CHAPTER 4

ART AS EXPERIENCE
Since Dewey conceives art neither operationally nor behaviorally but experientially, this chapter begins with an elaboration of the nature of objectivity inherent in experience as a natural occurrence, i.e., as an interaction of living creatures with their environmental conditions. Both for the identity of art and for art criticism, demands a contemporary esthetician, it is necessary to settle the question as to what constitutes an object of art. But he finds that the answers to this question are colored heavily by the general semantic conflict referred to in chapter two as psychologism and antipsychologism. A theory in art especially reveals the limitations of psychologism and antipsychologism in such a way that the merits of Dewey's conception of art as objective experience grow important and obvious.

Experience occurs continuously because the interaction of organisms with their environments is involved in the very conditions of life. In the general flow of life experience, certain experiences stand as heightened vitality or as active and alert commerce with the world. Dewey identifies such experiences as forming themselves into integrated units; for every
unit experience begins with an impulsion, i.e. a state of organic disequilibrium demanding an immediate activity on the part of the organism to restore the state of equilibrium. The organism acts and remains active till the state of equilibrium is attained. A unit experience or an experience (as Dewey prefers to name it) is identifiable because of its peculiar structure or pattern. This structure or pattern is one and the same with the meaningfulness of an experience in its most general sense.

Dewey is of the opinion that scientific ideas, or even values as ideas, represent only partially, and in a selective manner, the contents of human experience. But a conscious and creative interaction of the artist with some material medium enacts more fully, completely and deliberately all those conditions which may be said to comprise an experience as an integrated and complete unit. He maintains that an esthetic creation or enjoyment is "the clarified and intensified development of traits that belong to every normally complete experience."  

Occurrence of an experience is, in fact, simultaneous with an appearance of a capacity on the part of the organism to connect his own action with the reaction

from the environment. This capacity for the awareness of meaning on the part of the organism converts the contents of experience which were just doing and undergoing alternatively into doing and undergoing in relationship and provides experience with a kind of unity so that it is appropriately called an experience.

An experience occurs to meet a demand that belongs to the organism as a whole; in meeting this demand the organism is active as a whole and its activity culminates into a state of consummation or satisfaction of the whole organism. The kind of unity, that an experience is characterized with, justifies according to Dewey its name as such. He names the unity that an experience possesses as qualitative unity, but adds that he names it so, only in the absence of a more comprehensive term. Otherwise in an experience there does not exist any separation of emotions from the intellect and action. Dewey maintains, "The existence of this unity is constituted by a single quality that pervades the entire experience in spite of the variation of its constituent parts. This unity is neither emotional, practical, nor intellectual, for these terms name distinctions that reflection can make within it."²

²Ibid., p. 37.
Again an experience is a spatio-temporal happening. The ordered and organized movement of an experience is rhythmic and progressive; it is rather rhythmically progressive. Within energies involved in experience there is a progressive massing of values and a cumulative effect. Characteristics like continuity, cumulation, conservation, tension and anticipation are the objective conditions of any meaningful experience. Objective meanings reside in the economy and efficiency which different energies display in their operation to carry an experience to its integral fulfilment. Dewey calls an experience as integrated, unified, coherent and complete. To which Monroe C. Beardsley objects; he says, "An experience can be a certain duration; so much is clear. But what else can be correctly said about it? this is one puzzle. But even if we are allowed to apply some predicates to experiences, it may also be questioned whether they will be rich enough and exact enough to afford a reasonably clear distinction between aesthetic experience's and other kinds. That is second puzzle."³ Beardsley is justified in getting puzzled because Dewey fails to mark off sharply an aesthetic experience from

intellectual or practical experiences especially by means of the application of the above mentioned predicates. He on the contrary maintains that intellectual or practical experiences in order to be unified and complete must bear an esthetic stamp.

