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FROM ECLIPSE TO REFRACTION: TOWARDS A REFRACTIVE UNDERSTANDING OF DEWEY'S RECEPTION IN ANALYTIC AESTHETICS

Del eclipse a la refracción: Hacia una comprensión refractiva de la recepción de Dewey en la estética analítica

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Abstract

In recent decades, the relationship between pragmatism and analytic philosophy has received renewed historiographical attention. Existing narratives, however, have focused primarily on epistemology, logic, and the philosophy of science, leaving the reception of pragmatist aesthetics largely unexplored. This paper addresses that gap by examining the reception of John Dewey's aesthetic theory within analytic aesthetics. A recurrent historiographical view portrays Dewey's aesthetics as having been eclipsed by the rise of analytic approaches. Against this interpretation, I propose an alternative historiographical narrative, that of refraction, which understands Dewey's reception neither in terms of eclipse nor as a case of simple continuity, but rather as a process of conceptual transformation in which certain aspects of his thought were preserved, adapted, and reappropriated. The paper first situates the eclipse narrative within contemporary historiographical debates, then presents textual evidence of Dewey's uneven but significant reception within analytic aesthetics and finally argues for the need for new historiographical categories capable of capturing this more complex pattern of influence.

Key words: Pragmatism; Analytic Philosophy; John Dewey; History of Philosophy; Refraction Narrative.

Resumen

En las últimas décadas, la relación entre el pragmatismo y la filosofía analítica ha recibido una renovada atención historiográfica. Sin embargo, las narrativas existentes se han concentrado principalmente en la epistemología, la lógica y la filosofía de la ciencia, dejando en gran medida inexplorada la recepción de la estética pragmatista. Este artículo se propone cubrir ese vacío mediante el examen de la recepción de la teoría estética de John Dewey en el seno de la estética analítica. Una perspectiva historiográfica recurrente presenta la estética de Dewey como eclipsada por el ascenso de los enfoques analíticos. Frente a esta interpretación, propongo una narrativa historiográfica alternativa, la de

la refracción, que comprende la recepción de Dewey no en términos de eclipse ni como un caso de simple continuidad, sino más bien como un proceso de transformación conceptual en el que ciertos aspectos de su pensamiento fueron preservados, adaptados y reapropiados. El artículo sitúa, en primer lugar, la narrativa del eclipse en el marco de los debates historiográficos contemporáneos; luego presenta evidencia textual de la recepción desigual, aunque significativa, de Dewey en la estética analítica; y finalmente sostiene la necesidad de nuevas categorías historiográficas capaces de dar cuenta de este patrón de influencia más complejo.

Palabras clave: Pragmatismo; Filosofía analítica; John Dewey; Historia de la filosofía; Narrativa de la refracción.

"Perhaps we need a different leading metaphor."
Larry A. Hickman in *Shedding Light on the "Eclipse" Narrative: Some Notes on Pragmatism in the Twentieth Century* (2022)

Introduction

Over the past three decades, a body of historiographic literature has emerged exploring the intricate relationship between pragmatism and analytic philosophy throughout the twentieth century (Hickman, 2022). These interpretive approaches can be broadly divided into two main categories. The first includes continuity-oriented narratives, such as the anti-eclipse account (Misak 2013; Misak & Talisse, 2019) and the monist narrative (Festl, 2020), which argue that key pragmatist insights were incorporated by analytic philosophers, thereby supporting a conception of intellectual continuity between the two traditions. In contrast, the second category, exemplified by the eclipse narrative[1] (Rorty, 1995), the professionalism narrative (Campbell, 2007), and the political narrative (McCumber, 2001), contends that pragmatism was gradually marginalized, eclipsed, and eventually displaced by analytic philosophy, culminating in a form of disciplinary exclusion within the academic *milieu*.

Despite the varying emphases and conclusions that characterize these historiographic models, whether in terms of analytical focus or evaluations of pragmatism's status, they uniformly share a notable omission: a prominent gap regarding aesthetics and the philosophy of

[1] This label will be further developed in the sections that follow. Briefly, the term "eclipse narrative" refers to a prevalent view in pragmatist historiography according to which pragmatism was eclipsed by the rise of analytic philosophy (Talisse, 2007). More recently, this narrative has been particularly associated with Richard Rorty's historiographic perspective (Misak, 2013; Misak & Talisse, 2019).

art. To date, historiographic discussions have predominantly centered on epistemological and logical dimensions. Only a few introductory surveys, such as Rydenfelt (2024), have addressed convergences and divergences between pragmatism and analytic philosophy in ethics, with limited attention paid to aesthetic theory or the philosophy of art. This research seeks to address this gap by foregrounding a domain that has been systematically neglected.

The central hypothesis advanced here posits that existing historiographic accounts cannot be uncritically extended to the fields of aesthetics and philosophy of art, as they fail to capture the distinctive dynamics unique to these areas. Both the eclipse and anti-eclipse theories rest upon dichotomous, all-or-nothing conceptions of the relationship between pragmatism and analytic philosophy. In contrast, I argue that, at least within the aesthetic domain, it is necessary to propose a third interpretive path, one that acknowledges an ongoing exchange and continued reading of the pragmatist tradition by the analytic tradition.

