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**NATURE, SITUATION AND EXPERIENCE.
SOME METAPHYSICAL UNDERPINNINGS
OF JOHN DEWEY'S CONCEPTION
OF AN AESTHETIC EXPERIENCE**

ABSTRACT

The aim of the following article is to present some of the metaphysical grounds for the concept of an aesthetic experience in the naturalistic philosophy of John Dewey. First three sections are devoted to the main issues of Dewey's naturalistic metaphysics. The first, besides the definition of metaphysics as detection and description of the generic traits of existence, includes also the reconstruction of Dewey's notion of nature — the most fundamental concept in Dewey's system. It is reconstructed with the elaboration of the dynamic, continuous, emergent, rhythmical and situational character of the reality. The second section presents the metaphysical concept of a situation, along with its theoretical consequences, such as: overcoming the metaphysical dualism which isolates the subject from the object, the defence of the objective character of qualities, the concept of immediate phase of a situation and the pluralistic character of nature with all its manifestations. The third section presents deweyan metaphysics of experience. Author clarifies concepts, which are crucial in this respect: primal experience, the experience and the rhythmical structure of interaction. The last section elaborates these elements of Dewey's aesthetics which clearly remains in an intimate relation with the general metaphysical characteristic of reality: the concept of an aesthetic experience continuous with an everyday experience, the concept of active and passive phases of perception, rhythm as a form, distinction between the product of art and the work of art.

According to Dewey, art is conceived as a particular manifestation of nature, which realizes itself in the dynamic form of an aesthetic experience and, as such, it discloses the deepest general traits of reality. In such meaning, art is the culminating form of organization of nature and its most sublime manifestation. The late works of Dewey give the grounds for the interpretation, according to which, an aesthetic experience constitutes the essential context for every possible kind of experience. Consequently, the deweyan philosophy of art functions in his philosophic system not so much as a minor and marginal element related only to the artistic activities, but it pervades all other realms.

Keywords:

metaphysics, qualities, emergentism, interaction, nature, situation, experience, aesthetics, work of art.

INTRODUCTION

The lifelong quest of John Dewey's philosophical endeavour — as he repeatedly underlined through various stages of his career — was to grasp human experience in its fullest and richest dimension¹. As I intend to show in this article, he had been trying to accomplish this philosophical quest on the grounds of the original kind of metaphysical naturalism. One, which being driven by the anti-dualistic intuition, establishes its own position between empiricism and idealism. It stands up against materialistic reduction of reality, by arguing for the general principle of continuity of the material and ideal elements of nature. In fact, it not only secures a place for the human spirit, but in the very experience it finds nature in its highest level of organization, in its climax. The specific understanding of experience — the central category of the naturalistic empiricism of John Dewey — which is not situated in opposition to the world but as an immanent part of it, brings about the idea of the unified, continuous, rhythmical growth of nature itself, ending up in the highest form of organization of energy, which is embodied in an aesthetic experience. Aesthetics, however, as will be exposed in this article, is not associated solely with arts conceived as separate field of specific interest of human beings, but potentially regards all human activity. Aesthetic experience, in general, means for Dewey a certain dynamic form of cooperation of an organism with its environment, which on the side of an organism brings about the most wonderful feelings and emotions, the roots of which reach down to the deepest grounds of nature.

My aim in this article is to present some of the most striking convergences of aesthetic and metaphysical concepts of philosophy of John Dewey. His works devoted particularly to aesthetics, are scarce. In fact, his systematic elaboration of philosophy of art has been covered only in his *Art as Experience* and in the ninth chapter of *Experience and Nature*. However, his naturalistic philosophy assumes a deep continuity of nature and thus aesthetic experience is always understood as growing from a natural organization of energies and thus may be presented as a sublimation of a natural order. For this reason, it is very interesting to search within his metaphysics for concepts which can be employed in aesthetics and supply its critics².

¹ Th. Alexander, *John Dewey's Theory of Art, Experience, and Nature. The Horizons of Feeling*, State University of New York Press, 1987, p. XVI, also p. 57.

² This strategy is frequently employed, e.g. by Richard Shusterman in his *Pragmatist Aesthetics: living beauty, rethinking art*, chapter three 'Organic Unity: Analysis and Deconstruction', Blackwell Publishers, 1992.

I believe, that as a consequence of metaphysical concepts such as those of 'nature', 'situation', 'an experience', 'emergentism', 'the principle of continuity', 'primal experience', 'objectively existing qualities', or 'temporal structure of rhythm in an experience', deweyan aesthetics carries a meaning, the significance of which extends far beyond its traditional boundaries. The aim of this work is to present some of the unique ideas of deweyan aesthetics in reference to the crucial concepts of his metaphysics. I will begin with a reconstruction of the key terms of Dewey's metaphysics: nature, situation and experience. Then, I will present some of his unique aesthetic ideas, which display a characteristic affinity with the more general ideas of his metaphysics.

NATURE

Most researchers of Dewey's thought agree that it is essential to distinguish two general periods of his creative activity: the first (Early Works) which was founded on the grounds of idealism inherited from his early philosophical mentors, and the second (Late Works) which is what we might address as the mature and original philosophy of John Dewey this is generally characterized by a significant shift away from idealism towards his own naturalistic pragmatism ('empirical naturalism' as Dewey preferred it to be known)³. There has been a long discussion on the connections and differences between concepts from these two contradicting periods⁴. One of the most striking convergences is that between idealistic term 'Absolute' and its later equivalent in the term 'nature'. Certainly, this switch of terms marks a general change of philosophical positions from idealism to naturalism. Prof. Gutowski writes on this issue in his monograph *Between Monism and Pluralism*: 'Dewey «the naturalist» resigns from many of the Hegelian terms, but their role is only replaced by other, e.g. «Absolut» is replaced by «nature» (...), which however, by no manner

³ Obviously, if we treat the subject in a more detailed way, as is practiced by many academics, between these two periods there are numerous works, which are frequently addressed as middle works. For detailed information on the classification of Dewey's heritage see *The Collected Work of John Dewey, 1882–1953*, ed. Jo Ann Boydston, Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press 1969–1990.

