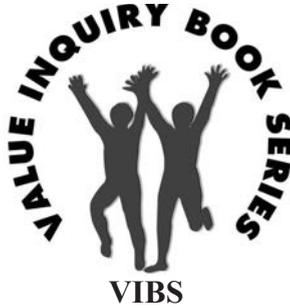


PRACTICING PRAGMATIST AESTHETICS



Volume 275

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a volume in
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PRACTICING PRAGMATIST
AESTHETICS
Critical Perspectives on the Arts

Edited by
Wojciech Małecki



Amsterdam - New York, NY 2014



**NARODOWY PROGRAM
ROZWOJU HUMANISTYKI**

The present scholarly publication was funded, in the period of 2012-2014, by a program of the Polish Ministry of Science and Higher Education under the name of “National Program for the Development of the Humanities.

Cover illustration: Louise Bourgeois: *Maman*, 1999. National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, Stainless steel, bronze, marble, 927 x 891 x 1023 cm.
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Cover design: Studio Pollmann

The paper on which this book is printed meets the requirements of “ISO 9706:1994, Information and documentation - Paper for documents - Requirements for permanence”.

ISBN: 978-90-420-3836-3

E-Book ISBN: 978-94-012-1081-2

© Editions Rodopi B.V., Amsterdam - New York, NY 2014

Printed in the Netherlands

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Two

THE ART OF EXPERIENCE: DEWEY ON THE AESTHETIC

Scott R. Stroud

1. The Promise of Deweyan Pragmatist Aesthetics

Part of the power of John Dewey's aesthetic theory could be said to come from its inherent ambiguity. In his *Art as Experience* (1934), Dewey explicitly wants to resist the "museum concept of art," or theorizing about the nature and capabilities of the aesthetic from the limits set by the historical groundings of art traditions in the western world.¹ This is a starting point that produces a limited—albeit not useless—conception of art based upon its modern sequestration in the confines of museum spaces. What is problematic about starting with the modern way of viewing art is that it leads us to wonder how we are ever to connect the rarified practices of art with practical, everyday life. And if pragmatists value anything, it will be the everyday experience of life, and not simply the achieved experiences of a small cadre of individuals. But everyday experience is messy and varied in scope. Thus, Dewey hopes to produce a theory of the aesthetic that is naturalized and wide-ranging, so much so that one may complain that its breadth allows anything in as being aesthetic in quality. The wideness of such an account of aesthetic experience is what often draws the objections of critics looking for neat accounts of what delineates the artistic.² It seems like it counts too much as art, or too much as aesthetic in quality.

I believe that this breadth is the strength of Dewey's form of pragmatist aesthetics, or at least the reading of pragmatist aesthetics that I see in Dewey.³ Here I will argue that Dewey's theory covers much ground, and that this is a good-making feature of his aesthetics. He not only gives an account of the aesthetic in experiences traditionally reserved for the realm of art and art objects, but he also aims at a goal that I see underlying his complex aesthetic writings—the extension of the notion of artful activity and experience to any experience in life, not just those traditionally associated with art. Such an extension would justify commentators like David Fott in extolling aesthetic experience as Dewey's "paradigmatic form of meaningful experience," or those like Martin Jay, who sees Dewey's promise that "[l]ife lived aesthetically would overcome the gap between means and ends and abet the inclusion of the many in the pleasures heretofore enjoyed by only the few."⁴ In order to make this case, I will proceed as follows. First, I will detail the

characteristics of the aesthetic as given by Dewey's *Art as Experience*. Second, I will use these characteristics as a basis to ascertain what Dewey's theory has to say about unity and meaning in the creation and perception of standard art objects. These are the art objects so prevalent and prized in mainstream western art circles. But the power of Dewey's theory does not end with these art objects. I will finally argue that his *Art as Experience* not only points at a way to see the everyday world of mundane activity as aesthetic, but also gives us a melioristic way to artfully create aesthetic experiences through attention to our orientations toward activity. In this sense, this chapter represents an expounding of Dewey's aesthetic theory with the aim of orientational meliorism, or the intelligent interrogation of our habits of attention and action with the goal of creating better qualities in experience. Dewey provides a detailed reading of the type of quality we ought to aim for in his recounting of what makes certain experiences so rewardingly aesthetic or consummatory in quality, so it is only fitting that I start my argument with these important first matters.

