

Introduction

Let no one say that I have said nothing new; the arrangement of the material is new. In playing tennis both players use the same ball, but one plays it better. I would just as soon be told that I have used old words. As if the same thoughts did not form a different argument by being differently arranged, just as the same words make different thoughts when arranged differently!

—Pascal, *Pensées*

This is a book of seven linked chapters that examine the varied imports, dimensions, and sources of aesthetic encounters. The chapters are directed toward diverse audiences with different disciplinary backgrounds and interests, encompassing philosophers, cultural psychologists, literary theorists, sociologists, and art historians. They are not mainly expository but rather dialectical, exploratory, and programmatic. They do not make up a treatise, nor are they meant as a “review of the literature.” The analytical linkages and frameworks of the chapters oscillate in a kind of swing and sway in the conceptual and hermeneutical space defined by a broad and open pragmatism and an equally broad and open semiotics.

But the chapters are not *about* pragmatism, or semiotics, or hermeneutics. They are about ways in which pragmatist analytical tools (especially those of Dewey and Peirce), semiotic analytical tools (specifically those of Langer and Peirce), and other complementary conceptual resources with philosophical import can throw new light on, and extend in various directions, the conceptual kernel and complex backgrounds of the theme of the opening chapter, “Dimensions of an Aesthetic Encounter,” which interlinks perceptual, hermeneutical, and semiotic frameworks.

The chapters proceed by a kind of “method of rotation and exemplification.” While each of the chapters can stand on its own, they are internally related to one another and intersect, overlap, or extend each other in multiple

ways. The inevitable repetitions and recurrences of themes, while due to each chapter having its own distinct purpose and point of origin, reinforce their cumulative heuristic effect and the intertwined thematic threads running throughout. The chapters bring into play a range of materials that are not otherwise combined. Their main purpose is to illustrate aesthetic linkages in new ways and to avoid committing the deadly fallacy of false alternatives, instead pursuing a core philosophical task of seeing connections.

Although the chapters could be read in any order, the order in which they are placed in the book is by no means arbitrary. The first chapter, “Dimensions of an Aesthetic Encounter: Encountering Giorgione’s *Sunset*,” which supplies the theme and sets the analytical task of the volume, begins with the analysis of an aesthetic encounter with Giorgione’s painting *The Sunset*, as fictionally portrayed in Iris Murdoch’s novel *The Sacred and Profane Love Machine*. The episode exemplifies in rich detail the multidimensional perceptual, hermeneutical, and semiotic nature of the encounter. This chapter introduces categories that will be exploited and developed in different ways in later chapters: the relations, implicit and explicit, between John Dewey’s and C. S. Peirce’s foregrounding of the category of quality and the qualitative matrix of perception; the aesthetic relevance of Peirce’s theory of interpretants; the role of the material and bodily nature of the medium in art, as illustrated in the phenomenology of painting with the help of the work of James Elkins and Nigel Wentworth; the centrality of embodied memory; Gadamer’s hermeneutical use of the play model of aesthetic encounters; and other issues and examples.

The second chapter, “Energies of Objects: Between Dewey and Langer,” examines the notion of energies of objects and their organization, a core theme in Dewey’s *Art as Experience*. It links Dewey’s pragmatist aesthetics, with its recognized fusion of Peircean and Jamesian categories, to Langer’s cognate yet different semiotic approach to art and the aesthetic dimensions of experience. This chapter engages a wide range of concrete examples: Siri Hustvedt’s account of her long-term engagement with Giorgione’s *The Tempest*, a foregrounding, in light of the theme of the energies of objects, of some different aspects of Murdoch’s fictional Giorgione encounter episode, and paintings by Pierre-Auguste Renoir and Hans Hofmann. It follows the theme of artworks as organized energy fields that are embodied in material sign-configurations with distinctive qualities. The chapter takes up the central notion of rhythm in Dewey and its relation to Langer’s idea of livingness, which Dewey also discusses as the animating power of an artwork. Rhythm

and livingness are shown to be expressive properties that have experiential force in their dynamic forms as gradients that permeate, not just artistic structures, but our experience as a whole.

