

## Dewey's Resistance to Totalitarianism

### Focusing on The Relationship Between the Theory of Esthetic Experience and Politics in His Works of the 1930s

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#### Abstract

This paper examines the relationship between Dewey's theory of "esthetic experience" and his political thought in the 1930s. Mainly, this paper focuses on Dewey's resistance to totalitarianism based on the issue of passionate mobilization to totalitarianism by using art which W. Benjamin claimed.

In the 1930s, Dewey criticized the use of art in totalitarian states. In *Freedom and Culture* (1939), Dewey says that a totalitarian regime controls the whole life of all its subjects by its hold over feelings, desires, emotions, as well as opinions through propaganda. However, on the other hand, Dewey writes that works of art are the most compelling of the means of communication by which emotions are stirred and opinions formed. For Dewey, art is in an unstable position. His concept of art cannot be separated from the theory of esthetic experience, which he also developed in the 1930s. Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to discuss whether Dewey's theory of esthetic experience and thought of art might aid in his resistance to totalitarianism.

To elaborate this, this paper is arranged into three sections. First, we will look at two points: On the one hand, Dewey's thought in the 1930s suggests the importance of culture, especially art, as a response to totalitarianism. On the other hand, Dewey's theory of esthetic experience contains within it the danger of working in affinity with totalitarianism. The second section will claim that esthetic experience includes dimensions of both the mediacy and immediacy of art by focusing on the making and appreciation of works of art. In addition, between both dimensions of esthetic experience, there is the chance for the "leap", a chance for the creation of new possibilities. Finally, the leap of esthetic experience will be interpreted as a counter to totalitarianism's encompassing of life. The major focus of this paper is the importance of communication brought about by the mediacy of esthetic experience.

#### Key Words

aesthetics and education, aestheticizing of politics, life, immediacy and mediacy, culture, democratic socialism

## Introduction

This study examines the relationship between Dewey's theory of "esthetic experience" and his political thought in the 1930s. Mainly, this study focuses on Dewey's resistance to totalitarianism. In the 1930s, Dewey defined both Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union as totalitarian states and, in particular, criticized the use of art in these two states. However, to date, there have been few works that discuss the relationship between Dewey's theory of esthetic experience, which he also developed in the 1930s, and his resistance to totalitarianism. Therefore, this study discusses whether Dewey's theory of esthetic experience might aid in his resistance to totalitarianism.

In finding that it does aid resistance, the discussion then turns to W. Benjamin's concept of the "aestheticizing of politics."<sup>1</sup> Benjamin claimed that aesthetics also carries the risk of being used to advance a totalitarian regime.<sup>2</sup> In addition, this study looks ahead to more contemporary discussions about "aesthetics and education" that have been carried out since the 1990s in Japan.<sup>3</sup>

This discussion shows the signification of aesthetics: that it can propose "something that brings the indivisible, which reason cannot measure" (Suzuki 1999: 163–164). This discussion also informs what the task of aesthetics is. T. Nishimura claimed that, since modern aesthetics has led to an "easy identification with the absolute" (Suzuki 1999: 163–164), "we must object to the complicity between modern education and aesthetics in their specifically modern meanings" (Nishimura 2010: 98). Aesthetics, as non-rational, has the potential to puncture purposive rationality, which designates the limits of modern education. However, it is necessary to avoid the unification of aesthetics and absolutism.

This paper is arranged in three sections. First, we will look at two points: On the one hand, Dewey's thought in the 1930s suggests the importance of culture, especially

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<sup>1</sup> Benjamin takes up art, especially films, to set human beings free through training them "*in the apperceptions and reactions needed to deal with a vast apparatus whose role in their lives is expanding almost daily*" on the premise of the loss of the "aura" that secures the authenticity of works of art (Benjamin 1986: 382; Benjamin 2008: 26; emphasis in original). In contrast, according to Benjamin, fascism "sees its salvation in granting expressions to the masses—but on no account granting them rights" (Benjamin 1986: 382; Benjamin 2008: 41). This is the famous confrontation between the "*aestheticizing of politics*" and the "*politicizing of art*" (Benjamin 1986: 382; Benjamin 2008: 42; emphasis in original).

