



JOHN DEWEY

## Art as Experience

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Based on John Dewey's lectures on esthetics, delivered as the first William James Lecturer at Harvard in 1932, *Art as Experience* has grown to be considered internationally as the most distinguished work ever written by an American on the formal structure and characteristic effects of all the arts: architecture, sculpture, painting, music, and literature.

## Art as Experience Details

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# From Reader Review Art as Experience for online ebook

## Chris Beiser says

Below is a very glowing review. It's hard for me to recommend this book more. This review is fairly overwrought, because this book has given me some incredible insights, and it's made a big impact on how I see the world. It may be better for you to just stop reading, buy a copy, and struggle through it. (AAE is so dense that I was unable to read it whenever heating or air conditioning was on, because it wasn't possible for me to filter out the sound and read the book simulatenously.)

I went into this book with what I would consider a good aesthetic sense, an understanding of the fundamentals of creative processes, and a set of hunches about what it means to have a cultural zeitgeist, the meaning of a medium as a communal form, etc. Today, at risk of coming off as expressing misplaced epistemological confidence, I feel fairly confident in saying that I understand what art is, and how it functions, on a fundamental level. It has changed how I see the world in a serious ways, and to a degree that's very unusual.

Many works of philosophy progress by making an argument; the world can be split into X'es and Y'es, and each of these are Z, and so forth. Dewey follows no such pattern. Though his prose is dense (so, so dense), to read it feels almost like it's been divinely handed down. I don't want to make it sound like I failed to give it a properly skeptical reception, but his logic is so clear, and fits so neatly with the experiences of creating, experiencing and thinking, that it needs no further argument.

Art as Experience was published in 1934. Dewey starts the book with a shoutout to cartoons and 'jazzed music,' which he (quite controversially for the time) calls some of the most exciting mediums of his day. It's a curious fact that despite being revered in design schools, he's only rarely been followed up on in Aesthetic philosophy. Part of this is that he's hard to read, and his approach isn't typical. But mostly, I suspect that it's because once he's done speaking, there's not much more to say. There are passages that clearly anticipate pop art and conceptual art, and unlike many aesthetic philosophies from his time, his has been strengthened, not weakened, by their arrival.

I'm struggling to find a way to close this review. Dewey might say that I have an impulsion, but (as shown by the literary-review tropes above) not mastery enough of the medium to produce a work that expresses it. I say you should buy a copy of Art As Experience.

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## Chris Bass says

Every page is brilliance--seriously, I am not exaggerating. Dewey's insights and thoughts are as refreshing and relevant to us today as when the lecture was presented at Harvard (1932). As I read through the first few chapters, I found myself copying pages of each chapter to use in my classroom. He provides necessary theory to challenge and discuss the relevancy of education and function of English Education.

Nice thoughts:

"The moment of passage from disturbance into harmony is that of intense life" (16).

"Most European museums are, among other things, memorials of the rise of nationalism and imperialism" (7). Yikes...Aligns a bit with Edward Said, here.

"The idea that the artist does not think as intently and penetratingly as a scientific inquirer is absurd" (47).

I have to admit, that I would never pick this book randomly off the shelf. It is on my reading list for a grad course; however, as I read the first few chapters, I couldn't help wondering why I didn't know more about this "local" genius (significant professor at UofC and their law school)

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### **Tomas Ramanauskas says**

Great observer, not a great writer. It takes time to get used to Dewey's heavy hand but then you are treated to a well nuanced exploration of relationship between the audience and the piece of art be it poetry, painting, music.

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### **Sharnn says**

Dense. I love reading through this, taking time and careful reflection.

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### **Angela says**

So, so so wonderful. This is a work of genius and beauty.

For me this book has to be read with a pencil. I appreciate it FAR more when I read a chapter in an evening and then write notes on it. There's a lot to integrate, enjoy, and just appreciate on an aesthetic level.

