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Art as Occupations

Two Neglected Roots of John Dewey's Aesthetics¹

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Abstract

Our purpose in this paper is to analyze two neglected roots of Dewey's aesthetics: his *fragmentary* or *piecemeal* aesthetics and its links with education. Bearing this in mind, we put forward a twofold hypothesis. Firstly, that there is a link between this fragmentary aesthetics and education, which has neither been clearly established by Dewey nor systematically examined in the literature. Secondly, that some of Dewey's educational conceptions -particularly the coherent articulation of occupations, art teaching and overcoming of the vocational-humanistic education dichotomy- are essential to a reevaluation of his aesthetics from a contemporary perspective.

Keywords

DEWEY'S FRAGMENTARY AESTHETICS, DEWEY AND EDUCATION,
ALBERT C. BARNES, BARNES FOUNDATION, OCCUPATIONS

Undoubtedly, *Art as Experience* (1934)² is one of the most important texts by John Dewey as well as his most systematic approach to aesthetics.³ This book usually appears in the literature as an almost mandatory reading for interpreters of classical pragmatism, and it is praised as an ineludible reference for those interested in aesthetics from a pragmatic point of view. However, this justified centrality tends to invisibilize two important veins of Dewey's thought: the vital role of his *fragmentary* or *piecemeal* approach to aesthetics, on one hand; and the relevance of his educational conceptions in relation to aesthetics, on the other.

Going beyond the centrality of *Art as Experience* toward a comprehensive and contemporary view of Dewey's aesthetics entails looking upon three grains of his thought. Firstly, Dewey's works –some of them considered *minor* and some implicit or sporadic references in canonical texts– depicting the links between education and aesthetics in his philosophy as well as texts which belong to his fragmentary approach to aesthetics. Secondly, his systematic development of aesthetic, mainly in *Art as Experience*, where Dewey presents his conceptions at length. Thirdly, what we could call a *reevaluated* aesthetics, which consists in a contemporary attempt to integrate diverse aspects of his philosophy, trying to overcome some weaknesses in his theoretical developments, especially regarding his dealing with the links between education and aesthetics. It is necessary to remark that these links were neither adequately addressed by Dewey nor exhaustively examined by the literature, as far as we know. We hold that it is crucial to make them critically explicit, in order to get

fruitful contemporary approaches not only to Dewey's aesthetics but also to his pedagogy and philosophy of education.

Thus, the core question of this article is the following: how should the educational root of Dewey's aesthetics have worked? Or, more precisely, how should he have *explicitly or meticulously* conceived aesthetics in relation to his educational developments? We think that two neglected roots of Dewey's writings related to aesthetics can help us to reevaluate it: what we call its fragmentary approach and Barnes' role in it, on one hand; and a coherent articulation among occupation, art teaching and the overcoming of the distinction between vocational and humanistic education, on the other.

To carry out our task we have divided this article into three parts. In the first (The Genesis of Dewey's Aesthetics. A Reinterpretation), we argue how to interpret the emergence of Dewey's aesthetics. In the second (Dewey and Education: Central Issues) we present the key aspects of this topic related to our purposes. Meanwhile, in the third section (Two Neglected Roots of Dewey's Aesthetics), we develop our argument by describing how to recover these sources, and also by showing how Dewey's aesthetics could be critically reevaluated or reconstructed from a contemporary viewpoint. Finally, we put forward a conclusion.

THE GENESIS OF DEWEY'S AESTHETICS: A REINTERPRETATION

It is well known that Dewey's aesthetics is usually equated with *Art as Experience*. This is part of the canonical interpretations that tend to conceive Dewey's philosophy in, using his term, *grooves* (LW 2: 113). *Democracy and Education* (1916) would therefore belong to the groove of philosophy of education; *Logic* (1938) would be part of the groove of the theory of knowledge; *Art as Experience* would be the core

of the aesthetics groove, etc. We think that two different causes, a philosophical and a metaphilosophical one, converge at the bottom of these interpretations. The first relies on professional philosophers' narrow specialization in the development of our activities. The second is metaphilosophical since, independently of their philosophical filiation, a great number of professional philosophers have an irremediable theoretical inability to take history seriously. Unfortunately, historical perspective and genetic approaches in philosophy are frequently far more declaimed than applied.

Examining the literature on Dewey's aesthetics, the confluence of the named philosophical and metaphilosophical causes entails a very unfortunate result: a robust tendency to disregard three fundamental aspects of his thought. Firstly, the links between aesthetics and other philosophical parts of his work, particularly education, are not usually systematically analyzed or reconstructed. Secondly, Dewey's context of production and especially *minor* texts -prologues, short articles, reviews- are almost completely forgotten. Thirdly, what we call *fragmentary aesthetics* does not get the attention it deserves, with some outstanding exceptions as we will see afterwards. To recover these neglected aspects, it is fundamental both to achieve a comprehensive understanding of the emergence of Dewey's aesthetics, and to establish its contemporary relevance.

It is widely known that aesthetics was not the exception in the revival of pragmatism that started in the 1980s.⁴ The books of Alexander, Shusterman (*Pragmatist Aesthetics*), and Jackson depict core aspects of Dewey's aesthetics, and their interpretations were essential to its renaissance. Despite their very valuable contributions, they do not systematically deal with the three core aspects we have mentioned in the last paragraph (links between aesthetics and education, the relevance of his context of production -especially *minor* texts- and his fragmentary aesthetics).

Although these gaps have been filled to some extent by recent literature, there remains a lot to be done.⁵ In this section we will address the role of fragmentary aesthetics while the other two aspects will be dealt with in the next sections.

