Instrumentalism and the Clichés of Aesthetic Education: A Deweyan Corrective

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Abstract

When we defend aesthetic education in instrumental terms or rely on clichés of creativity and imagination, we win at best a pyrrhic victory. To make a lasting place for the arts in education, we must critique the transmission model of education and the instrumentalist view of life that undergirds it. To help us perceive anew the nature and value of the aesthetic, I explore John Dewey's distinction between recognition and perception. Through a series of examples drawn from painting and poetry, I embody Dewey's theory and describe a number of artistic strategies for interrupting recognition and cultivating perception.

Habitualization devours works, clothes, furniture, one's wife, and the fear of war. "If the whole complex lives of many people go on unconsciously, then such lives are as if they had never been." And art exists that one may recover the sensation of life; it exists to make one feel things, to make the stone stony. The purpose of art is to impart the sensation of things as they are perceived and not as they are known. The technique of art is to make objects "unfamiliar," to make forms difficult, to increase the difficulty and length of perception....

―Viktor Shklovsky, “Art as Technique”

Introduction

This paper offers a fresh defense of aesthetic education. It explores the proposition that aesthetic experience is a crucial aspect of human flourishing and therefore an essential component of any conception of the educated person. The question that immediately arises for such a project, though, is why we need another defense of aesthetic education when we already have numerous studies that show the value of the arts in schools and extol the virtues of imagination and creativity as educational
ideals. One answer is that despite such efforts, the place of the arts in education remains as fragile as ever. In the current policy climate, where educational success is judged by reading and math test scores, the aesthetic dimensions of human experience seem at best to be irrelevant to the educational enterprise. Thus, I could justify this contribution on the grounds that the defense of aesthetic education is a Sisyphean task, and that the stone has once again come to rest at the bottom of the hill. While some may admire Sisyphus’s unflinching acceptance of futility, I propose that we reflect for a moment on the routes taken by others up this slope. Perhaps we can learn something about the peculiar gravity that affects us in this area.

We can identify two main strategies in the work on aesthetic education: what we might call, respectively, "the bureaucratic approach" and "the artsy approach." According to the bureaucratic approach, the only way to win a hearing for the arts is to speak the language recognized by those who control the funding. Thus, arts programs are shown to raise test scores of various sorts or to lead to skills in other, "academic" subjects. Though eminently prudent at first blush, this approach actually serves to reinforce the very conception of education that makes the perpetual defense of the aesthetic necessary. We must consider it a pyrrhic victory if we win another year’s funding for jazz band while further cementing the notion that education amounts to the transmission of discrete skills and information in the service of an instrumentalist picture of human life.

This is exactly what the artsy approach seeks to avoid. Declaring with Audre Lorde that you cannot use the master's tools to dismantle the master's house, the artsy approach sets out to defend the aesthetic in its own terms. Too often, though, this devolves into the mere use of aesthetic terms. We refer to artistic figures or aesthetic concepts without taking the time to embody them. Even scholarship on the importance of embodiment in teaching and learning is often couched in disembodied prose. We may cite Dewey, Merleau-Ponty, or Foucault on the body without taking the time to quote in detail and explicate with care. In humanistic writing, the point is never merely to say that someone has said something, but to show what the author has shown. The explication of texts is not some old-fashioned, pointless ritual, but one of our best safeguards against the danger that our ideas will become thin, disembodied slogans. We need to work not only with the names of thinkers or concepts but with the "body" of the text.

In its eagerness to point us toward the aesthetic qualities it so admires, the artsy approach too rarely takes this crucial step of embodying those qualities in its own discourse, forgetting for example that even the most interesting ideas can easily collapse into clichés. To choose an arbitrary example, Diaz and McKenna introduce their collection, Teaching for Aesthetic Experience, by noting: "As we search for connections and build knowledge through relationships with each other and our students, we trust in the process of artistic expression, a process that bathes us in wonder and mystery." The authors want us to feel the wonder and mystery that they themselves have experienced, but prose like this will not do the job. If we want to evoke wonder and mystery and not merely name them, we must find a way of writ-
ing that somehow accomplishes what Shklovsky calls for in the epigraph: to make the stone stony.\(^5\) We must constantly search for fresh and subtle and pungent ways to articulate ideas that are always in danger of growing stale, simplistic, lifeless, or worse. One day, in teaching my students about ancient Greek ethics, with its focus on human flourishing, I found myself repeatedly using the phrase "the good life." Then it suddenly occurred to me: I had become a walking, talking Citibank ad!

