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How to do different things with words

In this paper I am going to sustain that Dewey's approach toward aesthetics can exert a peculiar 'refreshing' effect on traditional analytical debate in philosophy of art. Furthermore it presents some advantages in reference to deeply critical continental approaches toward aesthetic productions such as those of Adorno and Bourdieu.

The thesis will be articulated through a synthetic inquiry into three strictly related concepts, strongly marking out Dewey's distinctive point of view – that is “aesthetic experience”, “aesthetic quality” and “consummation”.

The first one appears far from both traditional continental researches for aesthetic autonomy and from analytic unsuccessful attempts to define art.

The second one is based on the recognition that qualitative aspects are basically parts of our common experiences, are modes of meaning of our environment and can not be reduced to subjective phenomena or restricted to special compartments.

The third one implies the recognition of our aesthetic needs, intended from a nearly anthropological perspective and involves a problematization of our habit to think to consume only in terms of commodification and of confirmation of existing social and economic forces.

My paper's subject should be to identify those underlying features of Dewey's pragmatist aesthetics distinguishing his own approach to this discipline from the other ones.

But even this title – John Dewey's aesthetics - creates some embarrassment.

By at least two and a half centuries we are used to think of aesthetics as a specific philosophic discipline which is mainly characterized by its exclusions. Aesthetics was defined as sensitive cognition in opposition to intellectual knowledge, as subjective or intersubjective judgement, unable to capture any objective knowledge, as philosophy of art and not about nature, as contemplation of pure forms, detached from any practical interests. Above all, the birth of aesthetics as a specific discipline in Western culture has historically been linked to the affirmation in Europe and then in Northern America of a unitary system of the arts, that is to the emergence of a substantive idea of Art, beginning with a capital A and as singular noun – that is to a process intimately related to the

radical affirmation of artistic autonomy from other areas of human activities.¹ Therefore, we should at least try to reduce the embarrassment talking about an inclusive aesthetics in Dewey's case. I say 'inclusive' because on the one hand, its central instance is to find the aesthetic in experience, rooting it in the structural biological dependence of human organisms from the natural and social environment of which they are part. At the same time his approach is characterized by an ethical and political instance, as I shall argue, aiming to recover the aesthetic aspects of our ordinary practices from which they have been removed. On the other hand, Dewey proposes a broad concept of art, because it is understood as every "mode of activity that is charged with meanings capable of immediately enjoyed possession" [EN, p.269].²

However, since in the current case it would be too long dealing with these subjects,³ I prefer to limit myself to focus on three words or expressions. They seem to me capable to give a contribution to this conference's aim, that is to identify some specific aspects of pragmatism, distinguishing it from other philosophic traditions. These three words are more or less widely used and discussed in recent and contemporary philosophic debate, but Dewey used them to do very different things from those prevailing in other philosophic reflections.

The first one, which was the subject of a wider debate, is that of 'aesthetic experience'. In Dewey's thought it appears far from both continental researches for aesthetic autonomy and from analytic unsuccessful attempts to define art.

The second one, 'aesthetic' qualities', was broadly discussed in analytic aesthetics, but there are almost no attempt⁴, to compare the term with Dewey's proposals. Dewey's thesis is that we have to assume that qualitative aspects are basically parts of our common experiences, are modes of meaning of our environment and can not be reduced to subjective phenomena or restricted to special compartments.

The third word, 'consummation' or 'consummatory experience', is actually connected to a wider lexical constellation, which includes 'enjoyment', 'satisfaction' and 'fulfillment'. Dewey's pragmatic approach is based on the the recognition of our aesthetic needs, intended from a nearly anthropological perspective and involves a problematization of our habit to think to consume only in terms of commodification and of confirmation of existing social and economic forces.

¹ Cfr. P.O.Kristeller, *The modern system of the arts: A study in the history of aesthetics, part I* in *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 12/4, 1951, pp.496-527 and *The modern system of the arts: A study in the history of aesthetics, part II*, 13/1, 1952, pp.17-46.

