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Integration versus Individualism? Art and Society in Dewey and Mukařovský

One common charge against aesthetic theories, namely that they are veiled intellectual interventions in social conflicts rather than disinterested inquiries into the nature of art, can certainly not be directed against John Dewey's *Art as Experience*. The very structure of his book indicates that the central idea of conceiving art as experience emerges from a critical sociological diagnosis of contemporary society. Threatened by disintegration into separate spheres, society no longer grants art an integral place in the everyday life of its people. Artists react to the loss of a once central function in a community with a "peculiar esthetic 'individualism'" furthering the impression that "separateness from ordinary experience is the very essence of art" (9) – a notion also supported by current aesthetic theory. Conversely, the

diffuseness and incoherence as exist in art today are the manifestation of the disruption of consensus of beliefs. Greater integration in the matter and form of the arts depends consequently upon a general change in culture in the direction of attitudes that are taken for granted in the basis of civilization and that form the subsoil of conscious beliefs and efforts. (340)

That this alignment of aesthetic theory and social intervention is not an easy one may be seen in the curious status of Dewey's diagnosis: with regard to the social dimension of art it inspires an aesthetic theory that emphasizes the continuity of aesthetic experience and ordinary life, the communal origin of art, and its contribution to human understanding and cross-cultural communication. Ultimately, Dewey pleads for a change in social organization that will solve "the problem of recovering an organic place for art in civilization" (338) and thereby democratically open up the fulfillment provided by aesthetic experience to the many.¹ With regard to art, however, Dewey's notion of incoherence in modernist art is a dead end in his train of thoughts: art and society, equally marked by a lack of integration, are aesthetically and politically undesirable and treated as aberrations to be overcome. To that end, *Art as Experience* empha-

1 This open commitment to social intervention through theory is also present in Richard Shusterman's reinterpretation of Dewey's ideas with the explicit aim to widen "art's borders to forms of popular culture and to the ethical art of fashioning one's life" so as to "afford more full and frequent aesthetic experience for more members of society" *Pragmatist Aesthetics*, 59, 47.

sizes the integrational quality of art and the wholeness of aesthetic experience – against the acknowledgment that art's potential is apparently larger and more ambivalent. Here, Dewey foregoes the chance to explain a challenging problem he himself has raised, namely that art may strengthen a community, but also enhance the feeling of separateness and isolation in individuals. How is this social dimension related to the organization of matter and form, leading to different qualities in aesthetic experience?

Nine years after the publication of *Art as Experience*, the Czech critic and theorist Jan Mukařovský delivered a lecture at the Prague Linguistic Circle that can be read as a response to these questions, for "Intentionality and Unintentionality in Art" begins exactly where Dewey did not think further: with the phenomenon that art may refuse an experience of unity. For Mukařovský, this is not a Modernist exception, but an integral aspect of Western art from antiquity to the present, including 'high' as well as folk art. Treating it as a genuine problem of aesthetics, Mukařovský develops a theoretical argument which modifies and complements his earlier semiotic theory to include two ideas that are central to Dewey, namely the intensity of aesthetic experience and its anthropological foundation.

That "Intentionality and Unintentionality in Art" may thus be read in a fruitful dialogue with Dewey's book is not surprising: the essay builds upon Mukařovský's earlier work which, as other critics have already pointed out, shows a number of affinities with *Art as Experience*.² Most importantly in our context here is that he also underlines the significance of unity in art. As for Dewey, unity is not understood as organic, harmonious whole or fixed form, but as a dynamic process of our experience of art. Mukařovský also regards the aesthetic as an aspect of our attitude towards objects rather than an aspect of the object itself. As "an energetic component of human activity" the aesthetic is not absolutely separate from the non-aesthetic;³ consequently "we shall find no sphere in which the aesthetic function is essentially absent; potentially it is always present; it can arise at any time. It has no limitation, therefore, and we cannot say that some domains of human activity are in principle devoid of it, while it belongs to others in principle." ("Aesthetic Function" 35)

Since the aesthetic is relational rather than a fixed property of objects, artworks may lose the power to evoke an aesthetic attitude, while objects meant to serve a practical purpose may acquire it. This does not lead to complete relativism though; the realm of art assumes a certain stability through aesthetic norms and values present in a collective consciousness at a given time. As social facts, then, aesthetic functions, norms, and values govern the attitude of the

individual and the social dimension of art. This opens the way for an inquiry into the social dimension of art, one that Dewey is also interested in.

