

Dewey's Art as Experience

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The aim of this paper is to give an interpretation, albeit a partial one, of Dewey's *Art as Experience*. I will discuss how Dewey underlines art education with its own connecting importance. Certainly, he is adamant that art education does not just happen; it has to be harnessed and taught, where "in the very substance of art" (Dewey, 1980, p.212), it reverberates with the hustle and bustle, expansion and renewal, tempo and industry of the present in experience.

A programme of education for Dewey has to be conducive to students' capabilities, interests and accumulated handling of past experiences that are realizable in a social environment which nurtures a "wider and better balanced environment than that by which the young would be likely, if left to themselves to be influenced" (Dewey, 1944, p.22). Dewey's position depends upon a democratic social constructive process, compatible with the student's free capacity to enjoy within an educational environment the experience of living together, taking a full part in educational opportunities, influencing events, strengthening commitments and operating fuller lives.

To meet these challenges he wants to underpin the arts in education with a "pragmatic pedagogy" (Biestra, 1995, p.105) that motivates and galvanizes. A social democratic educational environment for Dewey that includes art education is a pulsating, cooperative, coordinating and modified process in harmony with the world around it (Dewey, 1944, pp.10-22). Dewey believes that art education reflects the wider and fuller expansion of individual and community sympathies, where doing art, the creation of it, is a genuine aspect of social life that is educative. Relying on well recognised historical and current examples at the time when he was writing *Art as Experience*, he attempts to explain how art excels in human intercourse. We have to ask, and in the course of this paper answer, that if art education is as germane as he claims it to be, he must demonstrate its public service. How does he do this?

Let us note that in *Art as Experience* Dewey has a number of intentions. Firstly, he is concerned with what stands in the way of art as experience. This is a point that is sometimes overlooked by theorists, policy makers, politicians, and teachers. Why should we see this as an issue not to be overlooked? There are reasons for us to discuss this not least because Dewey perceives it as a problem for art in education. Secondly he wants to demonstrate that the course of art in education should be continuous with natural impulses, community values and ordinary-normal everyday experiences which influence the work of art in a multitude of ways. Thirdly, he wants to show some of the processes of art production and execution and fourthly, why art as experience is valuable for democratic social life and education.

This work is broken down into two sections. Firstly, I will discuss why there are obstacles in the way of art as an experience. Secondly, I will discuss what an experience in art is for Dewey, and concordantly why natural impulses, culture and environment and ordinary-normal everyday experiences must act as dominant centripetal fields.

Obstructing Art as an Experience

Dewey does not agree that morality can be the sole rule giving ground for art education. This is not without precedent. Aristotle in his *Poetics* writes that: "there is not the same kind of correctness in poetry as in politics, or indeed in any other art" (Aristotle, 1984, 1460b1-15, p.2337). Dewey believed that the final determining element of art production was its aesthetic quality. The grandfather of philosophy, Plato, never pretended that art could be a model of moral function for the obvious reason that art has to handle the

particular and not the universal. In book ten of the *Republic* he implies that some art always has a particular place, event, person, colour or theme it wants to create when it tackles the appearance of an 'object' x in an angled and individually treated manner. A student has a particular bed design they want to make as a model or in a short story they have written they describe a particular person in some detail. Teaching art involves quintessentially how the artwork looks and how it is being performed. When working with appearances the student gains local knowledge of their 'object' by forming impressions of it that oscillate with its mode of production. Dealing only with the way things appear and the fact that appearances are variable is not the best way to understand morality.

However, to implement unmitigated, moralizing pressure upon arts education suggests to Dewey that it can: "miss a sense of the way in which art exercises its human function" (Dewey, 1980, p.346). One of the ways this can happen is when we: "treat works of art as a kind of sublimated Aesop's fables" (Dewey, 1980, p.346). Another way to evade art practice in education is to think that its essence rests on a conventional morality. In a reference to Shakespeare's plays Dewey notes how conventional morality can be "ingeniously extracted" (Dewey, 1980, p.349) from it. Our attention to Shakespeare is then satisfied by its indubitable conventional morality. Conventional morality regulates our judgements about the function of art.