The third chapter, "Quality and the Theory of Signs: Dewey's Peircean Aesthetics," takes up in more detail the role, both implicit and explicit, of Peirce's theory of quality in Dewey's aesthetics. The argument is that Dewey developed a "Peircean" aesthetics without explicitly developing Peirce's aesthetic hints in the systematic semiotic ways interpreters of Peirce's work have projected that Peirce would have employed, according to the fragmentary hints strewn throughout his writings. While Dewey does not systematically exploit Peirce's theory of signs in the development of this aesthetic theory, his aesthetics nevertheless mirrors its main lines. Dewey's aesthetics is not to be taken as an alternative to Peirce's but rather as one of its possible, indeed necessary, exemplifications and extensions. Thus, to speak of Dewey's "Peircean" aesthetics is to claim that there is a deep complementarity or congruence between them on multiple levels. In order to give concreteness to the discussion, the chapter examines the diverse engagements with Michelangelo's "Moses" by Robert Browning, Dewey, Sigmund Freud, and Giorgio Vasari.

The fourth chapter, "Aesthetic Naturalism and the 'Ways of Art': Linking Dewey and Samuel Alexander," discusses, with both historical and systematic intent, a potential hidden source in Dewey's aesthetics. This source is quite different from the implicit and explicit roles played by Peirce and James, as well as many others whom Dewey acknowledged to some degree. Alexander, the author of *Space, Time, and Deity*, also wrote extensively on aesthetics. Dewey was familiar with two of Alexander's rich essays, "Art and the Material" and "Artistic Creation and Cosmic Creation," and had corresponded with him but never met him in person. Nevertheless, notwithstanding that there is only one explicit reference to Alexander in *Art as Experience* and in letters to Sidney Hook and Corinne Chisholm and a passing allusion in his *Ethics*, there is evidence of Alexander's work in Dewey's *Art as Experience* that substantiates the deep naturalism of Dewey's approach to art and aesthetic experience. This chapter traces, with close attention to parallels, the shared thematic threads of (a) embodiment in a medium, (b) the notion of quality, (c) the materiality of inspiration, (d) the open nature of experiencing, and (e) metaphysical aspects of artistic processes.

The fifth chapter, "Between Nature and Art: Analytical Exemplifications of Dewey's Aesthetics," foregrounds the relations between examples and aesthetic theory in *Art as Experience* and examines further the theme of nature

as the matrix and medium of aesthetic experience and self-formation and of artistic creation. Dewey's lifelong philosophical project can be characterized as grappling with "the immense variety of interactions between the live creature and his world" ([1934a] 1989, 317). This world encompasses nature as immediately experienced in its dynamic variety and the human world arising out of nature's transformations by art and technics. Dewey shows nature's aesthetic import by means of texts from W. H. Hudson, Ralph Waldo Emerson, George Eliot, George Santayana, and others on their experience of nature's multiple forms. This chapter passes in review Dewey's remarks on the openness of nature in Chinese painting, the parallel sense of this open domain in van Eyck's *Jean Arnolfini and Wife*, and the bearing of Dewey's notion of such a background on a startling interpretation of the *Mona Lisa*. The analytical triad of representation, expression, and abstraction that runs throughout *Art as Experience* is illustrated by means of Dewey's comments on the Albert Barnes-motivated examples of Paul Cézanne, Henri Matisse, Renoir, and others. Dewey's distinctions between space, spatiality, and spacing as qualities of space-time in shaping nature in art and life lead to a consideration of Dewey's remarks on architecture and its links to and confirmation by the work of the Finnish architect Juhani Pallasmaa. A discussion of architecture reveals in concrete detail the correspondences of qualities of space-time in art and life, and thereby raises critical questions about the nature of the design processes of the built world and the individual and social effects on the human sensorium.

