

Published by  
State University of New York Press, Albany

© 1987 State University of New York

All rights reserved

Printed in the United States of America

No part of this book may be used or reproduced  
in any manner whatsoever without written permission  
except in the case of brief quotations embodied in  
critical articles and reviews.

For information, address State University of New York  
Press, State University Plaza, Albany, N.Y., 12246

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data

Alexander, Thomas M., 1952-  
John Dewey's theory of art, experience, and nature.

(SUNY series in philosophy)

Bibliography: p.

Includes index.

1. Dewey, John, 1859-1952. 2. Empiricism—History—  
20th century. 3. Aesthetics, Modern—20th century.

I. Dewey, John, 1859-1952. II. Title. III. Series.

B945.D44A67 1987 191 86-14545

ISBN 0-88706-425-6

ISBN 0-88706-426-4 (pbk.)

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

*For Jill*

Love is the bright foreigner, the foreign self  
Emerson

870929BTN3

Dewey arrived at methodologically to serve his original and ultimate end of providing an account of experience which preserved its lived organic wholeness, richness, and diversity.

Meaning, the subject of the next chapter, is grounded upon experience as situational. Meanings are emergent functions of situations and consequently display continuity with nature. We must expect that meanings will reflect the complexity of situations as both immediate and as mediate, as qualitative and as relational. Meanings function within wholes or contexts and exhibit the full interactional human involvement with the world. When meanings are thoroughly integrated with their media of expression and are intensely organized so as to effect experiences which stand out because of their depth, continuity, and texture, they become art. Art and aesthetic meaning mark the fulfillment of nature in experience and of experience in meaning. It is there that the capacities of the world to achieve the interpenetration of sense and value in human life are realized.

## Chapter 4

# The Embodied Mind

The systematic examination of the structures of experience has provided us with the basis for approaching Dewey's theory of meaning. We can expect that meaning will exhibit in its own distinctive way the transactional and situational features of the world in which it arises and operates. Although our century has been preoccupied with the question of meaning, perhaps because so much of modern life threatens to be meaningless, many of the dominant theories would have done well to begin where Dewey did and reflect deeply about the nature of experience and the relation of human beings to the world before elaborating their conceptual refinements. Dewey's views on the nature of meaning will strike many contemporary readers as too general and unsystematic, given the sophisticated competing theories. No doubt Dewey's views, radical enough for the first quarter of our century, need development. But in many fundamental respects, Dewey is still ahead of his time. What I believe his theory of meaning offers is a general theoretical framework for much of the work recently begun. It may yet provide a fruitful arena where the valuable insights from both the analytical and phenomenological-hermeneutical traditions can come and work together. That task, however, lies far beyond the scope of this book. It will be enough here to sketch the outline of Dewey's theory and to see it as establishing grounds for the claim that aesthetic expression presents us with a *paradigmatic* case of meaning rather than a peripheral one, as it has so often been regarded.

Dewey's theory of meaning is a vital link connecting his aesthetics to his general philosophy of experience. Yet while Dewey's views on experience raised a storm of critical dust, his theory of meaning has barely received any attention at all. The work of Everett Hall, Max

Black, and Victor Kestenbaum stand as lonely exceptions to this rule.<sup>1</sup> To the extent, however, that the work of George Herbert Mead can be regarded as the development of a project which he shared with Dewey, one can easily begin to grasp some of the contemporary as well as historical implications of the theory. Indeed, this approach has much in common with the diverse (but, possibly, converging) disciplines of speech-act theory, semiotics, hermeneutics, and theories of metaphor. This is not to mention its relevance to work done in cultural anthropology, socio-linguistics, and sociology.

Dewey's approach to the subject of meaning has an amphibious quality. On the one hand Dewey is strongly committed to approaching the issue from the standpoint of behavior. Meaning, after all, is something that occurs under specific organic conditions. Dewey is therefore careful, on the basis of his principle of continuity, to see meaning as emerging out of our biological activity. On the other hand, still in accordance with the anti-reductionistic corollary of the principle of continuity, Dewey treats meaning as an emergent, as a new manner of existence which cannot be reduced to its component units of biological acts. Thus meaning must also be approached from the standpoint of the novel situation which it constitutes, that is, culture. In both instances, Dewey will strive to avoid the fallacy of treating meaning as primarily cognitive. Long before meaning becomes a topic for questions about verification, grammatical syntax, logical structure, or categorial analysis, it is an affair of stories, lullabies, games, expressions of feeling, social interaction, religion, education, and art. Language, in this all-inclusive sense is the medium in which human beings participate in culture. To live a human life is to live in a world permeated by meaning and value. This rich domain of cultural life not only is the material upon which art draws but is also the soil from which art grows.

Dewey is interested from the start, then, in avoiding two extremes in dealing with the topic of meaning. The first extreme might be called the mechanistic theory of meaning. This essentially views meaning as a precise code of signals. While such an approach might include a wide array of contemporary theories, ranging from reductionistic psychologies to structuralism, a simple and obvious instance is the classic statement of language in the third book of Locke's *Essay*. (Although this part of the *Essay* tends to be ignored, I think it could be shown that Locke's theory of ideas is in fact an elaboration of his views about language.) For Locke our ideas arise from the powers of substances to affect the mind or from its own powers of activity. In either case, ideas arrive or are produced as complete and final on their own, or, as Dewey puts it, "ready-made." All that is needed is a conventional

system to represent our ideas to each other: "God, having designed man for a sociable creature . . . furnished him also with language, which was to be the great instrument and common tie of society. Man, therefore, had by nature his organs so fashioned, as to be fit to frame articulate sounds, which we call words" (*Essay*, III. i, 1). Locke always had trouble with his double attempt to think of man as discretely individual and also as a social being, as much so here as in his political theory. He continues:

Man, though he have great variety of thoughts, and such from which others as well as himself might receive profit and delight; yet they are all within his own breast, invisible and hidden from others, nor can of themselves be made to appear. The comfort and advantage of society not being to be had without communication of thoughts, it was necessary that man should find out some external sensible signs, whereof those invisible ideas, which his thoughts are made up of, might be made known to others. . . . Thus we may conceive how words, which were by nature so well adapted to that purpose, came to be made use of by men as the signs of their ideas; not by any natural connection . . . but by a voluntary imposition, whereby such a word is made arbitrarily the mark of such an idea (III.ii.1).

Language is conceived of as a system of names conventionally agreed upon for commonly held, but subjective, ideas. It is a social agreement, soberly and practically entered upon by thoughtful creatures. The notions of "agreement" and "convention" still plague anthropology textbooks, even though both these terms clearly presuppose a social context of interaction already existing. Language is then seen as a cultural, hence *artificial*, superimposition upon a system of natural relations. Nature and culture are dualistically opposed.

At the other extreme, we might locate the idealist theories of language which see communication as the realization of Spirit's self-consciousness through a concretizing medium. Hegel's whole *Phenomenology of Spirit* can be read as the (torturous) history of the languages whereby Spirit expresses and thereby comes to know itself. From the human standpoint, it certainly presents a more dynamic and problematic account of language than Locke's. For example, we read:

Language and labour are outer expressions in which the individual no longer retains possession of himself *per se*, but lets the inner get right outside him, and surrenders it to something else. For that reason we might as truly say that these outer expressions express the inner too much as that they do so too little: too much—because the inner itself breaks out in them, and there remains no opposition between them and it . . . : too little—because in speech and action the inner turns itself into something else, into an other, and thereby

puts itself at the mercy of the element of change, which transforms the spoken word and the accomplished act, and makes something else out of them than they are in and for themselves as actions of a particular determinate individual.<sup>2</sup>

Hegel makes the point that language is the active working-out, the expression, of something "inner," but this inner is not determinate until it is expressed or embodied in some objective medium. But then it is no longer inner or private. In becoming objective, the expression unsuccessfully tries to freeze what is, after all, a living, self-transcending process. Eventually, of course, Spirit will overcome its self-alienation through its historic embodiments and become one with its expression, history, in one luminous moment of self-understanding. Here it would seem that the Lockean tension between nature and language or culture disappears in the resolution of the Absolute. In the last analysis, however, I think Hegel succumbs to the subjective romantic view (which he strove to reject) whereby expression is the externalization of an inner self—the Absolute ultimately speaks only to itself about itself and realizes it is nothing other than this process of making Byronic stories about who it is. Another way of putting this is that whatever else we may think we are talking about, we are always, even if obliquely, referring to the Absolute. There is a final organizing teleology of speech which is the basis for making sense; the Absolute is the ultimate condition for the possibility of meaning at all.

Dewey and Mead, who both set out as Hegelians, had the intention of trying to naturalize what they considered the excesses of idealism while preserving its valuable insights. This does not mean, as Richard Rorty thinks, that they merely tried to hybridize Locke and Hegel, ending up with some sort of philosophical centaur. The problem was to come up with a model which could explain meaning as the development of symbolically mediated social interaction growing out of the conditional structures of biological activity. We have seen how Dewey grew dissatisfied with idealism and labored long and hard to compromise it with a more naturalistic perspective, a process which also involved a rethinking of naturalism. Whereas James' *Principles of Psychology* had been a guiding beacon in working out Dewey's theory of experience, it was singularly unhelpful on the subject of language or meaning, having in its 688 pages of text only two devoted to the subject. Experience and meaning were connected issues, however. Charles Peirce's early articles had introduced pragmatism essentially as a method of clarifying meaning through experimental inquiry.<sup>3</sup> If James' biological and teleological view of the mind could be connected with Peirce's view of inquiry as a method of determining, and thus settling, a disturbed or troubled situation through clarifying the prac-

tical consequences involved, then the basis for a theory of meaning as action could be established. This was essentially achieved in Dewey's breakthrough article of 1896, "The Reflex Arc Concept in Psychology." This article left the status of the social or the cultural rather indeterminate with respect to the questions of meaning. It was not really until *Experience and Nature* that Dewey came to work out the corresponding social dimension of his theory, which involved an application of the same model of action to the subject-matter of culture and meaning. Throughout this time Dewey and Mead mutually influenced each other, and their respective theories of meaning are quite complimentary. Dewey was tremendously aided by the articles of Mead, who in turn, based much of the lectures published as *Mind, Self, and Society* upon the less specific but synoptic theory of *Experience and Nature*. Meaning was to be understood as the symbolic use of biological gestures toward the end of coordinating social action. The individual needed to be able to take a social standpoint or perspective in order to interpret himself. Symbols provided just such a means: one could respond to them as others did and so use them with intent in regulating interaction. In this process, the individual realized his "social self."<sup>4</sup> Meaning had to be understood in terms of its functional and creative uses in cultural action.

This chapter will take the following path over this complex and rugged terrain. First, Dewey's crucial article on the reflex arc concept will be analyzed. This reveals that the unit of behavior, the act or the total action, determines the elements which fall within it and guides them as mutual coordinations. Two important phases of the act will then be discussed, emotion and habit. Every act is tensive and coordinating, having thereby emotional tone or depth as well as structure in action. Experience embodies this intrinsically dramatic and rhythmic quality, and art arises from the conscious exploitation of these features. In other words, experience is potentially expressive, and aesthetic expression is a natural realization of this capacity. But expression requires embodiment in a medium whereby it can become consciously, that is symbolically, appropriated. Communication relies upon the establishment of shared symbolic structures, i.e., culture. Communication relies upon a prereflective context of social action which lends itself to mutual articulation and thereby also makes possible a vast refinement and development of symbolic activity itself. A tacitly shared lifeworld expands into all facets of culture. Through communication as an ongoing process we can become significantly or meaningfully present to each other and thereby to ourselves. The presence of an articulated lifeworld leads to the development of experience as a self-reflective or conscious enterprise, spanning the range

from non-cognitive feeling to immediately apprehended sense to cognitive signification. The analysis of Dewey's theory of cognitive significance is beyond the range of this book, being nothing less than his instrumentalism. Here it will be enough to see that experience naturally has the capacity to have immediately embodied meaning that is not explicitly cognitive but which expresses everything which makes shared life human and worthwhile. Meaning is a contextually determined social process which is structured but creative and dramatic and in which *participation* rather than decoding or autonomous self-realization is the key idea. The inhabitation of the lived body is our first work of art. But it is only as we strive to transform the body into a participant in community that it acquires a significant or expressive life.

### I. The Act as the Unit of Meaning

The act is for the universe of meaning what the situation is for experience. It is a term which refers to that concrete, functioning, transactional whole through which the various phases are understood as integral organic parts and which, in turn, is realized by them. In spite of the inevitably Hegelian ring to this theory, it is emphatically naturalistic in the sense that it accounts for behavioral actions as well as cultural expressions by an appeal to the concept of organic activity. Instead of a transcendental Absolute, there is a natural organizing teleology to biological activity. In the context of culture, a number of individuals must be able to acquire a shared social perspective which can determine and coordinate their actions and forms the basis for the recognition of intent.

Working together at Chicago from 1894 to 1904, Dewey and Mead developed a biosocial theory of behavior which was ahead of its time, especially in its criticism of reductionistic S-R behaviorism. While Dewey laid the foundation in a brilliant series of articles on psychology, the most famous of which is "The Reflex Arc Concept in Psychology," Mead was the one who refined the theory, making it the cornerstone of his theory of social gesture.<sup>5</sup>

Before examining the theory of the act per se, the question must be asked, what sort of a world is it in which meaning arises? To this, Dewey answers, one in which there is structure and destruction; one in which action matters because it can effect a reconstruction; one, in short, in which there are both stable and precarious features so that *growth* rather than static, bare existing is the mark of life. The central fact of any life-form is that it has an environment. It is bonded to that environment in a stable way through its own internal adaptation and

through the external support of the environment itself, or implementation.<sup>6</sup> To be in an environment through structured or ordered activity is to be open to those features which can be destabilizing as well. The environment includes agents which may weaken or destroy the structures supporting an organism's existence. This may range from the microscopic wars of viruses, bacteria, and protozoa to the collapse of entire ecosystems. Were the universe simply fixed and predetermined in *all* respects, if, in other words, pure unperturbed mathematical harmony governed, meaning would not arise.<sup>7</sup> Not only would consciousness itself have no role to play, other than that of a ghostly spectator, but time itself would not exist. From this perspective one could not even perceive the *necessity* of the order. As Dewey notes, "A world that was all necessity would not be a world of necessity; it would just be" (EN, 64; LW 1:59).<sup>8</sup> Likewise, a world of pure flux would also be one of pure absurdity, utter meaninglessness. Even Heraclitus' cosmic flux had the hidden order of the "Logos," and Hume had his laws of association for the rhapsody of impressions.

The basic condition for meaning, then, is a world which has both the features of "the stable," the regular supportive order, and "the precarious," the adventitious, problematic, and aleatory disruption of that order. Here we should recall Aristotle's insistence upon both form and matter, actuality and potentiality as basic traits of the world. Dewey himself acknowledges that in his concept of matter Aristotle "came the nearest to a start in that direction. But his thought did not go far on the road. . . . Aristotle acknowledges contingency but he never surrenders his bias in favor of the fixed, certain and finished," (EN, 48; LW 1: 47). Most philosophies in Western civilization, says Dewey, are really "recipes for denying to the universe the character of contingency which it possesses so integrally. . . ." (EN, 46; LW 1:46). The previous chapter argued that Dewey's understanding of experience and nature called for a reintroduction of the notion of genuine potentiality. It now will become evident that this concept is significant for understanding the topic of meaning as well. If meaning is a process of communication in which there is an on-going interplay of the determinate and the indeterminate, of the actual and the possible, this will illustrate its continuity with Dewey's general theory of experience and nature. Most theories of meaning have attempted to comprehend the subject strictly in terms of the formal, structured aspect. Hence logic came to be regarded as the appropriate manner of approach for handling the meaning of meaning. The result was the detemporalization of meaning; logic achieved its clarity by being timeless and empty. Dewey argues that meaning is only *possible* in a world which can be disrupted, in which ambiguity, change, and destruction

play a role. This fissure in the world is essential to understand meaning. Meaning cannot be successfully abstracted from the world as *phusis*, as a temporal, generative process.

Thus Dewey approves the pluralism of Aristotle's natural philosophy, but rejects Aristotle's bias toward static classification. The plurality of nature also reflects nature's capacity toward dispersion, disorganization, and the gradual effacement of form. Order for Dewey is a dynamic and precarious process. It should be evident that the metaphysical issues raised in the previous chapter have a direct bearing on the question of meaning. Philosophies which view the real world as essentially static or purely actual with, at best, absolute mechanistic change from one atomic instant to the next will regard meaning as a question of simple logical correspondence or mirroring.<sup>9</sup> Though examples are rare of philosophies which go to the other extreme of advocating pure flux, one can note that in those cases meaning itself dissolves into pure random perception. Cratylus, we recall, ended up by only pointing at the flux, much as do the Zen Buddhists. Bergson saw language as inherently deceptive.<sup>10</sup>

Since nature is an on-going affair of stability and change, experience will reflect this on the organic level. Experience arises from the interaction of the organism with the environment, and as such involves the action of that environment upon the organism (and hence its capacity to be acted upon) and the action of the organism on the environment (its capacity to act upon the world and the capacity of the world to be acted upon). Dewey simply refers to this as "undergoing and doing." Now this process of interaction, of doing and undergoing, may follow a largely stable, routine pattern, such as one often sees in complex mating rituals between animals. It may, however, suddenly involve novel or threatening elements which either alert and warn the creature or inhibit and destroy it if unheeded. While other theories may either posit experience as originating in the world as a noetic spectator or as a mere epiphenomenal by-product, Dewey's view sees experience as arising from a functional need to interact effectively with the world, restoring stability by means or action. Certainly Dewey never intended for all experience to be reduced to a crude level of survival behavior or even to simple problem-solving like repairing a leak or trapping food. But historically and genetically from the Darwinian view, all the fundamental biological processes, the organs of perception, the complexities of the nervous system, and the structures of the human brain itself were selectively developed in the course of adaptation to an exploitation of the means of survival.<sup>11</sup> To whatever philosophical and poetic heights experience may take us, it also is there to help us get around.

