

Experimenting Experience: John Dewey, Aesthetics and Education

by
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ABSTRACT: Experience has one of the most significant places in the philosophy of John Dewey. He never gives a precise definition of experience; nonetheless, some branches of his reflection unfold a comprehensive idea concerning what an experience is. His aesthetics and his theory of education seem to be two of these branches, if not the most important ones. The paper aims at showing the strong intertwining of aesthetics and education in Dewey's work, and above all in the definition of the concept of human experience. Education is so elevated to the rank of anthropological feature inasmuch the work of art is for Dewey not just an object of leisure and luxury, but one of the fundamental experiences of human life.

KEYWORDS: Aesthetic Experience, Education, Exemplarity, Work of Art, Creativity

ABSTRACT: L'esperienza ha un ruolo significativo nella filosofia di John Dewey. Dewey non dà una definizione definitiva di esperienza; nondimeno, alcune parti della sua riflessione rivelano un'ampia comprensione di ciò che è l'esperienza. L'estetica e la teoria dell'educazione sembrano essere due di questi luoghi, forse tra i più importanti. L'articolo tenta di mostrare il forte intreccio di estetica ed educazione nell'opera di Dewey, soprattutto rispetto alla definizione del concetto di esperienza umana. L'educazione è così elevata al rango di tratto antropologico, nella misura in cui l'opera d'arte non è per Dewey solo un oggetto di piacere, ma costituisce una delle esperienze umane fondamentali.

KEYWORDS: esperienza estetica, educazione, esemplarità, opera d'arte, creatività

1. *Introduction*

This paper aims at showing the deep and wide relationship between art, aesthetic experience, and education in the philosophy of John Dewey. However, it does not focus precisely on the role of art in

education, or in the meaning of art education. It rather highlights the philosophical implications of this relationship. Art and aesthetic experience imply an intense interaction with the environment, which is productive of many discoveries, and asks for a strange engagement. In the aesthetic experience, we are as much receptive as productive, in the sense of making sense of our agency in having experiences of, and interactions with reality. Experience makes of human life an endless process of learning. And the aesthetic experience emphasizes this trait. We can therefore consider Dewey's aesthetics as a modern revival of Friedrich Schiller's idea of an "aesthetic education" of humankind. Schiller believes aesthetic education to be the only genuine way to progress and civilization as far as only art is able to harmonize the sensible drives that trigger our experience with our need of giving them a form. This idea is largely consistent with Dewey's conception of the aesthetic experience as a process of "doing and undergoing", which is expected to result into the emergence of new meanings of life and reality. I will proceed as follows: in the first paragraph, I will reconsider Dewey's theory of education, for the sake of reframing it within a philosophical investigation on creativity and the need for meaning in experience. In the second paragraph, I will reconsider his conception of art, especially as an educational device, in order to show how far aesthetic experience can be regarded as an exemplary representative of the fact that human experience is a form of life-long self-education. In the third and last paragraph, I will proceed to develop the comparison of Dewey's aesthetic theory with Schiller's project of an aesthetic education.

2. Dewey's Theory of Education Reconsidered

John Dewey was, among other things, a philosopher, an intellectual and an educational scientist. My aim is to focus on his philosophical work, above all his contribution to the aesthetic studies. However, I believe that his philosophy, and in particular his aesthetic theory is so closely intertwined with his theory of education, that one could speak of a modern version of the *aesthetic education* proposed by Friedrich Schiller at the end of the 18th century¹. The issue of the possibility

¹ See F. Schiller, *On the Aesthetic Education of Man* [1795], trans. by K. Tribe, Penguin, London 2016. Another pragmatist appropriation of the aesthetic education has

of establishing a link between Dewey and Schiller will be developed later. I believe that collocating Dewey's idea of education within the paradigm of the aesthetic education helps us see the philosophical consequences of this theory of education. However, if we wish to appreciate the philosophical and aesthetic implications of Dewey's concept of education, we should avoid a possible misunderstanding concerning his educational theory. The name of John Dewey is often associated with the well-known formula of "learning by doing". Yet this formula should not be interpreted as demanding a form of practical or physical engagement. This formula refers to practices which should be promoted in, and enhanced by the educational process, such as cooperating with each other or sharing knowledge with the others. These good practices lead to the opinion that learners and teachers need to be genuinely committed to the operational situation in which they happen to be involved. The ultimate purpose of this process is to make learners able to face autonomously the challenges of life, in the way these challenges are presented by their own experience. It is a matter of anticipating what cannot be entirely prepared in advance: the capability of solving unexpected problems. We cannot prevent ourselves from being surprised by the contingencies of life: consequently, we can neither establish rules of action, nor acquire habits of perception, once forever. This means that our educational programs should promote the development of a certain degree of flexibility and resilience in our lives, since these skills help us change rules or acquire new habits according to the different situations².

The purpose of education is to make room for creativity³; however, it is not a decontextualized and absolute creativity. Rather, it is the capability of transforming the context, in order to let it be a more

been recently proposed by Richard Shusterman: see R. Shusterman, *Pragmatism between Aesthetic Experience and Aesthetic Education. A Response to David Granger*, «Studies in Philosophy and Education» 22 (2003), pp. 403-412.

² See J. Dewey, *Experience and Education* [1938], in *Later Works*, vol. 13, ed. by A. J. Boydston, Southern Illinois University Press, Carbondale and Edwardsville 1988, pp. 1-62. Dewey's theory of education is exposed in a large number of books, articles and essays: this topic engaged him during his whole lifetime. I refer to *Experience and Education*, not only because this book focuses on the phenomenology of the educational process, but also because it helps unveil the analogies between the educational process and the aesthetic experience.

³ On creativity, see also E. Garroni, *Creatività*, Quodlibet, Macerata 2010.

favorable condition for the flourishing of the individual⁴. This means that this need for making room for the capability of changing habits and following new rules is concerned with a number of practices exceeding our educations narrowly construed. Aesthetic education is a process that prolongates into our life-long cultural experiences, individual and collective. It thus becomes an ethical stance as well as an educational issue. It is a way of rehabilitating the ancient idea of *paideia*. However, this modern *paideia* is particularly engaged with the problem of dealing with contingency creatively. As far as we consider art as the exemplary reference of our aesthetic education, we look at it as an example of a creativity open to contingency, and engaged in making sense of it.