Various experiences, i.e. scientific, moral, social and practical, although, are funded with their specific consequences and pregnant with their own possibilities; yet these experience stand out against the rest of experience due to their unifying and pervasive quality which is essentially esthetic in nature. In this respect it is significant to note that sciences, values and art are the outcome of experiences so intimately intermixed that their labelling as scientific, practical and esthetic experiences depends simply upon the degrees and ratios in which various aspects of one's personality are involved in one's encounter with the world to constitute these different modes of experience. In spite of the obvious difficulty in finding distinct, precise and exact predicates for various experiences, there is at least one predicate, i.e. integrated, which Dewey seems to have reserved to qualify esthetic experience. He, in fact, arrived at esthetic experience after his thorough and penetrating analysis of scientific and practical experiences which presupposed a division
between intellectual, sensory, emotional and motor aspects of human nature. To participate in esthetic experience intellectual, sensory, emotional and motor aspects of one's personality merge together losing their identity as such. Intellectual and practical experiences, according to Dewey, are partial experience, whereas esthetic experience is an integral experience. Art, being the technique of the whole organism, results in a more comprehensive grasp of experience and a fuller organic realization/fulfilment. A comparable view has been set forth by Max Reiser; he says, "The internal unity and consistancy of the art thing is not a logical type, it is not the order of a proposition but rather an organic order of existing being and things." Art rather enacts deliberately and fully the conditions of an integral experience.

To state Dewey's fundamental position it may be said that scientific inquiry, moral choosing and artistic creation are all man's encounters with the same world, i.e. these all possess empirical relevance, yet all in different manner, depending upon the degree and nature

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of man's involvement in his encounter. Naturalistically empirical meanings are the formulation of the recognizable links within conscious and meaningful experiences. Scientific meanings are the conceptual formulation of such links, whereas art symbols are the perceptual registration of the experiences as such. In spite of Dewey's significant efforts to distinguish art from science Reichenbach has accused him of establishing esthetics as an aspect of reality comparable to physics by attempting the impossible task of raising esthetic judgments to the status of statements of facts. Reichenbach bases his objection on the unequal status of primary, secondary and tertiary qualities, which taken together can be said to constitute the totality of man's immediate experience. He objects, "If the term objective esthetics ... is to have any meaning utilizable for a theory of action it must mean that esthetical ... properties can be demonstrated to every man as properties of things, i.e. they are intersubjective properties. But we know that this is not possible ... the secondary and tertiary qualities are no longer qualities of things, but relations between the thing and observer, varying therefore with the nature of the observer ... compared with secondary qualities, tertiary qualities are subjective to an even higher degree. Secondary qualities are at least biological
constants i.e. determined by the biological structure of the human body and therefore not susceptible to change, whereas tertiary qualities depend on the social milieu of the observer and are amenable to change by education and new social adjustment."

There is, of course, a sense in which Dewey grants art and science a similar status, and it is precisely this stand, which Reichenbach has objected to. Dewey emphatically argues that all qualities, i.e. primary, secondary and tertiary, belong equally to experience, which is born of the interaction of the mental and the physical phenomena in nature. None of these qualities are either exclusively mental or physical. The experience which is the locus of all these qualities fundamentally cuts across the dualism of subject and object. Reichenbach is a philosopher of science; yet he, in his objection, exhibits an ignorance about a scientific fact, that the situation in contemporary physics itself provides a scene of progressive conversion of primary into secondary qualities which seems to support Dewey's naturalistic interpretation of all qualities. Moreover Reichenbach's own argument to grant secondary qualities the status of

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biological constant goes against the very point he wishes to establish. Because the same argument can be put forward to grant tertiary qualities the status of cultural constants.

Although Dewey grants a uniform empirical status to science and art yet he clearly distinguishes them by repeatedly maintaining that science states meanings whereas art expresses them. Scientific statement is highly selective and generalized in its subject matter; moreover its formulation presupposes a methodology of its own kind, of which it is a warranted outcome. To preserve the integrity of the meanings of an experience as comprehensively as possible, expression in art utilizes individualized images as its means. Dewey draws a distinction between two different functions of symbolic representation in general (1) to differentiate and discriminate (2) to relate. The first function brings out the meanings of the things in their immediate and immanent sense, the second function involves the use of immediate and immanent qualities to signify something which is not immediately given. Mrs. Susanne Langer, commenting on the function of signification of words, says, "... little noises are ideal conveyers of concepts,
for they give nothing but their meaning." These words by Mrs. Langer have been quoted to suggest that the more qualitatively barren and indifferent a symbol the greater is its capacity to signify.

