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Kenneth Burke, John Dewey, and the Rhetoric of Aesthetics

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ABSTRACT

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Kenneth Burke and John Dewey each published books on aesthetics in the 1930s. These texts present parallel conceptions of aesthetics as holding a distinctly rhetorical role in society. My project is to line up these theories, focusing particularly on two key terms in each theory: Burke's *eloquence* and Dewey's *expression.* Together, these two terms explain what constitutes an aesthetic experience and explain how an aesthetic experience can open up individuals in a society to a variety of perspectives and identifications. As individuals are allowed to inhabit the experiences of others through their interactions with art, they are poised to become more cooperative and compassionate members of a democratic society.

Keywords: Kenneth Burke, John Dewey, Counter-Statement, rhetoric, aesthetics, art, experience, identification, democracy

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KENNETH BURKE, JOHN DEWEY, AND THE RHETORIC OF AESTHETICS

Introduction

The aesthetic theories of Kenneth Burke and John Dewey appeared in publication at nearly the same time: Burke's *Counter-Statement* was published in 1931 while Dewey's *Art as Experience* was published only three years later in 1934. Although the two theorists never explicitly respond to each other's ideas in their respective works, their theories line up in important ways to form what could be called a rhetoric of civic aesthetics. My project here is to describe that rhetorical aesthetic and to suggest its potential as a theoretical lens for understanding the communicative power of aesthetic experience as a form of public discourse. I also suggest that a rhetorical view of aesthetics that supports the role of art as public discourse provides a model for bridging the modernist separation of high art and utilitarian art and, thus, for reconnecting art to everyday, democratic life.

Both Dewey and Burke see art as having an inherently rhetorical and civic role in the public realm and, therefore, are concerned about the widening gap between the fine arts and everyday life in modern society. Dewey hearkens back to historical Athens as an example of a society that did not draw a line between art and public life. In *Art as Experience*, Dewey writes that because art in ancient Greece "reflected the emotions and ideas that are associated with the chief institutions of social life. . . . [, t]he idea of 'art for art's sake' would not have been even understood [by the Greek artists]" (6). In his recent work on Dewey, Nathan Crick further explains this idea when he describes the distinct connection between the artist and the society from which the Athenian artist emerged:

> Although each artist dealt with a unique medium, they all saw themselves as reacting to a shared situation toward which the community had a largely common

> emotional response. The function of Greek artists was equally instrumental and aesthetic; they were to intelligently guide the community by helping interpret and express their emotions in a common language. (148)

Art, then, had a clear rhetorical purpose in the Greek democracy: to help, as Crick says, "guide the community" and provide a sort of interpretative apparatus for life to members of the community. Indeed, Burke likewise was explicit about the civic purposes of Athenian art: "Art, viewed civically," he writes, "is not merely a mode of dignification. It is also a kind of 'medicine,' a mode of 'purgation'" ("The Institutions of Art" 60). Artists in the Athenian democracy worked with the rhetorical purpose of providing the citizenry with aesthetic experiences that evoked the kinds of emotions that reinforced or reinterpreted the experiences of their everyday lives—experiences that cultivated in them public virtues.

In contrast, Crick notes, modernity has seen "a detachment of the arts from their original function within the community. . . .[Art], instead of being a means [for] communion and celebration, becomes largely a commodity for sale in the marketplace and [is] used for personal ends of self-expression" (149). This separation of art from community life and the communication that sustains it is something that both Dewey and Burke saw as a danger to democratic society. For both, art provides an indispensable form of communication in a democracy. My argument is that both Dewey and Burke see aesthetic creation and reception as highly rhetorical and, consequently, civic practices. To make that argument, I explore the implications of their work for the idea of art as a form of discourse necessary to the functioning of a healthy democratic society.

Paul Stob has written compellingly about the theoretical parallels between Kenneth Burke and John Dewey. He argues that Burke and Dewey conceived of a similar role for

language (defined as any type of symbolic communication) in forming a unified public capable of creating a better civic life. According to Stob, Burke and Dewey both envision a democracy in which citizens share a common, unifying language that they utilize to "solve problems and build communities" (240). My analysis builds on this idea and differs from Stob's comparison of Burke and Dewey by focusing on Burke's and Dewey's aesthetic theories, an avenue that Stob leaves unexplored. Robert Danisch has looked at the highly rhetorical aspects of John Dewey's pragmatic philosophy, and Nathan Crick, Mark Mattern, and others have explored how Dewey's aesthetic theory connects to public life and the building of a democracy.[1] None of these scholars, however, have examined the clear similarities between Burke's and Dewey's conceptions of the aesthetic or the implications of their synthesized theories for art as a form of public discourse. I will investigate these intersections to demonstrate how each enriches the other when they are read side by side, and how together these theories illuminate the role of rhetoric in understanding the communicative function of art and in reconnecting art and everyday experience in society.

Burke and Dewey can be seen as addressing a problem that recent art historians like Preben Mortensen and Larry Shiner have also attempted to make clear: that the modern conception of art, which emerged two hundred years ago and which will be discussed in greater detail below, depends on a division of art and craft, a division that was simply non-existent in Athens and everywhere else prior to the eighteenth-century. Both Mortensen and Shiner suggest recent years have shown a greater concern in the art world for attempts to reconnect art with everyday experience, citing examples of quilts displayed on the walls of art museums and "street noises in symphony halls" (Shiner 3). I propose that Burke, Dewey, and a rhetorical aesthetic suggest a role for rhetoric in this reconnection of art and the everyday by positing that art as a form of public discourse can help individuals navigate identity in democratic life.