Although Dewey showed a genuine interest in the arts throughout his career, aesthetics has indisputably gained a major place within his philosophy, mainly in his *Later Works*, being “Experience, Nature and Art” (*LW* 1: 266-95) –the ninth chapter of *Experience and Nature* (1925)– and *Art as Experience* his chief productions in this field. Two preeminent factors contributed to shape his mature approach to aesthetics. First, the fruitful partnership that he cultivated with art collector Albert C. Barnes from the early 1920s, through which he became well acquainted with visual arts. Second, the recurrent criticisms of his philosophy as narrowly instrumentalist and lacking any aesthetic sensibility, which took a toll on him –a paradigmatic example being undoubtedly Munford’s *The Golden Day* (Westbrook 387).

It would be a huge historical mistake, however, to restrict Dewey’s work on aesthetics to the texts mentioned in the last paragraph. Rather, his work in this field could be divided into two parts: a *fragmentary* or *piecemeal aesthetics*, characterized by reviews, short articles and notes that he wrote throughout his career; and a *systematic aesthetics*, revolving around *William James Lectures* (1931) and *Art as Experience*. Dewey’s fragmentary approach to aesthetics can be reconstructed through three different stages in his career. In the first one, at the University of Michigan (1884-94), the distinctive features are his prevailing enjoyment of literature,⁶ on one hand, and his theoretical concern about philosophical idealism and experimental psychology, on the other.⁷ Beyond the influence of authors such as Wordsworth, Coleridge, Browning and Bosanquet, all widely cited in *Art as Experience*, his early emphasis on art as the

expression of a pure ideal looks still far from his mature treatment of the aesthetic experience (Alexander 17).

In the second stage, his years at the University of Chicago (1894-1904) and his first time at Columbia University (1905-1916), Dewey usually addressed art in his works on psychology, pedagogy and education. In this regard, the article “Imagination and Expression” (1896), not only lays the foundations for his further theory of occupations -developed in Chicago in *The School and Society* (1899), “The Place of Manual Training in the Elementary Course of Study” (1901), and in New York in *How We Think* (1910) and *Democracy and Education* (1916)-, but also foreshadows the affinity between childish play and artistic work widely stressed in several writings from the early 20th century: *A Cyclopedia of Education* (1911-14), *Experience and Nature*, and *Art as Experience*. Besides, in this period he had a strong commitment to Jane Addams’ Hull House -particularly, with the Labor Museum that belonged to it. This activity was a high influence on his conception of the useful/industrial arts and their role in education (Feffer 130).⁸

Finally, a third stage can be reconstructed by means of Dewey’s correspondence with Albert C. Barnes during the 1920s (Robins; Hein; Campeotto and Viale) and in his production during the 1925-29 period in close contact with the Barnes Foundation of Philadelphia. Through correspondence between them, it is possible to trace Dewey's growing interest in the visual arts, on one hand, and his increasingly urgent need to carry out a philosophical systematization of this topic, on the other. While in 1920, Dewey was still reluctant to take aesthetics seriously, he wrote to Albert C. Barnes: “I was interested in your suggestion about a seminar in esthetics. But I can’t rise to my part in it. I have always eschewed aesthetics...”. *Correspondence 2*: 04091, by 1928 he told George H. Mead that painting had become his main interest aside from philosophy:

“... but our serious occupation is pictures, in which we are both interested. In fact I think I'm more interested in them than anything else outside of philosophy, & we have both been educated à la Barnes”. *Correspondence 2*: 05438.

Furthermore, between 1930 and 1934 -that is, between the *Harvard Lectures* and the publication of *Art as Experience*- several letters unequivocally show Barnes' influence on the development of his systematic approach to aesthetics. For example, in a 1930 letter, Dewey told his friend Corinne C. Frost that Barnes was helping him in the making of *William James Lectures* (*Correspondence 2*: 090208). In March 1931, Dewey kept Barnes updated on the development of *Lectures*. He explicitly thanked the art collector for his suggestions and help, and mentioned that he had regularly been using *The Art in Painting* (Barnes' book from 1925) as a source (*Correspondence 2*: 04292). Meanwhile, in another letter to Corinne C. Frost from 1933, Dewey argued that the writing of *Art as Experience* kept him busy during the summer, autumn and winter of 1933 (*Correspondence 2*: 09289). In this regard, in the autumn of 1933 Dewey wrote to Barnes: “There are no chapters and not many, if any, pages that don't owe something to you” (*Correspondence 2*: 04316). In early 1934 Barnes began his careful revision of the manuscript (*Correspondence 2*: 04325). Still in January, after spending a weekend in Philadelphia, Dewey told Sidney Hook that he was completely rewriting chapter 12, “The Challenge to Philosophy” (*LW 10*: 276-302), following Barnes' suggestions (*Correspondence 2*: 05757).

Meanwhile, the period between 1925 and 1929 was undoubtedly the most prolific of what we called Dewey's fragmentary aesthetics. In 1925 he published three articles, “Individuality and Experience”, “Affective Thought” and “Dedication Address of the Barnes Foundation” in the short-lived *Journal of the Barnes Foundation*. In the same year, he addressed aesthetics in the ninth chapter of *Experience and Nature*,

“Experience, Nature and Art” (*LW* 1: 266-95), and published two abstracts of the same text in the *Journal of the Barnes Foundation* (1925) and in the book *Art and Education* (1929), edited by Barnes, Dewey and their associates in the Foundation of Philadelphia. Finally, in 1926 Dewey published “Art in Education- and Education in Art” as a review of Barnes’ *The Art in Painting*, a brief text that represents one of his deepest statements about the link between aesthetics and education.

