



JOHN DEWEY'S PRAGMATIST AESTHETICS The Specificity and Vitality of Aesthetics

MARTA VAAMONDE
UNED, Spain

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ABSTRACT

Everyday Aesthetics, radicalizing Dewey's notion of the continuity between art and experience, aims to find aesthetic qualities in ordinary experience. The problem is that it reduces the aesthetic significance that Dewey attributed to artistic production. Analyzing Dewey's work and its interpreters, I will demonstrate that the continuity of ordinary experience and art is what lends art its vital and distinctive character. The work of art contributes to developing other ways of seeing and acting in the world, reinforcing life in common, the basis of democracy.

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1. Introduction

The aim of this article is to delve into Dewey's aesthetics in order to highlight the continuity between art and ordinary experience, while underlining the specificity of art and its social function. Through commentaries critical of Dewey's aesthetics by T. M. Alexander, R. Bernstein, J. Claramonte, S. Hook, R. Shusterman, A. Kaplan, J. Kim, F. Kruse, M. Magada-Ward, and M. Puolakka, I will put into context his aesthetic theory, with the exception of various misinterpretations, including, for instance, Benedetto Croce's idealist approach, S Langer's reductionist interpretation or that of Stephen Pepper who accuses him of incoherence, since he sees two irreconcilable tendencies in his method, one pragmatist and the other idealist. On the contrary, my reflections regarding Dewey's aesthetics will be based on a critical analysis of his work, especially *Art as Experience* and *Experience and Nature*, and will show the continuity of ordinary experience and art, as well as its specificity, in accordance with the crucial social function that Dewey ascribed to it: art highlights the worthwhile aspects of life, allows us to overcome the barriers of prejudice and promotes the social cooperation so crucial to democracy. These functions of art are weakened if art is diluted within the ordinary as occurs in the contemporary Everyday Aesthetics.

The conclusion will show how Dewey's aesthetics overcomes, on one hand, the complete distinction between art and experience of some formalist or abstract contemporary aesthetic theories which lead to their isolation from one another and hinder their democratization; while on the other overcomes the dissolution of art into ordinary experience that hampers the fulfilling of its social function, improving life and the developing of democracy. I will also consider the characteristic quality that Dewey attributes to aesthetic experience and which art should provoke: satisfaction. Not all works of art elicits satisfaction; some aim to produce dissatisfaction in order to stimulate fundamental change.

Dewey's aesthetic theory has given rise to productive contemporary developments, an example being the so-called Everyday Aesthetics (Di Gregori et al., 2020). Following Dewey, this theory underscores the importance of accentuating the aesthetic qualities of ordinary experience as a response to the philosophy of art that limits itself to the analysis of work considered artistic (Saito 2017, p. 5). The problem is that the Everyday Aesthetics, in my opinion, lessens the significance that art possesses in aesthetic experience, and thus the social function that Dewey attributes to it.

As with the Everyday Aesthetics, Dewey thinks that there are aesthetic experiences beyond the enjoyment of works of art, but that art has an important and unique function that becomes obscured in the Everyday Aesthetic, that of transforming everyday experiences into aesthetic experiences. Not all ordinary experiences can be aesthetic; in order to be so they must be culminating experiences, and art serves precisely to produce these.

In accordance with his pragmatism and in contrast to theories of art that seek aesthetic qualities in the sphere of the transcendent or transcendental, Dewey finds the origin and meaning of art in experience. This means that the aesthetic is more ample than the merely artistic as defined by the Everyday Aesthetics. Certain experiences of nature can be highly aesthetic without being artistic (Kaplan & Kaplan, 1989, p. 196). However, in accordance with Dewey and distinct from certain tendencies within the Everyday Aesthetics (Saito, 2021) not all ordinary experience can be aesthetic; for that to happen there must be a culminating interaction between the person experiencing and the situation experienced, and this in turn depends on the disposition of the experiencer, as well as on the characteristics of what is experienced. So, for Dewey and, in contrast to the affirmations of one of the principal representatives of the Everyday Aesthetics (Saito, 2021), experiences like taking out the garbage can hardly being aesthetic however auspicious the disposition of the person concerned.

