

performing) will stimulate development. This is particularly likely since, as the authors say, "in our culture individuals are exposed unevenly to the arts. Moreover, many people do not encounter the arts frequently; nor do they often debate questions concerning them."<sup>5</sup> Parsons and his colleagues make one other comment on the present state of our psychological knowledge of aesthetic development that is equally applicable to the way we should educate for it: "We are limited [only] by our ingenuity and our data."<sup>6</sup>

The fifth contribution is the authors' recognition that they do not yet know how their data fit together into aesthetic stages in general. But they believe that when stages of aesthetic development are validated they will apply "potentially to the arts." Such a unitary development underlying the arts as a whole will, however, require "a serious engagement with each art for its actualization."<sup>7</sup> Parsons and his colleagues have made a beginning. They have challenged psychology to describe a unitary development underlying the arts as a whole and education to actualize that human capacity.

### Notes

1. Michael J. Parsons, Marilyn A. Johnston, and Robert F. Durham, "A Cognitive-Developmental Approach to Aesthetic Experience," in *Adolescents' Development and Education: A Janus Knot*, ed. Ralph L. Mosher (Berkeley, Calif.: McCutchan Publishing Corp., 1979), Chapter 7.

2. *Ibid.*

3. *Ibid.*

4. Monroe Beardsley, *Aesthetics: Problems in the Philosophy of Criticism* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1958).

5. Parsons, Johnston, and Durham, "A Cognitive-Developmental Approach to Aesthetic Experience."

6. *Ibid.*

7. *Ibid.*

## A Cognitive-Developmental Approach to Aesthetic Experience

Michael J. Parsons

Marilyn A. Johnston

Robert F. Durham

This contribution, devoted to a discussion of a cognitive-developmental approach to the aesthetic experience of children, presents some of the assumptions such a project requires, together with certain relevant findings in the literature. These assumptions are followed by a summary of the results of an initial empirical inquiry.

The focus is on the aesthetic experience of children, which includes judgments of and responses to works of art and is much broader than their creative abilities in the arts. A cognitive-developmental theory would undertake to trace the cognitive elements that underlie aesthetic experience, assuming that they determine, to some significant extent, the nature of that experience. The descriptions of these elements would have to be stated in terms that make clear both the way in which the aesthetic responses of children and of adults differ and the reasons for which these differences are relevant to their aesthetic character.

This is not a new idea. Although developmental psychologists as a group have not in the past been greatly interested in development in the arts, the question of aesthetic development has been approached in several different ways, and interest in the area has grown recently. The psycho-analytic school has studied the development of practicing individual artists.<sup>1</sup> Much work has been done on the developing abilities of the average child in making art, especially painting and drawing.<sup>2</sup> James Mark Baldwin's theory of development included an aesthetic stage,<sup>3</sup> and both Piaget and Werner and Kaplan have touched upon it in their studies of the development of the use of symbols.<sup>4</sup> Howard Gardner has made the most direct and recent approach.<sup>5</sup> He is interested not only in the use of symbols in general but particularly in those uses that constitute art, and not only in the child as a practitioner of art but also as a responder to it. His work also includes a useful review of the literature.

---

An early version of the first two sections of this contribution appeared in the *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 34 (Spring 1976). Most of the third section appeared in the *Journal of Aesthetic Education*, 12 (January 1978). Both are reprinted with the publishers' permission.



In spite of the existence of the above studies, the cognitive-developmental approach has not been explored in any thoroughgoing way. There are a number of reasons for this situation, and Gardner discusses some of them.<sup>6</sup> For example, he is most concerned to warn against the temptation to import the Piagetian stages into the aesthetic realm and to apply them to the way children think about art objects. The work of Machotka,<sup>7</sup> which will be reviewed below, is the best example of an attempt to do this. This approach cannot, however, take one very far. It seems unlikely that the advent of concrete and formal operations (which determine the chief stages of the development of scientific thinking) will be of primary importance in developing aesthetic judgment. The approach is not sufficiently radical: it does not take seriously the autonomy of aesthetic experience. Its effect is to treat aesthetic objects as if they were any other object and aesthetic concepts as if they were similar to nonaesthetic concepts. But this seems wrongheaded. Concepts like art, form, and expression combine with each other ("make a structure"), and not with concepts like space, length, and volume because the latter are ingredients in a different normative experience. Aesthetic experience is not a kind of scientific experience; nor is aesthetic judgment a kind of scientific judgment. There is virtual unanimity on this among philosophers, and, unless they are all wrong, it seems there should be a correspondingly distinct developmental history to be investigated. If aesthetic judgments and experience are *sui generis*, a developmental account of them must have its own categories and definitions. The same can be said, of course, of moral judgments, and perhaps also of religious ones.

The above does not necessarily mean that aesthetic development is unrelated to development in terms of operational thinking. Whether it is or is not cannot be decided in advance of the facts. It may be that operational thinking is necessary for aesthetic development, but it cannot be sufficient because some experience with the arts (how much and of what kinds are not clearly known) is also necessary. But the important point is that the one cannot be used to define the other.

One problem with speaking of a distinctive aesthetic development in the child is that it ignores important distinctions within the arts. It implies that development in all arts is the same and can be described in the same terms, and it ignores the differences between the various art forms and media, the different kinds of skills they call for, and the uneven development of individuals with respect to them. These differences might suggest that there is unlikely to be some unitary development underlying the arts as a whole; perhaps, rather, there is a separate development with respect to each art form. At this point it can only be said that this is ultimately an empirical question, for which the evidence is not available. The empirical

work for this essay consisted only of studying what children said of paintings. But it seems reasonable to speak of aesthetic experience and aesthetic judgments, and to do this is not to pick out any particular art form or medium. It can be assumed, therefore, that the development described applies potentially to all the arts, but also that it requires a serious engagement with each art for its actualization. Shortage of time alone would account for its unequal unfolding in individuals in all the arts. Also, in our culture individuals are exposed unequally to the arts. Moreover, many people do not encounter the arts frequently; nor do they often debate questions concerning them.

A further obstacle to a cognitive-developmental theory is based on the view that what is distinctive about the arts is their power to engage feeling, and, therefore, a cognitive theory is inappropriate. Such a view might hold that, if there is a development, it will be one of affective abilities, and cognitive elements or structures will miss this. This seems to be, in various forms, a commonly held view. Gardner's distinction between the "audience member" and the "critic" lends it credence, though his distinction is adopted for another purpose.<sup>8</sup> This objection is founded on a view of the relation between cognition and affect; it is with this view that a cognitive-developmental approach would have to take issue. We assume that cognition and affect interact to a significant degree in both children and adults. Affect is certainly important in aesthetic response, but what develops is not just the power of feeling, which the young child already has. It is the power of relevant feeling that develops. Thus, aesthetic development consists of the ability to respond relevantly to a work of art as an aesthetic object. This ability rests on a cognitive achievement, as the word "relevant" makes plain. And, for this reason, the development of both aesthetic judgment and aesthetic experience are considered parts of a single whole. It is not enough to study, as is sometimes done, judgments in isolation from whatever else people have to say about their experience of a work of art. When one tries to articulate that experience, he reveals (imperfectly, of course) what he thinks is relevant about the work. Thus, what one thinks is relevant will affect what he looks for in the work, and, hence, what he sees and what he responds affectively to. No doubt the reverse relation is also true: what affects one in a work will influence what he thinks is relevant to look for and will provide possible reasons for judgments.

