

Dewey on Art as Evocative Communication

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Abstract

In his work on aesthetics, John Dewey provocatively (and enigmatically) called art the “most universal and freest form of communication,” and tied his reading of aesthetic experience to such an employment. I will explore how art, a seemingly obscure and indirect means of communication, can be used as the most effective and moving means of communication in certain circumstances. Dewey’s theory of art will be shown to hold that art can be purposively employed to communicatively evoke a certain experience through an auditor’s experience of an art object. Such a use is shown to be an extension of Dewey’s conceptions of scientific method and the role of experience in criticism and communication, and is discussed in light of examples drawn from contemporary film, sculpture, and classical Japanese poetry.

Introduction

One continually vexing question for the philosophy of art is deceptively simple—how can art argue? This question is one way of probing the more fundamental question of how art can be used in a communicative fashion. With its use of paint, rocks, and florid descriptions, art seems like an unnecessarily indirect way to make a point. Indeed, some have gone so far as to say that one cannot make a communicative point using the means of art. For instance, Jürgen Habermas describes narrative art as “illocutionarily disempowered,” since the “internal relation between the meaning and the validity of what is said survives intact only for the characters in the novel . . . but not for the real readers” (1996, 224). Other forms of art do not communicatively fare much better, as Habermas argues that art in general only holds a “world-disclosing power” and not any sort of power that can be assertive of some sort of claim about the world (1985, 200-203).¹ Thus, we are left with the challenge of rebuilding a sense in which art can be communicative, or in other

words, how art can be used in an argumentative manner.

This is a debate that I believe can benefit from the thought of John Dewey on art, particularly his emphasis on the experiential aspect to aesthetic experience. While much has been written on Dewey's aesthetic theory, it has either focused on noncommunicative issues related to art or has focused on communication in Dewey without any sustained analysis of art as communicative activity.² The work on Dewey's aesthetics that may be of use to such a project tends to characterize his theory of art as "expressive," given its emphasis on an artist's imbuing of a physical object with meaning. While this is not objectionable on its own, it does tend to focus the analysis of art on the artist and her emotions, whereas any meaningful notion of communication would demand one look at the other party in the transaction—the audience. It must be noted that Dewey's characterization also integrally involves the audience's reception of the art object.³ Hence expression is coupled with reception in the complete, full aesthetic situation. The artist's experience of creating the art object is rich, full, and unified ("an" experience as Dewey calls it); given optimal circumstances, the audience's reception of the art object can also attain the heights of being a unified, full, and rich experience. These two aspects are made clear by Dewey in his description of the artistic and aesthetic processes in *Art as Experience* (LW 10, 1934/1989).

What I explore in this article is how Dewey's characterization of art can provide a reading of how art *can* be communicative. Indeed, Dewey calls art the "most universal and freest form of communication" (LW 10:275). If communication seems to imply anything as necessary to its common practice, it would have to be the notion of intention—humans communicate on and for purpose, be it to achieve certain results, to transform others, and so on. How does art fit into the realm of communication, and what specifically makes it the "most universal and freest form" available? I argue that art can be used as communicative in the sense that it can be employed by an agent (the artist) to *evoke* a certain experience in an auditor (the receiving audience member). I will readily admit that not all art does this, nor is all art created with the intention of being communicative. All I want to do is explore *how* art could be communicative. What I emphasize is the possibility of art objects being used in a purposively evocative way, and why they fulfill a unique communicative purpose in such an employment. To begin this argument, I first briefly examine what Dewey finds as the value of the "empirical method" he advocates, and how it is reflected in his theory of communication. Then I discuss how art objects can be used communicatively, and how art is a *unique* mode of communication distinct from everyday linguistic behavior. This section features three examples, drawn from contemporary film, sculpture, and classical Japanese poetry, to establish the possibility of art being used as communicative action. In the final section, I anticipate and answer some objections as to why this Deweyan reading of art as communicative utterance is a satisfactory account of one important use of art.

Empirical Method and Communication

In *Experience and Nature* (LW 1, 1925/1988), Dewey argues strongly for the value of what he calls “empirical method.” An initial misconception that Dewey must overcome is that experience is opposed to nature; instead, Dewey argues that experience is *in* and *of* nature. This is a rich process that deals with the obstacles and events of nature as material, as well as the objective conditions for such an experience to occur in the first place. As living organisms in an environment that is not always friendly to their survival, humans experience nature and find that they must reflect on it to enhance their control and use of it. Thus, one can distinguish a division (though not strict and hermetically sealed) between primary experience and reflective, secondary experience. The latter type of experience involves a second-order reflectivity on what one is experiencing or has experienced (primary experiences) and the causal, constituent parts of such experiences. Such reflective experience typically occurs when a situation is experienced as problematic or incomplete; it is at this point that reflective activity is called for by the individual to “fix” or adapt to this situation. Thus, a dialectical relationship holds between primary and reflective experience. Much of one’s experience is simply primary experience, but some of these situations lead one to actively reflect on the situation, its causal aspects, and how specific parts of it relate to other parts of that situation or of a remote situation. This reflective activity can then lead to the establishment of new habits or ways of navigating the world, thus resulting in future primary experiences conditioned by that moment of reflective activity. A fallacy to be avoided in all of this, according to Dewey, is the taking of the items of reflection (initiated with conscious purpose toward some problematic situation) as *the* constituents of the primary experience (LW 1:25). To employ Dewey’s example, one can reflect on a chair as a number of brown patches, or as an instrument to sit on—both are ways of analyzing what is experienced. The chair is not solely an instrument for sitting, as many other possible descriptions can be given in reflection that proceeds for alternate purposes. Most of us do not reflect much on the chair at all—our habits unproblematically guide our interactions with this instrument of sitting. The important point here is that experience is a primary, unanalyzed, integrated totality with its own “aesthetic” quality to it, and reflection breaks up such a whole (typically employing concepts) for specific purposes.