Dewey points out the features characterizing aesthetic experiences (Hook, 2000, p.141): sensorial elements and the meanings of these experiences are accumulative, that is, each one leads to and reinforces the others; there are tensions and obstacles in their development that demand and maintain attention, and ultimately these tensions are overcome, provoking the final culmination. Aesthetic experiences, as Dewey emphasized, flow toward their culmination. Thus, the meaning of art is the ordering of ordinary events in order to provoke these aesthetic and culminating experiences. Precisely because art enriches our experience, it performs a crucial social function. It helps us participate imaginatively in other ways of seeing and acting in the world, reinforcing our life in common which is the basis of democracy. The magnitude of these artistic manifestations in a given society and the extent to which they are enjoyed, are a clear indication, Dewey affirms, of a culture's development

(Dewey, [1934], 1996, p. 347). It's important to underscore the continuity of art and experience and not seek the roots of art in the subject, as in idealist schools of thought, in the formal aspects of a work of art, as in some formalist theories, or in agreements among art institutions. But precisely because art has its roots in experience, it can be directed toward provoking those aesthetic experiences which are socially significant. The continuity of art and experience is what lends art its distinctive and vital character, which in *Everyday Aesthetics* becomes blurred.

2. Aesthetic Theory in Dewey's Pragmatism

Hook affirms that Dewey's aesthetic theory clarifies the principal ideas of his philosophy (Hook, 2000, p.138) and it is certainly essential to an understanding of his pragmatism (Bernstein, 2010, pp. 181,182).

One of the main characteristics of pragmatism is that it bestows a practical aspect to theory. Theories serve to improve experience and its value resides in the fulfillment of that function. Hence, experience is crucial for understanding Dewey's philosophy as well as his aesthetics. Unlike traditional empiricism, Dewey doesn't view experience as the sum of impressions or introspective ideas, but as the interaction of an organism with its environment in a specific situation. When this interaction is broken and becomes conflictive, ideas serve to resolve the conflicts that are hindering its development. Thus, ideas are instruments of action, a means that serve to restore experience, while at the same time, with an aim in sight, projects that we design to achieve them. Once the conflict impeding the development is resolved, experience becomes satisfying.

To the degree that science, morality and art have their origin in experience and serve to transform and improve it, Dewey believes it possesses continuity, as opposed to the separation of spheres promulgated by modern philosophy. Science allows us to comprehend and guide our interactions with natural and social processes; morality has as its task guiding our interactions with others in order to contribute to personal growth; and the function of art is to provoke aesthetic experiences.

What characterizes aesthetic experiences, Dewey asserts, is that there is a rhythmic succession of tensions and satisfactions among its distinct elements: physical, organic, emotional, intellectual and cultural, that flow toward a final culmination. Aesthetic experiences are highly emotive and satisfying, which makes them unique. These origins of these aesthetic characteristics are neither transcendent nor transcendental, but are found in certain natural processes and in some everyday experiences, although in an isolated and unstable manner. The function of art is precisely to obtain these unique and culminating aesthetic experiences that only occasionally do we encounter under ordinary circumstances.

Like the *Everyday Aesthetics* and in contrast to either formalist or analytic philosophies of art, Dewey does not reduce the aesthetic to the artistic. There are aesthetic, that is, culminating, experiences in everyday life. Scientific research, moral conduct and productive activity can also possess aesthetic qualities if their realization produces satisfaction. But, as opposed to *Everyday Aesthetic*, Dewey believes that not just any ordinary experience, tidying up a room, for instance, can become an aesthetic one, however sensitive or receptive our attitude. Aesthetic experience requires a rhythmic succession of tensions and satisfactions among the distinct elements of which it's constituted and which reinforce each other until its consummation. And for this to occur, an often highly complex artistic process informed by significant levels of knowledge and technique is required.

Precisely because art has both its origin and aim in experience, it plays a vital role in Dewey's philosophy. Art transforms ordinary objects in order to provoke aesthetic experiences that make life pleasant, help us to perceive worthwhile aspects of everyday life and promotes understanding and sympathy for others. Given that art significantly recreates experience, making it satisfying and culminating, it's crucial, Dewey believes, for understanding experience itself.

Closely linked to his ontology, aesthetic references are keys to understanding his worldview in *Experience and Nature*. In a mechanical or random universe, there would be no aesthetic experience because there would be no experiences flowing to completion; either they would be externally ordered, or there would be no satisfactory order at all (Puolakka, 2004, p. 1). Neither would there be art that serves to guarantee the qualities experienced as valuable in a contingent universe. (Dewey, [1925] 1996, p. 269) (Dewey, [1934] 1996, p. 31) Art is also indispensable for understanding Deweyan ethics and politics. Dewey states in *Ethics*: "Artistic activities foster sympathy and cooperation" (Dewey, [1932] 1996, p. 45) that are necessary for democratic progress (Dreon, 2021, p. 3). Likewise,

in *Democracy and Education*, he points out the importance of art in education since it allows us to enjoy the valuable aspects of life (Dewey, [1916], 2014, p.213) and democracy itself is an educational project since it “teaches us to respect the perspectives of others and to solve public issues in a participatory, deliberative and cooperative way” (Mattarollo, 2022, p. 19) while avoiding the deontological separation between reason and feelings, which, as he indicates in *Human Nature and Conduct*, is the great moral tragedy (Dewey, [1922], 1996, p. 177).