There is no reason to believe that there is a direct relationship between what affects an individual and the reasons he gives for his judgments. The limits of self-awareness and the poverty of language make this unlikely, especially with children. Given also our capacities for stereotyping and overlooking, it is equally unlikely that there is no connection at all. Thus, if one thinks it relevant to say that a patch of color is his favorite color, he



is not likely to examine it closely enough to notice variations of tone and hue. Or, if one's vocabulary for praise and disapproval is limited to "beautiful" and "ugly," how can he be anything but confused by, say, Beckett's plays, or Picasso's *Guernica*?

In fact, a cognitive-developmental theory requires a varying discrepancy between what affects a person and what he can articulate. As in the areas of moral and scientific development, such a discrepancy is the motive force behind development. When one begins to be affected by new kinds of things in works of art, he strains to revise what he thinks can relevantly be said about them; when affect and articulation are more in equilibrium, the person is at a relatively stable stage. "Relevant" here means aesthetically relevant, that is, relevant to a response or judgment concerned with the work as an aesthetic object. As has been said, this sense of relevance is the core of development in this area. One could, instead, speak of the development of a "theory" of aesthetic relevance, though not, of course, of a self-conscious or articulated theory. This formulation would stress the parallel developments of scientific and moral judgments in the theories of Piaget and Kohlberg.

One can arrive at such a "theory" in the same way that Piaget and Kohlberg have. He can look at children's judgments concerning particular works of art and the reasons given for them and try to reconstruct what lies behind the judgments and the reasons. This is not very different from what the philosophers of criticism have tried to do with the language of critics, though, of course, they work with a higher level of cognitive sophistication.

The final and perhaps the most important obstacle to constructing a cognitive theory of aesthetic development has been simply the difficulty of conceiving the terms in which to couch it. Before one can profitably discuss judgments and reasons with children, with an eye to reconstructing implicit cognitive structures, he needs some conception of what to look for. This conception, as has been said, must rest on a view of what is distinctive about aesthetic experience across the arts and of what is different about the experience of the child and the adult. What follows is meant to illustrate the possibility with data from a study concerned with painting. At this point the account should be considered plausible rather than conclusive and should suggest parallel inquiries that might be conducted in connection with music, literature, dance, or other art forms.

### *Aesthetic Judgment: What We Now Know*

It is necessary to look briefly at some of the already known facts a theory of aesthetic development would have to explain.

A number of studies of the aesthetic judgments or preferences of children have been undertaken for various purposes, though most of them have not been guided by developmental considerations. Two important exceptions are the studies by Machotka and by Gardner, Winner, and Kircher.<sup>9</sup> Machotka deduced several hypotheses from the nature of the Piagetian stages of formal and concrete operations, all of which his findings tended to support. He reasoned that the interest in realism, and the use of criteria related to it, which is commonly observed in children, should appear with the advent of concrete operations (around the age of seven). He argued that to judge a painting in such terms requires a comparison of the painting as a picture with the appearance of the objects depicted in the real world. He found, in fact, that reasons related to realism did first appear at about seven years and that their number grew steadily until they peaked at about eleven years. He also reasoned that references to formal qualities, such as balance, harmony, and contrast, should first appear with the beginning of concrete operations and increase in frequency thereafter. This also seemed to be correct. Before age seven, the emphasis is on subject matter and color. The overwhelming importance to young children of subject matter in paintings is often commented on in the literature and is described in various ways, such as an interest in an abundance of detail and a failure to take note of the nature of the medium. Gardner, Winner, and Kircher, who questioned children closely about their conceptions of art, also found that their results "mirror Piagetian trends" in a general way, but with some limitations. They add at least two interesting facts about opinions during the adolescent years. Only at that time do they find the opinion that art requires native ability, talent, or genius, as opposed to simply hard work or skill. Also, there is a kind of relativism in judgments, which the authors interpret as a return to the relativism of the early years, which has been interrupted by a period of increasing respect for the criteria of realism and the authority of experts.

Child<sup>10</sup> discovered that, when college students make choices between pairs of works, they distinguish preference from judgments of aesthetic value, but that children in the first through the fifth grade do not. For the latter group there appears to be no difference between liking a work and judging it as good.

Finally, there are some suggestive findings concerning the expression of emotions. Bullough, studying the judgments of adults, and following him Myers and Valentine,<sup>11</sup> distinguished four common kinds of reasons for judgments:

*Objective:* remarks about the content of the work, the grouping, and so forth;

*Subjective:* remarks about the effect of the painting on oneself ("the picture makes me smell the sea and hear the waves");



*Associative:* remarks about what one is reminded of, or made to think of;

*Character:* remarks about the character or the emotional qualities seen in the work itself.

Bullough and Valentine tended to see these as types of judgment related to types of character in people, but clearly it is possible to look at these categories as potentially forming a developmental sequence. Moore<sup>12</sup> attempted to do this, hypothesizing that the fourth category ("character") would come last developmentally. His results showed, indeed, that the youngest children gave the most "objective" reasons (dominance of subject matter) and that the oldest gave the most "character" reasons. Both Child and Machotka made a distinction that seems related to that between the second and third categories and the fourth. Child tried to distinguish between what he called sentimental responses and emotional responses. He found that the first were most characteristic of elementary school children, but, unfortunately, there was poor interjudge reliability concerning the second. Machotka distinguished reasons relying on "empathetic identity" from those referring to the "global" character of the work; the latter appeared in his sample only after the age of twelve.

How might a developmental theory explain these and other facts? Below is an empirically based account of stages in the development of aesthetic experience that seems to encompass both these facts and additional data. The major thread running through these stages consists of two parts: one psychological and the other aesthetic. The first entails a progressive decrease in egocentricity of response; the second involves a progressive increase in relevance to the aesthetic object. The structure behind these stages consists essentially in the way the aesthetic qualities of an object are conceived. What varies is the location of these qualities as between the person and the object. At the beginning, children speak as if these qualities are very close to the self, as if there is no distance between the object and the self. Later, they are conceived of as residing in varying sets of rules, though the authority embodied in these rules shows a progressive decentering. Finally, though the data do not reach this far, aesthetic qualities are thought of as qualities of the object itself, as being in principle publicly accessible and based on the perceptual or intentional aspects of the object.<sup>13</sup> At the same time, the kinds of qualities thought to be relevant are progressively differentiated. Initially they include memories, private preferences, associations of all kinds; ultimately aesthetic matters are more clearly distinguished from moral and other considerations. If one focuses on judgment rather than aesthetic experience in general, he can conceive of these stages in terms of their relation to rules. First, there are no rules; next, there is a set of rather clear and

rigid rules; then, in adolescence, there are many and conflicting sets of rules (a phase in this scheme that would cover the relativism spoken of by Gardner); and, finally, the multiplicity of competing rules is settled by principles of relevance, that is, any quality is relevant that is public and is based on the perceptual or intentional aspects of the object. Any developmental scheme implies a normative conception of the end state to which development leads. In this case it is necessary to give an account of the kinds of features of aesthetic objects found to be relevant in the aesthetic experience of sophisticated adults. This is, of course, primarily a matter for the philosophy of art, or at least of art criticism, and all that can be done here is to point to the tradition on which this scheme has relied. According to that tradition, what is finally found to be important about a painting (considered as an aesthetic object) is its appearance—whatever is phenomenally available to the perception of any qualified observer. Our understanding of the meaning of this has relied heavily on the work of Monroe Beardsley.<sup>14</sup> At the adult level it may sometimes be difficult to decide whether a particular quality meets this criterion (for example, the faint sadness of a line), but with the earlier stages it is usually not. For example, the following (when given as a sufficient reason for judgment) seem to be irrelevant according to almost anyone's theory: "It's my favorite color"; "It took a long time to paint"; "I disapprove of boxing and people hitting each other." Further examples abound in what follows.