Initially, Burke's and Dewey's aesthetic theories might seem to conflict. After all, Dewey's book is titled *Art as Experience* and Burke attacks the very idea of art as experience in *Counter-Statement*. Burke writes, "Experience is less the *aim* of art than the *subject* of art; art is not *experience*, but *something added* to experience. But by making art and experience synonymous, a critic provides an unanswerable reason why a man of spirit should renounce art forever" (77). Despite this seeming contradiction, a closer look at Burke's and Dewey's terms and definitions reveals that both maintain similar conceptions of what constitutes art and aesthetic experience. Burke's theory of aesthetic experience can be summarized in his definition of form. He writes, "*Form* in literature is an arousing and fulfillment of desires. A work has form in so far as one part of it leads a reader to anticipate another part, to be gratified by the sequence" (*Counter-Statement* 124). For Burke, *form* describes the *experience* of the reader in responding to a text—an experience that involves the evocation of an emotional response in the reader, who is, after all, "gratified by the sequence." Dewey's concept of experience similarly describes a sequence that results in emotional gratification, but Dewey's more complete definition of experience helps round out Burke's *form.* After admitting that much of what we call experience is actually "inchoate" (36) and unformed, Dewey suggests that only *some* distinct moments have the type of form that makes them *an* experience:

> [W]e have *an* experience when the material experienced runs its course to fulfillment. Then and then only is it integrated within and demarcated in the general stream of experience from other experiences. A piece of work is finished in a way that is satisfactory; a problem receives its solution; a game is played through; a situation, whether that of eating a meal, playing a game of chess, carrying on a conversation, writing a book, or taking part in a political campaign,

> is so rounded out that its close is a consummation and not a cessation. Such an experience is a whole and carries with it its own individualizing quality and self-sufficiency. It is *an* experience. (*Art* 37)

An experience, then, has form and results in a "consummation" that could be compared to what Burke calls the "fulfillment of desires" (124).

Dewey's ideas coincide with Burke's remark that art is "s*omething added* to experience [emphasis in the original]" (77). For Dewey, this would involve the ways in which "[e]very work of art follows the plan of, and pattern of, a complete experience, rendering it *more* intensely and concentratedly felt" (54 emphasis added). The difference between *an* experience that occurs in everyday life and an aesthetic experience that is prompted by a particular art object is simply that one is "more intensely and concentratedly felt" because it is consciously created—or, as Dewey says, it is "selected, simplified, clarified, abridged and condensed according to [the artist's] interest" (56). Dewey acknowledges, then, that the "fine arts" may contain an aesthetic quality to a deeper degree than everyday objects or experiences, but he sees the distinction only as a matter of degree, not of kind.

Dewey's and Burke's conception of aesthetics complement each other in significant ways. Burke's explicit concepts of incipient action, identification, and of the rhetorical functions of the aesthetic lend clear rhetorical dimension to Dewey's inherently rhetorical ideas about art, ideas to which he never attaches the term "rhetoric." (In fact, although Dewey is keenly interested in the idea of communication as art, the actual word "rhetoric" appears only once in Dewey's *Art as Experience*, and even this one occurrence of the word does not establish the relationship between aesthetics and rhetoric. In contrast, some form of the word "rhetoric" appears 17 times in Burke's *Counter-Statement*, a book more than a hundred pages shorter than

Dewey's.) In turn, as touched on above, Dewey's careful and detailed articulation of what constitutes an aesthetic experience adds depth to Burke's less comprehensive explanation, and Dewey's aesthetic conception of *expression* nicely clarifies Burke's somewhat complicated idea of *eloquence*, as will be demonstrated later on in this article. Dewey's explicit focus on art as communication also fleshes out Burke's developing concepts of the importance of communication as a way of explaining the experience of art. When synthesized together, these two theories of identification and experience demonstrate how aesthetics communicate and influence, even when purposeful persuasion is not their main object. Both together are necessary to understanding how a rhetorical perspective of art can help bridge modernity's gap between art and everyday experience and how art allows for experiences of identification and transformation among citizens in a democratic society.

In the sections that follow, I will first briefly explore what Burke and Dewey mean by the term art, then describe the ways in which Burke and Dewey's aesthetic theories intersect and inform one another, and, finally, I will explain how art works as a form of rhetorical communication and public discourse to help sustain a democracy.

Defining Art

Both Dewey and Burke developed their civically-focused aesthetic theories at a time when the contemporary definition of art focused primarily on the idea of fine arts. Dewey writes, "In common conception, the work of art is often identified with the building, book, painting, or statue in its existence apart from human experience. Since the actual work of art is what the product does with and in experience, the result is not favorable to understanding" (*Art* 1). For Dewey, it is pointless to separate the art object from the aesthetic experience evoked in the creation or reception of that object. Dewey's theory attempts to reconnect art (which for him is

broadly defined to include everyday objects and events) with that concept of experience. For both Burke and Dewey, the term "art" refers to something much larger than the fine arts. They were more concerned with the experience evoked by art in the people that encounter it than with art objects themselves. In many ways, they were attempting to explain how art transforms everyday life experiences into reconstructed perceptions of the world—perceptions that are shared to the extent that the art is made public. The theories of Burke and Dewey are both influenced by and contrast with the prevailing modernist conceptions of art in the early twentieth century. Jack Selzer has explored how Burke was influenced by the modernist aesthetes among whom he circulated during his early career. Despite the fact that Burke is often seen as a "maverick genius," Selzer argues that "Burke's independence has been overstated" and "that Burke defined his early self and his early work both with and against several key strains in the modernist conversation" (21). Burke himself would agree. In *Language as Symbolic Action*, he reflects on how his view of artistic expressions changed over the years stating, "I began in the aesthete tradition, with its stress upon self-expression. Things started moving for me in earnest when, as attested in *Counter-Statement*, I made the shift from 'self-expression' to 'communication'" (305). It is in this shift towards seeing art as communication, articulated in *Counter-Statement*, that Burke can be connected to Dewey.