Yeah, reading this is itself an aesthetic experience for me. Again and again, reading this book takes me into flights of sublimity - actual intellectual climaxes I've only experienced with a few speakers and writers in my life. It's not like this is the most brilliant philosophy book ever written, but it is pretty damn brilliant - showing me that Pragmatism has a lot more to it than I credit it for because I tend to think American philosophers are brutish and lack cosmopolitan education. (Admittedly other Dewey books I've read bored me to tears....)

But this book strikes such chords of truth with me that it produces these actual peak moments of yes. I am SO happy reading it and long to share it with others who might share the joy of it. I think part of the resonance is because I read the book once 20 years ago and sort of understood it, and over the past two decades have experienced experience in a way that was only somewhat consciously shaped by this work. Additionally, my minimalist metaphysical/ epistemological position on the nature of reality and experience - which comes from a combination of yoga and pragmatism (pragmatism itself being a step ahead of phenomenology in some ways, as well as being deeply influenced by certain elements of Advaita Vedanta) resonates so strongly with what Dewey articulates here. So he's just saying what I feel to be true, both in his joyful, holistic comments on the aesthetic AND in his critiques of dualistic, internally contradictory modes of thinking.

A lot of new “spiritual” teachings about spiritual bypassing and “deep materialism” are articulated here. More than a hundred years ago. And articulated far better than anywhere else I’ve seen in modern spiritual writings.

The poverty of lived experience - if it is not fully integrated with the senses and objects and the world - is a big theme for Dewey. Accordingly I fear that the capacity to enjoy this work - on a purely AESTHETIC level - will be lost. It presumes a level of concentration, and ability to become absorbed into a world of sheer abstraction. The payoff is really significant - kinds of aesthetic thrill that far surpass “entertainment” of any sort I know. But damn, it’s a big investment of time, background and concentration to be able to have this reading experience.

On that point, just for a taste of this nearly hundred-year-old prose, here’s a passage I used for a blog post a few months ago, something that highlights the poverty of lived experience at times, and is a very good example of Dewey putting the Radical Empiricist doctrines of William James into practice.

From page 45 - 47 in Chapter 3, Having an Experience:

"An experience has pattern and structure, because it is not just doing and undergoing in alternation, but consists of them in relationship. To put one's hand in the fire that consumes it is not necessarily to have an experience. The action and its consequence must be joined in perception. This relationship is what gives meaning; to grasp it is the objective of all intelligence. The scope and content of the relations measure the significant content of an experience. 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. No one ever arrives at such maturity that he perceives all the connections that are involved. There was once written (by Mr. Hinton) a romance called "The Unlearner." It portrayed the hole endless duration of life after death as a living over of ethics's incidents that happened in a short life on earth, in continued discovery of the relationships involved among them."

"... nothing takes root in the mind when there is no balance between doing and receiving. Some decisive action is needed in order to establish contact with ethical realities of the world and in order that impressions may be so related to facts that their value is tested and organized. Because perception of relationship between what is done and what is undergone constitutes the work of intelligence, and because the artist is controlled in the process of his work by his grasp of the connection between what he has already done and what he is to do next, the idea that the artist does not think is intently and penetratingly as a scientific inquirer is absurd.... Any idea that ignores the necessary role of intelligence in production of works of art is based upon identification of thinking with the use of one special kind of material, verbal signs and words. To think effectively in terms of relations of qualities is as severe a demand upon thought as to think in terms of symbols, verbal and mathematical. Indeed, since words are easily manipulated in mechanical ways, the production of a work of genuine art probably demands more intelligence than does most of the so-called thinking that goes on among those who pride themselves on being 'intellectuals.'"

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## **Nelson Zagalo says**

Masterpiece. Thanks John Dewey for writing this book, even more because it was written in 1934.

