

Ermelinda Rodilosso

The principle of mutuality. An art-based approach to environmental aesthetics

Abstract

My work aims to focus on the intersections between aesthetics, intergenerational values, and climate change while exploring some core questions. How do aesthetic values interact with the construction of social and intergenerational values? Can the aesthetic experience of art have any influence on our attitudes toward the environment? These questions are related to the broader question: is the aesthetic experience of art connected to the aesthetic experience of nature? The thesis underlying this paper is that aesthetic appreciation of nature and art mutually influence each other. To prove this claim, I propose a Deweyan and pluralistic approach to environmental aesthetics that interacts with the fields of neuroaesthetics and intergenerational thinking. The key concept on which my proposal rests is the Deweyan connection between aesthetics and experience.

Keywords

Environmental aesthetics, Climate change, Intergenerational values

Received: 31/07/2022

Approved: 22/09/2022

Edited by: Elettra Villani

© 2022 The Author. Open Access published under the terms of the CC-BY-4.0
ermelinda.rodilosso@students.uniroma2.eu (Università degli Studi di Roma Tor Vergata)

1. Introduction

It is well-known that one of the merits of environmental aesthetics was redefining the boundaries and peculiarities of aesthetics as a whole. The inclusion of climate change within environmental aesthetics expands the field's scope. Indeed, ecological issues tend to broaden the philosophical inquiry in terms of space and time: on one hand, they no longer affect a defined geographic area but the entire biosphere; on the other hand, they concern not only the generations currently living on the planet but also future generations.

As regards the second aspect, one of the promising directions of environmental aesthetics points toward the inclusion of temporality and intergenerational thinking. The relationship between temporality and environmental aesthetics is multifactorial and proceeds in cross directions: it concerns the kind of aesthetic experience that future generations will have within the natural environment, but also the influence that the values of current generations will have on the preservation of the environment. Here I want to talk about the possibility to connect environmental aesthetics and artistic aesthetics, with a threefold purpose: first, to prove that they may influence each other; secondly, to suggest that reconnecting these two fields, rather than keeping them separate, can benefit both; third, to argue that a solid connection between aesthetic experience of nature and art can strengthen the link between environmental aesthetics and environmental ethics.

This purpose may raise some concerns: foremost of which is probably the notoriously challenging relationship between aesthetics and ethics. Furthermore, studies on environmental aesthetics have been mainly concerned with tracing the differences between the aesthetic experience of nature and the aesthetic experience of art to trace a line between the two fields. For this reason, it seems appropriate to make a premise: this approach does not intend to deny the autonomy of the two disciplines and reabsorb them into each other but to seek a fruitful contact between them.

I begin by outlining an approach that connects the cognitive model to the non-cognitive model through a Deweyan perspective. This approach leans on the idea that aesthetic experience is the result of a dynamic relationship between the subjects and their natural and social environment (Dewey 1934). Secondly, I argue that emotion and memory play a central role in aesthetic experience, both natural and artistic, and I analyse their

peculiarities in relation to neuroaesthetics. Ultimately, I explore the narrative role within an art-based account of environmental aesthetics.

The common thread in my argument is the idea of art as experience developed by Deweyan aesthetics. Indeed, it could be a ground for developing a principle of mutuality between the aesthetic appreciation of art and the aesthetic appreciation of nature, since it intends “to undermine more basic dualisms which underly and reinforce the sequestration and fragmentation of our experience of art” (Shusterman 2000: 13), such as the oppositions between body and mind, culture and nature, subject and object, and cognitive and non-cognitive. In my opinion, these dualisms are the source not only of an elitist conception of art but also of a form of incommunicability between the aesthetics of art and the aesthetics of the environment. Overcoming such dualisms is the first step in reconnecting these two dimensions.

Taking Dewey's pragmatist aesthetic as a basis is not problem-free. Despite “Dewey's definition of art as experience has a very fruitful transformational potential” (Shusterman 2002: 29), it is necessary to recognize that his elaboration has many controversies. Even Richard Shusterman, one of its staunchest defenders, stresses the need to revise and enrich Dewey's thought (Shusterman 1992: XVI). Probably, the most critical issue with *Art as experience* is the fact that it describes experience too vaguely and unclearly. As a result, the processes that characterize it are not sufficiently explicit (Shusterman 1992: 34), making any attempt to systematize pragmatist aesthetics particularly complex.

An incomplete definition of experience can make ineffective any attempt to reconcile artistic aesthetics and natural aesthetics. If the innovation of Dewey's thought lies in the elaboration of art as experience, its weakness may be the inability to take full advantage of the opportunities offered by this perspective due to its vague development. Specifically, if I cannot grasp how experience works and how it can influence the subjects and their aesthetic responses, I will not be able to understand how aesthetic experiences can influence each other. As a result, I will not be able to determine what are the connections between artistic aesthetic experiences and environmental aesthetic experiences.

In addition, the idea of experience conceived by Dewey can provide a certain degree of objectivity to my proposal, in the sense that the different human experiences actually accumulate into a body, community, or society. Through studying experiences, we can clarify, for instance, what cultural factors influence our aesthetic responses and cause us to appreciate an object in a particular way. Why does Chinese painting elicit some

aesthetic responses in us while Western painting elicits others? Why do we prefer a landscape at sunset over another time of day? We know that individual factors influence our aesthetic responses, but the social and cultural environments also play a role in this process. As I will explain later, a minimum degree of objectivity is required within an aesthetic that aspires to establish any connection with ethics. If an aesthetic theory relies solely on the subjective states of the individual, then any subjective motion can serve as a foundation for our behaviour. Hence, an exclusively subjectivist aesthetic cannot bond with the ethical.

No doubt, Deweyan aesthetics is not the only possible solution to overcoming the dichotomy between subject and object, but I believe it can make a significant contribution to the purpose.