But while Dewey's aesthetic arises from his earlier interest in political theory, Mukařovský had begun his inquiries into aesthetics with detailed studies of literature, folklore, film, and theater, and with reflections on the history of art before he turned to the social conditions of artistic creation and reception. His continuing attention to specific works of art in order to test or exemplify his theoretical claims provide a welcome complement to Dewey whose emphasis on experience frequently neglects the internal organization of an artwork. More importantly, Mukařovský provides us with a way to conceive art as potentially both integrating and individualizing, but this involves some surprising reformulations of Dewey's insights.

II

Aligning Dewey's political and aesthetic theory is the assumption that aesthetic experience is something positive and desirable for both, the individual and society. Far from the old fear that the intensity of aesthetic experience may overwhelm or liberate the individual and transport it beyond the boundaries of social control, Dewey regards it as enhancing the order and unity of a community:

Works of art that are not remote from common life, that are widely enjoyed in a community, are signs of a unified collective life. But they are also marvelous aids in the creation of such a life. The remaking of the material of experience in the act of expression is not an isolated event confined to the artist and to a person here and there who happens to enjoy the work. In the degree in which art exercises its office, it is also a remaking of the experience of the community in the direction of greater order and unity. (81)

Art and communal life are interwoven in a mutually reinforcing relation that does not allow us to distinguish between cause and effect or instrument and indicator. As a positive vision this complements the negative diagnosis which presented the incoherent structure of modern art in analogy to the disintegration of society. But how, exactly, can art contribute to social integration? Dewey offers two possible routes toward an answer: the first locates the roots of art in "the very processes of living" (24) in order to argue for the continuum of aesthetic and ordinary experience. Like all other creatures, human beings live in constant interaction with their environment, an interaction marked by the "rhythm of loss of integration with environment and recovery of union" (15) with it. It is in moments of achieved re-adaptation with its surroundings that the "live creature" experiences a wholeness and fulfillment that "is art in germ." (19) Here, past and future intensify the present of the moment as the past is not

² See Hans Robert Jauss, *Ästhetische Erfahrung und literarische Hermeneutik* 1, 166.

³ Jan Mukařovský, "The Place of the Aesthetic Function among the Other Functions," 32.

a burden but a resource and the future “not ominous but a promise.” (18) Cognition, emotion and willed action, separated when we are solving problems, merge as we cease to be mere agents in the world but become one with it, being both active and passive, doing and undergoing a moment that is a source of growth and “beginning anew.” (17)⁴

Art can arise because this process has become conscious in man; in and through art, the moment of overcoming resistance and achieving a unity of experience can be reflected upon. Aesthetic experience is therefore not identical with the organic experience described above, it is once removed from it and thereby allows us to experience the nature of experience in itself, freed from all external “forces that impede and confuse its development as experience.” (274)

For even though aesthetic experience is rooted in life, “an experience” needs to be marked off from its flow to be a distinct unity in itself. A rather simple but nevertheless important aspect of unity for Dewey is that aesthetic experience as “an experience” has to have a beginning and a concluding end: “we 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.” (35) Though Dewey acknowledges internal tension and contradictions within aesthetic experience, its end is not merely part of a necessary frame, but involves closure, culmination, and fulfillment. This is important to Dewey because through fulfillment art is echoing the moment of successful adaptation to one’s environment and this renders aesthetic experience a model of experience in general. “To esthetic experience, then, the philosopher must go to understand what experience is.” (274)⁵ While this helps to understand the important role of fulfillment for aesthetic experience, and of aesthetic experience for Dewey’s pragmatist philosophy, it does not yet explain art’s integrational force in a community. The latter depends not only on the central concept of experience but also on those of the individual and the community.

In his works on democratic theory, Dewey argues for an integral connection of self-realization and communal cooperation. It is only in free and democratic

interaction with others that the full potential of a personality may unfold and self-realization be achieved. If this is the case, then the communal significance of art does not merely rest upon the origin of the material in “the public world” but also relies on the fact that when this material passes through “the alembic of personal experience,” its public aspects will not evaporate from an individual vision. (82) Indeed, “the individual contribution which makes the object something new” (82) is vital, for new objects may convey new modes of experience, thus they contribute to the communicative process of “creating participation, of making common what had been isolated and singular.” (244) Participation and communication in the sense of “making common” are exactly the markers of an integrated democratic community whose relation to art is thus embedded in mutually enforcing processes.