That art is a form of communication is also a central tenet of Dewey's aesthetic theory. Mark Mattern writes, "The crux of Dewey's argument was that art, if closely tied to people's everyday lives, is a form of communication through which people learn about each other's similarities and differences, break through some of the barriers to understanding and awareness, and develop some of the commonalities that define community" (55). Because Dewey's broad definition of art included every day actions and objects with a clearly utilitarian purpose (like a

bowl or a cup), Dewey rejected the modernist aesthetic idea of art for art's sake. For Dewey, art plays an important role in the way individuals connect to their surrounding society and culture. Dewey writes that "works of art are the most intimate and energetic means of aiding individuals to share in the arts of living. Civilization is uncivil because human beings are divided into non-communicating sects, races, nations, classes and cliques" (350). For Dewey, "[a]rt is a more universal mode of language than is the speech that exists in a multitude of mutually unintelligible forms" (349). Art can connect individuals to one another as it synthesizes everyday occurrences into formal aesthetic experiences.

Recent historians of art also acknowledge the modern separation of art and life as a departure from earlier conceptions of art. In *Art in the Social Order: The Making of the Modern Conception of Art*, Preben Mortensen explores the history and development of the Western world's prevailing modern conception of art, which he summarizes in four main ideas:

1. The most important forms of art are sculpture, painting, music, literature (including drama and poetry), and architecture.
2. Art has a value in and of itself, just in virtue of being art, and not just as (for example) an instrument for moral and religious instruction or as a source of knowledge.
3. The creation of works of art is essentially, as it ought to be, a free creation by individuals endowed with special talents, and cannot, or only to a limited degree, be learned and taught. Indeed, works of art partly gain their significance and value because they are personal expressions of unique individuals.

4. Works of art express a subjective truth, and therefore differ fundamentally from science or other forms of systematic inquiry, which deal with objective facts of nature or society. We can only get at what a work of art expresses if we actually experience it. It is not possible to repeat or replicate, or perhaps even translate, a work of art in the same way as it is, at least in principle, possible to substitute one account of the Russian Revolution with another, equally good account. (1)

Mortensen goes on to explore how this modern conception of art is of fairly recent origin and how conceptions of art vary according to historical time and place. Larry Shiner agrees with the recent origin of this modern conception when he writes, "Art as we have generally understood it is a European invention barely two hundred years old. It was preceded by a broader, more utilitarian system of art that lasted over two thousand years" (3). Both Mortensen and Shiner acknowledge the objections that Dewey raised to the modern conception of the fine arts in which art exists apart from common and civic experience. Mortensen writes, "Some philosophers (for example John Dewey and more recently Richard Shusterman and David Novitz) and many twentieth-century artists deplore this conception of art, because, they claim, it isolates art from the broader concerns of people, makes it elitist, or outright irrelevant" (2). Shiner continues this explanation of Dewey when he writes that Dewey "vigorously attack[ed] the separation of the fine and useful arts and the separation of art and life generally" (264).[2]

For John Dewey, art was integrally related to the experience of everyday life—in fact, as discussed earlier, for Dewey, art is experience. Dewey is critical of those who would separate art from its environment. "Usually," he writes, "there is a hostile reaction to a conception of art that connects it with the activities of a live creature in its environment. The hostility to association of

fine art with normal processes of living is a pathetic, even a tragic, commentary on life as it is ordinarily lived" (28). Kenneth Burke agrees that there is an important connection between art and day-to-day life. He writes, "The forms of art, to summarize, are not exclusively 'aesthetic.' They can be said to have a prior existence in the experiences of the person hearing or reading the work of art. They parallel processes which characterize his experiences outside of art" (*Counter-Statement* 143). Later, in describing his concept of *eloquence*, Burke writes, "The primary purpose of eloquence is not to enable us to live our lives on paper—it is to convert life into its most thorough verbal equivalent" (167). In other words, for both Burke and Dewey, art has its basis in the common experiences of everyday life. Art is the translation of everyday experience to aesthetic experience.

Burke's and Dewey's Situated Aesthetic Theories

For Burke and Dewey, the aesthetic experience necessarily involves the context of the surrounding society. In his *Philosophy of Literary Form*, Burke writes, "Critical and imaginative works are answers to questions posed by the situation in which they arose" (1). In other words, art grows out of situations that occur in real life—art comes to symbolize actual life experiences or "patterns of experience" (*Counter-Statement* 150-51). As art comes to encapsulate the emotions and experiences that audiences inhabit in actual life, Dewey states, "it can enter into the experiences of others and enable them to have more intense and more fully rounded out experiences of their own" (*Art* 113). In this way, art allows for communication between individuals. Artists express their perceptions of and experiences with life in the art objects they create, and audiences utilize art to round out and intensify their own experiences. The aesthetic experience becomes expansive of more than just our experiences. The aesthetic experience takes us outside of ourselves and creates the possibility of shared experience with others (whether an

artist or other members of the audience) through the art. Even everyday objects and events can be fodder for aesthetic experiences that take us outside of ourselves.

The possibility of communication provided by art responds to one of the central problems of human existence: the inability of human beings to connect with one another. Human beings are inherently divided because they inhabit separate bodies, experiences, and ideologies. In his essay, "The Rhetorical Situation," Burke describes the barriers that prevent human beings from fully identifying with each other when he writes, "[A]lthough I as a *person* may sympathetically identify myself with other people's pleasures and pains, in my nature as a sheer *body* the pleasures of *my* food and the pains of *my* toothache are experienced by me alone" (265-66). This basic inability to fully inhabit someone else's experiences represents a problem faced by every individual within a society, and this barrier to unity is a potential danger to democracy, which, according to philosopher Paul Woodruff, requires harmony between people (*First Democracy* 81-107).

