



The Arts are Made of (Intelligent) Habits

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Abstract. Contrary to the traditional picture of “Art” as an autonomous realm separate from artisanal and technical activities, a view dating back to the second part of the eighteenth century, this paper claims that artistic practices are largely scaffolded by habits, understood as more or less flexible channelings of both organic and environmental energies. More precisely, the author suggests developing Dewey’s idea of “intelligent habits” as a conceptual tool that can solve the issue of the peculiar intelligence associated with artistic practices, as well as get rid of the picture of artistic creativity as involving a radical break with one’s habits. On the one hand, assuming that habits’ intelligence consists in their sensibility to the environment, artistic habits would appear to be one entailing an enhanced sensibility to changes in the situation in which they are embedded, and to the interactions that are occurring between doing and perceiving. On the other hand, rejecting the standard view of artistic creation as radically original, innovative, and solitary and assuming a view of it as embedded in a shared form of life, supported by a common sensibility, collective practices, and norms of conduct, allows us to focus on the creative side of intelligent habits, as well as to appreciate how enhanced creativity is grounded in previously established habits and produces new or renewed ones.

Keywords. Artistic habits, intelligence, creativity, John Dewey, 4E cognition.

1. *Introduction: a critical point of departure*

Classical aesthetics from Kant onward has provided a series of interpretations of art as essentially foreign to technical abilities, crafts, and habitual practices. This opposition has been an important component of the picture of art as a separate and independent realm, requiring specific forms of experience (Stolnitz [1962]) and proper criteria of judgment (Gadamer [2004]). However, the history of the terms *tékhnē* and *ars* reveals a far more heterogeneous use of these concepts and an emphasis on mastery, expertise, and the capacity to process materials that has perceived as characteristic, for instance, of both painting and poetry, both rhetoric and the art of sailing (Kristeller [1951, 1952]). The turn of the nineteenth century witnessed a progressive emancipation of the artistic domain from both craftsmanship and scientific practice (Shiner [2001]), which was a novelty in comparison to early modern Europe (see Smith [2006]). Genius became alien to the manual labor of the craftsman and original creation was conceived of apart from forms of *inventio* consisting in the masterful re-arrangement of pre-existing materials and models (Shiner [2001]). Disinterested contemplation became the mark of aesthetic experience as the adequate attitude required by art objects (Berleant [1991]), while Art – written with a capital A, as a singular noun – acquired an «ethereal» status (Dewey [1989]). Within a conception of art where originality and novelty were seen as the seal of the artistic, no significant space could be left for repetition, and no constitutive role could be assigned to habits in the definition of art.

The strength of the image of art as opposed to craftsmanship, labor, the acquisition of habits, and techniques can be perceived through the sarcastic criticism formulated by Nietzsche against the idea of artistic inspiration and Schopenhauer's conception of art as the true metaphysics. Nietzsche contrasts the metaphysics of the genius capable of grasping the hidden truth of the world with the «earnestness of handicraft», after having defined all great artists as «great workers, unwearied not only in invention but also in rejection, reviewing, transforming, and arranging» (Nietzsche [1878-1879]: § 155).

Do not talk of gifts, of inborn talents! We could mention great men of all kinds who were but little gifted. But they obtained greatness, became “geniuses” (as they are called), through qualities of the lack of which nobody who is conscious of them likes to speak. They all had that thorough earnestness for work which learns first how to form the different parts perfectly before it ventures to make a great whole; they gave themselves time for this, because they took more pleasure in doing small, accessory things well than in the effect of a dazzling whole (Nietzsche [1878-1879]: § 163).

In spite of Nietzsche's criticism, the idea of art as essentially foreign to handicraft, technique, manual practices, and habits was still alive 50 years later, when

Benedetto Croce wrote his entry for the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, giving voice to a very influential conception of art. Croce profoundly disdained technique and emphasized its marginal role in communicating lyrical insights, which in his view found their internal expression before the arising of the merely practical problem of fixing them in a material object:

The exact line that divides expression from communication is difficult to draw in the concrete case, for in the concrete case the two processes generally alternate rapidly and appear to mingle, but it is clear in idea, and it must be firmly grasped. Through overlooking it, or blurring it through insufficient attention, arise the confusions between *art* and *technique*. Technique is not an intrinsic element of art but has to do precisely with the concept of communication. (Croce [2014])¹

However, if one espouses a view of the arts as human behaviors, continuous with other ways of experiencing the environment, this kind of opposition between the arts and technical capacities seems artificial. It appears to be one-sided when looking at the history of the concept of art, as others have already mentioned (Kristeller [1951, 1952], Shiner [2001]). Above all, this opposition seems misleading if we take artistic practices rather than art objects in isolation as our point of departure – e.g. balancing the strength of the various fingers when learning to play the piano, familiarizing oneself with the paintbrush or camera, or acquiring the ability to stand at the right distance from the scene one wishes to portray. Capacities, skills, and habits – be they more or less embodied – are also essential when focusing on practices related to the fruition rather than production of art: from very basic abilities, such as silently reading a novel, to more complex forms of perception, such as selecting the right features in a Cubist painting in order to grasp its subject. Sometimes people acquire these skills and habits through explicit training and imitation, more often through very early exposure to an already habitualized environment (Mead [2011]), almost osmotically (Bourdieu [1977]), and by means of attunement with pre-established social habits and practices that are already there when the individual agent makes her own gesture (Dreon [2022]).