This should be obligatory read for anyone studying/researching Art Communication. Before the domain of Communication Sciences even existed, before Emotion Studies were seriously accepted by the academy,

Dewey has written a profound and dense work on the subject of Art Experience. It was done from a philosophical approach, however Dewey, clearly influence by his Pragmatics companion, William James, the father of Functional Psychology, does a magnificent cognitive analysis of the relation between the Art Work and the Subject Receptor. Dewey never refrains himself to talk about emotion, to go in depth in the analysis of the experiential human construct.

To fully understand how this book came to exist, it's necessary to go back and research Pragmatism, a movement founded by Dewey, James and Peirce.

The book is dense, it takes time to read, but it rewards yo, the more you invest in it.

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## **Monica says**

Another text that has changed my understanding about art and living. This text helped me to continue to emphasize the importance of the arts and the imagination in school. Dewey clearly demonstrates how art is a natural and important part of life.

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## **the gift says**

this is a later later later addition: in just reading deleuze, there is the idea that 'art' of any sort is not necessarily the uncovering of 'truth', as in heidegger, that this revealing is neither cause nor effect, but rather sort of 'side-effect', something essential to the project, yet not a goal, idea, sense, otherwise expressible. so perhaps learning 'pragmatics' of art is useful.....

this is a later later addition: have i mistaken the relative connotations of 'pragmatic' and 'practical'- well this is a poetic question. and perhaps i am thinking of 'pragmatic' as 'programmatic', that is, something of a scheme devised before application, before writing, with given goals and limits of the possible. for me, 'practical' is simply the 'practice' of writing, the doing, the words, which do not necessarily or instrumentally achieve a set goal or form or experience- that it is always a 'try' an 'essay'...

this is a later addition: i have now read some of dewey's poetry, not enough to review, but it is the exact sort i did not like studying- poetry that is self-consciously using language that is poetic, with rhyme schemes, stanzas, apostrophes, with sentiment rather dominant, but then as admitted i have not really read much poetry so maybe it is actually considered good... though in comparison with the translated Russian work just read from the stray dog cafe in Petersburg it is very staid, very dull, very uninteresting...

first review: this is an interesting, for me very different book on the arts. most of my reading on aesthetics has been continental phenomenologists, sartre, heidegger, merleau-ponty, so the ways of investigating this subject have been far more metaphysical. this is an american pragmatist writing. this is a historical document that seems even older than 1932 though it is a collection of lectures that year, where the emblematic works of art are primarily poetry...

i do not know whether 'pragmatism' has much to do with art. 'practical' yes, in that any work requires close attention, awareness, alteration of this or that part of the object designed to encapsulate and offer an artistic experience. 'pragmatism' suggests in this word, to me, the effective-under-the-circumstances, as if there were

some accepted limitation of the medium, some way this judgement, this correctness, can be measured, this possibility. 'practical' is a recognition that these aspects are malleable but specific to each experience, each work, and is rather the impossible, the unlimited, the intuitive, which any artist must discover in the process and each time no matter how similar the subject involved or means utilized...

but then, dewey is a 'pragmatist'. he starts with a metaphysics that proposes the 'live creature', the human, as both source and receiver of any work that pretends to the status of art, and gives argument why such experience is of human necessity. this is fine. this is not in dispute. then he talks of 'etherial things', 'having an experience', 'act of expression', 'expressive object', 'substance and form', 'natural history of form', 'organization of energies', 'common substance of arts', 'varied substance of arts', 'human contribution', 'challenge to philosophy', 'criticism and perception', 'art and civilization'... yes, there is a sense of great, perceptive, analytic thought, brought to bear on the experience of art, but i had some trouble shifting my mind to this inquisitive attitude. this work, this way, though he insists remains whole, an integration of subject and form, strikes me as too deliberately separated, dissected, simply in this logical dissertation...

