

## OUTLINE OF A DOCTRINE OF AESTHETIC EDUCATION

The question of the development of aesthetic perception in relation to works of art and phenomena of nature suggests a differentiation between aesthetic education and art education which will be attempted in this study. At the same time the necessary inter-relationship between the two will also be analysed.

According to Lansing the aim of “art education” is to develop artists and connoisseurs of art amongst the pupils. Teachers of art “must admit that they aim to develop connoisseurs”.<sup>1</sup> This twofold aim of “art education” as stated by Lansing could be a convenient starting point for defining and separating the concept of aesthetic education from that of art education. We can say that the aim of art education is to develop artists and the aim of aesthetic education, broadly conceived, is to develop connoisseurs.

<sup>1</sup> Kenneth M. Lansing, *Art, Artists and Art Education*, New York, MacGraw Hill, 1968, p. 268.

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### TOWARDS A DEFINITION OF AESTHETIC EDUCATION

Aesthetic education can be defined as all education, and all education activity or experience, which leads to the development of sensitivity to an enjoyment of beauty in all its varied and diverse forms. Aesthetic education, therefore, is a broader concept than art education.

Aesthetic education includes what is called art appreciation but is not entirely confined to it. It is the development of the capacity for enjoyment of the whole gamut of cultural products: the plastic arts, the performing arts, architecture and literature. The appreciation of the design of humbler artifacts, objects and utensils for daily use, is not excluded either. It goes beyond the appreciation or enjoyment of the sum total of man's activity as the creator of forms and includes natural forms which arouse in him the aesthetic emotion—the spontaneous feeling of pleasure when confronted with beauty.

Aesthetic education, therefore, aims at the development of the innate aesthetic sensibility for the enjoyment and appreciation of those objects and phenomena, whether existing as part of nature or products of culture, which possess the quality usually described as beauty. It approaches the phenomenon of beauty from the point of view of the spectator and from the perspective of the creator. A rôle which every man assumes, whether artist or not, when face to face with an object or phenomenon of beauty.

### ART EDUCATION DEFINED

Art education can be narrowly defined as the teaching of techniques and methods which adequately translate the aesthetic emotion into concrete forms and thus bring into existence works of art. Technical aspects of artistic creation are central to art education. In other words, the success of any programme of art education must be gauged by the degree of skill which is developed for the creation of works of art.

Art education, therefore, looks at the phenomenon of beauty in the perspective of the creator of the work of art. Its concern

is to develop in the artist the capacity to embody in the form of a work of art either the original experience or the emotional impact of it in such a way as to communicate it adequately to the spectator.

Eisner has divided what he calls artistic education into three sub-categories: the productive, the critical and the cultural.<sup>2</sup> From his treatment of the three sub-categories it is clear that by the critical aspect of art education he means what we have called in this paper aesthetic education—that is, the education of the aesthetic faculties and the development of taste and aesthetic judgement, through critical skills and knowledge.

Aesthetic education develops and refines perception which is also a necessary part of what we have called artistic education, properly speaking and what Eisner calls productive or studio art education.

#### AIM OF AESTHETIC EDUCATION

Sir Herbert Read, one of the most influential voices in aesthetic education in the first half of this century, commenting on the ideas of Professor Whitehead on the necessity of aesthetic education as an essential part of general education, called it “a corrective to the evils of specialized education” and explains that art is a special case of what Professor Whitehead means: “He wishes to encourage a much wider use of the aesthetic faculties; to make the aesthetic apprehension which we exercise normally in the case of a work of art the general habit in our apprehension of reality.”<sup>3</sup> In this sentence of Herbert Read we find stated one of the fundamental goals of aesthetic education: the cultivation of the aesthetic faculties and the development of the skills necessary for the aesthetic perception of our environment. This can be considered as the most general goal of aesthetic education. The specific

<sup>2</sup> E.W. Eisner, *Educating Artistic Vision*, New York, Macmillan Publishing Co., 1972, p. 65.

<sup>3</sup> Sir Herbert Read, *Education through Art*, New York, Pantheon Books, 1968, p. 261.

