John Dewey (1859-1952) is probably the greatest of American pragmatist philosophers and certainly the most influential for cultural criticism and aesthetics. His voluminous writings cover all the major philosophical disciplines, and among his primary themes are naturalism, instrumentalism, experience and experimentation, and an antifoundationalist historicism that sees philosophical problems as the reflection of real practical problems that emerge through social and scientific change. Apart from his eminence as a professional philosopher, Dewey was also an important public figure, a controversial educational reformer, and an outspoken supporter of the labor movement and other progressive causes. Not only his ethics and politics but also his epistemology and philosophy of science were deeply imbued with a commitment to participatory democracy and the openness of inquiry.

I shall concentrate here on Dewey's aesthetics as represented primarily in *Art as Experience* (1934), which, however, involves much more than aesthetics as traditionally conceived. Though Dewey's aesthetics initially aroused much interest among artists and critics as well as philosophers, it was, in academic circles, totally eclipsed by analytic philosophy of art, which by and large dismissed Dewey's aesthetic theory as "a hodge-podge of conflicting methods and undisciplined speculations" (Isenberg 128). Deweyan aesthetics is best portrayed by contrast to analytic aesthetics, and it contains many of the major themes of contemporary Continental theory that analytic philosophy either ignores or repudiates.

One of the most central features of Dewey's aesthetics is its naturalism. The first chapter of *Art as Experience* is entitled "The Live Creature," and it and all the subsequent chapters are dedicated to grounding aesthetics in the natural needs, constitution, and activities of the embodied human organism. Dewey aims at "recovering the continuity of esthetic experience with normal processes of living" (16). Esthetic understanding must start with and never forget the roots of art and beauty in the "basic vital functions," the "biological commonplaces" people share with "bird and beast" (19-20). For Dewey, all art is the product of interaction between the living organism and its environment, an undergoing and a doing that involves a reorganization of energies, actions, and materials. Though human arts have become more spiritualized, "the organic substratum remains as the quickening and deep foundation," the sustaining source of the emotional energies of art, which make it so enhancive to life (30-31, 85). This essential physiological stratum is not confined to the artist. The perceiver, too, must engage his or her natural feelings and energies as well as his or her physiological sensory motor responses in order to appreciate art, which for Dewey amounts to reconstituting something as art in aesthetic experience (60, 103-4).

In contrast, the major thrust of analytic aesthetics is sharply opposed to naturalizing art and its aesthetic value. G. E. Moore established this attitude with his doctrine of the naturalistic fallacy, a fallacy that "has been quite as commonly committed with regard to beauty as with regard to good" (*Principia* 201). Aesthetic qualities must not be identified with natural ones and are not even reducible or logically entailed by them.
Part of Dewey's naturalism is to insist that art's aim "is to serve the whole creature in his unified vitality," a "live creature" demanding natural satisfactions (Art 122). This stands in sharp contrast to the extreme emphasis on disinterestedness that analytic aesthetics inherited from Immanuel Kant. This emphasis goes beyond the mere Moorean point that beauty, like good, is a purely intrinsic value or end in itself that can only be misconceived as a means. There is the further characterization of art as something essentially defined by its noninstrumentality and gratuitousness. The underlying motive for such analytic attempts to purify art from any functionality was not to denigrate it as worthlessly useless but to place its worth apart from and above the realm of instrumental value and natural satisfactions. However noble the intention, this attitude portrayed aesthetic experience as eviscerate and socially irrelevant. No wonder theorists have turned to Friedrich Nietzsche, Georges Bataille, and Michel Foucault for recognition of the bodily factors and desires involved in the aesthetic, just as they turn to Continental Marxian theories for greater appreciation of art's historico-political and socioeconomic determinants and instrumental power.