With this brief reconstruction, we have tried to prove mainly two things: that art and aesthetic experience have always had a relevant place in Dewey’s philosophy, on one hand; and that Albert Barnes and the Barnes Foundation have played a fundamental role in the configuration of Dewey’s systematic aesthetic, on the other. Consequently, our reinterpretation of Dewey’s aesthetics emphasizes that looking at its genesis is a necessary endeavor, not only for historical but also for theoretical reasons. The key question for our purposes revolves around which root of Dewey’s fragmentary aesthetics is partially developed in the systematic one. Our answer is the following: Dewey’s aesthetics is not an exclusive endeavor developed in his mature philosophy but a fusion of his early interest in literature and the learning of visual arts (which has educational implications, as it will be seen in the third section) that he carried out at the Barnes Foundation since the 1920’s. Dewey remarks both aspects in his 1948 dispute with Benedetto Croce, when, in relation to literature he says:

I have learned little from what has been written in the name of the Philosophy of Art and Esthetics, since it has seemed to me to subordinate art to philosophy, instead of using philosophy as an incidental aid in appreciation of art in its own language. I have learned much however from the writings of essayists and literary critics, especially from English writers whose

works are themselves a part of the great tradition of English literature (*LW* 15: 100).

Meanwhile, regarding the role of Barnes, he holds that: "...what Dr. Barnes has said about the plastic arts ... I have found a source of instruction with respect to all the arts" (*LW* 15: 101). This fusion, consequently, is fundamental to understand the development of his aesthetics.

DEWEY AND EDUCATION: CENTRAL ISSUES

A quick glance at Dewey's *Middle Works* (1899-1924) is enough to show the relevance that education had for him in those years. Undoubtedly, *Democracy and Education* (1916) is his most accomplished work, but it is the peak of a long process of thinking, writing and doing on education. Our purpose is to show how Dewey's conception of education relates to aesthetics within this process. To accomplish this task we briefly point out the relationship between the empirical and the theoretical aspects of his educational conception, on one hand; and we refer to three key concepts and arguments that are relevant for our interpretation, on the other.

It is well known that one of the fundamental reasons behind Dewey's moving from the University of Michigan (1884-94) to the University of Chicago (1894-1904) revolves around education. At the latter institution, Dewey was appointed not only as head of the Department of Philosophy but also of the Department of Pedagogy and Psychology (Martin 183). One of his central activities in this Department was the foundation of the Laboratory School, an institution based mainly on his own theoretical perspective (Dykhuisen 94-96; Tanner 12-22). Consequently, Dewey's approach to education was empirical, in a primary school, as well as theoretical. After leaving the University of Chicago to go to Columbia University Dewey never had access to

experimental pedagogy in the classroom again.⁹ The activities of those years (1896-1904) in the Laboratory School, however had a lasting influence on his thought.

Regarding our article, to be unmistakably aware of this dual approach to education - empirical and theoretical- is a crucial point to understand the links between aesthetics and education, as we shall see in the next section.

Meanwhile, during his period at Columbia University (since 1905) Dewey wrote several texts on education, from “The Bearings of Pragmatism Upon Education” (1908-09), probably the first article where the label *pragmatism* is related to his theory of education to *Democracy and Education*, where the main ideas of his philosophy of education are exhaustively discussed. He also wrote *How We Think*, about his experience in the Laboratory School;¹⁰ *A Cyclopedia of Education* (1911-14), one hundred and twenty articles where he defined the core concepts of pedagogical theory, emphasizing his own approach; *Schools of Tomorrow* (1915), where he analyzed (with his daughter Evelyn) what actually happened when different American reformist schools put into practice theories of education. From his vast production, and given our purpose, we have briefly reconstructed three interwoven concepts that are fundamental to understand Dewey’s view on education and its links -implicit or explicit- with aesthetics: occupations, art education and the overcoming of the dualistic distinction between humanistic and vocational education. From all the concepts and categories that constituted Dewey’s views on education, occupation is the most important one -or at least, one of the crucial ones- within his pedagogical writings (De Falco “An Analysis”). In *The School and Society* (1899), for example, he holds that

By occupation is not meant any kind of "busy work" or exercises that may be given to a child in order to keep him out of mischief or idleness when seated at his desk. By occupation I mean a mode of activity on the part of the child

which reproduces, or runs parallel to, some form of work carried on in social life... *The fundamental point in the psychology of an occupation is that it maintains a balance between the intellectual and the practical phases of experience* (MW 1: 93, emphasis added).

We briefly highlight a key aspect of this concept that are relevant to our purposes for its links with aesthetics: the statement that an occupation is a “mode of activity” or, as it could be paraphrased, a *praxis*. If we think of school under the logic of occupations or *praxis*, there exists a criterion to unify the curriculum that overcomes the usual nonsense that tends to emerge in traditional school.¹¹ Such a nonsense springs from two sources: broad curricula of traditional schools often have either no connection with society or an extremely loose one. Put differently, traditional schools are between the Scylla of an extensive and disorganized curriculum, isolated preeminence of subject matters, and the Charybdis of three R’s conservatism, useless for truly understanding the social and political bonds within a community. By contrast, a school based on occupations would be equidistant from both extremes, attempting to integrate the practical and intellectual phases of experience. Regarding this issue, a similar connection between the intellectual and the practical phases is developed by Dewey in relation to the aesthetics experience in *Art as Experience*. Summing up, both aspects are crucial not only to education but also to aesthetics, as we will see in the next section.

Regarding art education, there are several references to it in Dewey’s *Middle Works*. In *The School and Society*, for example, the teaching of arts is related to the works of the artisan: “I think everybody who has not a purely literary view of the subject recognizes that genuine art grows out of the work of the artisan” (MW 1: 53) and conceives the museum as a central space in his ideal conception of school (MW 1: 53, Chart IV). Meanwhile, in “The Bearings of Pragmatism Upon Education”, Dewey

highlights the centrality of pleasure in any activity in order for this to be aesthetically relevant: “as Morris and others have pointed out, all embodiment of ideas in external form, when done freely and with joy in the activity, tends to gain an artistic quality” (MW 4: 191). Also, a similar statement had been previously made by Dewey in “Culture and Industry in Education” (1906), i.e. the most important educational problem for all levels (from kindergarten to university) is “... the connection of play and work” (MW 3: 292). In the same article, Dewey highlights the relevance of art for the educational system educative system with unequivocal words:

There is, then, something almost ludicrous, something at least paradoxical in our situation. We proclaim the growing importance of industry as an educational factor at the very time when we have discovered that play is the key to education. We are fighting, on one hand, child labor in the factory, while we are urging child industry in the school. *In truth this situation would present an insoluble contradiction were it not for the intervention of art* (MW 3: 292-293, emphasis added).¹²

Although in the third section we will analyze in detail the last sentence, we will briefly highlight now a core aspect for our interpretation related to it: in Dewey’s thought, it is a theoretical mistake to deal with aesthetics and education independently (in *grooves*), on one hand, and more specifically, that some of Dewey’s educational conceptions are fundamental for a reevaluation of his aesthetics, on the other. While education was Dewey’s central concern at that time (and art in his view was mainly useful to solve an inherent contradiction in the conception of school), this statement is crucial to support our interpretation: that the conception of art and the aesthetic experience should be analogous to that Dewey’s conception of education as an activity.