As I have just remarked, Dewey has never claimed that every form of education could or should be reduced to a practical activity, in the sense of a bodily activity. He believes that every educational practice should enhance the creativity, critical thinking and autonomous deliberation of the individual. Consequently, education fails if it transmits preformed cognitive patterns, designed for the sake of affirming pre-established ways of transforming reality, evaluating situations, and taking decisions. On the contrary, it is successful if it promotes the possibility of modifying the patterns transmitted by the educational process. For this reason, cooperation has a priority over the bodily and practical engagement of learners in this process. A cooperative atmosphere empowers the exchange of knowledge: the autonomy of the individual is so strengthened. This atmosphere can of course promote practical activities of teachers and learners. But this fact does not imply that every subject-matter of an educational program is reducible to a practical situation: the design of a cooperative background must consider the specificities of each educational program⁵.

Let us consider the case of the educational programs proposed today by several museums. As cultural institutions, museums collect, protect, and promote the study of objects which belong to our cultural heritage. And of course, they exhibit these objects. These objects are

⁴ For this idea of flourishing of life, see A. Ferrara, *Reflecting Authenticity. Rethinking the Project of Modernity*, Routledge, London 2002, with regard to the social context; see also S. Velotti, *La filosofia e le arti. Sentire, pensare, immaginare*, Laterza, Roma-Bari 2022, with regard to the artistic elaboration of this idea.

⁵ Gino Roncaglia states a similar concern as he analyzes the role, actual and possible, of the digital technologies in reshaping our idea of education: see G. Roncaglia, *L'età della frammentazione. Cultura del libro e scuola digitale*, Laterza, Roma-Bari 2020.

often works of art or archaeological relics. This is at least a common situation for museums dealing with human artifacts, which constitute a substantial part of our cultural heritage. The enhancement of education through the knowledge of this heritage was a purpose of many, if not all museums since their very foundation⁶. Education in museums can take different paths: it may focus on the history of the artifacts exhibited, as well as on their aesthetics. Adapting the aesthetic sense of artists and connoisseurs to the models of classical art was certainly one of the purposes of the earliest museums. However, a modern idea of aesthetic education does not necessarily require a classical conception of art, which would be established by some kind of aesthetic canon. The art of the past has often had a primary social function: it was the device of religious rituals, and the attractive pole of festivals which gathered the members of a community; it also provided the symbolic and mythological background shared by them⁷. However, the revival of this idea of art is not at stake in Dewey's aesthetic theory. He is more concerned with the role of art in education today.

If we consider this issue from a practical point of view, he aims at reforming museums, giving them a new function. Museums could be for instance a source of models for creatives and designers who work in the industrial sector: such an inspiration would probably grant a higher aesthetic quality to industrial productions⁸. But this is still a narrow idea of aesthetic education, although it already highlights consequences exceeding the scope of the individual education and concerning a larger cultural experience. However, this idea unwar-

⁶ It is important to distinguish between museums and galleries. At least since the age of Renaissance, monarchs, popes, princes, cardinals, the high clergy and nobility had often artistic and archaeological collections. But these collections were neither regularly open to the public, nor meant to promote the general education. They were first of all showing the collector's prestige, as it is still for the modern upper classes: see J. Dewey, *Experience and Nature* [1925], in *Later Works*, vol. 1, ed. by J. A. Boydston, Southern Illinois University Press, Carbondale and Edwardsville 1981, p. 279 and ff. This association of art with social prestige was also supported by the aesthetic prejudice that a work of "fine" art should lack any usefulness for experience: see *ivi*, p. 271. Chapter IX of *Experience and Nature* is especially devoted to art and aesthetics. Its title is *Experience, Nature and Art*; it was also republished as a single essay in an edited form in 1926 on the *Journal of the Barnes Foundation*.

⁷ See J. Dewey, *Art as Experience* [1934], Perigee, New York 2005, pp. 30-31.

⁸ See J. Dewey, *The Educational Function of a Museum of Decorative Arts* [1937], in *Later Works*, vol. 11, ed. by J. A. Boydston, Southern Illinois University Press, Carbondale and Edwardsville 2008, pp. 520-525.

rantedly assumes that something undoubtedly considered beautiful, such as the art of the past, is or could be the unilateral source of creativity for our new creations, including industrial products. Dewey's real concern is to understand how the work of art, either past or present, is able to enable the discovery of new aesthetic, and not only aesthetic, values. This would mean having an authentic experience. Aesthetic education transposes accordingly the need for creativity in daily problem-solving activities onto the idea of making sense of contingency as the moment for displaying one's creative attitudes. The educational purpose of art can be intended in the following sense: the work of art challenges us to be able to extend the horizon of issues with which we are able to deal, instead of limiting ourselves to the task of finding the best solutions for actual problems.

3. *Education as an Art*

3.1 *Knowledge and Problem-Solving*

In the previous paragraph emerged the need for a philosophically grounded idea of aesthetic education. An aesthetic education is not just an education to the historical importance of the works of art of the past; nor is it an occasion for entertainment. It is rather an invitation to discover what we are able to think and do having been charmed by the beauty and the creative power of the work of art. Dewey suggests that the first step of an aesthetic experience is when we "surrender" to it. In *Art as experience*, he writes that the «esthetic or undergoing phase of experience is receptive. It involves surrender. But adequate yielding of the self is possibly only through a controlled activity that may well be intense»⁹. The act of surrendering does not make us passive in front of the experience we have. It is the preliminary stage being necessary for the sake of feeling a complete interpenetration with the object experienced. From this point of view, the process is more important than the object itself. The aesthetic education does not aim at filling our heads with a due number of aesthetic experiences, above all of works of art universally recognized as masterpieces. A genuine aesthetic experience aims at being the way to other experiences, both aesthetic and ordinary. This idea brings us

⁹ J. Dewey, *Art as Experience*, cit., p. 55.

back to a possible comparison of Dewey's aesthetics with Schiller's project of aesthetic education.

Analyzing Schiller's *Aesthetic Education*, Martin Heidegger rightly says that aesthetic education is not an education *to* but *through* art¹⁰. In *Art as Experience*, Dewey mentions Schiller only twice¹¹; and the most remarkable of the two mentions appears in a footnote. Nonetheless, Dewey does not only give a positive evaluation of Schiller's aesthetics, but he also finds a continuity between Schiller's aesthetic theory and his own. Dewey writes, in fact, that «art is the fusion in one existence of the pressure upon the self of the necessary conditions and the spontaneity and novelty of individuality». And he immediately adds in a footnote:

The most explicit philosophic statement of what is implied in the play theory [that is, life understood as the expression of the individual's spontaneous and dynamic activity] is that of Schiller in his *Letters of the Esthetic Education of Man*. Kant had limited freedom to moral action controlled by the rational (supra-empirical) conception of Duty. Schiller put forward the idea that play and art occupy an intermediate transitional place between the realms of necessary phenomena and transcendent freedom, educating man to recognition and to assumption of the responsibilities of the latter. His view represents a valiant attempt on the part of an artist to escape the rigid dualism of the Kantian philosophy, while remaining within his frame¹².

