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John Dewey and Art

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MICHAEL KELLY

EDITOR IN CHIEF

the agent. Dewey would say that aesthetic experience is “expressive” of those settled dispositions.

It is apparent here how a full understanding of Dewey’s view of organic unity introduces topics that, traditionally, have not been considered especially relevant to aesthetics proper. But recent commentators have come to regard this as a major source of interest: Virtually the whole of Dewey’s mature work, and much of what he did earlier, is grounded on his wider views about the aesthetics of experience. For this Dewey has stretched not just the concept of “aesthetics” but also “experience” far beyond its familiar connotations. “Experience” for Dewey is not simply a phenomenological category. The term is a placeholder for the complex of operations and apprehensions that occur in what he calls “the interactive situation”—which is his way of describing the functional relationship between the human organism and its environment. All perceived qualities themselves emerge from this kind of complex, but “pervasive qualities” in particular emerge only when the human organism has learned to sustain a certain range of responses (emotional as well as cognitive) throughout the experiential process. In that case, and in the presence of appropriate environmental conditions, the result is a particular “system”—an assembly of parts connected together so that a particular end (consummation) is attained. Dewey’s familiar model here is biological (as in the case of the respiratory system of the human body, comprising the lungs and their associated vessels and airways). But he extends the reach of such a system beyond the boundaries of the organism proper, to include not only external elements that temporally coexist with the present state of the organism, but also future conditions that are created out of tensions internal to that present state. Dewey’s substantial, and controversial, claim at this point seems to be that what emerges from this interaction—and what constitutes the entire interactive situation as an organic unity—is more than simply the “pervasive quality” itself: it is also a telic element within the system that orients it toward consummatory “equilibrium,” for which the agent’s immediate apprehension of intrinsic pervasive quality functions instrumentally as an orienting clue for conduct.

So for Dewey, what has organic unity in such cases is not a physical artifact but a succession of interrelated events, and a physical art object may serve as an occasion not only for consummatory satisfaction but for a reinforcement of a spectator’s capacity for intelligent conduct in any field of practical inquiry. This (Dewey insists) is a central aspect of human life that Formalists missed by cordoning off “fine art” from other human products, and the fundamental impulse behind Dewey’s aesthetics is to “restore the continuity” between art and life that prevalent modernist theories had been ignoring. The encompassing breadth of the term *aesthetic* in Dewey is an indication of this. Life has real human value, Dewey would say, insofar as it exhibits the organic unity of experience.

All this places Dewey in an interesting relationship to recent developments in aesthetic theory. If we identify

“modernism” with Clement Greenberg’s view of a “self-critical tendency” that focuses exclusively on the intrinsic properties of the medium, Dewey is not a modernist because he does not hold that preoccupation with material properties, apart from other practical concerns, is even possible. But if we identify “postmodernism” with the Derridean rejection of any fixed frame for the artwork that could definitively set it apart from “outside” elements, then Dewey is no postmodernist either because he holds that experience itself does naturally exhibit structures of organic unity that define interactive situations. Here, as Richard Shusterman has pointed out (1992, pp. 71ff.), the contention between Dewey and postmodernism is not over the notion of organic unity per se but rather over the priority one should ascribe to the experience of aesthetic richness. Dewey takes such experience to be of supreme value for human life, and this fact he believes should determine our critical interests in art. His theory of organic unity is intended to provide a basic naturalistic framework for those critical interests.

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DAVID I. SEIPLE

Dewey and Art

Readers sympathetic to John Dewey’s philosophy generally admire his resistance to the conventional dualisms (e.g.,

mind and body, cognition and intuition, and subjective and objective) of the Western tradition, and often—as Stanley Cavell (1990) put it—feel “the thrill of certain moments of [his] writing” (p. 14). At the same time, even the most committed readers find it difficult to parse Dewey’s ideas about art as expressed in *Art as Experience* (the book, published in 1934, revises and expands the William James Lectures he delivered at Harvard University in 1931). The challenge results partly from Dewey’s circuitous argumentation, but also from his shifting definitions of key terms: “experience,” “expression,” “interaction,” “medium,” and “consummation.” It is also a consequence of the author’s resolve to avoid utilizing normative categories, for instance, beauty, significant form, autonomy, truth to nature (mimesis), as criteria of aesthetic value. While they had become standard in writing on art, over time such categories had, according to Dewey, radically undermined our capacity to understand the way works of art mean.

