NOTES

1. Harold Osborne, "Creativity, Progress and Personality," *Journal of Philosophy of Education* 18, no. 2 (1984).
2. John Dewey, e.g., in *Experience and Education* (New York: Macmillan, 1956).
3. See Michael Shallis, *The Silicon Idol* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984). Also a multiplicity of works such as Bruce Nussbaum, *The World after Oil* (1983); F. H. George, *After 1984* (London: Paladin, 1984); D. A. Bell, *Employment in the Age of Drastic Change* (1984).
4. C. A. Mace, "Psychology and Aesthetics," *British Journal of Aesthetics* 2, no. 1 (1962).
5. See for example Etienne Souriau, *La Couronne d'herbes* (Union générale d'Éditions, 1975), for an ethical system based upon aesthetic principles.
6. See H. Osborne, *The Art of Appreciation* (London: Oxford University Press, 1970), and "The Cultivation of Sensibility in Art Education," *Journal of Philosophy of Education* 18, no. 1 (1984).
7. Charles Dyke, "The Praxis of Art and the Liberal Dream," in *Essays on Aesthetics: Perspectives on the Work of Monroe C. Beardsley*, ed. John Fisher (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1983), p. 109; and Frank Cioffi, "The Aesthetic and The Epistemic," in *What Is Art?* ed. Hugh Curtler (New York: Haven Publications, 1983), pp. 202, 206.

The Place of a Cognitive Developmental Approach to Aesthetic Response

Michael J. Parsons

The idea has long been familiar that our creative abilities in the arts move through a number of developmental stages. There are several accounts of this development,[1] and its general character is well known. This knowledge has of course had considerable influence on art education. It has long seemed plausible to me that our appreciative abilities undergo a similar development. In this paper I want to generalize from work that I have been doing and argue that there is a place for a cognitive developmental approach to aesthetic response. That approach takes further the cognitive trend in the psychology of the arts, fills a gap in cognitive developmental theories, and could be helpful to art educators.

Recent work in the psychology of the arts has stressed the cognitive character of abilities connected with the arts.[2] Arnheim's work[3] has been influential in this connection. Howard Gardner[4] and Project Zero[5] have done a number of well-known studies of the origin and development of various skills and abilities; these studies in general treat the arts as symbol systems. There are other recent studies on the development of early symbolic skills,[6] influenced especially by Werner and Kaplan.[7] These studies in general investigate especially the earliest ages.

There have been several attempts to use cognitive developmental theory to understand responses to the arts. Machotka[8] argued that the appreciation of realism in paintings marks a developmental stage because it requires the ability to compare the representation with the reality, and this

Journal of Aesthetic Education, Vol. 20, No. 4, Winter 1986

in turn requires the Piagetian stage of concrete operations. He studied the reasons given by children of various ages for judgments of paintings and showed that indeed the age at which realism is typically preferred is also the age at which concrete operations typically become possible. Gardner[9] argued that such an approach would not be fruitful beyond the youngest ages because the appreciation of art does not require more than concrete operations (though maybe criticism does). But, with Winner and Kirchner,[10] he also showed that people's understandings of where art comes from do fall into three stages of development. And, somewhat further afield, Gablik[11] has argued that the history of art can be organized into three major stages corresponding to Piaget's three main stages of cognitive thought.

A more full-scale cognitive developmental theory of aesthetic development would obviously be sympathetic with this trend. But in my view such studies are based on a conception of cognition that is not really hospitable to the arts. They assume that there is only one cognitive domain—the "Piagetian" one of empirical-scientific knowledge. This means that there is only one stream of cognitive development and that development in the arts must be a kind of application of Piaget's findings. Put another way, one could say that while they take a cognitive approach to the arts, they do not ask what is specific to the arts—what kind of cognitions they mediate. I find this unduly limiting, because it does not allow us to get close to what is aesthetic about aesthetic response or to questions of aesthetic value. An alternative is to take seriously the view that aesthetic meanings are *sui generis* and that responding to works of art is different from responding to other kinds of objects. This is the view of the philosophical tradition going back to Kant, a tradition that divides human cognition into three basic kinds: the empirical, the moral, and the aesthetic. One contemporary version of this tradition that has influenced me in particular is the work of Habermas,[12] who argues that the three are different because they are concerned with three different worlds: the outer world of nature, the social world, and the inner world of needs and desires.