Burke and Dewey both see art, as it creates opportunities for shared emotion and shared experience, breaking communication barriers that otherwise develop between individuals. In a society that is full of divisions and rifts, art allows two separate people to inhabit and share a common emotional, aesthetic experience and thus recognize in each other a capacity for a common way of experiencing, and, by extension, a common way of believing and living. This recognition constitutes what Burke calls identification. For Burke, identification is a process of one individual becoming "substantially one" (*Rhetoric* 21) with another person, while still maintaining individual motives and desires. "Thus," Burke writes, in the process of identification, an individual "is both joined and separate, at once a distinct substance and consubstantial with another" (21). Burke sees the ability to identify with others as the purpose of

rhetorical communication, and identification is most complete in the aesthetic experience. Dewey writes, "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 the gulfs and walls that limit community of experience" (109). As these "gulfs and walls" are bridged by the connection with others provided by shared aesthetic experience, the individual attitudes and perspectives of separate members of a community can be changed, paving the way for democratic interactions.

This is not to say that art used for the purpose of connecting individuals within a society becomes purely didactic or political. Indeed, art need not be intentionally rhetorical to function rhetorically according to Burke's and Dewey's theories. Dewey writes, "I do not say that communication to others is the intent of an artist. But it is the consequence of his work" (*Art* 108). Burke further explains this idea when he makes a distinction between "the pamphlet, the political tract, the soap-box oration" and "the literature of the imagination," which, he says, "may prepare the mind in a more general fashion. That is, a great work, dealing with some hypothetical even remote in history and 'immediacy,' may leave us with a desire for justice" (*Counter-Statement* 189). In other words, a particular work can create certain emotions or desires in an audience, emotions and desires that can then be applied to situations outside of the art. This type of art gives people the opportunity to imaginatively inhabit an alternate experience, allowing them to temporarily identify with another person's life experiences or values or emotions. It is these identifications that may "prepare [their] minds" for a change of opinion or a new action.

This idea relates to Burke's concept of *incipient action*, where there is an action incipient to the attitude evoked by a particular work (*Grammar* 235). This is also how art as a form of rhetorical communication differs from the types of speeches and oratory that we typically term rhetoric. Nathan Crick writes, "In genuine aesthetic experience, the self feels a sense of natural

and uncoerced movement toward some consummation; the self feels a creative and active participant in the making of something new" (139). In other words, an audience to an aesthetic work may enjoy the experience as *an* experience without conscious concern for the message or what action they should perform as a result. Certainly, the art of influence is at work in aesthetic experience, but it may not be the central object, as in political oratory. Indeed, the experience of listening to political oratory itself may become an aesthetic experience when it is enjoyed as *an* experience. Kenneth Burke writes, "[A]s regards Rhetoric and Poetics, is it not true that, whatever their differences, they also have an area of overlap, since either Poetry or the exercisings of Rhetoric can be enjoyed for their own sake?" (*Language* 295). The aesthetic experience, which can occur in response to fine arts, popular arts, or even political oratory, has a less direct rhetorical purpose than other types of communication. But it has a greater potential for creating shared experiences, emotions, and identifications.

Art inherently evokes a response, or as Burke says, "aims at effects" (*Counter-Statement* 211) and so creates the opportunity for communication. Connection or communication happens when there is some commonality between reader and writer, or as Burke puts it, "communication exist[s] in the 'margin of overlap' between the writer's experience and the reader's" (*Counter-Statement* 78). This "margin of overlap" allows the audience to participate in the art itself. The more completely a work allows for this type of participation and communication, the more eloquent or expressive (in Burke's and Dewey's terms respectively) the piece of art is.

Both Burke's *eloquence* and Dewey's *expression* explore, in the tradition of Aristotle, how art achieves its rhetorical purpose of identification and audience participation through the evocation of emotion. Aristotle's familiar definition of tragedy includes the stipulation that good tragedy must contain "incidents arousing pity and fear, wherewith to accomplish its catharsis of

such emotions" (230). Kenneth Burke refers to "the field of art" as "the evocation of emotion by mechanism" (56). Later on, he writes that "literature as art . . . [is] literature designed for the express purpose of arousing emotions" (123). And, finally, Dewey describes how artists "build up a concrete situation and permit *it* to evoke emotional response. . . . the artist 'does the deed that breeds' the emotion" (70). In this view of art, the focus is on what occurs within an audience as that audience experiences a work of art—it is, after all, within the audience's minds that the artist attempts to evoke emotion. Because emotions exist within a particular subject (someone must feel the emotion in order for an emotion to exist), the effort to arouse emotions is an effort to arouse an audience. Art that aims to arouse emotions is art that seeks to engage an audience and to invite the audience to participate in the creation of the aesthetic experience.

Dewey and Burke's distinction that art is a participatory project is an important one. According to the modern conception of art, artistic expression has often referred to monological self-expression of a particular individual's ideas or emotions, or, as Preben Mortensen stated it, "the personal expressions of unique individuals" (1). Both Burke and Dewey, however, make a distinction between this type of monological expression and the artistic, participatory expression which ultimately engages individuals in a powerful aesthetic experience. Burke writes,

> Self-expression today is too often confused with pure utterance . . .The maniac attains self-expression when he tells us that he is Napoleon; but Napoleon attained self-expression by commanding an army. And, transferring the analogy, the self-expression of the artist, *qua* artist, is not distinguished by the uttering of emotion, but by the evocation of emotion. If, as humans, we cry out that we are Napoleon, as artists we seek to command an army. (*Counter-Statement* 53)

The work of the artist is deliberate and focused both inward to past experience and outward to the audience, but the spontaneous and immediate emotional release of an individual is focused inward only. This exclusive inward focus is what keeps Burke and Dewey from identifying these outbursts as artistic or aesthetic. The artist in Burke seeks to *evoke* emotions, just as Aristotle's tragedians seek to *arouse* emotions. The idea is Aristotelian. Dewey confirms that expression cannot be confined to the artist alone when he writes, "The material expressed cannot be private; that is the state of the madhouse" (112). Art, then, is distinguished from egocentric or maniacal ravings by its emphasis on audience reception and participation. The artist's expression finds a correlative in the experiences of the larger community surrounding him or her.

