The Aesthetic Experience of Making Smoking Pipes

David G. LoConto

Department of Sociology and Social Work

Jacksonville State University

dloconto@jsu.edu

Please directly all correspondence to David G. LoConto, Ph.D., Department of Sociology and Social Work, Jacksonville State University, 700 Pelham Road North, Jacksonville, AL 36203
The Aesthetic Experience of Making Smoking Pipes

Abstract

Little has been done regarding the ideas of George Herbert Mead as they apply to aesthetics or the aesthetic experience. In addition, little has been written regarding the smoking pipes and the people who smoke them, and create them. The purpose of this paper is to introduce the ideas of both John Dewey and George Herbert Mead on the aesthetic experience as they apply to the making of smoking pipes. A typology is developed of (1) process; (2) unpredictability; (3) the artist finds the commonality of existence with the audience; (4) the art takes part in consumerism; (5) passion; and (6) the artist has to distance oneself from the siren song of life.

Through the use predominantly of analysis of pipe maker websites, as well as in-depth interviews, and analysis of online discussion boards, the attempt here is to demonstrate how pipe making is consistent with the ideas of both Dewey and Mead on the aesthetic experience.
The Aesthetic Experience of Making Smoking Pipes

Most of the research or writing regarding the aesthetic experience applies to the formal form of art. According to Irvin (2008), 95% of the articles addressing aesthetics in three prominent journals dealt with this ‘art’, 3% with nature, leaving 2% for aesthetics as it applies to everything else. This narrowness of vision removes from consideration the beauty, the splendor that can be found in other aspects of life that can reflect the aesthetic experience.

Likewise, a review of the literature on pipe smoking yields little. Most research focuses on the effects of tobacco use (Hammond 1958; Johnston and Thomas 2008; Stolberg 2007), with little to no mention amongst them of the pipe smoking community, the high culture associated with pipe smoking, nor the aesthetic experience of the pipe smoker or pipe maker. Even the smoking of cigars finds little attention from scholars. Academics have focused most of their attention, when addressing smoking, to either drugs or cigarettes.

Similarly, the attention in pragmatism toward the subject of aesthetics has focused more on John Dewey and his thoughts in the seminal piece *Art as Experience* (1934). The work of George Herbert Mead in this area has been completely ignored. Though his ideas on aesthetics echo the views of Dewey, Mead’s 1926 article on aesthetics provides a glimpse into his world view. Gradually becoming critical of the direction the world was turning, Mead ended his career writing about beauty; truth; using knowledge for good; and the importance of working together (Mead 1926, 1929; 1929a; 1929b; 1929c). The current work takes the ideas of both Dewey and Mead on the aesthetic experience and applies them to the making of smoking pipes. A typology is created to demonstrate that pipe making fits the criteria both Dewey and Mead used in addressing the aesthetic experience.
Experience

Perception and experience are critical elements for both Dewey and Mead. Their early writings demonstrated the necessity for understanding the relationship of the physical environment and consciousness. Mead wrote in 1894 that the knowledge and experience of people can only be ascertained through the sensory stimulation within the context of the physical world (Mead 1894). Dewey echoed similar sentiments that action is dependent upon the coordination of the body with physical stimuli on how something is experienced (1896). Knowledge gathered through these experiences would then have a cumulative effect on how people perceive further stimuli. So the coordination Dewey is referring to occurs within the individual, as well as with the outside world. People’s experiences are influenced and possibly determined by past experiences and knowledge of what is, which was garnered through coordination with the environment. The socialization process provides this framework. This socialization process teaches people how to experience the world around them.

Some 32 years later in his continued focus on this relationship, Mead wrote, “The proximate goal of all perception is what we can get our hands upon. If we traverse the distance that separates us from that which we see or hear and find nothing for the hand to manipulate, the experience is an illusion or a hallucination” (Mead 1926, p. 382). This getting our hands on something is consistent with his thoughts on action, saying it followed a four step process of (1) impulse; (2) perception; (3) manipulation; and (4) consummation (Mead 1938). Physical things are used as a means to an end (Mead 1926). These physical things are there to fulfill the hearts and desires of humans (Mead 1926).

Mead however went one step further. He was concerned that people had lost sight of the interconnectedness of human perception, human possibility and the physical environment around
them. Instead, a bifurcation had developed. Due in part to industrialization and the developing fast paced lifestyles, people had lost sight of these connections, and in doing so had become isolated and distant from enjoyment; real enjoyment. Or as Dewey suggested, an experience (Dewey 1934). Through industrialization, and in the name of ‘progress’, people were increasingly getting caught up in the siren song of life. Mass production of goods was laying the foundation for losing touch with the world and the beauty within the world (Mead 1926).