⁴ See, P. Gutowski, *Between Monism and Pluralism. A Study of the Genesis and Foundations of John Dewey's Philosophy*, Wydawnictwo KUL, 2002, chapter I, 'John Dewey's intellectual evolution'. To find information on the history of the Polish reception of Dewey, see, K. Wilkoszewska, *The Reception of John Dewey's Philosophy in Poland*, http://www.deweycenter.uj.edu.pl/tekst_wilkoszewska.html, and, with a broader perspective on the reception of pragmatism in general, see, W. Małecki, *Pragmatism in Poland Today. A Report*, http://www.deweycenter.uj.edu.pl/tekst_malecki.html.

of means is a matter, especially the matter conceived mechanically (...). The term with the closest meaning which could replace the «nature» (...) is the term «life»⁵. Clearly, there is an explicit continuity of a role which is played by both these terms in each system. Nature, just like Absolut, is the most general way of referring to reality as a whole; both are thought to be the most inclusive form of existence, and as such are a unity of opposites (unity, internally consisting of a variety of different forms of organization). Furthermore, both terms express an experience in its fullness and describe its limits. However, the character of this general unity just like the idea of experience in the late naturalistic period is far from its idealistic predecessor. Being naturalized, unity is not final and static but always dynamic, vivid, and mutually interacting, and experience instead of being solely spiritual is conceived as remaining in deep interdependence with the matter as an effect of interacting of an organism and its environment. Likewise, nature, unlike Absolut, is not in teleological pursuit for terminal objectivity as a whole but is in constant flux, in its ultimately changing form. There is nothing like the ultimate truth in terms of one factual state of affairs, which can be comprehended as something stable and fixed. As will be elaborated in the next chapter, Dewey rejects the idea of a situation, which covers the whole of nature, which is to say, that there is nothing like one static organization of all nature⁶.

In his late naturalistic philosophy, however, Dewey does not resign from metaphysical inquires. On the contrary, he finds this sort of reflection to be essential. In *Experience and Nature* he defines metaphysics as ‘a statement of the generic traits manifested by existences of all kinds without regard to their differentiation into physical and mental’⁷. In this sense, metaphysics exists to search for and analyze the general characters, features, attributes and qualities of all possible existences. Dewey argues, that such knowledge provides a framework for properly understood criticism. ‘Any theory that detects and defines these traits is therefore but a ground-map of the province of criticism, establishing base lines to be employed in more intricate triangulations’⁸. He further explains the function of metaphysical conviction in everyday life, ‘the more sure one is that the world which encompasses human life is of such and such a character (no matter what his definition), the more one is committed to try to direct the conduct of life, that of others as well as of himself,

⁵ P. Gutowski, *Between Monism and Pluralism. A Study of the Genesis and Foundations of John Dewey's Philosophy*, Wydawnictwo KUL, 2002, p. 214 (my own translation — N.R.).

⁶ Ibidem, p. 145.

⁷ J. Dewey, *Experience and Nature*, Dover Publications, New York 1958, p. 412.

⁸ Ibidem, p. 413.

upon the basis of the character assigned to the world'⁹. Dewey's metaphysics is concerned only with the content of human experience. As we will see, it is not to say that consciousness is primal, and matter secondary. It means that the only content we have access to is that of our experience. It is possible to assign detected traits of experience to nature itself on the grounds of the most fundamental conviction of Dewey's metaphysics — experience is utterly continuous with the rest of nature; it is an aspect of nature, and thus the characteristic of experience is also a characteristic of nature itself. As Professor Arthur E. Murphy writes: 'The understanding of man with his wants and hopes and limited capacities as a factor in the natural world out of which the human organism has developed and with which, in even its loftiest flights, the human spirit remains essentially continuous, is then the primary task for this metaphysics'¹⁰. Murphy considers this as a relatively 'modest project'. 'No more «transcendent» reality than the world of natural events is referred to, and the situation of human experience within nature provides the limited but reliable basis on which this «empirical naturalism» is to be built'¹¹.

The definitive list of these traits has never been specified in Dewey's writings. Alexander collects only some of them when he writes, 'Dewey never gave a complete list of these traits (for example, at various places he mentions: transaction, the precarious, the stable, qualities or ends, means and relations, histories and processes, individuality, community, selectivity, continuity, emergence, potentiality, actuality, time, process, and histories)¹². What seems to lack the most on this list is the category, which by analogy with the categories of Aristotle might be called 'substance'. As will be elaborated further, in the terminology of Dewey, substance (*ousia*) is replaced by the concept of situation or experience.

The idea of pervasive continuity of nature might be expected to contradict the fact of diversity of the forms of organization of energies. This problem of novelty in the course of evolution is solved by the use Dewey makes of the concept of emergentism. Nature is simultaneously continuous and emergent. This means that in the course of constant growth of nature, there are moments, when newer and more complex events are brought about and simultaneously accompanied by the rise of new aspects of reality. It means that this higher level of organization is 'irreducible and inexplicable in terms of what has preceded it'¹³. However, at the same time this new

⁹ Ibidem, p. 413/414.