Conceptualization is the technique of cognitive mode, for knowledge is not concerned with things in their immediacy. In order to achieve a higher degree of generality characterizing its concepts, science attempts to dissolve immediate and immanent meanings in their potential consequences. Whereas art attempts to absorb the potential consequences into immediate experience by clarifying and intensifying the direct qualities in such a way that their meanings are deepened and widened. Art achieves fineness, according to Dewey, in the degree of efficiency with which an artist creates an image but a work of art becomes great as the scope of its subject-matter gets widened and enriched. For generalization, which is the essential function of science, conceptualization is the appropriate technique. Imagination is the technique of art. Scientifically minded people consider concepts superior to esthetic images. There is then a neutral

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approach, according to which, both concept formation and creation of images form merely two different modes of understanding. Dewey, though a great advocate of science, happens to give the technique of imagination a superior place than conceptualization as a means to arrive at a comprehensive grasp of reality. The technique of imagination, according to Dewey, involves the whole man for intellectual, sensory, emotional and motor aspects merge together in esthetic creation; it, therefore, holds a greater promise for him. He writes, "Tangled scenes of life are made more intelligible in esthetic experience not, however, as reflection and science renders things more intelligible by reduction to conceptual form, but by presenting their meanings as the matter of a clarified, coherent and intensified or impassioned experience."^7

Dewey rates inductive and experimental technique superior to pure reason, because pure reason by losing touch with the qualities of experience becomes empty. A thinker who is completely discursive is a lost thinker. In scientific experimental thinking ideas remain tied to the qualities of experience. They thus do retain their qualitative aspect. It is, in fact, this quality

^7John Dewey, Art as Experience, p. 290.
of ideas which directs thinkers through its most complicated conceptual pattern. In pure reason only human intellect is at work, in scientific thinking intellect works in union with senses and involves, though only selectively, the motor aspect too. Dewey is of the opinion that pure reason, "at its heights cannot attain complete grasp and a self-contained assurance. It must fall back upon imagination — upon the embodiment of ideas in emotionally charged sense."

As Dewey proceeded with his analysis of art he comes to realize the limitations even of the method of science. Although, to begin with, he considered the outcome of a scientific inquiry as the most authentic instance of empirical knowledge he later finds that all empirical meanings could not be formulated by means of scientific language, he argues, that if it were so, the language of fine arts would not have existed. There are empirical meanings which can be expressed only qualitatively. It is maintained that meanings symbolized in different arts like architecture, sculpture, painting or musical composition cannot be put in words. Meanings presented in any art are non-translatable not only in the language of words, but also are non-translatable

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8Ibid., p. 33.
in the language of any other art, e.g. what can be expressed through color cannot be put into the language of sounds. It is so because art expresses meanings in individualized form, or image.

Esthetic rhythm, Dewey maintains, is a matter of perception. It, therefore, includes as its integral ingredient the part played by human beings during their acts of creation or perception and enjoyment. An art product, as a physical existence, possesses a physical structure which is obvious to any physical inquiry into it. But its esthetic dimension can be realized only in an imaginative perception of the art product, for it embodies an esthetic or creative experience which could be decoded only in a recreative experience. It is in this vital sense that an art object differs from craftsmanship. Dewey's conception of esthetics may here profitably be differentiated from that of Virgil C. Aldrich, who in his article on "Design, Composition and Symbol" says, "World is like a mathematical monograph — You cannot understand it unless you know the language of mathematics. But there are beautiful things in the world. Works of art being especially clear cut cases. These are not artifact
either of engineering or mathematical intelligence." \(^9\)

Dewey, too, separates the intellectual dimension of a thing from its esthetic dimension. He rather warns philosophers (objectivists) against the futility of an intellectual attitude in their approach to the understanding of art. But he separates the two dimensions of things only in the sense in which botanical study of a flower is independent of an esthetic experience of it or an expression of that experience in an esthetic image. Certainly, therefore, esthetic rhythm experienced in the creation or perception of an art object is very different from an intellectual recognition of its mechanical order. Esthetic appreciation and enjoyment of a piece of architecture, a musical note, or a poem constitutes something which an engineer would miss in his intellectual grasp of the structure of the building, a physicist would miss in his physical inquiry into the arrangement of sounds and a grammarian would miss in his analysis of a poem.

