

**AESTHETICS AND CRITICAL PEDAGOGY:  
A CRITIQUE OF PARSONS' STAGE THEORY OF AESTHETIC  
DEVELOPMENT**

by

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## **ABSTRACT**

The present study brings to light the limitations of Parsons' (1987) stage theory of aesthetic development by facilitating a critical examination of it through the postmodern tenets manifest within critical pedagogy. It is pointed out that the aesthetic phenomenon exists as an entity within experience which ultimately denies definitive conceptual absolutes in its description. A divergency of theoretical positions within aesthetic traditions are reviewed so as to convey the problems and limitations of an aesthetic developmental theory which restricts responses to a designated sequence of possibilities. Aesthetic experience exists as a complex network of alternatives, not easily ordered into clearly definable conceptual frameworks from which to base teaching practices. Although Parsons' theory offers a structured order which identifies sequentially appropriate objectives for the teaching of aesthetics, it is critically rendered suspect based on the philosophical predispositions of critical pedagogy. It is argued that ideological biases maintained through cultural membership serve to orient researcher and subject belief systems so as to allow for normative behaviour(s) to be presented as given and natural rather than their being considered as culturally legitimated developments. Parsons' structural theory, which offers a strictly Eurocentrically biased conceptual itinerary, is critically assessed for the moral and ethical implication it imposes on subordinate group populations. Marginalized group belief systems are implicitly denied due recognition as valid and valuable options within experience. Critical pedagogy, as it is delineated within the present study, exposes the limiting and restrictive nature of an educational agenda which offers a definitive and a closed system of developmental possibilities.

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## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **INTRODUCTION**

#### **SIGNIFICANCE OF THE PRESENT STUDY: AESTHETICS, THEORY AND PEDAGOGY**

Aesthetics has become a subject area designated as central to the study and teaching of art in schools. During the last three decades, art activities have undergone radical reanalyses resulting in shifts to their underlying pedagogical orientations (Smith, 1987; Di Blasio, 1987). What used to be a focus on studio work and creative development has transpired, through the precedents and theoretical mandates initially set out by theorists such as Barkan (1963) and Kaufman (1963), to a focus which presently delineates the study of specific content areas as an important dimension of art education (see also Greer, 1984; Silverman, 1988; Eisner, 1988). Consequently, the impact of suggestions advocating the formal study of disciplines within art curricular agendas has deeply influenced the theoretical foundations of art educational curricula. Subject based orientations to the teaching of art have recently gained impetus and support during the last decade through Discipline-Based Art Education (DBAE) programs (Eisner, 1987; Greer 1984, Clark, 1991). These programs focus mainly on the inclusion of four discipline areas as necessary components for developing literacy in art: art history, art criticism, studio art and aesthetics. A similar orientation was initiated within B.C. in the 1981 secondary art curriculum guide which generally supported the theoretical orientations outlined by DBAE as a framework for defining desired curricular practices in art education (see Frost, 1988). Although incorporating the



study of aesthetics into school art programs has been defined as a desirable objective of instruction, in practice it has failed to be a truism within the practice of school art curricula (Hamblin, 1986, 1988, Dorn, 1981). Similar findings relate to practices within B.C. school art programs. A study conducted by Frost (1988) determined that within B.C. secondary school art practices “the importance of developing the ability to reason critically is not fully recognized by most art teachers” (p. 132). Although Frost (1988) does not directly relate her study and findings to aesthetics, but to reasoned criticism, it may be maintained that integral to reasoned criticism within the arts exists the actualization of a qualitative aesthetic response and awareness (Gray, 1987). As Greer (1988) points out, “identifying aesthetic qualities is part of art criticism” (p. 14). It may therefore be maintained from the findings of Frost’s (1988) study that the development and refinement of aesthetic responses in students does not receive in classroom practices the attention and place of importance designated it by curricular theoretical mandates. In a study conducted by Gray and MacGregor (1990), educators supporting a discipline based art orientation within their art programs were observed and interviewed. The difficulty of incorporating aesthetics into art educational practices was conveyed within the findings of the study through a number of comments: voicing her frustration with the expectations of DBAE, namely its aesthetic component, one instructor states, “I became saturated with DBAE and overkill and the mystique of aesthetics: how do we understand it” (p. 9). Another teacher who had training in all disciplines but aesthetics points out that to competently teach the four strands indicative of a DBAE educational format “too much is needed; it’s too complex without resources. Integrity is difficult to achieve, and it’s difficult to avoid superficiality” (p.11). These comments assert that implementing aesthetics into

one's art class objectives requires a depth of background knowledge that not all teachers have actualized. Hamblin (1988) also points out that the average teacher does not possess the required resources to develop transferable critical and visual literacy to his/her students; and for this reason the study of aesthetics is frequently evaded as a distinct component of art programs (see also Broudy, 1976). Educators who are ill equipped to convey comprehensive instruction in the subject lack the means to transfer an effective understanding to their students.

In an attempt to counter such a void within school art programs, Parsons (1987) has sought to uncover developmentally relative stages of aesthetic understanding. He points out that such a developmental theory of aesthetics offers "a sequence of steps, each of which is basically a new insight, these steps have nonarbitrary sequence. Some must be acquired before others" (Parsons, 1987, pp. 10-11). He maintains that,

These ways of understanding paintings are arranged in a developmental sequence. I argue that people adopt them in certain order. . . .The result is a common sequence of development built on a series of insights into the possibilities of art. Each step is an advance on the previous one because it makes possible a more adequate understanding of art. (Parsons, 1987, p.5)

Parsons (1987) identifies a framework within aesthetic responses by defining distinct response phenomena at various ages. Five stages of aesthetic understanding which students exhibit at these predetermined ages are posited. These stages, as Parsons defines them, are structured sequentially and are exhibited progressively from stage one to stage five. Parsons delineates the value of such findings as offering conclusive, ordered and age appropriate objectives for the instruction of aesthetics in schools.

Parsons (1987) theory of aesthetic development has received recognition as a viable and valuable instructional tool which offers a structured order for the teaching of aesthetic concepts. Its inclusion in a volume of selected writings concentrating on aesthetics in education attests to the fact that it is viewed as engendering valuable insights from which pedagogical practices may be oriented. The theoretical presuppositions of Parsons' theory are presented among papers by individuals such as Ralph Smith, Harold Osborne, Nelson Goodman, Alan Simpson, David Best and Howard Gardner to name only a few of the significant scholarly figures who have contributed insightful rhetorical pieces within the aforementioned volume entitled Aesthetics and Arts Education (1991). Although Parsons' (1987, 1991) stage theory has been generally well received, it will be posited that there are inherent limitations within the structural ordering and systematization of aesthetic responses according to a stage developmental hierarchy. The present study will critically examine the methodological biases inherent within Parsons research so as to convey the restrictive nature of the developmental theory itself. By employing the analytic tenets of critical pedagogy to critique Parsons' research, the value and generalizability of his stage theory of aesthetic development will be rendered suspect.

## **METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH PURPOSES**

The study seeks to identify and distinguish the limitations of applying Parsons' (1987) analytical classifications to the teaching of aesthetics in schools. A valid and viable means for bringing into question the legitimacy and value of developmental programs may be founded on methods of conceptual analysis (Short, 1991). As a

potential resource for the development of curricular programs. Parsons' theoretical conclusions merit such a critical and comprehensive assessment. Conceptual critiques of structural theories in education are typically undertaken with the purpose of identifying flaws and weaknesses within theoretical frameworks structured for optimizing and guiding teaching practices (Short, 1991). Short (1991) points out that,

... the purpose of conceptual structure assessment is not simply to understand the conceptual structure underlying a theory model, argument or research program, but to determine its adequacy for use in curriculum development. (p. 35)

The adequacy of Parsons' (1987) theory will thus be reviewed through the use of conceptually structured assessment based on a comparative analysis. Comparative analytical formats are a credible means for assessing the value of existing theoretical agendas (Short, 1991). By way of employing contrasts one may reveal the inherent inadequacies of conceptual programs for practical implementation.

In critically reviewing Parsons' (1987) stage theory of aesthetic understanding within a postmodernist perspective, the value and universalizability of his conclusions will be questioned. It will be pointed out that an educational program which instills critical thinking in students, as is advocated by a postmodernist approach to education, may foster aesthetic responses which do not correlate with the linear developmental progression defined by Parsons' (1987) theory. The pedagogical merit of structuring aesthetic educational programs within the guidelines suggested by content specific frameworks, such as that of Parsons' theory, will thus come into question.

Short (1991) similarly suggests that behavioural taxonomies and developmental

schedules should be evaluated for the “moral” implications they maintain. He points out that:

Generally, we tend to assume that our conceptual structures are morally neutral technical tools. This assumption is often false. For example, the conceptual structure associated with operant conditioning, which has been widely adopted as a way of thinking about classroom instruction and discipline, invites us to think of children, not as autonomous moral agents but as objects to be manipulated by conditioning techniques. (p. 35)

Within this vein of assessment, Parsons’ (1987) theory will be considered for its underlying ethical implications based on the theoretical presuppositions maintained within the moral tenets of critical pedagogy. By delineating age related response expectations, Parsons’ theory may serve to discriminate and enforce artificial norms within educational practices which deny difference and polyvocality—a naturally inherent characteristic of multicultural populations. The theory reviewed will therefore be carefully scrutinized for the limitations that the identified behavioural expectations might place on students in their responding to art.

It has also been suggested that a conceptual analysis offers a base understanding of the key terms the study is based around (Scriven, 1988; McMillan & Schumacher, 1989; Short, 1991). To condense the meaning of a concept or term into one holistic all-encompassing definition, frequently means that the provided definitions disregard a plethora of specialized but distinctive nuances, terms and concepts may possess. So as to avoid the limitations inherent to precise definitions, it is necessary to provide an array of conceptual examples which evoke a true awareness of a term’s definitional associations. Scriven (1988) points out that:

One should nearly always use what I have called “method of examples and

contrasts”, and not the method of explicit definition. That is you should try to clarify a notion by giving paradigmatic examples which illustrate the core meaning, the most typical use of the term . . . The “method of examples and contrasts” is better able to clarify important distinctions that are appropriate for a particular application while avoiding the risks of oversimplification inherent in operational or arbitrary definitions. (p. 145)

Within Chapter Two and Chapter Five, the proposed study will offer a detailed analysis of the concepts integral to the topic of study itself. A review of the positions which have been maintained on aesthetics will be presented within Chapter Two so as to illuminate the complex nature of aesthetic theory. This review will serve to present aesthetic theories not to qualitatively classify them, but moreover to identify the arguments as they have been ardently supported by theorists. In so doing, the subjective validity of a diversity of theories will be conveyed.

Similarly, a conceptual analysis of critical pedagogy as it may relate to education will be posited in Chapter Five. It must be noted that to define critical pedagogy requires an auxiliary definition of postmodernism. Although such an exercise is not in keeping with the postmodern notion of legitimacy within multiplicity relative to the personalized value of the argument, a description of the “postmodern condition” (Lyotard, 1984) is necessary so as to consider what effect such a philosophical perspective has had on educational theories such as critical pedagogy. This study will review a number of positions which exemplify a shift from the modern to the postmodern paradigm, and then go on to posit a description which reflects upon the type of thinking and awareness which will provide for a postmodernist orientation within pedagogy. Because there exists no single encompassing definition of

postmodernism (Giroux, 1988a; Harvey, 1990), one must convey the philosophical essence of postmodernist positions through presenting a variety of the possible stances which have been posited under the term “postmodernism”. The proposed study will review a diversity of postmodern theories and attitudes (Lyotard, 1984; Jencks, 1992; Hutcheon, 1992; Derrida, 1976; and others) so as to suggest positions which have served as productive baselines for curriculum reform (Cherryholmes, 1988; Giroux, 1988a; Stanley, 1992; Lather, 1991; etc.). It should be pointed out that postmodernist thought is relevant within contemporary educational theories as it exists within its reconceptualized form of “critical pedagogy” (Stanley, 1992). For example, critical theorists (Apple, 1990; Stanley, 1992; Giroux, 1987) suggest that educational systems should provide a context for empowering students to be “critical and self determined thinkers” (Giroux, 1987, p.17). Similarly, in presenting a postmodernist perspective for art education, Pearse (1992) posits a view which acknowledges art as a social process. He identifies the value of developing within students a receptive critical ability so as to allow them to critically challenge the legitimacy of interpretations within art. In so doing, students learn to actively realize the value of an array of artistic forms and the diversity of influences which constitute the potential for valid but unique perspectives. Pearse (1992) explains,

Educational theories which are based within a postmodernist position suggest that pedagogy provoke a new awareness and sensitivity within students which push the boundaries of notions of paradigms. Yet as is the case when a new paradigm replaces other ones, it still has to contend with the old ones being somewhere on the landscape —sometimes as competition sometimes as clutter. (p.249)

This perspective is further supported by Giroux (1988) who posits that educational curricula should not be based on closed systems of knowledge, but should cultivate in students an empowering attitude which questions the influences that serve to organize the foundation of their subjective experiences:

... teaching and learning must be linked to the goals of educating students: to understand why things are the way they are and how they got to be that way; to make the familiar strange and the strange familiar. (p.13)

Theorists of critical pedagogy suggest that students should be freed from the codes which limit learning to imposed rhetoric, and be presented with the challenge of forming and broadening their own subjective realities (Cherryholmes, 1988; Lather, 1991). It also is pointed out that students should not be expected to compile a list of philosophical arguments from which the power of the institution may be legitimized, but rather they should be prompted to raise questions regarding issues presented, and consequently to play an active role in the formation and critical awareness of their own subjective differences and understandings (Giroux, 1988a). Postmodern pedagogy, as it exists within "critical pedagogy", will allow students a freedom of thought which serves to broaden the boundaries of experience. Thus, Parsons (1987) stage theory of aesthetic development possesses the inherent capacity to be undermined, both conceptually and methodologically, by pedagogical practices which encourage students to realize perspectives outside of the boundaries delineated by societal and institutional norms.

It must be pointed out that it is not the intent of this study to establish the qualitative value of a postmodernist orientation within educational practices, but to consider the diversity of developmental progressions critical pedagogy (as a reconceptualization of postmodernist thought for educational contexts) might



engender within students' aesthetic understandings. This analysis will be maintained for the purpose of bringing into question Parsons' (1987) stage theory of aesthetic development.

Upon providing a conceptual analysis of aesthetics, Chapter Three will go on to provide a detailed critical review of Parsons' stage theory of aesthetic development. The validity of Parsons' (1987) conclusions will be questioned based on the limits inherent within the research methodology employed for the study. Within his research findings, Parsons fails to consider the influence of socially determined contextual expectations upon an individual's perceptual orientations. In effect, basing his theory on cognitive growth without examining or disclaiming the process of acculturation caused by societal expectations. The relationship between knowledge and the socializing process which supplies individuals with legitimating codes (Giroux, 1988a; Apple 1990; Cherryholmes, 1988; Kellner, 1988; Lather, 1991) will be addressed in the proposed study so as to identify a particular deficiency inherent in the perspective presented by Parsons (1987). Namely, what effects socio-cultural expectations can have on student responses.

The value of Parsons' (1987) theory within a pedagogical context will be questioned within Chapter Four on the basis of the limitations engendered within its structural approach to knowledge and understanding (Lather, 1991). The structured system that Parsons posits, in which there exists a sequential progression of stages which is hierarchical and suggests the possibilities of universalizable categories, implies a particular sequencing to teaching and learning respectively. Consequently, were Parsons' stages of aesthetic developmental responses to be taken as absolute, as is intended by the researcher, the pedagogical possibilities within aesthetic education would be restricted to the expectations that such a

theoretical construct would convey. It will similarly be suggested within Chapter Four that Parsons' theory of aesthetic developmental understanding constitutes a particular perception of the phenomenon which through its dominant cultural biases serves to disenfranchise minority group populations while concomitantly exemplifying a favoritism for Western ideological possibilities which do not facilitate an appreciation and empathy for otherness and difference—an important ethical objective within critical pedagogy. The effect of a structural pedagogical approach to the teaching of aesthetics will thus be criticized for its moral and ethical implications within educational agendas.

In summary the present study will use conceptual analysis, which through a postmodernist critical framework, brings into question the value of a stage theory of aesthetic developmental understanding as it is posited by Parsons (1987).

### **GENERAL PROBLEM**

- 1) To bring into question the value of Parsons' stage theory of aesthetic development from a postmodern perspective of critical pedagogy.

### **SPECIFIC PROBLEMS**

- 2) To illuminate the multiplicity of critical rationales which have served to inscribe theoretical delineations of the aesthetic experience so as to implicitly convey the relativistic nature of its possibilities.
- 3) To convey ideological biases inherent within Parsons' research

methodology so as to bring into question the validity. generalizability of his stage theory of aesthetic understanding.

4) To illuminate the moral and ethical implications of Parsons' stage theory of aesthetic development when considered in relation to the principles of critical pedagogy.

5) To consider how aesthetic development actualized within the practice of critical pedagogy might engender potentials for aesthetic understandings in students which would deviate from the norms defined by Parsons' sequentially ordered possibilities.

## **OUTLINE OF THE THESIS**

In Chapter Two a diversity of conceptual theories defining the aesthetic phenomenon will be reviewed so as to convey the complexity, diversity and heterogeneity of potential sources for aesthetic experience. This exercise is intended to suggest an open system of possibilities dependent on the critical arguments which serve to justify the positions taken. Chapter Three will provide a detailed presentation and critical analysis of Parsons' (1987) stage theory of aesthetic development so as to illuminate the methodological biases inherent within his findings, thus rendering the generalizability of his theory suspect. Studies which offer relevant research in relation to Parson' stage theory will similarly be analyzed for the methodologically dependent limitations of their findings. In Chapter Four the conceptual presuppositions manifest within critical pedagogy will

be adhered to so as to consider the moral and ethical implications of an aesthetic instructional program such as that offered by Parsons (1987, 1991). Chapter Five completes the present critical analysis of Parsons' theory by offering an in depth delineation of critical pedagogy, as reconceptualization of postmodern theory, so as to convey an educational program bias that could serve to engender aesthetic development different from the normative definitive patterns of age related understanding identified by Parsons'. Chapter Six summarizes and concludes the study.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **THEORIES OF AESTHETIC PERCEPTION**

#### **OVERVIEW**

This Chapter will identify the complex nature of aesthetics as a subject of study. The plurality and heterogeneity of philosophic debates surrounding theoretically based rhetorics on aesthetics will be discussed in order to foster an awareness of the divergent discourses which have been developed to describe the phenomenon itself. A conceptual analysis that presents numerous paradigmatic examples offers a representative sense of the phenomenon which cannot be realized through a holistic definition of aesthetic theory. The depth of critical arguments offered is intended to bear witness to the subjective and essentially relative nature of the aesthetic phenomenon.

#### **INTRODUCTION**

Historically, the etymology of the word “aesthetic” is derived from the Greek root *aesthetikos*, referring to sense perception (Crawford, 1991). As pointed out by Baumgarten, “the aesthetic value of a work of art depends on its ability to produce vivid experiences in the audience” (cited in Csikszentmihalyi & Robinson, 1990, p.7). Attaining a more clear and precise definition than this has constantly evaded any lasting consensus within its conceptual possibilities. It could be argued that the only common factor in the various efforts that have been made to define aesthetics exists in the admission of the difficulty of any such definition. Multiple positions

have encoded the aesthetic phenomenon by offering divergent interpretations engendering the experience itself, thus supplying a multiplicity of perceptual fragments which work towards conveying the complex nature of aesthetic viewpoints. This chapter will juxtapose opposing positions concerning the nature of aesthetics as they stem from variable philosophical knowledge sources within dominant art world traditions and discourses. Common conceptual streams of thought among existing philosophies will be used to classify potential sources for aesthetic experiences. Toward this end, major underlying art movements and ideologies which adhere to basic aesthetic categories will be presented. It must be noted, however, that it is not within the scope of this chapter to categorize all art movements, but moreover to inform the reader of the characteristics inherent within a diversity of aesthetic ideologies. The theories to be presented have survived critical scrutiny and in so doing have taken their place within dominant art world traditions and discourses on aesthetics. The delineation of such a variety of discourses is hoped to serve in portraying the ultimate relativity of aesthetic arguments as they foster valuable personalized vocabularies and insights which acquire relevancy when understood and maintained through the sincerity of experience.