Consequently, I propose a historiographical interpretation focused specifically on the field of aesthetics, which I refer to as the refraction narrative. Additionally, my approach focuses on John Dewey's aesthetics, given that *Art as Experience*, together with some of Dewey's lesser-known texts on aesthetics, constitutes one of the major, though not the only, contributions of the pragmatist tradition to the field of aesthetics.[2] This narrative suggests that John Dewey's ideas were received by analytic aesthetics, read, and adapted to align with new methodological commitments and philosophical aims. Unlike the prevailing historiographical models, this narrative does not conform strictly to dualistic theories such as the eclipse or anti-eclipse accounts. Instead, it describes a broader spectrum of contact, reading, and selective appropriation of Deweyan thought within a new philosophical paradigm. As a result, it posits a more complex association than what has been acknowledged by pragmatist historiography.

To develop the proposed hypothesis, the present text is structured into three parts. The first section offers a reconstruction of the eclipse narrative, demonstrating how it has been applied to the field of aesthetics

[2] Dewey's aesthetics and his book *Art as Experience* represent the pinnacle of pragmatist aesthetics (Shusterman, 2000) for two reasons. First, because it is the work in which the concepts and problems are developed in the most systematic way. Second, because other thinkers of this tradition, such as Kate Gordon (1908), George Mead (1926), and Horace Kallen (1930), formulated their own versions of pragmatist aesthetics in dialogue with Dewey's writings. For this reason, in this paper, I treat Dewey as the key figure representing the pragmatist aesthetic tradition.

and recurrently invoked in pragmatist texts that argue for the eclipse of pragmatism within analytic aesthetics. The second section advances the argument by providing textual evidence that Dewey was not simply displaced by analytic aesthetics, revealing a far more complex affiliation between the two traditions than has been acknowledged in existing pragmatist historiography of aesthetics. Finally, the third section examines the implications of the refraction narrative and concludes the article with some final remarks.

The Eclipse Narrative and Its Adoption in the Aesthetic Field

Recent analyses have identified a considerable number of accounts emphasizing the discontinuity between pragmatism and analytic philosophy (Hickman, 2022). Among these, one narrative deserves particular attention for two reasons: first, because it constitutes the most recurrent and influential version of the discontinuity thesis; and second, because it has been, to a significant extent, transposed into the field of aesthetics. This is the so-called "eclipse narrative" (Talisse, 2007). The eclipse narrative recounts how the classical pragmatists, Charles Sanders Peirce, William James, and John Dewey, were gradually eclipsed within the academic *milieu* after the consolidation of logical positivism in the 1940s and 1950s. Within this framework, pragmatism came to be regarded as a superficial, ambiguous, or insufficiently rigorous tradition.

This narrative has been propagated primarily through three distinct strands. The first consists of works aimed at introducing and disseminating the classical pragmatist tradition (Menand, 2001; Westbrook, 2005; and Pihlström, 2011). The second comprises biographical and interpretive studies by scholars specializing in the philosophy of John Dewey (such as Westbrook, 1991; Ryan, 1995; and Boisvert, 1998). The third — and perhaps one of the most influential — strand, as interpreted by Talisse (2007) and Misak (2013), is found in the work of Richard Rorty and the historiographic narrative he constructs around neopragmatism (Rorty, 1995). The following examples serve to illustrate the recurrent articulation of this narrative across academic texts.

> Along about 1945, American philosophers were, for better or worse, *bored* with Dewey, and thus with pragmatism. They were sick of being told that pragmatism was the philosophy of American democracy, that Dewey was the great American intellectual figure of their century, and the like. They wanted something new, something they could get their philosophical teeth into. What showed up, thanks to Hitler and various

> other historical contingencies, was logical empiricism, an early version we now call "analytic philosophy." (Rorty, 1995, p. 70).
>
> The Second World War is important for philosophy in the United States because of an ironic inversion. America emerged from the war as the preeminent economic and military world power. For philosophy, however, the postwar period was one of recolonization. The classical American philosophers were quickly marginalized as universities sought to embrace the latest European ideas. […] Philosophy in America would continue to thrive, but in directions that were hostile to the very conceptions of philosophy that motivated people like Royce, James, and Dewey (Boisvert, 1998, p. 3).
>
> Following its dramatic appearance in the first two decades of the twentieth century, pragmatism went into a long half-century eclipse among philosophers, even as its more vulgar formulations became more deeply embedded in American life (Westbrook, 2005, p. xii).
>
> The familiar story refers to a sort of "golden age" of American pragmatism that continued through the period we have been considering until perhaps the beginning of the Great Depression in 1929, or the start of World War II in 1939, or the death of Dewey in 1952. This period of pragmatic preeminence was then followed, it is usually thought, by a period of marginalization during which pragmatism was supplanted by more scientific and linguistic approaches to philosophy (Campbell, 2011, p. 78)

As is evident from the quotations presented, the eclipse narrative advances a version of intellectual history in which pragmatism was simply superseded by analytic philosophy, which subsequently cast it aside. In this account, there is no continuity: pragmatism is portrayed as having been marginalized within academic philosophy. The adoption of this historiographical framework carries significant implications not only for how the past of the pragmatist tradition is interpreted, but also for how its contemporary heirs conceive their own intellectual responsibilities, often understood as the task of reconstructing or reviving a tradition that has been exiled (Talisse, 2007). The questions of whether this exile truly occurred and whether pragmatism ever held a position of dominance within American academic philosophy remain matters of ongoing debate (Good, 2003; Talisse, 2007; Campbell, 2007).