Dewey draws an unusual distinction between the "product of art" and "a work of art". The product of

art is only potentially a work of art, to become a work of art, it falls short of a perspective, of which human contribution by way of an active process of perception, is an important factor. He says, "The product of art—temple, painting, statue, poem — is not a work of art. The work takes place when a human being cooperates with the product so that the outcome is an experience that is enjoyed because of its liberating and ordered properties." Sartre agrees with Dewey in holding that an artifact is not complete in itself and acquires completion only in the imaginative process which it generates. But Sartre differs from Dewey in calling the artifact unreal, because for Dewey it is not the case that the identity of the artifact is dependent upon the creator but the identity of the two is equally, mutually dependent. Creation in art, according to Dewey, provides a sense of an interaction of two potentialities. One is free and active, the other active but not free. The process of interaction starts with some demand in the free potentiality. It is the inspiration of the artist demanding a concretization. But the artist does not

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have anything like a finished imagination to be transformed to the material. The raw material, again as active potentiality, comes as a resisting force. Resistance offered by the material in the very process of concretizing provides meanings and definiteness to the possibilities of the artist's imagination, for it is in terms of conditions and nature of resistance provided by the material medium that the artist's imagination gets shaped. No rules can be laid a priori about the limits of the esthetic potentialities of the artist's imagination or the material medium. While an artist moulds the material medium in accordance with his imagination resisting material in turn moulds the imagination of the artist. The subjectivity of the artist and the potentialities of the material medium emerge only as a result of the interaction.

According to Sartre imagination of the artist transcends its material analogue through which it emerges, but Croce exhibits a complete indifference to the material artifact. A work of art for Croce is purely mental creation and exists only in the minds that create or recreate it. He clearly maintains that the expressive elaborations of an art creation could achieve the final form within the creative minds of the artist without the actual manipulation of the external material. For
Croce the material activity has either some economic value or it is simply a practical aid for memory. He says, "The aesthetic fact is altogether completed in the expressive elaboration of impressions. When we have achieved the word within us, conceived definitely and vividly a figure or a statue, or found a musical motive, expression is born and is complete; there is no need for anything else." Croce's thorough confinement of art to the creator's mind creates difficulties of its communication, identity, evaluation and criticism. Antipsychologist approach to art interpretation which arises due to the above mentioned difficulties is the other extreme position.

While introducing a book on readings in the problems of esthetics Morris Weitz, an objectivist, finds it essential to remove the most fundamental ambiguity from the theory of art. He calls this ambiguity the "process-product" ambiguity. This ambiguity, he thinks, arises due to the applicability of the term to both the


process and the product of art. In order to avoid the confusion arising from the applicability of the term, art, to both the process and the product of art, Weitz suggests that the use of the term may be confined to the art product. Having identified art with the artifact, Morris Weitz attempts his task of searching a logical description of the factual functioning of the concept of art.

For his survey of the artifacts, Weitz takes guidance from the historical theories which claim to provide the set of necessary and sufficient condition of a categorical definition of art. Morris Weitz surveys that, "Each of the great theories of art—Formalism, Voluntarism, Emotionalism, Intellectualism, Intuitionism, Organicism — converge on the attempt to state the defining properties of art. Each claims that it is the true theory because it has formulated correctly into a real definition the nature of arts; and the others are false, because they have left some necessary or sufficient properties.... Is aesthetic theory, in the sense of a true definition or set of necessary and sufficient properties of art, possible? If nothing else does, the history of aesthetics itself should give one enormous pause here. For in spite of the many theories, we seem
Morris Weitz finds that traditional theories of art are not true to the claim they make, although each theory aims to give a criterion of excellence and evaluation of art, their statements amount to nothing else than either a repudiation of preceding claims or a justification of certain criteria totally absent in previous theories. Morris Weitz, in this helpless situation, resorts to a solution of the problem of art by rejecting it. A theory in art, he claims, is not only factually difficult but logically impossible.