2. Cognitivism vs non-cognitivism

As has been observed (Brady and Prior 2020; Carlson 2018; Eaton 1998) the contemporary debate in environmental aesthetics can be divided into two main approaches, usually labelled cognitivism and non-cognitivism. Cognitivism argues that a certain kind of knowledge is required to the aesthetic appreciation of nature: in order to adequately experience nature, we need a solid grounding that is provided by natural science (Carlson 1981, 2000, 2007) or other forms of knowledge, such as cultural tradition or narrative (Saito 1998; Heyd 2001; Eaton 1998). Non-cognitivist positions tend to de-emphasize the previous statement, focusing on our less cognitive responses to aesthetic experience, namely engagement (Berleant 1991), imagination (Brady 1998) and emotion (Carroll 1993).

This demarcation, however, is not that sharp. There are several accounts that lie between cognitivism and non-cognitivism, which adopt a pluralistic or integrated perspective (Brady 1998; Moore 2008). Such approaches aim to overcome the major problems of cognitivist and non-cognitivist theories, holding that knowledge is not essential to the aesthetic appreciation of environment, but also recognizing the need for an objective grounding. I give a brief overview about some of the issues of both orientations.

The scientific cognitivist account developed by Allen Carlson relies on a “pure aesthetic appreciation” (Carlson 2000: 21) that might be criticized as reductionist, since it excludes subjective elements from aesthetic experience. Carlson’s attempt to guarantee objectivity to the aesthetic ex-

perience of nature turns out to eradicate the subject from the whole process. Ultimately, it is reasonable to state that “total objectivity in aesthetic judgements is an impossible goal” (Brady 1999: 153), since the ways in which we aesthetically experience an object is deeply influenced by the realm of human interactions and the social context (Bourriaud 1998; Bourdieu 1984). On the other hand, subjective perspectives like Berleant’s multi-sensory immersion in nature (Berleant 1991) tend to lack an objective standard. As Carlson and Parsons point out in their works, if the beauty lies merely in the eyes of the beholder, aesthetic experience is reduced to being personal and acritical (Carlson 1981, 2007, 2010; Parsons 2006).

One remark must be made at this point. If we intend to establish a connection between environmental aesthetics and environmental ethics, a certain degree of objectivity in aesthetic appreciation is required. As rightly noted by Janna Thompson, the interrelation “between aesthetic judgement and ethical obligation fails unless there are objective grounds” (Thompson 1995: 292). If there are no criteria to properly appreciate nature, then environmental aesthetics provides no ground for nature preservation. In other words, if aesthetic experience is merely personal, it is not possible “to learn to appreciate something, or at least to regard it as worthy of preservation” (Thompson 1995: 292). In this case, the transition from appreciation to action becomes highly problematic. No objectivity, no moral turn.

All things considered, a synthesis between cognitivism and non-cognitivism represents a fruitful opportunity to develop a connection between environmental aesthetics and environmental ethics, because: a) it does not pursue the problematic aim of total objectivity; b) but, at the same time, it does not fall into the total absence of objectivity. Indeed, the purpose of my work is to focus on the appreciator of aesthetics experience, by stating that the core of beauty relies in the interactions between humans and their surroundings, including intangible ones, such as culture and social context.

Noted that “it is important to recognize that our capacity for aesthetic appreciation isn’t an innate skill” (Moore 2008: 70), I move forward affirming that knowledge, social context and culture can affect our aesthetic appreciation of both nature and art, in the wake of Bourdieu’s thinking. In the following paragraph I will outline the reasons why a Deweyan approach can overcome the opposition between cognitivism and non-cognitivism.

3. *Beyond cognitivism and non-cognitivism: a Deweyan view*

The problem of the dichotomy between cognitivism and non-cognitivism relates more broadly, I believe, to the dispute between objectivistic and subjectivistic aesthetics. Indeed, it is possible to identify a binary tendency in cognitivist and non-cognitivist orientations: the former leans towards the object of aesthetic experience, while the latter focuses on the subject of aesthetic experience. Many models have tried to contrast subject/object dichotomy, but the one I would like to present here is Deweyan pragmatism and Shusterman's reception of Deweyan thought.

3.1. *The aesthetic and the natural being*

The first thing that emerges in reading Dewey's works is that his aesthetics represents an ambitious attempt to transcend traditional aesthetics. While modern aesthetics tended to limit aesthetic experience solely to the domain of fine art, Dewey intends to reconnect aesthetic experience with experience in its integrity. According to this view, aesthetic experience plays a pivotal role in human life: it deepens, enlarges and gives meaning to all kinds of experiences (Dewey 1934: 34). Why does this happen? Because Dewey states, "aesthetic experience is experience in its integrity" (Dewey 1934: 274). In other words, through it, we can feel a fullness of meaning which is immediately evoked. Whereas ordinary experiences and cognitive experiences are fragmented, aesthetic experiences are characterized by an intrinsic unity. This unity has the privilege of intensifying our daily experiences and showing them to us in a new light.

To understand the scope of these statements and to propose, as a result, the possibility of a Deweyan approach to aesthetics, it is necessary to delve into two concepts: a) the somatic naturalism and b) the peculiarities of aesthetic experience. Once I trace the fundamentals of Dewey's aesthetic thought, it is possible to weigh its consequences for aesthetics in its complexity and the benefits it can bring in the communication between artistic aesthetics and environmental aesthetics, between culture and nature.

