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Reviewing Pragmatist Aesthetics: History, Critique, and Interpretation – After Twenty Years

Grateful to the *European Journal of Pragmatism and American Philosophy* for organizing this symposium to mark the twentieth anniversary of *Pragmatist Aesthetics: Living Beauty, Rethinking Art* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), I should begin by explaining why the European context for discussing this book seems especially pertinent. Although known as an American philosopher, I was not academically trained in America; my philosophical education was more European in style -- first at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and then at Oxford. Second, I wrote the final draft of *Pragmatist Aesthetics* while on a year's study leave in Paris (supported by both American and French institutions). Third, the book was in fact published in Europe before it appeared in English. It was officially released in French as *L'art à l'état vif: la pensée pragmatiste et l'esthétique populaire* by the Parisian publisher Minuit the first week of January 1992 (after its printing and "depot legal" in December 1991). The original English version was not released by Blackwell until April (in Britain and elsewhere in Europe); and the American publication date was much later, since copies did not get there before June. By April, the French version was already blessed with wonderfully enthusiastic reviews in *Le Monde*, *Libération*, and *Le Nouvelle Observateur*; so in one sense *Pragmatist Aesthetics* was a European book before its American emergence. Furthermore, of the fourteen languages into which the book is now translated, eleven of them are European. Without these European translations, the cultural impact of the book would have been much diminished, and I gratefully acknowledge the work of my excellent translators, some of them excellent philosophers in their own right.

Finally, the book was blessed with two shrewd European editors whose suggestions greatly aided its reception. Blackwell's Stephan Chambers insisted that my originally planned title "Living Beauty, Rethinking Art: A Pragmatist Aesthetic" was too vague, and that I should make the main title "Pragmatist Aesthetics" both to complement my earlier book *Analytic Aesthetics* (Blackwell, 1989) and to provide a generic, descriptive title that would work well for catalog sales. This proved a prescient stroke of genius when internet searches emerged several years later; for the book appeared at the top of the list in all searches with the paired hit words of "pragmatism and aesthetics" or "pragmatism and art."

My editor at Minuit (the legendary Jérôme Lindon, who also owned that publishing house and was a close friend of Samuel Beckett) reshaped the book in even more significant ways. Insisting that the book's chapters on interpretation and ontological issues were too demandingly academic for the general intellectual reader and that such readers were necessary to make the book economically viable in France (a country where college students are not obliged to buy books and where university libraries are small in numbers and budgets), Lindon required my removing those three chapters for the French edition. I overcame my initial reluctance and trusted his judgment, which proved marvelously astute. In its reduced form and with its own bold French title, *L'art à l'état vif* was not too scholarly for non-specialists to enjoy it, so the book's audience extended far beyond philosophers and

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other academics to artists, journalists, and cultural mediators, and even the rock and rap community. The book was widely reviewed in the general press and featured on the M6 TV show “Rapline,” on which I was interviewed. To my relief, as Lindon (and Pierre Bourdieu) had predicted, the media success did not spoil its academic reception. In fact, this success inspired another fine Paris publisher (L’*éclat*) to publish two of the missing chapters plus some other texts of mine in an independent book, *Sous l’interprétation* (1994), translated by the distinguished French pragmatist Jean-Pierre Cometti. The next European translation (published by the large German trade publisher Fischer) stripped off another of the book’s original chapters (the one comparing analytic and pragmatist aesthetics) so as to present the book’s main arguments in an inexpensive “pocket” edition entitled *Kunst Leben: Die Aesthetik des Pragmatismus* (1994). Widely distributed, even in train-station kiosks, it was also widely discussed. Here again, media attention opened a way to independently publish the most important of the omitted chapters in a German version of *Sous l’intérpretation*, entitled *Vor der Interpretation* (Vienna: Passagen, 1996), the first publication in which my concept of somaesthetics appears (again before its first English mention).

