

ARTICLE

DEWEY AND SPORTS: AN OVERVIEW
OF SPORT IN HIS WORK

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ABSTRACT

From beginning to end, John Dewey's oeuvre is filled with philosophical discussions and political comments on the significance de jure and de facto of a wide range of distinct social spaces. In contrast to subjects he addresses regularly and others that he focuses on occasionally, his work does not systematically address sport. Nonetheless, sport is expressly recognized as a noteworthy environment and integrated into lines of argumentation in no small number of areas as an example. This paper provides an overview of the statements he made on this subject and their context, organizing them on the basis of their social, pedagogical, and aesthetic implications in order to make a supplementary contribution to social spaces in his work. It shall be demonstrated that Dewey assumes a number of positive possibilities in and through sport, but that these are not anchored naturally in or through sport. What sport and movement cultures finally are or should be remains pragmatically dependent on the intentions and consequences that serve as the basis for each specific sporting situation.

INTRODUCTION

Inherent in the cultural naturalism of John Dewey is a deep connection between experience and nature. Experience is the humanly possible interplay with nature, "a means of penetrating continually further into the heart of nature" (LW 1, 5). Nature is the bedrock of experience, captured in a concept that no longer refers to a "block universe" (316)—an essentially given, firmly established order of things, beings, and species—but rather "a realm of existence, composed of events" (Kahn 1948, 316), temporally and spatially situated appearances which can be given a meaning, evolving as the realization of natural potentials within the framework of evolutionary interplay. Every existence is therefore an event—nature, the existence of events; event, the characteristic trait of nature (LW 1, 63; cf. MW 4, 3–14).

This has a permanent impact on the positioning of the culturally shaped form of human living. The human, for Dewey, is the event within nature that unites coincidental and unique properties. Human beings are natural events like

any other natural event. They act in one and the same universe, are subject to the same mechanisms that all, even nonhuman, events in nature are subject to. At the same time, human events are special because they are the most complex and intimate events in nature. Distinct natural events may not represent separate kinds of being overall, yet they are also not all identical as a result of this, but rather exhibit different graduated degrees of an emergent process of change. Since different natural events interrelate in fields of interaction in unique ways, there is the possibility, in fragile moments, that qualitative leaps can occur within nature. New levels of organization emerge that are not solely due to the sum of their elements. Lower, less complex and higher, more complex activities and forms are combined with each other. Physical, biological, and mental operations continually emerge without being identical to what they came from: life from inorganic natural processes; mind from organic forms of life in the human species (LW 1, cf. LW 12, 26–30).

In general, Dewey distinguishes between three “levels of increasing complexity and intimacy of interaction among natural events” (LW 1, 200). The first level is physical, passive, without feeling. The interactions are physical; adhere to physical and chemical organizational processes that occur inevitably as long as natural laws are those that exist at the moment. Readjustments take place; the direction of the readjustment is irrelevant. Inorganic events simply do not care whether or not they exist in a certain state. The second level is living, active, involving feelings. The interactions are psycho-physical, containing needs, demands, or desires for a living state. There are still readjustments, but they are immediately possible as focused readjustments. Organic events focus their lives unconsciously on surviving. The third level is mental, social, and can abstract meaning from feelings. The interactions are framed symbolically and achieve a cultural function through language and communication, referring to qualities of situations as profitable. Feelings will not simply be felt, but rather spoken, acquiring a shareable, sustainable, ultimately (potentially) action-guiding meaning (194–209, cf. LW 3, 41–54; LW 12, 48–65).

The human is a coincidental and special event in nature, according to Dewey. As part of this nature, the human is inevitably involved in a contingent process of evolutionary change and struggle, and largely at the mercy of this struggle of life if he does not overcome himself in the possible options for mankind: acting socially and creating culture. It is merely conditioned in the nature of mankind to produce jointly, or better, conjointly the beneficial, good and beautiful in order to continue living life unharmed. The eventual result of these perpetually unstable interactions is societal association: a differentiated canon of self-logical (“eigenlogischen”) social spaces, systems, or fields, of therewith associated organizations, institutions, and support mechanisms. Whether in a political, judicial, economic, religious, familial, scientific, pedagogical, artistic, or sporting context, humans enter into each specific social tie with tried and tested intentions, and come together observably in specific