## **REALISM AND IMITATION**

Throughout history art works have imitated and represented objects in the real world. The technical skill and astute hand-eye sensitivity displayed by artists has served to infuse audiences with a satisfying sense of awe and admiration. Because people have continually taken pleasure in recognizing the features and qualities

rendered available to them through the medium of art, it may be posited that realism as an artistic genre has provided a source for engendering in the viewer a state of excited pleasurable aesthetic appreciation. It may also be recognized that art works are qualified as realistic and imitative in relation to the conditioned expectations within the viewer (Gombrich, 1960). An art work is an interpretation of the real and is therefore never capable of objectively reproducing that which is real. It was not until the Renaissance period that artists rendered objects according to the laws of perspective and diminishing planes. Before this period, art tended to sincerely lack representation of the proportions and planes of reality. Art styles of many non-Western countries still rely on codes for representing which fall short of what we in the western world have come to understand as realism. This is not, however, to say that realism and imitation in art are not heralded as important qualities amongst these groups. It simply suggests that what people consider as a faithful mimicking of reality depends greatly upon accepted standards permeated through the norms and expectations of one's culture. A portrait painted by a seventeenth century Japanese artist would greatly differ from that painted by a Renaissance artist and yet both would undoubtedly conceive of their work as representational. Gombrich (1960) points out that realism in art is relative to the modes of representation familiar to the artist. The artist being limited by a number of factors: his/her individual disposition and temperament, the possibilities of the medium, and the schema he/she has come to use as a means for defining what is seen. Nietzsche, as cited by Gombrich (1960), suggests that nature cannot be rendered objectively through art;

“All Nature faithfully” — But by what faint  
Can Nature be subdued to arts constraint?

Her smallest fragment is still infinite  
 And so he paints but what he likes in it  
 What does he like? He likes what he can paint!  
 (p.86)

Realism and imitation are subject to the norms of artistic convention, and the viewer, then, accepts even stylized images as immediately real if the depiction is faithful to one's preconceived notions of how reality is represented. Realism in art then is never pure but tempered by the conditions of the artist. Regardless of the schema used, however, viewers of art have consistently found pleasure in an artist's ability to reproduce a likeness of what they see before them.

A number of theorists have considered the role of mimesis and realistic representation as a factor for qualitative responses in the viewer. Plato, one of the first philosophers to require of art that it imitate reality, considered works of art subordinate to reality in that they were "mere imitations". In considering art's mimetic function as primarily instrumental for conveying moral ideals to the public, Plato deemed realistic representation important only in so far as it served this purpose (Swanger, 1982). Aristotle, unlike Plato, considered imitation and representation in art as serving to do more than illustrate the ideal: through representing nature convincingly, the artist could create novel experiences in the viewer which would serve to establish connections to the real world. Realist art in depicting worldly phenomena and the psychological states of man was regarded as a valuable means for the viewer to learn about the world. Through learning one derives pleasure; realism in art engenders a mode of intellectually edifying experience from which satisfaction may be actualized. Contrary to Plato, who maintained that art not portray undesirable emotional states such as jealousy and



greed because of its potential to transfer depictions to an individual's real world actions, Aristotle believed that socially degenerative states of human nature rendered realistically would allow the viewer to conceive their undesirability and thus bypass a need to actualize them within one's own existence. Art, as accorded by Aristotle, can serve as a form of "catharsis". He believed that well structured art forms which convincingly and realistically represent human feelings, arouse in the viewer an aesthetic response engendered within the delight of gaining knowledge and understanding about the depicted phenomena (Werhane, 1984). By actualizing an understanding of the emotion through experiencing it in its artistic representation, the viewer is not compelled to reinstate the experience through action in reality. The art work frees the individual of the need to realize the emotion rather than activating it:

To Aristotle, aesthetic emotions are felt during a performance of a play, and these emotions are then purged rather than activated by the work of art.

Thus art has a positive rather than a negative social effect by exhibiting and cleansing persons of emotions without leading persons to violent action.

(Werhane, 1984, p.8)

Although this comment focuses on Aristotle's perception of drama, the text goes on to point out that the cathartic function of art is applied in general to all forms of art. One broadens one's awareness through representation in art, and thus art gains importance in its ability to tell us about the world. Through learning about the world or recognizing already perceived understandings one encounters feelings of pleasure.

Sheppard (1987) also points out that through imitating and representing objects existent in external reality, art works have traditionally interested and appealed to

the viewer. Recognizing and identifying objects, people, or scenes which the artist has rendered through the use of artistic materials, generally serves to generate pleasurable responses in the viewer. It has been determined that individuals inexperienced in assessing art tend to base their preferences on a work's level of real world representation (Gardner, Winner, Kirchner, 1975; Parsons, 1987). Aristotle's theory of aesthetics suggests that representational works heighten experience by allowing one to verify or expand knowledge about the world. Realistic works may evoke an untutored natural appeal for individuals who have had little exposure to art in that training is not required to realize and find pleasure in learning. Finding pleasure in learning exists as a fundamental response prerequisite to human existence.

Similarly, Hutcheson's (see Dickie, 1988) theory delineates interest for representational works as dependent on the pleasure derived from discerning unity and similarities between reality and the art works depiction may exist without excessive training in the arts. The theory presented by Hutcheson (see Dickie, 1988) on the marked appeal of imitative art works' offers an alternate explanation to that of Aristotle's. His primary concern, however, does not directly relate to the relationship between representation and art; he is moreover interested in assessing the complex nature of aesthetic preferences by considering how the cognitive senses of perception and the reflex senses of morality and beauty function to elicit aesthetic experiences. Hutcheson (see Dickie, 1988) suggests that the cognitive sense functions to perceive uniformity and variety and the "reflex sense" of beauty reacts to produce pleasure triggered uniquely by uniformity in variety within the object viewed. Therefore, in perceiving uniformity and variety one experiences aesthetic pleasure. This theory may apply to the pleasure individuals take in viewing

representational art in that representational works convey beauty through two sources: uniformity and variety perceived within the elements and structure in the works themselves (a concept native to formalist theories), or through uniformity and correspondence to a real world referents. The similarity of the visual arrangement of elements in the art work to the visually perceived structures in external reality serve to elicit pleasure through recognized associations. Uniformity between the real world and the represented world structures may allow for a heightened sense of pleasure manifest within the uniformity perceived between the depicted and the depiction. Hutcheson (see Dickie, 1988) thus posits that the reflex sense of beauty is triggered by unity within variety as is afforded by the referentiality of the work. If this theory were proved as true, it would not then be surprising that individuals inexperienced in viewing and responding to art may base their judgments on intuitively felt harmonies derived from a works reference to real world objects and phenomena.

Within contemporary aesthetic theories, Nochlin (1978) points out that realism continues to maintain a base from which to engender aesthetic experience. Realism in art offers a fragment of our physical structured environment to be captured:

What is therefore the distinguishing feature of the new realism is not some phony superimposition of humanist values onto formulas, but rather the assertion of the visual perception of things in the world as the necessary basis of the structure of the pictorial field itself. (Nochlin, 1978, p.222)

A split second of a generic banal scene may be transposed as exactly what it is, a frame of experience necessarily stark and void of meaning. Insignificant detail is rendered so close in verisimilitude to real world perceptions that Gombrich's (1960) and Nietzsche's (see Gombrich, 1960) objections to art's ability to copy nature is

truly tested. It would seem that bringing to our attention a deliberately photographic view which would otherwise go unnoticed can serve to interest and please, in that, one is drawn to the importance in detail of even the insignificant. Similar to Aristotle's conception of art, one is posited to find pleasure through gaining knowledge. It is a knowledge of the significance of the common place within experience which serves to please the viewer. Art, by capturing a moment of existence and presenting it through the picture plane, tantalizes and excites the viewer through facilitating a previously unactualized discriminatory awareness

The proliferation of representational art throughout the ages serves to maintain it as a valuable feature of art works. However, despite the fact that many individuals center art preferences on an art work's degree of realism, it must be acknowledged that art works void of realism are not necessarily void of potential for generating aesthetic experiences. Works are not limited to imitation as a gage of their worth, and being sensitive to the array of diverse possible sources for finding pleasure in art enables one to encounter a potentially rich field of aesthetic experiences. Although representational qualities in art works deserve mention and appreciation in aesthetic theories, being uniquely limited to realism as a criterion for enjoying art serves to restricts one's depth of visual experiences. Imitation and representation should be considered as one of an array of potential sources for aesthetic responses to art.

### **DIDACTIC IDEALISM**

It has been posited by numerous philosophers that art works which convey specific exemplary didactic functions ultimately serve as catalysts for heightened

aesthetic realizations. By lucidly illuminating social, moral or religious ideals within the viewer, an art work exists as a source for elating and instilling pleasurable awareness. An art work attains recognition and praise by enlightening the viewer to ultimate ideals of mankind, and as accorded through such ideologies of art, the importance of the work depends on its power as an instrument to enlighten the populous to preferred states of being. Art may influence the viewer to take on attitudes pertaining to moral, social or religious issues or more generally it may simply serve to teach (Sheppard, 1987). For the purpose of the present study, “didactic idealism” will be maintained as a category for theories of art which exemplify this expectation. Conceptions of art, such as those presently outlined, translate “good” art as being art which sustains “positive” moral or social affects on the viewer. The transmission of an idealized mode of thinking and its power to convey moral or social ideal understandings then becomes the base from which to make qualitative judgments about art. A number of theories which convey a “didactic idealist” orientation will now be presented.

Werhane (1984) posits that art directly influences the audience so as to inevitably serve a utilitarian function. He labels this instrumental attitude towards art as “didacticism” and suggests that the main concern for theorists adopting the “didactic” theory of art is not what the subject of a work is, but the quality of knowledge or experience it is capable of manifesting in the viewer. Aristotle’s understandings which claimed that one can learn about nature through art, or that art is capable of arousing emotional empathy within the viewer and the depicted emotion, are early examples of didacticism in art theory.

Plato also maintained a form of didactic idealism within his conception of art. As identified within the previous “realist” category of aesthetic theories outlined,

Plato supported a somewhat condescending attitude toward artistic forms of communication, he proclaimed the superiority of reality over the imitation of reality through art and deemed art useful only in so far as it faithfully depicted exemplary states of human kind (Efland, 1978). An art work's faithfulness to its referent was essential in that alterations to a strict mimesis of reality in art could serve to convey aberrations of reality which might be regarded as possible real world phenomena and in turn could serve to stimulate and influence the public to less than ideal states of existence (Swanger, 1981). This notion is conveyed in Plato's suggestions for educating the young:

A young person cannot judge what is allegorical and what is liberal; anything that he receives into his mind at that age is likely to become indelible and unalterable; and therefore it is most important that the talks which the young first hear should be models of virtuous thought. (cited in Ross, 1984, pp. 11-12)

Plato is referring to the art of poetry as it may influence the young, but this understanding was also paralleled in his perception of how visual arts were capable of affecting the lives of the average citizen. Realistic representation was essential not simply to mimic reality, but to convey a reality of being in its ideal state. Plato acknowledged art as valuable only if it were capable of provoking moral inspiration through depicting the beautiful. Art was to serve the ultimate purpose of illuminating the model morals of reason and only those capable of conveying such ideals through art were deemed appropriate individuals for producing art works:

Let our artists rather be those who are gifted to discern the true nature of the beautiful and the graceful; then will our youth. . . receive the good in everything; and beauty, the effluence of fair works, shall flow into the eye

and ear. and insensibly draw the soul from the earliest years into likeness and sympathy with the beauty and reason. (cited in Ross, 1984, p.66)

Art, as Plato perceived it, maintained the ability, when portraying the beautiful, to “prepare the soul for reason” (Efland, 1978, p.6) which ultimately was believed to guide one towards ideal moral states—art served a meaningful purpose toward a desirable end. One could come to know the “good” through perceiving it in art. Thus, as accorded by Plato, art’s purpose was to serve instrumentally in perpetuating a desired morality within individuals. and in so doing could instill valuable pleasurable insights.

Plato’s theory required that ideal forms and states of human kind be depicted as they exist within the external world. His didactic idealist theory of art was later adopted and altered to suggest that art create the ideal rather than merely imitate naturally existing forms of the ideal. This modified theory allowed the artist freedom to imagine and juxtapose at will for the purpose of presenting images which surpassed in beauty the restrictiveness of natural forms (Sheppard, 1987). Artistic depictions were expected to embody a perfected state of representational reality by way of the selection and arrangement of exemplary forms. The artist’s purpose was to envisage and present ideals to man so as to offer council in developing strong idealist tendencies. This modified version of Plato’s artistic doctrines significantly influenced later movements in the arts. During the Renaissance, artists such as Raphael or Michelangelo sought to artistically create the perfect states of mankind through visual form. Beauty, as it was composed by the artist, was considered the pinnacle of the ideal and consequently the target for which artists strove to achieve in an attempt to exceed the restrictions of true realism (Sheppard, 1987). Renaissance art conveyed the “beautiful” so as to bring the

audience to a “higher” and more refined consciousness of exemplary states.

Leo Tolstoy, writing in the nineteenth century, similarly held a didactic concept of art. He believed that through art one could communicate profound deep felt human emotions which could be valuable in enlightening the viewer to more noble religious ideals. Great art, according to Tolstoy, “affects” or “infects” the viewer by promoting in one an understanding of the unity and spiritual goodness of the brotherhood of man. Successful communication of praiseworthy and morally “good” feelings such as the humble harmony of existence were considered desirable in that one could be moved toward a more righteous morality of character. Tolstoy points out the importance of art when he writes:

Art, like speech, is a means of communication, and therefore of progress, ie., of the movement of humanity forward toward perfection. . .the evolution of feeling proceeds through art—feelings less kind and more needful for the well-being of mankind are replaced by others kinder and more needful for that end. That is the purpose of art. And, speaking now of its subject matter, the more art fulfills that purpose the better the art, and the less it fulfills it, the worse the art. (cited in Werhane, 1984, p.95)

Tolstoy held that superior works of art transmitted feelings which served to elevate the audience to a belief in the spiritual and universal union of mankind.

Other philosophies have also purported to acknowledge the importance of art’s instrumental function in enlivening the viewer toward a predetermined set of desirable beliefs and values. For example, Marxist theories of art identify the “beautiful” in art, through a work’s ability to convey depictions of preferred social conditions within the economic situation of the time. The Marxist perception of art is not a simple account of a view existing independently of alternate possible



interpretations. Fundamentally, however, all Marxist theories of art identify a relationship between art and the social and economic structures. It is interesting to note that the nineteenth century German philosopher, Karl Marx, did not himself address the role of art as a factor in societal structures, his writings in art being more contemplative than dictative in regard to art's potential to contribute to the class struggle and social evolution. Although he wrote little about art, his discourse on the capitalistic exploitation of the proletariat, and his views on social and political consciousness served as a basis for the proliferation of theories relating to the function and purpose of art in society (Marcuse, 1978).

Nearly thirty years after Marx's death, Plakhanov, a Russian follower of Marxist philosophy published a text addressing the social implications of art. Within this work, Plakhanov addressed the existence of a state preference for utilitarian art because it served to convey ideologies which proved conducive in supporting state beliefs. The state held philosophy, termed Social Realism, which held the weight of state support behind it called for a political commitment on the part of the artist. This view is exemplified in Lenin's decree on the expected attitude of a state writer:

It is not simply that, for the socialist proletariat, literature cannot be a means of enriching individuals or groups; it cannot, in fact be an individual undertaking independent of the common cause of the proletariat. Down with non-partisan writers! Down with literary supermen! Literature must become part of the common cause of the proletariat, a 'cog and screw' of one single great Social Democratic mechanism set in motion by the entire politically-conscious vanguard of the entire working class. (cited in Laing, 1978, p.22)

What was deemed as inspiring and “beautiful” within art was its ability to unit a people toward a single cause—the ideals of the state. Laing (1978) points out that by the 1930s Social Realism was designated as the sole requirement for artistic excellence. Art was expected to inspire unity toward a common social end, and individuals under the social realist doctrine were expected to overcome personal feelings and motives so as to support the ideal social structure as it was set out and perpetuated by the state.

An alternate interpretation of Marxist theories of art, however, serves to dispute the foundational validity of the Social Realist philosophy. Such theories proclaim the importance of the individual in the struggle for liberation and deny state delineated conformist attitudes by defining what is “real” over the state promoted “ideal”. Essentially, this Marxist perspective suggests that art bring one to a higher consciousness and in so doing facilitate social awareness and class freedom. Csikszentmihalyi and Robinson (1990) convey the essence of this attitude in the following passage:

True aesthetic experience may break through the bonds that tie people into the existing system. Emancipation from false consciousness, or the systematic understanding of alienating social forces, is the *raison d’être* for the existence of works of art and the ultimate criterion by which they are to be judged. Thus the most valuable contribution of the aesthetic experience to the progress of mankind consists in bringing to the fore those human potentialities that the social system has repressed and in showing the causes of repression. (p.16)

Thus, diametrically opposed philosophies on art exist under the guise of a single term—Marxist philosophy. Both theories, however, do maintain some common

ground in that they similarly involve the emancipation of man from constricting social institutions. The Social Realist theory fighting against the dehumanizing power of capitalist societies requires social cohesion and denial of personal interests and concerns so as to offer the proletariat strength and stability for overcoming the dictates of capitalist rule. The alternative Marxist perspective on art is also concerned with emancipation from constricting and dehumanizing powers, but alternately does not see these powers as existing only within the false-consciousness perpetuated by capitalist rule, therefore, suggesting the need for conscious public awareness of all social systems and their potential to repress and deny the value of human life. Both these Marxist theories of art serve a didactic function—the power and quality of art works are determined by their ability to convey an intended social purpose.

A number of theories have been presented within a “didactic idealist” philosophy. In their ideological presuppositions, these theories all sustain a common thread which suggests that art functions to instill reactions within the viewer that serve a predesignated purpose. Plato believed art could, and should, if it were to exist at all, morally edify, and exemplify virtuous ideals. Classical and Renaissance theorists saw art as serving to create idealized reality so as to provide a model for the public. The view taken by Tolstoy maintained that art should instill the viewer with an understanding and desire for ideal brotherly love, and finally, according to Marxist theorists, art should socially indoctrinate or conversely liberate so as to produce desired societal conditions.

In all instances, the quality of an art work was based on its potential for achieving a desired effect or state in the viewer. These theories have inspired marked recognition for some of the finest works produced in art history, and

cannot, then, be relegated as unimportant in the study of aesthetic responses. It may be said, however, that taken in isolation of other theories of art, they are reductionistic in their view of the art experience. Much of what has been cultivated as fine works of art cannot claim to perform any instrumental function. The “didactic idealist” theories exist therefore as a single view contained within a complexity of aesthetic possibilities.

### **FORMALISM**

Ultimately, it may be acknowledged that art exists as an arrangement of lines, colors, shapes and masses. Formalists believe that it is the arrangement of these elements which one must be sensitive to so as to actualize pleasurable heights within visual experience. A viewer’s response, generated by way of intuitive sensitivity to colors, lines and forms engenders within the individual qualitatively defined sensory reactions. Formalist theories have led to the concept of “art for arts sake” (Werhane, 1984). According to this philosophy, pure sensory perception of the work exists autonomous to any external associations, art thus being liberated from a need to relate form to content and in the process to supply any worldly interpretations. The artist is responsible for creating works of “pure form” which exist void of meaning outside of themselves (McEvelley, 1991). Impervious to an art work’s historical significance or the artist’s intent, the aesthetic significance of a work exists in relation to the perceptual impact its formal structures have on the viewer.

Traditionally, a number of specialists in the philosophy of art have presented their understanding(s) on how formal visual pictorial arrangements affect our

encounters with works of art. To this end, Kant articulated the importance of the arrangement of elements in an art work for the actualization of aesthetic experience within the viewer. His account of “free beauty” gave rise to later formalist theories of art by suggesting that “free beauty is ascribed to an object in virtue of its form alone, without any consideration of any end to which the object may be directed” (cited in Sheppard, 1987, p. 41). Until the 18th century, art was generally valued for its functional potential as a religious and moral influence or alternately for its power to convey knowledge (Thompson, 1990). It was not until this time that the importance of a pure experiencing of the aesthetic object was considered independently of any purpose. Kant, deriving inspiration from revolutionary concepts initiated by eighteenth century writers such as Shaftesbury, created a foundation for the acceptance of disinterested attention as a symptom of aesthetic experience. According to Kant, art maintains values different and external to cognitive or moral judgment (see Werhane, 1984). He explains that within aesthetic experience the mind is active in that understanding and imagination, qualified specifically for realizing aesthetic experiences, and differing from understanding and imagination used for reasoning, allow one to undergo heightened states of experience when viewing great art works. One is able to meaningfully detect an intelligibly organized arrangement of forms so as to experience the pleasure of visual aesthetic perceptions. Aesthetic perception, being void of rules and purpose, lacks any adherence to definite concepts, but pleases strictly by way of the mind’s synthesis of visual relationships in that one intuitively responds to “universally defined” visual order so as to perceive arrangements of optic beauty. Universals of aesthetic beauty, as accorded by Kant, are not susceptible to objective definition and therefore cannot be defined but through

subjective aesthetic experience (Ross, 1984) .