² J.Dewey, *Experience and Nature, Volume 1:1925 of The Later Works, 1925-1953*, Southern Illinois University Press, Carbondale & Edwardsville 1988, [EN].

³ I discussed these aspects of Dewey's thought in *Fuori dalla torre d'avorio. L'estetica inclusiva di John Dewey oggi*, Marietti 1821, Genova-Milano 2012.

⁴ Except for some observations in H.Putnam, *The Threefold Cord: Mind, Body, and World*, Columbia U.P., New York 1999.

- I. Let's begin with the first formula, that is with 'aesthetic experience'. And I begin arguing that, if we want to understand what Dewey meant talking about aesthetic experience or better talking about those aesthetic aspects that are inherent to our experiences, we have not to refer to Monroe Beardsley's definition. Rather, we should read again George Mead's interpretation, we can find in a brief but significant essay published in 1926, *The Nature of Aesthetic Experience* – a text which was written under the explicit influence of Dewey's *Experience and Nature*.⁵

The problem with Beardsley is that the philosopher actually used some indications proposed by Dewey in *Art as Experience* in order to define an alleged "aesthetic value". But in Dewey's book these traits are meant to characterize what he called "an experience", that is an interaction which is marked out from most comings and goings of our environmental exchanges: it can be eminently artistic or peculiarly aesthetic, but it refers more generally to every kind of experience which comes to its consummation. However, Beardley's displacement can be understood as an answer to the central problem of defining the concept of art, which became urgent with Morris Weitz's famous article, dealing with the possibility of defining art after Wittgenstein and the known results of his *Philosophical Researches*.⁶

According to Beardsley the common feature characterizing the class of objects we call works of art would consist in their ability to generate an aesthetic experience.

Well, in order to explain what such a peculiar experience should be, Beardsley expressly refers to Dewey (surprisingly drawing him close to Kant!), recovering some of the underlying features the American pragmatist pointed out as characterizing a complete experience, marked out from the continuous, habitual and often inconclusive flow of our interactions with the environment. The phenomenological relief and the special awareness, the standing out of an experience in your memory or in your imagination, become the peculiar attention aroused by a piece of art capturing your aesthetic attention or causing an aesthetic experience. The vital intensification or the enhancement of meaningful exchanges with the environment turn into the intensity of an artistic experience or into the peculiar kind of concentration inspired by works of art. The unitary and consummatory characters of an experience change into the hallmark of that peculiar experience generated by a work of art, able of producing its differentiation from other experiences: "The experience detaches itself, and even insulates itself, from the intrusion of alien elements". [528].

⁵ Cfr. G.Mead, *The Nature of Aesthetic Experience*, in *International Journal of Ethics*, 36/4, 1926, pp.382-393 and M.C.Beardsley, *Aesthetic Experience Regained*, in *The Journal of Aesthetic and Art Criticism*, 28/1, 1969, pp. 3-11, M.C.Beardsley, *Aesthetics. Problems in the Philosophy of Criticism*, Hackett P.C., Inc., Indianapolis-Cambridge 1981, in particular §28., "The Instrumentalist Theory", pp.524-543.

⁶ Cfr. M.Weitz, *The Role of Theory in Aesthetics*, in *The Journal of Aesthetic and Art Criticism*, 15/1, 1956, pp.27-35.

But as Richard Shusterman argued⁷, Dewey's intent was not that of distinguishing art objects and the aesthetic experiences they should generate from other kinds of things and other sorts of human practices. Using some of Dewey's ideas in order to define aesthetic experience and artistic objects, means using a blunt weapon, an unsuitable tool that has been more or less conveniently criticized on several fronts.⁸