social structures. While Dewey examines some of these achievements in some detail and repeatedly (especially politics, economy, education), and partly in isolation or in segments (e.g., religion and law) in a descriptive or eulogic manner, at no point does he address *sport* on its own. This does not mean that the phenomenon plays no role in his oeuvre. Rather, his statements that relate to the meanings of sporting practices or movement cultures are simply not systematically worked out, but are instead typically illustrative in their purpose and strewn across his collective works. From this angle, the article enters the discussion of sport in Dewey's writings. The purpose of the paper is to assemble these scattered pieces for the first time and thus to provide a Deweyan outline of sport: a posthumous draft of his self-assembled analyses of very different societal structures. The main idea is to produce a representative exegesis of the collected works of John Dewey, elaborated to provide a general overview of the societal and democratic meaning that he ascribes to sport and movement cultures. Imitating the structure of his oeuvre, the paper is divided into three general parts: the first segment focuses on text passages that put the topic in a societal context, the second part examines the pedagogical elements, and the third section broaches the topic of aesthetic integration.

Social Significance

Modern society is characterized by a variety of different areas, according to Dewey: "elements of culture which are segregated in our present life" (LW 2, 110; cf. LW 10, 26). The individual segments are an expression of a societal development, each coming with its own unique practice. This is where the initial observation begins. For sport, among other social developments, has become a significant evolutionary achievement: "Incidentally, I may remark that the spread of sport and games is one of the characteristic features of existing social life" (LW 3, 225).

For Dewey, sport is a sociohistorically developed realm of society, primarily as a non-wage-based space-time form, and similar to other voluntarily or chosen *free forms of shaping time*, it is an organized way of compensating for the strain of daily life (MW 14, 86–87). Among its principal features are the quantitative significance and emotional energy of sport. Sports are, actively participated as well as passively entered, in massive devotion, and for an extensive cross-section of the population, an influential, largely barrier-free leisure time phenomenon. If nothing else, the large number of very different participants alone shows a potential for democratic and democratizing life that cannot be underestimated. In "Is There Hope for Politics" (1931), Dewey adds that it even contributes to, or can complement, seemingly less ordinary segments of modern life that traditionally are connected more or directly with democratization:

Politics may appear on the first page and on the editorial page of newspapers, but the sport pages occupy more space, and the average reader turns these pages with an eagerness which contrasts with the languid way in which he reads the political news and skips the editorials. (LW 6, 182)

However, in some essays and individual comments Dewey also describes—in varying degrees—the antitheses. In “A Sick World” (1922), Dewey addresses the form, extent, and avoidance of *negative developments* in social life in North America at the beginning of the 1920s. The world is sick not only because certain pathological conditions have been diagnosed by qualified physicians, but also because their treatment suppresses the symptoms rather than fighting the causes: “Cure is a negative idea; health a positive one” (MW 15, 43). This is seen in very frequent social phenomena, such as Couéism and its mantra-like, conscious autosuggestion of getting better and better every day in every way, where healing conceals the symptoms so one feels better quickly, but does not affect the causes, the real treatment of which are even delayed by concealment. Besides autosuggestion and different kinds of drugs, Dewey classified modern sport as one of those unpropitious, distracting amusement mechanisms that “owe today a considerable portion of their attraction to the fact that they give a temporary relief from consciousness of troubles” (42). The view of sport as a social practice for negative diversion is repeated in “Events and Meanings” (1922), intensified here as an externally initiated, mental soporific, and independent means of securing power, as a modern interpretation of bread and games for and through the economy:

Those in power are after all afraid of ideas, of conversation. They are afraid that conversation is more powerful than the power of the events upon which they so triumphantly ride. They give out jobs to keep the rest of us busy, and they dispense indulgences, called sport and amusement. And we are afraid of losing our jobs or of missing the latest show if we idle to engage in converse. (MW 13, 278)

