it enables only the object perception of frustration, generating an interpretant to which perceivers lack epistemic access. Following this discovery, however, it enables the aspect perception of frustration as well, generating an interpretant to which perceivers do have epistemic access. And at this point perceivers can use the expression as a sign, because they have become aware of what the expression has signified

¹¹ Dretske’s (1969) distinction between “epistemic perception,” in which a perceiver is aware of what has been perceived, and “non-epistemic perception,” in which a perceiver is not aware of what has been perceived, is applicable here.

to them all along. Expressions are symbols whose fitness to refer depends on neither habit nor convention, but on perception instead.

I have argued that Peirce has the resources to accommodate emotional expressions within his theory of signs. On a deeper understanding of how symbols refer to their objects, we find that emotional expressions are essentially symbols. However, we also find that Peirce's more familiar definitions of symbols, which deploy the language of "usage," "habit," and "convention," fail to account for the full range of symbolic signs. Thus, it is not Peirce's division between icons, indices, and symbols that stands in need of correction; rather, it is his claim that all symbols refer in virtue of being understood and used as signs.

One might object that Peirce doesn't need to accommodate my analysis in the first place. If Peirce has reason to reject my analysis of emotional expression, then there's no need for him to revise his understanding of symbols to accommodate such expressions. I will now argue my analysis of emotional expression is consistent with Peirce's views on emotion and perception, and thus that he has no independent reason to reject it.

4.2. Peirce on Emotion

To say that Peirce offers a "theory" of emotion would be to overstate his contributions to the philosophy of emotion.¹² However, Peirce does make a number of substantive claims about the nature of emotion, and these claims are largely consistent with what today is called the Component Process Model of Emotion, which, in turn, is consistent with my account of emotional expression. I'll begin by reviewing this contemporary perspective on emotion, and then I'll turn to Peirce's claims.

According to Klaus Scherer's Component Process Model (CPM), "[an] emotion is defined as an episode of interrelated, synchronized changes in the states of all or most of the five organismic subsystems in response to the evaluation of an external or internal stimulus event as relevant to the major concerns of the organism" (Scherer 2005, 697). In response to seeing a bear, for instance, a person may (1) appraise the bear as dangerous, (2) experience

¹² But see Savan (1981), Harrison (1981), Stephens (1981), and Beeson (2008) for commendable efforts to extract a theory from Peirce's scattered remarks.

a sinking feeling in the pit of her stomach, (3) perform standard facial expressions of fear, and (4) have the tendency to run away.¹³ Two aspects of CPM are particularly important for my argument. First, although each of these responses is considered to be a “component” of fear, only the cognitive appraisal is considered to be an *essential* component.¹⁴ A person can experience fear without expressing it or acting on it, but a person cannot experience fear without appraising something as dangerous. Second, because emotional expressions are considered to be non-essential components of emotions, it follows that a person who perceives an expression has thereby perceived the emotion of which it is a part.

With this perspective in mind, let’s return to Peirce. In his 1868 paper, “Some Consequences of Four Incapacities,” he describes emotions in a way that clearly foreshadows the contemporary view that cognitive appraisals are essential to emotion:

[T]here is no feeling which is not also a representation, a predicate of something determined logically by the feelings which precede it... Now every emotion has a subject. If a man is angry, he is saying to himself that this or that is vile and outrageous. If he is in joy, he is saying “this is delicious.” If he is wondering, he is saying “this is strange.” In short, whenever a man feels, he is thinking of *something*. (W 2.228-29).¹⁵

Here, Peirce explicitly identifies emotions with appraisals (Savan 1981; Harrison 1981; Stephens 1981, 134; Short 1986, 116-120; Beeson 2008, 144-148). On his view, to experience anger is to judge something as “vile and outrageous.” To experience joy is to judge something as “delicious.” And

¹³ Running away isn’t a component of fear, on this view; rather, the motivation or tendency to run away is the component. Thus, perceiving a scared person running away from a bear is not sufficient to perceive that person’s fear.

¹⁴ Almost all contemporary psychological theories of emotion agree that emotions are *componential*—that they involve a coordination of distinct parts, including feelings, cognitions, and expressions (Tomkins 1962; Izard 1977; Ekman 1994; Griffiths 1997, 77; Russell 2003; Scherer 2005; Green 2007, 88-90). These theories differ primarily in how they understand the organization of these parts.