Dewey is particularly enamored with one method of guiding reflection when it is needed. He extols the empirical method employed in the sciences because it “is the only method which can do justice to this inclusive integrity of ‘experience.’ It alone takes this integrated unity as the starting point for philosophic thought” (LW 1:19). Unlike other (predominant) modes of philosophical analysis that take the functions found in reflection as the important part of experience, Dewey advocates the method of the sciences because it seems to him to be the best way to usefully ground philosophy (and reflection in general) *in* experience without doing damage *to* experience. What is damaging, of course, is when this description is taken to *be* the experience—for instance, the overly intellectualized and misguided notion

that we *experience* “patches of brown in a chair-like shape.” The empirical method starts by acknowledging the integrated unity of primary experience, and then applies distinctions in reflection, all the while judging them as to their value in use and consequence for future experience (LW 1:19-20). This is the general orientation of this approach, and one who takes this empirical method to heart thereby takes this orientation to the world and his reflection upon it. The question then becomes, how does this impact such an individual’s reflective activities?

First of all, this method orients one toward empirically testable and fruitful descriptions about experience. In science, these are called hypotheses, and the individual comes up with them and empirically explores if they are defensible. Dewey focuses less in *Experience and Nature* on the context of discovery and more on the context of justification, and this suits my purposes in this article. For what he does in discussing empirical method is lay out a *procedure* by which it relates to primary experience, in order to create knowledge (which is reflective and involves the noting of meanings guided by purpose). While science is clearly a communal exercise in belief formation, there is a sense in which it proceeds at the behest and guidance of the individual. For example, the empirically oriented researcher experiences something of nature’s operation, reflects upon it, and then sees fit to transfer this to another (interested) human through the use of concepts and linguistic communication. This is a clear case of communication, one which occurs in journals of science constantly. What Dewey finds as important, though, is that the empirical method directs one to use means of communication not as directly representative of the experience described, but instead as a pointer *to* such an experience. The community meaning that is invested in language thereby allows one to “point” to some experience in the first place. The individual and the community are interconnected in a close fashion in Dewey’s reading of empirical method, and the individual should never be portrayed as monistic and atomistic in a Deweyan scheme of communication. Using such communally inflected terms of meaning, the empirically minded thinker “[s]tate[s] the purpose so that it may be re-experienced, and its value and the pertinency of selection undertaken in its behalf may be tested” (LW 1:35). This values the choice of other community members, and empowers them to follow the same procedure in order to *experientially* verify the claims made about the experience by the initial researcher. Such verbal reports as given in scientific writing then serve to direct one to a given experience, which they will then reflect upon in a manner similar to that of the initiating partner in this interaction. What Dewey is doing here is twofold. First, he is tethering reflective enterprises such as science and philosophy to experience, both in the beginning and at the end of conceptual thought. Second, he is proposing a reading of discourse as persuasive, as action oriented toward changing or transforming the other in an intentional and directed fashion. Thus, one argues for a certain claim about her experience, and in doing so issues of truth and error are broached. Dewey notes the persuasive and transformative character of such discourse, arguing that “[t]o convince of error as well as to lead to truth is to assist another to see and find something which he

hitherto has failed to find and recognize” (LW 1:35). The empirically oriented argument serves as a linguistic recipe for creating a similar experience, from which the experiencing person is free to come to his own conclusions. If the speaker has done her job correctly and effectively, the receiver will have a similar experience and confirm the speaker’s reflective description or analysis of it.⁴

This is the “miracle” of communication, as Dewey describes it. It involves the transformation of external events (both the material of experience and the means of communication) into a real participation and sharing of meaning among individual humans. Communication is truly a social event, even though it appears as if it is individualistic and one-directional—an agent intentionally uses words that are imbued with a communally recognized meaning that another person then reacts to in some (most likely) predicted way. Through such communicative practices, primary experience qua unified, felt event turns into objects with meanings and reflectively analyzed consequences (LW 1:133). In communication, the qualitative immediacy of experience is transformed into publicly accessible symbol systems (such as spoken or written language), which then allows for purposeful reflection on the meaning (for example, consequences and relationships) implied by the object in its environment. These symbol systems acquire their own “objective” meaning in that a given “proficient” speaker will recognize the meaning of the word “dog,” regardless of who uttered it. Further modifications can be negotiated, but the word has a meaning that grounds such reflection on the full meaning of the word. The word has a usually intended meaning, and this both signals a presumptive intent of the speaker and can be reflective of the actual intent of the speaker.⁵ Like experience in general, communication is both the (direct) experience of such meanings as well as the reflective analysis of such meanings and processes in a communicative situation. The point I emphasize, however, is that communication for Dewey relies on meanings, something reflectively introduced at some point to account for some primary experiences that are inherently nonreflective. Communication uses these meanings as a “method of action, a way of using things as means to a shared consummation, and method is general, though the things to which it is applied are particular” (LW 1:147). Like empirical method, communication is a general approach or method to how individuals can most profitably (namely, free of most harmful errors) reflect on experience in a community setting. Thus, communication encompasses the individual aspect of intention and purposive action, as well as the communal aspects of shared meanings and coordinated activity. Beyond the issue of mere understanding, Dewey’s reading of the empirical method and the process of communication gives an integral role to the respecting of individual autonomy enough to value one’s ability to first, have the same experience and second, reflect on it to see if the proposed claims (meaningful descriptions of this experience) are the best that can be advanced *given that experience*. The first is upheld by the empirical method (and communication) tying meaningful statements to replicable, public experiences and the second is encouraged by the giving of helpful means to experience such a state as that reflected upon.