<sup>2</sup> This study considers the issue of passionate mobilization to totalitarianism by using art, and Benjamin's concept of the "aestheticizing of politics," through an examination of Dewey's theory of esthetic experience. Y. Imai points out the similarity of Dewey's and Benjamin's aesthetics from the perspective of "the response to the modern condition of the poverty of experience" (Imai 1998: 156). However, Imai criticizes the structure of purposive rationality in Dewey's theory of esthetic experience.

<sup>3</sup> T. Nishimura (2010) describes the series of discussions in "Aesthetics and Education" in the 1990s in Japan.

art, as a response to totalitarianism. On the other hand, Dewey's theory of esthetic experience contains within it the danger of working in affinity with totalitarianism. Not dwelling on this last point, the second section will move on to examine the relation between the immediacy and mediacy of esthetic experience, which will reveal that there is a "leap" in Dewey's theory of esthetic experience. Furthermore, this leap creates unprecedented possibilities. Finally, this paper argues through an analysis of Dewey's treatment of totalitarianism that the points of employing his theory of esthetic experience against totalitarianism are social change, accomplished through the communication that art provides, and the creation of unprecedented possibilities.

## **1. Dewey in the 1930s**

### **1-1. Dewey's Political Thought in the 1930s**

Today, studies about Dewey's political thought in the 1930s, which was responding to economic and political situations such as the Great Depression and the eve of World War II, have been gaining increased attention.

As M. Sato (2012) and R. Westbrook (1991) pointed out, in the 1930s Dewey became sympathetic with socialism after he visited the Soviet Union and came to identify his political thought as "democratic socialism."<sup>4</sup> Dewey's "democratic socialism" has deepened through the struggle against the "three social systems that branched off after the economic depression: the state socialism of Stalinism; the state capitalism of the New Deal; and the totalitarianism of the fascist states" (Sato 2012: 106). A problem common to these three social systems is the tendency to "reduce the development of free individuality by enhancing state function" (Sato 2012: 112). In contrast, Dewey's idea of social democracy targets the development of individuality through interaction and communication with one's surrounding environment. This is different from the "old individualism" that divided individuals. Dewey calls it

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<sup>4</sup> Dewey's series of articles about his visit to the Soviet Union was published in the *New Republic* and later published in book form as *Impression of Soviet Russia* in 1928 (ISR). According to Morita, Dewey "found a spectacular social experiment trying to create a collaborative humanity" in the Soviet Union. While initially evaluating the experience positively, Dewey later realized that "the principles of people's spontaneous cooperation are incompatible with dogmatic Marxism, a government-certified ideology" (Morita 2004: 99). Thereafter, Dewey criticizes the intensification of Stalin's dictatorship in the Soviet Union and the communist's support of violent revolution. Additionally, Dewey became convinced of this critical position after the Trotsky trials (Inoue 2008).

democracy as “a way of living” (CD: 226).<sup>5</sup>

The main focus of this study is on Dewey’s resistance to totalitarianism. H. Morita recognizes Dewey as “anticipating Arendt” in his criticism not only of Nazism but also the Soviet Union after Stalin, which represented an intensification of the totalitarian regime (Morita 2004: 98). It is noteworthy that Dewey became the honorary chair of the Committee for Cultural Freedom, which was established to resist the advancement of totalitarianism. The manifest of the committee warned of the risk that the suppression of cultural freedom under a totalitarian regime might also occur in the United States and declared that securing the sphere of the free creativity of culture could defend democracy (Hook 1987: 248–274). Dewey’s stance against totalitarianism can be understood as a defense of “cultural freedom,” as a defense of the free development of the individuality (Inoue 2008: 194).<sup>6</sup>

## **1-2. The Defense of Political Freedom and the Emancipation of Individuality**

Dewey made cultural freedom and cultural creativity the key points of *Individualism, Old and New* (1930), *Liberalism and Social Action* (1935), and *Culture and Freedom* (1939), written as a response to the social situation at the time. Dewey says that culture is located “outside of political institutions,” and it is a “complex of conditions which tax the terms upon which human beings associate and live together” (FC: 67). The problem is, then, “to know what kind of culture is so free in itself that it conceives and begets political freedom as its accompaniment and consequence” (FC: 67).