To help overcome the weakening, inhibiting or disarming affects of conventionality, Dewey argues: (1) that the art teacher must produce "a change that will reduce the force of external pressure and will increase that of a sense of freedom and personal interest in the operation of production" (Dewey, 1989, p.343). (2) That the art teacher discusses and demonstrates the importance of an experimental outlook. Where students learn to handle, undergo and take delight in art materials that will further help them to discover new means of expression, methods of construction, conceptions of outlook and the production of new 'objects'. (3) That art curriculums and syllabuses must be broad based, encouraging fully, intimately and energetically all human modes of life experience and responses to the world intelligently and respectfully, as well as, enabling communication to be shared in the arts of living, relationships that effectively bring at all times students together whatever their cultures and interests are. Encouraging freedom through art education rather than repression through art education, means as teachers we have to foster the imaginations, emotions and desires of students. "Civilization is uncivil because human beings are divided into non-communicating sects, races, nations, classes and cliques" (Dewey, 1980, p.336). (4) Any curriculum and syllabus in art education must be constructed to value the preciousness of ordinary experiences, encouraging sympathy with it in animate ways. (5) To facilitate operations of production in art education where: "imaginative vision addressed to imaginative experience (not to set judgment) of possibilities that contrast with actual conditions. A sense of possibilities that are unrealized and that might be realized are when they are put in contrast with actual conditions, the most penetrating 'criticism' of the latter that can be made. It is by a sense of possibilities opening before us that we become aware of constrictions that hem us in and burdens that oppress" (Dewey, 1980, p.346).

Was the Inquisition in the Counter-Reformation correct to demand from the Renaissance painter Paolo Veronese to paint out the drunken figures and Germans in his painting the *Wedding of Cana*, 1562-3? In the *Tempest*, Ariel returns singing:

"Where the bee sucks, there suck I;
In a cowslip's bell I lie;
There I couch when owls do cry.
On the bat's back I do fly
After summer merrily.
Merrily, merely shall I live now

Under the blossom that hangs on the bough.”

(Shakespeare, Act 5, Scene 1).

Are we to think that the merit of these lines lies outside its art? Is a convincing impossibility preferable to an unconvincing possibility (Aristotle, 1984, 1461b1-15, p.2339)? However improbable and fantastical these lines are, some of the value of it for teaching is in its imaginative splendor that acts as a kind of regeneration of the world, an elemental evocation of being communing with a reality with such farfetched thought and an exhortation calm and cheerful, that the temperance of its tone sinks into the sweet consciousness of life.

Naturally, we would be most disturbed by any student who attempted to present in a painting, sculpture, dance, film or story the admiration of a rape. A morally repugnant attitude displayed in an art work may cast a shadow on the art work's usefulness but, it does not follow either that a morally 'good' attitude displayed in an art work will make us think twice about it. Counterfactually, ought we to accept though that there can be a correspondence, for example, between the moral sentiment of a play and its art. The work of Charles Dickens as much as Shakespeare and many others, seem to express this connection.

Children need protecting as Plato argued in the *Republic*. Clearly teaching has a moral duty of care but what Dewey is saying is that if we were to take Sophocles' *Antigone*, for example, the effect of this poetic drama confronts us agonizingly with the customs and morality of a Greek society. We come to imagine Antigone's strife intensely, compassionately and comprehensively because Sophocles is able to paint a picture of her which is full of human pathos and thought. Underlying the human common qualities which we perceive as real in the drama is to note the spirit of the poem's sanity and pertinence. The movement of the artist's subject matter and the scenes we recognise as being part of our world in *Antigone* are, as Dewey mentions being held together by our imaginative depth in direct proportion to the works arrangement and articulation. Hurting and embroiled in difficulty is Antigone's life, presented by Sophocles in a knowing way. We experience the interhuman in the play because the play creates a genuine conversational dialogue, a probability that actualizes in the concrete human life. Sophocles never depersonalizes, prearranges, undermines or withdraws the very vital reciprocity, self-realization and human existence of Antigone. The characters appear natural and true. This is part of the play's art: a "fiction that signifies great things" (Leonardo, da Vinci, 1989, p.142), the causes of which are dependent upon an art education that can invoke "the power of what is most deep-lying" (Dewey, 1980, p.71) in the control of the artistic material. This means for Dewey an art education nourished by life's understanding of sensitive imaginative creation. We must be careful not to suggest from this that artistic imagination is outside the true and the false. In this respect it has an acquaintance with the true and the false. The Aristotelian argument pertaining to imitation would exploit the fact that Sophocles' *Antigone* as poetic drama, enacts that "which the direct speech of agents gets us as near as language can come to the nature of significant action itself" (Halliwell, 1998, p.54).