Interpreting the familiar terms of philosophy as instances of a process is a typical aspect of Dewey’s philosophical method.⁶ No longer seen as fixed entities but set in dynamic relation to each other, they become ‘fluid’ and their mutual interdependence becomes visible. This allows Dewey to overcome dichotomies such as those between individual and community, private and public, but also between form and content, subject and object, or aesthetic and ordinary experience. Two major insights are gained this way: First, Dewey can acknowledge the power of art to capture and enchant us beyond Kant’s disinterestedness into an experience that involves us as whole human beings, including the sensual and even our bodies. Secondly, interweaving art with the social sphere, he does not only postulate a social dimension of aesthetics but embeds it in a political theory of modern democratic societies. Art as inducing communication is the concept that helps best to explain how art may hold its proclaimed integrating role.

But why should it be necessarily tied to an experience of fulfillment and the integration of matter and form? These two are certainly important for the central notion of art as a model of experience, but they do not seem crucial to the social dimension of art. Must not “aesthetic individualism” and the experience of fragmentation also be understood in the context of a collective modern experience – is it even possible to understand it without recurring to a common social framework? Dewey’s emphasis on aesthetic experience as “pure” experience prevents him to consider more closely the social dimension of art resisting or even negating this quality. But even the relation of art as experience to specific historical communities is not entirely clear since Dewey always emphasizes experience over and above the work of art in its social and historical context.

4 See also p. 48: “In short, art, in its form, unites the very same relation of doing and undergoing, outgoing and incoming energy, that makes an experience to be an experience. Because of elimination of all that does not contribute to mutual organization of the factors of both action and reception into one another, and because of selection of just the aspects and traits that contribute to their interpenetration of each other, the product is a work of esthetic art.”

5 Wolfgang Iser has perceptively commented that pragmatism needs art as providing a transcendent standpoint to examine experience as its central term. Wolfgang Iser, “Interpretationsperspektiven moderner Kunsttheorie,” 52.

6 This insight has been formulated and demonstrated by Axel Honneth in a lecture series on John Dewey in Frankfurt, summer 1998.

III

While Dewey concentrates on aesthetic experience and its social dimension, Mukařovský begins his essay with the world of objects: Intentionality is a feature of man-made objects as opposed to natural objects. The former are further distinguished into practical and artistic creations according to our ways of producing and perceiving them. In modern machines and tools, for instance, we consider only the properties relevant to a purpose, whereas in art "neither a single property of the object nor a single detail of its organization is beyond the range of our attention."⁷ The attempt to regard all properties and details as part of an integral whole gives rise to the notion of absolute intentionality in art, whereas whatever resists this unifying gesture is marked as unintentional. In fact, from Plato onwards, critics have remarked upon this surplus in art with varying judgment, and this continuing observation lets us realize "that unintentionality in art is not merely an occasional phenomenon, occurring perhaps just in some 'decadent' artistic movements, but an intrinsic one." ("Intentionality" 109)

Mukařovský thus focuses exactly on the notion that is so irritating to Dewey, but there is yet another contrast to *Art as Experience* implied in the very first paragraph of "Intentionality and Unintentionality in Art." The distinction between different human products rests upon a separation of practical and aesthetic functions whose undifferentiated coexistence is still visible in the works of folk culture. Here, tools may be adorned with 'useless' ornament, while pictures, songs, or dances may serve a role in social rituals or religious ceremonies. What Mukařovský calls differentiation corresponds with what Dewey implies in his notion of a loss of integration, but while *Art as Experience* frequently suggests that the integration of art in social life and the internal integration of a work of art are interdependent phenomena, they are treated separately by Mukařovský. As far as art's resistance to an integrating experience – 'unintentionality' – is concerned, the important distinction lies beyond the social realm in our perception of natural versus man-made objects.

Obviously, Mukařovský's two key terms need further clarification as he uses them in a non-intuitive manner. Intentionality is not defined in psychological terms with respect to an artist and his goal, but arises from Mukařovský's older semiotic theory of art and the concept of semantic unification connected to it. Even though the essay itself provides an understanding of what Mukařovský implies in his semiotic concept, I want to point quickly to some

earlier texts where he develops this idea more fully in order to show how "Intentionality and Unintentionality in Art" proposes a modification to it.