To assess and evaluate the chief claims of *Art as Experience*, even in summary form, is a daunting task. I offer a critical discussion of some key terms rooted in Dewey’s treatise in order to investigate how his aesthetics bears upon certain themes that remain crucial for art history and criticism, including the nature of an artistic medium, the quality of aesthetic experience in production and reception, the relation of intention to meaning, and the activity of interpretation.

The Artistic Medium. Dewey identified continuities where others established categorical distinctions. For him, the fundamental reciprocity between an organism and an environment—in which the organism comes to understand himself and what actions and objects mean by testing their effectiveness in overcoming obstacles it encounters to its growth—provided a model for unifying various divisions enacted by the Western tradition. In *Art as Experience* (1934), Dewey states that he aims to “restore [the] continuity between the refined and intensified forms of experience that are works of art and the everyday events, doings, and sufferings that are universally recognized to constitute experience” (p. 3).

Even in this preliminary statement, Dewey suggests how his theory of art diverges from conventional accounts. Charging that traditional aesthetics focuses on the enduring *product* of artistic activity—a somewhat misleading accusation—Dewey proposes that a “work” of art is not necessarily a static object but rather a special kind of dynamic *experience*, differing from everyday undertakings by virtue of its special refinement or intensification. The “delight of the housewife in tending her plants” and the “intelligent mechanic engaged in his job” exhibit the raw characteristics of the properly aesthetic (*Art as Experience*, p. 5), but Dewey values art specifically because it occasions a beholder’s apprehension of this special quality. Consequently, he often treats the work of art either as a sign of or as a stimulus for what he calls “an experience.” What distinguishes an experi-

ence from its quotidian analogues is its “consummatory” character—its manifestation of a pervasive qualitative of wholeness or completeness and a perfect adjustment of means to ends. That fit is not so much cognitively known as it is *felt* by the organism. Its aesthetic dimension can be appreciated, though, when the affective satisfaction the experience affords is subject to reflection. Indeed, “consummation” properly refers only to those moments in which the organism’s felt integration is complemented by a conscious awareness of the qualitative integration it has achieved.

Careful to avoid categorizing self-reflection as a purely intellectual or abstract operation, Dewey explains reflection’s emergence from an organic setting. Only after a developmental process through which the “live creature” transforms its “blind surge[s]” or impulses into “contrived” or orchestrated undertakings (*Art as Experience*, p. 59) can the consummatory phase of an interaction be consciously recognized. This process is crucial to understanding how Dewey thinks an individual expresses meaning through an artistic medium.

Dewey explains how the human being, constituted by basic needs and functions no different in kind from those common to “animal life below the human scale,” is inseparable from an environment that, far from being considered external to it, is rather the essential condition of life (*Art as Experience*, p. 18). The animal strives for union and integration with its environment. Disturbances to this harmony create tensions that must be brought into equilibrium through vital adaptation. Certainly, balance can simply be restored by more or less mechanical means, such as reflexes. But in its fullest and most significant form, stability results from the “transformation of [mere] interaction into participation and communication” (p. 22). The drive toward equilibrium requires—or perhaps we might say permits—the conversion of raw material into media of expression:

Art is thus prefigured in the very processes of living. A bird builds its nest and a beaver its dam when internal organic pressures cooperate with external materials so the former are fulfilled and the latter are transformed in a satisfying culmination....All deliberation, all conscious intent, grows out of things once performed organically through the interplay of natural energies....Art is the living and concrete proof that man is capable of restoring consciously, and thus on the plane of meaning, the union of sense, need, impulse and action characteristic of the live creature. (*Art as Experience*, pp. 24–25)

In this passage, “art” seems to designate processes of production that, while they may at first be carried out with something like the live animal’s absorbed but nonreflective involvement in its activity, nonetheless issue in a satisfying experience because they become intentionally directed. In other words, fulfilling internal drives by transforming external materials into media is the route to intentional expression.