3. Contextualization of *Art as Experience*

Aesthetics was Dewey's field of interest throughout his career (Bernstein, 2010, pp. 181-182). Despite these constant references, it is *Art as Experience* that most fully expresses his philosophy of art. It was published in 1934 on the occasion of the course in honor of William James that Dewey gave at Harvard in 1931. Although it is one of Dewey's most popular books and Monroe Beardsley (1915-1985) affirmed that "*Art as Experience* was the most valuable work on aesthetics written in English in our century"(Alexander, 1987, p. 1), it was prey to misinterpretation as soon as it appeared.

The polemic between Stephen Pepper, Benedetto Croce, and Dewey is well-known. Although Pepper considered it one of the four or five best books on aesthetics, he thought it contained contradictions between pragmatist and idealist notions. The claims about the intensity of aesthetic experience, its immediately felt qualities, and the diversity of aesthetic experiences derived from the plurality of interactions with the environment, expressed the pragmatic vein of Dewey's aesthetics which Pepper supported. According to Pepper, Dewey's emphasis on the fact that the work of art was an expression of the coherent organization of elements into a whole through its internal relations, meant a fall into idealism. Russell, like Pepper, was not happy with the concepts of "whole," "integration," and "coherence" that Dewey applied to aesthetic experience (Dewey, 1996, p. 4).

Croce echoed these criticisms by stating that he had discovered in Dewey's work "his [own] ideas in a new form"(Alexander, 1987, p. 3). Others, such as Charles Edward Gause in "Some Reflections on Dewey's Aesthetics" (1960), or George H. Douglas in "A Reconsideration of the Dewey-Croce Exchange" (1970), further developed this criticism.

Dewey himself fueled the controversy with his response to Croce and Pepper, who accused him of not being sufficiently pragmatist in his aesthetic approaches, stating:

The fact is that I have consistently treated the pragmatist theory as a theory of knowledge confined within the limits of the field of specifically cognitive matter. Moreover, I have specifically rejected the idea that aesthetic matter is a form of knowledge and have maintained that a primary shortcoming of art philosophies is treating aesthetics as if it were so. (Shusterman, 2014, p. 21)

However, it seems that Dewey wrote the work to confront critics who considered his instrumentalism insensitive to the imaginative values and satisfaction that experience itself procures (Shusterman, 2014, p. 17). We may conclude that if he does not conceive of *Art as Experience* as, in his own words: "an appendix or application of pragmatism" (Dewey, 1948, p. 208), it is not because his proposal is not sufficiently pragmatic, as Pepper thinks, but because, in tune with the pragmatist method, the investigation of art must adhere to experience and not to the dictates of a previous theory (Shusterman, 2014, p. 208).

Misinterpretations oscillate between those who accuse him of reductionism, such as Susanne Langer, who avowed that Dewey reduced the highest ideals to animal psychology (Kruse, 2007, p. 16), those who accuse him of having fallen into idealism, like Croce, and those, like George Boas in "Communication in Dewey's aesthetics" (Boas, 1953, pp. 177-183), or P. G. Whitehouse, in "The Meaning of Emotion in Dewey's Art as Experience" (Whitehouse, 1978, pp. 149-156), who consider the work of art's expressiveness in their theoretical presuppositions as different from those of Dewey.

The root of the problem of this alleged incoherence between the idealist and pragmatist streak of Dewey's aesthetics, lies in the fact that Dewey's naturalistic pragmatism has not been well understood (Alexander, 1987, p. 184). Dewey discusses the integration and articulation of the different elements that constitute the aesthetic experience, but this integration should not be understood, in idealistic terms, as an expression of an ideal totality that serves as a foundation, but in organicist terms, that there is an "organic unity" in some everyday experiences that art tries to preserve.

Susanne Langer's criticism of reductionism stems from a vision of nature that is quite distinct from Dewey's. Indeed, Dewey found in animal behavior the roots of aesthetic experience (Dewey, 1996, p. 20). But the fact that human experience originates in animal experience does not mean it is reduced to it. Human experience has its roots in nature, where we find the germ of art, but at the same time, it has its own peculiarities. One of the characteristic qualities of nature is diversity. It displays different ontological levels, some emerging from others and introducing specific properties (Hook, 1996, p. 14). In contrast to the mechanical and homogeneous vision of nature characteristic of modernity, Dewey emphasized diversity and continuity (Claramonte, 2008, pp. xiii-xiv).