Art creation runs ahead of the true and the false using imaginative methods and experiences in the world to express the character of the thing under scrutiny with "determinateness" (Dewey, 1980, p.206). As attractive as the muck and mire of life is for art production, the fact remains that: "poetry celebrates the diversity of the human soul, but philosophy inculcates the correct principles of the best life" (Rosen, 2005, p.354). "In this sense, poetry is like democracy whereas philosophy is like monarchy" (Rosen, 2005, p.354). What Dewey realised, succinctly expressed by Ernst Gombrich, but which Plato's epistemology logically found of second division status, was: "If we look out of the window we can see the view in a thousand different ways" (Gombrich, 1977, p.331).

Art when experienced properly interrogates and expresses genuine thought, perception and feelings rooted and integral in the commonality of life for Dewey. This life which affects the art making process in education is not necessarily governed by general principles in the way that moral judgements might be. Our imagination which comes from out of our lives may be morally reprehensible but for Dewey these may open questions of unrest as well as ease which he sees as being a check on society that also serves to attend to the

enterprise of what an actualizing culture is supposed to be democratically. On this view, art education has preparatory and instrumental value for moral contemplation.

As revelation externalized, art education may teach us how to love things by the particular way it communicates, saturating and transforming our vision. Aesthetic sensibility and training is not actual moral sensibility and training. The ethical excellence of a lived life presupposes something much more than: “Two apples, an onion, a pair of old shoes, ...A couple of notes, a couple of musical notes. And suddenly it is as if the Absolute itself were hanging on the wall or in the air, radiating in all its splendour” (Comte-Sponville, 2005, p.105). Two apples, an onion, a pair of old shoes and a couple of musical notes move towards “its own consummation through a connected series of varied incidents” (Dewey, 1980 p.43). We tend to see art as a fulfillment of its concrete human interaction with life. Its strength lies not in exercising principles whose moral purpose can burden art to the abstract and hence not art at all, but in eliciting imaginative vision through artistic devices that are open to pleasures and aesthetic qualities in experience “which from it proceeds the liberating and uniting power of art” (Dewey, 1980, p.349). Dewey does not see art education as having to be allegorical in kind, of which Goya’s *The Nude Maja* 1800 is a case in point. So while he favours an art education accompanied by sensitiveness to moral sentiment, reasoning and behaviour, he also sees that art as an experience sets out from a human context that cannot be subsumed by moral appreciation alone.

Hence, when Dewey states that: “The political and economic arts that may furnish security and competency are no warrants of a rich and abundant human life save as they are attended by the flourishing of the arts that determine culture” (Dewey, 1980, p.345). He is surmising that what the arts bring into a democratic social system of education is a richly endowed process of imaginative approbation that touches the emotions, values and desires of people in ways our political, moral and economic arts alone cannot supply. “The imaginative endures because, while at first strange with respect to us, it is enduringly familiar with respect to the nature of things” (Dewey, 1980, p.269). Humanity cries out for art because it satisfies and reinforces many common and quite ordinary qualities of human experiences.