Bell (1958) also postulates that true aesthetic experiences are unique and subjectively guided through arrangements of formal elements by asserting that a common denominator exists within such experiences which is the essence of all aesthetic encounters. This common denominator is a universal within the subjective, a concept similarly presented by Kant (1951). Combinations of lines and colors sustain formal arrangements and tensions which instill aesthetic experiences. Such arrangements are termed by Bell (1958) as “significant forms”. It being pointed out that:

For discussion of aesthetics, it need be agreed only that forms arranged and combined according to certain unknown and mysterious laws do move us in a particular way and that it is the business of the artist to combine and arrange them that they shall move us. . .we have to discover only what quality is common to objects that do move us as works of art. (Bell, 1958, p. 19)

In stating that art works “move us”, Bell (1958) refers to an emotional response generated through immediate pleasurable sensations derived from pattern sensations of the visual stimuli. Bell (1958), in the vein of strict formalist theories, postulates that for viewers of art to be induced to feel emotions associated with the artist’s intent or the viewer’s experience of worldly concerns such as “terror, mystery, or love”, is to fall short of true aesthetic emotion. Following such a formalist, or purist, doctrine, aesthetic encounters are void of worldly concerns and, as maintained by Bell (1958), “win an emotion more profound and far more sublime than any that can be given by the description of facts and ideas” (p.30). So as to explain the feelings of exhilaration and pleasure one undergoes by way of aesthetic

experiences, Bell ascribed to a belief in the potential of art to convey transcendental experiences and insights to the viewer through formal arrangements (McEvelley, 1991).

Fry also suggested that experiencing an intelligently organized combination of forms satisfies the “human need for abstract beauty which is fulfilled through the right distribution of elements in the formal structure” (cited in Falkenheim, 1980, p.89). He points out the significance of formal structure in art as a source for aesthetic experience by suggesting that one must appreciate the dynamics of the formal arrangements within works over interests directed to representation and the moral or social implications manifest within such representation (see Falkenheim, 1980). According to Fry (1990), it is only in this way that one may actualize the difference between the pleasure derived from viewing commercial and “impure” art forms as compared to “pure” art forms. The pleasure derived from the so called “impure” art is materialistic, superficial and transient while that of the “pure” art is lasting and permanent. To enjoy the lasting sensations of “quality” art, Fry suggests that one must direct attention to the formal relationships within the arrangement of a work so as to perceive the important interdependencies of formal elements as they contribute meaningfully to the entirety of the composition. Fry (1990) points out that most people are unable to actualize an understanding of the importance of formal elements in the perception of art and moreover are involved with the materialistic and personal value the work might maintain. He suggests that interest in the subject matter of an art work serves to distract from its aesthetic potential. In attempting to address the source of aesthetic experience, Fry postulates that,

One thing I think we may clearly say, namely, that there is a pleasure in the

recognition of order, of inevitability in relations, and that the more complex the relations of which we are able to recognize the inevitable interdependence and correspondence, the greater is the pleasure. ( p.78)

He points out that only art works which convey arrangements of visually pleasing formal stimuli will stand the test of time in that the popularity of subject matter and social importance of depicted issues are ever changing and transient. It is the formal beauty of a work which will serve to continually excite visual pleasure responses in the viewer so as to define works of classic (lasting) beauty regardless of popular trends (Fry, 1990).

Convinced of the validity of theories such as those presented by Bell (1913) and Fry (see Falkenheim, 1980), artists of the 20th century began overtly to concentrate on form over content in their work. Focusing on the importance of formal arrangements to the aesthetic experience, artists divorced their work entirely of any representational qualities which might adhere one's attention to pictorial purpose or social message over a concern for formal order. Art movements such as Suprematism and Neoplasticism which generated paintings void of any representation, strictly displayed arrangements of plastic and perceptual variables as a source for the viewers response. Mondrian, the founder of the Neoplastic movement, believed that through the use of formal elements one could convey the essence of universal beauty. Figural work, for Mondrian, served to distract the viewer in that one inevitably maintains subjective reactions to subject matter and only through responses to work which possesses no resemblance to subjects is one free to experience the "true essence of art" (Osborne, 1970). Osborne cites Mondrian's acknowledgement of the metaphysical power of formal arrangements within art in the following statement:



They are the great hidden laws of nature which art establishes in its own fashion. It is not necessary to stress the fact that these laws are more or less hidden behind the superficial aspects of nature. (p. 96)

Mondrian perceives that the universal beauty of form potentially existent in all visual planes is often unrealized by the viewer due to an overt concern for the contextual significance of objects. So as to divulge art of its contextual distracters, formalists believed work pure of form and empty of content more fully serves the purpose of illuminating natural harmonious arrangements of design.

Similarly, Greenberg (1990) conveyed support of formalist beliefs in that he described “true” art as being necessarily non-representational, existing as a pure sensory experience void of concepts or signification outside itself. In a paper entitled “The state of art criticism” (published in 1961, as cited from Thompson, 1990) Greenberg suggests that aesthetic value judgments are unanalyzable and are “acts of intuition” which depend on one’s like or dislike of a work of art. These judgements, in being considered unanalyzable, are dependent on the subjective absoluteness and universality of responses to the formal arrangement of elements within works. So as to allow for the universality of form to radiate one’s consciousness, judgments of art must be made in isolation of concerns for irrelevant factors such as fashionable trends in the art world or the social political, or biographical implications of a work. These aforementioned preoccupations are considered by Greenberg (1990) as a form of interpretation which deviates from true experiencing of art as art. Painting, in that it is a flat surface which takes on pigments, cannot according to Greenberg be translated as anything but what it is—a painted surface to be experienced and appreciated for the only true qualities it possesses—the arrangement of formal elements.

The importance of developing sensitivity to the formal arrangement of elements within the work of art has been highlighted through a study conducted by Csikszentmihalyi and Robinson (1991). Intending to uncover the salient features of the aesthetic experience, the researchers interviewed individuals highly trained in seeing and interpreting art, and by way of questioning, were able to discern significant aspects of the aesthetic experience engendered. The formal qualities of an art work, as discussed presently, proved to be one of the most frequently articulated sources for aesthetic appreciation for the viewers. Through the formal organization of elements such as line, color and texture, the “expert viewers” were able to sense a “beauty” in even “repulsive” paintings which, although lacking in appealing subject matter, gained in attractiveness through harmonious and balanced formal arrangements (Csikszentmihalyi & Robinson, 1991).

## **EXPRESSION**

The aesthetic theories to be discussed in this section examine the emotional expressive dimension of art as a primary characteristic and expectation of great art. The significance of communicating emotions through art was first recorded through the writings of Plato and Aristotle. Plato devalued emotional expression in art unless it exhibited ideal human emotions in that it could serve to coerce the already weak character of the average citizen into less than desirable sensibilities. Conversely, Aristotle saw the depiction of emotions in art as serving a cathartic function where an imaginative identification of the audience within the artistically depicted emotions could serve to purify the individual of any desire to maintain them within his/her own personal experience. Renaissance artists were concerned

with the accurate depiction of emotional states through careful observation of the physical characteristics which corresponded to specific emotions, and the Romantic period saw the depiction of emotional expressions in art gain importance in that art enabled one to expand one's life experiences through sympathetic identification with the depicted circumstances. Through art, one was able to gain an understanding of emotions which existed outside the limits of one's own life. The pleasure of art resided in its ability to present an understanding and empathy for a variety of emotional experiences (Osborne, 1970). It was not however until the 1930s that an "Expression Theory" was clearly articulated within philosophical theories of art (Thompson, 1990).

The concept of emotional arousal as essential to aesthetic experience was theoretically developed by individuals such as Tolstoy, Collingwood, and Croce. Tolstoy (1984) postulated that the essence of "good" art was that the artist was able to sincerely convey a feeling in a way that it be transmitted strongly and clearly so as to infect the recipient with the emotion genuinely felt and intentionally transmitted by the artist through the work. It is the ability of one man to convey feelings and experiences to another that Tolstoy considered the essence of art and aesthetic experience, as is suggested through the following passage:

Art is a human activity consisting in this, that one man consciously, by means of certain external signs, hands on to others feelings he has lived through, and that others are infected by these feelings and also experience them. (cited from Ross, 1984, p. 181)

As accorded by Tolstoy, aesthetic responses demand of art that it render powerful feelings engendered by the human condition visible for the viewer to experience. Tolstoy, in seeking a criteria from which to identify "good art", justified art's

qualitative nature in its potential to influence socially . Art, by way of presenting convincing depictions of external emotional experiences could pass on these feelings to the viewer, and parallel emotional states of understanding could be communicated through “good” art. Having outlined the nature of art as being that of conveying emotions from artist to viewer, Tolstoy went on to stipulate that the moral correctness of depictions was also a necessary criteria of good art. “Good art was for him that art which transmits to others by infection ‘the highest and best feelings to which men have arisen’” (Osborne, 1970, p.241).

Croce (see Sheppard, 1987) and Collingwood (cited in Ross, 1984) also supported the notion that aesthetic experience is dependent on emotional empathy sustained through the art work. Their theories however differ from that of Tolstoy’s in that Tolstoy based the criteria for judging art on its ability to evoke an emotion in the viewer. Collingwood and Croce moreover were interested in creating an appreciation for the artist’s ability to transpose emotions into a concrete form through art (Sheppard, 1987). Croce believed that “good” art was that which manifests the artist’s ability to display the emotion felt, and great artists were those capable of translating inner tensions and feelings into an outwardly recognizable rendering of the felt emotion. Art was considered by Croce as the activity of the mind in its synthesis and understanding of an experience (Werhane, 1984). Collingwood maintained a theory of art which resembled that of Croce’s so closely that their views on art are frequently presented as one (Sheppard, 1987, Osborne, 1970). Both Collingwood and Croce have organized mental activity into a series of stages. In the initial stage, one experiences sensations and perceptions in their pure form without being conscious of them. They are however manifest in unconscious physical reactions such as smiling or alternately the trembling and shaking of the

hands. The feeling is made tangible only through the individual's expression of it. therefore, the artist must manifest the abstract feelings into an actual form before the emotion may be apprehended:

It is by being clarified through the formative impulse of art that the formless and elusive feeling tone and mood which accompany all our perceptions and our other commerce with the world outside us acquire in the case of the artist both structure and precision. (Osborne, 1970, p.232)

The need to communicate emotions to a viewer is not the purpose of art; what reigns as essential is the artist's ability to translate felt emotions so as to clarify what is being experienced. One expresses emotions through what Collingwood calls imagination and Croce terms intuition. These communications involve embodying the felt emotion into a form of expression such as poetry, visual art or dance. The ultimate source for the production of art then is the artists expression of felt emotions through "imagination" or "intuition". "Imagination" and "intuition" allow for the transformation of intangible moods into tangibly comprehensible structures. The viewer similarly must employ imagination to actualize an awareness of what the artist has experienced in creating the work (Osborne, 1970). As Collingwood outlines in refering to himself as the artist, "if there is any effect which we wish to produce in the hearer, it is only the effect which we call making him understand how we feel" (cited in Werhane, 1984). Works of art then are evaluated by way of assessing the artist's ability to translate emotion into content. Although one may appreciate a work of art which offers such insight, it must be acknowledged that it inevitably lacks generalizable credibility in that a concrete embodiment of a depicted emotion may suggest alternate readings because of diverse experiences.

The aesthetic theory presently discussed concentrates exclusively on the artist's

emotional experience and neglects the possible uniqueness of the viewer's reactions due to dissimilar life experiences. It must be pointed out, as suggested by Dewey (1934), that an expressive reading of art works is subject to unique nuances depending on the different stages of one's maturation as well as the influences of one's place in time and society. According to Dewey, works of art can continuously inspire new personal realizations in and of experience. Gombrich (1960) similarly emphasizes the significance of the audience's predispositions and experiences in defining what kind of communication will be elicited from an art work's presentation of features. Aesthetic experience may begin as innate biologically bound reactions to visual stimuli, however, it has been suggested that these reactions become colored through worldly associations which are experientially, culturally and socially bound. To state then that great art must allow one clarity of insight into the artists experience, would be to deny that individuals with dissimilar life experiences could alternately decipher the structures presented by the artist. Although one may appreciate an artist's ability to convey personal emotional experiences through artistic mediums, it would serve as limiting to isolate all artistic responses and judgements within this aesthetic possibility. The philosophy of art presented by Croce and Collingwood would better serve as one dimension of a complex many in our responses to art.

An alternative view which deals with the importance of emotional content in art as integral to the aesthetic experience does not ascribe either to the work's power for "infecting" the viewer with emotion or in its serving as a medium to convey the experiences of the artist. What is utmost in such a view, as presented by Langer (1953), exists in developing sensitivity to the emotional structural content of a work itself. Langer suggests that art works function as "iconic signs" and symbols of

emotions in that the works structural form serves to reproduce the structural form existent within the experienced emotion itself. The entire arrangement of forms within a work function in unison to produce a rhythm, an over all impression or “gestalt” of emotional possibilities (Osborne, 1970). The cognitive emotional insight presently described is actualized not through analysis of the individual symbolic components of the work but through a synthesis of the work in its entirety of interrelated forms. The viewer then by way of experiencing the totality of forms, apprehends the nature of the depicted emotion. Langer (1953) ultimately perceives the concept of form as integral to expression. Suggesting that art deals with “beauty which is expressive form” (p. 396), this conceptualization conveying a respect for the formal qualities of an art work, but extending the formalist doctrine to encompass worldly feelings and expression within tensional arrangement of elements. Through her theory of aesthetics, Langer establishes the importance of the expressive symbolic nature of formal arrangements and their role within the aesthetic experience. From the “space tensions” created through pictorial arrangements within the art work, the viewer is able to elicit a unique experience. Through formal arrangements, one instinctively associates the elements perceived to structures relative to experience, and one makes connections with “life” through the expressive symbolic qualities of the pictorial stimuli. Tensions within pictorial arrangements can elicit reflections of experiences one has encountered, or conversely, one may sustain novel encounters of pictorial stimuli which maintain previously unfelt “life tensions” and emotions thus serving to expand one’s “felt” life experiences (Langer, 1953). Langer’s theory on arts expressive potential resides in the symbolic representation of emotions through the dynamics of arranged formal elements. She suggests that expression in art is dependent on the

personal expression of the artist's emotions and that emotions and feelings may be "captured and symbolized" through formal combinations which ultimately illuminate tensions representative of inner sentiments (Langer, 1953).

A view which similarly ascribes to the importance of visual properties and perceptual totalities for conveying emotional and symbolic expression is one presented by Arnheim (1974). Arnheim, like Langer (1953), points out that in viewing art one may undergo experiences derived from the symbolic expressions within the formal patterns the work presents. He cites Wertheimer's understanding which suggests a relationship between the forms used within an artistic medium to convey an emotion and their direct characteristic manifestations within the actual experience (see Arnheim 1974). A "sad" art work typically displays subdued colors and lines of confined movements and tensions representative of the limited energy and tensions felt in the actual physical experiencing of sadness. Artworks, in succeeding to manifest intended moods, rely on the formal structures of those moods as they are translated to perceptual arrangements of elements which in turn reflect through their inherent characteristics, symptoms of the depicted emotions. In the case of color, it may be acknowledged that even though learning can influence an individual's reaction to color stimuli, the affects of color are too spontaneous to be strictly derived through acculturation (Gombrich, 1960; Arnheim, 1974). The formal features are not experienced and important in isolation but contribute to a "gestalt" through which one perceives the parts only so far as they contribute to the whole (Wertheimer, 1984):

What a person or animal perceives is not only an arrangement of objects, of colors and shapes, of movements and sizes. It is, perhaps first of all, an interplay of directed tensions. These tensions are not something the



observer adds, for reasons of his own, to static images. Rather, these tensions are as inherent in any percept as size, shape, location, or color. Because they have magnitude and direction, these tensions can be described as psychological “forces”. (Arnheim, 1990)

The visual display of structural combinations serve to reflect tensions and dynamics of inner psychological states. Form, subject matter, and the overall structure of the work contribute to convey universal symbolically represented emotional expressions (see Werhane, 1984). According to Arnheim (1974), heightened aesthetic responses may be attained through an awareness and appreciation of the expressive and communicative power of a work’s totality of features.

The theories presented by both Langer (1953) and Arnheim (1974) suggest that the dynamics of formal arrangements evoke an aesthetic response by way of lucidly displaying emotional tensions within a composition. Unlike the previous “expression” theories conveyed by Tolstoy (1984) or Collingwood (1990) and Croce (see Osborne, 1970), the source of the visual beauty does not rest in the compositions potential to evoke emotional experiences within the viewer or in its ability to clearly convey the emotional experiences of the artist. What is of relevance to great art, according to Langer (1953) and Arnheim (1974), is that it capture through visual form emotional tensional associative realities.

## **CREATIVITY**

Aesthetic experience has been attributed to a dimension of “expression” separate from an isolated view of the power of expressive formal and emotional content in art works. Hochberg (1978) presents the argument that aesthetic encounters in

today's "art worlds" are frequently dependent on the artist's ability to express individuality of vision through the form of his/her artistic rendering:

The aspect of creativity has become so important that expression - indeed self-expression - is the most important, and perhaps the only function of art to many educators, psychologists and critics. (p. 167)

Aesthetic encounters in such a context are thus dependent on the artist's ability to create a means of expression novel to the previous experiences of the viewer. Such a stance suggests that the percipient of art takes an active role in assessing the visual work so as to mentally file and compare the novel stimuli to those of traditional practice in an attempt to assess its quality of new insights and new modes of transmission. Creative expression serves to produce novel encounters which, through expanding the breadth of one's experience and understanding, evoke in the viewer an aesthetic realization (Young, 1982). Within an aesthetic attitude such as the one being presently cited, a cognitive preoccupation on the part of the percipient is necessitated. The viewer must actively endeavor to synthesize new connections in understanding the world through the images and forms presented within the art work. Best (1985) cites Bond in pointing out that imagination in art is often misconstrued:

It is commonly assumed that because imagination is central to the arts this implies that they are concerned not with truth or reality but with fantasy, illusion, escapism. In fact, it often requires imagination to peel away illusions in order to see the truth, and it can involve a creative struggle to achieve the precise medium necessary for expressing and recognizing true insights. (p.84)

Imagination portrayed through art serves to activate heightened aesthetic responses

not because it simply presents “fantasy, illusion or escapism”, but through art the imagination organizes whatever means necessary so as to allude to cognitive insightful realizations about human phenomena and existence.

The artist’s “creative vision” allows the viewer to diffuse illusions for the sake of new insights. Best (1985) suggests that imagination engenders one to see the truth through conveying expression within a medium which reorganizes conventions. Through working with existing raw material in novel ways, the artist illuminates realities beyond those of accepted canons. The value of an artist’s contribution within the “creative” philosophy of aesthetics lies in his/her ability to display imagination and invention. Eaton (1989) cites Summer’s quote which conveys the importance of invention within the aesthetic experience:

The Cinquecento no longer regarded the imitation of nature, as the acme of artistic achievement, but rather viewed ‘invention’ as its foremost aim.

(p.35)

The artist is thus considered responsible for conveying novel insight beyond that of the norm. Cultural norms serve as accepted patterns from which individuals base their expectations of perception. Creative works ideally reorganize the conventional structures of artistic forms in such a way so as to give new meaning to traditional convention. Imaginative artistic productions challenge one’s preconceived ordering of supposed experiential limitations so as to deepen and expand one’s sense of the world and oneself. Reimer (1991) suggests that it is imagination which engages our feeling in viewing art in that novel experiences engendered in viewing a work, be it powerful or modest, allow an “out of the ordinary” experience to stimulate new insight. He suggests that when art presents a new way of seeing one is forced to pay attention and find worthwhile properties in the work. According to Reimer

(1991), creative acts,

... do not follow through in a straight, undeviating line of expectation but reach for the original solution, the unexpected event. the novel twist and turn, the unfolding of events that pull us, as we follow them, to feel more deeply because we cannot entirely predict the outcome. Great works of art present such challenges to our feelings by their richness of imagination—sometimes the audacity of the imagination—as to shake us to our foundations. Every good work of art, no matter how simple, must have enough originality to vivify our feelings, to bring them to more vibrant life. All such works, across the entire spectrum from the modest to the profound, enliven our experience. (p.335)

A work lacking clarity and vividness of novel insight does not draw the viewer into an excited effort to attend to newly illuminated truthful conceptions of existence. The aesthetic value of imagination in art is that it serves to strip away culturally determined norms which, through artistic invention, expose previously unrealized truths about reality, and in so doing allows for a depth of novel insights.