The question is, first, whether Dewey's attempt to situate art in a vital context does not dilute the specifically artistic; and second, whether the modulation of that aesthetic experience is broad enough to understand its complexity and diversity.

4. Aesthetics as Experience: The Continuity and Distinction of Aesthetic Experience in Dewey

One of Dewey's main concerns was to undermine the dualisms of modern philosophy that translates the fragmentation of life into spheres: the productive, the aesthetic, and the moral, with the consequent imposition of social barriers; for example, between productive men in the public sphere and emotional women in the private sphere; between an intellectually trained managerial class and a working class dedicated to manual labor. These barriers impede vital growth and democratic development. Art is no stranger to such fragmentations (Dewey, 1996, p. 12). In fact, at present, as Dewey affirmed, artistic objects are isolated in museums and galleries from everyday aspirations and sufferings (Dewey, 1996, p. 9). That is why artistic manifestations with more vitality, such as hip-hop, are not considered art. However, Dewey did not consider museums intrinsically evil; he contributed to his friend Albert C. Barnes' Foundation (Westbrook, 1991, pp. 387-388). The problem is reducing art to museum pieces.

Dewey thinks that this modern isolation of art is a response to economic and political factors. Capitalist's development has also fostered the reduction of the work of art into works produced to be sold on the art market regardless of their connection to social life. Most museums in Europe are commemorations of nationalism and imperialism, as, for example, Napoleon's spoils in the Louvre (Westbrook, 1991 pp. 14-15). Dewey draws attention to one of the consequences of the capitalist development: the reification of art. Adorno will also draw attention to this problem (Del Rey, 2004, p. 43), but their responses are disparate. Adorno wishes to protect the work of art from mass culture, and Dewey suggests a transformation that turns mass society into a genuinely democratic community; in this transformation, art plays a crucial role.

Moreover, Dewey points out that artistic theories and institutions naturalize this separation of art and community, affirming that beauty or the sublime come from something alien to everyday life (Dewey, 1996, p. 16), either from an isolated subject's projection, as in Croce's theory of expression; the object's pure form, in the style of Bell or Fry's formalism; or from what is marked by institutions, in the current institutionalist style.

Therefore, the problem of the philosophy of art is to restore the continuity of art with ordinary, everyday life processes, overcoming the fragmentations of modern life into the productive, the scientific, the moral, and the artistic (Dewey, 1996, p. 9). Dewey's concern was not to achieve a theoretical and definitive classification of what is and what is not art, because it is impossible to limit *a priori* the different manifestations that art will adopt historically (Hook, 1996, p. 139). Pragmatically, what matters is not to find an *a priori* criterion that provides us with certainties, but to relate art to everyday experience so it achieves its function, contributing to broadening and lending a deeper meaning to our life experiences (Kim, 2009, p. 52). This is the function of reading poems, Greek tragedies, or novels.

The pertinent question, then, is how Dewey understands experience and how art is generated from everyday experience.

Dewey characterizes experience as the interaction of an organism with the environment. (Dewey, 1996, p. 18) As environmental conditions change, the organism must constantly readjust the materials and energies of the environment to continue living. The incipient needs of the organism mark an initial tension that it overcomes by readjusting to the energies of the environment, achieving a momentary

equilibrium, because the processes of life do not stop until the death of the organism. This death predicates the continuation of the vital processes of other organisms. The living being alternately loses and re-establishes, rhythmically, equilibrium with its environment. In the transition from tension to equilibrium, its vitality is reinforced (Dewey, 1996, p. 22). Dewey sustains that these activities that rhythmically reach their culmination is art in its germinal state (Dewey, 1996, p. 25). The organism grows when it is able to overcome the tension and achieve a new readjustment with the environment. In these natural experiences, we find patterns, that is, ways of doing and qualities that will be present in aesthetic experiences.

The human being is conscious of these culminating experiences; we call them: "an experience" We have all had such experiences: a conversation, a game, a reading (Van Meter, 1953, p. 146). They stand out, Dewey says, qualitatively from all other experiences. They are endowed with a singularity that makes them unique; they are, therefore, self-sufficient activities (Claramonte, 2010, p. 197). In this experience, there is an organic relationship, or integration, between what the individual does and what he suffers. Desires, emotions, ideas, and materials reinforce each other; they are, therefore, experiences that do not cease but flow until their culmination (Dewey, 1996, p. 42). According to Dewey, these culminating experiences are aesthetic experiences.