Experience emerges from interaction; this origin provides the basis for intelligence, meaning, and the consummatory or appreciative phase of experience. There is, first of all, an inherent rhythm or shape to life as it oscillates between phases of stability and of instability. Any moment in the life of a creature is always situational and transactional. It is a moment of a process which has a past and a future, whether the organism is conscious of that process or not. When sensation and conscious experience occur, they may be seen as a broadening and deepening of this character. Significant too is Dewey's observation that growth and development are intrinsic to interaction. Growth is the establishment of continuity. Since organism and environment are mutually implicated at each moment, "It follows that with every differentiation of structure the environment expands" (*LTI*, 25; *LW* 12:32). There is, in short, a dynamic, rhythmic and growing nature to all interaction; experience exemplifies this in a heightened degree, and this aspect of experience itself becomes the basis for aesthetic experience and art.

Before examining how this rhythmic structure is possible and how it manifests itself in human experience, two further comments should be made. First it is not enough simply to assert that because experience has phases of doing and undergoing it thereby has structure. These phases must be *related* to each other or coordinated, and this relation itself must be recognized before meaning can arise. To adapt to an environment is not just to have a variety of responses, but is to have these responses *organized* into an overall unity of behavior. "Each particular activity prepares the way for the activity that follows. These form not a mere succession, but a series" (*LTI*, 27; *LW* 12:33). It is imperative for experience to be whole as well as diverse. The act of coordination or adjustment is teleological and temporal, and it establishes continuity.

The second point to keep in mind is that the structure of experience will be developmental, from a state of wholeness to a state of wholeness by way of an intervening phase of reconstruction or readjustment. The model of experience which Dewey presents is not a simple progression from a condition of routine, automatic behavior which is suddenly disorganized by a "problematic situation" leading to mechanical analysis, experimentation, reorganization and reintegration with a consummatory kick closing it off. There are a number of phases or functionally diverse parts operating at each moment. It is true that there is a temporal overall structure to an experience, and Dewey does tend at times to simplify this structure, so that one might get the impression that every significant moment of human existence follows the pattern of a motorist driving along, oblivious to the world,

having a flat tire, being awakened to the need, fixing the tire, and merrily going on his way with the satisfaction of having gotten out of a jam. Balancing this teleological dimension of experience is Dewey's conception of experience as a total *field* of action which has a complex structure at each and every moment and different degrees of focus, clarity, obscurity, and organization. It is *this* which changes from one moment to the next, not by a jerky series of mechanical actions, but by increasing articulation, illumination, meaning, and apprehension. To summarize: one must keep vividly in mind that experience for Dewey is *both* process and field—a "field-process" if you will. Structure is temporally *dynamic*; activity is *ordered*.

We must also recall Dewey's contention that the cognitive phase of experience occupies only a portion of the field. Both prior to and posterior to any knowing of the world, the world is encountered as something "suffered and enjoyed" (EN, 1st, 12; LW 1:372) so that "the difference between the esthetic and the intellectual is thus one of the place where emphasis falls in the constant rhythm that marks the interaction of the live creature with his surroundings" (AE, 15; LW 10:21).

This aspect of experience is "had" rather than known. For example, he says, "There are two dimensions of experienced things: one that of having them, and the other that of knowing about them so that we can again have them in more meaningful and secure ways" (EN 1st, 21; LW 1:379). Elsewhere, Dewey refers to "the universe of nonreflexional experience of our doings, sufferings, enjoyments of the world and of one another" (EEL, 9; MW 10:326). As experience becomes more organized, the qualitative immediacy does not retreat before a spectral world of relations. Rather, both the immediate or qualitative side and the mediate or rational side become more articulate and interwoven. The present moment, by being *part* of a whole developing situation, becomes suffused with the apprehension of the significance of the event, or "funded" in Dewey's term. Art itself, for Dewey, is the prime example of the power of experience to intensify and yet be meaningful. In other words, to understand Dewey's theory of meaning one must not lose sight of the world within which meaning occurs, nor of its inherently reconstructive and hence consummatory possibilities.

In the late 1890s Dewey at last hit upon an explanatory model of experience which satisfied his organic conception of experience, his attempt to have Hegel and Huxley at once. This model is most comprehensively presented in the article which stands as one of the major contributions to psychology, "The Reflex Arc Concept in Psychology," which appeared in 1896. Details of the view were worked out in a number of insightful articles, the most important of which are "The

Theory of Emotions" (1894-95), *Interest in Relation to the Training of the Will* (1895; 1899), "Imagination and Expression" (1896) and "The Interpretation of the Savage Mind" (1902). The essays printed in *Studies in Logical Theory* (1903) and Dewey's subsequent development of pragmatism would have been impossible without the basic ideas developed during this time. It is ironic that not only have Dewey's ideas been unprofitably ignored by philosophers and psychologists, but that his basic model has been used independently by thinkers as diverse as Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Jean Piaget, and Susanne Langer.<sup>12</sup>

The problem dealt with in "The Reflex Arc Concept in Psychology" is typically Deweyan: traditional dualisms (here that between stimulus and response in the peripheral and central nervous system) prevent a comprehensive, organic and functional account of behavior and experience. "As a result," states Dewey, "the reflex arc is not a comprehensive or organic unity, but a patchwork of disjointed parts, a mechanical conjunction of unallied processes," (EW 5:97). Instead of a mechanical cause-effect arc of stimulus and response, Dewey offers an idea which he calls "circuit co-ordination." What Dewey proposes, in other words, is to *start* with the idea of the organism already dynamically involved with the world and aiming toward unified activity. Since the organism is not self-contained, it must direct this impulsion toward an environment. Because the environment contains random, novel, and potentially disruptive elements, the activity must be one of continued readjustment and modification, that is, growth.

Take the old example of the child reaching for the candle and being burned. Whereas the old psychology sees a series of S-R actions and reactions (e.g., stimulus of bright-light; response of action-of-reaching; stimulus of pain; response of action-of-withdrawal), Dewey places these discrete actions within a whole context of developing activity, of exploration and coordination, in which the "stimulus" *can appear as such and so have meaning*. The same is true of the "response." First, the overall activity of the child is prior to any specific act of seeing. Dewey's infant is a bundle of out-going energies rather than a passive Lockean wax doll. Second, the *act* of seeing is prior to any "stimulation" of the retina; there is an elementary level of total sensorimotor coordination which organizes light into a visual field of "objects." Seeing is a general possible mode of organizing activity for the child. "In other words," says Dewey, "the real beginning is with the act of seeing; it is looking, and not a sensation of light" (EW 5:97). There is a "sensory quale," or a sense of the situation as a whole which is in process at the moment, which gives the particular moment its "value." Likewise there is of course the physical movement, "but both sensation and movement lie inside, not outside the act" (EW

5:98). Of course, beyond the simple act of looking lies the general coordination of looking and grasping. In this both the seeing and the reaching regulate and modify each other. The hand and the eye work together mutually supporting and coordinating each other in one activity directed toward an end. The experience in which they function widens and grows naturally.

In other words, we now have an enlarged and transformed coordination; the act is seeing no less than before, but it is now seeing-for-reaching purposes. There is still a sensori-motor circuit, one with more content or value, not a substitution of a motor response for a sensory stimulus (EW 5:98).

When, in this simple example, the moment of the hand being burned is reached, it also falls within the circuit of the whole act and cannot be treated as mere sensation or abstracted stimulus. Dewey observes:

It is worth while, however, to note especially the fact that it is simply the completion, or fulfillment, of the previous eye-arm-hand coordination and not an entirely new occurrence. Only because the heat-pain quale enters into the same circuit of experience with the optical-ocular and muscular quales, does the child learn from the experience and get the ability to avoid the experience in the future (EW 5:98).

The burn is interpreted or *seen as* the result of the action; if it were simply an isolated, brute sensation, unrelated to anything else, it would be a mindless, meaningless experience and would in no way enlarge one's perception or understanding of the world or change behavior at all. The original experience is "enlarged and transformed in its value." The various phases must be *seen as* parts of one whole act; the "feel" or "quale" of the beginning of the act and that of the end must be seen as termini of the same act, or, as Dewey puts it:

The fact is that the sole meaning of the intervening movement is to maintain, reinforce or transform (as the case may be) the original quale; that we do not have the replacing of one sort of experience by another, but the development (or as it seems convenient to term it) the mediation of an experience. The seeing, in a word, remains to control the reaching and is, in turn, interpreted by the burning (EW 5:99).<sup>13</sup>

Experience has the capacity to grow, for moments to fuse together and become meaningfully related parts of an overall action. Continuity can be established so that experience becomes surcharged with

meanings at issue. This is nothing else than what is perhaps the most important and distinctive human trait: the capacity to *learn*. It is no accident that at the time Dewey developed this theory he was engaged in his work on education at Chicago. Whatever else may have resulted from Dewey's research into education and the psychology of learning, perhaps the most crucial result for philosophy was Dewey's shift in epistemology away from "the problem of knowledge" toward the more important "problem of learning."

This analysis led Dewey to formulate the model of the circuit of coordination to replace the arc of previous psychology. What has been described is a circuit of "continual reconstruction" (EW 5:99). The emphasis is on the whole as well as the part. Dewey states that "what precedes the 'stimulus' is a whole act," and adds, "What is more to the point, the 'stimulus' emerges out of the coordination; it is born from it as its matrix; it represents as it were an escape from it" (EW 5:100).

This circuit is more truly termed organic than reflex, because the motor response determines the stimulus, just as truly as the sensory stimulus determines movement. Indeed, the movement is only for the sake of determining the stimulus, of fixing what kind of stimulus it is, of interpreting it (EW 5:102).

A part of behavior can play either the role of stimulus or response "according to the shift of interest." "It is a question of finding out what stimulus or sensation, what movement and response mean, a question of seeing that they mean distinctions of flexible function only, not of fixed existence" (EW 5:102), claims Dewey. Particular note should be given to Dewey's use of the word "mean" here. The old model, in fact, has an inexplicable jump from physical agitation to psychic event and back again, which Dewey views as "a survivor of the metaphysical dualism, first formulated by Plato" (EW 5:104). For Dewey, stimulus and response are "teleological distinctions, that is, distinctions of function, or part played, with reference to reaching or maintaining an end" (EW 5:104).<sup>14</sup>

Dewey distinguishes two stages of teleological behavior: The first is the case where the means are comprehensively adapted to the end (such as in the instance of instinctive or thoroughly habitual behavior); the second is the case where consciousness itself arises as an attempt to define and mediate both stimulus and response. In the first example, "The end has got thoroughly organized into the means" (EW 5:104), so that there is no need for conscious behavior: the act is definite from the start. In the second case, there is the need to render



the situation definite, and this means articulating the stimulus as well as the response. As Dewey points out:

Neither mere sensation, nor mere movement, can ever be either stimulus or response; only an act can be that; the *sensation* as stimulus means the lack of and search for such an objective stimulus, or orderly placing of an act; just as mere movement as response means the lack of and search for the right act to complete a given coordination (EW 5:106).

For example, take the case of a child who is sometimes delighted by and sometimes hurt by bright objects. Whenever he encounters a bright object, the outcome is doubtful: a "problematic situation" occurs. Dewey says, "*Now the response is not only uncertain, but the stimulus is equally uncertain; one is uncertain only in so far as the other is.*" The real problem may be equally well stated as either to discover the right stimulus, to constitute the stimulus, or to discover, to constitute, the response" (EW 5:106). Is the bright object a mirror or a flame? To determine which it is at once determines what consequences follow and which actions are appropriate. The doubtfulness of the end will call for the discrimination of the object in conscious perception.

Dewey summarizes this significant article the following way:

The circle is a co-ordination, some of whose members have come into conflict with each other. It is the temporary disintegration and need of reconstruction which occasions . . . the conscious distinction into sensory stimulus on one side and motor response on the other. The stimulus is that phase of the forming of co-ordination which represents conditions which have to be met in bringing it to successful issue; the response is that phase of one and the same forming co-ordination which gives the key to meeting these conditions, which serves as instrument in effecting the successful co-ordination. They are therefore strictly correlative and contemporaneous. The stimulus is something to be discovered; to be made out. . . . As soon as it is adequately determined, then and then only is the response also complete. . . . It is the co-ordination which unifies that which the reflex arc concept gives us only disjointed fragments (EW 5:109).

To understand the ideas presented above is to grasp the underlying dynamism of Dewey's mature philosophy of experience. In itself, to be sure, it addresses only a portion of experience, the psychology of behavior. It provides, however, a broad basis for interpreting and integrating the other dimensions, such as meaning, inquiry, and art.<sup>15</sup> In addition, it effects continuity between Dewey's metaphysics of situations as transactional events and his theory of conscious, signifi-

cant experience. The act is the genesis of a transactional situation on the level of organic behavior. Insofar as consciousness emerges from the act, it operates within it as an integral functional part. Yet, as will be seen, consciousness also brings with it the awareness of meaning.

To understand the act, it is necessary to go beyond the limited but central issue of simple sensorimotor coordination. Three important factors must be noted: first, because the whole act can be seen as the search for the proper stimulus to free action and unify the situation, the act is inherently selective; second, selectivity, which is a feature of all natural situations,<sup>16</sup> is manifested in experience as interest; and finally, selectivity and interest create the basis for an organized context of meanings and activities. While interest itself refers to the whole way the organism is implicated in its environment, its "intentional" involvement with a world, it also reflects the fact that every situation is relational: it is actively related and bound up with interactions, but it articulates a limited perspective. This does not mean all perspectives are of equal worth. Some are broad, generous, flexible, and profound while others are arbitrary, shallow, impulsive, and narrow.

A further basic observation can be made. Environments are not prior to organisms. That is, both are dynamically interdependent and are understood in terms of the other. George Herbert Mead offers the following simple illustration:

It is a difficult matter to state just what we mean by dividing up a certain situation between the organism and its environment. Certain objects come to exist for us because of the character of the organism. Take the case of food. If an animal that can digest grass, such as an ox, comes into the world, then grass becomes food. . . . In that sense organisms are responsible for the appearance of whole sets of objects that did not exist before.<sup>17</sup>

The organism determines its environment—it literally transforms a physical context into an environment. In this sense, acts radically transform the world, for they mark the release of new potentialities for existence. This is especially true of acts which occur within the universe of significant or symbolic experience. An environment then becomes a meaningful world.

Selection as part of the act is the determination of an attitude or perspective. It becomes the basis for forming an attitude, which, to recall, was the main point of Dewey's postulate of immediate empiricism. In other words, acts involve the determination of a field of action which includes the possible range of stances one can take to the field. In his article "Perception and Organic Action," Dewey offers an insightful criticism of Bergson's theory of immediate, intuitive selec-

tion based largely upon the model worked out in "The Reflex Arc Concept in Psychology." For Bergson selection is not only preconscious but primarily negative; i.e., it screens or ignores stimuli, subtracting rather than adding. For Dewey, "perceived objects present our *eventual* action upon the world . . ." (PC, 213; MW 7:13).

*What we perceive, in other words, is not just the material upon which we may act, but material which reflects back to us the consequences of our acting upon it this way or that. So far as the act of perception is concerned, we are led to substitute an act of choosing for an act of accomplished choice. Perception is not an instantaneous act of carving out a field through suppressing its real influences and permitting its virtual ones to show, but is a process of determining the indeterminate* (PC, 214; MW 7:13).

The act of perception, for Dewey, is no more just a censor than it is a mere spectator of appearances. It is an actor-writer; it is involved in transforming and participating in the ongoing events.

Because acts involve a structure, they involve the participant, be it mute organism or conscious "self," in its entirety. "The whole organism is concerned in every act to some extent and in some fashion" (HNC: II: vi, 150; MW 14:105). This point is emphatically repeated throughout Dewey's writings, and has far-reaching implications for his aesthetics:

It is not just the visual apparatus but the whole organism that interacts with the environment in all but routine action. The eye, ear, or whatever, is only the channel *through* which the total response takes place. A color as seen is always qualified by implicit reactions of many organs, those of the sympathetic system as well as touch. It is a funnel for the total energy put forth, not its well-spring. Colors are sumptuous and rich just because a total organic resonance is deeply implicated in them (AE, 122; LW 10:127).