Like Mead, Dewey bought into the ideas of action, perception, and experience. An experience occurs when there is interaction within the physical world which finds consummation. This creates a demarcation, or breach, much like what Mead suggested with the act, as well as his thoughts on consentient sets or specious presents (1910; 1926a; 1929). These breaks provide clarity for they distinguish objects and events. Without them, everything would be a blur. But for Dewey, a real experience provides something special. A feeling where people know they did in fact, take part in something extraordinary. In these types of experiences there is no break in flow. There might be pauses, places of rest, but they define the quality of a movement (Dewey 1934). A unity develops “that pervades the entire experience in spite of the variation of its constituent parts” (Dewey 1934, p. 37). “The action and its consequence must be joined in perception. The relationship is what gives meaning; to grasp it is the objective of all intelligence” (Dewey 1934, p. 44).

Emotion comes into play as they are inherent in experiences (Dewey 1934). Yet emotions are complex events that continually change. Emotions are attached to events, to objects, to things in general, and provide the unity needed for an experience. They are not isolated. Emotion is associated with the self, because the self is associated with a specific context, therefore emotion becomes an isolated event which ebbs and flows dependent upon the movement the person is
engaged (Dewey 1934). The qualities assured in the experience will be the unity which insures that these ebbs and flows for the aesthetic will be apparently seamless.

The Non-Aesthetic Experience

Both Dewey and Mead account for the non-aesthetic with similar themes. For Dewey, there are two aspects of the non-aesthetic: (1) loose succession that does not begin at any particular place and ends at no particular place; and (2) arrest and constriction, where there is only mechanical connection with one another. This is why the aesthetic stands out. It contrasts sharply from these two points. Enemies of the aesthetic are the humdrum, slackness of loose ends, routing, abstinence, coercion, incoherence, and aimlessness (Dewey 1958; Mead 1926).

This was evident as the manufacturing base of American society and Western civilization in general, were developing. Assembly lines were creating a different format for creation. Both Dewey and Mead saw this as routine. Dewey wrote, “The existence of activities that have no immediate enjoyed intrinsic meaning is undeniable. They include much of our labors in home, factory, laboratory and study” (1958, p. 362). They are not art. These things are useful in that they fulfill a need. Echoing the same sentiments as Dewey, Mead refers back to his thoughts on alienation, and the problems associated with socialization that leads to an ignorance of seeing the beauty of things. He wrote,

Closer at hand we see the routine and drudgery of countless uninterested hands and minds fashion in factories and mines the goods for which men give their wealth and themselves, and in the enjoyment of which men may be bound together in common interests which were quite divorced from their manufacture. Indeed, this is the definition of drudgery, the blind production of goods, cut off from all the interpretation and inspiration of their common enjoyment. It is the tragedy of industrial society that division of labor can
interrelate and exploit the social nature of men's technical production so far in advance of their common fruitions, that all the earned significance of the work of our hands is foreign to its elaborate technique (Mead 1926, pp. 383-384).

So the evil of the non-aesthetic is to ignore the association and interrelatedness of all of nature, but specifically in this sense, the interrelationship and dependency of humans with their environment (Dewey 1934; Follett 1918; Mead 1926).

Art and the Aesthetic Experience

For both Dewey and Mead, it is impossible to separate out art from the artist, as well as the consumer of such products (Dewey 1934; Mead 1926). Both see art as a process. More importantly the artist is an intellectual, where they have the knowledge and abilities necessary to carry out a thought and create something aesthetic. Throughout the process of creation, the artist largely knows how the art will end prior to consummation. Their knowledge, their expertise allows for this process. Yet, at the same time, the fluidity of the environment and the predictable unpredictability of nature ushers in a semblance of unknown. There can be an ending that is different than originally planned, albeit, still within the framework of expectations of the artist (Dewey 1934; Mead 1926). Everything interrelates to the other, and is cumulative. As Mead stated, “When one stops in his common labor and effort to feel the surety of his colleagues, the loyalty of his supporters, the response of his public, to enjoy the community of life in family, or profession, or party, or church, or country, to taste in Whitmanesque manner the commonalty of existence, his attitude is aesthetic” (1926, pp. 385-386).

Beyond the knowledge and abilities however is also the passion and the love for the work that is being created (Dewey 1934). The artist with this passion is able to perceive what the audience will see within the creation (Dewey 1934; Mead 1910). This receptivity of the
audience is not passivity. This is the difference between perception and recognition. Perception is reconstructive doing. Whereas recognition we fall back upon a previously formed scheme. It is much like a stereotype. Recognition does not stir anything within us that is new and inspiring. Perception is emotional throughout the body and soul in connection with the object. It involves surrender. Also, the creation of experiences of the beholder must be comparable to the creator of the art. Of course, when this happens, what occurs is that this can have an instrumental effect on the price of the object. Therefore in the market system that governs most of the art world, pieces of art will yield what the market offers. Mead stated,

What is peculiar to it is its power to catch the enjoyment that belongs to the consummation, the outcome, of an undertaking, and to give to the implements, the objects that are instrumental in the undertaking, and to the acts that compose it something of the joy and satisfaction that suffuse its successful accomplishment. . . . To so construct the object that it shall catch this joy of consummation is the achievement of the artist. To so enter into it in nature and art that the enjoyed meanings of life may become a part of living is the attitude of aesthetic appreciation (Mead 1926, p. 384).