## COGNITION

Cognition as an active agent in generating aesthetic experience has been prominently supported by Goodman (1968). Goodman (1991) points out the difficulty in stating that art refers to nothing but itself and the interplay of its formal elements. Goodman's theories of art appreciation which emphasize the cognitive dimension of the art experience, suggest that to view an art object without making reference to phenomena external to it, as is suggested by the formalist or purist

doctrines on art, sets restrictions unrealistic to the experiencing of art. Even in viewing non-representational paintings which make no direct reference to social moral or experiential issues, the colors or shapes within the composition emanate a life or symbolic quality of their own (Goodman, 1991). Goodman presupposes the existence of meaning and content within art. The function of cognition in art is prescribed as a means for continued active and alterable discovery of the changing symbolic content of an art work which is dependent on and comparable to previous experiences of the percipient. Works of art are taken to “denote” and “exemplify” and the viewer’s role is to make subtle “discriminations” while coming to terms with what it may be that a work conveys. It is suggested that we come to realizations about the world through the arrangements within a particular art work and our perception of the world may be altered and expanded by way of the realizations acquired through aesthetic experience (see Smith 1991). This concept is presented by Goodman (1968) in the following passage:

Representation or description is apt, effective, illuminating, subtle, intriguing, to the extent that the artist or writer grasps fresh and significant relationships and devises means for making them manifest ... In representation, the artist must make use of old habits when he wants to elicit novel objects and connections. If his picture is recognized as almost but not quite referring to the commonplace furniture of the everyday world, or if it calls for and yet resists assignment to a usual kind of picture, it may bring out neglected likenesses and differences, force unaccustomed associations, and in some measure remake our world. And if the point of the picture is not only successfully made but is also well-taken, if the realignments it directly and indirectly effects are interesting and important, the picture—like

a crucial experiment—makes a genuine contribution to knowledge. (pp.32-33)

Goodman points out the capacity art works possess for bringing forward insights about the world which might otherwise go unrealized. Through careful juxtaposition of elements and/or subject matter, connections and understandings novel to previous experience are engendered and the viewer is offered a medium from which to expand awareness. Art's ability to stimulate newly awakened possible readings involves a conscious cognitive synthesis of the metaphorical possibilities of the forms and content within the composition. It is these realizations and insights which Goodman (1968) sees as integral to the aesthetic experience within art.

Although Goodman's theory has been criticized by art specialists (Mitchell, 1991; Wolheim, 1991) for its lack of definitive value systems, and for its denial of the relevance of a work's historical context, his theories do however enable the boundaries of art and aesthetics to encompass art forms which are not within the perimeters of theories relying strictly on the formal and intuitively emotional qualities of a work. Goodman (1991), in proposing and lending strength to the importance of cognition within aesthetic encounters, maintained that all art works either "represent, express, or exemplify", and also pointed out that circumstance serves instrumental to the objects potential for expressing, representing or exemplifying. An example used is of a rock being capable of attaining artistic status upon being placed in gallery where it may attain credibility as "art" and thus potential for eliciting aesthetic responses through the symbolic qualities exemplified by way of its beauty of form and proportion (Goodman, 1991). According to the doctrine set forth by Goodman, art works are judged strictly in terms of their

symbolization and in terms of how well they “serve the cognitive purpose” in expanding one’s realization and understanding of the governing principles of the world in which one exists. Olson (see Smith, 1991) also acknowledges the importance of intellectual functions to the aesthetic experience by pointing out that cognition serves to activate and expand one’s perceptual abilities. Beardsley (1991) parallels this understanding by suggesting that the cognitive dimension of aesthetic experience allows for the discovery of interrelationships and connections within works which act as catalysts for instilling a heightened experience through intellectual discovery. Schopenhauer (see Sheppard, 1987) too favored the notion that art “elates” by offering insight and great knowledge. He maintained that metaphysical truths are represented through art as is conveyed in his perception that through art “the universal was perceived in the particular” (p. 63). It could be said that:

... the blinding intuition one experiences in front of a great work of art is pleasurable because a great amount of knowledge about the world is encapsulated in the transaction. What we ordinarily recognize as an aesthetic experience is a cognitive rush. (Csikszentmihalyi and Robinson, 1990, p.12)

This understanding is reinforced by Young (1982):

The nervous system of man has come to link cortical thinking areas of the brain and the limbic or pleasure areas of the brain so that it become possible for man to experience cognitive pleasure from nonsensory activity such as thinking. (p.10)

Cognitive dimensions of aesthetic encounters are explained, if only partially, by the satisfaction humans experience in gaining knowledge and insight through the arts (Arnheim, 1969; Winner, 1982).

A majority of the “art specialists” within the previously cited study by Csikszentmihalyi and Robinson (1991) referenced the “intellectual” as an important dimension of the aesthetic experience. For some, it was relegated as significant but of secondary importance serving to enrich one’s experience successive to one’s initial intuitive sensory and emotional encounters, while for others it maintained a status of primary importance. In such cases, an understanding and significance of a work was sought out through cognitive analysis as a means to broaden one’s aesthetic appreciation of the qualities inherent within the work of art.

Cognition may be relegated as relevant to the composition of a diversity of aesthetic theories. Just as the didactic idealist theories of art encompass cognitive actions as essential to perceiving the “ideal within the “real”, theories based on an art work’s “emotional” “creative”, and “cultural/historical” aesthetic qualities may similarly engender cognition as instrumental in evoking and heightening aesthetic experience. Although formalist doctrines deny cognition any role within aesthetic experience, it may be acknowledged that there exist weaknesses within such an argument. It lies true that formal sensual patterns may elicit pleasurable responses void of thinking about what the source of the pleasure may be. In approaching a work with formalist expectations however, the viewer begins the act of reacting to art with a cognitive consciousness of that which is expected of the art work. The ability to allow an openness of appreciation to formal arrangements within artistic compositions demands a conscious cognitive acceptance of the validity of the formalist doctrines. Upon having realized aesthetic appreciation of a work’s formal qualities, cognition again serves as instrumental in the synthesis of after thoughts which function to bring the conception of harmonious relations within art to a true appreciation. Although aesthetic responses may exist independent of cognitive



functions, it may be acknowledged that cognition can serve, if only peripherally, to enrich and broaden one's aesthetic experiences of art.

### **HISTORICAL/CULTURAL CONTEXT**

A philosophy of art which maintains the existence of a diversity of possible aesthetic dispositions, suggests that an art work, to be actualized in its true experiential potential for the viewer, must be judged relative to its culturally and historically designated aesthetic codes. Functioning as a means to bring the art work into a historical and cultural context, cognition serves not only to infuse the work with meaning but in turn constitutes its cultural and historical significance. Goodman has been criticized for his denial of the potential influence cognitive understanding of a work's "historicity" may have on one's aesthetic experience of the work, stating that one should only interest oneself in the "symbolic structures" of a work and not its "origins" (see Mitchell, 1991). In disagreement, some art specialists (Mitchell, 1991; Wolheim, 1991; Csikszentmihalyi & Robinson, 1990) suggest that one's experiences of art may be intensified if the work is considered in relation to the modes, beliefs and traditions of the time in which it was created. A work's significance may be missed because of its period and culture specific content, and only by way of considering the work in the historical and social milieu from which it was conceived, can one revive its meaningful insight and aesthetic potential.

The relationship between art and history has been traditionally explained as a mutually reflective mirror which affords a harmony of vision between the artist and society, an understanding which can serve to enrich one's experience of an art

work. Cultural conditions work as an impetus for the production of artistic styles and dogmas. A work structured by the predispositions of historical influences may delineate requirements of art unique to the artistic biases of the time. Art then may shine as a work of genius and aesthetic quality only if understood or experienced within the historical context and artistic expectations for which it was intended. Judging a work using aesthetic predilections foreign to its creation may allow its greatness, determined by its temporally specific intention, to go unnoticed and unactualized due to assessment using unrelated historically determined criteria for its analysis. It is pointed out by Hausen (1959) that evaluations and interpretations of art are not binding from generation to generation. He suggests that there is no development of art which is perpetuated entirely independently of the economic and social conditions of the era. Culturally tainted aesthetic requirements have continuously been subject to multiple interpretations which offer an infinitely rich variety of shifts in point of view. Art then is constantly undergoing changes depending on the dominant philosophies of the time. Each generation, in judging artistic creations of the past under the guise of the current artistic views, places objectives and expectations on work which inevitably do not always coincide with past aesthetic priorities. Hausen points out that ideologies within art are generally selected and preferred according to their appropriateness to the conditions of life at the time. An empathy and understanding of the artist's historical milieu allow for an earnest evaluation of the work's aesthetic merit in relation to its intention.

Although certain principles for aesthetic responses continually reemerge as driving forces behind the production and analysis of art, temporally specific nuances inevitably engender the styles with historically specific relevance. Understanding the context from which an art work transpires allows for a fuller

breadth of sensitive responses. Bourdieu (1984) presupposes the necessity of a viewer's cognitive referencing system which serves to situate the work within its historical and cultural codes for the viewer. It's pointed out that to read an art work one must maintain some prerequisite understandings:

In a sense, one can say that the capacity to see (*voir*) is a function of the knowledge (*savoir*), or concepts, that is, the words, that are available to name visible things, and which are, as it were, programmes for perception. A work of art has meaning and interest only for someone who possesses the cultural competence, that is the code into which it is encoded. The conscious or unconscious implementation of explicit or implicit schemes of perception and appreciation which constitutes pictorial or musical culture is the hidden condition for recognizing the styles characteristic of a period, a school or an author and, more generally, for the familiarity with the internal logic of works that aesthetic enjoyment presupposes. A beholder who lacks the specific code feels lost in a chaos of sounds and rhythms, colours and lines, without rhyme or reason. (Bourdieu, 1984, p.2)

“Cultural competence” then requires the “beholder” to possess an understanding of the artistic codes and objectives relative to a work's designated reality as determined by the creators aesthetic codes. So as to comprehend the aesthetic potential of works, the viewer must not ascribed to general undefined reactions to art works, but possess understandings relative to the underlying specific concepts engendered in the creation of the art product. Given a conceptual framework of a work's stylistic purpose, a viewer is able to judge a work in earnest according to the conditional criteria of art within its intended experiential tradition (Bourdieu, 1984).

True aesthetic visual literacy and artistic appreciation then within the “historical/cultural” orientation entails experiencing works within the expectations and demands of their socio-historical artistic codes. A similar argument may be presented for actualizing an appreciation of works within cross cultural contexts. It has been established that cultural biases infringe on the viewers freedom to appreciate culturally diverse art forms. Chalmers (1978) points out that:

Our literature is full of terms suggesting that judgment is crucial to appreciation, but rarely is appreciation related to understanding the nature and meaning of art in multicultural societies. (p.18)

This understanding posits the importance of studying the culture from which an art work came so as to fully actualize an appreciation of the presented artistic forms. Chalmers (1978) cites Finkelstein (1947) contention that:

To understand art, we must know not only the individual works of art but the cultural life of which they are a part. Works of art come into being through artists’ imagination, thought and labor. Cultural life, however, is created by society. Whether an artist shows meager or full comprehension of his times, whether he accepts the dominant cultural values of his age or is aware of the contradictions within that culture, his work is shaped by that cultural life. (p.19)

Because every cultural group defines its own artistic standard as it relates to their permitted local aesthetic canons, the use, purpose and value of art work is sensitive to peculiar beliefs and traditions of the given culture (Keesing, 1958). So as to truly appreciate the nuances of an artistic work, one must view it in relation to the environment and circumstances in which it was created. By studying the culture from which an art work originates, one comes to understand the learned patterns of

“correct” behaviour, attitudes, beliefs and values” which influenced the making of the work within its specific cultural context:

Art itself is a repository of cultural meaning but the meaning in a given art form depends on the viewers’ subcultural pool of knowledge in responding to it and the subculture of art of the original artist and of those in the subcultural context in which the artist works. (McFee, 1988, pp.227-228)

One lacking knowledge of the canons and codes integral to the creation of art forms which exist external to the boundaries of one’s own cultural expectations of art and the art experience, may be denied access to a work’s aesthetic impact. Understanding diverse societal biases and attitudes towards art influences an individual’s appreciation of cross cultural art forms in that one gains a deeper understanding of how a society’s art production reflects its values and beliefs (Wasson, Stuhr & Petrovich-Mwaniki, 1990). A work seen through the codes of its own cultural perspective gives meaning to its artistic form and helps one understand the purpose for its creation. Such an understanding serves to enhance aesthetic responses to culturally unfamiliar works which might otherwise go unappreciated.

Maintaining a unicultural orientation to art under the pretense that all art may be assessed under universally applicable criterion and codes, limits the viewer’s potential for realizing the possible aesthetic beauty of cross-cultural works. It may be acknowledged that commonalities exist within global arts. All cultural groups have some understanding and sensitivity to qualitative experiences such as balance, symmetry, proportion and surface finish. Contentions supporting the universal nature of art however cannot be maintained superfluous to culturally specific aesthetic canons if works are to be appreciated in the light of their true intended

experiential possibilities. The viewer of art must possess the necessary vocabulary and literacy skills in relation to the specific art form's historical and cultural codes so as to fully actualize a work's aesthetic capacity.

### **COSMIC TENSIONAL ORDER**

Painting within the Chinese artistic tradition was preceded by calligraphy which served to set the standards for the aesthetics of oriental art. In both painting and calligraphy the artist, in mastering brush techniques and achieving meditative self-discipline awareness of nature, aimed to depict the cosmic emotional essence of objects through the expressive quality and handling of line. Subject matter for paintings were of neutral character with plants, bamboos and flowers being selected to embody the rhythms and laws of nature through calligraphic expressive brush strokes. In succeeding to convey the spiritual emotional tensions of non-animated subjects, the artist could then incorporate the same essential awareness to depict animated forms such as the human figure (Osborne. 1970).

Aesthetic principles embodied within Chinese pictorial art exemplify criteria distinct from Western theories of art. Classical Chinese paintings do not aim to reproduce the physical appearance of objects, or to express an individual's feeling or a society's ideals. The artist, moreover, through self discipline and intensive memory training strives to cultivate an empathy for universal and cosmic principles of nature. Upon actualizing personal identification with universal "life tensions" by way of study and meditation, the artist then aims to reflect the felt harmony of cosmic tensions through the medium of art. Painting penetrates and illuminates the cosmic interdependencies of forms in nature and universal order. The general

distinguishing characteristics of Chinese art are described by Osborne (1970) in the following statement:

Painting as an activity which at once brings the artist into unity with and makes manifest the cosmic principle of Tao lies at the root of Chinese thinking about art, whether it is described as the cultivation of character, the expression of personality, or the search for the essence of things. It is essentially a non-naturalistic conception of art. The Chinese painter was not concerned, except incidentally to the pursuit of other aims, to “imitate” the appearances of things or to represent things ideally as he would like them to be or as they “ought” to be or even to reveal some metaphysical reality behind the appearances of things. The cultivation and practice of painting were thought of as a ritualistic activity creating an embodiment of the cosmic force of order which infuses all reality, human society, and the individual personality. (pp. 105-106)

The Taoist Philosophy, which serves as a base for Chinese pictorial traditions, emphasizes the importance of achieving intellectual and spiritual harmony with nature through disciplined study and meditation. Great works of art succeed in conveying the essence of nature's rhythms, relegating the subject as unimportant over the portrayal of the vital energies which connect the organic and the inorganic in nature.

Osborne (1970) points out the six canons which exist within the aesthetics of Chinese pictorial art. The first being the *Ch'i yun sheng tung*. *Ch'i* standing for “Spirit resonance which brings life movement” (p.110), *yun* suggesting “sympathetic vibration” (p. 111), and *sheng tung* being “life movement” or “life rhythm” (p. 116). *Ch'i* represents the vital force which influences all the animate

and inanimate in nature. Traditional Chinese philosophies maintain that the inanimate elements of the earth such as rocks and plants maintain equal importance to that of animate beings such as man—both play a vital role in the balancing of cosmic energies. The *Ch'i* also reflects man's personality as it exists in accordance with the ordering principle of the "life spirit". An individual must nurture righteous qualities of the mind so as to be a strong and harmonious element in the energy streams of universal existence.

*Ch'i yun* posits an identification between spiritual rhythms of the universe and their existing energies within the individual and the objects contemplated. The artist maintains a conscious awareness of universal energies so that in the act of painting he/she succeeds in unconsciously capturing the underlying rhythms of nature. All diversions are removed if one is to lose oneself within the object and render its vital forces visible. Osborne (1970) conveys the workings of this process in the following passage:

The demand is for complete concentration upon the object with elimination of all distractions until the painter becomes, as it were identified with his object. Only when the conception is fully formed in the mind does the painter begin to give expression to it. (p.112)

For the artist to succeed in "identifying" with the subject, complete mastery of technique is required. Set free of technical concerns, the artist is able to prepare through concentration and meditation to achieve through art a depiction of nature's energies. In coming to understand the forces underlying the objects, their essence can then be effortlessly rendered through a "spontaneous naturalness" of depiction which is highly valued in Chinese art. The ease of conveying the objects essence is thought to be derived from the artist achieving enlightenment through intense



meditation of the life forces.

The *sheng tung* of the first aesthetic canon, translated as “life movement”, posits the importance of capturing within the artistic rendering of an object its vital growth energy and rhythm. This is accomplished by way of the expressive calligraphic quality of the line produced through the artists manipulation of the brush.

The second canon, *Ki fa yung pe*, or “Bone structure, a technique of the brush” (Osborne, 1970, p. 117), embodies the mediation of the essential structures of a form revealed visible through brush strokes. The manipulation of expressive line is intended to convey the strength of the elements within the depicted composition. The artist’s rendering of a bamboo depicts its strength and sturdiness through the use of calligraphic lines which engender such an effect. Calligraphic brushstrokes set the foundation, not for the anatomical structure of the object depicted, but for the embodiment of the characteristic qualities which empower the “nature” of the form.

The third canon termed *Ying we hsiang hsing* is translated as “Reflecting the object, which means (drawing) its forms” (Osborne, 1970, p.118). Rather than maintaining a concern for depicting an object’s formal resemblance, the Chinese artist aims at conveying the “idea” of a form through suggesting its “essence” and capturing its “mass and shape”. Form may be conveyed simply through one or two powerfully expressive lines. Verisimilitude in Chinese art is thought to detract from the spirituality and beauty of brush work as it should capture the “idea” and cosmic forces of nature and not superficial physical resemblances. The successful depiction of the “life energy” through the use of but one or two lines allows the viewer to fill in the “idea” resonating from the limited but expressive depiction. The

artist in attempting to represent reality is striving moreover to capture physiognomic qualities which enliven the representation with the characteristic nature of the form(s) rendered rather than reproducing correct proportional depictions:

The Chinese were concerned with what are now called the 'physiognomic properties' of things or rather with the class of physiognomic properties which are most indicative of the individual and the type—the featheriness of trees, the spikiness of reeds, the characteristic placing and posture of vegetation in landscape, the textures and conformation of rock formations, the hairiness of animals, lightness of birds and butterflies; with expressive poise or gesture, the attitude of deprecation, the dignity of an eagle or an emperor—all those qualities of things for which no exact words exist and which are for the reason sometimes loosely said to express things. Chinese painting sought to suggest rather than 'imitate'. But except insofar as it conveys physiognomic qualities Chinese painting was relatively uninterested in external appearances and deprecated the reproduction of appearances as an end in itself. (Osborne, 1970, p. 122)

The aim of Chinese art was not mimetic in order to create illusionistic, realistically rendered forms, but to suggest its aesthetic underlying physiognomic character.

The fourth canon entitled *Sui lei fu ts'ai* involves color use within pictorial art. In classical Chinese painting color is used more for its symbolic quality to convey mood than for representing faithfully accurate color reproductions of the referent. Monochromatic color schemes being frequently employed with an understanding that ink can render all five colors visible by conveying atmospheric nuances through value changes (Osborne, 1970).

The fifth canon, *Ching ting wei chih* refers to the organization and arrangement

of elements within a composition (Osborne, 1970). This principle of compositional arrangements within Chinese pictorial works involves placing objects within a picture plane so as to support the natural tensional relationships of cosmic energies between the depicted forms. Every element of the composition contributing to the fostering and rendering of an emotional mood for the viewer to experience, and grouping and balancing in art has to do with reflecting psychological tensions through simple and economical manipulation of design elements.