In *Freedom and Culture* (1939) Dewey situates the peak of this adverse aspect of sport in the rigid control of social space by nondemocratic governmental systems. This broad-based essay is an analytical defense of democracy during the totalitarian wildfires that broke out before the Second World War. Besides the fascist and Stalinist systems of that time, Dewey’s critical comments also expressly draw attention to antidemocratic tendencies in American society. In the chapter entitled “The Problem of Freedom,” Dewey directs his argumentation at the successful conditions for a social-liberal democracy. The effect that social spaces have is anchored in the structural orientation of social sub-areas, in the practical organization of associations, connections, and groups. Democratizing spaces give rise to democratic consequences, and nondemocratizing spaces to nondemocratic consequences. While the ability of the economy and science to contribute here appears to be common and feasible in considerations of democratization, Dewey points to the largely disregarded benefits of entirely apolitical environments, advocating “the arts, the fine arts, as an important part of the social conditions that bear upon democratic institutions and personal freedom” (LW 13, 69). This defense of the arts is borne out in the totalitarian antithesis. A totalitarian organization is largely successful when a totality of the environment is coupled with the entirety of human approaches: “It must first of all, and most

enduringly of all, if it is to be permanent, command the imagination, with all the impulses and motives we have been accustomed to call *inner*" (70). Dewey grounds the democratizing punchline, as well as the perfidious totalitarian creativity, in the positive or negative instrumentalisation of those areas in which intended diversion, emotional participation, unexpected formatting, and limited resistance are combined. And sport is expressly included in this group as a means for producing this effect:

The theatre, the movie and music hall, even the picture gallery, eloquence, popular parades, common sports and recreative agencies, have all been brought under regulation as part of the propaganda agencies by which dictatorship is kept in power without being regarded by the masses as oppressive. We are beginning to realize that emotions and imagination are more potent in shaping public sentiment and opinion than information and reason. (70)

Pedagogical Possibilities

Dewey views education as a generic concept comprising all processes for acquiring knowledge and learning: intended and not intended, direct and indirect, desired and undesired, conscious and unconscious. Dewey himself fills this broad definition normatively with democratically and philosophically anchored leit-ideas of a general human education. The path and goal is a spatially bound process of growth and the ability to grow: accretion of experience through the forming and reforming of habits. A second consideration is seen here. As shown by the following reflections, Dewey embeds sports and games pedagogically, partly as an example and partly as a model.

In *How We Think* (1910), the *leisure attraction of sport* functions as a didactically relevant example. Overall, the book, as a pragmatic psychology of thinking, and developed for training teachers and other education professionals in what is didactically appropriate, addresses the pedagogical importance of phased reflexive thinking and shows its professional-theoretical and school-practical relevance. Reflexive thinking is posited as graduated control of the natural and spontaneous processes of observation, stimulus, and test in practice, the development of which in school is posited as a process moving in the direction of controlled competence. In the chapter entitled "The Natural Resources of Thought," Dewey describes the learning-theoretical significance of some natural resources that are central for mental stimulation in solving an already identified problem. These can assume a potentially action-based status and show the need for evaluation in the emergence, processing, selection, and evaluation of suggestions, as spontaneous inspiration and trains of thought, without logical status and where the ability to contribute in a problem-solving process is still uncertain. Thus natural resources are relevant from the perspective of learning theory, have didactical relevance, and are fundamental in the development of reflexive thinking. In this context, the disparate level of the students is noteworthy. Naturally, the transition from impulses to the idea is prefigured by an inter-individual degree of curiosity, facility, and orderliness of

uncontrolled, random stimulations. Within the context of schooling in particular, Dewey therefore warns against interpreting these differences as indispensable stabilities and creating rigid categories of pupils. Instead, he appeals to the mindset, task, and didactic craftsmanship of teachers; for example, in facilitating curiosity and suggestive ease with school topics by connecting them to relevant, popular, or target-group-adequate subject-matters such as sport:

Yet the teacher is not entitled to assume stupidity or even dullness merely because of irresponsiveness to school subjects or to a lesson as presented by text-book or teacher. The pupil labeled hopeless may react in quick and lively fashion when the thing-in-hand seems to him worthwhile, as some out-of-school sport or social affair. Indeed, the school subject might move him, were it set in a different context and treated by a different method. A boy dull in geometry may prove quick enough when he takes the subject in connection with manual training; the girl who seems inaccessible to historical facts may respond promptly when it is a question of judging the character and deeds of people of her acquaintance or of fiction. (MW 6, 209–210)