The cornerstone of Dewey's naturalism lies in a seemingly trivial observation: humans are living beings in constant interaction with their environment (Dewey 1925: 370). This interaction consists in moments of pause and activity that punctuate the natural rhythms of the "live creature" and determine the behaviours of individuals and the fabric of their

community. In this view, there is a continuity between nature and culture: the natural environment and its biological rhythms influence humanity, while the actions of individuals and communities affect the environment. Beauty is also deeply rooted in our biological rhythms, “which gradually get reflected and elaborated into the rhythms of myth and art and the rhythmic laws of science” (Dewey 1934: 152). To Dewey, aesthetics is an embodied expression of natural energies emerging in our interaction with the environment (Dewey 1934: 155-6), and it concerns human life in its complexity. In relation to this, a sharp separation between aesthetics and nature is detrimental to human experience since it makes the self “an unnaturalized and unnaturalizable alien in the world” (Dewey 1925: 24). We could say that the dichotomies inherited from the Cartesian tradition vitiates our ability to connect with the natural and social environment around us.

Here, it is important to specify that Dewey’s naturalism is not mechanistic nor reductionist: it considers nature and culture as closely united by a form of continuity. Unlike Santayana (Santayana 1925), Dewey states that nature and humanity affect each other: there is a link between humans’ perspectives, actions, beliefs, and the world. Santayana’s mistake had been to elaborate a type of naturalism that, instead of bringing together the relations between humanity and the environment in a harmonious dimension, continued to reiterate dualistic distinctions between the mechanisms of nature and the human mind, making his naturalism “broken-backed” and “half-hearted” (Dewey 1927). Given the characteristics of Dewey’s naturalism, it is possible to rule out the possibility of falling into excessive reductionism. A naturalist aesthetics that recognizes human biological links with the environment does not imply that aesthetic experience is equivalent to an exclusive exchange of resources and energies with the biosphere. More simply, it allows us to overcome certain dualisms and restore to aesthetics a continuity with experience in the natural world, a step that I believe is necessary to any aesthetics of the environment.

Following this line of thought, Dewey stands in antithesis to the elitist tradition of the fine arts: while the latter promotes the idea that art must be separate from the practical world – condensed into the theory of parnassianism – Deweyan aesthetics is based on the relation between art and experience, and consequently on the connections that the aesthetic has with the natural, the practical, the ordinary, and the cognitive. In a nutshell, Dewey believes that aesthetic experience is rooted in our life and in what we do. For these reasons, relegating aesthetic experience

within the fine arts seems reductive: an aesthetic experience that freely enters human life enhances its meanings, actions, and connections and makes it possible for humans to interact virtuously with the social and natural world. If we focus on the exceptional nature of aesthetic experience, we can see that Deweyan aesthetics is by no means a reduction of aesthetics to the realm of the ordinary. On the contrary, despite aesthetic experience works in every human experience, it represents a particular form of its extension and attribution of meaning and unity.

Moving toward the idea of aesthetic experience according to Dewey, I will first clarify the concept of experience in general. In *The need for a recovery of philosophy*, we find a layered definition. Experience is a term for a) “the intercourse of a living being with its physical and social environment”, b) “a genuinely objective world which enters into the actions and suffering of men and undergoes modification through their responses”, c) “an effort to change the given [...] characterized by projection, by reaching forward into the unknown”, d) “an undergoing of an environment and a striving for its control in new directions” (Dewey 1917: 111). Later on, Dewey adds that experience “occurs continuously” (Dewey 1934: 35), that is self-sufficient when “runs its course to fulfilment” (Dewey 1934: 35).

Every kind of experience has these characteristics. All these elements coexist and flow into each other, composing a complex pattern of possibilities. But what about the aesthetic experience? What makes it *different*? Dewey describes the aesthetic experience as “experience in its integrity” (Dewey 1934: 278), showing that it has a form of completeness through which the organism achieves an immediate sense of fulfilment. Unfortunately, Dewey does not say much more about aesthetic experience. The fact that Dewey provided neither a detailed definition nor an elaboration on the preconditions of aesthetic experience, nor a comprehensive description of this process, makes his aesthetic thought incomplete.

We know that aesthetic experience is something that develops over time (Dewey 1934: 62), but that is also cumulative (Dewey 1934: 28), meaning that the subjects’ aesthetic experiences stratify and influence their future responses. Moving forward, it has a moral and emotional connotation (Dewey 1934: 16): our interactions with the environment disclose different scenarios with which we associate a particular emotional state. During a certain type of aesthetic experience, we can feel peaceful, overwhelmed, disgusted, frightened, joyful, and this emotional response

will play a role in our future aesthetic judgments. In other words, the elements that characterize our experiences merge and blend into the new ones: “as one part leads to another and as one part carries on what went before, each gains distinctness in itself” (Dewey 1934: 36). Not only that, the arts, by intensifying human life, enable us to learn the meanings of our relationship with the environment and to change the ways we live and interact with it. (Dewey 1934: 17) Lastly, aesthetic experience is informed not only by the interactions with the environment but also by the socio-cultural dimension (Dewey 1934: 7-8, 43-4, 246). This means that interactions with social phenomena also play a role in our aesthetic experiences.

The Deweyan concept of aesthetic experience lends itself to criticism. Shusterman admits that Dewey’s notion regards many ordinary situations that are not artistic, meaning that it “fails to reflect the precise content and scope of our concept of art” (Shusterman 1992: 34). More broadly, this account risks to put together aesthetic experience with ordinary experience, without being able to distinguish them. Parsons and Carlson affirm that, even if Dewey’s theory embraces the possibility of appreciating a multi-sensory experience, it does not recognize a proper distinction between aesthetics and bodily pleasures (Parsons and Carlson 2008: 177). This criticism needs to be acknowledged. However, it would be wrong to conclude that this issue compromises the Deweyan account as a whole: we need to identify a demarcation element between ordinary experience and aesthetic experience. The core feature of aesthetic experience might be, for instance, emotion or imagination.

Here I do not deal with this problem, but I focus on the process of aesthetic experience instead. To delve into this process, it is necessary to consider the gaps in Deweyan thinking and seek new solutions to elaborate a comprehensive aesthetics. One of the philosophers who addressed this was Richard Shusterman who, with *Somaesthetics*, inserted new elements within Deweyan reflection.