In order to clarify how this process happens, it will be helpful to carefully analyze two key terms: first, Burke's *eloquence* and second, Dewey's *expression* and the ways in which each of these concepts connect to art's rhetorical function of evoking emotion and creating opportunities for emotional identification. The terms *eloquence* and *expression* overlap, enrich, and clarify each other, finally making it clear how emotional identification can lead to transformations in individual perspectives. As individual perspectives are transformed through experiences of identification, members of a democratic society are poised to view the variety of perspectives within their community with more tolerance and compassion.

Eloquence

Burke's idea of *eloquence* depends on two other Burkean terms: *patterns of experience* and *symbol*. A pattern of experience is a building block for the creation of art. Burke defines *patterns of experience* as "[e]xperience arising out of a relationship between an organism and its environment, the adjustments of the organism will depend upon the nature of the environment" (*Counter-Statement* 150). The environmental element that sparks a pattern of experience,

according to Burke, could be any number of things: "a cruel father, an indulgent mother, a long stretch of poverty, the death of a favorite aunt, rough treatment at the hands of other boys," and the list goes on (151). A person faced with one of these environmental factors will develop or "adjust" to the environment through use of emotional response. The combination of the environmental factor with the emotional response forms a pattern of experience—a pattern of distrust, jealousy, love, grief, or any other emotion (152). The artist creates a form or a symbol to encapsulate these patterns of experiences, enabling audiences to identify with the symbol that reflects their own experiences with patterns of particular emotions.

Although the audience may not identify with the exact details making up a pattern, the pattern of an emotion itself (the pattern of love or the pattern of jealousy) and the symbol which represents this pattern are things with which an audience can come to identify. Although most jealous spouses may not ultimately smother their partners with a pillow as does Othello, many of them may be able to identify with the pattern of jealousy demonstrated symbolically in the Shakespearean play. The smothering scene in *Othello* (and really the entire story of Othello and Desdemona's tragedy) becomes the symbol of the pattern of experience we recognize as jealousy. Of course, *Othello*'s plot demonstrates only one variant of many different plots or symbols that could come to encapsulate the pattern of emotional experience called jealousy. Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale* demonstrates an alternate example of how this pattern of experience might be symbolized.

According to Burke, "The Symbol is the verbal parallel to a pattern of experience" (*Counter-Statement* 152). Later, Burke defines the symbol as "the conversion of an experiential pattern into a formula for affecting an audience" (157). An entire plot or an entire work might be a symbol, but a particular character or aspect within a work can also work as a symbol. A symbol

is simply an artistic representation of a pattern of experience. When a symbol affects an audience by evoking their emotions, it functions rhetorically. In order to communicate through art, the artist must create a symbol that draws on the "material" of life: "pity, tragedy, sweetness, humor, in short all the emotions which we experience in life proper" (40). This connection of art to real emotion and experience outside of art is what allows an audience to have a powerful and even transcendental experience with art. According to Burke, symbols are more powerful when they move beyond merely symbolizing the artist's pattern of experiences and begin to touch nerves in an audience that remind them of their own patterns of experience. Burke writes, "A work deals with life for a great many people when it symbolizes such patterns of experience as characterize a great many people and ramifies the Symbol by such modes of experience as appeal to a great many people" (191). Art, in Burke's philosophy, always has this connection to life outside of the art. It is never art for art's sake. Greig Henderson writes of Burke's view of art, "The work of art is always doing something more than simply being itself, and there is no suggestion that the work of art is a self-sufficient object constituting its own hermetically sealed universe of discourse" (176). Rather, the work depends on the audience's real life experiences and emotions outside of the art for its emotional "charge" (*Counter-Statement* 164).

The patterns of experience an artist draws upon and the symbol that the artist creates to represent those patterns of experience work together to create the experience of eloquence. As mentioned earlier, Burke describes the "primary purpose of eloquence" as the purpose of "convert[ing] life into its most thorough verbal equivalent" (*Counter-Statement* 167). Although a perfect verbal equivalent is impossible, eloquence is achieved when an artist most nearly approaches symbolizing patterns of experience. Also according to Burke, "One work is more eloquent than another if it contains Symbolic [sic] and formal charges in greater profusion. That

work would be most eloquent in which each line had some image or statement relying strongly upon our experience outside the work of art, and in which each image or statement had a pronounced formal saliency" (165). There seems to be two essential requirements of an eloquent piece of art then: it must be symbolic and formally charged, and it must build upon emotions and patterns of experience. Eloquence, then, is the effective development of a pattern of experience into a symbol with which audiences can identify. It is through this eloquence that an artist can come closest to overcoming the inherent physiological inability of one body to completely identify with another body. Through attempting to encapsulate human emotion and experience in the symbol of his or her art, the artist is able to create the opportunity for unity with the audience as both artist and audience simultaneously share and inhabit the same pattern of experience. In sharing experience in this way, individuals are opened to the possibility of identification with new attitudes and perspectives. As individuals return to day-to-day life after such an opportunity, they are better prepared to enter into the shared concerns of fellow citizens in a democracy.