Two further claims are worth making about Sophocles’ *Antigone* and about art in general that reinforce Dewey’s examination. Aristotle remarks: “though the objects themselves may be painful to see, we delight to view the most realistic representations of them in art” (Aristotle, 1984, 1448a1-20, p.2318). The other point is that the delight that we can take from art can be: “at the same time learning—gathering the meaning of things, e.g. that the man there is so-and-so” (Aristotle, 1984, 1448a1-20, p.2318). If we were to reduce a tragic play simply to the level of its morality without its aesthetic qualities intact, without its image making, passion, excitement and what it says about human life, for instance, in Sophocles’ *Antigone*, we would not be talking about how Dewey perceives art as relevant for education. Dewey did believe that the character and the life of people as “they do and suffer” (Aristotle, 1984, 1447a10-15, p.2316) indicates some of the natural form of art education.

Can we disagree with Dewey when he maintains that our first “intimations of wide and large redirections of desire and purpose are of necessity imaginative” (Dewey, 1980, p.349)? If, for example, we cannot imaginatively see the problems, pleasures and anxieties of our students, what kind of relationships with them can we have? While human production often requires imagination for technical and commercial usages; art paradoxically “is looked upon with distrust” (Dewey, 1980, p.348) and in a world where “social divisions and barriers exist, practices and ideas that correspond to them fix metes and bounds, so that liberal action is placed under restraint” (Dewey, 1980, p.348). To overcome these difficulties he argues that: “Were art an acknowledged power in human association and not treated as the pleasuring of an idle moment or as a means of ostentatious display, and were morals understood to be identical with every aspect of value that is shared in experience, the ‘problem’ of the relation of art and morals would not exist” (Dewey, 1980, p.348). The individual eye of the artists and his or her take on the circumstances affecting their plot, characters, events

and actions will show their artistic reasoning to be morally imperfect. Yet is this necessarily a flaw in art and life? How perfect is our world and who lives a morally perfect existence? To think that life can be divided up into only good and bad features, right and wrong, the criminal and the saint, black and white, whiter than white, and “sheep and goats” (Dewey, 1980, p.348), suggests to Dewey that if moral beliefs are determined in this way they would inhibit human flourishing.

As claimed, Dewey’s thesis relates to the way our environment governs art education. It is characteristic of our environment that “experience is a matter of the interactions of organism with its environment that is human as well as physical, that includes the material of tradition and institutions as well as local surroundings” (Dewey, 1980, p.246). Art education projects itself through its environment and is in turn affected by it in a common community of life. An environment that is democratically interacting and socially concerned for art stands in response to it and becomes enlightened by it. Nothing is unusual about this except that for Dewey our living of a life should be kept alive by its environment so that our environment is in partnership with art as an experience. The greatest threat and possibilities for art education must, therefore, come from our environment.

Consequently, Dewey holds that an environment which minimizes human experience will reinforce intolerances not suited to the expansion of sympathies. Contrarily, he thought that a bench mark for any society was whether it could enter the spirit of another culture (Dewey, 1980, p.334), a process that involves a serious intercourse with art, without which Dewey envisages that a community’s lifestyle cannot cope with proper democracy, liberalism and change. How does art help democracy? He reasons that a society will succeed as an environment imperfectly and govern itself incompetently if it cannot take unto itself a multitude of things that would make it rich in the arts of living experience. He is insistent that in order to have a life that is fulfilling, the world we encounter in everyday existence should express the life in art freely, connectedly, intensely and widely. For art education to blossom in an environment it must be infused with common experiences that are natural to it, so that “the attitudes of the self are informed with meaning” (Dewey, 1980, p.59). Art education, he states, must form a symmetry with life because this is the condition for having an experience of art that helps to refine and support democratic values.

Dewey criticizes art theory and connoisseurship for having developed critiques centering on the anatomy of taste, categorization and intellectualism which have put aside daily living, the feeling of poetry, the skin of emotion, the touch of petals, thorns and roses. The ultimate test of any aesthetic experience for Dewey is in the actual, embodied meaning as expressed in the common lives of people. The world of art is divided up between rich taste and poor taste, between high culture and low culture. There is the exhibitionism of art as an economic and culturally intellectual marketing tool. There is the art lover who owes his education to the Louvre or the Tate Modern. We have the collector of art in search of rare items and the nouveau riche lifestyles displayed in countless newspapers and magazines. Likewise, we have the division of art between the contemplative and the useful arts and the wealth and power of individuals to determine prices and trends in art. There are the forces of nationalism, sectarianism and purism that in different ways for him have further weakened the connection that “aesthetic perception is in the concrete” (Dewey, 1980, p.10). When life is full of dangers and opportunities, when life can be narrow or widened, art feeds human experience making it “possible to carry to new and unprecedented heights that unity of sense and impulse” (Dewey, 1980, pp.22), that of fulfillment, continuity and enrichment which is needed in a complex, fearful, diverse and changing world.

