

AESTHETIC AND AFFECTIVE EXPERIENCES IN COFFEE SHOPS: A DEWEYAN ENGAGEMENT WITH ORDINARY AFFECTS IN ORDINARY SPACES

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ABSTRACT

Can everyday spaces, such as coffee shops bustling with rapid activity, promise an aesthetic experience that remains untapped and undertheorized? If so, what kinds of communicative habits make the coffee shop experience aesthetically wholesome? To this end, I engage and extend American pragmatist John Dewey's mission of recovering aesthetic experiences in habituated processes of living in his *Art as Experience* and interweave it with contemporary thought on affective experiences in ordinary activities. Ultimately, I present coffee shops as exemplars of everyday third spaces (spaces other than home and work) promising the qualitative immediacy of artful, affectively rich and embodied communicative experiences.

Keywords: coffee shops, pragmatist aesthetics, John Dewey, ordinary affects

"In a coffee shop in a city, which is every coffee shop in every city, on a day which is everyday . . ."—"Little Plastic Castle," Ani DiFranco

Even in her incompleteness, iconic singer-songwriter Ani DiFranco makes a poignant point. Her point pertains to the ubiquity of a coffee shop in a city, which is every coffee shop in every city on a day that is everyday. Such is the vitality of these third places that offer relaxing space and time over and above coffee and other related beverages in the global coffee culture.² Even though most of these spaces are in some capacity social cogs in the widespread profit-making machinery of global capitalism, their aesthetic import and the scope of their sensuous apprehension is far from explored or tapped. Extant research confirms the existence of these spaces as third places/spaces—socially produced places that symbolize a sense of place and communal solidarity beyond an individual's immediate dwellings (first place) and work spaces (second place).³ Further, scholars such as Kenneth Burke

and Jürgen Habermas acknowledge the potential of these sociodiscursive sites and parlors (albeit rife in endless debates and dissent) as spaces of the public sphere that welcome all their denizens to inspire consensus-driven political actions.⁴

Considering the vibrant potential of these self-same cultural and commonplace spaces of coffee shops, I consider American pragmatist philosopher John Dewey's theorizing in *Art as Experience* to explore their aesthetic promise. Even though Dewey utilizes the arts to develop his theory of aesthetic experience, his work also opens creative space to consider other ordinary but artful activities through which such experiences may be experienced habitually.⁵ That is my warrant to explore coffee shops—as everyday works of art that forge the spatial and temporal elements in these social and aesthetically rich spaces of enjoyment, reflection, togetherness, identity formation, and affective nourishment.

In this article, I link the classic Deweyan idea of “having *an* experience,” including its definitive inauguration and movements punctuated with rhythms, flows, “pauses, places of rest . . .”⁶ and consummation, with Kathleen Stewart's contemporary work on ordinary affects described as those rhythmic sensibilities “that give everyday life the quality of a continual motion of relations, scenes, contingencies and emergences.”⁷ In other words, ordinary affects are precisely that—ordinary encounters, movements, and rhythms passing through and between everyday spaces and bodies, imbuing living with its palpable and felt intensities prior to symbolic articulation. Mapping Dewey's rich description of aesthetic experiences onto affective circuits of the everyday and the ordinary in coffee shops highlights the communicative and enriching promise of habitual interchanges between everyday people in and with everyday spaces. Together, everyday aesthetics and ordinary affects generate a rich modality for rediscovering the sensuous vitality and harmony of body and mind amidst ordinary environments—an ethos central to Dewey's idea of aesthetic experiences. Jim Garrison supports such an idea in his discussion of Dewey's work on emotion that brought together thought and affect in activity or action.⁸ And while Garrison focuses on the “neurophysiological” aspects of Dewey's theory of emotion,⁹ in exploring coffee shops as my spatio-temporal exemplar of aesthetic and affective experiences, I illustrate both the physical/individual and social factors that shape and are shaped by everyday habits in such spaces. In doing so, I promote the vitality of coffee shops from mere public third spaces entailing “the charge that is paid in cappuccinos”¹⁰ to spaces with unexplored, aesthetically rich potential.¹¹ Clearly, it is becoming increasingly impossible to ignore the enriching potentialities of ordinary activities, choices, routines, rhythms, experiences, identities,¹² and personal and daily social habits that may abound in a coffee shop in a city, which is every coffee shop in every city, on a day which is everyday.

In the experience that leads to (but also ensues from) Dewey's aesthetic orchestration, I start in the raw with Kathleen Stewart's work in *Ordinary Affects* to show why the coupling with Dewey is important. I utilize this coupling to demonstrate

the potentialities of everyday coffee shops for rich aesthetic experiences based on Dewey's experiential theory of aesthetics in *Art as Experience*. Secondly, working from a foundation of ordinary affects and everyday aesthetics, I discuss potential hurdles to such experiences owing to both individual and social habits that may result from the ongoing interchanges between people and spaces. Finally, in response to such hurdles, I offer an idea of personal and social growth in the Deweyan sense, from his *Experience and Education*, that offers a pragmatic approach to overcoming these hurdles. Such growth ultimately illustrates the way daily activity of visiting a coffee shop can offer a genuinely educative, aesthetic experience.