### *The Development of Aesthetic Experience: An Empirical Study*

Following are the results of a study that used the foregoing ideas. The account, written as descriptively as possible, begins with a brief explanation of the methodology.

#### *Methodology*

We showed three large reproductions of well-known paintings to students individually from the first through the twelfth grade (thirteen from each grade) and asked them questions relating to the topics discussed below. The usual precautions were taken to make the child feel at ease and to point out that the situation involved no right or wrong answers. The topics and questions were prepared and practiced in advance, but the discussions were loosely structured, to allow further exploration of points as it seemed desirable. For the first six grades the paintings were Klee's *Head of a Man*, Picasso's *Weeping Woman*, and Renoir's *Girl and a Dog*; for the last six grades they were Bellows' *Dempsey and Firpo*, Picasso's *Guernica*, and Chagall's *Circus*.

The transcripts were analyzed in two steps: identification of sense



units (those passages, long or short, in which the respondent discussed some one identifiable idea relating to the painting) and their assignment to one of our topics; assignment of each unit within a topic to a stage. The second was done without knowledge of grade level. We began with descriptions of topics and stages, but the process of matching these with the data made it necessary for us to modify our descriptions and, in some cases, to scrap them and start over. It also caused us to see various inadequacies in the interviews themselves. By holding descriptions stable and taking random samples, however, we obtained an interjudge reliability of over 90 percent between the three of us on both operations—assigning units to topics and to stages.

Having assigned sense units to stages, we returned to the transcripts to match stages with grade levels. Where a student had several sense units on one topic and those units were not all scored at the same stage, we assigned the student to the highest stage reached within the topic. Table 7-1 gives the average stage level of the thirteen students in each grade for each topic and demonstrates a satisfactory directionality for the stages. The apparent regression in the topics "subject matter" and "color" between the sixth and seventh grade we attribute largely to the use of different reproductions, which elicited slightly different kinds of information. We should caution that we do not regard these figures as proof; only longitudinal studies could approach that status.

Table 7-1  
Average stage score for each topic by grade level

Grade	Semblance	Subject matter	Feeling	Artist's properties	Color	Judgment
First	1.0	1.0	0.9	1.6	1.5	1.2
Second	1.0	1.1	0.9	2.0	1.5	1.7
Third	1.0	1.2	1.0	1.9	2.0	2.0
Fourth	1.0	1.2	1.0	2.0	1.9	1.8
Fifth	1.2	1.5	1.0	2.0	2.0	1.9
Sixth	1.7	1.8	1.0	2.1	2.0	2.0
Seventh	1.7	1.3	1.5	2.4	1.4	2.2
Eighth	2.0	1.3	1.2	2.3	1.8	2.0
Ninth	2.5	1.6	1.9	2.9	2.3	2.6
Tenth	2.8	1.8	2.1	2.8	2.5	3.3
Eleventh	2.4	2.2	2.1	3.2	2.4	3.0
Twelfth	2.9	2.5	2.3	3.6	2.8	3.1

### Topics and Stages

We were able to identify six topics that revealed developmental levels. A "topic" is a coherent unit of discussion on which students were able to offer opinions and reasons for opinions. Although there appear to be logical relations between topics, we have not worked them out because our data did not seem sufficient to provide empirical support. We are, therefore, unable to this point to speak of aesthetic stages in general, that is, stages across all topics. A premature attempt to generalize in this way would tend to shut off further research rather than to stimulate it. Thus, we present the topics one by one, each followed by the stages within them.

We should emphasize that we do not think we have identified all the important topics or stages within topics. We are limited by our ingenuity and our data. It seems particularly evident that there must be both earlier and later stages than the ones described. Since we did not interview preschool children nor postsecondary students, we have no data for them, and so they are not included. In some cases it is quite clear that there must be an earlier stage than the ones we report; for example, in our first topic, all the children we interviewed already understood that paintings can refer to something by pictorially representing it. We assume that this is an idea that must be learned, though we have no data on how or when this learning takes place.

**Topic I: Semblance.** This topic is meant to cover the range of possible views concerning how and whether a painting refers, or what makes it a "picture." We were able to distinguish three stages within this topic.

*Stage 1.* Dominating this first stage is the idea of representation. It is presumably a new achievement, which distinguishes this from an earlier stage. We know from studies of children's drawing activities that for the very young a scribble is a scribble, a line is a line, and a color is a color. There are no pictures; paintings are not "about" something. In the first stage the idea of picturing by representing is taken for granted, and attention is concentrated far more on subject matter than on anything else.

Paintings depict objects by representing their important features, both what can be seen and what is known to be true about them. For instance, a person's head must have two eyes, a nose, and a mouth, and a hand must not have six fingers. Representation is considered item by item; the whole may or may not be distorted or out of proportion. Of primary importance is that the painting be comprehensible; one must be able to recognize what is represented. Often this is articulated as the demand that things look "real" or like they are "supposed to." We call this the stage of "schematic realism." Examples of it follow.



Boy, Second Grade [Picasso]

Q.: Is this the way you'd expect a painting of a weeping woman to be painted?

A.: No.

Q.: Why?

A.: When someone cries that's not how he looks. The other eye is supposed to be over here, not there.

Q.: What do you think the artist should have done differently?

A.: Put the eye over here, put another finger on that hand.

Girl, Fourth Grade [Picasso]

Q.: How can you tell a good painting from a bad painting?

A.: You can tell what it is if it's a good painting.

*Stage 2.* The new distinction achieved at this stage is that between schematic and visual realism. Paintings are still required to represent and to look "real," but what is to be represented is the visual appearance of objects, rather than simply what is known about them. "Real" means what objects look like, rather than what they are commonly known to be. This constitutes a more precise set of expectations, which we called "photographic realism." The change requires a further degree of de-centering because it takes account of what others know about the object—what can be seen by anyone. Discussions of Picasso's *Weeping Woman* best illustrate the shift. The youngest students objected to the placement of two eyes on one side of the face and to the fact that the eyes looked like "boats," and yet they usually did not object to the hands. While the hands are contorted, they do have five fingers and fingernails, as hands are "supposed to."

Boy, Second Grade [Picasso]

Q.: What about the eyes?

A.: They're weird, and they shouldn't both be on the same side.

Q.: What about the hands?

A.: They're OK.

Q.: Do you think the artist should have done them any differently?

A.: No, they're OK.

Older students objected to the hands also. Although the hands had five fingers and fingernails, they were not enough like "real" hands.

Girl, Sixth Grade [Picasso]

Q.: What about the hands?

A.: They're weird.

Q.: Is there anything he should have done differently?

A.: Made the hands look like real hands.

Girl, Sixth Grade [Picasso]

Q.: What about how he made the hands?

A.: The fingers are weird cause they don't go like a real hand.

