

Arts aim is
to reveal
truth via
sensuous
material
which has
aim in itself
idea

Art reveals metaphysical
- all reality is spirit developing towards self-consciousness
through human history.

Art is one of the ways absolute spirit (geist) is revealed (as essence of world
(art, religion, philosophy).)

realization of an end which possessed real and independent importance outside the realm of art.)

As opposed to this we must maintain that it is art's function to reveal truth under the mode of
art's sensuous or material configuration, to display the reconciled antithesis previously described,
and by this means to prove that it possesses its final aim in itself, in this representation in short
and self-revelation. (For other ends such as instruction, purification, improvement, procuring of
wealth, struggle after fame and honour have nothing whatever to do with this work of art as such,
still less do they determine the fundamental idea of it.)

It is then from this point of view, into which the reflective consideration of our subject-matter
finally issues, that we have to grasp the fundamental idea of art in terms of its ideal or inward neces-
sity, as it is also from this point of view that historically regarded the true appreciation and acquaint-
ance with art took its origin. For that antithesis, to which we have drawn attention, did not merely
assert its presence within the general thought of educated men, but equally in philosophy as such. It
was only after philosophy was in a position to overcome this opposition absolutely that it grasped the
fundamental notion of its own content, and, to the extent it did so, the idea of Nature and of art.

For this reason, as this point of view implies the reawakening of philosophy in the widest
connotation of the term, so also it is the re-awakening of the science of art. We may go further
and affirm that aesthetic as a science is in a real sense primarily indebted to this re-awakening for
its true origination, and art for its higher estimation.

ART AS EXPERIENCE (1859-1952) really?

■ John Dewey ■

Experience occurs continuously, because the interaction of live creature and environing
conditions is involved in the very process of living. Under conditions of resistance and conflict,
aspects and elements of the self and the world that are implicated in this interaction qualify
experience with emotions and ideas so that conscious intent emerges. Oftentimes, however, the
experience had is inchoate. Things are experienced but not in such a way that they are composed
into an experience. (There is distraction and dispersion; what we observe and what we think, what
we desire and what we get, are at odds with each other.) We put our hands to the plow and turn
back; we start and then we stop, not because the experience has reached the end for the sake of
which it was initiated but because of extraneous interruptions or of inner lethargy.

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

Philosophers, even empirical philosophers, have spoken for the most part of experience at
large. (Idiomatic speech, however, refers to experiences each of which is singular, having its own
beginning and end.) For life is no uniform uninterrupted march or flow. It is a thing of histories,

each with its own plot, its own inception and movement toward its close, each having its own particular rhythmic movement; each with its own unrepeated quality pervading it throughout. A flight of stairs, mechanical as it is, proceeds by individualized steps, not by undifferentiated progression, and an inclined plane is at least marked off from other things by abrupt discreteness.

Experience in this vital sense is defined by those situations and episodes that we spontaneously refer to as being "real experiences"; those things of which we say in recalling them, "that was an experience." It may have been something of tremendous importance—a quarrel with one who was once an intimate, a catastrophe finally averted by a hair's breadth. Or it may have been something that in comparison was slight—and which perhaps because of its very slightness illustrates all the better what is to be an experience. There is that meal in a Paris restaurant of which one says, "that was an experience." It stands out as an enduring memorial of what food may be. Then there is that storm one went through in crossing the Atlantic—the storm that seemed in its fury, as it was experienced, to sum up in itself all that a storm can be, complete in itself, standing out because marked out from what went before and what came after.

In such experiences, every successive part flows freely, without seam and without unfilled blanks, into what ensues. At the same time there is no sacrifice of the self-identity of the parts. A river, as distinct from a pond, flows. But its flow gives a definiteness and interest to its successive portions greater than exist in the homogenous portions of a pond. In an experience, flow is from something to something. As one part leads into another and as one part carries on what went before, each gains distinctness in itself. (The enduring whole is diversified by successive phases that are emphases of its varied colors.)

Because of continuous merging, there are no holes, mechanical junctions, and dead centers when we have an experience. (There are pauses, places of rest, but they punctuate and define the quality of movement.) They sum up what has been undergone and prevent its dissipation and idle evaporation. Continued acceleration is breathless and prevents parts from gaining distinction. In a work of art, different acts, episodes, occurrences melt and fuse into unity, and yet do not disappear and lose their own character as they do so—just as in a genial conversation there is a continuous interchange and blending, and yet each speaker not only retains his own character but manifests it more clearly than is his wont.

(An experience has a unity that gives it its name, that meal, that storm, that rupture of friendship. The existence of this unity is constituted by a single quality that pervades the entire experience in spite of the variation of its constituent parts.) This unity is neither emotional, practical, nor intellectual, for these terms name distinctions that reflection can make within it. In discourse about an experience, we must make use of these adjectives of interpretation. In going over an experience in mind after its occurrence, we may find that one property rather than another was sufficiently dominant so that it characterizes the experience as a whole. There are absorbing inquiries and speculations which a scientific man and philosopher will recall as "experiences" in the emphatic sense. In final import they are intellectual. But in their actual occurrence they were emotional as well; they were purposive and volitional. Yet the experience was not a sum of these different characters; they were lost in it as distinctive traits. (No thinker can ply his occupation save as he is lured and rewarded by total integral experiences that are intrinsically worth while. Without them he would never know what it is really to think and would be completely at a loss in distinguishing real thought from the spurious article. Thinking goes on in trains of ideas, but the ideas form a train only because they are much more than what an analytic psychology calls ideas. They are phases, emotionally and practically distinguished, of a developing underlying quality they are its moving variations, not separate and independent like Locke's and Hume's so-called ideas and impressions, but are subtle shadings of a pervading and developing hue.)