“What makes a material a medium,” Dewey writes, “is that it is used to express a meaning which is other than that which it is in virtue of its bare physical existence” (*Art as Experience*, p. 201). Espousing an idea that is not incom-

mensurate with some views articulated by the critic Clement Greenberg (and later by Michael Fried), Dewey suggests that the “causally conditioned” material of art—its literalness—must be transformed in order to “depict the wide and diversified universe of animate and inanimate things” (pp. 146 and 196). To become a properly artistic medium that “operates with full energy” (p. 197), the “contracted, flat, uniform” surface of a canvas must be overcome or, as Greenberg put it, “re-created.” Thus, a medium is established not when the artist imprints an inert substance with a pre-envisaged form, but when his absorbed attention to, and manipulation of, his materials issues in a “consolidated,” “complete,” and “immediate” presentation of meaning (pp. 56, 58, and 119). Dewey’s contention that only a “medium” can convey the “immediate,” as paradoxical as it sounds, is meant to ground his aesthetics in the world, refusing the metaphysical concept of art’s existence in an ideal realm separate from our own.

Aesthetic Experience in Production and Reception. Dewey’s theory of artistic media bears upon his dual effort to (1) describe what constitutes aesthetic experience for the artist (the producer of works of art) and the viewer (the receiver who encounters those works) and to (2) reconsider the conventional distinction between aesthetic and ordinary experience.

With respect to the first task, in Dewey’s terminology, “art” refers to processes of doing or making (production), while “esthetic” refers to the viewer’s perception (reception). Yet he cautions that the distinction cannot be rigidly maintained. Both can have a consummatory character. Art unites the stages of production and reception, and “the artist embodies in himself the attitude of the perceiver while he works” (*Art as Experience*, p. 48). Moreover, perception is aesthetic when a “relation to a distinct manner of activity qualifies what is perceived” (p. 49). What makes this manner of activity distinct is that it is “directed by intent” (p. 48). Since the artist “selects, simplifies, clarifies, abridges, and condenses” the means at his disposal according to his interest, his aesthetic experience is permeated by an “absorbed” sense of “conserving,” “consolidating,” and “accruing” meanings from past experience within the context of a present directed toward the future (pp. 54 and 56).

Artists use material not merely to accomplish a set task or to effect a predetermined end. Rather, those materials are “incorporated” in a special way into the artwork they make possible and are transformed into media in the process. When means persist in—and are fulfilled by—their end, an “integration” of a plastic medium has been achieved. This constitutes, for Dewey, an objective standard for value in painting. Plastic integration elicits from the beholder of the work of art a sense of a correlative integration in her “total set of organic responses” (Dewey, “Affective Thought,” p. 7). The beholder, in order to “lay hold of the full import of the work of art,” must “go through in [his] own vital pro-

cesses the processes the artist went through in producing the work” (*Art as Experience*, p. 325). So, while the experiences of the artist and the viewer are not literally identical, the latter is, in a re-creative sense, continuous with the former.

With respect to the second task, we have seen that Dewey averts the dilemma of distinguishing between the ordinary and the aesthetic by denying that there is a categorical distinction between them. In normal experience, we apprehend the meaning of objects and events by assessing their significance against the background of a total situation within which we are engaged. The aesthetic, continuous with both organic processes as well as with quotidian life, depends upon that basic condition for its “raw material,” and “issue[s] from [it]” (*Art as Experience*, pp. 11–12). Thus, the difference between the ordinary and the aesthetic is one of degree.

It turns out that what differentiates the process of artistic doing or making from everyday activities is the intensity of “completeness of living in the experience of making and perceiving” (*Art as Experience*, p. 26). Artworks exhibit a fulfilling wholeness that—while sometimes experienced in everyday activity—is intensely concentrated. In contrast to the “disorganization” and “compartmentalization” (p. 20) of modern, institutional life, art conveys the “immediate sensuous experience” (p. 29) of “self-sufficiency” (p. 35). Just as it is when we have *an* experience, in a work of art

there are no holes, mechanical junctions, [or] dead centers....In a work of art, different acts, episodes, occurrences melt and fuse into unity, and yet do not disappear and lose their own character as they do so....This unity is constituted by a single *quality* that pervades the entire experience. (*Art as Experience*, pp. 36–37)

Dewey singles out the critic Roger Fry to make the point that this unity is not merely a formal property of the work of art—a matter of perfectly adjusting pictorial elements to each other within a compositional whole. Instead, the work of art fulfills the “union of sense, need, impulse and action” that Dewey identified as the chief motivational drive of the live creature (*Art as Experience*, p. 25). Yet this quality of wholeness evades precise definition. The powerful coherence of aesthetic experience “cannot be described nor even be *specifically* pointed at”; it “can only be felt” (p. 192). A total, penetrating quality that is emotionally intuited rather than cognitively known, the “undefined pervasive quality” of the aesthetic is identical to “the spirit of the work of art” (p. 193). As if uncertain himself, Dewey confesses that “*somehow*, the work of art operates to deepen and to raise to great clarity that sense of an enveloping undefined whole that accompanies every normal experience” (emphasis added, p. 195).