*Stage 3.* The demand for "realism" is dropped, except in cases where the painting seems to require it. Otherwise, various styles and degrees of abstraction and distortion are accepted. There is increased awareness of, and tolerance for, a variety of kinds of painting, intentions of the artist, and responses by the viewer. The criterion for deciding how paintings should picture objects is usually inferred from the painting as a whole. For example, the artist's intention is often appealed to, or a genre, however vague (such as "modern art"), is considered. Again, this seems to require an advanced perspective since it acknowledges the possible multiplicity of intentions, points of view, or responses to an object.

Girl, Eighth Grade [Chagall]

Q.: What do you think the artist should have done differently?

A.: He could have made it more real, if he wanted to, but for this kind of painting, I think it's good.

Boy, Twelfth Grade [Picasso]

Q.: Would this be a better painting if it were more realistic?

A.: I think it is better the way it is, abstract, or even more so, in a way. This relates to the total confusion of the situation.

Girl, Tenth Grade [Chagall]

Q.: Would this be a better painting if it were more realistic?

A.: No, I don't think so. If he's trying to show his feelings, and if this is what his feelings are, then this is the way the painting should be.

Boy, Twelfth Grade [Chagall]

Q.: Would this be a better painting if it were more realistic?

A.: I don't think so, because photographs will capture action, but I think the artist tried to go inside of the action, and I think a simple photograph or reproducing it on a painting just reduces the effect of what this tries to do.

**Topic II: Subject Matter.** This topic includes all views on the kind of subject matter that is appropriate or acceptable in a painting, where "subject matter" means what is referred to or what is pictured. The first topic (semblance) concerned the way paintings refer; this topic concerns what is referred to. Though we found that we could make this distinction quite reliably, there is a close parallel between the stages in the two topics. In each we found three, and we conjecture that there is an earlier one for which we had no evidence.



*Stage 1.* At this stage the character of the subject matter dominates the response to a painting. The child thinks paintings should be about pleasant, interesting, and usual subjects. They should, for example, depict happy rather than sad things, and it is better if there is some action. There is an implication that appropriate subjects are a matter of common consensus: that it is obvious that people prefer pleasant to unpleasant subjects, and, also, that everyone will agree what is pleasant. We take this to be a sign of relative egocentricity.

Girl, Second Grade [Picasso]

Q.: What do you think painters should paint about?

A.: Happy things and pretty things.

Boy, Third Grade [Picasso]

Q.: Is this the kind of thing you'd expect an artist to paint about?

A.: No, because I sometimes look at a painting and I get tears in my eyes and I just want things to come out all right. I don't like sad things.

Q.: Is it good to paint about things that are sad?

A.: No, I like paintings to be nice and not about sad things.

*Stage 2.* The range of suitable subjects expands to include much that was previously thought unsuitable, particularly sad, nostalgic, and unpleasant subjects. Violent, cruel, or tragic themes are, however, still rejected, often on moral grounds. The moral grounds are not always clear; "Most people wouldn't like that" is often given as a reason for rejecting a subject. There is also a more explicit appeal to what other people like and dislike.

Boy, Fifth Grade [Renoir]

Q.: Is this a good thing to paint about, a girl and a dog?

A.: Yeah.

Q.: Why?

A.: 'Cause . . . I like animals.

Q.: It's a good thing to paint about animals?

A.: Yeah.

Q.: What if this was a sad painting about an animal, like the dog was hurt or something bad had happened to him? Would that be a good thing to paint a painting about?

A.: Yeah, 'cause it would show that dogs get hurt . . . it would show that animals get hurt.

Q.: What if it were about something mean, like someone being mean to an animal?

A.: I wouldn't like that.

Q.: Would that be a good thing to paint about?

A.: I don't think so.

Girl, Tenth Grade [Bellows]

Q.: Is boxing the kind of subject that you would expect people to paint about?

A.: No, because it's portraying violence, and I don't think many people like that

Boy, Tenth Grade [Picasso]

Q.: Is this the kind of thing you'd expect an artist to paint about?

A.: Sort of, but not this way, because people don't like to look at it. This is a sad picture, they look at it, not as something to relate to, but they look at the parts all mangled, and people don't want to look at that. When parts of the body are missing people don't like to keep that in their mind. Most war pictures are painted about people who have just been shot and are laying on the ground, but this picture has people all in different pieces, and it's not how most war paintings would be painted.

*Stage 3.* Good art can be made of any subject, including violence, cruelty, and tragedy. Moral objections are finally abandoned as irrelevant to art. Appropriateness of subject matter is determined by considering various criteria, such as the viewer's responses or the reality of the theme. There is a much greater awareness of the variety of possible attitudes toward any subject. In addition, what is referred to is often formulated as something more abstract than in previous stages, for example, "winning and losing" and "sadness at war."

Boy, Twelfth Grade [Chagall]

Q.: Is this the kind of thing you'd expect an artist to paint about?

A.: Yes, because I think that a circus has overtones on life. In a sense it represents life and is also a chance to get away from life. It offers the painter a wide range of possibilities; whatever meanings he's trying to get across, he can probably take a circus and find a place to use those ideas.

Boy, Eleventh Grade [Picasso]

Q.: Is this the kind of thing you'd expect an artist to paint about?

A.: Yeah, for someone who has lived through an experience. I wouldn't expect someone who has read about it, but for someone who was in the town and for him to come out and to paint something like this, I wouldn't think him off his rocker because in an abstract way it's captured all the feelings and expressions and things that went on in that time.

Girl, Twelfth Grade [Picasso]

Q.: Do you like this painting?

A.: I like it because wars are sometimes necessary. I think there are other ways to solve things; I think since I was born I can remember war going on with one country or another, and it is a fact, and I would buy it because it represents it and the people.

**Topic III: Feelings.** The key question in this topic is: what kinds and

sources of feelings are influential in the aesthetic response? As already indicated, we assume that the aesthetic response includes affective components, but that affect may be more or less clearly based on the aesthetic object. Again, we were able to distinguish three stages.

*Stage 1.* Here the child focuses on particular characters in the painting one at a time and attributes feelings to them. In doing this he is guided as much, or more, by the overt subject matter as by the expressiveness of painting. He uses stereotypes and implies that others have motives and feelings similar to what his own would be. He does not see subtle, complex, or ambiguous feelings.

This is an advance on the stage that, we presume, precedes it. The child focuses on the painting itself and is guided by what he sees far more than previously. He is not a prey to arbitrary associations and distinguishes more clearly what he sees from what he is reminded of. Nor does he project so freely his own feeling into the painting. If asked how the painting makes him feel, he usually identifies the emotion attributed to a major character.

Girl, Eighth Grade [Bellows]

Q.: What kind of feeling would you say is in this painting?

A.: Hatred.

Q.: Why's that?

A.: Because they are fighting.

Q.: Is that the main feeling, or are there other feelings?

A.: I think that's the only one.

Q.: What feeling do you get when you look at this painting?

A.: The feeling of hatred, like out to kill.

Girl, Seventh Grade [Chagall]

Q.: What kind of feeling would you say is in this painting?

A.: Like someone at a circus.

Q.: Is it a happy feeling or a sad feeling?

A.: These people up here look like they are having a good time.

Q.: Is there one or many feelings in the painting?

A.: There can be more than one feeling.

Q.: What other feeling is there?

A.: You can see someone looking at someone else.

Q.: What feeling do you get when you look at this painting?

A.: They look like they are happy.