However, most everyday experiences do not culminate but conclude; there is a factor that is experienced as external that ends them (Dewey, 1996, p. 146). These experiences are either routine or mechanical; desires and purposes do not converge in action, or become dispersed; as a result, they leave no trace.

Dewey's aim of situating art in everyday life by pointing to aesthetic experiences as culminating runs the risk of being unclear as to what is specific to artistic experiences (Claramonte, 2008, p. 197). A scientist, when doing research, or a mechanic, when fixing a car, can have aesthetic experiences, provided they are engaged in an intense activity that makes it unique. What is the difference? The material they work with, Dewey asserts (Dewey, 1996, p. 45). The artist works with the qualities of things, the scientist with symbols, and the mechanic with materials. The artist selects the material and shapes it to bring about these kinds of culminating experiences. The scientist enunciates an experience (Dewey, 1996, pp. 90-91). For example, through an indicative sign, the scientist would enunciate how to get to a city, while the artist would express the city with his work so we can experience it.

Dewey's assertion that artistic works are expressive was misunderstood. Dewey's position was identified with Croce's theory of intuition-expression and Santayana's theory of beauty as a projection of a subjective state (Alexander, 1987, p. 213). However, contrary to what the "theory of expression" maintains, Dewey points out that the art object is not simply the manifestation of emotion; if it were, the more intense an emotion, the better the work would be, and yet the work is weakened when there is an overload of emotion. Moreover, a person overwhelmed by emotion cannot express it. The outburst of an emotion is not its expression. For example, a child who cries discharges an emotion of sadness, while an actor who, in his performance, cries, expresses an emotion. The artist must organize the material in order to provoke certain emotions and this requires a thorough grasp of the qualities of the material (1996, p. 21).

Erroneous psychology, Dewey notes (1996, p. 250), is still found, like a fossil, in some aesthetic theories that maintain that emotions are introspective states rather than responses to environmental conditions (Dewey, 1996, pp. 48-49/72/153). According to this notion, the relationship between internal emotions and objects would be external. This concept applied to art separates the productive process and its culmination, the work itself, from the perceptive process, which it interprets as internal.

However, emotions are aroused in response to certain conditions; therefore, what is emotional is the situation: there are embarrassing or frightening situations (Eldridge, 2010, p. 249), etc. The artist selects and arranges the energies and materials, producing a work that arouses in us intensely emotional experiences. Works of art are expressive, not because they are a projection of the emotions of subjectivity, as idealism defended, but because they have an expressive form that arouses in us highly emotional experiences.

When a work is artistic, it is expressive, that is to say, communicative, made to be enjoyed. (Dewey, 1996, p. 110). They come to life when they are perceived. The separation of the productive and perceptive processes of the aesthetic experience is artificial because the artist himself is the first to perceive the work as he makes it. Production and perception are two moments of the same aesthetic

experience (Dewey, 1996, p. 54). The artist selects and integrates the material to captivate us with a work that can capture and hold our attention regardless of the place and the moment we are in. (Cochran, 2010, p. 247). Perception is not a passive process, nor is it unrelated to the production of the work (Dykhuizen, 1974, p. 259). For the production process to culminate, the artist must perceive each phase of the work; in turn, the perception of the work is also a dynamic and temporal process. Some elements of the work continuously lead us to others because works of art can always tell us something new. Hartmann called this the *cleft of the background* (Claramonte, 2021, p. 56). The temporal character of perception is evident in some arts, for example, in music or theater, but present in all others; for example, we do not perceive a cathedral all at once, but we discover it as we walk through it; the same happens with a painting.

In contrast to aesthetic experiences that occur in everyday life, works of art are produced to provoke aesthetic experiences; this is why Dewey asserts that they are expressive, an expressivity that depends on their form (Alexandre, 1987, p. 213). The artist selects the features and arranges them in such a way that they reinforce each other in a whole endowed with unity, coherence, and meaning. This order is not external to the very elements that make up the work of art; it is not a matter of following a protocol, because the form emerges, says Dewey, from the work itself. That is why each element of the work is significant; for instance, the image in a painting, the tone of a melody, or the words in a poem. But at the same time, they comprise a work that is a significant whole (Cochran, 2010, p. 252).