In this paper, I will support the claim that habits are pervasive in artistic practices and experiences by adopting a Deweyan conception of habits as constitutive and pervasive features of humans' interactions with their environment, supporting perception, action, and cognition. To put it the other way round, artistic practices and experiences are largely scaffolded by habits – and this also applies to the typically avant-garde strategy of disrupting established habits of artistic production and fruition. If artistic or aesthetic practices are not separate from ordinary interactions with the world, the point is rather to try to explore the roles played by habits in the arts and the dynamics governing them, so as to acknowledge and appreciate any differences of degree between eminently artistic experi-

ences and other everyday exchanges. The enhanced role of intelligent habits in artistic practices, I believe, could explain some differences within the continuum of experience.

Of course, the claim that practicing an art involves the capacity to manage a complex system of habits must face at least two main objections that come from the aesthetic tradition and are still present in the current debate. If the arts are practiced through quasi-automatic habits, how can they display a form of intelligence, even one arguably different from other forms of intelligence? Is “Art” a purely intuitive expression, is it foreign to discursive rationality, as originally stated by Arthur Schopenhauer (Schopenhauer [1819])? Furthermore, if the arts are constituted through repetitive actions and almost impersonal behaviors, how can we explain creativity and originality, which have been – and continue to be – considered essential aspects of “Art” in late modern Western culture? I suggest responding to these objections by building on the concept of «intelligent habits», first introduced by John Dewey in *Human Nature and Conduct* (Dewey [1988]: 51), so as to argue that the arts are mostly scaffolded through intelligent habits.

After depicting a Deweyan view of habits as functions of the environment, a view that proves particularly useful for understanding artistic practices (§. 2), I will develop Dewey’s idea of «intelligent habits» by arguing that they play a structural role in artistic practices and are a conceptual tool that can provide a decisive contribution to the current debate within strongly embodied, enacted, and distributed approaches to the mind (§. 4). On the one hand, I will show that Dewey’s conception of habits as intelligent or artistic is useful for moving beyond the debate on the contrast between “mindless” or “mindful” coping with the world² and assuming a view of intelligence as refined responsiveness to the environment (Miyahara and Robertson [2021]: §. 3). On the other hand, so-called intelligent habits are crucial in order to understand artistic creativity within a post-metaphysical framework, where habits are seen not merely as a means to perpetuate a tradition (either a living tradition or an exhausted one), but as agents responsible for the novel use of pre-existing resources and new ways of attuning oneself to changed conditions (§ 5-6).

2. *Habits as function of the environment*

Artistic practices, ranging from everyday activities to more refined ones, involve a complex cluster of behaviors: various forms of «doing and undergoing» (Dewey [1989]: 54) through the array of resources available in a specific context. Let’s take a couple of examples from both fields: taking care of one’s own garden and appreciating contemporary art – say, Lucien Freud’s figurative paintings within an already post-representational artistic scene. Creating and maintaining

a garden is no simple enterprise: it involves habits of attention, such as looking at the plants and understanding whether they are healthy or suffering because of excessive sun exposure, lack of water, and diseases. It involves even habits of active care, such as pruning plants at the right time of the year not only for the sake of their health and fertility, but also in order to maintain an equilibrium between the various plants, for instance by assigning one a more prominent role or limiting that of another. Sensibility to the specific conditions of plants' growth and flourishing is not simply a kind of school knowledge, so to say, but depends on habitual caring for the garden itself – putting one's fingers in the soil and understanding when a plant is thirsty, to begin with. Appreciating the details of Freud's painting – let's say his treatment of human flesh and skin – is equally complicated behavior, even though it places one in the position of a spectator: it requires a degree of familiarity with other ways of rendering facial and bodily surfaces – for instance, Rembrandt's or Egon Schiele's very different yet equally meticulous treatment of the human skin – and this depends on the specific training one has explicitly received at school or almost osmotically absorbed from one's environment (Bourdieu [1984]). It involves complex habits of selection, such as focusing on the skin, colors, and brushstrokes, by isolating the first element within a dense pictorial subject and the other two on the surface of the canvas – it implies «seeing in» as the twofold capacity to see both what is depicted and the plane surface (Wollheim [1993]: 188). In the case of an educated spectator, it implies the awareness of a deeply changed post-naturalist artworld, where a figurative painting can be perceived as either conservative or provocative – in other words, it implies extensive habitual exposition to abstract paintings, ready-mades, installations, performances, and so on.