The sixth chapter, "Pragmatism and the Challenge of a Cosmopolitan Aesthetics: On Theory beyond Borders," takes up the nature and scope of a remark in Ben-Ami Scharfstein's *Art without Borders*: "Art is not a single problem, nor does it have a single solution, rational or mystical." Art's multiple contexts, and its various types of contexts, are, he argues, the sources of this radical plurality, which characterizes thought itself. In this, art mirrors life. Nevertheless, in spite of the admitted plurality, Scharfstein issues a call for an "open aesthetics" (366) and an "aesthetic pluralism" (367) and asks, "Is there really an aesthetics that cuts across all human cultures?" (2009, 404). This chapter offers some elements for answering this question. I show how Dewey's notion of an encompassing nonobjective whole has deep affinities with the Taoist aesthetic vision presented in François Jullien's *The Great Image Has No Form*. Jullien's further formulation, in his *In Praise of Blandness*, of paradoxical aspects of the "circle of the perceived" in Chinese aesthetics, is examined in light of, and intersects with, the application and extension of the

role of Peirce's theory of quality in aesthetic perception. At the end of chapter 6 I trace further some remarkable parallels between Peirce's cosmological vision and the Taoist way of beauty put forth by François Cheng. The upshot is that while analytical concepts from Dewey and Peirce may not be sufficient on their own to frame a cosmopolitan aesthetics, they certainly can be used as paving stones for constructing pathways to an aesthetic pluralism and open aesthetics.

The seventh chapter, "Filling the Hole in Sense: Between Art and Philosophy," follows up on Dewey's argument in *Art as Experience* that the significance of art as experience is of incomparable importance for the adventure of philosophical thought. Dewey claimed that while both art and philosophy move in the medium of imaginative mind, art provides a "unique control" for the "imaginative ventures of philosophy" ([1934a] 1989, 309). This chapter explores some supplementary and supporting ways of showing how this is the case by taking up (a) Raymond Tallis's core idea that art's central task is to heal an "incurable wound in the present tense" (2014, 46) or "hole" in sense that leads us to substitute a conceptual scheme for experience itself, making it difficult to be present to one's experience "on the far side of use" (47); (b) Susanne Langer's authentication of presentational abstraction and symbolization as essential processes that makes being present semiotically possible; (c) Vladimir Jankélévitch's (2003) analysis of music's ineffability and its epiphanic and nonargumentative nature as a paradigm for philosophical practices; and (d) Michel Henry's (1988) seemingly paradoxical claim, based on reflections on Wassily Kandinsky, that art, especially abstract art, makes possible an affect-drenched experience of "seeing the invisible" and grasping of the essence of being alive. These are challenging exemplifications of ways of formulating, presenting, and critically engaging focal issues, both methodological and substantive, of art's challenge to the tasks of philosophy. The originary agonistic context of philosophy is wresting meaning from the noise of meaninglessness or discerning order in a seeming world of chaos. It is not merely that of winning an argument or composing treatise-like discursive arguments, goals that it also pursues. But philosophy can be pursued in multiple manners. Jankélévitch shows us that just as short forms in music should not be measured by the model of symphonies nor artworks measured by their monumentality, so philosophical reflections can and should be measured by their mediation of insight, their revelatory power, independent of monumentality. Both philosophy and art attempt to fill a "hole in sense" by various practices, which are discursive in the case of philosophy and nondiscursive or presentational in the case of art. Artworks

and the forms of philosophical writing can, by their very finiteness, nonetheless bear on the infinite or plenum of sense without claiming to encompass it. The fascinating multiplicity of artworks offers us nonreductive models that challenge philosophy to take on new forms in a conjoined task of enabling us to maintain and restore our existential and experiential balance and to make us be present to our experience, within what Dewey called, in *Experience and Nature*, the “moving unbalanced balance of things” ([1925] 1988, 341).