

## AESTHETIC EXPERIENCE

### – A PRAGMATIST PERSPECTIVE IN COGNITIVE AESTHETICS

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**ABSTRACT:** In the present paper, I analyse the connections between cognition and aesthetic experience according to two major philosophical paradigms: respectively, the aesthetic theory of Immanuel Kant and that of John Dewey. According to Kant's Third Critique, aesthetic judgment – the exemplary form of reflecting judgment – is indirectly, but significantly, related to cognition. Aesthetic judgments are not cognitive judgments in the narrow sense of the term, since the standard of taste does not depend on any objective property of the object. However, the feeling of pleasure enacted by the beauty of the object points out to an enhancement of our cognitive faculties, namely understanding and imagination – an enhancement qualified by Kant as a "free play" of those faculties.

In *Experience and Nature* (1925-1929) and then in *Art as Experience* (1934), John Dewey defended a more advanced paradigm of the relationship between aesthetic experience and cognition. According to Dewey, the aesthetic quality present in every experience does not point out to a pure reflective attitude, but constitutes a dynamic organizing principle of experience. Aesthetic experiences narrowly construed – art, beauty and so on – show the constitutively interactive character of every human cognition: while getting cognition of an object, humans interact with the surrounding environment, and so design new 'cognitive habitats' for their lives.

#### Introductory remarks

The present paper proceeds as follows. After these introductory remarks, I briefly analyse the relationship between cognition and aesthetic experience, according to five specific issues: a) the cognitive import of aesthetic experience (Schaeffer's hypothesis); b) the convergence of practical and reflective elements in aesthetic experience (Pepper's hypothesis); c) cognition and aesthetic experience in Kant; d) cognition and aesthetic experience in Dewey; e) cognition and aesthetic experience according to a 'crossing dialogue' between Kant and Dewey.

Kant's and Dewey's different accounts of aesthetic experience are too wide to be exhaustively discussed here. My purpose is only to emphasize the relationship of aesthetic experience to cognition – a topic which is

not new in Kant-studies and has some degree of originality for Dewey-studies. In the last forty years, critics increasingly recognized that Kant's account of aesthetic experience can be understood only in the perspective of a strong relationship to his theory of knowledge. The Critique of Judgment, as argues Emilio Garroni in *Estetica ed epistemologia* (1976), recovers and enlarges Kant's discourse about the status of scientific knowledge, first discussed in the Critique of the Pure Reason. Recently, this issue has been newly proposed by a volume edited by Rebecca Kukla, with contributions by some of the most illustrious English-speaking Kantian scholars, as well as by a paper, oriented to an encounter between Kant's aesthetic reformulation of schematism and cognitive sciences, by Linda Palmer. In Italy, let us think only to the works of Fabrizio Desideri on the Kantian notion of *reflektierende Wahrnehmung*, or those of Pietro Montani on the "free schematism" of the power of judgment as a form of "technical schematism".

From Dewey's point of view, the issue is perhaps less evident, since the most recent criticism focused more on the "everyday aesthetics" character of his aesthetic theory (Cometti 2009; Cometti, Matteucci 2015; Dreon 2012; Dreon, Goldoni, Shusterman 2012; Shusterman 1992), on the relationship between biology and aesthetics (Ottobre 2012), or in that among psychology, education and aesthetic experience (Alexander 1987). What seems to me as still unexplored, and which I shall focus on, is the nature of cognition as *expertise*, as emerges by comparing *Art as Experience* and *Experience, Nature and Art*. Dewey's contribution in that sense is extremely important because it allows us to enlarge our conception of cognition, which is still in Kant strongly influenced by the model of scientific cognition, in order to understand how actually works human cognition as a *power of interaction* with environment – a conception of cognition which matches much better with the purpose of investigating human cognition within the framework of the cognition sciences and of evolutionary anthropology (Sterelny 2014; Tomasello 2014).

Let me restate the hypothesis formulated by Jean-Marie Schaeffer about the cognitive import of aesthetic experience in his last book *L'expérience esthétique*. Aesthetic experience is neither a non cognitive agency of human behaviour, nor is a special form of cognition, separated from cognition in general. Aesthetic experience is rather a form of *redirecting attention* – which is a kind of primary intentionality, having not a specific object, but being rather oriented to experience in general – towards new possible uses, which appear not “enlisted” in the subject’s cognitive “agenda”. It follows that aesthetic experience does not necessarily designate a special activity, referred as something like an “artworld” – Philosophies of art based on the idea of “artworld”, like those of Danto (1981) and Dickie (1974), reject by the way the very idea that there is any constitutive bound between artworks and aesthetic experience.