In the seeds of occupations there are some clues for a meaningful reevaluation of Dewey's aesthetics.

Finally, in *Cyclopedia* (1911-12) Dewey explicitly maintains that the arts are the model to follow regarding education. Writing on this topic, he argues that art is an idealization of the ordinary elements of life that are valuable from a social perspective. Put differently, its central feature revolves around “consummation” and “it represents the end to which all other educational achievement should tend —its perfected goal” (*MW* 6: 404). Therefore, on the basis of this brief reconstruction that we present, it may be inferred that Dewey gives a crucial relevance to art education. In the next section we will come back to diverse aspects of this second concept that we have reconstructed.

The overcoming of the distinction between vocational and humanistic education is the third concept of Dewey's educational writings that we refer to in this article. At the beginning of the 20th century, there existed two antithetical models of vocational education in the American scenario. One was the model for “social efficiency”, supported by intellectuals like David Snedden and Charles A. Prosser. The other was the model of “education for democracy”, defended by Dewey and Jane Addams. The first one was based on a very strict division between humanistic education and technical training, while the second aimed at overcoming this dualism (Whipps; Fesmire; De Falco “Dewey and Vocational Education”). In *New Republic* (1915) there was a public controversy between Dewey and Snedden about the scope of both models (*MW* 8: 411-13; 460-65). Snedden argued that the main purpose of technical/vocational education was the incorporation of students to the labor market (*MW* 8: 463).

Dewey defines Snedden's model of “social efficiency” with the expression “learning to earn” (*MW* 10: 149). According to Dewey, an education focused exclusively on the assimilation of practical skills, which neglects values which “make

future workers aware of their rightful claims as citizens in a democracy” (*MW* 10: 149), generates a profit that is not enjoyed by the worker, but mainly by industry. For Dewey, therefore, it is not surprising that the most vehement protests against progress in education usually come from the most “successful business men,” who intend to relegate as simple “fads and frills every enrichment of the curriculum which did not lend itself to narrow economic ends” (*MW* 10: 147). For Dewey, the term “vocational” should be more broadly conceived:

(...) education should be vocational, but in the name of a genuinely vocational education I object to the identification of vocation with such trades as can be learned before the age of, say, eighteen or twenty; and to the identification of education with acquisition of specialized skill in the management of machines at the expense of an industrial intelligence based on science and a knowledge of social problems and conditions (*MW* 8: 412-413).

We have hitherto considered two axes in this section: Dewey’s double approach -empirical and theoretical- to education, on one hand; and three basic concepts of his writings on education -occupations, art education and the overcoming of the distinction between vocational and humanistic/liberal education-, on the other. Both axes are fundamental to the development of our hypothesis, as we will see in the following pages.

TWO NEGLECTED ROOTS OF DEWEY’S AESTHETICS

We have argued that a fruitful interpretation of Dewey’s aesthetics from a contemporary perspective entails the consideration of three parts relating to his works.

The first part turns around the role of what we have labeled Dewey's fragmentary aesthetics, a neglected root of his systematic aesthetics, as well as educational grains of his philosophy, that we have called one neglected root of his aesthetics. A second part, that we denominated his systematic aesthetics, refers mainly to *Art as Experience*. The third part, that we called a reevaluation of Dewey's aesthetics, consists in a reinterpretation that highlights its best aspects. This reevaluation is helpful for depicting and overcoming some theoretical weakness of his philosophical conceptions, on one hand, and to criticize some misguided interpretations in the literature that they caused, on the other. With the purpose to offer a reevaluation of Dewey's aesthetics, we base our argument on the two previous sections of this article. Our hypothesis is grounded in two parts: firstly, in the relevance of Dewey's fragmentary aesthetics for the link with education; secondly, that a coherent articulation among occupation, art teaching and the overcoming of the distinction between vocational and humanistic education, is essential in order to reevaluate Dewey's aesthetics from a contemporary perspective. More specifically: that in the seeds of occupations are some clues to meaningfully reevaluate the trees of his aesthetics.

The first neglected root of Dewey's aesthetics turns around what we call his fragmentary or piecemeal aesthetics. As we have argued in the first section, Barnes' ideas had a strong influence in its development. We may ask: what would have happened if Dewey had not developed a close friendship with Barnes? Would he have extensively dealt with aesthetics as he did in his mature years? Would Dewey even have written *Art as Experience*?¹³ These counterfactual questions are very useful to visibilize, examine and reconstruct core aspects of Dewey's systematic aesthetics. In other words: these questions serve as a starting point for a coherent critical reconstruction or

reevaluation of Dewey's aesthetics, which highlighted its better aspects from a contemporary perspective.

We think that the Barnes Foundation is to Dewey's aesthetics what The Laboratory School is to his pedagogy and philosophy of education. As we have argued in the second section, Dewey's pedagogy and philosophy of education was not only a speculative development. The empirical activities in the Laboratory School were *practical* grounds for his *theoretical* developments. Analogously, we should go beyond *Art as Experience*, his canonical text in aesthetics, to their empirical basis: Dewey's involvement in the Barnes Foundation.