2. The Characteristics of the Aesthetic

For a Deweyan form of pragmatist aesthetics, understanding the world of art begins with understanding the world of everyday experience. And understanding Dewey on the aesthetic is vital for understanding the two-fold way that I will argue is opened up for understanding the aesthetic in experience:

Dewey's *Art as Experience* begins with what can be called a naturalized reading of the aesthetic; the aesthetic is looked for not in certain historically-contingent artistic practices, but instead in certain excellent experiences. Thus, as Richard Shusterman has argued, Dewey is resisting a "wrapper" definition of art or the aesthetic (viz., a descriptive account) in favor of a normative account of the aesthetic as pointing at a range of high quality experiences.⁵ The first few chapters of *Art as Experience* leave one with the distinct impression that

Dewey focuses almost exclusively on experience in its everyday aesthetic aspects, exemplified by a subject's rapt attention to a gripping object or situation.

”6

The reason why not every experience is noted *as* aesthetic in its overall quality seems to involve a natural explanation. An organism fails to engage its environment in the right way. This right way includes meeting the challenges posed by an often resistant environment in a sustainable fashion that sets up future instances of meeting environmental challenges. In the terms of Dewey's moral theory,

”⁸ The living organism has needs that can be sated by the surrounding environment, but not all features of this environment conspire to help the organism meet such needs. Some create resistance or become obstacles to the living creature's activity.

As Dewey puts it,

An equilibrium in struggle over time has been reached, and ideally it sets up the grounds for future equilibriums to be reached as well. In Dewey's *Art as Experience*, this same process is described as being aesthetic in felt quality; the organism feels the culminating meaning of overcoming resistance over a temporal span. In a real sense, growth is equivalent to aesthetic experience—the latter simply captures the qualitative “feel” of a successful temporal struggle with a recalcitrant environment (e.g., an instance of growth). What is particularly powerful about Dewey's pragmatist aesthetics is that this sort of basis will fit our temporal encounters with art objects, as well as our engagement with any temporally-extended experience or activity we may undergo (such as the search for food, as the naturalistic terminology might suggest). By naturalizing his aesthetics, Dewey lays the conceptual groundwork to extend the aesthetic to virtually any activity.

What characteristics might we ascribe to the aesthetic on Dewey's account? By my count, I find three major traits of experience noted as “aesthetic” in quality. First, an aesthetic or integral experience is known by its simultaneous integration with and demarcation from surrounding experiences. It is *that* stretch of experience that stands apart from other stretches of one's experiences. The examples Dewey employs are the experiences of a wonderful meal or a tumultuous but successful journey by ship to Europe. Both of these experiences are temporal sequences of events that comprise an overall experience. They are not unrelated to surrounding experiences—one remembers how they got on the boat, to the restaurant, and so forth in connecting present and surrounding past experiences. But one does note the special nature of the present sequence of events, especially compared to the

surrounding events. Second, the integral experience has a certain kind of individualizing quality among its parts; it has some emotional meaning or tone that makes it *that* noticeable stretch of experience. It is the experiential quality of that meal that makes it not just any meal. Third, the parts of such integral or aesthetic experience possess a meaningful unity among them. This accounts for the existence of an individualizing quality in this stretch of experience. As indicated previously, the vital point of the temporal nature of an aesthetic experience is also implicated here. There is not a flat unity among its parts, but a unified build or consummation. I will make more of this temporal quality in the next two sections, but suffice it to say that such a unification is what grounds Dewey's claims that aesthetic experience is integral or consummatory experience—it goes somewhere and is idealized with meaning. Regardless of those (such as Stephen Pepper and Benedetto Croce) who accuse Dewey's aesthetics of being idealist, it is clear that unity plays a vital role in what makes such experience powerful for humans.¹⁰ What all of these characteristics add up to is an absorptive, immediately responsive experience for the living organism. As Dewey puts it in his *Art as Experience*, the aesthetic captures the unity of immediately vivid experience; “Art celebrates with peculiar intensity the moments in which the past reenforces the present and in which the future is a quickening of what now is.”¹¹ Art objects are often the best—but not the only—way to evoke such a vividness of present experience. It is to Dewey's analysis of such objects that I now turn.