3.2. *The aesthetic and the soma*

The shift from naturalism to somatic aesthetics is made emblematic by Shusterman's reception of Dewey's thought, which initiated a line of research focused on this aspect, namely *somaesthetics* (Shusterman 2008, 2012). This disciplinary framework is precisely concerned with investigating the *soma* as the “locus of sensory-aesthetic perception (*aisthesis*) and

creative self-fashioning" (Shusterman 1999: 302). This term stands for a living organism where perception, cognition and emotion occur: the basis of aesthetic experience. If Dewey identifies the need to overcome body-mind dualism, Shusterman pushes pragmatist theory further, recognizing the body as our "tool of tools" and our "basic medium for interacting with various environments" (Shusterman 2008: 4). So, we are dealing with a living unit that perceives, feels, organizes, remembers, reasons and performs actions. The emphasis on the oneness between the human body and aesthetic experience is maximal: it is not a matter of conceiving sensory data as something that invests the inert body, but as an active *trans-action* between body and environment. More importantly, the *soma* is conscious, self-aware, and this awareness makes it a unity of sensation, cognition, emotion, and relation.

Although Richard Shusterman has introduced enriching elements to Deweyan theory, we still need to clarify how experience, in particular aesthetic experience, works. To do so, I think it may be prolific to have an interdisciplinary confrontation with the field of neuroscience and neuroaesthetics. Indeed, it is relevant to note that Deweyan naturalism and Somaesthetics share remarkable similarities with the concept of *embodied cognition* developed by neuroscientists and philosophers Francisco Varela (Varela et al. 1992) and Antonio Damasio (Damasio 1994), and consequently to the field of embodied aesthetics (Scarinzi 2015). According to this theoretical framework, the body is not a mere container of the mind: body and mind are different parts of the interactive process of experience. Following this line of thought, aesthetic experiences are embodied in human beings, that are inseparable from the environment they interact with. Embodied aesthetics, of which Dewey represents the forerunner, also recognizes the connections between dimensions traditionally labelled "cognitive", such as conceptualization, and "non-cognitive", such as emotions and psychological states. Embodied cognition theory considers all forms of knowledge and cognition embodied and the body as the *milieu* of cognitive mechanisms (Varela et al. 1992: XV-XVI). The motor system is no longer passive, a mere structure for performing mental functions, but an active part of interacting with the environment. The emphasis on the study of everyday experiences, the deconstruction of Cartesian dualisms, and the body's enactive responses are also in line with Deweyan approach.

In light of these points of contact, I believe a link between Deweyan aesthetics, neuroscience, and neuroaesthetics can be promising. Relying on concepts such as experience, learning, and cognition, the pragmatist

tradition has positively influenced the development of neuroscience and psychology in general. In addition, some neuroscientists have drawn on the theories of Merleau-Ponty and Husserl, making the exchange between this field and the philosophical world even more fruitful. At the same time, it is undeniable that William James' *Principles of Psychology* strongly influenced Dewey's elaboration of experience. Moreover, Deweyan aesthetics relies on the continuity between the biological and the aesthetic, and thus the conjunction of these two dimensions appears consistent with his theoretical framework.

To enrich the notion of aesthetic experience, I believe Deweyan pragmatism and neuroscience, although with differences, can communicate effectively and benefit from an interdisciplinary dialogue. Since Dewey's theory of experience has some empty spots, a reflection on the neuroscientific concept of experience could help us understand what is missing in Dewey's thinking and, more importantly, how to renew it.

4. The mutuality between emotion and memory

Experience is defined by Dewey as "the result, the sign, and the reward of that interaction of organism and environment which, when it is carried to the full, is a transformation of interaction into participation and communication" (Dewey 1934: 22) and a "prolonged and cumulative interaction with environment" (Dewey 1934: 28). But how can the experience be cumulative? And how does experience produce a transformation into the subjects? In other words, how does the experience – aesthetic experience – work? Unfortunately, Dewey did not provide us with a specific theoretical framing on this topic, but we can identify two building blocks in his concept of experience: emotion and memory.

In *Art as experience*, emotion is defined as a quality that can shape an experience: whenever we find ourselves in a certain situation, we react to stimuli with a collection of different emotions (Dewey 1934: 67) that lead us to classify it as joyful, satisfying, victorious, or sad, fearful, disturbing. This collection of emotions gives rise, over time, to a unified concept of that particular situation, which is the progressive result of a layering of similar experiences (Dewey 1934: 42). This means that: a) emotions guide our judgment about our future experiences, and b) judgment is constantly changing. We can apply the same argument to aesthetic experience: perceiving a certain collection of emotions repeated over time influences our future aesthetic judgments.

But when we deal with the dimension of temporality, which makes the accumulation of similar experiences possible, another element turns out to be crucial: memory. In order to grasp the importance of memory in Dewey's theoretical account, we need to move to another work: *Reconstruction in philosophy*. Here is observed that "memory is vicarious in which there is all the emotional values of actual experience without its strains, vicissitudes and troubles" (Dewey 1920: 2). What makes experience cumulative is precisely the mind's ability to store stimuli and associate them with each other, which requires the use of the faculty of memory. We make this kind of association through the set of emotions concerning a given situation, and as similar experiences accumulate and become recurrent, they crystallize into a complex experience that can also affect an entire social group, becoming "socially generalized" (Dewey 1920: 7-8).

This interpretation of Deweyan concept of experience is consistent with current neuroscientific reference models. Indeed, if we look at neuroscientific studies on aesthetic experience, we can find many points of intersection between them and Dewey's account and Somaesthetics. The aesthetic experience model developed by Leder, Belke, and Oeberst (2004) is divided into five essential steps: perceptual analyses, implicit memory integration, explicit classification, cognitive mastering, and evaluation. The last one includes both understanding and affective state, which lead to aesthetic judgment and aesthetic emotion. Their conclusion emphasizes that aesthetic experience is a cognitive process from which emotional states arise, that ultimately influence our future aesthetic experience. The model proposed by Redies (2015) identifies emotions as the element that modulates the degree of an aesthetic experience, and memory as the faculty capable of storing and comparing such information in the brain.