In *Democracy and Education* (1916) Dewey addresses the pedagogical significance of the *dynamic vicissitude of sporting interaction*. Fundamentally, the entire work is intended for the purpose of not only describing the normative theory of growth in itself, but also legitimizing it in an argumentative devaluation of those theoretical approaches that have practically influenced the reality of education. In the chapter entitled “Preparation, Unfolding, and Formal Discipline,” Dewey discusses the theory of formal discipline critically and assigns to it a procedure that aims to cultivate, through repetition, skills determined in advance and considered relevant for education. Through mechanical, context-dependent repetition, such refinement results in a specialized, very limited, and not universally useful training of skills; for example, certain kinds of perception, memory, learning, presentation, wanting, feeling, thinking, and doing: “The analogy constantly employed is that of a billiard player or gymnast, who by repeated use of certain muscles in a uniform way at last secures automatic skill” (MW 9, 66). By contrast, Dewey introduces a view of education that posits “*selective response*” as the goal and mode of exercise, an interaction-influenced procedure, from which one can, from the murkiest of reactions that are triggered at a certain time, separate out those things “which are especially adapted to the *utilization* of the stimulus” (68–69). One thing here that is very well suited to pedagogy can be found in sport and games; in particular, those sporting activities that incorporate constantly changing and varying social acts involving human interaction, particularly team games and competitive situations:

Moreover, the difference between the training of ability to spell which comes from taking visual forms in a narrow context and one which takes them in connection with the activities required to grasp meaning, such

as context, affiliations of descent, etc., may be compared to the difference between exercises in the gymnasium with pulley weights to “develop” certain muscles, and a game or sport. The former is uniform and mechanical; it is rigidly specialized. The latter is varied from moment to moment; no two acts are quite alike; novel emergencies have to be met; the coordinations forming have to be kept flexible and elastic. Consequently, the training is much more “general”; that is to say, it covers a wider territory and includes more factors. Exactly the same thing holds of special and general education of the mind. (71)

Explicit educational value is also ascribed to various *structural properties of sporting activity*. In *Human Nature and Conduct* (1922), Dewey regards sport competition as symbolizing a desirable performance-based organization of the economic sub-area of society. The distribution of economic goods—of income, payment, and wealth—should not just be carried out randomly but rather according to the specific performance that can be ascribed to each member of society. Input and output should be in due proportion. In an analysis of suitable instincts for the economic system, which countered established proposals, Dewey, in the chapter entitled “Classification of Instincts,” opposed the possibility of “an acquisitive instinct” and proposed instead finding alternatives, among others, “a peculiar sporting instinct,” which, under the assumption of equal starting points and comparable measurability, ties individual performance to economic success and economic success to individual performance. In sport, according to Dewey, performance-constituting structures are characterized by a special parallelism to the ideals of the performance principle. The constitutive dimensions of performance determination and evaluation in sport do not simply reflect the principle of performance for sport, but rather elevate competitive sport to a moment of performance purity, to a status of economic-defining culture:

Not acquiring dollars, but chasing them, hunting them is the important thing. Acquisition has its part in the big game, for even the most devoted sportsman prefers, other things being equal, to bring home the fox’s brush. A tangible result is the mark to one’s self and to others of success in sport. (MW 14, 101)

In the chapter entitled “The School and Social Progress” in *The School and Society* (1899), Dewey asks why the American education system is not sufficiently able to create a certain type of responsible future citizen. This shortcoming is evident in the unsustainable difference between the predominant socializing structures and Dewey’s intended objectives of school. With the existing school system it is simply not possible to put potential and worthwhile pieces of a democratic education into effect. That which is supposed to be, already at this early point in Dewey’s seminal considerations, a genuine, jointly structured practice, and in that correspond to

the natural sociability of human ontogenesis, does in fact not appear to do justice to the claims, at least not remotely in terms of Dewey's standards for an adequate theory of education. The schooling of students for a non-natural democratic future develops in an institutional present that remains in structures that thwart this idea. School is not (yet) a natural social unit. As a positive example of the convergence of reality and intention, Dewey views structures and organizational processes in sport and games as ideal:

The radical reason that the present school cannot organize itself as a natural social unit is because just this element of common and productive activity is absent. Upon the playground, in game and sport, social organization takes place spontaneously and inevitably. There is something to do, some activity to be carried on, requiring natural divisions of labor, selection of leaders and followers, mutual co-operation and emulation. (MW 1, 10)

At this point, however, Dewey does not mention the fact that sport and games do not develop through natural law. Rather, they develop culturally, can be negotiated socially, and follow by themselves and inevitably a common denominator based on incorporated modalities of conduct. Community has its basis in natural sociability, but its practical implementation does not automatically follow "in an enduring way purely spontaneously" (LW 13, 35); rather, it requires communal processes of negotiation, memory, and demand. In *Experience and Education* (1938), Dewey combines these views with the question of pedagogically *desirable structures of school teaching*. Starting with "the old question of individual freedom and social control" (31), he develops, in the chapter "Social Control," a basic idea of social control that collectively transfers desirable conduct to the future generation, but "is not felt to involve restriction of personal freedom" (32). For school, this should entail minimizing elements of directive influence on behavioral expectations to the greatest extent possible, replacing them with the circumstances of daily conduct "that are conducive to community activity and to organization which exercises control over individual impulses by the mere fact that all are engaged in communal projects" (36). Dewey suggests a model of social control that is worthy of transfer, "an example of normal social control" (37), in diverse forms of games and types of team sport. Games and sport are constituted by rules and restrict the conduct of the participating actors by consent, in an accepted, unconscious way, with mutual coordination, and due to a shared experience: in order to maintain training, competition, the game situation, and aesthetic involvement (at least as long as the conduct moves within the arranged framework and in conformity with the governed canon):

Children at recess or after school play games, from tag and one-old-cat to baseball and football. The games involve rules, and these rules order their conduct. The games do not go on haphazardly or by a succession of improvisations. Without rules there is no game. If disputes arise there is an

umpire to appeal to, or discussion and a kind of arbitration are means to a decision; otherwise the game is broken up and comes to an end . . . There are certain fairly obvious controlling features of such situations to which I want to call attention. The first is that the rules are a part of the game. They are not outside of it. No rules, then no game; different rules, then a different game. As long as the game goes on with a reasonable smoothness, the players do not feel that they are submitting to external imposition but that they are playing the game. In the second place an individual may at times feel that a decision isn't fair and he may even get angry. But he is not objecting to a rule but to what he claims is a violation of it, to some one-sided and unfair action. In the third place, the rules, and hence the conduct of the game, are fairly standardized. There are recognized ways of counting out, of selection of sides, as well as for positions to be taken, movements to be made, etc. (32)

In general, Dewey anchors the role of such environments not sociologically, but in a naturalistically based *psycho-social psychology*: as “an attempt to understand and explain how the thought, feeling and behavior of individuals are influenced by the actual, imagined, or implied presence of others” (Allport 1954, 5). The focus is on the individual, personal habits, the person's mind. The goal of the findings is *not* how individual or collective spirit forms social spaces, but rather how different groups and their overtly individual characteristics create different spirits:

The conclusion seems inevitable that since “mind” does not appear in the original list of instincts it represents something acquired. It represents a reorganization of original activities through their operation in a given environment. It is a formation, not a datum; a product, and a cause only after it has been produced. (MW 10, 58, cf. MW 14)

Dewey makes impressive use of this model in “Interpretation of the Savage Mind” (1902), appropriately in regard to games and sport. The paper addresses the question of how the dominant activity of a social group produces generalized mental patterns and can influence the entire lifestyle significantly, as well as the course of the human species over the long term. In terms of social theory and research method, he orients his argument around the demands and conditions of practice: the “mind,” as an action-guiding organ, “is at least an organ of service for the control of environment in relation to the ends of the life process” (MW 2, 41). Relevant goals are not set by pure reason, but rather through the existing tasks in daily life, through that which is done and will be done in a group in order to fundamentally shape life. Each analysis of social groups finds action-guiding patterns of thought solely in and through the analysis of the dominant activity. A person is what he does and, to a certain extent and conditioned by socialization processes, what he did for generations: “Occupations determine the fundamental modes of activity, and hence control the formation