3. The Experience of Art as Aesthetic

Dewey's aesthetic theory does (eventually) engage what we would normally class as “art.” Art is what Dewey calls “an expression,” a word that denotes both an act and an object. The three qualities enunciated in the previous section come together in the “impulsion” that begins the Chapter 4 account of the act of expression. A creature has an impulse to engage the often resistant environment; in the world of expression, it is the material environment of the art object that offers resistance. Such impulsion at the hand of the artist is not mere discharge. At its best (expression), it is an ordered and intelligent reaction to the resistances of the material that comprises the art object. Expression happens in the temporal expanse from the old (e.g., the standing impulse of the creature) to the creation of the new (e.g., the newly charged and funded meanings wrought from the conflict of organism and environment). In art, this plays out in the integral, consummatory experience of an artist's setting out to create a certain kind of art object. After the objective means offers forth its variety of resistances, the artist redoubles their engagement with the object, albeit in a more meaningful way. The resistances have been accounted for, according to Dewey. This is the act of expressing or squeezing out meaning from one's creative interaction with the art object; as Dewey notes, “The act of expression that constitutes a work of art is a

construction in time, not an instantaneous emission.”¹² The act of expression is a temporal event that culminates in an artist’s increased understanding. As he puts it in *Art as Experience*, “The work is artistic in the degree in which the two functions of transformation are effected by a single operation. As the painter places pigments upon the canvas, or imagines it placed there, his ideas and feelings are also ordered. As the writer composes in his medium of words what he wants to say, his idea takes on for himself perceptible form.”¹³

The expressive object gets further specification in the art world with Dewey’s notion of media.¹⁴ Dewey’s aesthetic theory is wide, but not so wide that art objects cannot be analyzed on their own unique terms. “Media” (the typical unit of analysis in art) are contrasted by Dewey to “mere means”—the former “sum up” preceding elements of one’s experience in a consummatory whole. These elements to a very real extent *compose* the artistic effect that is desired. To use Dewey’s example, the paint used *is* the painting, it is not merely a means of painting. “Mere means” are characterized, on the other hand, by their replaceability and their externality to the effect desired. They are means that could be otherwise. They do not comprise the end desired like the paint did with the painting. Regular gas could be replaced by diesel or biodiesel; this replacement would be motivated simply by external concerns—pollution, efficiency, or availability. If one changes the paints used for a certain painting, however, one changes the painting itself. Using different words for a poem makes it a different poem. The experience of creating and hearing those words by a subject (be it artist or audience) *is* the aesthetic experience. The material of the art object both causes the aesthetic experience and constitutes it as instantiated. The medium is the end desired, and not a mere means to an external end. Thus, experience that is aesthetic can be said to involve an internality of means and ends—“all the cases in which means and ends are external to one another are non-esthetic. This externality may even be regarded as a definition of the non-esthetic.”¹⁵ The aesthetic gets more delineation when Dewey later adds the quality of immediacy to this unit of means-end: “It cannot be asserted too strongly that what is not immediate is not esthetic.”¹⁶ Of course, meanings and relations can be directly evident in perception, according to Dewey, so he is not simply limiting the aesthetic to shapes and form. Instead, the aesthetic is composed of a subject’s absorption in some object that is immediately meaningful and that is composed of means or materials that give it an irreplaceable quality.