According to Dewey, the work of art is representative not because it duplicates reality; mimesis involves selecting the features of objects and experiences that enable the artist to express them, that is, to arrange them in such a way as to elicit an aesthetic experience (Dewey, 1996, p. 252). Art transfigures our emotions and nature, ordering and highlighting the valuable aspects that are fragmented in everyday experience (Dewey, 1996, pp. 83/86). In the sense that Dewey sees relations between, but distinguishes aesthetic experience from, everyday experience, he shows his affinity with George Lukács. Lukács conceived the work of art as a homogeneous medium that procures perceptual discrimination; that is, focuses our attention (Lukács, 1965, p. 323). Also, for Dewey, the aesthetic experience produces this clarification and distillation of everyday perception (Dewey, 1996, p. 53).

Thanks to its specific form, that is, to its expressiveness, art acquires an important anthropological function. It enhances the breadth and intensity of our experiences (Magada-Ward, 2011, p. 23); it arouses in us culminating experiences indispensable for happiness. Moreover, expressivity gives works of art an essential social and political dimension, though not because they are instruments of propaganda. Dewey—like Adorno—thought that works of art should not be devoted to sermonizing, but because they are communicative, they allow us to participate in shared experiences. Such experiences are essential for maintaining community and also for understanding other cultures.

Primitive art served to keep community members connected. Feasts and rites celebrated harvests and served to connect the essential things to the life of the community. This social function of art which Dewey emphasizes is reminiscent of Ellen Dissanayake's "Making Special" theory (Dissanayake, 1995, p. 51). The separation of art and life as manifested in modern and contemporary art would not have made sense during extensive periods of history.

Works of art are how we enter through emotions and imagination into forms of experience and life other than our own (Dewey, 1996, p. 336). Therefore, when we perceive the art of other cultures, our attitudes and experience move in other directions (Dewey, 1996, p. 337). Art breaks down the barriers of prejudice and helps us to broaden our experiences by participating in other ways of living and experiencing the world. At the same time, those meanings incorporated into our lives acquire continuity. That is why Dewey states that attempts to preserve specific values in institutions, if they are not embodied in experience, are doomed to failure (Dewey, 1996, p. 350). Moreover, art plays a crucial role in the vital embodiment of meanings, in ways of looking at the world, and acting.

Dewey does not reduce aesthetic experiences to interacting with objects considered artistic; there are aesthetic qualities in some everyday activities as well as our interactions with nature. Dewey offers examples of everyday activities such as playing chess or conversing (Dewey, 1996, p. 42). Integrity, intensity, and the rhythmic succession of tension-satisfaction, anticipation, and conservation to completion, are aesthetic qualities in our lives (Shusterman, 2002, p. 8). However, works of art have a peculiarity: they result from productive processes that set aesthetic experiences in motion. Although encounters with nature can provide us with intensely aesthetic experiences, nature does not

intentionally provide them. Art works are expressive and communicative. Dewey distinguishes aesthetic experiences that are the result of artistic production from everyday experiences (Gauss, 1960, p. 127). This distinction does not imply a separation; on the contrary, it is what allows art to fulfill its function, namely, to improve our lives.

5. John Dewey and the *Everyday Aesthetics*

The *Everyday Aesthetics* is a subdiscipline developed in the last decades of the twentieth century in the context of Anglo-American aesthetics. It is a reaction against the limitation of aesthetics to objects of the fine arts (Saito, 2017, p. 5) by broadening its scope to include events, objects, and activities that make up everyday life, such as everyday artifacts, household chores, and daily activities like eating, walking, bathing (Saito, 2021) and so on. It also seeks to liberate aesthetic research from its focus on beauty or the sublime, to include the qualities that pervade everyday life, for example, disorder, dirt, animation, monotony, etc.

The first anthology on the subject was edited in 2005 by Andrew Light and Jonathan M. Smith: *The Aesthetics of Everyday Life*, with Arto Haapala and Tom Leddy as prominent representatives. The first monograph dates from 2007: *Everyday Aesthetics: Prosaics, the Play of Culture and Social Identities* by Katya Mandoki; followed by *Everyday Aesthetics* by Yuriko Saito, later in 2007; *The Extraordinary in the Ordinary: The Aesthetics of Everyday Life* by Tomas Leddy in 2012, and anthologies such as *Experiencing the Everyday*, edited by Friberg and Vasquez in 2017; or *Paths from Philosophy of Art to Everyday Aesthetics*, edited by Kuisma in 2019. In parallel, monographs and anthologies dedicated to specific aspects of everyday life emerged, including gustatory aesthetics (van der Meulen and Wiese 2017), domestic aesthetics, bodily aesthetics, functional beauty, design aesthetics, and olfactory aesthetics, as well as "artification" in practices such as education, business, science, and sport (Saito, 2008, p. 2).