Art as Evocative Communication

As previously noted, Dewey puts art at the apex of communication in terms of universality and general reach in his *Art as Experience*. How are we to analyze such a claim, and to relate it to the empirically oriented analysis of communication (including scientific communication)? In other words, how can art be used in a communicative fashion? In this section, I argue that art can be used as communicative (although it is not always employed in such a use) by evoking a certain experience through the art object. In the following discussion, I assume that the artist *intends* such a use of the art object, although Dewey acknowledges in *Art as Experience* that this is not always the case. Such an assumption is allowable, as it does not beg the question the critics referenced at the beginning of this study bring up—that of the putative inability of art to be argumentative or communicative.

How can art be conceived of as communicative? My basic argument begins with the idea that an artist may want to convey either (1a) a certain experience to an audience, or (1b) lead them to reach certain judgments about some experience. But (2) the artist cannot directly convey or describe the desired experience through language, or the subject matter she wishes to engage *is* the felt experience of some object, so (3) the artist employs the material media of art to *evoke* the experience she wants the audience to have or reflect upon in subsequent judgment. This is a clear communicative process of an artist using an uttered art object to affect the audience in a controlled way that expands their range of experience and possibly their reflection on such experience. Is such a process to be found in Dewey's reading of aesthetic experience and art?

It seems as though Dewey, who hints and exclaims about art's communicative power, does not fully develop this line of thought.⁶ It is there, however, especially when one approaches it from his extolling of empirical method and his description of art's power in *Art as Experience*. First of all, (1a) and (1b) form the important starting point of this argument—that there is some aspect to experience that is beyond the reach of language. This point, tied closely to Dewey's notion of "quality," is a contentious one. Paul C. Taylor (2002) notes that Dewey seems to be pointing to the immediacy of experience as that which is beyond definition. He argues that aesthetic experience, a paradigm case of experience with a certain immediacy, is definable, although definitions only take one to a certain point. Richard Shusterman (2002), commenting on this same issue, notes a certain useful dialectic between immediacy and nonimmediacy, as well as discursivity and nondiscursivity. For instance, one's somatic experience often influences what one can discursively say about it, and verbal guides can help improve somatic action. In another place, Shusterman (1997) notes five ways that Dewey uses the qualitative elements of experience to come close to a foundationalist notion of knowledge justification, although such a position is not necessarily in Dewey's thought as a whole (contra Rorty's critique). What I think can be profitably said about this controversy is that Dewey can be taken in a nonfoundationalist sense and can still maintain that there is some aspect of experience that is separate from sentential reports. This traces back to the basic

division that Dewey notes in *Experience and Nature* as well as *Art as Experience*, that experience is different in *feel* from reflective activity and its products (concept-laden descriptions of parts of one's experience). To take reflection and its results for *all* of a certain experience is to commit the fallacy of intellectualism. Knowledge is such a reflective endeavor involving conscious thought, justification, and propositional statement. Immediate experience is just that—immediate, and prior to detailed reflection. If there are discursive elements to immediate experience, it is because the concepts and words have been rendered as habitually meaningful. This is a point to which both Taylor and Shusterman seem to agree. One sees their nation's flag and immediately connotations spring to mind without forced reflection. One hears a simple word like “dog” and the meaning is there, with no need for mediated interpretation, deep thought, or reflection on its context of usage. I argue that the experience of something is not *exhaustible* in some linguistic formulation, since it lacks that immediate feel that comes with experience that is prereflective. I think here of the opening lines of the *Tao Te Ching*, in which “Lao Tzu” is recorded as describing the mysterious *Tao* (Way):

As for the Way [*Tao*], the Way that can be spoken of is not the constant Way;

As for names, the name that can be named is not the constant name.
(1:1)⁷

This can be taken as saying that the *Tao* is simply indefinable and that no definitions or linguistic conceptions come close to it, or that no definition or linguistic characterization totally *exhausts* its meaning. In other words, the latter explanation entails that many characterizations are possible, each highlighting an aspect of the *Tao*, but with no definition standing so accurate that a person would say “that *is* the *Tao*.” What linguistic characterizations leave out, of course, is what is not linguistic about the *Tao*, since (at least in part) “The Way is empty” (1:4). A similar point can be made for Dewey—experience *is* experience and not the reflective activity that characterizes mediated thought and stated definition. A definition is different from the experience of something, and while it may be useful, it always exists for a purpose and lacks something of the immediate feel of an experience of some event. No definition exhausts the experience of what is being defined. As Dewey points out, there is a difference between the experience of something and reflection on something—the latter looks for certain relationships and causal factors for some purpose (LW 10:297).

To return to (1a), if an artist wants to convey what a certain experience feels like, and a stated description of it would fail to convey the immediacy of experience, then she must resort to the controlled manipulation of energy and rhythm through a medium of art to evoke that experience in the attentive audience member. In terms of (1b), if an artist wants an audience to pass a certain judgment on an experience, then she must offer that experience to the audience in such a way that she encourages the reflective analysis of that experience in the desired fashion.

Like the *Tao*, ordinary experience cannot be exhaustively described in reflective terms because those terms are separate in kind from experience, as per premise (2). Characterizations of experience can capture part of that experience, but even this strays from the feeling of the experience itself. Thus, the artist is forced to use the art object to evoke something similar or even identical to the experience in question (the one she experienced and wishes to express, or the one she wants the audience to experience).