Ironically, then, the one thing that seems to unite our rival strategies for defending the aesthetic is that both of these rhetorical modes are themselves fundamentally anaesthetic. PowerPoint presentations about the effect of art classes on S.A.T. scores hide the aesthetic even as they defend the arts. If, however, we counter such bureaucratese with airy, sentimental invocations of beauty and wonder, we only exacerbate another problem. Whereas educational research and policy are prone to scientism, the culture of schools is characterized by sentimentality and cliché. In other words, the aesthetic can even be hidden behind talk of the aesthetic if such talk amounts to trading tokens of recognition or is plagued by education's special form of kitsch.\(^6\) And perhaps this helps to explain why it has been such a Sisyphean task. Our very strategies for defending the ideal of aesthetic education have themselves made it difficult to perceive the ideal and feel its force.

In order to avoid these pitfalls, my defense of aesthetic education will proceed in two stages. First, rather than launching yet another argument for the usefulness of the arts, we must tackle head-on the notions that obscure and distort the aesthetic domain. Thus, I begin with a critique of the transmission view of education and the instrumentalist conception of life that undergirds it. Once we have managed to put instrumentalism back in its place, we may begin to recognize the importance of the aesthetic, but this is only the first step in perceiving the ideal of the aesthetic education. We must then find a way to explore anew the features of aesthetic experience without letting this exploration be cut short by received ideas about "beauty," "imagination," or "art." As John Dewey reminds us in *Art as Experience*, "recognition is perception arrested before it has the chance to develop fully" (52). This quote from Dewey provides the second stage of my inquiry not only its rationale but its object. Exploring the meaning of this quote in the media of painting and poetry will help us to perceive the aesthetic anew. In the process, I hope to offer a genuinely aesthetic defense of aesthetic education.\(^7\)

**Against Instrumentalism**

In the contemporary educational scene we are told to leave no child behind. One of the many problematic things about this phrase is that it begs the question of where children are going. In other words, while debates rage over the key factors in student achievement—class size, teacher content knowledge, school accountability, instructional methods, and so on—we seem to have reached a stunning new level of inarticulateness about what constitutes achievement. What all the talk about educational means conceals—and this is just as true of intelligent debate among researchers over reading comprehension or heterogeneous grouping as it is of self-
serving sound-bites by politicians stumping about vouchers—is the vision of the educated person without which any talk of achievement would be meaningless.

If someone dares to ask what “achievement” means, the conversation is usually brought to a rapid halt with the seemingly incontrovertible statement that it means increased test scores. The methodologically minded may try to press the conversation further, pointing out that test scores are just a proxy for a construct. The reply will be that test scores are a stand-in for mastery of skills and knowledge of curricular material. The questions that never seem to arise in our educational conversations, though, are the most important ones: What skills do we value and why? What is worth knowing? and What is the place of such skills and knowledge in a life that is excellent, meaningful, and rich? On the subject of educational ends we are surprisingly inarticulate. Why is it that we tend to avoid questions about the visions of human flourishing that animate our educational practices and provide the real stakes for our educational debates?

One reason is that in a liberal society, public schools are supposed to remain neutral on questions of the good life. I say "supposed to" because such neutrality is impossible. In this paper, let us take it as axiomatic that educational activities and institutions are always informed by implicit or explicit educational aims, which only make sense in the context of a largely implicit ideal of the educated person, which itself only makes sense in the larger context of a comprehensive conception of the good which is rarely made explicit. The thick ethical notions animating educational practice remain largely implicit because while neutrality is impossible, the charge of violating the separation of church and state obviously still carries a great deal of force. More to the point, when reasoned discourse about the ends of education and the nature of human flourishing is relegated to the private sphere, public institutions fall prey to the least common denominator of ethical life: instrumentalism.