Ordinary Affects: Raw Material for Aesthetic Experiences

"The answers cannot be found, unless we are willing to find germs and roots in matters of experience that we do not currently regard as esthetic . . . It should just be a commonplace that esthetic understanding—as distinct from sheer personal enjoyment—must start with soil, air, and light out of which things esthetically admirable arise."—Dewey on *"The Live Creature"*¹³

The reason I suggest that Stewart's notion of ordinary affects speaks to Dewey's work is based on his thoughts in reference to having *an* experience in *Art as Experience*:

Experience occurs continuously, because the interaction of live creature and enviring conditions is involved in the very process of living . . . Because of continuous merging, there are no holes, mechanical junctions, and dead centers when we have an experience. There are pauses, places of rest, but they punctuate and define the quality of movement.¹⁴

Stewart provides a complement to Dewey's ideas on experience when she refers to a "something [that] throws itself together in a moment as an event and a sensation . . . both animated and inhabitable."¹⁵ Could seeking Stewart's "something," both *animated and inhabitable*, amount to finding the germs and roots of *an* experience in Dewey overlooked as unaesthetic? I think so. That something is nothing but *soil, air, and light*—the raw materials with the *potential* to create a processual aesthetic experience through what Stewart considers ordinary affects. As well as being a processual motion of relations, scenes, contingencies, and emergences, ordinary affects are "a shifting assemblage of practices and practical knowledges, a scene of both liveliness and exhaustion . . . the stuff that seemingly intimate lives are made of."¹⁶ To fit into Dewey's aesthetic scheme, the raw materials, as ordinary affects, must come together in unity and emotional wholeness, or else fall by the wayside as unaesthetic experience. But, for Dewey, *an* experience is a continual, habitual interaction between the environment and the organism with a definite initiation, successive flow of one part after another, bookended with a consummation that then precisely marks the experience as aesthetic. In Dewey's words from *Experience and Education*:

... all human experience is ultimately social: that it involves contact and communication . . . It ought not to be necessary to say that experience does not occur in a vacuum. There are sources outside an individual which give rise to experience. It is constantly fed from these springs.¹⁷

Dewey's observations imply that the orientations of both place and person toward each other determine the sustenance and fate of everyday aesthetics. Through their shifting assemblages of practices and practical knowledge, ordinary affects connect bodies and social spaces, habituated to each other in both liveliness and exhaustion. As a result, ordinary affects can be inexhaustible resources for better understanding everyday aesthetics. For example, as Stewart notes,

[Ordinary affects] happen in impulses, sensations, expectations, day-dreams, encounters, and *habits* of relating, in strategies and their failures, in forms of persuasion, contagion, and compulsion, in modes of attending, attachment, and agency, and in publics and social worlds of all kinds that catch people up in something that feels like *something*.¹⁸

In the multiplicity of ways that Stewart addresses ordinary affects, their underlying commonality is movement or motion of some kind regardless of whether it leads to the fruition of some larger endeavor. For Dewey, the movement in an aesthetic experience is due to emotions which he calls "significant . . . qualities . . . of a complex experience that moves and changes."¹⁹ These significant qualities of emotion, from Stewart's perspective, "can be experienced as pleasure and a shock . . . funny, traumatic, perturbing," all exemplifying "actual lines of potential . . . [those] pressure points of events or banalities suffered."²⁰ In *Art as Experience*, Dewey further writes, "emotions are attached to events and objects in their movement," which is why *an* experience is tinged with emotion.²¹ And what is the primal source of these emotive movements or energetic impulses that attach themselves to events and objects and can lead to aesthetic experiences? For Richard Shusterman, the primal source would be the body or soma, "the living, sentient, purposive body" that culminates in what he terms *somaesthetics*, the transformative and embodied philosophy of aesthetic appreciation, perception, and consciousness.²² Hence, it is one's somatic energy that fuels aesthetic experience and provides the motive force that Stewart attributes to ordinary affects—ones that "give circuits and flows the forms of life."²³ With this understanding of what is involved in the coupling of ordinary affects and Deweyan aesthetics, the next section sheds light on what it means to have an aesthetic experience in coffee shops. That is, it explains the ordinary affects of everyday aesthetics in a coffee shop.

Having an Experience: Ordinary Affects of Everyday Aesthetics in a Coffee Shop

What does it mean to experience the ordinary affects of everyday aesthetics in coffee shops? What exactly is it in coffee shops that makes them about more than just

coffee, turning them into third places with the ordinary affective potential for rich aesthetic experiences? Ordinary affects, when understood in terms of the “third meaning”—“immanent, obtuse and erratic” meanings as opposed to conventional meanings of “semantic message and symbolic signification”²⁴—resonate with continuity of aesthetic experiences that can define coffee shops as third places. There is almost a sensuous quality to “the feelings [that] ordinary affects “make possible” as third meanings, especially “in the way that they pick up density and texture” while navigating “bodies, dreams, dramas, and social worldings.”²⁵ In Deweyan terms, ordinary affects point toward mentally and somatically attuned interactions with an immediate environment that exemplifies “ebb and flow, systole and diastole; ordered change.”²⁶ All these ordinary affects can exemplify the rhythmic nature of an activity as simple as a morning or afternoon visit to one’s campus or neighborhood coffee shop. The following words from Dewey further demonstrate the connection between ordinary affects and everyday aesthetics when applied to processes of daily living, including an individual’s habitual visits to social spaces of communicative interchanges with both persons and places:

We do not have to travel to the ends of the earth nor return many millennia in time to find peoples for whom every thing that intensifies the sense of immediate living is an object of intense admiration.²⁷—Dewey on “The Live Creature”