This research does not seek to assess the accuracy or validity of the eclipse narrative itself. Rather, its aim is to show that, regardless of

its explanatory appeal, this narrative has been transposed into the field of pragmatist aesthetics and, more broadly, into the historiography of aesthetics. In this context, the eclipse narrative takes the following form: pragmatist aesthetics, typically identified above all with the work of John Dewey, was progressively superseded and subsequently marginalized by the rise of analytic philosophy. To substantiate this claim, I now turn to a selection of excerpts from texts that either introduce pragmatist aesthetics or engage more broadly with the history of aesthetics.

> Pragmatist aesthetics began with John Dewey — and almost ended there. He was the only one of pragmatism's founding fathers to write extensively on art to regard aesthetics as central to philosophy. But the philosophical influence of his aesthetic theory was very short-lived. Pragmatist aesthetics was soon eclipsed and rejected by analytic aesthetics […]; and it has not yet achieved a full recovery (Shusterman, 2000, p. xvi).

> Pragmatist aesthetics was, by the 1950s, totally eclipsed by the analytic philosophy of art. Recently, there have been signs of a re-evaluation of Dewey's legacy, especially because of the fatigue imposed by the limits of analytic aesthetics and because of its similarities with certain themes treated by continental European aesthetics (Castro, 2005, p. 143, own translation).

> Contemporary pragmatist aestheticians sympathetic to Dewey's vision of philosophy find much to admire in his writings on art and the role it can play in the betterment of life. After a period of eclipse, his writings on aesthetics have grown in influence within mainstream philosophical aesthetics (Marsoobian, 2011, p. 112).

> Éclipsé par le développement de l'esthétique analytique dans le monde anglophone et ignoré par les courants qui ont marqué la réflexion philosophique sur l'art en Europe, *L'Art comme expérience* de John Dewey (1934) bénéficie aujourd'hui d'un regain d'intérêt (Cometti & Matteucci, 2017, p. 7).

> In the 1950s there was an analytic revolution in English-speaking aesthetics. Prior aesthetic theories were considered to be too speculative and unclear. Dewey's work was caught up in this condemnation. Arnold Isenberg, for instance, in a founding document of analytic aesthetics, originally published in 1950, dismissed *Art as Experience* as

> a "hodgepodge of conflicting methods and undisciplined speculations", (1950/1987, p. 128) although he found it full of profound suggestions. Dewey's theories of expression and creativity were particular targets of analytic attack (Leddy & Puolakka, 2023).

A close reading of the passages reveals that historians of pragmatist aesthetics appear to have uncritically transposed into the aesthetic domain a narrative that had previously framed interpretations of other areas of pragmatism. More specifically, what is transposed is the claim that Dewey's aesthetics was displaced in the context of the rise of analytic philosophy. Such assertions, however, deserve scrutiny, since they often reproduce an established historiographical framework without sufficiently testing its adequacy to the specific dynamics of aesthetic reception.

> The silence to which Dewey's aesthetics has been consigned since the 1950s within the Anglo-American context (to say nothing of regions less receptive to the pragmatist tradition, such as continental European philosophy) contrasts sharply with the vitality with which *Art as Experience* continues to be read, even eighty years after its publication. Let us state it plainly: Dewey's aesthetic theory has aged far more gracefully than the analytic approaches that displaced it from the attention of those engaged in aesthetic reflection since the mid-twentieth century (Arenas, 2018, p. 286, own translation).

It was not uncommon for the eclipse narrative to be instrumentalized by contemporary pragmatists (Talisse, 2007). In the field of aesthetics, the pattern seems to be no different, as the quotation above demonstrates. This narrative often underlies calls for a renaissance or historical reassessment, justified by the claim that Dewey's pragmatist theory is superior to analytic approaches due to its broader scope and greater capacity to address the challenges posed by the contemporary art world. However, this type of statement often rests on the repetition of an established historiographical formula, without sufficient verification of its adequacy to the aesthetic field. Given the relative lack of studies devoted specifically to Dewey's reception within analytic aesthetics, what remains is often a simplified image of disappearance or exclusion. But to what extent can one still speak of eclipse in aesthetics if Dewey's ideas and concepts persisted, even when reformulated within analytic philosophy?

