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Devices in Experimentation: The Work of Art in a Pragmatist Perspective, between Somaesthetics and Techno-aesthetics

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Abstract. John Dewey puts aesthetic experience at the center of his reflection on art and beauty, reconsidering it dynamically. Nowadays, this view opened the path to somaesthetics, a term coined by Richard Shusterman, and aesthetic anthropology. Here, it is argued that the contribution of pragmatist aesthetics could be further developed by exploring its analogies with techno-aesthetics, a paradigm proposed by the French philosopher Gilbert Simondon in the early 1980s. Art occupies accordingly a special place within the different forms of aesthetic experience, being considered as a way of experimenting the impact of new technologies in the human experience. It is a process by which technologies create “devices” for experimenting perception and reflection: namely, ways of reconstructing the nature of the human mind in-between body and technology, and by means of their interaction. Cinema reconsidered by Dewey’s fellow George H. Mead, offers an exemplary case as both artistic and technological devices.

Keywords. Techno-aesthetics; Somaesthetics; Art; Aesthetic Experience; Philosophical Anthropology.

INTRODUCTION

Contemporary philosophy, above all pragmatism, is especially engaged in rediscovering the meaning and import of bodies to the human experience. The formulation of a new paradigm of aesthetics is exemplary of this trend. It is the case for Richard Shusterman, who coined the very expression of “somaesthetics” – *soma* being the Greek word meaning “body”. Somaesthetics is symptomatic of some of the interests and claims animating the contemporary philosophical debate. On the one hand, we see the appeal to the reformation of aesthetics. As every reformation, Shusterman’s idea of rethinking aesthetics as “somaesthetics” is also a way of reconsidering its theoretical premises: for aesthetics, according to the idea of his founder, Alexander G. Baumgarten, was originally meant to be the doctrine of the «sensible or inferior cognition (*cognitio sensitiva seu inferi-*

or)». And as far as sentience is concerned (Shaviro [2016]), bodies constitute an unavoidable reference, which still needs to be adequately investigated. The aim of the present paper, however, is not to consider the body as an independent entity, no matter whether aesthetic or not. Bodies will be rather considered here as means for developing cultural and cognitive structures, by which data are not only gathered but also elaborated. This idea leads to the way Kant reconsidered the theoretical status of aesthetics in 1790, with the publication of the *Kritik der Urteilskraft*, about forty years after Baumgarten's foundation of aesthetics. When speaking of the interrelationships existing among understanding (cognition), imagination (sense-data elaboration) and feeling (sentience) in the formulation of aesthetic judgments, Kant actually argues, among other things, that the elaboration of experience cannot be isolated from its constitution in (Desideri [2011]). In the present paper, I argue that pragmatist aesthetics, as this latter is theorized by John Dewey, is more consistent with Kant's insight than what somaesthetics would think; pragmatist aesthetics just puts a stronger emphasis on the bodily interaction with the surrounding world in the course of experience.

Soamesthetics also argues against any sharp and rigid division between popular and eye-brow culture. As soon as the emphasis passes in aesthetics from old categories, such as contemplation, to the newly considered category of the body, the abovementioned distinction between "high" and "low" phenomena in culture loses some of its legitimacy: for, at any rate, bodies express or perform values that cannot be judged according to highly spiritualized standards. In other words, aesthetic distance, that is, the need for removing any direct emotional commitment, is no longer, at least not necessarily, a discriminating standard for judging artworks. Let us take pop music. The evaluation of its aesthetic import cannot be reduced to melody and lyrics, although these features still play a role. Pop music occupies a place in our lives, from love to leisure time, which leads us to consider its aesthetic value as having creative effects to the atmospheres of our everyday life (Di

Stefano [2017]; Griffero [2016]; Matteucci [2015]). However, a charitable interpretation of the pragmatist criticism of the eye-brow culture should lead us to consider the possibility of "re-embodiment" the official culture (painting, classic music, drama, etc.) into new patterns. This phenomenon is well epitomized by the filmic adaptation of novels and dramas. By the way, this was John Dewey's attitude toward art experience.

The common trait of these phenomena is that aesthetic experiences address a living body, rather than a reflecting mind: for instance, movies ask the beholder an identification that goes beyond beliefs and opinions and appeals to a virtual embodiment into the hero's deeds (Mead [1926]). This is even more relevant to the contemporary process of the aestheticization of politics: let us only think to the importance given by politicians to the bodily appearance – often by means of the social media – and its power of creating collective identities.