What is interesting about Mead’s comment is that he sees this as natural occurring phenomena; that humans are naturally this way. It is something people desire and strive for. It is a necessity of humanity. The passion that is accounted for in the aesthetic experience is not simply appreciative in the sense of love. It is an action, therefore, there are other alternative emotions associated with the perceived art: “Our affective experience, that of emotion, of interest, of pleasure and pain, of satisfaction and dissatisfaction, may be roughly divided between that of doing and enjoying, and their opposites, and it is that which attaches to finalities that characterizes aesthetic experience” (Mead 1926, p. 385). Beyond this however, Mead is
concerned with the siren song of life, and its effects on having these aesthetic experiences, and the creation of art. The mechanical nature of industrial society, as well as the multiphrenia associated with postindustrial society influences people to become too busy, and lets the aesthetic nature of life go unrecognized (Gergen 1991; Mead 1926). It is with this thought in mind that the nature of the pipes, and their creation which returns us to the aesthetic.

Methodology

This is an ongoing study that is utilizing multiple qualitative methods as a means of triangulating information, and facilitating further understanding of the pipe community, pipe smoking, and the making of pipes. In that regard, historical analysis, in-depth interviews, participant observation at smoking pipe shows, unobtrusive observation at smoking pipe businesses, analyses of pipe maker websites and online discussion boards are being utilized.

Historical analysis is critical in framing pipe smoking. Due to the lack of information in academic literature on pipe smoking and pipes in general, there needs to be some form of history provided to give the reader an understanding of the evolution of the pipe and its relationship to human experience. Therefore a brief accounting of the history of the pipe is provided.

I also conducted in-depth interviews with eight well-known throughout the world pipe makers in Europe and North America via email and in person. Ongoing research will yield more interviews with pipe makers. The expectation is that as I gain further access to the pipe smoking community, interviews will become more common place. Analysis was also done of 66 websites of pipe makers of international notoriety. These websites were identified through examining online pipe stores, discussion boards, and through reading pipe smoking literature. In other words, the pipe community has recognized these 66 individuals as some of the best pipe makers in the world.
In addition, analysis was conducted on discussion board threads addressing the issues of aesthetics, pipe making, and the pipe smoking experience. There are literally thousands of threads by pipe smokers from around the world addressing a diverse amount of topics, from pipe shapes, weight of pipes, how to smoke pipes, the type of tobacco one smokes etc. There is almost an endless supply of discussion topics. Identification of these threads was driven specifically on subject material, with those addressing the various qualities of pipes, their materials, and the quality of smoke.

The History of the Pipe

The first mention of smoking is credited to Herodotus and the Greeks in the 5th century B.C, though the activity predates this (Crole 1999; Goldring 1973). Archeologists have uncovered pottery, statues, and hieroglyphics that go back nearly 3000 years. Smoking was depicted in three ways as a means of, (1) socialization; (2) relaxation; and (3) contemplation.

Socializing was evident as people would gather around a fire and ‘drink’ smoke (Crole 1999; Jeffers 1998; Newcombe 2006). This provided a context where people would sit, inhale smoke, and then converse with each other about the goings on of the day. Likewise, for many Native Americans, the smoking of the pipe was symbolic of people coming together out of respect (Crole 1999; Goldring 1973). As part of this ritual, smoking came to be recognized as something to do to facilitate relaxation (Newcombe 2006; Schrier 2009). Because most smoking was either done with a pipe, or some type of device that utilized a bowl, smoking was not something that one did ‘on the run’ (Crole 1999). So people would sit, interact with each other, and relax. Smoking was also a time for deep reflection, and came to be associated with ritual practices of many groups of people as a means for developing thought (Crole 1999; Newcombe 2006; Weber 1965). The tobacco in a pipe was viewed as having a calming effect, which would facilitate lucid
thought. And from 1500 through the late 1800s, pipe smoking ruled supreme in the Western world.