The Deweyan critique of the reduction of aesthetic experience to the viewing of museum pieces (Dreon, 2021, p. 8) with the consequent devaluation of our lives, links Dewey's aesthetics to *Everyday Aesthetics*. As Saito states, "Almost all writers on everyday aesthetics are inspired by John Dewey's *Art as Experience* ...in particular his consideration of "having an experience" demonstrates that aesthetic experience is possible in all aspects of people's daily lives" (Dreon, 2021, p.1).

However, there is a crucial difference between *Everyday Aesthetics* and Deweyan aesthetics. Although Dewey considered that aesthetic experiences are not reduced to interactions with artistic objects, his main focus in *Art as Experience*, is on the analysis of works of art: their origin, their qualities, and their interpretation, precisely because art performs an important function: to provoke those aesthetic experiences that significantly enrich our lives.

Despite the interdisciplinary nature and the thematic breadth of *Everyday Aesthetics*, Shusterman points to two principal tendencies: the first emphasizes the ordinariness of ordinary experience and argues that the feeling of familiarity that comes from these everyday objects envelops it in a kind of aesthetic experience different from that which comes from art objects that we value for their novelty (Puolakka, 2004, pp. 3-4). The second, more akin to the Deweyan approach, takes a more reconstructive attitude to everyday experience and seeks to integrate the experiences that capture people's attention into the flow of everyday life in order to prompt them toward a more acute perception, such as that elicited by works of art, thus significantly enhancing people's lives (Shusterman, 2012, p. 110).

Saito, one of the prominent representatives of the first of these tendencies, considers that Dewey didn't go far enough in his critique of reductionism, although he focuses his aesthetic research on experience. Aesthetic experiences, however, culminating and integrating, are not very common. Thus, according to Saito, Dewey's aesthetics is not very useful in highlighting the aesthetic qualities of our ordinary and familiar tasks (Saito, 2008, pp. 45-46). As a result, Saito attempts to go further by highlighting the aesthetic qualities of the ordinariness of everyday experiences (Saito, 2017, p. 7). The problem, in agreement with Shusterman and, in my view, with the Deweyan approach, is that if we highlight familiarity, routine, and unconsciousness as aesthetic qualities proper to everyday experiences, we should ask what is properly aesthetic about those experiences (Shusterman, 2012, p. 111). Moreover, this approach establishes a dichotomy between familiarity as an aesthetic quality of everyday experiences and novelty as a quality proper to artistic experiences. As Thomas Leddy points

out, this approach does not seem to consider the enrichment that everyday experiences can have when transformed into highly aesthetic artistic experiences (Leddy, 2021, p. 1).

The other tendency mentioned by Shusterman within Everyday Aesthetics has, in my opinion, more affinity with the Deweyan approach. From this point of view, everyday objects or events can be appreciated by a particular perception and thus be transfigured in a way that enhances and enriches our everyday experiences (Shusterman, 2012, p. 110). Intensity, clarity, and focus would be qualities of this aesthetic perception. However, according to Shusterman as well as Dewey, the intensity and clarification of perception depend not only on the attention we pay to the objects experienced but also on their special qualities (Shusterman, 2012, p. 112).

Shusterman stresses, like Dewey, that aesthetic experience arises from our especially life-giving and intense interaction with the environment that integrates all the elements that are part of the interaction: emotions, thoughts, desires, the body itself, and the qualities of the objects. Artistic production arranges these elements in a work to provoke that perception that culminates in the aesthetic experience.

Dewey attached great importance to *techné* as the procedure that gives form to the work, making it expressive and communicative. Although the aesthetic experience must have continuity with the rest of daily experiences, it is not diluted into them. The main difference between Dewey's aesthetics and Bourriaud's relational aesthetics (Dewey, 2008, p. xiii) is that, according to Dewey, the aesthetic experience calls our attention to and highlights the meaningful and valuable aspects of things, so it is not diluted into everyday life but enriches it. Moreover, art transfigures our emotions and nature, ordering and highlighting the valuable aspects that are fragmented in everyday experience (Dewey, 1996, p. 83).

The expressive form of art, that is, its power to provoke emotional experiences, endows it with an important social function; it unites members of society in shared feelings and values. Where there are barriers of race, territory, class, gender, etc., that impede communication and participation, art and civilization are weakened (Dewey, 1996, p. 347). As it enables human society to become a community, art plays a vital role in democratic development.

Dewey refers art to experience. Art cannot be reduced to an object placed in a museum, to what is qualified by art institutions as art, but culminates in aesthetic experience. The artist intelligently selects and transfigures the materials and energies that arouse in us culminating experiences, intense because their different elements reinforce each other, integrating them and making them unique.