Nonetheless, pragmatism does not usually provide an analysis of the body's nature, rather focusing on its agency and performance. Other philosophical schools have developed this issue at length. Let us only think of phenomenology: the interest of this school for the body starts with Edmund Husserl's (1960) distinction between *Leib* and *Körper*, that is body considered as an organic living entity, interacting with the rest of the world, and body as a purely physical entity. Or Maurice Merleau-Ponty's (1968) concept of "flesh" (*chair*), which does not correspond entirely to Husserl's *Leib*, inasmuch the former argues the ontological mutual implication of the perceiver's flesh and the world's flesh within the process of perception. And of course, we must consider the approaches which are critical of phenomenology, though being inspired by it: from Helmuth Plessner's (1980) idea that *Leib* and *Körper* are mutually implied to Gilles Deleuze's (2005) belief that the most significant experience with which painting could ever supply its beholder, as happens in Francis Bacon's art, is not the "flesh of the world" but rather the inorganic and dead-like character of reality, its being "meat" (*viande*).

Such insight into the nature of the human body is likely to be found in pragmatism: its interest being rather the *interaction* between the world and us. Of course, this interaction finds in the body its unavoidable means. But, behind the emphasis on interaction, pragmatism seems to be more interested in its expressive, rather than its receptive agency: on how it exposes the state of the mind *outside*, rather than how it configures it *inside*, in accordance with the object of experience. Expression is, of course, not addressed to any special target, but refers to the configuration of the expressive self as such. In the pragmatist perspective defended by Dewey, this is the very target of expression in aesthetic experiences: not this or that object, but the general address of the “live creatures” to their surrounding environments considered (in general) as the means of their life. According to some accounts, this is a reference to the biological survival of the species (Ottobre [2012]) or the psychological condition of the self (Alexander [1987]). To Dewey, however, there is a difference between the bare discharge of a biological need through a bodily “motion” and the embodied expression of an “emotion”. Both refer to life, though at different degrees and stages.

Nonetheless, somaesthetics tends to overlap motion and emotion. But if my approach is right, the aim of pragmatist aesthetics is rather to understand why emotion is able to absorb and reshape motion while exceeding its scope in the expression of feelings. My argument is, therefore, that we are bodies – that is, living beings, whose thoughts are inseparable from their deeds – inasmuch we have “interactive feelings” – that is, feelings which enhance the exchange with the surrounding world. That’s why interaction has been the center of the aesthetic concerns in pragmatism, since John Dewey and George H. Mead, who was Dewey’s fellow at Chicago University and applied the former’s aesthetic theory to his own studies in the psychology of identification. But this is true also for a philosopher like Susanne K. Langer, although she was critical to Dewey’s sympathy for non-traditional art experience. Nevertheless, whilst she draws her examples from some very traditional

contexts – but surprisingly for her age, not only from the usually called “fine arts” – and refuses any aesthetic implication in ordinary life and objects, she develops a concept of interaction that is totally consistent with the pragmatist method of investigating experience.

I shall proceed as follows: in the next paragraph, I reconstruct Dewey’s concept of interaction as it emerges in his account of aesthetic experience; in the third paragraph, I consider the cognitive implications of this account of aesthetic experience, according to some of its most recent readings; in the last paragraph, I make some final remarks about Mead’s notion of aesthetic identification, which I shall consider as one of the best candidates to explain the relevance of the bodily interaction to culture as a concrete experience. The first paragraph supplied with the general paradigm of aesthetic interaction; the second one help argue the meaning of aesthetic experience as a device available to the human subject: namely, a structure being able of establishing the conditions of experience anew; the third one let me theorize the work of art as a sort of *technology of attention* orienting and redirecting the audience’s perception by giving it a cultural – and technological, as far as art is a form of technique – framework. In other words, an aesthetic experience so construed arguably designs and shapes human subjects as constitutively exposed to the technological reconfiguration of their cognitive and emotional agency (Ihde [2002]; Stiegler [1998-2010]).