¹⁵ In an earlier work, he writes even more explicitly that “Every emotion, every burst of passion, every exercise of will, is like cognition” (CP 1.376 1888).

to experience wonder is to judge something as “strange.” All emotions are representations, on Peirce’s view, and they are representations of how objects and events in the world affect us. Interestingly, whereas many contemporary emotion theorists view the cognitive and feeling components as separate, Peirce appears to view the cognitive and feeling components as identical. The sinking feeling in the pit of one’s stomach is not separate from the appraisal of the bear as dangerous; rather, the sinking feeling *is* the appraisal (Stephens 1981).¹⁶

Peirce considers appraisals to be essential components of emotions, but he does not consider appraisals to be the only components. He continues:

There is some reason to think that, corresponding to every feeling within us, some motion takes place in our bodies... [T]he thoughts which determine [an emotion] already have motions corresponding to them in the brain, or the chief ganglion; consequently, it produces large movements in the body, and independently of its representative value, strongly affects the current of thought. The animal motions to which I allude are, in the first place and obviously, blushing, blenching, staring, smiling, scowling, pouting, laughing, weeping, sobbing, wriggling, flinching, trembling, being petrified, sighing, sniffing, shrugging, groaning, heartsinking, trepidation, swelling of the heart, etc., etc. To these may, perhaps, be added, in the second place, more complicated actions, which nevertheless spring from a direct impulse and not from deliberation. (W 2.230)

Here, Peirce suggests that in addition to feelings/cognitions, emotions also involve expressions and action tendencies. These elements are coordinated in the “chief ganglion,” and this coordination of elements is what distinguishes emotions from more abstract intellectual cognitions, which do not involve coordinated changes in the various subsystems of the nervous system. Thus, expressions and action tendencies are characteristic components of emotion, on Peirce’s view, even if they aren’t essential components.

¹⁶ See Kruse (2005, 768-769) for a critique of Peirce’s view. And see Goldie (2000) for a contemporary view that resembles Peirce’s.

I am wary of attributing to Peirce a more sophisticated view of emotion than he could have been capable of producing in his own time, but it is important to show that Peirce was very much open to a view of emotion that supports the conclusion that observers can perceive emotions in their expressions. We have seen that Peirce conceives emotions as rational, coordinated responses to changes in our environments, and thus his view of emotion is entirely consistent with the account of emotional expression that I developed in §2.

4.3. Peirce on Perception

From the fact that an expression is a component of an emotion, it follows that one can perceive that emotion in its expression (via object perception). However, it does not follow that one can perceive the expression *as* happy, sad, angry, etc. (via aspect perception). For that to be possible, two relatively controversial theses about the nature of perception must be true. I will now argue that we have good reason to think that Peirce would accept both theses, and thus that he could easily accept the view that expressions also enable the aspect perception of emotion.

First, there is an ongoing debate in the philosophy of perception as to whether only low-level predicates like “round” and “red” are represented in perception (Tye 1995; Dretske 1995; Clark 2000), or whether high-level predicates like “chair” and “sad” are represented in perception, too (Peacocke 1992; Siewert 1998; Siegel 2006). Given that emotion predicates are high-level predicates (Siegel 2010), my claim that we can perceive smiles as happy, pouts as sad, and growls as angry presupposes that high-level predicates can indeed be represented in perception. If it turns out that only low-level predicates are represented in perception, then we cannot literally *perceive* a face as happy, sad, or angry; we can only *infer* those emotions from their expressions. This view of perception would spell trouble for my view of expression.

Peirce never addresses the question of whether emotion predicates can be represented in perception, but he does hold that high-level predicates can be so represented, and so he lacks one important principled reason for denying that emotion predicates can be, too. When we look at a chair, for instance,

Peirce claims that we perceive that “the chair has its four legs, seat, and back, its yellow color, its green cushion, etc.” (CP 7.622 1903). We don’t *infer* that it has legs, a seat, a back, a cushion—all of which are high-level predicates—we *see* that it has them. Thus, Peirce holds that at least some high-level predicates are represented in perception (Rosenthal 2004, 206-210), and he does not provide any independent reasons to think that emotion predicates cannot also be represented.¹⁷

Furthermore, Peirce insists that we perceive the chair with all its predicates as an undifferentiated whole, and that only later, in an act of perceptual judgment, do we separate the object from its various predicates: “The judgment, ‘This chair appears yellow,’ separates the color from the chair, making the one predicate and the other subject. The percept, on the other hand, presents the chair in its entirety and makes no analysis whatever” (CP 7.631 1903). This brings us back to Wittgenstein’s formulation. We don’t perceive the happiness of a face separately from the curl of the mouth or the wrinkling around the eyes; we perceive the face in its entirety, and only later separate the face from its various predicates. Only at that point does it begin to sound mysterious to say that we perceive, rather than infer, emotion predicates in emotional expressions.