But these very themes can be found in Dewey. Though no less devoted than the analysts to defending the aesthetic and to proving its infungible worth, Dewey did so by insisting on art's great but global instrumental value. For anything to have human value, it must in some way serve the needs and enhance the life and development of the human organism in coping with its environing world. The mistake of the Kantian tradition was to assume that since art had no specific, identifiable function that it could perform better than anything else, it could only be defended as being beyond use and function. Dewey's important corrective is to argue that art's special function and value lie not in any specialized, particular end but in satisfying the live creature in a more global way, by serving a variety of ends, and most important, by enhancing our immediate experience, which invigorates and vitalizes us, thus aiding our achievement of whatever further ends we pursue. Not only does the work song sung in the harvest fields provide the harvesters with a satisfying aesthetic experience but its zest carries over into their work and invigorates and enhances it. The same can be said for works of high art. They are not merely tools for generating aesthetic experience: they modify and enhance perception and communication; they energize and inspire because aesthetic experience is always spilling over and getting integrated into our other activities, enhancing and deepening them.

Dewey's recognition of the global functionality of art is related to another view in which he seems to differ sharply from analytic philosophers--the philosophical primacy and centrality of art and the aesthetic. For Dewey, the aesthetic experience is the "experience in which the whole creature is alive" and most alive (33; see also 24-25, 109). "To esthetic experience, then, the philosopher must go to understand what experience is" (278). While Dewey saw art as the qualitative measure of any society (347), analytic philosophers saw science as the ideal and paradigm of human achievement. And analytic aesthetics, at least initially, was largely an attempt to apply the logically rigorous and precise methods of scientific philosophy to the wayward and woolly realm of art. Yet Dewey, appreciative as he was of scientific method and progress, could not help but regard scientific experience as thinner than art. For art engages more of the human organism in a more meaningful and immediate way (90-91, 126, 278), including the higher complexities of thinking: "The
production of a work of genuine art probably demands more intelligence than does most of the so-called thinking that goes on among those who pride themselves on being "intellectuals" (52). He therefore held "that art—the mode of activity that is charged with meanings capable of immediately enjoyed possession—is the complete culmination of nature, and that 'science' is properly a handmaiden that conducts natural events to this happy issue" (Experience 358).

Dewey tries to deconstruct the traditional privileging opposition of science over art not only by reversing the privilege but by denying that there is any rigid dichotomy or opposition between the two. He insists that "science is an art," for "esthetic quality . . . may inhere in scientific work," and both enterprises perform the same essential function of helping us order and cope with experience (Experience 358; Art 33, 125-26, 202). Like Jacques Derrida's idea of the general text, Dewey's central continuity thesis was aimed at breaking the stranglehold of entrenched dualisms and rigid disciplinary distinctions that stifle creative thought and fragment both individual experience and social life. He sought to connect aspects of human experience and activity that had been divided by specialized, compartmentalizing thought and then more brutally sundered by specialist, departmentalizing institutions in which such fragmented disciplinary thinking is reinscribed and reinforced (Shusterman 12-17, 46-55). In these ways he also anticipates Theodor W. Adorno and Foucault.

Dewey's aesthetic naturalism, aimed at "recovering the continuity of esthetic experience with normal processes of living," is part of his attempt to break the stifling hold of "the compartmental conception of fine art," that old and institutionally entrenched philosophical ideology of the aesthetic that sharply distinguishes art from real life and remits it "to a separate realm"—the museum, the theater, and the concert hall (Art 9, 14). But Dewey's aesthetics of continuity and holism not only undermines the art/science and art/life dichotomies but also insists on the fundamental continuity of a host of traditional binary notions and genre distinctions whose long-assumed oppositional contrast has structured so much of philosophical aesthetics: form/content, fine/practical art, high/popular culture, spatial/temporal arts, artist/audience, to name but a few.

Analytic aesthetics, pursued under the ideal of science, thus tended to shirk issues of evaluation and reform. The aim was to analyze and clarify the established concepts and practices of art criticism, not to revise them; to give a true account of our concept of art, not to change it. In vivid contrast, Deweyan aesthetics is interested not in truth for truth's sake but in achieving richer and more satisfying experience. For Dewey's pragmatism, experience, not truth, is the final standard. The ultimate aim of all enquiry, scientific or aesthetic, is not knowledge itself but better experience or experienced value, and Dewey insists on "the immediacy of aesthetic experience" and its experienced value (123). From this follows his view of the supremacy of the aesthetic: art's "immediately enjoyed," active experience is "the complete culmination of nature," for which truth or science serves as an auxiliary "handmaiden" (Experience 358). It also follows that aesthetic values cannot be permanently fixed by aesthetic theory or criticism but must be continually tested and may be overturned by the tribunal of changing experience.