The form of the modern pipe followed the designs of Native Americans (See Figure 1). Whether they are carved from clay meerschaum, or briar, through shape and style, pipe smokers and the makers of pipes today owe their designs largely to the inspiration of at least 2000 years of Native American pipe making (Crole 1999). Native Americans made pipes from stone, wood, and clay. Their styles were diverse and reflected the world around them and the purposes they would be used. These pipes were some of the first items that Europeans traded for upon arrival in the Americas (Crole 1999; Goldring 1973). Through this trade process, pipes made their way to England and gradually became popular in England. The British, more conservative in nature, recreated pipes that reflected also their conservative nature (See Figure 2). These pipes followed the more conservative nature of the British. English pipe shapes then, as are today tend to be more straight, billiard shapes, light, and easy to control. Through trade and conquest, the English moved on to Holland where they used clay as a pipe material that came to dominate pipe making for 150 years (Crole 1999; Goldring 1973; Weber 1965). Throughout the 17th and 18th centuries, while pipes were popular for all classes, they became established as part of the leisure class, and would be seen at coffeehouses, with long stemmed pipes (churchwardens) becoming popular, demonstrating the ability to sit and
relax, holding the pipe, instead of clenching it in one's mouth. By the 18th and 19th centuries, English pipe makers, as well as the Danes were now sculpting pipes to also reflect nature, especially nature that was far away. Images of Africans, Buffalo, and wolves were common. Pipes were a means to demonstrate a sophisticated knowledge of the world.

In the mid 19th century, Europeans discovered briar, which to this day is the staple material for the smoking pipe. As Weber describes briar, “Rugged, durable, very nearly fireproof, and boasting a handsome grain and a finish that often improves with age, the briar is deservedly titled the King of Pipes” (1965, p. 84). Briar is found from the heath tree which grows throughout the Mediterranean. While typically it enjoys life in moist, heavy rainfall areas, “the best briar comes from the areas least suited to its cultivation. On rock-strewn deserts, atop arid mountains, and in such bouldered woodlands as those found in Sardinia, where the heath tree must battle for its life, the bush, or knob at the confluence of the tree’s roots, attains the toughest, tightest grain” (Weber 1965, pp. 85-86). The briar root of the heath tree, when growing in arid conditions, is struggling for its life. In doing so, instead of growth aimed at its branches and leaves, is focused upon the root. Slow growth is demonstrated through tight grain with uniform lines. The briar desired is one that typically is 100 to 300 years old, and set to dry for five to ten years, or longer. Once harvested the briar root is placed in boiling water to let the sap and other oils seep out. The briar is then air dried and kept dry until ready for shaping. Little has changed over the past 150 years in this process, though the tools are much more diverse, and can facilitate a much different looking pipe.

With the advent of ‘acceleration’ and the cigarette, pipes gradually became more and more obsolete. Acceleration is the phenomenon where the act of smoking increases as it becomes simpler. The cigarette came to reflect industrialization and capitalism. Everything was fast and
economical. You can smoke cigarettes doing work and play. One can smoke a cigarette in five to seven minutes. To smoke a bowl from a pipe would require 30 minutes to three hours. This actually had a devastating effect on the pipe business. Gradually companies could no longer mass produce pipes for profit as fewer and fewer pipes were being bought. People were in too much of a hurry to relax and smoke a pipe. After World War II the art of the personalized touch on pipes took off, and the modern era of pipes came to be.

The Return of the Pipe

Prior to World War II, while some companies took great pride in hand crafted, individually produced pipes, most companies utilized mass produced pipes to reduce cost and make them available to the average person. With the loss of business however to cigarettes, the mass production of pipes was difficult to maintain. So this new hand crafted pipe era began. Jakob Groth defines the modern day pipe maker “as an artisan who makes pipes from start to finish. The pipe is the creation of one person; he takes care of the whole process himself. Furthermore, an artisan pipemaker shapes his pipes by hand. A pipe factory shapes its pipes from a master pipe as a template and produces a series of exactly the same pipes. A pipemaker’s pipe is individual and no two pipes are identical” (Groth 2009).

As Kirk Bosi (2010), American pipe maker wrote,

Important design features include tobacco holes cut with a custom drill bit that is tapered shaped to allow a better draw and thicker bowl walls to maximize cool smoking. Draft holes are drilled 4.3mm tapered down to the button of the stem to allow a 4mm to 4.25mm bit thickness at the flair end of the stem. All the pipes are coated with Carnauba Wax which allows the bowl to breathe while protecting the wood from oils and
impurities. So if your pipe is stamped with the BOSI logo, you know it has met a serious standard of pipe-making craftsmanship not found in machine pipes.

This new attitude and era owes much of its impetus to Sixten Ivarsson. Taking advantage of the damage done to English production of pipes by World War II, Ivarsson began making pipes by hand after the war. He took the traditional English billiard and developed variations into his own style (See Figure 3). Though his pipes sold for anywhere between five and 10 times the cost of manufactured pipes, they gained in popularity quickly.