Could there be a Deweyan sentiment that better encompasses a sizable range of the almost mundane and commonplace tasks of going to a campus or neighborhood coffee shop just to get coffee, work, chat, or philosophize to the ends of the earth? Perhaps not. Yet this mundane and everyday pursuit, which might silently scream of drudgery, can turn into an aesthetic experience if the human organism habituates itself to intensify its sense of immediate living in its immediate environments. However, the onus is not just on the subjective experience of the individual, since she or he is always interacting with an environment that shapes her or his experience. The idea is for both contributors to attend to and nurture the daily rhythm, its density, and the texture that inaugurates, navigates, and consummates that habitual visit to a coffee shop, complete with communicative gestures, bodies, dreams, dramas, and social worldings. For instance, consider the habitual impact of social spaces. Recent research on coffee shops finds that coffee acts as a social drug.²⁸ Notwithstanding the feelings of loneliness and emptiness that any social space can engender, coffee shops also strongly signify relational attachment because they are physical and symbolic spaces for everyday contemplation, communicative interchange, the building of cultural capital, and a sense of belonging and hospitality other than one’s home or office.²⁹

Equally important is the role of the human organism that partakes in not just the ritual of consuming coffee, but also of the time and space where these rituals are habitually performed. As Kristopher Philips writes, the organism’s sole domain

is a “mysterious . . . what-it’s-likeness”—“the qualitative subjective experience”³⁰ of drinking that “cup of Joe” in either a cardboard or more ceramic vessel, in a coffee shop in a city, which is every coffee shop in every city. Without the organism’s embodied interactions, these environmental spaces would just remain skeletal and impoverished, unable to provide the rich aesthetic experiences that I contend coffee shops can provide. Understandably, the habitual orchestration of the social with the personal, of space with the human organism, feeds into the organic possibility of experiencing the ordinary affects of everyday aesthetics (and vice-versa) in coffee shops. For example, Catherine Tucker’s observations about a coffee shop in Guatemala City, in her work *Coffee Culture*, illustrate how the ordinary affects of everyday aesthetics are “a tangle of potential connections,” “both flighty and hardwired, shifty and unsteady but palpable too.”³¹ Tucker writes:

I am seated at one of the small tables, checking my email through the shop’s free WiFi and drinking a delicious latte . . . Conversations create a quiet background murmur, and the shop maintains a comfortable ambience with stained wood décor, stylish wall art with a coffee theme, sofas and easy chairs around low coffee tables, and small circular tables with simple wooden chairs. I shut down my laptop, slip it into the case, and set my coffee mug on the counter. “Gracias,” I say to the friendly barista.³²

Tucker’s account offers just one of the many everyday examples of the way people interact with their coffee house environments, bolstering my claim about having *an* experience, in the Deweyan sense, by attending to the ordinary affects of everyday aesthetics. Her account heightens Stewart’s claim that the ordinary “registers . . . intensities—regularly, intermittently, urgently or as a slight shudder.”³³ The regular, intermittent, urgent intensities of life’s flux and flow are the conversations, the shuffling of sofas and chairs to make room for people arriving and departing, the aroma of coffee and the clinking of coffee cups, the grinding of beans, the laughter, the discussions . . . the slight shudder on the back of the spine due to the cold winter wind. There is nothing novel about her description, but its ordinary affects brim with the qualitative immediacy of lived and embodied experience—the hallmark of everyday aesthetics. Tucker’s experience resonates with Dewey’s account of “a combination of movement and culmination, of breaks and re-unions [with her schedule]” because of which, “[her] experience is capable of esthetic quality.”³⁴ Tucker’s commonplace experience calls our attention to what Edward Soja terms his third space concept—one that “capture[s] . . . a constantly shifting and changing milieu of ideas, appearances, and meanings.”³⁵

When we think of coffee shops as fluid third spaces, the third meaning of ordinary affects relates more closely to the potential for aesthetic experiences in the same spaces, rife with movement and change. The third meaning in its commonplace raw materials comes from those background murmurs caused by the ordinary affects of impulses and sensations, as well as more place-specific multiple

customer orders—both tall and short—the art on walls, and the fleeting goodbyes to the barista, as they cumulatively inspire and consummate a continuous aesthetic experience in a third place, a coffee shop. Coffee shops offer a tangle of potential connections between the organism and her environment—culminating in an aesthetic experience. Better yet, Tucker’s experience hearkens back to Ani DiFranco’s poetic lyrics. Tucker is writing about a coffee shop in Guatemala City, but it could easily be a coffee shop in a city, which is every coffee shop in every city on a day which is everyday—which is in fact the latent beauty of having an aesthetic experience. Of course, this depends on the interaction between the environment and the human organism: an aesthetic experience, as the third meaning, reflects *living-in-process*, anywhere and everywhere—more so in third places such as coffee shops. Even with all the possibilities for everyday aesthetics, with their ordinary affects, Dewey wisely observes that, “life is no uniform uninterrupted march of flow.”³⁶ Not all social spaces qualify as nourishing, as socially or culturally inviting, as one would like to believe. Thus, sometimes space disrupts the rhythm of our experience. Likewise, sometimes individuals and relevant others in communicative interchanges fall prey to mental and somatic habits that dull the senses and inhibit the cultivation and appreciation of everyday aesthetics and their ordinary affects. In the following section, I discuss some such social and individual hurdles to aesthetic experiences in coffee shops. To overcome the obstacles, I eventually discuss Dewey’s views on growth and their connection with educative and aesthetic experiences in the context of coffee shops.