A fact to be highlighted is that in 1922 was appointed as Director of Education at the Foundation (Robins 30), whose fundamental purpose was originally to transform the way art was taught at public schools and universities in the USA.¹⁴ However, the extremely ambitious purposes of the Barnes Foundation were barely accomplished (and the importance of Dewey's role in the institution has different interpretations in the literature),¹⁵ his immersion in aesthetics in those years is an incontestable fact. In other words, he joined the institution as a philosopher of education and pedagogue, with a good knowledge of literature but little interest in other branches of art, and became a conspicuous esthete.¹⁶

Within this framework, which would the *consequences of Barnesianism* in Dewey's aesthetics be? A short answer is: the pairing of aesthetic and education. Although this pairing unfortunately was not clearly made in *Art as Experience*, a *reevaluation* of Dewey's aesthetics allows us to make it visible. In other words, emphasizing the importance of his fragmentary aesthetics and his *Correspondence*, i.e. going beyond the centrality of *Art as Experience*, we would overtly appreciate the links between aesthetics and education in Dewey's thought.

A pivotal text for this task is Dewey's "Art in Education-Education in Art", a review of Barnes' *The Art in Painting*.¹⁷ There, Dewey examines Barnes' statement that art is "intrinsically educative" (LW 2: 114). The conceptual ground for this conception of art is clarified by the following words:

We perceive only what we learned to look for, both in life and art. ... The experience of the artist arises out of a particular background, a set of interests and habits of perceptions which, like the scientists's habits of thought, are potentially shareable by other individuals. They are only sharable, however, if one is willing to make the effort involved in acquiring a comparable background and set of habits. *To see as the artist sees* is an accomplishment to which there is no shortcut, which cannot be acquired by any magic formula or trick (Barnes "The Problem of Appreciation" 46-47, emphasis added).

Firmly relying on visual arts, the keystones of Barnes' view of art, and also of his educational Foundation, are two: "to see as the artist sees" is an essential component of art, on one hand; this process can be learned, on the other. Although Dewey did not use this expression in his works, in several parts of *Art as Experience* (LW 10, 134, 204, 328) he makes recurrent paraphrases of it.¹⁸ A paradigmatic one is the following:

... to perceive, a beholder must *create* his own experience. And his creation must include relations comparable to those which the original producer underwent. They are not the same in any literal sense. But with the perceiver, as with the artist, there must be an ordering of the elements of the whole that is in form, although not in details, the same as the process of organization the creator of the work consciously experienced. Without an act of recreation the object is not perceived as a work of art. The artist

selected, simplified, clarified, abridged and condensed according to his interest. The beholder must go through these operations according to his point of view and interest (*LW 10: 61*).

Undoubtedly, Dewey's view on perception is indebted to Barnes' conception of learning i.e. "to see as the artist sees". Besides, seeing or perceiving as the artist does is essentially an educational process for both Barnes and Dewey. The first neglected root of Dewey's aesthetics, therefore, has to do with the *Barnesian* genesis of artistic appreciation within his thought. Dewey's pairing of aesthetics and education, however, reaches farther. We can start to appreciate this through his definition of art:

Art denotes a process of doing or making. This is as true of fine as of technological art. Art involves molding of clay, chipping of marble, casting of bronze, laying on of pigments, construction of buildings, singing of songs, playing of instruments, enacting roles on the stage, going through rhythmic movements in the dance. Every art does something with some physical material, the body or something outside the body, with or without the use of intervening tools, and with a view to production of something visible, audible, or tangible (*LW 10: 54*).

Following his definition, Dewey's pairing of aesthetics and education goes beyond aesthetic appreciation, as in Barnes' view, toward *praxis*. "To make as the artist makes" would be a more accurate expression of his conception of art, conception that has a profound pedagogic consequence: art is beyond appreciation toward occupation, "a process of doing or making". In other words, a crucial core of Dewey's educational writings could be named *art as occupations*, an issue dealt with in the following pages.

The second neglected root of Dewey's aesthetics also revolves around its links with education. We have maintained that his conceptualization of these links is

unsatisfactory. Why is his dealing with this link so unsatisfactory? The most coherent answer could be the following: because, although he explicitly claimed the relevance of art and aesthetic experience for teaching, his educational framework irremediably tends to be grounded on a scientific approach. A paradigmatic example of this theoretical position can be found in the first edition of *How We Think* (1910), where scientific thought gained an insurmountable supremacy and arts clearly played a secondary role. There, Dewey insists on the need to find “some *clue of unity, some principle*” or “*centralizing factor*” (MW 6: 179) that organizes the curriculum. He has labeled this principle with different terms: “scientific habit of thought, that we call scientific” (MW 6: 179), “scientific method” (MW 6: 296), “experimental method” (MW 6: 258), “reflective thinking” (MW 6: 188-190), “critical thinking” (MW 6: 239, 244) or even “method of inquiry” (MW 6: 265).¹⁹ It is therefore not surprising that several receptions of Dewey’s educational thought were explicitly imbued with a narrow scientific spirit.²⁰

But not only in *How We Think* does Dewey give an inaccurate treatment to the link between aesthetics and education. An inadequate analysis of such link can also be found in some of his other major books, particularly in *Democracy and Education*, his major book on education, where he did not write a chapter or systematic section on that issue. Such an omission is difficult to understand since there are numerous texts from various periods where Dewey draws strong links between aesthetics and education.²¹ Inversely, and from the aesthetic viewpoint we can ask why in *Art as Experience* there is not a comprehensive examination of the ties between aesthetics and education.²² This lacuna is still more striking since this book is dedicated to Barnes and the educational tasks of the Barnes Foundation. Thus, a paradoxical situation occurs, namely that despite the numerous links among art, the aesthetic experience and education that

Dewey found and wrote about, in many texts from the *Early Works*, his major books on education and aesthetics he fails to give them a systematic and accurate treatment.²³

Consequently, as his conceptions of the link between aesthetics and education in his major books are manifestly inaccurate, we should go *beyond Dewey* -more precisely: beyond the *canonical Dewey*- making a reconstructive endeavor. In this grain, the first step is to state that examining Dewey's philosophy in grooves is clearly misleading. The second step is to acknowledge that aesthetics and education are necessarily linked within his philosophy. The third one is to show *how* these connections should work.