By the 1960s, and the improvements in global trade, Ivarsson’s ideas were now being witnessed by people throughout the Western world. Here enters the Pesaro school of pipe making in Northern Italy. The Pesaro style, or school, is most closely associated with Mastro de Paja and Ser Jacopo and the man behind both companies—Giancarlo Guidi, who currently runs Ser Jacopo, but previously headed up the pipe making team at Mastro de Paja. According to Guidi and others, the Pesaro school was created in the 1960s and 1970s by small groups of local craftsmen who then splintered off into the various brands. The cross-pollination of ideas generated during the early years established the Pesaro school and that exchange of ideas continues today. Il Ceppo and Mastro de Paja are the oldest brands from the area that still make pipes, with Guidi splitting off from Mastro de Paja in 1982 to found Ser Jacopo. Georgio Imperatori, who founded Il

![Figure 3 Traditional Sixten Ivarsson shapes.](image-url)
Ceppo, worked with Giancarlo Guidi in the very early Pesaro school days, before Guidi founded Mastro de Paja. Similarly, Bruto Sordini of Don Carlos got his start under Guidi at Mastro de Paja. Many of the newer Italian brands, such as Rinaldo and L’Anatra, also have close ties to one of the older companies.

The Pesaro school is most traditionally neoclassical. This means they took classic English shapes and recreated them in new and interesting ways (See Figure 4). Shapes are in many cases determined by the grain--certainly not to the degree that many Danish, German and American pipes are--but unlike most English pipes (especially in years past), the Pesaro school certainly considers straight, consistent grain in the making of their pipes. Looking back at the beginning of the 21st Century, this seems almost obvious. However, in the 1960s, neither the Italian pipe renaissance, nor the Danish revolution spurred by Sixten Ivarsson, had fully developed. Until then, while this type of grain was considered positive, if it happened, it happened by accident. One need only look at Dunhills, GBDs, Barlings, Comoys and other great English pipes from the 1950s and before to see this.

Combining this regard for traditional shapes with a concern for grain, one begins to understand the Pesaro pipe. Other influences are involved also, though. For lack of a better descriptor, Pesaro pipes look Italian. English pipes reflect British culture, perhaps best articulated by traditional, refined elegance. Italian pipes, like Italian cars, are thematically more modern and more chic in their elegance.
Though the pipe business continued to dwindle, hand-made pipes gradually found their place amongst a smaller collection of pipe smokers. In the 1990s, the Internet began to play a role in what American pipe maker Mark Tinsky referred to as the Renaissance of pipe smoking (Tinsky 2009). Pipe makers began utilizing personal websites to sell their pipes directly to the public. The advent of Paypal and other online payment systems allowed for pipe makers from around the world to reach pipe smokers globally and directly. Selling directly to the public created more profit for the pipe maker while avoiding sharing profit with retail businesses. In addition, the development of an interest in Estate Pipes created a lure similar to that of antique cars. Estate Pipes are previously owned pipes. Most are smoked and can be bought for a minimum of the cost of the brand new pipes through retail stores as well as online stores and Ebay. That served to introduce previously costly pipes to newer pipe smokers. What it did in addition was also to create a desire for ‘high grade’ pipes. If a pipe smoker can buy a high grade pipe that brand new retails for $1000, for only $200, it changes the pool of pipes the pipe smoker considers for purchase. Instead of only looking at pipes in the $100 to $250 cost, the pipe smoker then also observes what the higher grade pipe makers are creating. This inevitably leads to more sales of higher end pipes as the desire for the pipe overrides budgetary concerns. This is jokingly referred to by pipe smokers as PAD, ‘pipe acquisition disorder’. PAD is defined as, “a somewhat benign affliction that causes the victim to always feel as if he or she needs "that” pipe. The outward manifestation of the disorder is the constant procurement of pipes” (Davison 2010).

Another contribution to the increase in pipe smoking was the collapse of the global economy in September of 2008. With many people around the world no longer having money for travel and other endeavors, pipe smoking found a niche. Life began to slow down. People are now spending more time relaxing at home instead of being on the go. In addition, it is more
costly to smoke cigarettes than to buy a pipe and simply replace the tobacco. So pipe smoking has caught on in recent years.

The Aesthetic Experience of the Pipe

Taking the ideas of both Dewey and Mead, a typology of the aesthetic experience can be applied to pipe making: (1) process; (2) unpredictability; (3) the artist finds the commonality of existence with the audience; (4) the art takes part in consumerism; (5) passion; and (6) the artist has to distance oneself from the siren song of life.

It may be obvious that a pipe simply does not appear out of nowhere. There is a process involved. While many pipe makers address the curing processes and how this drives out resins from the briar, going over details of the process of pipe making, Fritz Becker (2010) explained it differently. Jewish born in Vienna, he later took residence in Italy to avoid racial persecution during World War II. His son Paolo has since kept up the family business. However, Fritz wrote on the Becker Pipes website regarding the process of pipe making:

To be able to create an object so precious, it is necessary to pay particular attention to the various moments of its creation, beginning with the accurate choice of the briar and its perfect seasoning, to the final hand-working of each shape, piece by piece. This explains why the number of pipes that leave my workshop is so limited. I am certain that the most refined smoker and collector will find as much satisfaction in smoking the "Becker Pipe" as I felt when I conceived it, shaped it and finished it in my workshop.