Both cases, while very different, confirm Dewey's "ecological claim", so to speak, that is his idea that habits are functions of the organism as well as of the environment, i.e. of the way a specific interaction occurs (or, even better, "transaction": cf. Dewey and Bentley [1990]: 6-7).

Habits – Dewey states – are similar to physiological functions such as breathing or digesting, which depend on the functioning of the lungs and stomach as well as on the quality of the air and the kind of food one eats. Habits are not linear patterns of behavior, due to the repetition of a causal connection between a purely perceptual stimulus from the outside and a consequent motor response (Barandiaran, Di Paolo [2014]). Rather, habits must be framed within the complex interactions occurring between living organisms and their environment, insofar as habitual practices are already there within the natural environment and the social context one belongs to, yet at the same time are dynamically reconfigured by the habitual actions performed by individuals³. On my part, I have suggested a provisional definition of habit as the "more or less flexible channeling of both organic and environmental resources" (Dreon [2022]: ch. 4),

in order to emphasize that both individual resources from the agent (organic and cultural resources) and resources from the environment (natural and naturally social ones) enter into the constitution of a habit. This attention to the role of the environment in the constitution of habits also involves a clearly externalist implication, i.e. the idea that a habit is not – at least not primarily – an internal process occurring within the mind or the brain of the agent⁴, but a kind of acting in the world out there: it is a way in which an agent provisionally and dynamically comes to terms with an environment. This is important in connection with the anti-representationalist use of the concept of habits in the current debate within post-cognitive approaches to the mind (Caruana-Testa [2022]). It is particularly relevant – I would argue – when considering artistic practices, where sensibility to environmental circumstances is peculiarly enhanced, insofar as such practices involve the capacity to use all the available materials, as well as to enjoy them as a constitutive means to attain specific results. Taking the surroundings into account, and constantly monitoring the changes they undergo, is crucial for artists, who – as pointed out by Dewey – must constantly consider the effects of their works on the perceivers (Dewey [1989]: 52)⁵. Now, the issue at stake here is how this process occurs – I mean the process of continuously being attentive and responsive to the various features of the environment, including others' perceptions of a work of art. Could it be interpreted as a habitual process or must it be conceptualized as conscious and explicit reasoning? In the next section, I will summarize the state of the art on mindless vs mindful coping with one's circumstances and show a Deweyan way out by developing his idea of "intelligent habits" and applying it to his conception of artistic production in *Art as Experience*.

3. *Mindless vs mindful coping and a deweyan way out*

Most habits involved in artistic performances are strongly embodied – for example, a talented pianist performing the Goldberg Variations once told me that coordinating one's breathing with the rhythmic movement of one's back toward and away from the keyboard, so as to support the effort required by the complex execution of the work, is among the most crucial aspects of playing the piano. This is especially true when it comes to intricate pieces of music like the one mentioned. In the field of gardening, pruning requires eye-hand coordination, moving one's body around the plant, and continuously adjusting the use of the shears as one's perspective changes – similarly, I guess, to the movements of a sculptor around a piece of marble. At the same time, artistic practices are heavily laden with knowledge, deeply stratified levels of meaning, theories, and structured interpretations – for example, there must be something like a «philosophi-

cal disenfranchisement of art» permitting us to enjoy Lucien Freud's naturalistic paintings in an artworld where the Imitation Theory has been largely transcended (Danto [1964, 2005]).

Consequently, the field of the arts seems to be the most challenging for the debate around the issue of contrasting allegedly mindless coping with the world with mindful perception and action – let's call it the Dreyfus-McDowell debate (Schear [2013]), for argument's sake. Another interrelated point regards the appropriateness of distinguishing between habits and skills within artistic practices, possibly following Gilbert Ryle's line of thought (Ryle [1984]).

Positions are varied in the field and all scholars tend to characterize their own stance in opposition to a simplified version of its counterpart. By focusing on skills acquired at an adult age through training, Hubert Dreyfus claims that both bodily/motor skills (such as driving a car) and intellectual skills (i.e. playing chess) are forms of intelligent behavior, although they do not entail the use of mental or brain representations. Differently from the beginner, who needs to follow an explicit behavioral rule and make decisions according to it and the specific context of its application, skillful action would depend «almost entirely on intuition and hardly at all on analysis and comparison of alternatives» (Dreyfus [2002]: 372). Here, Dreyfus' polemical target seems to be the very idea of mental representation as a necessary medium for mediating between the subject and the object. In previous publications (Dreyfus and Dreyfus [1986]), by contrast, this scholar's phenomenological analysis of skill acquisition seemed to involve a more radical claim, namely that «expert performance is guided by non-cognitive responses which are fast, effortless and apparently intuitive in nature» (Toner, Montero, Moran [2015]: 1128). Barbara Montero has criticized this view as a “just-do-it” conception of expert skill, defending instead what she calls the “cognition-in-action” conception, not least by drawing upon her experience as a former dancer. She supports the thesis that any form of skilled bodily performance – in the arts as well as in sports – does entail a variety of conscious mental processes, such as consciously monitoring one's own actions, planning, predicting, deliberating, and generally conceptualizing one's own actions (Montero [2016]).