Enriched by a repertoire of power and indifference, the art world and the wider community, Dewey comments, have both down-graded aesthetic experiences. Art education has meaning only when: “Instruction in the arts of life is something other than conveying information about them. It is a matter of communication and participation in the values of life by means of the imagination, and works of art are the most intimate and energetic means of aiding individuals to share in the arts of living. Civilization is uncivil

because human beings are divided into non-communicating sects, races, nations, classes and cliques” (Dewey, 1980, p.336).

The net effect of all this has been a betrayal of the human subject in art as a common normal experience for art education. Under these circumstances, Dewey maintains that art education becomes deprived of its depth. Collapsed are the shared properties of life which may be active in art education as an experience through the whole person. Withered and now marginalized, art education as life positive finds itself in a dry well bereft of normal aesthetic experiences. The field of life’s gravitation has changed—arts way into our interior has been overruled. When this happens, Dewey intimates that art education becomes the economy of being, an arbor of self-deprivation. The shift, however, that Dewey makes is that our “vivid aesthetic experience” (Shusterman, 1995, p.35) grounds art more effectively with our social life. These vivid aesthetic experiences reduce the chasm that can exist between ordinary experience, art and culture.

Aesthetic education starts “with the soil, air, and light out of which things aesthetically admirable arise” (Dewey, 1980, p.12). The delightful sounds of a student playing the violin, the excitement of seeing a great grey owl, of fragrant mornings when the air is full of scent, the compassion of children playing together, a humming bird knocking against one’s window, the measured way a student leaves visible in their painting a rock’s shape through colour, a poem written by a student recoding his love for his mother, the sweet touch of a father’s kiss on his son’s cheek as he goes to school, jet black pebbles found on a beach, the reading of a fairy tale, the pride taken in ancestral knowledge, or the singing voices of a school’s choir resonating along its corridors. Here we have the concrete significance of celebrating, the “valuable in things of everyday enjoyment” (Dewey, 1980, p.11), but which may come as an extra rather than the normal aspect of art and education in our environment. The Maori statues on Easter Island, Michelangelo’s *Creation of Adam*, Rodin’s *Kiss*, Picasso’s *Guernica* and Moore’s *Family Group*, are just a few of the many hundreds of examples that if we had time for in our debate would demonstrate how art does not isolate itself from the concrete world of reality and idealism.

To summarize, Dewey is reminding us that the generative nature of art as experience starts with aesthetic perceptions in the concrete. Conversely, Dewey’s claim that a student may well: “undergo sensations as mechanical stimuli or as irritated stimulations, without having a sense of the reality that is in them and behind them: in much of our experience our different senses do not unite to tell a common and enlarged story. We see without feeling; we hear, but only a second-hand report, second hand because it is not reinforced by vision. We touch, but the contact remains tangential because it does not fuse with qualities of senses that go below the surface. We use the senses to arouse passion but not to fulfill the interest of insight, not because that interest is not potentially present in the exercise of sense but because we yield to conditions of living that force sense to remain an excitation on the surface” (Dewey, 1980, p.21). Art education intervenes, argues Dewey, to push through the values of ordinary deep experience.

Art as an Experience

The creative and experiential primitive impulses of art is expressed by Dewey in the following way: “In order to understand the aesthetic in its ultimate and approved forms, one must begin with it in the raw; in the events and scenes that hold the attentive eye and ear of man, arousing his interest and affording him enjoyment as he looks and listens: the sights that hold the crowd—the fire-engine rushing by; the machine excavating enormous holes in the earth; the human-fly climbing the steeple-side; the men perched high in air on girders, throwing and catching red-hot bolts” (Dewey, 1980, p.5). These are the provocations that excite visual images and the reciprocal processes of further hearing, touch, smell and movement that calls forth an emotion, a surge of action, an intensity of thought, a resumption of effort and an enlargement of perception.