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aim of aesthetic education in Herbert Read's view is "teaching the enjoyment of art" and "the development of sensitiveness in relation to works of art."<sup>4</sup> The means of aesthetic education that Read advocates are the development of an intimacy with works of art of all periods through representative examples in an "atmosphere of creative initiative" where "aesthetic sensitiveness is awakened, the habit of enjoyment is formed."<sup>5</sup>

### AESTHETIC EDUCATION AND HISTORY OF ART

According to Read, in matters "of aesthetic apprehension it is above all necessary to create in the student a form of activity rather than to inspire an attitude" and the best way to begin aesthetic education is through the history of art.<sup>6</sup> Through the wealth of illustrations which are available today a teacher must show his students "examples of what art has been, beginning at the beginning, with the art of primitive man, coming down the ages, through Asia, Egypt, Greece and all the lands of the earth wherever a culture has arisen until we meet the art of our own time"<sup>7</sup> This survey of world art will inevitably show "the influences which spread from age to age and land to land."<sup>8</sup> The teaching must also show "how the artist has exploited his material, the beauty of each technique and the function of each work of art in relation to the life of the people, their economy and their religion."<sup>9</sup>

The enjoyment of the art of the past should most certainly not lead to the neglect of the art of the present, as contemporary art is a key to the understanding of our times. In the words of Herbert Read: "Art today is a testimony to our culture, a witness to its positive qualities and its limitations, just as the art of the past is to the cultures of the past." Thus a wider cultural rôle for aesthetic education is spelled out in these words which delineate

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 262.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 263.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 262.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 263.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

Read's philosophy of Education through Art. "We cannot fully participate in modern consciousness," writes Read, "unless we can learn to appreciate the significant art of our own day."<sup>10</sup> This is possible only through "intuitive sympathy" which helps us to "share the artist's vision."<sup>11</sup> Finally Read formulates the goal of aesthetic education by writing about what he conceives as the rôle of art in social life, in the most ambitious manner possible: "In the end, art should so dominate our lives that we might say: there are no longer works of art, but art only. For art is then the way of life."<sup>12</sup>

Read's method therefore is empirical and inductive. Teaching about art, according to Read, should be personal; and teaching through concrete examples of art, and by means of the history of art, is superior to teaching by means of a "theory of art". This view of Read can be interpreted as meaning, in the context of his whole attitude towards art, that he prefers his students to arrive at their own general "theory of art" through direct contact with the works of art. Thus the spiritual itinerary of the teacher towards his own conception of art should be before the students' eyes for them to see and feel as the point of departure, and the experiences on the way to the grand synthesis that is the final point of arrival. Teaching aesthetics as a "theory of art", as a deductive system, through which the arts can be interpreted would, according to Read, reduce the aesthetic experience to a purely intellectual domain and it would lose some of the emotional qualities which form part of its essence.

Herbert Read's notion that aesthetic education should proceed through the history of art can be accepted generally but the contribution that aesthetics, understood as the "theory of art", has to make to aesthetic education should not be underestimated. Indeed the value of Read's writings to a large extent depends on the generalizations and efforts at synthesis which he always makes. His writings or those of any other critic will lose their *raison d'être* as guides to aesthetic experience if a constant attempt to make

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 263.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 264.

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an abstract system, to co-ordinate the elements, to bring about a coherent design for the perception of the phenomenon of art, is absent from them.

The denial of the legitimate place of intellect and of knowledge of abstract categories and concepts can be as harmful to the development of aesthetic sensibility as the absence of feelings. Indeed the over-emphasis on feelings which seems to be present in most of the writings of art critics, including Herbert Read, overlooks the rôle that intellect and perception play in developing and refining feelings. Indeed in their teaching and writing art critics use their intellects to communicate their feelings for works of art. They use words and language which by their very nature are abstract to describe feelings and the relationship of the feeling to the object or phenomenon which gives rise to it.

As is often pointed out, the development of creativity is the development of the power of expression. The development of the capacity for the expression of feelings about works of art through the medium of language and its cultivation should, therefore, be considered as a normal and an integral part of aesthetic education. Verbalizing aesthetic experience develops greater perception and the increased capacity to perceive develops the power to express. A two-way relationship exists between the capacity to feel and the capacity to express, each reinforcing the other towards opening up wider horizons of aesthetic perception and expression in the individual. This, in every sense of the word, is a creative activity the development of which is the major goal of aesthetic education as defined in this paper.