On the contrary, the instance guiding Dewey's investigation is just the continuity thesis - probably so familiar as to appear almost naive - that you can not understand the orogenesis if you do not start from mountains rooting in the earth's crust, whose they are integral parts. In other words you can not understand those "refined and intensified forms of experience that are works of art" if you do not start from "everyday events, doings and sufferings, that are universally recognized to constitute experience" [AE, 9].⁹ But the point characterizing Dewey's approach is not only that this continuity is based on the "biological obviousness" of human organisms' structural dependence from the natural and social environment, whose they are basic parts. The point is that his leading scientific questions are also ethical or political ones. Why did so-called works of art turn into "ethereal things", that are separated from everyday practices and constitute the privileged possession or fruition of a few? Why do we consider obvious that there is no enjoyment in work, but that it must essentially be exertion? Why do we also assume that satisfaction in a well done work must remain alien to the logic of scientific research, otherwise it would risk losing its seriousness? Mead focuses his attention on just this kind of issues, insisting on an intentionally broad and hopefully pervasive conception of aesthetic experience. Aesthetic aspects or phases of our ordinary experiences relate to the ability to enjoy immediately, to appreciate what we are doing, avoiding to focus solely on the ends we are pursuing, but enjoying (or suffering, I might add) just the experience constituting a particular practice and the situation in which it occurs – that is by enjoying, in Mead's interpretation, the means themselves, not using them merely instrumentally, being completely taken by the results we have to achieve. Therefore aesthetic appreciation does not concern a particular class of objects, but the aptitude to let enjoyed meaning a part of everyone's life [384]. In aesthetic appreciation we do not almost blindly pursue an end, regardless of the means used, but we enjoy what we are doing, we stop in order to appreciate them, to contemplate what we are doing and undergoing, says Mead. But it is quite clear that the contemplation he is speaking

⁷ R.Shusterman, *The End of Aesthetic Experience*, in *The Journal of Aesthetic and Art Criticism*, 55/1, 1997, pp.29-41.

⁸ Cfr. G.Dickie, *Beardsley's Phantom Aesthetic Experience*, in *The Journal of Philosophy*, 62/5, 1965, pp.129-136 and N.Carroll, *Aesthetic Experience Revisited*, in *British Journal of Aesthetics*, 42/2, 2002, pp.145-168, N.Carroll, *Beyond Aesthetics*, Cambridge U.P., Cambridge 2001, the following chapter: "Four Concept of Aesthetic Experience".

⁹ J.Dewey, *Art as Experience*, Volume 10:1934 di *The Later Works, 1925-1953*, Southern Illinois University Press, Carbondale & Edwardsville 1989, [AE].

about is not a disinterested gaze, turned to a particular set of objects. It is rather an ability to enjoy human activities and such .

Besides in his characterization of aesthetic experience as consummatory experience Mead remained faithful to Dewey. The isolated individual is not a natural fact. It is the result of the competitive conditions of industrial society, and this is true also for the separation of enjoyment from work, and for its reducing it to mere exertion. In the actual situation where division of labour is structural, it seems natural that work results can be enjoyed by a privileged few. But if we recover the basic biological idea that human interdependence is structural, that is it is linked to the largely destitute constitution of our organism - as declared in *Human Nature and Conduct*¹⁰-, then it is evident that "shared experience is the greatest of human goods" and enjoying it is a way to enhance living experience itself.

From this point of view the aesthetic attitude appears a structural and healthy attitude, whose the so called fine arts constitute a development, a refinement. But if the aesthetic attitude in contemporary society is separated into a different field, and stripped off from other human practices, "the thirst of enjoyment is still there" [387] and will look elsewhere for other possible satisfactions. In this perspective, the celebration of great artists can become a mere compensatory enjoyment for the absence of other consummatory experiences in our ordinary life.

It is true, however, that in *Art as Experience* - that Mead could not have read when he wrote this paper - Dewey poses the problem of distinguishing, even if on the background of a basic continuity, between what is eminently artistic from the aesthetic, meant as a "primary phase in experience." Dewey's answer is achieved through the concept of having an experience that stands out in comparison to the usual and often inconclusive comings and goings with the world. But it is an answer that is explicitly based on degree or on size differences. It is certainly an unsuccessful response if it is interpreted to draw a definite distinction between art and non-art, because it admittedly applies to reading a novel, to confident participation in an election campaign, to a dinner with an ancient friend or to a struggle with one's lover.¹¹

But the point is still that Dewey do not want simply to describe a state of affairs. He is much more interested in the question asking what can we do, even on a philosophical level:

it is safe to say that a philosophy of art is sterilized unless it makes us aware of the function of art in relation to other modes of experience, and unless it indicates why this function is so inadequately realized, and

¹⁰ J.Dewey, *Human Nature and Conduct, Volume 14 di The Middle Works, 1899-1924*, Southern Illinois University Press, Carbondale & Edwardsville 1988, [HNC].