This sentiment is common among pipe makers. They view what they are doing as creating something special, unique, and involving time and energy. It is a process that requires that the pipe maker be a craftsman, and an expert. The pipe maker takes great pride in what is being created. Carlo Scotti (2010), who began Castello Pipes, wrote, “I run a craftsman’s shop, not a
factory, my pipes are works of art, fruit of expert hands, heart, and fantasy.” The art of pipe making is indeed a process that goes beyond simply making cuts, sanding, and staining.

The process is often referred to as a conversation between the pipe maker and the briar with which one works. Todd Johnson (2010), an American pipe maker who speaks often throughout his website about the aesthetics of what he produces writes,

Yes, a pipe must be properly and precisely engineered, but I do not concede that form should function. Rather the two should be fiercely intertwined and viewed singularly as a composition, as apparent in a Billiard as in a Ballerina. My work draws mainly on the traditions of Danish modernism, but it is inspired by everything from Italian automotive design to ancient Japanese weaponry and armor.

This ‘conversation’ illustrates the process associated with pipe making as it reflects the interaction with the physical world that both Dewey and Mead refer. Pipe makers are working with briar root and taking what the briar gives. They could use putty to fill pits in the briar, but they instead work with what nature gives them and through this process create something special in their eyes, and to the pipe smoker.

Likewise, this process is also unpredictable. There is no telling what could occur while carving through a piece of briar. As many pipe makers have attested, there is a frustration that develops when what seems to be a perfectly fine piece of briar that has a pit in the center that ruins the pipe being made. As Todd Bannard, a Canadian pipe maker said,

REALLY nice briar is expensive, and you can either buy it specially selected, or just buy a ton of briar and sort through for the awesome blocks. Excellent blocks are still fairly common. PERFECT blocks are not. Many a pipe gets rusticated at the last second when some treacherous pit shows up (Brothers of Briar 2009c).
Rainer Barbi, who began making pipes in 1974, is known as one of the great German pipe makers. With regard to the unpredictability of making pipes, Barbi (2010) writes: “In a dialogue between the nature of the block and my own ideas, a rough shape is sawn. I hope to have understood what the wood is telling me, but due to [the] Babylonic diversity of language, I can never be sure.” Scott Thile (2010), an American pipe maker said it simply, “My goal is to incorporate the individual esthetics and smoking characteristics of each piece of briar.” This unpredictability manifests itself in diverse ways. It is not unusual for pipe makers to simply take a piece of briar that has pits and rusticate it or blast it, which effectively removes or hides the pits by creating the entire surface of the pipe to mimic this effect. Others, like Marco Biagini of Moretti Pipes throws out any pieces of briar that have pits. He does not rusticate them. He tries to accentuate the flame grain of the briar as much as possible. Like others however, he takes what the briar gives, and does not force anything (personal communication December 20, 2009).

An integral aspect of aesthetics is that the artist must find a commonality of existence with the audience. Given that all pipe makers observed, smoke a pipe, their knowledge and experiences with pipes comes into play with their creations. They see what the audience sees much of the time, though each pipe maker has their specific fans. There are still enough numbers of pipe smokers to identify diverse number of styles from which to choose. On the American pipe maker Lee Van Erck’s website (2010), it is said of him, “Lee himself believes that his pipes appeal to smokers because he himself has been smoking pipes for 35 plus years and he personally knows what appeals to the dedicated pipesmoker. When he creates a pipe, he strives for one that is eye-catching, expresses the natural grain in the briar, feels good in the hand, and above all, smokes well.” Going beyond ‘knowing’ what the pipe smoker wants, the pipe maker also has contact with pipe smokers to know what is desired. J. Alan Burt-Gracik (2010), an
American pipe maker states, “I remain interested in dialogue with my clients to fit the needs of their collections and to expand my artistic boundaries. I welcome contact with current and potential customers, and hope to best meet the needs of each.” Likewise, Jan Zeman (2010), a New Zealand pipe maker says,

When I create a pipe, I try to make it a personal item that is an extension of the smoker that receives it. I feel that this is my way of bringing a little joy and pride into the lives of my fellow smokers. I try to create pipes that I think a fellow pipe smoker will be proud of, enjoy and get the most value for the money. I want to create pipes that will bring pleasure to the true pipe lovers, rather then trying to produce smoking utensils for the masses.

This mentality is not necessarily shared by all pipe makers. Though all agree there is a desire to create pipes that are appealing to the pipe smoker, some know their limitations. As American pipe maker, Thomas Bahder (2010) says, “All a pipe maker can do is make a pipe that he himself likes. The rest must be judged by each smoker.”