*Stage 2.* The distinction between one's own feeling and that attributed to characters in the painting is made explicit at this stage. One's own feelings often derive from prior views of subject matter—interest, moral disapproval, boredom, personal sympathy, and so forth. This rests on a

new understanding that different people may respond in different ways to the same painting, and particularly that one's own feelings may not be shared by everyone. Although attention is still on individual characters considered one by one, rather than on the painting as a whole, there is greater tolerance of ambiguity of feeling both in oneself and in a painting.

Girl, Tenth Grade [Bellows]

Q.: What kind of feeling would you say is in this painting?

A.: Excitement, because all of the people around the ring are cheering him on.

Q.: Would you say there is one or many feelings?

A.: There's probably many.

Q.: What other feelings would you say are there?

A.: These other people here are afraid because they are scared something is going to happen to that guy. He might hurt himself.

Q.: What feeling do you get when you look at this painting?

A.: Emptiness really, like if I were to go to one of those fights, I'd probably be bored stiff.

Boy, Ninth Grade [Bellows]

Q.: What kind of feeling would you say is in the painting?

A.: Well, sadness and gloom on one side and roaring emotion on the other.

Q.: Which one do you think is the strongest?

A.: The roaring emotion, because everybody is cheering the guy that knocked the other guy down into the stands.

Q.: What kind of feeling do you get when you look at the painting, what emotion?

A.: I feel sorry for the guy that's falling over, and I feel sorry for the guy underneath too.

Girl, Eleventh Grade [Chagall]

Q.: Well, what kind of feeling comes across from the painting?

A.: Well, sort of a happy feeling if you like circuses, but I hate circuses.

Q.: What kind of feeling do you get when you look at the painting, what emotion?

A.: I don't get feelings out of the picture; I don't enjoy pictures like that.

*Stage 3.* This stage generalizes beyond the feelings of individual characters to the emotional impact of the painting as a whole. In order to do this, the person may or may not adopt the point of view of the artist, that is, he may speak of the artist's feelings or intentions. Or he may adopt the point of view of the "universal spectator." Again, this seems to require advanced perspective-taking abilities. The distinction between one's own and others' feelings is very clear, and the person can set aside his own feelings as prejudices, when they are not relevant. Feelings are seen as complex and particular.



sources of feelings are influential in the aesthetic response? As already indicated, we assume that the aesthetic response includes affective components, but that affect may be more or less clearly based on the aesthetic object. Again, we were able to distinguish three stages.

*Stage 1.* Here the child focuses on particular characters in the painting one at a time and attributes feelings to them. In doing this he is guided as much, or more, by the overt subject matter as by the expressiveness of painting. He uses stereotypes and implies that others have motives and feelings similar to what his own would be. He does not see subtle, complex, or ambiguous feelings.

This is an advance on the stage that, we presume, precedes it. The child focuses on the painting itself and is guided by what he sees far more than previously. He is not a prey to arbitrary associations and distinguishes more clearly what he sees from what he is reminded of. Nor does he project so freely his own feeling into the painting. If asked how the painting makes him feel, he usually identifies the emotion attributed to a major character.

Girl, Eighth Grade [Bellows]

Q.: What kind of feeling would you say is in this painting?

A.: Hatred.

Q.: Why's that?

A.: Because they are fighting.

Q.: Is that the main feeling, or are there other feelings?

A.: I think that's the only one.

Q.: What feeling do you get when you look at this painting?

A.: The feeling of hatred, like out to kill.

Girl, Seventh Grade [Chagall]

Q.: What kind of feeling would you say is in this painting?

A.: Like someone at a circus.

Q.: Is it a happy feeling or a sad feeling?

A.: These people up here look like they are having a good time.

Q.: Is there one or many feelings in the painting?

A.: There can be more than one feeling.

Q.: What other feeling is there?

A.: You can see someone looking at someone else.

Q.: What feeling do you get when you look at this painting?

A.: They look like they are happy.

*Stage 2.* The distinction between one's own feeling and that attributed to characters in the painting is made explicit at this stage. One's own feelings often derive from prior views of subject matter—interest, moral disapproval, boredom, personal sympathy, and so forth. This rests on a

new understanding that different people may respond in different ways to the same painting, and particularly that one's own feelings may not be shared by everyone. Although attention is still on individual characters considered one by one, rather than on the painting as a whole, there is greater tolerance of ambiguity of feeling both in oneself and in a painting.

Girl, Tenth Grade [Bellows]

Q.: What kind of feeling would you say is in this painting?

A.: Excitement, because all of the people around the ring are cheering him on.

Q.: Would you say there is one or many feelings?

A.: There's probably many.

Q.: What other feelings would you say are there?

A.: These other people here are afraid because they are scared something is going to happen to that guy. He might hurt himself.

Q.: What feeling do you get when you look at this painting?

A.: Emptiness really, like if I were to go to one of those fights, I'd probably be bored stiff.

Boy, Ninth Grade [Bellows]

Q.: What kind of feeling would you say is in the painting?

A.: Well, sadness and gloom on one side and roaring emotion on the other.

Q.: Which one do you think is the strongest?

A.: The roaring emotion, because everybody is cheering the guy that knocked the other guy down into the stands.

Q.: What kind of feeling do you get when you look at the painting, what emotion?

A.: I feel sorry for the guy that's falling over, and I feel sorry for the guy underneath too.

Girl, Eleventh Grade [Chagall]

Q.: Well, what kind of feeling comes across from the painting?

A.: Well, sort of a happy feeling if you like circuses, but I hate circuses.

Q.: What kind of feeling do you get when you look at the painting, what emotion?

A.: I don't get feelings out of the picture; I don't enjoy pictures like that.

*Stage 3.* This stage generalizes beyond the feelings of individual characters to the emotional impact of the painting as a whole. In order to do this, the person may or may not adopt the point of view of the artist, that is, he may speak of the artist's feelings or intentions. Or he may adopt the point of view of the "universal spectator." Again, this seems to require advanced perspective-taking abilities. The distinction between one's own and others' feelings is very clear, and the person can set aside his own feelings as prejudices, when they are not relevant. Feelings are seen as complex and particular.

Boy, Eleventh Grade [Chagall]

Q.: What kind of feeling would you say is in the painting?

A.: Well, I think he's sort of mocking the circus with this, and without the head, and a few of these things like that.

Girl, Twelfth Grade [Bellows]

Q.: What kind of feeling would you say is in the painting?

A.: Like I said, some would say violence, but I would say anticipation.

Q.: Anticipation of what exactly?

A.: Well, it's a battle of physical prowess, and you fight it out to the end, and one is beaten, and one has made the better showing. I'm not happy about it; I don't like to see people hurt. It's not that; it's just that if you're a boxing buff that's what you want to see, and that's what he's got down here.

Girl, Twelfth Grade [Picasso]

Q.: What kind of feeling would you say is in the painting?

A.: Confusion and fear.

Q.: Why do you get that?

A.: Because you don't know what it's about. You look at all of the mouths, and they are trying to scream; this person over here looks like she is looking for light and doesn't know where to go; and this guy here in the corner, he's screaming like let me out.

Q.: What feeling do you get when you look at this painting?

A.: In a way, it's very strange because I wish I could help. I wish something like that wouldn't happen. Maybe Picasso was trying to get his point across saying why do you do this? Look what it does to the people: look what happens. It makes you feel like you are guilty almost, like this is your doing.