The sixth and final canon, *Chuan mo i Hsieh*, involves copying and reproducing exemplary models created by master artists. Although Chinese painting engenders the rendering of an artists self through his/her personally depicted affinity to the natural energies of being, it is considered important for artists to also learn by copying past masters. Through copying great works with a degree of accuracy the artist is able to gain an insight into the “life principles” as felt by other masters and to sustain the insight of great accomplishments.

In summary, the underlying characteristics of classical Chinese aesthetics exist in the embodiment of universal tensions within art. The stability of existence is illuminated through the depiction of spiritual tensions which enliven each object and being with its own physiognomy and energy in relation to its existence within a universal order of things.

### **THE QUALITY OF EXPERIENCE: JUSTIFYING THE AESTHETICS OF POPULAR ART**

Dewey (1934), although not attempting a clear definitive explanation of what is engendered within aesthetic experiences, suggests a view which acknowledges that

the quality of experience evoked by an art work serves to determine its aesthetic merit. Ultimately, he points out that the function of art is that it be instrumental in actualizing experiences within the viewer in such a way as to enrich and integrate the diversity of life's encounters. Shusterman (1992) cites Dewey's declaration of such a belief:

The work-song sung in the harvest fields not only provides the harvesters with a satisfying aesthetic experience, but its zest carries over into their work, invigorating and enhancing it and instilling a spirit of solidarity that lingers long after the song and work are finished. The same wide-ranging instrumentality can be found in works of high art. They are not simply a refined set of instruments for generating a specialized aesthetic experience. They work to modify and sharpen perception and communication; they energize and inspire because aesthetic experience is always spilling over and getting integrated into our other activities, enhancing and deepening them . . . Art thus 'keeps alive the power to experience the common world in its fullness' and renders the world and our presence in it more meaningful and tolerable through the introduction of some 'satisfying sense of unity' in its experience. (p.10)

Art, as accorded by Dewey (1934), generates an awareness which essentially refines and embellishes an individual's worldly existence. He takes a stance which contrasts with those of traditional aesthetic theories in that when referring to artistic sources of heightened aesthetic experiences he acknowledges the aesthetic potential of both popular and "high" art alike. This conception of popular art as a valuable aesthetic mode capable of enriching life differs greatly from the "art for art's sake" doctrines advocated by alternate "elitist" streams of aesthetic thought. Art within

such doctrines is considered separate from real life because it involves educated and socially conditioned insights to the “disinterested” and “higher” philosophical possibilities of the art experience which common individuals are not expected to actualize (Kant, 1984; Bourdieu, 1984). Such philosophies maintain that art exists in isolation of reality in that it exudes understandings beyond those derived from common experience. Dewey opposes the belief that aesthetic experience may exist in isolation, and suggests moreover that it engenders important and influential life enriching effects. Art is instrumental in the life process, and aesthetic experience exists as a natural experiential need of all humans; it serves to vitalize existence by integrating a variety of insights into ordinary daily life (Dewey, 1934). Dewey does not separate and specify unique strands of experience as ultimate to aesthetics, but instead acknowledges its diverse nature, and maintains that art essentially perform an integral life enhancing function for all social classes. Popular art elicits exciting pleasurable experiences which serve to elate the common individual, and although these responses may be based less on academic “know how”, and more on personal identities and ideologies, they nonetheless evoke the heightened state of pleasure associated with aesthetics.

Shusterman (1992), like Dewey, acknowledges the aesthetic possibilities of popular art and suggests that traditional conceptions of art exist as idealized theories which deny the potential benefits to be maintained through popular designs of art. He challenges the differentiation between elite art and the art of popular culture by considering the similarity of experience which may be engendered from both “high” and “low” forms of art. It is suggested that in coming to appreciate the aesthetic possibilities of the so called “low art” or art of popular culture one acknowledges as important the aesthetic experiences of the masses. Traditionally, popular art has

been relegated as an inferior form of art (Fry, 1990; Collingwood, 1984; Bourdieu, 1984). In effect, Shusterman (1992) provides an argument which effects a denunciation of such a stand owing to the aesthetic pleasure afforded by so much of popular art. He points out that to deny the value of popular art experiences is to deny the legitimacy of enjoyment of popular art forms inspired in a large proportion of the population.

In an enumeration of charges against popular art, Shusterman (1992) exposes weaknesses in the arguments posed by critics. Against the contention that popular art produces a negative effect on society by reducing the quality of civilization and increasing cognitive lethargy of the masses, he posits that such beliefs exist unsupported by empirical proof. The fact of the matter being that according to statistical data, the cultural interest of the general public has risen with the growth and development of mass-media and popular art (Shusterman, 1992). Popular art, by allowing more people access to artistic experiences, increases the population's awareness of art, and thus serves as a fulcrum from which to base discussions and develop understandings about its experiential possibilities. In response to the conviction that mass media art will lead the public to a state of totalitarianism, Shusterman cites Gans' opinion that "media are merely responsive to public opinion proving at most 'the reinforcement of existing social trends', rather than shaping or transforming them" (p.176). Art of mass culture has similarly received criticism for its tendency to "sell out" to popular commercial trends (Shusterman, 1992). This contention, however, loses credibility in that like popular art, fine art is consistently influenced by the modes and artistic fashions of the time, and irregardless of such influences, works of aesthetic excellence have continued to be actualized within the stylistic trends of the epoch. It has been suggested that

popular art denies potential for stimulating intellectual thought. Its effortlessness “easily captivates those of us who are too weary and often beaten to seek what is challenging” (Shusterman, 1992, p.183). The “effortless passivity” of popular art is thought to explain not only its wide appeal but its failure to truly satisfy an experience of heightened aesthetic involvement. Shusterman posits that it would be false to relegate mindless involvement as integral to all experiencing of popular art, and audiences of mass culture cannot legitimately be labeled as incapable of taking a critical attitude toward the presentation and quality of popular art. Concomitantly, popular art, like “high” art, does not always expect of the viewer intellectual efforts for the actualization of heightened aesthetic experiences. Independent perceptual responses may compel aesthetic appreciation without vigorous and active cognitive involvement. One may derive pleasure in both popular and “high” art by way of the beautifully discriminating arrangements of formal elements within design. Because the average individual does not possess the theoretical knowledge to discuss the redeeming qualities or weaknesses of compositional design, is not to say that he/she does not embody perceptual apparatus which can find pleasure within sensitive arrangements of visual popular art products.

The final argument to be presented which suggests the illegitimacy of popular art forms derives its point of force from a view posited by Bourdieu (1984). Bourdieu clearly states that art should not maintain a role subservient to function. Art ideally within traditional “elitist” aesthetic doctrines makes a break with ordinary existence and through form and style excites aesthetic responses. Shusterman (1992) argues against such an ideology of art by pointing out the interrelationships which inevitably exist between art and life. He reviews Dewey’s understanding which stipulates that all art, even that of formalist traditions, serves some kind of

function, be it simply that it function to embellish. Art allows for a richer more satisfying existence, and its qualitative evaluation is dependent on the quality of experience the work may afford. Dewey (see Shusterman, 1992) points out that the value and character of an art experience may vary from person to person depending on the individuals diversity of preparation or conditioned training. According to Dewey, however, aesthetic standards which maintain an elitist prioritization of criteria alienate the mass population from cultivating benefits derived through the appreciation of art. Shusterman (1992) cites Dewey's contention on the alienating force of "high" art within popular culture:

Identification of art with the high tradition of fine art can thus serve an oppressive socio-cultural elite seeking to assert and bolster its class superiority by making sure that art (at least in its canonized modes of appreciation) will remain beyond the taste and reach of the common man, at once marking and reinforcing his general sense of inferiority. (p.19)

"High art" philosophies prove too esoteric and intellectually demanding for comprehension by the common individual. Such elitist attitudes on art deny the general populace the experiential benefits which Dewey identifies as a derivative of the art experience. Dewey acknowledges art's power to embellish the quality of life for both the common and cultured individual and deems as essentially important the aesthetic pleasure realized within the art experience regardless of socio-cultural differences. He finds shortcomings in adhering to a culturally elitist concept of art in that it not only denies the legitimacy of the mass public's aesthetic experience, but it serves to restrict the range of possible aesthetic experiences of the culturally elevated (Shusterman, 1992). The importance of denying distinctions between high and commercial or industrial aesthetics is posited in that both may afford aesthetic



experiential rewards. “High” art, although it may set valid and valuable standards of insight, should not presuppose that its erudite demands on artistic experience cannot be expanded to encompass entertainment and popular cultural forms of art as similarly valuable and legitimate to the art experience. It can be acknowledged that mass art maintains the capacity to foster intellectually as well as perceptually inspiring responses within the audience (Shusterman, 1992).

Mass media products may exhibit poorly designed superficially conveyed popular imagery, but again the same can be posited about poor quality art derived from the trends set by the art world. Recognizable subtle complexities which contribute to popular art’s aesthetic potential in enriching one’s experience cannot be denied of the “best” of the mass produced. Like high art, popular art may possess diverse aesthetic potential depending on the type of encounters it effects. Not all popular art promotes heightened aesthetic experiences, just as not all fine art deems aesthetic recognition. Judgements and standards may be made by the quality of experience afforded based on the level of heightened and/or vivified experience engendered through the art work.

## **POSTMODERNISM**

Postmodern theories break with modernist beliefs in that they do not identify ultimate truths, but support the search for the diversity of possibilities within experience. Consumer society has made available to individuals a legitimate variety of encounters which has served to obliterate the homogeneity of experience previously ascribed because of socioeconomic stigmatizations (Jameson, 1991). The postmodern age, presents the coexistence of a wide range of experiential

possibilities which serves to liberate and relax the restrictions effected by modernist aesthetic theories (Lyotard, 1984). As Foster (1983) points out:

... the postmodernist strategy becomes clear: to deconstruct modernism not in order to seal it in its own image but in order to open it, to rewrite it; to open its closed systems to the "heterogeneity of texts" (Crimp), to rewrite its universal techniques in terms of "synthetic contradictions" (Frampton)—in short, to challenge its master narratives with the "discourse of others" (Owens). (p.xi)

Postmodern strategies allow for a realm of translations which do not attempt to constitute a single reality, as was the case within modernist ideologies. Art within postmodernist theories denies autonomous presynthesized dogmas, allowing moreover for an awareness of a realm of translations from which one may synthesize an understanding of a heterogeneous collage of possibilities. The art experience does not emerge from a stable core of experience but moreover is derived from the idiosyncratic possibilities within experience, and one's perception of a situation or object is influenced by a host of vocabularies deduced from the multidimensionality of possible influences (Shusterman, 1992). Postmodernism attempts to illuminate the diversity of "private languages" (Foster, 1983) which infiltrate our existence and serve to perpetuate an awareness of alternate personal possible affiliations.

Identifying a plurality of beliefs does not suggest that art present an eclectic arrangement of images for the sake of composing nostalgic memorabilia, but instead suggests that art aims to facilitate critical discourse by involving the viewer in a process of "ana-lysing, ana-mnesing, of reflecting" (Jencks, 1987, p.7). The complex components of aesthetic experience are constituted by countless variables

which do not lend themselves to reduced empirical prescriptions. Because of a lack of conventional unity within imagery, the viewer becomes involved in a process of assimilation and assessment of the various cultural and social codes which may be simulated. The postmodern does not fix a new language of experience but suggests that visual artistic codes engender an awareness of new unlimiting modes which serve to extend the viewers experiential reach. The reorganization of existing possibilities allow one to acknowledge that reality is composed of a multiplicity of versions which become evident within the juxtaposition of possible historical and social dialects.

Newman (1986) introduces postmodernist philosophies by presenting, through historical assessment, the art movements which led the way to the emancipatory ethics of postmodernist philosophy. The shifts in philosophical priorities within art were dependent largely on critical reaction to the structures of existing art theories. Minimal art, an important component of modern art theory, maintained a focus on the purity of disinterested experience dependent on the internal structuring of the art object itself. Reactions to the socially detached theories of Minimal art served as an impetus for the birth of Pop art concepts. Pop art engaged objects from mass culture in place of purely formal visual elements of pictorial design so as to question the theoretical framework of the Minimal art movement. Products of industrialization and contemporary consumptive society were displayed as “high art” emblems mockingly demanding pure formal appreciation. The Pop art movement began a shift in philosophy from the purely perceptual to the essentially conceptual in that it began to allude to art’s potential to question the status quo. This critical discourse was later fully realized by way of conceptual art theories which took on the precedent of eliciting conscious membership to critical

ideological positions with respect to questionable accepted societal norms. Conceptual art ultimately aimed to elicit insight into the realities of class politics by way of focusing a critical eye on societal ideological issues. It was this narrowly designated autonomy of perception which the postmodernist movement sought to dispel within its new doctrines of aesthetics that essentially involved conceptual emancipation. Postmodernist movements go beyond the focused strategies of conceptual art in order to engender an awareness of the fragmented possibilities within the divergent realms of human experience (Newman, 1986).

A selected number of lexical terms derived from the “discourse of postmodernism” and presented by Newman (1986) will be reviewed in an attempt to illuminate the essential character of Postmodernist art. The first of these, “the transavantgarde” alludes to the denial of art history in being important as a linear development of autonomous historical movements. Postmodernist philosophies essentially acknowledge the coexistence of multiple artistic possibilities portrayed within a fragmented totality. Newman cites Olivia’s image of the state of “discontinuity” within postmodernist doctrines:

The initial precept is that of art as the production of a catastrophe, a discontinuity that destroys the tectonic balance of language to favor a precipitation into the subject of the ‘imaginario’, neither as a nostalgic return, nor a reflex, but a flowing that drags inside itself the sedimentation of many things which exceed a simple return to the private and the symbolic. (p.38)

Postmodernist art involves the portrayal of portions of reality not through a conventional linkage of myopic themes engendered within a single consciousness, but through an amalgamation of possibilities beyond the conventions of singular

private totalities. The essence of “transavantgardism” lies in the fact that postmodern art exemplifies “subjective fragmentations”. One is continually propelled to aspire to and recognize the multiple vocabularies available to experience (Newman, 1986). Postmodern art does not take an aggressive position in denying all single autonomous positions, but instead appreciates the existence of “dispositions different from its own” (Jencks, 1986). Much of the content of postmodern art recycles past attitudes and philosophical agendas so as to actualize new possibilities within new contexts and thus actualize benefits by way of acknowledging the diversity of preexisting and possible vocabularies.

A second lexical category outlined by Newman (1986)—“the death of the author”—involves negating the role of the artist as instrumental in infusing a work with intentional nuance. The viewer looks not at what the author intended but at the work as an autotelic self sufficient entity which may actualize meaning only within a viewing consciousness. Intentional structures presented by the artist cannot in themselves possess significance but rely on “psychoanalytic formations” available within the viewer to invest them with contextual significance. The viewer absorbs the inscriptions presented and brings them together so as to engender possible visions and understandings within the experience. Newman cites Barthes in presenting this principle of postmodernism:

We know now that a text is not a line of words releasing a single “theological” meaning (the “message” of the Author-God) but a multidimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash; and the reader is the space on which all the quotations that make up a writing are inscribed without any of them being lost; a text’s unity lies not in its origin but in its destination. (pp. 38-39)

An art work attains meaning only by way of analysis and synthesis within an audience's conscious effort in perceiving the complexity of possibilities within its significance. By denying the author a position and critical stance, postmodernism diffuses the possibility of theoretical "polarizations" which would serve to inhibit the actualization of an emancipated "collectivity" of perceptions (Newman, 1986).

The "collectivity" of perceptions is frequently conveyed within postmodernist theories through the use of "allegory". Allegory serves the purpose of illuminating a fragmentation and diversity of meanings through a works presented characteristics. It is implemented as a medium to liberate, reveal and deconstruct autonomy of translations and to initiate previously inhibited association. Unlike modernist art, which supposes that art ultimately convey "symbolic" metaphorical connotations, postmodernist art aims at conveying allegorical illusions which do not supply a singular decided association, but reveal enigmatic labyrinths of possible references. The associations are void of ultimate truths in that they are not transparent, but through allegorical associations one "deciphers" multiple constituted positions and meanings which the viewer then enters into his/her possible cognitive repertoire (Newman, 1986).

In addition to assemblages of allegorical connotations, postmodernist art frequently presents elements of "fascination and the uncanny" through which the viewer both "collects" and "consumes" symbolist reveries. The audience escapes into a world of intangible and foreign possibilities which evade any unifying sense of order. Through the chaotic possibilities conveyed in the fragmentation of imagery and its juxtaposition, the viewer actualizes "sudden revelations" by way of the "uncanny" (Newman, 1986).

"Bricolage", an alternate term cited as integral to the postmodernist lexicon by

Newman, verifies the importance of combining fragments within artistic imagery as has been postulated by the postmodernist use of allegory, the fantastical and transavantgardism. This prescription within contemporary art is not isolated to concepts and abstract ideological possibilities, but also presents itself in the technical practice of assembling actual fragments of varied objects within single artistic works. By taking from a "stock of elements" which previously existed in alternate contexts, the artist brings together a complex diversity of "earlier ends" to signify indeterminate new possibilities. Segmented wholes are placed within a previously incompatible milieu of varied fragments so as to convey a multilingual set of alternatives within artistic interpretation. Bricolage conveys the existence of "irreducible differences" which exist within the "decentered" works of the postmodernist movements.

In an attempt to create cognitive unity of new information on the pretext of cultural codes, one generally "simulates" personal justifications for experienced phenomena. Postmodernist theories suggest that one go outside of his/her personal predilections and encyclopedic knowledge in order to "simulate" an awareness of multiple existing possibilities. There exists no "real", therefore all possibilities prevail as alternatives which ultimately engender a "simulated" "real". Newman points out that "there never was an authentic truth or origin, that these are nostalgic constructions" (p.47), and thus supports the postmodernist belief which identifies the illegitimacy of copying the "real".

Characteristically, postmodernist works exemplify a wide range of traditions which convey contrast and discontinuity so as to personify the heterogeneity of the possibilities within our pluralist societies. By way of "parody" postmodernist works divulge the futility of cynicism owing to the indiscriminate lack of

superiority within all possibilities (Newman, 1986). In place of choosing between alternatives, postmodernism allows for a collage of alternatives and thus comes to accept the authenticity of an existing pluralism (Harvey, 1990). Art works do not propose a unified representation of the world but instead present a perpetually changing selection of options which strip away illusionary representations of a coherent, “accurate” picture of existence. A work’s beauty and aesthetic potential lies in the lucidity of insight imposed on the viewer to the indiscriminate validity of pluralistic alternatives. Art breaks down barriers within techno, mass, historical and/or sociological dialects and thus demonstrates the authenticity of all possible “otherness” (Harvey, 1990).

### **SUMMARY**

The objective of this chapter has been to present the diversity of philosophical attitudes which have ultimately served to delineate a conceptual bases from which one may gain insight to the character of aesthetic responses. The theoretical frameworks which provide insight to the experiential possibilities of art remain as dynamic and diversified as do art works themselves. Because art works remain infinitely varied and interpretations of art are similarly diverse, it may be posited that the only norm or criteria amongst the diversity of interpretations lies in that all aesthetic experience involves a unique response of heightened awareness. It is the quality of experience evoked, rather than the characteristics within the art piece which identify aesthetic responses. The sources of visual experience within the art piece, however, are the raw material from which one draws on so as to synthesize a reaction to the visual stimuli presented. Aesthetic traditions have enjoyed a diverse



array of alternative theoretical constructs from which to focus when discerning aesthetic evaluation of a work. A detailed itinerary of aesthetic theories have presently been reviewed not so as to limit aesthetic possibilities to the theoretical systems presented but so as to illuminate the complex realm of positions which may be ardently adhered to within aesthetic understanding. Theorists have sought absolute autotelic definitions which by way of a purity of dogma, serve as a basis for their aesthetic beliefs engendered from within their philosophical biases. Through problematizing and questioning the relevancy of interpretations, theorists come to realize the value of conceptual possibilities and the need for further retheorizing so as to actualize base understandings of yet unvoiced conceptual possibilities which explain actualized aesthetic experiences. Aesthetic ideologies have remained in a state of flux, each belief system maintaining only a temporally limited gestational period before being overridden by a new theoretical replacement considered to be superior by its advocates. It becomes evident, consequently, that the divergent aesthetic possibilities cannot be stratified into hierarchical systems of prioritization, but must be reconciled as phenomena of a complex and varied index of possibilities. The art experience may not be understood within the limitations of a single definition, but exists as a rich body of experiential possibilities. If different theoretical models generate different ways of defining aesthetics and knowing aesthetics, then it should be clear that there are no absolutes within aesthetic understandings. Aesthetic interpretations then may be understood as relativistic rather than foundational in nature in that an art work must be enjoyed from the subjective position of the viewers' contextually bound vocabularies and experiences.