Aesthetic experience refers to any possible form of human cognition, in the broad sense of any interaction between nature and the human subject, at the only condition to consider this interaction not for its specific objectives, but for its capability of refreshing the human powers of cognition, namely human attention to the world as place of every possible discovery and invention.

Schaeffer’s hypothesis is quite convincing. It only describes, however, *how* aesthetic experience is able to activate such a complex mechanism, as well as to let it work. But it does not explain *why* human subjects have such a refined power. The kind of “why” I would like to answer to is not of an *ontological* order, but rather of an *epistemological* one. I am interested less in assessing some theses about the *nature* of human beings and more in arguing some hypotheses about the *quality* of human cognition as a performance and a specific attitude.

#### **Cognition and aesthetic experience: reconsidering a relationship**

Aesthetic experience is one of the most influential aesthetic categories, at least since the middle of 19<sup>th</sup> century. It variously describes the way we interact with beautiful or more narrowly artistic objects. As a comprehending category, it was used for describing the role either of the artist (or the author) or the spectator (or the reader), according to different artistic agendas and philosophical paradigms. It helped establishing criteria for making distinctions between natural and artistic beauty, or between different forms of experience – as does Hans Georg Gadamer in his most famous essay, *Wahrheit und Methode* (1960), by arguing his well-known distinction between *Erlebnis* and *Erfahrung*. Aesthetic experience helped also drawing a sharp distinction between ordinary experience and aesthetic objects, or on the contrary to find the inner relations between these two domains of human life.

It is recently emerging the idea that the identity-and-difference between aesthetic experience and cognition should be now reconsidered. In his last essay, *L'expérience esthétique* (2015), Jean-Marie Schaeffer suggests the urgency of such an enterprise because of the new problems advanced by cognitive sciences. Cognitive sciences work with a very enlarged notion of cognition, which entails both rational and practical cognition, as well as the emotional response connected to them. Within that context, Schaeffer considers aesthetic experience as the enactment of a specific form of intentionality relevant for subjective attention, rather than for the objective representation of cognition.

Schaeffer is aware that his account of aesthetic experience, though presented as a scientific hypothesis, is indebted with some major philosophical accounts. I think in particular to Kant’s *Kritik der Urteilskraft* (1790) and John Dewey’s *Art as Experience* (1934), as well as to the chapter on art and aesthetics of his previous essay *Experience and Nature* (1925; 2<sup>nd</sup> edition: 1929), entitled *Experience, Nature and Art*. Both thinkers give

fundamental contributions to focusing the relationship between cognition and aesthetic experience. By making a confrontation between Kant and Dewey, my purpose is to show that, while scientific descriptions help us accounting for the way human mind works as one has an aesthetic experience, philosophical hypotheses propose explanations for the sense of such a specialized cognitive performance.

In this perspective, reconsidering past paradigms of aesthetic experience is as important as establishing a dialogue between philosophy and the cognitive sciences. I argue that such a dialogue would be impossible without considering the specific issues labelled by philosophical investigation. Philosophical investigation is not relevant just for scientific “meta-theory”: it develops hypotheses on its own. The dialogue between philosophy and science makes sense only in the case that philosophy might reformulates its theoretical questions according to the advancements of scientific research, and science, on its turn, might reframe its research issues being influenced by philosophical reflection. Let us consider the experiments of brain imaging conducted on a subject who is having an aesthetic experience. Those experiments take for granted that we all agree on what is an aesthetic experience – and, above all, on *what kind of cognition it is*.

**Kant and Dewey:  
two defenders of the aesthetic-cognitive relationship?**

While, as we shall see, it is quite evident what relationship Kant recognizes between cognition and aesthetic experience (D’Angelo 2011; Desideri 2011; Garroni 1976; Kukla 2009; Marcucci 1988; Montani 2014; Palmer 2011; Scaravelli 1973), Dewey is usually considered rather as a defender of the relationship between ordinary life and aesthetic experience (Cometti 2009; Cometti, Matteucci 2015; Dreon 2012; Dreon, Goldoni, Shusterman 2012; Shusterman 1992). In the present paper, I consider Dewey’s aesthetics from a different point of view – a point of view which puts in contact Dewey with Kant.

