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EDUCATING THE SELF THROUGH AESTHETIC EXPERIENCE

BY

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DISSERTATION

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## ABSTRACT

This study calls for a shift in the way we think about the mode, meaning, and purpose of education by recognizing the aesthetic dimension. Through deepening Deweyan aesthetic theory with D.W. Winnicott's ideas on the self, I am addressing a crucial gap in educational literature pertaining to the constitutive role of aesthetics in the growth and development of the self. Put simply, John Dewey's philosophy upholds the idea that learning and growth is inherent in aesthetic experience because it refines the way we are related to the world and Winnicott's psychoanalytic account offers this insight greater precision and depth by filling out a critical component that Dewey does not address; namely, our early interactions in the world and the development of the self. This approach informs both policy and practice, speaking to arts education and beyond by advancing the notion that there is profound learning potential embedded within aesthetic experience. Thus, I argue that we need to cultivate this mode of aesthetic learning throughout all of education.

To make this case, I lay out Winnicott's theory of differentiation as I see it relating to the work of the Deweyan scholar, Elliot Eisner in chapter two, "The Difference Differentiation Makes: Extending Eisner's Account." This offers an understanding that recognizes how aesthetic education continues to carry out the process of differentiation throughout life. In this, the self is continually refined in relation to the world through aesthetic experience.

Chapter three, "Dewey's 'Peculiar' Mode of Human Association: Aesthetic Experience and Meaning," proposes a link between aesthetic experience and meaning making by identifying a quality of relation that they share in common. I suggest that we understand this quality of relation as a literal quality of relationship, as I draw on

Dewey's conviction that the establishment of partners within the "peculiar" mode of human association is what gives rise to intelligence and meaning. This insight is deepened through Winnicott's psychoanalytic account, which fills out significant gaps within Dewey's account. The linkage between aesthetic experience and meaning affords the insight that the quality of relation that bonds the two is precisely what we need to foster in education; thus, offering a valuable insight that has fundamental significance for education.

Chapter four, "A Potential Basis for the Ideal: John Dewey's Philosophy and the Unthought Known," extends this discussion through consideration of Victor Kestenbaum's recent work concerning the role of the ideal within Dewey's philosophy. Drawing on Kestenbaum's work, I propose what might be the developmental basis for understanding the role of the ideal throughout human life. Through this extremely broad perspective on human living, I believe we find a way to connect my educational project with a view of human life that is rarely considered, but nevertheless might explain a crucial, motivating force throughout all of our lives.

In the final chapter, "Conclusion and Implications for Practice," I consider what this approach means for educational practice and the education of teachers in particular. I propose that we aspire to cultivate the self of the teacher in such a way that will allow for teachers to extend this approach with students. I argue that it is vital to establish an experiential basis within teacher education for teachers to draw upon and offer examples from the arts to inform how this mode of education might work. In this, I uphold the notion that the arts have the potential to serve as the model for the rest of education for how we might cultivate the aesthetic mode of learning that is so central to education itself.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION: AESTHETIC EXPERIENCE AND THE SELF

The aim of this dissertation is to articulate a theory of education and learning that, although deeply impactful and ubiquitous, is not typically addressed in educational discourse. This is problematic because in not paying attention to the subtle but profoundly educative nature of aesthetic experience, we are missing out on a crucial opportunity to more effectively facilitate experiences that are inherently and deeply educative. In making my case, I will be drawing from two distinct, yet compatible theoretical frameworks; namely, John Dewey's philosophy and D.W. Winnicott's psychoanalytic theory. Put simply, Dewey's philosophy upholds the idea that learning and growth is inherent in aesthetic experience because it refines the way we are related to the world and Winnicott's psychoanalytic account offers this insight greater precision and depth by filling out a critical component that Dewey does not address – our early interactions in the world and the development of the self. I will be drawing out connections between these two theoretical approaches throughout, but perhaps the best, and certainly most pragmatic, starting point rests not in theory, but in practice.

In many ways I have been working on this project long before I ever conceived of the idea of writing a dissertation. Indeed, I could point to many potential beginnings, however, the clearest point of emergence lies in frustrations I felt as a music educator. Beyond the curriculum that was articulated and clearly defined, I endeavored to foster something more through my teaching. Yet, despite a deep conviction that this



“something more” was critically important, I could not satisfactorily explain *what* this was and *why* it was so significant. I knew this “something more” occurred within musical experience and that I was not alone in this intuition, as testimonies speaking to the immense power of music abound.<sup>1</sup> But without a theoretical account of such experiences, I was extremely limited in my capacity to cultivate them, let alone attest to their educational significance.

Although at the time my sights were set on the possibilities of musical experiences, I have come to understand that there is something more basic underlying experiences with music that warrants consideration and have thus shifted my focus away from artworks to human functioning. As such, the account detailed here applies well beyond the bounds of musical experience, while at the same time describing a mode of engagement that does not necessarily encompass all types musical encounters. I believe that in doing so, I have been able to address the disturbing lack of understanding I experienced as a music educator and, perhaps more notably, a lack in educational discourse to address the significance of aesthetic experience.

Pradeep Dhillon’s work helps in this regard by clarifying the theoretical framework for discussing aesthetic education. Although the term aesthetic education is often conflated with art (or music) education, Dhillon follows both Immanuel Kant and John Dewey in maintaining the important distinction between them. Whereas art education focuses more “narrowly on the creation and appreciation of artworks in themselves,”<sup>2</sup> aesthetic education addresses the much wider realm of the role aesthetics plays in all human functioning. “This is not to exclude artworks but to recognize them

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<sup>1</sup> Examples of such testimonies can be found: <http://blog.kexp.org/why-music/> (KEXP and AIR, “Why Music Matters: Stories about the Power of Music.”)

<sup>2</sup> Pradeep Dhillon, “Aesthetic Education,” in *A Companion to Aesthetics*, Second edition, ed. Stephen Davies, et al. (Malden, Massachusetts: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 114.

instead as just one form of human activity that engages us aesthetically.”<sup>3</sup> The shift in focus from artworks to human functioning changes more than just the object of study – it alters the types of claims that emerge. Thus, considerations of aesthetic education speak to the core of our functioning and therefore have bearing on all educational pursuits at a foundational level.

This offers a nuanced argument in support of the arts. Rather than collapsing into either of two rather clichéd arguments, this approach is situated in between them. Hence, at one extreme we find arguments that are all too instrumental (no pun intended) that make claims like “Young people who are involved in making music in their teenage years score 100 points higher on the SATs than those who don't play music.”<sup>4</sup> This claim, substantiated by the American Music Conference, was offered as a selling point for piano lesson software. Although I do not know how successful this approach is as a marketing tactic for musical lesson software, it is certainly not successful in upholding the value of music or learning in the arts more generally because it has nothing to do with the value of the arts in themselves. However, at the other extreme we find an argument that is only slightly better. The so-called “art for arts sake” argument has the benefit of relying on value that may be found within the arts, but the only influence this basic argument has lies with those who are already convinced. In this, we find the case in which we are (literally) preaching to the choir.

But in recognizing the inherent place of aesthetics within human functioning, claims emerge that far surpass either of these approaches. Accordingly such an approach has the benefit of tapping into what is special about the arts (i.e. they offer us

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> meridee calder, “Classical Music Study Improves SAT Scores for Teens,” <http://piano-lesson-software-review.toptenreviews.com/classical-music-study-improves-sat-scores-for-teens.html>

peak manifestations within experience of our aesthetic grounding in the world) while at the same time addressing a realm beyond the art museum or the concert hall by speaking to who and how we are in the world. Indeed, it is for this reason that Dewey contends that the idea of art for arts sake would not have been understood in Ancient Greece, for example, and should not be understood today. As such, Dewey affords that within the context of Ancient Greece “no contemporary would have doubted that music was an integral part of the ethos and the institutions of the community.”<sup>5</sup> Dewey later extends this idea, offering that within the ancient context

[The arts] connected things that were overtly important and overtly done with the substantial life of the community. Art was *in* them, for these activities conformed to the needs and conditions of the most intense, most readily grasped and longest remembered experience. But they were more than just art, although the esthetic strand was ubiquitous.<sup>6</sup>

Likewise, the approach I am supporting seeks to more fully integrate the aesthetic mode of learning (and living) into education and as a consequence I believe that the arts emerge as preeminent examples of what we should be aspiring for within education and indeed within all of life. Hence, to the extent that arts education programs tap into and cultivate the potential for learning embedded within aesthetic experience, they stand to pave the way for unlocking profound learning potential that can be extended to all areas of education. As such, I believe the arts, above other domains, offer great potential in serving as the model we need for all of education.

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<sup>5</sup> John Dewey, *Art as Experience* (1934; repr. New York: Perigee, 2005), 6. Dewey also made this point again in a more contemporary context in (the Works Progress Administration) in his 1940, “Art as our Heritage,” In J. A. Boydston (Ed.), *The Collected Works of John Dewey, The Later works, 1925-1953* Vol. 14, 1939-1941, Carbondale, Illinois: Southern Illinois University Press, pp. 255-257.

<sup>6</sup> Dewey, *Art as Experience*, 341.

## Literature Review

My research speaks to the educative value of aesthetic experience from a Deweyan perspective. Although this has not been a dominant discussion, the idea that aesthetic experience has educative value has been established within philosophy of education with Maxine Greene, Phillip W. Jackson, and Elliot Eisner leading the conversation.<sup>7</sup> Accordingly, I will briefly review literature within the field to show how my project relates to previous developments.

Maxine Greene stands out as a philosopher of education who places a great deal of value on experiential learning. This value shines through in her rich examples of educational encounters with art works in *Variations on a Blue Guitar: The Lincoln Center Institute Lectures on Aesthetic Education*, substantiating the claim that aesthetic experience can be deeply educative. While Greene offers a great deal of depth to claims about the educative potential of aesthetic experience through her fruitful descriptions, her conception of aesthetic education is limited to the arts, defining aesthetic education as:

an intentional undertaking designed to nurture, appreciative, reflective, cultural, participatory engagements with the arts by enabling learners to notice what is there to be noticed, and to lend works of art their lives in such a way that they can achieve them as variously meaningful.<sup>8</sup>

While this conception of aesthetic education certainly upholds the educative value of aesthetic experience, I have concerns about Greene's concentration being limited to the arts. My concerns rest not with Greene's philosophical account itself, but rather with the way this limited focus on art functions in two different respects.

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<sup>7</sup> In addition to these philosophers, I would also add Bennett Reimer as an important philosopher of music education. See, Bennett Reimer, *A Philosophy of Music Education: Advancing the Vision*, Third Edition (Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 2003).

<sup>8</sup> Dewey, *Art as Experience*, 6.

My first worry is that this limited focus on works of art perpetuates the very separation between artworks and everyday living that Dewey endeavored to counteract. Indeed, one of Dewey's major aims in *Art as Experience* is to "restore continuity between the refined and intensified forms of experience that are works of art and the everyday events, doings, and sufferings that are usually recognized to constitute experience."<sup>9</sup> Dewey expands on this idea through metaphor in saying, "Mountain peaks do not float unsupported; they do not even rest upon the earth. They *are* the earth in one of its manifest operations."<sup>10</sup> Thus, while there is nothing inherently problematic in focusing on the intense, peak examples of aesthetic experience that artworks often facilitate, I think it is important to recognize that these peak examples are not separate from our everyday functioning. Indeed, these examples are peak precisely because they are vitally connected to the manner of our being in the world, as organisms interacting with environments and growing through and as a result of this interaction. Of course, Greene in no way undermines this claim as she herself attests that "the arts awaken [us] to the process of living itself,"<sup>11</sup> however, her limited focus on artworks does not reveal the full extent to which this is the case and could function to reinforce the false separation between the arts and everyday life that Dewey sought to dissolve.

My second concern is that her limited focus on artworks also limits the potential impact of her claims. In only speaking to the educative potential of experience with artworks, Greene's account does not address the broader educational importance of aesthetic experience in all learning. Thus, while I recognize the valuable contribution that Greene and others offer through rich portrayals of peak educational experiences

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Maxine Green, *Variations on a Blue Guitar: The Lincoln Center Institute Lectures on Aesthetic Education* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2001), 63.

with artworks, I think it is important to conceptualize such accounts within the broader framework of aesthetic education. Accordingly, Dhillon tells us that aesthetic education means not only “the enhancing of our awareness of this dimension of our activities and experiences but also serving more humbly, but not less importantly, as a reminder of its pervasive presence.”<sup>12</sup> In this, I mark a point of departure in my work as compared Greene’s, as I endeavor to speak to this broader dimension in connection with the peak manifestations that Greene so powerfully attests.

Philip W. Jackson is another philosopher of education who focuses on art from a Deweyan perspective. His conception of aesthetic experience is not limited to interactions with artworks, but Jackson is chiefly interested in what the arts have to teach us about how to live our lives. Jackson addresses both the general reader and educators in particular, drawing out practical implications of Dewey’s aesthetic theory. While I am also interested in drawing out implications of Dewey’s aesthetic theory and am focused on what this means for educators, Jackson’s concentration is more closely tied to practice whereas I am interested in delving deeper into key theoretical underpinnings.

Nevertheless, Jackson nicely identifies the precise aspect of Dewey’s theory that I find to be extremely important for education in the following quotation:

When conditions are just right or very close to it, the resultant transaction between self and surroundings constitutes *an* experience. What is special about such occurrences is not simply that their parts or phases hang together to form a whole. Nor is it simply that we find them to be momentarily satisfying. What adds to their importance are the enduring changes that they produce. They leave in their wake a changed world.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Dhillon, “Aesthetic Education,” 117.

<sup>13</sup> Philip W. Jackson, *John Dewey and the Lessons of Art* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1998), 5.

Jackson elaborates on this point, noting changes in the world due to the existence of a new art object or an existing object acquiring new meanings. But of particular importance, he notes:

The experiencer changes by undergoing a transformation of the self, gaining a broadened perspective, a shift in attitude, an increase of knowledge, or any of a host of other enduring alterations of a psychological nature....Another way of thinking about these interchanges with art objects that result in enduring changes in both the experiencer and the experienced is to label them educative. They are so, Dewey would say, because of their liberating effect on future experiences.<sup>14</sup>

Jackson quickly moves on from this insight, leaving a great deal unpacked. While the changes that occur in the world are fairly manifest, the transformations occurring on the side of the self are less evident. I contend that it is important for the field of education to unravel what occurs in such transformations, as this process marks our fundamental orientation in the world and the mechanism through which a profound type of learning occurs. Although I have a great deal more to say about this, for now it will suffice to say that my work is complimentary to Jackson's project and that my interests rest in the process of transformation that Jackson identifies in his survey of Dewey's aesthetic theory.

Similar to Jackson, David A. Granger<sup>15</sup> ties Dewey's theory of aesthetics to educational practice. Granger compellingly draws together Robert M. Pirsig's *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance* and Dewey's aesthetic philosophy, weaving a tale that shows how Dewey's theory played out within Pirsig's educational context, and indeed, how it plays out in life itself. Going beyond mere identification that "Dewey's later works suggest that art and the aesthetic can assist us in recovering the full meaning

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<sup>14</sup> Jackson, *John Dewey and the Lessons of Art*, 5-6.

<sup>15</sup> David A. Granger, "Teaching Aesthetics and Aesthetic Teaching: Toward a Deweyan Perspective," *Journal of Aesthetic Education* 40, no. 2 (2006): 45-66.

potential of the everyday for both our students and ourselves,”<sup>16</sup> Granger shows us how this can work in his charming essay. Thus, Grainger’s work is a nice complement to my project.

Of all the philosophers discussed, Elliot Eisner’s approach is perhaps the closest to mine, as our arguments parallel and complement one another, emphasizing different aspects of aesthetic phenomenon. Eisner is a prominent educational theorist who draws heavily from a Deweyan framework. While he conceives of aesthetic experience to be “potential in any encounter an individual has with the world,”<sup>17</sup> Eisner places special emphasis on arts education and provides powerful support to the “topsy-turvy” claim that “the arts can serve as a model for teaching the subjects we usually think of as academic.”<sup>18</sup> Eisner puts forth numerous lessons that the arts teach education in general, ranging from somewhat derivative arguments about the arts teaching us that “there can be more than one answer to a question and more than one solution to a problem,”<sup>19</sup> to claims intimately connected to the experience and process of art.

When other fields, indeed, when other activates are pursued for their aesthetic properties and when they are acted upon with an eye toward the generation of such experience, the activity or the field increasingly begins to approximate an artistic one. In other words, science, both its products and its practice....increasingly becomes a means for generating artistic forms of life....Thus, education can learn from the arts what it means to treat fields as potential art forms, and in so doing the arts become a model for [all of] education.<sup>20</sup>

Chapter two of this dissertation is devoted to offering a full account of how my work extends Eisner’s account, but for now it will suffice to explain more generally how

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 64.

<sup>17</sup> Elliot Eisner, *The Arts and the Creation of Mind* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 2002), 232.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 196. Moreover, Eisner made this point for the entire profession in his AERA Presidential address: “Forms of Understanding and the Future of Educational Research,” *Educational Researcher* 22, no. 7 (1993): 5-11.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 196.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 208.



my project relates to Eisner's work. Like Dewey, Eisner provides "a case rooted in our biological nature and in the achievements of our culture."<sup>21</sup> Both Dewey and Eisner start with the premise that we are biological creatures embedded in an environment that is both physical and cultural through which we live and grow. While we are biologically determined to develop in certain ways, we also rely on our environments to activate many of our potentials (such as language development). Eisner is particularly attuned to our sensory capacities and maps out a trajectory of human development that moves from a potential for sensory processing, through experience of the qualitative environment, to the ability to differentiate among qualities experienced, form concepts, and represent these concepts within a shared social context.<sup>22</sup> This trajectory is important for Eisner's overall argument as he ultimately makes claims about mind, of which he says: "The child's developing ability to differentiate, to form concepts, and to represent those concepts reflects the use and growth of mind."<sup>23</sup> This idea is key for Eisner, as Arthur Efland recently surmised, "the essence of mind [for Eisner] is the process of forming representations of one's experience."<sup>24</sup>

Continuing his argument, Eisner recognizes the immense contribution of culture, which determines what aptitudes will be cultivated, and also notes how representation influences what is experienced. In addition, Eisner emphasizes the critical role that the arts can play in our lives by helping us to slow down perception and savor the qualities of our environment in order to secure feelingful experience. Moreover, "A major aim of arts education is to promote the child's ability to develop his or her mind through the

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<sup>21</sup> Elliot Eisner, *Cognition and Curriculum Reconsidered*, Second Edition (New York: Teacher College Press, 1994), 19.

<sup>22</sup> In particular, see Eisner, *The Arts and the Creation of Mind*, 20-22.

<sup>23</sup> Eisner, *The Arts and the Creation of Mind*, 22.

<sup>24</sup> Arthur Efland, "The Arts and the Creation of Mind: Eisner's Contributions to the Arts in Education," *Journal of Aesthetic Education* 38, no. 4 (2004): 76.

experience that the creation or perception of expressive form makes possible.”<sup>25</sup> Thus, Eisner tells us that the arts have an essential role to play in all education, as he understands education to be “a process of learning how to become the architect of your own experience and therefore learning how to create yourself.”<sup>26</sup>

Interestingly, the trajectory that I follow begins in the same place that Eisner does and ends with similar conclusions, however in the interim we diverge by placing emphasis on differing aspects of aesthetic development. Thus, a major distinction between my work and that of Eisner is the point in development in which we focus our sights. Where Eisner moves on to look at the work of school age children, I believe that there are much earlier developments that warrant significant attention. Thus, for my purposes, Eisner skips over a significant development that occurs between our initial experiencing of the qualitative environment in infancy to the ability to differentiate qualitative aspects of experience. I contend that this is not an insignificant omission, as the process through which we realize the capacity to make distinctions forms the basis of all our aesthetic encounters. Hence, while developing this capacity may not be unusual, it is no less momentous. Put simply, what Eisner’s analysis does not address is that before we can make distinctions about our environment we must first achieve some kind of working capacity to differentiate what is “me” from what is “not me.” This developmental point not only marks the initial emergence of what Eisner refers to as mind, but also of self. I believe it is especially important to take the notion of self into account given Eisner’s conclusion about the role the arts can play in “learning how to create yourself.” Indeed, this is precisely the point in which my work joins up again with Eisner, as I believe that this is a core insight that my work seeks to address and deepen.

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<sup>25</sup> Eisner, *The Arts and the Creation of Mind*, 24.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.

## Learning through Aesthetic Experience

This project grows out of Dewey's insight that learning and growth is inherent in aesthetic experience. Through the use of the term aesthetic (or as Dewey wrote – "esthetic"), Dewey is calling attention to our intimate connection with our surroundings. Indeed, the experienced rhythms of falling in and out of step with our surroundings form the basis of aesthetic knowing and it is through this rhythmic aesthetic flux that we learn and grow. Dewey offers a basic example of this unfolding in the beginning of *Art as Experience*.

Every need, say hunger for fresh air or food, is a lack that denotes at least a temporary absence of adequate adjustment with surroundings. But it is also a demand, a reaching out into the environment to make good the lack and to restore adjustment by building at least a temporary equilibrium. Life itself consists of phases in which the organism falls out of step with the march of surrounding things and then recovers unison with it – either through effort or by some happy chance. And, in a growing life, the recovery is never mere return to a prior state, for it is enriched by the state of disparity and resistance through which it has successfully passed. If the gap between organism and environment is too wide, the creature dies. If its activity is not enhanced by the temporary alienation, it merely subsists. Life grows when a temporary falling out is a transition to a more extensive balance of the energies of the organism with those of the conditions under which it lives.<sup>27</sup>

Thus, moments of lack, moments of temporary disharmony and rupture, are opportunities for a kind of profound growth that is intimately rooted in our connection with the environment. In aesthetic experience, we attend closely to this connection and the rhythms of this interchange – rhythms that perhaps become most literally manifest in the case of musical experience. Indeed, it is through attending to this rhythmic process and contending with the moments in which we temporarily fall out of step with our surroundings that learning and growth unfolds within aesthetic experience.

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<sup>27</sup> Dewey, *Art as Experience*, 12-13.

This basic insight lies at the core of my project. Thus, I am interested in knowing more about how this process of self/world transaction plays out and I offer particular emphasis on the side of the self in order to attain greater precision in understanding this of this mode of learning. In this, Dewey offers a good place to start:

Whenever anything is undergone in consequence of a doing, the self is modified. The modification extends beyond acquisition of greater facility and skill. Attitudes and interests are built up which embody in themselves some deposit of the meaning of things done and undergone. These funded and retained meanings become a part of the self.<sup>28</sup>

And it is thus that the self becomes educated through aesthetic experience.

Examples of this type of unfolding are vast, ranging from encounters such as lack in very basic needs of life (e.g. hunger for food or fresh air, as Dewey indicated above), to more complex and subtle unfoldings such as attending closely to a symphony and taking in its rhythmic flow. However, a particularly good example appears in a recent article by Aaron Stoller entitled, "Educating from Failure: Dewey's Aesthetics and the Case for Failure in Educational Theory."<sup>29</sup> In this, Stoller tells the story of Sadie, a college student who encounters a significant rupture when she is not admitted to graduate school. Stoller offers Sadie's story as an example of how moments of failure offer unique potential for cultivating the capacity for creative thought and action. In this, Stoller exemplifies this mode of aesthetic learning as he contends, "When done productively, creating meaning and value from the moment of failure is no different from artistic creation, both of which rely on a sophisticated ability to intuit and work from the affective background of thought."<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 275.

<sup>29</sup> Aaron Stoller, "Educating from Failure: Dewey's Aesthetics and the Case for Failure in Educational Theory," *Journal of Aesthetic Education* 47, no. 1 (Spring 2013): 22-35.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 26.

We encounter Sadie in her initial moment of deep failure after she received her final rejection letter – “in an instant she was overcome by the realization that everything she had planned and hoped for was no longer a possibility.”<sup>31</sup> Through Sadie’s story, Stoller does a wonderful job of exemplifying this aesthetic mode of learning. Indeed, we follow Sadie through this deep failure in a process of healing that eventually culminates as Sadie comes to understand herself anew through self-reflection and narrative re/visioning. In this, Sadie refines her relationship with the world through creative acts of meaning making, enacting a very deep process of learning and growth.

[For Sadie,] the process resolved in her realizing that the original goal of doctoral study was not true to many of her own beliefs about the world and did not play to her unique talents and skills. She was able to honor her past choices – which she originally felt were rendered worthless in light of the rejection – by bringing them forward into a new re/visioned future and gained a newfound confidence in her own creative abilities.<sup>32</sup>

Thus, the type of learning I am interested in unfolds through an aesthetic process such as the one Sadie experienced in transaction with the world. This is a process that we, as aesthetic beings, continually enact as we encounter and move through ruptures that are both large and small. Furthermore, I believe that we should attend to this process carefully in order to better understand and support this mode of learning. Indeed, this is precisely my aim herein.

I find it significant that Stoller points to friendship as the catalyst for the type of learning and healing that Sadie required after her moment of deep failure. In this, Stoller’s approach is precisely in line with what I have in mind. Hence, my turn to psychoanalytic theory supports this move in coming to understand the importance of relationships in initially developing the capacity to make meaning and subsequently in

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 28.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid. 33.

supporting the process of meaning making – whether it be through the internalization of prior relational experience or more overtly, as Stoller exemplifies through Sadie’s story. This idea will be fleshed out more in chapter three, however it is helpful at this point to note the ways that Stoller identifies friendship as the catalyst for this process. Hence, Stoller offers that friendship is precisely what enables the reconstitution of self within community – a necessary component of healing after deep failure – because our friends know our unique talents, skills, and abilities in a way that often surpasses our own view of ourselves. Thus, the very personalized insights that only our friends can offer give us a way to move forward as we rework our self-narrative in relation to the moment of failure.