As with the Everyday Aesthetics, Dewey does not reduce aesthetic experience to the enjoyment of pieces in a museum. Aesthetic experiences are characterized by being culminant and in everyday life it's possible to encounter these types of experiences. However, art provokes these kinds of aesthetic experiences, and for Dewey this endows them with a vital importance that is not afforded them in the Everyday aesthetics. Artworks are expressive because they promote and guide the emotions they produce until their culmination, and they are communicative because they allow us to participate in other ways of seeing the world or to act that are represented in the artworks themselves. The representative, expressive and communicative character possessed by works of art, lends the aesthetic experience they produce a singular significance. Art helps us improve our lives, making it more satisfying, while allowing us to experience other ways of acting and perceiving the world. If art does not delimit aesthetic qualities that are found in experience, this does not limit, for Dewey, the importance of art. Rather, it is what allows it to transform our experiences, and, finally, our lives.

6. Conclusion

Dewey's pragmatism attempts to overcome the dualisms of modern philosophy that rest on factors of social conditioning that fragment human life and impede its development (Kaplan, 1996, p. 10). The proof of this fragmentation is the compartmentalization of modern life into different spheres. On the one hand, the sphere of the objective, external and material, that is, nature and production, which would be dealt with by science and technology. On the other hand, the subjective, which would be dealt with by morality, based on values and ideals of a "liberated" conscience transcending nature. Nowadays art merges with digitalization, it is an example of how sensorial experiences that can be transformative, but also non-emancipatory (Coeckelbergh, 2017, p. 287), (Mazzone & Elgammal, 2019). And finally, art which, in museums, allows the occasional reconciliation of the individual with himself and with the world in a kind of Sunday recreation.

In contrast to the modern separation of art and the rest of our working and family spheres, Dewey finds aesthetic qualities in everyday experiences and objects. There is no opposition between a useful and a beautiful object; something can be both useful and beautiful. Therefore, the idea of complementary can be applied to Dewey's theory as demonstrated by J. Fernández (2021, p. 135). What prevents both objects and productive activities from having aesthetic qualities is that the people who work do not participate fully in the processes of production; their emotions and purposes are not taken into account in their activity, which becomes purely mercantile. Nor is scientific research opposed to art; it can have aesthetic qualities when culminating.

Art is closely linked to morality, not because it is dedicated to indoctrination (Shusterman, 2002, p. 348), as Adorno pointed out, but because, for example, poetry, novels, etc., discover forms of life through imaginative representation that contrast with current conditions. Dewey affirms that art presents possibilities that are not realized but could be realized. It has enormous critical power; in fact, it is difficult to find a social movement that has not preceded a change in the arts. In addition, art allows us to put ourselves imaginatively in the place of others; that is why it is an instrument for the good. Art avoids the conversion of values into precepts that are routinely obeyed in order to highlight their instituting character (Shusterman, 2002, p. 347).

Faced with the separation of art and life, Dewey finds aesthetic qualities in ordinary experience, which is why he is considered an antecedent of Everyday Aesthetics. Dewey and the representatives of Everyday Aesthetics try to avoid the reduction of aesthetics to the contemplation of museum pieces and the consequent impoverishment of our everyday life; however, there are crucial differences. Everyday Aesthetics ends up diluting the aesthetic into the everyday; however, for Dewey, aesthetic experiences have specific characteristics that distinguish them from the rest of ordinary experiences: the integration of their elements that flow toward their culmination, and their intensity, are some of their characteristic notes. Although aesthetic experiences are not reduced to artistic experiences, the perception of nature, for instance, can also be culminating. However, for Dewey, art has an important pragmatic function. It allows us to order our experiences through a production process with a complex *techné* towards their culmination, highlighting and ordering the aesthetic qualities that, on many occasions, are dispersed within daily routines.

This peculiarity of art gives it great ethical and political importance. Works of art are expressive because they have a certain form, which is why they are communicative; that is, they enhance the culminating experiences that contribute to drawing attention to the valuable aspects of our lives and improve empathy and communication with others.

Aesthetic experience is therefore vitalizing but also specific and closely linked, though not reducible, to artistic production. This linking of art with experience responded to a pragmatic objective: improving our daily lives through art. However, it is precisely this optimistic view of art that can be problematic. Dewey characterizes aesthetic experiences as culminating and wholly satisfying. The question is whether all aesthetic experiences are satisfactory or whether there are artistic propositions that are characterized precisely by producing dissatisfaction.

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