Their respective ideas on aesthetic experiences are presented here as two different but close responses to the naturalized description of aesthetic experience proposed by cognitive sciences and based on brain imaging (Consoli 2010). This argument needs, of course, that we establish a common area of interest between Kant and Dewey, as far as a definition of cognition is concerned. I do not want to argue for the identity between one is able to recognize as cognition according to Kant and what might be defined as “cognitive” in relation to Dewey. Kant has a more rational idea of cognition. If we consider the relationship he establishes between cognition and science, we must consider that his idea of scientific knowledge is based on physics and astronomy, i.e. producing rational frames within one may reconstruct the order of the Universe. In Dewey cognition cannot be separated from practice. As emerges in *Logic. Theory of Inquiry*, scientific cognition deals with a highly controlled interaction with environment, which is distinct from common conducts of life, but does not radically differ from them. In that sense, I argue that the “cognitive fallacy” stated by Dewey is valid only with reference to a narrowly speaking rational cognition, while cognition could be investigated according to an enlarged view, which comprehends all forms of interaction with environment oriented to ways of problem solving.

I argue that, if we look at the Third rather than the First Critique, we could apply this enlarged concept of cognition to Kant, as well as to Dewey. Cognition narrowly construed, that is cognition as stated in the First Critique, is irreducible to this paradigm. Cognition broadly construed, however, that is cognition as stated in the Third Critique, has a larger experiential ground and entails a wider range of interactive attitudes towards nature. Above all, experience, as stated in the Third Critique, foresees the possibility of establishing cognitively undetermined, but highly meaningful, relationships to reality. Aesthetic experience should be considered, then, as a way of refreshing the agency of our cognitive powers – imagination and understanding in

Kant's words. Some interpreters (Desideri 2011; Garroni 1976; Montani 2014; Palmer 2011) recognize that this aspect of the Kantian paradigm of aesthetic experience has an import also for the modern research in the cognitive sciences. And, for us, it overlaps and enriches Dewey's theory of aesthetic experience as interaction with environment.

In that sense, especially if we focus not on their respective epistemologies but on their aesthetic theories, we must recognize that, although maintaining different perspectives about the inner nature of cognition, Kant and Dewey share the same idea that we need to think a reflective stage of cognition in general, whose task is to define the relationship between cognition and experience – and for both thinkers this stage is represented by aesthetic experience.

#### **Stephen C. Pepper's hypothesis**

The idea of aesthetics I am defending here must be explained. I am speaking of aesthetics as primarily being a philosophy of art or of beauty. And I also argue that an aesthetic theory, which emphasizes more the nature of experience and cognition than that of the work of art or of beauty, is the kind of aesthetic theory we find both in Kant and Dewey. This idea of aesthetics has many forerunners. I just mention here what argues Stephen C. Pepper in the last chapter of his essay *The Work of Art* (1955). This chapter focuses on Dewey's notion of "fusion" within the analysis of aesthetic experience (Pepper 1955, 159 ff.). What Pepper calls "fusion" is what Dewey preferably calls "consummation". In other words, it is the ability of assembling together the different fragments of an experience, in order to give them a unified sense. Consummation is a quality proper to every experience, if it is *an* experience, as argues Dewey, that is if it fulfils the condition of conveying a sense of the interaction the subject has with the world through it. The consummatory quality present in every experience is, however, emphasized in the aesthetic experience, where the enhancement of our sense of

interaction and mutual exchange with the world is more relevant than the specific cognitive content of experience. Pepper writes:

Fusion then seems to be the state of consciousness to be found *unless* a problematic situation arises forcing discrimination and analysis to avoid pain and frustration. Fusion, accordingly, is not a process added to primitive elements generating a new supervening quality. Rather, analysis is the added process breaking into a primitive fusion generating a discrimination of some elements lying in the fusion. The continuity of life is a gradation of qualitative fusions, here and there broken into by articulated analyses and discriminations wherever practical exigencies require it. (163-164)