But what I find most striking of all is within Stoller’s account is his suggestion that when we lack a habit of our own to keep us moving forward through a difficult situation, we can be set in motion once again by borrowing the habit of a friend. Thus, Stoller offers, “In many cases friendship in this moment involves not simply habit formation but habit sharing. The caretaking friend my help her suffering friend by simply setting him in the motion of habit, offering her own habit if the suffering friend has none available.”<sup>33</sup> This is again precisely inline with the approach I am taking in turning to psychoanalytic theory. Although Heinz Kohut is not a major figure in my dissertation taken as a whole, his notion of transmuting internalization is worth mentioning here, as it comes very close to this idea and offers a high degree of precision in understanding how this kind of growth unfolds within the self. Hence, transmuting internalization is a process in which the self contends with lack by absorbing aspects of previously experienced others into the self. Indeed, by literally incorporating habits of

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid. 31.

others into the self and satisfying the moment of rupture we build new habits, or, as Kohut would say, we build self-structure. The reason I believe it is important that we recognize the role of friendship in reforming our habits is because this points to the role a teacher might play in supporting this mode of learning. As such, a significant role of the teacher would be to nurture moments of rupture in order to help students attend to and move through moments in which they fall out step with their surroundings.

These moments of rupture – that is, falling out of step with the environment – occur at a scope that is both large and small. As such, Stoller’s depiction offers a strong place to start in offering a concrete example of deep failure that we can readily identify and relate to. However, this is not to suggest that this type of unfolding only occurs at this degree of magnitude. Indeed, this ubiquitous process is constantly unfolding largely undetected and unseen. But this lack of recognition is no indication of lack in significance and indeed profundity, as this mode of learning lies at the core of our selfhood.

### Overview

The chapters that follow fall out of an observation that Dhillon afforded in her brief sketch of the philosophical literature dealing with aesthetics in which she noted that for Dewey “only those aesthetic experiences would be considered educative that foster more meaningful experiences.”<sup>34</sup> This insight invites a number of further questions that Dhillon does not engage about the educative potential of aesthetic experience and thus marks a point of emergence for my work. Accordingly, my examination continues on in this trajectory, expanding on this insight to provide a

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<sup>34</sup> Dhillon, “Aesthetic Education,” 116.

deeper understanding of what constitutes meaningful experiences, how this relates to aesthetic experience, and how this deeper understanding informs the field of education.

In chapter two, “The Difference Differentiation Makes: Extending Eisner’s Account,” I address these questions in relation to Eisner’s account. This accomplishes a number of things. First, this marks the place in which my account diverges from Eisner’s, showing precisely the point at which I believe further consideration is warranted. Second, in explaining how my project diverges from Eisner’s account, I lay out Winnicott’s theory of differentiation. This is particularly important because in laying out Winnicott’s approach I am establishing a theoretical foundation that I will be drawing on throughout this dissertation. In this, I am also indicating my point of departure from Dewey’s project as well. Third, I reconnect Winnicott’s approach with Eisner’s. In tying this back together, I am offering a nuanced perspective for understanding acts of meaning making and aesthetic experience that I find to be compatible with a Deweyan approach. Extending Eisner’s account in this way offers an understanding aesthetic education that recognizes how aesthetic education continues to carry out the process of differentiation throughout life. In this, the self is continually refined in relation to the world through aesthetic experience.

Chapter three is entitled, “Dewey’s ‘Peculiar’ Mode of Human Association: Aesthetic Experience and Meaning.” This is a crucial chapter for my overall argument because it links aesthetic experience and meaning making through a quality of relation. I propose that we understand this quality of relation as a literal quality of relationship, as I draw on Dewey’s conviction that the establishment of partners within the “peculiar” mode of human association is what gives rise to intelligence and meaning. I deepen Dewey’s discussion by turning to Winnicott’s psychoanalytic account, which fills out



significant aspects of Dewey's approach. Furthermore, Winnicott's theory proves significant in linking aesthetic experience and meaning through detailing the way immediate sensation becomes transformed into meaning within the establishment of partners. In linking aesthetic experience and meaning, a valuable insight comes to the fore that has fundamental significance for education. Hence, this approach offers that the quality of relation that bonds aesthetic experience and meaning is precisely what we need to foster in education. This connects well with the insight Stoller offers above in pointing to friendship as the catalyst for the aesthetic mode of learning and offers an important perspective that I believe we urgently need in education.

Chapter four, "A Potential Basis for the Ideal: John Dewey's Philosophy and the Unthought Known," extends this discussion through consideration of recent scholarship within the field of philosophy that draws out questions regarding the place of the ideal within Dewey's philosophy taken as a whole. In this, I follow Victor Kestenbaum in examining the relation of imagination and reality throughout Dewey's philosophy. As Kestenbaum opens up the space for questions to take root concerning the role of the ideal within Dewey's philosophy, I use the space that Kestenbaum affords as an opportunity to propose what might be the developmental basis for understanding the role of the ideal throughout human life. In this, I am looking very broadly at what might be the motivating, moving, driving force of this educational approach and indeed human life itself. Through this extremely broad perspective on human living, I believe we find a way to connect my educational project with a view of human life that is rarely considered, but nevertheless might explain a crucial, motivating force throughout all of our lives.

In closing, chapter five, "Conclusion and Implications for Practice," considers what this approach means for educational practice. Indeed, such implications become particularly pronounced through considerations of the education of teachers. In this, we must consider the development of the teacher's self such that he or she will be able to extend this approach with his or her own students. Thus, it is vital to establish an experiential basis within teacher education for teachers to draw upon. I offer suggestions for how we might accomplish this by discussing the scope of implementation, what an aesthetic method of teaching might look like, and I draw on metaphors from the arts in order to inform how this mode of education might work. This is particularly significant, as I believe the arts have the potential to serve as the model for the rest of education in cultivating this mode of learning.

## CHAPTER 2

### THE DIFFERENCE DIFFERENTIATION MAKES:

#### EXTENDING EISNER'S ACCOUNT<sup>1</sup>

At a time when arts programs are being cut from our schools, we need to be reminded that the aesthetic mode of learning exemplified in the arts has fundamental significance to the purposes of education itself and thus has a central role to play in schooling. Elliot Eisner is a leading advocate of this view, and he provides convincing support for the contribution of the arts serving “as models of what educational aspiration and practice might be at its very best.”<sup>2</sup> Eisner’s core argument makes claims about human cognition and asserts that the arts play a key role in the creation of mind. In sum, Eisner’s argument starts with the assertion that we derive the content of all concepts from our ability to experience different qualities of the world that we pick up through our senses. He thus rightly links our sensory capacities directly to cognition. For Eisner, the essence of mind is reflected in the process of making qualitative distinctions in response to the environment, forming concepts, and representing those concepts. Accordingly, he tells us that the arts play a critical role in the development of mind because they fundamentally engage a process in which “perception is refined, imagination stimulated, judgment fostered, and technical skills developed”<sup>3</sup> – all of

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<sup>1</sup> This chapter first appeared as an article in *Educational Theory* 64, no. 1 (2014): 55–74; used with permission.

<sup>2</sup> Elliot W. Eisner, *The Arts and the Creation of Mind* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 2002), xii.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

which directly contribute to Eisner's conception of mind. Hence, Eisner concludes that the arts are core to the mission of schooling, as they epitomize the essence of mind.

In addition to the invaluable contribution Eisner affords through this core argument that reveals the formative role the arts can and do play in the creation of mind, there is another important theme that emerges throughout his work that is worthy of attention. Speaking beyond representation alone, Eisner states, "it is the process, the immersion in the activity itself and the quality of life that it makes possible, that should command more of our attention. The arts remind us of what life can be at its most vital".<sup>4</sup> This idea is present throughout Eisner's work, addressing a realm that extends beyond the doings of mind alone and embracing a more encompassing notion of self. In this, aesthetic experience *in itself* proves meaningful.

We find this idea again to be strongly present in Eisner's assertion that "among the most important ideas *The Arts and the Creation of Mind* addresses is the idea that humans are meaning-making creatures. All of us wish to create meaningful experience."<sup>5</sup> And indeed, it is out of Eisner's commitment to meaningful experience that he argues in support of providing access to the multiple forms of representation through education in the arts, as "each form of representation we employ confers its own features upon the meanings we make or interpret."<sup>6</sup> However, what I want to draw out is that the type of meaning making Eisner focuses on requires more than the workings of mind alone and relies on a prior developmental achievement, namely, the establishment of self-in-relation-to-world. Going further, the reason this prior development is important is because the subsequent meaning making Eisner attends to carries with it not only an echo – a repetition – of an earlier drama, but indeed a

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 203.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 230.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

reverberation, carrying on a significant process that continues to refine self-in-relation-to-world. In this, we find the essence of creative living; the very thing D. W. Winnicott tells us gives meaning to life itself.

Thus, I will show that there is even more to be said about the value of aesthetic education underlying Eisner's insights regarding the arts' capacity to develop the mind. As such, my goal in this chapter is to extend Eisner's account, providing a deeper appreciation for aesthetic experience itself by drawing out the developmental foundation upon which such experience not only relies, but continues to function in the present day. I will establish that meaning making is fundamentally an act of self-in-relation-to-world and is therefore, first and foremost, an act of self and, secondarily, a doing of mind. It is fitting that the path for making this case lies directly in line with the trajectory Eisner follows; however, I will be taking a much deeper look at the process of differentiation by considering contributions from psychoanalytic theory in order to appreciate the immense significance this process entails in our early lives at the time of differentiation and beyond. In this exploration, the psychoanalytic perspective emerges as having a great deal to offer in describing the richness of meaning making itself in addition to addressing the environmental conditions that support the process of meaning making. Furthermore, the psychoanalytic perspective strengthens our understanding of the critical role aesthetics plays within education through providing a fuller account of the developmental foundation of all aesthetic phenomena and its connection to the process of differentiation and meaning making.

#### The Need for a Deeper Look at Differentiation

Like John Dewey's approach, Eisner's argument is grounded in the fact that, at base, we are organisms inextricable from an environment. He begins with the assertion

that we are biologically designed to be sensitive to the qualities of our environment, but the activation of our sensory system requires that we meet a properly supportive environment in order for this capacity to come to fruition:

The actualization of capacity, that is, its transformation from capacity to ability, depends on both what the individual brings to the environment and what the environment brings to the individual. During the course of human development there are certain critical periods during which stimulation and nurture of sensory capacities are crucial.<sup>7</sup>

We can see this idea reflected in Eisner's account of differentiation. Put simply, to differentiate means to distinguish, to make or render different,<sup>8</sup> and Eisner's account focuses on sensory differentiation, a significant process in which children learn to make distinctions based on the various sensory qualities they experience within their environment. As he explains, some objects in our environment are large or loud whereas other objects are smooth or sweet. We respond to these distinctions, recall them in memory, and even manipulate them in imagination. Furthermore, as we gain more experience with the world, we become more sophisticated in our capacity to differentiate. In this vein, Eisner says, "as children mature, their ability to experience qualities in the environment becomes increasingly differentiated."<sup>9</sup> He tells us that it is exploration that leads to the construction of distinctions among the qualities encountered in the environment. This account suggests that as long as a child's sensory capacities are intact and he or she meets an environment sufficiently rich in qualitative differences, the child will develop the capacity to distinguish among qualities within the environment.

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<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

<sup>8</sup> *Oxford English Dictionary Online*, s.v. "differentiate," accessed December 19, 2013, <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/52467?redirectedFrom=differentiate&>.

<sup>9</sup> Eisner, *Arts and the Creation of Mind*, 20.

While this account essentially holds true, I would like to deepen the discussion by taking seriously the idea that the distinctions discerned from the environment are in service of a self-in-relation-to-world and are not discerned simply for their own sake. Accordingly, Dewey asserts that “the dictionary will inform anyone who consults it that early use of words like sweet and bitter was not to denote qualities of sense as such but to discriminate things as favorable and hostile” – that is, as favorable or hostile to a self-in-relation-to-world.<sup>10</sup> Thus, I maintain that the ability to make such distinctions rests on a more fundamental psychological capacity of self-in-relation-to-world and that the further refinement of sensory differentiation that Eisner addresses is secondary to this fundamental development. This is important to recognize because even if the conditions Eisner details do provide a child with the ability to notice and respond to the distinctions in texture, size, shape, smell, and sound that the environment provides, this is not to say that these distinctions would necessarily be meaningful – that is, related to self and world. Hence, I contend that in order for the information discerned from the environment to be meaningful, we need to account for more than simply sensory detection of qualitative differences. As such, the process of sensory differentiation that Eisner describes emerges as a secondary development that relies on a more fundamental process of psychological differentiation.

In order to demonstrate how this idea extends and deepens Eisner’s account, I turn to an example he uses to illustrate the trajectory that connects the development of a four-week-old infant to that of a forty-year-old:

The extent to which sensory systems can be used to distinguish among those qualities to which they are biologically sensitive depends in part on the organism’s prior experience and developmental history. For example, the four-week-old infant must learn how to focus and how to track moving objects, but so

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<sup>10</sup> John Dewey, *Art as Experience* (1934; repr. New York: Perigee, 2005), 15.

must the forty-year-old adult who is first learning how to hunt. While the adult has all of the physiological prerequisites, other necessary conditions — prior hunting experience, for example — may be missing. As for the infant, *both* the physiological and the experiential conditions that are lacking will soon be gained, for, at about the age of four months, both the ability to focus and to track are well-developed skills in the normal child.<sup>11</sup>

Stated differently, the eye movement of the four-week-old infant eventually leads the child to be able to track and focus reliably at four months of age. Continuing the example, Eisner links the physiological achievements acquired in infancy to the activity of the now forty-year-old who is hunting for the first time. While this adult may indeed lack the experiential prerequisite of prior hunting experience needed to effectively demonstrate the skills of visual differentiation required in hunting, she is drawing from the advanced physiological abilities she has acquired since the time of infancy in addition to a plethora of other experiences with the world in which she has refined her capacity to visually differentiate. Thus, the ability to differentiate requires both physiological and experiential achievements, and we build on what has been acquired in the past as we continually refine our capacity to differentiate.

In this account it seems that Eisner is placing the tracking and focusing activity of the infant within the same line of developmental continuity as the tracking and focusing activity in relation to hunting. However, I do not believe that such an analysis goes far enough to address the vast differences between the two cases. At one level we can see that although the hunter is “reading” the landscape with naïve eyes, she is drawing on an already firmly established ability to discern the stones from the field, whereas the activity of the neonate is qualitatively different. Indeed, at this point in development, the eye movement of the four-week-old is essentially a matter of physical stimulus and

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<sup>11</sup> Elliot Eisner, *Cognition and Curriculum Reconsidered*, 2nd ed. (New York: Teachers College Press, 1994), 24. In this quotation, Eisner is drawing on Burton Leonard White, *Human Infants: Experience and Psychological Development* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1971).



response, as she is only beginning to perceive the most basic distinctions within the visual array.

But there is an even more fundamental difference between the two cases. The eye movement of the forty-year-old hunter is imbued with meaning derived from interaction with an external, shared reality that has social significance, and this is not at all the case for the neonate. Where Eisner presents a continuum, I see a more radical break. Within the scope Eisner provides in this example, the two cases strike me as being fundamentally different, although I will refine my position on this point later in the chapter. Hence, in addition to consideration of sensory differentiation, we must also take into account the development of the psychological capacity to experience the world as external and separate from – but related to – the self. Indeed, in order for qualitative distinctions in the environment to be meaningful, we must first develop the more fundamental psychological capacity to distinguish what is “me” from what is “not me.”

Accordingly, in addition to the account Eisner provides regarding the development of our sensory capacity to differentiate qualities within our environment, I suggest we look more deeply into the psychological capacity to distinguish what is “me” from what is “not me” in order to gain a richer understanding of the process of differentiation. In doing so, I will be relying on the psychoanalytic use of the term “differentiation.” Although different from Eisner’s usage, the link between Eisner’s discussion of sensory differentiation and the psychological differentiation I wish to explore is stronger than mere terminology. Indeed, I maintain that Eisner’s usage of the term is a direct extension of the process described within psychoanalytic theory. Thus, one difficulty with using the term “differentiation” in reference to the visual fields of both hunter and neonate is that they are not only differentiating between the various

objects held in relationship within the visual field, they are also distinguishing what is “me” and “not me.” In this, there might indeed be a radical break between the activities of the neonate and the hunter.

### Extending Eisner’s Account

Ultimately, the reason I believe it is important to recognize the difference psychological differentiation makes is because of the crucial insight it provides for understanding the realms of culture, play, and aesthetic experience. In short, psychological differentiation, the process that develops the capacity for a relation between self and world, establishes a space in between the two that Winnicott termed transitional phenomena. In the next section I will engage in a much more detailed description of Winnicott’s transitional phenomena in order to show the deep significance of what is at stake in this developmental unfolding; however, before doing so, I want to take a closer look at Eisner’s work in order to draw attention to the points at which the concept of transitional phenomena stands to productively extend Eisner’s account.

My basic claim is that underlying the acts of representation central to Eisner’s account of mind resides a capacity of self upon which these acts necessarily rely in order to be meaningful – that is, related to a self and world. Significantly, this capacity involves the ability to experience the space in between self and world. This in-between space is essentially an experiential realm of play that both separates and connects what is inside and outside of the self. Winnicott maintains that transitional phenomena are the foundation of meaning making. And if we take this idea seriously, the acts of representation that Eisner addresses necessarily invoke transitional phenomena. This is a crucial insight for appreciating the full richness of the acts of representation that Eisner

details, but, going even further, this enables us to see that play and aesthetic experience are at the very core of meaning making.

Eisner describes four cognitive processes that are used in acts of representation, and I maintain that if we attend closely enough to these processes, we will begin to hear the reverberations of transitional phenomena residing within each of them. The first cognitive process Eisner addresses is inscribing, in which an idea or image is made more durable through manifestation in some kind of material form. This stabilizes the idea or image, but it is “never, to be sure, in the exact form in which it was originally experienced.”<sup>12</sup> For my purposes, this process is of the utmost significance, as it epitomizes self-in-relation-to-world and I read the next two processes Eisner addresses to be derivative of this fundamental act of meaning making. The second cognitive process Eisner discusses, editing, is a precise process of “making the work, work” through “paying attention to relationships and attending to details.”<sup>13</sup> Communication is the third cognitive process Eisner describes, and it is this process that, in my view, provides the major thrust behind Eisner’s work taken as a whole. Communication entails “the transformation of consciousness into a public form,”<sup>14</sup> and this is something that Eisner feels is taken for granted too much of the time. Eisner asks, “How does speech, or an imagined image, or a melody we hear in our head get communicated? What must the ‘reader’ do for it to make sense, that is, to be meaningful?”<sup>15</sup> Eisner contends that the role of education is to facilitate these acts of mind through enabling access to forms of representation.

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<sup>12</sup> Eisner, *Arts and the Creation of Mind*, 6.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 7.

It is the fourth cognitive process Eisner identifies that most overtly touches upon Winnicott's discussion of play. Significantly, "for Winnicott the opposite of play is not work but coercion."<sup>16</sup> Drawing on this experiential realm of play, Eisner cites "the discovery of ends in process, which in turn generates surprise,"<sup>17</sup> as the fourth cognitive process. Eisner describes the emergence of new possibilities that present themselves in the course of working and the surprise that this engenders. I am reminded of the hours I spent in practice rooms as a music student going over the same scales or études again and again, only to suddenly hear an old, familiar passage in a new way. Perhaps this was through a new point of emphasis in a phrase or hearing a scale as a whole unit rather than a series of notes in a technical passage. This moment of surprise is indicative of the paradox – and the acceptance of the paradox – that Winnicott maintains is central in transitional phenomena – specifically, that what is created is also discovered. And Eisner, too, recognizes this paradox: "Put succinctly, surprise, a fundamental reward of all creative work, is bestowed by the work on its maker."<sup>18</sup>

Within the context of Eisner's discussion, I believe that the need for consideration of the broader realm of the self becomes most apparent through the fourth cognitive process, as it is not a matter of skill or knowledge that engenders the discovery of ends in process, but rather rich engagement within experience that is made possible by utilizing our capacity to experience transitional phenomena. This lines up well with Winnicott's approach, in which "for both patient and analyst playing replaced knowing as the aim and the means of analysis. The mother, and her later counterpart, the analyst, could enable but should not, in Winnicott's view, inform or teach."<sup>19</sup> I believe that if we

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<sup>16</sup> Adam Phillips, *Winnicott* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1988), 142.

<sup>17</sup> Eisner, *Arts and the Creation of Mind*, 7.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> Phillips, *Winnicott*, 143.

took this idea more seriously in education, this fourth cognitive process, in particular, would be more fully supported. Eisner elaborates on this fourth cognitive process elegantly in saying, “Opportunities in the process of working are encountered that were not envisioned when the work began, but that speak so eloquently about the promise of emerging possibilities that new options are pursued.”<sup>20</sup>

It is important that we do not overlook that fact that the capacity to use the third area of living, transitional phenomena, is essential in order for this — and, indeed, for all four of the cognitive processes Eisner addresses — to come to fruition. In order to fully appreciate this, I maintain that we need to step back from a focus on mental doings and consider the broader role of the self. While the field of education as a whole has done a lot to address the realm of mental doings, considerations of this broader realm are less common; this is problematic if we aspire to facilitate these four cognitive processes.

Thus, this perspective reveals that there is much more at play than we typically account for in discussions of education. Going further, the broader dimension of the self-in-relation-to-world is important for the field of education to recognize because in facilitating these four cognitive processes, education must draw on its foundation. And the expansion of this foundation within education relies on a properly supportive environment in order to enable such unfoldings. As such, when Winnicott refers to the hampering of the ability to use transitional phenomena by ongoing environmental factors that stifle the creative process, there is great value for education in understanding the conditions that hinder as well as support this unfolding. Thus, a key question for an education that aspires to facilitate acts of representation and the creativity inherent therein is this: What are the environmental conditions that support the emergence of

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<sup>20</sup> Eisner, *Arts and the Creation of Mind*, 7.

these four cognitive processes? On this point, the psychoanalytic perspective has much to offer.

#### D. W. Winnicott, Differentiation, and Transitional Phenomena

In using the term “differentiation” to refer to the psychological capacity to distinguish what is “me” from what is “not me,” I am drawing on the psychoanalytic meaning of the term. Essentially, the psychoanalytic notion of differentiation refers to the process babies and young children go through in separating from the mother and developing their own sense of self. Taking into account the fact that we were all literally one with the mother in-utero, psychoanalytic theory upholds that psychological separation with the mother does not occur at birth when physical separation occurs. Thus, according to Winnicott, “Psychologically, the infant takes from a breast that is part of the infant, and the mother gives milk to an infant that is part of herself.”<sup>21</sup> If, for my purposes here, we extend this idea to Eisner’s example of the four-week-old infant, since visual stimuli at this very early stage in development is just another component of the all-encompassing experience of oneness and merger with the mother (and, by extension, the world), so too is the mother the beholder of the meaning of the visual terrain. D. W. Winnicott expressed this idea poignantly when, in the middle of a seminar in 1942, he exclaimed, “There’s no such thing as a baby! ... [I]f you show me a baby you certainly show me also someone caring for the baby.”<sup>22</sup> Hence, in the beginning, the entire unit of the baby is comprised in the environment-individual setup, or the nursing couple. The process through which the baby emerges as a unit and comes to distinguish “me” from

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<sup>21</sup> D. W. Winnicott, *Playing and Reality* (1971; repr. London: Routledge, 2008), 16.

<sup>22</sup> D. W. Winnicott, “Anxiety Associated with Insecurity” (1952), cited in Jan Abram, *The Language of Winnicott: A Dictionary and Guide to Understanding His Work* (Northvale, New Jersey: Jason Aronson, 1996), 2-3. Abram’s book is a comprehensive anthology of Winnicott’s work. She compiles extensive excerpts from his writings, papers, and other archival materials, organizing these according to the concepts central to his theories. She includes a complete bibliography of Winnicott’s work, and many of the Winnicott quotations I use in this chapter come from this source.

“not me” is the process of differentiation at its most fundamental level. From this perspective, we can see that the process of differentiation is primarily about the development of self-in-relation-to-world, and that the development of sensory capacities and the perception of qualitative differences in the environment that Eisner emphasizes is a secondary matter that builds on this foundation.

Before jumping further into a discussion of differentiation from a psychoanalytic perspective, I would be remiss if I did not acknowledge that there is no direct or definitive way of knowing infantile experience. For that matter, I acknowledge that I have no way of knowing what the four-week-old infant in Eisner’s example is experiencing or what the tracking and focusing activity she is developing *means* to her. Nevertheless, Winnicott’s discussion about the process of differentiation makes sense to me on a number of levels, and I find it to be persuasive. Additionally, I consider the fact that Winnicott had a great deal of clinical experience working with mothers and infants to be encouraging (although admittedly not conclusive).<sup>23</sup> Thus, I ultimately leave it to the reader to determine for him- or herself the merits of Winnicott’s account, but ask for the temporary suspension of any disbelief in order to allow Winnicott’s account to emerge and potentially resonate.

### *The Process of Differentiation*

The process of differentiation involves a complex interaction between the baby and the mothering environment (which is not limited to the mother alone, and need not involve the biological mother at all). Broadly, there are two main phases to the process of differentiation: illusionment and disillusionment. The first phase involves an intense period following birth in which the mother goes into a state of preoccupation with her

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<sup>23</sup> Indeed, Winnicott was a pediatrician before he became a psychoanalyst and therefore, there is a rich experiential basis underlying his theoretical account.

baby so extreme that Winnicott likens it to an illness. Indeed, it is a state of supreme psychological merger that supplies the necessary conditions for a basic sense of security and trust to be formed, enabling the next phase to be meaningful. Facilitated by the mother's gradual "recovery" from this illness, the second phase begins when the mother remembers that she is a separate person, and, in doing so, she aids her baby in realizing the same thing.