In the light of the German philosophical anthropology, above all Plessner (2019), one could speak of the human position – in the world as well as in itself – as essentially “decentered”. But unlike the German philosophical anthropology, with its claim for technics as a sort of “compensation” for this decentered position, pragmatism is consistent with the idea of “techno-aesthetics”. Techno-aesthetics is a word coined by the French philosopher Gilbert Simondon (2014), in his 1982 letter answering Derrida’s request of suggestions concerning the foundation of the Collège international de Philosophie. According to this letter, the meaning of this new branch of philosophy is

manifold: it ranges from the reconsideration of the aesthetic experience in terms of technique – the beholders of Leonardo’s *Mona Lisa* admires her smile because they integrate it with the movement of her lips, as if their vision was a filmic montage – to the discovery of the aesthetic features of both technological devices – the Eiffel Tower – and technology-oriented artworks – as happens for the Futurist movement – to mention only of the most influential versions of techno-aesthetics argued by Simondon. The version mostly consistent with the present paper sounds as follows: as far as the work of the senses is especially concerned in the human interaction with the world, which is even considered its primary task, we discover that our sensations refer not only to passive (or rather, receptive) states of our minds, but also to an active engagement in technical operations of manipulation or transformation of the physical matter of our experience. Drawing an example from ordinary experience – an example of mine, not of Simondon – the sensations we receive from food as we cook (colors, flavors, texture of the food) cannot be isolated from the concrete act of cooking, that is, transforming those natural elements into a dish ready for being tasted. Accordingly, Simondon argues that even the aesthetic delight we take in beauties is, at least originally, inseparable from some technical disposition toward the subject-matter of our experience. Architecture is particularly suitable to this case: as far as we take delight in the shape and decoration of a building, we also appreciate its “fitness” for the function it was designed for. Nor is beauty subordinated to function, and neither is the opposite true: it is rather plausible that beauty and technical functionality are two interdependent factors in the process of building and dwelling. If we consider the reuse of pagan temples as Christian churches in many places throughout the territory of the former Roman Empire, or the passage of the same holy site from and to being either a church or a mosque, we see how far aesthetic, cultural and technological factors interacted in defining the “form” of those sites. Most importantly, we are led to acknowledge that we are unable to fully appre-

ciate that form outside a joint evaluation of its aesthetic, cultural and technological agency: the brilliancy in reusing a certain space for a new liturgical need, without losing its aesthetic effect, can be considered as one of the highest virtues of the architects who worked to those buildings in different ages and having different purposes. Simondon (1954) considers the radical separation of aesthetic and technical motivations in the evaluation of a work as a later product of modernity.

AESTHETIC EXPERIENCE ACCORDING TO JOHN DEWEY

John Dewey develops his aesthetic theory in a period of time that is also a fundamental step in his philosophical elaboration. In 1925, with the publication of *Experience and Nature*, Dewey offers a synthesis of his philosophy and presents his method of investigation. *Experience and Nature* contains a chapter on aesthetics, the title of which is *Experience, Nature and Art*. *Experience, Nature and Art* already contains the heart of Dewey’s aesthetic theory, although some remarkable differences can be found, with regard to his later reflections on aesthetics. However, his general idea of the aesthetic remained unaltered. In 1934, he publishes his best-known treatise on aesthetics, *Art as Experience*, in which he gathered and ordered the lectures he gave the year before on that very topic. Between 1925 and 1934, he published short essays, in which he deals with special issues concerning aesthetics. One of the most interesting is *Individuality and Experience* (1926), in which Dewey enquires the importance of art education, as well as the relevance of this form of education to a proper understanding of aesthetic experience at large.

In *Art as experience*, Dewey famously argues that we should consider the aesthetic “in the raw” before passing to the most refined aesthetic experiences available to our civilization, such as works of art. To have such a “raw” aesthetic experience, one just needs to go out and have a walk throughout the city: noise, sounds, colors, the shape of the

buildings, the speediness of the cars, the crowd occupying the streets and squares being busy with their affairs – all of these aspects being as many triggers to the experiencer's sensibility.

Actually, Dewey did not make his account of the aesthetic in the raw depend on any previously argument or theory on the human sentience and perception. On the contrary, the remarks contained in his aesthetic essays seem rather to depend on his general account of the aesthetic experience as a whole. This is, of course, an effect of the "empirical method" Dewey presented in first chapter introduced in the second edition (1929) of *Experience and Nature*. According to this method, the pragmatist philosopher should never start her enquiry from an abstract conception of the subject's mind or perception: the nature of these entities should rather result from the actual investigation of experience, just as happens with nature, the reality of which cannot be fully detached from the experience we have of it. But if what I have just said is true, then experience is but a name for a form of interaction that puts in mutual contact the subject's inward life and the reality outside them, as well as each one of them with the others. Or at least, this is the case for aesthetic experience.