We can point out the way in which three educational categories are useful to begin with this task. In other words, through the conceptions of occupations, art teaching and the overcoming of the *dualism* between humanistic and vocational education, we can depict the communicating channels between aesthetics and education in Dewey's thought.

We have argued that occupation is one of the most important topics in Dewey's educational writings, perhaps the most important one. We have also argued that it could be called *praxis*. Although, as we have already held, he has not coherently established its relations with aesthetics, a paragraph of *Democracy and Education* could give us a clue to find this connection:

The continually increasing importance of economic factors in contemporary life makes it the more needed *that education should reveal their scientific content and their social value*. For in schools, occupations are not carried on for pecuniary gain but for their own content. Freed from extraneous associations and from the pressure of wage-earning, they supply modes of experience which are intrinsically valuable; they are truly liberalizing in quality. Gardening, for example, need not be taught either for the sake of

preparing future gardeners, or as an agreeable way of passing time. It affords an avenue of approach to knowledge of the place farming and horticulture have had in the history of the race and which they occupy in present social organization (*MW 9: 209*, emphasis added).

Regarding occupations, crucial issues dealt with in this paragraph revolve around what Dewey clearly conceives as well as what he diffusely presents. Under pressure of economic forces, education for Dewey should make explicit its *scientific content* and its *social value*. In other words, to be actually successful in its role, school should emphasize those topics associated with natural sciences and those related to humanities and social sciences, especially those linked to the development of civic virtues and the flourishing of a genuine democracy. Both aspects are coherently presented in his writings. References to *aesthetic quality* or *aesthetic aspect*, on the other hand, are frequently indirect or implicit as in the sentence "... they supply modes of experience which are intrinsically valuable; they are truly liberalizing in quality" (*MW 9: 209*), but not always openly acknowledged as *aesthetics*. To understand why this Deweyan ambivalence exists, it is indispensable to refer to Dewey's *minor* texts and his *Correspondence*. Particularly, a letter he wrote to Barnes -we have quoted it in the first section- may be revealing:

I have always eschewed esthetics, just why I don't know, but I think it is because I wanted to reserve one region from a somewhat devastating analysis, one part of experience where I didn't think more than I did anything else (*Correspondence 2: 04091*).

It is obvious that this statement, Dewey was refusing to offer a seminar on aesthetic, is neither completely true nor a mere excuse given to a friend. Firstly, aesthetics has a fragmentary but important role in his thought. Secondly, until that

moment, he really had not *systematically* deal with aesthetics with a plain consequence: while Dewey's theoretical examination of *scientific content* and *social value* of education mostly have a *clear* role and curricular counterpart, for example in chapters VII, XVII, and XXI of *Democracy and Education*, his diffuse or marginal reflections about the relevance of *aesthetic quality* or *aspect* from a theoretical point of view, results in an imprecise role and *curricular* counterpart of art and aesthetics. In other words: neither in *Democracy and Education*, nor *Art as Experience* nor *Experience and Education* do we find a curricular development for art and aesthetics similar to the one relative to the natural sciences and humanities.

Concerning the ties between aesthetics and education, we have argued that the coherent articulation among occupation, art teaching and the overcoming of the distinction between vocational and humanistic education is necessary to make them systematically explicit. Starting from the last one, from Dewey's discussion with Snedden we can infer a decisive point: his view of humanistic and vocational education turns around a sharp and accurate criticism of traditional conceptions of them. In other words: the humanistic one should not be a mere intellectual or leisure task detached from society, as usual in liberal education; technical education should not be a narrow practical endeavor detached from a scientifically relevant examination of how community bonds work. As we have argued, this criticism entails overcoming the pernicious dualism between humanistic and vocational education.

From this criticism, we can analogously infer that for Dewey art and the aesthetic experience should have been effectively linked with several dimensions of the real world, without becoming a mere refuge from it. Hence, an education grounded in a vision of art detached from society, *art for art's sake*, should not be promoted.²⁴ This aspect should have had a straightforward curricular articulation within Dewey's

philosophy of education, in order to avoid its recurrent association with a narrow scientificism. Dewey himself acknowledged this usual criticism to his educational conceptions, referring to the imbrication of these views with the educational aims of the Barnes Foundation:

Since my educational ideas have been criticized for undue emphasis upon intelligence and the use of the method of thinking that has its best exemplification in science, *I take profound, if somewhat melancholy, ironic, satisfaction* in the fact that the most thoroughgoing embodiment of what I have tried to say about education, is, as far as I am aware, found in an educational institution that is concerned with art. I do not know whether it is matter for surprise that education in the esthetic field should be the first to do the obvious and simple thing. But I do know that hardly a week—certainly not a month—passes that I do not receive a letter, sometimes from a teacher, sometimes from a student, which asks why there is such a gap between educational theory and educational practice; that does not ask, in effect, why teachers and students who wish to do productive work—work productive in experience, intelligence and interest—should be so hampered and harassed (*LW 11: 505-506, emphasis added*).

In this context, Dewey's satisfaction means that his project was not only addressed to make explicit the *scientific content* and *social value* of education but what we could call its *aesthetic aspect*. To perform this task Dewey's scarce references in minor texts to art teaching are useful. As we have argued, art teaching is the second educational concept essential to depict the links between education and aesthetics. We highlight one of them that is crucial to our article. Analyzing the paradox between the growing relevance of industry within educational systems, on one hand, and the

discovery of the centrality of play for pedagogy, on the other, Dewey's sustains "*In truth this situation would present an insoluble contradiction were it not for the intervention of art*" (MW 3: 292-93, emphasis added). The solution to this contradiction offers us a key to reinterpret Dewey's view on the link between aesthetics and education. The significance of these words is that art -and, we can add, aesthetic experience- is indispensable to make educational systems and curricula coherent. In other words: there exist three parts of the curriculum that should be balanced: *scientific content, social value* -Dewey's words in *Democracy and Education* (MW 9: 209) which we have referred to- and *aesthetic quality* or *aspect*. Our hypothesis is that to reach this balance, it is necessary to make explicit the aesthetic relevance of Dewey's theory of occupations.