At the start, by adapting almost perfectly to her baby's needs, the mother supports an illusion of the baby's omnipotence – in other words, from the baby's perspective, it is he that creates the world around him:<sup>24</sup>

The breast is created by the infant over and over again out of the infant's capacity to love or (one can say) out of need. A subjective phenomenon develops in the baby, which we call the mother's breast. The mother places the actual breast just there where the infant is ready to create, and at the right moment.<sup>25</sup>

It is the mother's supreme identification with her baby that allows for this necessary illusion. Furthermore, this extraordinary task performed by what Winnicott termed the "ordinary devoted mother" lays a foundation of *being*:

The important thing is that *I am* means nothing unless *I* at the beginning *am along with another human being* who has not yet been differentiated off. For this reason it is more true to talk about *being* than to use the words *I am*, which belong to the next stage. It cannot be overemphasized that being is the beginning of everything, without which *doing* and *being done* have no significance.<sup>26</sup>

Winnicott tells us that supreme merger with the mothering environment at the beginning of life provides the necessary foundation for a life lived creatively: "Creativity

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<sup>24</sup> My use of "he" in reference to the baby and throughout this recurrent example is intended to clarify the positions of mother (she) and baby (he). It should be understood that my use of "he" or "she" is intended to provide clarity of position and is not intended to stipulate gender. The "mother" in my discussion could very well be a man and the baby could certainly be male or female.

<sup>25</sup> Winnicott, *Playing and Reality*, 15.

<sup>26</sup> D. W. Winnicott, "The Ordinary Devoted Mother" (1966), cited in Abram *The Language of Winnicott*, 68.



is the doing that arises out of being.”<sup>27</sup> Thus, the experience of omnipotence a mother affords her baby at the beginning is retained throughout life in the form of creative impulse – an impulse that is not a special endowment for the artist alone, but is “something that is present when *anyone* ... looks in a healthy way at anything or does anything deliberately.”<sup>28</sup> Indeed, we are born in a state of merger with the environment, and we depend on the environment to provide the support necessary at the beginning in order to meaningfully start to separate out in the next phase of differentiation.

Disillusionment is a gradual and precarious process in which the mother and baby separate from each other, enabling the realization of a world that is separate from – but related to – a self. While disillusionment is only possible if the illusion of omnipotence has been sufficiently supported at the start, it is the process of disillusionment that ultimately separates out what is “me” from what is “not me.” Furthermore, Eisner’s conception of mind begins to emerge through the process of disillusionment, but so too does the self – which is broader than Eisner’s conception of mind, as it encompasses independent initiative and purpose in addition to the doings of mind.

Through lessening her degree of adaptation in a way that meets her baby’s growing ability to contend with frustration, a mother disillusiones her baby. The baby will have to wait a little longer to be fed, for example, and through such small but manageable “failures” on the part of the mother, she allows for her baby to discover himself. Indeed, the creative gesture that emerges out of frustration in the form of a cry or protest brings forth the moment that the baby can start to discover himself as a separate being from the mother: “By ‘failing’ in this way, the mother unknowingly,

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<sup>27</sup> D. W. Winnicott, “Living Creatively” (1970), cited in Abram *The Language of Winnicott*, 111.

<sup>28</sup> Winnicott, *Playing and Reality*, 92.

allows the infant to feel and experience his needs. This 'failure' contributes to his developing sense of self."<sup>29</sup> At the same time, the baby is discovering the actual world that is, of course, not really under his omnipotent control. In this way, the process of learning the world and learning the self form two sides of the same coin of differentiation.

Precarious is perhaps one of the best words to describe the process of disillusionment because it must be fine-tuned to meet the baby's growing developmental needs, which are constantly shifting. "If the external opposition is too intrusive, the baby can only react, rather than respond. Reacting to impingements, in Winnicott's terminology, means that the infant's sense of self and continuity-of-being is interrupted.... This is what constitutes a violation of self."<sup>30</sup> The opposite extreme of impingement is the mother who clings to her infant and in remaining merged never allows the baby to separate out what is "me" from what is "not me." Moreover, as the baby develops, there is a constant vacillation of needs:

We see therefore that in infancy and in management of infants there is a very subtle distinction between the mother's understanding of her infant's need based on empathy, and her change over to an understanding based on something in the infant or small child that indicates need. This is particularly difficult for mothers because of the fact that children vacillate between one state and the other; one minute they are merged with their mothers, and require empathy, while the next they are separated from her, and then if she knows their needs in advance she is dangerous, a witch.<sup>31</sup>

However, through providing the appropriate support at the appropriate time, the mother is gradually relieved of her adaptive function, as "the infant's mind and the

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<sup>29</sup> Abram, *The Language of Winnicott*, 130.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

<sup>31</sup> D. W. Winnicott, "Theory of Parent-Infant Relationship" (1960), cited in Abram *The Language of Winnicott*, 130.

infant's intellectual processes [become] able to account for and so to allow for failures of adaptation."<sup>32</sup> Winnicott provides an example of the moment such intelligence emerges:

Think of an infant expecting a feed. The time comes when the infant can wait a few minutes because noises in the kitchen indicate that food is about to appear. Instead of simply being excited by the noises, the infant uses the news item in order to be able to wait.<sup>33</sup>

This marks a significant point in a baby's development and also marks the point at which Eisner's notion of mind enters into Winnicott's discussion of differentiation.

In forming the concept of the arrival of food derived from information picked up through the senses, the baby in Winnicott's example is enacting the initial aspects of mind that Eisner describes, that is, sensory differentiation and concept formation. Eisner tells us, "The formulation of concepts is, in a sense, a data-reduction process of distilling the essential features of an array of qualities so that they stand for a larger class of phenomena."<sup>34</sup> In the case of the baby in Winnicott's example, this involves reducing sensory data from the noises the baby hears into essential features that have come to stand for the arrival of food. However, connecting Winnicott's example to his theory of differentiation tells us that there is much more going on than Eisner's account addresses. First, the baby is becoming aware of *his* need, which is separate from the environment. Thus, the baby is learning both self and world. Second, the baby is learning to tolerate the frustration of not having his need met because he has an idea – a symbol – of food arriving soon. This symbol is not just mental activity that formed a concept disconnected from purpose and intention, but is rather something that *he* (the baby) can make use of, putting self and world in relation to one another. And, third, this symbol provides a

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<sup>32</sup> D. W. Winnicott, "The First Year of Life: Modern Views of Emotional Development" (1958), cited in Abram *The Language of Winnicott*, 132.

<sup>33</sup> D. W. Winnicott, "From Dependence Towards Independence" (1963), cited in Abram *The Language of Winnicott*, 132.

<sup>34</sup> Eisner, *Arts and the Creatioin of Mind*, 21.

connection between the baby and food, which is ultimately a symbol of connection with mother. Thus, in a healthy way the baby is warding off separation because he is filling in the potential space between himself and mother with his own *creative* act of concept formation. This last aspect is exactly in line with Winnicott's transitional phenomena.

While Eisner's discussion of differentiation and mind accounts for aspects of the world in relation to sensory perception and mental activity, Winnicott's scope is broader, encompassing the self as a whole in relation to the world. This difference in scope is likely reflective of the fact that Eisner focuses on school-age children, whereas Winnicott's focus is on infancy. I believe that Winnicott's emphasis on the foundational aspects of human development enriches Eisner's discussion by providing an appreciation of the immense role that the process of differentiation continues to play throughout life. To show how this is the case, I will now turn directly to a discussion of Winnicott's notion of transitional phenomena.

#### *Transitional Phenomena*

The concept of transitional phenomena is critical for my purposes not only because it is pivotal to the process of differentiation occurring in infancy and early childhood, but more significantly because it provides a conceptual framework for understanding a realm of experience that occurs throughout life which offers particular insight into the arts. Abram describes transitional phenomena well in observing, "the concept of transitional phenomena refers to a dimension of living that belongs neither to internal nor to external reality; rather, it is the place that both connects and separates inner and outer."<sup>35</sup> This experiential realm fits well within Dewey's conception of aesthetic experience and thus serves to deepen Eisner's account on multiple levels. In

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<sup>35</sup> Abram, *The Language of Winnicott*, 311.

addition to deepening Eisner's discussion of differentiation, the concept of transitional phenomena remains a strong counterpart throughout Eisner's discussion of the arts.

Although we experience transitional phenomena throughout life, at base this concept is linked to the process of differentiation occurring in infancy and early childhood. It is epitomized in a baby's first object — a soft doll or toy, the corner of a blanket, or even a baby's own hand or fist. This is the object that first transitions from being "me" to "not me," making it possible for the baby to symbolize and to have a relationship between internal and external reality. From the baby's perspective, this object is both "me" and "not me": it is both created by the baby and discovered as an aspect of an already present world; it is paradoxical through and through — and it is vital that this paradox be accepted.

I should like to put in a reminder here that the essential feature in the concept of transitional objects and phenomena (according to my presentation of the subject) is *the paradox, and the acceptance of the paradox*: the baby creates the object, but the object was there waiting to be created.... I tried to draw attention to this aspect of transitional phenomena by claiming that in the rules of the game we all know that we will never challenge the baby to elicit an answer to the question: did you create that or did you find it?<sup>36</sup>

Thus, as "one of the bridges that make[s] contact possible between the individual psyche and external reality,"<sup>37</sup> parents accept this paradox and allow their child to carry around his or her first object at all times, allowing it to get dirty because they know that washing it would introduce "a break in continuity in the infant's experience, a break that may destroy the meaning and value of the object to the infant."<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Winnicott, *Playing and Reality*, 119.

<sup>37</sup> D. W. Winnicott, "Group Influences and the Maladjusted Child" (1955), cited in Abram, *The Language of Winnicott*, 341.

<sup>38</sup> D. W. Winnicott, "Transitional Objects and Transitional Phenomena" (1951), cited in Abram, *The Language of Winnicott*, 340.

At the time of disillusionment, when the mother becomes gradually less available to her baby, this first object comes to symbolize the mother who, from the baby's perspective, is not yet separate. In times of her physical absence, the baby psychologically holds onto her through the use of the transitional object. Over time the quality of the baby's interaction with the object changes. At the start, Winnicott describes the interaction between the baby and the transitional object as object-relating, in which the object is subjectively perceived – just as the mother is a part of the baby at this point, so too is the first object. However, if all goes well in the process of disillusionment, the quality of this interaction gradually changes into what Winnicott termed object-usage, in which the object becomes external and separate from the baby – it has withstood all of the baby's aggression as well as love and remained intact and separate.

Once this occurs, the object itself is no longer needed; however, this critical object has enabled a new capacity within the child that is of immense importance. This capacity extends well beyond the use of a single object, establishing a space that can be filled in with creative play, the use of symbols, and with all that eventually adds up to cultural life.<sup>39</sup> Indeed, Winnicott argues that in one sense, there is no actual separation for humans between baby and mother, child and family, individual and society or world. This is because we fill in the gap, which in reality does of course exist, with symbol and creative play: "The baby's separating-out of the world of objects from the self is achieved only through the absence of a space between, the *potential* space being filled in in the way I am describing."<sup>40</sup> Winnicott contends that this potential space is the "location" in which we spend most of our time when we are experiencing life. Thus,

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<sup>39</sup> Winnicott, *Playing and Reality*, 147.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 145.

Winnicott directly links our highest cultural achievements with a child's play at the time of differentiation.

It will be observed that I am looking at the highly sophisticated adult's enjoyment of living or of beauty or of abstract human contrivance, and at the same time at the creative gesture of a baby who reaches out for the mother's mouth and feels her teeth, and at the same time looks into her eyes, seeing her creatively. For me, playing leads on naturally to cultural experience and indeed forms its foundation.<sup>41</sup>

Thus, the process of differentiation not only enables the distinction between internal and external reality, but it enables the capacity for a third area of living:

My claim is that if there is a need for this double statement, there is a need for a triple one; there is a third part of the life of a human being, a part that we cannot ignore, an intermediate area of *experiencing*, to which inner reality and external life both contribute. It is an area which is not challenged, because no claim is made on its behalf except that it shall exist as a resting-place for the individual engaged in the perpetual human task of keeping inner and outer reality separate yet inter-related.<sup>42</sup>

Although Winnicott admits that he cannot precisely define the word "culture," he is quite clear that we can only benefit from "the common pool of humanity, into which individuals and groups of people may contribute, and from which we may all draw *if we have somewhere to put what we find.*"<sup>43</sup> Thus, Winnicott tells us that successfully realizing the process of differentiation enables the capacity for play, culture, creativity, art, religion, not to mention the feeling that life itself is worth living.

This perspective reveals that differentiation entails a great deal more than sensory capacity alone and provides much more detail regarding the considerable difference between the eye movement of the four-week-old and that of the forty-year-old in Eisner's example. However, at this point, I find myself in a position to back off a

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 143.

<sup>42</sup> D. W. Winnicott, "Transitional Objects and Transitional Phenomena" (1951), cited in Abram, *The Language of Winnicott*, 338.

<sup>43</sup> D. W. Winnicott, "Location of Cultural Experience" (1967), cited in Abram *The Language of Winnicott*, 110.

bit from a claim that I made previously regarding the difference between the two cases. Previously, I referred to the two cases Eisner presents as being fundamentally different and noted that I envision a more radical break where Eisner describes a continuum. However, now that we have arrived at a level of much greater specificity regarding the process of differentiation, I am in a position to refine this statement a bit. The fundamental difference I was referring to pertains to the establishment of a self that is separate from the world while still being related to it. However, Winnicott's detailed account of the process by which this achievement occurs reveals that psychological differentiation, too, occurs along a continuum. Thus, the degree of difference between the two cases depends on the precision of the lens through which we are looking.

#### *The Extreme End of the Continuum of Differentiation*

Continuing this discussion of Winnicott's theory, I will next address Winnicott's account of the extreme end of the continuum of differentiation — specifically, his discussion of psychosis. This is one of the more controversial aspects of Winnicott's theory, and I would like to clarify that, for my purposes here, it is not important whether Winnicott is right about psychosis itself, as my interest in psychosis is theoretical rather than clinical. As a manifestation of a self that is not firmly established as separate but related to the world, the case of psychosis provides a way to understand the extreme end of the continuum of differentiation. And this affords a great deal of insight into how the process of differentiation — in its full range of manifestations — plays out in human life, especially as it relates to aesthetic phenomena.

Winnicott viewed psychosis essentially as an “environmental deficiency disease,” ascribing its etiology to very early environmental failures that disrupt the process of differentiation: “I admit that some infants are more difficult to nurture than



others, but as we are not out to blame anyone, we can ascribe the cause of illness here to a failure in nurture.”<sup>44</sup> Indeed, this is an extreme view of the etiology of psychosis, and it is common today to consider environmental conditions as only one of several potential contributing factors to the occurrence of psychotic illness. Accordingly, the fourth edition of the American Psychiatric Association’s *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* states, “Although much evidence suggests the importance of genetic factors in the etiology of Schizophrenia [one of the major psychotic illnesses], the existence of a substantial discordance rate in monozygotic twins also indicates the importance of environmental factors.”<sup>45</sup> Notably, this statement is not included in the most recent edition, the DSM-5.<sup>46</sup> As my purpose is not to determine the cause of psychosis, I maintain that Winnicott’s view on this matter is germane to this discussion despite any controversy about his claim.

As a psychoanalyst, Winnicott was deeply aware of the vital role the capacity for transitional phenomena plays in human life. In enabling a “person’s inner world [to be] related to the outer or actual world and yet ... personal and capable of an aliveness of its own,” the process of differentiation, when successful, makes it possible to live meaningfully and creatively.<sup>47</sup> I believe that for Winnicott, the meaning of life resides in creative living. While this is something we all struggle with at times, Winnicott tells us that the more extreme struggles of psychotic patients provide a way for us to understand what human life is all about:

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<sup>44</sup> D. W. Winnicott, *Home Is Where We Start From: Essays by a Psychoanalyst*, ed. Clare Winnicott, Ray Shepherd, and Madeleine Davis (New York: W. W. Norton, 1986), 105.

<sup>45</sup> American Psychiatric Association, “Schizophrenia and Other Psychotic Disorders,” chap. 5 in *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders: DSM-IV-TR* (Washington, DC: American Psychiatric Association, 2000), 309.

<sup>46</sup> American Psychiatric Association, *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders: DSM-5* (Washington, DC: American Psychiatric Association, 2013).

<sup>47</sup> D. W. Winnicott, *Home Is Where We Start From*, 31.

[W]hat is life about? You may cure your patient and not know what it is that makes him or her go on living. It is of the first importance for us to acknowledge openly that absence of psychoneurotic illness may be health, but it is not life. Psychotic patients who are all the time hovering between living and not living force us to look at this problem, one that really belongs *not to psychoneurotics but to all human beings*. I am claiming that these same phenomena that are life and death to our schizoid or borderline patients appear in our cultural experiences. It is these cultural experiences that provide the continuity in the human race that transcends the personal existence. I am assuming that cultural experiences are in direct continuity with play, the play of those who have not yet heard of games.<sup>48</sup>

This portrayal opens the discussion of differentiation even further, as the case of psychotic illness provides a counterpart to a citation Eisner includes in his discussion of sensory differentiation pertaining to some famous research on kittens.<sup>49</sup> This research showed that “kittens whose eyes have been occluded during the first few months of life lose their capacity to see when the occlusions are removed.”<sup>50</sup> Thus, just as there are necessary environmental contributions in the development of sensory capacities, Winnicott’s claim about the actualization of the psychological capacity to differentiate is in line with Eisner’s assertion that “the actualization of a capacity ... depends on both what the individual brings to the environment and what the environment brings to the individual.”<sup>51</sup> Indeed, the case of psychotic illness gives us living proof that the capacity for psychological differentiation (that is, to distinguish “me” from “not me”) is not something that can be taken for granted. Winnicott refers to psychosis as a “failure of the structuring of the personal self, and the capacity of the self for relating to objects that are of the environment,” thus placing psychosis at the heart of the process of differentiation.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Winnicott, *Playing and Reality*, 134-135.

<sup>49</sup> M. Stephen Kuffler and John G. Nicholls, *From Neuron to Brain: A Cellular Approach to the Function of the Neuron Systems* (Sunderland, Massachusetts: Sinauer Associates, 1976).

<sup>50</sup> Eisner, *Arts and the Creation of Mind*, 20.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>52</sup> D. W. Winnicott, *Home Is Where we Start From*, 105.

Winnicott's view of psychosis exemplifies the very Deweyan notion of the integral relationship between organism and environment, asserting that sanity and insanity alike are not features of isolated individuals, but rather appear in the interaction of individuals with their environments. Drawing on a quotation from a friend of his, Winnicott expresses this idea:

“Insanity is not being able to find anyone to stand you,” and here there are two factors: the degree of illness in the patient and the ability of the environment to tolerate the symptoms. In this way there are some in the world who are more ill than some of those who are in mental hospitals.<sup>53</sup>

From this perspective, the problem of insanity is not unrelated to the problems all of us face in everyday living. (Alas, according to this view, we are all insane at least some of the time!) Moreover, Winnicott views all mental illness as an “exaggeration of elements” that occur normally and notes specifically that “we do not see anything which would put psychiatrically ill people in a place apart.”<sup>54</sup> This is not to dismiss the very real problems that psychotics and others who are psychiatrically ill face, but rather to understand these problems as extreme manifestations of the struggles we all encounter.

### *The Aesthetic Realm*

Indeed, what is vital at the time of differentiation in infancy and childhood continues to be important throughout life. Just as Winnicott exclaimed in 1942 that “there's no such thing as a baby” separate from the mothering environment, he extended this idea into adulthood in 1971: “When one speaks of a man one speaks of him along with the summation of his cultural experiences. The whole forms a unit.”<sup>55</sup> Hence, we continually draw upon our capacity to experientially fill in the potential space between self and world, and this is evident in the subtle and ongoing nature of

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 109.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 105.

<sup>55</sup> Winnicott, *Playing and Reality*, 133.

transitional phenomena. "The potential space varies greatly from individual to individual, and its foundation is the baby's trust in the mother *experienced* over a long-enough period at the critical stage of the separation of the not-me from the me, when the establishment of an autonomous self is at the initial stage."<sup>56</sup> Although in health we do not need the same degree of environmental support required at the time of differentiation because a basic trust in the environment has been established, this in no way denies the ongoing and pervasive nature of transitional phenomena. As Winnicott states,

It is assumed here that the task of reality-acceptance is never completed, that no human being is ever free from the strain of relating inner and outer reality, and that relief from this strain is provided by an intermediate area of experience which is not challenged (arts, religion, etc.) This intermediate area is in direct continuity with the play area of the small child who is "lost" in play.<sup>57</sup>

Thus, immersed in a cocoon of sound, a high school musician consciously awaits the arrival of her impending flute entrance while also allowing for a measure of absorption among the sounds objectively emanating from the instruments of her fellow musicians and her own internal world. As she prepares to play the first note of her entrance – a C# right above the staff, perhaps the most open and vulnerable of notes because it literally involves the release of all control by the fingers – she breathes in the sound around her and places herself within the acoustic array. She has trust that the ensemble around her will support her voice, which at this point is one and the same with her own, as she reaches back unconsciously to a time when she took initial steps away from her mother, on some level unaware of and therefore unthreatened by the distance she was physically enacting because of the support her environment provided that made it possible for her to fill in the gap, maintaining connection despite the void

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 148.

<sup>57</sup> Winnicott, "Transitional Objects and Transitional Phenomena," 346.

incurred. It is her capacity to do so — to stay close as she steps away, to use the sounds around her to hold her — that makes possible fresh exploration in the world. And as an extender of the aesthetic realm, her teacher oversees and facilitates this expansion, fulfilling a function that is no doubt different, but in a meaningful way similar to that of her mother way back when.

Resting at the intersection between self and world, Winnicott's realm of transitional phenomena facilitates the aesthetic dimension at a core level. Thus, Winnicott's deeper look at the process of differentiation opens Eisner's discussion of mind and the arts considerably by including the concept of self-in-relation-to-world.<sup>58</sup> Beyond Eisner's account of mind, the concept of self speaks to motivation, meaning, and, indeed, what makes life itself worth living. Perhaps the most significant insight that I take away from Winnicott is that what distinguishes living from merely existing is being able to creatively fill in the potential space between self and world. And on this point, Eisner's account of mind reenters the picture, as his discussion of meaning and representation provide the mechanisms through which this is achieved.

### Meaning and Representation

The three main terms that come into play within Eisner's discussion of mind are sensation, conception, and representation.<sup>59</sup> A fourth term, meaning, is integral to the workings of this conception of mind; however, I think that we need to embrace Winnicott's discussion of differentiation in order to appreciate the full richness of what this fourth term adds. Hence, when something is considered to be meaningful, I contend that there is more going on than sensation, conception, and representation. Indeed,

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<sup>58</sup> It would also be sufficient to merely say self, as there can be no self except in relation to the world.

<sup>59</sup> Indeed, these are the three terms that Eisner mentions in the first sentence of the preface to *Cognition and Curriculum Reconsidered*: "This book is about the relationship among sensation, conception, and representation," ix.

discussions of meaning entail a self-in-relation-to-world and thus invoke the deeper notion of differentiation that Winnicott provides.

It is clear that meaning is vital to Eisner's overall project. Indeed, Eisner attests, "The ability to secure meaning in the course of our experience is a basic human need; we all want to lead meaningful lives. But meaning is not simply found; it is constructed."<sup>60</sup> Commencing from this point, Eisner focuses on representation and the importance of learning how to be "multi-literate" in order have access to the full range of meanings made available through culture: "Literacy, as I use the term, is the ability to encode or decode meaning in any of the forms of representation used in the culture to convey or express meaning."<sup>61</sup> Thus, Eisner contends that one of the major aims of education is to develop "students' ability to access meaning within the variety of forms of representation that humans use to represent the contents of their consciousness."<sup>62</sup> This lends a great deal of support to arts education and science or math education alike, as "each form of representation has a special contribution to make to human experience."<sup>63</sup>

However, I urge that we pause a moment to consider the *meaning* the construction of meaning has in terms of Winnicott's discussion of differentiation before moving on to the issue of representation. Hence, prior to consideration of overt acts of representation, I believe it is fruitful to consider more modest acts of perception as a key to appreciating that the meaning and creativity implicated in such acts is, indeed, embedded within this less complicated scope. Winnicott tells us that a trace of the infantile experience of creating the world remains in all acts of perception, as "what is

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<sup>60</sup> Eisner, *Cognition and Curriculum Reconsidered*, x.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 19.

objectively perceived is by definition to some extent subjectively conceived of.”<sup>64</sup> Thus, even the act of looking and seeing is inherently creative and invokes transitional phenomena, filling in the space between sensory stimuli and meaning. As Adam Phillips surmises from a Winnicottian perspective, “Perception — looking at things — is an addition to, but must never be separated from, apperception — seeing oneself.”<sup>65</sup> While Eisner tells us that the ability to encode and decode forms of representation makes it possible to derive meaning from acts of perception, Winnicott adds that such acts emanate from a self and that there is an essential component of creativity invested in these acts:

The creativity that we are studying belongs to the approach of the individual to external reality. Assuming reasonable brain capacity, enough intelligence to enable the individual to become a person living and taking part in the life of community, everything that happens is creative except in so far as the individual is ill, or is hampered by ongoing environmental factors which stifle his creative process.<sup>66</sup>

Hence, to the extent that we are healthy in this way, every deliberate act is creative and implicates the self — and were this not the case, it would not be possible to derive meaning from such acts. Whenever meaning is constructed, there is always a self-in-relation-to-world, and it is fruitful to take this into consideration as a prerequisite to Eisner’s discussion of representation. While Eisner has a great deal to tell us about the importance of providing students access to multiple forms of representation, I want to add that in doing so we are expanding on a foundation of self-in-relation-to-world and, thus, are allowing for an educational unfolding that is much deeper than we typically recognize.