The internality of ends and means says something vital about the art object. I will eventually argue, however, that it also says something significant about our subjective orientation toward activity in general. In terms of art, the object will be a vital part of the experience of some subject, since it is the focus of attention in the aesthetic experience. The subject can be either the artist or the audience. It is the sculpture’s struggle with *that* hard stone that conditions and composes the ultimate statue. And it is the details rendered in that stone that take up the attentive audience’s focus in the experience of

perception. Both sets of aesthetic experiences are temporal, involve individuating qualities, and consummate with a new and renewed meaning at their conclusion. “Media” is simply Dewey’s way to talk about the material of the art object in experience, but many may be tempted to take Dewey as limiting the aesthetic to the world of art and the museum. Of course, this would be far from Dewey’s point. He resisted the museum concept of art not because traditionally-defined art objects fail to be aesthetic, but because such art objects might lead us astray in determining the core of what the aesthetic is and what could possibly be aesthetic. Notice how Dewey segues from his discussion of artistic expression in his *Art as Experience* to art as experience. He eventually talks about “art” as

a quality of doing and of what is done. Only outwardly, then, can it be designated by a noun substantive. Since it adheres to the manner and content of doing, it is adjectival in nature. When we say that tennis-playing, singing, acting, and a multitude of other activities are arts, we engage in an elliptical way of saying that there is art *in* the conduct of these activities and that this art so qualifies what is done and made as to induce activities in those who perceive them in which there is also art.¹⁷

This is the work of art, or the yield of the art object in the experiences of those involved. Yet Dewey leaves open the possibility that the conduct of a range of activities can be artistic or artful. This must mean that they imply or contain the same sort of qualitative distinctiveness of the aesthetic, as well as the integrity of it as media. Do the various activities that make up playing tennis, say, meet the status of being a medium and not a mere means? It is unclear that they are replaceable, as might be the case with different types of fuel in certain engines. The act of playing tennis is not simply winning; that is the goal. The act itself is the executing of certain moves and skills that comprise a certain level of tennis facility. In a very real sense, then, the act of playing tennis is comprised of *that* set of swings, serves, and so on. Any different set of actions would render it a different game of tennis, just as different paints or words would render a certain painting or poem a different work of art.

What might fool us into thinking that such activities lack media-status is that they seem everyday and ordinary. They are simply the movements of one’s body. They also strike one as too spontaneous—one is simply lunging at that ball, say, and this is different from the forethought put into the creation of great works of art. As Richard Shusterman has demonstrated, however, there is a vital role for the body in pragmatist aesthetics.¹⁸ The body is implicated in highly skilled actions, whether they are small or seemingly insignificant in scope (moving a fine paintbrush) or larger in range (a powerful serve, say). Such actions can be done with more or less attention and skill. This is what renders them artful to some extent. True artists, be they great painters or grand tennis players, possess the somatic control, habituation, and foresight to evoke

a certain feeling in those observing their struggle with some external material or environment. Yet one must not make the miss-step of thinking that the embodied activities paradigmatic of artful, embodied activity are those of institutionally identified artists. This might be the case in Martin Jay's analysis of pragmatist aesthetics, when he focuses on body artists of the 1980s and 1990s who "seemed intent on foregrounding and reveling in trauma, in both its physical and psychological senses."¹⁹ Body artists would not be excluded from Deweyan aesthetics, of course, but I believe focusing on such rarified, symbolic uses of the body gets us further from the point Dewey wanted to make—in natural and "everyday" experiences, there is the capacity for the aesthetic. The live creature and the engaged tennis player can have unity in experience in the same way that a successful performance art piece might bequeath to its doer and audience. One does not need to transcend or challenge the everyday or the ordinary to reap the rewards of the aesthetic on the account of Dewey that I have given. One merely needs the unity and build in object and in experience to get the heightened immediacy that the aesthetic represents. But here I have gone beyond a wide theory of art *objects* and into even more general ground. And a defense, or at least explication, of such a move must be made.