In order to defend cultural freedom, it is necessary to rethink social and economic systems and technology that restrict individuals’ actions. However, Dewey does not insist on removing them. For Dewey, protecting the potential for individuality is required. Individuality consists of the interaction between individuals and the environment, which includes social and economic systems and technology. In addition, this argument links the discussion to societal reform through communication. For Dewey, art became critical to thinking about communication.

In *Art as Experience* (1934), Dewey claims that “individualization” is the process

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<sup>5</sup> R. Bernstein (2000) emphasizes the sense of the time when he reinterprets Dewey’s article “Creative Democracy” (1939). Bernstein also points out that Dewey expressed disappointment at the strengthening of Stalin’s dictatorship as well as the rise of Nazi Germany in “Creative Democracy” (Bernstein 2000: 216).

<sup>6</sup> The concept of “culture” is one of the main concerns of Dewey’s later thought up until his last years. For example, Dewey wanted to change the title of *Experience and Nature* (1925), which is one of the main works of his later period, to *Nature and Culture* in 1951 (Dykhuizen 1973: 318).

by which a work of art becomes unique. Moreover, Dewey says that the individuality of artists punctuates “a mannerism” by opening up “a unique manner of acting in and with a world of objects and persons” (ION: 122; 121). Dewey emphasizes communication as mediated by works of art:

In the end, works of art are the only media of complete and unhindered communication between man and man that can occur in a world full of gulfs and walls that limit the community of experience. (AE: 110)

Dewey says that art emancipates individuality, and the communication mediated by art fosters social reform. The political power of art does not belong to “the personal political intent of the artist” but to the creativity of art and its capacity for communication (AE: 347).

### **1-3. The Risk of Connecting the Theory of Esthetic Experience and Dewey’s Political Thought**

While his political thought deepened, Dewey published *Art as Experience* in 1934 based on a series of lectures in 1931. In this book, Dewey developed his conceptions of art and esthetic experience. Although Dewey argued that art responded to current political situations, as previously mentioned, few studies have discussed the relationship between his political thought and his theory of esthetic experience. Recently, however, such studies have begun to appear.

M. Ueno (2010) discovers the relationship between Dewey’s political thought and theory of esthetic experience by looking at the concept of communication and expanding his discussion to the issue of the publicness of education. However, Ueno does not focus on Dewey’s resistance to totalitarianism. Also, Ueno is not cognizant of how Dewey makes it difficult to talk about a dimension of communication involving multiple actors because Dewey’s theory of esthetic experience underpins personal and direct experience.<sup>7</sup>

T.M. Alexander (1987) values the “immediate or qualitative meaning” of experience (Alexander 1987: 57), but he also discusses communication and community as mediated by art. He says that “[t]o grasp the origin of art it is also necessary to grasp the origin of the community of shared experience” (Alexander 1987: 189). Art can be

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<sup>7</sup> Such criticisms are pointed out in B. Croce (1948) and C. Pepper (1989).

the media through which a community can share experiences. Therefore, for Alexander, art “unites the metaphysics and political aspect of Dewey’s philosophy” (Alexander 1987: 186). However, Alexander’s argument is not cognizant of Dewey’s thinking about politics in the 1930s.

As previously mentioned, aesthetics, as non-rational, has the potential to puncture purposive rationality. This is the reason for the recent attention given to Dewey’s aesthetics.<sup>8</sup> However, as Benjamin shows, aesthetics harbors the risk that it may bolster a totalitarian regime. The connection between immediacy and mediacy in Dewey’s theory of esthetic experience contains the risk that irrational and harmonious direct experiences will be of absolute and uncritical value. In other words, there is the risk that the absolutization of immediate experience, working as the central dogma of communication, has a high affinity with a totalitarian unity.<sup>9</sup> Dewey also describes the risk of art being used as “propaganda for special views which are dogmatically asserted to be socially necessary” (FC: 169). On the one hand, the non-rationality of art bears the conception of social reform, but on the other hand, it can pander to totalitarianism. Art is in an unstable position.

