Art as Experience by John Dewey

Dewey, J. (2005). *Art as experience*. New York, NY: Perigee.

Find where this goes: "Matisse said that the camera was a great boon to painters, since it relieved them from any apparent necessity of copying objects. But representation may also mean that the work of art tells something to those who enjoy it about the nature of their own experience of the world: that it presents the world in a new experience which they undergo."

Chapter 1: The Live Creature

If one is to go beyond personal enjoyment…one must commit themselves to fining out aoubt all that went into influencing and creating it. P2

"In order to understand the esthetic in its ultimate and approved forms, one must begin with it in the raw; in the events and scenes that hold the attentive eye and ear of man, arousing his interest and affording him enjoyment as he looks and listens: the sights that hold the crowd--the fire-engine rushing by; the machines excavating enormous holes in the earth; the human-fly climbing the steeple-side; the men perched high in air on girders, throwing and catching red hot bold. The sources of art in human experience will be learned by him who sees how the tense grace of the ball-player infects the onlooking crowd; who notes the delight of the housewife in tending her plants, and the intent interest of her goodman in tending the patch of green in front of the house; the zest of the spectator in poking the wood burning on the hearth and in watching the darting flames and crumbling coals." P3

So extensive and subly persuasive are the ideas that se Art upon a remote pedestal, that many a person would be repelled rather than pleased if told that he enjoyed his casual recreations, in part at least, because of their esthetic quality. The arts which today have most vitality for the average person are things he does not take bo be arts: for instance, the movie, jazzed music, the comic strip, and, too frequently, newspaper account of love-nest, murders, and the exploits of bandits. P4

Regarding art in caves, scarification, household functional items: “But the arts of the drama, music painting , and architecture thus exemplified had no particular connection with theaters, galleries, museums. They were part of the significant life of an organized community.” P5

Arts were part of everyday life not sectioned off. “The idea of “art for art’s sake” would not have been even understood. P7

Growth of capitalism leas to the “promotion of the idea that they are apart from the common life.” P7

Artists often feel compelled to exaggerate their separateness to the point of eccentricity. Consequently artist products take on to a still greater degree the air of something independent and esoteric. P8

Nature of the problem: that of recovering the continuity of esthetic experience with normal processes of living. P9

The comparison of the emergence of works of art out of ordinary experiences to the refining of raw materials into valuable products may seem to some unworthy, if not an actual attempt to reduce works of art to the status of articles manufactured for commercial purposes. P10

We cannot answer these questions any more than we can trace the development of art out of everyday experience, unless we have a clear and coherent idea of what is meant when we say “normal experience.”

"The first great consideration is that life goes on in an environment; not merely in it but because of it, through interaction with it." P12

Order is not imposed from without but is made out of the relations of harmonious interactions that energies bear to one another. P13

Direct experience comes from nature and man interacting with each other. In this interaction, human energy gathers, is released, dammed up, frustrated and victorious. There are rhythmic beats of want and fulfillment, pulses of doing and being withheld from doing. P15

To the being fully alive, the future is not ominous but a promise; it surrounds the present as a halo. It consists of possibilities that are felt as a possession of what is now and here.

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

**Chapter 2: The Live Creature and “Etherial Things”**

Etherial: “The Sun, the Moon, the Earth and its contents, are material to form greater things, that is, etherial things—greater things than the Creator himself made. –John Keats

Why is the attempt to connect the higher and ideal things of experience with basic vital roots so often regarded as betrayal of their nature and denial of their value? Why is there repulsion when the high achievements of fine art are brought into connection with common life, the life that we share with all living creatures/ Why is life thought of as an affair of low appetite, or at its best a thing of gross sensation, and ready to sink from its best to the level of lust and harsh cruelty? P20

Moments and places, despite physical limitation and narrow localization, are charged with accumulations of long-gathering energy.

The past is carried into the present so as to expand and deepen the content of the latter.

The existence of art is the concrete proof of what has just been stated abstractly. It is proof that man uses the materials and energies of nature with intent to expand his own life, and that he does so in accord with the structure of his organism—brain, sense organs, and muscular system.