¹⁰ A. E. Murphy, *Dewey's Epistemology and Metaphysics*, in *The Philosophy of John Dewey* published as *The Library of Living Philosophers* series ed. Arthur Schilpp, Northwestern University, Evanston and Chicago 1939, p. 217.

¹¹ Ibidem.

¹² Th. Alexander, *John Dewey's Theory of Art...*, op. cit., p. XVI, also p. 89.

¹³ Ibidem, p. 107.

element that reveals a new quality or aspect of nature still remains in deep continuity with the preceding lower organizations of events. Humans, for instance, present traits of nature that have never existed before, but exhibit aspects and traits of the lower levels as well. Having a cultural aspect of existence does not cease the biological and physical one. In this way, Dewey saves the ideal as an important aspect of reality and simultaneously saves the crucial community of experience and nature.

On the most basic level of inorganic entities, the naturalistic reality of Dewey is a rhythmical flow of energies which intersect, exert pressure on each other, organize and reconstruct, and connect and interact with each other. The rhythm is constructed by the dynamic pattern of situations that arise when the harmonic flow of energies is distracted. The rhythm is stretched between two moments: the initial loss of equilibrium and the final reorganization which brings the new balance to a situation. When the energies fall into conflict and homeostasis of the situation is lost, the possibilities for the overcoming of the tension are naturally searched for and finally fulfilled. It might be managed by restraining, falling apart or vanishing in the entropy but also by conjunction, reconstruction, and organizing energies and elements into connected wholes remaining in stable relations. Under certain conditions, some of these more complex organizations of energies become something distinctively different, displaying new qualities and bringing new possibilities. This idea is addressed by Dewey as a principle of emergentism, and is conceived as a natural consequence of the dynamic, rhythmical pattern of a problematic situation. However, the concept of a problematic situation refers equally to the level of physics and chemistry (e.g. the eruption of a volcano — as a reorganization of energies which have lost equilibrium) as it does to the level of sensitive creatures (the feeling of hunger — as the loss of harmony of the creature with its environment) and human beings; most of Dewey's analysis refers to the latter instance.

For Dewey, the traditional concept of the mind being separate from the body stands for an artificially abstracted fragment of the wholly integrated process of the pulsation of life. As a consequence it produces the artificial philosophical problem — how 'to get together again what has been sundered'¹⁴. In other words, how does one explain the process of the isolated mind experiencing nature. Dewey points that this is the moment when traditional systems employ non-empirical, superficial elements into their doctrine — the 'pure ideas' of John Locke or Hegel's 'Spirit', for instance. The naturalistic empiricism of Dewey avoids this problem by starting its inquiries at an earlier stage, before this traditional dualism of subject and object is brought about. To signify this fundamental mode of existence, in which conscious,

¹⁴ J. Dewey, *Art as Experience*, Minton, Blach & Co., New York 1934, p. 9.

conceptually constructed self, as a distinct individual, is not yet present, Dewey employs the term, 'primal experience'. It is thought to be a necessary condition for the growth of conceptual experience; one which later on becomes the domain of science. In this meaning every experience has its two phases: first the immediate, and second the mediated. Although this element will be analyzed extensively further on, it is important to point out that while the latter might be understood as traditional experience (already equipped in conceptual content of consciousness), the former (primal experience/immediate phase of experience) is organized only by qualities, without the help of any general concepts, classifications, logical means of analyzes, etc. This level of so called primal experience, manifested by overwhelming qualities, serves, in Dewey's doctrine, as the bridge between conceptual experience and the external world. It may be pictured as the intensive emotion caused by the sudden loud noise of a broken window or by a way of being in infancy or even being an animal as so far as it does not separate itself from its surroundings and trusts in qualities that are felt. In this sense, an experience is ultimately nature. Experience is continuous with its surroundings. It is an aspect of a situation, and, as such, an experience is definitely not only a subjective event. An experience has its subjective aspect, but can by no means be reduced extensively to the internal world of a human being. In reality, an experience is always the outcome of a certain history of the mutual interchanging of an organism and its environment. It is fair to say, that environmental and subjective aspects are equally present in an experience.

To recapitulate, the term 'nature' describes the reality as a whole, conceived as continuous, emergent and as organized in situations. Under specific conditions nature also emerges with experience and in this instance nature displays qualities and emotions.

SITUATIONS

The author of *Experience and Nature* does not understand qualities and emotions as scarcely subjective elements. On the contrary, unlike most modern philosophers following the basic distinctions of Descartes, Dewey considers them as objectively existing manifestations of real events. Qualities, along with emotions, are thought to be the properties of a situation and only as a subsequent effect are they also the property of an individual, subjective side of experience. For Dewey, as I will try to show in the following paragraph, emotions, like qualities, play a very important role in constructing human experience, binding it with the surrounding environment and coordinating its development. They occur as an effect of a certain

level of complexity of the situation itself, and establish the ground for continuity between experience and nature. This perspective secures a much more important role for qualities and emotions than they usually serve in the traditions of continental philosophy where, for the most part, they are thought of as purely irrational elements of human consciousness, epistemologically irrelevant and deprived of any cognitive value. Their function in Dewey's system, instead of deceiving, becomes revealing and constructive in the course of human inquiry or at least in organizing refined, conceptual experience.