I learned important lessons from these editorial reductions. It not only confirmed my Jamesian intuition that rigorous philosophical reasoning can be rendered enjoyably accessible to the general reader; it also taught me that philosophy needs to take account of the socioeconomic realities that shape its possible forms of expression, if it wants to be expressed and disseminated in the most effective way. No matter how utopian and idealist one’s pragmatist vision is, one must work with the material constraints of the institutions that enable it to be properly conveyed. I also learned that a book is essentially a tool for communicative learning rather than an object to be fetishized. If different contexts require different tools, then there was every reason to adjust the book to fit the new cultural contexts of translation. Thus in my future negotiations with editors and publishers about the book’s translation in other languages, I expressed my willingness to work with them on what would be the best version (and book title) for that linguistic and cultural field, even if this meant a reduced version (or variant title). I likewise offered to write a special preface for each translation to contextualize *Pragmatist Aesthetics* in that country’s aesthetic field so as to aid the book’s reception. Whether or not this preface-strategy was a key to the book’s translation success, it certainly gave me an international cultural education.

Different publishers reduced the book in different ways (depending on their budget and their judgment of what would be best for their cultural field), while some translated the entire book, even when it came to the ten chapters of its second English edition. Even scholars love the comfort of their native language, so my commentators sometimes refer to the book’s version in their own language, mentioning chapter numbers that don’t correspond to the English original (or other translations). If pragmatism affirms the virtues of pluralism and flexible functionality while highlighting contextuality and enjoyable user experience, then the publication history of *Pragmatist Aesthetics* certainly manifests this orientation. As this symposium aims to document the diverse impact of the book, I provide an Appendix of its variant editions in different translations so that readers can decode the symposiasts’ chapter references and trace the book’s different forms, but also to acknowledge my debt to the book’s translators.

I am grateful to this symposium’s four commentaries for helping me to clarify the book’s origins and aims and to explain its role in my overall project and situate my position in the philosophical field; they also spur me to make some of my commitments more ex-

¹ Bourdieu was the person who brought the manuscript to Lindon’s attention, and the book was eventually published in the Minit series Bourdieu directed.

pllicit and consider some new ideas. The principal points of these commentaries relate to the following general themes: the genealogy of *Pragmatist Aesthetics* and its relationship to other philosophical traditions or movements; the topics of aesthetic experience and popular art; and the more strictly philosophical questions of experience, interpretation, ontology and the role and limits of language.

Genealogy and Position in the Philosophical Field

Pragmatist Aesthetics is my third authored book, but the first in which I explicitly identified my philosophical position as something other than firmly analytic. Despite the great virtues of analytic aesthetics, I saw there were important issues that were treated with greater richness in continental traditions (e.g., hermeneutics, critical theory, poststructuralism, and neo-Marxism). Paolo D'Angelo has written an excellent paper showing how *Pragmatist Aesthetics* serves as a bridge between analytic and continental philosophy, but I should correct his suggestion that I was an effective as a bridge because I "belonged to neither school of thought," enjoying "this double extraneousness." In fact, I was very much in the mainstream of analytic aesthetics until my gradual turn to pragmatism in the late 1980s. This mainstream status explains why I was asked by *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* --then (as now) a bastion of analytic aesthetics -- to guest-edit a special issue on this topic, which was then published by Blackwell, then famous for cutting-edge anthologies in this field. My reputation as an analytic philosopher also, I think, helps explain some of the book's success. As Krystyna Wilkoszewska notes, "The work's status was strengthened by the fact that until that time its author had been associated with an analytic orientation in aesthetics." This strengthening, I hope, is not only because being an established analytic philosopher allowed me to wield the symbolic power of that authoritative tradition, but also because my style of argumentation in *Pragmatism Aesthetics* remained largely analytic even though I contested some of the reigning dogmas and preoccupations of analytic aesthetics. The book therefore could appeal to a broad range of readers (particularly younger academics) who were trained in the analytic tradition in aesthetics and appreciated its merits but were also sensitive, as I was, to its serious limitations. They wanted a pragmatism that could engage with the dominant theories and thinkers in the analytic philosophical field and that could formulate Dewey's key insights in a rhetoric that respected the analytic virtues of clarity, concision, and linear argument more than Dewey's great *Art of Experience* was perceived to do. (The philosophical-rhetorical style of Dewey's book, I confess, had earlier blinded me to its wonderful insights; and much later, in the early 1990s, when I tried to interest French theorists in translating it, they almost always replied that his style was too prolix and unattractive. That was what convinced me to publish my own book *Pragmatist Aesthetics* in an attractively streamlined French version.)