The reference to mind activities at work in the process of experience, together with the establishment of their relationship to the world outside, is especially mentioned by Dewey in the last part of *Art as Experience*, when he argues that, before being a noun, "mind" is a verb ("to mind") designating our special care for the persons, things and affairs surrounding us. Dewey is not only committed to the mind-body problem, as clearly stated in *Experience and Nature*. His remarks actually foreshadow the Extended Mind Theory, as he imagines mind as a reality existing in-between the brain's inward processes and the reality of the world available to our knowledge and action. One of the main functions of experience is, therefore, that of recreating the mutual connection between thought and reality anew. Every kind of experience fulfills this task in a way or another: educational experiences do it for the sake of the youth's

education and intellectual growth; cognitive experiences do it for the sake of getting a deeper knowledge of nature; ethical experiences do it for the sake of redirecting more adequately emotions to the objects of their interest. This is just to mention some of the most eminent examples of human experience and their task with a view to the enhancement of the mind.

But what is the task of aesthetic experience? The answer to this question is in fact much harder than one could believe. Before answering this question, let me only remind that the idea that aesthetic experiences have a task must be intended in a broad sense. It is precisely the sense according to which, following the Kantian paradigm, aesthetic experiences have the power of supplying us with the experience of the non-empirical conditions of experience generally construed (D'Angelo [2011]). In other words, aesthetic experiences have the "task" of reorganizing the cognitive faculties of the mind and enhance their agency, though only in an indeterminate way, that is, having no immediate cognitive purpose (Garroni [1976]; Kukla [2006]; Marcucci [1988]; Palmer [2011]). The idea that aesthetic experiences have such an indeterminate and mediated task becomes even stronger in a pragmatist perspective. As a matter of fact, since Dewey, pragmatist philosophers often refer the sense of aesthetic experience to the reorganization of the human form of life, considered either biologically (Noë [2015]) or culturally (Shusterman [1992]). If we consider experience from the point of view of its outcome, we come to the following conclusion: the outcomes of either the cognitive or the ethical experience are much more easily recognizable than that of the aesthetic experience. Cognition and behavior offer easy references for such outcomes, being respectively the outcome of either investigation or deliberation. The solution is less evident when we pass to the case for education. Education is relevant as far as art education occupies an important part in Dewey's (1988a) account of aesthetic experience. Dewey's (1988d) influential views on education are largely based on the idea of cooperation between teacher and student. Scholars in education usually investigate the para-

digm of the “learning by doing” education according to this preference given to cooperation in the educational process. But there are some other aspects implied in this process, which are maybe more interesting for a philosophical account of the aesthetic experience. As far as art is concerned, Dewey cares for the fact that teachers are “masters” whose task is not limited to share an already accomplished knowledge with students – who are considered as “apprentices”. Education is a process of growth, the conclusion of which coincides with the recognition that students, the youth, have become autonomous individuals: they are able and free to behave and have experiences independently from their teachers’ directories. Furthermore, teachers are now in the condition of learning from their own students’ outcomes, in order to revise their previous know-how. If we consider aesthetic values (beauty, harmony, style, decoration, etc.) as elements of such a know-how, we acknowledge then that aesthetic values stay neither entirely on the teachers’ side, nor in the students’ side. Aesthetic values lie rather in-between them.

Dewey’s remark on art education are relevant to his aesthetic theory at large. They point out, in fact, to a new model of autonomy in art, conceived not subjectively in the facts and intersubjectively only in theory, as might be argued for Kant’s theory of the reflecting judgments. Having an independent insight into art creation implies *cooperation*: for cooperation is the pragmatic enhancement of the human interaction with environment. This position recalls Friedrich Schiller’s arguments in the *Letters upon the Aesthetic Education of Man* (1795) when arguing the anthropological basis of aesthetics. It is not by chance that Dewey admired Schiller’s way to aesthetics, whilst criticizing Kant’s one – needless to say, largely misunderstanding this latter. Nonetheless, as far as we are concerned with Dewey’s way to art education, his ideas could sound even closer to Kant than to Schiller. I am referring to what Kant writes in § 46 of the third Critique about the difference existing between “imitation” (*Nachahmung*) and “emulation” (*Nachfolge*) in the affairs concerning beauty. One imitates somebody else’s taste