The problem with Dewey’s proposals for resisting totalitarianism through art is that they may vacillate between immediacy and mediacy. If immediacy and mediacy are separate in the first place, Dewey’s trust that the creativity of art and communication will break through “mannerism” should fail. Despite their connection, if immediate experience becomes the absolute and central value of communication, the risk that it may bolster a totalitarian regime is unavoidable. In the following, this study examines the connection between mediacy and immediacy of the esthetic experience.

## **2. Dewey’s Theory of Esthetic Experience**

### **2-1. The Immediacy of Esthetic Experience**

At first, this study shows a feature of the aspect of immediacy of esthetic experience. According to Dewey, esthetic experience “is esthetic in the degree in which organism and environment cooperate to institute *an experience* in which the two are so fully integrated that each disappears” (AE: 254; emphasis added). About “an

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<sup>8</sup> For example, N. Saito focuses on Dewey’s “esthetic experience” to “release him from the framework of conservative criticism such as instrumentalism, scientism, and optimism” (Saito 2009: 8).

<sup>9</sup> For example, Imai criticizes Dewey’s concept of direct experience as defenseless against the politics of aesthetics through the use of media that “penetrates the phase of pre-activity of self and incorporates certain tendencies of perception” (Imai 2015: 34).

experience,” Dewey says:

[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. [...] Such an experience is a whole and carries with it its own individualizing quality and self-sufficiency. (AE: 42; emphasis in original)

“An experience” has a specific “quality” and is fulfilled through the interaction between an organism and its environment. In other words, “an experience” is a united experience. In addition, a unique quality of “an experience” is that it is retrospective: “we say in recalling them, “that *was* an experience”” (AE: 43; emphasis in original).

Dewey says that esthetic experience is based on “an experience,” but not all experiences are esthetic.<sup>10</sup> We have an esthetic experience when life becomes conscious of and realizes the “rhythm of loss of integration with environment and recovery of union” (AE: 20–21).<sup>11</sup> Dewey says that this rhythm is experienced as a process of interaction. Therefore, Dewey claims that the artist does not “shun moments of resistance and tension” (AE: 21).

There are three points that show the character of immediacy in esthetic experience. (1) Esthetic experience arises from the activities of a living organism. (2) Esthetic experience has its root in “an experience,” with the specific “quality” that we say of it retrospectively that “it was an experience.” (3) Most importantly, for “an experience” to become an esthetic experience, there must be a “(re)union” within the interaction, in other words, within the rhythm of conflict and integration.

## 2-2. The Mediacy of Esthetic Experience

It is clear that esthetic experience is based on immediate experience. However, when esthetic experience acquires a “form” as a work of art, therein lies the mediacy of

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<sup>10</sup> For example, in a study that illustrates the importance of discussing the differences between “an experience” and “esthetic experience,” M. Hayakawa writes, “an experience is just the primitive form of the esthetic experience, and it can only be called an esthetic experience when it has become more sophisticated and fulfilling through the works of discrimination and reflection” (Hayakawa 1998: 99).

<sup>11</sup> Dewey’s concept of direct experience was affected by W. James’ concept of “pure experience.” This is clear in *Experience and Nature*. Dewey says, “primary experience” (pure experience) is given as “vital modes” and “given in an uncontrolled form” (EN: 21; 24). Dewey considers “secondary experience” to be as important as primary experience. Dewey says that the objects one attains in secondary experience as reflective experience “*explain* the primary objects, they enable us to grasp them with *understanding*” (EN: 16; emphasis in original).

esthetic experience.<sup>12</sup> In what follows, we will examine the aspect of the mediacy of esthetic experience by describing the making and appreciation of works of art.

### (1) Making

According to Dewey, an “impulsion” of an organism makes a work of art along with rhythmic interaction with a medium (AE: 66). Dewey says that “the expression of the self in and through a medium, constituting the work of art, is *itself* a prolonged interaction of something issuing from the self with objective conditions” (AE: 71; emphasis in original).