Though it likes to pass itself off as life itself, instrumentalism is a point of view on life. The instrumentalist believes that the most important thing in life is meeting our basic needs, but he doesn't argue for this view. He acts as if this is all there is to life. For the instrumentalist, life simply is getting by, or, with luck, getting ahead. Above this proverbial "bottom line," he sees only illusions: the games of the rich, the fables of the church, the inventions of philosophers. How does the instrumentalist get away without arguing for such a contentious theory of life? In part, because we present his arguments for him whenever we open our mouths. Instrumentalist ideas are woven right into our most common phrases. When we talk about "getting a living," "real world experience," or "growing up and facing facts," we are speaking in the language of instrumentalism. In the rhetoric of this language, living comes predefined as working at a job, and reality—that which the wise and courageous spend their whole lives trying to comprehend—is treated like a simple and basic fact that we must face. How does instrumentalism hold up as a doctrine when it is made more explicit?

Let us consider some examples. One time I was watching a pelican sitting on a rock in the ocean. As you may know, flying is quite a feat, demanding a huge
expense of energy, especially for a bird as massive as the pelican. Watching the pelican take off, circle the waters, dive for fish, and return to the rock empty-handed, I wondered about the pelican’s predicament and our own. The pelican must fly to catch fish, but isn’t it also true that the pelican must eat fish because he must fuel his flying? Nature is full of such circles and, frankly, I am not sure that pelicans mind very much.

But now consider a similar human predicament. When I was in high school, I worked at a pizzeria, washing dishes and making pizzas. I worked at Pappy’s Pizza in order to earn spending money, primarily so that I could afford the gas to be able to borrow my dad’s car. One day, on my way to work, I was doing just this—putting gas in the car—when I had a somewhat unpleasant epiphany: I am buying gas in order to get to work to make money to buy gas! I work so that I will have money to buy gas to get to work! There must be more to human life than this, I thought. Could life really be such a vicious circle: gas, pizza, gas, pizza?! Did my life really have the same logic as that of a pelican?

In fact, humans probably have a lot to learn from other animals that seem to know better than we do how to experience what Jean-Jacques Rousseau called "le sentiment de l’existence," the simple joy of being a living thing in the midst of nature. On the other hand, human beings are the story-telling animal, and stories have a beginning, a middle, and an end. It is this fact and not the inevitability of biological decay—Hannah Arendt has remarked—that makes us mortal. As a member of a species, we are potentially immortal. Just like the pelican enjoys its cycles of fishing and flying, so its life continues in its offspring. But our lives are inseparable from the stories we tell about our lives. We do not write the first chapters, it is true, nor do we choose all of the characters we will work with. But we do have, it seems, a special capacity to individuate ourselves and to understand ourselves through story. This narrative human life is marked by an end strikingly different than that faced by the pelican that dives downward for the last time, reclaimed by the sea that had sustained it. All animals live and all animals expend effort to stay alive, but it is only human beings—as linguistic, self-conscious creatures—that have a life to lead. Each of us can, each of us must consider our life as a whole, asking ourselves what shape and direction we will give it. We can hide from this fact—by pretending that our existential decisions are faits accomplis, or by modeling our life stories on generic ones—but the fact remains. This makes inescapable for each of us the question Socrates never tired of asking. As he puts it in The Republic: "It is no trivial matter we are discussing—the question is 'how should one live?'"

To those that claim that this question is a luxury for the wealthy, we must disagree in the strongest possible terms. We must point out that the hunger for meaning, the need for space and resources to answer the questions "Who am I?" and "Where am I going?" is at least as strong as our other basic needs. Certainly, poverty can close down this space. In fact, this is precisely how one writer, Earl Shorris, defines poverty, as the closing in of what he calls "the surround of force." When human beings are pushed and pulled by the forces of necessity, they lose the
freedom to lead their lives. This fact, though, gives us a reason to fight poverty, not a reason to be suspicious of Socrates' question. Indeed, it shows that giving someone the space to confront Socrates' question—along with food, water, shelter, medicine, education, and so on—is a way to fight poverty. It was this idea that led Shorris to experiment with a basic skills program for adults on public assistance. Shorris abandoned the basic skills classes for seminars in the classics. Shorris offered these desperately poor people what most people would think him foolish to offer: courses in Aristotle and Herodotus, in logic and rhetoric. And what happened? Shorris's students drank in the chance to reflect on their lives as if it were water in a desert.

What does all of this—pelicans, pizza, and poverty—have to do with the ideal of aesthetic education? The answer is that it is this instrumentalism that leads to the marginalization of the aesthetic in education. The arts are treated as an "enrichment," a bonus, a luxury. Thus, they are always the first subjects to be cut when school budgets grow tight, and there is no better way to win funding back than by showing that art experiences give students skills that are transferable to other subjects or favorable to test scores. This not only makes aesthetic experience a mere means to the end of success in so-called academic subjects, but it silently reinforces a conception of education that is fundamentally inimical to the aesthetic experience.