The work of neuroscientist Gina Gabrielle Starr is one of the most extensive and accurate on the topic. In *Feeling beauty*, Starr explores the depths of aesthetic experience from the perspective of neuroaesthetics and humanistic inquiry. She associates memory and emotion as the foundation of reinforcement learning and reward processing, both involving aesthetic experience, showing that: a) aesthetic experience is a dynamic and developing process; b) aesthetic experience relies on a neural architecture involved in perception, imagery, memory, emotion, and language; c) aesthetic experience influences the way we perceive art and the world around us, accumulating and changing over time. Although we are accustomed to conceiving memory as something that pertains only to the

past, memory studies suggest that it is instead something that concerns the foundation of every present and future human experience. Indeed, thanks to the experiences accumulated in our memory, we can plan and predict future situations, allowing the imagination to unfold. Aesthetic experience, says Starr, “can change how we think and feel in the now, and in engaging systems for emotion and reward as well as for imagery and even memory in the core network, in can change how we think and feel in the future” (Starr 2013: 147).

As we discuss the neural interconnections between emotion and memory, it is important to stress that memory is always emotionally connoted and is always characterized by a form of arousal, since the areas devoted to memory and emotion work closely together within the limbic system. From a neuroscientific point of view:

aesthetic experience starts with sensations or imagery, which we analyse perceptually and semantically and which engage processes of memory as well as of emotion; these sensations and images also have evolving reward value. [...] neural activation moves from sensory cortex forward toward the basal ganglia (reward processes) and toward the hippocampus and amygdalae (memory and emotion—though these functions are not exclusively carried out in these structures). (Starr 2013: 24)

The topic is vast and would require a dedicated study, but here I do not elaborate further on the interconnections between aesthetic experience and neuroscience. Based on the information gained, what I am interested in pointing out is that, when it comes to experience, there is a form of circularity between memory and emotion: memory enables the storage, categorization, and recall of emotions associated with a determined experience, while emotions stimulate the activation of memory. This is what makes experience cumulative and constantly developing: if I acquire several similar experiences, they are layered and connected and influence my future experiences.

We can conclude that Dewey’s insights, while incomplete and not always clear, are correct. Aesthetic experience is characterized by a dynamic interaction between the subjects and their environment (both natural and social), and this interaction concerns a form of mutuality between emotion and memory, which influence each other and affect the way we aesthetically perceive our environment.

5. *The mutuality between aesthetic appreciation of nature and aesthetic appreciation of art*

We have thus found a common element in every aesthetic experience: the interdependence of emotion and memory. Identifying a common ground to aesthetic experience allows us to trace connections between the aesthetic experience of nature and the aesthetic experience of art. Having reached this point, an important question arises: what kind of influence can art have on the aesthetic appreciation of nature? Can it be an opportunity for enrichment or a hindrance? What I claim in this work is that these areas can both draw nourishment from the other and, consequently, strengthen the links between ethics and aesthetics.

The concept of reciprocity between art and nature is not new. Ronald Moore developed it in his work *Natural beauty. A theory of aesthetics beyond the arts*. First, we must acknowledge that “whoever holds a stake in the natureworld is *ipso facto* viewing nature through an artifactual lens” (Moore 2008: 196). I already attested this in the preceding paragraphs: artistic experience consists of a dynamic and mutual confrontation between subjects and their environmental and social dimensions. Our aesthetic sense is never entirely “pure”, because our previous experiences produce an artifactual vision that influences our judgments. If any aesthetic experience can influence others, then environmental aesthetic experiences and artistic aesthetic experiences can have a mutual influence. This being so, if we learned to aesthetically appreciate a tumultuous sea, we might derive greater satisfaction from a painting by Ivan Aivazovsky. Conversely, if we experienced fulfilment from reading *Walden* by Henry David Thoreau, we could experience a path on a lake in a more intense and meaningful way.

Such an approach appears applicable to many non-cognitivist models. For instance, if we consider Carroll’s arousal account (1993), our emotional responses to aesthetic experiences may interact and shape our aesthetic sense. As previously stated, emotion has a powerful impact on memory and if we accumulated layers of aesthetic experiences that provoke a collection of similar emotions, we would be more likely to imprint them in memory and draw connections between them. Brady’s imaginative model (1998) might instead be compatible with the idea that imaginative experiences can refine and guide our aesthetic appreciation. Through the accumulation of these kinds of experiences, we can compare them with each other and improve our ability to “imagine well” (Brady 1998: 145). Ultimately, I believe that a Deweyan and pluralistic approach

to environmental aesthetics can offer valuable resources for reflection in combination with other models.

Of course, not all art teaches us to appreciate nature: it can also be misleading and present a narrow view of the natural environment. For this reason, I need to make two clarifications: a) not all art forms are equally suited to sharpen our aesthetic sense of nature, and b) not all works of art teach us to properly appreciate nature.

The first statement mainly concerns the formal aspects of aesthetic experience. If we think about art forms, it is evident that landscape painting can conflict with the aesthetic appreciation of nature. Indeed, it forces the spectator into a static point of view, reduces the environment to a scene, and does not convey a multisensory set of sensations (Carlson 2009). On the contrary, architecture and land art both elicit a dynamic experience in the appreciator, and they are immersed and in close contact with the environment. As in the case of architecture, they can even represent our “human environment” (Carlson 1986: 23). It is, therefore, necessary to recognize that there are limits to the effectiveness of different art forms because not all of them foster an ideal connection with the aesthetic experience of nature.