Pepper also argues that this concept of "fusion", or "consummation", could be derived from Baumgarten's idea of aesthetic experience as *cognitio sensitiva*. As a matter of common knowledge, Alexander G. Baumgarten is the founder of aesthetics since he is the first philosopher who used the word "aesthetics" (in German *Ästhetik*) to describe the philosophical investigation of beauty and art. He coined this word by deriving it from the Greek word *aisthesis*, which means "sensation", "feeling" and "perception". Baumgarten, who was a follower of Leibniz's Rationalism and a student of the Rationalist philosopher Wolff, compared sensation to rational cognition and considered sensation as a lower degree of cognition. This *cognitio inferior* was, however, necessary in order to pass to the rational ground of cognition, which is to be considered as the only true form of cognition and the *cognitio superior*. The specificity of Baumgarten's contribution is that he is the first thinker who considers the possibility of investigating *cognitio sensitiva* as such. Compared to *cognitio rationalis*, the former is actually "confused", that is irreducible to any rational or intellectual rule, but deserves that the philosopher considers it autonomously and formulates specific issues on it. Though confused, sensitive experience is able, in facts, to appear in its proper "clarity". And for Baumgarten art and beauty are

exemplary cases of sensitive experiences, which manifest the quality of clarity. Here is the reason why Baumgarten puts in relationship the epistemological issue of sensitive cognition and experience with the philosophical question on art and beauty.

Kant's and Dewey's visions on aesthetics are evidently indebted to Baumgarten. Both thinkers, however, argue for a significant difference from Baumgarten's paradigm of aesthetic experience. They do not consider aesthetic experience as the effect of mere collection of sensations. To use Pepper's words, the "fusion" realized through aesthetic experience is not merely *quantitative*, but has a specific *quality*. According to Kant, aesthetic experience deals with the refreshment of our cognitive agency. This refreshment is possible because imagination and understanding, that is the synthesis of perception and the organization of experience into a conceptual framework, enter into a new "disposition" during aesthetic experience. This disposition is described by Kant as the "free play" of those faculties, oriented not a given cognitive matter, but to our cognitive attitude as a whole. The kind of fusion realized deals with the entire life of the mind<sup>1</sup> of the subject. According to Dewey, fusion is realized when all the parts of a single experience enter each other into an organic relationship, which has a consummatory quality and engenders pleasure for this reason. This second kind of fusion deals with the capability of grasping the sense of our single interactions with the world. Both Kant and Dewey introduce, then, significant amendments to Baumgarten's theory of aesthetic experience as "confused cognition".

The way I shall consider here aesthetic experience, referring to Dewey, emphasize the aspect of interaction with environment. Aesthetic experience enhances the vital relationship of the human subject to the world. As a consequence, we cannot consider it, as Dewey seems to suggest, only in relationship to the single aesthetic

experience: consummation has a value for the entire life of the mind. I introduce therefore the issue by making reference to Kant, who emphasizes this aspect. Aesthetic experience is considered then as a particular form of experience, which refreshing our cognitive agency *in general*, enforces our power of interaction with the world. To use Schaeffer's words, our perceptual attention results 'upgraded' as we have an aesthetic experience.

### Aesthetic experience in Kant

Renewing the Italian tradition of Kantian studies, stated by scholars like Luigi Scaravelli, Silvestro Marcucci and above all Emilio Garroni, Paolo D'Angelo argues that we should consider aesthetic experience as an «experience of the non cognitive conditions of experience as such». Aesthetic experience would represent no special area of the life of the mind. It is rather the enactment of a different modality of manifestation of the mental life of the human subject, where the focus is not on the specific objects the subject deals with, but on the way s/he feels and perceives.

As a matter of common knowledge, the task of philosophy, from the point of view of Kantian Criticism, is to establish the "conditions of possibility" of experience and cognition in general. The difference between establishing the conditions of possibility of experience and cognition in general and describing the psychology of cognition can be stated as follows. Let us rather consider first our experience and cognition as such, that is to say *in general*, as the only reliable ground for every investigation that claims to establish a rule for our experience of the world. As a consequence, every agency of the human mind (reason, will, understanding, imagination) has to be investigated according to its specific conditions of possibility, that is to say its possibilities and limits according to the specific objects it is directed to.