I turn to this question in the next section of this paper. Before doing so, however, I would like to anticipate that the argument advanced here seeks to move beyond the eclipse narrative within the field of aesthetics and, in doing

so, aligns with historiographical approaches that underscore the continuity between pragmatism and analytic philosophy. I propose a new interpretive narrative, rather than simply adopting one of the existing frameworks. The dominant theories currently available (Misak & Talisse, 2019; Festl, 2020), as noted earlier, originated in debates situated within epistemology, logic, and the philosophy of science. However, these domains cannot be uncritically applied to developments within aesthetics, as aesthetics has followed a distinctive historical trajectory, one not readily comparable to other branches of analytic philosophy, since analytic aesthetics emerged only subsequently in relation to these areas (see Lamarque, 2013). For this reason, and to avoid a reductionist approach, I have chosen to construct a narrative that focuses specifically on the transformations occurring within the philosophy of art and aesthetics. I now turn to the original texts in order to examine how this reception actually unfolded.

The Conceptual Transformation of Dewey's Reception in Analytic Aesthetics

Let me begin by clarifying why this particular historiographical metaphor has been chosen. Refraction is a phenomenon described in physics, referring to the change a wave undergoes when it passes from one medium to another. In this transition, certain properties (such as wavelength) are altered, while others (such as frequency) remain constant. This phenomenon provides a compelling metaphor for understanding what occurred within the field of American aesthetics. I propose that Dewey's aesthetic theory underwent neither a simplified continuity nor a complete eclipse, but rather a process of refraction, a transformation that occurred as his thought crossed into a different philosophical medium. In this process, certain features (such as thematic concerns and philosophical objectives) were altered, while others (such as core concepts) were preserved. This metaphor not only captures the theoretical dynamic at stake but also informs the methodological orientation adopted in this research.

I propose understanding "refraction" as a historiographical category designed to capture a specific and nuanced mode of philosophical reception. Refractive reception occurs when concepts or theoretical orientations are taken up within a new intellectual context and undergo transformation, displacement, or reorientation. This approach allows me to conceptualize reception as a spectrum, encompassing partial silencing, indirect transmission, selective appropriation, or the absence of explicit citation, alongside ongoing engagement. Refractive reception does not reduce these cases to narratives of total erasure or unbroken continuity; instead, it

captures the complex interplay of preservation, adaptation, and critique. Importantly, refraction should not be understood as mere conceptual similarity or parallel development: it requires historical evidence of reading, appropriation, and conceptual transformation, and serves as a lens to interpret reception without collapsing it into simple continuity or rupture.

In negative terms, refraction should therefore not be confused with mere conceptual similarity or parallel development. It does not consist in the simple comparison of concepts that appear alike or of broadly shared theoretical orientations. Rather, refraction functions as a historiographical criterion for analyzing cases of reception in which there is historical evidence of reading, appropriation, and conceptual transformation.

To ground this hypothesis historically, it is important to highlight previous historiographical work, such as that of Guyer (2014). According to his account, during the 1950s, three major lines of influence shaped aesthetic thought in the English-speaking world, particularly in the United States and the United Kingdom: the symbol theory of Ernst Cassirer and Susanne Langer, the work of Ludwig Wittgenstein, and the concepts derived from the aesthetics of John Dewey. While the impact of Wittgenstein has received substantial scholarly attention (Carreño, 1999; Lamarque, 2013; Macarthur, 2014), the contributions of Cassirer and Dewey remain largely underexplored.

This relative neglect of Dewey's influence among the historiographical triad invites a closer investigation of how his ideas were received across the analytic tradition. Accordingly, this investigation draws methodological inspiration from an approach proposed by Talisse (2007) in his critique of the eclipse narrative. Rather than presupposing the marginalization of pragmatist aesthetics, it undertakes a direct, first-hand examination of central figures and works within the dominant analytic tradition. A return to the primary texts reveals that key contributors to both the historical and contemporary analytic aesthetic canon (such as Monroe Beardsley, Morris Weitz, Arnold Isenberg, Nelson Goodman and Arthur Danto) not only demonstrate familiarity with Dewey's work but also reference him explicitly and engage critically with his concepts. It is important to clarify here that this process of refraction does not occur uniformly among these philosophers. Degrees of explicit acknowledgment of Dewey, critical engagement with his theory, and conceptual transformation vary significantly among authors. The notion of refraction is crucial precisely because it allows me to explain cases in which partial silencing coexists with ongoing conceptual appropriation, without reducing such dynamics to either complete continuity or total erasure.

The first case to be surveyed, particularly significant for the argument developed here, is that of Monroe Beardsley. Widely recognized as one of the earliest philosophers to systematically extend the scope of analytic philosophy into the field of aesthetics, Beardsley developed a critical, argumentative, and methodologically rigorous body of work (Åhlberg, 1993; Guyer, 2014; Wreen, 2024). Among the numerous articles and books he authored, commentators often highlight three major works as forming the core of his aesthetic thought (Wreen, 2024): his 1958 book *Aesthetics: Problems in the Philosophy of Criticism*, followed by *The Possibility of Criticism* (1970), and by the 1982 volume *The Aesthetic Point of View*. In addition to these, it is also worth noting his historical survey *Aesthetics from Classical Greece to the Present: A Short History*, published in 1966.