Furthermore, even if Dewey never mentions Schiller in his essays on art and education, yet these thinkers seem to share the same stance: they believe that the intensified playful experience empowered by a work of art must be taken as the model of the possibilities of flourishing of the individual life. Art does not matter just as a subject-matter available to educational programs. The education to art is only a part of the agenda of an aesthetic education.

Assuming the project of an education through art brings us to the core of the question. We should not forget that for Dewey the purpose of education is not the bare transmission of cognitions, but a way of

¹⁰ See M. Heidegger, *Übungen für Anfänger. Schillers Briefe über die ästhetische Erziehung des Menschen: Wintersemester 1936/37*, ed. by U. von Bülow, Deutsche Schillergesellschaft, Marbach am Neckar 2005.

¹¹ J. Dewey, *Art as Experience*, cit., pp. 199 and 293.

¹² Ivi, p. 293.

making knowledge effectively operating. The efficacy of the educational process proceeds together with the growing of the learner's capability of solving problems autonomously. Being entangled with the flourishing of life and the development of autonomy, the validity of an aesthetic education should be especially evaluated for the way it promotes the freedom of imagination and grants the authenticity of the experience. For Dewey, the capability of solving problems in real life is also a task of imagination, its freedom being therefore an issue of the layman as well as of the artist and the poet. Imagination is primarily the imagination of the possible and the virtual, rather than the imagination of the unreal and the fictional. The capability of finding solutions to contingent problems, without the imposing influence of any external authority, is indeed intertwined with our creative agency, as we have seen above. On the other hand, the cooperative atmosphere, through which only a teacher is able to enhance the learner's autonomy, recalls the atmosphere of an artistic workshop, where master and apprentice cooperate together to the creation of a work of art while the former teaches the art to the latter¹³. The imagination at work in the educational process is therefore an imagination of new possibilities with the others: the sense of the fictional imagination displayed by the work of art is, though virtually, the enhancement of new forms of cooperative creativity. In the workshop, the master never stops learning while teaching to the apprentice¹⁴.

In accordance with Dewey's theory of education, knowledge is a source of creative solutions to the problems of life. Firstly, education addresses the faculty of *discrimination*. By this word, Dewey designates a crucial aspect of judging, that is, the capability of selecting the traits and features which help evaluate a situation or grasp the features of an object. For this reason, it requires the exchange and interpretation of knowledge. There are striking similarities between Dewey's idea of discrimination and Kant's definition of the faculty of judgment. Kant defines judging as the faculty of subsuming the

¹³ See J. Dewey, *Individuality and Experience* [1926], in *Later Works*, vol. 2, ed. by J. A. Boydston, Southern Illinois University Press, Carbondale and Edwardsville 1986, pp. 1-6.

¹⁴ We could understand the art master as a type of "ignorant schoolmaster", in the formulation of Jacques Rancière. See J. Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster. Five Lessons in Intellectual Emancipation*, trans. by K. Ross, Stanford University Press, Redwood 1991. Generally speaking, Dewey's theory of education entails a revival of the Socratic maieutics.

particular under the universal. If the universal rule under which we subsume the particular case is given in advance, then the judgment is “determining”. In this case the faculty of judgment claims no transcendental foundation, for it depends on universals, such as the concepts and ideas produced by other faculties of the mind. However, when one has to find the universal rule under which the particular case must be subsumed, then the judgment is “reflecting”: that is, it entails the reflection upon its very ground¹⁵.

Discrimination can be regarded as a skill of the reflecting faculty of judgment, as far as judging implies here to be sensitive to the different aspects of the case considered while searching for the proper criteria of judgment. It is an ability at the same time bodily – a certain refinement of the sensibility – and intellectual – a certain perspicuity in the analysis of the object. More importantly, it is a skill which can be developed through its education. Furthermore, the educational process is one of the stages where we can prove our discriminating skills as far as we are involved in a cooperative situation of teaching and learning – and learning by teaching. Dewey’s idea of cooperation in education, exemplarily mirrored by the artistic workshop, could therefore have another connection with the aesthetic sphere: they transfer the issue of the universal communicability of one’s taste from the transcendental plan of the foundation of the faculty of judgment to the pragmatic plan of sharing creative standards between master and apprentice¹⁶.

We can consequently believe that the transmission of knowledge through educational practices could even be a distinctive trait of the human evolution, as argued by Kim Sterelny¹⁷. If education characterizes the human nature in its very evolutionary foundations, then we could assume that the human condition is also characterized by the endless search for learning new cognitions and skills, in a perspective

¹⁵ See I. Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment* [1790], ed. by P. Guyer, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2001, pp. 66-68 (§ IV). For a more extended comparison of Dewey’s pragmatist aesthetics and Kant’s critical aesthetics, see D. Cecchi, *Il continuo e il discreto. Estetica e filosofia dell’esperienza in John Dewey*, Franco Angeli, Milano 2014.

¹⁶ See D. Cecchi, *Modelli e norme. L’esemplarità estetica riletta in chiave pragmatista*, in M. Striano-S. Olivero-S. Santarelli (eds.), *Nuovi usi di vecchi concetti. Il metodo pragmatista oggi*, Mimesis, Milano 2016, pp. 180-192.

¹⁷ See K. Sterelny, *The Evolved Apprentice. How Evolution Made Humans Unique*, MIT Press, Cambridge, MA 2011.

of continuous education and self-education. Human beings, unlike other animals, are educational beings even when their life training has been fulfilled, and the relationship of master and apprentice cannot be concretely replicated. At that moment, we probably assume our social context as an extension of the educational process by which we learn how to live. Culturally speaking, we understand society as a space made of actors who are, mutually and interchangeably, teachers and learners dealing with the information necessary to the society's survival as if it were the object of a collective enterprise of education. We could even suggest that culture, in Dewey's view, describes the ensemble of practices, habits, skills and cognitions available to a certain society, in order to organize their individual and collective life. Consistently with what I have said so far, the idea that culture and education overlap with each other, not only individually but collectively, can be traced back to the Greek idea of *paideia*, and has a modern anticipation in Schiller's project of an aesthetic education meant both as an ethical and a political goal of the humankind.