Expression

Dewey's concept of *expression* adds a helpful dimension to Burke's *eloquence* by expanding on how art is communication. Dewey makes a helpful distinction, touched on earlier, about the difference between monological self-expression and what we might call dialectical, artistic expression. Whereas self-expression can be described as "a spewing forth" that ultimately "may bring relief" (*Art* 64), artistic expression depends on the transformation of raw, personal emotion into a symbolic equivalent with the purpose of communicating or evoking emotion. A "spewing forth" or what Dewey elsewhere calls a "discharge" (*Art* 82) is a display of emotion that does not seek anything beyond or outside of itself. It does not lead to identification or

communication. Artistic expression, however, like Burke's *eloquence*, seeks the evocation of emotion in the audience—it invites participation.

In his work on Dewey's aesthetic theory, Thomas Alexander writes, "Expression refers to an interaction; it is an event which becomes *an* experience. . . . The aesthetic encounter with the object will evoke emotion and transform or reconstruct the habits of perception of the appreciators" (229). By coming to the art with prior experiences and by allowing emotion to be evoked, the audience becomes a participant in an aesthetic experience. Dewey believes that "poet and novelist have an immense advantage over even an expert psychologist in dealing with an emotion. For the former build up a concrete situation and permit *it* to evoke emotional response" (70). The capacity of art to evoke emotion is what gives it its inherent rhetorical function. And the "concrete situation" that Dewey speaks of that becomes the *form* that allows emotion to be evoked and that allows for audience to participate in the art.

Form for Dewey, as Symbol for Burke, is the thoughtful, conscious "*shaping of materials* [by an artist] in the interest of *embodying* the excitement," and without this shaping of materials, "there is no expression" (*Art* 64). Expression results from a "long period of gestation" (79). In this gestational period, "The primitive and raw material of experience needs to be reworked in order to secure artistic expression" (77). Dewey further explains that "[e]ven in the most mechanical modes of expression there is interaction and a consequent transformation of the primitive material" (67), and that "[o]nly when material is employed as media is there expression and art" (66). In expressive art, then, emotion and experience are the raw materials which are literally transformed—given a new form which better *expresses* to an audience. In speaking of metaphor (a type of form), Dewey writes, "Verbal expression may take the form of metaphor, but behind the words lies an act of emotional identification, not an intellectual comparison" (79).

Underneath, but intrinsically connected to the form of art, is this rhetorical "act of emotional identification"—the act of evoking emotion and creating emotional connection with an audience. The point of connection is the material of art (the raw materials of emotion and experience), but the connection is facilitated by the form, by the reconstitution of the experience into something new which calls for reexamination.

It is here that Burke's rhetoric of identification helps make explicit the rhetorical aspects of Dewey's theory. Identification, according to Burke, is an essential aspect of rhetorical persuasion. In *A Rhetoric of Motives*, Burke writes, "You persuade a man only insofar as you can talk his language by speech, gesture, tonality, order, image, attitude, idea, *identifying* your ways with his" (55). Identification involves the ways in which we are affected and even inherently changed by the messages, stories, and ideas that we take inside ourselves. When we identify with something, we are able to adopt the attitude or beliefs of the people or the art (and, by extension, the artist) we are identifying with. The "act of emotional identification" (*Art* 79) that Dewey describes refers to the possibility of artist and audience to share the same emotion as a result of the evocative power of a particular work of art. As Dewey says, "The more a work embodies what belongs to experiences common to many individuals, the more expressive it is" (297)—the more it is able to allow for identification and communion between individuals.

For Dewey, like Aristotle, emotion is "*to* or *from* or *about* something objective" (*Art* 69). Emotion occurs as a result of how we view the objective world around us. Emotions are powerful because they color the way we perceive and then interact with the world around us and, thus, by extension the way we see and respond to art. When an artist or a rhetor understands the elements that evoke genuine emotion (the things that an emotion is "*to* or *from* or *about*"), then, theoretically, by ensuring that those elements are present in the art object created, he or she will

be able to evoke a particular emotion and create an experience of emotional identification. John Dewey supports this notion when he says, "The intimate nature of emotion is manifested in the experience of one watching a play on the stage or reading a novel. It attends the development of a plot; and a plot requires a stage, a space, wherein to develop and time in which to unfold. Experience is emotional but there are no separate things called emotions in it" (43). Aesthetic emotion entails *an* experience with a beginning, middle, and end—a developed sense of plot.

As an audience responds to a work of art, they make connections which eventually lead them to feel the emotions evoked by the experience and identify with the emotional experience of the art. This identification involves seeing the similarities between the emotional experience in the art and the emotions and experiences that belong to the audience outside of the art. In this way, the audience can imaginatively inhabit the emotional experience of the art. Thomas Alexander, in commenting on Dewey, writes that emotion "is the capacity to become involved with a subject matter or a medium. . . . If the emotion is lacking, there is no involvement, no care, and so no deep or significant response" (222). If there is no emotion, there is also no identification and then no increased unity which leads to a stronger democracy.