Thus, as Philip W. Jackson reveals, Dewey's conception of art includes: "the continuity between experiences connected with the arts, on the one hand, and ordinary experience on the other" (Jackson, 1995, p.26). Yet to teach art through the capacity of experience means that the student's "position expresses the poised readiness of the live creature to meet the impact of surrounding forces, to meet so to endure and to persist, to extend or expand through undergoing" (Dewey, 1980, p.212) responses apart from its own. The handling of direct experiences is how Dewey envisages the initial teaching of art in education to be about: involving face to face direct contact engagement. This does not mean necessarily to imitate, important as this is, but rather that the world of art making is opened up to leave room for what can ordinarily be shared as an appropriate direct experience in perception. In direct experience the student is free to perceive "those potencies in things" (Dewey, 1980, p.185) which evoke an aspect of the object in revelatory ways. From the real object "the extraction of what the subject matter has to say in particular to the painter in his integrated experience" (Dewey, 1980, p.92), emanates from under the circumstances of direct experience.

A few words are needed to explain how Dewey defines experience. There is a difference between an experience proper and the mere sensation of an experience which he describes as inchoate. "Things are experienced but not in such a way that they are composed into an experience" (Dewey, 1980, p.35). He is trying to show at this stage that the vague sensation of an experience fails to create a meaningful experience. "Things happen, but they are neither definitely included nor decisively excluded" (Dewey, 1980, p.40); for a vague sensational experience is an indistinguishable experience without any evoking purpose, organisation or aesthetic quality to it. It represents "no genuine initiation and conclusion" (Dewey, 1980, p.40). It is without distinction. He invites us to think of this notion as an uneducated experience because it fails to exercise understanding and obligation.

On the other hand, an educational experience is an "organized" (Art as Experience, 1980, p.40) interchange of conversation, movement, growth, self-sufficiency and interest. It interacts with its environment knowingly, consenting to it and alert of it. In recognition of Dewey, Harry S. Broudy writes: "An experience has a beginning, a development, a climax, and a resolution that rounds it off, thus making it stand out" (Broudy, 1994, pp.33-34). The educational point for Dewey is that: "Experience is the result, the sign, and the reward of that interaction of organism and environment which, when it is carried to the full, is a transformation of interaction into participation and communication" (Dewey, 1980, p.22). An experience therefore is memorable, connecting, accumulating, complete and accomplishing. It often has an important qualitative dimension: "a unity that gives it a name, that meal, that storm, that rupture of friendship" (Dewey, 1980, p.37) or 'that dance routine'.

Now, 'undergoing' and 'doing' are words that continuously crop up in Art as Experience to further reveal how an educated experience takes effect. The undergoing element refers to receptivity while the doing element refers to action. Undergoing and doing form a relationship in experience whose pattern and structure creates a perception. Perception requires, Dewey argues, the interaction of undergoing and doing because this relationship produces activity and consequence. Furthermore: "experience is limited by all the causes which interfere with perception of the relationship between undergoing and doing" (Dewey, 1980, p.44). Perceptual insight is in proportion to: "The scope and content of the relationships measure the significant content of an experience" (Dewey, 1980, p.44). "A child's experience may be intense, but, because of lack of background from past experience, relations between undergoing and doing are slightly grasped, and the experience does not have great depth or breadth" (Dewey, 1980, p.44). Dewey insists that little or too much undergoing or doing will distort student's perceptions, when what is always needed is a balance. Perception is the decisive action that is required in art activity. "A painter must consciously undergo the effect of his every brush stroke or he will not be aware of what he is doing and where his work is going" (Dewey, 1980, p.45), a process that carries on his thoughts and "sensitivity to bare colour and to difference in dexterity of execution" (Dewey, 1980, p.45). Qualitative differences experienced in seeing, hearing, reading, dancing and making give rise to differences in thoughts, ideas, emotions and performances.