3.2 *Experience and Culture*

On the one hand, at the crosspoint among his theory of education, his aesthetics and his social theory, Dewey reformulates the motives lying behind the categories of *paideia* and aesthetic education. On the other hand, he tries to intercept some of the cultural trends of his time. Interestingly enough, between the late 1940s and the early 1950s Dewey worked at two unaccomplished drafts of a new Introduction he was asked to write for one of his most celebrated books: *Experience and Nature*¹⁸. The starting point of the two drafts is the same: Dewey notes that the recent scientific advancements and the development of philosophical movements close to the scientific atmosphere reduce the concept of experience to that of scientific experiment. Clearly, as I will clarify later on, this is not the main sense he gave to this concept as he put it at the center of his philosophical work. But, almost astonishingly, in the second one of the two aforementioned drafts, Dewey states his unease with the semantic transformation of "experience", to the extent of saying that, if he were to write *Experience and Nature*

¹⁸ J. Dewey, *Appendixes. Experience and Nature: A Re-Introduction*, ed. by J. Rather, in *Later Works*, vol. I, ed. by J. A. Boydston, Southern Illinois University Press, Carbondale and Edwardsville 1981, pp. 330-364.

at that moment, he would have replaced the word “experience” with “culture”¹⁹. And the idea of culture defended in those pages is not at all a humanistic and idealistic one: Dewey refers to Bronislaw Malinowski’s article on Cultural Anthropology published on the *British Encyclopedia*. The techniques and technologies developed by the different human groups are as much relevant to this idea of culture as the aesthetic and moral values, or the religious beliefs, of those groups. We could even argue that a culture is the extended educational context by which individuals grant their own survival, and foster their capabilities, by means of the cooperation with the others.

The other aspect is the social and political employability of the idea of extended educational context. Axel Honneth has righteously remarked that Dewey, above all in *The Public and Its Limits*, thinks of the public sphere as a “cognitive medium” in which knowledge circulates, contributing to the general welfare, through the exchange of information among the individuals²⁰. For Honneth, Dewey’s paradigm of public sphere is a good alternative to the “agonistic” paradigms elaborated by political theorists such as Hannah Arendt and his own teacher Jürgen Habermas. It is also important to note that Dewey underlines the importance of media for the enhancement of this idea of public sphere. His starting point is in fact the twilight of the traditional society, made of small communities in which the direct participation of the individual to the collective debate is still a concrete opportunity, compared? to a mass society in which individuals conduct anonymous lives in metropolises deprived of any immediate public dimension. Media can play a social role if they are able to provide the knowledge which can re-empower the deliberative agency of the individuals. But, according to Dewey, this is possible only if media avoid a spectacular life, by which only the sensibility of the mass can be thrilled, without educating their judgment. And to do that, modern media should learn the lesson of the great art of the past²¹. In other words, to consider the educational import of modern media, we must assume an aesthetic standard: we must consider their

¹⁹ See *ivi*, pp. 361-364.

²⁰ See J. Dewey, *The Public and Its Problems* [1927], in *Later Works*, vol. 2, ed. by J. A. Boydston, Southern Illinois University Press, Carbondale and Edwardsville 1986, pp. 235-372; for the definition of the public sphere in Dewey as a cognitive medium, see A. Honneth, *Democracy as Reflexive Cooperation: John Dewey and the Theory of Democracy Today*, «Political Theory» 26/6 (1998), pp. 763-783.

²¹ See J. Dewey, *The Public and Its Limits*, *cit.*, pp. 349-351.

models, and the way they are able to provide us with exemplary portraits and narratives of modern life²².

3.3 Exemplarity

An idea of exemplarity can be traced, in John Dewey's works, precisely in the mutual relationship between the master and the apprentice in the educational context of art. My claim is that this is a pragmatic reformulation of the Kantian conception of the exemplarity of the work of art²³. Kant thinks that the work of art, more exactly the work of art "of genius", is exemplary inasmuch it is able to foster the free «imitation» (*Nachfolge*) of other artists, which is different from a pedantic «copying» (*Nachahmung*) of the model²⁴. The work of art of genius may run the risk of falling into an «original nonsense» (*ursprünglicher Unsinn*)²⁵: that is, it may fail to communicate to the public. But it may also discover new creative solutions; at any rate, it «occasions much thinking», that is, it unfolds a larger horizon of thoughts and experiences²⁶. The work of art of genius is therefore exemplary for the judgment of the public, as well as it is a source of inspiration for the artists. Dewey reverses Kant's point of view, but remains in a substantial continuity with the latter. The originality of the masterpieces can be recognized in the way these works feed the works of apprentices and followers. We can extend this idea, and think of the art world, from the point of view of the artists, as a

²² The political meaning of the aesthetic exemplarity has been analyzed, in a Kantian perspective, in the seminal work of Hannah Arendt: see H. Arendt, *Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy*, ed. by R. Beiner, Chicago University Press, Chicago 1982. Alessandro Ferrara has originally reformulated Arendt's stance in A. Ferrara, *The Force of the Example. Explorations in the Paradigm of Judgment*, Columbia University Press, New York 2008. I think that accounts of political exemplarity are consistent with an agonistic idea of society, in which the exemplary action can be understood as a breaking point in the life of a society. Its positive effects might be the enlargement of the cultural horizons entailed by that society, or the redirection of its vital interest. As we shall see, Dewey rather highlights the cooperative elements of the concept of exemplarity.

²³ See D. Cecchi, *Modelli e norme*, cit.

²⁴ I. Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, cit., p. 188 [§ 47]; see also H. R. Jauss, *Kleine Apologie der ästhetischen Erfahrung*, Konstanzer Universitätsverlag, Konstanz 1972, p. 4.

²⁵ I. Kant, *op. cit.*, p. 186 [§ 46].

²⁶ Ivi, p. 192 [§ 49].

virtual space of dialogue among different creators. Several artists of the baroque age are called “caravaggeschi” because they were directly inspired by the works of Caravaggio. They are not just pedantic imitators: the list of Caravaggio’s apprentices and followers comprehends the names of Artemisia and Orazio Gentileschi. Furthermore, the technique of *chiaroscuro* used by Caravaggio in his paintings was used also by other artists contemporary to him. The beholder is so led to compare his paintings with those of Gherardo delle Notti or Giovanni Lanfranco.