Behind the rhetoric of testing and standards lies the theory that education is about transmission, that schools must impart the information and skills that will be useful later in life. This sounds so familiar by now, and so sensible, that it is almost impossible to imagine an alternative, but there is another tradition, one that sees education not as transmission but as transformation. In this model, while skills and content have their place, the key question is: What experiences, relationships, and environments help me to become the kind of person I want to become? Since experiences with works of art are transformative if they are affecting at all, it is hard to see how we could ever secure a permanent place for the arts in a system of education that understood itself as transmission.

And undergirding the transmission model is the instrumentalist view of life I have been critiquing. If life becomes reduced, as Wordsworth feared, to "getting and spending," then education need not concern itself with age-old questions about what is worth striving for in a human life. And the question put to aesthetic education will always be: What do students—who are busy getting an education to help them get a living—get from the arts? With this image of the student out of our way—the student who scores well on standardized tests and goes on to earn well in standardized jobs—we should now be able to recognize an aesthetic ideal of the educated person. However, a second problem presents itself, for recognition of the ideal may itself become a hindrance if it means that we stop short of perceiving it. Let us turn, then, to Dewey and see whether working closely with his distinction between recognition and perception can help us perceive the aesthetic ideal itself.
Seeing As and Seeing More

Dewey's *Art as Experience* is packed with understated insights, the kind of ideas that make a modest first impression only to stay with you and change everything. A perfect example is his contrast between "bare recognition" and "full perception." What does he mean when he defines recognition as arrested perception? In a nutshell, he is saying that categories are shortcuts. We scan a room, recognizing table and chairs, fruit bowl and coffee cups. As soon as we have safely located each object in a known group of objects, it ceases to occupy our attention. As Dewey puts it, "bare recognition is satisfied when a proper tag or label is attached" (53). In moments of recognition, our seeing stops short and we lose our chance to experience the uniqueness and complexity, the "thinginess" and "thereness" of the object. In seeing as, we fail to see more. To bring out the stakes of this idea, Dewey offers the example of recognizing a person:

In recognition, there is the beginning of an act of perception. But this beginning is not allowed to serve the development of perception of the thing recognized. It is arrested at the point where it will serve some other purpose, as we recognize a man on the street in order to greet or to avoid him, not so as to see him for the sake of seeing what is there. (52)

Here Dewey offers us a picture of ourselves that is as true as it is unflattering. We rush through each present moment with blinkers on, grabbing things by their most familiar and convenient handles. Everything we encounter becomes something to be used, something already known.

At this point a skeptical voice interrupts:

A life without purpose and recognition would be impossible. Maybe you aesthetes have time to stand around staring at people on the street, but I'm trying to get somewhere. Without recognition, you wouldn't even be able to find your way to the museum!

Let us concede some points to the skeptic who represents, after all, the voice of practicality in each of us. A life of pure perception would be intolerable for any duration. As the skeptic points out, categories are crucial for navigating the world. Furthermore, without recognition, which helps us ease certain phenomena into the background, it is not clear that we would be able to foreground and carefully perceive any object. If we allowed all phenomena equal claim to our attention, we would confront only chaos.

Having said this, we must insist that the skeptic's worry is somewhat academic compared with the problem diagnosed by Dewey. We are much more likely to stop short of perception than we are to get lost in it. According to Maxine Greene—the thinker who has done the most to reveal the existential import of Dewey's aesthetics—the human condition is characterized by numbness and somnolence. We stumble through life like sleepwalkers, struggling to achieve moments of "wide-awakening." Our categories (by which we recognize single objects) and habits (by
which we organize whole sequences of recognition into repertoires of automatic action) insulate us all too fully from the thorny, the surprising, the complex. In other words, recognition is not simply a problem for the aesthete who wants to luxuriate in some "enrichment experience." Recognition threatens experience itself. "Experience, insofar as it is experience," Dewey writes, "is heightened vitality" (19). For Socrates, famously, the unexamined life is not worth living; for Dewey, it is the unexperienced life that is not worth living, the unperceived world that is not worth inhabiting. "Even a dog," Dewey writes, "that barks and wags his tail joyously on seeing his master return is more fully alive in his reception of his friend than is a human being who is content with mere recognition" (53).