Qualitative differences in art elevate creative vision, the experience of which can modify and result in more sensuous, expressive and imaginative presentations. All this happens within the framework of undergoing and doing: “as we manipulate, we touch and feel, as we look, we see; as we listen, we hear. The hand moves with etching needle or with brush. The eye attends and reports the consequences of what is done” (Dewey, 1980, p.49).

Dewey accepts that “an environment that is changed physically and spiritually demands new forms of expression” (Dewey, 1980, p.303). Where “the very meaning of an important new movement in any art is that it expresses something new in human experience, some new mode of interaction of the live creature with his surroundings and hence the release of powers previously cramped or inert” (Dewey, 1980, pp.303-4). However, this new vision must indispensably protect itself by a “deliberate openness to life itself” (Dewey, 1980, p.304). From this point of view, the student’s vision will become contrived or corrupted if it is not seriously open to human challenges. Certainly the student in art education must be allowed to go their own way and “evoke the energy appropriate to its realization” (Dewey, 1980, p.178) secured by a vision which is cooperative and completed by life. The art critic Mel Gooding on the painter Patrick Heron writes: “In shaping and re-shaping the house and its unique garden, he has been shaped by it; in occupying it, it has come to occupy him; it has become the ground of his creative being, the very centre of his vision and his imaginings” (Gooding, 2002, p.8). Art education is a sponge as well as a fountain.

Some further enunciations of the common in my above remarks are in order. Dewey makes it plain: “The material out of which a work of art is composed belongs to the common world rather than to a self, and yet there is self-expression in art because the self assimilates that material in a distinctive way to reissue it into the public world in a form that builds a new object” (Dewey, 1980, p.107). In a number of his quotes already mentioned the common world involves those valuable things found in everyday enjoyment; like fixing a child’s bicycle or those moments when the teacher tells us a story that helps to light up the world for us. It is a good custom, argues Iris Murdoch in *The Sovereignty of Good over Other Concepts*, to see the world as it is and to look at these things which give light as discernibly important. Murdoch argues that these things are precious to others and with oneself. In this way art education exhibits for Dewey less of life’s automatic rigid functioning and more of what is overflowing in children’s and adults’ perceptions that show how art as an experience unites people “in origin and destiny” (Dewey, p.271).

Implicit in Dewey’s conception of direct experience is also one’s immediate experience. In the normal course of events we thrive upon our immediate experiences, an instance of which is the student’s spontaneity in the making of their art work. Unconstrained, unmediated and unforced as this human action may be, the poet William Wordsworth is quite specific about it, mentioning in his preface to the *Lyrical Ballads* that immediate experiences in art have a ‘distinct purpose’ (Wordsworth, 1907, p.935). It looks, listens, feels and imagines actively. When he sums up immediate experience as: “the spontaneous overflow of feelings” (Wordsworth, 1907, p.935), we are taken by this intentional artistic expression but this is a less than transparent statement since it designates on first view only the subjective.

Nevertheless, Wordsworth clears the air for us by explaining how immediate experience can operate in art making in a practical way. He reveals how immediate experience is: (1) a “submission to a necessity” (Wordsworth, 1907, p.954), (2) a “state of subjection to an external object” (Wordsworth, 1907, p.954) and (3) a response to “objects as they exist and as re-acted upon by one’s own mind” (Wordsworth, 1907, p.954). Wordsworth further adds that immediate experience in art creation requires “a fashioning through imagination” (Wordsworth, 1907, p.934) and the “impression of sense” (Wordsworth, 1907, p.955), which are “from repeated and regular feelings” (Wordsworth, 1907, p.935) that get “modified and directed by other thoughts” (Wordsworth, 1907, p.935). Immediate experiences are susceptible to the “shifting scenery of the mind” (Wordsworth, 1907, p.955). It would be an inaccuracy to conceive the ‘shifting scenery of the mind’ as an arbitrary process as we are being governed by undergoing, doing and perception.