Jason Stanley (Stanley [2015]) proposes an even more radically intellectualistic view, by presenting the allegedly mainstream idea in sociology, anthropology, and neuroscience as the claim that skills are independent of cognitive states, like knowledge and beliefs, and that practices fall outside the realm of rationality – a thesis he traces back to Pierre Bourdieu. Stanley rejects the view that procedural knowledge is independent of propositional knowledge and assumes that skilled action is grounded in settled or full beliefs, i.e. beliefs that we take to be infallible and not subject to doubt. But this is not enough to characterize skilled action as rational, according to Stanley, who adds that skilled actions must be understood as intentional, that is as actions in relation

to which we can give a reason for acting. Consequently, he argues that skilled action falls within the space of reasons (McDowell [2013]). Recently, Christos Douskos has preferred to stress the difference – within the field of non-deliberative behavior – between intelligent actions or skills and unintelligent, merely mechanical habits (Douskos [2019]). Drawing on Gilbert Ryle (Ryle [1984]), Douskos defines habits as the mere mechanical repetition of an act acquired through conditioning and training. Most importantly for the purpose of the present paper, he characterizes habits as single-track dispositions, i.e. one-way, rigid responses that are deaf to changes in the context. By contrast, skills appear to be intelligent capacities and multi-track dispositions involving sensibility to one’s surroundings, the capacity to generate novel responses to changes in environmental conditions, and agents’ critical dispositions toward their own actions and practices.

Recently, Miyahara and Robertson have suggested drawing on Dewey’s idea of habits in order to solve what they call the «Intelligence Puzzle of Habits», namely the tension between two apparently opposing aspects of habits: habitual actions seem to constitute a form of intelligent behavior, despite being automatic and/or unintentional. Their way out of the puzzle passes firstly through a reconceptualization of intelligence, which they do not understand in primarily propositional, conceptual, and combinatory terms. Positions à la Ryle contending that habits are merely mechanical, non-intelligent single-track dispositions and intellectualist stances, grounded in the idea of knowing-how as a species of propositional knowledge (Stanley, Krakauer [2013]: 8), are unsatisfactory. Alternatively, «by intelligent behaviour, we refer to behaviours that unfold in line with goals, projects, plans, needs, norms and the like within the specific material and sociocultural constraints of the immediate situation» (Miyahara, Robertson [2021]). In other words, to use Deweyan vocabulary, intelligence can be said to entail “sensitiveness”⁶ to the context as well as flexibility to changes in one’s environmental conditions. At the same time, Miyahara and Robertson recover Dewey’s idea that habits can be, and often are, intelligent rather than routine. Habits work as «holistic network[s] of perception, action and thinking» (Miyahara, Robertson [2021]) that are capable of responding to different circumstances via constant monitoring of their efficacy through environmental signals. Dewey’s emphasis on the role of the environment in co-constituting behavior as clusters of multiple habits enables these scholars to conclude that the unfolding of habitual conduct is guided by the environment, and not by representations within the agent’s mind.

My aim here is to take a more in-depth look at Dewey’s idea of intelligent habits and to argue that they play a key role in artistic practices. However, before proceeding any further, I wish to say a few words on habits and skills. I am inclined to think that overlapping, fuzzy limits and family resemblances between

skills and habits are the norm in natural languages and real practices. Nevertheless, I believe it is worth maintaining a functional distinction between the two. Skills are complex capacities to do something, and one acquires them through training (different phases of their acquisition have been studied by scholars). People may learn a skill by having its acquisition as their main aim, but it is equally common for a skill to be learned because it is instrumental to something else. For example, although one may learn to drive a car by having the acquisition of the capacity itself as the main goal, I personally learned to drive simply because I needed a faster means of transport. The arts (i.e. painting, dancing, sculpting, etc.) are grounded in skills, in accordance with the original meaning of the Greek term *téchne* as capacity, ability, competence, or even mastery. Skills are constituted of a complex variety of habits, both routine habits and more intelligent ones, such as focusing our visual and acoustic perception on the potential dangers to be avoided in the street when driving the car, or attuning the movement of our back towards and away from the keyboard with the rhythm of our breathing when playing the piano. Skills are clusters of habits so to say, and many of them are not acquired intentionally, through an individual choice, but rather through attunement to the circumstances and the process of mutual adaptation of the different components interacting with one another. From this point of view, skills appear to be scaffolded by habits – habits of perception, selection, action, thought, etc.