To regard "Art as a Semiotic Fact" – the programmatic title of the most concise presentation of his theory – meant to relate the work of art and its internal organization to the social world. Art is communicative, that is, "designed to serve as an intermediary between its author and a collectivity," and as such it exceeds any individual state of mind.⁸ Rather it necessarily draws upon norms and values present in a collective consciousness. The structure of the sign as proclaimed by Saussure helps to capture this relation:

The work-thing functions, then, only as an external symbol (the *signifiant* according to Saussure's terminology) to which corresponds in the social consciousness a meaning (sometimes called the 'aesthetic object') consisting of what the subjective state of consciousness evoked in the members of a certain collectivity have in common. (83)

Since art, unlike language, lacks a clear system relating signifiers to signified, how do we attribute meaning to man-made objects? And what does art as sign then refer to, how is it related to reality? As an autonomous sign, art foregrounds the mediating task of a sign itself, while its relation to reality is rather equivocal. In "Art as a Semiotic Fact" this relation is formulated as one to "the total context of so-called social phenomena – for example, philosophy, politics, religion, and economics." (84) It is in the long study *Aesthetic Function, Norm and Value as Social Facts* (1936) that Mukařovský elaborates this relation further.

To perceive an object as a work of art is not an individual, arbitrary decision. Rather, the properties of some objects appeal to a system of aesthetic norms and thus set in motion our perception of these objects as aesthetic signs. In this process we free the artwork from specific references to reality and simultaneously establish a relation to the totality of our experience. Thus the elements of a work of art become carriers of non-aesthetic values, released from their practical context and reorganized within the aesthetic system. Their potential contradictions within the artwork and their discrepancies with governing social values challenge our habitual attitude toward them. This tension may be a source of a change in our conception of reality; art can liberate us from the pressures of practical life with its habitualized norms and values since it evokes them, but allows us an alternative, experimental attitude to them.

At this point, Mukařovský's ideas seem diametrically opposed to Dewey's. Art negates and distances us from common experience rather than intensify and integrate it. In fact, Mukařovský leaves little room for intense aesthetic

⁷ Jan Mukařovský, "Intentionality and Unintentionality in Art," 89. Hereafter cited as "Intentionality."

⁸ Mukařovský, "Art as a Semiotic Fact," 82.

experience since the aesthetic itself is dissolved into a conglomeration of non-aesthetic values and the subject is merely a sociological one. As Peter Steiner put it rather polemically: "As an author he was a mere vehicle of impersonal impulses coming from the previous artistic tradition and the extra-artistic context. As a perceiver he only complemented the social core of meaning of the work by his subjective, and hence irrelevant, private associations."⁹

In contrast to these earlier essays, "Intentionality and Unintentionality in Art" shifts emphasis toward an active, perceiving subject. While the artistic sign was formerly characterized by de pragmatizing its relations to reality, the focus is now on the fact that it can 'mean' only as a whole. Consequently, it challenges the perceiver to unify the fullness and contradictions of its internal organization. Semantic unity as the very basis of a semiotic effect and the way this unity is achieved through our perception of art therefore become central issues:

Thus semantic unity is a very relevant condition in a work of art, and intentionality is the force which binds together the individual parts and components of a work into the unity that gives the work its meaning. As soon as the perceiver adopts an attitude toward a certain object, which is usual during the perception of a work of art, he immediately makes an effort to find in the organization of the work traces of an arrangement that will permit the work to be conceived as a semantic whole. The unity of a work of art—for which theoreticians have so often looked outside the work [...] can rightly be found only in intentionality, the force operating within the work which strives toward the resolution of the contradictions and tensions among its individual parts and components, thereby giving each of them a specific relation to the others and all of them together a unified meaning. Hence intentionality in art is *semantic energy*. ("Intentionality" 96)