Focusing solely on the selection of his most renowned works, Dewey is mentioned as a bibliographic reference in three of the four. Perhaps the most significant of these is his presence in *Aesthetics: Problems in the Philosophy of Criticism* (1958). Dewey's name appears throughout various chapters, attesting to his influence on Beardsley's thinking. Particularly noteworthy is a footnote that states: "In the following pages, supplemented by further remarks in Note 28-B, I rely most heavily upon the work of John Dewey, Edward Bullough, I.A. Richards, and Immanuel Kant [...]" (Beardsley, 1958, p. 527). The topic under discussion is the concept of aesthetic experience, a notion that some historians (Guyer, 2014) have already noted to bear strong affinities between the two philosophers. One may consider Beardsley a successor to Dewey, insofar as he grants a central role in his theory to this very concept, which was so fundamental to the pragmatist. Beardsley's engagement with Dewey provides one of the clearest examples of what I characterize here as refractive reception. A more detailed study examining which features of Dewey's notion of aesthetic experience are preserved and which are transformed by Beardsley has yet to be undertaken.

That footnote is not the only passage in Beardsley's 1958 work that merits attention. Twenty-seven pages later, Dewey is cited again, this time in a way that more directly reveals the complexity of the intellectual relationship between the two philosophers. The reference does not suggest a linear inheritance, nor does it align with the eclipse narrative that would portray Dewey as merely superseded by analytic thought. Rather, Beardsley adopts a tone that is both appreciative and critical, acknowledging Dewey's influence while also marking a clear theoretical distance. This ambivalence is particularly revealing, as it points to a nuanced engagement in which Beardsley refrains from outright rejection while simultaneously signaling the limits of Deweyan thought for his own purposes. Given its significance, I quote the passage in full:

> John Dewey's description of aesthetic experience as "*an* experience" is rich in insight and suggestion, and deserves consideration by itself. It is presented in *Art as Experience* […]. An experience is a segment of experience in general that is demarcated from the rest by its high degree of unity. This unity consists, according to Dewey in its being pervaded by a single individualizing quality, and is intensified by other characteristics of the experience: its consummatory character (impulses aroused in the experience being carried to completion within it), its continuity (the passage from stage to stage without gaps and dead spots, so that each stage carries within it the past and the future), its rhythm (a controlled dynamism, or ordered change), its cumulativeness (a progressive massing of materials), its shape (or dominant kinetic pattern), its concentration of energy. Some of these terms, so vividly employed by Dewey, are vague and hard to pin down experimentally, yet it cannot be denied, I think that they point toward important aspects of aesthetic experience. There are passages to be pondered on nearly every page of this remarkable work, but there is not room to quote and comment on them here. Dewey's abhorrence of dualisms has, in my opinion, led him to try to erase too many indispensable distinctions, which I have been at pains to establish in the earlier chapters, but his book is full of interesting and important ideas (Beardsley, 1958, p. 554).

I consider this quotation from Beardsley's work to be especially important for qualifying the application of the eclipse narrative to the field of aesthetics. Beardsley, one of the philosophers responsible for establishing analytic aesthetics, not only adopts a laudatory tone toward Dewey's theory and his book but goes even further, his summary of the characteristics of aesthetic experience in Dewey makes it clear that he studied the pragmatist's work in depth. He knows Dewey's theory, and he is willing to acknowledge both its strengths and its limitations. Such evidence makes it difficult to sustain an unqualified version of the eclipse narrative in the field of aesthetics. The fact that Dewey's work was subject to critique and transformation does not, by itself, imply eclipse. After all, many pragmatists absorbed and transformed the work of other philosophers, such as Emerson (Shusterman, 1999) and Hegel (Dreon, 2020), and yet this has not typically been described in terms of eclipse.

The eclipse narrative would be more persuasive in Beardsley's case if he had abandoned references to, and dialogue with, Dewey over the course of his career. However, that simply did not happen. Twenty-four years after the publication of the aforementioned book, in his essay collection *The Aesthetic Point of View*, Dewey remains one of Beardsley's key

interlocutors, upon whom he draws when addressing a range of aesthetic themes. This time, the references are not situated within the context of aesthetic experience but rather emerge in a discussion of intrinsic values. At the opening of the third essay in the volume, Beardsley writes:

> Many philosophers apparently still accept the proposition that there is such a thing as intrinsic value, that is, that some part of the value of some things (objects, events, or states of affairs) is intrinsic. John Dewey's attack seems not to have dislodged this proposition, for today it is seldom questioned. I propose to press the attack again, in terms that owe a great deal to Dewey, as I understand him (Beardsley, 1982, p. 46).

Even more clearly than in the earlier citation, here Beardsley actively aligns himself with Dewey, not merely referencing him, but also positioning his own argument as a continuation of the critique first formulated by the pragmatist philosopher. This is not an ephemeral acknowledgment: Beardsley explicitly states that many of the terms and conceptual tools he employs are drawn from Dewey, or at the very least, from his reading and interpretation of Dewey's work. Such a gesture reveals not only familiarity but also intellectual affinity. At least in Beardsley's case, Dewey cannot plausibly be described as eclipsed or relegated to the margins. In this context, Dewey appears as a philosophical comrade-in-arms, an ally in the ongoing battle against the doctrine of intrinsic values.