**Topic IV: Color.** Here we looked more particularly at an element of the medium itself—color. The basic question shaping this topic is: what is it about color that is pleasing, or, what constitutes goodness of color in a painting? Children seem to find this the most readily intelligible and easily answered question of all (“Are these good colors?” “What makes them good colors?”), and the answers fall into three rather clear levels. We tried to do the same thing with other particular aspects of painting, especially with “form,” but could not get worthwhile results. There is no doubt that more work with topics of this kind is merited.

*Stage 1.* Young children appear to respond very directly to color. They delight in color itself, relishing colorfulness and preferring bright, gay, distinct colors. They feel that any color is better than no color (black and white) and that many colors are better than few. They have strong preferences for some colors over others. Brightness is preferred to dullness. Their choices are egocentrically based. “It’s a good color” means much the same as “I like the color”—a situation sometimes summed up by “It’s my favorite color.” The term “favorite” seems to indicate a relation

between the color and the individual that does not acknowledge the presence of others. It names a quality of the color as most important (“being my favorite”), which is inaccessible to others and cannot be seen by them.

Young children do not look closely at particular patches of color; they seem content to recognize the color rather than to realize its particular qualities in the particular instance. In other words, red, not a particular patch of red, is the favorite. It is as if the general color word acts as a kind of prejudice that bypasses the need for closer scrutiny of individual patches. Thus, although children are very responsive to color at this stage, it is paradoxical that they do not individuate them very well.

When children were asked how they could tell “good colors,” typical responses included: “I look at ‘em,” “They’re bright, and they show up,” and “They’re my favorites.”

Boy, First Grade [Klee]

Q.: Which painting do you like best?

A.: This one.

Q.: The Klee? Why?

A.: It has more colors. This one has more colors, too.

Q.: Which do you like best?

A.: This one [Renoir] has more colors, and this one [Klee] doesn't have green.

Boy, Second Grade [Picasso]

Q.: What do you think about the colors?

A.: I don't know; I don't like 'em.

Q.: How come?

A.: They're all dark, and they don't look good.

Q.: What would have been better?

A.: If they looked like this [Renoir]. It needs to have a lot of colors.

*Stage 2.* At this stage there is a new sense of the appropriateness of color. This is clearly dependent on the notion of realistic representation discussed under the topic “semblance.” Colors are good if they are appropriate to the subject represented, that is, if they are “realistic.” Vocabulary at this stage included “real,” “right,” “proper.” Some typical responses to the question “What makes these good colors?” include: “Cause there’s dogs that color and dresses that color.” “Cause when you look at a real person like that you think that’s what it would look like.” “Well, you know, it’s just like if it wasn’t a painting it would really look like that.”

There was little doubt about how one tells that a color is realistic, what things really look like, or who is to decide such matters. It was assumed that everyone thinks the same and that the colors of things are



obvious and indisputable. This implies continued stereotyping and is similar to the assumptions in the first stage of "subject matter" and of "feelings."

One noticeable difference from the first stage is that a painting might have "too many" colors, as several children said of the one by Klee.

Girl, Sixth Grade [Klee]

A.: It's got weird colors, too.

Q.: What's weird about the colors?

A.: Too many colors on the face.

*Stage 3.* At the third stage there is a greater sense of the appropriateness of color: colors should be appropriate to the whole painting, to its mood and its theme. Appropriateness also includes realism, which is synonymous with the "intention of the artist." What is new is the view that colors can express emotion or mood directly, without the necessity for realism in every case. This view only emerged clearly among students in the last years of high school.

Girl, Twelfth Grade [Picasso]

Q.: What do you think about the choice of colors for this painting?

A.: I like them because, when you think of war, you think of everything being dark and gloomy, but if it had to be changed I think it would be darker because when you think of death, you think of darkness.

Boy, Twelfth Grade [Picasso]

Q.: What do you think of the colors that were used for this painting?

A.: I thought they were a good choice, not real sharp black and whites, mostly a gray, and it seems to bring out the darkness and the fury and panic and death.

**Topic V: The Artist's Properties.** This topic deals with children's views of what it takes to be a good artist. We asked what an artist would need to paint a good painting, and, in particular, what would be difficult about it. We use the label "The Artist's Properties" because the first stage is not concerned with personal qualities. Development through the four stages of this topic most obviously reveals an increasing ability to see a painting from the point of view of the painter and a growing awareness of the importance of the affective and emotional in art.

This topic is further removed from actual paintings than the others since it is overtly about artists. The artists involved are not usually particular people, however, but are generalized, as in "anyone who painted this painting . . . ." The topic is, moreover, clearly normative since it refers to qualities needed to paint a good painting.

*Stage 1.* Young children mentioned only physical items as necessary to

paint a good painting. Characteristic responses include: "A brush and paint and some water to get the paint out of the brushes." "Lots of colors and a paintbrush." "Just a paper and paints to color it."

The implication seems to be that anyone who has the physical equipment could paint well. When children at this stage were asked which paintings would have been hardest to do, they chose the largest ones, those with most colors and objects represented in them, and those with small spaces to put colors.

*Stage 2.* At the second stage the artist's attributes were mentioned most. While these are personal qualities, they are not really individual. They include manual skill, perseverance, patience, hard work. Time is also frequently mentioned. It is assumed that the harder a painting is to do, the better it is. This amounts to admiration for craftsmanship, which has often been thought the beginning of aesthetic appreciation.

Girl, Fourth Grade [Renoir]

Q.: Why would this painting be hard?

A.: They'd have to try really hard to get the drawing right, and it might take a month to draw one thing.

Boy, Second Grade [Klee]

Q.: What does it take to paint a painting like this?

A.: It takes time, and you really have to work at it.

Girl, Sixth Grade [Klee, Renoir]

Q.: Which do you think would be the hardest painting to paint?

A.: The first [Renoir] because it would be hard to get the colors in it, and it has a lot of details.

Boy, Fifth Grade [Klee, Renoir]

Q.: Would the Renoir be harder or easier than the Klee?

A.: Harder because it has more things in it, and it's real.

*Stage 3.* Here, children become aware of mental abilities as being essential. An artist has to know what to do, to know what things look like, and to be able to think of things to paint. Often this means having seen the reality and noticed carefully how things look. At other times it means thinking carefully about the subject and how to represent it. There is a stress on the cognitive, rather than the experiential or affective, results of these activities.

Boy, Ninth Grade [Chagall]

Q.: What do you think it would take on the part of the artist to paint this picture?

A.: He had to study for a long time, I guess. He had to go to a lot of concerts, a lot of ballets to learn the forms, and he had to study the people who were doing it. Just things like that, he'd have to know a lot about it.

Girl, Eighth Grade [Chagall]

Q.: What do you think it would take on the part of the artist to paint this picture?

A.: Well, he probably went to a circus and sort of imagined from some of the things that were seen, and I think he probably saw a guitar and made an animal out of it, from the animal in the circus, and he sort of departed things like the body from her head, and made different things out of the original picture.

Boy, Ninth Grade [Picasso]

Q.: What do you think it would take on the part of the artist to paint this picture?

A.: I'd say a lot of thought and a lot of imagination, the way he doesn't paint all of the people realistic; they are just all distorted, their hands and faces, and I think that's a part of it which shows confusion.

*Stage 4.* In the final stage, affective qualities are considered more essential to the artist than cognitive ones. Experience is necessary more because it affected the artist than because it gave him ideas or knowledge. Creativity, meaningfulness, and talent are largely matters of feeling.

Boy, Eleventh Grade [Picasso]

Q.: What do you think it would take on the part of the artist to paint this picture?