Describing reality in terms of fixed substance or non-temporal essence is a method which Dewey rejects very firmly in his critics. His idea of a situation as a complex event or process not only reveals its temporal, dynamic, and shifting character but also emphasizes its contextual dependence of subordinated identities. Dewey holds, that the question concerning the nature of objects: 'what is it?' should be answered in terms of 'state of affair', 'event', or 'process', rather than 'thing', 'essence', or 'enclosed object'. According to Dewey's naturalism, every existence is an event, and every event, or state of affair, remains in various relations with other events. He states this clearly, when writing: 'That all existences are also events I do not doubt, for they are qualified by temporal transition. But that existences are only events strikes me as ignoring of the context. For every occurrence is a *concurrence*. An event is not a self-enclosed, self-executing affair'¹⁵. 'Events', 'affairs' or 'existences' remain in mutual relations with others, and are contained in a situation. That is, the organic whole is composed of parts in a way that these parts remain in functional relations, constituting 'an affair of affairs' — the situation. However, it is extremely important to notice that there is nothing like the ultimate situation, an absolute whole. This is the main difference between the terms 'nature' and 'absolute'. As Gutowski express it, 'The world is not a consciousness existing outside time and space, from which nature emerges. It is exactly opposed — the world is nature, from which consciousness emerges as an element of a certain situation. Furthermore, nature itself is not a unity, but a diversity of situations. Otherwise speaking, there is no one, all-embracing situation, but rather a multiplicity of separated situations. The process of unifying of diversity is taking place on the level of every single situation, but there is no such process as the unifying of all situations into one universal situation'¹⁶.

Situation, then, can be described as dynamic, organic whole, consisting of parts (events) which remain in a functional relation, and which under certain conditions are

¹⁵ J. Dewey, *Knowing and Known*, with Arthur Bentley, Beacon Press, Boston 1949, p. 60.

¹⁶ P. Gutowski, *Between Monism and Pluralism...*, op. cit., p. 145 (my own translation).

able to display qualities which, to a larger degree, fulfill the unity of that situation, revealing its hitherto hidden aspects — feelings, emotions, thoughts, concepts, etc.

As previously mentioned, in their dynamism or temporality, situations exhibit a 'two phased' order¹⁷. These are the earlier emerging, immediate character, and later, the more precise, legible and complex, mediated, or mediating character. 'Situations as wholes are immediate, in the sense of being, to at least some degree, actualizations and fulfillments which exist, which become manifest in here and now. Yet, as inherently temporal and complex, they are «mediated», composed of functioning parts, having histories and projects or possibilities toward future developments'¹⁸. Dewey writes about situation and experience as stable and precarious¹⁹. As stable they exhibit 'their immanent wholeness which makes them unified'²⁰ — an immanent organic wholeness of the temporal process. As permanently in change, the entity is inescapably always stretched between the past and the future; to some extent, as a consequence of its history, it already is what it is, but the situation is still open to what is to come. Just like Aristotle's substance, *ousia*, it is stretched out between its actuality and its possibility. Unlike Aristotle, however, Dewey refers to situations, not individual beings, and finds their unifying force in the pervasive quality, not the form. Quality also ceases to carry that everlasting durability of form. In spite of being the first marker of individual elements and being the most fixed one, it is still not eternal but temporal; qualities like everything in reality, are passing by. Quality reveals itself immediately in the moment of reorganization of elements. In fact, quality is the first sign of the emergence of a new order, in which, however, precise distinctions and identifications are not yet possible, as long as the second phase of the mediated situation is not present.

When the pervasive quality occurs, it marks up the elements which are relevant in experience and excludes irrelevant elements; in such a way the horizons of the situation are organized at the beginning. It is strongly stated that this process is not of a cognitive kind. It takes place on a pre-logical level, before any conceptualization can take place. 'Situations or «res» are primarily organized, active, lived experiences unified by a prelogical or pre-analytical qualitative unity which gives them their continuity and sense'²¹. However this quality is, by no means, a subjective

¹⁷ Although, it has previously been shown in direct reference to the structure of experience, it equally refers to the situation. It is simply because experience is a part or rather an aspect of the situation itself. Such a structure of experience is just a result of the same structure on the level of situation.

¹⁸ Th. Alexander, *John Dewey's Theory of Art...*, op. cit., p. 106.

¹⁹ See, I chapter of *Experience and Nature*

²⁰ Th. Alexander, *John Dewey's Theory of Art...*, op. cit., p. 113.

²¹ *Ibidem*, p. 105.

projection. On the contrary, Dewey insists that its provenience is rather objective because, it is brought about by activities external to the organism, and is possible only because of potentialities existing in both external elements and organism organization. In other words, it is possible due to the certain history of interchange between elements living and growing up together — the organism and its environment. Dewey writes, ‘The qualities never where «in» the organism; they always where qualities of interactions in which both extraorganic things and organisms partake’²². Therefore, quality is of situation, and only as an effect of reflection may it be attributed to the internal, intimate world of the individual. Professor Alexander puts it bluntly in the following way, ‘The «quality» of situation is neither «in» the sentient organism nor «in» the object. The quality is only in the situation and is of it’²³.

Occurrence of the quality is always sudden and overwhelming. Because of its immediacy, it appears as something ready-made, it comes as final and absolute, never as something comparative. ‘Empirically, the existence of objects of direct grasp, possession, use and enjoyment cannot be denied. Empirically, things are poignant, tragic, beautiful, humorous, settled, disturbed, comfortable, annoying, barren, harsh, consoling, splendid, fearful; are such immediately and in their own right and behalf. ...aesthetic quality, immediate, final or self-enclosed, indubitably characterizes natural situations as they empirically occur. These traits stand in themselves on precisely the same level as colours, sounds, qualities of contact, taste and smell. Any criterion that finds the latter to be ultimate and «hard» data will, impartially applied, come to the same conclusion about the former. *Any* quality as such is final; it is at once initial and terminal; just what it is as it exists’²⁴. Obviously, it is not to say, that qualities are not comparable, because they certainly are. We are comparing actual qualities of our experience with those already collected, and thus can tell whether some were more intense or less satisfying. The thing is, however, that we are able to do so only by means of conceptual, refined, rational experience. Before this phase of experience emerges, we exist in the realm of primal experience, the immediate phase of experience, where qualities are the only material. What Dewey points to here, is that before the conceptual, analyzing phase approach, the qualities in a situation are total and obvious, fully present, in their absolute actualization.