¹¹ Cfr. J.Kaminsky, *Dewey's Concept of an Experience*, in *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 17/3, 1957, pp.316-330 and to D.C.Mathur, *A Note on the Concept of "Consummatory Experience" in Dewey's Aesthetics*, 63/9, 1966, pp.225-231.

unless it suggests the conditions under which the office would be successfully performed. [AE, 17]

In my opinion this is the aspect qualifying Dewey's 'pragmatic' aesthetic. In this perspective it appears fully consistent with Pierce's thesis that the intellectual scope or the meaning of a theory must be measured against the effects that it is able to achieve in our life conduct.¹²

II. I am going to say now a few words about the theme of 'aesthetic qualities', a term that significantly appears before *Art as Experience*, already in *Experience and Nature*, where it plays a basic role in Dewey's conception of experience. On the other side, the analytical discussion on the alleged aesthetic qualities was extensive and articulated and led to the introduction of the notion of aesthetic supervenience or emergentism. The major contributions are those by Frank Sibley, first, and by Jerrold Levinson, later.¹³

In a preliminary survey of this debate issues at stake seem to relate and not to relate to the same things. I mean that both Dewey and the two mentioned authors often propose a number of adjectives to illustrate what is meant by aesthetic qualities, in the absence of criteria of definition and, above all, their proposed lists appear almost partially analogous. Dewey says that in our continuous relations with our environment, things are naturally perceived as "poignant, tragic, beautiful, humorous, settled, disturbed, comfortable, annoying, barren, harsh, consoling, splendid, fearful" [EN, 82]. In *Being Realistic About Aesthetic Properties* Levinson provides a varied list of aesthetic attributes, he distinguishes according to their greater or lesser evaluative force. They range from "striking, splendid, excellent, miserable" to "balanced, chaotic, unified" and "melancholy, anguished, cheerful," to "graceful, gaudy, garish" [351-352].

But it is evident that while for the American pragmatist the point was to detect a basic structure of our interactions with the environment on which we depend - and, I would add, a basic trait of the common language in which we move -, Sibley's and Levinson's main field of investigation is the art critic's vocabulary. Besides their most important problem is that underlying our modern aesthetic

¹² Cfr. J.P.Cometti, *Qu'est-ce que le pragmatisme?*, Gallimard, Paris 2010 p.18. Thomas Alexander expressed some doubts in defining Dewey's aesthetic as 'pragmatist', because of this expression little presence in AE (cfr. also R. Shusterman in his rejoinder to the Symposium dedicated to its *Pragmatic Aesthetics* in *The European Journal of Pragmatism and American Philosophy*, 2012). However this expression seems to me appropriate for the previous indicated reasons. But see also the following pages for further considerations.

¹³ Cfr. F.Sibley, *Aesthetic Concepts*, in *The Philosophical Review*, 68/4, 1959, pp.421-450, F.Sibley, *Aesthetics and Nonaesthetics*, in *The Philosophical Review*, 74/2, 1965, pp.135-159, J.Levinson, *Aesthetic Supervenience*, in *Music, Art & Metaphysics. Essays in Philosophical Aesthetics*, Oxford UP, Oxford-New-York 2011, pp.134-158, J.Levinson, *Being Realistic about Aesthetic Properties*, in *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 52/3, 1994, pp.351-354, J.Levinson, *Aesthetic properties, evaluative force, and difference of sensibility*, in E.Brady, J.Levinson (ed.), *Aesthetic Concepts: Essays After Sibley*, Clarendon Press, Oxford 2001, pp.61-80, J.Levinson, *What are aesthetic properties?*, in *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, suppl. Vol.79, 2005, pp.211-227.

tradition, that is the possibility or the impossibility of justifying our judgements about works of art, eventually finding any realistic or subjective bases for supporting them. I shall argue, however that Dewey's reflections can be useful not in resolving difficulties in the analytical debate, but in resetting the terms of the debate itself.