Therefore, the activity of expression is not “the direct and immaculate issue” of the natural impulse and tendencies of the artist (AE: 70), but is the creation of works of art that generate the form in and through the medium.

In addition, “[t]he quality of a work of art is *sui generis*” because the interaction of the artist and the environment occurs at each point in time (AE: 113; emphasis in original). The work of art expresses esthetic experience as “an idiom that conveys what cannot be said in another language and yet remain the same” (AE: 111). Dewey also says that “the self assimilates that material in a distinctive way to reissue it into the public world in a form that builds a new object” (AE: 112). Therefore, in making works of art, esthetic experience, which implies a direct and nonlinguistic experience in and through a material, becomes public by acquiring a distinctive form.

For Dewey, creating a new narrative from esthetic experience and throwing it back into a public sphere is as vital as the beginning of esthetic experience, in which a “direct and unreasonable impression comes first” (AE: 150).

### (2) Appreciation

In the appreciation of works of art, esthetic experience arises within the interaction between viewers and works of art. Dewey says that “[t]he esthetic or undergoing phase of experience is receptive” and “involves surrender” (AE: 59). However, “[w]hen we are only passive to a scene, it overwhelms us and, for lack of answering activity, we do not perceive that which bears us down. We must summon energy and pitch it at a responsive key in order to *take in*” (AE: 60; emphasis in original). In this way, perception and appreciation are trying to respond to works of art while being overwhelmed by them. In other words, perception and appreciation are the activities in which the passive and active are united. At that time, the past experience of viewers

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<sup>12</sup> Dewey criticizes the dichotomy of form and matter and says that “form is always integral with matter” in works of art (AE: 315).



becomes their reference point.

According to Dewey, “in order to perceive esthetically, he [the perceiver] must remark his past experience so that he can enter integrally into a new pattern” (AE: 143). Viewers’ perception and appreciation recreate past experiences by working on objects that overwhelm them (AE: 60). Then, when a viewer “exercises his individuality, a way of seeing and feeling that in its interaction with old material creates something new, something previously not existing in experience” (AE: 113).

In appreciation, the creation of new experience is done through “criticism,” which analyzes and defines the direct impression given by works of art (AE: 308–309). In other words: “Criticism is a search for the properties of the object that may justify the direct reaction” (AE: 312). Analysis and definition in criticism neither describe the feeling itself nor explain or interpret works of art “on the basis of factors that are incidentally inside them” (AE: 319). They mean to create a new experience and “[t]he critic, because of the element of venture, reveals himself in his criticisms” (AE: 312).

To summarize the discussion of the making and appreciation of works of art, both are based on esthetic experience as a direct experience. However, there is an aspect of mediacy between the making and appreciation of works of art. This means that a work of art is a re-creation of the experiences of the artist that in turn recreate the viewers’ past experiences.

### **2-3. The Leap of Creative Intelligence**

It is imagination that plays an essential role in the recreation of experience. Dewey says the “first intimations of wide and large redirections of desire and purpose are of necessity imaginative” (AE: 352) and “[o]nly imaginative vision elicits the possibilities that are interwoven within the texture of the actual” (AE: 348). Imagination is the ability to share experiences “far beyond the scope of the direct personal relationship” and is a power of awareness to create a culture that previously did not exist (AE: 350). Imagination “involves a dissolution of old objects and a forming of new ones in a medium” (EN: 171).

Also, Dewey calls the intelligence associated with imagination “creative intelligence” (AE: 351). Dewey defines the work of intelligence in esthetic experience as the “perception of [the] relationship between what is done and what is undergone” (AE: 52). In the production of art, intelligence operates between what has already been produced and what is to come next. In appreciation, intelligence operates between accepting the work of art and criticizing it. Therefore, creative intelligence combines

what is done and what is undergone and brings out new possibilities from this combination. N. Saito defines creative intelligence as “a mode of thinking while taking on the ‘accidental’ in the unpredictability and uncertainty of life and speculating it forward” (Saito 2015: 56). According to Saito, such intelligence depicts the “movement of the leap” within uncertainty (Saito 2015: 65).