this is partly, no doubt, that this is not the style of philosophy i find most congenial. this is not the attitude. though he is working at about the same time as heidegger's work there is a world of difference between their approaches, their assertions: though dewey insists he will be descriptive and not prescriptive, he cannot help in the examples he chooses, the approaches of both creators and critics, giving his idea of what counts as art. but this is not that poetry creates new words and thus worlds, not that art reveals any existential being, any truth, any clearing, such as is said in heidegger. this is very directly how the work of art 'works': goes from a to b, offers respite, offers something like correspondence truth, grows out of history, reflects cultures, and how we should evaluate somehow according to 'how it works'... this is pragmatism i guess...

this is good in its way, thus a three, but strikes me more as what a scientist might imagine best to address this most slippery topic of the arts: as a biologist determine your genus, your species, your population, as a chemist discover your elements, your phases, your combinations, as a physicist describe your movement, your interactions, your expressions- but this is art for a scientist. it is rather naive. while it is best in critical papers of all disciplines, to pose as disinterested, academic, impersonal- i do not know if this is possible with the arts. for though i hear that dewey did write some poetry, not published in his lifetime, this entire book, this attempt to comprehend the experience of art conflicts with my experience- and should they ever deign to read it, probably that of my artist friends...

it does not help me that the art dewey uses most in his work is poetry, and this a tradition of which i am not much familiar. not the poetry heidegger tends to in his later work, not the poetry neitzsche uses to give his philosophy, but poetry that trends along the historical line through english 'greats'. but then merleau-ponty is heavily weighted to painting, particularly cezanne, and neither thinker addresses abstract expressionism let alone pop art. (actually hd does deal with ab-x in an essay i read but forget the title) dewey does not, either, address that most synthetic art which involves so many other arts- and at least according to deleuze offers a new way of thinking- that seventh art of the cinema... if there is any art which does best fit kant's organization of thought and so judgement, there is the cinema. dewey dismisses kant early on then in fact dismisses much continental philosophy on the arts. dewey is a pragmatist...

i read once a quote by poet charles bukowski (somewhere): 'the philosopher explains something simple in a very complex way, the poet explains something complex in a very simple way'- whether you like his work or not, he is on to something there...

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## Forrest says

Some labyrinths are worth descending into just to get a glimpse of the Minotaur, even if you can't yet defeat him. *Art as Experience* is one of those. It will require several more descents to get the clearest picture of the Minotaur and more familiarization with the territory in order to be able to face it head on. But I have seen the face of the Minotaur, and it is beautiful and terrifying. This is my attempt to follow the threads back out of the maze.

Dewey's monstrous work - and I use this as a term of admiration, rather than derision - is daunting in scope, yet, at its core, it is a simple argument: People change, their perception changes, so that every encounter with a potential "art" carries with it the possibility of an aesthetic experience. The imposition of one's preconceived theory *on* art interferes with one's direct interaction *with* art, since it imposes generic ideas on the mind that do not take into account both the artists and the viewers own experiences as influences in the interplay between creator and created, viewer and viewed.

This flies in the face of several philosophical traditions that tend to shoehorn art into their paradigms as an afterthought or even a necessary nuisance - philosophers seem to recognize that they *ought* to include art in their thought-system, but they don't really know where to place it on the map. From this springs the aesthetics-theory equivalent of Ptolemaic models of the geocentric universe, with their complicated, strained systems of deferents, equants, and epicycles.

Dewey's solution is to abandon philosophical preconception and begin from the ground up, defining the very word "experience" with some logical rigor, then examining whether or not that definition accurately communicates the difficult-to-quantify interplay between art and those who appreciate it (or not). His theory arises *from* art as an experience, the experience of production and enjoyment, rather than imposing his theory *on* art and aesthetic experience. He uses flowers as an analogy to show the difference between the mere appreciation of art and the understanding of art:

*"Flowers can be enjoyed without knowing about the interactions of soil, air, moisture, and seeds of which they are the result. But they cannot be understood without taking just these interactions into account - and theory is a matter of understanding. Theory is concerned with discovering the nature of the production of works of art and of their enjoyment in perception."*