As art allows for identification with new or different attitudes, it paves the way for the transformation or reformation of individual perspectives. The transformative power of art consists in its ability to "[strike] below the barriers that separate human beings from one another" (*Art* 282). Expressive art leads to identification and communion, and identification and communion lead to the development of individuals and finally of communities. Dewey says, "Expression is the clarification of turbid emotion; our appetites know themselves when they are reflected in the mirror of art, and as they know themselves they are transfigured" (80). In other words, human beings themselves can be "transfigured" by experiences with art. Perceptions and

attitudes can be changed by the aesthetic experience of interacting with expressive art because the process of interaction becomes a process of transcendence. Audiences transcend their own perspective and experience and, as they come back from the aesthetic experience, are able to move outside of the patterns of experience coloring their worldview and, in turn, adopt new, perhaps more productive, patterns of experience. In commenting on Dewey's aesthetic philosophy, Philip Jackson writes that

> those art-centered experiences that make a profound difference in our lives deserve being called spiritual—though perhaps not religious in the conventional sense—insofar as they involve feelings and thoughts of a transcendental nature. What is transcended in such situations are the boundaries of custom. The experiencer undergoes an altered sensibility, achieves a novel way of looking at things. (96)

Through interaction with expressive art, the audience is able to temporarily transcend the particular attitudes or human limitations which prevent them from experiencing real connection or communion with other human beings. Thomas Alexander writes, "[T]he function of art can be said to be representation—not as formally translating an exact image or idea but as 're-presenting' the world, as giving the world back to us its freshness and novelty" (229). Expressive art allows for such a recreation of the world because it requests the participation of the audience in the aesthetic experience. Even more than other types of communication, art invites audiences to imaginatively and empathetically take on the perspective and worldview of someone else.

The audience is able to bring prior experiences and emotions to their perception of the art—in this way, the audience co-creates the aesthetic experience with the artist. Dewey writes that each work of art "is created every time it is esthetically experienced" (113). In this way,

aesthetic experience is a continual back-and-forth, dialectical exchange of creation. Audiences participate in process of dialogical exchange where both audience and artist bring something to the art object (in its distinct form) and come away from the object somehow changed. Thomas Alexander sums up the importance of this concept well when he writes: "Expression, in other words, is nothing less than the task of life, standing as it does for the fulfillment of our human impulsion for meaning and value" (233). Expression allows individuals (artists and audiences) to participate in creating meaning and to experience communion in a world saturated with "gulfs and walls" (*Art* 109) that separate us from each other.

Burke and Dewey on Art and Democratic Life

Why is emotional identification through art so important to democratic life? One reason is that it expands the imaginative ability of individuals within a democracy. The aesthetic experience which allows us to transcend our own narrow, very personal emotional experiences and perspectives—what Dewey calls our "gulfs and walls" (*Art* 109)—creates for us the possibility of emotional connection with others. In order to have an aesthetic experience, in order to be a part of this emotional connection, individuals must have a developed ability to live (at least for a while) imaginatively outside of themselves. This is what we might call the moral power of art. Dewey writes that "the ideal factors in every moral outlook and human loyalty are imaginative. . . . Hence it is that art is more moral than moralities" (*Art* 362). Nathan Crick expands on this idea when he writes, "Read through the lens of imagination, the moral function of art begins to take on a rhetorical character insofar as it opens possibilities that can be taken up experimentally by a culture as it progresses into the future" (158). Art offers a democratic people the opportunity to experience harmony with one another through experiences of shared emotion, and also potentially offers new ways of interacting and responding to one another. Dewey writes,

"The moral function of art itself is to remove prejudice, do away with the scales that keep the eye from seeing, tear away the veils due to wont and custom, perfect the power to perceive" (338). As art fulfills this function, it prompts individuals to see and adopt new, more tolerant, and imaginatively open perspectives—which in turns allow them to reason and act more for the good of a community as they function within a democracy.

Art performs a moral and rhetorical function because it allows and even demands for us to become emotionally engaged in the life experiences of other people—it creates opportunities for empathy. Martha Nussbaum believes that tragedy allows people to "embrace the lives of others" (*Upheavals* 353). Amelie Rorty argues in a similar vein by saying Aristotle teaches us "that good tragic drama—tragic drama properly understood—can promote rather than thwart understanding, attune rather than distort the emotions it arouses" (3). Kenneth Burke comments insightfully on the rhetorical purpose of art in the introduction to his *Rhetoric of Motives*,

> We do not flatter ourselves that any one book can contribute much to counteract the torrents of ill will into which so many of our contemporaries have so avidly and sanctimoniously plunged. But the more strident our journalists, politicians, and alas! even many of churchmen become, the more convinced we are that books should be written for tolerance and contemplation. (xv)

Art which aims to arouse aesthetic emotion (which is, emotional engagement in someone else's emotional plot) fulfills this aim by allowing us opportunities to develop greater tolerances for our individual differences and greater contemplation of our relationships to each other as members of society. Without the presence of emotion in art, this moral outcome and identification is not possible.

Although Burke and Dewey expound on the moral and rhetorical power of art, they are not attempting to promote didactic art. Writes Dewey,

> It is by way of communication that art becomes the incomparable organ of instruction, but the way is so remote from that usually associated with the idea of education, it is a way that lifts art so far above what we are accustomed to think of as instruction, that we are repelled by any suggestion of teaching and learning in connection with art. But our revolt is in fact a reflection upon education that proceeds by methods so literal as to exclude the imagination and one not touching the desires and emotions of men. (*Art* 361)

Rather than dictating behavior, art provides individuals with possibilities or strategies for behavior—possibilities for action. Burke writes, "Art forms like 'tragedy' or 'comedy' or 'satire' would be treated as *equipments for living*, that size up situations in various ways and in keeping with correspondingly various attitudes" (*Philosophy* 304). Art with a rhetorical, emotional impact presents its audiences with strategies of perceiving and responding to situations, and, writes Burke, "Another name for strategies might be *attitudes*" (297). Attitudes, according to Burke, have "the quality of 'incipient action[s]" (*Grammar* 480). This idea of incipient action suggests how aesthetic experience and identification can eventually be translated into actual actions within a democracy. The ways in which individuals emotionally identify themselves results in the ways they will interact with others around them.