Although the situations organize nature on every level of its emergence, most of Dewey’s notions about them refer precisely to the highest emergent — level of meaning: human situations. It is so, for the reason that conscious experience gives

²² J. Dewey, *Experience and Nature*, Dover Publications, New York, 1958, p. 259.

²³ Th. Alexander, *John Dewey’s Theory of Art...*, op. cit., p. 112.

²⁴ J. Dewey, *Experience and Nature*, op. cit., p. 96.

nature the best opportunity to express its possibilities to the greatest fulfillment. The human being, as mentioned previously, unifies three levels of emergentism (physical, organic and mental).

Dewey argues that before we conceptualize and interpret our being in a situation, we are already in it, we also more or less successfully act in it, and we do have some basic orientation as well. 'We are «in the world» in a variety of active ways long before we ever have to reflect consciously on how we are in a situation'²⁵. Dewey writes, 'My thesis is that the intellectual element is set in a context which is non-cognitive and which holds within it in suspense a vast complex of other qualities and things that in the experience itself are objects of esteem or aversion, of decision, or use, of suffering, of endeavor and revolt, not of knowledge'²⁶. Hence he introduces the discrimination between 'having experience' and 'knowing experience'. The rational cognition is, for Dewey, focused on a relatively narrow scope, which is situated on the great ocean of non-cognitive experience. It is this pre-logical, ineffable world of aesthetic meanings which gives indispensable context for conceptual cognition.

This vast field of unclear meanings, qualities and feelings, is a domain of Dewey's aesthetics and it has to be incorporated into the description of experience in order to grasp it in its fullness. Consequently, Dewey stresses that it is only the aesthetics that can penetrate this realm and open it for our comprehension.

AN EXPERIENCE

*The word 'experience' is here taken non-technically. Its nearest equivalents are such words as 'life', 'history', 'culture' (in its anthropological use). It does not mean processes and modes of experiencing apart from what is experienced and lived. The philosophical value of the term is to provide a way of referring to the unity or totality which is broken up and referred to only in ready-made distinctions or by such words as 'world', 'things', 'objects', on the one hand and 'mind', 'subject', 'consciousness' on the other.*²⁷

²⁵ Th. Alexander, *John Dewey's Theory of Art...*, op. cit., p. 110.

²⁶ *Ibidem*.

²⁷ J. Dewey, *Complete Works of John Dewey*, Southern Illinois University Electronic Edition under editorship of Jo Ann Boydson, Middle Works (1899–1924), 13:351.

Probably the most difficult issue in Dewey's thought is to understand the relation between experience and nature²⁸. As I was trying to show, his concept of experience is radically situational and temporal, and what is most important, it rejects the idea of experience as emerging against and being opposed to nature. 'Nature and experience (...) are dimensions of the structured transactions of organism and environment and of self and world which at each moment have a qualitative, organic continuity making it *that* situation. Experience and nature have a relational dynamic side, as well as qualitative side, which are aspects of situations as functional wholes'²⁹. Experience is not a substantially different and sharply separated phenomenon, in which fragments of nature find their translated correlates. 'Experience emerges from nature but is continuous with it'³⁰. Thus, the principle of continuity along with the principle of emergentism is the grounds for understanding the relation between nature and experience.

After this artificial border between internal and external world falls down, human experience just like experiences of lower creatures, has to be seen as an inherent part of a united nature, which can be divided and separated only by means of abstract mental operations. However, this does not lead to the conclusion that its distinctions exist absolutely in its object. Dewey protects this unity by pointing at the 'primal experience'. Professor Wilkoszewska explains this concept in her *Art as a rhythm of Life*, when writes 'What philosophers name «entity» in Dewey's system is a row of events, process of life, experience. Every experience is, on its primal level, a unity of subject and object, e.g. the relation of a plant with its environment (air, soil, water, sun) is so strong, that only a human being with his all-brightening mind can pull these bonds apart, separating the plant itself from its surrounding. Whereas, for the plant, which (just like an animal) only receives experiences, without consciousness of this reception, water, air and soil are just «its own» like the roots, stalk or leaves. Human experience differs from these of plants and animals mainly because in the former instance the receiver becomes conscious. However, the more conscious such insight into experience is, the further the distance to its primal form it assumes'³¹. This primal experience is utterly qualitative and unified and might only be felt, not known (or elaborated in words, terms, concepts etc.).

²⁸ This problem along with the extant elaboration of deweyan concept of experience is covered in: J. Pieter, *Analysis and Critics of John Dewey's Theory of Experience*, 'Kwartalnik Filozoficzny', 1932.

²⁹ Th. Alexander, *John Dewey's Theory of Art...*, op. cit., p. 98.

³⁰ Ibidem.

³¹ K. Wilkoszewska, *Art as a Rhythm of Life*, Universitas, Kraków 2003, p. 89–90 (my own translation).