As we saw in the case of empirical method (for example, science), words are used to reflectively describe how one is to have such an experience for herself. After this experience, the individual can render her own judgment concerning the descriptive validity of the empirical claims made by the original speaker or writer. Art fits this general mold, but differs in that it offers through its merging of subject matter closely with material an immediate experience of unity and rhythm within the subject matter being conveyed. Science uses statements, which Dewey compares to a “signboard.” While it directs a person’s course of travel to a city, “[i]t does not in any way supply experience of that city even in a vicarious way. What it does do is to set forth some of the conditions that must be fulfilled in order to procure that experience” (LW 10:90). Such statements serve as reflective means in communication to direct one to experience, but do not immediately create such an experience in the person reading the scientific report. In art, the experience of the art object is a felt experience in its own right, and is one that exceeds the reading of journal articles in unity, intensity, and emotional coherence. It is *an* experience, one that is the presentation of material *in* and *through* experience. Discussing Van Gogh’s use of art to evoke certain experiences, Dewey notes:

He aimed, through pictorial presentation of material that any one on the spot might “observe,” that thousands had observed, to present a *new* object experienced as having its own unique meaning. Emotional turmoil [a broken heart] and an external episode [a bridge over the Rhone River] fused in an object which was “expressive” of neither of them separately nor yet of a mechanical junction of the two, but of just the meaning of the “utterly heart-broken.” (LW 10:92)

Van Gogh wanted to evoke a certain experience in a viewer, and he forged a unique union between his subject matters and the artistic medium to accomplish this, a setting much like the correct selection and use of words to accomplish one’s ends through verbal communication. The picture served as the vehicle of communication, since its structure and form were integral parts to evoking a message that could not be exhaustively described in words that either reflected on everyday matters or called on reflective thinking to get at the new connections that Van Gogh was attempting to make. Thus Dewey argues that “[Van Gogh] did not pour forth the emotion of desolation; that was impossible. He selected and organized an external subject matter with a view to something quite different—an expression. And in the degree in which he succeeded the picture is, of necessity, expressive” (LW 10:92).

What is implied in the “success” criterion of expression, of course, is the same experiential touchstone that the empirical method relies upon—a picture such as this is expressive if it does or could successfully express some experience to an attentive auditor. Since that experience cannot be captured exhaustively through reflective means (or a short paragraph full of descriptive statements would have done the job), it must express through the evocation of the specific experience in question in the auditor. Of course, such evocations admit of varying ranges of convergence; specific, technical terms will obviously result in more convergent meanings than a nonlinguistic, abstract painting. The point still remains that an artist can be more or less successful at her aims of evoking a certain type of experience from an auditor for a certain purpose. Continuing on this topic of the value of successful evocation, Dewey emphasizes that art is not merely descriptive, or it would be the same as science; instead, “[c]ertain relations of lines and colors become important, ‘full of meaning,’ and everything else is subordinated to the evocation of what is implied in these relations, omitted, distorted, added to, transformed, to convey the relationships” (LW 10:93). Thus, not only is the art object an object of experience for the auditor, but it is the causal focal point of an experience that draws attention to new relationships that can then serve as material for reflection and analysis. The artist, in doing so, can use the art object to the ends of (1b), encouraging an auditor to reflect and draw conclusions on a certain aspect of the experience as orchestrated by the artist. To illustrate this point, I now examine three examples drawn from artistic practices such as film, sculpture, and classical Japanese poetry.

The first example of the evocative employment of an art object to elicit certain experiences, as well as certain reflective, deliberative activities associated with this experience, can be identified in a recent popular film. Steven Spielberg, in an interview concerning his 1998 film, *Saving Private Ryan*, provides an excellent instance of the point I am making. Speaking of the intense combat scenes in his film, he states, “I’m asking the audience—and it’s a lot to ask of an audience—to have a physical experience, so that they can somewhat have the experience of what those guys actually went through” (Hertzberg, 1998, 31). One can see how Spielberg is trying to make a point that cannot be given in the dry prose of a history text. By his own admission, he appears to want to evoke a certain reflective experience in an audience in the best way he knows how—by evoking something similar to the soldier’s original (embodied) experience through the medium of film. This will expand the audience’s experiential repertoire and will most likely lead to the audience engaging the full meaning of what has been depicted (namely, the values and experiences of soldiers in war, national defense policies, etc.). A certain sort of experience is evoked for a certain purpose, and this purpose is fundamentally communicative. It is not a communicative instance of saying something in one way and then saying something in another fashion; instead, it seems that Spielberg wants to convey an experience of “being there” to the audience, and the only way he can do so is by coming close to what the represented experience must have looked and sounded like.⁸ The film can compel and shape the experience of the attending

audience, and a large part of that power comes from its making present an experience or situation that was not present before.⁹ Spielberg is dealing (largely) with an audience that has not experienced firsthand the horrors of Omaha Beach, so his film makes present certain aural and visual experiences to the viewers. If what is presented to the audience's attention conflicts with values they hold or expands the reasons why they hold certain values or action-strategies, then reflective activity will likely be called forth to solve this temporary disruption of the habitual activities of life and value. Art objects, such as *Saving Private Ryan*, hold the power to create intense experiences that are saturated with meaning and purpose, so much so that their employment as means is equivalent to the end they aim at. I return to this point later in this study, but suffice it to say that this is precisely why Dewey extolled art's communicative power as unique—the complex meanings that can be made of a particular art object are connected in a very close sense to one's experience of that art object. Even reflection on such an art object still falls within the experience of it in a more expansive sense, a point that Peter Kivy captures in his concept of a work's "reflective afterlife" (1997, 132). The experience of an art object may engage our powers of reflection, both during its time of reception and in periods following its conclusion. During both of these times, though, our reflection is closely engaged with the particulars of *that* art object.