Dewey emphasizes that the first stage of esthetic experience is a feeling of “seizure” (AE: 150), an impact beyond understanding and language. “Not only, however, is it impossible to prolong this stage of esthetic experience indefinitely, but it is not desirable to do so” (AE: 150). The experience of “seizure” will have meaning for later critical responses.

The feeling of “seizure” is a momentary feeling. Responding to it and recreating such experiences is reflective and requires time. Within that time, the immediacy of esthetic experience moves to mediacy. This duality is neither disconnected nor concentrically connected. Both are connected by a “leap” to the creation of unpredictable new possibilities. That leap in both the making and appreciation of art depicts a different movement than putting direct experience in an absolute and central position.

### **3. Esthetic Experience as Resistance to Totalitarianism**

#### **3-1. Totalitarianism and Art**

How does this leap resist totalitarianism? To begin to answer this question we must locate the place of art in Dewey’s argument against totalitarianism.

In *Freedom and Culture*, written in the same year as the conclusion of the German–Soviet Nonaggression Pact (1939), Dewey wrote that “works of art [...] are the most compelling of the means of communication by which emotions are stirred and opinions formed” (FC: 70). However, a totalitarian regime controls the emotions of the masses through works of art: “A totalitarian regime is committed to controlling the whole life of all its subjects by its hold over feelings, desires, emotions, as well as opinions” (FC: 70).

Dewey argues that totalitarianism results from a simplification of theory, which it states “in absolute terms” (FC: 116). According to Dewey, there are two types of such theories of absolutism. One is German idealism, especially the Hegelian simplification, which was used to support the Nazis. The core of this thought is “found in its attempt to find a ‘higher’ justification for individuality and freedom where the latter is merged

with law and authority, which *must* be rational since they are manifestations of Absolute Reason” (FC: 149; emphasis in original). The second is the Marxist simplification. Dewey writes that Marxist simplification “combines the romantic idealism of earlier social revolutionaries with what purports to be a thoroughly ‘objective’ scientific analysis, expressed in formulation of a single all-embracing ‘law,’ a law which moreover sets forth the proper method to be followed by the oppressed economic class in achieving its final liberation” (FC: 119).

These two absolutized rational theories control human life including desires and emotions. Against them, Dewey argues that social events occur as the result of interaction between individuals (who have desires and emotions) and external environmental factors. He claims that within desire and emotion are “non-rational and anti-rational forces” (FC: 162). For Dewey, art’s key role in the resistance to totalitarianism is to create new things while accepting the non-rational and anti-rational aspects of human beings.

In addition, the problem of totalitarianism cannot be taken as the problem of Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union alone. Dewey found the risk of totalitarianism sprouting in the division of individual activities within laissez-faire liberalism of the United States at that time. The problem derives from the loss of the emergence of individuality that occurs through interaction with one’s environment, for which “[q]uantification, mechanization and standardization” were chiefly to blame [ION: 52].

Such problems cannot be overcome either by the denial of economic activity (national socialism) or by the control of people’s economic activity through national intervention (national capitalism).<sup>13</sup> Instead, economic activity must be recaptured as an opportunity that enables the individualization of individuals and an opportunity for “the development of a shared culture” (ION: 57). To do that, it is necessary to liberate collective intelligence through “the rise of the scientific method and technology” (LSA: 53). Dewey envisions democratic socialism as going beyond the division of individuals brought about by economic individualism and seeks to foster individuality through the creation of culture, rather than a totalization of America. The breakthrough that democratic socialism might accomplish is founded on Dewey’s concept of communication, which makes up the core of his thought.

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<sup>13</sup> Dewey criticized the New Deal. It represented an intensive model of government intervention in the market. Thus, it seems, at first glance, to be in line with Dewey’s argument. However, Dewey points out that the New Deal is a reaction to the Great Depression and evidence of “the growth of exacerbated Nationalism” (EBNS: 316).