Readers might legitimately press Dewey to illustrate how this sense of union is manifested in a particular work of art. But the author’s main goal—to develop a naturalist account of the origin of works of art and to articulate a general theory

of aesthetic experience—keeps him from analyzing specific artworks in much detail. In any case, his emphasis on the experiential quality of that wholeness mitigates its being found as a distinct *property* of any extant work of art. That coherence, when perceived, is “not the exclusive result of the lines and colors” but of the “subtle affinity” between “what the beholder brings with him” from prior experiences and the artwork he views (p. 87). In aesthetic experience, those interests and attitudes, meanings and values “fuse with the qualities directly presented in the work of art” (pp. 89, 98).

Here, though, a bifurcation seems to emerge between the beholder’s experience and the artist’s intention with regard to meaning—a split that Dewey never sufficiently resolves. The viewer brings a prior history to bear in his present experience of the artwork, and this history definitively shades his understanding of what is meaningful to him about the work of art. But is what the work of art *experienced as* identical to its meaning? The question would seem central to understanding what, for Dewey, constitutes the proper domain of interpretation (a subject he never explicitly broaches in *Art as Experience*). But the philosopher hedges in answering. On the one hand, he asserts the meaning of the work of art is what the artist intended. In the work of art, there is a sense of “personally felt emotion guiding the selecting and assembling of the materials presented” (p. 68). It is “saturat[ed] with conscious meanings” and a “deliberate expression” (p. 23). Form, he argues, is the creator’s particular manner of “envisaging, of feeling, and of presenting experienced matter” (p. 109). The implication is that it is the creator’s point of view that a beholder must perceive—and interpret—in order to experience aesthetically. A painting should not be used as a “spring board for arriving at [extraneous but agreeable] sentiments” (p. 113); meaning is not “a matter of association and suggestion” (p. 118). The creator offers a proposal about existence that the viewer is asked to judge as credible or not.

On the other hand, Dewey clearly values the meanings attributed to the work of art by the viewer, even going so far as to claim that each individual’s experience creates a different work of art. Thus, he says, no two readers have the same experience of a poem: indeed, “a new poem is created by every one who reads poetically” (*Art as Experience*, p. 108). “It is absurd,” he goes on to say,

to ask what an artist “really” meant by his product: he himself would find different meanings in it at different days and hours and in different stages of his own development. If he could be articulate, he would say “I meant just *that*, and *that* means whatever you or any one can honestly, that is in virtue of your own vital experience, get out of it.” (*Art as Experience*, pp. 108–109)

But if it is true that whatever a beholder “get[s] out of it” is the work of art’s meaning, then it is hard to see how we might settle right and wrong claims about what an artist actually meant. Indeed, there would be no conflicting claims as such to adjudicate since a report on experience is not a

claim about meaning. A report on what one gets out of it would not *oppose* another person’s report; rather, it would simply *differ* from it—with no consequences in terms of interpretation.

Intention, Meaning, and Interpretation. If meaning is determined by the contingent experiences of a viewer, that condition would seem to obviate the problem of judging competing claims about what the work of art means. One beholder’s experience would just vary from another’s. Since neither would strictly be interpreting the work of art, no basis would exist for agreement or disagreement. But as we have seen, Dewey sidesteps the extreme implications of such an anti-intentionalist position: art, he writes “is the immediate realization of intent” (p. 85).

Still, it would be useful to understand better what Dewey means by intent, and how it is expressed. Notice that in the line just quoted, Dewey does not say “*an* intent.” The latter formulation would have particularized intention by locating it within an agent and ascribing to him an objective: the expression of his or her own meaning. Here and in other instances in *Art as Experience*, Dewey downplays the agency that creates the coherence he values in the work of art. (And he never goes so far as to say that what is complete about the artwork is its having a complete meaning that is fixed by its author.) Partly, Dewey’s resistance to the idea that meaning is determined by the individual is a logical consequence of his naturalistic theory of intention, in which an individual’s “own” meaning is not self-generated (as if autonomously created), but rather is the result of a complex series of environmental interactions and intersubjective relations.