<sup>1</sup> For the notion of "life of the mind", see H. Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*, ed. by M. McCarthy, Harcourt, Brace & Jovanovich, New York 1987.

The question about the conditions of possibility of what Kant calls “power of judgment” (*Urteilkraft*) is, however, more complicated than in the previous cases of the Critique of Pure Reason and of the Critique of Practical Reason. In those cases, Criticism “constitutes”, in Kant’s words, determinate objects bound to the relation to specific faculties of the mind: epistemic objects in relation to understanding; free will in relation to reason, considered as ethical deliberation. In other words, mental faculties are considered in an immediate relationship to special areas of human knowledge and action. In the case of *Urteilkraft*, on the contrary, the subject deals with experience “in general” (*überhaupt*). This statement is relevant for the special treatment Kant has of *Urteilkraft*. The power of judgment is, writes Kant:

The power of judgment in general (*überhaupt*) is the faculty for thinking of the particular as contained under the universal. If the universal (the rule, the principle, the law) is given, then the power of judgment, which subsumes the particular under it (even when, as a transcendental power of judgment, it provides the conditions *a priori* in accordance with which alone anything can be subsumed under the universal), is **determining** (*bestimmend*). If, however, only the particular is given, for which the universal is to be found (*wozu sie das Allgemeine finden soll*), then the power of judgment is merely **reflecting** (*bloß reflektierend*). (KU, § IV; CPJ, 66-67)

The power of judgment is not merely a logical faculty of syllogism. If it were so construed, theorizing the existence of the *reflektierende Urteilkraft* would be senseless. There would just be no difference between “subsuming a particular case under a universal rule” and the inferential power of human understanding. In other words, while having an experience, the subject would immediately recognize causal bounds among phenomena. To Kant, the evidence is quite the opposite:

The determining power of judgment under the universal transcendental laws, given by the understanding, merely subsumes; the law is sketched out for it *a priori*, and it is therefore

unnecessary for it to think of a law for itself in order to be able to subordinate the particular in nature to the universal. – But there is such a manifold of forms in nature, as it were so many modifications of the universal transcendental concepts of nature that are left undetermined by those laws that the pure understanding gives *a priori*, since these pertain only to the possibility of a nature (as object of the senses) in general, that there must nevertheless also be laws for it which, as empirical, may indeed be contingent in accordance with the insight of **our** understanding, but which, if they are to be called laws (as is also required by the concept of a nature), must be regarded as necessary on a principle of the unity of the manifold, even if that principle is unknown to us. (KU, § IV; CPJ, 67)

Kant emphasizes that the human subject addresses in principle experience “in general” as the undetermined background of all her/his possible determined experiences. Instead of assuming a metaphysical idea of the order of the world – an idea of “cosmos”, so to say – we must assume that the reflective condition of our mind is the founding principle of our experience and, in a mediated way, of our cognition. Kant’s argument follows what Kant himself states in the First Critique: pure concepts of understanding are the *a priori* condition for determining every possible cognition of given objects. As a consequence, transcendental necessary laws of nature are the directly inferred by transcendental categories – i.e. pure concepts of understanding.

This rational organization of nature would not make sense, unless it refers to the specific and contingent conditions of applications to given objects and particular cases. As stated by Luigi Scaravelli, in order guarantee the application of transcendental concepts to empirical phenomena, Kant must argue for the existence of a “third manifold” – the two first manifolds being the above mentioned transcendental categories, and empirical phenomena. This “third manifold” is the (possible) system of the (empirical) laws of nature, which actually describe particular and contingent cases according to their organization in kinds and species. Kant reconsiders here the possibility of a *teleology of nature*. His system of nature is not speculative – and Rationalist,

as that of Baumgarten. The power of judgment must be therefore considered as an autonomous faculty in the system of mental faculties.