In Chapter Three, Parsons' (1987) research which identifies a stage theory of

aesthetic development, will be critically analyzed for its biased research orientation that engenders conceptually limiting requirements for aesthetic education programs. By delineating aesthetic developmental understanding as limited within a sequential and specific order of concept presentation, Parsons restricts the breadth of aesthetic understandings individuals may realize.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **A CRITICAL EXAMINATION OF A METHODOLOGICALLY FRAMED THEORY OF AESTHETIC DEVELOPMENT**

#### **CHAPTER OVERVIEW**

Parsons (1987) stage theory of aesthetic development offers a framework from which to appropriate pedagogical programs relative to students' conceptual abilities and sequentially defined predispositions. Although Parsons' research illuminates normative aesthetic developmental understandings as they exist within Western societies, the generalizability of his stage theory will be questioned on the grounds that the methodology employed by the researcher does not check for socio-cultural actants which function to shape behaviour. Studies (Machotka, 1966; Moore, 1973; Gardner, Winner & Kircher, 1975; Rosenstiel, Morisen, Silverman & Gardner, 1978) which offer findings that support Parsons' theory will similarly be reviewed and considered in relation to the bias inherent in their ideological orientations which serve to limit the depth and breadth of their inquiries, findings and conclusions. A brief outline of the research procedures used in the studies cited will be provided which will engender a description of the retrieved data, the researchers' analyses and the conclusions drawn from the data obtained. Such information will facilitate a critical analysis of the conclusions made by the researchers. The perspective to be maintained in evaluating the aforementioned studies acknowledges the possibility of behavioural norms within societies existing as phenomena shaped through the power of dominant cultural discourses. The first section of this chapter will qualify the nature of the critical orientation taken within

the present inquiry, while the subsequent and final segment of this chapter will employ the approach described in an analysis of Parsons' stage theory and of other related studies (Machotka, 1966; Moore, 1973; Gardner, Winner & Kircher, 1975; Rosenstiel, Morisen, Silverman & Gardner, 1978).

### **IDENTIFYING AND JUSTIFYING: THE PROPOSED CRITICAL PERSPECTIVE**

Educational research has typically sought to uncover data which exists unproblematic by any indice to subjectivity. As Eisner (1992) points out:

Objectivity is one of the most cherished ideals of the educational research community. In fact, it is so important that if our work is accused of being subjective, its status as a source of knowledge sinks slowly into the horizon like a setting sun. (p.9)

Fostering empirically based data to guide educational practices, has ultimately been considered an objective link and source for optimizing the effectiveness of pedagogical methodologies. Of late, however, the epistemological value of educational practices based on absolutist or foundationalist regulatory systems of knowledge have come into question (Eisner, 1992; Guba, 1992; Von Glassersfeld, 1989). Guba (1992) points out "that relativism—particularly ontological relativism that postulates multiple socially constructed realities rather than an objective reality—is now the favored position of many philosophers of science" (p.18). Objectivist scientific knowledge claims within educational research are generally being considered in regards to the dependent nature of much of their designated findings. Concepts such as "better" and "improved" are being qualified as relative

to their applicability within a given context and not as universals which indiscriminantly foster optimum conditions for all possible participants. This current trend within educational philosophy recognizes that one's perception of a situation or object is inevitably influenced by a host of vocabularies deduced from the multidimensionality of possible influences (education, culture, experiences, etc.).

Research methodologies which strive to identify generic trends for the purpose of efficient and practical transcription of data into "easy to use and apply" educational methodologies are thus rendered insensitive to the reality of individual differences and needs which may exist in school populations. In an attempt to uncover generalizable "rules" which serve to optimize learning conditions for a general body of students, researchers have traditionally attempted to format seemingly "neutral" research programs. Cherryholmes (1993), however, points out the futility of such an objective in that research methodologies are not produced within a vacuum; they depend on the belief systems and ideological orientations of the researcher to stimulate and identify areas of needed study and to outline methods for realizing the researchers goals. The questions asked and orientations taken serve to "bias" research from the onset and to divulge information and patterns which, while illuminating important factors dealing with the interests and goals of the researcher, may serve to ignore the influence of possible variables which would offer further insight to the subjective and relative nature of the research findings.

The remainder of this chapter aims to identify such oversights within research programs relating to aesthetic development. The methodological weaknesses of studies which support the existence of age related developmental responses in students aesthetic understanding will be reviewed by way of a critical approach to

research which identifies the potential for socio-cultural contexts to enforce and shape behavioural norms. Although a number of studies will be identified and assessed, the primary focus will engender a criticism of Parsons' stage theory of aesthetic development as it offers conclusions which identify aesthetic understanding as limited by developmentally determined behavioural capabilities in students. Behavioural findings, it will be pointed out, cannot be attributed to the organicity of biologically determined variables in individuals, as is suggested in Parsons' (1987) work on aesthetics, until the effect of dominant cultural influences have been analyzed and ruled out. Therefore, in not establishing an analysis of the cultural context which might enhance the possibility of certain behaviours existing over that of others, Parsons' argument, which posits developmental phenomena as absolute, identifies and infers claims that supersede the data obtained.

Hammersley (1992) points out that conventional ethnography (similar to the methodology utilized by Parsons) typically offers theoretical findings which do not take into consideration implicit institutional effects on observed behaviours. He suggests that:

. . . such research neglects the constraints operating on the people studied, who are portrayed as simply exercising their freedom. This criticism has two aspects. One is that people's understandings of the world are taken at face value rather than their distortion by ideology being recognized. Another is that there is a failure to identify the macro-social structural determinants of people's behaviour. Associated with this, it is claimed, is a neglect of social conflict and contradictions, and of power differences. In short, it is argued that simply to describe people's behaviour as if it were the product of a freely expressed culture is systematically to misrepresent that

behaviour. (pp.99-100)

It will be pointed out that the research studies to be reviewed take subject responses at “face value”; they do not attempt to identify socially determined canons and expectations as potential catalysts in shaping consistency within subject responses. Behavioural conventions which might be mediated through conformity to the status quo should be realized as such and tested for before being taken as exemplars of fundamental patterns inherent to normative biological development. The researchers furnish evidence and support arguments based on the data gathered which validate the inferences and conclusions made. The probing techniques and specific rhetorical questions posed, however, disclose value based programs of inquiry which regulate and bias the findings in relation to the epistemological orientation of the researcher(s). The hypothetically “objective” and “neutral” methodological programs ordered by the researcher(s) will be critically analyzed in order to identify how researcher values permeate the forms of inquiry and effect the conclusions drawn. Ultimately, a stage theory of aesthetic development, as posited by Parsons, will be questioned in relation to the controlled and limited focus the employed process of inquiry facilitates.

## **QUALITATIVE STUDIES AND AESTHETIC DEVELOPMENT**

In the studies to be reviewed (Machotka, 1966; Moore, 1973; Gardner, Winner & Kircher, 1975; Rosenstiel, Morisen, Silverman & Gardner, 1978; Parsons, 1987), data were collected through qualitative research designs. This method was appropriated by the fact that most of the skills used in art perception do not lend themselves to directly observable behaviour; if one is to learn what goes on in the

mind of an individual, one must rely on their direct testimony for such information. Through listening carefully and systematically to how individuals reacted and responded to paintings, the researchers were able to acquire insights and discover meanings relayed by the subjects through the verbalization of their aesthetic experience in relation to the art work presented.

Parsons (1987), in his book How We Understand Art, proposes five stages of cognitive aesthetic development which delineate insights people have at various stages of aesthetic understanding. Through a qualitative method of data collection, five distinct patterns used by the subjects to respond to art are discerned by the researcher. He points out that people react differently to paintings because of varied expectations regarding what paintings should be. The reasoning involved in analyzing the merit of art works is identified as undergoing expansion and changes in focus as a child gains new abilities and insights to the experiential possibilities of art works. The ways people understand art is sequentially manifest in a certain order by Parsons, consequently, the stages are hierarchical, sequential and continuous: Stage one comes before stage two and stage two comes before stage three and so on from lower to higher capacities. Almost all preschool children use stage one concepts, almost all elementary school children use stage two ideas, and some, but not all, adolescents use stage three concepts. Developing stage four and five aesthetic constructs was not found to be a spontaneous consequence of age. These more advanced stages are perceived to be attained only through experience and conscious interaction with the possibilities of visual art (Parsons, 1987).

Stage one, as Parsons (1987) describes it, was usually found in subjects during their preschool years, with these individuals generally exhibiting an attraction for both abstract or realist works. A strong attraction to color was



prevalent at this stage and respondents enjoyed merely enumerating the objects they individually viewed within an art work. Individuals at stage one were also identified as being aware of only one point of view—their own— and their responses to art seemed to take on more of a “biological than social character”.

During their elementary school years, the subjects generally demonstrated stage two responses to art works by conveying an understanding that art works realistically and “ideally” represented objects or scenes. There was no insight into the artists’ motives or intent, excepting the artist’s desire to demonstrate technical skill in reproducing a painting which was faithful to its referent. At this stage, it is posited that individuals required an understanding of what a painting was about so as to enjoy viewing a work and similarly levied approval of the moral quality of the subject matter in order to classify the work as “good art”.

By stage three, which usually surfaced in individuals during their high school years, realism was no longer a prerequisite for enjoying art. Abstractions were accepted in that they extended the work’s expressive capacity. Individuals at this stage had not yet grasped the expressive potential of strictly formal qualities in art works and as yet there was no clear acceptance of totally non-objective art. Expression and universal meaning conveyed in the art work was of paramount importance, and abstraction and less than “ideal” subject matter merited worthy appraisals if these qualities served to further the expressive intent of the art piece. A judgment at this stage was based on intuitive or subjective feelings which required of the art work, expressively conveyed meaning relative to humanity and society itself.

In stage four, it was judged that the subjects no longer relied on intuitive feeling to understand and evaluate the works of art, and that viewing paintings became an

intellectual exercise in which newly received information is constantly checked against previous knowledge. The subject's experience of viewing a painting is an objective one in which "interpretation becomes the attempt to relate together different views of a painting and to make a whole of its various elements" (Parsons, 1987, p.8). Hence, one continually revises an understanding of a work of art as significant aspects of the work are brought to light. At stage four, the viewer constructs a framework for understanding art works that is based on an objective analysis of style, technique, historical and social issues of the art world. Evaluation is no longer personal and subjective but becomes "intersubjective" or "intertextual".

At stage five, it was identified that the subjects evaluation of an art work became personal. For example, the individual takes on the authority to question the ideals of the artistic community and does not require validation of opinions to maintain a point of view. Understanding artistic tradition serves to give one the authority to transcend the dictates of society and make personal judgments. Through articulating one's reading of art works, a dialogue is opened that may serve to reinterpret the situation, but the final analysis, at this stage, involves a subjective interpretation of the reasoning employed in analyzing works of art. "The essence of stage five is the seeking of reasons for interpretations " (Parsons, 1987, p.150-151).

Through this study, Parsons (1987) aims to identify the basis of a theory of aesthetic stage development which parallels Kohlberg's and Piaget's structural theories of moral and cognitive development respectively. Kohlberg's and Piaget's stage developmental theories are considered universal and totalizing in scope because of their ahistorical and decontextualized structural formations, it is questionable, however, whether Parsons' could similarly be considered so. For

example, in looking at the cross-cultural requirements of art, it is clear that realism (a stage two requirement of art) is not an inherent criterion for all peoples. The Euro-American regard for realism in art is a Western cultural ideal which is not maintained by all world cultures: for instance, two such cultural groups, within Canada, being the Haida and the Inuit. Although the art of these two groups shows the presence of schematic representational qualities, it does not, at any point of its development, reach the stage of photographic-like realism. Since advancement in aesthetic understanding, according to Parsons' stage theory, is sequentially invariant, if stage two is not realized, the higher levels of aesthetic cognition cannot be attained. Is one then to infer that these two groups never fully actualize stage two, three, four and five understanding of art? In assessing the art of these two cultural groups it is clear that the above case is not a point in fact. Indian and Inuit art clearly demonstrate sensitivity to the expressive potential of art, as well as a highly refined ability for arrangement and organization of the formal qualities of an art work concomitant to a conscious understanding of their own artistic traditions. It is therefore evident that these peoples attain higher level aesthetic abilities, but not by way of stage two. Consequently, this case confirms that Parsons' (1987) invariant sequential stages of aesthetic cognitive development are not universally transferable, nor totalizing in scope because of variance due to historical and contextual factors. This leaves one to question the validity of Parsons' stage theory even within the Western context. If stage development is dependent on societal influences, rather than innate psychological aptitudes, were societal expectations to change, Parsons stage theory would prove inapplicable. The question thus arises: Does Parsons' stage theory reflect stage development which cannot be altered through instructional intervention or alternate socio-cultural normative expectations?

The methodology used by Parsons (1987) to advance a stage theory of aesthetic development lends itself to criticism in that it offers value based inquiry which makes claims beyond the scope of the data collected, organized and provided by the researcher. The designated program of inquiry essentially optimizes the potential for attaining data which supports the researcher's ideological presuppositions while limiting procedures that might challenge the taken perspective. For example, Parsons accessed information for his data analysis by way of semi-structured interviews which were conducted over a ten year period with more than three hundred subjects of various ages, ranging from preschool students to college art professors. Since subjects were all chosen from a population of "ordinary people living in and around Salt Lake City" (p.18), the subject selection employed by Parson's optimizes the chances of conformity within subject responses due to the homogeneity of environmental norms influencing behavioural outcomes for this set of subjects. Had Parsons' subject selection represented a diversified population consisting of individuals with varied cultural, class and race affiliations, the researcher might have uncovered less consistency within responses based on divergent, context-bound, normative expectations. The researcher having not done so, does not validate the potential cross-class, culture, or racial relevancy and generalizability of the findings.

In asking the subjects to respond to five or six fine art reproductions by means of questioning that touched on a number of preplanned topics, Parsons' (1987) aim was to understand what people thought about paintings. His procedures sought to uncover the cognitive abilities students, or others maintained through illuminating their rhetorical understanding of "fine art" and there was no attempt made to consider how attitudes might be experientially formed or effected which, according

to Parsons' developmental theory, are a sequential definition of cognitive abilities. Stimuli chosen for the subject/interviewer discussions reflect a selection bias which might have served to limit the breadth and pattern of subject responses while increasing the possibility of uniformity existing within the findings. The art works employed as a basis for discussion were all classic works from the Western artistic tradition. Non-Western and popular art examples were not a composite part of the images discussed by the subjects. In not including such art styles, Parsons does not realize the possibility for eliciting data which might offer insightful nuances to alternate aesthetic sensitivities held by individuals as relevant to their "real life" experiences. The stimuli selection then serves as a threat to the generalizability of the findings because of the narrowness of scope in the selection of art works.

The form of inquiry inherent within the questions posed to the subjects similarly does not discount the possibility of constancy existing within the early stages of aesthetic responses based on the norms potentially instilled through societal mainstream expectations. Semistructured interviews that comprised a selection of standard topic questions were employed to initiate all discourse from which data was recorded. The following list identifies the questions used in the study:

1. Describe this painting to me.
2. What is it about? Is that a good subject for a painting?
3. What feelings do you see in the painting?
4. What about the colors? Are they good colors?
5. What about the form (things that repeat)? What about texture?
6. Was this a difficult painting to do? What would be difficult?
7. Is this a good painting? Why ? (p.19)

Parsons (1987) format of questioning reflects an ideologically biased procedure of

inquiry which engenders questions representative of the researcher's theoretical beliefs, expectations and practical intentions. For example, question one establishes in a neutral way, the possibility for probing the subjects responses to the art work in terms of its formal characteristics and its thematic content. Questions two to six isolate specific aesthetic dimensions within the art work in order to focus and define the thematic content of discursive replies to specific dimensions and aspects within art works such as color, form, expression and technique. All questions exemplified within Parsons' procedures lead students to discuss dimensions in the art works which belong to Western art world traditions. In asking specific questions such as those about color or form the researcher instills an awareness of these aspects within an art work so as to limit the subjects responses to the identified areas. The prescriptive system of inquiry designated by Parsons therefore identifies "appropriate" content specific topics upon which individuals may model future discourses on art. Similarly individuals who have had some exposure to art and art talk, but who still maintain potentially limited understanding of topics such as form or expression, might borrow from mainstream discourse so as to satisfy the questions asked over transmitting a true portrayal of their unmediated artistic experience. Again, it may be pointed out that the researcher's conclusions, which culminate in a stage theory of aesthetic development, cannot relate such phenomena as cognitively dependent without initially attempting to rule out the effect of socio-cultural expectations on behavioural norms.

A number of related studies were uncovered through computer searches and following up cited studies which similarly identified patterns within aesthetic behaviour similar to those identified by Parsons (1987). These studies will presently be reviewed and analyzed so as to consider how the ideologies frame the

various arguments rendered. In the first of these studies to be reviewed Machotka, (1966) conducted research in which he analyzed the criteria children use for evaluating paintings. Pointing out that a number of studies have been conducted which identify children's painting preferences, Machotka (1966), demarcates the shortcomings of previous studies in that no specific ages are identified as related to the various perceptions of art. He also suggests the shortcomings of previous studies where there was no attempt made to connect suggested aesthetic development to other theories of child development. Towards such an end, Machotka (1966) posits a relationship between aesthetic development and Piaget's stages of cognitive development, and thus identifies a personalized base ideology from where his process of inquiry is focused. It is this goal which serves to frame the system of questioning which generates data relevant to the researcher's particular objectives while eschewing forms of inquiry which might challenge the theoretical presuppositions that inspire the researcher's efforts.

For the purpose of Machotka's (1966) study, fifteen color reproductions were selected from classic works by Western artists dating from the time of the renaissance to more contemporary periods. In uniquely employing Western fine art reproductions the stimuli selection could limit and constrict the rhetorical positions maintained by the subjects, thus not engendering a comprehensive array of possible attitudes to art forms from alternate styles. The subjects (N=120) interviewed consisted of the following population: French boys from an upper middle-class elementary school and an upper middle-class junior-high school, as well as a group of 18 year olds from a similar socioeconomic milieu. A group of 15 subjects from each grade were involved in the study. The selection of subjects demonstrates a population of a relatively homogeneous nature in regards to socio-cultural and

economic experience. Uniformity within subject responses thus maximizes the potential for uniformity in the findings. A subject selection diversified in race, class, culture, etc., would have served to challenge and test the researcher's theory, consequently strengthening the generalizability of the findings. Instead, the field situation provides a decidedly theory driven selection of subjects which engenders a context that, while it optimizes the likelihood of validating the researchers ideological beliefs, does not verify any absolute correlation between aesthetic and cognitive development.

Interviews were conducted individually and the subjects were shown a group of three paintings from which they were expected to identify a) which painting they liked best, and b) what reasons they had for making the choice. Content analysis of the responses was based on criteria selected from a prior pilot study which identified what children deemed as important in their analysis of art. Twelve criteria were identified from which the frequency of responses from the present study were calculated. The data collected suggested age related aesthetic preferences. It was noted that preference criteria which refer to color and content exist before a child develops sensitivity to formal analysis of works. Realism, it seemed, becomes a criterion for evaluation at age seven and increases in importance until age eleven, at which time the demand for realism becomes increasingly less pronounced. Sensitivity to formal relations between elements of the composition such as harmony or contrast of colors did not occur markedly in the subject's analysis of paintings until the age of 12. Machotka (1966) attributes this shift to a correlation between Piaget's stage of formal operations in which a child becomes less concerned with concrete analysis and more interested in "hypothetico-deductive" reasoning. It is suggested that because of the onset of formal operations, children



begin to engender preferences based on concepts related to composition, it being inferred, that this is a result of the child's ability to consider hypothetical propositions at this stage of cognitive mental development. Machotka (1966) suggests that the art observer must be aware of a number of existing styles in order to be sensitive to style and composition in paintings. Younger individuals who base their judgment of painting on a single criterion of realism are aware of only one style, that of realism, which Machotka suggests explains younger children's inability to use criteria such as style and composition in their analyses of paintings.