Like Wilkoszewska, I deeply respect the fine pragmatist scholarship of John McDermott and other members of the Society for the Advancement of American Philosophy, but it had no real impact on the field of American aesthetics and (to the extent that it was noticed in this field) was perceived as essentially historical commentary or belle-lettrist essays without the rigor of systematic philosophical exploratory analysis. In contrast, Richard Rorty, Nelson Goodman, Joseph Margolis, and Stanley Fish strongly influenced the Anglo-American field of aesthetics; Rorty and Fish being especially influential in literary studies as well. These thinkers along with Arthur Danto and Pierre Bourdieu (himself an admirer of Wittgensteinian and Austinian analytic philosophy) significantly shaped my thinking and helped

make *Pragmatist Aesthetics* a book whose pragmatism is less pure in its sources but which I hope for that reason is more pragmatically pluralist and successful by being less parochial².

For better or for worse, I belong to the tradition of post-analytic pragmatists; and I understand the “post” as not a simple rejection of analytic questions, methods, terms, and values but rather as going beyond their limitations. If I differ sharply from most post-analytic pragmatists (particularly Rorty, Goodman, Brandom, and Margolis) in insisting on the continuing philosophical value of experience -- including non-linguistic, non-interpretive experience, this does not mean devaluing interpretation (or language) as crucial issues for aesthetics and philosophy. But it does mean that I also take somatic experience and disciplines of somatic practice quite seriously. I revisit the topic of interpretation later in my remarks, since both Wilkoszewska and Roberta Dreon discuss it at length. But for now, in this genealogical section, I should at least correct Wilkoszewska’s narrative by insisting that interpretation was a key topic of my research long before I came to Temple University in the mid-1980s. Indeed it formed one of the major chapters of my Oxford doctoral dissertation, and I published an earlier version of that chapter (while still a graduate student) in the important analytic journal, *Philosophical Quarterly*³.

I came to pragmatism in mid-career and first entered it through the portal of Dewey’s aesthetics, since philosophy of art was my chief focus at the time. When I first wrote *Pragmatist Aesthetics* my knowledge of the earlier classical pragmatists was still very limited, and so (as Wilkoszewska notes) I initially saw Dewey’s aesthetics as the clear and absolute origin of pragmatist aesthetics, though I always contested the view she here expresses that Dewey’s aesthetics “remained unnoticed during his time.” In fact, as I argue in the first chapter of *Pragmatist Aesthetics* and elsewhere, Dewey’s *Art as Experience* stimulated considerable interest both among artists and theorists, and even among some famous aestheticians like the great Italian thinker Benedetto Croce. Dewey’s decline in aesthetic reputation and influence came after his death. As I became more deeply immersed in the pragmatist tradition, I began to see that many of Dewey’s key ideas were anticipated by Emerson, Alain Locke, and William James. As Emerson and Locke highlight many of the social, democratic, and pragmatic themes of Dewey’s *Art as Experience*, so James strikingly prefigures the philosophy of mind that shapes Dewey’s key notion of aesthetic experience, which clearly echoes James’s account of the unity of consciousness in *The Principles of Psychology*. Dewey hailed that masterpiece as the book that most influenced his thought; and it repeatedly insists on the continuity of practical, aesthetic, and cognitive interests – themes central to the pragmatist aesthetics that Dewey later developed in *Art as Experience* (which he initially wrote for delivery as the first William James Lectures at Harvard). Having elsewhere presented a detailed case for pragmatist aesthetics’ Jamesian roots, I should not rehearse it here⁴.