The point is that the principle of such a faculty is radically different than the principles of either the Pure or of the Practical Reason. If it were just the postulate of a real representation of the ends of natural things according to a general rule, this principle would be intellectual. This point contrasts, however, what I said about the status of the Power of Judgment, i.e. that we are unable to immediately reduce the manifold reality of empirical phenomena to concepts, and we need a principle to *orient ourselves through experience*. The principle of *Urteilkraft* cannot be referred to concepts and necessary laws:

The power of judgment thus also has in itself an *a priori* principle for the possibility of nature, though only in a subjective respect, by means of which it prescribes a law, not to nature (as autonomy), but to itself (as heautonomy) for reflection on nature, which one could call the **law of the specification of nature** with regard to its empirical laws, which it does not cognize *a priori* but rather assumes in behalf of an order of nature cognizable for our understanding in the division that it makes of its universal laws when it would subordinate a manifold of particular laws to these. (KU, § V, *CPI*, 72)

Kant calls definitively this principle of judgment *Naturzweckmäßigkeit*, which can be loosely translated as “purposiveness of nature”. Kant, indeed, largely overcomes the traditional conception of teleology. For the reasons mentioned above, the *Naturzweckmäßigkeit* is not a concept, but a *feeling* since it can refer only to situations in which we actually feel a sense of the good organization of nature, its disposition to be experienced and known by human subject, and our disposition as cognitive agents to experience and know it. The harmony of nature is not an idea or a concept the subject may infer from the universal laws that govern the mechanism of nature. Harmony is generated by the feeling of pleasure we have in relationship to specific phenomena.

The question of aesthetic pleasure is not a matter of mere sensitive attractiveness. Aesthetic pleasure is directly engaged in the way cognition is established, since it foresees the orientation through experience in the perspective of defining the concepts necessary to recognize the laws that govern phenomena. As argues Emilio Garroni, aesthetic experience displays a high *heuristic potentiality*: having an experience means to orient oneself through events and facts which might, or might not, have a meaning in relationship to our knowledge. By anticipating the possible meaning of phenomena, aesthetic experience, as Kant says, “quickens” our cognitive powers. This passage is possible because in aesthetic experience we find a relationship between the “disposition” (*Stimmung*) of the inner play among faculties – in particular between understanding and imagination – and “proportion” (*Proportion*) which this cognitive play establishes with a given object through our commitment:

Cognitions and judgments must, together with the conviction that accompanies them, be able to be universally communicated, for otherwise they would have no correspondence with the object; they would all be a merely subjective play of the powers of representations, just as scepticism insists. But if cognitions are to be able to be communicated, then the mental state, i.e., the disposition of the cognitive powers for a cognition in general, and indeed that proportion which is suitable for making cognition out of a representation (whereby an object is given to us) must also be capable of being universally communicated; for without this, as the subjective condition of cognizing, the cognition, as an effect, could not arise. (KU, § 21; *CPI*, 122-123)

#### **Aesthetic experience in Dewey**

In *Art as Experience*, Dewey takes an attitude comparable to what Kant states in the Third Critique. Dewey himself, however, misunderstands the meaning of Kant’s aesthetics. On one hand, Dewey believes that Kant argues for a “contemplative” theory of aesthetic experience; on the other hand, Kant considers the attitude typical of aesthetic experience as being

necessarily characterized by a lack of interest for the concrete reality of the object. Both statements are wrong, if we go back to what argued in the previous paragraph. The *Interesselosigkeit*, stated by Kant with reference to aesthetic experience, emphasizes the reflective and mediated attitude of a kind of experience where the refreshment of the general cognitive agency prevails over the single cognitive enterprise. Neither contemplation nor lack of interest is Kant's focus on aesthetic experience. His focus is rather the primary nature of reflection on experience in general over cognition of given objects.

The following passage, taken from *Art as Experience*, shows how far Dewey shares Kant's theoretical instance on the nature of aesthetic experience:

Thus the non-esthetic lies within two limits. At one pole is the loose succession that does not begin at any particular place and that ends – in the sense of ceasing – at any particular place. At the other is the arrest, constriction, proceeding from parts having only a mechanical connection with one another. There exists so much of one and the other of these two kinds of experience that unconsciously they come to be taken as norms of all experience. Then, when the esthetic appears, it so sharply contrasts with the picture that has been formed of experience, that it is impossible to combine its special qualities with the features of the picture and the esthetic is given an outside place and status. The account that has been given of experience dominantly intellectual and practical is intended to show that there is no such contrast involved in having an experience; that, on the contrary, no experience of whatever sort is a unity unless it has esthetic quality. (*AE*, in *LW* 10, 47)

Dewey's description of the "non-esthetic" echoes Kant's idea of a strong relationship existing between aesthetic experience and the epistemological claim for the necessity of a free orientation through experience – an orientation which prepares the work of cognition, i.e. the recognition of specific causal bounds among phenomena. There are, of course, also differences between Dewey and Kant. Unlike Kant, for instance, Dewey does not theorize a general purposiveness of nature, "as if" (*als ob*) a supersensible intelligence had planned its course.