Note that Dewey addresses not only the understanding of art, but the understanding of its production, as well. He gives importance to the conscious manipulation of materials during an artist's work (he is careful to identify "work" as more of what an artist does than of what an artist produces, though the word often works with both definitions simultaneously). While others work for efficiency, especially in the manufacturing and production sectors (I can vouch for this from my day job as a "Continuous Improvement Supervisor" - yes, that's my actual job title), the artist works to consciously form matter into a "work" of art that communicates meaning. I am struck particularly by Dewey's assertion that *"It is possible to be efficient in action and yet not have a conscious experience."* This is my experience in my day job. And this is why I love writing. Though writing is hard work, and believe me, it's a lot like real work, I am *immersed* when I write, fully conscious of the experience, and yet "lost" to the outside world. It's like making intellectual love with words and sentences - a very sensual, immediate experience, very much unlike the job I use to pay the bills.

That's not to say that someone can't produce something of great craftsmanship with efficiency. But Dewey is careful to indicate that the conscious work, bolstered by an emotional investment, something of the "heart" of the artist, again in an attempt to communicate meaning, is different than the work of creating a functional

object. A chair is just a chair, unless the artist can somehow, in the chair's construction, communicate meaning beyond the mere utility of the chair, thus providing an aesthetic experience to the audience:

*"Without emotion, there may be craftsmanship, but not art"*

Dewey also separates the art object from that which it represents. Once the artist has manipulated matter to create a work of art, it is its own *thing*, despite what it might represent. Thus, Dewey includes abstract art as fully capable of engendering aesthetic experiences, again depending on what the artist puts into it and what the audience brings to its viewing: *"When someone complained to [Matisse] that she had never seen a woman who looked like the one in his painting, he replied: 'Madam, that is not a woman; that is a picture'."*

The "unity" that occurs when the audience comes into dialogue with the artist through the work of art is what, ultimately, constitutes the aesthetic experience. The audience approaches the work of art with their own prejudices (Dewey uses the term "resistances") born of previous experience. The artist has also brought his or her prejudices, also born of previous experience, to the work(ing) of (the) art. In this interaction, the art itself acts as the device of communication between the two parties, and a sort of negotiation takes place.

*"There is unity only when the resistances create a suspense that is resolved through cooperative interaction of the opposed energies."* The audience brings something of opposition to the table, and that opposition cannot always be resolved (take, for example, my utter loathing of *The Catcher in the Rye* which is loved by some of my close friends and many of those whose opinions on literature I hold in high regard). In the example of Matisse just quoted, one can surmise that either the prejudices of the woman speaking to him did not allow the art to "speak" to her, or that Matisse failed to create the art in such a way that the woman could understand. This is why the appreciation or rejection of art can be such a divisive discourse. Not everyone's communication style is compatible with everyone else's. As with speaking, so with art.

This leads to Dewey's criticism of criticism (!). This segment of *Art as Experience* is excellent in that it shows that any justification toward "objectivity" on the part of a critic is misplaced if the critic doesn't acknowledge his or her *then current* circumstances, which must inform the criticism. In other words, there is no absolutely true objectivity when it comes to critiques of art (or literature, etc), and such critiques can change over time, as the critics experience changes.

Now, I have merely scratched the surface. This is a work that demands to be read and re-read. I am shocked that this wasn't ever included in my studies as an undergraduate Humanities major. Perhaps the professors thought this should be reserved for graduate level studies and, if so, they might have been right. This book, like any labyrinth, is a challenge. But it is worth it, if only to get a glimpse at the horrible beauty of the Minotaur which, in my case, at least, is likely to go undefeated in this lifetime. I simply don't have enough years left to fully explore every nook and cranny of this monumental work, though what I've retained thus far will definitely inform all my own creative endeavors from now on.

Finally, I believe that the paragraph I quote below, by itself, speaks potential volumes. It might seem fairly straightforward, but, I believe, it contains subtle twists and turns that could inform ones study of art (in all its forms, whether visual art, statuary, architecture, dance, poetry, or music) for a lifetime.