### AESTHETIC EDUCATION AND THEORY OF ART

Aesthetic doctrines or “theories of art”, as they are called, have a rôle to play in aesthetic education. In aesthetic education, the rôle of verbal categories and of art theory is stated by Eisner in the following manner:

“Now what should be emphasized over and over again is that the verbal categories are not ends but means. Any teacher who merely helps children to acquire words without helping them perceive the referents

of those words is engaged in meaningless verbal teaching. The important point is that the verbal categories function as a starting point for reminding students of what can be attended to in a work of art. Verbal categories do not exhaust the work because they are considerably more gross than the amount of information that can be obtained through vision. They do function in much the same way that theories of art function. Morris Weitz described the function of theory in art this way. 'Indeed the great contribution of theories of works of art is precisely in their teachings, not in their definitions, of art: each of the theories represents a set of explorable criteria which serve to remind us of what we may have neglected or to make us see what we may not have seen. To do this, I should think, is the primary job of teaching. Here, then, is the relation between teaching and the nature of art or, the nature of art and its implications for teaching: that the great theorists of the nature of art have served as the great teachers as well, in telling us, through their definitions of art, what we are to learn from them about the arts.'"<sup>13</sup>

We can therefore sum up the rôle of “theories of art” in aesthetic education in the following manner:

The word “aesthetic” as the name of a field of study or intellectual endeavour has generally referred to a philosophical doctrine whose centre of reflection is the nature of beauty in general and of art in particular and their place in the general scheme of life. Aesthetics is also called “theory of art” which provides a conceptual framework for the appreciation and evaluation of art through normative categories through the use of which aesthetic perception can be organized and the universe of art rendered meaningful and comprehensible as a whole and the value of artistic work judged.

Aesthetics, therefore, understood as theories of art or as philosophical doctrines of art, are deductive systems where specific works of art, of artists or of schools of art, are understood and evaluated by means of general categories and systems. Therefore “theories of art” understood as deductive systems have an important place in aesthetic education as complementing the inductive and empirical teaching. They are not dogmas but guides to the aesthetic organization of perception of works of art. As long

<sup>13</sup> Eisner, *Educating Artistic Vision*, *op. cit.*, p. 192.

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as they help to organize perception and introduce order into sense impressions, thereby giving greater insights into works of art, they are an indispensable tool of aesthetic education. But if as dogmas they hinder insight and limit perception they defeat the development of aesthetic experience. But here it is the failure to make proper use of a deductive system rather than the failure of a system simply because it is deductive. Any educational scheme which *a priori* rejects all deductive systems as heuristic tools of learning is creating limitations and handicaps for the learner.

Thus it seems to me that both the inductive and deductive methods must be used for the fullest development of aesthetic awareness in the learner.

### THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ART EDUCATION AND AESTHETIC EDUCATION

Art education has an important place in aesthetic education. The aesthetic emotion aroused by a work of art leads the spectator to ask: "How?". How is it possible that a work of art representing a given phenomenon has an emotional impact which the phenomenon experienced in life did not have, or if it had, did not reveal the aspects, or the depths, which contact with the work of art does?

It is by starting the spiritual journey in the opposite direction from that of the artist that the spectator discovers the key to the understanding of his own newly-felt emotion. It is by knowing the techniques of the artist and some of his ways of solving aesthetic problems which reveal to the spectator the path which leads from inspiration to creation; and the possibilities inherent in natural forms, and their development through techniques, which reach hidden recesses of human emotions and call forth an aesthetic response.

Art education, however, does have an aesthetic dimension, and art education can perform its rôle adequately only if it proceeds parallel with the development of aesthetic sensibility as the quality of a work of art depends partly on the mastery of the techniques deployed and partly on the content—the aesthetic sensibility

and the quality of feelings—which they serve to embody in the finished work of art.

Aesthetic education, therefore, is of fundamental importance in art education, understood as the education of the creative artist. Aesthetic education teaches the artist the “what” of his activity. In other words, the purpose, end or goal of his activity. Art education teaches the “how” of his activity. The former is the end, the latter the means.

The purpose of all artistic activity may be broadly defined as enlarging the aesthetic experience of all those who come into contact with a given work of art. The enlargement of aesthetic experience may be defined as the stimulation of a feeling or emotion which an individual experiences in front of a work of art which he had either not experienced before or had not experienced to the same degree or in all of its dimensions.