Dewey is not just saying that the body is "implicated in perception" (PC, 226; MW 7:25), he is saying that the whole field of meanings is implicated as well. We do not perceive that shade of red because of some "simple idea" of red. In another essay, Dewey refers to this Lockean doctrine as "pure superstition." Instead, we perceive it as occupying a place on a continuum of discriminated colors. Even seeing something *as* a "color" is learned; originally we encounter total experiences from which "things" emerge. As Dewey points out, "a child recognizes its dresses long before it identifies colors . . ." (PC, 197; LW 2:51). The context of perception and meaning, then, must be conceived to be a whole field of sense and action which reverberates at each moment to the degree it is organized.

Therefore, in addressing the problem of meaning, Dewey does not start off by isolating the discussion to rules of linguistic usage. He begins by taking on a tradition deeply committed to mind-body dualism, to the separation of thought and action and to a pre-existent world of atomic objects, whether material atoms, Platonic Forms, Aristotelian individuals, or Lockean simple ideas, which provide the ultimate referents of meaning. Against these prejudices, Dewey tries to create a model of total organic coordination, the "psycho-physical" or "Body-Mind" as Dewey came to refer to it. The organism and its environment are mutually implicated at each moment; they are aspects of one situation fundamentally related through the act. The organism is just this ability to draw on a range of material in the world and transform the energy in that material into an organized pattern of activity. An environment is in turn that range of energy which is available to the organism and necessary for its survival.

To conclude, experience is part of a process of interaction. The organism-in-its-environment is the basic fact which any attempt to understand experience or meaning must confront. Too often philosophical theories of experience seek to ground themselves on an abstract, unitary *ego cogito* or *Ich denke*. As Dewey observes, originally it is much more accurate to say experience begins with "It experiences." Only when one is ready to take on responsibility for the consequences of action is it legitimate to say that "I experience" or "I think." The self emerges by committing itself to its future as a project.<sup>18</sup> To put it another way, the "identity" sought in experience will be found in the process of selecting and appropriating a course of action. Identity comes with identifying, and this presupposes the context of situational involvement. The unification or organization of experience, instead of being founded on an a priori given, is the inherent problematic side of experience for Dewey. That experience *is* capable of such integrity is revealed most vividly through the aesthetic or artistic, through *an* experience. But the overall continuity of experience is a perpetual problem for action, something which calls forth the need for care, intelligence, responsibility and meaning and which raises the question of value.

## II. The Relation of Emotion and Impulse

The act arises from two basic conditions. The first is the ground of the biological structural functioning of the organism. While this area is properly the subject of biology and physical psychology, it does carry important implications for a theory of experience and meaning. The

second condition is the social and cultural world into which each human is born. Not only are we intrinsically social creatures, depending on others for survival and fulfillment, but we interact with others and through this interaction come to realize ourselves as expressive, communicative beings who must mean what they say.

Let us look first at the biological aspects. The circuit of coordination described in the previous section provided a model of learning behavior. Dewey expanded his analysis in later works, most notably in *Human Nature and Conduct*, with increasing emphasis upon the role of impulse and habit in structuring our world into coherent, premeaningful patterns. Habits provide a stable repertoire of responses; impulse provides the dynamic impetus for immediate reconstructive focus in which the fixed, acquired pattern of behavior, the habit, gets re-enacted and adapted to fit the situation. In this latter case, not only is the old habit immediately involved, relived as it were, but it provides an interpretive structure or context to the immediate moment, raising the experience to a level of complexity and integration which it otherwise would not possess. In this process, the habit itself expands and grows as it tries to adapt to the new circumstance so that the domain of organized responses develops, a premonition of the growth of meaning in experience.

To put the issue into extreme cases, a world governed by pure routine habit is basically a non-conscious world. The repeated actions of an assembly-line worker dull consciousness to the point where a free-floating and diffuse day-dreaming may be most of what occupies attention. There is structure to the world—so much structure that automatic reflexes almost suffice. To take the opposite case, a world lived almost with pure impulse alone—the experiment of a Rimbaud for example—never acquires much meaning. Though consciousness may be raised to a pitch of frenzy, to the degree that structure is absent there is no meaning in the experience (other than, perhaps, the sense of confusion). In an ideal learning situation, however, not only is the present experience informed and interpreted through the past acquired habits, but the past, brought to bear on the novelties of the present, is revived and colors the experience with significance. Both the stable and the precarious are necessary preconditions for a consciousness which learns and grows. In addition, the present is informed with emotion and interest because of the role of the novelty of the impulse.

This third sort of experience is as much tinged with emotion as with meaning. As Dewey points out, "Habit is energy organized in certain channels. . . . Emotion is a perturbation from clash or failure of habit, and reflection . . . is the painful effort of disturbed habits to

readjust themselves" (*HNC*, I:v, 76; *MW* 14:54). Emotion is not an internal state simply corresponding to an external condition, which is mysteriously projected onto the world. It is the tone of the world or of one's "attunement" to the situation. Dewey sees emotions as "intentional": "an emotion is *to* or *from* or *about* something objective, whether in fact or in idea. An emotion is implicated in a situation . . ." (*AE*, 67; *LW* 10:72). Or, as Victor Kestenbaum says, "Emotions are a particular reflection of the irreducible implication of self and world."<sup>20</sup>

Emotion plays a revealing role in Dewey's theory of experience. It reflects the importance of the prereflective dimension not only in sensing the structure, but in anticipating organizing action. A major example of this is the selective power Dewey accords emotions. Emotion is from the start a response in activity and reflects the underlying dynamics of interaction. In its shock, it evokes the *need* for organized activity. It mirrors a fracturing of action and mutely but effectively points out the crisis in the field of experience, demanding direction and selection of foci of importance.<sup>21</sup> As will be seen later, this is achieved primarily through the "pervasive qualitative whole" which guides the sense of the situation. For now, it should be noted that this unifying, expanding power of emotion accounts for the inherent expressive power of experience.

Dewey's important article, "The Theory of Emotion," which antedated "The Reflex Arc Concept" by a year, supplements the latter's account of learning behavior with an analysis of the role of emotion and expression in experience. There, Dewey tries to mediate between the Darwinian theory and the James-Lange theory. While Darwin tended to regard expression as the externalization of a pre-existent internal emotion, originating in acts useful for survival, James, along with Lange, argued that "the bodily manifestations must first be interposed . . . we feel sorry because we cry, angry because we strike, afraid because we tremble, and not that we cry, strike, or tremble because we are sorry, angry, or fearful, as the case may be."<sup>22</sup> In other words, for James, the attempt to abstract all the *felt* physical symptoms associated with strong emotions results with nothing being left over; there is no "psychic" or mental entity existing apart, an "idea" or "impression" of "sadness," "anger," "fear," etc. "What kind of an emotion of fear would be left," argues James, "if the feeling neither of quickened heart-beats nor of shallow breathing, neither of trembling lips nor of weakened limbs, neither of goose-flesh nor of visceral stirrings, were present, it is quite impossible for me to think."

As in the article dealing with the reflex arc, Dewey sees that problem here is with the remnants of the old dualistic view of mind and body: either a psychic "feeling" with a physical reaction or a

physical cause with a psychic effect. Dewey's solution here is similar also: If we look at the whole situation first, before breaking it up, both physical action and feeling have integrated functional roles. Dewey's major point is that "all 'emotional expression' is a phase of movements teleologically determined, and not a result of pre-existent emotion. . . ." (EW 4:169). How are movements "teleologically determined"? Again, this refers to the act as the whole unit of behavior. Dewey states that "the situation clears itself up when we start from the character of the movement, as a completed or disturbed coordination, and then derive the corresponding types of normal and pathological emotion" (EW 4: 163). Normal emotion is that which has an object; pathological emotion, for Dewey, is "the objectless emotion," or rather, one which supplies its object and imposes it on the situation. In the normal case, though, there is a genuine response to the object; it "'sets trains going'—these are revivals of motor discharge and organic reinforcement. Upon such occasions thinking becomes really whole-hearted; it takes possession of us altogether, and passes over into the aesthetic" (EW 4: 157).

Here we see Dewey beginning to connect the aesthetic with a total, meaningful response to an object in a situation which involves the reintegration of a "disturbed coordination" in which both intelligence and emotion are interrelated and fulfilled. Expression is not the simple transit of a complete inner feeling out into the world by a mechanical action; nor is it just an accompanying inner response to physical conditions. It is the meaningful outcome of a process which has both phases of organic coordination and of emotional and conscious response and control. Thus Dewey says, "To an onlooker, my angry movements are expressions—signs, indications; but surely not to me" (EW 4: 154). Dewey repeats the same point years later in *Art as Experience*:

At one extreme, there are storms of passion. . . . There is activity, but not, from the standpoint of the one acting, expression. An onlooker may say, "What an expression of rage!" But the enraged being is only raging, quite a different matter from *expressing* rage. . . . Again, the cry or smile of an infant may be expressive to mother or nurse and yet not be an act of expression of the baby (AE, 61; LW 10:67).

As will be discussed later, this is an important distinction for Dewey: the difference between a mute, uncontrolled "seizure" and the fully controlled and funded expressive gesture which realizes the aesthetic. To anticipate, they are parts of the evolving situation, the seizure coming first (like fear of a rattlesnake in the path), the phase of

deliberation which tries to reconstruct the situation (e.g., to run, kick the snake, go around it, etc.), action and resolution. The original emotion of terror may be entirely transformed. From fearing the snake, we may develop an interest in snakes and their behavior and the role they play in desert ecology. We may even come to derive great satisfaction from observing them and, as naturalists do, seek them out. In the last case especially, the emotion has been transformed and made expressive because it has become connected with intelligence and meaning. It has been transformed by education. Instead of being eradicated, it has been given intelligent direction.

Emotion naturally arises in experience because experience is in rhythmic alteration from stable to precarious and back. As a stable situation (like walking) is suddenly transformed into a precarious one (like running across a snake), the emotional seizure marks the inhibition of habits, and announces the phase of readjustment; it is the tension of object and response. "The emotion," asserts Dewey, "is psychologically, the adjustment or tension of habit and ideal . . ." (EW 4:185). Emotion is properly considered a phase of the ongoing situation, and to the extent that experience is dramatic, intelligent, and informed, it will also have a depth of emotion to it and be expressive.

Here is one illuminating point where Dewey and Plato are in some agreement. Plato is often misunderstood as seeking to suppress desire. But for anyone who has read *The Symposium* or the central books of *The Republic*, it is evident that the good life for Plato does not involve the eradication of desire, or eros, but the education of desire. Eros mediates the world of ideal reality and the world of changing binding them together. Only those who feel this drive most have true philosophical natures, says Plato. Philosophy, in other words, becomes the education and fulfillment of eros. However blind emotion may be as it awakens in the process of life, Dewey also argues that it becomes the impulsive force whereby we seek the ideal of reintegration and discover the paths of intelligence. The integrated experience which Dewey sees exemplified in the aesthetic, will be alive with mind and feeling thoroughly interwoven. In its own way, the aesthetic experience will be that vision of the sea of beauty described by Plato. Only, for Dewey, this reflects the realization of the ideal possibilities of nature rather than the transformation of our natural origin in a moment of celestial homecoming. For both, however, one can state that human experience is a nisus toward a determining, meaning-giving horizon aesthetically apprehended, a drive which is the offspring of need and resource.

Dewey describes two further constituent factors of the act. They are impulse and habit. Impulse refers to the spontaneous, "plastic

and creative phase of the act in which the need for reconstructing the situation is apparent, and one seeks the best response, the "search for the correct stimulus." "Impulses are the pivots upon which the re-organization of activities turn, they are agencies of deviation, for giving new directions to old habits, changing their quality" (*HNC*, II:i, 93; *MW* 14:67). In broader terms, impulses reflect the possibility of creative response opened up in the tensive nature of the situation, and thus are vital for genuine growth and continuity. They mark the interface between the stable, structured world of habit and the immediacy of the present, which grabs us with emotional seizure.

Dewey distinguishes impulsion from impulse. The former term is the "movement outward and forward" of the "organism in its entirety." It is the general organizing activity of the living being rather than any specific action. "Impulsions are the beginnings of complete experience because they proceed from need . . . that belongs to the organism as a whole and that can be supplied only by instituting definite relations (active relations, interactions) with the environment" (*AE*, 58; *LW* 10:64). This is nothing less than the origin of the possibility of aesthetic experience. It indicates why Dewey will acknowledge the significance of *an* experience because of its capacity to satisfy the impulsion for wholeness and integrity. The act is built upon this premise: significant experience is the striving toward fulfillment. When this striving is thwarted, the impulsion or demand tacitly operating becomes consciously revealed. Recall Heidegger's famous example of becoming aware of the essence of a hammer because of its breaking during routine activity, thereby suddenly leaping to attention. It goes from being merely "ready-to-hand" (the preconscious world of automatic habit, in Dewey's terms) to being "present-at-hand" (a tensive focus of consciousness for Dewey).<sup>23</sup> The moment the world is raised to awareness, as it were, is the moment it threatens to fall apart. The world as *object* arises from the world as action. If the sense of the original prereflective wholeness of experience is lost, we may settle upon any number of "dualisms" to account for the problematic world which sets consciousness its tasks: subject and object, mind and body, theory and practice, and so on. The broken hammer, originally part of a unified field of activity, is suddenly set off against "me" with my desires and purposes as a "thing" or "object."

To the extent the situation is reintegrated, meaning is added: "Blind surge has been changed into a purpose; instinctive tendencies are transformed into contrived undertakings. The attitudes of the self are informed with meaning" (*AE*, 59; *LW* 10:65). The carpenter with the broken hammer is suddenly aware of who he is, what he is doing, what role he plays in the entire project. He also is capable of being

aware, as Heidegger points out, of the whole "world" involved in the simple activity: the hammer relates to nails, wood, building, living houses, social occupations, and so on. For Dewey, the sense of the meaning of the situation becomes expressive as it is reconstructed

Impulsion from need starts an experience that does not know where it is going; resistance and check bring about the conversion of direct forward action into re-flection; what is turned back is the relation of hindering conditions to what the self possesses as working capital in virtue of prior experiences. As the energies thus involved reinforce the original impulsion, this operates more circumspectly with insight into end and method. Such is the outline of every experience that is clothed with meaning (*AE*, 60; *LW* 10:66).

It is essential, then, for there to be "working capital" for the situation to transcend merely impulsive reaction. But before the reconstruction of the situation through awareness of ends and means can be achieved, there must be this impulsion in experience.

Impulse, as distinguished from impulsion, stands for that particular phase of the act in which a specific tension is established which incites the search for the stimulus, i.e., which has a drive toward reintegration. We act "impulsively" when we try to mediate the situation on the basis of uninformed desire. Impulse naturally encounters the novel because it has no means-end relationship clearly in view. Artists, for this reason, may often seek to stimulate their imagination through actions or drugs which randomize experience. The Dadaist for example, "wrote" poetry by cutting up words, shaking them in a bag, and pulling them out one by one to form a poem. In seeking to become aware of a fresh, spontaneous image, one has to break with conventionalized, routine association. But, of course, pure impulsive action is not only a poor substitute for art, it is impossible. We find Dadaists, like Arp, admitting to rearranging "chance" patterns of fragments of paper. But even had he not rearranged the patterns, his method of determining the random pieces, his selection of material and so on, would be examples of order.

### III. The Habitual Body and the Structure of Action

The role of structuring experience falls to habit. This concept, central in pragmatism, received extensive treatment from Peirce at James before Dewey. For James, habit could denote both the rigidity and plasticity of behavior. Arising to meet the demands of a novel situation, habit could also become a set, repeated response. As noted James, is at once the means of growth and "the enormo-

flywheel of society, its most precious conservative agent. It alone is what keeps us all within the bounds of ordinance, and saves the children of fortune from the envious uprisings of the poor."<sup>24</sup> For Peirce, habit was the basis of inference and action. "That which determines us," he says, "from given premises, to draw one inference rather than another is some habit of mind." Habits were the general structures of belief and were reflected in action as the meaning-giving interpretants of specific events. Through habit, the brute immediacy of experience could become a sign for a general objective reality. Indeed, for Peirce, "the whole function of thought is to produce habits of action."<sup>25</sup>

Dewey's account of habit proceeds from James' biological version on the one hand and Peirce's pragmatic version on the other, relating the two through the concept of the act. With James, Dewey sees habits arising from the nature of biological adjustment; with Peirce, Dewey asserts that they are the basis of the possibility of meaning and intelligent action. Habit, however, thus comes to have a notoriously broad range of meanings for Dewey. Kestenbaum observes that, "Habits are what Dewey variously calls 'accepted meanings,' 'funded meanings,' 'acquired meanings,' and 'organic meanings.'"<sup>26</sup> Dewey's use is even broader than this list suggests. Habits are "adjustments," "means," "organizations of energy" and "social modes of interaction" as well.