I broadly summarize some basic elements of the analytical debate on aesthetic qualities.

1. First of all, both authors presents what should be meant as aesthetic concepts, qualities, judgements or expressions (Sibley) or as aesthetic attributes and properties (Levinson) by means of lists of examples such as those mentioned above. If Levinson declares he does not pose the question of "what counts as an aesthetic attribute" (AS, 134), Sibley says that it is not possible to define it rigorously, adding that he believes there is "no need to defend the distinction" (AN, 135). According to him it is quite clear from our using these kind of words that when we say that something is "large, circular, green, slow, or monosyllabic" (ibid.), we are not formulating aesthetic judgements (!), while when we say that something is "graceful, dainty, or garish , or that a work of art is balanced, moving, or powerful" we are expressing aesthetic judgements. The qualities which are expressed in this second set of cases would imply "an exercise of aesthetic sensitivity or perceptiveness", an exercise in taste. Non aesthetic judgements are based on "natural, observable, perceptual, physical, objective and neutral" qualities (although Sibley declared his dissatisfaction about all these terms to illustrate the distinction he aims to point at, AC, 421).

2. Both authors note that terms of this kind are frequently common in ordinary language too, but this kind of occurrence is clearly not the object of their scientific interests. Levinson, in particular, considers this sort of attributes in everyday conversation as ambiguous, because both descriptive aspects and the evaluative ones are typically intertwined in them (see point 4).

3. Sibley argues that there is a dependency relationship of aesthetic from non-aesthetic qualities or that the former are emerging on the latter ones. "Emergence" here means that while there are "non-aesthetic features which serves as conditions for applying aesthetic terms" (AC, 424), however they can not be considered as necessary and sufficient conditions. When I try to justify that a certain sculptural work is harmonious because it presents a good integration between full and empty spaces, the relationship between harmony and integration of solids and voids is not a necessary and sufficient condition, but only characteristic or typical. In other words, there is no predetermined rule for conforming the aesthetic aspect to the non-aesthetic one.

Levinson's basic thesis is that "the aesthetic attributes of an object are supervenient on its nonaesthetic ones" (Levinson, AS, 134), in the sense that non-aesthetic properties of an object

would provide even no negative conditions of government of aesthetic properties. Therefore aesthetic properties are in no way reducible to subvenient properties, that is to perceptive ones, or to subperceptive, microphysical ones.

4. Levinson argues that aesthetic qualities are not inherently evaluative, or at least that it is always possible to distinguish a descriptive component from any attached evaluative connotations of the term (AS), so that we can talk about aesthetic terms that are valuation-added. On this basis, Levinson said later (BR) that the aesthetic attributes should be understood realistically as properties possessed by objects that are judged "striking", "splendid", or "chaotic". They have not to be interpreted idealistically, as if the judging subject would project subjective attributions on what he is judging.

I could now propose some quotations from Dewey's work on this subject, but ,at the risk of running into some simplification, I will try to identify some traits, distinguish his divergent setting.

1. First of all, both in EN and in AE Dewey is talking about experience in general, that is about continuous exchanges taking place between human organisms and the natural and social environment, on which their survival depends at all levels.¹⁴ He is obviously not talking about specific artistic practices, not about the vocabulary adopted by the art critic, but also from a careful observer. Well, at this level aesthetic qualities are clearly primary or basic, not supervenient on supposed mere perceptual or pure physical properties. Because our survival depends radically on the environment we belong to, including other individuals from whom we receive nourishment and protection from birth [HNC], it is simply inevitable that the environment itself has an immediate impact on us, and that situations in which we find ourselves in constant interaction with it are perceived as friendly or dangerous, as favourable or harmful, as sweet and comforting or hostile and disturbing or as embarrassing and annoying. For this reason, before you can postpone this impact, before you can plan or realize new strategies, using available elements in a certain situation as means in view of further aims, you feel these situations for what they do directly on you, against you or on your behalf. It is properly this aspect that Dewey identifies as the aesthetic quality of and in experience.
2. Aesthetic qualities are not descriptive and neutral, but already significant of the way in which our exchanges with the environment are carrying on. In other words, they imply a primitive, not cognitive but rather affective form of evaluation. This is exactly Dewey's