That Dewey’s aesthetics drew on earlier thinkers linked to pragmatism does not diminish his impressive achievement. I still regard *Art as Experience* as providing the first systematic account of pragmatist aesthetics, though I should remind readers that Dewey never identified his aesthetic theory as pragmatist, and in fact the terms “pragmatism” or “pragmatist” do not even appear in the book. Dewey had good tactical reasons at that time to

² I should note that Bourdieu first took an interest in me because of my analytic writings, especially my work on Wittgenstein, which he cites in his book *Les Règles de l’art* (Paris: Seuil, 1992).

³ The thesis was titled “The Object of Literary Criticism” submitted and defended in 1979 and later published in (Rodopi, 1984); the article was “The Logic of Interpretation,” *Philosophical Quarterly* 28 (1978): 310-324.

⁴ See Richard Shusterman, Dewey’s *Art as Experience: The Psychological Background*, *Journal of Aesthetic Education* 44.1 (2010): 26-43; and “The Pragmatist Aesthetics of William James,” *British Journal of Aesthetics* 51:4 (2011): 347-361.

avoid identifying his aesthetic theory as distinctively pragmatist, and some distinguished Dewey scholars today still reject using this term to describe his aesthetic theory⁵. Is pragmatist aesthetics then a neo-pragmatist notion read back into Dewey's aesthetics? In any case, Dewey remains (in my eyes) the most influential, systematic source of pragmatist aesthetics, and I'm sure he would have encouraged its development beyond his own particular theories in order to advance continued, progressive cultural flourishing.

Aesthetic Experience and Popular Art

Paolo D'Angelo rightly identifies aesthetic experience as a key theme through which *Pragmatist Aesthetics* seeks to displace the analytic preoccupation with formal definitions of art while at the same time mediating between analytic and continental philosophy through their affirmations and criticisms of the concept of aesthetic experience. He shrewdly notes how this theme of aesthetic experience productively connects with the book's defence of popular art, where pragmatist meliorism is presented as a middle road between global celebrations and condemnations of popular culture. Recognizing how the book's account of popular art (which closely examines its socio-political and aesthetic features and cultural import) differs sharply both from the typical analytic focus on formal or ontological issues of mass-media art and from the typical continental denunciation of the mass culture industry, D'Angelo also appreciates how my discussion goes beyond Dewey's vague (and at times somewhat condescending) theoretical gesturing toward popular art. He sympathetically sees how my defence of the popular "is moved by an authentic interest... and direct knowledge" and goes beyond "the level of theoretic analysis" in order to illustrate the rich meanings of popular art through interpretive analysis. Conversely, it is perhaps Wilkoszewksa's loyalty to the more limited scope of Dewey's aesthetic interests that makes her uncomfortable with the attention I give to popular art. I remain convinced that such attention was indeed essential for advocating a pragmatist aesthetics relevant to the lifeworld of the 1990s and remains necessary today if we want to pursue the pragmatist meliorist project of improving aesthetic expression and experience while maintaining the essentially democratic orientation that inspires the classical pragmatist tradition from its prehistory in Emerson through James and Dewey.

Aesthetic experience is the focus of Heidi Salaverria's paper, which ambitiously seeks to develop my treatment of this concept in three interrelated ways: first, to show how my theory of aesthetic experience displays important and fruitful convergences with Kant's aesthetics, although Kant is typically painted as a villain in *Pragmatist Aesthetics*; second, to argue that the distinctive pleasure of aesthetic experience (implicit in Kantian and pragmatist aesthetics) is essentially transformatory; third, that this distinctive transformatory pleasure is a pleasure of doubt. Let me begin by repeating my earlier confession (cited by Salaverria from my paper on James's pragmatism aesthetics) of having been too harsh in my criticism of Kant's aesthetics and failing to highlight that "my own pragmatist aesthetics shares with him (much more than with Hegel) an emphasis on pleasure, perception, and