The originality of the work of art consists of embodying in plastic or literary form those spheres of human feeling which had found no artistic or literary representation before or only partially or inadequately. Originality, it goes without saying, is generally accepted as a criterion in evaluating works of art and it is by reference to originality that much of the creativity of artists is measured by the public.

#### CONCERNING CREATIVITY AND ITS ROLE IN AESTHETIC EDUCATION

The creativity of the artist consists of finding, inventing or discovering adequate technical means to express in plastic or literary form what has remained unexpressed hitherto, thus innovating and renewing the formal and aesthetic criteria themselves—thereby enlarging and adding to aesthetic categories through which cognitively the enlarged view of man’s emotional life and artistic capacities can be understood.

Progress in art, therefore, can only be measured in terms of the progress in technical means for expressing human feelings and emotions. However, the aesthetic sense or sensitivity of the artist is the mainspring, the force, behind technical innovation in the arts. Thus the aesthetic sensibilities of the artist are the fac-

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tor on which the progress or development of the arts ultimately depends. It is progress in the arts which leads to the enlargement, intellectually speaking, of our aesthetic horizon. In other words, the broadening of the intellectual horizon in aesthetic matters, or raising to full consciousness of innate feelings, is brought about through the agency of the artist making a technical breakthrough and bringing to our emotional understanding things hitherto vaguely felt or those which had remained dormant. These then become conscious thought and add the intellectual dimension to the emotional, towards the comprehension of beauty; and thereby enhancing its enjoyment by bringing into play both the emotional and the intellectual faculties.

Both in aesthetic education and in art education the creative process is the object of analysis. The understanding and appreciation of the mechanism and process of successful creation of aesthetically valid works of art are one of the goals of both of them. Consequently creativity is a concept which has a central place in the teaching of art and of art appreciation.

The creative process which should be at the centre of art and aesthetic education is the problem of the successful translation of the aesthetic vision into artistic design which brings into existence a valid work of art; or rather, it is a problem of translating an aesthetic feeling into a vision which takes form with the progress of creative work where the means at hand are deployed, in the judgement of the artist, to express fully the original aesthetic impulse in the completed work of art.

It is the feeling of the appropriateness of means to express the content of the work which evokes the aesthetic feeling properly so called. It is in the harmony between the means deployed to express the content that the spectator experiences the aesthetic emotion, which he shares with the creator of the work of art.

A creative teaching-learning situation is the establishment of a two-way communication between a teacher and a learner with regard to specific problems. In aesthetic education the problems are of an aesthetic nature. The learner, who is faced with aesthetic problems, can obtain guidance and help in their solution from the teacher, who has faced them previously, by communication of the teacher's own experience and insight, thereby furthering learning through a change in knowledge and

understanding. However a distinction is made between aesthetic problems and technical problems in art education. In artistic creation, creative problems are also of an aesthetic nature, but their solution is sought through technical means that are at the disposal of the artist. His solutions are sought in the light of his own knowledge of the possibilities that the materials offer and his own skills in transforming these materials to aesthetic ends. Knowledge and skills are therefore necessary and these can be communicated in the teaching-learning situation.

If creativity is defined as the general problem-solving capacity, then the problems of an aesthetic nature which arise in creative artistic work and the technique available for solving them can be communicated in the teaching-learning situation. It must again be emphasized, however, that, in artistic education, it is particularly important to develop the ability to translate the aesthetic vision into artistic design; in this respect, interest, motivations and emotions are as necessary as the skills required to do so.

It would normally have been possible to conclude this discussion of aesthetic education at this point. Yet it seems necessary to recall the basic assumption which has guided this paper, namely that the aesthetic faculty is very much similar for all mankind and the same method and approach fundamentally is suitable for every cultural situation; at least the basic elements which have been considered here need no modification and can stand on their own. This basic point will be expanded in the concluding pages which follow and which also discuss the potential contribution of aesthetic education in the context of a general cultural education of a cosmopolitan orientation.

#### THE NECESSITY OF A UNIVERSALIST APPROACH IN AESTHETIC EDUCATION

Research—particularly in the international context—if it is to have any hope of successful application, must have a starting point in some principle of universal validity. Such a principle of universal validity may be a scientific theory well grounded in facts or it may be a working hypothesis on which a scientific theory can

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be developed or some ethical principle whose ethical validity is postulated in universalist terms.

A universalist theory, hypothesis or ethos is in our day inescapable, and it is only in this context that the appropriateness of a doctrine of aesthetic education can be judged for our epoch.