A second example of such an evocative employment of an art object comes from the 1980s and involves the site-specific sculpture, *Tilted Arc*, by Richard Serra. This work was commissioned by the federal government to adorn the courtyard of a federal building in New York City, and was installed in 1981. Richard Serra's ultimate design placed a 120 feet long, 12 foot high curved piece of self-rusting steel in the middle of the courtyard. Serra's stated intentions, coming after his art object was accused of being an eyesore, indicated that he designed it with a certain evocative purpose in mind. In defending the effects that *Tilted Arc* had on the individuals using the courtyard, he said, "I make works that deal with the environmental components of given places My works become part of and are built into the structure of the site, and they often restructure, both conceptually and perceptually, the organization of the site." This restructuring of space is what Serra was hoping to evoke with works such as *Tilted Arc*, as he bluntly points out that he is "interested in creating a behavioral space in which the viewer interacts with the sculpture in its context."¹⁰ Was he successful in restructuring the space in the experience of the viewer with his large slab of steel? Incredibly so, as the testimony of individuals who had used the courtyard before and after *Tilted Arc* was placed in its center testified to in public hearings concerning the sculpture. Many felt the steel mass disoriented their experience of the plaza, made them alter their habits of entering the buildings, and interrupted the walking paths of the employees around and through the courtyard (Battin, Fisher, Moore, & Silvers, 1989, 182). Eventually, the government removed the sculpture on a March night in 1989. Regardless of the aesthetic merits of such an art object, it proves a simple point. Artists such as Richard Serra can set out to evoke certain experiences (such as that of altered

public spaces) to make a point about habits of transit, gathering, and so on. Even though the reflection brought on by the evoked experiences eventually was its literal downfall, it is hard to dispute that *Tilted Arc* was a purposively evocative, and hence communicative, art object.

A third example of such an evocative employment of art can be drawn from classical Japanese poetry. Take, for instance, the Japanese form of poetry called *haiku* (or *haikai* in its first labeled form). The more or less modern form of *haiku* involving a strict seventeen-syllable form evolved from the “party game” of *renga* largely due to the artistry of the poet Bashō (1644-1694). Bashō was essentially a wandering ascetic for much of his life, and was involved in Zen practice during major periods of his practice as a *haiku* poet. While this article is not a study of Zen Buddhism, a few key parts to this system of thought must be enunciated, as they will be involved in what Bashō is trying to do with his *haiku*. Zen doctrine, following Chan Buddhism in China, focused on cultivating the individual to be present to “ordinary” experience free of its conceptual encumbrances (chief among which would be the classical Buddhist target of “the self”). As D. T. Suzuki explains, the goal of Zen practice is *satori*, which is “to become conscious of the Unconscious (*mushin*, no-mind).” The difficult aspect to Zen “teaching,” however, is that its truths are part of a “wordless transmission”—*satori* “cannot be attained by the ordinary means of teaching or learning. It has its own technique in pointing to the presence in us of a mystery that is beyond intellectual analysis” (1973, 220).¹¹ How does one get to such a stage of enlightenment, or awareness of what really is present to an individual? This is not attained through reflective experience, but instead (normally) is reached through the help of a teacher who has experienced this state beforehand. Thus, Zen monasteries feature teachers who use devices such as *kōans*, nonsensical stories or questions designed to jar the rational mind away from concepts such as “the self.”¹² Another way of evoking such experiences of enlightenment is through the composition and reception of *haiku*. Bashō’s poetry has been described as being the “moment of enlightenment itself”; his poetry, as Thomas Hoover claims, offers many examples of the “perfect Haiku,” a piece of art that “is not *about* the moment of Zen enlightenment, it *is* that moment frozen in time and ready to released in the listener’s mind” (1977, 204, 206-207). For instance, take Bashō’s most famous *haiku*:¹³

An ancient pond
A frog jumps in
The sound of water

This short and direct poem is powerful, according to critics such as Hoover, precisely because it does not try to do the impossible—to talk about some sort of end state known abstractly as *satori*. Instead, it is praised because it presents an *image* of what the artist wants the audience to be present to—in this case, a seemingly timeless pond and the sound that a frog makes jumping into it. This may not seem

like the ultimate experience in life, but according to Bashō, it is the example that he awakened to in that present situation. Thus, he presents a small, vivid presentation of this event to evoke that image and that avoids an overemphasis on conceptual description and analysis. Indeed, this is vital for the Zen project, as “Zen eschews deliberation and rational analysis; nothing must come between object and perception at the critical moment” (Hoover, 1977, 206). If Bashō were to write a reflective treatise on Zen, a different effect would be had; the focus then would be on rational argument, as opposed to the Zen goal of encouraging a direct mindfulness of the situation one is in. Suzuki praises Bashō’s use of “little,” terse language in his poems to get around the rational mind and to evoke this direct confrontation with “reality” (in this case, an old pond and its resident frog)—“[a]s long as we are moving on the surface of consciousness, we can never get away from ratiocination” (1973, 241). That would be the level of *thinking* in writing about the pond; instead, the aim of *haiku* poetry such as that of Bashō’s is to evoke a direct confrontation in the auditor, a confrontation that the poet himself has had and wishes the audience to have or think about as well.¹⁴

Process and Product in the Evocative Use of Art

At this point, the preceding analysis and examples have hopefully shown the plausibility of (1a) and (1b) in terms of the aspects of experience that stay within experience, as well as (2)’s insistence on the discursive, reflective inexhaustibility of such aspects. The final point in my argument, (3), deals with art being used evocatively. The three examples drawn from sources as diverse as film, sculpture, and Japanese poetry have touched on this point in the previous section, noting that art serves as a particularly vivid vehicle to evoke what the artist wants the audience to feel and experience. It can do this because of its close integration of subject matter and media, the particular nature of the artistic enterprise as separate from highly reflective activities such as scientific or philosophical disputation. Like the empirical method, reflective activity (in the case of art, the artist’s purposive and skilled creative activity) leads the audience to certain experiences for some purpose—such as knowledge (a reflective endeavor), standards for better experience, improved somatic states, and so forth.