¹⁴ J.P.Cometti helped me in recognizing Darwin's deep influence on Dewey, that has to be understood neither reductionistically nor deterministically, nor teleologically. The basic point is not to start with entities intended as fully provided for their properties, but thinking to the emergence of certain characters from the organism's interactions with its environment. I would add that these characters are not to be understood as a set of properties, but as answer modalities, as behavioural habits.

point when he says that "Even such words as long and short, solid and hollow, still carry to all but those who are intellectually specialized, a moral and emotional connotation". Our immediate experience has a sort of proto-evaluative extent, it implies a rejection or an acceptance, a repulsion or an approval.

3. In this context, even the alleged mere sensory or pure physically recording the situation appears as an abstraction. First of all, I feel a certain situation as warm and friendly, for example, and then, returning analytically on the immediate experience, I can distinguish some aspects I relate to specific perceptual channels or I can investigate the physical or microphysical structure of the involved objects. But it deals with the results of further operations, or of new experiences distinguishing the different phases of a past experience to solve a problematic or an indeterminate situation.¹⁵

4. It should also be recognized that when I feel a certain natural or social environment as hostile or comfortable, I am not aware of this in the sense of a cognitive content: first of all I experience something, I feel it and then I can know it explicitly or reconsider it analytically and reflexively, but the point is that knowledge is not the only and the first game in town. For this reason Dewey constantly underlies that as long as our exchanges proceed normally, without problems arising, "immediate qualities, sensory and significant [...] since they are *had* there is no need to *know* them" [EN, 202]. He always thundered against the so-called intellectual fallacy of providing interpretations of experience in exclusively or predominantly cognitive terms.¹⁶

5. In philosophical discourse it is customary to speak about aesthetic qualities, adopting the noun. But Dewey, who was very attentive to ordinary language habits, notes that in order to say how we feel the way or the tone of a certain interaction between our organism and its environment, we often use adjectives or adverbs. Life circumstances can be sweet or bitter, and this sort of affective tone tends to guide our behaviour, but can be revised and correct when things do not work. But there is neither abstract nor material entities as sweetness or bitterness, as harmony or dissonance we could assign to life circumstances.

6. This last remark brings me to my final point. It could be argued that, if aesthetic qualities have neither stable nor regular correlations with the alleged physical or sensory substrate supporting them, then they are subjective - as are the secondary qualities of our modern tradition. It seems that there is no way out of the alternative between subjectivist idealism and realism. But Dewey turns upside down the terms of the problem arguing that when I feel a certain situation as difficult or a

¹⁵ R. Bernstein in his *Dewey's Metaphysics of Experience* (in *The Journal of Philosophy*, 58/1, 1961, pp.5-14) observes that in Dewey "qualities are not limited to those which have been called sense qualities, or to primary and secondary qualities. There are tertiary qualities which are directly felt" (p.7).

¹⁶ Cfr. R. Bernstein (op. cit), insisting on this aspect (p.6).

piece of music as disturbing, I am neither finding a property of the situation or of the song, nor I am subjectively projecting my private impressions on the objects I am trying to cope. I am rather feeling a 'real' character of the ongoing relation, which both tells me something of the environment I am facing and guides my behaviour in it. And to support this kind of non-dualistic position, Dewey has no need to be a pseudo-idealistic philosopher (see Bernstein's criticism), he rather proposes a form of Darwinian naturalism and of Jamesian empiricism.

Experience is neither the reign of the subject nor objective reality. It is the open result of reciprocal exchange between organisms and their environment, which both contribute to make the world what it is, to determine and modify it, but no activity can be considered as the final one, able to completely provide the world for all its supposed properties.¹⁷

III. I come now to the last part of my report, which is going to be dedicated to the theme of "consummatory experience", or to the "consummatory phase" of experience, with particular reference to the philosophical issue of enjoyment.