Although Dewey does not theorize such a teleology, he is nevertheless inspired by William James' "Radical Empiricism". From James, Dewey recovers the idea that cognition is made of "experienced relations". From Peirce's "Pragmaticism", Dewey also recovers the idea of "infinite semiosis": cognition is based in a series of inferences about the object experience, which correspond to semiotic acts of increasing denotation of the object, whose meaning is finally stabilized into a "habit" concerning the use of the corresponding sign (i.e. its name). The semiotic experience stated by Peirce has, then, a pretty heuristic quality, which is confirmed by the importance given to abduction among inferential powers. These sources of Dewey's philosophy, namely of his aesthetics, do not contrast with Kant's account of aesthetic experience. They rather emphasize its anti-metaphysical character, by avoiding any form of teleological framework for experience – and in particular for aesthetic experience (Calcaterra 2011; Cecchi 2014).

The only form of teleology of experience recognized by Dewey concerns the purposiveness of aesthetic experience, taken as a single process, which makes sense of its own course, i.e. has a consummatory quality. In *Experience and Nature*, Dewey describes aesthetic experience as a sort of 'developing expertise'. Dewey believes that we should translate the word "experience" into the Greek word *techne* – which means "art", as well as "technique" or "know-how". This word shows the fundamental understanding of experience by the ancient Greeks. In the *Unfinished Introduction* (1949-1951) to the new edition of *Experience and Nature*, Dewey even establishes an analogy between experience and culture: in this case, experience designates the common ground of knowledge, values and beliefs shared by a community.

We need, however, to retrace Dewey's phenomenology of aesthetic experience, where, as said above, the emphasis is on how we have *an* experience, rather than on how we reframe our life of the mind *through* experience, in order to fully understand the meaning of the aesthetic for him. Experience must be primarily understood as an 'individualizing' process. Only

at the end of this process, experience engenders a meaning, which becomes an integral part of our cultural and cognitive, setting. *Aesthetic experience has the function of emphasizing the organizing process of ordinary experience* – an organizing power which Dewey qualifies as an aesthetic principle of ordinary experience. As a consequence, we are not interested in aesthetic experience because it refers either to beauty or art. This is due to the fact that aesthetic experience emphasizes the *primary cognitive (or aesthetic-cognitive) performance* of experience:

Experience occurs continuously, because the interaction of live creature and environing conditions is involved in the very process of living. Under conditions of resistance and conflict, aspects and elements of the self and the world that are implicated in this interaction qualify experience with emotions and ideas so that conscious intent emerges. Oftentimes, however, the experience has its inchoate. Things are experienced but not in such a way that they are composed into *an* experience. There is distraction and dispersion; what we observe and what we think, what we desire and what we get, are at odds with each other. [...]

In contrast with such experience, we have *an* experience when the material experienced runs its course to fulfilment. Then and then only is it integrated within and demarcated in the general stream of experience from other experiences. A piece of work is finished in a way that is satisfactory; a problem receives its solution; a game is played through; a situation, whether that of eating a meal, playing a game of chess, carrying on a conversation, writing a book, or taking part in a political campaign, is so rounded out that its close is a consummation and not a cessation. Such an experience is a whole and carries with its own individualizing quality and self-sufficiency. It is *an* experience. (*AE*, in *LW* 10, 42)

The peculiar feature of *an* experience is its specifically dynamic organizing quality, which refers to its specific materials and course. It is its *aesthetic quality* because it depends on the subject's active and full commitment in the *sensitive* relationship to the object experienced. "Aesthetic" recovers here, like for Baumgarten and Kant, the sense of "sensitive". Aesthetic categories accordingly take a new meaning than in the

philosophies of art stigmatized by Dewey. Aesthetic pleasure, for instance, is the result of the consummation, the feeling of having *an* (i.e. one organic) experience. Dewey himself overlaps the original sense of the word – "consummation" derives from the Latin *consummatio* and means "fulfilment", "accomplishment" – with the secondary sense of "consume", superimposed to the former. In a nutshell, every organic and organized experience has an aesthetic ground. Every experience is, in principle, aesthetic. Aesthetic experiences narrowly construed emphasize this quality and make us them available for a direct and more intensive perception of this aesthetic ground of experience.