*"[The existence of art] is proof that man uses the materials and energies of nature with intent to expand his own life, and that he does so in accord with the structure of his organism - brain, sense-organs, and muscular system. Art is the living and concrete proof that man is capable of restoring consciously, and thus on the plane of meaning, the union of sense, impulse, and action characteristic of the live creature. The intervention of consciousness adds regulation, power of selection, and redispotion. Thus it varies the arts in ways without end. But its intervention also leads in time to the idea of art as a conscious idea - the greatest intellectual achievement in the history of humanity."*

Go forth, Theseus. But please don't forget about the black sails, okay?

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### **sam howie says**

I was always going to give this book 5 stars from reading bits and pieces before actually now finally reading it front to back. It is an astounding accomplishment in aesthetic theory written with two feet placed firmly on the ground, in the true pragmatist style that Dewey involved himself with. In summation, I feel, it takes or removes the magic from art and leaves only the essence, and essence is all that is ever needed to make and/or view art.

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### **Kym says**

Ouch, this is a tough one. Some very memorable and useful pieces swimming in the sea of concepts. I've never felt so stupid reading a book in my life!

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### **Steven says**

Why, in all my courses on aesthetics and art history, have I not been assigned this? Might it be because Dewey takes down Kant and his continental successors with a little common sense and a few grammatically legible sentences? Well, it sure doesn't hurt. I say, "legible," but that doesn't mean the reading here is not dense. Every page is work and reward; therefore, you may find yourself poking along at a snail's pace, five or ten pages at a time. I don't think Dewey's book can be read any more quickly. There's no way I can go through the chapters point by point here (I've highlighted something on practically every page), but I'll leave a sample of Dewey's cut-to-the-chase sensibility:

"'Imagination' shares with 'beauty' the doubtful honor of being the chief theme in esthetic [sic] writings of enthusiastic ignorance. More perhaps than any other phase of the human contribution, it has been treated as a special and self-contained faculty, differing from others in possession of mysterious potencies. Yet if we judge its nature from the creation of works of art, it designates a quality that animates and pervades all processes of making and observation. It is a way of seeing and feeling things as they compose an integral whole. It is the large and generous blending of interests at the point where the mind comes in contact with the world. When old and familiar things are made new in experience, there is imagination. When the new is created, the far and strange become the most natural and inevitable things in the world. There is always some measure of adventure in the meeting of mind and universe, and this adventure is, in its measure, imagination" (267).

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### **Jason says**

The greatest book written by an American in the 20th Century. It's not just about aesthetics. He claims, in an even harder book to read, (I know, I know, but its worth the effort) Experience and Nature, that experience itself exhibits aesthetic characteristics (rhythm, flow, spatial and temporal relationships) and only when we

understand this will we understand the nature of thinking, joy and fulfillment. This book goes with that insight and further elaborates on the form of experience best suited for truly communicating with others-- a form exhibited by art produced by many cultures at many times. This artful communication lies at the core of democratic community, the idea that animates all of Dewey's work. This book lies at the core of American philosophy and one of the best gifts that 20th century America has given, unto this point, to humanity. Hyperbolic? Perhaps. But just try to read the book, and a few others by Dewey.