⁵ I explain those tactical reasons in my introduction to the French translation of Dewey's book *L'art comme expérience*, trans. J-P. Cometti et al. (Paris: Gallimard, 2010), 11-24; and in "Dewey's *Art as Experience*: The Psychological Background." Thomas Alexander is one prominent Dewey scholar reluctant to associate Dewey with the term pragmatist aesthetics. At a recent symposium at SAAP (New York, March 17, 2012) to help trace the impact of my book and the future of pragmatist aesthetics, he expressed his "discomfort with the term," citing Dewey's remarks that he "used [the term] very little," and then with "reserves." I cite from the first page of his typescript that quotes Dewey's letter to Corliss Lamont Sept. 6, 1940 cited in Corliss Lamont, "New Light on Dewey's *Common Faith*," *The Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. 58, No. 1 (1961), p. 26.

the experiential particularity of aesthetic reactions that cannot be reduced to the conceptual.” Because Kant’s signature aesthetic themes of disinterestedness, purposelessness, and intellectualist formalism still divide us, I uncritically followed my admired forerunners in pragmatist aesthetics – James, Dewey, and Rorty – in their acute antipathy toward Kant’s aesthetics. Dewey, of course, had a soft spot for Hegelian holism; and Rorty’s textualism, holism, and advocacy of philosophy as edifying narrative also bespeak a conceptualism that favors Hegelian *Begrifflichkeit* and ideas over perceptual pleasure; James and I seem closer to Kant in highlighting the *sensory* pleasures of aesthetic perception and judgment that depend on the particular subject’s lived experience and that cannot be reduced to conceptual rules, descriptive formulae, or verbal generalizations (though Dewey, of course, also insisted that aesthetics could not be reduced to the conceptual or to generalizations). The paradigm of aesthetic experience or judgment is thus a particular experience or a singular judgment: not an experience of, say, sculpture or poetry in general, but rather of this or that particular sculpture or poem.

This is what I meant in saying that I shared Kant’s view of “the experiential particularity of aesthetic reactions that cannot be reduced to the conceptual.” I did not mean to suggest that there was one particular kind of reaction that defines all aesthetic experience or even all good aesthetic experience. But I worry that Salaverria is interpreting (or extending) my views in this essentialist way; so let me here reaffirm my pluralism with respect to aesthetic experience and its pleasures. There are many different kinds of aesthetic experience, especially if we take into account the complex and contested character of that concept and do not try to legislate that only one usage of the term is appropriate. Not all of the experiences or reactions that we call aesthetic are experiences of pleasure; not only are there bad aesthetic experiences that provide no pleasure (except by the relief of their ending), but there are also valuable aesthetic experiences that cannot be described as pleasurable. Some works of contemporary art are valuable in creating intensities of perception, feeling, or intellectual insight that are not really pleasurable (and could even be somewhat painful or unpleasant) but such experiences can nevertheless be aesthetically powerful and rewarding. Moreover, even if we confine ourselves to pleasurable aesthetic experiences, we need to recognize a variety of pleasures. This plurality of aesthetic pleasures goes beyond the traditional Burkean distinction between the pleasure of beauty and the delight of the sublime: there is pleasantness, amusement, merriment, elation, bliss, rapture, exultation, exhilaration, enjoyment, diversion, entertainment, titillation, fun, gratification, satisfaction, contentment -- and so on. I share Kant’s affirmation of the centrality of pleasure for aesthetics, but my palate of the aesthetic seems wider; I would not exclude experiences or judgments in which sensual delight or “charm and emotion have a share” (*Critique of Judgement*, I.i. § 14). Though admiring Kant’s amazing analytic skill in trying to define the pure aesthetic judgment or experience, I do not share this quest for purity in aesthetics any more than I endorse the Cartesian quest for apodictic certainty. Perfect purity in aesthetics is an overrated ideal, if not also a chimera. *Pragmatist Aesthetic* appreciates the aesthetic richness of mixing, which is why its rap chapter is important and emblematic.