I’ve just argued that Peirce’s views on perception are consistent with my view that some expressions enable the aspect perception of emotion—that observers can perceive smiles as happy, pouts as sad, and growls as angry. My view further assumes that we can perceive emotions in things that are not themselves emotional. Thus, we can perceive a pout as sad, even when the person pouting does not feel sad. These claims assume that *appearing* sad swings freely of *being* sad.

Peirce’s acceptance of this thesis is more clear-cut than the first. He is adamant, for instance, that when one experiences a hallucination, the content of one’s perception is identical to that of a veridical perceptual experience: “There is no difference between a real perception and a hallucination, taken in themselves” (CP 7.644 1903). Expressions that are not components of emotions are like hallucinations in this respect: the perception of them may have the same content as that of expressions that are components, even though the content of one is accurate and the other not.

¹⁷ See Gruender (1983) and Hookway (1985) for competing interpretations of Peirce’s theory of perception.

Relatedly, Peirce insists that perceptions do not force us into believing that they are accurate. However, they do force us into accepting that things appear to us as they do:

Let us say that, as I sit here writing, I see on the other side of my table, a yellow chair with a green cushion... The chair I appear to see makes no professions of any kind, essentially embodies no intentions of any kind, does not stand for anything. It obtrudes itself upon my gaze; but not as a deputy for anything else, not “as” anything. It simply knocks at the portal of my soul and stands there in the doorway... It would be useless for me to attempt to pooh-pooh it, and say, “Oh come, I don’t believe in the chair.” I am forced to confess that it appears. (CP 7.619-620 1903)

It is possible to perceive a pout as sad, for instance, even when we know that the person pouting is not feeling sad, just as it is possible to perceive a weeping willow as sad despite knowing that weeping willows are not really sad. That being said, we cannot “pooh-pooh” our perceptual experience; the face and tree *appear* sad to us, which is to say that a high-level emotion predicate is represented in our perception, and there is nothing we can say or think to change that fact. The way things appear may belie the way things are.

In sum, Peirce’s views on perception are consistent with my analysis of emotional expression, and thus Peirce could have adopted this analysis without needing to alter the details of his theory of perception.

5. Conclusion

I’ve argued in this paper that emotional expressions challenge a common understanding of Peirce’s theory of signs. It is often held that icons refer by resemblance, indices by a physical connection, and symbols by habit or convention, yet emotional expressions refer in none of these ways. Instead, they refer to the emotions they express by enabling the perception of them. However, I then considered an alternative way of distinguishing among icons, indices, and symbols—based on whether their fitness to refer depends on one,

two, or three elements of the signification relation—and argued that emotional expressions may be categorized as a special kind of symbol. Expressions signify emotions by generating an interpretant—a state of perception to which perceivers may or may not have immediate epistemic access—that associates the expression with its emotion.

My goal has been to set the foundation for a Peircean exploration of the semiotics of emotional expression. Determining the way in which emotional expression refer to emotions is, however, only the first step. The next step would be to determine how expressions interact with the other trichotomies of signs that make up Peirce’s system. In the system developed in the *Elements of Logic*, for instance, Peirce holds that three trichotomies of signs interact to produce ten classes of signs (CP 2.254-263 1903). In the system sketched in his letter to Lady Welby, Peirce increases the number of trichotomies from three to ten, and argues that these ten trichotomies interact to form sixty-six classes of signs (CP 8.344 1908). Emotional expressions play a significant role in our daily interactions with others, and Peirce’s framework provides a powerful set of tools for understanding the ways in which these expressions function.¹⁸

¹⁸ I’d like to thank Robert Lane and two anonymous reviewers for their many helpful comments on this paper.

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