A bit more must be said as to what is conveyed through the evocation of aesthetic experience.¹⁵ It cannot be exhaustible in a discursive, reflective characterization, since it has a qualitative feel that cannot be completely rendered in such a way. What else is unique about the aesthetic experience? What I suggest is that the art object has the power of evoking such a powerful experience because in this total interaction process and product, instrument and end are fully integrated. This is something that cannot be done (to the same extent) with scientific or philosophical writing, and this is a point Dewey notes about his own dialectical method. Dewey states in a 1930 essay, “In Reply to Some Criticisms” (LW 5, 1930/1984), that in philosophical writings (such as his essays), “[d]ialectic is used, of course, but it is used in order to invite the reader to experience the empirical procedure

of experimental inquiry and then draw his own conclusions” (LW 5:213). What seems to differentiate (reflective) dialectic from aesthetic experience is the size of the gap between instrument and end. For Dewey, argumentative discourse aims to move the reader and invite her to draw her own conclusions based upon her own experience (the ones Dewey hopefully anticipated in his purposive creation of argument), with the directions and the experience being quite separated. In art, however, the process of viewing the artwork *is* the product or the experience. The form and substance of art evoke an experience, an ordered discharge of impulse from the engaged audience, which reaches a consummatory phase. This phase *is* in all parts of the work of art, just as the paint is not a medium for the painting but is an integral part of the painting (LW 10:144). The work of art is instrumental in that it is designed for the purpose of causally affecting the aesthetic experience the artist desired (assuming he is an effective artist), and it is simultaneously final in that the experience *is* what the work of art is. It is not a simple proposition that can be extracted from the art object (“War is hell” from the film *Hamburger Hill*, for instance), since that would deny the experiential aspect of the aesthetic experience. Like the paint, the means of the art object are taken up in the art object and its affected experience (LW 10:201). If its import were a simple proposition, and not an experience to be had, this would imply that the work of art was replaceable by other means: “Such external or *mere* means . . . are usually of such a sort that others can be substituted for them; the particular ones employed are determined by some extraneous consideration, like cheapness” (LW 10:201). Art, however, uses “media,” which Dewey notes as referring to “means that are incorporated in the outcome” (LW 10:201). As bricks and mortar become part of the structure they are used to build, the parts of the art object also become integral parts of the experience as a whole. As Dewey succinctly puts it, “Colors *are* the painting; tones are the music” (LW 10:201). One must add that these qualities are the painting *as experienced*, continuing our emphasis on successful expression being a reference to an audience that experiences that expression. This is why artists such as Spielberg, Serra, and Bashō turn to art objects: Compared to rational argument, artistic media are a much more direct way to evoke the experience they want their audience to have and to think about.

Some authors, such as Steven Fesmire (2003), link Dewey’s notion of the experience of new possibilities through art (LW 10:336) to the exercise and improvement of the subject’s imagination, which turns out to be a crucial part of Dewey’s reading of moral activity. I want to avoid that type of argument here, since I believe what is unique about the aesthetic experience is that it is an experience of a process *as* the product, not merely as a means to improve or exercise one’s capacities for empathy. This point is recognized by Philip W. Jackson (1998, 119-120), who highlights the spirituality of art through its unificatory power over experience. I would add that this power would seem to come from what art does uniquely well—the simultaneous unification of process and product.¹⁶ In this case, the “process” referred to is the activity (process) of attending to and experiencing the art object and its mean-

ings. Unlike the claims of science that direct the reader to an external experience, the partaking of an art object is the experience in question, and is the product that the artist is aiming to produce with her artistic utterance. Another commentator I would point to in this regard is Crispin Sartwell (1995), who notes that the means-end relationship is extremely close in the aesthetic experience brought on by an artistic product. He also extends this to everyday action, drawing from Krishna's instruction in the *Bhagavad Gita* as to the way one should (according to Sartwell) turn everyday action into art:

If we could achieve the end by sheer force of will, if we could realize it without performing the means, we would. Krsna [Krishna] asks us, not to renounce all desire and thus all action, but to desire the means as intrinsically valuable as *well* as valuable in service of the end. The means are not to be absorbed in the end; the time and energy devoted to the means are not wasted. Rather, this time and energy are to be *consecrated*. (Sartwell, 1995, 50)

What emerges from these commentators is twofold—first, that the nature of the aesthetic experience involves the process as the product (all means are integrally tied to and realized in the end) and second, that a subject's orientation can affect how nonartistic means are valued. The second point is important to Dewey's theory of aesthetic experience, and I have discussed it elsewhere (Stroud 2006b; 2007). The first point, however, is what Dewey emphasizes as a unique and powerful characteristic of art objects, and would seem to be a vital reason as to why artists turn to art objects to make the points they want to convey. Dewey notes that the artist, in the act of expression, goes through inner and outer transformations in ordering the artistic material and the impulse-derived subject matter (LW 10:81), and it is only fitting, given Dewey's balanced approach, that the experience of the receiver mirror this transformation. Thus, the experience of the production of the art object, as well as its reception, involves a reordering and transformation not only of external materials (the art objects, physical reactions to them, etc.), but also internal materials such as one's thoughts, attitudes, and emotions. In other words, there is a symmetry between the aesthetic experience of the producer and the receiver, which facilitates the predictive control that a good artist displays in her crafting of an evocative art object. Art is valuable as a communicative strategy because it is the means and ends of an important type of communication—the direct communication of experience.