The relationship between masters and apprentices, followers or contemporaries is not limited to the history of art. It entails also the way contemporary artists are inspired by the works of artists of past ages. With the series of the popes “caged”, Francis Bacon establishes a virtual but intense dialogue with Velasquez’s portrait of Innocent X Pamphilj; and this is only one of the most evident cases of dialogues established between artists of different ages. The artistic exemplarity cannot be therefore dissociated from the educational import of the work of art as far as the creative work grows thanks to its sources of imitation. Kant especially refers the exemplarity of a work of art to the search of a universal standard of taste. It refers to judgment. And as far as the aesthetic judgments are not objective, they depend on the subjective feeling of pleasure engendered by beauty, and on the communicability of this feeling. The universality of taste does not descend then from a canon of rules, but, as he claims, on the occasion of the single experience, from the possibility of a universal agreement on the beauty of a certain object. The general validity of an aesthetic judgment can be claimed only at these conditions: the case judged does not refer to a logical principle of judgement, applicable to other cases, but displays only an exemplary exhibition of beauty²⁷.

We can say that Dewey’s operative account of the artistic exemplarity transfers Kant’s remarks into the concrete plan of the artists at work, who judges the works of other artists for the sake of enhancing their own style. Dewey highlights two more aspects. Firstly, the work of the apprentices guided by the master has also a backward effect as far as it may help masters reconsider their own work. Masters learn by teaching as far as the process of learning brings to a creative activity which is relevant to the master’s self-education. Secondly, the educational import of the artistic exemplarity is circular, and entails

²⁷ Ivi, pp. 122-124 [§§ 21-22].

also the act of judging the works of art without any concrete creative engagement with them. The works of apprentices, followers and of all sorts of imitators affect our perception and evaluation of the master's work as far as the former's works display the unexplored meanings of the works of the masters. Beholders contemplate the works of art in an implicit operational perspective. When this operative and educational point of view passes from the artistic workshop to an enlarged social and cultural context, it does not change its nature, but rather works at shaping the collective view according to its own criteria.

4. *The Aesthetic Experience as an Educational Process*

According to what said above, the aesthetic experience has an intimate connection with educational practices: it may even be taken as a sort of prototype of most of our educational practices. As a consequence, we must reconsider the structure and the effects of aesthetic experience according to the claim of its educational nature; the aesthetic theory of Dewey can help us develop this issue. Dewey left two general accounts of the aesthetic experience: the first one is contained in *Experience, Nature and Art*, which inaugurates his engagement in the aesthetic theory; the second one is the object of his definitive treatise in aesthetics, that is, *Art as Experience*²⁸. The former text was published in 1925 as a chapter of *Experience and Nature*, the second edition of which dates 1929; *Experience, Nature and Art* remains unaltered in the two editions, but it has been the object of an autonomous publication in an edited version. In 1931, Dewey gave the William James Lectures at Harvard and chose aesthetics as the subject-matter of those Lectures; in 1934, he published *Art as Experience*, rearranging the materials presented for the William James Lectures.

The reflection on art and the aesthetic occupies, not exclusively but intensively, almost ten years of Dewey's lifetime. Aesthetics is not just one of the principal subjects he tackled: his engagement with aesthetics is one of the fundamental moments, if not the most important one, in which he deals with understanding the nature of experience, a key-concept of his philosophy. The nature of experience is also relevant to the building of his theory of education as far

²⁸ For an overview on the different interpretations of Dewey's aesthetics, see L. Russo (ed.), *Esperienza estetica: a partire da John Dewey*, Aesthetica, Palermo 2007.

as education is an experience, the purpose of which is the empowerment to the independent undertaking of new experiences. As we have seen above, the expansion of the individual's horizon of actual and possible experiences is regulated according to an artistic paradigm: the learner is like an apprentice who has progressively learnt new techniques, so developing an autonomous faculty of judging and an original creative agency.

4.1 *Affectivity and Consummation*

Between 1925 and 1934, Dewey publishes some shorter and more circumscribed essays on aesthetics: some of them are written for some special occasions; other ones specifically deal with the issue of the educational agency of art. Philosophically speaking, the most important one of these essays is *Affective Thought*²⁹. Here, Dewey develops a psychological and philosophical theory of the artist's emotional involvement in the creative process; this theory foreshadows the remarks he makes in *Art as Experience* on the intellectual consequences of having an aesthetic experience. Indeed, creating a work of art means indeed to sensibly embody an idea: it is a conjunction of affectivity and thought, which dynamically overcomes their dualism in an aesthetic synthesis. This way of considering the creative work recalls Schiller's theory of art as a play which unifies the formal and the material sides of life, thus educating the humankind to cultivate an authentic idea of humanity: a human being, writes Schiller, «is only a complete man [sic] when he plays»³⁰.

Dewey is interested in reconstructing the phenomenology of the artist's mind being engaged in the creation of a work of art. To create a work of art does not just mean that some abstract "statements" find a concrete vehicle to be communicated. It rather means that the artist shows the effects of a joint of intelligence and sensibility. Affectivity, conceived in relation to the artistic work, is the feeling of the joint action of thought and senses, both committed to the discovery of new aspects of reality and life. In the ordinary experience, emotions are signals of the engagement with a new kind of interaction with the surrounding world: the work of art does not mirror these situations

²⁹ J. Dewey, *Affective Thought* [1926], in *Later Works*, vol. 2, ed. by J. A. Boydston, Southern Illinois Press, Carbondale and Edwardsville 1986, pp. 104-110.

³⁰ F. Schiller, *op. cit.*, p. 57.

per se, but rather imagines the possibility of an interaction by which we are able to reorganize the general scope of our experience³¹. The emphasis is put on the reflective elements of the experience, rather than its material contents³².

The last statement brings us back to the issue of the two accounts of the aesthetic experience, respectively presented in *Experience, Nature and Art* and in *Art as Experience*. They are not two radically opposed versions of the same topic: Dewey does not change his mind on the pivotal points of his account of the aesthetic experience. However, he emphasizes different aspects. As we shall see, the definition of art is the only, but significant, issue on which he partially changes his point of view. As far as a phenomenology of the aesthetic experience is concerned, the main difference concerns the terminology used to describe it. In both cases, Dewey calls the ending point and culmination of this experience «consummation»: it is at the same time the fulfillment of the experiential process, and the emergence of its meaning. Being not an abstract formula, the meaning of the aesthetic experience emerges through the interaction with the world, and depends on the acceptance of the dialectic of «doing and undergoing»³³ which characterizes the flow of this experience. Individuals need to «surrender»³⁴ to this flow, in order to expand the horizon of their practical agency.