(We say of an experience of thinking that we reach or draw a conclusion.) Theoretical formulation of the process is often made in such terms as to conceal effectually the similarity of "conclusion" to the consummating phase of every developing integral experience. These formulations apparently take their cue from the separate propositions that are premises and the proposition that is the conclusion as they appear on the printed page. (The impression is derived that there are first two independent and ready-made entities that are then manipulated so as to give rise to a third.) In fact, in an experience of thinking, premises emerge only as a conclusion becomes manifest. (The experience, like that of watching a storm reach its height and gradually subside, is one of continuous movement of subject-matters. Like the ocean in the storm, there are a series of waves; suggestions reaching out and being broken in a clash, or being carried onwards by a cooperative wave. If a conclusion is reached, it is that of a movement of anticipation and cumulation, one that finally comes to completion. A "conclusion" is no separate and independent thing; it is the consummation of a movement.)

(Hence an experience of thinking has its own esthetic quality.) It differs from those experiences that are acknowledged to be esthetic, but only in its materials. The material of the fine arts consists of qualities; that of experience having intellectual conclusion are signs or symbols having no intrinsic quality of their own, but standing for things that may in another experience be qualitatively experienced. The difference is enormous. It is one reason why the strictly intellectual art will never be popular as music is popular. (Nevertheless, the experience itself has a satisfying emotional quality because it possesses internal integration and fulfillment reached through ordered and organized movement.) This artistic structure may be immediately felt. In so far, it is esthetic. What is even more important is that not only is this quality a significant motive in undertaking intellectual inquiry and in keeping it honest, but that no intellectual activity is an integral event (is an experience), unless it is rounded out with this quality. Without it, thinking is inconclusive. In short, esthetic cannot be sharply marked off from intellectual experience since the latter must bear an esthetic stamp to be itself complete. . . .

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

The enemies of the esthetic are neither the practical nor the intellectual. They are the humdrum; slackness of loose ends; submission to convention in practice and intellectual procedure. Rigid abstinence, coerced submission, tightness on one side and dissipation, incoherence and aimless indulgence on the other, are deviations in opposite directions from the unity of an experience. Some such considerations perhaps induced Aristotle to invoke the "mean proportional" as the proper designation of what is distinctive of both virtue and the esthetic. He was formally correct. "Mean" and "proportion" are, however, not self-explanatory, nor to be taken over in a prior mathematical sense, but are properties belonging to an experience that has a developing movement toward its own consummation.

(I have emphasized the fact that every integral experience moves toward a close, an ending, since it ceases only when the energies active in it have done their proper work. This closure of

a circuit of energy is the opposite of arrest, of *stasis*. Maturation and fixation are polar opposites. Struggle and conflict may be themselves enjoyed, although they are painful, when they are experienced as means of developing an experience; members in that they carry it forward, not just because they are there. There is, as will appear later, an element of undergoing, of suffering in its large sense, in every experience. Otherwise there would be no taking in of what preceded. For "taking in" in any vital experience is something more than placing something on the top of consciousness over what was previously known. It involves reconstruction which may be painful. Whether the necessary undergoing phase is by itself pleasurable or painful is a matter of particular conditions. It is indifferent to the total esthetic quality, save that there are few intense esthetic experiences that are wholly gleeful. They are certainly not to be characterized as amusing, and as they bear down upon us they involve a suffering that is none the less consistent with, indeed a part of, the complete perception that is enjoyed.

I have spoken of the esthetic quality that rounds out an experience into completeness and unity as emotional. The reference may cause difficulty. We are given to thinking of emotions as things as simple and compact as are the words by which we name them. Joy, sorrow, hope, fear, anger, curiosity, are treated as if each in itself were a sort of entity that enters full-made upon the scene, an entity that may last a long time or a short time, but whose duration, whose growth and career, is irrelevant to its nature. In fact emotions are qualities, when they are significant, of a complex experience that moves and changes. I say, when they are significant, for otherwise they are but the outbreaks and eruptions of a disturbed infant. All emotions are qualifications of a drama and they change as the drama develops. Persons are sometimes said to fall in love at first sight. But what they fall into is not a thing of that instant. What would love be were it compressed into a moment in which there is no room for cherishing and for solicitude? The intimate nature of emotion is manifested in the experience of one watching a play on the stage or reading a novel. It attends the development in plot; and a plot requires a stage, a space, wherein to develop and time in which to unfold. Experience is emotional but there are no separate things called emotions in it.

By the same token, emotions are attached to events and objects in their movement. They are not, save in pathological instances, private. And even an "objectless" emotion demands something beyond itself to which to attach itself, and thus it soon generates a delusion in lack of something real. Emotion belongs of a certainty to the self. But it belongs to the self that is concerned in the movement of events toward an issue that is desired or disliked. We jump instantaneously when we are scared, as we blush on the instant when we are ashamed. But fright and shamed modesty are not in this case emotional states. Of themselves they are but automatic reflexes. In order to become emotional they must become parts of an inclusive and enduring situation that involves concern for objects and their issues. The jump of fright becomes emotional fear when there is found or thought to exist a threatening object that must be dealt with or escaped from. The blush becomes the emotion of shame when a person connects, in thought, an action he has performed with an unfavorable reaction to himself of some other person.

Physical things from far ends of the earth are physically transported and physically caused to act and react upon one another in the construction of a new object. The miracle of mind is that something similar takes place in experience without physical transport and assembling. Emotion is thereby giving qualitative unity to materials externally disparate and dissimilar. It thus provides unity in and through the varied parts of an experience. When the unity is of the sort already described, the experience has esthetic character even though it is not, dominantly, an esthetic experience.