Dewey's conception of art suggests that the process-product ambiguity is not a mishap; it is not an ambiguity at all, for art is a quality of doing and what is done. Creative activity is, in fact, not possible in the absence of esthetic activity especially due to the reason that creation of art object is not guided, in any strict sense of the term, by any external or prior standards. Great art has always been characterized by a break from the tradition. Such considerations as tradition, technique, or old knowledge of any kind often

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obstruct the freshness and originality of the artist. An appropriate entry of such considerations again takes place through the artist's relating his doing with the effects he is undergoing. Dewey maintains, "The expressiveness of the object of art is due to the fact that it presents a thorough and complete interpenetration of the materials of undergoing and of action, the latter including a reorganization of matter brought with us from past experience."15

Creation, in fact, becomes esthetic only if it is controlled by reference to immediately felt relations of order and fulfilment. An experience is creative to the extent it is freed from the factors that subordinate it to anything beyond itself. Its meaningfulness therefore depends upon its self-sufficiency with respect to its production, perception, appreciation and enjoyment. The totality of this structure is repeated every time the object once created is esthetically perceived. Dewey in fact gives art the status of language not because its symbolism is bounded by conventions but for the reason that art presupposes an audience. Unless a perceiver is able to undergo the process of recreation of the object,

15John Dewey, Art as Experience, p. 103.
his perception, enjoyment and appreciation remain incomplete.

Recreation of the art object in its subsequent perceptions determines the nature and extent of communication and the kind of objectivity of meaning possible by means of art as a form of language. It is unanimously accepted that recreative experience is never identical with the creative experience. Two experiences of an art object even of the creator himself at two different occasions would differ. It is precisely for this reason that objectivists exclude the creative experience of the artist and the recreative experience of the spectator from their evaluation and criticism of art work. But they find that the product of art could neither be reduced to some structural properties nor to any set of arbitrary conventions. For meaningfulness and communicability of art, argues Dewey, it is neither desirable nor possible that the recreative experience be identical with the creative experience. He writes, "For to perceive, a beholder must create his own experience. And his creation must include relations comparable to those which the original producer underwent. They are not the same in any literal sense. But with the perceiver, as with the artist, there must be an
ordering of the elements of the whole that is in form, although not in details, the same as the process of organization the creator of the work consciously experiences. Without an act of recreation the object is not perceived as a work of art. The artist selected, simplified, clarified, abridged and condensed according to his interest. The beholder must go through these operations according to his point of view and interest.\(^{16}\)

The nature of objectivity of communication in art, according to Dewey, is similar to the kind of objectivity and identity that an integral experience (as discussed in the beginning of this chapter) possesses. Just as an integral experience demands an active reorganization of environment for the satisfaction of an organic need, an art creation involves the manipulation of material medium for the satisfaction of the esthetic impulse and fulfilment of an inspiration. The possibility of communication by means of art assures that art is not a subjective phenomenon. Even in case of performance arts like dance where no permanent artifact is created, there is a creation and recreation of an objective art experience in which the artist and the audience participate and an objective communion takes place. Since communication

\(^{16}\)John Dewey, *Art as Experience*, p. 54.
is not possible without the manipulation of some material medium, dance and drama utilize human body itself for this purpose.

Dewey's conception of art, as an objective experience, avoids both the fallacies of psychologism and antipsychologism. He rejects subjectivism on account of the reason that without utilization of material medium no objective meaning what-so-ever can exist. He also rejects objectivist's approach because he thinks that both the technique of art creation and its esthetic perception defy structural or formal comprehension. The objectivity of art is of a vital kind. The organic unity of an experience or an intensified version of it in art cannot be analyzed by means of intellectual or mechanical categories. Esthetic sensibility is required not simply to create art but even to appreciate and criticize it. A work of art is a perceptual embodiment of a creative experience of the artist the meaning or objectivity of which can be decoded or realized only through another recreative experience.