…the *idea* of art as a conscious idea—the greatest intellectual achievement in the history of humanity. P26

Ultimately there are but two philosophies. One of them accepts life and experience in allity uncertainty, mystery, doubt, and half-knowledge and turns that experience upon itself to deepen and intensify its own qualities—to imagination and art. This is the philosophy of Shakespeare and Keats. P35

**Chapter 3: Having an Experience**

EXPERIENCE occurs continuously, because the interaction of live creature and environing conditions is involved in the very process of living. P37

In an experience, flow is from something to something. As one part leads into another and as one part carries on what went before, each gains distinctness in itself. The enduring whole is diversified by successive phases that are emphases of its varied colors.

In a work of art, different acts, episodes, occurrences melt and fuse into unity, and yet do not disappear and lose their own character as they do so… p38

In fact emotions are qualities, when they are significant, of a complex experience that moves and changes. P43

The miracle of mind is that something similar takes place in experience without physical transport and assembling. Emotion is the moving and cementing force. It selects what is congruous and dyes what is selected with disparate and dissimilar. It thus provides unity in and through the varied parts of an experience. When the unity is of the sort already described, the experience has esthetic character even though it is not , dominantly, an esthetic experience. P45

The word esthetic refers, as we have already noted, to experience as appreciative, perceiving, and enjoying. It denotes the consumer’s rather than the producer’s standpoint. P49

**Chapter 3: The Act of Expression**

The junction of the new and old is not a mere composition of forces, but is a re-creation in which the present impulsion gets form and solidity while the old, the “stored” material is literally revived, given new life and soul through having to meet a new situation.

It is this double change, which converts an activity into an act of expression. P63

He thus begins to be aware of the meaning of what he does. As he grasps the meaning of an act at first performed from sheer internal pressure, he becomes capable of acts of true expression.

An activity that was “natural”—spontaneous and unintended—is transformed because it is undertaken as a means to a consciously entertained consequence. Such transformation marks every deed of art. P65

The real work of art is the building up of an integral experience out of the interaction of organic and environmental conditions and energies.

The act of expression that constitutes a work of art is a construction in time, not an instantaneous emission….It means that the expression of the self in and through a medium, constituting the work of art, is itself a prolonged interaction of something issuing from the self with objective conditions, a process in which both of them acquire a form and order they did not at first possess. P67-68

If one examines the reason why certain works of art offend us, one is likely to find that the cause is that there is no personally felt emotion guiding the selecting and assembling of the materials presented. 71

The spontaneous in art is complete absorption in subject matter that is fresh, the freshness of which holds and sustains emotion. P73

In other words, art is not nature, but is nature transformed by entering into new relationships where it evokes a new emotional response. P82

Works of art that are not remote from common life, that are widely enjoyed in a community, are signs of a unified collective life.

The remaking of the material of experience in the act of expression is not an isolated event confined to the artist and to a person here and there who happens to enjoy the work. It is also a remaking of the experience of the community in the direction of greater order and unity. P84

**Chapter 5: The Expressive Object (the object that is expressive)**

Expression like construction, signifies both an action and its result. P85

But representation may also mean that the work of art tells something to those who enjoy it about the nature of their won experience of the world: that it presents the world in a new experience witch they undergo. P86

Before an artist can develop his reconstruction of the scene before him in terms of the relations of colors and lines characteristic of his picture, be observes the scene with meanings and values brought to his perception by prior experiences. Pg 93

The artist now used light, space, color and line, the media, to present an object that belongs of itself in an enjoyed perception experience.

Bliss is not a stencil transferable from one painter’s work to that of another, but bears the marks of its individual creator, for it expresses his experience as well as that presumed to belong to a saint in general. P95

According to Vernon Lee, as well as to some other theorists in the field of esthetics, “art” signifies a group of activities that are, respectively, recording, constructive, logical and communicative. p105

The essential thing esthetically is our won mental activity of starting, traveling, returning to a starting point, holding on to the past, carrying it along; the movement of attention backwards and forwards, as these acts are executed by the mechanism of motor imagery. The resulting relations define shape and shape is wholly a matter of relations. P106

In the end, works of art are the only media of complete and unhindered communication between man and man that can occur in a world full of gulfs and walls that limit community of experience. p109

**Chapter 6: Substance and Form**

Because object of art are expressive, they are a language.