Salaverria rightly insists that aesthetic pleasures can be transformatory and be especially powerful and valuable for that reason, but we should not let this obscure the existence and value of aesthetic pleasures that are not transformatory. In other words, aesthetic experience and its pleasures can serve other worthy ends besides transformation. Compensatory pleasures have their place too; entertainment is not a dirty word, and even pragmatists like myself who appreciate the Jamesian ideal of “the strenuous life” can recognize that we need moments of relaxing as well as effortful engagement and that some of our aesthetic enjoy-

ment can be more soothingly gratifying than demandingly stressful. Aesthetic experience (including the aesthetic experience of popular art) should not be identified narrowly with passive, escapist pleasures; but nor should it be confined to ascetic experiences of the “the new,” the difficult or “problematic.” The latter exclusive position is not the pluralist pragmatism I favor but instead a one-sided, restrictive modernism, exemplified by Shklovsky’s formalist demand for defamiliarization or “making strange.” Moreover, I would not want to limit “the transformatory element in aesthetic pleasure [to] doubt.” An aesthetic experience can transform someone by being so overwhelming in its compelling, pleasurable power that it leaves no room for the lingering experience of doubt. One is simply transformed or converted. (I therefore resist the idea that all aesthetic pleasures require a lengthy lingering, though certainly the hermeneutic pleasures of art often demand it). Aesthetic experience can also transform by reinforcing previous, implicit convictions so powerfully that the person is transformed to see those convictions more clearly so that she not only explicitly embraces them but even acts on them. Here again doubt does not seem to play an essential role.

Finally, I have basic doubts about the pleasure of real doubt. My experience is closer to Peirce’s account of real doubt as a disturbing irritation. “Doubt is an uneasy and dissatisfied state from which we struggle to free ourselves and pass into the state of belief” by means of inquiry.⁶ In inquiry, we linger in some sense over our doubts in order to resolve them, and that sort of active work of problem solving may indeed yield a sense of pleasurable agency and active effort in problem-solving. Moreover, the eventual resolution of doubt through the problem-solving lingering of inquiry certainly brings significant satisfaction or pleasure. But to linger over self-doubt, for its own sake, seems more a recipe for depression than transformation. Perhaps Salaverria is led to tout the pleasure of doubt because she emphasizes the lingering of pleasure and sees that doubt demands the lingering of inquiry. I have trouble appreciating her argument because I am not at all clear what she means by doubt.⁷ It cannot be Peirce’s unpleasant notion of doubt; Salaverria indeed cites Peirce but rather than referring to his view of doubt, she invokes his notion of “Musement,” a notion Peirce explicitly linked to “aesthetic contemplation” (among other topics) and which he describes in very pleasant terms of play, musing, and free speculation (CP 6.458) that are liberated from the rigors of strict inquiry and the disturbing irritation of real doubt. Perhaps Salaverria’s theory would be more convincing if it were reformulated in terms of Peircean musement or in terms of a willingness to entertain alternatives to our entrenched beliefs and values. Such bracketing of our beliefs in order to engage in imaginative consideration of alternative views is not real doubt but rather what might be called a willing suspension of belief so as to contemplate other possibilities in aesthetic experience; a useful counterpart of the “willing suspension of disbelief” that Coleridge urged as necessary for us to enjoy fiction.

⁶ See *Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce*, 8 vols. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1931-1958), hereafter CP; vol 5: 372.

⁷ I also cannot understand the point of Salaverria’s apparent critique of an aesthetic/functional opposition in my work between asserting that heightened somaesthetic consciousness of the body’s essential connection with its environment might provide “the richest and deepest palate of experiential fulfillments because it can draw on the profusion of cosmic resources, including an uplifting sense of cosmic unity” and asserting that “that [somatic] habits must engage and assimilate the environments in which they function, particularly those environmental elements that support or enable their functioning.” It is precisely because of the soma’s necessary engagement and communication with the surrounding environment that the environing cosmic resources are available to appreciate through greater somatic consciousness. It would, moreover, be against my pragmatist view to suppose there is an essential conflict between aesthetic experience and functionality or between aesthetic appreciation of cosmic unity and scientific understanding. The presumed opposition between the functional, the aesthetic, and the scientific seem to be a Kantian specter that haunts Salaverria’s analysis.