Possible Objections to Such an Account of Artistic Communication

I conclude this sketch by considering two sources of worry for such an account of art as evocative. The first objection concerns the putative “foundational” status of experience in this Deweyan account, as well as its exact relationship to reflective and discursive modes of interaction. What exactly is the relationship between

experience and discursive practice? As Richard Shusterman has noted, aesthetic experience is mute and often personal, and seems to be something that cannot be communicated (2000, 56). He attached this worry to the legitimation of critical judgments as well as whole fields of artistic practice (popular art, for example). Whereas Dewey seemed to assert that “nothing but aesthetic experience is needed for legitimation, and criticism is merely a means to bring the reader to have the relevant experience,” Shusterman argues that legitimation “is social and justificatory, and thus requires means of consensus-formation that are not as immediate and nondiscursive as aesthetic experience” (2002, 31). I wholeheartedly agree with Shusterman that there is a productive dialectic between public discourse and individualized experience, and that neither should be said to be foundational or “trumping.” I wonder, however, if the competition in which some authors (such as Richard Rorty) place these two levels is not a case of their kicking up dust and complaining about the visibility. This seems to be Rorty’s complaint, one which Shusterman goes an admirable distance toward answering by separating experience from a monolithic reading of epistemological justification as the sole use of experience. I think the complete position will be one that acknowledges that some aspect of experience cannot be captured by discursive, reflective strategies, and that critical, reason-based discussion (Shusterman’s point) is needed to ensure that claims of experience do not mutate into trumping claims of knowledge and certainty. This is especially true in the case that Shusterman notes—popular art. If discourse leaves such an area unjustified and unlegitimated, few if any will direct sustained, serious attention toward such art objects to reap the experience they can provide. Reflective discourse, as Shusterman advocates, is needed to bring about and support the conditions that encourage such experience. I think, however, that the communicative role of primary, aesthetic experience is also important. For instance, arguing about what shade of red looks the best in one’s living room only goes so far. At a certain point, it is best to bring the putative shades of red into the room, and experience it for oneself. This is the point that Dewey, perhaps too strongly at times, makes in his *Art as Experience*. The point that an artist is trying to make with an artwork can really only be made in that way because of the artwork’s exemplary fusion of experience as process and experience as product. The art object leads the auditor to an experience, which happens to be the experience of the artwork itself. This is not something that could simply be communicated using propositional utterances, and this is the point, I believe, behind Dewey’s worry about trying to convey some simple intended meaning in art—this would lead to most of the art object being superfluous as a mere means, and hence replaceable. Instead, Dewey notes that the art work is public, and so are the elements of audience reaction to it (their experience of the work); thus, “[i]t is not necessary that communication should be part of the deliberate intent of an artist, although he can never escape the thought of a potential audience. But its function and consequence is to effect communication, and this is not by external accident but from the nature he shares with others” (LW 10:275). The artist sets out in a public medium to create a work of art that will af-

fect an audience in some fairly foreseeable ways. This setting allows the artwork to communicate, either intentionally on the part of the artist in terms of wanting to use the experience of the artwork to evoke an experience in the audience (and perhaps their reflective judgments on such an experience), or on the part of the audience in orienting themselves toward this public, purposive, and meaningful object as if it were an artistic message meant to evoke a specific response.

The second objection to my account of art as evocative concerns its fit to Dewey's theory of communication. For instance, one may accuse my "one-directional" reading of communication as being more in line with Tolstoy's "infection" model of art than Dewey's transactional approach. Tolstoy makes much of the communicative power of art, going as far as to claim:

Every work of art results in the one who receives it entering into a certain kind of communion with the one who produced or is producing the art, and with all those who, simultaneously with him, before him, or after him, have received or will receive the same artistic impression. (1896/1995, 38)

Tolstoy's model of art was very focused on the communicative use of art, and featured a connection between artist and audience that went beyond rational discourse. For instance, he bluntly states that "through the word a man conveys his thoughts to another, while through art people convey their feelings to each other" (1896/1995, 38). Does not the account I give above seem more like this one-directional communication from the artist to the audience than Dewey's interactive description of language and communication as a sharing of meaning? First, I think there are important differences between my account of Dewey on art and Tolstoy's account. For instance, Tolstoy defines art and its value in terms of its "infectiousness" (1896/1995, 121)—this is a criterion that Dewey would avoid reifying in definitional terms. Second, Tolstoy deals specifically with feelings, whereas my Deweyan account traffics in experience. This is a crucial difference between them, as a Deweyan view of communication does not place much weight on individuated mental contents that "infect" another person. Instead, Dewey prizes the meaning behind words, which is traceable back to experience and toward anticipated experience, a fact that is apparent in his description of how shared meaning operates in terms of behavior and imaginative anticipation of what others will think of an utterance's meaning (LW 1:141). In the case of experience itself, someone like Bashō evokes an experience not because there is some preexisting mental meaning in his head that he wishes to convey to another person; instead, he found the experience of a certain situation interesting and moving, so he re-presents it through an artistic medium to one who wasn't there in that original situation (or who failed to experience it as Bashō did). Again, the Deweyan focus is not on the mere transmission of something (an emotion, a proposition, etc.), but is instead on the experience—actual, past, or anticipated—connected to some concrete stimulus (be it a situation or utterance). The evocative account I have provided in this article is transactive insofar as it involves artists purposively manipulating a medium with

foresight as to how auditors will experience it; this mirrors Dewey's description of language use in social settings, but is altered by two details. The artist is usually (but not always) removed from the audience in space and time. Additionally, the "meaning" of the art object is bound tightly to the process of experiencing that object (whereas language in its discursive use "points" toward experiences of some sort). These two features may give my account the appearance of a one-direction, infection model of communication similar to Tolstoy's, but in reality the Deweyan model of interaction is merely delayed through the sometimes drawn-out process of artistic creation and reception.