The final passage that unequivocally confirms the significance Beardsley attributes to Dewey comes from his *Aesthetics: From Classical Greece to the Present*, published in 1966. In this work, the analytic philosopher undertook the task of composing a concise history of aesthetics, ranging from ancient Greece to his contemporary peers, highlighting what he saw as key moments in the development of the field. Dewey appears not as a marginal or transitional figure, but as a central contributor in the chapter dedicated to contemporary developments. The passage that introduces Dewey in this context is especially emphatic and deserves to be quoted in full:

> Dewey was over seventy years old when he got around to the task of working out this view fully and articulately, but his book *Art as Experience* (1934) has an air of spontaneity and new discovery, freshness of vision, enormous richness of suggestion, and a special Deweyan eloquence, with his characteristically oblique but steady and inexorable advance of argument. It is, by widespread agreement, the most valuable work on aesthetics written in English (and perhaps in any language)

> so far in our century. It is the kind of book that may lose its reader the first time around but, once it begins to open up, yields surprising new insights every time it is read; and numerous passages return to memory and ask to be quoted for the vigor or pungency with which they seem to seize upon a most important truth (Beardsley, 1966, pp. 332-333).

At the time Beardsley published his book, analytic aesthetics was already well underway, and debates within the field were flourishing. Even so, he stated that the most valuable text on aesthetics written in English in the twentieth century was Dewey's 1934 book. This claim must be taken seriously: it is neither minor, nor careless, nor incidental. It is a deliberate judgment made by one of the founding figures of analytic aesthetics (Åhlberg, 1993; Guyer, 2014; Wreen, 2024), placing a pragmatist work at the very center of the stage. As I will show in what follows, Beardsley was not the only analytic philosopher to read and engage with Dewey, though he was perhaps one of the few to do so in such an open and determined way.

Another philosopher who deserves particular attention is Morris Weitz. Like Beardsley, Weitz belonged to the first generation of thinkers to formulate an analytic approach to aesthetics (Åhlberg, 1993; Lamarque, 2013). His most influential contribution is arguably the 1956 article *The Role of Theory in Aesthetics*, in which insights drawn from Wittgensteinian philosophy were transplanted into the domain of the philosophy of art. More specifically, Weitz adapted these insights to confront one of the central questions of the time: the nature of works of art.

Although it is indisputable that Wittgenstein's legacy is the most prominent influence on Weitz, this does not mean that the philosopher did not draw upon other philosophers and traditions to build his aesthetic reflections. Dewey is one such figure who continues to appear in Weitz's work, especially in his longer publications, such as his 1950 book *Philosophy of the Arts*.

In the 1950 work, while discussing the use of form and content in works of art, Weitz writes that his analysis is based "[…] in part, upon the writings of Bell, Fry, Parker, A.C. Bradley and Dewey in aesthetics […]" (Weitz, 1950, p. 44). Here, Dewey is clearly positioned among other philosophers as a predecessor upon whom Weitz draws to develop his own reflections and with whom he enters into dialogue. This becomes even more evident two pages later, when Dewey is again mentioned in connection with another aesthetic concept. The pragmatist philosopher reappears once more in the same volume, on page 75, in the context of a discussion about design in painting. What seems particularly noteworthy here is not only that, like Beardsley, Weitz builds upon Dewey's reflections to develop his own, but

also the extent to which he appears to be familiar with Dewey's body of work. Among the references Weitz cites are not only the well-known 1934 book, but also as lesser-known texts, including some that remain obscure even among Dewey specialists today, such as the 1929 volume *Art and Education*, published by the Barnes Foundation, in which Dewey edited and contributed with three essays (Dewey et al., 1929).

Twenty-seven years later, when Weitz published *The Opening Mind: A Philosophical Study of Humanistic Concepts*, Dewey is mentioned by name only once in the main body of the text. However, it is not this reference that I wish to highlight, but rather the bibliographic sources Weitz lists as foundational for the third chapter of the book. There, Dewey's 1934 work appears alongside other major figures in the history of aesthetics such as Bell, Fry, and Coleridge and, notably, among a predominantly analytic group that includes Beardsley, Danto, Dickie, Wittgenstein, and Goodman. In this context, Dewey is treated as one contributor among others, with clear evidence of sustained engagement, even if Weitz does not seek to reproduce Dewey's ideas or position himself as his intellectual heir. On the contrary, Weitz seems to take Dewey seriously enough to read him carefully, comment on his work, and quote him as a bibliographic reference throughout his academic life.

The cases of Nelson Goodman and Arthur Danto are often taken to support the eclipse narrative; however, a closer examination suggests a more complex dynamic that is better captured in terms of refraction. Frequently identified as two of the most prominent figures in twentieth-century analytic aesthetics (Shusterman, 1987, Åhlberg, 1993; Lamarque, 2013), both display considerably less engagement with Dewey than their predecessors, such as Beardsley and Weitz. This relative disengagement is clearly reflected in their published works, where explicit references to Dewey's writings are rare, and expressions of admiration or theoretical indebtedness are largely absent. For those invested in tracing the intellectual lineage of pragmatist aesthetics, this apparent omission may lend support to the view that Dewey was indeed marginalized as the analytic tradition matured. However, this conclusion becomes more complex upon closer examination. Despite the lack of direct citation, several commentators, particularly within the pragmatist tradition, have drawn attention to conceptual resonances between Dewey's project and those developed by Goodman, for example. Indeed, in one of the few introductory books on pragmatist aesthetics, he is even listed as one of the thinkers belonging to that tradition (Małecki, 2014). In the secondary literature on aesthetics, it is quite common to find efforts to uncover broad conceptual affinities between the views of Dewey and Goodman (Shusterman, 1995; Freeland, 2001; Cometti, 2008; Belén,

2008; Tononi, 2022), particularly with regard to their treatment of the nature of art, aesthetic experience, aesthetic cognitivism, and their shared resistance to a sharp division between science and art.