Interpretation, Language, and the World

Professor Wilkoszewska instructive paper raises some useful issues about interpretation's central role in the original English version of *Pragmatist Aesthetics*. She notes how one of the two interpretation chapters was dropped in the Polish edition and wonders whether this is also true of other translations and whether this indicates that I realized that "the problem of interpretation is not an integral part [of] pragmatist aesthetics." Convinced that it isn't, she claims that I originally dealt with interpretation because it was fashionable in analytic aesthetics and deconstruction, and she argues that the book might have been better and more pragmatist if I had not treated this topic but confined myself to Dewey's key concepts of "experience" and "interaction." Before considering her claims, let me first set the bibliographical record straight. I omitted *both* chapters on interpretation along with a chapter on (the aesthetics, logic, and ontology of) organic unity in seven of the book's fourteen translations, including the French translation preceding the English original. The reason was always a question of economy because these chapters were more technically philosophical and less accessible to non-specialists: the principal economical question was financial because adding the three chapters would make the book both bigger and costlier while also reducing its appeal for the general reader who would have more trouble than interest in reading the technical chapters. But this points also to economical questions of time and effort – both for the reader and for the translators. The Polish translation (generously undertaken initially by two fine philosophers with no financial incentive) was taking a very long time to be completed, even as new members were added to the translation team; so I thought that sacrificing the most specialist chapter on interpretation would help bring the book more quickly to completion and be less costly to a Polish university Press that was rightly worried about costs. Professor Wilkoszewska who superbly coordinated the Polish translation and publication of my later books *Practicing Philosophy* and *Body Consciousness* can, I hope, appreciate these economic considerations, just as I admire how she was able to avoid sacrificing any of the chapters in the books of mine that she published with such masterful quality and efficiency.

An aesthetic theory today cannot, I think, be complete without a serious treatment of interpretation – not merely because it is a topic central to most contemporary philosophical traditions -- analytic philosophy and deconstruction, hermeneutics, poststructuralism, critical theory, phenomenology, and indeed also pragmatism (just think of Peirce and neopragmatists such as Rorty, Margolis, Davidson, and Fish) – but primarily because interpretation is a crucial function in the practical criticism of the arts, perhaps the most common critical activity not only of academic critics but of journalist reviewers, students of literature, and ordinary readers who elaborate and share their interpretations of books, movies, music, theatre, dance, and visual artworks with their friends. Yet despite the enormous consensus on its practical importance the logic and methods and limits of interpretation are much contested. As a philosophy that takes practice seriously, pragmatism cannot afford to abandon this issue whose practical impact is immense. I cannot agree with Wilkoszewska's implied argument that if Dewey does not really discuss the concept of interpretation in his aesthetic theory, then it is not important to pragmatist aesthetics. I draw a different conclusion: that pragmatist aesthetics needs more than what Dewey provides. By the same mistaken logic, one could argue that since Dewey does not deploy the term "pragmatism" in his aesthetics, then pragmatism should not be integral to pragmatist aesthetics.

I am sure Wilkoszewska knows that my respect for interpretation does not imply a disrespect for experience; not only for interpretive experience but for uninterpreted experience. *Pragmatist Aesthetics* and my subsequent writings show a continuing advocacy of the

value of experience as a philosophical concept, against continued attacks on it from powerful philosophical currents (including the neopragmatism of Rorty and Brandom). To ensure a secure place for experience we need to show the limits of interpretation, but to do that we need to treat interpretation seriously. That is the logic that structures my arguments in “Beneath Interpretation.” We need both experience and interpretation as central concepts in pragmatist aesthetics; they should be complementary (since each concept alone has its limits) rather than be erected as one more dichotomy which requires choosing one against the other instead of using one together with the other. Experience and interpretation should work together, and T.S. Eliot (in “Little Gidding”) poetically expresses one of their collaborative connections:

We had the experience but missed the meaning
 And approach to the meaning restores the experience
 In a different form, beyond any meaning
 We can assign to happiness. I have said before
 That the past experience reviv'd in the meaning
 Is not the experience of one life only
 But of many generations – not forgetting
 Something that is probably quite ineffable.