Dewey had much respect for Tolstoy's account, even though his account differed from it in important respects. Dewey even concluded one of his chapters on expression in *Art as Experience* by saying:

I can but think that much of what Tolstoi says about immediate contagion as a test of artistic quality is false, and what he says about the kind of material which alone can be communicated is narrow. But if the time span be extended, it is true that no man is eloquent save when some one is moved as he listens. Those who are moved feel, as Tolstoi says, that what the work expresses is as if it were something one had oneself been longing to express. Meantime, the artist works to create an audience to which he does communicate. (LW 10:110)

What I believe this demonstrates is that Dewey's account, contra Tolstoy, hinges on the close connection of art objects to experience—either in their production/creation or in their reception. Tolstoy erred in tying his account to a strictly evaluative one, and failed to allow for the diversity that art and artistic practices entail. For Dewey, art's purpose was not solely communicative; he merely wanted to emphasize that this is one powerful use and effect of art objects in community settings. Where art excels at communicating is where the message is an experience that cannot be conveyed in any better way than through art, in which the process and product are unified. The only way to convey such a point to the reader is to arrange the features of the art object such that they lead her to and constitute such an experience. This is the sort of interaction and sharing that Dewey prized in his thoughts on communication, and this is what takes center stage in his experiential account of art's communicative power. While the process of art may delay and segment the interaction between artist, art object, and audience, the interaction is still there, and it is still centered on the experience "objectified" in the public medium of the art object. What the examples of Spielberg, Serra, and Bashō that I have discussed in this study all display is that this Deweyan reading of art's evocative power does correlate to a significant use of art, and that such an employment relies heavily on the unity of process and product, instrument and end in the experience offered by the art object.

What I have tried to explicate in this study are the details of such a use that art can be put to, namely that of the purposive evocation of experience in order to

make the audience aware of that experience or in order to elicit reflective judgment on such experiences. Art can be used in a communicative fashion, especially in regard to the transmission of the most illusive message of all—one that is simultaneously and wholly both the instrument and end of the communicative encounter. Perhaps this close connection between instrument and end in life and interaction is why Dewey claims that “In the end, works of art are the only media of complete and unhindered communication between man and man that can occur in a world full of gulfs and walls that limit community of experience” (LW 10:110).

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Notes

1. Similar criticisms of such a “cognitive” view of art and its use in argument are found in Peter Lamarque & Stein Haugom Olsen (1994).

2. Thus, Richard Shusterman (2000) provides a nice example of the former—an interesting analysis of pragmatist aesthetics without a reading of art’s communicative value. For readings that deal more with communication than with the potentials of art qua communication, consult Lary S. Belman (1977) and Nathan Crick (2004).

3. Note that Dewey is not giving a “definition” of art, conceived of in the terms of covering the extension of the term “art.” For an analysis of why Dewey does not attempt this, see Richard Shusterman (2000), 34-61.

4. Of course, much of science operates on “ethos” and trust of the other’s character; this accounts for the nonemphasis of independent replications done in most lines of scientific research.

5. Joseph Margolis (2002) calls this the “Intentional” nature of language, and distances a work’s Intentional meaning from the intention of the author.

6. Indeed, what he has said about communication has even been critiqued as naive and unrealistic by commentators such as Thomas Alexander (1995).

7. The translation used here is Robert G. Henricks (1989).

8. For a further analysis of “vicarious” audience involvement in war films, as well as their ability to argue by “mood,” see John S. Nelson (2000).

9. Indeed, Spielberg was so successful at evoking such experiences, he was awarded the Distinguished Civilian Service Award from the U.S. Army, Distinguished Public Service Award from the U.S. Navy, and the Department of Defense Medal for Distinguished Public Service for the “public service” his film did for simulating the horrors of war and for showcasing the bravery of American soldiers. For more on these awards, see Gary Sheftick (1998, Sept 18), “Navy honors Spielberg and Hanks for film ‘Saving Private Ryan’” (1999, November), & Linda D. Kozaryn (1999, August).

10. Richard Serra, from a transcript quoted in Margaret P. Battin, John Fisher, Ronald Moore, & Anita Silvers (1989), 182.

11. For discussion of Suzuki’s general take on Zen and its connection to aesthetics, see

Steve Odin (2001), 141-156.

12. For my analysis of kōans as evocative art objects, see Scott R. Stroud (2006a).

13. Translated in Thomas Hoover (1977), 206.

14. William J. Higginson (1985), 5 emphasizes this point in his reading of the power of *haiku*.

15. It is also important to note that not all aesthetic experience is connected to an art object. Some can come in natural settings, or settings not intentionally created to put the auditor in such a state (say, a random view of a city's skyline).

16. The related division between product-centered and process-centered notions of art and creativity are discussed by R. Keith Sawyer (2000). While Dewey is argued by Sawyer to be focused on the process-centered approach, Sawyer does note product-centered deviations in *Art as Experience*.

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