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<sup>64</sup> Winnicott, *Playing and Reality*, 88.

<sup>65</sup> Phillips, *Winnicott*, 129.

<sup>66</sup> Winnicott, *Playing and Reality*, 91.

Beyond being compatible with one another, the accounts of Winnicott and Eisner have a certain degree of overlap, as they both argue in support of the other's basic position to some extent. Winnicott was deeply concerned about enabling the individual's capacity for play and creativity to come to fruition. While his core focus was on the environmental conditions that support the capacity to experience transitional phenomena through the process of differentiation, he also recognized the critical need for individuals to be introduced to cultural elements at the appropriate point in their development so that they could exercise this capacity. Indeed, Winnicott identifies two needs that must be met in order for an individual's capacity for play to come to fruition. The first involves the proper environmental conditions that support the process of differentiation, and the second is directly on point with Eisner's approach: "The second need is for those who have care of children of all ages to be ready to put each child into touch with appropriate elements of the cultural heritage, according to the individual child's capacity and emotional age and developmental phase."<sup>67</sup> Eisner follows up on this point well in saying, "Without the ability to 'read' the special and unique meanings that different forms of representation make possible, their content will remain ... an untappable resource, an enigma that they cannot solve."<sup>68</sup>

And, indeed, there are a number of ways that Eisner makes points that speak to the foundation Winnicott provided in his notion of transitional phenomena and the role it plays in human life. In addition to mental doings, I believe Eisner is fundamentally concerned with what life is all about, and I think that he shares in Winnicott's vision that it is cultural experience and the creation of meaning that makes life worth living. Eisner tells us that "work in the arts is not only a way of creating performances and products; it

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 148.

<sup>68</sup> Eisner, *Cognition and Curriculum Reconsidered*, 19.



is a way of creating our lives by expanding our consciousness, shaping our dispositions, satisfying our quest for meaning, establishing contact with others, and sharing a culture.”<sup>69</sup> Hence, although the major thrust behind Eisner’s argument rests in the mental doings of sensation, conception, and representation, there is a broader picture to which he is speaking and, indeed, a broader picture to consider in all discussions of aesthetic phenomena. Furthermore, this broader picture emerges through the process of differentiation; thus, while the arts do indeed contribute to the creation of mind, they are more fundamentally an act of self-in-relation-to-world.

#### Coda

At a fundamental level, all representations are concrete manifestations of interactions between self and world. Representations are embodied in material and made meaningful through the use of culture. Indeed, Winnicott tells us that it is culture that continues to hold us beyond the time of differentiation, extending the mothering environment through the use of transitional phenomena. Thus, culture – and this includes the forms of representation that Eisner concentrates on – is meaningful because culture provides the material and nonmaterial substance that we use to creatively fill in the potential space between self and world. Eisner describes the mechanisms through which this is achieved (that is, forms of representation), and Winnicott describes the meaning of it.

This discussion establishes that what constitutes meaningful experience is a self-in-relation-to-world and that the process through which this developmental achievement is realized has fundamental significance that persists throughout life in the form of aesthetic experience. This insight has bearing on the conception of aesthetic

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<sup>69</sup> Eisner, *Arts and the Creation of Mind*, 3.

education itself, as it connects the doings of representation to a capacity for creativity and selfhood that is laid down in early life. Accordingly, through this analysis we see the emergence of a view of aesthetic education as an extension of the process of psychological differentiation. This deeper view of aesthetic education affords the insight that in addition to enabling students to have access to multiple forms of representation through which meaning is made, doing so generates the conditions for the continual refinement of self-in-relation-to-world. In this, aesthetic education touches the very core of our being and enacts the continual deepening and refinement of a process that provides meaning to life itself.

## CHAPTER THREE

### DEWEY'S "PECULIAR" MODE OF HUMAN ASSOCIATION: AESTHETIC EXPERIENCE AND MEANING

John Dewey's philosophy poses an intriguing connection between aesthetic experience and meaning. Indeed, the bond between the two is clearly established within Dewey's writing, but its significance has been left largely untitled. Thus, my aim in this chapter is to disclose and deepen the vital link between aesthetic experience and meaning within Dewey's philosophy – and beyond. I begin my analysis by focusing on Dewey's discussion of meaning and explore the "peculiar" mode of human association that gives rise to intelligence and meaning: the establishment of partners. In doing so, I deepen Dewey's discussion by turning to the psychoanalytic theory of D.W. Winnicott, whose developmental perspective fills out significant aspects of Dewey's account. Winnicott remains a vital counterpart throughout my discussion, as his insights carry over from the development of meaning to aesthetic experience in detailing how immediate sensation becomes transformed into meaning. Crucially, I submit that a quality of the relationship that facilitates this profound transformation persists in all subsequent meaningful relations between self and world and that we can see this quality reflected most intensely within aesthetic experience. In this, the connection between aesthetic experience and meaning surfaces, uncovering a fundamental link between the two that resides at our core as meaning making creatures. Hence, I submit aesthetic experience *as* meaning.

A valuable insight in its own right, realizing this union proves significant for education in particular, as aesthetic experience moves to the core of all meaning making pursuits and the quality of relation that bonds them becomes fundamental to learning itself. Moreover, the significance for education is deepened further through considering a developmental perspective. Indeed, where Dewey's analysis describes a quality of relation, psychoanalytic theory provides a systematic approach that speaks to the development of the capacity for this type of relation to occur. Furthermore, as psychoanalysis is primarily concerned with providing therapeutic support, it is chiefly focused on cultivating the conditions that enable this type of relation to come to fruition; thus filling a significant educational gap within Dewey's account.

#### Dewey's Discussion of Meaning

What is key for my purposes is that both Dewey's aesthetic theory and theory of meaning rely on a relational quality between self and world – a relational quality that I believe originates in a developmental unfolding that connects the two on a fundamental level. To show how this is case, I begin my analysis in consideration of Dewey's discussion of meaning. For Dewey, meaning emerges through use and thus necessarily involves a relationship between self and world because in order to make use of objects in the world they must first be related to us through our intents and purposes. Although this can be difficult to understand in the abstract, the case of communication provides a concrete manifestation of this necessary relationship. Hence, another way of looking at this is to say that on an essential level, meaning can be understood in terms of "two selves involved in a conjoint or shared undertaking."<sup>1</sup> While it may not always be the case that there are literally two selves involved in every instance of meaning making, I

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<sup>1</sup> John Dewey, *Experience and Nature* Second Edition (New York: Dover Publication, Inc., 1958), 299.

uphold that this statement nevertheless essentially holds true in terms of the quality of relation (if not a literal relationship between two selves) that is necessary for engendering meaning. In order to show how this is the case, I turn to Dewey's theory and the necessary establishment of partners in a situation.

*The Establishment of Partners*

Although meaning encompasses a broader scope than instances of literal communication between two selves, the case of communication provides a context in which meaning clearly and necessarily resides. As such, communication provides a good place to start in teasing apart the significance of Dewey's account of meaning. Dewey tells us that the essence and import of communication, signs, and meaning is that "Something is literally made common in at least two different centres of behavior."<sup>2</sup> Whereas the mechanical routine exhibited in the "speech" of a parrot may prove meaningful to a hearer, the occurrence itself cannot be considered a full act of communication, as it lacks the alliance that is necessary in genuine acts of communication and language.<sup>3</sup> Thus, Dewey says, "While signaling acts are a material condition of language they are not language nor yet are they its *sufficient* condition;" namely, "the establishment of cooperation in an activity in which there are partners."<sup>4</sup>

It is important to recognize that the establishment of this partnership in activity is something unique that characterizes human association. Hence, what Dewey refers to as the "peculiar" form of interaction that characterizes human association is the context that establishes this necessary partnership in activity, of which "intelligence and meaning are the natural consequences."<sup>5</sup> It is significant that human beings are born into

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 178.

<sup>3</sup> See Dewey, *Experience and Nature*, 299.

<sup>4</sup> Dewey, *Experience and Nature*, 179.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 180.

an environment of “complex social relationships in which mutual action, recognition, bonding, and prolonged raising of children are facts”<sup>6</sup>—a context which gives way to significant consequences. “The significant consideration is that assemblage of organic human beings transforms sequence and coexistence into participation.”<sup>7</sup>

Dewey supports this idea in providing a general description of the development of language emerging out of the “distinctive patterns of human association.”<sup>8</sup> Dewey maintains that a baby’s initial gestures and cries are not primarily expressive and communicative, rather they are “over-flow” and “by-products” that lack communicative intent. Nevertheless, this is precisely the context within which language comes into existence, as “The story of language is the story of the *use* made of these occurrences.”<sup>9</sup> Indeed, a baby’s cries are put to use in being interpreted on the plane of meaning and responded to. Despite the fact that “‘Expression,’ or signs, communication of meaning, exists in such cases for the observer, [and] not for the agent,”<sup>10</sup> over time this context eventually gives way to a situation in which baby and caretaker form a participative alliance and establish a genuine community of action.

What is crucial from this description is that it is a quality of relating that makes language and communication possible—a quality of relating that I maintain is fundamental in occurrences of both meaning and aesthetic experience. In this, Dewey makes a significant distinction between human and non-human animals.

By habit, by conditioned reflex, hens run to the farmer when he makes a clucking noise, or when they hear the rattle of grain in a pan. When the farmer raises his arms to throw the grain they scatter and fly, to return only when the movement ceases. They act as if alarmed; his movement is thus not a sign of food; it is a

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<sup>6</sup> Thomas Alexander, *John Dewey’s Theory of Art, Experience, and Nature: The Horizons of Feeling* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1987), 154.

<sup>7</sup> Dewey, *Experience and Nature*, 175.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 175.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 177.

stimulus to flight. But a human infant learns to discount such movements; to become interested in them as events preparatory to a desired consummation; he learns to treat them as signs of an ulterior event so that his response is to their meaning. He treats them as means to consequences.<sup>11</sup>

The distinction between the two is indicative of “the essential peculiarity of language, or signs;” that is, the establishment of “a situation in which the two parties share.”<sup>12</sup>

As a follow up to this example, I would like to submit another example put forth by D.W. Winnicott that is exactly in line with the point Dewey intended with the example of chickens in comparison to a human infant. Focused on the perspective of the infant, Winnicott describes “the dawn of intelligence:”<sup>13</sup>

Think of an infant expecting a feed. The time comes when the infant can wait a few minutes because noises in the kitchen indicate that food is about to appear. Instead of simply being excited by the noises, the infant uses the news item in order to be able to wait.<sup>14</sup>

Indeed, unlike the chickens that flee when the farmer raises his arms, the baby in this example is able to interpret the analogous noises on the plane of meaning as an indication of food arriving soon. And taken in conjunction with the rest of Winnicott’s theory, this example goes even further as it fills out significant details that deepen Dewey’s account. Hence, this instance also describes the converse of the situation Dewey described above in which the baby’s initial gestures and cries are interpreted and made meaningful by a caretaker. Indeed, the kitchen noises themselves are not expressive of food or anything other than the result of objects being manipulated. But much like what his mother has done on countless occasions in response to the baby’s

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 178.

<sup>13</sup> Jan Abram, *The Language of Winnicott: A Dictionary and Guide to Understanding His Work* (Northvale, New Jersey: Jason Aronson Inc., 1997), 132.

<sup>14</sup> D.W. Winnicott, “From Dependence towards Independence,” cited in Abram *The Language of Winnicott*, 132.

noises and gestures, the baby now does in response to the environment, as he<sup>15</sup> interprets the sounds to be expressive, communicating a meaning and makes use of these sounds as a participant in the situation. In this, Winnicott's example offers a glimpse into the point of transition from the baby's experience being a series of discrete, moment-to-moment occurrences to something more coherent and connected. This fits well with Dewey's assertion, "When events have communicable meaning...they are more than mere occurrences; they have implications."<sup>16</sup> Hence, the noises are not just noises to the baby, but rather have implications and thus have meaning and consequence relevant to the baby.

It is also noteworthy that in this instance the meaning for the baby is not the result of a full act of communication because the noises are merely signals. Hence, much like the "speech" of a parrot, the noises are not intended to communicate anything. But nevertheless, what is of the utmost significance is that in this case the baby has become a participant in the situation. In this, there is relationship between the baby and the situation and this is what makes meaning possible. Hence, meaning does not *require* a full act of communication. What is requisite, however, is a quality of relating that I contend is even more fundamental to meaning than communication. And this quality of relating is founded in the essential partnership that comprises what Dewey describes as the "peculiar" mode of human association.

### *The Development of Meaning*

Dewey supports the idea that we are born into a world of immediate experience in which there is no meaning for the infant and that it is the "peculiar" mode of human

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<sup>15</sup> My use of "he" in reference to the baby in this case and throughout is intended to clarify the positions of mother (she) and baby (he). It should be understood that my use of "he" or "she" is intended to provide clarity of position and is not intended to stipulate gender. The "mother" in my discussion could very well be a man and the baby could certainly be male or female.

<sup>16</sup> Dewey, *Experience and Nature*, 174.



association that gives rise to intelligence, as the human infant becomes a partner in activity. In this, Dewey tells us communication is born, of which meaning resides at the heart as the thing shared in common between two partners. Indeed, Dewey talks about the “possession of the capacity to engage in...[cooperative] activity”<sup>17</sup> as intelligence, but he does not offer a great deal of precision about the process through which intelligence of this sort emerges as a consequence. Fortunately, this is a point in which Winnicott’s account excels. Thus, in order to illuminate how meaning might emerge developmentally given Dewey’s broad framework I have continued to incorporate Winnicott’s ideas into the following discussion of Dewey’s theory. I believe this offers greater precision to Dewey’s philosophy and that reading these theories together opens up rich opportunities for a deeper understanding of this significant process, as Winnicott’s ideas not only serve as good examples but go even further to propose the way in which we learn to engage with the world on the plane of meaning.

In its immediacy, Dewey tell us that consciousness “is something had, not communicated and known”<sup>18</sup> and this is supremely the case for the infant in its earliest stage of development. Winnicott theorizes that at the start, the mother (that is, the mothering environment) adapts almost perfectly to the infant’s needs and in doing so is intimately attuned to the immediate sensation that is the infant’s experience. This is not to say that the mother literally feels the infant’s immediate sensations, but rather that she is empathetically attuned to the infant’s experience conveyed to her through his gestures and cries. In this, the infant’s immediate sensations are interpreted and made *meaningful* by the mothering environment through her appropriate response – although at this point the meaning resides almost solely on the side of the mother. At this stage, the

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 180.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 307.

mother supports the infant's immediate consciousness by indeed making it meaningful—even though the infant cannot yet *know* this meaning.

Dewey tells us, “Meanings are rules for using and interpreting things; interpretation being always in imputation of potentiality for some consequence.”<sup>19</sup> Even though Dewey does not offer this reference in any connection to infancy, the case of infancy provides the original and most potent example of this being the case. Indeed, the mother provides meaning to the infant's immediate sensation by interpreting his reactions. In doing so, she provides “rules for interpreting things” and imputes potentiality for all future consequences. Remarkably, at this initial stage of development, her interpretation—that is, the rules she lays down—will provide the structure of meaning, itself, that the child will retain and re-make throughout life.

For Dewey, meaning is oriented toward the future, but is at the same time reliant on a background of meanings established in the past. Hence, within a particular moment “meaning is awareness of...consequences before they actually occur.”<sup>20</sup> To be sure, this is not to say that awareness of meaning is a magical act of fortune telling, but rather is an assessment of current circumstances in connection with a background of experience that points the way forward. Hence, “a meaning is a method of action, a way of action, a way of using things and means to a shared consummation.”<sup>21</sup> Thus, I submit that within the mother-infant matrix, initial meanings as methods of action are laid down and begin to form the background required in order for meaning to subsequently exist for the baby. Indeed, the background of meanings required to make sense out of future situations gains its primary foothold in the mother-infant matrix in which the baby's sensations are essentially transformed into meaning. Furthermore, it is no coincidence that within this

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 188.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 324.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 187.

same context the establishment of partnership, which Dewey tells us is essential to language, is also founded.

*A Continuum of Sense*

Although the connection between aesthetic experience and meaning within Dewey's philosophy is an underdeveloped area within the secondary literature, there are some notable exceptions. In particular, the work of Thomas Alexander and Victor Kestenbaum stand out. For my purposes in this chapter, Alexander's analysis proves to be a close ally, as he establishes "the grounds for the claim that aesthetic expression presents us with a *paradigmatic* case of meaning rather than a peripheral one, as it has so often been regarded."<sup>22</sup> Alexander diligently attends to the detail of Dewey's philosophy; drawing out how within *an* experience "the human impulsion for meaning and value is manifestly fulfilled."<sup>23</sup> Alexander's work triumphs in upholding Dewey's philosophy in the face of some of his strongest critics and shows above all that the central, guiding thought in Dewey's philosophy is the aesthetic dimension of experience.<sup>24</sup>

In short, I claim that when we explore experience which has been shaped into an aesthetically funded process, into "*an* experience," we will discover Dewey's paradigmatic understanding of experience. And this, in turn may lead to a more coherent understanding of the rest of Dewey's philosophy. Experience as artistically shaped and aesthetically funded gives us also Dewey's paradigmatic understanding of meaning.<sup>25</sup>

Indeed, I would be remiss not to draw on Alexander's excellent analysis in connecting Dewey's theory of aesthetic experience with meaning as I continue to deepen this vital connection.

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<sup>22</sup> Alexander, *John Dewey's Theory of Art, Experience, and Nature*, 119.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, xix.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, xiii.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, xiii.

Alexander sorts out a significant aspect of Dewey's account, providing a conceptual framework that unravels a point of confusion within Dewey's theory of meaning. As Alexander points out, "Dewey does seem to contrast 'immediate meaning' of sense with the discursive or mediate meaning of signification and the immediate but unmeaningful presence of feeling."<sup>26</sup> One example of where this contrast can be seen is within Dewey's discussion of consciousness in which he offers a distinction between two different ways the term "consciousness" is typically employed – a distinction that hinges upon meaning or the lack thereof. "On the one hand, [consciousness] is employed to point out certain qualities in their immediate apparency, qualities of things of sentiency, such as are, from the psychological standpoint, usually termed feelings."<sup>27</sup> Dewey describes this form of consciousness as being anoetic – unthinkable – because "this is consciousness wherever meanings do not exist; that is to say apart from existence and employment of signs, or independently of communication."<sup>28</sup> And this distinguishes the other type of consciousness – the realm where meanings are clearly perceived. This type of consciousness implies the use of signification, but this is not necessarily always the case. Nevertheless, Dewey tells us, "Meanings do not come into being without language, and language implies two selves involved in a conjoint or shared undertaking."<sup>29</sup> The confusion within this account lies in a lack of precision regarding "how one shifts between these phases or how brute immediacy and relational mediacy can fuse together to create 'sense.'" <sup>30</sup> The use of the term "sense" is significant because it describes a third realm that is no doubt closely aligned with feeling, however where there is sense, there is meaning – thus marking a significant distinction.

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 170.

<sup>27</sup> Dewey, *Experience and Nature*, 298.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 299.

<sup>30</sup> Alexander, *John Dewey's Theory of Art, Experience, and Nature*, 170.

Alexander's suggestion is "to regard Dewey's distinctions of feeling, sense[,] and signification as matters of *degree* along a continuum rather than as three separate modes of experience."<sup>31</sup> Thus, he continues,

At one extreme, we can focus more on the immediate aspects, we tend toward "feeling," losing sight of the unrealized potentialities of the project at hand. We pay attention to the present on its own account and ignore the future. At the other extreme, we can become absorbed in trying to mediate or locate the immediate in a future-oriented process, operation or context. We may become solely concerned with the final outcome of an action and its significance so that the immediate loses its qualitative luster in anticipation of those to come and becomes a bare sign. It is at these extremes of feeling and signification that experience is likely to fall apart and the means-end relationship become divided.<sup>32</sup>

Alexander directs us between these extremes, explaining that it is within this realm we encounter aesthetic experience. "The ideal to which Dewey points is the continuous interplay of sense and signification so that the immediate is taken up into a broad and deep context which in turn is realized and brought to light in immediate experience. This is exactly what Dewey means by *an* experience."<sup>33</sup> This is a very significant point, to which I am working to add that the ideal of continuous interplay of sense and signification involves a quality of relation that I believe originates in the mother-infant milieu and extends out to all meaningful interactions between self and world.

In an all too brief passage within *Experience and Nature*, Dewey explores the distinctions between feeling, sense, and signification. In doing so, Dewey offers a nice degree of precision that gives credence to the continuum Alexander proposed. "Sense is distinct from feeling, for it has a recognized reference; it is the qualitative characteristic of something not just submerged unidentified quality or tone."<sup>34</sup> Hence, there is

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 172.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Dewey, *Experience and Nature*, 260-1.

meaning in sense, whereas – at least from this vantage point – meaning is void in feeling. Put differently, Dewey tells us that sense is distinct from feeling because of the added property of mind, which requires the “organized interaction with other living creatures;”<sup>35</sup> i.e. language and communication – or even more fundamentally, the establishment of partners. With this added property of mind, “the qualities of feeling become significant of objective differences in external things and of episodes past and to come....Feelings are no longer just felt. They have and they make *sense*; record and prophesy.”<sup>36</sup> Indeed, the distinguishing factor between sense and feeling is a *relationship* between an immediate sensation and the recognition of a reference to something else, something that holds significance within a community for a future consequence.

However, this relationship is not necessarily something that need be signified, as “Sense is also different from signification. The latter involves use of a quality as a sign or index of something else.”<sup>37</sup> Thus, still distinguished from feeling, it is possible for sense to be in the form of immediate meaning: “The sense of a thing...in an immediate and immanent meaning; is the meaning which is itself felt or directly had.”<sup>38</sup> In this, immediate experience may be void of signification, but it is not necessarily void of meaning. We see this same idea in Dewey’s assertion within the next chapter, “The nature of awareness of meanings cannot be conveyed in speech. As with other immediate qualitative existences, words can only hint, point; the indication succeeding when it evokes an actual experience of the thing in question.”<sup>39</sup> In this, Dewey is describing the transition between an immediate meaning that is sensed, to one that

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 258.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 261.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 304.

becomes signified, named – evoking an experience that is not only known, but also thought.

*Feeling within an Established Partnership*

Deepening this perspective further, I would like to submit that the distinction established between feeling and sense, hinging on the presence of meaning or the lack thereof, is less clearly delineated than conveyed above when you take into consideration the significance of the “peculiar” mode of human association. Indeed, I am proposing that there is a way in which meaning is always present given the “peculiar” mode of human association – the very thing which gives rise to language and intelligence. This comes to the fore through consideration of the continuum of sense in connection with a developmental perspective; that is, as a progression originating in infancy that leads to the eventual realization of sense and meaning through the establishment of partners. Hence, I uphold that there is a way in which the infant’s immediate feeling is meaningful despite the fact that the infant, himself, is not aware of it yet. This idea is supported in Dewey’s claim that “intelligence and meaning are the natural consequences”<sup>40</sup> of the “peculiar” mode of human association, but with Winnicott’s help I take this claim a step further.

Thus, I contend that where the “peculiar” mode of human association exists, meaning necessarily resides on at least some level. Given the appropriate lens, we can see that this rings true from the very beginning of human life – that is, from the start of an individual human’s life who is born into the “peculiar” mode of human association. Shifting the perspective away from an infant conceived autonomously, Winnicott saw the entire unit of the baby residing within its environmental milieu. Echoing the

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 180.

immense significance Dewey afforded the establishment of partners and the interaction between organism and environment, this idea came to the fore in the middle of a seminar in 1942 when Winnicott exclaimed “‘there’s no such thing as a baby’ – ‘...if you show me a baby you certainly show me also someone caring for the baby....’”<sup>41</sup>

With this in mind, let us reconsider the case of infancy in which the mother gives an infant’s gestures and cries meaning through her interpretive response. In this case, meaning is present, although it is true that the meaning resides almost completely on the side of the mother. However, it categorically cannot be the case that she is the sole purveyor of this meaning because the meaning is ultimately an interpretation of the *infant’s* sensation. Thus, to the extent that the mother gets it right and effectively responds the infant’s gestures and cries, she transforms his immediate sensations into meaning as an interpretation for some future consequence. In this, she supplies the very definition to meaning. And despite her immense role in generating this meaning, the meaning itself is nevertheless intimately connected to the infant’s immediate sensation—rendering the human infant a partner in meaning from the very beginning. Thus, given Winnicott’s rich theoretical description, I contend that there is meaning even in the extreme case of an infant’s immediate sensation, as the infant is rendered a partner within the “peculiar” mode of human association.

Eventually, this partnership becomes more robust, as the infant becomes able to take a greater share in the meaning. Hence, if we consider developmental growth along the continuum Alexander outlined, what initiates as shocks in feeling becomes something more through experienced partnership and the building up of a background of experience that can serve as a reference point from which to relate and make sense.

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<sup>41</sup> Cited in Abram’s, *The Language of Winnicott*, 2-3.



Indeed, having a certain amount of meaningful background – a background that is built up in relationship with another self and supplies the content that can be used for interpretation – makes it possible for sense to embody meaning. This supports Dewey’s claim that sensations themselves become a class of meaning, as “something qualitative and capable of objective reference....They are a class of meanings which embody the mature results of elaborate experimental inquiry in tracing out causal dependencies and relationships.”<sup>42</sup> On this point, Winnioctt’s perspective greatly deepens Dewey’s account, as it offers an explanation for how the necessary background of sense-meanings originates.