4. The Art of Experience: Activity as Aesthetic

There is art in the creation of an object; there is also art in the creation of experiences with certain qualities. The latter claim expands the scope of Dewey's aesthetics far beyond the realm of art objects. One may then ask, How can the experience of any activity become aesthetic on Deweyan grounds? If the aesthetic captures a phase or quality of experience that is particularly delightful and meaningful, this question comes with great implications. Potentially, Dewey's aesthetics could be an "art of experience," or a way of artfully or skillfully rendering activity as aesthetic. And, keeping in line with pragmatism's melioristic orientation, it could be seen as a program or recipe for creating more of these valuable experiences. This theme is not totally foreign to Dewey's pronouncements. For instance, long before he became comfortable or qualified enough to opine on art objects as traditionally conceived, he spoke on the artfulness behind activity and life. In his earlier *Outlines of a Critical Theory of Ethics* (1891), he clearly made the point that the aesthetic or the artful can encompass most of life. Given the right amount of skill, life could become the "supreme art" practiced by the living creature. Speaking on this connection of art to the various activities implicated in life, Dewey states:

Living itself is the supreme art; it requires fineness of touch; skill and thoroughness of workmanship; susceptible response and delicate

adjustment to a situation apart from reflective analysis; instinctive perception of the proper harmonies of act and act, of man and man.²⁰

Here one sees the wide version of aesthetic experience in pragmatist aesthetics—a way of going about activity that gives it the unity, balance, and meaning that artistic media displayed in Dewey's later analysis of art objects. As was the case in the previously used example of tennis playing, the activity itself is the medium. In other words, the activities undergone by an agent comprise the larger endeavor (e.g., playing tennis, creating *this* painting, etc.). The nuances and idiosyncrasies of the activities *qua* means become media when they inflect and compose the details and particulars of the whole object in question. In the case of activities such as sports, dining, or even artistic activities like dance, the period of effort and application of skill to activity is the art object. The means here become media given their internal relation to what they create and compose.

Why aren't all activities automatically accorded the status of "media" or as artful exercises of human skill? Why must we struggle to attain this heightened notion of unity, quality, and build naturally resident in every experience in some amount? Talking about the expressivity of art objects, Dewey gives us our clue. The definition of the aesthetic does not merely mean internal unity of parts of the material world of an environment. It also implies a subject's integration with that environment. In reply to the question, why aren't more objects "expressive," Dewey points to subjective shortcomings as the primary culprit, namely habitualized ways of thinking and perceiving that render objects dull and easily glossed over:

Yet apathy and torpor conceal this expressiveness by building a shell about objects. Familiarity induces indifference, prejudice blinds us; conceit looks through the wrong end of a telescope and minimizes the significance possessed by objects in favor of the alleged importance of the self.²¹

Dewey is pointing at habits of how people attend to objects and events. Often "familiarity" and the "slackness of routine" blind agents to the aesthetic potentialities of the external world. This obviously can include one's experience of an art museum being ruined by mental distraction, but Dewey's point here is deeper. Much, if not all, of our non-aesthetic experiences might be causally conditioned by the habits we take to them. Yet the question still remains of this wide reading of Dewey's aesthetic theory: what kind of subjective habits preclude the unity and meaning that is resident in artful or aesthetic experience?

The hint to what the wider, subjective reading of aesthetic experience is comes from two overlooked examples in Dewey's *Art as Experience*. The first example involves a simple everyday activity—a variety of passengers commuting into New York City by ferry boat. This example was first used by

one of Dewey's former students (Max Eastman), but here Dewey expands on it as a way to further explain the deep sense of unity and meaning implied by his aesthetic theory.²² Dewey recounts the experience of each (stipulated) passenger at the railing during the voyage into the city. One glances around randomly, seeing this building, pronouncing its name, and then glances at another one. Another passenger, anxious to get to work, sees the time on the ship as mere drudgery, as something to get through as quickly as possible. This person looks out and only sees reminders of how long a ride is left, or "landmarks by which to judge progress toward his destination."²³ Yet another passenger sees "the scene formed by the buildings ... as colored and lighted volumes in relation to one another, to the sky and to the river. He is now seeing esthetically."²⁴ The experience of this last person involves the perception of an interconnected whole in front of him, a "perceptual whole, constituted by related parts. No one single figure, aspect, or quality is picked out as a means to some further external result which is desired, nor as a sign of an inference that may be drawn."²⁵ This seems to be the person in the example who represents the aesthetic middle ground in experience, the point that lies between aimless interaction with one's environment and mechanical fixity and focus around that environment. Yet some have taken this example to be misleading or confused, however. Armen Marsoobian reads this example as one implying Dewey's notion of "aesthetic form," and proceeds to question whether the second passenger—the work-obsessed one—is really "seeing" in a "less-unified manner."²⁶ What Marsoobian is getting at seems to be the point that aesthetic objects can be unified even in the presence of "extrinsic ends" such as the second passenger's work obsession. Unity might have different forms than the neat, objectified reading that Dewey seems to assume with the last passenger's aesthetic experience.