I begin with a brief personal note, based on a misunderstanding or better on an ambiguity in the first Italian translation of *Art as Experience* and of *Experience and Nature* - a misunderstanding that is revealing of the pre-eminence of a certain ascetic trend in aesthetic tradition. In the two translations by Granese and Bairati "consummation" is expressed with "consumo", that is with "consume" and "consummatory experience" with "esperienza consumatoria", that is with "consuming experience".¹⁸ I confess that when I was reading these translations for the first time I was upset as, I imagine, every philosopher trained in the continental tradition. This embarrassment arises in front of a thinker who seems to argue that consume has been discovered by human being before their identifying what is good and preparing the means to achieve it (EN, 75), or that what does mark off a certain experience from most inconclusive coming and going with our environment is represented by arriving at a form of consume. Besides putting together eminently artistic experience with consume causes immediately a pseudo-instinctive reaction in the standard European philosopher, because a strong suspect arises you are proposing a new version of artistic enslavement to consume, confirming culture translation into uncritical cultural industry.¹⁹

But in Dewey's writings "consummation" and "consummatory experience" have positive value, as

¹⁷ On the reality of relations see H. James, *A World of Pure Experience* in *Essays in Radical Empiricism*, ..

¹⁸ In his new translation of *Art as Experience* Giovanni Matteucci choose "perfezionamento" for translating "consummation", that is better connected to "fulfillment", "compimento" in Italian, used very often by Dewey in related sentences.

¹⁹ For this characteristic European attitude see H.R. Jauss, *Ästhetische Erfahrung und literarische Hermeneutik*, Frankfurt, Suhrkamp, 1982, trad. it., p.95.

confirmed by any English vocabulary. 'Consummate' means to complete, and in this sense, to bring a certain process to its perfection – for example, a marriage with the consummation of the sexual act, a premeditated murder with its realization. 'Consummate' is also used to talk about the culmination of a desire and the correlated efforts made to pursue it, that is to express its realization. But let's go stepwise.

Dewey introduces the term "consummatory experience" in AE to characterize his concept of having an experience, that is in order to distinguish an experience that can be eminently artistic or aesthetic, but more generally stands out from our daily inconclusive experiences, from ordinary interactions that mostly go further, leaving no trace and giving no satisfaction.

Some scholars, such as George Mead, Jack Kaminsky and more in detail D.C. Mathur, have emphasized that the "consummatory phase" of an experience is the one leading it to its fulfillment. Therefore it confers that experience its unity and a certain relief in comparison to most trite routine. In particular, according to Mathur's reconstruction, in experiencing rhythm we could recognize a first phase of immediate quality of experience of doing and undergoing, a further stage of reflective experience, where the involved organism takes awareness of doing and undergoing relations that are taking place, and a final consummatory phase, "which incorporates the significance and meaning of the reflective phase and is thereby rendered more rich and deepened in its immediacy." [226] Mead for his part, as I mentioned earlier, points out that an experience comes to its end not simply when a certain goal has been achieved, but when its pursuing it does not preclude an appreciation of the means by which we tend to realize it, that is when we enjoy instrumental activities for themselves, therefore producing an enhancement of life.

From this point of view it is clear that the distance is again very strong with respect to critical theory typical approach, which is essentially based on a strong dualism between value rationality and instrumental rationality – a dualism Dewey puts constantly into question.

In addition to these comments I would like to remember the natural context in which the American pragmatist introduces the idea of the consummatory phase of an experience.²⁰ Experience in general can be fulfilled because we live in an unstable world and our existence depends constantly on the exchanges occurring in our world. It is quite natural that interactions have a rhythmic flow: organic and environmental energies find moments of instability and disequilibrium and moments of deeper integration or balance. And it is quite natural that human organisms do not only pursue forms of equilibrium with their environment, but also that they tend to enjoy it, as an opportunity for

²⁰ Cfr. Abraham Kaplan's *Introduction* to AE, who notes that Dewey's philosophy of art is near to Aristotle's naturalistic biology. Both scholars intended energy in biological terms, because "Dewey shares with Aristotle (who was also a naturalist in the biologist's sense) an awareness of the primacy in these domains of the developmental psychology of adaptive responses to the environment" (p.xvii).

energetic enhancement. Abstractly denying these aesthetic needs, namely the need to enjoy and expand life interactions, means removing them, displacing them uncritically into other objects and in other forms.