4. *On intelligent habits*

My suggestion here is to approach Dewey's concept of «intelligent habits» as a particularly useful tool for interpreting artistic practices. Dewey is perfectly conscious that while habits are frequently conservative and even connected to the «monopoly of social power», they can also be productive, insofar as they constitute the actual means by which we can intervene in the world, for the better or worse. In particular, habits should not be seen as opposed to intelligence and thought, because habits support active thinking and knowledge in at least two complementary ways: on the one hand, by restricting the focus of attention, making selections, and fixing boundaries; on the other, by enlarging the range of possible actions, observations, imaginings, and opportunities (Dewey [1988]: 123). Both the limiting, restrictive function and the positive, creative side of habits are important, but the former can of course become an obstacle for growth and fertile interactions with one's surroundings if it leads one to become stiff and blind to changes in circumstances. Dewey introduces the distinction between intelligent and routine habits (Dewey [1988]: 51) in a few pages where he argues against a reductive image of habits as the mere repetition of previous actions and in favor

of a view of them as a kind of «ability and art, formed through past experience» (Dewey [1988]: 48). The connection between intelligent habits and the arts in the broad sense of the term is so clear that he speaks of «intelligent or artistic habits» as synonyms (Dewey [1988]: 52; cf. 55: «intelligent habit or art»).

Now, the point I wish to make is that the key aspect distinguishing intelligent habits from routine ones lies in their stronger or weaker sensibility to environmental circumstances. Habits are intelligent when they are sensitive to the environment and consequently more flexible and capable of envisaging new forms of interactions, of enlarging and enriching the field of possible transactions with the environment. Habits become routine – as frequently happens when we grow old (Sullivan [2021]) or within forms of artistic mannerism – when they become inattentive to changes in the context and simply continue to operate as they always have, regardless of environmental changes.

It is important to clarify that one should not take Dewey's distinction to mean that there are inherently intelligent and routine habits. It is not a matter of “what”, but of “when”, in the sense that being intelligent or routine is a phase that can belong to the development of any habit: an intelligent habit can become routine through mere repetition, laziness, and inertia, while routine habits can become intelligent when facing a crisis and an emotion arises as «a perturbation from clash or failure of habit» (Dewey [1988]: 54) – as happens when a person mechanically follows her usual way to work, suddenly steps into a puddle, and becomes aware that her summer sandals are not suited for a wet pavement; or when a tale by Calvino contradicts the reader's expectations about a linear plot.

To return now to the basic point just mentioned, enhanced sensibility to changes in the environment and any interactions that are occurring between doing and perceiving can be considered the distinctive feature of artistic habits. A good sculptor seems able not only to easily chisel a block of stone or marble, but also to overcome its unevenness; a masterful translator of poetry not only is capable of almost effortlessly finding semantic correspondences between words across two language, but can also perceive in advance how they will sound to the reader. This is perfectly in line with what Dewey says in *Art as Experience*, where he emphasizes that experiences become artistic when there is an enhancement in the perception of the relationship between what is done and what is undergone⁷.

Note, however, that Dewey does not mention the label “intelligent habits” in this later work and, in a couple of cases that focus on artistic expression as involving a break in habituation, he uses the word «habits» to refer to habits that have become «blind routines» in ordinary experience (Dewey [1989]: 161, 178). It could be stated that one of the defining features of artistic experiences is that they frequently affect the spectator by changing one of her habits from routine to intelligent through an emotional crisis that makes her more sensitive to a new situation. I will return to this point in the last section.

In *Human Nature and Conduct* the emphasis on intelligent habits as artistic is also a response to the broad socio-political criticism of the dogmatic opposition between the artisan and the artist over the last two centuries. Artistic practices involve mechanisms and techniques because artists are not «winged subjects» in Schopenhauer's world (Schopenhauer [1819]), but fully embodied people. According to Dewey, it is the wish to maintain «the monopoly of social power» that nourishes the opposition between habits and intelligence, technical work and art, body and mind (idem). «The artist is a masterful technician», he says, because while «the mechanical performer permits the mechanism to dictate the performance» (Dewey [1988]: 51), the artist is flexible, processes materials and energies available in his surroundings, and is particularly sensitive to changes in the environment, as well as to the effects of what he does on the environment, including spectators. Consequently, Dewey presents literature as a paradigmatic case of intelligent habits, where linguistic gestures and habits do not simply perpetuate the forces that have produced them but «modify and redirect them», by disclosing new possibilities⁸. If this reading of Dewey's concept of intelligent habits is correct, a crucial consequence must be highlighted in comparison to the previous philosophy of habits and especially the so-called double law of habits, worked out by the French Spiritualist tradition⁹. This law states that «from the moment an action is repeated or continued over time, it produces a twofold effect, i.e. it makes the initial impression faint, but equally encourages activity, making movements more ready and confident» (Capodivacca [2008]: 16, my translation). By contrast, intelligent or artistic habits seem to combine fluid movements with a stronger awareness of the features of the material, the audience, and the complex situation with which they are interacting. This awareness cannot be reduced to a kind of intellectual knowledge; rather, it is a kind of enhanced perception or “sensitiveness” that Dewey characterizes as «special sensitiveness or accessibility of a certain class of stimuli, standing predilections and aversions» (Dewey [1988]: 32), namely predispositions to welcome or reject environmental suggestions. Frequently, it takes the form of a bodily sensibility that the artist has for her own medium and interlocutors; more broadly, I suggest considering it a sensibility towards the impact that environmental resources can have on the artistic process, as well as the impact that the artistic process can have on the audience¹⁰.