In a discussion of experience and expression, Dewey offers a comprehensive account of the evolutionary origin of conscious intent out of the basic interactions between an organism and an environment. To clarify the nature of “complete experiences,” Dewey distinguishes impulses—the more or less mechanical reflex reactions of the organism to environmental stimuli—from implications—the organism needs that drive an extroverted “movement of the organism in its entirety” toward the world (*Art as Experience*, p. 58). In encountering resistance to the fulfillment of its “blind surges,” but in successfully transforming those obstacles into advantageous conditions, the live creature “becomes aware of the intent implicit in its impulsion” (p. 59). “Resistance,” Dewey writes, “calls out thought” (p. 60). Insofar as the live creature assimilates prior experiences and uses them as a resource to confront new obstacles (“reviv[ing]” and “re-creat[ing]” them in the process), obstructions become the means or media by which the live creature expresses itself.

This model, however, poses certain difficulties to developing a coherent theory of artistic meaning. When “sheer internal pressure” drives the infant to cry, Dewey says, the act cannot properly be understood as expressive (indeed, it is not properly an *act* at all). As he becomes increasingly aware of the determinate responses his cry elicits from

others—and to the degree he begins to control his cry in anticipation of its consequences—he “grasps the meaning of his act” (*Art as Experience*, p. 62). Meaning neither preexists an interaction, nor is created *ex nihilo*, but rather always emerges within and through an interaction. (The point of Dewey’s argument, like that of his student and colleague George Herbert Mead, is that meaning is not self-determined by an isolated, introspective ego, but is continuously socially tested and evaluated.) It is only when he grasps how his acts effect different results that the child begins to express himself. If we extend this argument to the creation of a work of art, it would seem to suggest that the artist’s meaning is dependent upon the responses he elicits from his beholders or, in other words, from how they put the work to use (which is the same as saying it is dependent upon their experiences of his artwork).

Furthermore, Dewey’s example of the crying child calls forth a distinction between an act that, from the point of view of an observer, might appear expressive and one that is actually or intrinsically expressive. To be genuinely expressive, the “child who has learned the effect his once spontaneous act has upon those around him [must] perfor[m] ‘on purpose’ an act that was once blind” (*Art as Experience*, p. 62). The scare quotes around “on purpose” continue to indicate the basic problem, and perhaps reveal a certain hesitancy on Dewey’s part. For if meaning is not determined by the child, but is just the name we give to his developing capacity to recognize effects, then we have a kind of compromised on-purpose-ness. Meaning, instead of being self-generated, becomes a matter of manipulating one’s acts to achieve desired effects:

The child may now cry for a purpose, because he wants attention or relief. He may begin to bestow his smiles as inducements or favors. There is now art in incipency. An activity that was “natural”—spontaneous and unintended—is transformed because it is undertaken as a means to a consciously entertained consequence.

(*Art as Experience*, p. 62)

Dewey goes on to discuss the opposition between true communication (the “artistic”) and dissimulation or manipulation (the “artificial” or “artful”). But his discussion raises an issue more pertinent than evaluating the relative sincerity or fraudulence of an act. The issue has to do with what properly constitutes interpretation. Although he is far from clear on his stance, it is possible that Dewey is saying that interpretation should produce claims about what an agent, through her artwork, means. On this reading, we would expect Dewey’s frank admission that what is being interpreted—what we are targeting or making claims about in interpretative activity—is what is intended, that is, the artist’s meaning, not the artwork’s effect on the viewer or the viewer’s experience.

However, many of Dewey’s examples in *Art as Experience* seem to divide meaning from an artist’s intent. We might take him just to be suggesting that intent, too, is a social phe-

nomenon—not prior to or independent of meaning but in a relationship of mutual determination to it. To do so would constitute a rethinking of intention so that it is not identified with an artist’s or author’s preformed mental plan but as something embedded within a community.