An immediate experience comes into its own when as Wordsworth comments: “the more versatile the fancy the more original and striking” is the image (Wordsworth, 1907, p.955). From habit forming, prior experiences, imagination, interrogation and “patient observation” (Wordsworth, 1907, p.955) Wordsworth, like Dewey, feels that student’s immediate experiences are developed successively. The net effect is that: “These processes of the imagination are carried on either by conferring additional properties upon an object, or abstracting from it some of those which it actually possesses and thus enabling it to re-act upon the mind which hath performed the process, like a new existence” (Wordsworth, 1907, p.956). Wordsworth is adamant that we have to be enthused, tender and “delight in the spirit of life” (Wordsworth, 1907, p.937) in order to avoid “vulgarity and meanness” (William Wordsworth, 1907, p.937). Art education explores immediate experiences in order to see what gives the suspense and what bursts through actions, emotions and thoughts. In the activity of art as an experience, coalesced are the constant comings and goings of individualized performances and visualizations “which through successive deeds there runs a sense of growing meaning conserved and accumulated towards an end that is felt as accomplishment of a process” (Dewey, 1980, p.39).

Children playing in the school’s playground, a chess club at school, handling spiders in a science class, a school’s Christmas pantomime and a school’s visit to a nature reserve can all be experienced in imaginative ways. Art education becomes defined by these experiences by showing itself to be alive to their scenes and meanings. A student in an art class is not only trained to notice these things but is taught how to create a synergy of life and a synthesis of vitality that achieves a particular integration of receptivity and doing.

Never withdrawn from view in the Lascaux caves is ordinary life. Yet, what we are interested in knowing is why the Lascaux cave paintings as Palaeolithic art are more than a pathetic truth of the ordinary? The art work on the walls and ceilings in the Lascaux caves show in some detail not just the anatomical correctness of different animals: their knees, tendons, hoofs, metatarsal glands, nostrils, humped shoulders, and tongues in a realistic fashion but something further approaching an art which: “explodes with a dark, blind power. Even Goya’s bullfights are but a vague echo of this passion” (Herbert, 1985, p.11). Present in these artistic images are significant human experiences that are the sensitive wrestling of the perceptions they reveal. They are not just the finesse of execution in expression but a commitment to a higher aim. Would we say that these Lascaux artists have demonstrated, in their image making constructions, a care for the human as the universal in the particular (Aristotle, 1984, 1451b1-10, p.2322)? Reflecting on his time in the Lascaux caves, Herbert writes: The road opened to the Greek temples and the Gothic cathedrals. I walked towards them feeling the warm touch of the Lascaux painter on my palm” (Herbert, 1985, p.17). We should say that in the teaching of art a ‘higher’ aim imaginatively conceived is not without eminence. However, for Dewey, art education does not depend on the forging of a ‘higher’ aim because art is not “just a stimulus to and means of an overt course of action” (Dewey, 1980, p.274).

We have seen how art education responds when it is in contact with the world involving a self that acts and is acted upon. This means that effective art teaching relies on a correspondence between the standards peculiar to art itself and the standards desired by our cultural, institutional and ordinary experiences. The student is trained to form habits and limitations and meaning and value in distinct purposeful ways. Direct and immediate experiences are at the forefront of Dewey’s proposal for teaching art in education. As discussed, different visions in art education relate to the forces operating in its environment as well as to the internal mechanisms, processes and imaginative experiences that help the student to release and expand its own natural abilities to produce art work which is steeped in the “underlying common elements of the experienced world” (Dewey, 1980, p.248). Art education proves its worth not by being merely morally correct but by further acts informed by material that is grasped and gathered in sensitive, concrete and accountable expressive ways that are communal and close to us. His theory makes sense because it demonstrates the creative involvement between what is undergone and what is completed as an integral part of the intercourse of experience in art practice. By explaining what art as an experience is, he has answered

how art in education can produce a flourishing understanding of the temperament of its society. Dewey's claim that art education can make an enormous human contribution to democratic, social and human understanding still stands out as a test for our education system.

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