



European Journal of Pragmatism and American Philosophy

VIII-1 | 2016

Dewey's Democracy and Education as a Source of and a Resource for European Educational Theory and Practice

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Electronic version

URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/ejpap/457>

DOI: 10.4000/ejpap.457

ISSN: 2036-4091

Publisher

Associazione Pragma

Electronic reference

Enrico Guglielminetti, « Complete Gesture &... », *European Journal of Pragmatism and American Philosophy* [Online], VIII-1 | 2016, Online since 20 July 2016, connection on 01 May 2019. URL : <http://journals.openedition.org/ejpap/457> ; DOI : 10.4000/ejpap.457

This text was automatically generated on 1 May 2019.



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Complete Gesture &...

Enrico Guglielminetti

- 1 ... **eschatology**. Imagine: it's a sunny morning of January 20, 1961 in Washington D. C. JFK is delivering his presidential inaugural speech. He has just taken his oath of office. All of people is listening to him with attention and admiration (somebody perhaps with envy and hate). It's his complete gesture (henceforth CG), the CG both of a man and of a nation. Recognition of identity through change [A=B] takes place, from the very beginning of the presidential address, as recognition of the identity (through change) of the whole nation:

We observe today not a victory of party but a celebration of freedom – symbolizing an end as well as a beginning – signifying renewal as well as change. For I have sworn before you and Almighty God the same solemn oath our forbears prescribed nearly a century and three quarters ago.

- 2 The celebrated apex of this gesture comes just before the end: “Ask not what your country can do for you – ask what you can do for your country.” Every gesture like this carries a historical index, as Walter Benjamin would say: freedom – the core business of the nation – is endangered. It's the now-time of responsibility:

In the long history of the world, only a few generations have been granted the role of defending freedom in its hour of maximum danger. I do not shrink from this responsibility – I welcome it.

- 3 If, as Maddalena suggests, identity is recognition of identity, we can't imagine a figural (in the sense of Dante and Auerbach) re-presentation of JFK's identity, without imagining a re-occurrence of this very speech. JFK speaks presidentially, like Jesus breaks the bread and Ulysses strings the bow. Speaking is however, in the case of JFK, a political act. You cannot have/recognize his identity, without having this speech. You cannot have this speech, without having politics. You cannot have politics, without having “both sides” – friends and foes – who should negotiate: “Let us never negotiate out of fear. But let us never fear to negotiate.” The question is: what about politics/negotiation in paradise? In other words: if CG carries a historical index (“knowing that here on earth God's work must truly be our own”), and if CGs define our identity, paradise is to be represented either as erasure of identity, or as repetition of history. Something like that could be said about stringing the bow. Ulysses' gesture remains in a sense abstract, if we separate it

from its very context: the mortal conflict between Odysseus and the young suitors. How could a complete synthetic pattern run the risk of abstraction?

- 4 ... **Dido.** “*Adgnosco veteris vestigia flammae.*” Everyone remembers Dido’s words: “I recognize the signs of the old flame” (*Aen.* IV: 23). Dido’s identity depends completely on her passion-love for Aeneas. She has, in a sense, no property apart from her relationship with him. What about these strange *relational properties* (namely, intrinsic properties which *are* external relations)? The other-wordly (or eschatological) identity/recognition of identity of Dido is unthinkable, without taking into account her passiveness. Are there gestures which *are* feelings? Does the concept of CG include only the subject’s activities or does it extend also to our passivity? What does a semiotic treatment of these “signs” (*vestigia*) look like?
- 5 ... **dis-continuity.** The theory of CG inherits the pragmatist account of experience based on mathematical *continuum*. However, experience is above all dis-continuity. It’s hard to say, for instance, that Auschwitz is situated in a continuum of possibilities. The metaphor of drawing a line on a blackboard seems to suggest that possibility (the white surface) precedes actuality (the line). Experience and history, however, hardly work so. Existential possibility can be regarded as a consequence of reality, not the other way around. First comes the gesture, then its shadow (the possibility) is added to it. If we interpret actuality as the pivot, which allows for the transformation of possibility into necessity, our philosophy minimizes the unforeseeable features of reality (also the miraculous ones). So Hegel’s famous criticism of mathematics keeps on being important in philosophy. I would be glad if Maddalena’s theory of CG (which in its essence is a philosophy of freedom and actuality) could become more independent from a scheme of possibility-necessity.
- 6 ... **synthesis.** I deeply appreciate the idea of a synthetic philosophy. Synthesis, however, can be interpreted in different ways. Not necessarily synthesis excludes separation. Modernity is the time of separation, and the project of forgetting Kant seems to me dangerous, inasmuch as it implies – or seems to imply – a negative evaluation of modernity. Kantian dualism has obviously its limits, but reminds us that a thought is not reducible to a physical object, and that the world – despite its reasonableness – is always also a place of tension, separation and even madness. A synthetic philosophy need not be a philosophy of continuity and reasonableness. A complete synthetic pattern need not forget the divisions of reality, of which Kant was so aware.
- 7 ... **analysis.** Analytic philosophy fails first of all because it doesn’t deliver a real philosophical analysis. Far from reducing physics to a more fundamental *philosophical* principle (like being, becoming, the form of the Good...), analytic philosophy inherits from physics the basic bricks of reality (space-time points or what have you): physics becomes therefore the true philosophy, while philosophy is reduced to a sterile commentary of physics. We have long since no *philosophical* analysis. If we bring analysis back to its *philosophical* meaning, I do not see in principle any contradiction between philosophical analysis and philosophical synthesis.
- 8 ... **words.** Philosophy itself has its gestures. In the history of philosophy gestures are probably *words*, like *substance* for Aristotle, *One* for Plotinus, *critique* for Kant... An illustrated book of philosophy should read the *k-words* of our discipline as bodily postures. Philosophers could be pictorially represented: everyone with his gesture, with his favourite word, through which s/he makes her/his attempt to grasp and celebrate the “breadth and length and height and depth” of reality and its additions.

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