I believe that the Deweyan point can be saved from such a demur, however, if one looks at it not with a focus on the aesthetic object, but instead with a focus on what habits create what quality of present experience. Our habits direct our attention, and our attention affects our present experience and the chances for success in future experience. Thus, attention is related to both experiential quality and efficacy, with the latter often ranging from present actions to future desired effects being realized. This realization is also present in Dewey's reading of the goal of normative endeavors such as ethical cultivation. In *Human Nature and Conduct* (1922), Dewey argues:

What sense is there in increased external control except to increase the intrinsic significance of living? The future that is foreseen is a future that is sometime to be a present. Is the value of *that* present also to be postponed to a future date, and so on indefinitely? Or, if the food we are struggling to attain in the future is one to be actually realized when that future becomes present, why should not the food of *this* present be equally precious?²⁷

What Dewey is reminding us of here is that so many of our normative endeavors—be they in art or in morality—focus on one site of reward and meaning: the present. Goals will always occupy some (remote) present, and all too often when we pursue a remote ideal our tendency is to ignore the present here and now. In aesthetic matters, this maligning of the present is the direct result of habits that focus our attention elsewhere. This is exactly what seems to be happening in the second passenger's experience; they ignore the present experience (involving the activity of commuting and the vista before them) at the behest of a habitual focus on work and its activities. Once they arrive at work, it is not a stretch to envision them rushing through work tasks while caring only about the paycheck lying at the end of the week. In a deep sense, their habits of attention have externalized the value and meaning of the present experience, and in so doing, they make their experience of that present activity or object a mere means—something that could be skipped or replaced if possible. What makes the experience of the third passenger aesthetic in quality is nothing about the object (the skyline). Instead, the difference-making factor lies in their habits of attention and goal valuation.

A second example from Dewey's *Art as Experience* continues to emphasize the importance of the subject in unifying experience. Dewey refers us to two identical test-taking students in an educational setting: "One student studies to pass an examination, to get promotion. To another, the means, the activity of learning, is completely one with what results from it. The consequence, instruction, illumination, is one with the process."²⁸ Here again we see that a situation's experiential quality is altered based upon the attitude that an agent takes toward it. The second student's experience seems to possess the unity of the aesthetic; this unity is precluded by the fragmenting effect of focusing on externalized goals (getting a degree as the most important thing). The object or activity is not the most important thing, since both test-takers (like all the passengers on the ferry) occupied identical material situations. What was different was the agent's orientation toward the activity or object. Herein resides the widest possible reading of Dewey's aesthetics: almost any activity can be rendered aesthetic by a skillful deployment of the right orientation by a subject.

As I have detailed elsewhere, one's orientation is a wide-ranging mental habit that governs how one sees the world and negotiates actions and value within it.²⁹ What sort of orientation lies behind these examples? It seems clear that Dewey's aesthetics idealizes an orientation that does two things: (1) it conceives of the present situation or object as integrally connected to any future (or past) state, such as a goal or cause, and (2) it values the present situation or object as equal to or greater in worth than remote states of affairs, goals, and so forth. Another way of putting it is that the aesthetic orientation does not (1) separate the present from remote states of affairs, nor does it (2) devalue that present in light of remote states of affairs. As Crispin Sartwell