A.: He'd have to experience almost everyone of those feelings that's represented by different animals and things, in order to capture it like he has, because he's done a good job as far as the animals and the woman, plus he would have to have been there. He probably would have been against the people who were bombing.

Q.: How do you get that?

A.: If he was for the bombers then he would have made the people look small and weak and very scared and showed it as them being the people in trouble, whereas I get the impression from this as being for them and relating to what they felt.

Girl, Twelfth Grade [Picasso]

Q.: What do you think it would take on the part of the artist to paint this picture?

A.: I think the person that painted it must have gone through a lot of suffering.

Q.: How can you tell?

A.: Just the expression on people's faces; they look helpless.

Girl, Twelfth Grade [Picasso]

Q.: What do you think it would take on the part of the artist to paint this picture?

A.: It seems like he can kind of remove himself from the whole situation, and he kind of sees the war in a way and shows the uselessness of it and the agony that people experience and the destruction, and, in a way, it gives the feeling of how useless it all is.

Girl, Twelfth Grade [Picasso]

Q.: What do you think it would take on the part of the artist to paint this picture?

A.: I think if he was there during the bombing I think he is a man that has a lot of fear and horror inside of him.

Boy, Eleventh Grade [Picasso]

Q.: What do you think it would take on the part of the artist to paint this picture?

A.: The artist probably had to have been there when it happened, and he might have lost somebody close to him, because it looks like it's all about death and destruction.

**Topic VI: Judgment.** This topic includes all of the kinds of reasons offered for an aesthetic judgment, that is, anything that is counted as a reason for claiming "this is a good painting." "Judgment" is different from the other topics in that it can provide a kind of synopsis of any of them. Any view classified in a previous topic can reappear here, reinterpreted as a reason for judgment. This topic is, therefore, at a different level than the others, and it is more comprehensive. We have hesitated to include it because of its nonparallel character, but retain it for two reasons.

The first reason is that it is the culmination of the others, rather than just a repetition; it is a focal point, not just another section. Aesthetic experience naturally leads to, includes, and rests upon aesthetic evaluations, though these are not always explicit. This is to say that it is a form of experience with its own normative structure, and it is the development of this structure, as filtered through the abilities of children, with which we are centrally concerned.

The second reason is that, as a separate topic, it contains some new distinctions. For instance, in no other topic is it clear, although it may be implicit, that the youngest children cannot tell the difference between judgment and preference; that is, they have not mastered the concepts necessary for making this distinction. In the first stage, the meanings of "I like this painting" and "I think this is a good painting" are indistinguishable. We interpret this again as early egocentricity. This is significantly different from the "relativism" of the fourth stage, where it may be claimed that, for example, "I think this is a good painting" *means* "I like this painting." In the first case the distinction at issue is overlooked or ignored. The second presumes that distinction, simply because it is a denial of its importance or meaningfulness. It is a reaction, perhaps, to the intermediate stages in which the distinction is first learned and taken for granted, but it is not a return to the first. We would argue that it is, rather, an advance over the previous stage in the same direction that previous movement



had pointed: diminished egocentricity and greater relevance to the aesthetic object. Hence the whole is better described as a development than as a circular path.

*Stage 1.* In the first stage, reasons for judging a painting as good were based directly on personal preferences. Hence they were often idiosyncratic, dogmatic, or both. Children could not distinguish preference from judgment; they used "I like it" interchangeably with "It's good." There were not, however, many cases of this.

Boy, First Grade [Renoir]

Q.: Do you think this is a good painting?

A.: Yeah.

Q.: Why?

A.: I just like it.

Boy, Fourth Grade [Klee, Picasso, Renoir]

Q.: Which do you like the best of the three paintings?

A.: Probably this one.

Q.: The Renoir? Why?

A.: 'Cause I like pets. I have one dog, one bird, two cats, and a horse.

*Stage 2.* The main criteria for judging a painting at this stage are: the amount of time and effort it took; the manual skill involved; the amount of detail; the degree of realism achieved. Criteria such as these implicitly acknowledge the experience of others because they appeal to features that are not idiosyncratic, but are thought to be there for anyone to see. They constitute a lever by which to create the distinction between judgment and preference and are a milestone of decentering in aesthetic experience.

These criteria are taken for granted, not argued for; the similarity of everyone's perceptions is also taken for granted. Characteristic reasons for judging a painting good include the following: "The colors mainly make it good." "It's done very carefully." "It has good colors, and things look right." "He made the outlines just right." "It looks like the real thing." "It has lots of good details." "It has a lot more things in it, and it would be harder to draw and put everything in it."

*Stage 3.* The criteria for judgment expand and change at this stage; of primary importance is whether a painting is expressive. This is sometimes thought of as cognitive—"conveys a message"—and sometimes as affective—"expresses an emotion." The criteria of skill, effort, and realism found in the second stage are retained only as instrumental to these effects. What is expressed is often vaguely conceived, but it is assumed that the message or emotion is unambiguous.

Boy, Twelfth Grade [Bellows]

Q.: Now this is more realistic, and you said you don't like it?

A.: I don't like the subject matter and feeling. That Dempsey painting may be doing what it's supposed to do; I mean it's a really popular painting; it's been around; and it's supposed to make you hurt. I mean a painter is supposed to arouse an emotion whether it's negative or positive, but I don't like it.

Girl, Tenth Grade [Picasso]

Q.: Would you say that you like this painting, or you don't like this painting?

A.: I don't like it.

Q.: Why?

A.: It's good for what he's feeling. It's a good painting for after war, but I just don't like it.

Q.: Can you tell me why?

A.: It's not something you'd like hanging in your room; it's not a very happy picture.

Q.: So you're saying you don't like it because it's not happy?

A.: Well, it is just ugh!

Q.: Would you say that this is a good painting, or it's not a good painting?

A.: I think it's a good painting because it shows all of his real feelings. If you look at it, you can tell what his real feelings are.

*Stage 4.* The distinguishing feature of this stage is that the criteria for judging are seen as depending on the circumstance: the artist's intention, the beholder's response, or the genre or style to which it belongs. The emphasis is still on expressiveness, but how, what, and whether something has been expressed is a matter for interpretation. Sometimes the criteria of the second stage (especially realism) apply, because of the artist's intention or because of considerations concerning genre. This seems to constitute an advance in perspective-taking ability in that it is no longer assumed that everyone interprets a painting in exactly the same way. The result is sometimes what can loosely be termed "relativism" with respect to aesthetic judgments—the view that "It is a good painting" means "I like it" or "The artist likes it." This is not always so. There is also the view, for instance, that a painting is good if it is exactly as the artist intended it to be. We do not suppose that this is the final stage of aesthetic judgment, but it is the last one we could distinguish.

Girl, Seventh Grade [Bellows]

Q.: Would you say that you like this painting, or you don't like this painting?

A.: Yeah, it's OK. It would be nice for a tourist to see, like Muhammad Ali, if he comes in, and he could picture what happened.

Q.: Would you say that this is a good painting, or it's not a good painting?

A.: In a way yes and in a way no. Like some older people might not enjoy it because it would take a violent act to do this, and why can't they just be nice?

And some younger people would say, it's all right and if you want to fight, then go fight, and they'd say this guy is strong because he won the crown.

Boy, Twelfth Grade [Chagall]

Q.: Would you say that this is a good painting, or it's not a good painting?