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### **Steven says**

Perhaps this is anachronistic in our current mash-up culture (or maybe it isn't?), but I think writers should do some reading in aesthetic theory. Dewey's book, originally delivered as a series of lectures in 1932, is one I'd recommend, either to argue with or from which to seek inspiration. I first read this for a philosophy seminar and that kind of systematic studious reading is far different from how I read it now, which is to open it at random and read for a bit and then see where that takes me. Here's an example: "The determination of the *mot juste*, of the right incident in the right place, of exquisiteness of proportion, of the precise tone, hue, and shade that helps unify the whole while it defines the part, is accomplished by emotion. Not every emotion, however, can do this work, but only one informed by material that is grasped and gathered. Emotion is informed and carried forward when it is spent directly in search for material and in giving it order, not when it is directly expended." (73) Something similar to ponder on any page you open. Here's one more: "Refusal to acknowledge the boundaries set by convention is the source of frequent denunciations of objects of art as immoral. But one of the functions of art is precisely to sap the moralistic timidity that causes the mind to shy away from some materials and refuse to admit them into the clear and purifying light of perceptive consciousness." (197) And speaking of anachronisms, unlike critical works published today, this book is not weighted down with endless footnotes or endnotes. What a fresh reading experience that is, aesthetically pleasing, you might say. Whether you want to weigh in to a philosophic debate on aesthetic theory, or just browse for inspiration on the function and form of artistic endeavors, you'll find something useful in Dewey's book. Besides, he's an American pragmatist, the perfect antidote if you've been reading too much French post-structuralist theory.

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### **Colleen says**

Super verbose to the point where he'd spend pages to get to a single point. The author's writing style was also very dry and hard to wrap my head around. I had to read this for a class, and I was reading it early and I'm glad I did because I could not be able to finish this quickly. I often could only read a few pages a day and call it major progress. If I wasn't reading this for a class, I'd never ever read this book and do not recommend it.

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### **Brynn says**

"Art celebrates with peculiar intensity the moments in which the past reinforces the present and in which the future is a quickening of what now is." (17)

"'Spontaneity' is the result of long periods of activity, or else it is so empty as not to be an act of expression." (75)

"There are values and meanings that can be expressed only by immediately visible and audible qualities, and to ask what they mean in the sense of something that can be put into words is to deny their distinctive existence." (77)

"In other words, art is not nature, but is nature transformed by entering into new relationships where it evokes a new emotional response." (82)

"Every work of art 'abstracts' in some degree from the particular traits of objects expressed. Otherwise, it would only, by means of exact imitation, create an illusion of the presence of the things themselves." (98)

"But whatever path the work of art pursues, it, just because it is a full and intense experience, keeps alive the power to experience the common world in its fullness." (138)

"Significant advances in technique occur, therefore, in connection with efforts to solve problems that are not technical but that grow out of the need for new modes of experience." (147)

"For art is a selection of what is significant, with rejection by the very same impulse of what is irrelevant, and thereby the significant is compressed and intensified." (216)

"Time as empty does not exist; time as an entity does not exist. What exists are things acting and changing, and a constant quality of their behavior is temporal." (218)

"Language comes infinitely short of paralleling the variegated surface of nature. Yet words as practical devices are the agencies by which the ineffable diversity of natural existence as it operates in human experience is reduced to orders, ranks, and classes that can be managed." (224)

"For, as we have already seen, the more a work of art embodies what belongs to experiences common to many individuals, the more expressive it is." (297)

"For masterpieces themselves can be critically appreciated only as they are placed in the tradition to which they belong." (323)

"He then misses the point of all art, the unity of form and matter, and misses it because he lacks adequate sympathy, in his natural and acquired one-sidedness, with the immense variety of interactions between the live creature and his world." (326)

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## **Penny says**

"Mountain peaks do not float unsupported; they do not even just rest upon the surface. The ARE the earth in one of its manifest operations."

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## **Regina Andreassen says**

What a wonderful book! Aesthetics, as perceived by John Dewey, is more than just philosophy; is, as Baumgarten stated, the science of perception, while Art is perhaps the most sublime expression of human aesthetics. Moreover, Dewey reminds us that art is not exclusive to art galleries, museums, or expensive collections but is born in our daily experiences. A brilliant work, written in an elegant, dynamic style!

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### **Tara says**

I slogged through this text, but after reading am thoroughly entrenched in Dewey's philosophy and theory about art as experience. Her writes in a manner that is accessible, but this material is dense and not exactly riveting. If you are reading Dewey with an academic or theoretical framework in mind, then you won't be disappointed.