5. A different view of creativity

Beyond the issue of habits and intelligence, supporters of the claim that the arts are largely scaffolded by intelligent habits must address the problem of the relationship between habits and creativity. If habits are mere repetitions

of the same responses to similar stimuli, and if artistic creativity means the production of some radical novelty, how can the two concepts be compatible? Solving this apparent paradox requires reframing both concepts, habit and creativity. As already stated, the pragmatist perspective rejects the behaviorist, mechanistic view of habits and, while acknowledging their role in stabilizing organic-environmental transactions, stresses their active function in scaffolding perception, action, cognition, and will, as well as their flexibility in dynamically adjusting action to changed circumstances. While I will return to the creative side of habits later, the point now is that the very idea of artistic creativity must be reoriented. Consolidated scholarship has already reframed the concept from a historical-cultural point of view. It has been shown that the current standard opposition between creativity and tradition is a relatively recent development in Western culture and that it is misleading to generalize this opposition and apply it to every culture and form of life (Kristeller [1983]). Scholars have noted the theological origins of the idea of artistic production as radical innovation and the creation of something unprecedented in the already existing world – a conception deriving from the very idea of *creatio ex nihilo* (Blumenberg [2000]). It has also been acknowledged that the conception of artistic production as a form of creation is closely connected to the late modern invention of Art as an autonomous system and independent realm, separate from craftsmanship. Within this perspective, completely original creation replaces invention as a form of artistic production consisting in the processing of pre-existing models, materials, and socio-cultural constraints (Shiner [2001]). Further scholarship has criticized the abuse of original creativity in the arts and ordinary life, by showing its collusion with neoliberalism and the capitalist economy (Benjamin [1969]; Reckwitz [2017]; Joas [1996]; Sennet [2008]).

I do not wish to enter this debate in the present paper. Instead, my focus is on non-dogmatic ways of conceptualizing artistic creativity, in such a way as to make this notion compatible with a view of the arts as supported by intelligent habits. Some authors have defended more or less pragmatist-inspired views of creativity: Hans Joas has supported an idea of creativity as a constant feature of human beings and human conduct, providing a view of it as “situated understanding”, namely as concerning situations in which human agents are embedded and which require a new solution under certain conditions because they are challenging and cannot be tackled as usual (Joas, Sennet, Gimmler [2006]: 11). Richard Sennet emphasizes that the crucial point for creative behavior is not so much the production of something new, but experiencing resistance and the capacity to work with it (Joas, Sennet, Gimmler [2006]: 11-12) – a capacity that is shared by the artisan as well as the artist. Vlad Glăveanu has developed a conception of creativity contrasting

with the main view of the term in the psychology of creativity, which is usually centered on the individual and the creation of a product through a mainly mental process. By building on pragmatism, and a general approach to the mind as embodied, extended, enacted, and embedded in a social environment, Glăveanu has come to regard creativity as a social phenomenon, existing outside the mind of the individual subject in a specific cultural environment. Against the ideology of the isolated genius, he considers the creating subject to be a social agent, defined by the network of social relationships and the cultural traditions governing them (Glăveanu [2013]: 72). With an explicit reference to Dewey, he regards the creative act not as a mainly mental and linear process, but as a form of mutual adjustment of means to ends and the other way round that engenders continual loop effects between perception and action under the influence of external and material constraints (Glăveanu [2013]: 73). The creative output is the outcome of these continuous interactions and is permeated by the cultural models and behavioral patterns, habits, and rules in which creation is embedded. Finally, creative action responds to existing environmental affordances, i.e. to the opportunities provided by the context, and requires an engaged audience to interact with.

This picture of creativity can be completed, I believe, through a couple of further references to Dewey's approach to the arts. The first reference concerns the public character of artistic expression, so to say, while the second one concerns the re-conceptualization of the notion of the artist. A third Deweyan point, centered on resistance as a crucial aspect of artistic expression, will be examined in the next section.

Regarding artistic expression, Dewey insists that it is not the mere conveyance of a pre-existing mental state within the artist's mind (either an idea or a feeling). Instead, an artistic expression should be conceived of as the transformation or re-working of already existing sources and elements, a process intended to offer a new experience of the work of art to the people who will share it. According to Dewey, artistic expression can emerge from a variety of elements: sounds and colors, but also sensorimotor dispositions and behavioral habits, techniques, skills, and forms of mastery, as well as previous individual and shared experiences and meanings. In any case, the elements involved are for the most part socially shared, as is the expressive output, namely a re-organization of resources capable of giving birth to new ways of experimenting and sharing the common world (Dewey [1989]: 66)¹¹. Consequently, the artist cannot be envisaged as a solitary genius, creating works of art *ex nihilo* (Dewey [1989]: 71). Dewey refers to the artist as «the alembic of personal experience» through which common materials, habits, and already shared meanings pass and are transformed into something new, essentially destined to be enjoyed or suffered publicly (Dewey [1989]: 88; see Dreon [2015]).