This is not to admit that Dewey is confused in his use. Habits primarily refer to the organizing abilities of the organism to reconstruct its environment; they "incorporate an environment within themselves. They are adjustments of the environment, not merely to it" (*HNC*, I:iii, 52; *MW* 14: 38). They are not "inner forces" or powers of an autonomous organism so much as dynamic, structured processes integrating the organism-environment field. They are general paths of integration and interpretation. As such they express continuity; in fact, they become the basis for the continuity between the biological and social worlds. Prior to any existing individual, there are those "definite modes of interaction of persons with one another" (*HNC*, I:iv, 59; *MW* 14:44) which are the "given" ways of interpreting and acting in the world. The symbolic universe of a culture, in other words, lies ready to shape the new impulsive lives born into it. Habits, then, are *situational* structures rather than individual reflexes, psychic associations or repeated actions.

Habits are therefore general dispositions or tendencies. This means two things for Dewey: "one that habits have a certain causal efficacy, the other that their outworking in any particular case is subject to contingencies" (*HNC*, I:iii, 49; *MW* 14: 37). More specifically, "all habits are affections . . . all have a projectile power. . . . All habits

are demands for certain kinds of activity; and they constitute the self (*HNC*, I:ii, 25; *MW* 14: 21). As Kestenbaum explains, habits are "dramatic" and "creative" prereflective, "sense-producing" aspects of experience. One culture's "way of life" may be quite different from another's such that given the same circumstances entirely different attitudes, meanings, and responses may be evoked. A mountain may evoke a religious, ceremonial attitude in an American Indian while to a mining geologist it may initiate exploration for coal and shale deposits. The point here is not "relativity of perception," it is rather that the whole world-view, the way of being in the world, for each individual not only structures the moment, but has that "projectile power" to ward very different consequences. The Indian and the geologist do not see different mountains; they live different lives.

Though habits may incline us to act in certain ways in certain situations, no two situations are identical, and the differences from one situation to the next may not only determine the success or failure of that habitual way of acting, but may affect the habits themselves. In other words, the past is no absolute guarantor of the future, and habits, like rules, must ever be confronted with exceptions.

Habits have this general or universal character, as Peirce noted. This means they are capacities for treating different situations similarly in terms of relevant similar features. They constitute a complexly structured reservoir. Therefore, Dewey observes, "Repetition is in no sense the essence of habit." Repetition is not what makes habit possible; habit is what makes repetition possible.

The essence of habit is an acquired predisposition to *ways* or modes of response, not to particular acts except as, under special conditions; these express a way of behaving. Habit means special sensitiveness or accessibility to certain classes of stimuli, standing predilections and aversions, rather than bare recurrence of specific acts (*HNC*, I:iii, 42; *MW* 14:32).

Habits are the constitutive structures of organized responses. Any particular adjustment in one part of the field may mean a transformation of the whole system. Dewey is insistent on this point that "The whole organism is concerned in every act to some extent and in some fashion. . . ." (*HNC*, II:vi, 150; *MW* 14:105). There is what Merleau-Ponty has happily called the "habitual body" which makes the world visible, i.e., to appear *as* a world; he says it is:

By giving up part of his spontaneity, by becoming involved in the world through stable organs and pre-established circuits that man can acquire the mental and practical space which will theoretically free him from his environment and allow him to see it. . . . It is an

inner necessity for the most integrated existence to provide itself with an habitual body.<sup>27</sup>

Later on, Merleau-Ponty says that our habits "weave an environment" about us; Dewey would certainly agree.<sup>28</sup>

Habits are means of mediating situations; they are "active means, means that project themselves, energetic and dominating ways of acting" (*HNC*, I:ii, 25; *MW* 14:22). They are those tools which lie closest to hand, so close, as already noted, as to constitute the self. Habits are not to be thought of as purely means outside of ends; they determine, select and are immanent in those ends. Means, says Dewey, are everywhere in a process—ends are really just "terms" or limits of that process: "'End' is a name for a series of acts taken collectively—like the term army. 'Means' is a name for the same series taken distributively—like this soldier, that officer" (*HNC*, I:ii, 36; *MW* 14:28). The relation of ends and means via habits establishes the continuity of the act. Habits provide the conditions for meaning by not only creating the structured side of the situation, but by being the dynamic tools for transforming it. Dewey asserts that "habits are arts. They involve skill of sensory and motor organs, cunning or craft, and objective materials. . . . They require order, discipline and manifest technique" (*HNC*, I:i, 15; *MW* 14:16). Art is present with our most intimate and immanent way of being in the world.

The habitual body is the primary means and material of expression; it is the primary medium of meaning. The first characteristic of a "world," of a domain of significant experience, is the expressive gesture. While this idea will be discussed later, for now it can be observed that habit, infused with emotion and alive with impulse to the immediacy of the situation, is not only intelligent but potentially expressive. The simple, unconscious act of walking may tacitly embody a sense of pride, shame, indifference, or a host of other attitudes. The anthropologist Elizabeth Marshall Thomas says of the Kalahari Bushmen, "They are handsome because of the extreme grace in their way of moving, which is strong and deft and lithe; and to watch a Bushman walking or simply picking up something from the ground is like watching part of a dance."<sup>29</sup> While such habits alone do not constitute expression (except, as mentioned, in the derivative sense of a child's cry "expressing" pain to an onlooker or a gazelle "expressing" grace in running), they do provide the material for expression. The Bushmen easily transform their workaday habits into expressive actions, dances, and song.

While habit is thus the means toward expression and intelligent action, it is also capable of ossification into dead routine. This hap-

pens when habit loses its contact with emotion and impulse, in short, with the variety and immediacy of the situation. As Dewey illustrates:

The difference between the artist and the mere technician is unmistakable. The technique or mechanism is fused with thought and feeling. The "mechanical" performer permits the mechanism to dictate the performance. It is absurd to say that the latter exhibits habit and the former not. We are confronted with two kinds of habit, intelligent and routine. All life has its élan, but only the prevalence of dead habits deflects life into mere élan (*HNC*, I:iv, 71; *MW* 14: 51).

Habits, being dynamic structures for Dewey, connote flexible means of enlarging or expanding the situation; habit as mindless repetition is a decayed, derivative mode. As Merleau-Ponty states, "Habits express our power of dilating our being in the world, or changing our existence by appropriating fresh instruments."<sup>30</sup> Dewey not only would agree with this but insist that habits form the basic tools of learning or of expanding the meaning of a situation. Dewey insists, "Habits enter into the *constitution* of the situation; they are in it and of it, not, so far as it is concerned, something outside it" ("Epistemological Realism" in *EEL*, 277; *MW* 7:120).

The immediate moment or phase of a situation is responded to as part of a situation because of this constitutive connective power of habit. Habits, in other words, frame or establish a temporal *context*, a referential basis of interpretation and action. To refer again to optical illusions like the Muller-Lyer diagram or Zöllner's lines, or even to visual puns like Jastrow's duck-rabbit, we see immediately how a habitual way of reading the world is brought up short, as it were, and made conscious. There are numerous examples to illustrate Dewey's thesis that our very way of perceiving the world, much less our ways of understanding it, depend upon the informative nature of habit. Bedouins living in an isolated culture which rejects pictorial images cannot intuitively see lines as representing a man or camel, nor can they see photographs as images of nature. Canadian Indians who live in circular, domed huts have a very different sense of spatial relationships and aesthetic balance than someone growing up in a modern city which is based on the grid and line. Again, visually oriented Eskimos incorporate numerous subtle "pun-drawings" into their art which we do not even notice. On a different scale, Kuhn's study of scientific revolutions points out how deeply this selective, prejudicial power of habit may influence primary data of research. Kuhn remarks that Western astronomers only began detecting change in the heavens after Copernicus had questioned the Medieval paradigm which thought of the heavens as progressive orders of changeless perfec-

tion: "The Chinese, whose cosmological beliefs did not preclude celestial change, had recorded the appearance of many new stars in the heavens at an earlier date. Also, even without the aid of the telescope, the Chinese had systematically recorded the appearance of sunspots centuries before these were seen by Galileo and his contemporaries."<sup>31</sup> Habits predispose use actively, they determine what we see, what we focus upon, and how we may respond.

There are several implications to note. First, "There is no immaculate conception of meanings or purposes" (*HNC*, I:ii, 30-31; *MW* 14:25). Not only are we always "in the world," but we are in it in certain active *ways* which respond and discriminate divergently. Habits are not "inner drives" or "powers" latent in us like the "seminal reasons" of the Stoics; they are not "things." They are dynamic and structuring aspects of those "field-events" called situations. The more complex and discriminating we are is due to the habitual ways we have of interpreting and responding to a situation; indeed, it refers to the very possibility of certain situations coming to be at all. Therefore, the more numerous our habits the wider the field of possible:

Observation and foretelling. The more flexible they are, the more refined is perception in its discrimination and the more delicate the presentation evoked by imagination. The sailor is intellectually at home on the sea, the painter in his studio, the man of science in his laboratory. These commonplaces . . . mean nothing more or less than that habits formed in this process of exercising biological aptitudes are the sole agents of observation, recollection, foresight and judgment. . . . Concrete habits do all the perceiving, recognizing, imagining, recalling, judging, conceiving and reasoning that is done (*HNC*, III:i, 175-77; *MW* 14:123-24).

The point is not just that the sailor, artist, or scientist each has his own environment in which his skilled habits come into refined play; for the sailor a storm at sea *becomes* a situation which is more stable than precarious, possibly even an aid in speed; for the artist the storm *becomes* a situation which may eventuate in a painting or poem; for the scientist the storm *becomes* a situation in which meteorological phenomena may be studied. The habits of each person realize different potentialities in nature and create different situations.

Habits fused with emotion and impulse constitute objects of experience or "perceived meanings" and these meanings involve a "dramatic" or participatory attitude. An object reflects taking a determinate response to part of the world. These aspects are fundamental for the capacity of experience to achieve artistic expression and aesthetic enjoyment. Habit is kept alive through the roles of impulse and emotion. These signify a "break" with the homeostasis of the environment

in some ways. This may be purely biological, as in the case of pain, hunger, or any reflex. It may also be an "imbalance" in the cultural environment, the world. A swastika on a synagogue, a parent's command, the cry of an injured child—all these evoke meanings which arrest and focus attention. The situation must be "minded"; its meaning discovered. This, according to Dewey, is the origin of consciousness. But why is consciousness a continuous phenomenon? Dewey's answer is that "in every waking moment, the complete balance of the organism and its environment is constantly interfered with and a constantly restored" (*HNC*, III:i, 178-79; *MW* 14:125). A consequence of this is that the more refined and diverse our responses are, the more there is to respond to, i.e., the more "attention" will be needed. In other words, more complex behavior can *create* problematic situations which would not exist on simpler levels. Because we live in a world of symbols, beliefs, and meanings, a falling star may initiate elaborate rituals to placate gods and set the world aright, whereas for a herd of cattle the event passes without concern. The more complicated our modes of being in the world are, the more intelligence is needed.

The question is, however, how do habits create "perceived meanings"? Keeping in mind that for Dewey the situation always operates with a number of phases or aspects functioning together, a schematic outline may help. Because the world always has some aspect of novelty to it, habits are, more or less, always in the process of readjustment (and this may involve *ignoring* novel features of the environment as well as paying attention to them). Because habits integrate and unify situations, they tend to project a context, to structure a situation around any immediate object, both spatially and temporally. We see a wheel as part of the car rather than as part of the ground, and we see space itself as having depth and direction because of habit. We also see things temporally as processes: we see the car's movement as part of one process, the growth of a child as another. We may interpret the process in terms of its future outcome, "going home," "growing vegetables," "discovering a solution," etc. The present moment comes to inhabit a spatio-temporal field of meaning and action, a context, and it is shaped by that context. Dewey avoids the transcendental-immediate dualism by beginning with a concept of the situation as a temporally developing whole, a "field-process."

As a situation develops, a "tensive" or "problematic" phase may arise. As mentioned before, "problematic" is not necessarily a happy term, connoting as it does simple, technological practical action in the crudest sense, like fixing a tire. *All* experience is problematical in some degree. By this term, Dewey was trying to refer to the tensiv-



focus of a situation.<sup>32</sup> Lying down after a heavy meal is hardly the problematic situation that the lean hunter faces trying to snare today's food. It is for convenience that we call the latter problematic and not the former, but both are modes of adjustment.

Keeping in mind that situations are more or less secure or precarious rather than absolutely one or the other, when a problematic moment in the situation arises, habits are, as Dewey puts it, "turned inside out," i.e., stable habits become "reflected in remembered and perceived objects having a meaning" (*HNC*, III:ii, 182; *MW* 14: 127-28). More directly, objects are perceived meanings arising from the shock of world and habit:

Thus out of shock and puzzlement there gradually emerges a figured framework of objects, past, present, future. These shade off variously into a vast penumbra of vague, unfigured things, a setting which is taken for granted and not at all explicitly presented. The complexity of the figured scene in its scope and refinement of contents depends wholly upon prior habits and their organization. . . . [Consciousness's] occurrence marks a peculiarly delicate connection between highly organized habits and unorganized impulses. Its contents or objects, observed, recollected, projected and generalized into principles represent the incorporated material of habits coming to the surface, because habits are disintegrating at the touch of conflicting impulses. But they also gather themselves together to comprehend impulse and make it effective (*HNC*, III:ii, 182-83; *MW* 14:128).

Among these discriminated aspects of the situation are those meanings which constitute the "self." The phase of deliberation or the adjustment of the immediate problem into a resolved context is characterized by Dewey as a "dramatic rehearsal in imagination" and as an "experiment" with ideas (*HNC*, II:iii, 190-91; *MW* 14:132-33). Clearly, what Dewey has in mind is simply that before we remove a rattlesnake from our path we try to imagine how we will do it, rehearsing possible avenues, trying to see what likely consequences might arise with each possible action. But, contrary to Dewey's language at this point, subjective speculation is secondary to the primary power of social deliberation. We debate with ourselves because we have debated with others. Discussion of how to deal with a problem in a social context, for Mead as well as Dewey, is what teaches us to deliberate privately. On a more elementary level, we are *taught* to be mindful and thoughtful. Mind is social and situational, and our efforts at "working" the immediate problematic phase involve organizing dramatic, dynamic habits of action and meaning into a coherent field. From being read as a brute object inhibiting action, the focus of perception

is read against a number of possible contexts which reveal aspects of its meaning. The environment, so to speak, widens with this play of habits interpreting the object. "We do not act *from* reasoning;" claims Dewey, "but reasoning puts before us objects which are not directly or sensibly present, so that we may then react directly to these objects, . . . precisely as we would to the same objects if they were physically present" (*HNC*, III:iv, 200; *MW* 14:139).

The dramatic nature of this must be emphasized to contrast it with the utilitarian theory of reasoning as calculation. Dewey himself significantly chooses the metaphor of the actor—the artist—over against that of the accountant.<sup>33</sup> The purpose of foresight is not prediction but "to ascertain the meaning of present activities and to secure, so far as possible, a present activity with a unified meaning" (*HNC*, III:iv, 205-06; *MW* 14:143). Only rarely do we treat situations for the possible cumulative amount of pleasure or pain or even happiness likely to be obtained. The task is to reconstruct the present toward its ideal, realizable possibilities. The future consequences of the utilitarian never arrive; there is an infinite arithmetical sum to be computed. For Dewey, the utilitarians enslaved the present to the intangible future forever. It is the precise point of Dewey's approach to invert this priority and make the present the question for action. When, however, one sees the present as part of a *meaningful action*, as something which can contribute toward the meaning and value of our lives, then the present can be critically reconstructed in terms of future consequences. These consequences are dramatically enacted *ideals* of life. We participate in the meaning of the world dramatically. Tribal rituals and ceremonies point directly to this: before the world is quantified and measured it is inhabited. This underscores Dewey's central thesis that the question of "meaning" is vitally linked to growth of experience:

We have to be always learning and relearning the meaning of our active tendencies. . . . [The] continual search and experimentation to discover the meaning of changing activity keeps activity alive, growing in significance. . . . Imaginative forethought . . . keeps that act from sinking below consciousness into routine habit or whimsical brutality. It preserves the meaning of that act alive, and keeps it growing in depth and refinement of meaning. There is no limit to the amount of meaning which reflective and meditative habit is capable of importing into even simple acts . . . (*HNC*, III:iv, 208-09; *MW* 14: 144-45).

Because there is habit in the situation, the field of experience is a structured context capable of further organization and wholeness. It

fact, "habit" is just this capacity of experience to become a rich, connected field through participation and action. The whole precedes the part, but is realized through it. This, in brief, is the force of Dewey's emphasis on situation, act, and context. Because habit establishes the context, it transforms the basic biological nature of the act into a situation capable of taking on meanings.

One final characteristic of habit should be mentioned, one which links the subject directly to Dewey's aesthetics. Part of the meaning of a situation involves this drive toward wholeness, the attempt to mediate the problematic and transform it into the consummatory. This only happens because the immediate aspect of the situation in its problematic phase reveals itself as a means toward reintegrating the field. The present, in other words, becomes interpreted in terms of its ideal significance and so *becomes* a means of reconstructing itself.<sup>34</sup> In the deliberative phase of experience, after possible ways of reconstructing the situation have been imaginatively entertained, a specific course of action or mediation is selected. To the extent every experience has a mediated, reconstructive value, it has a potential end-in-view which "constitutes the meaning and value of an activity as it comes under deliberation" (*HNC*, III:vi, 225; *MW* 14:155). In art, the end-in-view becomes so wholly integrated with the act from beginning to end that the "meaning" of the work is the work itself. The guiding sense of the whole is immanent throughout, making it *an* experience.