The corresponding force on the side of the perceiver is the 'semantic gesture' as our striving to encompass all components of a work in its unity. As in Dewey, this unity is captured as a process of overcoming contradictions, but in contrast to Dewey, Mukařovský does not stress the achievement of unity and the possible satisfaction accompanying it. Rather, his vocabulary ("energy," "force," "intentionality," "gesture") clearly strives to present unity as a dynamic principle that points into a direction but is not necessarily fully executed. It provides an orienting axis to be followed by the activity of the recipient. As Herta Schmid has pointed out, the genesis of the term 'semantic gesture' in Mukařovský's oeuvre suggests a synthesis of an earlier formalist understanding

9 Peter Steiner, "Jan Mukařovský's Structural Aesthetics," ix–xxxix, xxvi. A critique concerning the disappearance of aesthetics, emotion and the subject is also formulated in Herta Schmid, "Das 'Drei-Phasen-Modell' des tschechischen literaturwissenschaftlichen Strukturalismus," 124.

of wholeness as *Gestalt* and a new "semantic interpretation of *Gestalt*" Mukařovský has been searching for.¹⁰

Accompanying this shifted emphasis from the result of the work as a whole onto the semantic gesture is a move away from the vocabulary of social norms and values. That we should nevertheless understand this process as being embedded in the social world can only be inferred by examples of the historicity of semantic unification, the reference back to his earlier essays, and, most importantly, by the overall direction of the argument: in the end, Mukařovský underlines that art as a sign appeals to man as a social and historical being. This is not to deny the significance of norms and values in aesthetics but it does de-emphasize the liberating effect earlier attributed to art. In fact, Mukařovský now regards the social dimension as limiting the full range of aesthetic experience. Curiously enough, this modifies his earlier ideas in a way that brings him closer to Dewey.

The perception of art as sign and the attempt at semantic unification rest upon the recognition of aesthetic norms the work relates to either by affirming or rebelling against them. In both cases the relation to these norms is the basis for its communicative nature as intersubjective sign that can be interpreted. Collective norms therefore establish the appeal to begin a meaning-giving process in the course of which we also realize the manifold relations to non-aesthetic norms and values, de pragmatized and reorganized through the work. Since this perception is so closely tied to recognition of collective values, it is difficult to regard it as liberating in the sense of carrying the individual beyond social boundaries.

On the contrary, the aberration from a system of given norms and a new attitude toward a differently ordered reality are always necessarily tied back to a given social context—the liberating experience can only be understood before the background of shared habits and ideas. Therefore it points toward them as much as it may lead away from them. Herein may indeed lie an integrating aspect of art as Dewey wanted to see it. In Mukařovský's concept it rests upon art's mediating role in communication between socialized human beings—it is a communication within the framework of common norms and values. This formulation goes beyond Dewey since it also allows for an experimental rejection of the social; ultimately, however, art as a sign challenges and affirms the individual as a social being.

The question to both thinkers at this point is whether and how this social dimension is related to intensity or immediacy of aesthetic experience, and whether there is also an individualizing potential in art. To Mukařovský, these

10 Herta Schmid, "Die 'Semantische Geste' als Schlüsselbegriff des Prager Literaturwissenschaftlichen Strukturalismus," 233.

two aspects are related to the resistance to semantic unification, felt as unintentional. While intentionality orients the perceiver toward a certain unity of meaning that renders the work a sign, unintentionality lets it appear as a natural object: "By calling the work a *thing*, we wish to indicate that, because of what is unintentional, semantically ununified in it, the work appears to the viewer as similar to a *natural* fact, that is, a fact which in its organization does not answer the question 'For what?' but leaves the decision about its functional use to man." ("Intentionality" 106)

It is the simultaneous appearance as sign and thing that may provoke varied and often intense reactions to art. A natural object, such as a stone or a cloud, usually does not demand our attention, unless we intend to use it as a tool or unless its mysteriousness appeals to our imagination. In the latter case, we may associate entirely personal emotions, experiences, or images with the object since there is nothing in it that may constrain a free play of meaning. The work of art combines the appeals of sign and thing to create a constant tension between freedom and constraint, between the personal and the social: As sign it commands our attention, it appears as semantically regulated and therefore demands a certain discipline in our interpretive response; as a thing, however, it provokes a direct, unmediated reaction:

If the work of art is understood only as a sign, it is deprived of its direct incorporation into reality. It is not only a sign but also a thing immediately affecting man's mental life, causing direct and spontaneous involvement and penetrating through its action to the deepest levels of the perceiver's personality. It is precisely as a *thing* that the work is capable of affecting what is universally human in man, whereas in its semiotic aspect the work always appeals eventually to what is socially and temporally determined in him. Intentionality allows the work to be perceived as a sign, unintentionality as a thing; hence the opposition of intentionality and unintentionality is the basic antinomy of art. ("Intentionality" 128)