Having an Experience: Potential Hurdles

Ray Oldenburg laments the capitalistic onslaught of governmental and corporate behemoths (for example Starbucks, Dunkin Donuts) and their space standardization, which might compromise the unique aesthetic promise of these spaces.³⁷ Mark Pendergrast echoes Oldenburg’s critique in the context of 18th century British coffee houses, which were not all “universally uplifting places [but in fact] chaotic, smelly, wildly energetic, and capitalistic.”³⁸ To that end, Oldenburg believes that, ideally, third places signify those spaces that are community- friendly, local, and relatively small in size.³⁹

If coffee brand or chain standardization more than offsets consumers’ promise of experiencing a uniquely quirky leisure and workspace, the former also forecloses on consumer appreciation and socialization by way of economic, geographic (e.g., pricing or location), and technological factors. This, despite the fact that the modern coffee shop, as a third place for Habermasian opinion formation, may have come a long way from being “exclusively bourgeois and male in character, with seated patrons being served by the waiters.”⁴⁰ For example, while Morris points out the racial homogeneity of coffee shops in the United States, which cater to “white middle-class clientele,”⁴¹ he also notes the role of the ambient environment

in drawing in consumers over and above coffee. In a similar tone, Asaf Bar-Tura laments that technological advances stoke individuals' capacity for separate-togetherness, as opposed to coming together in coffeehouses because of digital pre-occupations, such as laptops, the web, and online music.⁴² For all of the potential hurdles to being attuned to the ordinary affects of aesthetic experiences in everyday spaces like coffee shops, there are pragmatic ways of overcoming such hurdles.

Having an Experience: Overcoming Potential Hurdles through Educative and Aesthetic Experiences of Growth

Dewey's views on growth through educative experiences in *Experience and Education* are keys to illustrating further the connection between aesthetic experiences and living-in-process/progress that coffee shops can offer. By tracing the trajectories of scholarly works that explore Dewey's views on "communication, creativity, democratic community, religion, and gender," Jim Garrison foregrounds Dewey's theory of aesthetics in his oeuvre.⁴³ For Garrison, Dewey's aesthetics herald "Education and the New scholarship on John Dewey,"⁴⁴ which David Granger takes up in observing the scholarly inclination toward revisiting Dewey's aesthetics, among other related works. Likewise, Granger supports the fruitful connection between Dewey's aesthetics and his reflections on education, stressing Dewey's community-congealing ethic, through which educative experiences can be more aesthetically attuned to the ordinary and the everyday and, ultimately, more qualitatively enriching.⁴⁵ The academic re-turn to Dewey's aesthetics supports my claim that educative experiences can be conceived as aesthetic experiences if we consider the Deweyan notion of growth as a bridging component. Among other scholars, Scott Stroud's schema of activity⁴⁶ as aesthetic experience engages precisely with Deweyan growth to show how living-in-process, manifested in third places such as coffee shops, speaks to "the pleasurable activity of the journey" through "doings and sufferings that are universally recognized to constitute experience."⁴⁷ In the final section of this article, I discuss this concept of growth from a Deweyan perspective and then offer as evidence the affective and aesthetic import of "growth as education and education as growth" in coffee shops.⁴⁸

In *Experience and Education*, Dewey suggests that growth mediates the connection between education and experience. For Dewey, this growth, which takes a particular trajectory and direction through educative experiences, is "an active participle [of] growing," which means cultivating those habits of mind and body that help one discriminate between educative and miseducative experiences marking the "principle of continuity or the experiential continuum."⁴⁹ This continuity continually interweaves experiences from the past with those of the present and future. Similarly, the habits that constitute the continuity of one's experiences in life, and consequently growth, are not formed in a vacuum and depend equally on their interaction with the environment that shapes them, which is transformed in return.

That is to say, educative experiences contribute to the growth and quality of those future experiences that are connected to past experiences and generate habitually focused energy, whereas “mis-educative” experiences retard this growth.⁵⁰ Stroud applauds Dewey for aligning growth with aesthetic experience, as it allows scholars to “extend the aesthetic to virtually any activity.”⁵¹ Growth here is the “felt quality” of an aesthetic experience through the organism’s overcoming of obstacles that the environment throws its way—that is, the habitual interchange of self and sociality.⁵² By way of growth, an experience becomes the aesthetic reward of the “interaction of organism and environment,” transforming the former into “participation and communication”—a living-in-process.⁵³

What is important to note here is that miseducative and unaesthetic experiences lack a certain rhythmic consistency, whereby one experiential part does not flow from initiation to consummation. Thus, despite the liveliness of isolated experiences, they are miseducative (and by extension unaesthetic) because “their disconnectedness may artificially generate dispersive, disintegrated, centrifugal habits.”⁵⁴ Of course, in *Experience and Education*, Dewey focuses exclusively on issues of education. He offers an interactive view of what he calls progressive education grounded in lived experience, as opposed to the “either-or” philosophy that drives traditional education and dismisses the value of these interactive, intermediary experiences in favor of imposing top-down approaches.⁵⁵ Yet, since Dewey insists equally that education and “actual experience” are intricately and intimately interwoven, highlighting the social character of education, his idea of growth through educative experiences can be extrapolated to aesthetic experiences in coffee shops.⁵⁶ After all, coffee shops thrive on communicative rituals within a particular space; their everyday visitors and customary rhythms of inhabiting this space illustrate the educative and aesthetic potential of growing through communicative interchanges in the same spaces. The remainder of my argument focuses on how this educative and aesthetic potential of growth unfolds in coffee shops.