In sum, the process of rendering immediate sensation meaningful through interpretation for a future consequence comprises the root of the endeavor to make meaning. This process initiates in infancy, but is extended throughout life as we engage with and come to understand the world with a growing sense of nuance. Through a close reading of Dewey’s philosophy, Thomas Alexander pinpoints this idea precisely in saying, “Meaning is rather the very struggle to make the world coherent; it is the on-going process of trying to make sense.”<sup>43</sup> This is a process that depends upon a background of experience that I believe is developed in an intimate relationship originating in infancy. And I maintain that a quality of this relationship remains fundamental in all meaningful relations between self and world.

#### *Internalized Partnership*

Beyond infancy we may no longer require an external partner to be intimately attuned to our sensations in order to help us render them meaningful, but a quality of this initial partnership nevertheless persists. Indeed, by drawing on a background of

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<sup>42</sup> Dewey, *Experience and Nature*, 326.

<sup>43</sup> Alexander, *John Dewey’s Theory of Art, Experience, and Nature*, xvii.

experienced meanings we are able to supply this function for ourselves and in doing so, the function of the original other is internalized. In this, we become related to the world through the internalization of this partnership. For this reason, I maintain that that in an essential way meaning can always be understood in terms of “two selves involved in conjoint or shared undertaking.”<sup>44</sup> Indeed, whether it is literally the case that two selves hold a meaning in common for some participative alliance or if the function of an other self is internalized, a quality of relation remains fundamental.

Although he uses different terms, I believe we can see this same idea reflected in Alexander’s analysis of Dewey’s philosophy.

Meaning emerges from communication, from the effort of participants to modify and interpret a situation through a shared set of symbols in virtue of which the situation becomes common or takes on a common meaning for the participants. Language is the highest development of such a common symbol system and largely functions to coordinate other activities. But language creates new modes of shared life which it can directly embody. Language succeeds in so restructuring our world, that the world is encountered on the level of sense.<sup>45</sup>

Hence, I am suggesting that on an essential level, language *is* the establishment of partners. Thus, what was once a literal partnership between mother and infant is the very thing that positions us to subsequently be in relation to the world through its internalization. In this, “new modes of shared life” become possible. Indeed, I am suggesting that underscoring Alexander’s assertion that *language* is what succeeds in restructuring our world, we find the internalization of an established partnership. Thus, in a very literal way, partnership is fundamental to meaning and I believe a quality of this partnership persists in all meaningful relations with the world. Furthermore, given this developmental origin and the literal transformation of an infant’s sensations into meaning through partnership, we can see just how it is that language (that is,

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<sup>44</sup> Dewey, *Experience and Nature*, 299.

<sup>45</sup> Alexander, *John Dewey’s Theory of Art, Experience, and Nature*, 182.

partnership) is what makes it possible for the world to be encountered on the level of sense.

*The Bounds of Sense and Meaning*

If a quality of relation is necessary for meaning to exist, the converse of this is that where this quality is lacking, so too is meaning. I believe that we can see this reflected through exploring the limits Alexander outlined in the continuum of sense. Alexander acknowledges that, at least in theory, these limits can be extended further, however he cautions that “it is best to regard ‘pure feeling’ and ‘pure signification’ as limiting terms, and, in fact, bizarre extremes impossible in themselves, of the continuum of ‘sense.’”<sup>46</sup> This is because we cannot make meaning beyond these bounds and it is my contention that between these poles, we find the realm in which the quality – if not literal presence – of partnership endures.

We have already explored one pole in the limit case of feeling, showing how the “peculiar” mode of human association manages to keep this limit in bounds through the establishment of partnership – even in the extreme case of infancy. Hence, it is the relationship between an infant and its mothering environment that manages to hold the infant within bounds, in spite of an infant’s limited capacity to participate. However, where this relationship wanes, we encounter a realm that is truly anoetic – an unthinkable domain of immediate feeling that lacks a connection to anything beyond the immediacy of sensation. Indeed, this is the realm one might call insanity. At the other extreme of “pure signification,” I envision a realm in which immediate presence is lost in abstraction and all that remains is a bare sign. Hence, much like computer code that runs itself, I believe that beyond this limit lies a realm of pure signification that lacks a

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 172.

connection to anything beyond itself. Thus, as previously cited from Dewey, “While signaling acts are a material condition of language they are not language nor yet are they its *sufficient* condition;” its sufficient condition being “the establishment of cooperation in an activity in which there are partners.”<sup>47</sup> In this, we can see that where connection – a quality of relation – is lacking, so too is meaning. This quality of relation is founded in the establishment of partners and is fundamental to meaning. Furthermore, this quality of relation is most supremely manifested in the case of aesthetic consummation.

However, before moving on to a discussion of aesthetic consummation and aesthetic experience more generally, I want to point out a way in which we can also see these poles reflected in the work of D.W. Winnicott. Rather than focusing on the extremes of pure feeling and pure signification, however, Winnicott fills in the range between these limits in a discussion that I understand to be concentrated around aspects that are internal and external to a self, or stated differently, between self and world. In his discussion of creativity, Winnicott laid out two poles, outlining a spectrum of orientations between self and world that he uses to describe the limits of creative living. This is relevant to the current discussion because in Winnicott’s view creativity is at base a matter of the quality of relation between self and world. Coming very close to something Dewey might say, we can see this exhibited in Winnicott’s description of creativity manifested in someone “who is thinking in terms of the material that can actually be used so that his creative impulse may take form and shape, and the world may witness.”<sup>48</sup> I read his discussion of creativity to ultimately address the quality of relation that enables meaningful contact between self and world, as his ideas are in accord with the bounds under current consideration.

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<sup>47</sup> Dewey, *Experience and Nature*, 179.

<sup>48</sup> D.W. Winnicott, *Playing and Reality*, 93.

At one end of the spectrum, Winnicott broadens the scope from a concentration limited to feeling to a consideration of all that is apparent within a self. I understand this shift in focus to be less extreme than the limit of pure feeling, but nevertheless to address this end of the continuum. Hence, Winnicott describes the situation in which an individual remains absorbed in the self and cannot make meaningful contact with the world. One instance of this is manifested in the case of hallucinations, in which imagination takes over and supersedes reality. As Winnicott tells us, "hallucinations are [essentially] dream phenomena that have come forward into waking life."<sup>49</sup> Indeed, "for many individuals external reality remains to some extent a subjective phenomenon."<sup>50</sup> This describes a situation in which there is a lack in the participative alliance or establishment of partners that is so fundamental to meaning. And in this lack, we find phenomena internal to the self that is not in relation to the world. Hence, one orientation between self and world in which meaning is limited involves an excess of what is internal to the self. This is exhibited in the overabundance of imagination in the case of hallucinations or even more extremely within the realm of "pure feeling" that is disconnected from an interpretation that would render it meaningful for a future consequence. In these occurrences, aspects of the self are not in relation to the world; as such, meaningful exchange is prohibited.

In the other direction, Winnicott broadens the scope again. Rather than the extreme of pure signification, Winnicott considers individuals "so firmly anchored in objectively perceived reality that they are ill in the opposite direction of being out of touch with the subjective world and with the creative approach to fact."<sup>51</sup> It is fitting that Winnicott refers to this group as extroverts who live mostly on the outside, unable to

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 89.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 88.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 89.

“get into touch with dream.”<sup>52</sup> This orientation describes individuals whose “relationship to external reality...is one of compliance, the world and its details being recognized but only as something to be fitted in with or demanding adaption.”<sup>53</sup> These individuals lack a sense of meaning in their flurry of activity. Hence, similar to a bare sign that could become meaningful if it were brought into a relationship with something beyond itself, the doings of Winnicott’s extrovert stand to significantly gain in sense and meaning through a relation to the internal self.

As we will see, the same poles come to the fore yet again in Dewey’s discussion of aesthetic experience in his emphasis on the importance of a perceived relationship between doing and undergoing. I maintain that it is no coincidence that these poles align, as aesthetic experience is indicative of a rich engagement between self and world – an engagement of exquisite sensitivity and nuance that is perhaps best exemplified in the partnership in which meaning originates, that of mother and infant. However, Dewey does not directly name this intimate relationship as the root of our nature as aesthetic beings. Rather, Dewey casts a much wider net, grounding the aesthetic within the interchange of live creature and environment. What is essential in aesthetic experience is the quality of engagement within this interchange. Thus, my suggestion is that the quality of engagement indicative of aesthetic experience is one and the same with the fundamental condition of meaning itself – a relational quality between self and world that is the result of the “peculiar” mode of human association.

#### Dewey’s Theory of Aesthetic Experience

The concept of aesthetic experience encompasses a broad terrain. In the most expansive sense, whenever there is interaction between an organism and its

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 90.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 87.

environment the result is an experience with the potential for at least some degree of aesthetic quality. This is because our world is neither utterly chaotic, comprised of mere flux with no order, nor already “finished” in the sense that it contains no resistance. Thus within every interaction with the environment, the live creature encounters – or at the very least is poised to encounter – some degree of resistance and disruption of equilibrium with the environment. In this, the live creature is in position to draw on the ordered relations that are present in the environment in order secure greater stability. And when participation with the environment comes after a phase of disruption and conflict, Dewey’s theory maintains that the resulting experience “bears within itself germs of a consummation akin to the esthetic.”<sup>54</sup>

Dewey begins *Art as Experience* with “the live creature,” planting the seed of aesthetic experience decisively in the live creature’s interchanges with its environment.

At every moment, the living creature is exposed to dangers from its surroundings, and at every moment, it must draw upon something in its surroundings to satisfy its needs. The career and destiny of a living being are bound up with its interchanges with its environment, not externally but in the most intimate way.<sup>55</sup>

This intimate connection with the environment is the ground upon which our status as aesthetic beings rests. But Dewey goes further than this. As live creatures that make meaning, we draw on this intimate connection and use it in meaningful ways. “The rhythm of loss of integration with environment and recovery of union not only persists in man but becomes conscious with him; its conditions are material out of which he forms purposes.”<sup>56</sup> This idea is key. Indeed, Dewey grounds our capacity as aesthetic

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<sup>54</sup> John Dewey, *Art as Experience* (New York: Perigee, 1934/2005), 14.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

beings in our intimate connection with the environment, but also in our capacity to be conscious of this connection and to use it on the plane of meaning.

Thus, while the seed of the aesthetic lies in the raw connection between the live creature and its environment, in order to grow to fruition there must also be a capacity to derive meaning from the rhythms of these intimate interchanges. “Contrast of lack and fullness, of struggle and achievement, of adjustment after consummated irregularity, form the drama in which action, feeling and meaning are one.”<sup>57</sup> In this, the vital connection between aesthetic experience and meaning resides.

Although Dewey was keen to emphasize the fundamental connection between live creature and environment for aesthetic experience, what does not come out as strongly in his writing is the equally important acknowledgement that for the live creature that is human, this environment is social. I believe recognizing this is of the utmost significance. Indeed, we have already seen that it is the “peculiar” mode of human association that brings about meaningful interchanges with the environment. Thus, although Dewey was right to locate the ground of the aesthetic within the interchanges of organism and environment, I believe we must also keep in mind that the aesthetic cannot come to fruition without meaning—and meaning relies on the establishment of partnership. Hence, I believe that in order to draw out the connection between aesthetic experience and meaning with greater precision, we need to consider Dewey’s discussion of aesthetic experience in light of the “peculiar” mode of human association and the original environment for us all; namely, the mothering environment. Indeed, I maintain that this is the place in which we first learn to connect with our

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 15.



environment both meaningfully and aesthetically due to the exquisite attention afforded within the relationship of mother and child.

*Art and the Aesthetic*

Dewey surmises that art and the aesthetic emerge from the conditions of a live creature embedded in an environment that is neither all flux, nor already “finished” through the use of the rhythms of interchange with the environment on the plane of meaning. There is art in the gardener tending to her plants just as there is in experiencing the architecture of Paris, as art emerges when the connection between organism and environment is intensified through consciousness and meaningful use. While in some sense Dewey’s usage of the term art may appear to lessen its import by bringing it literally down to the earth we stand on, another way of looking at this is to consider that in doing so he is creating room for its full grander to be seen in connecting it with the conditions of who and how we are in the world. “Mountain peaks do not float unsupported; they do not even just rest upon the earth. They *are* the earth in one of its manifest operations.”<sup>58</sup> And it is from this soil that Dewey contends “the greatest intellectual achievement in the history of humanity” emerges – “the *idea* of art as a conscious idea.”<sup>59</sup>

Art is the living and concrete proof that man is capable of restoring consciously, and thus on the plane of meaning, the union of sense, need, impulse and action characteristic of the live creature. The intervention of consciousness adds regulation, power of selection, and redistribution. Thus it varies the arts in ways without end.<sup>60</sup>

From this vantage point we can see that Dewey’s grounding of the aesthetic in the live creature’s interchanges with its environment makes it possible for a much deeper

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 26.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 26.

significance of art's value to come to the fore than the typical usage of the term "art" affords in its reliance on privileged objects set at remove from everyday experience.

Hence, the title, alone, of his major aesthetic text, *Art as Experience*, says a great deal about Dewey's approach to art. That is, a work of art is not an object, but rather an experience with an object. "[T]here is a difference between the art product (statue, painting or whatever), and the *work* of art. The first is physical and potential; the latter is active and experienced. It is what the product does, its working."<sup>61</sup> Indeed, for Dewey the term art is used to indicate an intensification of our aesthetic grounding in the world that is realized within experience. Hence, the real "work" of art does not lie in the embodied object, but rather in the experience it affords. This applies not only to the work of the artist, but also to the work of the perceiver, as Dewey weaves artist and audience together in experience with art objects serving as mediators. For Dewey, experience is crucial, as art does not even exist until an object is experienced.

Thus, the experience of art is significant in human life because it manifests the rhythms of our interchange with the environment and as such, reflects back to us our very beingness in the world. It is significant that the experience of rhythm through interchange with our environment is necessarily prior to the art objects such rhythms engender. Indeed, this is because we relate such rhythms to a background of experience, and in doing so they are rendered meaningful. "Underneath the rhythm of every work of art there lies, at substratum in the depths of the subconsciousness, the basic pattern of the relations of the live creature to his environment."<sup>62</sup> And on this point I am working to show that it is the quality of relation fostered at least as much as it is the content of such rhythmic exchange that is significant. Indeed, I maintain that this quality is

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 168.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 156.

founded in the establishment of partners that defines the “peculiar” mode of human association and, furthermore, that this quality is the very thing that furnishes meaning.

Music serves as a wonderful example of this. Indeed, not only does music provide instances in which rhythmic content is most literally present, but music also engages us in such a way that the quality of relation that is key in furnishing meaning is fostered. For example, the ebb and flow of the second movement of Beethoven’s Seventh Symphony provides an embodiment of an experience complete with moments of quiet tension, lush and intense eruptions that leave arm hairs on end, all the while pressing through, encapsulating an experience that eventually and subtly resolves. With an exhale that is understood this movement’s closing makes sense of all that has come before. And I maintain that the reason we understand this punctuation through time is because in experiencing it we render it meaningful through a relation to a background of meaningful experience—a background established through partnership. Thus, not only do we respond to the many layers of rhythmic content, but we do so because we have an experience with the same quality of partnership learned way back when, in the establishment of partners originally afforded us as organisms born into the “peculiar” mode of human association.

#### *Aesthetic Consummation*

One key to understanding Dewey’s aesthetic philosophy resides in his concept of consummation. Dewey is persistent in his emphasis on resistance and disruption of harmony between the live creature and its environment. In doing so, he is setting the stage for consummation occurring in the subsequent restoration of harmony. Dewey tells us that “life grows” in such moments of consummation because in overcoming a temporary falling out “a more extensive balance of energies of the organism with those

of the conditions under which it lives"<sup>63</sup> emerges. And this moment of meaningful reorganization is central to Dewey's conception of aesthetic experience. Accordingly, it is something that the artist in particular is attuned to. "Since the artist cares in a peculiar way for the phase of experience in which union is achieved, he does not shun moments of resistance and tension. He rather cultivates them, not for their own sake but because of their potentialities, bringing to living consciousness an experience that is unified and total."<sup>64</sup> And this is precisely what Dewey intends with his account of aesthetic experience.

Although aesthetic consummation itself does not pin-point the quality of relation I am trying to draw out of Dewey's discussion, there is no doubt that it is of chief importance for Dewey's aesthetic theory. As such, there is a great deal that can be said of aesthetic consummation. Aesthetic consummation is a fulfilling of a situation—a cultivation of what has come before and transformation of individual parts into a collective whole that maintains and indeed amplifies the integrity of the individual parts. "[F]low 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."<sup>65</sup>

Aesthetic consummation is the concluding result of a process—a process that is often long and arduous. And the moment of consummation can be misleading because in its climatic finish there is temptation to lose sight of all that has come before. Like a strike of lightning, the moment of consummation may well be illuminating, but this is not to betray the fact that "it is the focal culmination of long, slow processes of

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 13.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 14.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 38.

maturation. It is the manifestation of the continuity of an ordered temporal experience in a sudden discrete instant of climax.”<sup>66</sup>

This momentary climax of consummation is often followed by a period of calm. This is because aesthetic consummation is a satisfaction of situation. It is the creation of a new organization of energies that restores harmony. It soothes a situation for a time. It provides a resolution that is organically secured. And this is quite different from a mere cessation or stopping of activity that is unrelated to what has occurred prior.

A piece of work is finished in a way that is satisfactory; a problem receives its solution; a game is played through; a situation, whether that of eating a meal, playing a game of chess, carrying on a conversation, writing a book, or taking part in a political campaign, is so rounded out that its close is a consummation and not a cessation.<sup>67</sup>

However, what I find to be most important about aesthetic consummation is that it is a moment of growth and is thus relevant to education at a core level. In connecting the past and present in a way that is organically structured, aesthetic consummation establishes a new order that extends into the future. It is “a fulfillment that reaches to the depths of our being—one that is an adjustment of our whole being with the conditions of existence.”<sup>68</sup> And it is the creation of “a new relation to the environment, one that brings with it the potency of new adjustments to be made through struggle.”<sup>69</sup> Aesthetic consummation is an essential moment of learning in relation to the environment; it is a moment that touches the core of who we are as meaning-making creatures embedded in an environment.

### *Doing and Undergoing*

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 24.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 37.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 16

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

As important as consummation is for Dewey's discussion of aesthetic experience, there is another main idea that Dewey uses to describe what gives *an* experience aesthetic quality that is at least as critical for education – if not more. In addition to consummation, Dewey discusses the importance of a relationship held within perception between doing and undergoing, a relationship that speaks directly to the relational quality I have been drawing out. As Dewey says, "The doing may be energetic, and the undergoing may be acute and intense. But unless they are related to each other to form a whole in perception, the thing done is not fully esthetic."<sup>70</sup> While this relationship between doing and undergoing is not exactly the same as consummation the two ideas are closely related. Aesthetic consummation is the natural and eventual outcome of a process of holding the relation of doing and undergoing together within perception; that is, through connecting what is done in the world and what it is for the self to undergo that doing. It is this relationship – and perceptual awareness of this relationship – that directs activity and eventually leads to a consummation between self and world that gives experience the quality of the aesthetic.

There is something deceptively simple about the notion of doing and undergoing. On the one hand, it seems obvious that we do things in the world and as we do them, we experience what we are doing – we undergo what is happening in the world. But to what extent is this really true?

Oftentimes...there is distraction and dispersion; what we observe and what we think, what we desire and what we get, are at odds with each other. We put our hands to the plow and turn back; we start and then we stop, not because the experience has reached the end for the sake of which it was initiated but because of extraneous interruptions or of inner lethargy.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 52.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 36.

Indeed, experience is often overburdened on the side of undergoing with “inner lethargy” or on the side of doing with “extraneous interruptions.” And when there is an imbalance between what is internal and external to the self, perception of the relation between the two is blurred and this “leaves the experience partial and distorted, with scant or false meaning.”<sup>72</sup> Hence, while it might be easy to refer to a relation between doing and undergoing, it is another thing completely to perceive their relation within experience.

Dewey describes how someone might experience the world with an imbalance on the side of receptivity (undergoing). “What is prized is then the mere undergoing of this and that, irrespective of perception of any *meaning*. The crowding together of as many impressions as possible is thought to be ‘life,’ even though no one of them is more than a flitting and a sipping.”<sup>73</sup> When this type of imbalance occurs, true consummation cannot be realized because the individual is not meaningfully in touch with the objective world, as there is too much concentration on the side of the self. As Dewey tells us, “Inner harmony is attained only when, by some means, terms are made with the environment. When it occurs on any other than an ‘objective’ basis, it is illusory – in extreme cases to the point of insanity.”<sup>74</sup> I maintain that this type of imbalance lies toward the end of the continuum of “pure feeling” and we can see just how well this idea fits given Winnicott’s aforementioned filling-out of this spectrum in his description of the situation in which an individual remains absorbed in the self and cannot make meaningful contact with the world.

In the other direction Dewey also describes an imbalance on the side of doing. When this occurs, “Zeal for doing, lust for action, leaves...a person, especially in this

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 46.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.; emphasis added.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 16.

hurried and impatient human environment in which we live, with experience of an almost incredible paucity, all on the surface.”<sup>75</sup> In this case, experience is “dispersed and miscellaneous,” and “resistance is treated as an obstruction to be beaten down, not as an invitation to reflection.”<sup>76</sup> This case describes someone who is unable to relate a present undertaking with the perception of its undergoing, connecting it with a range of meanings and values from his or her past. In other words, when this type of imbalance occurs, activity in the world overpowers and disconnects from the self. I believe this relates to the other end of the spectrum, the realm in which signification and bare activity reigns supreme – but in a way that is disconnected from anything beyond itself, rendering its potential for meaning to be severely limited or even null. Indeed, this describes the case of Winnicott’s extrovert and outlines an orientation in which meaning wanes due to a lack of connection to the inner the self.

Significantly, Dewey proposes these two types of imbalances as limit cases, placing the possibility of aesthetic consummation between their bounds. Hence, “Between the poles of aimlessness and mechanical efficiency, there lie those courses of action in which through successive deeds there runs a sense of growing meaning conserved and accumulating toward an end that is felt as accomplishment of a process.”<sup>77</sup> This growing sense of meaning and felt accomplishment is indicative of what is truly aesthetic: the presence of consummation within experience. And since neither group effectively perceives the relation of doing and undergoing within their activities there can be no consummation. “There are beginnings and cessations, but no genuine initiations and concluding. One thing replaces another, but does not absorb it and carry

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<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 46.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 40.



it on...Needless to say, such experiences are anesthetic."<sup>78</sup> Indeed, lying within these bounds – at the very heart of the continuum of sense and meaning – we find aesthetic experience; thus confirming aesthetic experience *as* meaning.

But the connections do not end there. Indeed, Dewey's description of doing and undergoing describes a relationship between an activity that is rendered meaningful and sensual awareness within oneself. And I contend that this connects directly to the previous discussion of the transformation of an infant's sensation into meaning through the mother's interpretive response, as she forms the vital connection between sensation and meaning to which Dewey now refers. Hence, not only does the relationship of mother and infant provide a good example of this phenomenon, but going further I maintain that it tells us about the origin of the capacity to hold together doing and undergoing within perception, itself. Indeed, through the internalization of the mother-infant relationship, we provide this function for ourselves. As such, the quality of relation persists in all meaningful engagements with the world and I find that Dewey is speaking directly to this quality of relation in his discussion of doing and undergoing. In this, I maintain that perceiving a relationship between doing and undergoing is made possible do to another, more fundamental and more literal relationship – that of mother and infant.

Thus, I submit that both Dewey's aesthetic theory and theory of meaning rely on a relational quality between self and world that originates in a developmental unfolding that connects the two on a fundamental level. This is significant because in locating this developmental origin the connection between aesthetic experience and meaning is deepened. But going even further, I maintain that this developmental origin provides a

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<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 41.

theoretic framework that speaks to the cultivation of this type of relating. And given that this relational quality is the essential bond between aesthetic experience and meaning, fostering its realization becomes fundamental to education.

### Cultivating Aesthetic Experience and Meaning

Indeed, the linkage between aesthetic experience and meaning is particularly significant for education because it tells us that we must look to aesthetic experience in order to foster meaning, which is no doubt central to education. Hence, although the arts themselves are unfortunately not always considered core to education, one would be much more blatantly remiss to make this same oversight in consideration of the importance of meaning and the process of making meaning for education. What this discussion reveals is that aesthetic experience lies at the heart of the meaning-making endeavor and that the quality of relation common to both is what educators should aim to foster. In this, the arts have a great deal to offer all of education in serving as exemplars for fostering aesthetic experience – a realm of experience that is no doubt present in the arts, but also extends beyond the scope of things like music and painting, as aesthetic experience is fundamentally rooted in the interaction between self and world.

What is of the utmost significance given Dewey's discussion of aesthetic experience is that perceiving a relationship between doing and undergoing is critical for all of education. Indeed, not only does the perception of doing and undergoing describe the quality of relation that eventually leads to consummations that are the embodiment of meaning, learning, and growth, it also describes the fundamental condition of meaning itself. In this, the educator's role becomes one of tending to the continued process of doing and undergoing. Indeed, while aesthetic consummation is itself a

manifestation of doing and undergoing, it is an achievement that can only be realized through a sustained process of such relating. "Like the soil, mind is fertilized while it lies fallow, until a new burst of bloom ensues."<sup>79</sup> Thus, even though aesthetic consummation might be one very important goal, as it describes the moment that meaning is realized, the educator's focus should not be on consummation itself, but rather on fostering its conditions. In this, perceiving the relation between doing and undergoing is even more critical for education than consummation. Furthermore, the fact that people often struggle with imbalances on either side of doing and undergoing points to an educational need for its cultivation.