A theoretical and terminological shift can be highlighted in the way Dewey describes the process bringing to the consummation of the aesthetic experience. In *Experience, Nature and Art*, he thinks of a dialectic of the “instrumental” and “consummatory” elements at work in the aesthetic experience³⁵; with the word «instrumental», he especially designates all the “utilities” of the individual’s practical engagement. In an ordinary experience, the consummatory elements are subordinated to the instrumental ones: the meaning of the object, and the pleasure it gives to us, correspond to its usability. This relationship is reversed in the aesthetic experience: the instrumental features of the object are exploited for the sake of enjoying an experi-

³¹ For another account of the aesthetic meaning of interaction, see P. Montani, *Tecnologie della sensibilità. Estetica e immaginazione interattiva*, Raffaello Cortina, Milano 2014.

³² See also P. D’Angelo, *Estetica*, Laterza, Roma-Bari 2011, p. 79.

³³ J. Dewey, *Art as Experience*, cit., p. 45 and ff.

³⁴ See J. Dewey, *Affective Thought*, cit.

³⁵ J. Dewey, *Experience and Nature*, cit., p. 271 and ff.

ence of free discovery of the world, using the object as a display and a mediator. We might be experts of painting techniques, or have a wide botanical knowledge, but these “instrumentalities” can be claimed only for the sake of appreciating more intensively and deeply the beauty of a work of art or of a rose.

Before comparing this account of the aesthetic experience with the one presented in *Art as Experience*, it might be useful to consider the definition of art related to it. Dewey argues that a work of art is a «device in experimentation carried on for the sake of education. It exists for the sake of a specialized use, use being a new training of modes of perception»³⁶. Art is therefore comparable to microscopes or microphones. Education means here that the work of art trains our perception, and so educates our sensibility. This definition of art could be integrated with the idea of estrangement made popular in the same years by the critical and poetical theories of Brecht and Shklovsky. According to Dewey, the work of art aims at reconfiguring our perceptual patterns; this reconfiguration is also bound to the suspension of the already established habits of perceptual interaction with the world. The perception of reality is therefore refreshed as if we were able to: perceive things for the first time (Shklovsky); consider the contexts and conditions of human life in unexpected and revelatory ways (Brecht); empowering the establishment of new habits in action and perception (Dewey). The work of art has in that sense an educational effect, even beyond or despite the artist's will.

4.2 Art and Expression

Let us now consider the account of the aesthetic experience presented in *Art as Experience*, and the definition of art to which it leads. Instead of speaking of the joint functioning of instrumental and consummatory elements, Dewey now considers how far the consummation of the aesthetic experience corresponds to an effective and successful integration of the individual's life energies, toward a more intensive interaction with the world. Life is fragmentary and made of routines: having a unified and original experience, we give a new meaning to the objects we deal with. As a consequence, we feel an enhancement of our vitality: this is, in Dewey's words, the aesthetic «in the raw»³⁷,

³⁶ Ivi, p. 293.

³⁷ J. Dewey, *Art as Experience*, cit., p. 3.

that is, the aesthetic belonging to all ordinary experiences, at least virtually. The aesthetic experience presents this tendency toward the search for meaning in an exemplary way. This aspect accounts also for its educational import: a work of art shows the way life could flourish according to a better integration of our life energies. There is however a further development of this idea.

As far as the aesthetic experience is, among other things, a form of spontaneous expressivity, Dewey has to sketch a theory of expression in *Art as Experience*. This theory is presented in chapters 4 and 5, entitled *The Act of Expression* and *The Expressive Object*³⁸. In the first chapter, Dewey highlights how far the human expressivity is not reducible to the “impulse” of fulfilling elementary life needs, but entails also the “impulsion” to manifest one’s own life to the rest of the world while being affected by their interaction. But even more important is the fact that human beings, and only them, distinguish between the act of expressing themselves and the object, i.e. the medium, of their expressivity. We could also say that human expressive agency is the only one which is not limited to the bodily expressivity, but entails also the discovery and use of other expressive media³⁹. The enhancement of the human expressivity is not the only consequence of this distinction. We must also consider that the human expressivity is free as far as it can arbitrarily choose its media. This idea of expressive freedom makes room to a reflection upon the sense of our interaction with the world, and then to the possibility of imagining new forms of interaction. Interestingly enough, Dewey draws a distinction between “expressing” an emotion and “stating” a matter of fact⁴⁰. Being an expressive object, the work of art is therefore available to an infinite number of interpretations. By the way, Dewey has already claimed in *Experience and Nature* that the work of art is «indefinitely instru-

³⁸ Ivi, pp. 60-109.

³⁹ In my opinion, this aspect of Dewey’s aesthetics contrasts with the idea of a “somaesthetics”, at least in its strongest formulation, which makes the body the real target of the aesthetic experience. For the idea of somaesthetics, and its implications with John Dewey’s philosophy, see R. Shusterman, *Pragmatist Aesthetics. Living Beauty, Rethinking Art*, Rowman & Littlefield, Lanham 2000. For a general account on the pragmatist approach to aesthetics, see R. Dreon, *Introduction to Pragmatist Legacies in Aesthetics*, «European Journal of Pragmatism and American Philosophy» 13/1 (2021), pp. 11-15.

⁴⁰ J. Dewey, *Art as Experience*, cit., pp. 86-88.

mental to new satisfying events»⁴¹. This aspect could be considered as an exhibition of the human power of designing different forms of interaction with the world.

The difference between the two definitions of art in John Dewey's aesthetic theory is relevant to the understanding of the intertwining between education and art. According to the first definition – the work of art as an educational device of perception – we should consider it as a tool immediately available to specific practices. A work of art would be, in fact, a medium by which sensibility can be affected. According to the second definition – the work of art as a semantically variable expressive object – a work of art is still an educational tool, but not in an immediate sense: for it makes us reconsider the sense of our interaction with the world more in a reflective than in a practical way. A work of art is only in the first case a tool in the narrow sense of the word, whilst, in the second case, it is a “strange tool”. According to Alva Noë, tools are necessary to the organization of the human life. Works of art are tools of second order, or “strange tools”, because they do not reorganize any aspect of our lives; however, they put on display some of the organizational and technical traits of our lives⁴².

My idea is that, as far as the educational meaning of art is concerned, we can consider a work of art as a proper tool if it immediately affects our minds and bodies. We must on the contrary consider it as a “strange” tool if it is available to different interpretations. One could of course argue that the former case is not really a work of art, but another form of media communication enriched by a high aesthetic import. At any rate, in both cases we deal with an educational object, the purpose of which is the enhancement, either immediate or mediated, of our interaction with the world. In the first case, we undertake a new kind of interaction. In the second case, the work of art reshapes our image of reality, for the sake of making to new possible interactions with the world. We could say that, in the first case, we deal with an idea of education close to the sense of the German word *Bildung*, that is, a sort of training, whilst, in the second case, we are dealing with a form of *Erziehung* in Schiller's acceptance of the word, that is, the cultivation of a certain idea of humanity.