Educative and Aesthetic Experiences of Growth in Coffee Shops

In the context of a daily visit to an everyday, ordinary coffee shop, all of the ensuing communicative rituals between person and place have an organic and rhythmic unity because they begin with a daily visit and consummate themselves when the exchange between person and place is over. For example, an organism’s need for an invigorating cup of coffee every morning, coupled with friendly baristas who, over time, start predicting her or his choice of beverage in an ambience that is conducive to contemplation and his or her well-being, are all simple habitual interchanges. It also does not hurt when, in between performing the mundane task of buying and selling that everyday cup of coffee, the organism and her or his environment *make time* for brief communicative exchanges. However, and more poignantly, these precise interchanges between the coffee shop visitor and other inhabitants of the

coffee shop milieu denote an educative and aesthetic experience for both for the following reason. The interchanges exemplify the active participle of growing as they reenforce the cultivation of those individual and social habits (of both person and place) that will prompt the same pleasant habitual interchanges in the future based on the felt quality of past pleasantries. These interchanges can be said to embody *centripetal habits*, habits that coalesce or “round out” an experience in its educative and aesthetic quality, as opposed to Deweyan *centrifugal habits* resulting from miseducative experiences. The development of this centripetal intimacy between person and place serves an educative and aesthetic purpose because it coalesces both in constituting a third place, the comfortable dwelling that one visits everyday, as an integral and mutual part of one’s individual and social habits.

The notion of centripetal intimacy can be especially useful when one finds oneself in a coffee shop in a city, which is every coffee shop in every city, on a day which is every day, without the aesthetic and affective charm of the small and local that Oldenberg associates with third places. What happens to aesthetic and affective experiences if someone lives in a city, town, or village where the promise of the aesthetic is only possible in a standardized chain, such as Starbucks or Dunkin Donuts? Can the interactions of individuals and environments in such uniform spaces compromise the ordinary affects of everyday aesthetics that Dewey so strongly promotes?

As one possibility, I would contest the snare of capitalistic uniformity by reenforcing a melioristic (and centripetally intimate) habituation of organisms to everyday spaces, and vice versa, in which one pursues the best available path in sound and sight without disregarding the good and bad components of the situation at hand. To be sure, a standardized coffee shop may have a cookie cutter layout and the spatial representation may seem too impersonal. However, spaces thrive because of the tangle of potential connections of animated bodies that imbue sensibilia with the rich flavors of qualitative immediacy made possible by self and others. In such cases, individuals can focus on developing centripetal intimacies with their barista or other workers in a coffee shop chain. Such can transmute the standardized blandness into personable moments that inspire one to visit that chain. In that case, spatial standardization is merely an obstacle that can be overcome. The self and others can habituate their relation to the growth of aesthetic and educative experiences among a tangle of potential connections in spaces where customization is outside of one’s control. Likewise, the baristas/employees can draw individuals to standardized spaces through their singular habits of attention to the collective space, and meliorate the situation at hand by focusing on communal experiences that celebrate the power of the everyday and the ordinary. Furthermore, this centripetal intimacy between person and place can help both discern the nature of miseducative and anesthetic experiences in another coffee shop, where this ordinary yet cordial sense of sociality is amiss from the first moment of an interchange. In other words, both person and place lack a rhythmic consistency in their interchange (e.g., the person or baristas

are inattentive or peevish, the music and sound in the space is too overstimulating, the space is poorly lit) that may still produce a singular if isolated lively experience in that visit. Yet, this still retards the growth of future educative and aesthetic experiences in this coffee shop because it generates disintegrated, decentered, dispersed, and centrifugal habits of attention in both person and place.

When considering one's daily visit to that neighborhood coffee shop, all of the aforementioned processes start and cease everyday in a similar temporal and spatial order. Yet somehow they are all unique, too, insofar as they entertain subtle changes and "chance event[s] [that] might add a layer of conflict or daydream to things."⁵⁷ Dewey speaks of these changes as doings and undergoings in experience, punctuated by preparation and cessation, that give living- in-process its characteristic rhythm. As Dewey further notes, "each resting place [of cessation] in experience is an undergoing" that emerges from a former doing.⁵⁸ Together, these convergences and divergences constitute the everyday experience of visiting the same space—rich in the same somatic impulses, rhythms, sensations, disjunctures, flows—and create a non-foundational unity, balance, and meaning for the participating organism. Or as Dewey puts it, the ebb and flow, systole and diastole, inauguration and consummation of and in experience.

The idea of educative and aesthetic experiences in coffee shops can be pursued further, as Stroud suggests: (1) through "the activity itself as a medium" in a contingent reality and (2) through the organism's mental habits and orientations. Both of these are crucial ways "of artfully or skillfully rendering activity as aesthetic."⁵⁹ And both, as Stroud suggests, are consistent with "aesthetic experience in pragmatist aesthetics—a way of going about activity that gives it the unity, balance and meaning," similar to Dewey's analysis of artistic media.⁶⁰ That is to say, a coffee shop as a third place, just like any other socially produced space, offers the organisms interacting with it a space for creating what Henri Lefebvre calls moments of "play, love, work, rest, struggle, knowledge, poetry . . ."—absolute conduits "for thinking and living."⁶¹ Since these moments emanate from interactions between organisms and their environments, the former assume communicative forms embedded in "social relationships and forms of individualized consciousness."⁶² As Lefebvre suggests, "each moment, a modality of presence" also entails the possibility of alienation, in which case the modality of presence becomes an absence.⁶³ I utilize Lefebvre's account in my claim that educative and aesthetic experiences in coffee shops stem from those interactive activities as media, which channel these *communicative moments as absolute modalities of presence*, regardless of their ephemerality or intensity, because these "moments exist in the deepest parts of nature, animate or inanimate."⁶⁴