Let us now heed the advice of the skeptic and find our way to the museum. While it is central to Dewey's project to knock art off its "remote pedestal" and reroot aesthetics in everyday life, he too recognized the special power of art to provoke perception (5). "Art," he writes, "throws off the covers that hide the expressiveness of experienced things" (104). Art invites us to see more, and different works of art issue this invitation in different ways. By looking at some examples from painting and poetry, we can identify two major strategies at work, each with its own variations.

The first strategy involves prolonging perception through the exploration of a medium. Recall our earlier example of recognizing the objects in an ordinary room. Now consider what happens when we encounter a table and chairs in a Van Gogh, or a fruit bowl in Cezanne, or (my most recent discovery) a coffee cup in Fantin-Latour. We still recognize each object. And yet, such artworks somehow simultaneously remind us that there is more to see, more to seeing than seeing as. It is as if spending some time with such a painting helps restore the balance between the brain and the eyes. This effect cannot be generated simply by the obvious simulacral quality of the works. The pictures of the man and woman on public bathroom doors also call attention to their own constructedness, but hardly cause us to linger in perception. How do paintings coax us toward perception?

The answer is less obvious than it sounds: it is because painters realize their objects in paint. "Each medium," Dewey writes, "says something that cannot be uttered as well or as completely in any other tongue" (106). Thus, paint has its own properties, such as thickness, slickness, creaminess, and crustiness. It has its own history, defined by the sequence of notable attempts to explore these properties and to frame and reframe visual problems. Paint is its own world, and it is in this world that Van Gogh builds his chairs, that Cezanne grows his apples, that Fantin-Latour molds his coffee cup. When we behold their paintings, the objects do yield to our seeing as, but not completely or easily. The paint pushes back against us, just as it did to the artists. We see a table, but we also see color, shape, line, brightness, reflectiveness, overlap, and next-to-ness. Paradoxically, this difficulty in grasping the objects leads to a fuller, less alienated connection with them in the end. After spending time with these paintings, we remember what it is like to sit around a small table; we feel what it is to have one's weight supported by a chair;
we sense the way an apple fills out its orb; we appreciate the hollow of the coffee cup, waiting to be filled.

It is important to note that the contrast here is between schematic visual recognition and full visual experience, not between words and some essentially nonlinguistic reality. In fact, we can just as easily locate the tension between recognition and perception within the life of language. It is the special province of poetry to help us perceive words themselves and the experiences they embody instead of simply decoding them. Just as the painted apple gave us back aspects of the real apple, so the poetic word reconnects us with the way words actually bear meaning. In the medium of words, meanings have tone, rhythm, weight, voice, texture, memory—since words are haunted by past uses—and neighbors—since words are interconnected by vast networks of criss-crossing connotations.

Listen to how Wallace Stevens reunites writing with speech, gesture, and song in the first two stanzas of his poem "Waving Adieu, Adieu, Adieu":

That would be waving and that would be crying,
Crying and shouting and meaning farewell,
Farewell in the eyes and farewell at the centre,
Just to stand still without moving a hand.

In a world without heaven to follow, the stops
Would be endings, more poignant than partings,
   profounder,
   And that would be saying farewell, repeating farewell,
   Just to be there and just to behold. 26

Reading the poem aloud, we find that it not only discusses waving, but that it itself waves. The first three lines rock back and forth, pivoting on the conjunctions at their center. Thanks to the frequent use of "ing" endings, this metronome effect is repeated within individual words. Then, in the fourth line, the rhythm begins to break down and we find ourselves "standing still" in more ways than one. Again, Stevens not only tells us about ending, but makes us feel it. The fifth line stops at the word "stops." In the second stanza, the sing-song rhythm is replaced by a more staccato effect. We pause firmly after the comma in the fifth line, and when we start up again it is only to stop abruptly on the word "stop." And in case we were to miss the caesura in the next line, it is marked by the word "endings." As endings become partings, the pace begins to picks up with the alliterative series of "p" words. In line 7, we are waving again, and the repetitiveness of the gesture is evoked in form and content. In this way, the poem explores and reconnects us with the experience of saying goodbye. It helps us to feel how we ward off intimations of the profound and poignant ending that each goodbye potentially represents. Even as we convince ourselves that goodbyes are only partings, we protest too much: waving, waving, and waving again. At some point the waving must stop, we must simply behold the
person to whom we are saying goodbye.