When it has not simply been ignored, Dewey’s aesthetics has been met with both exaggerated hostility and exaggerated adulation. Benedetto Croce lambasted Dewey in print, but in 1966 Monroe called *Art as Experience* “the most valuable work in aesthetics in English (and perhaps in any language) so far in our century” (Beardsley, 1966, p. 332). What appears to be called for—and what some philosophers have begun to undertake—are thorough analyses of Dewey’s key terms that do not fall into the circuitousness that characterizes his writing (an intentional strategy employed by Dewey to resist the ossification of ideas and values). Michael Kelly, for instance, has recently argued that attending to a model like Dewey’s might help regenerate aesthetics by restoring its links to ethical and practical life—links that are severed whenever aesthetics asserts its judgments as if they are independent of values. With such analyses in hand, a more productive correlation of Dewey’s aesthetics with the actual history of art—with the conventions and constraints that constitute the possibility for an artist’s creative expression—will be possible.

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MICHAEL SCHREYACH

DIALOGICAL ART. Dialogical Art refers to a distinct genre within contemporary art practice in which forms of dialogue and social exchange play a central role. Examples include the work of the Viennese collective WochenKlausur, Ala Plastica in Buenos Aires, Park Fiction in Hamburg, and Rick Lowe's Project Row Houses in Houston (Kester, 2011). This work is affiliated with a broader shift toward collaborative and performance-based approaches in contemporary art that has been variously labeled "Relational" and "Participatory" (Bourriaud, 1998). The term "dialogical" reflects the interest among these artists in a model of aesthetic experience in which the conventional relationship among artist, artwork, and viewer becomes more reciprocal and interactive. It also suggests the specific relevance of Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of "dialogics" for the interpretation of this work. While Bakhtin has exercised a significant influence in the fields of literary and cultural studies, he has received far less attention in the visual arts (Deborah Haynes's *Bakhtin and the Visual Arts* being a significant exception). In part this can be attributed to the fact that Bakhtin wrote primarily about literary forms. However, Bakhtin's work, especially his earlier philosophical research, can contribute much to our understanding of contemporary collaborative or participatory art practices.

Dialogical Art practices challenge many of the hermeneutic conventions of contemporary art criticism and theory. These conventions emerged out of the rapprochement between post-Conceptual art practice and Continental Theory during the 1980s, which led to a reframing of formalist models of art criticism associated with figures such as Clement Greenberg. We might describe this shift

as marking a "linguistic turn" in the analysis of contemporary art, due to the important role played by literary theory and semiotics, especially evident in the influence of journals such as *October* (Krauss, 1980). Within this new paradigm the work of art is understood as analogous to a poetic text, "laying bare the device" of meaning through a "de-familiarizing" disruption of the viewer's habitual consciousness of the world (Shklovsky, 1917). The work of the Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure, as presented in *Course on General Linguistics*, played a key role in the propagation of this model (Saussure, 1913). It gave additional theoretical coherence to an evolving set of beliefs within contemporary art practice in which society was viewed as a vast network of semiotic and ideological regulation that served to constrain and determine our individual actions. Within this system the only truly unconstrained form of expression belongs to the artist, who is able to comprehend this totality, while at the same time devising forms of cognitive assault and deconstructive exposition capable of bringing others to some awareness of its existence. Because viewers in this scenario are understood as receptive and uninformed, awaiting enlightenment at the hands of the artist, the artist's relationship to them is typically monological rather than dialogical.

Bakhtin was familiar with Saussure's work through his influence on Russian linguistics during the early twentieth century. However, Bakhtin came to a very different set of conclusions regarding the relationship between language and human consciousness. In fact, Bakhtin was openly critical of Saussure's decision to focus on the synchronically fixed system of language, at the expense of the diachronic unfolding of individual speech acts (his famous distinction between *langue*, which is "essential" and *parole*, which is merely "accessory" and "random"). In Bakhtin's view, this marked a significant impoverishment of our understanding of human creativity (Volosinov, 1929). By refusing to engage with the complexity and messiness of actual human dialogue ("our pernicious temporality," as Bakhtin describes it) Saussure reiterates a longer tradition within modern thought that sought to impose abstract theoretical principles on the "un-repeatable singularity" of human existence (Bakhtin, 1993, pp. 11–13). Here *langue* becomes the generative locus of meaning, while individual speech can only ever be an epiphenomenal expression of this larger structuring system. Bakhtin associates this outlook with what he terms a "monological" understanding of human consciousness, which overlooks the transformative nature of reciprocal, inter-subjective experience. In monological thought the Other remains "only an *object* of consciousness," as Bakhtin writes. "No response capable of altering everything in the world of my consciousness is expected of this other. The monologue is accomplished and deaf to the other's response: it does not await it and does not grant it any *decisive force*" (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 293).