From a Deweyan perspective, these communicative moments, which connect person and place through their interactions as media, can be considered largely habitual. Understandably, the moments can either grow in the direction of future

modalities of presence as centripetal intimacies between person and place in coffee shops or retard growth through their decentered and centrifugal habits, resulting in miseducative and unaesthetic activities mediating everyday experiences. Likewise, as Stroud astutely observes, despite the promise of an aesthetic experience in an artful activity, we still “struggle to attain this heightened notion of unity, quality and build” in our everyday activities.⁶⁵ As living-in-process would have it, we cannot blame the contingent reality and the apparent ill will of the environment every time—the coffee shop cannot always be poorly lit, malodorous, or the baristas simply rude! Dewey attributes the disjunction of experience to the following characteristics, which, for Stroud, connote an organism’s rhythmic inconsistency in interacting with her surroundings:

H]umdrum; slackness of loose ends; submission to convention in practice and intellectual procedure. Rigid abstinence, coerced submission, tightness on one side and dissipation, incoherence and aimless indulgence on the other, are deviations . . .⁶⁶

While the subject’s lack of integration with the environment may be the result of its maladaptive subjective mental and bodily habits, the environment, its rhythm and social habits impact it equally, and are in turn impacted by the individuals acting within it. The lack of integration is precisely Lefebvre’s explanation for why rich modalities of presence, such as a “form of communication, becomes a form of isolation and incommunicability.”⁶⁷ However, the isolation is never one-way. Communicative alienation is relational and social, which contributes to miseducative and anesthetic experiences for both person and place in coffee shops. On the other hand, to have educative and aesthetic experiences in a coffee shop, person and place can be attuned to each other’s activities as media. Person and place can sensitize their whole gamut of ordinary affects, impulses, disjunctures, and flows of communicative moments (both good and bad) to the quality of presence of that everyday experience. To exemplify my theoretical grounds here, consider the following detailed snippet of an educative and aesthetic experience from my daily morning schedule at a coffee shop in a city, which is every coffee shop in every city, on a day which is everyday:

It’s 9 am and I walk into my everyday coffee shop. I already have a smile on my face because I know that I will be greeted with everyday yet enthusiastic hellos (an absolute moment of habitual recognition between person and place and the warmth of mutual hospitality). Friendly vibrations every morning are somehow important. Crucial. I enter and the baristas behind the counter greet me warmly, all smiling—hey, it’s you!!! (A moment of play.) I say my hellos back in my shy but quaintly happy demeanor—while also smiling very warmly. It helps plenty that we all know each other’s names, especially on days when there’s no place to sit or stand. Habitual recognition minimizes complaining.

After waiting for a while (because today the place is bustling with peoples and energies) I go up to the counter and order the same coffee and bean-avocado-pico on a wheat taco, pausing in between to ask how the barista is doing. We talk about the weather—maybe even share a joke or two. The conversation is not life-altering in anyone's scheme of life, but it keeps us tethered to the *present moment* and we laugh together from deep within our soma. I am not working there today, but like everyday after paying, I pick up my coffee to then leave. (On some days, I get my morning coffee free of charge, because for some reason it's Sunday J day!!).

I don't even have to ask, but like magical clockwork (which is really the power of individual and social habits), on the counter next to the bar, a box of soymilk is sitting so contentedly! I am grateful that the barista remembered what I needed. I thank her profusely and then it's time to say goodbye for the day. Tomorrow, I would re-inaugurate this little ritual and it would follow the same rhythm all the way to its consummation.

The encounter that I have recounted is not really self-congratulatory magic, but rather an educative and aesthetic experience initiated and consummated everyday without any extra cost. This situation involves precisely the sort of centripetal intimacy between person and place that coalesces or rounds out one's experience in its educative and aesthetic quality. The ordinary and everyday experience exemplifies the active participle of growing, as it reinforces the cultivation of those individual and social habits (of both person and place) that will prompt the same pleasant habitual interchanges in the future based on the felt quality of present (and past) pleasantries. The baristas' minor but exceptionally kind habituation to my everyday needs (which could be to any other person) is an example of an educative and aesthetic experience that attests to what Lefebvre considers "the idea of reciprocal immanence between the sociological and the individual."⁶⁸ Each of the ordinary affects and communicative moments feeds into this embodied interaction between the coffee shop environment, its baristas—the sociological—and me, the coffee shop goer as the everyday individual. Nonetheless, the interaction highlights the value of the everyday, the commonplace vitally important to a reciprocal aesthetic experience.

It is discursively impossible to describe the qualitative richness embedded in the minutiae of everyday interactions and ordinary affects. Yet this example demonstrates the power of individual habits, in attunement first with one's social habits and consequently of the social and physical space which is in constant interaction with the individual. I second Stroud's suggestion not to focus on the "aesthetic object," such as a mere cup of coffee or a long line in front of the counter, but on "what habits create what quality of present experience."⁶⁹ A mutual, rhythmic, and habitual interchange between the organism and the environment, based on a ritualistic initiation, navigation, and consummation of everyday experiences, can create

an aesthetic quality in one's experience in coffee shops. As a result, the habits of self, and of the space that constitutes others in interaction with self, feed into each other's rhythms and contribute to mutual growth that inspires future visits to the same coffee shop as a third place. The habits that focus on the everyday quality of present experience do so by "a better distribution of its elements and instants into 'moments'" [that augment] the vital performance of everyday, its capacity for communication . . . by defining new modes of enjoyment in natural and social life."⁷⁰

