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## To The Reader

This inaugural issue of *Action, Theory and Criticism for Music Education* is devoted to papers presented at the interdisciplinary colloquium held June 11-15, 2000 in Helsinki Finland by the “MayDay Group” of musicians (MDG) and the “Artist, Work of Art, and Experience” group of artists (AWE). These proceedings were originally published in the *Finnish Journal of Music Education (Musikkikasvatus)*, Vol. 5, No. 1-2 (2000). With the permission of that journal, they are now made accessible to the international community of music education scholars. Two lectures by Professor Richard Shusterman, a leading pragmatist philosopher who has concerned himself centrally with the arts, were arranged by AWE to coincide with the colloquium and produced two interviews by Lauri Väkevää of the University of Oulu, Finland, the second of which is published here for the first time. Thanks are offered to Professor Shusterman for his contribution to the colloquium and for granting permission to publish the interviews.

By way of background, the MayDay Group ([www.maydaygroup.org](http://www.maydaygroup.org)) is a group of international scholars from a variety of disciplines in music and music education. J. Terry Gates, SUNY Buffalo and Thomas A. Regelski, SUNY Fredonia (both now emeritus) created the group in 1993 to consider mounting challenges facing music educators and the status of music in society. Its analytical agenda is to interrogate traditional and status quo conceptions of music and music education from the perspectives of critical theory, critical thinking and research from all relevant disciplines. Its positive agenda is to inspire and promote action for change, both concerning how music and musical value are understood in the contemporary world of music and in the institutions responsible for music in society, particularly music education. The AWE Group (<http://triad.kiasma.fng.fi/awe/WRITINGS/index.html>) includes artists from several disciplines associated with several art schools and universities in Finland who share mutual interest in applying Pragmatism to important issues in art and art theory. Finnish philosopher Pentti Määttänen, a specialist in John Dewey and Charles S. Pierce, has been informal leader of this group.

MayDay colloquia are held once or twice a year, and each explores one of the seven “action ideals” posted on the Group’s website. The Helsinki meeting focused on Ideal Five: “In order to be effective, music educators must establish and maintain contact with ideas and people from other disciplines.” A joint meeting with artists was, therefore, very apt and produced much of mutual value. As a prelude to the colloquium, Professor Claire Detels, a musicologist at the University of Arkansas and a MDG member, agreed to produce a “study paper.” This was drawn directly from her book *Soft Boundaries: Re-Visioning the Arts and Aesthetics in American Education* (Bergin and Garvey Publishers, 1999), a critique of how single-disciplinary specialization and scholarly and pedagogical insularity within and between art and music departments of universities and schools have produced negative consequences for the effectiveness of arts and music education. The study paper was not read at the colloquium; but because it was addressed directly by several papers and other participants, it is also included with the proceedings.

Given the commitment of the AWE group to pragmatism and a strong interest on the part of several MDG members in music and music education as *praxis*, a Pragmatist theme evolved that addressed distinctly post-modern, post-analytic and post-structuralist perspectives on art, music and music education. In contrast to the hegemony of modernist aestheticist accounts of art, music and music education, the pragmatist-praxial tone of these proceedings exemplified for the arts a trend in other disciplines that has recently been called “the practice turn.”\* In contrast to the “linguistic turn” of analytic, common language and formal language philosophy that occurred early in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, this newly burgeoning *practice theory* is concerned with human actions that are organized around praxis and pragmatic values, and that involve shared and embodied understanding, skills and know-how—where, in short, meaning arises in situated conditions of use.

Heidegger, Wittgenstein and a wide array of notable post-analytic, post-modern and post-structuralist philosophers, as well as second-generation critical theorists such as Habermas, have influenced the growth and direction of practice theory. It incorporates recent social philosophy and cultural theory and, in distinction to the rationalist bias of analytic theory, draws on empirical findings from the social sciences and cognitive studies, including neuroscience and consciousness research. The relevance for the arts and for music and music education in particular of this new emphasis on embodied praxis should be obvious; at the very least it offers the promise of new directions for thinking and research regarding the challenges facing music education. Thus, this collection of papers presents a variety of fresh and sometimes competing perspectives that otherwise have been overlooked, minimized, or even denied in many status quo discussions of music and music education. This new and sometimes provocative research is offered in keeping with the MayDay Group’s agenda to facilitate and disseminate new ideas, to continue to promote analysis of and open-minded dialogue about both old and new ideas, and to help effect change for the betterment of music education and music in society.

\* Theodore R. Schatzki, Karin Knorr Cetina and Eike Von Savigny, eds. *The Practice Turn in Contemporary Theory*. Routledge: 2001.