A more dramatic and radical consequence of this experiential standard is that our aesthetic concepts, including the concept of art itself, are revealed as mere instruments that need to be challenged and revised when they fail to provide the best experience. This can
account for Dewey's obvious attempt to direct his aesthetic theory at radically reforming our concepts of art and the aesthetic. **Dewey deplores the dominant elitist tradition of fine art, which he attacks under the labels of "the museum conception of art" and "the esoteric idea of fine art"** (*Art* 12, 90). The prime motive for his opposition to the spiritualized sequestration of art was not ontological considerations of naturalistic continuity and emergence. Rather, the motive was the instrumental aim of improving our immediate experience through a sociocultural transformation in which art would be richer and more satisfying to more people because it would be closer to their most vital interests and better integrated into their lives. **The compartmentalization and spiritualization of art as an elevated "separate realm" set "upon a remote pedestal," divorced from the materials and aims of all other human effort, has removed art from the daily experience of most of us and thus has impoverished the esthetic quality of our lives** (9-16).

But more than art suffers from its spiritualized sequestration; nor was this compartmentalization established simply by and for aesthetes to secure and purify their pleasures. **The idea of art and the aesthetic as a separate realm distinguished by its freedom, imagination, and pleasure has as its underlying correlative the dismal assumption that ordinary life is necessarily one of joyless, unimaginative coercion.** This provides the powers and institutions structuring our everyday life with the best excuse for their increasingly brutal indifference to natural human needs for the pleasures of beauty and imaginative freedom. These are to be sought, not in real life, but in fine art, an escape that gives temporary relief. Art becomes, in Dewey's mordant phrase, "the beauty parlor of civilization" (339), covering with an opulent aesthetic surface its ugly horrors and brutalities, which, for Dewey, include class snobbery and capitalism's profit-seeking oppression and alienation of labor. Modern socioeconomic forces have so divided between joyless "externally enforced labor" and free enjoyment and between production and consumption that the "chasm between ordinary and esthetic experience," art and real life, has become theoretically convincing (15-16, 285). **Thus, for Dewey, not only art but philosophical theories about art are significantly shaped by "extraneous" socioeconomic conditions, so our concept of art needs to be reformed as part and parcel of the reform of society that has so constituted it.**

I conclude with Dewey's perhaps most central aesthetic theme: the privileging of aesthetic experience over the material object that ordinary, reified thinking identifies (and then commodifies and fetishizes) as the work of art. For Dewey the essence and value of art is not in such artifacts but in the dynamic and developing experiential activity through which they are created and perceived. He therefore distinguishes between the "art product" and "the actual work of art [which] is what the product does with and in experience" (9). Dewey's emphasis on art as experience stands in sharp opposition to analytic philosophy's suspicion of aesthetic experience, which it typically regarded as too elusive, variable, and psychologistic to serve as the center of philosophy of art. Analytic philosophy instead privileged art's objects, and it expended enormous efforts in trying to fix the precise criteria for identifying the same object in its various manifestations (e.g., authentic copies and performances) and for individuating it from other objects and inauthentic manifestations (e.g., forgeries).

Dewey thus anticipates poststructuralism in attacking the notion of the artwork as a fully fixed, self-sufficient, and inviolable object and in insisting on the active role and openness of aesthetic perception as a creative practice that reconstitutes aesthetic
meaning. The poststructuralist move from closed work to open textual practice was prefigured in Dewey's move from a closed artistic product to open transformative aesthetic experience. But Dewey seems more moderate than most poststructuralists in his rejection of traditional ideas of unity and structure. While he repudiates for both ontological and aesthetic reasons the notions of structural fixity and reification, he advocates flexible stabilities and durable unities through change, asserting that such relative stabilities and unities are necessary ingredients for the fashioning of a satisfying life and for fruitful social action.

Pragmatism has recently been revived in literary theory through the writings of Stanley Fish and Richard Rorty. But neither of them pays attention to Dewey's aesthetics, and indeed they present theories that are un-Deweyan in their disembodied "textualism" and elitist professionalism. Though some of Dewey's aesthetic ideas and judgments may be dated, his work still represents the best point of departure for progressive pragmatist literary theory and aesthetics.

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