or genius when one attempts to reproduce them mechanically, as if they could be reduced to a set of rules – which is impossible in principle. Contrariwise, one emulates somebody else when one takes the somebody else’s taste or style as a model for her own aesthetic judgment or creativity, while keeping in mind that emulation does not replace her freedom in judgment and creation, but is rather a means by which they can be fostered and enhanced. The difference between imitation and emulation is epitomized quite easily and immediately if we refer to art. The Italian historian, critic and theorist of art Cesare Brandi (1986) considers Mannerism as an art movement in which creativity was reduced to the reproduction of two styles: namely, those of Michelangelo and Raphael. The painters belonging to the Mannerist movement followed either the former or the latter in matters of style: paintings were considered not really as pictures by the artists of Mannerism, but rather as “signs” witnessing their belonging to either the former’s or the latter’s school. This is imitation, properly speaking. And by the way, it may lead to remarkable aesthetic results – as happens to many Mannerist painters, such as Andrea del Sarto, Pontormo or Rosso Fiorentino – but still lacks originality. On the other hand, emulation is experiment in art when analogies can be discovered between an artist’s work and other artists’ works or other genres and styles. It is so for Caravaggio’s *Vocazione di San Matteo* (1599-1600) (Prater *et alii* [2012]). It is a painting in which the artist probably applied the devices and even the tricks he learnt while training in making a genre of art inspired by ordinary life, which followed different standards than official historical, mythological and above all religious art. The cycle of St Matthew for the Contarelli Chapel was Caravaggio’s first commission in religious art. Furthermore, many observers suggested that Jesus’ gesture of indicating the publican Levi with his finger, while being accompanied by a certain degree of ambiguity that was unusual in religious painting and more typical of profane art, could be inspired by Adam’s hand gesture toward God Father in the Frame of the Creation of Adam in the vault of the Sist-

ine Chapel. By means of a web of art “quotations”, Caravaggio’s painting would be therefore nourished by a series of theological references, while presenting the scene taken from the Gospel as a scene of ordinary life. In this case we have emulation, rather than imitation: the artist did not follow his models slavishly, but took them as patterns of inspiration. By the way, emulation seems to require a good degree of interpretation. Another example of this sort of experimented emulation in contemporary art can be found in Francis Bacon’s variants of Velásquez’ portrait of Pope Innocenzo X. In this case, Bacon finds new meanings, concerning his own views on humanity and its bodily condition, in a masterpiece of the Baroque art of official portrait (Deleuze [2005]).

Not mind alone but mind in action – which is an embodied mind, by the way – operates in Dewey’s account of emulation in art. Arguably, the art creator, before designing the work of art she has in mind, imagines a *virtual body* by which she is able to *simulate* the interactions with the work, both during the creative process and at the moment of reception (Dewey [1988b]). In this perspective, *culture is the complex of all bodily operations and affections that can be designed and simulated with regard to the world of artworks available at a given moment*. In *Experience and Nature*, Dewey argues indeed in favor of a special task of art – or “fine art”, as he calls it, recovering this word from the language of the modern theory of art and renewing its meaning. “Art in being, he writes, the active productive process, may thus be defined as an esthetic perception together with an *operative* perception of the efficiencies of the esthetic object” (Dewey [1981]: p. 281). For this very reason, considered from the audience’s point of view, art is “a device in experimentation carried on for the sake of education. It exists for the sake of a specialized use, being a new training of modes of perceptions” (Dewey [1981]: p. 293). Dewey does not isolate art from the aesthetic realm: he rather finds the proper place for art within the manifold manifestations of the aesthetic quality of experience, that is, the several different ways by which human beings, the “live creatures”, are able to organize the raw and

scattered matter of their sensible interaction with the world into *an* experience.

According to the quotation mentioned above, art is likely to perform its powers more especially on *perception*: it trains or educates us to a new perception of reality. As I said, the overlapping between training and education is typical of Dewey’s pragmatist approach to education, which brings him to develop a philosophy of education based on the principle of “learning by doing”. The analogy between works of art and tools (microphones and telescopes) strengthens this belief. Nonetheless, it could be misleading: for technologies offer new tools for having further experiences, which might be in turn scattered and result in no organic experience, whilst the work of art is created for fulfilling the second task, which is an aesthetic enterprise properly speaking. To put it in a formula, one can say that microphones, telescopes and every sort of capture technology supply us with perceptions made available by a certain operability: the aesthetic quality of these perceptions, that is, their pointing out to the dynamic unity of experience, is left for further elaboration. Contrariwise, works of art present this very elaboration and so empower their audience to larger areas of operability than before. This is the meaning of the feeling of liveliness often bound – by Dewey, among others – to the aesthetic experience. This is what Dewey calls sometimes the “consummation” of the aesthetic experience, which emerges in the interplay with its “instrumentality”. Experience is momentarily liberated from both the routines of already assumed habits and behaviors, and the fragmentation of pure contingency, in which the only standard to evaluate facts and events is dictated by the law of impulse. Expression, as Dewey repeatedly states, differs from mere impulse as far as the latter is triggered by immediate needs, whilst the former entails a larger and deeper consideration of reality and engages all the forces available to the self to support this interaction. We can say now that expression is but the general phenomenon concerning the set of operations and affections by which a body simulation becomes available to cultural exchanges. If this statement