Thomas A. Regelski, Editor.

## Aesthetic experience: A Problem in Praxialism

### On the notion of aesthetic experience

Pentti Määttänen

Meanings do not travel with words. An expression is often used quite differently in different contexts and by different writers. This holds also for the term ‘aesthetic experience’. Roughly speaking there are two conceptions of aesthetic experience which I call Kantian and Deweyan.

By Kantian conception of aesthetic experience, I mean disinterested pleasure aroused by something beautiful (Kant 1978, A 16/B 16). Kant looked for subjective generality that is not based on concepts (ibid., A 18/B 18). This kind of aesthetic experience is also transcendental in the sense that the ability to judge something to be beautiful transcends sense-experience. Generally speaking, transcendentalism means that there are formal structures of reason and understanding, concepts and categories, which determine our ways of experiencing the world and our habitual behaviour. The formal structures are first, *a priori*, and the experienced world (or the world as experienced) is constituted by virtue of these structures. The reason is independent of any sensual conditions, and that is why it is called pure.

Deweyan naturalism is an opposite conception. Our rational abilities must have an explanation that is based on natural and cultural evolution. The nature is first and we as thinking beings are still natural beings. Culture is a phenomenon created by natural

beings. Reason does not transcend sense experience in Kantian sense. Formal structures of reason, our conceptual capacities are not independent, they have their origin in our interaction with the natural environment which, during the emergence of human culture, has changed into a combination of natural and cultural environment. (See Dewey 1984.)

The conception of aesthetic experience that is formulated in the framework of this kind of naturalism cannot be based on transcendental conditions of perception. From this point of view it is a directly opposite notion to the Kantian view. But this is also the point where the clear differences stop and confusions begin to emerge.

Kant insisted that the pleasure arisen by beauty should be disinterested pleasure. One reason for this is, apparently, the attempt to get aesthetic judgement on a transcendental *a priori* basis. Also, John Dewey speaks about disinterested pleasure but on a completely different ground. According to Dewey an aesthetic experience is not subordinated to operational thinking. It is a consummatory experience, an end in itself and not a means for some other experiences. There is an element of fulfilment in it, but there is no element of transcendentality in the Kantian sense on the word. It is a good experience that is desired for its own sake.

Dewey emphasizes particularly that not absence of desire and thought “but their thorough incorporation into perceptual experience characterizes esthetic experience, in its distinction from experiences that are especially ‘intellectual’ and ‘practical’” (Dewey 1980, 254). The desires are fulfilled in the perception itself (ibid.). Dewey mentions features like cumulation, tension, conservation, anticipation and fulfilment as formal features of an aesthetic experience (ibid., 145) and defines form as the operation of

foreseen fulfilment (ibid., 137). In an aesthetic experience there is the sense of qualitative unity (ibid., 136), it is *an* experience.

Detachment from operational thinking does not entail detachment from practical activity in general. It does not entail some kind of escape into independent pure consciousness. Dewey maintained (Dewey 1946, 18) that meaning is use. The child learns the meaning of a hat by learning to use it. In addition, in the same way the child learns the meaning of *the word* 'hat', by learning to use it. Every perceptual experience is intellectually interpreted, and this takes place with the help of meanings. The meanings attached to an aesthetic experience as a perceptual experience are basically habits of action, use. The interpretation takes place in a framework of the practical social world because that is where the meanings reside.

### Dewey's Aristotelian background

Dewey's conception has its roots. He criticized Aristotle in many ways, but there are also similarities, especially in the analysis of human practical activity.

Aristotle's philosophy is thoroughly teleological. Movement and change are always directed to a goal, *telos*. Aristotle's distinction between *praxis* and *poiesis* is based on this notion. He said that in *poiesis*, productive activity, the *telos* is separate from the activity itself (Aristotle 1925, 1140b6-7). A boat, for instance, is the *telos* of the activity of building the boat. In *praxis*, on the other hand, the *telos* is the activity itself. *Praxis* is something that is done for the sake of the *praxis* itself.

The highest *telos* for human beings is, according to Aristotle, good life, happy life (ibid., 1097a30-1097b8). To have a good and happy life is the best *praxis*. There is no

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purpose of life that would “transcend” the life itself. One element of happy life is to have good experiences. Aristotle mentions things like friendship, political life (which in those days meant something quite different), justice and enjoyment. Aristotle realized that good experiences might be different. The word ‘good’ has many uses like the word ‘to be’ (ibid., 1096a23-25). Separate and self-sufficient good, if there were such a thing, cannot be reached (1096b31-35). Therefore, happiness is the only perfect goal that is selected for its own sake. It makes life worth living (ibid., 1097b15). Aristotle appreciated most of all theoretical contemplation, but Dewey criticized this kind of separation of theory and practice.