However, this marks the place in which Dewey's theory leaves off. Although Dewey effectively names this quality of relation, as well as its lack in either direction, his work simply does not tell us much about its cultivation; he merely stresses its import. This provides yet another opening for Winnicott's theory to contribute. Hence, not only does Winnicott's theory furnish this discussion by deepening and filling in significant aspects of Dewey's theory in linking aesthetic experience and meaning, Winnicott also offers a great deal of insight regarding the cultivation of this relational quality. Indeed, psychoanalysis is primarily concerned with offering therapeutic support and Winnicott was particularly interested in cultivating this relational quality in his work with patients.

Winnicott approached psychotherapy as a form of playing – "it has to do with two people playing together."<sup>80</sup> Playing is the word Winnicott uses in addressing the relational quality I have been speaking to throughout and I believe we can find good examples of this form of playing in the relational quality fostered within the music classroom. Thus, I submit another example of literal partnership found within music

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<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 24.

<sup>80</sup> Winnicott, *Playing and Reality*, 44.

education in instances of call and response among musicians. Although this type of musical exchange is perhaps most commonly thought of within the context of jazz music, we can find instances of it within most musical genres and can be utilized at all levels of musical instruction – from beginning to advanced students. One way of implementing this form of playing within a music classroom might be to improvise simple rhythmic phrases back and forth with a student in which the teacher responds to the student in such a way that it becomes a direct commentary or response to what has come before within the exchange. There are literally endless variations to this basic technique and when done well a participative alliance – partnership in activity – is established. Indeed, what is key in this example is the quality of relating that is fostered and in this, the exchange of interpretive responses is not unlike that of the mother and infant. We find a similar type of relation in the play Winnicott established in his work with children through a technique he developed called the Squiggle game.<sup>81</sup> In playing this game a participative alliance is formed in which the participants try to turn one another's squiggle drawings into something interesting through continuing on where the other's squiggle left off. In these brief examples, we see an extension of the original partnership established in infancy between mother and child, further manifesting the "peculiar" mode of human association that gives rise to intelligence and meaning in the first place.

I believe that once we know what to look for (i.e. the quality of relation I have been discussing throughout), further examples will abound. Indeed, this quality of relation lies at the core of the "peculiar" mode of human association and is thus something we are not strangers to. As teachers we can foster this in a number of ways:

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<sup>81</sup> See, Abram, *The Languages of Winnicott*, 329; and D.W. Winnicott, "The Squiggle Game" in *Psycho-Analytic Explorations*, ed. C. Winnicott, C. Bollas, M. Davis, and R. Shepherd (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1989), 299-317.

through the literal relationships present in our classrooms and by extension through engagement with mediums, be it written and spoken language, colors and shapes, or sounds and gestures. In this, we can see aesthetic education as a continuation and further refinement of the immense educational unfolding that initiates at birth. Indeed, through taking seriously the idea that the limit cases of aesthetic experience are non-coincidentally one and the same as the limit cases of meaningful interaction between self and world, we are in position to support an immense educational unfolding that in many ways can be seen as the overarching aim throughout all of Dewey's philosophy.

Thus, in the beginning of *Art as Experience* Dewey remarks, "In a life that is truly life, everything overlaps and merges. But all too often we...are divided within ourselves."<sup>82</sup> In this divide, the quality of relation that is so fundamental to aesthetic experience and meaning alike splits apart. However, we avoid this split in fostering the conditions for aesthetic experience and in doing so are fostering the conditions for the conditions for meaning to flourish.

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<sup>82</sup> Dewey, *Art as Experience*, 17.

## CHAPTER 4

### A POTENTIAL BASIS FOR THE IDEAL:

#### JOHN DEWEY'S PHILOSOPHY AND THE UNTHOUGHT KNOWN

Throughout the preceding chapters, I have been discussing the relation between imagination and reality from various angles. In chapter two this tension was exemplified in a discussion of Winnicott's transitional phenomena, which at a fundamental level relies on a paradox – and the acceptance of the paradox – that what is created is also discovered. As such, in order for external reality to become “real” (i.e. meaningful and useable) to an infant, Winnicott tells us that we must protect the space for imagination and reality to come together and that this protected space endures throughout life in what Winnicott conceives of as cultural experience. In this, there is no straightforward reconciliation between the two, as imagination and reality continually work together in meaningful experience.

Chapter three makes a similar point through examining and highlighting the quality of relation between self and world that persists in instances of meaning making. Significantly, this quality of relation is paradigmatically exemplified in aesthetic experience and thus we find a crucial bond between meaning making and aesthetic experience. This extends the conversation concerning the relation between imagination and reality, as it offers the insight that we should be paying attention to and working toward cultivating the quality of relation founded in Dewey's “peculiar” mode of human association in order to foster meaning making *and* aesthetic experiences.

In this chapter, I will be discussing the relation between imagination and reality again, this time by drawing on the work of Victor Kestenbaum whose recent book on John Dewey's philosophy draws out tension between Dewey's account of the two that brings a vital question to the fore concerning what the ideal means within Dewey's pragmatism. In raising this question Kestenbaum is resisting the dominant view within Deweyan scholarship. Nevertheless I think he is successful in unraveling and exposing an unresolved tension surrounding the relation between imagination and reality within Dewey's writings. In doing so, Kestenbaum raises important questions concerning the place of the ideal within Dewey's philosophy. And while Kestenbaum does furnish this question with an answer – namely, "It is as much an act of faith as it is a discovery of fact that we behold the sublime at the intersection of imagination and reality, or indeed at any intersection at all"<sup>1</sup> – this is not an answer that leaves us resting in a final solution. Rather, much like art itself, is an answer that ends in wonder.<sup>2</sup>

This place of wonder in which Kestenbaum leaves off leads me yet again to a gap within Dewey's account that unremittingly calls my attention: the developmental origin for both aesthetic experience and meaning. As such, Kestenbaum's questions concerning the role of the ideal within Dewey's philosophy offer a rich opportunity to tend to this gap further and to connect my project with current conversations within Deweyan scholarship.

Thus, my aim in this chapter is to pick up Kestenbaum's question concerning the role of the ideal within Dewey's philosophy. In doing so, I will examine Kestenbaum's claims and pay attention to the places that Kestenbaum alerts us to tension within

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<sup>1</sup> Victor Kestenbaum, *The Grace and the Severity of the Ideal* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2002), 225.

<sup>2</sup> This is in reference to Dewey's assertion, "Philosophy is said to begin in wonder and end in understanding. Art departs from what has been understood and ends in wonder." (*Art as Experience*, 281).

Dewey's account. In conjunction with this examination of Kestenbaum's work, I will offer my own interpretation by proposing what might indeed be the developmental basis for the ideal within human experience. In doing so, I will be moving beyond the scope of either Dewey or Kestenbaum and will draw on contributions from psychoanalytic theory that extend the foregoing conversation concerning the relation of imagination and reality. In this, I propose a way to understand the no more than human, but also no less than transcendent position of the ideal within human experience.

### Kestenbaum's Question

While there has been a range of interpretations concerning Dewey's idealism that includes the stance that Dewey completely rejected idealism, that he essentially embraced it, and that he accepted and transformed some of it,<sup>3</sup> the consensus view, which Thomas Alexander embraces, is that Dewey broke with idealism in 1903 with his *Studies in Logical Theory*, joining the new pragmatic movement.<sup>4</sup> Thus, the "more or less the prevailing stance in Dewey scholarship [is] that the ideal has a natural basis and that when the natural seeks ideal fulfillment, the latter must be reconciled to the former."<sup>5</sup> Kestenbaum does not deny that this position is not only present, but is predominant within Dewey's writing. Nevertheless, Kestenbaum carefully tends to moments in which Dewey at least temporarily suspends the requirements of reality. In doing so, Kestenbaum draws out tension within Dewey's account and raises valuable questions regarding the place of the ideal within Dewey's philosophy.

From the start, it should be clear that Kestenbaum is not suggesting that Dewey embraced ideals that are fixed or absolute. Indeed, Dewey clearly rejected such notions

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<sup>3</sup> Kestenbaum reviews some of these views on pages 4-7 of *The Grace and the Severity of the Ideal*.

<sup>4</sup> Thomas Alexander, *John Dewey's Theory of Art, Experience and Nature: The Horizons of Feeling* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1987), 42.

<sup>5</sup> Kestenbaum, *The Grace and the Severity of the Ideal*, 7.



of the ideal. Nevertheless, Kestenbaum maintains that for Dewey “ideal meanings...could function in experience in ways which were not fixed or absolute, that is, in ways which encourage their fuller realization.” And while Dewey is keenly interested in reconciling the ideal with the real, a harmonization that is supremely manifested within “The Act of Expression”<sup>6</sup> and aesthetic consummation, Kestenbaum shows that there are places within Dewey’s philosophy in which the authority of the ideal is allowed to maintain some precedence.

This view relies on what Kestenbaum sees as Dewey’s “primacy of meaning thesis,” that “meaning is wider in scope as well as more precious in value than is truth.”<sup>7</sup> Thus, Kestenbaum presents the case that Dewey’s “pragmatism is an attempt to respect the authority of the ‘tangible and the real’ at the same time that it does justice to meanings which transcend the verified and the evident and which, in their most perfect expressions, are intimations of the ideal.”<sup>8</sup> Thus, while Kestenbaum offers no disavowal of the instrumentalism and naturalism that is so central to Dewey’s pragmatism, his work nevertheless closely attends to the places within Dewey’s philosophy that transgress “the expectations of a well-behaved instrumentalist-naturalist philosophy.”<sup>9</sup> In this, Kestenbaum teases open the places within Dewey’s philosophy in which “the ideal ‘outruns’ the actual, leaving our practices and habits, and pragmatism itself, in a less certain state.”<sup>10</sup>

Throughout *The Grace and Severity of the Ideal: John Dewey and the Transcendent*, Kestenbaum explores what he refers to as “pragmatic occasions of transcendent and

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<sup>6</sup> See John Dewey’s fourth chapter, “The Act of Expression,” in *Art as Experience* (New York: Perigee, 1934/2005), 60-84.

<sup>7</sup> John Dewey, “Philosophy and Civilization,” in *Philosophy and Civilization*, cited in Kestenbaum, *The Grace and the Severity of the Ideal*, 2.

<sup>8</sup> Kestenbaum, *The Grace and the Severity of the Ideal*, 1.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> *ibid.*, 26.

intangible ideals.” Some chapters closely and explicitly attend to Dewey’s philosophy whereas others embrace the “spirit” of Dewey’s work through hermeneutical play based on Dewey’s thinking. In this chapter, I will be concentrating mostly on Kestenbaum’s final chapter, “Dewey, Wallace Stevens, and the ‘Difficult Inch,’” in which Kestenbaum attends closely to a few of Dewey’s texts: one chapter of *Psychology* (1887) and some chapters of *Art as Experience* (1934). Throughout this chapter, Kestenbaum is working “to observe Dewey trying to find a standpoint from which to behold the sublime and its elevations.”<sup>11</sup> In doing so, Kestenbaum identifies places in Dewey’s early *and* later works in which Dewey appears to allow the authority of the ideal to have some precedence over the real. In this, Kestenbaum offers reason to question the role of the ideal within Dewey’s philosophy.

The purpose of Kestenbaum’s final chapter is to suggest “that the basic question life asked of Wallace Stevens regarding ‘whether the sublime was livable’ is essentially the same one asked of John Dewey, or at least the same one asked by Dewey in his philosophy.”<sup>12</sup> In order to show how this is the case, Kestenbaum asks, “What can sublimity, imagination, or transcendence mean in Dewey’s pragmatism?”<sup>13</sup> And Kestenbaum then goes on to show us that, indeed, whether we conceive of this “something more” as sublimity, imagination, or transcendence it is clear that it has an important place throughout Dewey’s philosophy.

#### An Examination of Dewey’s Early Writings on Imagination

Kestenbaum opens up the space for his question to take root through the lens of a poem by Wallace Stevens in which an interesting idea is proposed – that of particulars bending to the abstract in what Stevens refers to as “the difficult inch.” Following this

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 203.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 201.

up through an examination of Dewey's 1887 chapter on imagination in *Psychology*, Kestenbaum shows how at this early point Dewey's career, he was "well on the way to bending particulars to the mind's – and imagination's – abstractions."<sup>14</sup> This comes to the fore through Dewey's discussion of creative imagination:

Creative imagination develops this ideal element, and frees it from its connection with petty and contingent circumstance. Perception and memory both have their worth because of the *meaning* of the perceived or remembered thing, but this meaning is subordinate to the existence of the thing. Imagination reverses the process; existence is subordinate to meaning.<sup>15</sup>

In this, Dewey is asserting that the existence of something within imagination is dependent on it having meaning, rather than meaning being dependent on existence as we might expect given Dewey's naturalism. This reversal is the first place in which Kestenbaum alerts us to tension within Dewey's account concerning the relation of imagination and reality.

As Kestenbaum shows, this tension can be understood through a distinction Dewey affords between the functions of idealizing imagination and universalizing imagination. Kestenbaum explains these functions in saying,

Idealizing imagination overshoots fact and reality. Universalizing imagination overshoots fact and reality in order to return to them the 'permanent meaning of facts.' In the latter, unlike the former existence is *not* 'subordinate to meaning' because natural existence is construed by Dewey to be a condition for the possibility of meaning.<sup>16</sup>

Going beyond the letter of what Dewey offered in this early text, Kestenbaum suggests that the relation between idealizing and universalizing imagination can be understood as a process of imaginative activity. In this, idealizing imagination functions as an intermediary that allows the self a kind of free-reign to play in service of the individual

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 204.

<sup>15</sup> Dewey, *Psychology*, cited in Kestenbaum, *The Grace and the Severity of the Ideal*, 205.

<sup>16</sup> Kestenbaum, *The Grace and the Severity of the Ideal*, 206.

self in a way that is unconfined by the contingency of existence. “The meanings of idealizing imagination range beyond existence.”<sup>17</sup> However, “the universalizing imagination bends these meanings back to existence, back to natural existence.”<sup>18</sup> Kestenbaum sums up this process saying, “Idealizing imagination draws us away from reality and toward the unreal. The universalizing moment of imagination draws us through and then away from the unreal and fantastic so as to transform the real. Thus does the ‘difficult inch’ become the sublime inch.”<sup>19</sup>

With this, Kestenbaum highlights and explores a moment in which we can observe Dewey in this early text working to reconcile the real and the unreal. Kestenbaum’s reading is generous in that he goes beyond the categorization of imaginative activity that Dewey put forth, bringing the ideas to life through putting Dewey’s text in conversation with Wallace Stevens. In doing so, Kestenbaum identifies a common vulnerability that Dewey and Stevens share through their attempts to reconcile their adherence to the free-reign of imagination with the constraints required by reality. In “The Noble Rider and the Sounds of Words,” Stevens identifies and sums up an undeniable problem concerning this position: “The imagination loses vitality as it ceases to adhere to what is real. When it adheres to the unreal and intensifies what is unreal, while its first effect may be extraordinary, the effect is the maximum effect that it will ever have.”<sup>20</sup> With this, I believe Kestenbaum is right in asserting that Dewey would no doubt agree with Stevens regarding the need for imagination to maintain connection to reality in order to “sustain us” and to possess vitality. And yet despite the implied consensus between Dewey and Stevens in reference to this concern, Kestenbaum

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 207.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Wallace Stevens, “The Noble Rider and the Sound of Words,” cited in Kestenbaum *The Grace and Severity of the Ideal*, 207.

maintains and later demonstrates how “neither the philosopher nor the poet could put aside ‘the unreal of what is real.’”<sup>21</sup>

Despite his generous reading of what Kestenbaum calls Dewey’s “early equivocations,” Kestenbaum is ultimately unconvinced. Reflecting on his own sketching of Dewey’s position, Kestenbaum wonders if his presentation of Dewey’s ideas renders fact, idealizing imagination, and universalizing imagination as being all too external to one another. In this, the products of creative imagination amount to either mere “idle play” or duplicates of reality. And this does not satisfy the requirements of the universal, as “The universal is what prevents imagination’s alienation from reality from degenerating into narcissistic self-deception and self-dispersion.”<sup>22</sup> Moreover, “The universal redeems imagination’s excesses, but also, and more important, it gives the imaginer a place to stand to behold the sublime.”<sup>23</sup>

With this, Kestenbaum highlights an overarching concern; namely, that “there can be no experience of transcendence for human beings which involves ‘more than human things’ or ‘more than human voice.’”<sup>24</sup> Endeavoring to clarify and further develop Dewey’s overall position, Kestenbaum recasts Dewey’s idealizing and universalizing imaginations as insubordinate imagination and natural imagination, respectively. In doing so, Kestenbaum is working to find solid ground for imagination to find its true grandeur all the while setting up a conceptual framework that he will draw from later in his argument. Thus, Kestenbaum invites us to wonder how Dewey can incorporate an insubordinate imagination, which ranges beyond existence, back into his philosophy of experience.

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<sup>21</sup> Kestenbaum *The Grace and Severity of the Ideal*, 208.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 209; Kestenbaum is drawing in quotations from Wallace Stevens’ “Chocorua to Its Neighbor,” in *The Palm at the End of the Mind*.

In doing so, Kestenbaum draws out a core dilemma. If we allow imagination the freedom to range beyond existence, how can we then use imagination's resources to uncover the hidden meaning of actual things? Put differently, how can we manage to stay grounded in reality and still allow imagination the free-reign Dewey describes? We want imagination to help us to get more in touch with the real so that we can live with a kind of vitality that will endure and grow. And if we allow imagination too much reign, if we give it the authority to run amuck, it is simply not clear how it can be worked back into experience with the real such that it can be rendered useable, meaningful, and vital.

#### A Preliminary Proposal

Based on Winnicott's perspective, which was discussed in the previous two chapters, I would like to offer a preliminary association that may provide a way of understanding these two disjuncts. Indeed, I am struck by a parallel between the free-reign Dewey sometimes affords imagination and the experience of omnipotence that Winnicott theorizes we are all born into; that is, as long as this experience is properly supported within the illusionment stage of the process of differentiation.

Thus, in Dewey's 1887 description, imagination is considered as "a stage in the development of knowledge where the self and its interests are explicitly freed from slavery to the results of the action of mechanical association."<sup>25</sup> While Kestenbaum is struck by the uncompromising freedom Dewey allows imagination within this passage, Winnicott liberates this idea even more than the early Dewey. Indeed, Winnicott not only allows imagination to be freed from slavery to the results of actions, but goes even further to say that it is the results of action that actually serve the infant. Hence, "The mother, at the beginning, by an almost 100 per cent adaptation affords the infant the

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<sup>25</sup> John Dewey, *Psychology* (Whitefish, Montana: Kessinger Publishing, 1886/2005), 198.

opportunity for the *illusion* that her breast<sup>26</sup> is a part of the infant. It is, as it were, under the baby's magical control....Omnipotence is nearly a fact of experience."<sup>27</sup>

The connection I am getting at is that the experience the infant is afforded at this stage would necessarily be "freed from slavery to the results of the action of mechanical association." Indeed, to the extent that the mother is successful in illusioning her infant, the baby would be free from any need to be concerned about the results of his actions because "The mother's adaptation to the infant's needs, when good enough, gives the infant the *illusion* that there is an external reality that corresponds to the infant's own capacity to create."<sup>28</sup> In this, rather than facing any burden of needing to fit in with or adhere to external requirements, an experience that the world is actually the "slave" of the infant is afforded.

This idea is radical. Going beyond the extreme of idealizing imagination put forth by the early Dewey, Winnicott describes a necessary experience in which not only is imagination allowed to run amuck, but also one in which reality bends to meet the unruly demands of imagination. Thus, "The mother places the actual breast just there where the infant is ready to create, and at the right moment."<sup>29</sup> Yet, notice that Winnicott says "Omnipotence is *nearly* a fact of experience."<sup>30</sup> Hence, all the while allowing imagination to have excessive reign, Winnicott is fully aware that this experience of omnipotence is only *nearly* a fact. That is, it is as close to being a fact as it could be from the standpoint of experience – and yet, it is not a fact. In this, Stevens' suggestion of

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<sup>26</sup> It should be noted that Winnicott footnotes his use of the word "breast," indicating that through this term he include[s] the whole technique of mothering. "When it is said that the first object is the breast, the word 'breast' is used, I believe, to stand for the technique of mothering as well as for the actual flesh. It is not impossible for a mother to be a good-enough mother (in my way of putting it) with a bottle for the actual feeding." (Winnicott, *Playing and Reality*, 15.)

<sup>27</sup> D.W. Winnicott, *Playing and Reality* (London: Routledge Classics, 1971/2008), 15.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*; emphasis added.

particulars bending to the abstract within “the difficult inch” might well ring true within experience, while not exactly bending in fact.

Thus, when Kestenbaum suggests that according to the early Dewey, “The projections of imagination do not receive their auspices from the past, from ‘experiences already had’; neither do their exertions of imagination have to do principally with the visible,”<sup>31</sup> he and Dewey are offering that imagination aims for something beyond experience. But what if that is not quite right? What if what is aimed for is not only grounded in experience, but is grounded in the foundation of all experience? And yet, all the while this experience might not be grounded in actual fact. Could it be that the stage of illusionment allows for the reversal Dewey spoke of in 1887 in which “existence is subordinate to meaning” and that, in this, we find a basis for the ideal firmly situated within human experience?

#### Examining *Art as Experience*

After establishing the unruly and unresolved role of imagination within Dewey’s early philosophy, Kestenbaum sets off to examine several chapters of Dewey’s 1934 *Art as Experience*. Kestenbaum offers an intriguing and insightful reading of Dewey’s first two chapters before extending his analysis to chapters eleven and twelve in which Dewey’s discussion of imagination is explicit and takes on peak significance. Kestenbaum’s ultimate position is that “there is good reason...to take [Dewey’s] endorsement of ‘negative capability’ in the thirties as a continuation of his endorsement of idealizing imagination in 1887.”<sup>32</sup> In this, Kestenbaum is showing that Dewey did not (and perhaps could not) completely let go of the ideal within his philosophy despite the

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<sup>31</sup> Kestenbaum *The Grace and Severity of the Ideal*, 205.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 225.



conflict this may cause given his commitment to naturalism concerning the ground on which we stand in allowing for such excess of imagination.

*Chapter One: The Live Creature*

Dewey's first chapter, "The Live Creature," endorses a deeply naturalistic view. As established in the previous chapter, aesthetic experience is at base a matter of organisms interacting with their environment. "The first great consideration is that life goes on in an environment; not merely *in* it but because of it, through interaction with it."<sup>33</sup> Kestenbaum extends this idea in asserting,

The somewhat disguised or at least covert premise of the chapter is that meaning does not originate in itself, but like life itself is an accommodation to, and transformation of, what is other than itself... Meaning's origin, its original, is the environment of the empirical world with which we are in constant interaction.<sup>34</sup>

Within this chapter Kestenbaum asserts that we do not find traces of imagination's reversal, as meaning must be adjusted to existence. Accordingly Dewey stresses, "Inner harmony is attained only when, by some means, terms are made with the environment. When it occurs on any other than an 'objective' basis, it is illusory – in extreme cases to the point of insanity."<sup>35</sup> Having established Dewey's naturalism within this first chapter, Kestenbaum moves on to his analysis of chapter two.

However, before turning the page so quickly, there is one important point from this first chapter that I would like to highlight, as I believe it supports my basic proposal regarding what might be the developmental basis for the ideal. All the while stressing the importance of staying connected to the world and objective reality, Dewey offers, "through the phases of perturbation and conflict [that lead to aesthetic consummation],

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<sup>33</sup> Dewey, *Art as Experience*, 12.

<sup>34</sup> Kestenbaum, *The Grace and the Severity of the Ideal*, 210.

<sup>35</sup> Dewey, *Art as Experience*, 16.

there abides a deep-seated *memory of an underlying harmony*, the sense of which haunts life like the sense of being founded on a rock.”<sup>36</sup> Could it be that this haunting memory is an experience that underlies all experience – indeed, an experience of the ideal? Is it possible that this memory affords us the motivation and the desire to press on through perturbation and conflict, not only for the sake of overcoming obstructions, but moreover because we are compelled to do so, as the experience of being founded on a rock both grounds us in and haunts us with a taste of the ideal? I suggest that this might indeed be the case and, furthermore, that holding his position need not conflict Dewey’s naturalism.

*Chapter Two: The Live Creature and “Ethereal Things”*

Kestenbaum next turns to Dewey’s second chapter, “The Live Creature and ‘Ethereal Things,’” in which he finds a glimmer of Dewey’s early endorsement of reality-defying imagination. Kestenbaum offers that the chapter is devoted to giving sense a good name as sense provides a point of connection between the things of nature and ethereal things. “The first step in accomplishing this is to make sense a full-fledged point of meaning-producing contact with the world.”<sup>37</sup> I developed my own reading of Dewey’s philosophy in support for this position in the previous chapter through my description of an infant’s sensation being literally transformed into meaning through a mother’s interpretation and response. However, I made this point by drawing on *Experience and Nature* and Kestenbaum alerts us to a deepening of this insight within this second chapter. As such, Dewey says, “Sense, as meaning so directly embodied in

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid., emphasis added.