The end-in-view organizes the field-process of experience; it gathers the whole context into itself as it functions, and in so doing is both immediately present and mediating, making the field present also. The end-in-view actively mediates between the real and ideal. The way this happens will be discussed later, but essentially it is through qualitative sense and feeling that the situation is immanent in the present moment:

The "end" is the figured pattern at the centre of the field through which runs the axis of conduct. About this central figuration extends an infinitely supporting background in a vague whole, undefined and undiscriminated. At most intelligence but throws a spotlight on that little part of the whole which marks out the axis of movement. Even if the light is flickering and the illuminated portion stands forth only dimly from the shadowy background, it suffices if we are shown the way to move. To the rest of the consequences . . . corresponds a background of feeling, of diffused emotion (*HNC*, III:vii, 262; *MW* 14:180).

Thus the body, which will become the medium of expression and communication, is a prefigured, teleological and dynamic field. It

incorporates luminous and horizontal features and is deeply implicated in the world as process. The capacity of the body to respond and act, to be disturbed and to organize, to feel itself threatened with disconnection and to generate strategies of reconnection with the world provides the condition from which communication emerges. In itself, however, embodied life is mute and unavailable, an event in the world but not in possession of itself as expression. Only when this embodiment is a socially shared event does it become used and so available for self-interpretation and expressive enactment. Only as the body becomes a symbolic medium does the self-other relationship emerge at all.<sup>1</sup> A lived body is not necessarily anyone's body because it is not for someone other. Therefore, an analysis of the body alone will not give us the mind.

#### IV. Social Mind: Gesture, Expression and Participation

The dominant fact of human existence is the inhabitation of a world of meaning and value. This world lives in all those symbols through which we actively share or create our existence with others. Culture is the activity of communication. Ultimately, culture is nothing else than all those symbolic modes of shared participation which constitute the world. In one respect, culture simply is a general body of shared habits which make coexistence possible. Culture is rooted in the lived body. But it reflects powerful generalized habits which appropriate the body and make it part of a complex event, the traditions which bind the community. The body's very capacity to be involved and to adapt flexibly, makes it easily available to pre-existent determinate actions, the structures of the culture into which it is born. And these begin shaping it at once until eventually the body is attuned to the life of symbols so that they gain operative power and guide the body throughout most of its life. The root of "religion," *religio*, meant "to bind," no doubt because religion was what bound the community into a whole. It made one a member with duties, privileges, and commitments.

Dewey's emphasis on the organic basis of experience was necessary because of the dominant tradition which opposed the natural to the mental or understood it at best as a lower, degraded expression of Spirit's self-knowledge. For this Dewey was often regarded as a "naturalist" in the tradition of Darwin or Spencer. When Dewey developed his theory of culture, which saw mind as constituted through the shared participatory act of communication, an act which surpassed the biological body, he was regarded as a crypto-Hegelian.

This problem in interpretation should be familiar by now. Dewey was trying to keep faith with his principle of continuity, which was the essence of his naturalism, and so he seemed a materialist to the idealists, an idealist to the materialists, or something both at once to anyone who was a "nothing-but" in the tradition of Hobbes. Dewey does regard the social as something more than what can be accounted for by biology or genetics, though these are factors which should not be considered irrelevant any more so than the physical environment itself. If it makes sense to see the Kalahari Bushmen, the Pygmies of Africa, the Eskimo, and the Polynesians in terms of their physical environments, it should also make sense to see culture in terms of the biological environment as a whole. Reductionisms like sociobiology or structuralism must be avoided, first because they are unnecessary, given Dewey's principle of continuity, and second, because in their desire to explain everything by a single principle they make mysteries of what they cannot account for. In *Experience and Nature*, Dewey had labelled his philosophy "naturalistic empiricism" or "naturalistic humanism." "To many," he added, "the associating of the two words will seem like talking of a round square, so engrained is the notion of the separation of man and experience from nature" (*EN*, 1a; *LW* 1:10). Later, in *Logic: The Theory of Inquiry*, Dewey transforms this name for his philosophy to "cultural naturalism" (*LTI*, 20; *LW* 12: 28), reflecting his growing dissatisfaction with "empiricism" as well as "humanism" as illuminating terms. I think this should be the term under which Dewey's philosophy is presented, showing as it does his interests ranged far beyond those of "instrumentalism."

Cultural naturalism regards the social as a new mode of functioning which arises naturally in the world by utilizing available structures and potentialities in novel and more inclusive ways. Life is transformed from mere copresence or coexistence into an interactive, participatory event in which there is meaning. Association or interaction is one of the generic features of existence. We see various forms of it from the subatomic level to the human. What differentiates these levels is the type of interaction which occurs. On all levels there is organization of parts into wholes, but these wholes realize different ends; they accomplish different things. Clearly, what human coexistence accomplishes is something more than physical interaction or even mere survival. As the Greeks saw, human beings are capable of pursuing "the good life," the life where intelligence realizes a variety of worthwhile ends, of which shared experience is paramount.<sup>35</sup> But for Dewey this is not to be accounted for by a preordained end shaping the restless matter of nature from above. It comes about with the accomplishment of communication. While communication may have

originated in aiding our species to survive, given that coordinated group action was necessary to a creature of our individual weakness, once present it set the stage for the realization of an untold number of *new* ends, a range of possibilities recorded in our histories and cultures and which have not yet been exhausted.

In *Experience and Nature*, Dewey's discussion of communication follows his analysis of experience as situational, nature as precarious and stable, ends as naturally suffered, enjoyed, or "had" events, and means or instruments as active "doings" whereby we undertake to reconstruct the world. The placement and sequence of the chapters in this book follow a hidden but very profound dialectic. A world in which experience played no role nor which had any function to realize in its environment would not interest us. A world without change would not generate desire or intelligence just as a world without structure would eternally frustrate them. A world in which there were no moments undergone and enjoyed for their intrinsic qualities would not establish the quest for obtaining those experiences when they vanished. The search for means of stabilizing and directing the world sets one on the path of action, which is to eat of the fruit of the tree of knowledge. Action in turn creates the possibility of interaction with others of our kind as well as with other objects in the world. But when we interact with those who deal with the world as we do, new possibilities are opened which are not present in our transactions with fire, stone, or even animals. We come to grasp that the other is another like us, and we are like him. There is a common, shared experience which makes communication possible and mutual interaction far more flexible, far more rich in its possibilities than anything ever seen before. Thus Dewey begins his discussion with the quiet understatement, "Of all affairs, communication is the most wonderful" (*EN*, 166; *LW* 1: 132). It is in his subsequent chapters that we see all which it leads to: the realization of individuality and creativity, meaningful experience, conscious deliberation, the arts of intelligence, and critical wisdom.

What makes communication possible and what is it? In one sense, it makes itself possible simply because we are born into a world where there already is a system of communication which is progressively directed toward us. But it would be more accurate to say it makes *us* possible. We gesture, talk, and express ourselves because we were taught to. What is artificial is to try to project ourselves back to a state of nature, as did Locke or Rousseau, and then see communication as an artifice built upon the artifice of our social existence. Communication should not be understood by opposing it to the natural; instead it should be regarded as a transformation of it.

The question then comes down to: *how* does communication utilize and transform the biological structures so that something entirely new, meaning, comes to characterize the world? That human beings have an unusual capacity to form and reform habits is noteworthy, but not enough to indicate the radical sort of change brought about by language and culture. But if we start with the recognition that from the beginning human beings are involved in complex social relationships in which mutual action, recognition, bonding, and the prolonged raising of children are facts, the capacity for emotional response and habitual development is part of a much more complex environment. Our first emotional responses are less likely to be the familiar Lockean ideas of red, sweet, round, and so on than those of dependence, love, separation, anxiety, and others which probably have no name. Our first acts of genuine communication are more likely to be cries for food or demands for attention than naming indifferent objects.

The social context, as anyone who grew up in a family can tell, is not by and large a tranquil one. Problematic situations seem rather the order of the day. This is especially true of the young, who have not mastered that mysterious and difficult medium whereby they can express needs, wants, or desires. In order for expression to occur, something must be utilized as a medium, some public event which can be shared and responded to. The first thing at hand, so to speak, is that most available means of organizing the world about us, the body. Our first years are spent mastering its possibilities. But to use one's body as a means to something else, such as using one's arm and hand as a means to reaching a toy, is not the same as using one's arm and hand as a means for someone else to do something, such as indicating that one wants the toy. The former is simply using the body; the latter is to make use of it, to apprehend it as the initiating part of an action which requires for its completion the responsive participation in that action by another for whom the gesture is a *gesture*. Communication begins in the event of participation in a social situation where the interaction between the participants realizes some end. We may be creatures with a flexible range of habitual responses—the human palate and throat can make an amazing variety of sounds. But by the time we are two or three we have settled down to concentrating on just those sounds which define the tonal range of our linguistic group, its aesthetic contours, so to speak. The reason for this is obvious—these are the tones we need to use to be understood; these are the tones which signify words.

Dewey and Mead thus see the origin of communication in two events. The first is simply the capacity to appropriate the body and its

talents as a means to an end. The second event is to regulate action from the concept of symbolic mediation and mutual participation. Dewey observes:

Gestures and cries are not primarily expressive and communicative. They are modes of organic behavior as much as are locomotion, seizing and crunching. Language, signs and significance, come into existence not by intent and mind but by overflow, by-products, in gestures and sound. The story of language is the story of the *use* made of these occurrences; a use that is eventual, as well as eventual. . . . If the mere existence of sounds . . . constituted language, lower animals might well converse more subtly and fluently than man. But they became language only when used within a context of mutual assistance and direction. The latter are alone of prime importance in considering the transformation of organic gestures and cries into names, things with significance, or the origin of language (EN, 175; LW 1:138-39).

Later on, Dewey adds, "The heart of language is not 'expression' of something antecedent, much less expression of antecedent thought. It is communication; the establishment of cooperation in an activity in which there are partners, and in which the activity of each is modified and regulated by partnership. To fail to understand is to fail to come into agreement in action; to misunderstand is to set up action at cross purposes" (EN, 179; LW 1:141).

This bears a good deal of consideration. Dewey had resolved the dualistic reflex arc by showing that sensorimotor coordination was a mutual adjustment of one whole act. The child reaching for the candle guided his reaching by his seeing and his seeing by his reaching. The phases interpreted each other because they were part of one continuous activity. It was the continuity of the activity which allowed for the further interpretation of the heat and pain to be responded to by withdrawing the burnt hand. Dewey is using the same model here, but on the scale of social participation. The act is now one shared by several members instead of being that of one organism. If the act is to be accomplished, there needs to be a means of communication because there is the need of *mutual* ongoing coordination. The participants in the act need to know what the others are doing so that they can determine their own conduct, and vice versa. Above all, there must be some mutual agreement on the end of the action, that is, on what the action is. A symbol system arises when such available material as cries or movements of the arms or head can actively mediate action between several participants. In other words, the meaning of a symbol lies not in its capacity to create similar images in different people's minds nor simply in its capacity to fall under a semantic rule.

It lies in the capacity to coordinate action toward a commonly undertaken end. Syntactics and semantics exist because of their pragmatic value. To see meaning as grounded in the act of communication, moreover, is to see it as a problematic process of mutual interpretation in which there is a constant interplay between clarity and ambiguity.

Meaning is as temporal as it is social. To see language or meaning as a code is to see it in terms of defining a settled or unproblematic situation. Such rigid codes do exist, from the elaborate codes used in logic and mathematics to the kinship relations of tribal cultures. These reflect highly stabilized modes of interaction. If mathematicians could not agree on the use of rules governing their symbols, or if a tribe could not agree on kinship patterns, little further work could be accomplished. While such rigidly organized structures do exist and provide a reassuringly exact body of data for the investigator, there is little reason to regard them as paradigmatic instances of meaning or culture. Their very lawlike nature leads to the tendency to regard language or culture as a synchronic structure, when the obvious fact is that both have evolved. If life had gone on in such a precise environment where ambiguity played no role, neither mathematics nor structuralism would have come to be.

Therefore Dewey chooses to look at communication as the key to meaning, and this is to be understood as a transactional event in which structure and ambiguity, actuality and possibility, order and disorder are present. The temporality and teleology of the event cannot be safely ignored. On the one hand, Dewey sees communication emerging from tools and on the other from signalling events. Both these subjects must be approached cautiously. By pointing to tools, Dewey is attempting to show that it is through a particular objective mode of conduct that we begin to appropriate the very *idea* of action, which in turn reveals our temporality and our situationality. A tool is a means of grasping the future through control of the present.

The first step away from oppression of immediate things and events was taken when man employed tools and appliances, for manipulating things so as to render them contributory to desired objects. In responding to things not in their immediate qualities but for the sake of ulterior results, immediate qualities are dimmed, while those features which are signs, indices of something else, are distinguished. A thing is more significantly what it makes possible than what it immediately is (EN, 128; LW 1:105).

The immediate is not ignored so much as reinterpreted. We do not infer fire by not seeing smoke nor do we drive a nail by not using the hammer. We could not escape the immediate if we wanted to. A "tool"

is a transformation of the immediate in terms of its possibilities toward the future by using it to integrate or organize conduct. The present becomes seen in terms of the possibilities it contains rather than purely in terms of its actualities, its purely had or undergone qualitative ends. Tools are intrinsically temporal and situational structures.

Man's bias toward himself easily leads him to think of a tool solely in relation to himself, to his hand and eyes, but its primary relationship is toward other external things, as the hammer to the nail, and the plow to the soil. Only through this objective bond does it sustain relation to man himself and his activities. A tool denotes a perception and acknowledgement of sequential bonds in nature (EN, 123; LW 1:101).

A hammer refers to the hardness of nails, the softness of wood, the drive of force and friction, the need for shelter in a world of cold and rain as well as to the being who holds the hammer and drives it with skill and art, who needs the shelter and from this need has devised a plan. To grasp the hammer is to grasp a project. A hammer is only metal and wood otherwise. In grasping the project, we undertake the *present* as the *material* for the basis of action. The immediate moment is no longer had but used and directed. Tools are transcendentals for Dewey:

The invention and use of tools have played a large part in consolidating meanings, because a tool is a thing used as a means to consequences, instead of being taken directly and physically. It is intrinsically relational, anticipatory, predictive. Without reference to the absent, or "transcendence," nothing is a tool. The most convincing evidence that animals do not "think" is found in the fact that they have no tools, but depend upon their own relatively-fixed bodily structures to effect results. . . . Anything whatever used as a tool exhibits . . . an existence having meaning and potential essence (EN, 185-86; LW 1:146).

Tools reveal the world in terms of its relations, bonds, conditions, or structures because they also reveal the user in terms of his projects. Man himself stands forth as an agent, as a being with a temporal existence which is purposively involved with the world in terms of its portents and possibilities. To set upon the path of action is also to set upon the path of self-transformation. For when man undertakes to reconstruct the world, he reveals new ends as well securing old ones. Originally, the domestication of grain or cattle may have been seen as supplementing the needs of a nomadic existence. But gradually man's discoveries transformed him into a farmer and town-dweller, a build-

er and a planter, a creator of social structures more complex than the loose democracies of the hunter. Fire warmed at first, but it became the means to pottery, metallurgy, steam-power, and petroleum energy.

But in discussing tools we have jumped ahead of ourselves, for most tools are cultural instruments. That is, they "are bound up with directions, suggestions and records made possible by speech; what has been said about the role of tools is subject to a condition supplied by language, the tool of tools" (EN, 168; LW 1:134). The hammer also refers to the refining of metal, the shaping of wood, the toolmakers, the carpenter who learns his trade from the master carpenter and who may come to pass his knowledge on. The hammer exists in a context of contracts and payments, boom times and bust; it is used with reference to blueprints, to shouts of orders and requests. But the central point remains: tools are extensions of the projects of the body and it is because they reveal the present in terms of its possibilities that the biological individual can undertake the most important task, the active participation in the social project itself.

As already indicated, communication is just that activity of coordinating social action. Like any other project, it requires instruments, tools or a medium. Thus a very special and unique tool is called for which allows for *mutual* coordination. It must allow for the members to participate in one action, to share ends and apprehend possibilities together. Thus, the major achievement of communication will be its intrinsic capacity to make action intelligent through making it social.

When communication occurs, all natural events are subject to reconsideration and revision; they are re-adapted to meet the requirements of conversation . . . . Events turn into objects, things with a meaning. They may be referred to when they do not exist, and thus be operative among things distant in space and time, through vicarious presence in a new medium. . . . Events when once they are named lead an independent and double life. In addition to their original existence, they are subject to ideal experimentation: their meanings may be infinitely combined and rearranged in imagination and the outcome of this inner experimentation—which is thought—may issue forth in interaction with crude or raw events (EN, 166; LW 1:132).