Regarding occupations, —the third educational concept mentioned above— we have argued two ideas along this article: firstly, that it is one of the fundamental cores of Dewey's pedagogic and educational writings; secondly, that it is one of the key to understand and reconstruct the connection between aesthetics and education within Dewey's thought. Why, specifically are occupations so important in relation to aesthetics? Because two grains converge in occupations that otherwise would be dangerously splitted: industriousness as an essential element of education, on one hand, and play, as an activity *free* from all external constrictions, on the other. In other words, industriousness, without an effective link with play, runs the serious risk of becoming crass instrumentalism; play, without a coherent link with a practical phase, runs the serious risk of becoming superficial leisure. *Art as occupations* or *occupations as art* could be the phrases that capture the links between aesthetics and education, on one hand, and make explicit Dewey's overcoming of the dualism between vocational and humanistic education, on the other. Consequently, to conceive art as occupation it is a

necessary step to acknowledge a neglected root of Dewey's aesthetics: its link with education.

CONCLUSION

We have argued in this article that Dewey's systematic aesthetics—as developed mainly in *Art as Experience*—does not coherently present the links that it implicitly has with education. To make them explicit it is necessary to reevaluate Dewey's aesthetics, recovering two neglected roots of it: one related to his fragmentary or piecemeal aesthetics, on one hand; the other related to some of his educational conceptions, especially to occupations, on the other. Both neglected roots addressed to education: the first one turns mainly around Barnes' dictum of learning “to see as the artist sees”, that Dewey paraphrased as perception, i.e., to learn to see or to perceive as the artist does is an educational task; the second one revolves around some Deweyean educational conceptions, especially occupations, that go beyond appreciation toward *praxis*.

Notes

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2. All works by Dewey are taken from *The Complete Works of John Dewey*, edited by Jo Ann Boydston (37 volumes). These are divided into *Early Works* (cited in text as *EW*, followed by Volume: page number), *Middle Works* (cited as *MW*, followed by Volume: page number) and *Later Works* (*LW*, followed by Volume: page number). Dewey’s private correspondence is taken from *The Correspondence of John Dewey* (4 volumes), edited by Larry A. Hickman. The letters are cited as *Correspondence*, followed by Volume: code of letter.

3. By systematic aesthetics, we mean a reflection on diverse aspects of the nature of arts, and the philosophical conceptions related to art, like beauty, form, image, etc. This is Dewey's attempt in *Art as Experience*. Before this book, Dewey's approach was fragmentary or piecemeal, i.e. aesthetic topics were dealt with separately in different parts of his work. **To be completed after evaluation.**
4. The standard history of the apogee, in the first part of the 20th century, and decline of classical pragmatism, in the fifties, with the subsequent emergence of neopragmatism in the eighties, has been accurately challenged in recent literature (Campbell; Spencer, among others). The crucial point of this impugnation was the unjust invisibility of the works of noteworthy philosophers such as John Smith, John McDermott and Richard Bernstein, who have preserved pragmatist tradition. However, Dewey's aesthetics seems to fit the standard view, since perhaps with the exception of Monroe Beardsley (332), his approach suffered an indisputable ostracism and has been firmly criticized by analytic thinkers for being undisciplined and contradictory (Isenberg 128). It was only in the late 1980s, with the works of Alexander and Shusterman ("Why Dewey Now?"), that an extensive and critical recovery of Dewey's thought on the arts began.
5. Recent literature on Dewey's aesthetics could be classified into three grains. Firstly, those who recover the ties with art collector Albert C. Barnes and The Barnes Foundation of Philadelphia (Ueno; Hein; Granger "The Science of Art"; Nakamura). Within this group, the remarkable Alexander Robins's Ph.D. Thesis deserves to be highlighted, since it meticulously shows the interactions of Dewey with the *milieu* of the Barnes Foundation (in particular with his young fellows Thomas Munro and Lawrence Buermeyer) and the influence of this

milieu in his aesthetic thought. Secondly, Perricone and Innis (“Aesthetic Naturalism”), among others, have read Dewey’s aesthetics in the light of his naturalism. Thirdly, Haskins and Dreon have interpreted Dewey’s thought about the arts in relation to modern tradition in aesthetics. An

6. Following Jay Martin, it can be said that, as most Americans born around mid-19th century, Dewey considered literature as the supreme art (400). About this point, see Dewey’s early essays “Poetry and Philosophy” (*EW* 3: 110-24), “The Lesson of Contemporary French Literature” (*EW* 3: 36-42), and his association with the expert in literature Fred Newton Scott during his stay in Michigan (*EW* 4: 120-23; Martin 119).
7. Dewey’s claim to fuse idealism and experimental psychology into a coherent philosophical system is evident in “Aesthetic Feeling”, the fifteenth chapter of *Psychology* (*EW* 2: 268-81). In 1891 Dewey organized the course “The Philosophy of the Beauty” where he stressed this twofold approach: aesthetics is analyzed from both an idealistic (Hegel, Lotze and Schiller) and a psychological standpoint (Allen, Sully and Wundt) (University of Michigan 58-9). Also, his review of Bosanquet’s *A History of Aesthetics* (*EW* 4: 190-98) shows his interest in the discussions on this topic among British Neohegelians. For a deep insight into Dewey’s early aesthetics see Rockefeller; Morse.
8. In the *Middle Works*, Dewey’s conception of industrial arts is depicted in *MW* 1: 53-54. In his later years he deepened again this aspect of his educational theory in the essay “The Educational Function of a Museum of Decorative Arts” (1937).