<sup>37</sup> Kestenbaum, *The Grace and the Severity of the Ideal*, 211.

experience as to be its own illuminated meaning, is the only signification that expresses the function of sense organs when they are carried to full realization.”<sup>38</sup>

The second step Kestenbaum identifies in Dewey’s quest to give sense a good name is to describe experiences of “acute aesthetic surrender.” Kestenbaum cites Dewey as he accounts for the basis of such experiences in the stirring “into activity resonances of dispositions acquired in primitive relationships of the living being to its surroundings, [which are] irrecoverable in distinct or intellectual consciousness.”<sup>39</sup> Dewey then links this insight with the ideal saying, “There is no limit to the capacity of immediate sensuous experience to absorb into itself meaning and values that in and of themselves – that is in the abstract – would be designated ‘ideal’ and ‘spiritual.’”<sup>40</sup> In this, we find Dewey saying that there is a natural basis for experiences of “acute aesthetic surrender” and that these immediately sensuous experiences contain what we identify as the ideal. Thus, here we find Dewey affirming a natural basis for the ideal. Kestenbaum refers to this as Dewey’s “most assertive expression” of his rehabilitation of sense and summarizes Dewey’s position as follows:

Nature allows, is agreeable to, idealization. However, idealizing activities such as those of the imagination can never fully silence the “resonances of dispositions acquired in primitive relationships of the living being to its surroundings.” Poetry, all art, deepens rather than cancels out the indebtedness of reality-defying projections of the mind to the reality-affirming resonances of the “difficult inch.”<sup>41</sup>

Notice the tension Kestenbaum implies between idealizing activities and nature, in his reading of Dewey not permitting idealizing activities to have the capacity to *silence* the “resonances of dispositions acquired in the primitive relationships of the living

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<sup>38</sup> Dewey, *Art as Experience*, 22.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>41</sup> Kestenbaum, *The Grace and the Severity of the Ideal*, 212.

being to its surroundings.” In this, we see an interpretation that idealizing activity might otherwise lack at least some kind of compatibility with nature. Although I am challenging this reading through my proposal that the roots of idealizing activity might indeed have a natural basis, Kestenbaum’s interpretation nevertheless leads to an interesting question and answer, which allows for a deeper investigation of Dewey’s account. As such Kestenbaum asks: “Can, and must, the flights of imagination be bodied forth in a sense always bearing traces of, resonances of, its natural environment? To the natural imagination the answer is yes. To the insubordinate imagination the answer is no.”<sup>42</sup> With this, Kestenbaum teases open Dewey’s appeal to Keats’ “negative capability” – a move that proves significant for both Kestenbaum’s project as well as my own. For Kestenbaum, this provides an opportunity to crack open “an unobtrusive, almost imperceptible abridgement of the sanctions afforded by fact.”<sup>43</sup> And for my purposes, I find doing so offers credence to the suggestion I am advancing regarding the potential basis for the ideal.

Dewey “enthusiastically” endorses Keats’ “‘Negative Capability’; as one who was ‘capable of being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason’”<sup>44</sup> and Kestenbaum notes where Dewey praises those who do not need to reach after “consecutive reasoning.” However, Kestenbaum also notes that Dewey “is silent as to whether imaginative meanings must reach after fact.”<sup>45</sup> With this, Kestenbaum opens up Dewey’s reading of this “negative capability” and in doing so creates room once again for imagination to be freed from adherence to fact.

Do not reason, knowledge, and reflection in some nontrivial way take account of the environment, incorporating it into their determinations? If so, does not the

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 213.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Dewey, *Art as Experience*, 33. Dewey is citing Keats in this quotation.

<sup>45</sup> Kestenbaum, *The Grace and the Severity of the Ideal*, 213.

“putting aside” of reason’s objections mean that the objections of fact, of actual existence, also have been put aside? Perhaps Dewey was not minimally but deeply aware that for one possessing “negative capability” meaning cannot be anchored in fact anymore than it can be anchored in reason...Perhaps, after all, Dewey did recognize that the capacity for being in “mysteries”...necessarily means that reason’s longings cannot be fulfilled, even when abetted by nature.<sup>46</sup>

With this, Kestenbaum is right back to his central dilemma concerning how Dewey can allow imagination such free reign without losing vitality and becoming nothing more than “castles in the sky.” And even if we accept my suggestion that the basis of imagination’s freedom resides in our earliest interactions with the world, Kestenbaum’s dilemma still adheres, as it is not clear how this early experience fits in with our later experiences that require a much firmer grasp on reality.

#### *Examining Imagination*

Dewey provides an extensive discussion on imagination toward the end of chapter eleven, “The Human Contribution,” and the beginning of chapter twelve, “A Challenge to Philosophy.” Kestenbaum keenly observes that by extending these titles slightly, a description of the place of imagination within Dewey’s philosophy comes to the fore: “Imagination is the highest human contribution to experience and as such its role in Dewey’s philosophy of experience hardly can be exaggerated.”<sup>47</sup> But no matter the immense role of imagination within Dewey’s philosophy, this is not to say that Dewey’s treatment of imagination is without conflict. And this conflict, as demonstrated by Kestenbaum, is essentially the same tension we have been following throughout this analysis; namely, whether imagination can have the authority to resist constraints that are required by nature (i.e. the insubordinate imagination) or whether imagination’s role

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 213-214.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 214.

needs to be limited to supporting the possibilities of nature as we find in the natural imagination.

Kestenbaum picks up on a place within “The Human Contribution” in which Dewey does not seem to be entirely clear about the relationship between the two. In a discussion of the conflict artists undergo, Dewey aims to explicate the nature of imaginative experience through the lens inner and outer visions. While the two modes of vision wrestle back and forth within the artistic process, Dewey ultimately says, “The artist is driven to submit himself in humility to the discipline of the objective vision. But the inner vision is not cast out. It remains as the organ by which outer vision is controlled, and it takes on structure as the latter is absorbed within it.”<sup>48</sup> In this, Dewey seems at first to be saying that objective reality takes precedence, as the artist must *submit* in humility to the discipline of this outer vision. But next Dewey seems to be hinting yet again at imagination’s reversal when he says that inner vision is what *controls* the outer vision and that outer vision must be absorbed within the inner vision. This leads Kestenbaum to raise some questions: “What, precisely, has the objective contributed if imagination controls, directs, the objective? How does the ‘object of external vision’ offer much resistance to the inner vision when the latter controls external vision?”<sup>49</sup> In response to these questions, Kestenbaum concludes that Dewey has built a variation on the “airy Citadel” and persists in cracking open the spaces in which Dewey allows for the insubordinate imagination.

To be clear, Dewey does offer a way of reconciling this concern in the sentence that follows the quotation Kestenbaum highlights. Thus, Dewey continues, “The interaction of the two modes of vision is imagination; as imagination takes form the

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<sup>48</sup> Dewey, *Art as Experience*, 279-280.

<sup>49</sup> Kestenbaum, *The Grace and the Severity of the Ideal*, 216.

work of art is born.”<sup>50</sup> In this, I believe Dewey is relying on the version of imagination that Kestenbaum refers to as Dewey’s natural imagination – and Kestenbaum offers no dispute about the fact that *most* of the time Dewey supports the natural imagination, which ultimately requires imagination to reconcile with the real. We see an example of this version of imagination (i.e. natural imagination) again in Dewey’s later assertion that “Time is the test that discriminates the imaginative from the imaginary. The latter passes because it is arbitrary. The imaginative endures because, while at first strange with respect to us, it is enduringly familiar with respect to the nature of things.”<sup>51</sup>

Nevertheless, Kestenbaum persists, finding that Dewey offers the insubordinate imagination at least some credence. As Kestenbaum explains,

To say, as Dewey does, that the “interaction” of inner and outer vision is imagination simply affirms the reciprocal, egalitarian character of the activities of natural imagination. It also, however, tends to gloss all those assertions of the insubordinate imagination which do not measure themselves according to whether mind and material “squarely meet and interpenetrate.” Joining with nature, becoming one with it, is not imagination’s sole aim. Often, imagination would like to control – in all the transforming and transfiguring senses of “control” – the objective, the outer, the natural.<sup>52</sup>

If Kestenbaum is right and if this is indeed a place in which Dewey’s appeal to the insubordination imagination appears, I believe we are in position to consider my proposal given the reading Kestenbaum affords. Thus, I offer that it might indeed be the case that in imagination’s aspirations to “control” we are experiencing reverberations of the experience of omnipotence afforded in earliest stage of development and that while this foundation is “natural” in the sense that it has a real experiential basis, it still might not be true in reference to actual fact.

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<sup>50</sup> Dewey, *Art as Experience*, 280.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>52</sup> Kestenbaum, *The Grace and the Severity of the Ideal*, 216.

I submit this proposal for further consideration as we look to Kestenbaum's continued analysis. Kestenbaum highlights the end of "The Human Contribution" with a quotation in which Dewey is less exacting about the requirement of reconciliation with the real. Hence, Dewey says, "Philosophy is said to begin in wonder and end in understanding. Art departs from what has been understood and ends in wonder. In this end, the human contribution in art is also the quickened work of nature in man."<sup>53</sup> In this, Kestenbaum detects another reversal, but rather than reversing meaning and existence as Dewey did forty-seven years prior, this time Dewey is less clear with the use of the term "wonder." Kestenbaum asks,

What differentiates understanding from wonder?...Does wonder perhaps take Dewey as close as he can to transcendence not possessed by a self because the self has dissolved?...What happens to pragmatism when the "real world" it wishes to handle, the reality with which it wishes to interact and penetrate, is unconfined by wonder and imagination?<sup>54</sup>

This marks an exciting point within Kestenbaum's analysis as well as within Dewey's philosophy as we turn the page to chapter twelve, "A Challenge to Philosophy." In this chapter Dewey takes up the make-believe and play theories, both of which are formulated in terms of imagination. Based on this observation Kestenbaum concludes that despite the indirect treatment, we can see that "Dewey cannot let go of the problem of imagination"<sup>55</sup> and asserts that "Dewey seems to know that his pragmatism, as well as his aesthetics, has something important at stake in his account of imagination."<sup>56</sup>

Although Dewey ultimately finds fault in the make-believe theory, his discussion of it upholds the critical importance of imagination within aesthetic experience. Indeed,

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<sup>53</sup> Dewey, "The Human Contribution," cited in Kestenbaum, *The Grace and the Severity of the Ideal*, 216.

<sup>54</sup> Kestenbaum, *The Grace and the Severity of the Ideal*, 216-217.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 217.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*



aesthetic experience is a type of experience that does not merely reproduce or imitate reality and Dewey goes so far as to say, "because of the domination of esthetic experience by imaginative quality, it exists in a medium of light that never was on land or sea."<sup>57</sup> In this moment Kestenbaum yet again identifies a place in which "Dewey agrees with Stevens that imagination 'creates images that are independent of their originals,'" as "never having been 'on land or sea,' such light is a contribution or addition to reality [and] its original...is not in nature."<sup>58</sup> But this is not to say that imagination is sufficient for aesthetic experience and this is Dewey's main objection to the make-believe theory; hence, "an esthetic product results only when ideas cease to float and are embodied in an object."<sup>59</sup> However, emphasizing imagination's vital contribution, Kestenbaum finds that not only can Dewey "allow for a reversing subordination of existence to meaning early in the aesthetic experience; indeed he must have such a reversal in order for an aesthetic experience...to realize possibilities not realized in ordinary experience."<sup>60</sup> With this, a chief question again comes to the fore:

Reverie, dream, illusion, and insubordinate imagination are elisions. They displace or at least disrupt reality by making and marking a break with the environment. In their grip, I become detached from "objective materials." Objects float. I float. Natural objects are unconfined, but so too is the self. Having a place to stand to behold the elision of the real is unimportant, since the self as standpoint has been elided. Simply put, both environment and self are transcended in moments of sublimity. How do we get back to reality?<sup>61</sup>

Kestenbaum's question of how we can get back to reality is a central concern throughout his final chapter. And it is an important question. Indeed, this question not only adheres, but also takes on even greater significance and pertinence if we accept my

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<sup>57</sup> Dewey, *Art as Experience*, 287.

<sup>58</sup> Kestenbaum, *The Grace and the Severity of the Ideal*, 217.

<sup>59</sup> Dewey, *Art as Experience*, 288.

<sup>60</sup> Kestenbaum, *The Grace and the Severity of the Ideal*, 219.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 218.

proposal that the places in which imagination seems to outrun reality within Dewey's philosophy might well be connected to our earliest experiences – which I propose is the same as Dewey's "deep-seated memory of an underlying harmony, the sense of which haunts life like the sense of being founded on a rock."<sup>62</sup> In fact, accepting my proposal brings an even bigger question to the fore; namely, if we are born into an experience of omnipotence, a "larger than life" experience that is perhaps the closest we ever get to knowing and tasting the ideal, how do we ever come to know the real world?

### Getting Back to Reality

I believe addressing the more fundamental question of how it is that we come to know the world in the first place (and in doing so, become a self) provides insight that may help to reconcile Kestenbaum's concern. Furthermore, I believe that the fact that this question keeps coming up within Dewey's philosophy offers credence to the idea that the process of becoming a self persists throughout life, as the self is continually refined within aesthetic experience. In chapter two, I described the process of differentiation as laid out by Winnicott, which offers a way of a way of understanding the more fundamental question pertaining to the initial establishment of self as well as providing insight into ways this earlier process continues to unfold throughout life. As such, I believe there are several important points from this prior discussion that bear fruit for addressing the questions Kestenbaum raises.

#### *Born Into an Illusion*

I have alluded to the first important point throughout this discussion in the establishment of the illusion of omnipotence that we are born into. While it does not directly answer how it is we come to know reality, it is nevertheless a crucial aspect of

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<sup>62</sup> Dewey, *Art as Experience*, 16.

the overall process, as it is the necessary precursor to the achievement of self. Hence, Winnicott tells us that although “the mother’s eventual task is gradually to disillusion the infant...she has no hope of success unless at first she has been able to give sufficient opportunity for illusion.”<sup>63</sup> Thus, our earliest interactions with the world might well constitute an illusion that we retain as a vital memory that persists, “haunting” us throughout life.

Christopher Bollas is a leading figure in contemporary psychoanalytic theory and he follows the trace of this early relationship within adult life. In *The Shadow of the Object: Psychoanalysis of the Unthought Known*, Bollas describes this early experience as

an identification that emerges from symbiotic relating, where the first object is ‘known’ not so much by putting into an object representation, but as a recurrent experience of being – a more existential as opposed to representational knowing. As the mother helps to integrate the infant’s being...the rhythms of this process – from unintegration(s) to integration(s) – inform the nature of this ‘object’ relation rather than the qualities of the object as object.<sup>64</sup>

In this, Bollas is emphasizing that at this stage the mother is deeply and profoundly known, although she is not known as a separate person. I believe that the rhythms of her process of reintegrating her infant with the world lay down the initial rhythms of interaction with the environment that Dewey so intensely picked up on. We can see the deep significance Dewey affords the experience of such rhythmic exchange in his statement, “Contrast of lack and fullness, of struggle and achievement, of adjustment after consummated irregularity, form the drama in which action, feeling, and meaning are one.”<sup>65</sup> In this, Dewey is commenting upon the fundamental connection between organism and environment. And indeed, these comments ring profoundly true in the

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<sup>63</sup> Winnicott, *Playing and Reality*, 15.

<sup>64</sup> Christopher Bollas, *The Shadow of the Object: Psychoanalysis of the Unthought Known* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987), 14.

<sup>65</sup> Dewey, *Art as Experience*, 15.

case of an infant interacting with his or her first environment, which establishes a foundation of rhythmic interchange that we retain in a form of knowing at the deepest layers of our being. Hence, what Bollas refers to as the “unthought known.”

Bollas focuses on the profound imprint of this early memory and the way it later manifests itself in the adult’s “quest” to “surrender” to various mediums in hopes of reenacting this early perceptual identification. Metamorphosis of the self is central to this mode of being, as the mother is experienced as a process of transformation that “lives on in certain forms of object-seeking in adult life, when the object is sought for its function as a signifier of transformation.”<sup>66</sup> However, while the mother is no doubt immensely transformative of the infant’s self at this early stage of perceptual identification, I believe that we can say even more about her function beyond transformation. Thus, I would like to extend Bollas’ discussion of transformation to also include what we later come to identify as the ideal. With this, I am suggesting a way in which psychoanalytic theory might benefit from connections to Dewey’s philosophy, as considerations of the ideal offer a more overarching conceptualization of the impact of this profound early experience.

Within the “aesthetic moment” Bollas identifies “a deep subjective rapport with an object (a painting, a poem, an aria or symphony, or natural landscape) and [the subject] experiences an uncanny fusion with the object, an event that re-evokes an ego state that prevailed during early psychic life.”<sup>67</sup> I believe that the re-evocation of this early state of being could very well offer us the experience of particulars bending to the abstract and perhaps the trace of this early experience is what Kestenbaum is picking up on within Dewey’s writings. Indeed, I find it plausible that in bending the world to meet

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<sup>66</sup> Bollas, *The Shadow of the Object*, 14.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

their infants, what mothers do in fact creates an experiential imprint that lives on within the realm of illusion and imagination that we know on a deep level and continually seek throughout life.

*Breaking with Illusion and Becoming a Self*

But Kestenbaum is right that this illusion cannot sustain us, as it not only does not provide us with ground to stand on, it does not allow for a self at all. Thus, if we accept Winnicott's assertion that we are born into an illusion, we must eventually find a way to break with this illusion in order to get in touch with reality and therefore to develop a healthy self. This brings us to the second important point; namely, disillusionment, which is what ultimately the process that allows for the self to emerge through contending with reality. As we have already seen, the process of disillusionment involves the mother's gradual lessening of adaption to her infant. From the mother's perspective there is nothing immense occurring within the moments of frustration she allows her infant, but in doing so she is indeed paving the way for her baby to meet reality and fact, and thus to develop as an independent self.

I offer a now favorite example to illustrate this point: "Think of an infant expecting a feed. The time comes when the infant can wait a few minutes because noises in the kitchen indicate that food is about to appear. Instead of simply being excited by the noises, the infant uses the news item in order to be able to wait."<sup>68</sup> I believe this significant point in development provides a key for helping us to understand how we subsequently "get back to reality," as Kestenbaum asks. We have already seen that this developmental milestone marks the beginning of the baby separating out from the environment in becoming aware of his own need and in so doing he is emerging as an

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<sup>68</sup> D.W. Winnicott, "From Dependence towards Independence," cited in Abram *The Language of Winnicott*, 132.

individual self. In addition, the baby is developing his own purpose with the world, as he uses real material of the world (i.e. kitchen noises) as a symbol to help him understand his environment and contend with frustration. Purpose in the world is key to this example and I do not think it is a coincidence that purpose is also Dewey's answer to this question.

Thus, Dewey tells us that purpose implicates the individual self in the most organic way and I believe that purpose goes a long way toward answering the question of how we come to know reality as well as how it is we "get back to reality."

It is in the purposes he entertains and acts upon than an individual most completely exhibits and realizes his intimate selfhood. Control of material by a self is control by more than just "mind"; it is control by the personality that has mind incorporate within it. All interest is an identification of a self with some material aspect of the objective world, of the nature that includes man. Purpose is this identification in action. Its operation in and through objective conditions is a test of its genuineness; the capacity of the purpose to overcome and utilize resistance, to administer materials, is a disclosure of the structure and quality of the purpose. For, as I have already said, the object finally created *is* the purpose both as conscious objective and as accomplished actuality.<sup>69</sup>

I believe this speaks to the question Kestenbaum raised as to "whether the sublime was livable" and his suggestion that this is the basic question asked by Dewey in his philosophy. Hence, in realizing our most intimate selfhood through purpose and implication with objective conditions, we stand to navigate a course that aims toward the sublime. Looking broadly at Dewey's philosophy, I believe it is safe to say that for Dewey the overarching aim of all manifestations of purpose is to restore harmony between the organism and the environment – and perhaps this aspiration might well be a quest to restore our connection to the ideal and thus to find (or at least aim toward) a way to live the sublime. This is exemplified in the works of art Dewey keenly picked up

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<sup>69</sup> Dewey, *Art as Experience*, 288-289.

that take harmony as an important constitutive aesthetic feature. However, it is important to note that this is not a full answer to the question of whether the sublime is actually livable. Rather, in identifying purpose in this way, I believe Dewey is pointing us in the direction of how we might find a way to live the sublime, if it is indeed something that can be livable.

Deeping this account of purpose further, we find Dewey's understanding of the development of purpose in his analysis of the play theory. While he is in favor of much of what the play theory allows, his only resistance to the theory is that it does not "recognize that esthetic experience involves a definite reconstruction of objective materials."<sup>70</sup> Dewey demonstrates what he means by drawing out a key distinction between the play of a kitten and the play of a growing child, saying that the former "has a certain order as an activity, in consonance with the structural needs of the organism, [but] does not modify the object played with except by a change of its spatial position, a more or less accidental matter."<sup>71</sup> By contrast, Dewey says the play of a growing child has purpose as a common thread that runs through a succession of acts. "In playing with blocks the child builds a house or a tower. He becomes conscious of the meaning of his impulses and acts by means of the difference made by them in objective materials."

While I agree that there is a key distinction to be made concerning the play of a child and that of a kitten, I want to redraw the line of demarcation as I find that Dewey was not precise enough in his analysis. Hence, I resist the developmental trajectory Dewey laid out in demonstrating a child's growing capacity to use objects in the world as the embodiment of purpose in contrast to a kitten. Dewey says, "The first manifestations of play by a child do not differ much from those of a kitten. But as

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 290.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 289-290.

experience matures, actives are more and more regulated by an end to be attained.”<sup>72</sup> Although I agree that as experience matures purpose with the world becomes more manifest and robust, I think Dewey is missing something critical at the earliest stages of development. Indeed, the play of Winnicott’s baby is not arbitrary or accidental. Hence, Dewey is not recognizing the ways that the first manifestations of play by a child might indeed contain purpose with the world that might not be tangible in the use of objects, but are nevertheless distinct from the play of a kitten in a meaningful way. Thus, I contend that the baby in Winnicott’s example is creating an object in the world – i.e. a symbol that is derived from the material substance of the kitchen noises – and that in doing so the noises and the meaning conjoin into a symbol and become the embodiment of purpose. Although this is more subtle than the later play of the child who uses blocks in “becoming conscious of the meaning of his impulsions and acts by means of the difference made by them in objective materials,” I believe Winnicott’s example provides insight into an infant doing something similar with the objective material of sound. Indeed, even if the “difference made” is only occurring within the consciousness of the infant, this difference is of paramount significance and I think recognizing this difference would provide an important contribution to Dewey’s philosophy. Thus, I want to extend Dewey’s consideration of what constitutes the reconstruction of objective materials to also include the very real “difference made” in the case of Winnicott’s baby.

But what is more is that in extending Dewey’s account to accommodate the “difference made” in the cases of Winnicott’s baby, we are also extending our understanding of the point of intersection between imagination and reality – the very place Kestenbaum concludes that we behold the sublime.<sup>73</sup> Thus, in recognizing this

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 290.

<sup>73</sup> Kestenbaum, *The Grace and the Severity of the Ideal*, 225.



“difference made” we are also allowing room for this intersection to blur a bit, as alongside purpose in the world, we also find Winnicott’s baby enacting his own omnipotent creation. Indeed, in accepting Winnicott’s account, we must allow that the baby is both creating and discovering the kitchen noises. In allowing for this paradox and understanding its crucial role within development, I believe we can further crack open an understanding of the continued role this paradoxical intersection might well play throughout human development. Thus, I believe it is plausible that we may indeed find the ideal residing alongside purpose with objective materials in the world and that in this we find a richer account of how the sublime might be livable.

#### The Value and Limitation of Outrunning the World

I maintain that initial transitional objects make way for a capacity to experience transitional phenomena throughout life. In this, we retain a trace of the infantile experience of omnipotence in the meeting of imagination and reality. And while it might be true that there are occasions in which imagination does outrun reality and that in these instances the self does not have solid ground on which to stand, it is important to recognize the value as well as the limitation of such instances.

The limitation of these instances may be easier to recognize, as this is what we have been wrestling with throughout this discussion. Indeed, where imagination outruns reality, the self remains aloof—sometimes to the point of being tortured by the irreconcilability of the real the ideal. Dewey spoke of this struggle in the beginning of *Human Nature and Conduct*, giving voice to the problems this can cause within lived experience:

In varied ways men come to live in two worlds, one the actual, the other the ideal. Some are tortured by their irreconcilability. Others alternate between the

two, compensating for the strains of renunciation involved in membership in the ideal realm by pleasurable excursions into the delights of the actual.<sup>74</sup>

This also speaks to Kestenbaum's worry concerning reality degenerating "into narcissistic self-deception and self-dispersion," as this is precisely the risk of imagination running too far amuck. Winnicott, too, gives voice to this ever-present concern saying,

From birth, therefore, the human being is concerned with the problem of the relationship between what is objectively perceived and what is subjectively conceived of, and in the solution of this problem there is no health for the human being who has not been started off well enough by the mother.<sup>75</sup>

But in working with objective conditions, Dewey affords that the self is continually refined, as Dewey is aware that this is a concern and something we work through throughout all of life.

In short, Dewey tells us that "the self is created in the creation of objects."<sup>76</sup> Indeed, we need "the tang of overt conflict and the impact of harsh conditions" because without it "art has no material."<sup>77</sup> This is exactly in line with Winnicott's discussion of disillusionment, which is rife with the tang of conflict and contending with harsh conditions. Dewey not only picks up on this, but he powerfully connects the tang of disillusionment with a process that persists throughout life in the continual development of self.

Individuality itself is originally a potentiality and is realized only in interaction with surrounding conditions. In this process of intercourse, native capacities, which contain an element of uniqueness, are transformed and become a self. Moreover, through resistances encountered, the nature of the self is discovered. The self is both formed and brought to consciousness through interaction with environment. The individuality of the artist is no exception. If his activities remained mere play and merely spontaneous, if free activities were not brought

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<sup>74</sup> John Dewey, *Human Nature and Conduct: An Introduction to Social Psychology* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1922), 8.

<sup>75</sup> Winnicott, *Playing and Reality*, 15.