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### **Glenn Russell says**

Are there times in your life that are dull and dreary, a mechanical, mindless shuffling from one tedious task to another? According to American philosopher John Dewey (1859-1952), such moments in anybody's life lack aesthetic quality. He writes in *Art as Experience*, "The enemies of the aesthetic are neither the practical nor the intellectual. They are the humdrum; slackness of loose ends; submission to convention in practice and intellectual procedure." We may ask, by Dewey's reckoning, what will be needed to have an aesthetic experience? And when will an aesthetic experience be deemed artistic? As a way of answering these questions, we can take a look at the following example:

A woman is sitting on a bench in a city park. She listens to the children playing on a nearby playground, she feels the sun on her skin, she watches attentively as people walk to and fro. She feels connected to everyone and everything; life has such fullness and she will remember this afternoon in the park for a long time. Then, after about an hour of this very rich experience, she takes out her flute and starts playing. Since she is a world-class flutist, her wonderful music attracts a number of people who stand around and listen to her play. After playing several pieces, she nods her head and puts away her flute. The small crowd applauds and walks off.

Dewey would say the woman's first experience of sitting in silence, fully present and awake to the richness of what life offers, has a certain completeness and aesthetic quality. Her second experience of playing the flute and sharing her music is an extension and intensification of the first experience. And because her playing incorporates a mastery and control of a particular technique (flute playing) and expression of emotions and feelings with others, it is a powerful artistic form of human communication.

Expanding on this example, a key concept for Dewey is 'continuity', that is, how all of life within the universe is part of a dynamic rhythm, forever alternating between disequilibrium and equilibrium, tension and resolution. And our human experience, including human making and crafting, is an outgrowth and amplification of these patterns of nature. Thus, for Dewey, viewing art and aesthetic experience as something set apart, restricted to museums, galleries, theaters and concert halls is a modern distortion.

Also, along the same lines, Dewey asks, “Why is there repulsion when the high achievements of fine art are brought into connection with common life, the life that we share with all living creatures? Why is life thought of as an affair of low appetite, or at its best a thing of gross sensation, and ready to sink from its best to the level of lust and harsh cruelty?” With such questions, we see how Dewey values continuity and integration of all aspects of our very human nature – mental, emotional, sensual, bodily, perceptive. He rebels against rigid dualism, setting spirit against flesh, mind against body. Applying this line of thinking to art and aesthetics, Dewey urges us to view human creativity as, ideally, involving the whole person. Unfortunately, he notes, such a holistic approach goes against the grain of our modern-day, highly-specialized, compartmentalized culture.

Yet again another aspect of continuity is linking an artist’s creation with the artist’s life as a whole. I recall reading about a court case where the judge asked great 19th century American painter James Abbott Whistler how he could charge so much for a painting since it took less than an hour to paint. Whistler replied, “Yes, but it also took a lifetime of experience.” It is this ‘lifetime of experience’ Dewey recognizes as being so important to artistic creation.

One area I find particularly fascinating is how Dewey defends abstract art against those thinkers and art critics who view abstract art as devoid of expression or overly intellectual. Dewey counters by citing how all art abstracts, for example, a painting portrays a three dimensional landscape in two dimensions. He also likens abstract art to a chemist’s abstraction of the material, visible elements of earth, water, fire and air into molecules and atoms. Another thought-provoking insight is when Dewey notes how many people in our modern world are tormented since they lack the control and technical skill to transform their powerful emotions and life experiences into a work of art in any form.

On the universality of art and aesthetic experience, we read, “In the end, works of art are the only media of complete and unhindered communication that can occur in a world full of gulfs and walls that limit community of experience.” So, for Dewey, unlike politics and religion, subjects that have a tendency to cut people off from one another, painting and sculpture, music and dance, theater and literature and other forms of art provide us with a great opportunity to connect with other people and share our common humanity. Certainly, what we have going on with Goodreads is an excellent example of Dewey’s philosophy.

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