While Dewey started out with an anthropological dimension of art, Mukařovský has now arrived at one. Departing from a semiotic and sociological approach to art, however, this appeal to human nature has a different status, for it complements the communicative aspect art may have within a social framework. Regarding art as a sign the perceiver will understand herself in her social and historical context, and this holds true even – or especially – when art enables her to recognize an alternative order. It is through the immediate experience of resisting this perception that art transcends a framework of social norms and values to affirm the continuity of human nature and to achieve ontological continuity on the basis of it. Herein, not in the aberration from given norms, may lie a moment of individualizing freedom in our response to art.

IV

In a sense then, Mukařovský agrees with Dewey that the resistance to wholeness in art encourages individual empowerment *vis à vis* the work and provides an experience beyond the social framework. For Mukařovský, however, this potentially individualizing moment rests on art's appeal to human nature – in other words: it is precisely the aspect of art Dewey emphasizes most that can be, in Mukařovský's view, a source of resistance to social norms and values and a challenge to an integrated community. However, unintentionality is also a continuous source of intense and immediate aesthetic experience that keeps an artwork alive. The power to resist complete integration into an achieved semantic unity endows the work with renewed urgency and mysteriousness that will provoke new approaches to it.

Unlike Dewey, Mukařovský historicizes our ability for semantic unification as it rests upon the habits of artistic perception embedded in aesthetic norms. Consequently, the elements of a text or a painting which are perceived as a violation to wholeness may also change through time, and the history of reception offers numerous examples of this phenomenon. To Dewey's demand for "greater integration in the matter and form of the arts" one can therefore respond with Mukařovský that this integration is not part of the physical object. Rather, integration is subject to our habits of perception, it is part of our experience with an object which may change through time. Secondly, the social significance of unintentionality in art is more ambivalent than Dewey may allow for. That art may appeal to what is atemporal and asocial in man actually enables it to mediate between individuals without a common system of norms and values. As Dewey put it, "works of art are means by which we enter, through imagination and the emotions they evoke, into other forms of relationship and participation than our own." (333) Proposing a dual nature of art as sign and thing, Mukařovský can explain why art may serve a communicative function between people sharing norms and values while simultaneously allowing us to connect with those outside our cultural frame. But that which enables art to appeal to us as human beings across cultures also allows for an individual aesthetic experience that transcends the social – to Dewey this seems to be a price he does not want to pay.

To regard wholeness as an aspect of reception does not only historicize it, but also allows Mukařovský to differentiate between folk art and so-called 'high' art. Like Dewey, he observes a greater continuity of the aesthetic with common life experience in folk art where "we cannot distinguish and delimit even art itself – an activity with a predominant aesthetic function – from other activities." ("Aesthetic Function" 36) While folk art therefore provides Dewey with a model of integrated art, Mukařovský points out that in terms of form

and content, folk art is characterized by a high degree of incoherence. Ballads and folk songs, for instance, are usually composed of small stereotypical units ("details") which are semantically more or less independent and thus allow each new performer a certain interpretive freedom by adding, losing or reorganizing them.¹¹

From the point of view of 'high' poetry, these variations may appear as disturbing instances of inconsistency or even as intentional aspects of deformation, but this ignores that folk art is not subject to the same pressure of semantic integration as 'high' art is. Once we distinguish between art and practical objects, we seek intentionality in the former through semantic unification of all its elements. Without this differentiation, intentionality as an aspect of human creation is just as present in the external, practical purposes of the work, semantic unity is not intently searched for and it is certainly not regarded as a basis for evaluation. The social role of folk art as arising from and stabilizing a community therefore does not rest upon easy semantic integration of matter and form. On the contrary, the loose modular structure furthers a mode of reception integrated in practical activities of the audience that may come to participate in a performance. Thus the social dimension of folk art can be ascertained by examining the practical context of communal activities, regardless of the degree of semantic unity.