puts it, in fully aesthetic activity “we ought to reconstrue the relation of means to ends in our actions ... our action should not be performed merely for the sake of the end; the end must not absorb or expunge the means in our deliberation.”³⁰ The means are connected to the end in a value-laden sense. Note that the operative orientation behind such experience involves a focusing of attention in a certain way. One could easily have an orientation that subverts attention to the present, perhaps in favor of ruminative worries over the future or about the past. The sort of orientation that is conducive to the aesthetic is there in the absorptive experience of art objects; it is just often obscured by the presence of objective media (e.g., the paint). Dewey’s talk of the paint comprising the painting is not inaccurate, but he is simply focused on the media that makes up the art object. The experience of the painting will clearly be one of attention to *that* paint, but it is an experience that takes place over time and that involves a viewer engaging the material of the art object. The work of art occurs over time, and in a viewer’s experience. The subjective side to the aesthetic comes into play here, as harmful habits of attention (orientation) can distract us from the art object, or even from the work it does on us and to us in our experience.

Is this wide reading of Dewey’s aesthetics in line with his actual project? I believe it very much is. The notion of the aesthetic foregrounds absorptive, immediate experience. Good artists are skilled at wrestling with objective materials in such a way as to stand a good chance of evoking such a reaction in an audience. Yet like the passengers staring at the haphazardly-formed view of the New York skyline, we are often confronted by objects or situations that aren’t specifically created to act as objective media. The moral of Dewey’s aesthetic theory is that even these sorts of experiences can be rendered aesthetic in quality. They too can have the meaningful quality, build, and consummation that a well-wrought play could possess. One simply needs to look at and value the present as a meeting place of past and future, as the location of funded meanings pointing toward something yet unrealized. This is the picture Dewey started with in *Art as Experience* when he talked of the “esthetic ideal:” “Only when the past ceases to trouble and anticipations of the future are not perturbing is a being wholly united with his environment and therefore fully alive.”³¹ It is in such a situation that the living creature does not abandon the present through their orientational focus. Instead,

To the being fully alive, the future is not ominous but a promise; it surrounds the present as a halo. It consists of possibilities that are felt as a possession of what is now and here. In life that is truly life, everything overlaps and merges. But all too often we exist in apprehensions of what the future may bring, and are divided within ourselves. Even when not overanxious, we do not enjoy the present because we subordinate it to that which is absent.³²

The aesthetic combines the future and the past in the present. In the case of art, an artist does an admirable job when it becomes easy for an audience to become enraptured in *this* scene, with its summations of what came before and with the anticipated pointings it does to the future within the film. Yet we must never forget that life and the struggles of the living creature—including the living symbol-using creature that is the human—extends beyond the realm of art objects as defined by specific cultural traditions of production and reception. Our activities can hold the same level of integration as an art object; the difference is simply in the details. Instead of the funded meanings being about this fictional character or that one, they might be about the tone of the tennis match or what this swing of the bat means for the next inning's pitching challenges. The form is still there—an attentively engaged present funded by the past and anticipating the future. We can engage this present skillfully, or mechanically or randomly. The latter two qualities, of course, parallel the two extremes between which lies the aesthetic: the lockstep mechanism of pure execution and a randomness that allows of no build or meaningful culmination.³³ This form is actualized in the subjective experience of a doer or an auditor (of some work of art) when their orientation focuses their attention on rather than distracts it from the present situation or object.

There are clearly moral implications to this reading of the aesthetic, since it encompasses both the quality of experience denoted by the word “aesthetic” as well as the moral victories denoted by Dewey’s word of “growth.” To be an effective moral agent would be to be an agent attentively engaged with the particulars of a situation. This reading of aesthetic experience as a certain manner of attention to present experience could also be read as a form of Deweyan mindfulness.³⁴ Space limitations prevent me from fully exploring the moral applications of this equivalence between growth and the aesthetic, but here I can merely rest on the assumption that Dewey’s aesthetics rests on—that the value of the unity, build, and quality of the aesthetic is something that needs no argument. If one grants the value of aesthetic experience, then the promise of Dewey’s aesthetic in its widest form is this: that more of life, perhaps all of life, can have the qualitative reward of the finest aesthetic experience, if only we orient ourselves in such a way as to create such an outcome. Such a skilful and intelligent engagement with experience is as artful as any work on an artistic medium for Dewey. There is still media in the artful life, it is merely the material of activity and experience itself.