This character of aesthetic experience brought many interpreters to reconsider Dewey's aesthetic theory within different interpretive paradigms: a substantial disappearance of the difference between "ordinary" and "special" (namely aesthetic) experience, where lifestyle, rather than style artistically construed, is at stake (Cometti 2009; Cometti, Matteucci 2015; Dreon 2012; Dreon, Goldoni, Shusterman 2012; Shusterman 1992); a milestone in the dialogue between aesthetics and evolution theory (Ottobre 2012); or a contribution to the revival of "aesthetic education" (Alexander 1987).

#### Dewey and Kant: a crossing dialogue

What I would like to propose is to reconsider Dewey's aesthetic theory from the point of view of its relationship to cognition. Kant's *Kritik der Urteilskraft* constitutes a model for this relationship. The contribution Dewey's aesthetics might give it should be searched in the opportunity of rethinking cognition as a less theoretical and more practical *interaction* with nature. Accordingly, the specificity of aesthetic experience is not only that of refreshing cognitive faculties in the perspective of new possible cognition. As underlines Pietro Montani in his last book, *Tecnologie della sensibilità* (2014), where he attempts, by the way, to establish a relationship between Kant and Dewey, aesthetic experience also supplies the *enrichment of the*

*qualities of experience*, allowing the subject to find a new access into and new possibilities within the concrete material of experience. We should consider, then, the peculiarly *technical* feature of aesthetic experience, while reconsidering the prosecution of the “aesthetic” into the “artistic” as the fulfilment of a process designing new ways of manipulating sense data. But, for this, we need to go back to *Experience and Nature* and to its aesthetic chapter, *Experience, Nature and Art*, where Dewey writes:

Artistic sense [...] grasps tendencies as possibilities; the invitation of these possibilities to perception is more urgent and compelling than that of the given already achieved. While means-consequence relationship is directly sensed, felt, in both appreciation and artistic production, in the former the scale descends upon the side of the attained; in the latter there predominates the invitation of an existent consummation to bring into existence further perceptions. Art in being, the active productive process, may thus be defined as an esthetic perception together with an *operative* perception of the efficiencies of the esthetic object. (EN, in LW 1, 281)

“Fine art”, in a Deweyan perspective, is no longer an activity which pursues the beholder’s contemplation. Art should be rather conceived as a way of *training* the beholder’s perception to the condition of assuming new schemes for interpreting and comprehending reality. It is “aesthetic perception” brought to display its inner “operability”. In other words, it is a way of establishing new technical rules, either for perception or for action. This new task of the so-called “fine arts” has doubtlessly a direct influence on our cognition. Dewey himself recognizes that there is no difference in quality, but only in quantity or in specificity, among art, technique and science. All those activities open the path to different forms of cognition:

Knowledge or science, as a work of art, like any other work of art, confers upon things traits and potentialities which did not *previously* belong to them. (EN, in LW 1, 285)

This state of affairs designs a new horizon of tasks and opportunities for the “fine arts”. Furthermore, a new relationship between artists and the public is to be sketched. In *Individuality and Experience* (1926), for instance, Dewey suggests that art teachers, rather than teaching youth what is art, should assume the role of “masters” who interface with “apprentices”. The passages quoted above from *Experience and Nature* show that this is not a special solution for a specific problem. Dewey has in mind aesthetic experience as a form of “reflective cognition”. But by “reflective cognition” he would not mean the pure refreshment of cognitive faculties, like Kant. It is an enhancement of our cognitive agency *and* an active and productive interaction with the surrounding environment, an activity which concretely foreruns the work of other, more refined, cognitive practices, like science, in order to establish clear and shared experimental criteria. The meaning of what is art changes. Dewey’s words describe better than any other this new function of art:

It 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. The creators of such works of art are entitled, when successful, to the gratitude that we give to inventors of microscopes and microphones; in the end, they open new objects to be observed and enjoyed. (EN, in LW 1, 293)

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