6. *Habits and creativity*

Rejecting the standard view of artistic creation as radically original, innovative, and solitary, and instead embracing a view of it as embedded in a shared form of life and supported by a common sensibility, collective practices, and norms of conduct, allows us to consider the intertwining of habits and creativity. The goal is to explain how and to what extent habits are or can be creative, as well as to consider the plausibility of a picture of creativity as scaffolded by pre-existing habits and giving rise to new habits of perception, thought, and eventually action, without being exhausted by habits.

Recently, Ross and Glăveanu have emphasized how habits support craftsmanship, particularly by mitigating the risks arising from the use of uneven materials, as well as by offloading certain aspects of an activity while allowing others to become more conscious and dominant (Ross and Glăveanu [2023]). In a previous article, Glăveanu defended the claim that creativity is an intrinsic part of habits and concerns the way in which a habitual action becomes attuned to different dynamic contexts, improves technical practices, and enables the acquiring of mastery (Glăveanu [2013]: 84). Although I agree that, as a phase of habitual interactions, creativity concerns their capacity to adjust to different contexts (Glăveanu [2013]: 84), I believe that the very concept of intelligent habits permits a more effective conceptualization of habitual creativity. Let us therefore return to Dewey and apply the concept of intelligent habits introduced in *Human Nature and Conduct* to his conception of artistic expression as presented in *Art as Experience*.

As already shown when defining intelligent or artistic habits as those habits that involve an enhanced sensibility to changed circumstances, it is clear that such habits are creative insofar as they imply a kind of flexible attunement, which is to say a relatively new channeling of pre-existing energies and resources in order to adjust to more or less different situations. Although Dewey does not mention «intelligent habits» and «routine habits» in *Art as Experience*, as already stated, in relation to the act of artistic expression he is clearly suggesting that intelligent habits scaffold artistic practices. He speaks of «motor dispositions previously formed», «motor sets of the body», and «channels prepared in advance» (Dewey [1989]: 103). It is clear that according to Dewey these habits are intelligent in the above-mentioned sense, for he explicitly states that «[t]he motor coordinations that are ready because of prior experience at once render his perception of the situation more acute and intense and incorporate into it meanings that give it depth, while they also cause what is seen to fall into fitting rhythms» (Dewey [1989]: 103). As previously noted, intelligent habits do not reduce sensitivity to the context while making movements easier, as generally stated by the so-called double law of habits. On the contrary, they enhance the perception of ongoing transactions. They are intelligent because they function as an embodied

incorporation of meanings (cf. Bourdieu [1977]) and contribute to the aesthetic experience by facilitating the establishment of a satisfying rhythm in experiential transactions (cf. Vara Sánchez [2020]). They are also creative insofar as they involve the «diversion of immediate response into collateral channels» when the situation has changed or when one is facing a different context (Dewey 1989, 103). These habits are seen as a constitutive part of the surgeon's conduct as well as of the violin player's, according to Dewey's continuistic view of artistic practices and everyday experiences. Even the perceiver's experience is supported by some previously set habits and must be open to «indirect and collateral channels of response», should the music heard or the painting seen diverge from the person's expectancies (Dewey [1989]: 103). This can be seen as a first – and we might say basic – intertwining of habits and creativity in artistic production and aesthetic experience, a process that concerns the adaptability of intelligent habits to an ever-changing environment.

However, I think there is more to say about habits and creativity with reference to mainly artistic or aesthetic experiences for Dewey¹². The crucial point is that an artistic expression involves some form of resistance which transforms an otherwise merely organic discharge of energies into an expressive act (Dewey [1989]: 102), namely the re-organization of pre-existing materials and energies. This impediment is signaled by an emotion, according to Dewey, that works as a “perturbation”, «a clash or failure of habit» (Dewey [1988]: 54). This failure is key to eliciting a sort of affective-based awareness of doings and undergoings, as Dewey would put it, that is to say in turning the mutual dynamic adjustment between doing and perceiving typical of artistic production into a conscious process. In other words, artistic expression entails the crisis of a habit through an emotionally significant event or component that makes sensibility more acute and can cause the transformation of a routine habit into an intelligent one, the re-orientation of a previous habit, or even the new channeling of previous resources.

In a nutshell, creativity is grounded in previously established habits and produces new or renewed ones. It lies at the core of the transformation of habits from routine to intelligent, but also from intelligent habits to alternative intelligent habits. Enhanced creativity, so to say, concerns the reorganization of channelings of the bodily, cultural, natural, and social resources constituting habits, meaning the re-directing and modifying of existing habits, as well as their replacement with new ones.