### 3-2. Communication Mediated by Art

Communication goes beyond economic lubricants. According to Dewey, nonverbal expressions such as “[g]estures and cries are not primarily expressive or communicative” (EN: 138–139). Moreover, “[l]anguage, signs and significance” as communicative things “come into existence not only by intent and mind but by overflow, by-products, in gestures and sound” (EN: 139). Where do such “by-products” exist? Dewey states:

So too man’s posture and facial changes may indicate to other things which the man himself would like to conceal, so that he “gives himself away.” “Expression,” or signs, communication of meaning, exists in such cases for the observer, not for the agent. (EN: 140)

In nonverbal expressions, the observer brings meaning to communication.<sup>14</sup> According to Dewey, verbal communication is also inherently impossible unless it is shared by the recipients.

For Dewey, nonverbal communication is the work of creating an expression, which can only be transmitted and accepted as a nonverbal sensation, into a unique meaning. All communication is inherently creative and indeterminate, verbal and nonverbal communication alike. Therefore, no prior meaning has been established for communication. Instead, that uncertainty becomes a space for creation.

Especially in artistic expression, “[i]f the artist desires to communicate a special message, he thereby tends to limit the expressiveness of his work to others” (AE: 110). Rather, the “unexpected turn, something which the artist himself does not definitely foresee, is a condition of the felicitous quality of a work of art” (AE: 144).

Artworks are offered to the recipient as open media and create unexpected meaning. It is communication mediated by art for which Dewey argues.

### 3-3. Esthetic Experience Resisting Totalitarianism

Works of art as representations of the artist’s experience recreate viewers’ past

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<sup>14</sup> In *Experience and Nature*, Dewey discusses “meaning” as an overlap of “sense” and “signification” (EN: 200). Sense is grasping a direct and sensory quality and “signification” is indicative meaning. This study cannot discuss the multiplicity of Dewey’s semantics in detail, but it should be pointed out that “meaning” implies both immediacy and mediacy, an important issue in his theory of esthetic experience as well.

experience, and they demonstrate their uniqueness through the mutual relationship between the artist and the viewer. This is what communication through art means. In addition, both production and appreciation include the chance of the leap resulting from creative intelligence.

This movement of the leap in the mutual relationship between making and appreciation bring about the reorganization of the activities of “quantification, mechanization and standardization” and repel the absolutization of theory. Here, the contrast between art used to strengthen and maintain the existing political system and social order and art used to reorganize them is clear.

However, such a restructuring process does not rebuild the political system and social order from the ground up. For Dewey, seeking a fundamental reconstruction of the social order by means of a simplified theory means abandoning intelligence for “credulous faith in the Hegelian dialectic” (LSA: 60). The outcome of this would be the violent creation of different governing structures. On the other hand, Dewey’s democratic socialism, conceived from a perspective critical of totalitarianism, promotes a continuous transformation of the political system and social order through the movement of the leap. The driving forces for such transformations are communication via art and creative intelligence, which suggests possibilities that previously did not exist. “The future is always unpredictable” (ION: 122).

However, Dewey also said “that art itself is not secure under modern conditions” (AE: 347). To be able to secure the creative potential of art, “the material for art should be drawn from all sources whatever and that the products of art should be accessible to all” (AE: 347). Art is not something that is praised as being placed on a “far-off pedestal,” such as is found in museums (AE: 12).

Dewey insisted that works of art are created out of “ordinary experience” (AE: 17). According to him, the vital activity at the root of the aesthetic quality is ordinary experience. However, as mentioned before, there is also the risk that everyday life may be involved in totalitarianism through the dimensions of sense, desire, and emotion. The theory of esthetic experience embraces life’s continuous transformation toward an unknown future, hoping to foster opportunities for the leap in the interaction between life and the environment, with the necessity of starting with the vitality.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> This argues against R. Rorty’s (1989) concept of the “liberal ironist” who distinguishes between the public and the private. R. Shusterman (1997) advocates a “somaesthetics” based on Dewey’s theory of esthetic experience. According to Shusterman, awareness of the physical senses and their control could be cultural-critical because it results in both an adaptation to civilization and awareness of how power works on the body. Shusterman criticizes Rorty for ignoring Dewey’s concept of experience, including esthetic experience. The issue with Rorty is that he neglects the political potentiality of action in a nonpolitical sphere.