The presence of communication makes the immediately lived moment fraught with meaning. "Even the dumb pang of an ache achieves significant existence when it can be designated and descanted upon; it ceases to be merely oppressive and becomes important . . ." (EN, 167; LW 1:133). From comforting and tendering a small, sick

child to holding the hand of a dying friend or parent, a mere organic event is transformed into something significant because it is shared and participated in by others. Heroic, even if lonely, deaths can become significant actions. While Heidegger is right that "death" forms the ultimate horizon of my possibilities as an individual, defining "my life" and "my actions," it is not true that death is necessarily an isolatingly absurd event, as many existentialists have understood. I may also grasp my death as an event *for* others; but for Dewey this would make all the difference. It can be a mode of meaningful participation. The finality of individual death opens up the possibility, even the necessity, of participating in a shared social project which transcends individual lives—culture. Everyone dies, but the culture continues.<sup>36</sup> As Dewey observes in *Democracy and Education*:

Every one of the constituent elements of a social group. . . is born immature, helpless without language, beliefs, ideas, or social standards. Each individual, each unit who is the carrier of the life-experience of his group, in time passes away. Yet the life of the group goes on. . . . If a plague carried off the members of a society all at once, it is obvious that the group would be permanently done for. Yet the death of each of its constituent members is as certain as if an epidemic took them all at once (DE, 2-3; MW 9:5-6).

Education and enculturation are necessary means of establishing continuity of action and meaning. The process of coming to be a member of a group is the primary and omnipresent fact of human life. It should not be unnatural to discover in the activity of learning a better and truer model for meaning and communication than those based on the notions of static, atemporal structures. The arts of social life transcend the biological limit of death, and this has meaning for human existence as it is lived. Through culture, the individual life can be taken up into a transindividual project.

The key to communication is how we come to participate in the life of others and they with ours. Once this is possible, the mutual coordination of action, the common appropriation of projects also is possible. Dewey finds the key in that of learning or dramatic participation. To be born into a society is to be born into structured patterns of activity. What one learns in education is to participate in these roles; to become a member of the group is to know one's range of actions which have significance for the group. To learn to be human involves learning how to play by rules. There are many early instances of this in the miniature games we play from peek-a-boo to knocking down towers of blocks. But the supreme game of course is language; it is the game of games, the one which opens up the avenues to all the

rest of the culture's activities through education. Language is the "tool of tools" because of its orchestral power in coordinating our varieties of projects into one culture, one community.

The importance of language as the necessary, and, in the end, sufficient condition of the existence and transmission of non-purely organic activities and their consequences lies in the fact that, on one side, it is a strictly biological mode of behavior, emerging in natural continuity from earlier organic activities, while, on the other, it compels one individual to take the standpoint of other individuals and to see and inquire from a standpoint that is not strictly personal but is common to them as participants or "parties" in a conjoint undertaking. But it first has reference to some other person or persons with whom it institutes *communication*—the making of something common (LTI, 46 LW 12:52).

The essence of language is that there is always a "one" and an "other" who interact. It is not an impersonal system of difference because it has a participatory structure reflected in the very number and persons of verbs not to mention in the cases of pronouns. Other modes of cultural participation are also deeply reflected in the varieties of languages. The plurality of forms of address in Japanese and other Asian languages forces awareness of the social hierarchies involved. The word for "I" is often a mode of the form "your subject." In English, the use of "man" to refer to men and women has come to be seen as part of a social problem. Thus, learning a culture is learning the roles we can take and this in turn comes to define who we are. The underlying problematic of the social encounter may be this very tension in testing our self-understanding or self-image. Only through social participation do we acquire a self, yet this is ever at risk, as Erving Goffman has shown.<sup>37</sup>

From birth on, we are involved in more and more activities; as we master the elementary roles we are pushed on to more difficult ones. From being the mere recipient of attention, we are asked to give attention, from being treated as not responsible for our actions, we are progressively treated as more and more responsible. We are especially asked to participate as communicants.

If we had not talked with others and they with us, we should never talk to and with ourselves. Because of converse, social give and take, various organic attitudes become an assemblage of persons engaged in converse, conferring with one another, exchanging distinctive experiences, listening to one another, over-hearing unwelcome remarks, accusing and excusing. Through speech a person dramatically identifies himself with potential acts and deeds; he plays many

roles, not in successive stages of life but in a contemporaneously enacted-drama. Thus mind emerges (EN, 170; LW 1:135).

By "mind," Dewey is not referring to personal self-consciousness but to the general modes of conduct which create the possibility of the self along with the role of the other. Mind appears or is appropriated by individuals in a culture, but "is in itself a system of belief, recognitions and ignorances, of acceptances and rejections, of expectancies and appraisals of meanings which have been instituted under the influence of custom and tradition" (EN, 219; LW 1:170). Mind is a way of referring to the possibilities an individual may act on in terms of culture. Cultures are just these generalized tendencies for structuring, interpreting, and responding to the world. As one is involved in participating in shared activity, one becomes aware that it is "I" who is asked to do something, that it is "I" who must respond, that there is someone here who is within my sphere of action—which is to say that the act called for is to be *my* act. There must be some way, some means of responding which fulfills the request for participating.

The means for doing this is through symbolic action. Symbolic action is to be distinguished from signalling, though it utilizes signalling. Most animals exhibit signalling behavior: the waving of fins, the rustling of feathers, the bristling of hair, the arching of the back. While such acts bring about consequences, they are done without intent. As Dewey notes, "Primarily meaning is intent and intent is not personal in a private and exclusive sense" (EN, 180; LW 1:142). In other words, the act of the peacock or the cat is not "expressive"—except in a derivative sense to an onlooker. The animal is not using the gesture to stand for the activity, even though the result may be accomplished through the immediate act. For example:

By habit, by conditioned reflex, hens run to the farmer when he makes a clucking noise or when they hear the rattle of grain in a pan. When the farmer raises his arms to throw the grain they scatter and fly, to return only when the movement ceases. . . . But a human infant learns to discount such movements; to become interested in them as events preparatory to a desired consummation; he learns to treat them as signs of an ulterior event so that his response is to their meaning. He treats them as means to consequences. The hen's activity is egocentric; that of the human being is participative. The latter puts himself at the standpoint of a situation in which two parties share. This is the essential peculiarity of language, or signs (EN, 177-78; LW 1:140).

In one of his less dramatic illustrations, Dewey gives the instance of one person asking another to bring her a flower, say by pointing.

The proper response is not to the movement of her arm, but to its intent, that is, to see it *as* "pointing to something." How is this possible? The person responding must, as it were, try to become the first person and see the situation from that person's standpoint—to try to see what the situation *is* for her, that of wanting the flower and for him to get it. In seeing the object of the gesture, the flower, he must see the relationship between the flower and the desire of the other, with the additional component of seeing the role he plays in this. He will bring her the flower only if he can integrate himself into a shared response, namely that she should have the flower. The "stimulus" to his act of bringing the flower is his "anticipatory share in the consummation of a transaction in which both participate" (EN, 179; LW 1: 141). They must both share the common possibility of the situation and define their roles within it for communication to occur. The first person must point with the intent that the act be seen-as the *beginning* of an uncompleted act, as a request *for* the other. She must take his standpoint, she must see him as a respondent to her gesture just as he must see her in terms of her perspective, the initiator of an action. There is a double sharing of perspectives here to define the roles in which each looks at him or her self from the other's standpoint as well as their own. This is what makes the gesture a symbol which coordinates action. It has the same intent for both parties—they can both respond to it from a *common* standpoint. Communication is the elucidation of this common standpoint, a making common. "Such is the essence and import of communication, signs and meaning. Something is literally made common in at least two different centres of behavior. To understand is to anticipate together, it is to make a cross-reference which, when acted upon, brings about a partaking in a common, inclusive undertaking" (EN, 178; LW 1:141).<sup>38</sup>

The gesture which is used may have originated with the impulse simply of reaching to get desired objects. This was its preintentional use. But such an act could easily become associated with others bringing that which was out of reach. It is when the child *uses* the reaching or pointing gesture in order for the other to bring the flower that a common perspective has been established. A signal has then become a symbol, though perhaps not a well-defined one. The child may point to get the object pointed at; she may point simply to say "there!" or "Go away!" or any other number of meanings. Because the symbol is indefinite, and thus creates misunderstandings, it may be limited and supplemented by other symbols to express the necessary differences of action. But even in the use of complex symbol systems, there is the constant possibility of misunderstanding (indeed, the complexity of a system invites this because of the potentially creative range of

its use). Thus the act of communication is often one of each party mutually supplementing, checking, and modifying their actions or interpretations. A Platonic dialogue can be just an exhibition of "mutual coordination" in which each party genuinely participates with the other in trying to define the object of the quest, such as the definition of courage, justice, or friendship.

Communication is defined by *symbolic interaction*, the mutual capacity to respond to the meaning of the tool used as a symbol. Language is the most efficient and creative of the symbol systems invented, for it readily passes from one user to another and back. At one moment I can be the "I" and at the next moment the "you" or the "he," and I have no difficulty sorting these out or placing them together. I became your "you" and someone's "he." The identity here is functional. The dynamics of the situation are grasped. To be involved in communication, then, is for there to be an interplay not only between various parties, but between the present, the past, and the future. As Dewey puts it, "If we consider the *form* or scheme of the situation in which meaning and understanding occur, we find involved simultaneous presence and cross-reference of immediacy and efficiency, overt actuality and potentiality, the consummatory and the instrumental" (EN, 181; LW 1: 143). To discover the situation we are in is to discover the action which is being undertaken. This is why ostensive definitions, like the case of Malinowski asking for the word for the object he was tapping, are context dependent. One must see the situation, and the situation is grasped through its possibilities, and possibilities are hard things to point at. Education is largely the attempt to make us easily grasp the likely range of possible meanings of a situation. As Dewey said, we must learn to anticipate together.

What a physical event immediately is, and what it *can* do or its relationship are distinct and incommensurable. But when an event has meaning, its potential consequences become its integral and funded feature. When the potential consequences are important and repeated, they form the very nature and essence of a thing, its defining, identifying, and distinguishing form. To recognize the thing is to grasp its definition. Thus we become capable of perceiving things instead of merely feeling and having them. To *perceive* is to acknowledge unattained possibilities; it is to refer the present to consequences, apparition to issue, and thereby to behave in deference to the *connections* of events (EN, 182; LW 1:143).

Essences for Dewey are thus the commonly recognized possibilities or modes of interaction events have. We call the table a table because that is what it functions as for the most part—it's predominant function is denoted. And if we should use it momentarily as a



stage or stepping stool, we still call it a "table" because that is what it "really" is (that is what we use it for most of the time, and this common use is what allows us to refer to the object). When we come to asking about Reality, the essences we come up with will be the preferred modes of interaction. Hence for Dewey "reality" marks a predominance of bias or preference, an evaluation, and this is why it is such a dangerous word to use *apart from* the activity of critical evaluation, as most metaphysicians have done. But the capacity of the immediate to become fraught with the portent and meaning of the future has the utmost significance for the question of "immediate meaning." The futurity of the act, its possibilities, can be apprehended in the present through symbols. Symbols literally embody meaning because they work in coordinating attitudes or organizing experience. "Essence is never existence, and yet it is the essence, the distilled import, of existence; the significant thing about it, its intellectual voucher, the means of inference and extensive transfer, and object of esthetic intuition. In it, feeling and understanding are one; the meaning of the thing is the sense it makes" (EN, 183; LW 1:144). To this Dewey adds that we should not be surprised that "the very essence of a thing is identified with those consummatory consequences which the thing has when conditions are felicitous." The history of metaphysics is written in that sentence.

Communication easily becomes the means whereby the goods of life are realized and appropriated and so itself becomes consummatory. It realizes all those goods which involve being with others. Participation is naturally that activity whereby we realize and use our participatory roles, our selves. Most conversation is not the utilitarian conveying of practical information; it is simply a means of being with others and being present to them. Dewey chides the nominalist theory of meaning primarily because it is antisocial. Nominalist theories, like Locke's, miss the main point of communication—that it reveals man as a participant prior to being an individual. Although language is instrumental, by its very power to make present those goods of shared life, to create shared life in doing so, it is supremely consummatory as well. "For there is no mode of action as fulfilling and as rewarding as is concerted consensus of action. It brings with it the sense of sharing and merging in a whole. Forms of language are unrivalled in ability to create this sense, at first with direct participation on the part of an audience; and then, as literary forms develop, through imaginative identification" (EN, 184; LW 1:145). Art appropriates this capacity directly. It can already be seen that aesthetic meaning for Dewey is a participatory event in which communication

is a primary and not a secondary feature. It is founded in and also is the realization of social life, culture.

Language is communication and communication is culture. Though the verbal tools we call languages are paradigmatic means for cultural participation, they are not the only means. Thus, properly speaking, language is culture at large:

Language, in its widest sense—that is, including all means of communication such as, for example, monuments, rituals and formalized arts—is the medium in which culture exists and through which it is transmitted. . . . It includes . . . not only gestures but rites, ceremonies, monuments, and the products of the industrial and fine arts. A tool or machine . . . is also a mode of language. For it *says* something, to those who understand it, about operations of use and their consequences. To the members of a primitive community a loom operated by steam or electricity says nothing (LTI, 20, 46; LW 12: 27, 51-52).

The world of primary experience, which Dewey describes at the beginning of *Experience and Nature* as the basis for all our secondary, refined or reflective experience, is just this lifeworld of culture, of embodied goods, participation, action and interaction, in which meaning is transmitted through communication. Our reflective enterprises are only possible because they appropriate a symbolic and shared material. Reflective thought will mark a transformed *use* of this material. It has the capacity to be the genuine liberator of meaning for Dewey—unless, of course, it forgets its humble origin.

There is always a tension in meaning, then, between the rules of custom and the innovations of creative use. "Meanings are rules for using and interpreting things; interpretation being always an imputation of potentiality for some consequence" (EN, 188; LW 1:147). If meaning did not have this rule-like nature, it could not bind or generate a community of action. But as we saw with habit, no two events are the same. Rules must be applied to them to mean, and their application always is a challenge to their *traditional* meaning. Those theorists which see in "ordinary language" the paradigm of meaning ignore the creative demands each situation of life presents. They would be the tribal elders who repeat something because "it is the way of the ancestors." To be sure, one cannot legitimately create a private language. It is amusing to remember that Tolkien's original desire was to write an account of the Elvish language, but in order to do so he had to create a world and a history for it, even a theology. But in the creative exploration of meaning lies the secret of communication. Meanings almost demand to be played and experimented with,

as Dewey observes: "Meaning, fixed as essence in a term of discourse, may be imaginatively administered and manipulated, experimented with. Just as we overtly manipulate things, making new separations and combinations, thereby introducing new things into new contexts and environments, so we bring together logical universals in discourse, where they copulate and breed new meanings" (EN, 194; LW 1:152). Meanings evolve, and much under the conditions that Darwin's pigeon breeders raised pigeons.

There is a tremendous force present in the life of symbols which needs to be recognized. "Language is . . . not a mere agency for economizing energy in the interaction of human beings," asserts Dewey, "It is a release and amplification of energies that enter into it, conferring upon them the added quality of meaning. The quality of meaning thus introduced is extended and transferred, actually and potentially from sounds, gestures, and marks, to all other things in nature (EN, 173; LW 1: 137-38). We learn meanings by using them, and this means that we must apply them in a variety of contexts and situations. Dewey observes, "A newly acquired meaning is forced upon everything that does not obviously resist its application, as a child uses a new word whenever he gets a chance or as he plays with a new toy" (EN, 188; LW 1: 147-48). On a general level, one may think of the various creative meanings the word "god" or "divine" has had in history. Dewey points to the broadening of the legal term "jurisdiction," which evolves from meaning simply the place of the crime, to right of extradition, to location of the crime in the event, to legal power of action defined with respect to desirable consequences. The development of meaning thus has a dynamic quality which is realized through the social medium. Even one's own utterances take on new significance as others interpret them or use them. "All discourse, oral or written," says Dewey, "which is more than a routine unrolling of vocal habits, says things that surprise the one that says them, often indeed more than they surprise any one else" (EN, 194; LW 1: 152). Writers and poets are those who try to say such surprising things and discover what they mean. They must play the role of speaker and auditor at once (hence, perhaps, the tendency to speak of "muses" or the subconscious as a source for creativity). The successful poem or work of literature will impart that surprising utterance so that it comes to inhabit the living language of the culture and mark a new occasion for shared experience. "The level and style of the arts of literature, poetry, ceremony, amusement, and recreation which obtain in a community . . . do more than all else to determine the current direction of ideas and endeavors in the community. They supply the meanings in terms of which life is judged, esteemed, and criticized" (EN, 204; LW 1:159).

Ideals or visions of life have directive power because they illuminate the possible. Our world-views given in culture determine the meanings and values of our lives. The living body of a culture is the community.