NOTES

1. John Dewey, *Art as Experience*, in *The Later Works of John Dewey*, vol. 10, ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1989).
2. See, for instance, the criticisms of Noël Carroll, *Beyond Aesthetics*:

- Philosophical Essays* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), and George Dickie, "Beardsley's Phantom Aesthetic Experience," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 62 (1965), pp. 129-136.
3. Scott R. Stroud, *John Dewey and the Artful Life: Pragmatism, Aesthetics, and Morality* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2011).
 4. David Fott, *John Dewey: America's Philosopher of Democracy* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 1998), p. 109; Martin Jay, "Somaesthetics and Democracy: Dewey and Contemporary Body Art," *Shusterman's Pragmatism: Between Literature and Somaesthetics*, eds. Dorota Koczanowicz and Wojciech Małecki (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2012), p. 196.
 5. Richard Shusterman, *Pragmatist Aesthetics: Living Beauty, Rethinking Art* (New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 2nd ed., 2000).
 6. Dewey, *Art as Experience*, p. 9.
 7. *Ibid.*, p. 18.
 8. For instance, see John Dewey, *Human Nature and Conduct*, in *The Middle Works of John Dewey*, vol. 14, ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1988); *A Common Faith*, in *The Later Works of John Dewey*, vol. 9, ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1989). For a secondary account of growth in Dewey's moral thought, see Gregory F. Pappas, *John Dewey's Ethics: Democracy as Experience* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008).
 9. Dewey, *Art as Experience*, p. 20.
 10. For a similar way of accounting for the aesthetic, see Philip W. Jackson, *John Dewey and the Lessons of Art* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998). A slightly different way is given in Nathan Crick, *Democracy and Rhetoric: John Dewey on the Arts of Becoming* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2010). Regarding the Pepper/Croce objections, see Thomas M. Alexander, *John Dewey's Theory of Art, Experience and Nature: The Horizons of Feeling* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1987).
 11. Dewey, *Art as Experience*, p. 24.
 12. *Ibid.*, p. 70.
 13. *Ibid.*, p. 81.
 14. *Ibid.*, pp. 100-102.
 15. *Ibid.*, p. 202.
 16. *Ibid.*, p. 123.
 17. *Ibid.*, p. 218.
 18. Richard Shusterman, *Body Consciousness: A Philosophy of Mindfulness and Somaesthetics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008).
 19. Jay, "Somaesthetics and Democracy," p. 201.
 20. John Dewey, *Outlines of a Critical Theory of Ethics*, in *The Early Works of John Dewey*, vol. 3, ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1969), p. 322.
 21. Dewey, *Art as Experience*, pp. 109-110.
 22. Max Eastman, *Enjoyment of Poetry* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1913).
 23. Dewey, *Art as Experience*, p. 140.

24. *Ibid.*, p. 140.
25. *Ibid.*, pp.140-141.
26. Armen T. Marsoobian, "Aesthetic Form Revisited: John Dewey's Metaphysics of Art," *Philosophy in Experience: American Philosophy in Transition*, eds. Richard E. Hart and Douglas R. Anderson (New York: Fordham University Press, 1997), p. 216.
27. Dewey, *Human Nature and Conduct*, p. 183.
28. Dewey, *Art as Experience*, p. 201.
29. Scott R. Stroud, "Pragmatism and Orientation," *Journal of Speculative Philosophy*, 20:4 (2006), pp. 287-307.
30. Crispin Sartwell, *The Art of Living: Aesthetics of the Ordinary in World Spiritual Traditions* (Albany: State University of New York, 1995), p. 97.
31. Dewey, *Art as Experience*, p. 24.
32. *Ibid.*, p. 24.
33. *Ibid.*, p. 22.
34. Scott R. Stroud, "Toward a Deweyan Theory of Communicative Mindfulness," *Imagination, Cognition, and Personality*, 30:1 (2010-2011), pp. 57-75.