The second statement, on the other hand, concerns the semantic aspects of aesthetic experience. Clearly, the semantic content of a work of art does not always resonate with the relationship between humans and the environment, or it may suggest an erroneous aesthetic appreciation of nature. In this case, the aesthetic experience of a work of art may have no positive effect on our relationship with the environment. However, the usefulness of a Deweyan and pluralistic approach to environmental aesthetics also lies in the possibility of analysing what misguided views we have of the beauty and value of nature. Understanding what aesthetic and cultural biases lead us to have a flawed view of the environment also helps us to set in motion our resources to change our perspectives. In conclusion, although the mutuality of art and nature is not linear and is not without its problems, it remains a valid element to be evaluated within the reflection on aesthetics.

I consider two main objections to my proposal of a mutual relationship between art and nature. The first one starts from the assumption that environmental aesthetics and artistic aesthetics present significant differences in the kind of experience they elicit in the appreciator. These differences are unquestionably true, as emphasized by many works on the topic (Berleant 1991; Brady 1998, 2009, 2020; Carlson 2000, 2007, 2010). Nonetheless, I believe these differences do not affect the Deweyan model

I analysed in the previous paragraphs: even if environmental aesthetic experience presents its characteristics, we have already attested that it consists of a dynamic process that can interact with other types of experience, whether physical, cultural or scientific. Therefore, we have no reason to think there is a condition of incommunicability between these fields of aesthetics.

The second regards the need to appreciate nature “on its own terms” (Saito 1998): if we assume that artistic and cultural layers affect our view of nature, we will never appreciate nature as it is. This is also a significant objection. However, we must recognize that our aesthetic appreciation arises from a human perspective, which is ineradicable. Clearly, to make a connection between the aesthetic and the ethical, it is necessary to employ all our resources to appreciate nature on its own terms. Still, we cannot achieve a “pure” aesthetic appreciation of nature. The socio-cultural context constantly mediates our aesthetic experiences, and this becomes evident when we think about the different aesthetic canons that have followed throughout the history of humanity. If we did not recognize this, we would risk falling back into a rigid form of objectivism.

For these reasons, a Deweyan approach to environmental aesthetics turns out to be fruitful, since it is grounded in the objective processes that characterize artistic experience while remaining subject-centred. In this way, we can have at least three positive outcomes: a) to identify and understand the negative drifts in our appreciation of the natural environment, b) to promote the refinement of our aesthetic sense regarding the environment, c) to shape or enrich our intergenerational values related to the environment. In the next paragraph, I explore these possibilities in the field of narrative.

6. Narrative and intergenerational values: a powerful intersection

Of all the forms of communication, narrative is probably the most present in our lives and the most present throughout human history. “Narrative is present in myth, legend, tale, novella, epic, history, tragedy, drama, comedy [...] Narrative is international, transhistorical, transcultural: it is simply there, like itself” (Barthes 1977: 79). Arguably, the most engaging aspect of narrative is that it has to do with our lives and the encoding, evolution, and transmission of our values over time. For this reason, at a time in history when we need the construction of new values for the preservation of our planet, narrative plays a somewhat privileged role.

In the realm of aesthetics, narrative is present in different forms: many works of art have a narrative-type content, or from a broader perspective, they simply possess their own story. In this concluding paragraph, I want to argue that narrative art forms, such as literature and fiction, can effectively pose the question of intergenerational values within environmental aesthetics.

If we think about the formal characteristics of fiction, we can see that it elicits a kind of aesthetic experience that has similarities to the natural one. First, it is *immersive*. When we read a story we reproduce not only visual images, but auditive, olfactory, tactile and gustatory sensations as well (Winter 2019). “The hallway smelt of boiled cabbage and old rag mats” (Orwell 1949), “with his dripping and ragged clothes clinging to him cold and clammy” (Tolkien 1937), “I heard the rain still beating continuously on the staircase window” (Brontë 1847), “a sort of soft bread centre whose flavour reminded me of artichoke” (Verne 1870). This kind of experience is not strictly multisensory, but it reminds us of our past sensations, bringing them into our minds through memory and imagination. Moreover, the story builds up a certain setting – place, environment, or atmosphere – where the narrated events occur (Kort 2004). The reader enjoys a privileged view of the setting, observing developments while *immersing* themselves in it, producing a set of complex phenomena (Grünbaum 2013: 112), such as reactions, emotions, and engagement. So, spatial context and sensory reference are pivotal for fiction to work, since they allow events to manifest and the reader to perceive them. Thanks to these aspects, we can say that fiction guarantees an aesthetic experience endowed with a high level of immersiveness.

The second aspect of fiction is closely related to the first, and that is *dynamism*. It is important to emphasize that a story does not project us into a static scenery, but a constantly changing setting: characters interact with their environment and experience an action/reaction relationship with their surroundings. As well to the living creature and the *soma*, characters must be “alive” for a story to be a good story (Vermeule 2010), and thus they move, feel, and interact with their social and environmental context (Buell 2005), physically and emotionally. Narrative space is undoubtedly a place in which the writer, the characters, and the reader *have experiences*: they have emotional responses, acquire knowledge, and even refine their ethical discernment. Through these experiences, we can indeed broaden our horizons through “many lives, many circumstances, and many places” (Treanor 2014: 125).

The third aspect I want to mention is the *temporal dimension*. Fiction is the art form that most effectively marks the flow of time and can embrace broad periods. While painting and sculpture present us with an aesthetic stimulus crystallized in time and music scans a rhythmic and ahistorical time, literature and fiction have the potential to illustrate a dynamic time flow. Thanks to it, the reader can adequately perceive the changes that occur during the story, changes that affect the characters, their actions, and the places they inhabit. This characteristic is also the most fruitful in the field of intergenerational aesthetics and aesthetics of climate change for at least two reasons. First, a form of art that can adequately expose the manifestations of change – even climate change – can provide us with cognitive resources regarding the extent and the consequences of the Anthropocene. Second, it can show the possibility of shaping values over time allowing us to imagine different aesthetic and ethical values concerning the environment and future generations. Since it “plays an enormous role in shaping the way a culture perceives and conceives the environment” (Eaton 1998: 149-50), through fiction we can question our current values and compare different narratives about nature. In this sense, aesthetic values can interact with the construction of social and intergenerational values, and they may influence our attitudes toward the environment.