If aesthetic meanings are different in kind from empirical and moral meanings, they will be expressed in distinctive concepts. Aesthetic thought will have its own concerns and structures, its own problems and ways of supporting judgments. An analysis of aesthetic development will focus on the development of these specifically aesthetic concepts and judgments. There are well-known theories of development of empirical-scientific and moral concepts and judgments in the work, respectively, of Piaget[13] and Kohlberg.[14] It seems an obvious thought that there may be a parallel development of aesthetic thinking. James Mark Baldwin[15] is the only one to have tried to work this thought out in detail, though he thought of it more as an enterprise in logic than in evidence.

It may be worth pointing out, parenthetically, that the cognitive focus does not deny the importance of the emotional side of aesthetic experience. Rather, it denies the value of the distinction in this case. Our cognitions and our emotions are intricately related in aesthetic response. The way we understand a painting influences our feelings, and our feelings guide our understanding of it. In general, cognitions give shape to emotions and for this reason are the better focus for developmental analysis.

One of the virtues—and difficulties—of this approach is that it takes value issues seriously. Because it is developmental, it must arrange our understandings of art in a sequence of increasing adequacy. It presup-

poses that some responses to a work are to be preferred to others because they more adequately grasp the qualities of the work. The stages of development must reflect this situation because they will make possible increasingly adequate responses. Each stage will rest on a better understanding of art and use it to interpret paintings more adequately. An account of these stages therefore must be normatively oriented: it will consist largely of an account of these successive understandings and of how and why they are more adequate.

The approach also has the advantage of connecting with the body of established cognitive developmental theory and thus of relating the discussion of particular skills and concepts in a more comprehensive theory of development. It can also connect aesthetic development with a more basic psychological development. Each successive new understanding of art is related to a new ability to understand the perspective of others. This is because perspective-taking is the common theme of cognitive developmental theories. One could argue that they all assume that cognitive development is achieved through the realization of our naturally social being. We move from an initial state of egocentrism to one of autonomous sociality; and furthermore this movement can be divided into three major levels, in the aesthetic as much as in the moral and empirical domains.

In each domain we begin in the same cognitive state. We are born small, without language, with native reflexes but without concepts or categories, subject to an unorganized plenty of sensory stimuli. Though we are socially oriented, we are unable to distinguish self from others. We are aware only of what appears to us and not of what appears to others; and we are subject only to our pleasures, pains, and perceptions. From this beginning we construct an understanding of the world, including the world of art; we do this by gradually becoming aware of the presence of others, by learning their language and sharing their admirations. At this level we are able to appreciate the sensuous beauties of paintings, the skills of manipulation, the values of representation, the interest of subject matter, and the stereotypes of beauty and ugliness. We take the norms involved for granted, as if they were facts established by perception. We do not distinguish interpretation from perception, nor the aesthetic from other kinds of experience.

At the next level we are more fully members of our society, living its achievements from the inside, sharing its values, grasping its intentions. Cognitively we can take the point of view first of individual others and then of the society as a whole. This enables us to transmute the joys and stresses of our biological impulses into a wider world of publicly meaningful appreciations. We can understand art as the expression of subjectivity, appreciate the expression of a wide range of difficult emotions—the violent, the ugly, the tragic; and later find meaning in the formal aspects of paintings, in style, genre, and social and historical context. We are aware of our own subjectivity, understand that we interpret what we see, distinguish facts from values, and find art criticism helpful.

The third is the level of autonomous judgment—the "post-conventional" level, as it is often called. The basic point here is that we make our judgments more in light of good reasons and less in light of socially current opinions. We can criticize in a reasonable way the values and categories of our society and, what is the same thing, examine our own experience for the influence on it of stereotype, habit, and idiosyncratic factors. In this way we can more relevantly respond to the actuality of the work and more

adequately grasp its qualities. At the same time we can raise questions about both our own and the work's values. Indeed, we can see the purpose of art as raising questions about perception and value, reformulating accepted needs and norms, and helping us reach a better understanding of our inner nature. This is individual independence of thought, but it is not the less social for that. The criticism of established values—in society as well as in the art world—has the implicit goal of improving them, of reaching an unachieved but possible consensus based on reason.

My own work[16] has focused on responses to paintings and fleshes out this skeletal structure with an account of the development of a number of concepts with which we think about paintings. It further divides these three levels into five stages and analyzes the movement from one to another in particular responses to particular paintings. I assume that one could work out similar accounts that focus on any of the other art forms.