Communication is uniquely instrumental and uniquely final. It is instrumental as liberating us from the otherwise overwhelming pressure of events and enabling us to live in a world of things that have meaning. It is final as a sharing in the objects and arts precious to a community. . . . communication and its congenial objects are objects ultimately worthy of awe, admiration, and loyal appreciation. They are worthy as means because they are the only means that make life rich and varied in meanings. They are worthy as ends, because in such ends man is lifted from his immediate isolation and shares in a communion of meanings. . . . When the instrumental and final functions of communication live together in experience, there exists an intelligence which is the method and reward of the common life, and a society worthy to command affection, admiration, and loyalty (EN, 204-05; LW 1: 159-60).

#### V. The Sense of Context

Meaning arises from the mutual effort to communicate. It is a process in which the members are participants trying to adjust and adapt to each other through symbolic action. Each is trying to determine through the other and himself what the meaning of the situation is. The situation is one of mutual, constant interpretation. Both the temporal dimension and the contextual structure of the situation are significant factors in meaning. Not only is meaning primarily an ongoing process of interpretation, but this process is one of trying to render the significant context of the situation determinate. There is in the meaning-event an interplay between the indeterminate and the determinate, and the development of the interpretation is largely that of the participants progressively eliminating those possible alternative interpretations which are not features of the situation, as well as articulating and exploring those features which have bearing and are relevant. In short, the participants are trying to determine *what* the situation *is*, and the resulting meaning of the situation will be seen-as the outcome of the process of interpretation. The task of communication is that of finding a common situation whose meaning can be shared. The interpretive horizon or context of the situation will be the same for the participants. Significant action is that in which the members are all responding to the *same* situation or interpretive context. They will be able to interact and communicate with the least amount of misinterpretation allowable.

But ambiguity can never be eliminated. Not only is there always a vast amount of inarticulate tendencies, assumptions, or possible deviations from what is explicitly shared, but the very fact that situations are always developing in time means that further interpretive responses may break down and that the shared situation is no longer shared, at which point there is a fracture in the community. The Protestant Reformation represented just such a fragmentation in the history of European Christianity. Once the common context of the interpretive authority of the Church disappeared, there emerged a veritable babel of new communities of theological languages, which gradually defined their own interpretive contexts, as, for example, in the works of Luther or Calvin. The constant thrust of the possibilities of the future into the present and the emergence of new events marks the need for continual interpretation. Organized situations may become disorganized, even because of the activity of new interpretations. Likewise, the automatic repetition of a past interpretation in a new event may render the present entirely problematic or reduce it to minimal significance, ignoring its creative potential. Meaning reflects a permanent problematic of situations.

Communication and meaning are for Dewey a genuinely dialogical process of mutual exploration, discovery, growth, and learning. The paradigmatic instance of meaning is to be found in the active participation of members in learning about the world and each other. The essence of meaning, in other words, lies in significant growth, and growth involves creativity as well as order. Meaning is most fully exemplified in this sort of continuity. Views which seek to understand meaning primarily in terms of a static synchronic system of signs and rules will be faced with the paradoxical intrusion of the temporal and concrete contextual use of the system, and elaborate conjurations will be needed to exorcise the Cartesian demon. Meaning is a shared project of the human condition, something to be mutually undertaken. Meaning is something we must constantly strive for, discover, and seek out together.

We encounter the world as a structured and significant place. The world of ordinary experience is not one of sense data or internal hypotheses about external states of affairs. We meet people, sit in chairs, sip coffee, discuss politics and movies, fall in love, have disagreements, and worry about death and taxes. The meaning of these events is encountered or had. But obviously it is only because we have spent a great deal of time organizing our responses to the world that it has taken on the configuration that it has. The structured and significant world of our immediate experience is the product of a long art. The organization of the visual field is based on a complexly integrated

body of sensorimotor responses. These responses represent capacities of the living organic body as well as structures of the environment. Language furthers our ability to organize experience and activity so that we can respond to the sense or meaning of an event above and beyond what we realize in terms of its place in the field of sensorimotor activity. The world, then, has levels of tacit interpretation in it as it is directly or immediately encountered.

This is not to suggest that the world in itself is unstructured or that its structure is noumenal. Order, for Dewey, is neither autocratically imposed on a chaotic manifold of sense nor is it passively received and imprinted on us like a stamp on wax. Order arises from the possible conjunctions of the organism and its environment realized through interaction. There must be a world with a certain order to it and an organism with a certain order to it prior to any activity which may be undertaken. A body is an implicit range of interpretation and that structured range of objects to which it can respond marks its environment. A body which could not read its environment would die. But it does not have to read all the features of the world, only those which are relevant for it to carry on its activity. Nor is it necessary for the organism to duplicate those features of the environment which are significant. Thus I think it is best that we understand Dewey's view as one in which there are a plurality of possible interpretive contexts or situations. As the range of possible functions increase in the situation, the range of possible interpretations expands. There are a plurality of possible worlds to the extent that there are a plurality of possible universes of action.

Dewey's analysis of meaning as had or undergone is important because it provides the basis for his theory of aesthetic meaning. Aesthetic meaning is but the capitalization of the fact that the sense of the world is directly encountered or had in ordinary experience. The world has sense, according to Dewey. But obviously this is not to be taken as implying that there is but one true way of interpreting the world. The world may have many senses. The sense of the world refers to the immediately had or undergone coordination of the organism to an environment. We encounter the world as a structured field because of our continual and organized responses. The sense of the world arises from transactional activity. It is for this reason that we see chairs and people instead of indeterminate masses. The meaning of these objects is directly had as part of the experience. Experience has a range of possible ways of encountering the world, extending from the highly indeterminate, unlocalized feelings we have to the highly articulate symbolical manipulations of cognitive experience. These might be seen as extremes of the continuum of sense. In distin-

guishing these aspects, it should not be forgotten that they may *all* be copresent in experience, functioning together:

The qualities of situations in which organisms and surrounding conditions interact, when discriminated, make sense. Sense is distinct from feeling, for it has a recognized reference; it is the qualitative characteristic of something, not just a submerged unidentified quality or tone. Sense is also different from signification. The latter involves use of a quality as a sign or index of something else, as when the red of a light signifies danger. . . . The sense of the thing, on the other hand, is an immediate and immanent meaning; it is the meaning which is itself felt or directly had. . . . The meaning of the *whole* situation as apprehended is sense. . . . Whenever a situation has this double function of meaning, namely signification and sense, mind, intellect is definitely present (EN, 260-60; LW 1:200).

Here Dewey explicitly asserts that meaning can be "immediate." It must be recalled that in Dewey's metaphysics of situations, immediacy in no way excluded mediacy: situations were at once both immediately existing and processes of development. At any moment a situation "exists"; it has an immediate degree of its realization, and this stage reflects the whole of the process in its own way. Dewey argues that the total act of behavior is immanent in and determining of the various sensorimotor coordinations at each moment. The *whole* act was present in the part. This feature will also be present on the level of meaning. Dewey distinguishes three plateaus of existence, the physical, the psychophysical and the mental or the level of meaning.<sup>39</sup> Through the principle of continuity, although each level will display its own irreducible features, there will be generic traits linking them. Just as Dewey proposes a field-theory of nature and a transactional view of life, exemplified in his theory of the act, so, too, will he give a transactional analysis of the experience of meaning.

Dewey does seem to contrast the "immediate meaning" of sense with the discursive or mediate meaning of signification and the immediate but unmeaningful presence of feeling. This has created a difficult problem in understanding Dewey's central thesis, since one is likely to be at a loss as to exactly how one shifts between these phases or how brute immediacy and relational mediacy can fuse together to create "sense." When Dewey comes to speak of quality, which stands for the immediate, felt aspect of experience, he says, "Quality is quality, direct, immediate and undefinable"; elsewhere he asserts that "Immediacy of existence is ineffable" (EN, 110, 85; LW 1: 92, 74). It might be inferred from these passages that any talk of "immediate meaning" is contradictory. Meaning seems here to be a matter of relations. The previous chapter noted how critics like Gar-

rett and Bernstein were led to conclude that Dewey's theory was gangrenous and needed amputation. I argued against these critics that Dewey's principle of continuity and theory of situations does present a coherent alternative.

Though Dewey was undeniably careless, even negligent, in formulating certain parts of his philosophy, I don't think this is a difficult problem to unravel. First, one must constantly return to what Dewey means by "experience"—something very different from what someone like Hume does. Experience for Dewey cannot be reduced to "elements" which must be classified rigorously as "qualities" or "relations." These terms are at best abstractions made to clarify and organize experience in certain situations, and as such should be regarded functionally as the tools they are. We learn to use terms like "red," "sweet," "hard," or "disgusting" to focus on aspects of certain situations and terms like "before," "next to," "taller," and so on to focus on other aspects. But these sets of terms do not exclusively refer to simple qualities or relations. "Red" can refer to a variety of hues, no one of which we ever see twice, but which are *related* for us by the term, which thereby helps us organize our general experience. Likewise, we can pick on so-called relational aspects and take them as qualifying the situation. "Tallness" easily can be seen as a quality, but so can "next-to-ness" or "beforeness." Experience, according to Dewey, can be taken qualitatively or relationally, depending on how we are using it. Primary experience is malleable, and we may focus on the intrinsic aspects of the immediate moment or we may try to relate the immediate phase into a larger process or context. In short, there is only a problem connecting "qualities" and "relations" when the psychologist's fallacy has been committed and these abstractions are mistaken for pre-existent constitutive elements. It is of historical note that the term "quality" appears with Plato's effort to distinguish subject and attribute (along with his apology for coining such a "bizarre" word), and Aristotle originates the term "relation" also in connection with philosophical problems in metaphysics and logic.<sup>40</sup> "Qualities" and "relations" were inventions of philosophic analysis.

Secondly, if we look at how experience functions, we see that both qualities and relations are fully compatible, and are, indeed, necessary for each other. Take once more the example of hammering. A hammer, nail, and board may all be taken for their immediate qualities, or they may all be taken relationally, say in terms of purpose or cause and effect. But if we start with the basic *action* of hammering we see that it would be impossible unless both aspects were in the experience. If we tried to hammer a nail solely by considering the relational aspects, disregarding the color, shape, heft, force and so on,

the job would be botched if it ever could begin (for how could we identify the hammer or nail without their telltale qualities?). Likewise, by regarding only the qualities, we could not integrate them into a meaningful, continuous action. In primary experience, we "sense" what the hammer is and how we are using it; we tend to discriminate qualities or relations as problematic situations arise, e.g., this hammer feels "too heavy" or one has to change the angle at which one is driving the nail. It is the whole situation, however, which makes these distinctions meaningful, not vice versa.

On this analysis, I believe that it would be better to regard Dewey's distinctions of feeling, sense and signification as matters of *degree* along a continuum rather than as three separate modes of experience. At one extreme, as we focus more on the immediate aspects, we tend toward "feeling," losing sight of the unrealized potentialities of the project at hand. We pay attention to the present on its own account and ignore the future. At the other extreme, we can become absorbed in trying to mediate or locate the immediate in a future-oriented process, operation or context. We may become solely concerned with the final outcome of an action and its significance so that the immediate loses its qualitative luster in anticipation of those to come and becomes a bare sign. It is at these extremes of feeling and signification that experience is likely to fall apart and the means-end relationship become divided. We may come to view all mediation, relation or cognition in experience as solely "practical" or significant. All qualitative feeling may be consigned to sheer emotional reaction or detached, "purely aesthetic" attitudes. This is the state of affairs, of course, which Dewey decries and against which his philosophy of experience is directed. For this reason, then, it is best to regard "pure feeling" and "pure signification" as limiting terms, and, in fact, bizarre extremes impossible in themselves, of the continuum of "sense." The ideal to which Dewey points is the continuous interplay of sense and signification so that the immediate is taken up into a broad and deep context which in turn is realized and brought to light in immediate experience. This is exactly what Dewey means by *an* experience.

Feeling, then, denotes the qualitative or immediate side of experience, the part which is "had" or undergone. It still exemplifies the immediacy of existence, but now consciously, while also remaining grounded in the situation. To repeat Dewey's important discussion of this idea:

The most that can be said about qualities in the inanimate field is that they mark the limit of the contact of historical affairs, being abrupt ends or termini, boundaries of beginning and closing where a par-

ticular interaction ceases. . . . In life and mind they play an active role. . . . For in feeling a quality exists as a quality and not merely as an abrupt, discrete, unique delimitation of interaction. . . . "Feeling" is in general a name for the newly actualized quality acquired by events previously occurring upon a physical level, when these events come into more extensive and delicate relationships of interaction. More specifically, it is a name for the coming to existence of those ultimate differences in affairs which mark them off from one another and give them discreteness. . . . Thus qualities characteristic of sentiency are qualities of cosmic events (EN, 266-67; LW 1:203-04).

For every situation in experience there is an underlying sense or feeling of the "pervasive qualitative whole" which makes everything experienced *as* belonging or not belonging, *as* making sense or not of *that* situation. It is this feeling of the whole context which marks off "aesthetic experience" as the consummation of a whole process.

Though feeling may be immediately had or undergone, Dewey notes that "it is capable of receiving and bearing distinctions without end" (EN, 257; LW 1: 198). This is what communication and language exploit, for they transform a quality into a bearer of meaning.

As life is a character of events in a peculiar condition of organization, and "feeling" is a quality of life-forms marked by complexly mobile and discriminating responses, so "mind" is an added property assumed by a feeling creature, when it reaches that organized interaction with other living creatures which is language, communication. Then the qualities of feeling become significant of objective differences in external things and of episodes past and to come. This state of things in which qualitatively different feelings are not just had but are significant of objective differences, is mind. Feelings are no longer just felt. They have and they make *sense*, record and prophesy (EN, 258; LW 1:198).

Qualities are capable of functioning in meaning situations through their power both to be immediately had and to have, as part of their immediate aspect, the sense of the larger situation in which they function. Because immediate experience can conserve "within itself the meaning of the entire preparatory process," says Dewey, means and ends can be discriminated and intelligence ceases to be a matter of instinct or sheer habit. "The result is nothing less than revolutionary. Organic activity is liberated from subjection to what is closest at hand in space and time. Man is led or drawn rather than pushed. The immediate is significant in respect to what has occurred and will occur. . ." (EN, 269; LW 1:206-07).

This is a highly crucial observation. The immediate sense of expe-

rience may be *had as* the consummatory outcome of a process—its *meaning* may be that of completion or fulfillment, and that meaning will be directly embodied *in* the object of experience. The origin of aesthetic feeling is to be found in learning to enjoy the presence of sense. Dewey notes that when language is used so that an “emphatic immediate presence of sense occurs” it becomes poetry (EN, 293; LW 1: 223). In such moments, there is a qualitatively enjoyed meaning to the situation which is not a purely monochrome or simple feeling. Indeed, the contrary seems to be the case: there is the sense of richness, texture, variation, and complexity which have been successfully organized. This is what Dewey says reflects a completed or total organic response. In less biological terms, there is an integrated and consummatory moment in which one’s interpretive responses are called forth and fulfilled in the object. A coordinated perspective is realized which brings the sense of the situation alive to consciousness.

Experience is a field-event incorporating the horizons of feeling, the objects of sense, and the foci of consciousness. Dewey’s analysis of consciousness is one of the most interesting topics in *Experience and Nature*. It is important here because aesthetic meaning is meaning realized in conscious appropriation. In fact, for Dewey, the aesthetic and artistic phases of experience mark the highest realization of consciousness. Dewey begins by distinguishing two types of consciousness, consciousness which simply is the having of experience and consciousness which is the having of meaning or meaningful experience. In the latter case there is awareness of objects or events in terms of their sense. Consciousness is an event for Dewey, and therefore to be distinguished from mind or the total system of meanings, the cultural background of consciousness:

The relation of mind to consciousness may be partially suggested by saying that while mind as a system of meanings is subject to disorganization, disequilibrium, perturbation, there is no sense in referring to a particular state of awareness *in its immediacy* as either organized or disorganized. An idea is just what it is when it occurs. . . . Immediately, every perceptual awareness may be termed indifferently emotion, sensation, thought, desire: not that it *is* immediately any one of these things, or all of them combined, but that when it is taken in some *reference* to conditions or to consequences or to both, it has, in that contextual reference the distinctive properties of emotion, sensation, thought or desire (EN, 304-05; LW 1:230-31).

As immediately undergone, consciousness simply is that totality of experience which is qualitatively had. But taken in its temporal reference its meaning becomes part of the way it is undergone, i.e., it is

had as desire or thought. And it is precisely this capacity of consciousness to embody within itself at the moment how functions in the temporal structure of the situation which allows it to become the occasion of a complex variety of meaningful experiences. Indeed, on further analysis, consciousness is not a timeless, static moment but a volatile, transitional nexus in the field of meaning. “Consciousness,” Dewey says, “an idea, is that phase of a system of meanings which at a given time is undergoing re-direction, transitive transformation” (EN, 308; LW 1:233). Later, he adds, “The *immediately* precarious, the point of greatest immediate need, defines the apex of consciousness, its intense or focal mode. And this is the point of *re-direction*, of *re-adaptation*, *re-organization*” (EN, 312; LW 1:236).