is right, then aesthetic perception acquires a fundamental importance inasmuch it is the moment when the cultural import of art, that is, a form of body simulation, proves its efficacy. In other words, it is through perception that minds discover whether and how far bodies are available to their designs and imaginations. Works of art can be therefore considered as “strange tools” (Noë [2015]), the function of which is to either enhance or stabilize the identity of living organisms governed by a reflecting mind – human beings, for example. Furthermore, they provide these organisms with devices that either implement or expand their communicational agency. In that sense, works of art are not just “strange tools”: they are, more precisely, *perceptual and emotional devices*¹. This is peculiarly true for those technologically supported works of art that are movies – as well as, of course, for their contemporary expansions: video installations, web documentaries, etc.

THE WORK OF ART AS PERCEPTUAL AND EMOTIONAL DEVICE

Art seems therefore to be a device being able to orient perception, in order to trigger its agency. Accordingly, aesthetic experience does not lose its instrumental quality when developing a new consummation of reality. On the very contrary, it reorganizes the mind’s (and the body’s) relationship to the world: now, it is the search for new consummation – that is, renewed pleasure taken things and events, accompanied by the acquisition of new meanings concerning those things and events, as well as reality at large – that leads instrumentality, whilst in the ordinarily utilitarian experience, it is the instrumentality of this experience that seeks the repetition of already experimented consummations. Of course, the concept of instrumentality does not entail the actual use of technologies. However, it sheds a special light on

the human practical intercourse with nature: for it foreshadows that every practical interaction with nature is oriented to the discovery, development or refinement of some tool or technique. For that very reason, one might argue that, far from fore-running somaesthetics, Dewey’s aesthetic theory could be considered as an original version of techno-aesthetics.

Nonetheless, in Dewey’s account of the technical import of aesthetic experience, bodies matter to a techno-aesthetics much more than in Simonson’s original formulation of this concept. As we saw above, Dewey reaffirms the analogy of works of art with technics. But this relationship is much different than it was conceived during antiquity – although Dewey aims at finding some continuity with the Greek thought, arguing that as far as *techne* indicated in Greek a skilled and expert interaction with a special kind of objects, this is the equivalent of his conception of experience. But Dewey addresses especially the issue of how minds, bodies and eventually cultures are engaged in the imaginary simulation and technological design of experience. The category of “work of art” must be considered here at large. Dewey considers also new media – radio and newspapers, for instance – as artistic devices that newly design the citizens’ participation to the public sphere and the very process of deliberation². This phenomenon points out to a sort of “proxification” of the body, in the broad sense of body argued here. By “proxification” I mean the tendency the human body manifests to be prolonged by technological proxy. This phenomenon is more evident in

¹ In a recently published book, Giovanni Matteucci (2019), in a philosophical perspective comprehending Dewey and pragmatism, suggests a revival of the argument that works of art are “devices”.

² Honneth and Farrell (1998: 775) argue that, in Dewey’s perspective, the public sphere functions as a “cognitive medium”. I agree with their perspective in Dewey’s political theory; however, I believe they do not consider how far media, in the narrow, technological sense of the word, are necessary to establish the public sphere as a cognitive medium amid political agents. Furthermore, they do not consider that Dewey actually considers these media as artistic devices, in a sense that emphasizes their power on perception and sensibility. Accordingly, we should speak of the public sphere as both a cognitive and an aesthetic medium.

the case of capture technologies (microscopes, for instance), which extend one of our sense organs (mainly, but not only, the eye). It is less evident, but still relevant, in the case of media, such as newspapers and radio. But it becomes extremely significant for new media, which create duplicates of ourselves, acting in our place and are our representatives in a public virtual sphere: let us just think to the use of tweeter, blogging, YouTube and even holograms as means to political action, and sometimes replacement of traditional political identities. New media intercept their artistic import as far as we consider them as necessary proxy of the acting and communicating selves: they provide them with a «radical mediation» (Grusin [2015]) of their deeds, speeches and imagery.