The work of art is complete only as it works in the experience of others than the one who created. P110

The external object, the product of art, is the connecting link between artist and audience. P111

But as a work of art it is recreated every time it is esthetically experienced.p113

…from the unregulated with of undisciplined men to produce something new and startling. They are inevitable as the common things of the world are experienced in different cultures and different personalities. P113

Works of art, like words, are literally pregnant with meaning. Meanings, having their source in past experience, are means by which the particular organization that marks a given picture is effected.

There are, as he says, in our minds a vast number of emotional attitudes, feelings ready to be re-excited when the proper stimulus arrives, and more than anything else it is these forms, his residue of experience, which, fuller and richer than in the mind of the ordinary man, constitute the artist’s capital. What is called the magic of the artist resides in his ability to transfer thse values from one field of experience to another, to attach them to the objects of our common life, and by his imaginative insight make these objects poignant and momentous. –Dr. Barnes p123

The scope of a work of art is measured by the number and variety of elements coming from past experiences that are organically absorbed into the perception had here and now. They give it its bocy and its suggestiveness. They often come from sources too obscure to be identified in any conscious memorial way, and thus, they create the aura and penumbra in which a work of art swims. P128

The work of art is only complete as it is in the experience of of others than the one who cared it. P110

 The extant object, the product of art, is the connecting link between artist and audience. P110

The material out of which a work of art is composed belongs to the common world rather than to the self, and yet there is self- expression in art because the self assimilates that material in a distinctive way to reissue it into the public world in a form that builds a new object.  P112

But as a work of art it is recreated every time it is esthetic ally experienced. P113

Any other idea makes the boasted "universisality" of the work of art a synonym for monotonous identity. The Parthenon, or whatever , is universal because it can continuously inspire new personal realizations in experience. P113

The painting is used as a springboard for arriving at sentiments that are, because of extraneous subject-matter, agreeable. The subject matter of experiences of childhood and youth is nevertheless a subconscious background of much great art. But to be the substance of art, it must be made into a new object by means of the medium employed, not merely suggested in a reminiscent way. P118

It is significant that the word "design" has a double meaning. It signifies purpose and it signifies arrangement, mode of composition. ...ordered relations of elements. P121

Works of art like words, are literally pregnant with meaning. Meanings having their source in past experience, are means by which the particular organization that marks a given picture is effected.

...residue of experience. Transfer these values from one experience to another, to attach them to the objects of our common life, and by his imaginative insight mark these objects poignant and momentous. ( regarding Matisse 's volume on transferred values. P 123

the scope of a work of art is measured by the number and variety of elements coming from past experiences  that are organically absorbed into the perception had here and now. They give it its body and its suggestiveness. They often come from sources too obscure to be identified in any conscious memorial way, and thus they create the aura and penumbra in which a work of art swims. P127-128

\*\*The expressive inclines to the side of meaning, the decorative to that of sense.

For in architecture as in painting and poetry, raw materials are reordered through interaction with the self to make experience delightful.  P132

If the attempt to express does not succeed-and of course it does not always- then the decorative quality stands by itself and is oppressive- like too much sugar. P134

But whatever path the work of art pursues, it, just because it is a full and intense experience, keeps alive the the power to experience the common world in its fullness. It does so by reducing the raw materials of that experience to matter ordered through form. P138

**Chapter 7: The Natural History of Form**

Form as something that organizes material into the matter of art. Pg139

Bit “relation” in its idiomatic usage denotes something direct and active, something dynamic and energetic. It fixes attention upon the way things bear upon one another, their clashes and unitings, the way they fulfill and frustrate, promote and retard, excite and inhibit one another. P139