<sup>76</sup> Dewey, *Art as Experience*, 293.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 293.

against the resistance offered by actual conditions, no *work* of art would ever be produced. From the first manifestation by a child of an impulse to draw up to the creations of a Rembrandt, the self is created in the creation of objects, a creation that demands active adaption to external materials, including a modification of the self so as to utilize and thereby overcome external necessities by incorporating them in an individual vision and expression.<sup>78</sup>

However, this explanation does not address another fundamental question.

Hence, if the self is created in the creation of objects, what motivates and fuels this process? Throughout his philosophy, Dewey does provide an answer to this question—namely, obstruction and resistance from the environment. But is obstruction and resistance enough? Indeed, what is the moving force that motivates and allows for the meeting of obstructions in the first place? This is a question Kestenbaum raises within the second chapter of *The Grace and the Severity of the Ideal*, stating, “it would be at least a bit odd to claim that the desire, the love, the eros, embodied in the exercise of their habits is motivated solely by the desire, to meet obstacles and obstructions.”<sup>79</sup> Thus, Kestenbaum concludes that desire need be “fueled by something more worthy than the obstruction. The fact that desire can be obstructed tells us that obstruction is not the end, the goal, the motive force of desire. Something transcending the obstruction is the occasion and the perfection of desire.”<sup>80</sup>

Thus, I propose that the moving force of desire, the something that transcends obstruction and occasions the perfection of desire through the continual refinement of self is “the deep-seated memory of an underlying harmony” that Dewey spoke of in “The Live Creature,” “the sense of which haunts life like the sense of being founded on a rock.”<sup>81</sup> I put forth that this “deep-seated memory” may in fact be a literal memory of a

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<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 293.

<sup>79</sup> Kestenbaum, *The Grace and Severity of the Ideal*, 43.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> Dewey, *Art as Experience*, 16.

time before words, in the warm embrace with the world that we are afforded through the mothering environment. In this, I propose we find a foundation for the ideal. And in this, I believe we also find the reason Winnicott insists that “there is no health for the human being who has not been started off well enough by the mother.” Indeed, in this, I believe we find the value of imagination’s authority to sometimes outrun reality, as this spurs us to continually work to restore harmony with the environment and in doing so, further refine the self.

Yet, we should also recognize the tragic price that we pay in the creation of self. Hence, in forming a self we lose a deep and profound merger with the world that the mother-environment affords. Heinz Kohut, a prominent psychoanalytic theorist, speaks powerfully to this loss.

You too, like all of us have lost your innocence, have fallen from grace. You too like all of us, must have your moments of doubt whether our values, our meanings as portrayed by our art, philosophy, and religion, are not in truth illusions. And you too, like the rest of us cannot always call up the sense of inner security, wholeness, and joyful certainty that is given to us at times....You too, like the rest of us, must, therefore realize...that there is no return passage to paradise – only a forward move. That we must strive toward...‘infinite consciousness,’ that the fruit from the tree of knowledge is our only available sustenance, is our only quite unreligious, salvation.<sup>82</sup>

And although there can be no “return passage to paradise,” Kohut insists that this loss is something we can be grateful for.

Indeed I believe that we can even be grateful for the fact that the disturbed wholeness of our self will never be fully and permanently restored – neither by religion and philosophy nor by science and art – because it is the very incompleteness of man’s self...which spurs him to his greatest achievements, which keeps alive in him, to the end of time, the attempt to recapture the lost wholeness of his self.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> Heinz Kohut, “Psychoanalysis and the Interpretation of Literature: A Correspondence with Enrich Heller,” *Critical Inquiry* 4, no. 3 (1978): 448.

<sup>83</sup> Kohut, “Psychoanalysis and the Interpretation of Literature,” 449.

Indeed, the ideal might well be a memory of merger with the world, an experience of omnipotence that we are born into. Ironically this experience of wholeness and completeness of the “self” is in fact the very antithesis of what constitutes the self in actuality, as the formation of self requires a fall from grace in the meeting of harsh conditions through the process of disillusionment. And although this is a process of immense formative significance within early life, I maintain that it is not a process that is ever completed once and for all. Thus, Dewey tells us, “There is always a gap between the here and now of direct interaction and the past interactions whose funded result constitutes the meanings with which we grasp and understand what is now occurring.”<sup>84</sup> Indeed, it is precisely for this reason that we find the continued growth and refinement of self throughout life in aesthetic consummation, which resides at the intersection of imagination and reality. However, no matter the achievement of self such consummation might provide, it is of the utmost significance that imagination continues to outrun reality and that we retain a trace of our early experiences of merger and omnipotence, as this provides a way to continue the process of growth that is inherent to life itself.

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<sup>84</sup> Dewey, *Art as Experience*, 284.

## CHAPTER 5

### CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

This dissertation is calling for a shift in our thinking about the mode, meaning, and purpose of education by recognizing and responding to the aesthetic dimension of learning. This is a particularly important message to heed today given the high stakes testing movement, which is based on an extremely narrow conception what education *should* aim for and thus functions such that the quality of relation that is central to both meaning making and aesthetic experience is all too often overlooked. This is problematic because this quality of relation is central to the growth and development of the self. Furthermore, while there is no doubt that it is important for students to be proficient within academic domains, it is even more critical that we do not lose sight of the fact that at the most fundamental level education is not about teaching a core set of academic subjects, but rather about teaching subjects that are human.

Above all, I have aspired to demonstrate how aesthetic experience is fundamental to the growth and development of the self. This is well established within John Dewey's philosophy, but this insight is deepened and becomes even more pronounced through considerations of D.W. Winnicott's account. As such, the example of Winnicott's baby and the kitchen noises serves as a linchpin for understanding the emergence of an infant's self as he begins to make meaning through the use of material that both is and is not a part of himself. Thus, we encounter the realm of transitional phenomena, which is intimately tied to aesthetic experience as well as meaning making.

And as much as this is a story of becoming differentiated in developing purpose with external reality, it is at the same time a story of maintaining connection to what indeed might be the foundation the ideal within human life.

I am thus proposing a view of education that takes seriously the growth and development of the self and aspires to continually cultivate the conditions that foster aesthetic experience – the realm in which we find the paradigmatic case of meaning making and in which the self continues to grow and develop in relationship with the world. As much as this view of education is interesting from a philosophical standpoint, it is most significant for what it offers educational practice. As such, my aim in this chapter is to draw out some key implications of this approach for the way we go about educating students.

At perhaps the broadest level, this view of education calls for a significant shift in focus for educational policy by placing the growth and development of the self at the center of the educative endeavor. This is a significant shift, indeed, away from test scores functioning as the proxy for our educational aims and consequentially driving our educational methods. By contrast, I am suggesting that we focus our aspirations on a more holistic notion of the self that we are educating. Thus, I contend that education *should* be about educating citizens who can contribute to as well as make use of culture in the broadest sense and I believe that the way to accomplish this is to take seriously the aesthetic dimension of learning.

At a more concentrated level, I believe that implications for this view of education become particularly pronounced through considerations of the education of teachers. As such, it is within this realm that the aesthetic mode of learning must come to the fore with a particular emphasis on the developing the self of the teacher such that

the teacher will be able to extend this approach with students. Accordingly, much of this chapter is devoted to establishing a basis for teachers to draw from. This basis is necessarily rooted in experience, but this is not to dismiss the importance for teachers to have a theoretical grasp as well. Moreover, discussions of teacher education lend themselves well to broader discussions of educational practice in general and this will naturally fall out within the discussion that follows.

Hence, in what follows I will draw out some key components of how this approach would work in educating teachers. I will address the importance of establishing an experiential basis for teachers to draw from and will support this idea by discussing the scope implementation, what an aesthetic method of teaching might look like, and draw on metaphors from the arts that can serve as a model for how this type of education would work.

#### Aesthetic Experience as a Basis for Practice

If we are to prepare teachers to incorporate this view of education into their practice, we need to place a great deal of emphasis in facilitating aesthetic experiences in our work with teachers. In this, the teacher's own self would be developed and refined, as we have seen that this is inherent within aesthetic experience. But we would need to go even further than this in preparing teachers. In addition to nurturing the teacher's self in a general way through facilitating experiences that are rich with the quality of doing and undergoing, I believe we should do so with an eye toward expanding their capacity to experience transitional phenomena. In addition, we need to prepare teachers to be acutely attuned to the experience of others in order for them to be able to facilitate aesthetic connections in their work with students.



Above all, I believe it is paramount that teachers have an experiential basis upon which to draw in their practice with students in order for them to be able to incorporate this view of education into their work with students. Although I have worked hard to espouse this view from a theoretical standpoint, I maintain that the standpoint of experience has far more to offer than any theoretical explanation could provide in this regard. Thus, while it would be important for teachers to have a theoretical understanding of this approach in order to be more deliberate and discerning in their practice and in order to explain the significance of this approach to administrators and other educational stakeholders, an experiential basis that lacks any explanatory power would do far more in supporting students than a perfect theoretical grasp that somehow lacked an experiential basis could possibly yield.

Thus, in addition to mastery within certain academic domains this approach tells us that teachers must also have the capacity to play within those domains in order to cultivate the aesthetic mode of learning. In this, teachers would be able to support students in opening up their very selves through an experience that is rich with the quality of doing and undergoing in which student and teacher alike engage with the quality of play. In this realm of experience, a lesson in poetry, anatomy, or algebra invites students to learn about the world through these various disciplinary lenses as they incorporate their interactions with this subject matter into their way of being in the world. Thus, learning unfolds on a very deep level as the self is refined in relation to the world. But in order to support students within this realm of experience teachers, themselves, need to have a well developed capacity to enter this realm of transitional phenomena.

While the basic capacity for transitional phenomena would necessarily have been established long before teachers would ever enter our classrooms, this only tells us that we have a foundation on which to build. Thus, one role of teacher education is to further expand and refine this capacity by fostering experiences that are rich in the quality of relation that is central to aesthetic experience and meaning making. We need to incorporate play into our work with teachers. We need to help teachers to become ever more attuned to the particulars of the world within their domains of study while also maintaining acute awareness of the quality of relation this attunement brings forth within experience. We need to notice when our efforts to facilitate aesthetic experiences fall short and work to understand why this might be the case. Although the reasons for such “failures” will be many, I bring this up because such instances might indicate places in which we can work to expand teachers’ capacities to experience transitional phenomena and thus to further cultivate the self of the teacher.

Underlying these suggestions is the notion that while aesthetic experiences *in themselves* have inherent value, it is at the same time true that aesthetic experiences also have an instrumental value in developing the capacity for further aesthetic experiences and aesthetic culminations. This concept is foundational to the practice of psychoanalysis and the work of Winnicott in particular in which “for both patient and analyst playing replaced knowing as the aim and the means of analysis.”<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, Dewey, too, upheld this view. In *Experience and Nature* Dewey described art as an activity that directly refreshes and enlarges the “spirit” and is “instrumental to the production of new objects and dispositions which are in turn productive of further refinements and replenishments.”<sup>2</sup> In other words, art (or aesthetic experience) is

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<sup>1</sup> Adam Phillips, *Winnicott* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1988), 143.

<sup>2</sup> John Dewey, *Experience and Nature* Second Edition (New York: Dover Publication, Inc., 1958), 365.

instrumental toward the achievement of further consummatory experiences “because [it] is charged with an office in quickening apprehension enlarging the horizon of vision, refining discrimination, creating standards of appreciation which are confirmed and deepened by further experiences.”<sup>3</sup> Thus, we find that aesthetic experience refines the self such that we become ever more closely attuned to the aesthetic connections between self and world that foster growth.

### The Scope of Implementation

In applying this idea to teacher education, I maintain that we should aspire to cultivate as many moments of aesthetic experience as possible, but we must also recognize that the degree of implementation could vary significantly without undermining the basic idea that cultivating aesthetic attunement is important in education. As such, we should keep in mind that every little bit helps and that incorporating this view into educational practice is ultimately about a process of continual aspiration. The aim is to keep going and growing. In Winnicott’s conception, this is an aim toward creative living – the very thing that gives meaning to life itself.

Stated more concretely and with explicit focus on the work of teachers, Kevin J. Pugh and Mark Girod address a version of this idea that applies explicitly to the context of schools and teachers. All the while advocating for science teachers to incorporate transformative aesthetic experiences within their classrooms, Pugh and Girod recognize that there are challenges involved in the implementation of this approach. One significant challenge has to do with the very real limitations such as time and energy that teachers inherently face.

One concern is that this teaching may be too labor intensive. It takes significant time to craft the content in an artistic way and to develop and model a passion

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 366.

for the content. With teachers' heavy loads and the common practice of teachers being asked to teach outside their main area of interest and expertise, we speculate that it would be difficult for teachers to teach for transformative, aesthetic experiences all the time. Instead, they may need to focus on fostering transformative, aesthetic experiences with a few concepts and, over time, build a repertoire of methods for teaching concepts in an artistic way.<sup>4</sup>

Thus, even when implementation is necessarily limited by very real and legitimate constraints of educational practice, it is still worthwhile to incorporate this approach into our work with students to whatever extent is possible.

However, I believe we can look even more deeply into the implementation of this approach within educational practice. While it is no doubt true that crafting lessons in an artistic manner would be important in implementing this view, I would like to stress that at the most basic level the aesthetic unfolding for which I am advocating occurs within moments that contain a certain quality of relation. Hence, momentary offerings of exquisite attention to objects, ideas, and to one another form the building blocks of implementation. In this, even if we do not yet have a full lesson plan or method, we can still advance this approach within meaningful moments of aesthetic attunement. Thus, implementation can quite literally vary on a moment-to-moment basis with the aspiration of cultivating as many moments of exquisite attention as we can. Over time, I believe that we will find an increased capacity for this quality of attunement—and this increased capacity may very well lead to an established “repertoire of methods for teaching concepts in an artistic way.”

#### An Aesthetic Method of Teaching

In emphasizing the smaller moment-to-moment scope, I am working to show what would underlie a “repertoire of methods” for teaching that would support this

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<sup>4</sup> Kevin J. Pugh and Mark Girod, “Science, Art, and Experience: Constructing a Science Pedagogy from Dewey’s Aesthetics,” *Journal of Science Teacher Education* 18 (2007): 9-27.

approach. This opens an important discussion for the practice of teaching in general concerning the role of method within educational practice. Hence, while an established set of methods might be desirable for teacher educators and teachers alike, I believe we should take heed of an important concern that might ensue from such a desire. I believe there is potential for our aesthetic aim to be undermined where there is too strict an adherence to method. Indeed, if it is a quality of relation, fostered within moments of exquisite aesthetic attunement, that we are aspiring toward, we must remain deferential to emergent connections in order to foster such meaningful moments of attunement. As such, our teaching methods must allow for flexibility in order to remain open and responsive to emergent connections.

Accordingly, I suggest that we draw on Dewey's discussion within *Experience and Education* of the scientific method as a guide in determining how an aesthetic method of teaching might work.

I am aware that the emphasis I have placed upon scientific methods may be misleading, for it may result only in calling up the special technique of laboratory research as that is conducted by specialists. But the meaning of the emphasis placed upon scientific method has little to do with specialized techniques. It means that scientific method is the only authentic means at our command for getting at the significance of our everyday experiences of the world in which we live. It means that scientific methods provides a working pattern of the way in which and the conditions under which experiences are used to lead ever onward and outward.<sup>5</sup>

In this, Dewey is advocating for the "intelligently directed development of the possibilities inherent in ordinary experience"<sup>6</sup>—and I believe gets us well on our way toward an aesthetic method of teaching. Indeed, for Dewey

The difference between the esthetic and the intellectual is thus one of the place where emphasis falls in the constant rhythm that marks the interaction of the live

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<sup>5</sup> John Dewey, *Experience and Education* (New York, Touchstone, 1938/1997), 87-88.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 89.

creature with his surroundings. The ultimate matter of both emphases in experience is the same, as is also their general form.<sup>7</sup>

Thus, an aesthetic method of teaching would be very close to Dewey's understanding of the scientific method – the most important aspect of both being experiential awareness of the intimate connection between self and world.

As Thomas Alexander conveyed, we find Dewey's paradigmatic understanding of experience itself within his notion of aesthetic experience and this "lead[s] to a more coherent understanding of the rest of Dewey's philosophy."<sup>8</sup> Thus, I believe that we are now in position to better understand Dewey's educational philosophy precisely because we have been attending to and deepening Dewey's aesthetic philosophy throughout. Indeed, I believe that this discussion leads to a richer understanding of what Dewey put forth in works like *School and Society*, *Democracy and Education* and *Experience and Education* by calling out the significance of aesthetic experience. In this, considerations of aesthetic experience reveal deeper insights about Dewey's approach to education, while Dewey's discussion of education extends this significance more broadly by helping us to understand how we might use these insights within educational practice.

#### Getting the "Sound" in their "Ears"

Years ago, when I was a student teacher I was given some advice by my supervisor that has stayed with me throughout the years. At the time I was working with a prominent high school band and my supervisor told me that above all I should be sure to keep the sound of that particular band in my ear and work to recapture it in my subsequent work with my own students. Although his advice was specifically referring

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<sup>7</sup> John Dewey, *Art as Experience* (1934; repr. New York: Perigee, 2005), 14.

<sup>8</sup> Thomas Alexander, *John Dewey's Theory of Art, Experience, and Nature: The Horizons of Feeling* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1987), xii.

to the tone quality that this particular concert band was exhibiting, I think there is a deeper lesson to be extracted from his words.

That band had a wonderful sound – it was solid and well supported because of the balance among the instruments. The individual tones of the various instruments blended together, merging into an ensemble sound. The students listened to one another and adjusted what they did as individuals to match what they heard around them. It takes great care to play in tune and in time with a large group and the only way to play with that kind of ensemble sound is for each individual to offer exquisite attention to what they are doing in relation to what is going on around them. Thus, my supervisor’s advice necessarily extends beyond sound alone because in order to recapture that ensemble sound in my work with future students I would also be recapturing this quality of exquisite attention and responsiveness to the world.

This quality of exquisite attention and responsiveness is something that is exhibited particularly well in the arts. As such, I believe the arts offer us prime examples of the quality of relation we should be aiming for. Extending my supervisors advice to teacher education, I maintain that we must work to provide examples of this quality of relation in our work with teachers so that they too will be able to keep that “sound” in their “ears” as they subsequently work with students. Furthermore, it should come as no surprise that the arts offer examples of some of the best ways to accomplish this.

In some ways I am suggesting that we educate teachers in a manner that is similar to how we educate musicians. Becoming a musician requires extended practice and sequential development. Musicians need to spend many hours practicing everyday. They practice alone, they practice in groups, they practice with individual teachers, they practice when they are away from their instruments through mental exercise alone, and

they practice by attending closely to the performances of others. As much as it is important to stress the amount of time spent practicing, it is important to stress what all this practicing does. Yes, of course practicing is about becoming more proficient and performing well at the next concert or recital, but it is also about building up an internal working model of what to aim for. In this, music teachers are not only seeking to correct and offer guidance for the next performance, music teachers are working to build up and refine students' inner working models of what an excellent performance is. They are working to get that "sound" in students' "ears."

By extension, in order to get that "sound" in teachers' "ears" we need to allow for lots of time spent practicing and we need to do so such they build up and refine a working model of what they should be aiming for. In some ways, it is easier to talk about this inner working model in terms of sound because there are very specific qualities and properties that we can refer to and measure with sound.<sup>9</sup> But unfortunately, it is difficult to be so specific when it comes to the inner working model that I believe teachers need to cultivate. Teachers need to know in themselves what it feels like to offer exquisite attention. They need to be able to recognize when others are affording such attention to the world. They need to know what it feels like when someone responds to them with exquisite attention. They need to recognize when the "fit" is not quite right. And above all we need to build up their inner working models through experience so that they can feel and respond to the right "fit" when they come across it.

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<sup>9</sup> However, this does not address the constructed experience with sound, which is not objective.



## Museum Teaching as a Model

In a recent book entitled *Teaching in the Art Museum: Interpretation as Experience*, Rika Burnham and Elliot Kai-Kee describe a model of dialogic gallery teaching that I believe does an exceptional job at exemplifying how we might foster the quality of relation we should be aiming for in teacher education. This model explicitly aspires to cultivate an environment that is supportive of what Dewey referred to as “*an experience*” as the gallery teacher encourages museum visitors to share their impressions and interpretations of artworks with one another. In this model, the gallery teacher’s role is to “advocate for the endeavor as a whole. As she moves, follows, or opposes at various points in a dialogue, she is conscious of the well-being of the enterprise.”<sup>10</sup> In this, the teacher’s role is to serve as a catalyst for “*an experience*” as she helps the dialogue to progress “from anticipation, through the stages of conservation, cumulation, and tension, and arriving eventually at culmination and fulfillment”<sup>11</sup> – that is, if all goes well. Although there are important differences between an art museum and the context of teacher education that would no doubt involve modifying this approach to meet the context of our classrooms and universities, I think we have a great deal to gain from considering this approach as a model for how we, too, might cultivate “*an experience*” in our work with teachers.

Burnham and Kai-Kee discuss the place of authority within gallery dialogues and I think their insights on the matter stand to inform how we, as teacher educators, might relate to our students. The authors point out that “There is a place for authority in the dialogic relation, but it should be sustained by the interchange itself. Indeed, gallery teachers must be careful that the authority automatically granted them does not inhibit

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<sup>10</sup> Rika Burnham and Elliot Kai-Kee, *Teaching in the Art Museum: Interpretation as Experience* (Los Angeles: Getty Publications, 2011), 92.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

visitors' exchange of views."<sup>12</sup> I think we face a similar concern in our work with teachers and that we must be mindful of the relations of power at play within classrooms. While it need not be a problem that we, as instructors, have some measure of power or authority from the get go, it is important that this does not get in the way of fostering the quality of relation we are aiming to foster. If our students feel inhibited, the aesthetic mode of learning will not come to fruition. Inhibition can come from many sources and I believe we must do our part to earn and support others in earning what Burnham and Kai-Kee refer to as "true authority." "True authority in dialogue is *earned*—in the course of the dialogue itself—by contributions of knowledge, observation, and insight on the part of all the participants."<sup>13</sup> As such, I believe we should construct environments that are rich with opportunities for exquisite attention and work to foster this through supporting a space of wonder and open exchange in which we closely attend to what our students are experiencing in order to help guide and facilitate the experience.

Although there are rich examples of gallery dialogues provided throughout this text, chapter seven, entitled "Information in Gallery Teaching: Charles Le Brun's *Water Tapestry*," offers a particularly good example of this mode of teaching. In this, I believe we find an example of the role of the teacher that Dewey described in *School and Society*. Thus, Dewey portrays a mode of engagement in which the teacher keeps one eye on the student by closely attending to the student's emerging interest. The other eye is on the subject of study—in this case the subject being the tapestry, *Water*. Throughout the exchange the teacher helps the student to navigate by directing the student in ways the teacher knows to be productive, given his or her expertise in the subject. But there is a

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 91.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

very real danger of the teacher's expertise taking over the experience and limiting the quality of engagement we are aiming to foster. As Burnham conveys,

[I]f, in our enthusiasm to open up the work, we succumb to the temptation to pour out information too soon, too fast, in the wrong sequence, or too abundantly, we can end up with a group that may follow along attentively as we in effect narrate the work for them, but that never really looks and sees the image before them, never discovers it for themselves.<sup>14</sup>

Alas, I think this situation describes what occurs in schools too much of the time and that there is a great deal we can learn from the model of gallery dialogues.<sup>15</sup>

In a concluding chapter, Burnham raises a particularly interesting issue by looking at what we should be aiming for within a single lesson of this aesthetic mode of teaching. In this, rather than asking what we aspire to accomplish on a large scale by considering broad outcomes of a long educational process, Burnham considers a much more modest scope. While some might note the distinction between the contexts of teaching in an art museum during a single visit, as opposed to years spent in teacher education, I believe the question pertains to teacher education at the level of each individual lesson. In short, Burnham is asking whether we should be aiming for grand transformative experiences that enable students to see the world in a new way or whether we should be more modest in our aspirations and work to facilitate rich experiences with artworks.

Underlying this question is the observation that sometimes students have singular experiences that culminate in a way that does seem to change their very being in this world. This is powerful. This type of profoundly educative experience is at the heart of this entire approach. Yet, Burnham cautions against having such grand

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 123.

<sup>15</sup> This kind of problematic phenomenon occurs too often in music education when ensemble directors focus on just the sound of the group, correcting and directing the interpretation without engaging the members of the ensemble.

expectations and instead offers that the teacher's aim should be on the quality of experience generated (and that is all). Despite the fact that I am advocating for a view of education that does transform the self, I agree with Burnham. As Dewey says, "Like the soil, mind is fertilized while it lies fallow, until a new burst of bloom ensues."<sup>16</sup> Hence, I believe the quality of relation, exemplified in the gallery dialogues that Burnham and Kai-Kee describe, is fertilizer for the self. While sometimes we may be present for the emergence of a new burst of blooms, how and when this kind of transformation occurs is not for us to determine. I believe Burnham is right to caution against teaching specifically for this type of transformative experience because doing so might undermine the very quality of relation that fosters this larger process of educating the self.

Indeed, I believe the theory I present throughout upholds one very basic insight; namely, that it is a quality of relation between self and world that fosters a profound aesthetic unfolding. In this, we find the growth and development of the self. We learn and grow aesthetically through our experiences of interactions with our environment. Some experiences and interactions are more helpful than others in this process. Those that are the most helpful are experiences that contain a rich quality of relation between self and world and it is these types of experiences that we should be working to cultivate. Examples from the arts prove to be excellent in exemplifying this type of unfolding and I believe this is because the arts themselves are an outgrowth of our intimate connection with the world. Furthermore, in understanding and, more importantly, experiencing this aesthetic unfolding we are in a much better position to support others in this process of educating the self through aesthetic experience.

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<sup>16</sup> Dewey, *Art as Experience*, 24.

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