⁴¹ J. Dewey, *Experience and Nature*, cit., p. 274.

⁴² See A. Noë, *Strange Tools. Art and Human Nature*, Hill & Wang, New York 2015.

4.3 Dewey, Kant, and Pragmatism

A comparison of Dewey's aesthetics with Schiller's aesthetic education could be made difficult by the overt Kantian affiliation stated by the latter at the very beginning of his letters *On the Aesthetic Education of Man*⁴³. It is true that Dewey was not very sympathetic with Kant's philosophy and aesthetics. However, I believe we must understand the sense of Dewey's condemnation of Kant's philosophy, also to have a better understanding of the scope and objective of his own philosophical reflection. In *The Need for a Recovery of Philosophy*, a short essay published in 1917, and included in the volume *Creative Intelligence*, Dewey states that in «the orthodox view, experience is regarded as a knowledge-affair»⁴⁴. The "orthodox view" refers to Kant, but it also refers to empiricism, in particular to Hume, before him. The idea of experience that emerges in the works of those narrow empiricists is «(at least primarily) a physical thing, infected throughout by 'subjectivity'»⁴⁵. This way of understanding experience leads to "sensationalism" and "particularism". In other words, experience is identified with the sense data captured by the sense organs as if the "subject" were a merely passive spectator of reality. This is sensationalism. The single experience is accordingly thought to be a single event, isolated from other experiences and the overall movement of the individual's life. This is particularism. Interestingly enough, Dewey seems to attribute to Kant a (failed) attempt of avoiding these two fallacies of empiricism: «In the sensationalism which sprang from Hume (and which was left unquestioned by Kant as far as any strictly empirical element was concerned) the implicit particularism was made explicit»⁴⁶. More precisely, it seems that Kant rejected sensationalism, i.e. the reduction of experience to sensibility alone, but was unable to avoid particularism, the idea that experiences are singular events and are especially bound to cognition, without considering other aspects of our life of the mind, such as affectivity. Consequently, Kant has to idealize the continuity of expe-

⁴³ See F. Schiller, *op. cit.*, p. 3.

⁴⁴ J. Dewey, *The Need for a Recovery of Philosophy*, in *Middle Works*, vol. 10, ed. by J. A. Boydston, Southern Illinois University Press, Carbondale and Edwardsville 2008, p. 3.

⁴⁵ *Ibidem*.

⁴⁶ *Ivi*, p. 8.

rience and think of the single experiences as pieces of an «experience überhaupt» conceived for the sake of a disembodied subject who knows reality as a spectator, but has no interaction with it. It follows that «Kantianism, then, naturally invoked universal bonds to restore objectivity. But, in doing so, it accepted the particularism of experience and proceeded to supplement it from non-empirical sources»⁴⁷. Pragmatism moves of course against this solution. However, it should be noted that, in doing so, it agrees with Kant at least on the criticism of empiricist sensationalism. Pragmatism could be then understood as an advanced form of critical philosophy, which reaffirms the claim for a genuine understanding of human experience, trying to deprive its earlier version (Kantianism) of its idealistic stances. Dewey writes in a similar vein:

When professed idealism turns out to be a narrow pragmatism – narrow because taking for granted the finality of ends determined by historic conditions – the time has arrived for a pragmatism which shall be empirically idealistic, proclaiming the essential connexion of intelligence with unachieved future – with possibilities involving a transfiguration⁴⁸.

What is the philosophical issue at stake in this criticism of idealism? It is exactly the belief that the mental representation of objects can supply an ultimate and totally trustworthy experience of reality. On the contrary, Dewey believes that the «point that occurs to mind most readily is that philosophy will have to surrender all pretension to be peculiarly concerned with ultimate reality, or with reality as a complete (i.e., completed) whole: with the real object»⁴⁹. However, Kant also believes it is impossible to grasp the ultimate sense of reality by empirical means. Consequently, he introduces the distinction between phenomenon and noumenon. Consequently, Dewey could not criticize Kant for an alleged attempt of reducing reality to its mental representation. The former could only criticize the latter for having explained the open and emendable character of experience by claiming for the possibility of thinking, but not knowing, reality as a whole in our minds. In short, we should leave also the concept of noumenon, in order to have a fully genuine account of the way

⁴⁷ *Ibidem*.

⁴⁸ *Ivi*, p. 13.

⁴⁹ *Ivi*, pp. 24-25.

we have experiences. However, this is what Charles S. Peirce aims at doing, claiming that his project keeps the critical stance of Kantian philosophy, depriving it from its idealistic aspects⁵⁰.

Not only does Dewey move in perfect continuity with this project, but he also adds an element to it, having especially in mind the dynamic of our experiences. He believes in fact, in a perfectly Darwinian mood, that «as life requires the fitness of the environment to the organic functions, adjustment to the environment means not the passive acceptance of the latter, but acting so that the environment changes take a certain turn»⁵¹. Consequently, experience is «primarily a process of undergoing: a process of standing something; of suffering and passion, of affection, in the literal sense of these words»⁵². The idealistic concept of an experience “in general” must be replaced by the pragmatist account of experience as an interaction with the environment, by which only the needs of life can be fulfilled. The continuity of experience is actually the continuity of life. We have experiences as far as we must feed this continuity through our own action and engagement. Having experiences highlights the dynamical character of our interactions with the environment, which need to be configured and organized: experience, «in other words, is a matter of simultaneous doings and undergoings. Our undergoings are experiments in varying the course of events; our active tryings are trials and tests of ourselves»⁵³. Our life interactions have a creative import, which aesthetic experiences put on display. In *Art as Experience*, Dewey writes in fact: «In short, art, in its form, unites the very same relation of doing and undergoing, outgoing and incoming energy, that makes an experience to be an experience»⁵⁴. According to Dewey, life interactions take a sort of «rhythm»⁵⁵ through the aesthetic experience.

4.4 Dewey and Schiller

In the *Aesthetic Education*, Schiller does not consider the organization

⁵⁰ See D. Cecchi, *Il continuo e il discreto*, cit., ch. 1.

⁵¹ J. Dewey, *The Need for a Recovery of Philosophy*, cit., p. 4.

⁵² *Ibidem*.

⁵³ Ivi, p. 5.

⁵⁴ J. Dewey, *Art as Experience*, cit., p. 50.