In focusing on the cognitive, the approach is of course also in harmony with current emphases in art education on the cognitive and the disciplinary. And because of the advantages mentioned above—that it can deal with aesthetic value issues and connect with an established psychological tradition—it may be quite useful to educators. It coincides in particular with the needs of the movement to establish art as a serious school study dealing with aesthetic understandings. It presumes that aesthetic development requires significant interaction with artworks and hard work struggling with them. Because, like all cognitive developmental theories, it is a cognitive conflict approach, it suggests that the best works to spend time with will be those that are difficult enough not to be comfortable, and easy enough to be accessible. Moreover, it offers some general explanations and predictions of what will be suitably challenging at different stages, and some guidelines for selecting such works in particular cases. For example, one could say that in general works expressing strong but difficult emotions are educationally profitable for children who are beginning to operate at the beginning of the second level mentioned above.[17] So one could identify the aesthetic topics that would likely be worth discussing with such children.

In the same way, it appears that the idea of style is understood differently at different stages, and a serious consideration of its historical significance is likely to be useful only later in the second level. Style in paintings is understood first only as behavior due to habit or whim; though an artist's style can be identified, it is essentially meaningless matter of fact. Later it is understood as the characteristic mood or feeling of the artist, and only after that can it be seen with its art-historical meanings of the echo of one work in another. Only at this latter stage does it seem worthwhile teaching "style" deliberately. In general, the theory could suggest how various aesthetic themes and concepts are likely to be understood by different groups and which are most likely to succeed educationally.

For teachers, a scheme of cognitive development offers the possibility of understanding in a new way how their students construe aesthetic concepts and what kind of cognitive problems they have with them. This opportunity to understand students may be its most important contribution. But it also offers, from the cognitive developmental tradition, some basic strategies for dealing with these problems, strategies that may be summarized in the slogan "challenge and support." And finally it may provide a way of evaluating the success of educational programs, because it

allows the assessment of student improvement in regard to the central educational concern—the grasp of what is aesthetically valuable in works of art.

NOTES

1. For example, J. H. Di Leo, *Young Children and Their Drawings* (New York: Brunner/Mazel, 1970); H. Gardner, *Artful Scribbles: The Significance of Children's Drawings* (New York: Basic Books, 1980); R. Kellogg, *Analyzing Children's Art* (Palo Alto, Calif.: Mayfield, 1969).
2. For a lengthier overview of this trend and of the accompanying trend in art education, see R. Smith, "The Changing Image of Art Education: Theoretical Antecedents of Discipline-based Art Education" (forthcoming).
3. R. Arnheim, *Art and Visual Perception* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1954); and *Visual Thinking* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969).
4. H. Gardner, *The Arts and Human Development: A Psychological Study of the Artistic Process* (New York: Wiley, 1973). See also essays collected in his *Art, Mind and Brain: A Cognitive Approach to Creativity* (New York: Basic Books, 1982).
5. See, e.g., D. Perkins and B. Leondar, eds., *The Arts and Cognition* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977); and *Harvard Project Zero: Basic Abilities Required for Understanding Creation in the Arts* (Cambridge, Mass.: Graduate School of Education, Harvard University, 1974).
6. E.g., N. Smith and M. Franklin, eds., *Symbolic Functioning in Childhood* (Hillsdale, N.J.: Lawrence Erlbaum, 1979).
7. H. Werner and B. Kaplan, *Symbol Formation* (New York: Wiley, 1963).
8. P. Machotka, "Aesthetic Criteria in Childhood: Justifications of Preference," *Child Development* 37 (1966): 877-85.
9. Gardner, *The Arts and Human Development*.
10. H. Gardner, E. Winner, and M. Kircher, "Children's Conceptions of the Arts," *Journal of Aesthetic Education* 9, no. 3 (July 1975): 60-77.
11. S. Gablik, *Progress in Art* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1976).
12. E.g., in pp. 8-42 of J. Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action*, vol. 1, trans. Thomas McCarthy (Boston: Beacon Press, 1984).
13. J. Piaget, *The Science of Education and the Psychology of the Child* (New York: Orion Press, 1970).
14. L. Kohlberg, *Essays on Moral Development*, vols. 1 and 2 (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1981).
15. J. M. Baldwin, *Thought and Things: A Study of the Development and Meaning of Thought*, vol. 3 (London: Swann, Sonnenschein and Co., 1914; reprinted New York: Arno Press, 1974).
16. M. Parsons, *How We Understand Art: A Cognitive Developmental Account of Aesthetic Experience* (New York: Cambridge University Press, forthcoming).
17. See M. Parsons, "Talk about a Painting: A Cognitive Developmental Analysis," *Journal of Aesthetic Education*, forthcoming.

The Nonconceptual Nature of Aesthetic Cognition

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The most widely recognized, most influential, most highly valued mode of cognition in our culture is that mode called "conceptual." So powerful is the influence of conceptualization on our ideas of what knowledge con-

Journal of Aesthetic Education, Vol. 20, No. 4, Winter 1986