It is exactly what makes man capable of having the experience in its meaningful dimension (conceptual experience), since meaning is possible only on the grounds of quality. It emerges with its immediacy and creates intuitions, which later on lead us toward mediated, precise concepts and judgments. In spite of permanent temporal interchanges of situation, qualities also make it possible for us to keep focus on what we are doing or thinking (pervasive quality binds the situation together) in order to stay on track to the successful end of an experience. Moreover, it is on a prelogical level (having experience, contrary to knowing experience) where quality selects and includes elements that are relevant and excludes irrelevant ones from the scope of our interest. In this way, quality selects material, against which the conceptual cognition (conscious experience) emerges. In such a sense, all our life experiences are possible because of qualities and emotions. Quality, which naturally emerges from interaction of an organism and its environment, partakes in organizing the growth of experience.

This process may be pictured by a simple example. Imagine someone having a peaceful and relaxing nap on their couch when a suddenly gust of wind opens the window with a loud noise. It is the quality of the frightening sound along with the quality of unpleasant coldness what wakes the person up and organizes their first actions. The tension that has appeared was not so much created only by the external factors as rather by its mutual interaction with the organism. In addition, the inquiry, which aims to discharge the tension, is being managed by these felt qualities. Coldness, so to say, is pushing for the change. Conceptual experience is always emerging from this world of pre-existing qualities and feelings. After choosing proper means to appealing aims, the person closes the window releasing him/herself from the pressure of the disturbing quality. The situation finally changes (a new situation approaches), its history went through to its end. The tension is discharged now, and the new quality takes over and reorganizes all its elements. Warmth has replaced coldness, quietness is now present instead of the previous rumble; tranquillity instead of anxiety.

Even though this example is rather vulgar, it still gives a fair sample of much more complicated situations, histories, interactions within which we always find ourselves with our conscious experience; already engaged, already in a certain position, with some general inclinations, fears and hopes.

Usually, most of our everyday experiences are distracted, and they fail to accomplish its consummation. In the course of growth, something goes wrong and the rhythm of cumulating and organizing sensations breaks down. As none of us coordinates all factors of reality, our plans tend to shift, various pressures take over us, etc.; there is a long list of possible reasons for such a failure. What is more important

is that, on such a background of these unfinished, interrupted, paused enterprises, there also occur these distinct ones, which find their worked-out termination. Experience, which terminates in its complete fulfilment, the full realization of its potentialities, Dewey refers to as *an* experience a marked out experience, which takes place '(...) when the material experienced runs its course to fulfillment. Then and only then 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... Such an experience is a whole and carries with it its own individualizing quality of self-sufficiency. It is an experience'³². Especially in *Art as Experience*, Dewey gives many examples of such experiences terminated in full actualization of their inner possibilities, driven successfully to the happiest end in the course of rhythmical interaction.

As we can see, this unique quality of consummation is not prescribed solely to one sort of experience; it is rather a culminating effect of a formal structure of a temporal event, which can be realized in all fields of human activity. To achieve a consummation in experience is not so much the matter of what is experiencing, but how it is experiencing, or more precisely — how the experience grows and develops. The growth of every experience is characterized by the same general temporal structure of rhythmical interactions. It means that every experience permanently remains in the rhythm, which involves 'the action of environment upon organism (and hence its capacity to be acted upon) and the action of the organism on the environment (its capacity to act upon world and the capacity of the world to be acted upon)'³³. Dewey refers to that under the terms of 'undergoing and doing'.

In the instance of *an* experience, the rhythm of passive and active phases remains in the 'progressive interaction' — the temporal phases of such interaction are bound by belonging together, 'relating to each other, sustaining and interacting with each other in a tensive, dramatic unity so that there is a cumulative sense of an overall event being accomplished or brought to completion'³⁴. When experience is not terminated in such organization of an integral whole, their quality remains tacit. Hence, they also lack significant meaning, while intelligently driven experience, penetrating possibilities of the situation, remains in dynamic balance between doing and undergoing — which secures the accuracy of the mutual response of phases — and leads to higher levels of integration, gradually exhibiting its quality in a more intense manner. Because it is a pervasive quality that is responsible for revealing the

³² J. Dewey, *Art as Experience*, op. cit., p. 35.

³³ Th. Alexander, *John Dewey's Theory of Art...*, op. cit., p. 126.

³⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 201.

immediate meaning, the more harmonized the organization of an experience is, the deeper and more striking the meaning it contains. 'An experience is one which has been successfully transformed through intelligent action so as to be an inherently complete and dynamically moving whole which realizes the sense of meaning as deeply as possible'³⁵.

ART AS THE CULMINATING EVENT OF NATURE AND THE CLIMAX OF EXPERIENCE

Despite the fact that all kinds of experiences carry the possibility to be terminated in full consummation, there is one realm which presents a particularly fortunate surrounding for its complete actualization — the realm of art. According to his naturalistic commitment, Dewey conceives art as an intensification of an ordinary experience. There are two main aspects of this idea of continuity between common and sublime experience. First, as I elaborated above, an experience which brings its full consummation is growing in the framework of the symmetric rhythm of interaction between an organism and its surroundings. In most events, the rhythm, so to say, is a means to realizing the external aim — the discharge of tension. In the aesthetic experience, the rhythm becomes the aim in itself. Prof. Wilkoszewska addresses this issue when writing, '(...) although in all kinds of experience their rhythm leads to the realization of an external aim, in aesthetic experience the rhythm itself is an unfolding consummation. Admittedly, the aesthetic experience is also emerging in this general framework: need — fulfilment, but in processes of growth the rhythm itself becomes the most exposed element'³⁶. The second aspect concerns the qualitative character of aesthetic experience. Art as an activity operates on the level of pure qualities, not mediated by enclosed senses and fixed concepts. Thus, the world of qualities is capable of embracing wider horizons of reality, greater and deeper experiences, and containing more than a narrow scope of cognitive understanding. Dewey writes, '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'³⁷. Artists focus directly on qualities, while the conscious experience of ordinary people pays attention mostly to signs and symbols. While the latter are susceptible to logical explanation (it thus might become a subject of rational discourse), the former

³⁵ Ibidem, p. 186.