These lines further evoke my theory of interpretation as an interactive process of making sense in which the interpreter’s understanding and interpretation are shaped not only by her own personal experiences, interests, knowledge, methods, and habits but even more largely by the traditional understandings, interests, meanings, and values that she has inherited from her cultural and social traditions and that are embodied significantly in the object she interprets.

Roberta Dreon’s perceptive contribution helpfully underlines the importance of interpretation for pragmatist aesthetics, while also articulating “the pluralistic and anti-foundationalist attitude” that structures my account of interpretation and experience, of language and the non-linguistic, of somatic spontaneity and reflection. Rather than one-sidedly choosing or privileging one over the other, my pragmatist strategy is to recognize how these contrasted factors intertwine and to explore how they can both be used to complement each other so as to improve our understanding and our lives. Dreon also recognizes my ontological commitment to a real, “shared world” beyond linguistic representations. But commitment to that world and to understandings beneath interpretation does not entail that such understandings are “neutral” in the sense of grasping “neutral data” unshaped by our interests, desires, needs, and entrenched categories and habits of thought. Our basic understandings are always partial both in the sense of being incomplete and in the sense of being biased or shaped by our interests. My interpretation of the preceding symposiasts’ contributions is similarly partial, though I hope it is adequate in engaging their views and in expressing my sincere appreciation for their enlightening efforts.

Appendix

As this special symposium on *Pragmatist Aesthetics* is concerned with its impact in diverse cultures, and since some of the symposiasts refer to different editions and translations of the book that contain different chapters, it seems useful to provide this appendix of bibliographical details regarding the book’s different versions and the particular chapters of each version.

Pragmatist Aesthetics: Living Beauty, Rethinking Art. Oxford: Blackwell, 1992. 2nd ed. New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 2000. First edition chapters: 1 Placing Pragmatism; 2 Art and Theory between Experience and Practice; 3 Organic Unity: Analysis and Deconstruction; 4 Pragmatism and Interpretation; 5 Beneath Interpretation; 6 Aesthetic Ideology, Aesthetic Education, and Art's Value in Critique; 7 Form and Funk: The Aesthetic Challenge of Popular Art; 8 The Fine Art of Rap; 9 Postmodern Ethics and the Art of Living.

Second edition (2000) added chapter 10 Somaesthetics: A Disciplinary Proposal

Translations (For each translation I provided an additional preface to situate the book in its cultural field).

1. *L'art à l'état vif: la pensée pragmatiste et l'esthétique populaire*. Trans. Christine Noille. Paris: Minuit, 1992. Chs. 1,2,6,7,8,9

2. *Kunst Leben: die Ästhetik des Pragmatismus*. Trans. Barbara Reiter. Frankfurt: Fischer, 1994. Chs. 2,6,7,8,9

3. *Taide, elämä ja estetiikka: Pragmatistinen filosofia ja estetiikka*. Trans. Vesa Mujunen. Helsinki: Gaudeamus, 1997. Chs. 2,6,7,8,9

4. *Vivendo a Arte: O Pensamento Pragmatista e a Estética Popular*. Trans. Gisela Domschke. São Paulo: Editora 34, 1998. Chs. 2,6,7,8,9; and ch. 1 as Postscript

5. *Estetyka pragmatyczna: Żywe piękno i refleksja nad sztuką*. Trans. Adam Chmielewski, Leszek Koczanowicz, Ewa Ignaczak, Andrzej Orzechowski, and Łukasz Nysler. Wrocław: University of Wrocław Press, 1998. Chs. 1,2,3,5,6,7,8,9

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