Despite these recurring conceptual parallels identified in the secondary literature, Goodman's relationship to the pragmatist tradition presents a particular complexity. Unlike the philosophers previously examined, such as Beardsley and Weitz, Goodman does not make any explicit reference to Dewey in the body of his most famous books. That is, there are no direct quotations, no mentions by name, nor any of Dewey's works listed among his bibliographic sources. And yet, for readers familiar with Dewey's writings, the resonance is unmistakable. The conceptual proximity between the two philosophers becomes especially apparent when considering passages such as the one quoted below:

> For it is by activities that are shared and by language and other means of intercourse that qualities and values become common to the experience of a group of mankind. Now art is the most effective mode of communication that exists. For this reason the presence of common or general factors in conscious experience is an *effect* of art. Anything in the world, no matter how individual in its own existence is potentially common […] (Dewey, 1934/1987, p. 291).

> A third answer, bypassing the issue over practicality versus fun, points to communication as the purpose of symbolizing. Man is a social animal, communication is a requisite for social intercourse, and symbols are media of communication. Works of art are messages conveying facts, thoughts, and feelings; and their study belongs to the omnivorous new growth called 'communications theory'. Art depends upon and helps sustain society — exist because, and helps ensure, that no man is an island (Goodman, 1968, p. 257).

There are both convergences and divergences in their respective views, but the two philosophers appear closely aligned when one considers the broader framework of what is ultimately being proposed, namely, a conception of art as a form of communication, one that plays an essential role in collective and social life by helping to shape and sustain it. In both thinkers, what is individual becomes potentially communal through art. While Dewey privileges qualitative, lived experience, Goodman emphasizes a more semiotic perspective. A detailed comparison between Dewey and Goodman has yet to be undertaken; for present purposes, it is sufficient to note that, just as they seem to share the idea of art as communication,

they also appear to converge on other key points: an active conception of aesthetic experience, the continuity between science and art, the cognitive gains derived from engaging with the arts, and a rejection of the notion of the passive observer of art. Even though Goodman does not mention Dewey by name, Dewey's work nonetheless appears to remain a relevant point of comparison, at least when one considers the structure and concepts employed in Goodman's aesthetics.

Goodman's case is best understood as a suggestive borderline case for the refraction narrative. Unlike Beardsley and Weitz, whose engagement with Dewey is textually explicit, Goodman offers a much less direct form of evidence, grounded primarily in conceptual proximity rather than in demonstrable textual appropriation. For this reason, his case does not establish refractive reception in a strong sense. Nevertheless, the lack of explicit references to Dewey in Goodman's major works should not, by itself, be taken as evidence of eclipse. Rather, the indirect conceptual convergences between the two philosophers suggest a more complex field of possible transmission, selective appropriation, and conceptual transformation. At the very least, Goodman's case indicates the need for further investigation before any definitive historiographical conclusion can be sustained.

Another key figure in the analytic aesthetics tradition is Arthur Danto (Carroll, 2021). While Danto's work is occasionally compared to Dewey by interpreters within the pragmatist tradition (Mitchell, 1989; Shusterman, 2016; Haskins, 2022), particularly regarding the shared conviction that artworks cannot be fully appreciated apart from their historical and social contexts, such similarities should not be read as evidence of direct influence. Dewey appears only sporadically in Danto's writings, being mentioned in works such as *The Abuse of Beauty* (2003) and more prominently in *What Art Is* (2013), where Dewey's name appears in the preface alongside other figures: "After Kant — and Hume, before him — there were Hegel, Nietzsche, Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, and John Dewey, each delivering marvelous but conflicting theses" (Danto, 2013, p. xi). This recognition, blending acknowledgment and critique, resonates with the pattern observed in other philosophers. Furthermore, if Shusterman's (2016) account is accurate and Danto indeed supported his efforts to reconstruct pragmatist aesthetics, it suggests that Dewey was not entirely eclipsed in analytic aesthetics. Danto may not have systematically developed Deweyan themes, but his occasional acknowledgment of Dewey nonetheless complicates any straightforward account of complete eclipse. His case is better understood as a more attenuated form of refractive reception, marked by selective acknowledgment, critical distance, and conceptual divergence.