Conclusion

In this paper, I have tried to show that Dewey's idea of «intelligent habits» is a conceptual tool that can solve the issue of the peculiar intelligence of artis-

tic practices, as well as disprove the picture of artistic creativity as involving a radical break with existing habits. On the one hand, assuming that habits' intelligence consists in their sensibility to the environment, artistic habits appear to be those entailing an acute sensibility to changes in the situation they are embedded in, and the interactions that are occurring between doing and perceiving. On the other hand, rejecting the standard view of artistic creation as radically original, innovative, and solitary and assuming a view of it as embedded in a shared form of life, supported by a common sensibility, collective practices and norms of conduct, allows us to focus on the creative side of intelligent habits, as well as to appreciate the fact that enhanced creativity is grounded in previously established habits and produces new or renewed ones. As I put it, the enhanced role of intelligent habits in artistic practices could therefore explain certain differences between them and ordinary interactions within the continuum of experience. This claim clearly implies that it would be misleading to consider the rejection of established habits a universal and honorific feature of "Art", across all time and space. By contrast, it seems necessary to contextualize the typically avant-garde strategy of disrupting established habits of artistic production and fruition within the framework of the autonomist conception of Art that arose in the late eighteenth century and is thus rooted in a specific culture and form of life, where habit-breaking has become an established habit for most elitist high art. Certainly, it would be important to focus in detail on the dynamics of habit-breaking and disruption that are so widespread in avant-garde and contemporary art – to the point where, in this specific cultural context, habit-breaking could be regarded as a habitual gesture. Evidently, however, this is a matter for further investigation and must be postponed to another occasion.

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Notes

- 1 At the end of this section, Croce's tone becomes sarcastic: «Provided, that is, that the ideas are rigorously conceived and the words used accurately in relation to them it would not be worth while to pick a quarrel over the use of the word "technique" as a synonym for the artistic work itself, regarded as "inner technique" or the formation of intuition-expressions. The confusion between art and technique is especially beloved by impotent artists, who hope to obtain from practical things and practical devices and inventions the help which their strength does not enable them to give themselves» (Croce [2014]).
- 2 E.g. between the mindless or mindful playing of an instrument, dancing, listening to a piece of music, or being absorbed by the plot and the psychology of the characters when watching a TV series.
- 3 The proper dynamic of habits is that of the "organic circuit" rather than that of the linear process, as already emphasized by Dewey in his seminal work criticizing the reflex-arc concept (Dewey [1986]).
- 4 This, however, is not to deny the development of neurological paths within the nervous system, as stated by James (James [1981]: ch. 4). What I wish to state is that even neural processes are resources entering into a habit together with other processes and resources, for

- example bodily movements, gestures, other people's actions, natural and cultural circumstances, habits and skills already at work within a social environment, etc.
- 5 I will quote the relevant passage in full, because it clearly shows that Dewey connects the perception of doing and undergoing with intelligence, which makes it very significant for the issue I will address in the next section: «Because perception of the relationship between what is done and what is undergone constitutes the work of intelligence, and because the artist is controlled in the process of his work by his grasp of the connection between what he has already done and what he is to do next, the idea that the artist does not think as intently and penetratingly as a scientific inquirer is absurd» (Dewey [1989]: 52).
 - 6 Miyahara and Robertson use the word «sensitivity», instead of the old-fashioned term «sensitiveness». As will be seen later in this paper, I prefer using the word «sensibility» in continuity with the research I have conducted in Dreon [2022], ch. 2.
 - 7 «Because perception of relationship between what is done and what is undergone constitutes the work of intelligence, and because the artist is controlled in the process of his work by his grasp of the connection between what he has already done and what he has to do next, the idea that the artist does not think as intently and penetratingly as a scientific inquirer is absurd» (Dewey [1988]: 52).
 - 8 «Language grew out of unintelligent babblings, instinctive motions called gestures, and the pressure of circumstance. But nevertheless language once called into existence is language and operates as language. It operates not to perpetuate the forces which produced it but to modify and redirect them [...] Literatures are produced [...] In short, language, when it is produced meets old needs and opens new possibilities. It creates demands which take effect, and the effect is not confined to speech and literature, but extends to common life in communication, counsel and instruction» (Dewey [1988]: 57).
 - 9 For a clear picture of the two lines of thought which have developed the double law of habit – the English line sprung from Joseph Butler and David Hume and the French one sprung from Xavier Bichat, Maine de Biran, and Felix Ravaisson – see Piazza [2018], Ch. 5.
 - 10 For a reframing of the word sensibility, see Dreon [2022], Ch. 2.
 - 11 Interestingly, Dewey here uses the word “representation” in a sense that is quite remote from the common current use of it as a synonym of “mental content”, as well as from the idea of “literal reproduction”: «But representation can also mean that the work of art tells something to those who enjoy it about the nature of their experience of the world: that it presents the world in a new experience which they undergo» (Dewey [1989]: 89). On this issue, see Dreon [2012]: 78 and ff.
 - 12 Even Glăveanu considers different modes or degrees of relationship between habits and creativity; more specifically, he distinguishes between habitual, improvisational, and innovative creativity (Glăveanu [2012]: 85).