³⁶ K. Wilkoszewska, *Art as a Rhythm of Life*, op. cit., p. 129 (my own translation).

³⁷ J. Dewey, *Art as Experience*, op. cit., p. 74.

might be comprehended only by means of overwhelming immediate feeling. The qualities are the subject matter of artists, and so their job is to think about the relationship between them. 'Each brush stroke must be measured in terms of its relationship to the whole of what is being painted'³⁸. Dewey claims that it is not for art to operate on the level of solving practical problems, or to use signs and symbols to project and direct practical endeavours (although art still requires some measure of practice to realize itself). A significant role of art is to reveal and extend meanings on the level of qualities, which emerges from properly organized experience. Jack Kaminsky expresses it in the following way, 'A poem may consist of words and sentences. But the words and sentences of poetry are not intended to suggest, as they do in science, experiences to be obtained if given operations are performed. They are intended to produce an immediate realization of experience. The propositions of science have intent: «art is the immediate realization of intent»'³⁹.

It does not mean that the artist is someone who holds a preconceived, already fixed idea, which he/she simply places on the canvas or into his/her poem. Dewey rigidly rejects such a view. As Kaminsky writes in his essay, 'The artist labors long and wearily to actualize what may have originally been only a vague suggestion. He adds and erases. He paints and then repaints... The original emotion that first stimulated work becomes modified as the search for the best expression introduces new ideas and new feelings... In each step of their creation they are constantly doing and undergoing, constructing and reevaluating. The results to be attained are not present in the mind of the artist prior to its actual accomplishment'⁴⁰. The final idea is an effect of (mutually referring to each other) moments of doing and undergoing, creating and appreciating.

'Just as the creator must embody within himself the attitude of the appreciator, so too the appreciator must take an active, creative role for perception to occur'⁴¹. As the role of an artist is not solely active and creative, likewise the observer is not just a passive receiver of meanings and qualities. To have a perception, the observer has to engage in the rhythm of interaction. 'To encounter a work of art is to engage in a dialog of perception'⁴². Dewey explains what he means by real appreciation using the discrimination between the two terms 'recognition' and 'perception'⁴³. The

³⁸ J. Kaminsky, *Dewey's Concept of An Experience*, 'Philosophy and Phenomenological Research', 1957, No 3, p. 323.

³⁹ Ibidem.

⁴⁰ Ibidem, p. 324.

⁴¹ Th. Alexander, *John Dewey's Theory of Art...*, op. cit., p. 210.

⁴² Ibidem.

⁴³ This discrimination is elaborated in 5.5 section ('The process of perception of art') of: W. Kaczocha, *Studies in the 20th Century Philosophy*, Wydawnictwo Fundacji Humaniora, Poznań 2008.

former works as a label-fixer and the latter stands for an insight. Recognition scarcely works like identification. It simply classifies things and events. This means of observation and rapid knowledge is used for practical purposes in the everyday struggle with pressures and problems that demand solutions. Perception requires more than this; it 'is an act of reconstructive doing... For to perceive, a beholder must create his own experience'⁴⁴. Participation in interaction, involving past experience and future projects of the appreciator, is needed in order to realize this balanced development based on intelligent dialogue of engagement and sensitivity. Only in this way can significant qualitative meaning grow along with progressive integration of the doing and undergoing phases. 'The work of art exists as completed physical entity when it is presented to view, but it becomes an object of aesthetic value only when it causes a response in the observer, and the nature of that response is dependent upon an active participation in the aesthetic experience'⁴⁵.

This entails the differentiation between the object of aesthetic appreciation and the work of art⁴⁶. Professor Irena Wojnar addresses this distinction writing, 'Dewey, in his deliberations, introduces the distinction between an aesthetic object such as a painting, sculpture or poem, and the work of art, which is the result of the interaction of the appreciator and the object. Thus, the experience of the receiver is a necessary condition for the full existence and realization of a work of art'⁴⁷. In Dewey's own words, 'the work of art is an event and cannot be innocently confused with the physical object which is a condition for the experience. There is no work of art apart from human experience. The object is more properly termed the «art product» while «the actual work of art» is what the product does with and in experience'⁴⁸. Since 'work of art' does not refer merely to a physical entity, but to a certain situation, the concept of form significantly changes its traditional meaning. It is not a static relation between elements of an art product, but a dynamic structure involving both experience and the art product. 'The art work has a form when its elements are able to generate in human experience that particular kind of experience in which there is the emotional excitement of ends to be accomplished and actions to be undertaken'⁴⁹. The form is a possibility of experience to contain external material

⁴⁴ Th. Alexander, *John Dewey's Theory of Art...*, op. cit., p. 210.

⁴⁵ Ibidem, p. 211.

⁴⁶ This discrimination is also elaborated in section 5.8 ('The meaning in art') of: W. Kaczocha, *Studies in the 20th Century Philosophy...*, op. cit.

⁴⁷ I. Wojnar, introduction to polish translation of John Dewey's *Art as Experience*, (*Sztuka jako doświadczenie*, tłum. A. Potocki, Wrocław — Warszawa — Kraków 1975), p. XX (my own translation).