While Goodman and Danto were actively writing, other aestheticians within the analytic tradition continued to mention Dewey in their works. It is particularly noteworthy that one of the earliest essays explicitly dedicated to reflecting on analytic philosophy of art, written by Arnold Isenberg and published in 1987, includes a reference to Dewey. Although Isenberg is now a relatively obscure figure, he was a promising aesthetician in the 1950s (Guyer, 2014), and according to one of his scholars, he should be best understood as a transitional figure between pragmatist and analytic aesthetics (Mothersill, 1973). I would like to quote his passage at length, as it has been used, as previously shown in a quotation discussed earlier in this paper, by pragmatist historiography to support the eclipse narrative. However, this strikes me as a reductive reading of the philosopher's statement:

> The study of aesthetics, in the hands of professional philosophers, has always been *to some degree* analytical. The question that I consider worth serious attention is whether a more single-minded and rigorous application of analysis to aesthetic problems, by its conscious and avowed devotees, can make an important contribution. If we answer this question in the affirmative, it is not to disparage traditional and current approaches. I may cite as an example a book like Dewey's *Art as Experience*. This book is a hodgepodge of conflicting methods and undisciplined speculations. Yet it is full of profound and stimulating suggestions. One cannot help being grateful that it was written; but one may also see the need for something else (Isenberg, 1987, p. 128).

In contrast to Leddy and Puolakka's (2023) suggestion of an eclipse and overcoming of pragmatist aesthetics, what I observe in this passage is a far more complex relationship, one I prefer to characterize as refraction. It is true that a sharp critical tone is present; it is equally true, and of no lesser importance, that Dewey is also praised. Despite the problems identified, his book is regarded as profound and stimulating; Isenberg expresses appreciation, even while acknowledging that Dewey's methods and approaches must be surpassed. What I want to emphasize here is a shift in the academic environment that gives rise to a refraction of Dewey's theory: Dewey continues to be read, at times favorably acknowledged and at others critically examined, while his themes and interests are reformulated by philosophers such as Beardsley, Isenberg, and even Goodman.

The discussion developed thus far is sufficient to indicate that the eclipse narrative does not adequately capture the historical complexity of Dewey's reception in aesthetics. I now turn briefly to the present. Although it is beyond the scope of this research to revisit each of the

major aestheticians exhaustively within the analytic tradition, it remains noteworthy that Dewey's name frequently appears in the writings of many contemporary philosophers trained in this tradition. Philosophers such as Richard Wollheim (1968), Noël Carroll (2001), Jerrold Levinson (2006), Cynthia Freeland (2001), Arnold Berleant (2012), and Yuriko Saito (2007; 2022), among others, have engaged with Dewey's ideas in various ways throughout their work. This persistent presence attests not only to Dewey's enduring relevance but also to the continued significance of his contributions to ongoing debates in analytic aesthetics.

One final case worth mentioning, one that attests to the ongoing dialogue between philosophers in the analytic tradition and Dewey's pragmatism, is the work of Alva Noë. His 2015 book, *Strange Tools*, not only opens with an epigraph by Dewey, but also features Dewey by name and discusses his aesthetics across multiple chapters, with more than ten direct mentions, not to mention the bibliographic references. This continuity is further confirmed by his most recent book, *The Entanglement* (2023), which was awarded the Outstanding Monograph Prize from the American Society for Aesthetics, also in 2024. This work, like the previous one, maintains a dialogue with Dewey and at times even echoes his concepts and definitions. I believe that the references and examples presented thus far are sufficient to support my central claim.

Towards a Refraction Narrative: Rethinking Historiography

The textual evidence examined throughout this paper suggests that the eclipse narrative, while useful for describing important institutional and methodological transformations in twentieth-century philosophy, is too coarse to adequately explain what occurred in the field of aesthetics. In this domain, Dewey's reception cannot be accurately described in binary terms of presence or absence, nor simply in terms of appearance and disappearance.

A close examination of the primary texts reveals a more intricate dynamic of selective appropriation, conceptual transformation, and critical engagement, marked by varying degrees of explicit acknowledgment. Dewey's central aesthetic concerns, such as aesthetic experience, the continuity between art and life, and the critique of rigid dualisms, did not simply vanish from the analytic philosophical landscape. Rather, they were taken up, reformulated, and reinserted into analytic aesthetics, adapted to new vocabularies, interests, and methods.

The notion of refraction proposed here is intended as a historiographical lens that can account for these more complex dynamics of

reception and reappropriation. It does not deny the significance of broader historical shifts within analytic philosophy, nor does it seek to establish a straightforward line of continuity between Dewey and later analytic aestheticians. Instead, it offers a way of understanding how philosophical concepts and problems may persist through transformation, displacement, and selective uptake. This does not mean denying episodes of silence, displacement, or neglect. Rather, it means recognizing that such episodes coexisted with forms of reception and conceptual transformation that the eclipse narrative alone cannot adequately capture.

In the end, this research does not aim to offer an exhaustive theory of refractive reception, but rather to open a more nuanced avenue for interpreting Dewey's place in the history of twentieth-century aesthetics. If the refraction narrative is correct, then Dewey's aesthetics should not be understood as a lost tradition that needed to wait until the 1990s to be recovered. Rather, it should be understood as a body of thought that continued to serve as a basis for debate within a new philosophical context. In this case, just as a wave passing through a new medium alters certain properties while preserving others, Dewey's aesthetic theory underwent a process of refraction and was not erased but transfigured.

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