Dewey notes how this point has serious implications especially in the artistic field. Closing the arts in museums, but also making their fruition the prerogative of just a few and precluding their enjoyment by the most, may mean that most people have to search for mere surrogates. From Dewey's perspective these surrogates are not necessarily represented by popular arts, by jazz or by mass media, as in Adorno's lesson. On the contrary, an aesthetic surrogate can be found in any artistic practice if it does not produce an intensification of the vital energies, but their impoverishment, dissipation or consumption.

On the other hand, the typical trend in advanced industrial society of erasing enjoyment from daily work, of denying the opportunity for everybody to enjoy his own work results and the connected sense of fulfillment, produces a tendency to search for those pleasures, habitually denied in routine activities, in private time, that is in time free from work, now felt as mere fatigue. From this point of view and perhaps with some surprise, you can find a certain closeness between Dewey and Herbert Marcuse, and in contrast to Adorno's sentence against any affirmative form of art.

In his essay *The aesthetic dimension* of 1978 there is a close connection between a sort of biological naturalism and the demand for a fairer and happier society for everybody.²¹ Marcuse affirms that "Marxist theory is the less justified one in ignoring the metabolism between humans and nature" and that a classless society firstly requires the recognition of human desires and bodily needs, as well as an "organic development within the historical and social reality"[22]. But we can find some interesting proximities in a paper written many years before, in 1938, entitled (*Notes*) *For a hedonism criticism*.²² Firstly it should be recognized that hedonism was able to denounce the spiritualization and the internalization of happiness, conceived as possible only in a non-material dimension. However the problem is that hedonism has claimed as legitimate access to happiness only a material or bodily approach, without calling into question the assumption of its mostly private, personal and subjective characterization. But if happiness can have no place in relations between men in contemporary society, if happiness can not be shared, "just the consume field remains for happiness" [121]. But it is a sort of consume that searching for satisfying human natural urges to consummation, however produces an impoverishment of living energies rather than

²¹ I refer to the Italian translation of the essay (H.Marcuse, *La dimensione estetica. Verso una critica dell'estetica marxista*, in *La dimensione estetica*, Italian translation edited by Perticari, Guerini e Associati, Milano 2002).

²² H.Marcuse, *Per la critica dell'edonismo*, in *Cultura e società. Saggi di teoria critica 1933-1965*, Italian translation by F.Cerutti, Einaudi, Torino 1969. In the same volume cfr. also *Sul carattere affermativo della cultura*.

their enhancement.²³ From Dewey's point of view in the current world the consummatory phases of experience are transformed into forms of mere consume. But the point is that we should begin to put in question our as consolidated as regressive habit to consider consume only as a form of energy dissipation, which inevitably tends to confirm the existing forms of economic power by means of our most urgent needs immediate satisfaction. On the contrary the consummated experience can intensify life, can fortify vital energies, enriching us with new possibilities and new meanings liable to be immediately enjoyed or suffered.

I conclude my paper with a quotation from Marcuse who can not remain indifferent to the readers of both Dewey's *Ethics*. During his analysis of both emancipatory and regressive aspects of hedonism, the German philosopher asks:

[..] Does not happiness, which implies the need to intensify itself and last, request that isolation of individuals, reification of human relations, accidental nature of satisfaction should be removed, so that happiness can be compatible with the truth? [121]

²³ Cfr. H.Marcuse, *Eros e civiltà*, edited by G.Jervis, Einaudi, Torino 1964: "In a genuine human civilization human existence will be more play than exertion and man will live more in a state of expansive freedom than under necessary limits"(p.207).