But why is that? How can narratives influence our values? A valid answer is provided by Brian Treanor, who states that narratives are connected to human identity and its possibility for transformation. Identity is a form of narrative that represents “an attempt to hold together her diverse acts, feelings, and thoughts into the coherence of one narrative subject that perdures over time” (Treanor 2014: 112). Ultimately, narratives are about our *whoness*, our ways of life, and the history of our paths and interactions with the natural and social world, which determine the construction and transformation of ourselves and our values.

The possibility of projecting ourselves within different stories allows us to imagine both destruction of and care for the environment (Ghosh 2016), thanks to the visualization of a complex spectrum of possibilities. The different narratives about the relationship between humans and nature can actively shape our current values and lead us to virtuously communicate with present and future generations. In addition, values shape our attitudes toward nature, whether aesthetic or ethical: a set of shared intergenerational values that promote a harmonious relationship between humanity and the environment refines our aesthetic and moral sense.

7. Conclusion

I have outlined the main cognitivist and non-cognitivist orientations in environmental aesthetics, recognizing the Deweyan model as one of the orientations that can overcome this opposition. The concept of art as experience can indeed bring together humanity and nature, the subjective and the objective. At the same time, I identified some gaps in this approach, admitting that Dewey did not sufficiently explain the functioning of aesthetic experience. Shusterman deepened Deweyan's reflection with the idea of *soma*, but I believe more is needed to complete the concept of experience.

Through a comparison between Dewey's thought and neuroscience, I could assert that memory and emotion lie at the basis of our experiences, making them cumulative. The accumulation of experiences, in turn, can change our perceptions and affect our aesthetic sense. The attested circularity between memory and emotion allows us to deconstruct the dualisms between art and nature, reconnect artistic and environmental aesthetic experiences, and explain how they may interact. Finally, I wanted to suggest that fiction may have a central role in the mutual relationship between art and nature because of its characteristics related to immersiveness, dynamism, and temporality.

I want to mention that the Deweyan approach I displayed is deeply pluralistic: my proposal doesn't seek to supplant current models, but to work in synergy with them. Indeed, I consider Deweyan pragmatism a cross-cutting approach into which other models can be integrated, such as the arousal or the imaginative. Among the many opportunities for enrichment offered by Deweyan aesthetics, I think it is appropriate to direct our reflection to the possibility of reconnecting the aesthetic experience of nature with the aesthetic experience of art, which would require further development.

As stated by Thomas Heyd, "we have to reconsider the relationship between ethics and aesthetics, but also nature and culture" (Heyd 2006: 11), especially if we investigate climate change. The possibility of irreversibly altering our planet compels us to bear all our resources to overturn climate change: from the destruction of the environment to its care. Through works of art and our cultural heritage that tell "stories that may guide us in our aesthetic appreciation of the natural world" (Heyd 2001: 134) we can shape our aesthetic and ethical values on nature, and hand them on to future generations. Proper communication between different

intergenerational values, stories, and experiences can help us both to appreciate nature “as it is” and to develop a virtuous relationship with it.

Bibliography

- Barthes, R., *Introduction to the structural analysis of narratives*, in S. Heath (ed.), *Image, music, text*, London, Fontana Press, 1977.
- Berleant, A., *Art and engagement*, Philadelphia, Temple University Press, 1991.
- Berleant, A., Carlson, A. (eds.), *The aesthetics of human environments*, Toronto, Broadview Press, 2004 and 2007.
- Bourdieu, P., *Distinction. A social critique of the judgement of taste*, trans. by R. Nice, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1984.
- Bourriaud, N., *Esthétique relationnelle*, Dijon, Les presses du réel, 1998.
- Brady, E., *Aesthetic value, ethics and climate change*, in “Environmental values”, 23, 5 (2014), pp. 551-70.
- Brady, E., Howarth, J., Pratt, V., *Environment and philosophy*, London, Routledge, 1999.
- Brady, E., *Environmental aesthetics*, in J. Callicott, R. Frodeman (eds.), *Encyclopedia of environmental ethics and philosophy*, Detroit, Macmillan, 2009, pp. 313-21.
- Brady, E., Prior, J., *Environmental aesthetics. A synthetic review*, in “People and nature”, 2 (2020), pp. 254-66.
- Brady, E., *Imagination and the aesthetic appreciation of nature*, in “The journal of aesthetics and art criticism”, 56, 2 (1998), pp. 139-47.
- Brontë, C., *Jane Eyre* (1847), London, Harper Press, 2010.
- Buell, L., *The future of environmental criticism. Environmental crisis and literary imagination*, Malden, Blackwell Publishing, 2005.
- Carlson, A., *Aesthetics and the environment. The appreciation of nature, art and architecture*, London-New York, Routledge, 2000.
- Carlson, A., *Contemporary environmental aesthetics and the requirements of environmentalism*, in “Environmental values”, 19, 3 (2010), pp. 289-314.
- Carlson, A., *Environmental aesthetics, ethics, and ecoaesthetics*, in “The journal of aesthetics and art criticism”, 76, 4 (2018), pp. 399-410.
- Carlson, A., *Nature, aesthetic judgment, and objectivity*, in “Journal of aesthetics and art criticism”, 40 (1981), pp. 15-27.
- Carlson, A., *Nature and landscape. An introduction to environmental aesthetics*, New York, Columbia University Press, 2009.
- Carlson, A., *Reconsidering the aesthetics of architecture*, in “The journal of aesthetic education”, 20, 4 (1986), pp. 21-7.
- Carlson, A., *The requirements for an adequate aesthetics of nature*, in “Environmental philosophy”, 4 (2007), pp. 1-12.