and use of habits” (42, cf. *LW* 2, 263). Dewey exemplifies this line of argument with human development in nomadic hunting, but allows for a generalizing, perpetual significance. Characteristic for hunting, as the primary food-obtaining form of life, is its immediacy, the direct relationship between needs, activity, and satisfaction of needs, of effort and reward: “Want, effort, skill, and satisfaction stand in the closest relations to one another. The ultimate aim and the urgent concern of the moment are identical” (*MW* 2, 44). These statements are illustrated ethnographically in an example of Australian aborigines who demonstrate the epochal significance of hunting, the fact and the way that habits form mental patterns, how those mental patterns define the important areas of life, and how those mental patterns, at least partially and in new forms, are passed down historically through generations. The life of aborigines is so fundamentally defined by hunting that not only the act of hunting as such prompts mental relevance, but many parts of life can only be interpreted against this backdrop. Irrespective of whether it is art, religious ceremonies, funeral rituals, the selection of partners, or sexuality, the characteristics of the prevailing activity lead to the preference for those possibilities of cultural endowment that offer a familiar degree of correspondence. According to Dewey, sport and games in and for modernity preserve the mentally anchored striving for immediacy:

Game and sport are still words which mean the most intense immediate play of the emotions, running their entire gamut. And these terms still are applied most liberally and most appropriately to hunting. The transferred application of the hunting language to pursuit of truth, plot interest, business adventure and speculation, to all intense and active forms of amusement, to gambling and the “sporting life,” evidences how deeply imbedded in later consciousness is the hunting pattern or schema. The interest of the game, the alternate suspense and movement, the strained and alert attention to stimuli always changing, always demanding graceful, prompt, strategic and forceful response; the play of emotions along the scale of want, effort, success or failure—this is the very type, psychically speaking, of the drama. (45)

In *Human Nature and Conduct* (1922), Dewey reinforces the educational meaning of the environment with anthropological considerations. The pragmatic provisions of the foundations of human nature allow for traceable evidence of the feasible paths, means, or directions of development. The evolution of humans thus obtains an intrinsic foundation. Fundamental are three central concepts and their relationships to each other: habit, impulse, and intelligence. Dewey views mankind primarily as “a creature of habit” (*MW* 14, 88). The human is through and through a creature of habit. Being and becoming human can only be understood in the decoding of habits, incorporated behavioural dispositions which are acquired with relative stability through the unavoidable interaction with an inevitably individual living environment. At the same time, even if not synonymously, the human is an

organic existence. The human being is not *nothing* at the beginning of his life and becomes *something* through social integration, but rather possesses inborn impulses to react to events in his surroundings. Environments provide meaning for an existing, energetic endowment. Impulses are the unlearned origin of habits, the undetermined yet determinable material of human nature (63–118; cf. EW 5, 77; MW 9, 67; LW 10, 64). Thus the environment matters, be it in a desirable or undesirable way.