A.: Well, the artist has talent obviously. As far as talent goes I can say that it's good, but as far as—I can't say too much for his style.

Q.: You say he obviously has talent. What shows you that?

A.: Just some of these pictures, the heads, the details. It's just like music; you may not like country western music, but you can say he has talent. So he obviously has talent, but I don't like it.

Girl, Twelfth Grade [Picasso]

Q.: Would you say that you like this painting, or you don't like this painting?

A.: I don't think I like it because, I think—not because it scares me, I think that has a little to do with it—but I don't like the way it was done.

Q.: You just don't like it?

A.: Yeah. It could be because it bothers me.

Q.: Would you say that this is a good painting, or it's not a good painting?

A.: I think it's a good painting because he portrays emotion. It's like a poem; if you don't like it, it's just a bunch of jumbled words unless it has meaning to you. This would have meaning.

Boy, Tenth Grade [Picasso]

Q.: Would you say that you like this painting, or you don't like this painting?

A.: I really don't like it.

Q.: Why don't you like it?

A.: It's something that doesn't interest me, and it's sort of abstract. I wouldn't mind having it to sort of sit back and try and interpret it.

Q.: Would you say that this is a good painting, or it's not a good painting?

A.: I think that depends on the artist, like what point he was trying to get across. It's good if he accomplished that, and if he didn't, then it's bad.

Q.: So you'd say you would probably have to know what the artist intended?

A.: Yeah.

### Educational Implications

We have presented our findings to date as descriptively as our admittedly interpretive framework allows. We think the right conclusion is that a cognitive-developmental approach along these lines is plausible. We do not think we have identified all of the topics and stages of the development of aesthetic response. We consider the foregoing account a stimulus to further research, and we hope that it will be so. It needs corroboration, and it suggests a great number of further questions. Any further program of inquiry would, of course, need to be a fairly long-term effort. It seems reasonable to ask in the meantime, however, what the "educational implications" of a scheme like this might be. We will address this question very briefly, recognizing that one can only speak tentatively.

It seems to us easy (and common) to overstate the importance of cognitive-developmental schemes for educators. We would not want to say that a scheme like the above, were it well founded, would define *the* aim of teaching art in the secondary schools. We might say that, insofar as there is already commitment to the aim of enhancing appreciative abilities in the education of the average student, then this aim might be clarified by such a scheme. And, as a matter of fact, there is a contemporary movement among art educators that does favor increased emphasis on such an aim—a movement for what is sometimes called "aesthetic education."<sup>15</sup> This is, of course, the normal thing to say about cognitive-developmental schemes. We think it might be particularly important in art education because of the unusual difficulties in clarifying what "appreciative abilities" are. Art educators probably have more trouble articulating their aims clearly than teachers in any other area. They must rely primarily on intuition and personal experience in the selection of materials or the choice of day-to-day objectives. Most art educators know that their principal goal is not to provide knowledge about art (either its history or techniques), to furnish a vocabulary in which to talk about it, nor to pass on conventional judgments of aesthetic merit. They realize, on the other hand, that they are obligated to do more than promote a kind of standard-free, free-association response in which everyone does his own thing. For this reason we think that a knowledge of the cognitive structures underlying our stages would be helpful to the profession.

An example may be helpful. The similarities between the attitudes of the very young and of adolescents have struck a number of observers. As we have seen, both groups are more disposed to accept abstraction and distortion than the intermediate group. Both are less conventional in their preferences, less rigid in their approach. Gardner, in the study cited earlier, sees adolescents' tendency toward relativism in judgment as a return to the freedom of the early years. Both groups seem to have more interest in the emotional and personal aspects of art. All this, combined with the unalloyed enjoyment of art by young children, and the frequent excellence of their products, has led at times to the view that the normal path of development in this area is at best circular, and at worst a decline. Our schools and the character of society at large have been variously blamed for this.<sup>16</sup>

This kind of romanticism can be paralyzing to educators since it gives them little to teach and much to worry about. The aim is to protect the "innocent eye" of the young child, but the deleterious effects of the late elementary school years are seen as more or less inevitable. Any cognitive-developmental scheme, on the other hand, will interpret these facts as progressively developmental: the adolescent differs from the late



elementary school child in the same way and in the same direction as that child differs from the very young. It stresses the much greater reflectiveness of the adolescent; his increased awareness of the nature of art, and its expressivity; his sense of the multiple interpretations possible, and of the variety of possible criteria that might apply; his differentiation of kinds of experience and judgments; and so on. We think that the details supplied in this contribution have already made this view plausible. If then, in addition, it is true that the average level of attainment of adults, in cognitive-developmental terms, is lower in the arts than in other areas, art educators have a positive task ahead of them. The school is the only institution in American society where most people are likely to be exposed to a wide range of aesthetic objects, in a context of discussion, stimulation, and the kind of cognitive conflict that might help them develop further. We see this as an important aim for schools. A well-conceived account of development could provide suggestions for the necessary curriculum and instruction and for modes of ascertaining success in detail. In view of the present state of knowledge, it seems premature to say more than this. We hope we have said enough to encourage continuing inquiry in the field.

### Notes

1. See, for example, Otto Rank, *Art and Artist: Creative Urge and Personality Development* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1932).
2. See, for example, Victor Lowenfeld and W. Lambert Brittain, *Creative and Mental Growth*, 5th ed. (New York: Macmillan, 1970); and R. Kellogg, *Analyzing Children's Art* (Palo Alto, Calif.: National Press Books, 1969).
3. James Mark Baldwin, *Thought and Things*, Volume 3 (London: Swann Sonnenschein, 1911), esp. Parts 4 and 5.
4. Jean Piaget, mostly in *Play, Dreams and Imitation* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1962); and H. Werner and Bernard Kaplan, *Symbol Formation* (New York: John Wiley, 1963).
5. Howard Gardner, *The Arts and Human Development* (New York: John Wiley, 1973).
6. *Ibid.*, 304-310, 323-329.
7. Pavel Machotka, "The Development of Aesthetic Criteria in Childhood," doctoral dissertation, Harvard University, 1961; and *id.*, "Aesthetic Criteria in Childhood: Justifications of Preference," *Child Development*, 37 (December 1966), 877-885.
8. See Gardner, *The Arts and Human Development*, 323, 324.
9. Machotka, "The Development of Aesthetic Criteria in Childhood"; *id.*, "Aesthetic Criteria in Childhood"; Howard Gardner, Ellen Winner, and M. Kircher, "Children's Conceptions of the Arts," *Journal of Aesthetic Education*, 9 (July 1975), 60-77.

10. Irvin Child, *The Development of Sensitivity to Esthetic Values* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University, 1964).
11. Summarized in C. W. Valentine, *The Experimental Psychology of Beauty* (London: Methuen, 1962), 53-57, 123-135, 203-208.
12. Barry Moore, "A Description of Children's Verbal Responses to Works of Art in Selected Grades," *Studies in Art Education*, 14 (Spring 1973), 27-34.
13. This view of the end state is based in particular on the work of Monroe Beardsley, especially his *Aesthetics: Problems in the Philosophy of Criticism* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1958), and this formulation is based in particular on his "Aesthetic Theory and Educational Theory," in *Aesthetic Concepts and Education*, ed. R. A. Smith (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1972); and, for music education, in Bennett Reimer, *A Philosophy of Music Education* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1970).
16. See, for example, Herbert Read, *Education through Art* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1958).