Consciousness is a reconstructive activity. But it is reconstructive of a field of meanings. In other words, consciousness for Dewey has an intrinsic dramatic and narrative structure which operates within a web of meanings which provide the sense-giving felt context:

Every case of consciousness is dramatic; drama is an enhancement of the conditions of consciousness. . . . It seems to me that anyone who installs himself in the midst of the unfolding of drama *has* the experience of consciousness in just this sort of way; in a way which enables him to give significance to descriptive and analytic terms otherwise meaningless. There must be a story, some whole, an integrated series of episodes. This connected whole is mind, as it extends beyond a particular process of consciousness and conditions it. There must also be now-occurring events, to which meanings are assigned in terms of a story taking place. Episodes do not mean what they would mean if occurring in some different story. They have to be perceived in terms of the story, as its forwardings and fulfillings. At the same time, until the play or story is ended, meanings given to events are of a sort which constantly evoke a meaning which was not absolutely anticipated or totally predicted: there is expectancy, but also surprise, novelty (EN, 306-07; LW 1:232-33).

This is essentially the structure of *an* experience, as will be seen in the next chapter. Consciousness is the event which realizes meaning. It is the tensive focus as well as the temporal enactment of a dramatic or narrative world. Just as time has meaning as a dramatic or narrative event, so dramatic or narrative meaning is inherently temporal.

There are two implications to be drawn from this analysis of consciousness. The first is that every conscious event is part of a larger situation in which there is a supporting context, an interpretive world in terms of which the event of consciousness takes on meaning. This environment is present in or had in experience as the sense of objects and the horizons of feeling. Although, Dewey insists, there are no

meanings without language, any linguistic event has a substructure of "an immense multitude of immediate organic selections, rejections, welcomings, expulsions, appropriations" and so on:

We are not aware of the qualities of many or most of these acts. . . . Yet they exist as feeling qualities, and have an enormous directive effect on our behavior. . . . In a thoroughly normal organism, these "feelings" have an efficiency of operation which it is impossible for thought to match. Even our most highly intellectualized operations depend upon them as a "fringe" by which to guide our inferential movements. They give us our *sense* of rightness and wrongness, of what to select and emphasize and follow up, and what to drop, slur over and ignore among the multitude of inchoate meanings that are presenting themselves (EN 299-300; LW 1: 226).<sup>41</sup>

As the previous chapter showed, this qualitative feeling which binds and organizes the situation is precisely what determines the situation as such. It is the integration of the total coordination of interpretive responses; it is a genuinely binding or organizing event which actualizes the possibilities of the situation toward significant mutual support and action. Because consciousness is always intentional of an object located within an event or ongoing situation, the present moment is both a case of and a problem for interpretation:

"This," whatever *this* may be, always implies a system of meanings focussed at a point of stress, uncertainty, and need of regulation. It sums up history, and at the same time opens a new page; it is record and promise in one; a fulfillment and an opportunity. . . . It is a comment written by natural events on their own direction and tendency. . . . The union of past and future with the present manifest in every awareness of meanings is a mystery only when consciousness is gratuitously divided from nature, and when nature is denied temporal and historic quality. When consciousness is connected with nature, the mystery becomes a luminous revelation of the operative interpenetration in nature of the efficient and the fulfilling (EN, 352-53; LW 1: 264-65).

The second implication to be drawn from Dewey's analysis of consciousness is the significance he attaches to having a civilized or uncivilized subconscious. It is evident that by the "subconscious," Dewey is referring to the whole tacit dimension which undergirds interpretation and meaning. But this dimension is not to be thought of as the reservoir of irrational drives which contort the conscious life toward their darker ends. This of course is possible. But to the extent that one lives a life which is the product of an intelligent culture, there

will be an integration and productive relation between the conscious and unconscious phases of experience:

The deification of the subconscious is legitimate only for those who never indulge in it—animals and thoroughly healthy and naive children—if there be any such. The subconscious of a civilized adult reflects all the habits he has acquired. . . . It is most reliable in just those activities with respect to which it is least spoken of, and least reliable with respect to those things where it is most fashionable to laud it (EN, 300-01; LW 1: 228).

By the last remark, Dewey means that it is in our most fully alert and consciously intelligent moments, such as in mathematics, philosophy, or "in a highly cultivated fine art" that the civilized subconscious is most fully praised and realized. To see the paradigm of the subconscious in neurotic cases is much like identifying the characteristics of health from a ward of the sick and dying. Art, then, is truly capable of expressing the subconscious through conscious articulation. This expression may even be said to be the realization of the implicit meaning of the field of experience. In the work of art, there is a provocative power which is capable of probing deeply into the psychic life of man. The dynamisms and tensions it incorporates may not be resolved, for there may be no final resolutions of the basic tensions which are life except death. But the work of art may be able to evoke, illuminate, and give catharsis to such tensions. Furthermore, as the psychic life of man, the universe of mind, develops and modifies, as the underlying interpretive worlds which guide meaning change, works may wane and die or suddenly spring to life after centuries to reveal something about ourselves long forgotten. For the Christians of the fifth century, the poems of Sappho revealed nothing more than unlicensed pagan sexuality, and were systematically destroyed. Today, the trash heaps of Roman Egypt are sifted in the hopes of bringing them to light. Sappho understood the beauty of the flesh, the lived, passionate body which felt and saw everything intensely and clearly. When the early Christians rejected the world, it was this very capacity to celebrate, affirm, and enshrine the flesh which was denied. Thus Sappho's works were annihilated while Plato's were copied and preserved. The Platonic Eros is, after all, a heavenly directed one even if it must climb the ladder of the body's passions as well as the passions of the intellect.

One of the central problems for the narrative of consciousness, then, is the establishment of context. To inhabit the world is to inhabit it through an organized manner of response. It is to be able to fit in with a universe of discourse grounded on a universe of shared life.

Truly to grasp the sense of an event is to grasp it in terms of a form of life. This is precisely the anthropologist's problem. For not only does he try to inhabit the world of another people, he must yet remain a Western anthropologist, someone who identifies himself within the context of science. On the one hand, the anthropologist must try to encounter the world of the culture he studies as it is lived, or, in Dewey's expression, as it is had. On the other hand, it is his job to bring to light the whole tacit dimension of the world he is studying through the critical and analytical tools of his science. The tension between these rival tendencies has been dramatically illustrated in the writings of Carlos Castaneda and the controversy surrounding them. Castaneda believed that to understand the world of the Yaqui medicine man Don Juan he had to accept it on its own terms. His effort to live within that world directly meant, however, he could no longer study it. To inhabit a world in one sense is to be able to respond to the symbols of that culture as the people do and without a constant accompanying detachment. Yet, one does not achieve understanding by abandoning the need for critical interpretation. The anthropologist who remains totally detached from the culture he studies, however, may achieve objectivity at the cost of rendering his subject matter, the life of a people, completely opaque. The ambiguity of the human situation cannot be evaded either in the blind acceptance of a culture's symbols or by their suppression. The need for interpretation is obliquely acknowledged by the very fact Castaneda transformed the world of the Yaqui shaman into literary books—something the Yaqui do not need to do.

We may see an internal instance of this paradox in Thomas Kuhn's theory of the nature of scientific revolutions. During a scientific revolution, such as the period when the Ptolemaic and Copernican models or paradigms were competing, there is a problem in going from one interpretive context to the other much like that of the member of one culture trying to inhabit the world of another. Nevertheless, although Kuhn seems to regard the leap from one paradigm to the next almost as an instance of existentialist choice, the process he describes is more like one of *learning* to shift one's contextual perspective. In other words, human beings are primarily capable of learning to participate in a shared social perspective, of making experience continuous as well as progressive. We can learn someone else's worldview because we have learned our own, as it were. When, as in the case of a scientific revolution, there is a radical shift in assumptions, these shifts are nevertheless interpreted as due to the conflict of rival theories and definite problems with evidence. In learning someone else's culture, the anthropologist has available to him precisely

what the members of the culture lack, methods of illuminating the tacit meanings of their world. It should be no surprise that the encounter would also throw the assumptions of the anthropologist's world into relief as well. To the extent that philosophy itself exists as a critically interpretive and evaluative enterprise, as one which seeks to become self-reflective and self-critical within its own culture, it must find methods of detachment in the very process of creating tools of analysis. In other words, philosophy needs its speculative moments to reveal its own possibility as an analytical enterprise. One doesn't simply criticize ideas; one criticizes ideas in terms of other ideas. This naturally leads to the projection of new interpretive horizons which have been specifically created for the purpose of illuminating a critical issue, that is, the creation of metaphysical systems.

Human experience is a process of learning contexts. There are no neutral or absolute reference points from which we may speak or interpret. In his essay, "Context and Thought," Dewey says:

We grasp the meaning of what is said in our own language not because appreciation of context is unnecessary but because context is so unescapably present. It is taken for granted; it is a matter of course . . . Habits of speech, including syntax and vocabulary, and modes of interpretation have been formed in the face of inclusive and defining situations of context. . . . We are not explicitly aware of the role of context because our every utterance is so saturated with it that it forms the significance of what we say and hear (*ENF*, 90; *LW* 4:4).

The human project and problem is always that of learning the sense of the world.

But the sense of the world depends ultimately, in whatever context we are in, upon the felt, qualitative, and non-cognitive dimension. This theme is the central topic of Dewey's highly significant essay, "Qualitative Thought." Without the role of quality to create the sense of the situation, inquiry would be impossible. By "quality" Dewey is referring not primarily to particular discriminated qualities *within* a situation, but to the distinctive, unnameable uniquely characteristic feel of *that* situation. The qualitative sense of the whole situation provides the fusion of part and whole in experience which, in terms of meaning, is the integration of "text" and context.

By the term situation in this connection is signified the fact that the subject-matter ultimately referred to in existential propositions is a complex existence that is held together, in spite of its internal complexity, by the fact that it is dominated and characterized throughout by a single quality . . . The situation as such is not and cannot be stated or made explicit. It is taken for granted, "understood," or



implicit in all propositional symbolization. It forms the universe of discourse of whatever is expressly stated or of what appears as a term in a proposition. The situation cannot present itself as an element in a proposition any more than a universe of discourse can appear as a member of discourse within that universe. . . . The situation controls the terms of thought; for they are *its* distinctions, and applicability to it is the ultimate test of their validity (PC, 97-98; LW 5: 246-47).

It is this sense of the whole situation which allows it to be regulated. It is evident that what is right or fitting, that is, what is rational, is for Dewey ultimately determined by the situation as a whole, and how this whole is felt or enters into conscious experience. Does this make Dewey in the last analysis an intuitionist like Bergson? Definitely not. To be sensitive to the controlling quality of the context is to embark upon the path which intelligently explores nature. Although the focus of consciousness may depend upon the tacit horizon or fringe, it is capable of controlling and interpreting the situation so that it realizes those meanings and values which fulfill and do not frustrate human existence. Furthermore, it is possible for there to be better and worse determining contexts. A civilized context, one which is deeply interwoven with the world and which allows for the development and growth of experience through means, is far better than an impulsively and irrationally guiding context or one which is dead-ly mechanically and routine. The cognitive and the non-cognitive can, for Dewey, enter into a mutually supportive and creative relationship, and this is exemplified in the thinking of the artist. Art has the unique capacity to present the rich suggestiveness of meaning; the horizon of indeterminate meaning becomes revealed in its positive role. "The full content of meaning," says Dewey in the essay referred to, is best apprehended in the presence of the work of art." He adds that "Language fails not because thought fails but because no verbal symbols can do justice to the fullness and richness of thought" (PC, 102; LW 5:250).

Genuine works of art are "intellectual and logical wholes" because "the underlying quality that defines the work, that circumscribes it externally and integrates it internally, controls the thinking of the artist his logic is the logic of what I have called qualitative thinking" (PC, 103; LW 5:251). Dewey, in fact, goes further and maintains that artistic thought is merely a paradigm of intelligent, meaningful human experience, which is the central thesis of *Art as Experience*:

The logic of artistic construction and esthetic appreciation is peculiarly significant because they exemplify in accentuated and purified

form the control of selection of detail and mode of relation, or integration, by a qualitative whole. . . . Artistic thought is not however unique in this respect but only shows an intensification of a characteristic of all thought (PC, 103-04; LW 5:251-52).

The question of meaning for Dewey cannot, therefore, evade the importance of the "lived experience," since it is a prime example of what meaning is. From the start of his philosophical development, Dewey had found the ultimate significance of experience to lie both in its capacity for richness and in its sense of wholeness. Gradually, however, Dewey ceased to find an idealist metaphysics a proper account for this. Instead, he located the aesthetic as the most descriptive category, by which he referred not to some museum experience of works of fine art but to life organized into a creative, dramatic and expressive situation. To understand this dynamic whole, Dewey used such concepts as we have seen in this chapter: impulse, habit, the act, emotion, gesture, sense, and context. But in the last analysis, Dewey wished to point to the whole in which these were but abstracted features, phases playing different roles. If Dewey's theory lacked the logical rigor of other philosophies of meaning, it had what they so often conspicuously lacked, namely, a vision of the human world within which logic and language occur. Because art pointed to this world in such a dramatic way, Dewey came to view it not as a pleasant theme for a philosophical pastime, but as a central subject which constantly demanded philosophical investigation.

## VI. Conclusion

It should be evident now why Dewey's discussion of meaning is a vital link between his metaphysics of experience and his aesthetic theory. Art is not casually proclaimed by Dewey to be a subject of central significance for philosophy: "To esthetic experience, then, the philosopher must go to understand what experience is" (AE, 274; LW 10:278). The topic of meaning is a fairly neglected area of Dewey's philosophy, and it has been for that reason I have taken some time in examining it. Dewey rejected the idea that meaning could be profitably confined within the parameters of logic or linguistics, for what was to be the explanation of *their* meaning. The approach which sought to interpret meaning ultimately in terms of atomic self-evident truths had been tried, and Dewey found that instead of illuminating experience, such an attitude only succeeded in mystifying it. Dewey therefore undertook to see meaning in terms of that complex totality of the ways we are in the world, both as biological creatures and as cultural beings.

On the level of the body, Dewey sees in its primary structures and modes of response the basis for the emergence of the significant gesture.<sup>42</sup> The reconstruction of the reflex arc into the circuit of coordination provided him with the basic model which would guide his understanding of activity as a process of constant adaptation and organization within one whole act. This allowed him to analyze the respective functions of emotion and habit. Emotion is that feature which reveals our tensive, problematic involvement with the world and which becomes capable of transformation into an expressive consummatory feeling. We are linked to the world primarily through emotion. But we are also inhabitants of the world; that is, we have woven a complex network of possible responses which provide structure and method to our actions. It is the habitual body which grounds the further organization of experience in the context of social communication. Meaning emerges from communication, from the effort of participants to modify and interpret a situation through a shared set of symbols in virtue of which the situation becomes common or takes on a common meaning for the participants. Language is the highest development of such a common symbol system and largely functions to coordinate other activities. But language creates new modes of shared life which it can directly embody. Language succeeds in so restructuring our world, that the world is encountered on the level of sense. Sense is continuum of experience, ranging from feeling at one extreme to cognitive signification at the other. When sense is realized in conscious experience it is just that immediate, qualitative sort of meaning which becomes the possibility of aesthetic experience. Experience can become the immediately sensed consummation of a process. In this sort of conscious experience the non-cognitive and indeed subconscious context are fully operative. Sense can become a revelation of the way we are in the world and so can express its meaning. Dewey explicitly points to the example of the artist and the method of artistic thinking as a paradigm for intelligence. Art as a process is the civilization of experience; it is the struggle to embody meaning and value in terms by which we are humanly realized.

## Chapter 5

# The Art of Experience

In 1931 John Dewey delivered the first of the William James Lectures at Harvard; the subject was to be the philosophy of art. The book which grew from these lectures did more than commemorate James in an oblique way, for if any book fulfilled the promise of James' late-blooming radical empiricism it was *Art as Experience*. At the same time, this work marked the culmination of Dewey's struggle to articulate what "experience" is in its fullest and richest sense. Although the book is still one of Dewey's most popular, it is often regarded as a tangential, if happy, addition to the mainstream of his thought, the part covered by the rubric of "instrumentalism." The other tendency, as noted, was to see his aesthetic theory as simply inconsistent with his philosophy altogether. For those who regarded pragmatism and its heirs as the hard-headed kitchen drudge's philosophy, the grasping child of utilitarianism and positivism, *Art as Experience* would have appeared anomalous indeed. The alternative was to force upon it an interpretation consistent with the prejudices of a reductionistic naturalism. Susanne Langer took this option, describing the book as an application of the sort of doctrinaire behaviorism which reduces all higher human values and ideals to questions of "animal psychology."<sup>1</sup> Others criticized Dewey's effort to approach aesthetic experience as a development of ordinary experience for blurring or removing exactly those distinguishing features which made the aesthetic unique. Particularly troublesome were Dewey's organic metaphors which were indiscriminately used with both the biological and aesthetic associations. Finally, there was the questionable view which Dewey espoused that the aesthetic was intrinsically an act of expression or communication. The inherent difficulties of the expression theory