Now let us turn to the second strategy. Rather than aiming to prolong perception, some works of art aim to interrupt recognition. Instead of inviting us to see more about apples, for example, the second strategy pushes us to see more about seeing as. Consider, for example, René Magritte’s playful labeling. A pipe is declared not to be one, a picture of a clock is labeled "the wind," and, most interestingly, a picture of a valise is labelled "the valise." Magritte’s true subject would seem to be neither clocks, pipes, nor sponges, but our own drive toward recognition.

Marcel Duchamp goes one step further. By placing ordinary objects such as a toilet and a snow shovel in the museum setting, he asks us to consider what it means to see something as art. Art institutions may be designed to help us suspend the practical attitude and take up a perceptive stance, but as we have all experienced, museums and galleries present their own obstacles to aesthetic experience. Instead of fully perceiving the work, we may stop short as we recognize a "masterpiece," "a Duchamp," "a found object," "an example of the early period," and so on.

My favorite example of the second strategy may be Andy Warhol’s "Do It Yourself" series. In one of these pieces, Warhol replicates a kitschy sailboat scene from a paint-by-numbers set, filling in some of the many colored fields. What Warhol seems to be doing is inviting us to finish the picture, offering us in the process a hilarious glimpse at our own tendency to schematize and romanticize, to set up cardboard versions of things in front of the things themselves.

**Conclusion**

We have been trying to imagine an ideal of the educated person centered around aesthetic values. This led us to challenge the prevailing conception of education and the instrumentalist view of life that supports it. For as long as life is reduced to "getting and spending" and education conceived as transmission of information and skills useful for securing a place in the work force, aesthetic education will seem like a mere diversion or decoration. On the other hand, aesthetic values start to seem very much at home when we begin to think of education as transformation and recall a more existential view of the human condition. Each of us, I suggested, is faced with Socrates' question, How should I live? and each of us therefore has the task and opportunity of crafting a life that is excellent, meaningful, and rich. Any education worth the name will encourage students to confront Socrates' question and give them resources to help them articulate what they think it is excellent to do and to become. Talk of creativity in schools becomes academic if this most fundamental creative task of human beings, creating a self and a set of meaningful life projects, is ignored or discouraged.

I have also tried to intimate some of the special resources offered by the arts for answering Socrates' question, ways in which the arts and more generally, a poetic sensibility, contribute to the richness and meaningfulness of a human life. What is at stake is nothing less than learning to perceive the richness and complexity of the world. Without the capacity to move beyond sheer recognition, we are, in the
words of Northrop Frye, "in the position of a dog in a library, surrounded by a world of meaning in plain sight that we don't even know is there." As I indicated, the extended meditation on Dewey's contrast between recognition and perception was also meant to serve a second purpose. It was intended to help us avoid the habit of using labels like "art," "creativity," and "imagination" instead of perceiving these phenomena in their fullness, their thorniness, and their recalcitrance. Without fresh thought, without the specificity of a mind at work in a medium, even good ideas degenerate into slogans, clichés, and remembrances of what was once a live insight. And education seems to be especially prone to sloganizing and sentimentality. This is why we must keep setting out to discover the aspects of the educational ideals that move us, becoming students of what Wallace Stevens calls the "intricate evasions of as." We must not settle for trading tokens of recognition: whether they be No Child Left Behind, "liberate the oppressed," or "fund the arts."

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**Notes**


2. It is for this reason that I cannot view the rapidly growing hegemony of APA citation style as an innocuous development. The problem lies, of course, not in the literal format, but in the culture that has grown up around the form. Scholars using APA style often drop citations to whole works parenthetically into their sentences without further elaboration, as if the sheer existence of this book (to which alone the citation attests) helps their argument. Such practice begs all of the questions we should be asking when someone cites a source:
What passage or section of the text are you citing? How are you interpreting it? And how does this reading advance your argument?

3. My argument here dovetails with Dewey's distinction between an expression and a statement. See John Dewey, Art as Experience (1934; New York: Perigee Books, 1980), 84-91. All future references to this text will be cited parenthetically. A statement is a "signboard" pointing to an experience to be had elsewhere (84); an expression constitutes an experience (85). A statement is generalized, conveying abstract kinds; an expression is individualized and "has a local habitation" (90-91).