From this point of view the doctrine of Herbert Read of Education through Art is of considerable interest as it formulates the problem in universalist terms. Read's ideas concerning both the goals of aesthetic education and its method are formulated in such a manner as to provide a most welcome conceptual framework for research in this field.

One of the most valuable ideas of Herbert Read is that not only is art universal but the psychological processes through which the potential in man for aesthetic creativity and the production of works of art is realized is the same for all mankind and well grounded in human nature. Thus that aspect of human nature which is fundamental to the creation of aesthetic forms does not vary in time and space but is the same everywhere and at all times:

“What we must now affirm, and deduce what consequences we may from the affirmation, is that the child's reactions to the universe of things are also universal, constant for the human race, natural to every child. There is not one way of reaction in an American child and another in a Chinese child, one way in a European child and another in an African child: the child's perceptual development is uniformly human. This I regard as perhaps the most significant fact established by our scientific observations of child art during the past fifty years. Whether we use the comparative method and assemble the evidence in international exhibitions of children's art, or use the analytical method and trace the mental development of the individual child, we are confronted with the same universal phenomenon—the use of a language of signs and symbols that is common to children of every race.”<sup>14</sup>

Thus it may be said that the art of all the world and of all epochs is a universal language which can be understood and appreciated by all of mankind and through which communication can be

<sup>14</sup> Sir Herbert Read, *The Redemption of the Robot*, London, Faber & Faber, 1970, p. 238-239.

established between all men. This is the fundamental strength of Read's doctrine, which gives it coherence and accounts to a large extent for his increasing influence, from year to year, on ideas about art education and teaching in the English-speaking countries.<sup>15</sup> Although it can be said that none of those who have been influenced by Read's writings have insisted, as often or as emphatically as he did, on the universal dimension of his thinking. However, this is likely to be a factor in the development of a universal theory of aesthetic education. What degree of influence Read's ideas will have on the development of such a theory in the future it is difficult to say. However, as was pointed out before, the universalist quest in the field of aesthetic education, it seems to me, is inescapable and an inevitable starting point for reflection. This is one reason why Read's ideas receive a certain emphasis in this paper.

Scientific studies such as we have indicate the aesthetic faculty as an integral part of human nature and common to all mankind. Differences in the modes of aesthetic perception and of transmission of aesthetic experience have often been emphasized. Such differences exist but their degree or their nature, it seems to me, has often been misunderstood. Cross-cultural empirical studies have demonstrated that the differences between cultures or societies in aesthetic matters may be smaller than within the same culture or society or even non-existent.<sup>16</sup> Often it may be simply the difference between the degree of aesthetic education of the individual, irrespective of culture or society, which accounts for the difference or the similarity of judgement or taste in aesthetic matters. "Child and Imao found that Japanese potters—even those living in remote villages having very little or no contact with Western art—agreed more with aesthetic judgement of American art experts than did American high school students."<sup>17</sup>

In conclusion, therefore, we may safely say that aesthetic edu-

<sup>15</sup> In 1954 an International Society of Education through Art was founded and supported by Unesco.

<sup>16</sup> Eisner, *op. cit.*, p. 139.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

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cation should occupy a central place in the reform of education worldwide, not only as a means of personal development but also as a means of cross-cultural communication and understanding. This it could do, as we have tried to demonstrate above, because it has its basis in the aesthetic nature of man common to all mankind, especially if it develops its potential, which it undoubtedly has, for transforming the approach to teaching of history and all subjects which have a historical dimension. Starting as the history of Art, it could transform itself into a general cultural history of mankind studying through art the social, economic, religious and even the technological dimension of human society which Herbert Read advocated as we have seen in the beginning of this paper. Thus through Art as starting point, the growth and development of world culture and society could be studied. This would be no mean achievement in education at this juncture of history where mankind is blindly and desperately searching, not fully knowing it, for some unifying principle above the warring factions and groups who, in the name of cultural identity, "pluralism" or historical originality, can only offer aesthetic confusion and cultural chaos. The quest for a unifying principle is not to deny historical originality, diversity or pluralism, but to understand and explain it without losing sight of the fundamental unity of mankind and the identity of human nature amid all the social and historical diversity throughout the ages. General cultural history centered on the aesthetic achievement of mankind offers one way of reaching this goal.

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