Carroll, N., *Art, narrative and moral understanding*, in J. Levinson (ed.), *Aesthetics and ethics. Essays at the intersection*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1998.

Carroll, N., *On being moved by nature. Between religion and natural history*, in S. Kemal, I. Gaskell (eds.), *Landscape, natural beauty and the arts*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1993, pp. 244-66.

Carroll, N., *The wheel of virtue. Art, literature and moral knowledge*, in "The journal of aesthetics and art criticism", 60, 1 (2002), pp. 3-36.

Damasio, A., *Descartes' error. Emotion, reason and the human brain*, New York, G.P. Putnam's sons, 1994.

Dewey, J., *Art as experience* (1934), New York, Perigee, 1980.

Dewey, J., *Reconstruction in philosophy*, New York, Henry Holt and Co., 1920.

Dewey, J., *Half-hearted naturalism*, in "The journal of philosophy", 24, 3 (1927), pp. 57-64.

Dewey, J., *Experience and nature* (1925), London, George Allen & Unwin, 1929.

Dewey, J., *The need for a recovery of philosophy* (1917), in R.B. Talisse, S.F. Aikin (eds.), *The pragmatism reader. From Peirce through the present*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2011, pp. 109-40.

Dreon, R., *Introduction to pragmatist legacies in aesthetics*, in "European journal of pragmatism and American philosophy", 13, 1 (2021), pp. 1-15.

Dreon, R., *Was art as experience socially effective?*, in "European journal of pragmatism and American philosophy", 5, 1 (2013), pp. 279-92.

Eaton, M., *Fact and fiction in the aesthetic appreciation of nature*, in "Journal of aesthetics and art criticism", 56 (1998), pp. 149-56.

Ghosh, A., *The great derangement. Climate change and the unthinkable*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2016.

Grünbaum, T., *Sensory imagination and narrative perspective. Explaining perceptual focalization*, in "Semiotica", 194 (2013), pp. 111-36.

Heyd, T., *Aesthetic appreciation and the many stories about nature*, in "British journal of aesthetics", 41, 2 (2001), pp. 125-37.

Heyd, T., *Encountering nature. Toward an environmental culture*, London, Routledge, 2007.

Johnson, M., *Mind incarnate. From Dewey to Damasio*, in "Daedalus", 135, 3 (2006), pp. 45-54.

Kort, W.A., *Place and space in modern fiction*, Gainesville, University Press of Florida, 2004.

Leder, H., Belke, B., Oeberst, A., *A model of aesthetic appreciation and aesthetic judgements*, in "British journal of psychology", 95 (2004), pp. 489-508.

Mattern, M., *John Dewey, art and public life*, in "The journal of politics", 61 (1999), pp. 54-75.

Moore, R., *Natural beauty. A theory of aesthetics beyond the arts*, Peterborough, Broadview Press, 2008.

Orwell, G., 1984 (1949), New York, Signet Classics, 1977.

Parsons, G., *Freedom and objectivity in the aesthetic appreciation of nature*, in "British journal of aesthetics", 46, 1 (2006), pp. 17-37.

Redies, C., *Combining universal beauty and cultural context in a unifying model of visual aesthetic experience*, in "Frontiers in human neuroscience", 9 (2015), art. n. 218.

Scarlinzi, A. (ed.), *Aesthetics and the embodied mind. Beyond art theory and the Cartesian mind-body dichotomy*, London-New York, Springer, 2015.

Saito, Y., *Appreciating nature on its own terms*, in "Environmental ethics", 20, 2 (1998), pp. 135-49.

Santayana, G., *Dewey's naturalistic metaphysics*, in "The journal of philosophy", 22, 25 (1925), pp. 673-88.

Shusterman, R., *Aesthetic experience and somaesthetics*, Boston, Brill, 2012.

Shusterman, R., *Body consciousness. A philosophy of mindfulness and somaesthetics*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2008.

Shusterman, R., *Dewey's art as experience. The psychological background*, in "The journal of aesthetic education", 44, 1 (2010), pp. 26-43.

Shusterman, R., *Pragmatist aesthetics. Living beauty, rethinking art* (1992), Lanham, Rowman & Littlefield, 2000.

Shusterman, R., *Pragmatism and criticism. A response to three critics of pragmatist aesthetics*, in "The journal of speculative philosophy", 16, 1 (2002), pp. 26-38.

Shusterman, R., *Somaesthetics. A disciplinary proposal*, in "The journal of aesthetics and art criticism", 57, 3 (1999), pp. 299-313.

Shusterman, R., *Why Dewey now?*, in "The journal of aesthetic education", 23, 3 (1989), pp. 60-7.

Starr, G., *Feeling beauty. The neuroscience of aesthetic experience*, Cambridge-London, The MIT Press, 2013.

Thompson, J., *Aesthetics and the value of nature*, in "Environmental Ethics", 17 (1995), pp. 291-305.

Tolkien, J.R.R., *The hobbit* (1937), Boston, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2013.

Treanor, B., *Emplotting virtue. A narrative approach to environmental virtue ethics*, Albany, Suny Press, 2014.

Varela, F., Thompson, E., Rosch E., *The embodied mind. Cognitive science and human experience*, Cambridge, The MIT Press, 1992.

Vermeule, B., *Why do we care about literary characters?*, Baltimore, The John Hopkins University Press, 2010.

Verne, J., *Twenty thousand leagues under the sea* (1870), New York, Barnes & Nobles Classics, 2005.

Winter, B., *Sensory linguistics. Language, perception and metaphor*, Amsterdam, John Benjamins, 2019.