Aesthetic experiences as defined by Dewey are good examples of that what makes life worth living, what makes people happy. There are thus historical grounds for maintaining that Dewey’s philosophy of art can be called praxialism in the same sense as this term has been used in recent discussion in philosophy of music and music education. Dewey’s notion of aesthetic experience is, when applied to music, in accordance with for example Thomas Regelski’s characterization that praxially, music is “good time” (Regelski 1996, 36). In addition, David Elliott’s emphasis on flow experiences is in accordance with Dewey’s conception.

### **Recent controversies**

Praxial philosophers of music have been very critical to what they call aesthetic ideology. According to Elliott this ideology entails autonomy of the individual, irrelevance of the individual’s background, stripping of all social and practical links in the purpose of entering the quasi-religious realm of aesthetic experience (Elliott 1995,

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23-25). Aesthetic ideology also “posits a fictional object that exists in an ideal world apart from any physical score and any single performance of that score” (ibid., 25-26). Regelski refers to “some kind of transcendent aesthetic response from musical qualia” (Regelski 1996, 34). In contrast to this they want to consider music as a situated phenomenon, as a part of human social life in general.

This criticism applies to the Kantian notion of aesthetic experience. However, it is not necessary to be a neo-Kantian in order to discuss aesthetic experiences. Dewey certainly was not. If this point is neglected, the criticism may go astray. If someone uses the expression in Deweyan sense, there is no point in criticizing this person for being a transcendentalist. Elliott quotes Reimer: “Aesthetic experience serves no utilitarian purpose. It is experience for the sake of experience in and of itself” (Elliott 1995, 36). I am not going to discuss whether Reimer is a transcendentalist or not. The point is that this quotation is not enough to prove that he is. These words as such can be interpreted to say the same thing as Dewey: People go to concerts in order to have good experiences. Some people call them aesthetic experiences, some people do not. These experiences are not means for further experiences in the same sense as the experience of buying a ticket is a means. People usually do not go to concerts because they want to have ticket-buying experiences. This distinction does not prevent Dewey from saying that art serves life, education, personal growth and other things that are familiar from Elliott’s book.

There are also problems arising from different uses of the term ‘transcendent’. In his recent book, Keith Swanwick takes a definition from a general dictionary according to which to transcend means simply to rise over, to go beyond some limits (Swanwick 1999,

28). This definition has, unfortunately, only nominal connection to the philosophical use of the term described above. He runs the risk for being criticized to maintain a transcendental (Kantian) notion of aesthetic experience. However, after reading what he really means by the term one might come to the conclusion that he is more close to the Deweyan notion. He points out that the concept of flow experience, which is widely used by Elliott and others, and the notion of aesthetic experience he wants to apply are quite similar to each other. It is, of course, a confusion to identify the flow experience with the Kantian notion of aesthetic experience, as Regelski has pointed out (Regelski 1996, 36), but Dewey's notion is a different issue.

### **Dewey and praxialism**

Dewey seems to be more praxialist than the praxialists themselves. Elliott identifies mind with brain and shares therefore some of the background assumptions of Kantian transcendentalism: mind and meanings (contents of thought) are separated from the external world, they are located "in the head" (see Määttänen 1998). To use Elliott's words, they are stripped of all their social and practical links to the world. This framework of discussion is basically Cartesian (see Määttänen 1995, Chapter 5). Mind functions for a while, and gives the orders to the body. One might have expected that if a praxialist emphasizes situatedness and practical nature of musical thinking, then he would use the same approach to all thinking. Why is "knowing-in-action" important only for musical knowledge and not for knowledge in general?

Dewey was of the opposite opinion. He maintained that thought couldn't be separated from external action, practice. Mind is a capacity developed by a natural being

in its interaction with the natural (and social) environment (Dewey 1984). For Dewey meaning is use. These notions are necessarily tied with social practice. This holds, of course, also for musical meanings (see Määttänen & Westerlund 1999). The “praxial” nature of music can be analysed in a natural way in the context of “praxial” cognition in general. Musical meanings are not separated artificially from other meanings.

Dewey can thus be said to be a protopraxialist before the contemporary praxialists. He is more consistent in his views about the relationship between thinking and practice, and his notion of aesthetic experience has its roots in Aristotle’s conception of *praxis*.

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