Individual orientations and habits of space grounded in lived experience may seem too commonplace to cultivate or merely offer reductive explanations for something as complex as an educative and aesthetic experience. Yet if we begin to break them down into their qualitative richness, their tangle of potential connections and the ordinary affects of everyday aesthetics and communicative moments, the difference between educative, miseducative, aesthetic, and unaesthetic experiences truly appears. The difference is easier to discern because of Dewey's own approach to pragmatism and aesthetics, whereby both person and place can sustain educative and aesthetic experiences as part of their habitual apparatus in everyday spaces such as coffee shops, regardless of personal and social constraints. This is because Dewey's pragmatism is neither optimistic nor pessimistic. It is melioristic—availing itself of "lived experience" that has both "good and bad elements"⁷¹—which is why Dewey writes the following, which resonates harmoniously with my counter-claims:

As an organism increases in complexity, the rhythms of struggle and consummation in its relation to its environment are varied and prolonged, and they come to include within themselves an endless variety of sub-rhythms . . . There are more opportunities for resistance and tension, more drafts upon experimentation and invention, and therefore more novelty in action . . . The designs of living are widened and enriched. Fulfillment is more massive and more subtly shaded.⁷²

Dewey's words here are deeply meaningful for having an educative and aesthetic experience in an everyday coffee shop because the obstacles to its fulfillment are that pervasive and that much more subtly shaded in the context of growth for a complex organism. There is more commodification of third places, more technology pervading the interaction between coffee shops and their everyday visitors. There are more mental distractions inhibiting the everyday barista's habitually kind acclimation to one's beverage needs or the little gratitude the coffee shop visitor could extend to the barista in return. But by overcoming these obstacles ordinarily and habitually, growth is possible for both as melioristic educative and aesthetic experiences in third places. This is why Dewey's words are in fact a call to arms, to cultivate those ordinary lived experiences that intensify immediate living and embrace communicative moments of complete presence in such spaces. As Dewey notes,

Space thus becomes something more than a void in which to roam about, dotted here and there with dangerous things that satisfy the appetite. It becomes a comprehensive scene within which are ordered the multiplicity of doings and undergoings in which man engages.⁷³

Coffee shops as third places become spaces offering more than a void of technological isolation, alone-togetherness, or the satiation of our caffeine needs. Coffee shops can be educative and aesthetic third spaces for co-conspiring contemplative leisure between person and place, where all our ordinary affects, their impulses, “energetic” doings, and “acute and “intense” undergoings mirror each other through an interactive reciprocity.⁷⁴ Educative and aesthetic experiences steeped in processual thoughtfulness then permeate the interaction between the organism and her environment. These habitual interchanges take place in the direction of growth that is based on past communicative moments of presence and that inspires future visits to a coffee shop in a city, which is every coffee shop in every city, on a day which is everyday.

CONCLUSION

My primary purpose with this study was to explore the aesthetic potential of coffee shops as everyday spaces over and beyond their well-researched socioeconomic and political import in the public sphere. Essentially, I broached a discussion that highlights the qualitative immediacy of lived and embodied communicative experience possible in everyday coffee shops as third places—something easily overlooked in the academy. To demonstrate the rich potential of coffee shops as spaces conducive to the immersive doings and undergoings of contemplative leisure, I sought the counsel of American pragmatist philosopher John Dewey, mainly from *Art as Experience*, coupling his work on everyday aesthetics with Kathleen Stewart’s contemporary commentary on ordinary affects. This collaborative coupling between everyday aesthetics and ordinary affects, particularly as understood in the context of coffee shops, contributes to the field of pragmatist aesthetics by demonstrating in detail how everyday aesthetics can be mapped onto the affective circuits of habitual interchanges between person and place. In other words, ordinary affects illustrate the subtle movement of everyday aesthetics in spaces like coffee shops that one may visit daily as a part of habit. In this paper, I seconded Dewey’s mission “of recovering the continuity of esthetic experience with normal processes of living”⁷⁵ through the example of coffee shops as works of everyday art in everyday experiences.

In this journey of aesthetic recovery, I first linked Kathleen Stewart’s work in *Ordinary Affects* to Dewey’s *Art as Experience* to show why their coupling is both important and valuable. I utilized this collaboration to demonstrate the potential of everyday coffee shops to offer rich aesthetic experiences, based on Dewey’s

aesthetics in *Art as Experience*. Secondly, on the basis of ordinary affects and everyday aesthetics, I discussed potential hurdles to such experiences owing to both the individual and social habits that result from communicative interchanges among people and spaces. Finally, in response to these hurdles, I ended my discussion by stressing personal and social growth in the Deweyan sense, from his *Experience and Education*, as it might offer a pragmatic approach to overcoming these hurdles. The idea of growth ultimately illustrated how the daily activity of visiting a coffee shop in a city, which is every coffee shop in every city, on a day which is everyday, can still promise an educative and aesthetic experience.

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NOTES

1. Ani DiFranco, "Little Plastic Castle," in *Little Plastic Castle*, Righteous Babe Records, 1998, compact disc.
2. Jonathan Morris, "Coffeehouse Formats through the Centuries: Third Places or Public Spaces?" in *Coffee: A Comprehensive Guide to the Bean, the Beverage, and the Industry*, ed. Robert W. Thurston et al. (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2013), 252.
3. Henri Lefebvre, "History, Time and Space," in *Henri Lefebvre: Key Writings*, ed. Stuart Elden, et al. (New York: Continuum, 2003); Morris, "Coffeehouse," 252; Ray Oldenburg, *Celebrating the Third Place: Inspiring Stories about the Great Good Places at the Heart of Our Communities* (New York: Marlowe, 2001), xvii; Edward W. Soja, *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places* (Cambridge: Blackwell, 1996); Lisa Waxman, "The Coffee Shop: Social and Physical Factors Influencing Place Attachment," *Journal of Interior Design* 31 (2006): 37.
4. Asaf Bar-Tura, "The Coffeehouse as a Public Sphere," in *Coffee Philosophy for Everyone: Grounds for Debate*, ed. Fritz Allhoff, Scott F. Parker, et al. (Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 90; Kenneth Burke, *The Philosophy of Literary Form: Studies in Symbolic Action*, 3rd ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973), 110–11; Jürgen Habermas. *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1991), 59.
5. Scott R. Stroud, "The Art of Experience: Dewey on the Aesthetic," in *Practicing Pragmatist Aesthetics*, ed. Wojciech Malecki. (New York: Rodopi, 2014), 38–40.
6. John Dewey. *Art as Experience* (New York: Perigee Books, 1934), 36–37.
7. Kathleen Stewart, *Ordinary Affects* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 2.
8. Jim Garrison, "Dewey's Theory of Emotions: The Unity of Thought and Emotion in Naturalistic Functional 'Co-ordination' of Behavior," *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society* 39 (2003): 406.