As a matter of fact, in all of the abovementioned cases, technological devices enact an artistic power while keeping their nature of device. Furthermore, these devices depend on the interaction between technological device and the body, but do not necessarily replicate the body's structure and functioning: bare intensification of the body's "natural" powers is only one of the manifold solutions available to technology. On the contrary, this latter is able to shape the body's form and identity: as has been noted, media environments are for instance able to make visitors literally feel sensations and feelings to which they have no access in their ordinary lives (Pinotti 2018). Are these experiences part of our bodily memory, as much as those offered by real life? I believe they are as far as virtual or augmented reality (Diodato 2013; Montani 2014) affects us, shapes our habits³ and orients our behaviors: they are instrumental to a new consummation of reality, to use Dewey's words. Nor such experiences always end with the reduction to natural bodies: artistic devices sometimes establish new stable "hubs" for our identities, as happens for instance to our social media accounts. Most noteworthy is the fact that the reflecting mind does not precede the inter-

action among body, technology and reality, but rather emerges during this interaction as a sort of dynamic background of experience, as Dewey argues in the last part of *Art as Experience*. As a matter of fact, we deal with natural objects having in mind the purpose of discovering new properties of them: this means, in a pragmatist perspective, that we make them available not only to our present action but to an indeterminate and virtually infinite series of future actions – an operability, the meaning of which appears inexhaustible: namely, indefinitely available to our consummation. Most importantly, we make them available to forms of common use and exploration: to this purpose, body simulation becomes pivotal. And the design of perception through artistic and technological devices is the primary target.

Interactive video installations, such as *Carney arena* (2017) by Alejandro González Iñárritu or Studio Azzurro's narrative museums and sensitive environments, are good examples of this situation: mind is able to develop its tools for elaborating experience only after and with reference to a new organic alliance between the body and the technology we apply to⁴. Noë (2015) applies a techno-aesthetic perspective on aesthetic experience and especially art, although he never calls his theory in this way, in order to enlarge the horizons of the Extended Mind Theory and apply it to the aesthetic realm. But to do that, he needs to open the perspective of this theory to biology broadly construed, in particular the idea of organism, while arguing the role of technics in building a properly human culture. The aim of this strategy in argumentation is not reductionist: aesthetics is still a part of philosophy, not of science. Narrowly speaking, conceiving works of art not just as "strange tools", but also and more importantly

³ For the role played by habits in Dewey's philosophy, see Dreon (2016).

⁴ I use the term "organic" in the same sense as Noë (2015) who, in a pragmatist vein inspired by Dewey, argues that technics is able to literally reorganize human life outside the boundaries of biological organisms, and that works of art are "strange tools" that do not apply to any special task in particular, but enhance our consciousness of how far our identities can be established only through the displacement of our bodies onto technology.

as perceptual and emotional devices, I argue that to have an aesthetic experience by the means of art implies the fact of being charged by the establishment of new cultural values, in order to make sense of, or reject, the new affections triggered by the encounter with a given work. Accordingly, we need to formulate some hypotheses concerning the emotional attitude we have in the course of the aesthetic experience. The hint for such hypothesis is given by George Herbert Mead's reconsideration of Aristotle's notion of *katharsis* in his article *The Nature of Aesthetic Experience*, appeared on the *International Journal of Ethics* in 1926 and largely influenced by John Dewey.

George H. Mead's interests as a scholar mainly went to the psychology of the self and social psychology. Philosophically speaking, he was largely inspired by John Dewey's pragmatism. With Dewey, he contributed to the development of the University of Chicago, where they were colleagues. Mead devoted only few articles and essays to the issue of the aesthetic. This issue, however, could but play a key role in the definition of the psychology of the self, in the light of its social meaning. As far as aesthetic experience is concerned, Mead seems to appropriate Dewey's aesthetic theory. However, Mead develops an issue that Dewey seems not to consider in his aesthetic writings, and with the outmost originality. Dewey was much concerned with contemporary mass phenomena in aesthetics, and was sometimes reproached for this reason (see Langer [1957]: 27, 110-111); nevertheless, he never elaborated a theory upon cinema. By the way, cinema is often considered as the forerunner of the contemporary experimentations with video art and interactive technologies (Grusin [2015]). In his article about aesthetic experience, Mead fills this gap; however, the scope of this article is not limited to filmic experience and entails a general pragmatist conception of the aesthetic. Furthermore, the originality of Mead's contribution is not bound to the fact of filling a gap in Dewey's theory. Mead elaborates here an original view concerning the role of emotion in the aesthetic experience: he recovers Aristotle's classical notion of *katharsis* and recon-

siders its meaning in the light of the new forms of narrative, that is, at his times, cinema. The import of Mead's contribution is therefore twofold: on the one hand, he discovers a new connection between pragmatist aesthetics and the previous conceptions of art in the history of philosophy; on the other hand, he specifies what happens when emotion is not aesthetically oriented generally speaking, but is triggered by an artistic device.