In art, as in nature and in life, relations are modes of interaction. They are pushes and pulls, they are contractions and expansions; they determine lightness and weight, rising and falling, harmony and discord. P140

It’s values, its qualities as seen, are modified by the other parts of the whole scene, and in turn these modify the value, as perceived, of every other part of the whole. There is now form in the artistic sense. Pg141

Form may then be defined as the operation of forces that carry the experience of an event, object, scene, and situation to its own integral fulfillment. P142

The existence of resistance defines the place of intelligence in the production of an object of fine art. Pg 150

Only because an artist operates experimentally does he open new fields of experience and disclose new aspects and qualities in familiar scenes and ojects.

That which is now classic is so because of completion of an adventure, not because of its absence. Pg 150

There is rhythm in nature before poetry, painting, architecture and music exist. Were it not not so, rhythm as an essential property of form would be merely superimposed upon material, not an operation through which material effects its own culmination in experience. Pg 153

The existence of a multitude of illustrations of rhythm in nature is a familiar fact. Oft cited are the ebb and flow of blood, the anabolism and katabolism of all living processes. What is not so generally perceived is that every uniformity and regularity of change in nature is a rhythm. Pg 155

The medium thorugh which energy operates determines the resulting work. Pg 164

It is possible to exaggerate the quality of serenity in art. There is no art without the composure that corresponds to design and composition in the object. But there is also none without resistance, tension, and excitement; otherwise the calm induced is not one of fulfillment. Pg 166 (boredom?)

For the unity in variety that characterizes a work of art is dynamic. Pg 167

**Chapter 8: The Organization of Energies**

Previously I emphasized the dependence of this final work upon the existence of rythms in nature; as I pointed out, they are the conditions of form in experience and hence of expression. Pg 169

[the liberties that artist’s take] mark the difference between mechanical or purely objective construction and artistic production. For rhythm involves constant variation…The greater the variation, the more interesting the effect, provided order is maintained—a fact that proves that the order in question is not to be stated in terms of objective regularities but requires another principle for its interpretation.

This principle, is that of cumulative progression toward the fulfillment of an experience in terms of the integrity of the experience itself—something not to be measured in external terms, though not attainable without the use of external materials, observed or imagined. Pg170-171

The live creature demands order in his living but he also demand novelty. Confusion is displeasing but so is ennui. … From the standpoint of actual experience it adds emphasis, distinction, as long as it does not prevent a cumulative carrying forward from one part to another. P173 [like dynamic in music?]

This element of continual variation—provided dynamic relations of re-enforcement, and conservation are met—is what makes a picture or any work of art wear. P174

Through selection and organization those features that make any experience worth having as an experience are prepared by art for commensurate perception. There must be, in spite of all indifference and hostility of nature to human interests, some congruity of nature with man or life could not exist.

An English writer, Galsworthy I think, has somewhere defined art “as the imaginative expression of energy which, through technical concretion of feeling and perception, tends to reconcile the individual with the universal by exciting in him impersonal emotion.” Energies that constitute the objects and events of the world and hence determine our experience are the “universal.” P193

**Chapter 9: The Common Substance of the Arts**

The interest of an artist is the only limitation placed upon use of material, and this limitation is not restrictive. It but states a trait inherent in the work of the artist, the necessity of sincerity; the necessity that he shall not fake and compromise.

Tolstoy’s identification of sincerity as the essence of originality compensates for much that is eccentric in his tractate on art. P197

But any experience the most ordinary, has an indefinite total setting. Things, objects, are only focal points of a here and now in a whole that stretches out indefinitely.

As Tennyon said:

*“Experience is an arch wherethro’*

*Gleams that untravell’d world, whose margins fades*

*Forever and forever when I move.”*

For although there is a bounding horizon, it moves as we move. We are never wholly free from the sense of something that lies beyond. P201

Coleridge said that every work of art must have about it something not understood to obtain its full effect.

We are, as it were, introduced into a world beyond this world, which is nevertheless the deeper reality of the world in which we live in our ordinary experiences. We are carried out beyond ourselves to find ourselves. P202