9. Ibid.
10. Jonathan Morris, "Coffee Shops," in *Encyclopedia of Consumer Culture*, ed. Dale Southerton, Vol. 1, Acculturation-Externalities (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Reference, 2011), 186, *Gale Virtual Reference Library*.
11. Ibid.
12. Dewey, *Art as Experience*, 12.
13. Morris, "Coffee Shops."
14. Dewey, *Art as Experience*, 36–38.
15. Stewart, *Ordinary Affects*, 1.
16. Ibid., 1–2.
17. John Dewey, *Experience and Education* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1950), 32–34.
18. Stewart, *Ordinary Affects*, 2.
19. Dewey, *Art as Experience*, 41.
20. Stewart, *Ordinary Affects*, 2.
21. Dewey, *Art as Experience*, 42.
22. Richard Shusterman, *Thinking through the Body: Essays in Somaesthetics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 3
23. Stewart, *Ordinary Affects*, 2.
24. Roland Barthes, *The Responsibility of Forms: Critical Essays on Music, Art, and Representation*, trans. Richard Howard (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985); Stewart, *Ordinary*, 3.
25. Stewart, *Ordinary Affects*, 3.
26. Dewey, *Art as Experience*, 16.
27. Ibid., 6.
28. Steven Topik, "Coffee as a Social Drug," *Cultural Critique* 71 (2009): 101.
29. Bar-Tura, "The Coffeehouse," 90; Morris, "Coffee Shops," 252; Waxman, "The Coffee Shop," 37; Topik, "Coffee as a Social Drug," 87; Catherine M. Tucker, *Coffee Culture: Local Experiences, Global Connections*, 1st ed. (New York: Routledge, 2011), 7.
30. Kristopher G. Philips, "The Unexamined Cup is not Worth Drinking," in *Coffee Philosophy for Everyone: Grounds for Debate*, ed. Fritz Allhoff, Scott F. Parker, et al. (Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 35.
31. Stewart, *Ordinary Affects*, 3–4.
32. Tucker, *Coffee Culture*, 3.
33. Stewart, *Ordinary Affects*, 10.
34. Dewey, *Art as Experience*, 17.
35. Soja, *Thirdspace*, 2.
36. Dewey, *Art as Experience*, 35.
37. Oldenburg, *Celebrating the Third Place*, 119.
38. Mark Pendergrast, "Black Puddle Water or Panacea?," in *Coffee Philosophy for Everyone: Grounds for Debate*, ed. Fritz Allhoff, Scott F. Parker, et al. (Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 14.
39. Oldenburg, *Celebrating the Third Place*, xvii–45.
40. Morris, "Coffee Shops," 186.
41. Ibid.
42. Bar-Tura, "The Coffeehouse," 94.

43. Jim Garrison, "Introduction: Education and the New Scholarship on John Dewey," *Studies in Philosophy and Education* 13 (1995;1994): 169, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/BF01077676>.
44. Ibid.; David Granger, "Expression, Imagination, and Organic Unity: John Dewey's Aesthetics and Romanticism," *Journal of Aesthetic Education* 37 (2003): 46.
45. David Granger, "Teaching Aesthetics and Aesthetic Teaching: Toward a Deweyan Perspective," *Journal of Aesthetic Education* 40 (2006): 45–46.
46. Stroud, "The Art of Experience," 40.
47. Dewey, *Art as Experience*, 3.
48. Dewey, *Experience and Education*, 29.
49. Ibid., 27–28.
50. Dewey, *Experience and Education*, 13.
51. Stroud, "The Art of Experience," 35.
52. Ibid.
53. Dewey, *Art as Experience*, 22.
54. Dewey, *Experience and Education*, 14.
55. Ibid., 6.
56. Dewey, *Experience and Education*, 7.
57. Stewart, *Ordinary Affects*, 12.
58. Dewey, *Art as Experience*, 56.
59. Stroud, "The Art of Experience," 39.
60. Ibid., 40.
61. Lefebvre, "History, Time, and Space," 170–175.
62. Ibid., 173.
63. Ibid., 175.
64. Lefebvre, "History, Time, and Space," 172.
65. Stroud, "The Art of Experience," 40.
66. Dewey, *Art as Experience*, 40.
67. Lefebvre, "History, Time, and Space," 175.
68. Lefebvre, "History, Time, and Space," 173.
69. Stroud, "The Art of Experience," 41.
70. Lefebvre, "History, Time, and Space," 175.
71. Stroud, "The Art of Experience," 45.
72. Dewey, *Art as Experience*, 23.
73. Ibid.
74. Dewey, *Art as Experience*, 50.
75. Dewey, *Art as Experience*, 10.

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