This certainly also applies to athletic environments. Within this context, Dewey vividly broaches the issue of the educational possibility of games and sport for a *morally balanced orientation of impulses* in the chapter “No Separate Instincts.” Fundamentally, Dewey sees three conceivable consequences of impulses: unintelligent explosion, reorganizing conversion, and imploding forced delay. The delay does not obliterate the impulsive force, but rather stores the energy temporarily until it can be released at the right opportunity, historically considered primarily in largely opposite reactions to the necessary will of a restricting power. Impulses perpetuate imbalances and their questionable intolerance in this way. Empirically, deprivation has been regularly followed by a lack of restraint, self-righteous times by moral permissiveness, romanticism by realism, collectivism by individualism, reason by emotion. The conduct adopts in each case converted forms that continue the imbalance of extreme forms. This applies without exception also to the very culture and time in which Dewey maps out these rather abstract conclusions. Dewey ascribes to the early 1920s an exploiting economic supremacy in people’s lives: exhausting professional demands followed by a search for compensating reactions, for neither monotone nor extremely serious activities “that are significantly called re-creation” (MW 14, 111). In both cases the daily imbalance gives rise to a distracted *Zeitgeist* that seeks diversion, replenishment, stimulative compensation; according to Dewey’s diagnosis to artificial stimulus, alcoholic excesses, sexual extremes, opium, and other narcotics. The critical aspect, for Dewey, is not the pleasure itself, but rather the origin, cause, and consequence. Opportunity is successfully sought in the approach, but without the involvement of satisfaction in a material sense (110). Symptoms are fought and not the causes; the imbalance doubles rather than achieving natural harmony. Based on this contemporary deficit diagnosis, Dewey continuously returns to the practical moral significance of games and art: “of sport in its varied forms, drama, fiction, music, poetry, newspapers” (111). The selected cultural spaces succeed in combining compensation with meaningfulness, balancing out impulses and achieving compensation. Games and art offer, as neither directly useful nor serious but nevertheless sensible activities, models for practically useful but, except for the sensation of reward, nonsensible mechanical everyday activities; that is, “add[ing] fresh and deeper meanings to the usual activities of life” (112). Through the experience of meaningfulness in artistic activity, the natural experience of such meaningfulness can be recreated and defined as a model for all of life and thus also for professional activity. Through art and

games, work is decoupled from meaningfulness. “[A]bnormal artificial exigents and stimulations,” such as “useless games and arts,” react to the identical circumstance that there is no regulated activity; the impulses and instincts are stimulated in full and in an elastically balanced way (112). The clear preference for games and art is in the effect of moral depth: the causes of imbalances are fought and not their symptoms; process and result achieve a productive, constructive activity and not diversion. Art “releases energy in constructive forms” and “is the starting point of an activity which *shapes* material” (113).¹

Aesthetic Potential

A third observation is related to considerations on the aesthetic possibility of human experience. In his later work *Art as Experience* (1934), Dewey presents a pragmatic theory of art and aesthetics. It might only address sporting practices and movement cultures as an aside, but it was predestined for such future application due to its broad-based design. The negative starting point of the entire theoretical approach is a critique of the spatial exclusivity of aesthetic experience since the 19th century: Artworks are now (and in contrast with earlier times) only capitalist, imperialist, or nationalist objects of prestige locked away in museums and galleries. Work, daily life, pleasure, and joy are treated as separate spheres of human life. By contrast, in the first three chapters of *Art as Experience*, Dewey posits a major role for the aesthetic in the past, calling for the recovery of a premodern connection between aesthetic consciousness and daily experience. The goal is the condition under which artistic works of all complexions elevate the meaning of daily life. This involves eliminating the separation of everyday and aesthetic experience, reducing it at least to the extent that people’s immediate feeling of being in the world becomes constantly more fulfilled, that people’s experiences are increasingly free from randomness and blind routines. Artworks in a broad sense, including sporting, should be significant joists of institutions and practices in daily life:

The collective life that was manifested in war, worship, the forum, knew no division between what was characteristic of these places and operations, and the art that brought color, grace, and dignity, into them. Painting and sculpture were originally one with architecture, as that was one with the social purpose that buildings served. Music and song were intimate parts of the rites and ceremonies in which the meaning of group life was consummated. Drama was a vital reenactment of the legends and history of group life. Not even in Athens can such arts be torn loose from this setting in direct experience and yet retain their significant character. Athletic sports, as well as drama, celebrated and enforced traditions of race and group, instructing the people commemorating glories, and strengthening their civic pride. (LW 10, 13)

The theoretical foundation of this idea is readily apparent. The inevitable origin of daily life and art is experience; the requisite “detour” for a pragmatic philosophy of art is the distinction between difference and nondifference in an ordinary and aesthetic human understanding of the world. If one takes the assumed continuity of natural events seriously, aesthetic experiences are as it were random as well as special experiences. Fundamentally, a human is a living being like any other. He exists in interaction, is subject to the elementary conditions of life in a contingent environment, welcomes orderly circumstances, and encounters these with a feeling of harmony if they correspond to his needs. People regularly partake in experiences that inherently offer the possibility of an aesthetic impact, but this potential is not realized in all, or even most, experiences. Dewey defines the aesthetic difference normatively in the uniformity of experiencing. Aesthetic experiences are experiences in which the material and energy of the environment are harmoniously connected with inner impulses at the end of a (necessarily dissonance-initiated) process and they expand life qualitatively. Aesthetic experience is the intensified daily life experience that assumes a quintessential form as a result of its level of intensity: it is completed, consummated, satisfying, well-arranged, assured. Whenever the full sense of the ordinary experience is finally expressed it is an aesthetic experience:

A piece of work is finished in a way that is satisfactory; a problem receives its solution; a game is played through; a situation, whether that of eating a meal, playing a game of chess, carrying on a conversation, writing a book, or taking part in a political campaign, is so rounded out that its close is a consummation and not a cessation. Such an experience is a whole and carries with it its own individualizing quality and self-sufficiency. It is *an* experience. (42)

Dewey views aesthetic experiences as that idealized class of experiences that unfurl a holistic potential that is latent in every experience and ultimately combines cognitive, emotional, practical, somatic,² and aesthetic shares in the narrower sense. This can take place in and through the artistic media of sport, e.g., a game of tennis (218); however, it does this in Dewey’s conception at most illustratively and in praxis as culturally formatted qualities of doing and what is done:

The act that *expresses* welcome uses the smile, the outreached hand, the lighting up of the face as media, not consciously but because they have become organic means of communicating delight upon meeting a valued friend. Acts that were primitively spontaneous are converted into means that make human intercourse more rich and gracious—just as a painter converts pigment into means of expressing an imaginative experience. Dance and sport are activities in which acts once performed spontaneously in separation are assembled and converted from raw, crude material into works of expressive art. Only where material is employed as media is there expression and art. (69)³

CONCLUSION

From beginning to end, Dewey's oeuvre is filled with philosophical discussions and political comments on the significance de jure and de facto of a wide range of distinct social spaces. In contrast to subjects he addresses regularly, such as politics, economics, and education, or others that he focuses on occasionally, such as religion or law, he only makes scattered statements on sporting practice or movement cultures, as examples integrated into overarching lines of argumentation. Nonetheless, sport is expressly recognized as a noteworthy environment. This paper provides the first overview of the statements made by Dewey on this subject and their context, organizing them on the basis of their social, pedagogical, and aesthetic implications in order to make a supplementary contribution to the examination of social spaces in his work. In conclusion, Dewey offers a number of mostly positive possibilities in and through sport, and ties them together, however pragmatically, not substantially, in or through sport at the present time or in the past: Sporting spaces are fundamentally responsible for equal opportunity and ultimately a democratic and democratizing obligation, like all social spaces, breathing life into socially acceptable, pedagogically suitable, or aesthetically graceful interactions, even if certain peculiarities of the phenomenon facilitate and complicate such organization. What sport can or cannot do remains pragmatically dependent on how each specific sporting situation is contextualized. What sport finally is or is not must be constantly redefined in a pragmatic way in each specific impact analysis, with each specific instrument, and for each specific space and time.

NOTES

1. Cf. *acknowledging* Cohen (1940, 218); *sceptical* Paringer (1990, 166), fn. 141.
2. Shusterman speaks literally of a somaesthetic in and with *Art as Experience*: cf. 2000, 137–153; 2008, 180–216.
3. Exactly, this relationship between possibility and the lack of development offers the basis for *future application* with a reference to sport. In 1975, Mitchell writes “that sport is an art-form experience that follows the form which Dewey contributes to all art” (28). Similar argumentation can be found in general in Feezell (2004, 37–42), more narrowly interpreted in Martin (2007) for running, in Lally with respect to the process of self-cultivation of endurance athletes (2013, 189–196), or in Takahashi with a sport-pedagogical intention “to re-evaluate the concept of experience and education presented by J. Dewey in order to investigate the educational values which subsist in the sport experience itself” (2013, 85). Kupfer (1985, 111–140) shares Dewey's view *in particular*; Welsch (2005, 148–150) *also* advocates Dewey's position of focusing more on modern sport as a topic of aesthetics: as modern or postmodern art in everyday life and for everyone. Shields raises the useful transfer effect that sport experience has on university experiences (2010, 92).

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