⁵⁵ Ivi, p. 25.

of life as a “rhythm” that becomes clear through an aesthetic display; he rather speaks of a “play”. In a famous passage, he states that «man should *only play* with beauty, and he should play *only with beauty*. And so at long last, to state it clearly and completely: man plays only when he is a man in the full sense of the word, and he is only a complete man when he plays»⁵⁶. Schiller is not just arguing that we are free from the burden of everyday life in the aesthetic experience: otherwise, the following statement that man is «only a complete man when he plays», and also when he creates or has aesthetic experiences, would sound senseless as far as we have previously understood the playfulness of aesthetic experience in the acceptance of a moment of leisure. On the contrary, Schiller believes the aesthetic to be a fundamental phase of reorganization of life energies. As we have seen above, Dewey recognizes this peculiar trait of Schiller’s aesthetics as far as he points out to the latter’s idea of a dialectic lying behind aesthetic experiences, between a «material impulse» (*Stofftrieb*) and a «formal impulse» (*Formtrieb*). A «playful impulse» (*Spieltrieb*) harmonizes the «reciprocity» (*Wechselwirkung*) of the two previous impulses⁵⁷.

Notably, *Wechselwirkung* is a hardly translatable word as far as it designates a mutual action or effect of two poles or living forces, rather than the fixed position of two correlated terms. Schiller’s claim is anthropological⁵⁸: he is not arguing just how the aesthetic works. He actually describes how life, individual and collective, develops in its different forms: aesthetic, as well as ethical and political. Life forces being not harmonized by play result into an unaccomplished existence. When Schiller applies his theory of the life impulses to society, he distinguishes for instance between “barbarian” societies, in which the formal impulse prevails on the material one, and “savage” societies, in which the material prevails on the formal. The barbarians only recognize the power of laws, to the extent of entirely identifying their culture with the formal character of laws. However, once «man becomes form, then he *has no form*»⁵⁹. The savages, on the contrary, only recognize the force of nature, which endlessly changes, to the extent of identifying their condition with this continuous change: so

⁵⁶ F. Schiller, *op. cit.*, pp. 56-57.

⁵⁷ Ivi, pp. 50-51.

⁵⁸ See G. Pinna, *Introduzione a Schiller*, Laterza, Roma-Bari 2012.

⁵⁹ F. Schiller, *op. cit.*, p. 49.

the savage «never becomes *something other*; and so in each case he is *neither the one nor the other*, and consequently a nonentity»⁶⁰. Schiller's perspective does not apply only to those societies of the past, which were either barbarian or savage. He is making a criticism of modernity with its industrial and political revolution, first of all the French Revolution that started only few years before he wrote these *Letters*⁶¹. In modern societies, we witness the opposition of elites fixed in their formal condition, and the working class confined within the narrow boundaries of their sensible life, and destined to mechanical and repetitive activities⁶². Aesthetic experiences emphasize the process of harmonizing the different life impulses: they are an exemplary embodiment of form in matter, and shaping of matter by form. Play is the process by form becomes formative, and matter receptive, to the extent of exchanging their roles: form is also receptive to nature of matter, as well as matter displays its implicit formative features. Playing is therefore a process of interplay. As far as aesthetic experiences exemplarily show an anthropological need, they are not just a kind of leisure: they entail an education to humanity.

Needless to say, Schiller's aesthetic education has more than one point of contact with Dewey's aesthetics. Both thinkers believe the aesthetic to be a phase of interplay of life energies, in order to display a higher or more refined organization of life. They also highlight the social consequences of aesthetics as far as Dewey, life Schiller, is concerned with the standardization of experience due to the industrialization of production and consume. The American philosopher also believes the communication in the public sphere would enjoy a significant advancement by the emulation of art. For both of them, modernity should turn away from the mass form of life it created, and find an imaginary rescue in an aestheticized world of pure forms. On the contrary, they believe our everyday life should be transformed in accordance with an aesthetic ideal⁶³. Dewey's way to an inclusive and educational idea of art and aesthetic experience also helps us

⁶⁰ Ivi, p. 47.

⁶¹ See A. Ardivino-P. Montani-G. Pinna (eds.), *Schiller e il progetto della modernità*, Carocci, Roma 2006.

⁶² Herbert Marcuse develops this stance in a Marxist vein: see H. Marcuse, *The Aesthetic Dimension*, Beacon Press, Boston 1979.

⁶³ On Dewey and his non-elitist conception of aesthetic experience, see J.-P. Cometti, *La force d'un malentendu*, Questions Théoriques, Paris 2009; R. Dreon, *Fuori dalla torre d'avorio*, Marietti, Genova 2012.

recover a Kantian aspect, which he unexpectedly shares with Schiller, and even affirms more strongly than the latter. Aesthetic experience exemplarily displays traits that belong to ordinary experience. The latter is our principal strategy for controlling and designing our lives according to a design of our needs and purposes:

Success and failure – he writes in *The Need for a Recovery of Philosophy* – are the primary “categories” of life; achieving of good and averting of ill are its supreme interests; hope and anxiety (which are not self-enclosed state of feeling, but active attitudes of welcome and wariness) are dominant qualities of experience⁶⁴.

He uses the categories of “success” and “failure”. Pleasure and pain could suggest indeed a “sensationalist” and “particularist” concept of life, focused on the single impressions we have of the environment. On the contrary, we have to consider how life can develop into a life project, though open to contingency, by the effort of our experiences and interaction with the environment itself⁶⁵. He believes so that anticipation «is therefore more primary than recollection; projection than summoning the past; the prospective than the retrospective»⁶⁶. However, anticipation is one of the tasks of which imagination is charged in the schematism of the concepts of understanding throughout experience, in Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason*. And the idea of an interplay of the material impulse with the formal in Schiller’s *Aesthetic Education* is but the anthropological reformulation of Kant’s idea of a “free play” of imagination and understanding in the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*⁶⁷. In this free play, imagination is not charged of schematizing specific concepts in contingent experiences, but is able to experiment the scope of their reference to possible experiences. The pleasure we take in the beautiful object points out to the possibility of extending the horizon of our knowledge of reality. From Schiller’s anthropological point of view, this process of extending the knowledgeability of reality implies an education of humanity: it engages the single individual as well as mankind at large. It stands for the possibility of imagining education as both an individual and

⁶⁴ J. Dewey, *The Need for a Recovery of Philosophy*, cit., p. 6.

⁶⁵ For a consideration of the possibility of naturalizing the aesthetic after Dewey, see G. Matteucci, *Estetica e natura umana*, Carocci, Roma 2019.

⁶⁶ *Ibidem*.

⁶⁷ See I. Kant, *op. cit.* (§ 9).

a collective engagement. Dewey's interest for aesthetics shares the same stance, and he reconsiders it in the light of the scientific and social situation of his times.

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