Mead considers a mass consume product of the Hollywood cultural industry of his times: adventure movies. Accordingly, he wonders as follows:

Does this discovery of a situation in which one may enjoy unreproved the terrors and fright of another quicken the old impulse and render him callous to sufferings of others? I think not. I think the experience is rather a catharsis, in an Aristotelian phrase, than a reversion. Nor does physically timid man become more courageous from watching with compensatory delight Doug Fairbanks annihilate a nest of bandits. But there should be a certain release, and relief from restraint, which comes from the fulfilment of the escape reaction with a richness of imagery which the inner imagination can never offer. If these escape reactions play any legitimate part in the economy of keeping house with one's self, and I think they do, the elaboration of them at just the point where the imagination fails should emphasize that function, and the enjoyed imagery is genuinely aesthetic. (Mead [1926]: 392)

Otherwise – Mead concludes as he applies the same consideration to modern literature, such as Joyce's *Ulysses* – imagery would be only a “private affair”, lacking any social meaning (Mead [1926]: 393). Interestingly, Mead's insight into “catharsis” as a filmic device is consistent with the interpretations of Aristotle's notion, developed by both hermeneutics (Gadamer [1960]) and the aesthetics of reception (Jauss [1972]) during the second half of the 20th century: the end of this purification from “terrors and fright” is that the spectator finds her place in the world and recognizes reality as her own reality anew. Every theory based on the idea of the spectator's direct and immediate identifica-

tion with the “hero” are here rejected as too naïf.

But Mead is interested in the psychology of the audience: namely, to what happens to their bodies as their emotions are triggered by some movies. He seems to forerun the recent application of the concept of “embodied simulation” forged by the neurosciences to film theory (Gallese&Guerra [2015]). According to the Embodied Simulation Theory, the spectator who watches, for instance, a scene characterized by suspense activates the same neuronal networks as if she is undergoing the same experience. Many sequences in Hitchcock’s movies are likely to be designed according to this principle. However, Mead gives us an important indication concerning how to avoid any form of reductionism in applying this theory to cinema and art in general. He distinguishes, in fact, between the individual’s “imagination” and the movie’s “imagery”: the former is limited as far as it depends on the individual’s constituency, habits, behaviors and past experience, whilst the latter is intrinsically social. Mead’s remarks on the social value of film go exactly in the opposite direction than those proposed by Adorno and Horkheimer (1973) about twenty years later: filmic imagery does not expropriate the individual’s imagination of its freedom in “schematizing” experience; on the contrary, the former has the power of nourishing the latter.

When we consider works of art as perceptual devices, the idea of “proxy”, that is, a mere extension of sense organs, is consistent with our consideration. However, when we pass to consider them as emotional devices, our reflection upon the technological import of art needs to be reconsidered too. To conclude, I would like to argue that, as far as emotions are concerned in art, the very concept of device needs to be reformulated. In the ordinary experience, emotion appears to be a special tie between subjects and objects, or subjects and subjects: the capability, or incapability, of handling objects or relationships to other subjects seems to be an essential drive in the phenomenology of emotions (Nussbaum 2001). In the aesthetic experience, things stay in a different way. Here,

emotions target not a dual but a triple relationship: subjects, objects and the devices connecting them. The subject’s emotions contemporarily refer to some objects (stories, images, sounds, etc.) and devices (the media used). The expertise required to handle these media triggers an emotional condition as much in the use (broadly construed) of the artistic media as in the experience of the very content of the work of art. Arguably the emotion oriented to technology is an essential component of our aesthetic pleasure as much as the emotion oriented to content: for both of them concur to the reorganization of the subject’s cognitive attitude at large. Here it is one of the possible senses of the connection between aesthetics and the Extended Mind Theory (Noë 2015; Matteucci 2019): our interactions with works of art considered as devices provide us with new “landscapes” for our cognitive activity.

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