Still some pipe makers recognize the relationship they have with the consumer, the pipe smoker. They recognize there is more to the story than simply purchasing a pipe to smoke. There is something more to the relationship. It is not unusual for men pipe smokers to talk about their pipes as though they were talking about a cherished woman. They strive to take care of her acting out the stereotypical masculinity of days gone by. They protect and them themselves responsible for her. Beyond that however is the person who made that cherished woman. The ‘Creator’ if you will. As Michael Lindner (2010) wrote,

A look at any number of brands – from mid-line to high-end – will show that engineering can be all over the map from mediocre to perfect. So why do we as collectors prefer pipes
from Ulf instead of Per, or Teddy instead of Lars? Because each pipe maker brings something beyond styling, beyond engineering, beyond materials, to the pipes they make. They bring a little bit of themselves.

There is some kind of connection that exists. When the pipe maker creates that instrument of enjoyment, as the pipe is an extension of identity for the pipe smoker, it is also an extension for the pipe maker. The pipe smoker however achieves a sense of oneness with the creator of the pipe. In many ways the pipe smoker is trying very hard to show the pipe maker that they deserve their creation.

The capitalist consumption of a product suggests there also is a monetary cost involved. Pipes range in price from $3 for a corn cob pipe to well over $15,000. There are various reasons for the variety of cost, from the reputation of the pipe maker, the rarity of the grain, or the rarity of the materials. As one pipe smoker said,

First there's the necessity of good briar and good engineering (proper drilling and formation of the airway, tight tolerances in the mortise/shank gap, a well designed bit end) to make a good smoking pipe, and that takes skill, good materials and labor (read, ya gotta spend the time to do it right). These basic factors put you right into the $150 - $250 minimum range with a couple of exceptions like Stanwell and Peterson who can manage to put out some fine pipes for a bit less (though there can be a bit of a crap shoot with the drilling at times as, I believe, they rely on a set of design practices and allow for some slop here and there). You spend less you get less with regards to material quality, engineering aptitude and the slop factor. You spend more, you're now into the aesthetics area and are playing with an entirely different set of factors, as in what is art worth, what
is a craftsman’s time worth, what is the market bearing for his work . . . (Brothers of Briar 2009).

While another said,

The first time I spent more than 100 bucks on a pipe, I remember telling myself, "what the hell did I do?" Then I smoked it... It was like a splash of water on a 100 degree day... My pipes make me a better employee too. Used to be, if the boss asked me to stay late, I had the attitude, of "aw shit." Now I secretly say, "Yes, another Tinsky for my collection!" My entire perspective has changed. If you have enough smokers, I would still save for an extra month and get the pipe you really want. It will even be more rewarding when you do get it (Brothers of Briar 2009a).

Still another said,

We all know that what you get for the money with high grades is design style, attention to detail, fantastic workmanship and (of course) resale value. I don't care how sweet that Stanwell smokes, it won't fetch a fraction of what a Castello with a poor drilling will. And then there's the anomaly issue - is that wonderful cheapo a fluke? Is that 4K Collection a pipe that slipped through the cracks of quality control and only a statistical outlier? I'm sitting here smoking an S. Bang horn filled with G&H Louisiana flake and it's pure heaven, a cool even smoke with no moisture and perfect draw - a pipe that barely even gets warm to the touch. I know enough guys who also own Bangs to know that they smoke wonderfully, the reputation proves that they are great smoking instruments, and that Per and Ulf have made engineering a priority and intend that their pipes be smoked. (Brothers of Briar 2009b)
Ultimately, the cost of the pipe is what the market yields. As American pipe maker Rad Davis says, “the rarity of the grain is what influences the price;” (personal communication January 5, 2010). Yet, Moretti has a pipe that is advertised for over $1600 whose stem is made of an amber fossil that is said to be approximately 40 million years old. And while rusticated and blasts have traditionally been used to cover up imperfections in the briar, blasts have gained in popularity recently and it is not unusual for some blasts to sell for over $3000 now.

Another important aspect of the aesthetic experience is that of passion. At a pipe show in St. Louis, where there were over 90 tables set up selling over 2,000 pipes and various products associated with pipes, emotion was everywhere. Pipe smokers were in amazement looking at the pipes they so desired. Pipe makers were telling stories of the process they went through in making a particular pipe. They were talking about how much they liked a particular pipe. How the effort was extreme with a particular pipe they struggled with. Ultimately what was heard was the excitement found amongst everyone talking about pipes, pipe smoking, and the creation of these pieces. American pipe maker, Will Purdy (2010) said,

Time spent smoking a pipe is a magical thing. I feel it promotes deep thinking, sparks pontification, and can facilitate relaxation and contentment as well. A good smoke is far from time lost, it is, I think, time recaptured. The world of pipe smokers is filled with fine people. Every time I have the pleasure of attending a pipe show, I am filled with a sense of community. Laughter, liquor, and passion abound.