The separation of aesthetic from practical functions on the one hand, and the opposition of intentionality and unintentionality on the other, are separate phenomena, and Mukařovský's inquiries demonstrate that it is worthwhile to distinguish between them.¹² For Dewey, however, the two frequently seem analogous as he is generally reluctant to make classificatory distinctions. Thus he moves freely between rites and ceremonies, folk art, craftsmanship, industrial art, architecture and fine art in his examples, but hardly examines the internal organization of single works. Moreover, as aesthetic experience is equally part of the process of creation as well as reception, these two are also seen in close analogy to each other. Therefore Dewey is quick to go from the isolation of the artist in modern society to the isolating effects evoked by their works. Since this claim does not follow from an analysis of art we may suspect its origin in Dewey's social diagnosis. In fact, his philosophical work, particularly in the field of political theory, is marked by his concern about a contemporary tendency toward an uncontrolled individualism and a lack of social cooperation. Inasmuch as his philosophy is committed to theoretical reflection in close connection to social practice, this concern about individualism appar-

ently prevents a calm assessment of aesthetic modernism and asserts itself at times as a normative approach to art.

It would be premature to conclude, however, that a detailed attention to art and an open commitment to an integrated, democratic society are incommensurable elements of aesthetic theory. If we share with Dewey the uneasy notion of "aesthetic individualism" in contemporary art and society, Mukařovský's essay may help us to capture our diagnosis in terms more precise than Dewey's. Cautioned against a quick association of semantic incoherence and social disintegration, we may grant that what may appear as strikingly incoherent to us today, may soon be embraced in a new semantic gesture tomorrow. Furthermore, we may also be aware that there have always been realms of artistic activity where semantic unity did not play a crucial role in aesthetic evaluation. As the example of folk culture shows, this is not necessarily an indicator of socially disruptive forces. However, what Dewey may have sensed and what we can diagnose today is a change in our evaluation of semantic integration. Artists and critics have come to emphasize and appreciate 'difference' and the deconstruction of semantic unity as resistance to an omnipresent disciplinary power structure in both art and society. While this curiously echoes Dewey's tendency to regard the social and aesthetic as analogous and therefore deserves a similar critique, the new evaluation of unintentionality is a phenomenon Mukařovský did not foresee. As aesthetic evaluation is based on values lodged in our collective consciousness which guide us in what we conceive as art in the first place, a reversal of values certainly deserves an inquiry into its aesthetic and its social implications.

11 Mukařovský, "Detail as the Basic Semantic Unit in Folk Art," 184.

12 See Mukařovský's own emphasis in "Intentionality," 127.

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Pragmatism, Time, and Literature

As the organizers of this conference have written, pragmatism "holds the promise of describing central aspects of the cultural object ... in terms that do not have to ignore the constructive and creative dimension of these acts." However, as they also point out, "[t]he actual challenge ... consists in moving beyond the stage of 'promise' by trying to extend the classical tradition into a literary and cultural theory that would be competitive in current debates." While I am cautious to claim that pragmatism can be translated into a model for literary and cultural studies directly, I will argue that it can be used as a framework to ground and explain a model of literature and culture, which is historicist and pragmatic at the same time.

I. Directions of Pragmatism's Potential Contributions to Literary and Cultural Studies

In this paper, I do not want to argue for pragmatism's value as a genuine American philosophy against long standing claims that it is not a philosophy at all. Neither do I want to follow the well travelled road of interpretations which focus on the semiotic aspect of pragmatism and its conception of language, which seems to have been the main concern of pragmatist critiques of post-structuralism. Rather, I will begin with the description of a constellation in contemporary literary and cultural studies and point out the deficiencies I see as decisive in the political criticism which has dominated the critical scene for a decade. Having thus established a horizon of problematics, I will sketch what I see as the theoretical and political reasons for these lacunae and move on from there to models which, in my view, go beyond these deficiencies. As a next step, I will ask in what respect pragmatism can serve as a paradigm for achieving a shift and reorientation in contemporary criticism and sketch a model which accommodates precisely those features which I find lacking in "power"-oriented analyses.¹ I will suggest that, on the one hand, pragmatism can be made use of and is, indeed, indispensable for a reconception of literary and cultural studies,

1 Giles Gunn, for example, points to a problem "which derives from the philosophical prejudice built into a position like that of Bercovitch and other ideological critics: that cultural texts are unable to engage in processes of reflection on the values that generate them without at the same time being subsumed by those values" (30).