5. One example of such writing is Annie Dillard, Pilgrim at Tinker Creek (New York: Harper and Row, 1974).

6. The key word here is "if." That is, I certainly do not mean to suggest that all discourse around the aesthetic in education falls prey to these problems. It is the virtue of Maxine Greene's writing, for example, that she often directs our attention to the unhandsome aspects of our condition, thus combating the sweetening of reality characteristic of kitsch. Or consider the way Philip Jackson will build an argument around a close reading of a single poem. See, e.g., Philip W. Jackson, "On the "Tight Resemblance" of Teaching and Art," Arts and Learning Research 20, no. 1 (2003-2004). Or to cite just one more example, when Eliot Eisner speaks of educational connoisseurship, calls for a criticism of criticism, or showcases the exemplary criticism of a figure like Leo Steinberg, he is specifically reminding us of the rigors of writing genuinely aesthetic prose about the aesthetic. See e.g., Elliot Eisner, The Enlightened Eye: Qualitative Inquiry and the Enhancement of Educational Practice (New York: Macmillan, 1991), chaps. 4, 6, & 7.

7. I am grateful to the anonymous reader who pointed out the need to clarify how I can enlist Dewey in a critique of instrumentalism when Dewey himself called an aspect of his philosophy instrumentalism. There is no contradiction here as Dewey was, despite his "instrumentalist" views that language is a tool and that thought is always purposive, a steadfast and eloquent critic of the reduction of education to skills, and of life to getting a living, that I am calling instrumentalism.


13. This is Bernard Williams' translation of Plato, Republic 352d. See Bernard Williams, Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985), 1.


15. For the classic statement of this distinction, see Philip Jackson, "The Mimetic and the Transformative: Alternative Outlooks on Teaching," in The Practice of Teaching (New York: Teachers College Press, 1986), 115-145. Because Jackson also reveals a mimetic aspect to the transformative tradition, namely that the teacher models and the student emulates the personal qualities which the transformation concerns, I prefer to call Jackson's two outlooks transmissive and transformative.

16. Certainly, one can transmit information about art—for example, that Dada flourished in Zurich during the First World War—but this is not aesthetic education.


20. See, e.g., Vincent Van Gogh, The Bedroom, 1888. Oil on Canvas, 72 X 90 centimeters. Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam. A reproduction is accessible online at http://www3.vangogh-museum.nl/vgm/index.jsp?page=2796&collection=1300&lang=en:. It is unfortunate, in an essay on seeing, that cost/copyright concerns have made it impossible to reproduce here the images under discussion. The reader is encouraged to view reproductions of the images online. When a specific link is not offered, the work can be found by doing a Google Image search.


23. Cf. 75 & 319. For more on Dewey's conception of medium, see 106-114, 195-202, and 226-244.

24. Notice that the medium, or world of paint as I call it, concerns not only literal physical properties, but those properties in interaction with subjective and intersubjective meanings, such as the artist's intention, the practice of painting, cultural values, and so on. Thus, my account squares even with Dewey's stricter definition of medium. Though Dewey often speaks as if the paint or marble or words were themselves the media, when he is being more
precise, he makes a point of distinguishing between such "raw materials" and medium as a specific language that results from the interaction of the purely physical qualities and properties of the materials with individual and cultural intentions, meanings and values (287).

25. On medium as resistant, see 58-70. Dewey says that it is the medium which makes the difference between genuine expression and immediate "discharge or mere exhibition" (63).


27. See, e.g., René Magritte, La Trahison des images (Ceci n’est pas une pipe) [The Treachery of Images (This is not a pipe)], 1929. Oil on canvas, 25 3/8 x 37 inches. Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles, CA. A reproduction is available online at http://collectionsonline.lacma.org/mwebcgi/mweb.exe?request=record;id=34438;type=101. Cf. René Magritte, The Key to Dreams, 1935. A reproduction is available online at http://courses.washington.edu/hypertext/cgi-bin/book/wordsinimages/magritte.html.

28. See, e.g., Marcel Duchamp, In Advance of the Broken Arm (Snow Shovel), 1945 (replica of the lost original of 1915). Wood and galvanized iron snow shovel, 48 x 18 x 4 inches. Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven, CT.


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