It is pointed out that the ages identified as transitional points in a child's understanding of art closely parallel Piaget's transitional ages for cognitive stage development. Consequently, Machotka (1966) maintains that it could be suggested through this analysis that a child's framework for interpreting art is directly related to his/her cognitive development. Although the connection Machotka makes between aesthetic sensitivity and cognitive development is valuable in suggesting a possible relationship between a child's intellectual and aesthetic development, this theory is not validated through the findings of the presently cited study. By simply observing behaviour, one cannot infer the child's inability to access other modes of understanding art if appropriate or different contextual stimuli were applied. It could be suggested that the findings, instead of reflecting a child's age related aesthetic ability, might reflect norms derivative of the status quo or of the normative forms of exposure traditional aesthetic education has allotted. Fully developing aesthetic sensitivity is directly related to training (Hamblin, 1988, Bourdieu, 1984), or in Piagetian thought to encountering stimuli which initiate accommodation and assimilation of novel schemata and understandings. In not qualifying student exposure to the aesthetic phenomena, it cannot be assumed through Machotka's

(1966) study that the aesthetic critical abilities identified are related to an individual's aesthetic aptitudes and not to predefined age specific art activities within educational and dominant cultural norms which might delimit children's aesthetic sensitivity. Information selection then serves as a threat to the external reliability of Machotka's (1966) theory which maintains that aesthetic criteria in judging art directly relates to an individual's cognitive development. Observer effects threaten the study's internal validity in that Machotka claims the findings to be representative of correlations between cognitive and aesthetic development, an assumption which goes beyond the context of the study. Alternative explanations could and should be delineated and eliminated in relation to the coercive powers of contextual variables so as to ensure that alternative explanations will not serve as a threat to the internal validity of Machotka's theory.

Moore (1973) also points out that it is necessary for more research to be done on individual's art appreciation. Towards this end, he conducted a study in which he analyzed the verbal responses to works of art by children in grades one (n=20), four (n=20), seven (n=20), ten (n=20), and twelve (n=20). The subjects chosen originated from the same community and had not received any formal lessons in art appreciation. Subjects were interviewed individually and were asked to respond to individually presented reproductions. Three art works were shown (a representational, a semi- abstract, and a non-representational piece) all typical of the Western artistic traditions. As in the previous two studies, stimulus selection served to bias and limit the findings. The subjects were asked to tell the interviewer what they saw in the painting, whether they saw anything in the painting other than objects and to explain what they liked best in the painting. Similar to Machotka's (1966) itinerary of questions, Moore's (1973) form of inquiry offers descriptive

insight to an individual's aesthetic point of view. It similarly does not, however, question preferential commitments in relation to their possible context dependent nature.

It was concluded, through the data collected, that "children at different grade levels did make different types of comments about art works" (Moore, 1973, p.29). For example, young children's statements were proportionately more objective than were the statements of the older children in that they focused on objects shown in the paintings. Older children considered the whole painting rather than the parts, attended to the artist and historical period and made references to the art work as possessing human feeling "proportionately" more than did the younger subjects. It was pointed out however, that all groups made "proportionately" more references to the objects portrayed in the painting than any other aspect of the painting. The researchers suggest this to be a result of lack of instruction in art appreciation. It was deemed difficult for a child to understand aspects of painting which have not been presented to him or her. It is pointed out that "if the prevailing concept of art is one of visual representation of objects, it seems reasonable to assume that the subjects would look for visually depicted objects in the paintings" (Moore, 1973, p.31).

The researcher recognizes that the study attempts to simply describe the responses to art made by children who had not received formal instruction in the subject area. There are not, however, any claims made as to whether the responses given by the students are desirable, unalterable or contextually dependent. It is acknowledged that the questions used to elicit responses from the subjects influenced the sorts of responses which the subjects made, in that comments subjects offered about the art works might well have been influenced by the leading

questions posed. This suggests a threat to the internal validity of the study in that the study originally proposed to identify what children of various age groups chose to discuss about art, and not what researchers initiated from them through prompting.

A fourth study conducted by Gardner, Winner, and Kircher (1975) analyzed responses to poems, paintings, and music, from children aged four to sixteen. For the intent of this paper, it will be useful to consider only the findings which relate to visual perception. To understand the “personal experiences” individuals encounter when viewing art, these researchers interviewed 121 subjects between the ages of 4 to 16, all from middle and working class families. The subject selection does not engage responses from a variety of socio-culturally determined affiliations with respect to class, economic or racial status. Again this does not allow the findings to represent all possible discourses. The interviewers presented a work of art to the subject and asked him/her to describe what was perceived. From there, a number of randomly ordered but preplanned questions were solicited by way of an “open-ended” clinical procedure. This procedure allowed for the probing of “unexpected potentially relevant responses” (Gardner, Winner, and Kircher, 1975, p.62). The researchers’ however did not pursue the relevancy of socio-cultural and potentially coercive lived experiences which could serve as instrumental in shaping responses. The probing techniques were moreover concerned with fine tuning the rhetorical descriptions offered by the students. Subject responses were categorized into three broad groupings which demonstrated similar age specific distinct characteristics used by the subject to make sense of art. Subjects aged four to seven demonstrated what were termed by the researchers as “immature” responses. Those aged eight to twelve demonstrated what were termed as “intermediate” responses, and individuals

aged fourteen to sixteen characteristically elicited responses that the researchers categorized as “mature” responses.

The “immature” subjects’ responses were frequently contradictory (eg., there was an inability to understand the human origin of paintings) and subjects often believed the works to be made by machines or in factories, and yet conversely, in answer to following questions, the same subjects would state that anyone, often even animals, could produce paintings. “Immature” subjects were little concerned with the presence of opposing views in their answers, and they generally did not understand the difference between a representation of a horse and its referent; thus, indicating a lack of differentiation between symbolic representation and the actual subject. Only a vague understanding of the distinction between real and imaginary worlds was exhibited by this group. Four and five year olds tended to prefer abstract over representational works for their “pretty colors” and “nice designs”, while six and seven year olds tended to demonstrate an increased preference for more traditional realistic paintings.

Individuals at the intermediate stage were described as possessing a strong preference toward realism which they believed should ideally be qualitatively judged by expert authorities. There was, however, a confusion regarding what makes one opinion better than another. The responses and interpretations of this group rarely, if ever, deviated from a strictly concrete interpretation of the “here-and-now” of their responses. They demonstrated an appreciation for the difficulties of producing art works and understood that it takes a great deal of work and perseverance to become a good artist. The subjects were able to distinguish between real and imaginary objects, but displayed a “preoccupation with realism.” (Gardner, Winner, Kircher, 1975, p.68). At this stage, subjects demonstrated

some understanding of style but no conception as yet of formal aesthetic properties in the works viewed.

The oldest subjects, those demonstrating what the researchers termed as “mature” responses, were “capable of a broader, more complex and cognitive view of art” (Gardner, Winner, Kircher, 1975, p.65). They were open to expressive non-literal rendering of subject matter, but as yet, had not elicited an understanding of the expressive potential that formal qualities in art works can convey. The modal responses of this subject group revealed an appreciation of the direction “artistic creation” could take in terms of style and different media, and art was able to then take on significance as a medium for personal and universal expression. Although these subjects showed marked appreciation for imaginative and expressive works of art, they continued to demonstrate a preference for schematically representational paintings as compared to non-objective imagery. Responses were characterized by a tolerance for many different ways and occasions for creating art rather than by the often narrow and contradictory views of the two younger groups.

Through the findings of this research, it is posited that the theory of developmental aesthetic sensitivity is supported, in that it becomes apparent that mechanisms used for understanding art change as an individual matures. Gardner, Winner and Kircher (1975) pointed out that there is “no evidence that the stages of thought are taught or imitated: rather they appear to be spontaneous constructions at a certain developmental stage” (p.74). Because this study makes no attempt to analyze the previous art experiences of the subjects, the aforementioned comment by the researchers makes claims beyond the context of the study. The researchers did not probe the art education histories and experiences of the subjects so as to identify aesthetic development as “spontaneous” and not “taught” or culturally

bound. Again, development in aesthetic sensitivity was identified, but no effort was made to analyze the consequences of instruction or contextual influences on aesthetic development so as to account for its effect(s) in regards to the behavioural phenomena observed.

A fifth study, conducted by Rosenstiel, Morison, Silverman and Gardner (1978), identifies the necessity for understanding the development of aesthetic sensitivity so as to better understand what training should be engendered at specific grade levels in art education classes. The researchers acknowledge the findings of the previously cited studies but go on to identify if, when and how children begin to “distinguish” between personal preferences, community preferences and what identifies “technical competence”. The researchers randomly selected subjects (N=180) from grades one (n=45), three (n=45), six (n=45) and ten (n=45), all chosen from suburban area school classrooms. The subjects were asked three questions: 1) “Which painting do you like best?”; 2) “Which painting do you think other people would like the best?”; and 3) “Which painting do you think is painted the best?” (Rosenstiel, Morison, Silverman and Gardner, 1978, p.97). The answers the subjects provided to the questions were itemized and then separated into nine “subordinate” categories by the researchers, and the percentage of responses pertaining to the nine categories within each grade level were then calculated. It was found that subject groups from grades one, three and six demonstrated similar responses in that little variation existed between a subject’s personal preference, perceived community preference and technical quality preference. An increased ability to identify differences in the questions came with an increase in age. The developmental trends of age specific responses identified more varied responses paralleling an increase in age. When subjects were asked

about personal preferences, their responses showed that “mood, theme and painterly surfaces are increasingly taken into account” by the older subjects (Rosenstiel, Morison, Silverman and Gardner, 1978, p. 105), and preference for color and subject matter decreased with age. When asked what painting the subjects thought other people would like best, grades 3 and 6 subjects regularly cited specific persons and groups while the older group tended to refer to genres and personality types. The third question pertaining to the technical quality of works of art elicited the greatest variation in responses between first and tenth grade students. First grade students made comments “general in nature” and similar to their answers for questions one and two, whereas third grade student statements showed an admiration for technical realism, and a slightly higher tendency to refer to the works painterly qualities or to suggest the relevance of art history. It is not until grade ten, however, that students were likely to refer to formal qualities within the work or to demonstrate an ability to operatively utilize terms specifically related to art criticism.

The researchers themselves identify possible limitations of the methodology used; it being suggested, that children’s limited vocabulary may have proved as a stumbling block for fully actualizing, through dialogic interactions, how the subjects perceived and felt about the art works. They state that “it is quite possible that children could make finer discriminations but were handicapped by a limited vocabulary for discussing the topic” (Rosenstiel, Morison, Silverman and Gardner, 1978, p. 105). Such an understanding serves to suggest a threat to the internal validity of the findings in that students may be sensitive to more than they are able to express verbally. Because of the limited verbal ability of young students, their responses may be only revealing a part of their actual experiences. The power of



conventional discourse to constrain and homogenize subject responses is thus realized.

Going on to point out the educational implications of the findings derived from the study, the researchers suggest that in understanding the sequence of development of aesthetic sensitivity (as cited in previous studies and as supported in the study presently cited) procedures for implementing age appropriate aesthetic instruction can be identified. Rosenstiel, Morison, Silverman and Gardner (1978) suggest that “it makes little sense, for instance, to invoke diverse critical standards among first graders or to focus on issues of mood or message among third graders—these topics seem out of reach of the average child of this age” (p.105). These conclusions, however, depart from the specific context of the study, in that the study attempted to determine age specific characteristic reactions to art works; there being no attempt made to ascertain whether first graders were capable of addressing “diverse critical standards” or whether third graders were capable of understanding notions of “mood or message” within an art work. The researchers in no way attempted to engage young students in such activities so as to determine their ability or lack of it in synthesizing these concepts. Rosenstiel, Morison, Silverman and Gardner (1978) themselves in fact acknowledge in their concluding paragraph that, “It is worth noting in conclusion, a confirmation of the generally low degree of aesthetic sensitivity among school children in this country” (p.106) and suggest this tendency to be a result of poor education in the field of aesthetics. In ascribing to a lack of effective aesthetic education, the researchers acknowledge the limited education/exposure students receive in school toward developing aesthetic sensitivity. Regardless of this point, however, the researchers do not suggest the possibility of age specific responses to art as being a lack of training or

contextually determined, and do not rule out such a possibility through their research. Observer effects again threaten the internal validity of the research because in suggesting that young subjects are not capable of certain aesthetic perceptions, the researcher's are going beyond the context of their findings.

### **SUMMARY**

The studies reviewed employed qualitative research methodology to uncover norms and patterns within subject responses to art. These qualitative studies typically relied on the accumulation of evidence which identifies patterns within behaviour so as to impart the findings with interpretive significance. The validity of the claim which suggests normative standards within age related patterns of behaviour is not the issue in question here. Patterns which exemplify age specific clusters of common responses existed, as supported by the densely illustrated field data furnished as evidence by the researchers. What is in question, however, is whether the data supplied conveys a comprehensive picture of the variables influencing aesthetic understanding. It is posited by Parsons (1987) that the developmental changes one exhibits within his/her responses to art are indicative of existing behavioural phenomena which exist as sequentially definitive experiences structured by a form of cognitive development specific to visual responses. Data bases offered by Parsons and the related studies cited frame research findings in such a way which excludes forms of inquiry that could be conclusive in challenging the theories drawn. Cultural forces and societal guiding principles must be taken into account if behavioural norms and developmental theories are to be considered as foundationally and epistemologically sound. The following questions thus arise:

Are linearly defined stage developmental trends within aesthetic understanding, as defined by Parsons (1987) and supported by the findings of Machotka (1966), Moore (1973), Gardner, Winner & Kircher (1975) and Rosenstiel, Morisen, Silverman & Gardner (1978), dependent on cognitive developmental growth patterns, or are they formed and/or influenced through a complex system of acculturation and socially defined expectations based on cultural normative standards? It is not within the scope of the present study to verify aesthetic understanding as a consequence of socio-culturally dependent influences. It is, however, the purpose of the present chapter to bring into question the validity of the conclusions made by Parsons (1987) which supports a stage theory of aesthetic development in that the data offered does not validate such an inference based on the methodological research formats provided. In accordance with the postpositivist perspective taken by critical ethnographers, it may be maintained that the studies cited do not take into consideration the complex, contextually relative and indeterminate nature of most human experience as a possible factor shaping Western societal norms within aesthetic understanding. Convictions held by researchers, bias inquiry mediated for the purpose of uncovering “usable” foundational knowledge claims for aesthetic educational programs.

The studies reviewed suggest that aesthetic understanding is developmental and characteristic of predefined age groups. It is suggested that if this were to hold true, appropriate age specific activities could be delineated for the implementation of age appropriate programs for aesthetic development in schools (Parsons 1987). The developmental trends that the cited studies convey are legitimately validated through the research methodologies employed. What is lacking however is a consideration of the possible socially and historically dependent nature of the

researchers' positions and research findings. Dominant cultural traditions may ground understandings of normative patterns within behaviour as essentially innate and foundational in nature without challenging them as "socially constituted, historically embedded, and valuationally based" (Lather, 1991, p.52) possibilities. Guba (1992) points out the constructivist position which asserts that.

the findings of any inquiry are literally created, relative to the particular inquirer and to the particular context in which the inquiry was carried out. If either inquirer or context is changed different findings are created. The different findings are neither more or less true than the first, but only different. (p.19)

The studies presented exemplify such context and perspective dependent relevancy within the methodology provided, data obtained and theories derived. There is a direct interrelationship between the researchers' biases and the realities uncovered in that, as exemplified in the cited studies, an ideological frame of reference engenders findings which fosters the reproduction of a theorist's beliefs while subverting the effective recognition of potentially content threatening ideological possibilities. The research findings cited portray a fragmentary representation of phenomena as they do not acknowledge the shaping and behaviour framing potential inherent to discourses of dominant cultural power systems.

The research studies reviewed engender such a theoretically dominated program of study. In attempting to identify developmental logic structures within human experience, Parsons (1987) has not considered the possibility of socially coercive practices as shaping responses before attributing conformity to essentialist behavioural norms. Had Parsons excluded the effect of overt and covert socio-cultural expectations as instrumental in engendering consistency within subject

behaviours, he may have empowered his claims relating existing generalized patterns as developmentally and “objectively” determined. Not having done so, the methodology employed does not allow for a stage theory of aesthetic development to be validly claimed as sound knowledge based on the procedures engendering its formation.

In the following chapter, the present study will be furthered by addressing the moral limitations of adhering to a structural program such as Parsons’ by examining how its inherent features serve to regiment and limit behavioural possibilities.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **THE PRACTICAL, MORAL AND ETHICAL IMPLICATIONS OF A CURRICULA BASED ON PARSONS' THEORY OF AESTHETIC DEVELOPMENT**

#### **CHAPTER OVERVIEW**

The first section of this chapter will attempt to characterize structural based theories, so as to allow for a critical examination of the limitations they inhere within pedagogical practice. The structural nature of Parsons' theory will be conveyed and outlined as it impartially orders and defines aesthetic developmental understanding in relation to Eurowestern art world traditions. In the second section of this chapter, the theoretical absolutes within a structural delineation of the aesthetic experience will be critically examined for their moral and ethical implications as engendered within a postmodern perspective.

#### **IDENTIFYING THE STRUCTURAL NATURE OF PARSONS' THEORY**

Parsons' (1987) theoretical analysis of aesthetic understanding displays an ordering and defining of behavioural phenomena characteristic of structural theory. It is an analysis of human responses which aims at uncovering generalities within behaviour patternings so as to provide a cohesive descriptive order to phenomena. Gardner (1972) points out that:

The structuralists are distinguished first and foremost by their ardent

powerfully held conviction that there is structure underlying all human behaviour and mental functioning and by their belief that this structure can be discovered through ordering analysis, that it show cohesiveness and meaning, and that structures have generality. (p.10)

In a like fashion, Parsons' theory clearly organizes a behavioural framework for aesthetic understanding by distilling, through research findings, distinct age specific response generalizations and expectations. A structuralist theory, such as Parsons', attests to the systematization of existing experiential phenomena within the aesthetic experience as bounded by ordering principles. Thus, his theory renders explicit the rules and norms for reasoning about art as they exist incrementally and developmentally with the presupposition that behavioural phenomena can be attributed to explanatory frameworks possessing an inherent and explicit logicity and order (see Culler, 1975). In this way, Parsons theory of aesthetic development exemplifies a tendency characteristic of structural theoretical approaches to knowledge which objectify the nature of the "systems" underlying an event (see also Scholes, 1974). By clearly delineating and characterizing five unique stages of cognitively related and conceptually based aesthetic understandings, Parsons is able to offer conventions attestable to the aesthetic experience as definitive and determinately organized. A "coherent system" for understanding how people respond to art at various stages of development is thus fostered through the use of a structuralist orientation.

In attempting to give order to a phenomenon and to offer a standardized design within visual preferential response patterns, Parsons (1987) synthesizes, through research data, a model of insights individuals sequentially acquire. He identifies, through discursive questioning and discussions, stage specific sequentially

arranged understandings individuals actualize which are attained in a non-arbitrary sequence of increasing conceptual complexity. The constructed formal framework identifying such a generative pattern hierarchically describes how individuals change in their experiences and appreciation of art. By making no qualifying contextual requirement for the acquisition of competency in the stage levels delineated, Parsons implies that response behaviours exist as the product of a stable pattern within normative development. Incrementing one's conceptually based appreciation of art is defined as limited within the boundaries of cognitive specific abilities maintained in a chronologically ordered sequence of conceptual possibilities. By noting patterns within art preferences as exemplified in age related clusters of common response behaviours, Parsons sequences conceptual descriptors and gives system and structure to aesthetic understanding. The developmental framework employed for definitively ordering aesthetic abilities is conveyed in the following passage:

... we acquire them—some of them—gradually, i.e., in a sequence of steps, each of which is basically a new insight. These steps have a nonarbitrary sequence. Some must be acquired before others. A developmental account identifies the steps that a particular domain requires, and the sequence of our learning them. It plots the growth of our constructions as we gradually come to understand a major area of cognition. (Parsons, 1987, p.10-11)

Parsons describes the structurally framed nature of the responses given by subjects with an explicit intention to offer behavioural patterns, while attributing an existing developmental sequence as foundational in nature. Such a segmented and hierarchical structuring of the developmental itinerary simplifies the complexity of



the tasks involved in the teaching of aesthetics by delineating objective criteria to be aspired to at each level of understanding so as to gage "progress" or development. Parsons points out that the value of such a methodological ordering of aesthetic concepts lies in the framework it provides for making age appropriate content decisions in the teaching of aesthetics. His stage theory of aesthetic development "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" (Parsons, 1991, p. 371). Thus identifying behavioural expectations within aesthetic responses orient educators in content decisions within aesthetic educational programs that facilitate recognition of "appropriate" educational guidelines for the instruction of aesthetics at various grade levels. As Cherryholmes (1988) puts it with respect to the utility of structural theories in pedagogy, "knowing rules means knowing how to proceed" (p.4).