9. One of the main reasons for Dewey's moving from Chicago were the quarrels he had with William R. Harper (President of the University of Chicago), about the relevance and founding for the Laboratory School (Martin 210-14; Knoll).
10. *On How We Think see Saharrea and Viale.*
11. The connection between school and life was a central issue for Dewey. See *MW* 1: 55.
12. These ideas are already outlined during the Chicago years (1894-1904) in the short article "The Aesthetic Element in Education" (1897).
13. The same question was made by Martin: "... without Barnes' impetus, Dewey would probably never have written a book on aesthetics. Literature was so much a part of his life from the earliest times that he simply took it for granted" (402).
14. From the beginning of 1924, Barnes started collaboration with Penn State University and the Museum of Fine Arts of Philadelphia, while Dewey provided him with a collaboration with Columbia University and the Metropolitan Museum of New York. Thanks to these institutional agreements, in 1924-25, Dewey's associate Thomas Munro was hired by Penn State University to teach the course "Fine Arts V: Modern Arts", and by Columbia for the course "Applied Aesthetics" (Ueno 115). In 1925 also Lawrence Buermeyer was hired as lecturer by Penn State for the course "The Aesthetic Experience". Meanwhile, in the same year Barnes and Dewey contacted Pennsylvania's Governor Glifford Pinchot to discuss a public educational reform. Their claim, after incipient interest, was substantially ignored by the authorities (*Correspondence* 2: 04159).
15. There exist contrasting interpretations on Dewey's involvement in the Barnes Foundation. Harold McWhinnie suggests that Dewey played a pivotal role, being Barnes' artistic advisor throughout his life (33). By contrast, Robins speaks of

an agreement from 1922, which exonerated Dewey from teaching and limited his actual tasks to reviewing the written material and the pedagogical plans of the institution (30).

16. Beyond the difficulty of reconstructing Dewey's actual duties at the Barnes Foundation, a direct and conspicuous influence of his theory of education must be recognized in Barnes' mature approach to art. In fact, Barnes' reading of *Democracy and Education* was crucial to change his conception of art, from a substance separated from life (following the formalism of Clive Bell and Roger Fry), to a type of activity or occupation rooted in ordinary experience (Bahr 324). Furthermore, Robins holds that some of the foundation's first teachers (Thomas Munro and Lawrence Buermeyer) were former students of Dewey's and the organizing philosophy was mainly rooted in pragmatism (15).
17. It is beyond this article to make a critical comparison between the first edition of *The Art in Painting* (1925) and *Art as Experience* (1934). The first was not only one source more of the several of the latter. There are numerous explicit references to Barnes's work in *Art as Experience* (LW 10: 99, 100, 123, 124, 206) and many other less explicit (Innis "Between Nature and Art"). For example, according to Robins (52-55), Dewey's ideas on decoration exposed in chapter VI of *Art as Experience* are directly taken from chapter III of *The Art in Painting* (29).
18. Barnesianism in Dewey's aesthetics is also evident in his conception of the desirable role of art criticism. According to Dewey "The function of criticism is the re-education of the perception of works of art; it is an auxiliary in the process, a difficult process of learning to see and hear" (LW 10: 328). At the

- same time, he laments over the fact that "the faculty of learning to perceive a work" was "a faculty which many critics do not possess" (*LW* 10: 134).
19. Henry M. Cowles in *The Scientific Method* affirms that this equiparation, in its extreme version, results in the "myth of the scientific method", understood as "... a set of steps that justifies science's authority" (1). Unfortunately, *How We Think* became the fundamental text for the teaching of the scientific method in this mythical or reduced version because Dewey decided to present an enumeration under the idea of "a complete act of thought" (237).
 20. For example, *How We Think* was decisive for the General Science teaching movement in high school (1905-20) in creating a class of professional educators who saw in science something capable of generating interest in the general public, on one hand, and that could be useful to the masses of students in daily life, on the other (Rudolph 353). This led in the 1910s to a proliferation of General Science courses, first, for entrance to the university and, later, for secondary school. During the 1920s and 1930s the identification of Dewey's theory with a kind of narrow "problem solving" education based on the scientific method became even stronger. According to Howard B. Dunkel, in this period art teachers found notable problems in working in institutions nominally inspired by Dewey's theory (232).
 21. A similar criticism had been previously made by Dunkel (234).
 22. In the literature, also Read (245), Jackson (xii) and Granger (*John Dewey, Robert Pirsig* 2) claimed a lack of educational references in *Art as Experience*.
 23. As David Granger suggested (*John Dewey, Robert Pirsig* 3), Dewey had the chance to deepen the link between art and education in his 1938 book *Experience and Education* but, again, he failed to address this topic. By that

time, his poor treatment of aesthetic/art education looks surprising, considering that in 1937-38 Dewey was fully involved in Barnes' last project *The Friends of Art and Education* (Ueno 132-37).

24. Echoing Barnes' protests against the prevailing academicism of art education programs (Barnes "The Shame in the Public Schools"), Dewey holds that most art teachers "clothe themselves with some tradition as a mantle, and henceforth it is not just "I" who speaks, but some Lord speaks through me. The teacher then offers himself as the organ of the voice of a whole school, of a finished classic tradition, and arrogates to himself the prestige that comes from what he is the spokesman for" (*LW 2*: 59). Within this frame, in "Art in Education- and Education in Art" Dewey criticizes the current tendencies in art appreciation. "They spring from the disposition of artists, or at least "connoisseurs," to set art on a pedestal, to make of it something esoteric, something apart from values inherent in all experiences of things in their full integrity ... [and] from the constant needs of the everyday man". This attitude has been institutionalized not only by art teachers, but also by art museums, professional critics, histories of art and biographies of painters (*LW 2*: 114).

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