⁴⁸ Th. Alexander, *John Dewey's Theory of Art...*, op. cit., p. 187.

⁴⁹ J. Kaminsky, *Dewey's Concept of An Experience*, op. cit., p. 326.

and internal ‘material’, feelings, emotions, memories, projects, etc — in a dynamic structure of mutual influence, leading to the growth of integration of experience and its final consummation. ‘Form can only emerge with the on-going organization of experience, but what it reveals is the capacity of the material to be significantly appropriated (...) Action and response, exploration and adjustment, discovery and integration initially display experience as rhythmic field, as yet indeterminate, but insistently pointing toward a determinate, organized individual experience’⁵⁰.

Nature reveals itself in its fullest extent when its properties are fully displayed. As a result of what has been said, it seems that this is exactly what happens in aesthetic experience.

Taking into account his very long academic career, Dewey decided to express systematically his ideas on philosophy of art relatively late. Thus, it is not very surprising that most of his ideas on the grounds of aesthetics remain in deep continuity with formerly invented epistemological and metaphysical concepts. As I have been trying to show there is also a theoretical reason, which lies in the very assumptions of the naturalistic position of Dewey. His own idea of generic traits of existence with its continuity, emergentism, objectively existing qualities, or the concept of rhythm entails the general framework which has to be respected in all possible events and discourses; thus, also in the aesthetic one. What I intended here was to present some of the most important references between these major fields of Dewey’s interest, and to elaborate his aesthetics not only as a continuation of a variety of former inquires but as their climax and the deepest final insight.

I believe that these metaphysical concepts, like primal experience or a situation with its contextual and dynamic character, along with the concept of interaction as a dynamic structure of all events or epistemological ones like prelogical cognition, have proved to be the obvious underpinnings for the fundamental aesthetic ideas of Dewey, like those of interaction as a structure of a work of art, rhythm as a dynamic form, or qualitative meaning. The explanation of these conceptions in reference to their metaphysical predecessors gives a revealing context for Dewey’s doctrine of art and aesthetic experience. It also situates aesthetics in a major position among other disciplines of philosophy, since aesthetic experience is presented here as paradigmatic

⁵⁰ Th. Alexander, *John Dewey’s Theory of Art...*, op. cit., p. 234.

for all kinds of experience⁵¹. It is in this kind of experience, where nature reveals its potentialities in the richest, and simultaneously deepest, way, where the most penetrating and inclusive insights are realized.

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⁵¹ Similar interpretation is presented in section 5.9 ('Panesthetism') of: W. Kaczocho, *Studies in the 20th Century Philosophy*, op. cit.

NATURA, SYTUACJA, DOŚWIADCZENIE. O PEWNYCH METAFIZYCZNYCH PODSTAWACH KONCEPCJI DOŚWIADCZENIA ESTETYCZNEGO JOHNA DEWEYA

STRESZCZENIE

Celem niniejszego artykułu jest przedstawienie pewnych metafizycznych podstaw, na jakich opiera się koncepcja doświadczenia estetycznego w naturalistycznej filozofii Johna Deweya. Pierwsze trzy części artykułu poświęcone są głównym zagadnieniom jego naturalistycznej metafizyki. W części pierwszej, poza wyjaśnieniem znaczenia, w jakim Dewey używa pojęcia metafizyki — odnajdowanie i opis powszechnych cech istnienia — podjęta została również rekonstrukcja, podstawowego dla metafizyki Deweya, pojęcia natury. Wśród najistotniejszych cech metafizycznych, jakie Dewey przypisuje naturze, znajdują się: dynamizm, ciągłość, emergentyzm, rytmiczność i wewnętrzne złożenie z sytuacji. Część druga artykułu prezentuje metafizyczną koncepcję sytuacji i jej najważniejsze teoretyczne konsekwencje, tj. przewyciężenie dualizmu metafizycznego oddzielającego podmiot od przedmiotu, obronę obiektywnego charakteru jakości oraz dynamicznego, kontekstualnego i pluralistycznego charakteru natury i wszelkich jej przejawów. W części trzeciej przedstawiona została deweyowska metafizyka doświadczenia. Autor wyjaśnia, kluczowe w tym zakresie, zagadnienia: doświadczenia pierwotnego, doświadczenia rzeczywistego oraz rytmicznej struktury interakcji. W ostatniej części autor przedstawił te wątki estetyki Deweya, które wyraźnie pozostają w ścisłym związku z jego ogólniejszą, metafizyczną charakterystyką rzeczywistości, tj. koncepcję doświadczenia estetycznego jako ciągłego z doświadczeniem codziennym, koncepcję aktywnej i pasywnej fazy percepcji, rytmu jako formy oraz rozróżnienie pomiędzy przedmiotem sztuki i dziełem sztuki.

Sztuka, w ramach prezentowanych w tym artykule poglądów Deweya rozumiana jest jako szczególny przejaw natury, który, w dynamicznej formie doświadczenia estetycznego, ujawnia najgłębsze, powszechne cechy rzeczywistości. W tym sensie jest szczytową formą organizacji natury i stanowi jej najbardziej wysublimowaną postać. Późne pisma Deweya dają podstawy do interpretacji, w której doświadczenie estetyczne stanowi istotny kontekst dla wszelkiego rodzaju doświadczeń. Wówczas deweyowska filozofia sztuki stanowi raczej osnowę reszty systemu niż jego marginalny element związany jedynie z działalnością artystyczną.

Słowa kluczowe:

metafizyka, jakości, emergentyzm, interakcja, natura, sytuacja, doświadczenie, estetyka, dzieło sztuki.

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