In *The Public and Its Problems*, John Dewey writes, "The idea [of a democracy] remains barren and empty save it is incarnated in human relationships. . . . The idea of democracy is a wider and fuller idea than can be exemplified in the state even at its best. To be realized it must affect all modes of human association, the family, the school, industry, religion" (143). If we

define democracy, apart from a form of government, as a mode of human interaction based on ideas of equality and harmony, then we can understand why Dewey writes that "the idea of democracy is a wider and fuller idea" than simply the idea of government. Certainly, the concept of what constitutes democracy and what public virtues are necessary for democratic life is challenging and complicated. For the purposes of my analysis here, Dewey's broad definition of democracy as it is "incarnated in human relationships" (143) is a helpful frame for discussing the role of art in democratic life. Art as a form of public discourse can do its best work here, at the level of interpersonal connectedness among individuals and whole communities.

As a vehicle for shared emotion and shared experience, art is an equalizer—it places individuals on the equal plane of experiencing and identifying with the same emotions. In "Responsibilities of National Greatness," Kenneth Burke explores how identification involves "notable risks and dangers, which must be recognized if democracy is to function at its best" (47). Identification involves opening ourselves up to being influenced. Wayne Booth seems to be describing Burke's theory of identification when he writes, "No one who has thought about it for five minutes can deny that we are at least partially constructed, in our most fundamental moral character, by the stories we have heard, or read, or viewed, or acted out in amateur theatricals: the stories we have really *listened* to" (240). Art must be part of a democracy because it allows people to experience different types of identification, and, then, as a result, to make choices about what types of identifications they want to accept and integrate into the formation of their own identities. Of course, because art can be such a powerful form of influence, it is indeed necessary for individuals to be critical in making these types of decisions about identification, in order to avoid being misled by propagandistic uses of art.[3]

Each work of art a person experiences has the potential to become a part of that person's way of evaluating and responding to the world. Consuming a variety of works representing a variety of perspectives creates a greater opportunity to fill in the gaps and expand the scope of one's world view. When discussing why each piece of art need not encapsulate the entire human experience, Burke writes, "For the reader the artist's world may become, at the termination of the fiction, a mere addition to his working hypotheses" (*Counter-Statement* 182). Each piece of art absorbed by an individual throughout a lifetime builds together to help that individual make sense of many patterns of experience. The reader takes what he or she learns from the symbol of an individual piece of art, and adds it to his or her own hypotheses for understanding the world and for interacting with people. The transcendent moment of connection that the art provides allows the individual to disconnect on some level from his or her own life and see patterns of experience through the lens of the art. In this process, it is less important that individuals in a community are consuming the same works of art or high arts as opposed to mass or popular arts as that they are consuming *expressive* or *eloquent* art, wherever it is found—art that allows for the type of identifications that invite individuals to see themselves and the world around them in new ways and, in so doing, cultivate public virtues like compassion and empathy.[4]

Although people are separated by bodies, time, space, ideologies, and unique life experiences, some level of human connection is possible through the transcendent possibilities of symbolic communication. The poetics of symbolic communication can function rhetorically by encouraging us to re-process our understanding of our own and others' experiences and, by extension, alter our interactions with other human beings. Of the Athenian democracy, Paul Woodruff writes that "in the arts they were the most creative community of its size in human history. In architecture, in painting, in sculpture, in poetry—in everything—they were dazzling"

(36). The Greeks used the arts as a type of emotional and civic education that "made the audiences more thoughtful about politics than they would otherwise have been" (229). Burke and Dewey seem to agree with this purpose for the arts. By evoking our emotions and allowing us to participate in an aesthetic experience, art provides us the opportunity for shared experience and even shared identity. The capacity art has to cause us to set aside our narrow views and to take on an alternative way of seeing represents perhaps the best contribution art makes to public discourse in a democracy. Burke's and Dewey's ideas of *eloquence* and *expression* are significant to rhetorical studies because they suggest a way to reimagine and reassert the role of art in democratic life. In turn, this new understanding will allow us to be critical and thoughtful about the art we experience, the identity we forge as individuals and as a community, and our openness to diverse views in a democratic society that must respond to and meet the needs of a variety of perspectives.

Notes

[1] Mattern explores Dewey's ideas about art as a powerful form of a communication that can help individuals and communities share unifying experiences. Mattern takes issue with Dewey, however, for "eras[ing] conflict, negotiation, and contestation—in short, politics—from the world of art" (55). Mattern expands on Dewey's theory by suggesting ways in which Dewey's ideas can be applied to the use of art in political action. Nathan Crick devotes a chapter to dissecting Dewey's aesthetic theories and presenting Dewey's implicit rhetorical ideas in explicitly rhetorical terms. Robert Danisch suggests that Dewey's pragmatism is highly rhetorical because it emphasizes social action as a result of communication.

[2] Although Shiner applauds Dewey for arguing against the separation of art and craft, Shiner ultimately concludes that Dewey's position on the subject is "ambiguous" because of Dewey's admission that some objects may fill a purely utilitarian purpose and therefore hold no interest for us. See Shiner 264-65.

[3] Certainly, art could be used as propaganda. Kenneth Burke's warnings about the dangers inherent in identification in "The Responsibilities of National Greatness" are helpful as a response to this possibility. Burke felt it was important for people to be careful and critical about the things with which they identify themselves in order to avoid identifications that could be potentially harmful or destructive.

[4] Granted, there are a variety of public virtues that could be discussed here as necessary to a functioning democracy: wisdom, justice, charity, and others. I focus here on the virtues of compassion and empathy because art, with its power to lift people imaginatively outside themselves and its inherent potential for identification, is uniquely suited to the cultivation of these virtues. Compassion and empathy, as virtues that emphasize understanding others, are also

essential to creating harmony—one of the central components of democracy discussed by Paul Woodruff in *First Democracy*.

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