## Conclusion

This study examined the theory of esthetic experience as a response to totalitarianism in Dewey's works in the 1930s. First, this study confirmed that, in the 1930s, Dewey conceived of his notion of "democratic socialism" and signaled the importance of culture in response to the circumstances of the time, including totalitarianism. Also, it was pointed out that, although Dewey emphasized art as a part of culture, art included a risk of working in harmony with totalitarianism.

Second, this study described how the theory of esthetic experience, while it was based on immediate experience, included dimensions of both the mediacy and immediacy of art by focusing on the making and appreciation of works of art. In addition, between both dimensions of esthetic experience, there is the chance for the leap, a chance for the creation of new possibilities. To show that, this study focused on the concept of creative intelligence included works of the imagination. Therefore, the theory of esthetic experience and communication does not treat immediate experience as absolute and central.

Finally, this study clarified that, according to Dewey, the leap of esthetic experience, which is based on vitality can be interpreted as a counter to totalitarianism's encompassing of life, including day-to-day life. The major focus of this study was the importance of communication brought about by the mediacy of esthetic experience.

How does Dewey's theory of esthetic experience connect with his educational thought? In other words, how does it connect to the issue of "aesthetics and education?" Focusing on the concept of creative intelligence, the educational significance of the esthetic experience is its capacity to create something that did not exist previously: "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" (AE: 349). This is resonant with two concepts discussed in *Experience and Education* (1938): interaction and continuity.

In *Experience and Education*, Dewey shows the importance of interaction between individuals and their environment and the continuous recreation of community through education by discussing "individual freedom and social control," the overlapping themes of Dewey's political thought (EE: 31). Based on the argument of this study, this interaction creates new possibilities, and the continuous recreation is uncertain because nobody can tell the future perfectly. Dewey desired to protect the

opportunity for social reform by designing schools that could produce this kind of interaction and continuity.

The theory of esthetic experience is significant because it also aids in a reconsideration of Dewey's purposive rationality. However, the non-rationality of life in opposition to the rationality of the absolutization of theory can easily lead to totalitarianism, as long as it is a mere liberation of life.<sup>16</sup> Against that, Dewey provided conceptual tools for opposing totalitarianism in his discussion of creative intelligence, which would find the possibility that previously not exist in non-rationality. Therefore, the key to integrating his educational thought and his resistance to totalitarianism through aesthetics lies in the concept of creative intelligence.

What follows from this is to consider the leap, through creative intelligence, as a node of the non-rational movement and as the intelligence of life. It will be necessary to consider this in light of recent attention to Dewey's concept of "life."<sup>17</sup>

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### Abbreviations

EN = *Experience and Nature* (1925 LW1)

ISR= *Impressions of Soviet Russia* (1928 LW3)

ION= *Individualism, Old and New* (1930 LW5)

AE = *Art as Experience* (1934 LW10)

LSA= *Liberalism and Social Action* (1935 LW11)

EE= *Experience and Education* (1938 LW13)

FC= *Freedom and Culture* (1939 LW13)

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<sup>16</sup> For example, S. Suzuki says, "thought based on the universalism of 'life,' for the most part, has a totalitarian tendency and is easily connected to totalitarianism, which sacrifices individuals for the whole" (Suzuki 1995: 13).

<sup>17</sup> Recently, a study of Dewey's conceptualizations of life and the vital is being conducted, focusing on *Taisho-Shin-Kyoiku* (New Education in the Taisho Era). M. Hashimoto indicates the "possibility of the historical linkage between Dewey's concept of 'life' and Bergson's concept of '*la vie*'" (Hashimoto 2013: 221). Also, S. Tanaka argues that "Dewey's thinking on education is based on the concept of 'nature' that tacitly leads to Christian 'Agape,'" which is inseparable from Dewey's concept of "life" (Tanaka 2015: 36–37). Both of their suggestions reinterpret Dewey's thought from the viewpoint of vitalism.

EBNS= “The Economic Basis of the New Society” (1939 LW13)

CD= “Creative Democracy: The Task Before Us” (1939 LW14)

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