I think making pipes is all about passion. Pipes that are made with it show it. There is a “there there.” An “it” factor appears. They pass passion to their owners – offer pride, and a satisfaction – whether they are in the hand or on the rack. They come in wonderful shapes, and wear the wonder of the grain of the briar on their faces. . . . Pipes spend our
days on this earth with us. They share our triumphs, help lessen our sorrows, never judge. Time passes, yet they remain constant. The pipes that gave me pleasure when I was 18 and still had a rogue pimple or two, still do the same today now that my hair has begun to turn loose and grow gray. Even their names are inviting: Bulldog, Apple, Prince, Billiard, Dublin, Pot. Well maybe not Pot, but how about Cherrywood? Ahhhh!

Associated with the aesthetic experience is leaving the hustle and bustle of industrial and postindustrial society and taking the time to inhale life. For the pipe maker this is what attracts them to the lifestyle of the pipe.

People who do not smoke pipes often think of pipe smoking as simply a nicotine habit. In most cases, nothing could be farther from the truth. For most people, pipe smoking is not based on getting a nicotine kick. Instead, pipe smoking provides a meditative relaxation during which one can reflect on the passage of the day, and on life itself.

Those people who participate in the Fellowship of the Briar know exactly what I am talking about. Unfortunately, it takes significant time to develop the skill to smoke a pipe without burning your tongue and experiencing other problems. This investment of time creates an obstacle to participating in, and getting the benefits of, The Fellowship of the Briar. For me, pipe smoking lets me see the complete insanity of our hectic lives, and to place it in a context to better deal with it (Bahder, 2010).

There is this distancing oneself from the siren song of life. The lure of the hunt in everyday life has kept everyone busy. So much so that George Ritzer refers to this as McDonaldization, the process where life becomes predictable and efficient (Ritzer 2007). Life follows the rules of the fast food industry. People are in a hurry for instant gratification. Seemingly out of Fahrenheit 451, people get caught up with a life that has express lanes in grocery stores, drive through dry
cleaners, ATMs, automatic deposits, carpool lanes, cell phones, wireless Internet and a host of other things to create the illusion of getting things always in the ‘now’ (Bradbury 1950). Pipe making and pipe smoking return the pipe maker and smoker into a slower paced life.

A pipe smoker may signify a jazz musician or a silent hunter surveying a craggy vista. Smoking a pipe is often considered a dignified action of the thoughtful. In this sense a pipe is the catalytic accoutrement to a moment’s reflection. As a pipe maker it is my pleasure to provide an original, handmade object for someone. The right pipe is a gift that will accompany somebody through time (Burt-Gracik 2010).

The thoughtful is part of the history of pipe smoking. The pipe maker is creating for the pipe smoker the pleasure of taking the time to reflect on time. As Thomas Bahder wrote,

*I call my pipes Renaissance Pipes--a reminder of days when things were individually made, one at a time, for better or worse. I feel that Renaissance Pipes aptly describes my pipes. I hope that, for some people, my pipes can help provide pleasurable moments of contemplation* (Bahder 2010).

Or,

*The connection between smoking and spirituality has already been well-documented; one need only look at the Native Americans to see strong examples of this (although this is only one of many). However, as a pipe maker I have become acutely aware of a strong connection to spirituality in making pipes. When I am working on my pipes, when I’m “in the zone”, it’s very similar to the peace one feels when meditating – my mind becomes still, my focus becomes singular, and I “let go” of all external influences. It is a time of rejuvenation and introspection* (Lindner 2010).
Conclusion

The creation of the pipe and the process which it follows is that which is stipulated by Dewey and Mead in their representation of the aesthetic experience. From start to finish, pipe makers proceed through (1) the process of the creation of the pipe; (2) the unpredictability associated with working with natural materials; (3) finding the commonality of existence with the audience; (4) experiencing consumerism with what they create; (5) the passion associated with their creation; all the while experiencing distance one feels from the siren song of life.

The ‘art’ of the pipe is mentioned by most. It is an endeavor that provides for some a mystical revelation of eras gone by; of a communal conversation with nature; of relationship building with people around the world. Though people come from different backgrounds, there is a comradery that unites people much like that discussed by Mead at the end of his career. There is this international mindedness that goes beyond borders and governments.

This paper has attempted to demonstrate that the art of pipe making is indeed an aesthetic experience. Future research can further develop this endeavor. In addition, given that pipe shows and clubs are all over the United States and other parts of the world, it would appear a virgin territory for analysis. Areas of study can also include collective behavior, identity building, high culture, as well as political motivation regarding taxes on tobacco. All these are part of the pipe community. What is certain is that within this community there is a wealth of data that has yet to be tapped.
References