This aspect of structural theory is of particular importance to the instruction of aesthetics in that it has frequently been dismissed from practical application within classroom practices because of an inherent elusiveness and intricateness of content possibilities (Hamblin, 1986; 1988; Dorn, 1981). It is posited by Redfern (1985) that "within the thinking of many educationists today aesthetic education is a somewhat amorphous notion which makes both for widespread theoretical confusion and for practical shortcomings in many classrooms . . . as a subject of theoretical investigation and as a practical enterprise aesthetic education is enormously complex and demanding" (pp.x-xi). The concept of aesthetics, therefore, in lacking potential for a unitary definition among art educators, does not readily facilitate its inclusion into art programs (Abbs, 1989; Kaelin, 1989). As Abbs (1989) notes:

One of the major confusions in the teaching of the arts revolves around the word aesthetic . . . it remains a crucial term for both the renewal and unification of the arts in education, yet it is a term that is constantly misunderstood and even maligned. (p.75)

Research findings such as Parsons' (1987) would then seem to offer an insightful solution to the complex and congested melange of options facing art instructors in the teaching of aesthetics. The problem, however, arises when one questions the indiscriminate applicability of Parsons' age specific findings to real world expectations in students. Does consistency exist within the responses of designated age groups because of limitations within developmental cognitive potentials or do situational expectations serve to restrict and structure given responses?

Parsons' (1987) philosophical viewpoint, that specifies Eurocentric norms as a basis from which to elicit discussions on art works, intersects only those understandings complying with perspectives dominating and comprising mainstream culture. For example, Parsons' (1987) himself identifies the ideological bias which his research is grounded in:

I too have been as much influenced by artists and philosophers of art as by psychologists, and the focus of my analysis is on concepts that we ordinarily use when we talk about art . . . . For example, we ordinarily look to art for beauty, expressiveness, style and formal qualities. Our aesthetic development consists precisely in coming to understand concepts like these in increasingly adequate ways. (p.12-13)

The ideological basis for Parsons' aesthetic distinctions hinges upon the premise of a unified intersubjectivity based in Eurowestern traditions which are presented as foundational representations that totalize the aesthetic experience and formalize its

nature. This results in anything outside of the ideologically determinate discourses—those of dominant Western art traditions—being marginalized within the procedural methods employed in the research study. Parsons participates to selectively isolate the corpus of behavioural characteristics available for subject discussions by ordering questioning procedures in accordance with predefined Western world masternarratives which incur a normalizing and totalizing structure to the research project. The potential for the expression of marginalized group discourses within responses is limited by the privileging of one ideological viewpoint over another in objectifying the aesthetic experience in the form of a structure .

In effect, the logic of Western cultural discourses immanently frame the legitimacy of Parsons' (1987) design which in itself decidedly concurs with a self-validating foundational bias provides grounds for self-representation—that of the researcher's ideology—while denying potential for the expression of subordinate group understandings. The philosophical basis to which the researcher ascribes suggests the possibility of the existence of ahistorical theoretical absolutes manifest outside of socio-cultural influences which function to order human behaviour and understanding. Parsons renders explicit the conventions engendered within each developmental stage not so as to uncover possible contextual catalysts contributing to stage response descriptions, but simply to determine the objective nature of the stage system itself. His argument exists as unchallenged by the research findings in that it is presented according to a non-relativistic view of reality which does not acknowledge, or leave space for the “macro-social” structural determinants of human behaviour. Culler's (1975) description of structuralist analysis exemplifies the methodological premises of such an approach:

Structural analysis does offer a particular type of explanation. It does not attempt, as phenomenology might to achieve empathetic understanding: to reconstruct a situation as it might have been consciously grasped by an individual subject and hence to explain why he chose a particular course of action. Structural explanation does not place an action in a causal chain nor derive it from the project by which a subject intends a world . . . (p.27)

A structuralist system of inquiry, as that used by Parsons, does not address the cultural coding actants which effect generative processes of individual understanding. Rather than explain the phenomenological or interactive processes influencing and governing perception within aesthetic experience, Parsons limits the portrayal of the phenomena studied to foundational links between aesthetic experience and a determinate organismic relationship that governs its experiential characteristics. He makes the connection between aesthetic stage specific development and forms of cognition specifically tailored for aesthetic understanding. Contextual sources which are instrumental in engendering perceptual biases or abilities in individuals are not identified nor considered in their relation to the phenomena studied. In acknowledging the basis for aesthetic understanding and responses to be universalizable, normative and totalizing due to the presupposition of the “shared” nature of cognitive structures found in subjects when assimilating art works visually, Parsons fails to examine the role and influence of experiential variables as potential sources for the engenderment of conceptually based aesthetic understanding. It therefore becomes necessary to ask: Are the common structured features of aesthetic responses organismic in nature, or are they produced by the qualifying effects of dominant cultural discourses on cognition?

Parsons (1987) does not explore the specific stimulus factors which might engender the preferential awarenesses maintained by subjects in relation to their personalized experiences with art. In not considering the socio-cultural catalysts that shape subject responses, the researcher denies consideration of variable dominant sources on which he himself hinges the development of aesthetic understandings. Parsons (1987), in fact, acknowledges that one must realize conceptual challenges so as to attain a broader and higher level of perceptual abilities, specifically pointing out that actualizing conceptual prowess typified within incrementations in aesthetic understanding is dependent on experience:

Where individual people wind up in this sequence depends on what kinds of art they encounter and how far they are encouraged to think about them.

(p.5)

He similarly points out 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. (Parsons, 1991, p. 371)

Although Parsons (1987; 1991) recognizes a relationship between encountering conceptual structures through exposure and attaining an understanding of those structures, he does not infer any possibility of altering the delineated pattern of development based on alternate patterns of conceptual encounters, exposures and challenges. A structuralist account of the phenomena studied, does not necessitate for an exploration of the possible situationally dependent nature of response patterns which function to incur the behaviours observed. Parsons' belief in the static structures inherent to the organismic character of aesthetic developmental understanding does not require an inquiry into the causal variables which might

serve to instill variation in the quality and nature of the aesthetic experiences. The stage theory proposed clearly develops an agenda posited in the form of a grand metanarratives embodying in its principle formation, theoretical absolutes for aesthetic understanding which serve in themselves to legitimate Western elitist discourses as maintained within fine art traditions. This is brought to bear in the stages outlined by the researcher that set out understandings which coincide with and parallel the major doctrines governing the creation of fine art within Eurocentric cultures. Ultimately, the centering of discourse in the ideals of dominant culture, does not allow for the possibility of expression of subordinate groups or for the recognition of alternate patterns adhered to in actualizing aesthetic pleasure from art works. A structuralist orientation ascribing normative patterns for developmental knowledge claims (such as Parsons' [1987]) does not consider the relative nature of aesthetic experience, but instead creates a working equilibrium from the consequences of a hegemonically defined order (see Culler, 1978; Apple, 1990).

In referring to Parsons' (1987) structural theory, it is necessary to recognize in its formulation an adherence to the continuity of the whole concept of Western absolutist traditions guiding research (see Lather, 1991). A poststructuralist, postmodern viewpoint acknowledges the diversity of possibilities engendered by attempting to transgress foundational knowledge systems which would allow for the voicing of subordinated discourses of "disenfranchised" groups, societies or cultures to be heard (Freire, 1970; Spivak, 1992). The ideological influences dominant in Parsons' structuralist perspective do not allow for the representation of an agenda which accesses alternative understandings beyond those maintained and reproduced within the mainstream discourses pervading and upholding Western cultural traditions. There is no acknowledgment of the differences and

counternarratives which may be perpetuated in a society that constitutes alternate group representations based on race, ethnicity, class and gender affiliations. The following section of this chapter will consider, by way of a postmodern perspective, the ethical implications and moral consequences of initiating pedagogical practices in school curricular programs based on a structurally defined framework such as that of Parsons' (1987) stage theory of aesthetic development.

### **THE ETHICAL AND MORAL LIMITATIONS OF A STAGE DEVELOPMENTAL APPROACH IN THE TEACHING OF AESTHETICS**

A theory such as Parsons' (1987) which supports a Eurocentric elitist itinerary of aesthetic ideals and conceptual possibilities must be considered for the ethical and moral implications its biased system of knowledge claims conveys. Within societies which increasingly embrace greater numbers of multi-ethnic and minority group populations (Kanpol, 1992), it is questionable whether a pedagogical methodology which normalizes behavioural expectations to the status quo, justly serves the needs of all concerned. There exists,

wide evidence from many countries that cultural and class groups develop very different needs and interests, that have had to be addressed with different social and education policy solutions. (Corson, 1992, p.193)

Pedagogical practices, then which are based on established *a priori* structured systems should be considered for their suitability to the different socio-cultural populations they affect before being implemented as standard educational itineraries. Members of lower status groups are disadvantaged in school systems

which transmit only dominant cultural value systems in that their own cultural capital must be repressed so as to allow for successful integration within mainstream expectations. Conformative behavioural expectations imposed on students, by way of the perpetuation of rule systems which are insensitive to knowledge bases individuals maintain in relation to personalized codes and forms of discourse, instill a sense of inadequacy within understandings that deviate from the status quo.

The recent impetus evident in contemporary critical discourse has brought to light a postmodern awareness of the limitations inherent within structural based agendas derived from modernist paradigms. In this way the structural framework within Parsons' (1987) theory may be criticized for its underlying modernist premises that frame stable, elitist categories as defining totalizing principles inherent to the aesthetic experience. The definitive polarization of conceptual thought within structuralist mandates creates an unrealistic determinism evident in such a stance. Ultimately, this has led to the demise of its popularity within recent interpretive paradigms, as Apple (cited in Lather 1991) suggests:

The program of making everything knowable through the supposedly impersonal norms and procedures of "science" has been radically questioned. The hope of constructing a "grand narrative" either intellectual or political, that will give us the ultimate truth and will lead us to freedom has been shattered in many ways. Reality it seems is a text, subject to multiple interpretations, multiple readings, multiple uses. (p. vii)

Apple discerns the existence of power frameworks which infuse society with dominant discourses presented under the guise of a "scientific" objectivity. He questions the existence of these "master narratives" by recognizing the possibility of



indiscriminant options within objective conditions and situational realities. In presenting concepts which advocate that “the existence of multiple sets of power relations are inevitable” (Apple cited in Lather 1991. p. vii), Apple inadvertently reveals the limitations in stage models such as Parsons’ (1987) as a conceptual curricular tool from which to orient teaching practices. In essence dominant structural mandates that designate uniformity within subject responses, relative to totalizing cultural expectations, do not allow for an appreciation of the existing pluralism of needs and understandings maintained by cultural, gender and socioeconomic groups within contemporary societies.

In place of doctrines articulating ultimate truths centered on foundational social and scientific epistemologies, discourses now resonate an understanding of the relativistic nature of positional realities. There presently exists a socio-cultural awareness which highlights and privileges diversity, multiplicity and difference by critically acknowledging a host of existing subject positions and social dialects. Jencks (1992) points out that the postmodern condition challenges “monolithic elitism, to bridge the gaps that divide high and low cultures, elite and mass, specialist and non-professional or most generally put—one discourse and interpretive community from another” (p.13). Postmodernism essentially challenges positivist belief systems which offer foundational models for guiding social policies that are absolute and totalizing in nature. Critical pedagogy, a philosophical movement within education, derives its bias from a postmodern respect for *otherness* and *difference* as it exists within human experience. Objective and definitive interpretations of knowledge claims are denied within such orientations so as to allow for interpretive frameworks characterized by individuals who exemplify difference based on divergent affiliations grounded in their class,

gender, age and race related experiences.

A structurally limited educational program which offers dominant class tendencies as normative in nature may be questioned in relation to the moral and ethical implications inherent to pedagogical agendas that enforces Eurocentric understandings on marginalized group populations. Siegel (1990) qualifies the ethics of education as it is exemplified within the principles of critical theory:

. . . ethical considerations arise in educational contexts in that how we teach—our manner of teaching—has an ethical as well as an instrumental side. We want to teach effectively, so that learners stand a good chance of learning; however, our methods of instruction must meet certain moral standards if they are to be acceptable. For instance, instructional methods which call for physical or psychological abuse of the learner are morally objectionable, no matter how effective. (p.42)

Although Parsons' (1991) stage theory of aesthetic development provides an ordered framework which supports a workable system for the teaching of aesthetics. The structuralist approach adopted would concomitantly serve to disenfranchise subordinate group perspectives in its objectives goals, and purposes. Individuals, in an attempt to aspire toward success within given institutionalized norms must, to a great extent, deny the value of their own personalized cultural codes based on age, race, class and gender membership so as to succeed within dominant socio-cultural expectations. Thus, aesthetic pedagogical programs which do not address the perspective understandings of marginalized groups offer a methodology which, by way of excluding subordinate group orientations, imply that there is an inferior quality inherent within such perspectives. In not recognizing belief systems external to the Eurocentric paradigm, instructional

methods are impoverished in their potential to instill confidence or a sense of psychological assuredness in minority groups. Negative psychological dimensions are brought to bare on the act of learning through the denigration of certain belief systems in that the traditions they maintain are denied enunciation in the classroom. Thus the egalitarian principles underlying the foundational concepts of a right to equality of representation in education are undermined by practices founded strictly within Western based philosophies.

Giroux (1988c) points out that morally and ethically correct educational policies should enhance possibilities for furthering a dialogue that allows for an accurate and full exchange of views, and that such practices involve using situational conditions which foster quality learning while maximizing an individuals potential to succeed. Fostering “quality learning” for all populations within socio-culturally diversified communities cannot be based on seemingly objective systems of knowledge. This presupposition is based on the premise that perceptual and experiential biases are not generalizable in character, but exist moreover as relative to personalized histories and customs. Programs which treat the individual as a commodity by subscribing to foundational views of knowledge do not appropriate codes which are familiar and comfortably suitable for all individuals. World views maintained by subordinate group population which are based on personalized context dependent understandings are denied a place of communicable importance within the hegemonic order subscribed to by foundational research based agendas such as Parsons (see Apple, 1990; Lather, 1991; Cherryholmes, 1988).

If Parsons’ (1987) schema were to be appropriated, art pedagogy would be organized around a core curriculum based on the reinforcement of an educational system designed to reproduce itself according to the canons of knowledge which it

sanctions its students to possess. Thus, the capability of students to reveal genuine individuality in questioning opinions, belief systems or methods “modeled” and upheld in art classrooms becomes restrained due to limited acceptance of non-dominant ways of thinking which are ultimately cultivated in Eurocentrically oriented school programs. Such pedagogical situations present a hidden curriculum, by way of modelling programs of study which are to some extent discriminatory, conveying a narrow mindedness which does not foster empathy for alternate ways of seeing. Siegel (1990), referring to modes of critical thinking, suggests that a student’s moral education should include the development of certain dispositions and habits which include:

... a willingness and an ability to face moral situations impartially rather than on the basis of self-interest, for adequate moral behavior demands such impartiality. Hand in hand with impartiality is empathy, for the mature moral agent must be able to put herself in the position of others, and grasp their perspective and feelings, if they are to take seriously into consideration the interests of others; the development of empathy as a moral sentiment is thus equally a part of adequate moral education. Likewise, a morally mature person must recognize the centrality and force of moral reasons in moral deliberation, and moral education must strive to foster that recognition. Such “rational virtues” as impartiality of judgment, ability to view matters from a variety of non-self interested perspectives, and recognition of the force of reasons, to name just three such virtues, are indispensable to moral education. (p.43)

A developmental theory, such as Parsons’ (1987), exhibits a specific delineation of appropriate and valued response patterns which in itself does not leave space for the

engenderment of open recognition for alternate perspectives. In confining aesthetic possibilities to a designated sort of reasoning at various developmental levels, Parsons sets up a structure which exemplifies rigidity and correctness in responses to art that do not allow for an empathy of otherness to be fostered in related discourses. Cherryholmes (1988) cites Wittgenstein (1953) in stating that “Discourses are not composed by randomly choosing works and statements. Instead, rules constitute and regulate language use” P.3). These rules, as Cherryholmes further explains, are relative to accepted cultural and social exemplar definitions. It is here posited that the power of ideological arrangements within society and a given culture may serve to shape subjective appraisals. This position suggesting, in a system such as Parsons, that an individual is denied a degree of freedom due to a psychological need to realize a comforting degree of familiarity within the designated norms of one’s cultural and social milieu. If there are only Euro-classic conventions conveyed within teacher expectations, educators themselves, then, limit experiential possibilities by communicating a disposition which suggest the superiority of dominant understandings over that of others. A pedagogical program that does not offer lower status group representation in its curricula perpetuates biases which instill a partiality for certain belief systems over those of others thus perpetuating forms of prejudice by way of selective exemplar representation.

Parsons’ (1987) stage theory does not allow free development of perceptual experience in that each stage is sequentially defined by the definition of stage specific behavioural dictates. In adhering to ultimate dogmas of exemplar behaviours, the objectification of aesthetic responses within a fixed pattern of developmental progress, renders the student, in the eyes of the pedagogue or the

institution, a homogeneous and indistinguishable subject to be weaned through the assimilative stages of a theory such as Parsons'. In essence, the structural conception of aesthetic response becomes a means for regenerating the dominant social norm in schooling because it leaves no space for recognizing contextual based difference among individuals (see Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977). The perpetuation of normative standards in educational objectives, to be met in aesthetic pedagogy by the teacher in relation to the student, commodifies the content of the subject area and diminishes it by transforming it to a form of *cultural capital* (Bourdieu, 1984). What is implied by an adherence to the hierarchical and sequential progression delineated in Parsons' stage theory, is the suppression of human agency which would personalize, through experiential variance, aesthetic behavioural expectations and endeavours. Simply put, Parsons' theory does not tolerate the deviation of the subject from its structuring of human experience, but depends on willing conformity to universalize its claims. Parsons theory, in this fashion, perpetuates the researchers culturally based values in regard to the possibilities within the aesthetic phenomenon by conveying the transmission of a personal cultural heritage as absolute. Such a structural system posits and enforces a sense for the *habitus*, or the socio-cultural rules which have been manifest due to exposure within a given environment (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977). The habitus is rendered identical for each student thus fostering data which is indicative of the perspective which Parsons adopts in suggesting universals within the development of aesthetic responses in all peoples. Uniformity is not attributed to power systems, which do not apprehend themselves as such, in that the relative nature of aesthetic experiences are misrepresented in the form of objective truths (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977; Bourdieu, 1984)). In adopting authoritative research based

instructional programs, such as that offered by Parsons, educators privilege the illusion of a socially valid consensus of viable options in respect to aesthetic developmental potentials. Structured procedural guidelines, although they may offer effective means for transmitting dominant cultural systems of appreciating art, do not provide for an empathy and critical appreciation of alternate viable aesthetic possibilities. Parsons' developmental program which identifies ordered restrictions to the development of aesthetic preferences places limits on individual freedom for generating and engendering perceptual preferences. In not addressing the effect of difference existing due to race, class and ethnicity, the structure Parsons details does not allow for an appreciation of aesthetic principles which permeates the confines of a Eurocentric dominated discourse.

Parsons (1987) posits a foundational conception of "natural" stages as biological and determinate in nature, over considering the situational dependency for the perpetuation of their distinctions. Dominant cultural discourses serving to perpetuate a uniformity in his own perception of the aesthetic experience as well as that of the subjects interviewed are not acknowledged as a limitation to the generalizability of research outcomes. The habitus which serves to form norms within a designated socio-cultural milieu is thus not taken into consideration. Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) convey situational realities which procure commonality within subject understandings in the following passage:

Insofar as it is the arbitrary imposition of a cultural arbitrary presupposing Pedagogic authority, ie. a delegation of authority which requires the pedagogic agency to reproduce the principles of the cultural arbitrary which a group or class imposes as worthy of reproduction both by its very existence and by the fact of delegating to an agency the authority needed in

order to reproduce it pedagogic action entails pedagogic work, a process of inculcation which must last long enough to produce a durable training, i.e. a habitus, the product of internalization of the principles of a cultural arbitrary capable of perpetuating itself after pedagogical action has ceased and thereby of perpetuating in practices the principles of the internalized arbitrary. (p.31)

The habitus involves normative conditioning which allows the reproduction of dominant class understandings through implicit and explicit transmission of mainstream value systems for the regeneration of normative values and ideals. In this respect pedagogical agendas are patterned on a "centered" way of seeing ultimately serve to privilege dominant group understandings while relegating alternate belief systems as inferior in relation to the perspective they offer. Giroux (1988a) questions the value of definitively structured programs of instruction which emanate Eurowestern world norms and ideologies as far as they can be considered generically efficient, and effective methods for guiding instruction. The ideology shaping Parsons' (1987) expectations and students stage related behaviours can be traced to prevalently biased Eurowestern codes of aesthetic perception. Examining stage one of Parsons' developmental theory, which is characterized by an idiosyncratic attitude to art works, it is evident that individuals at such an early age have not yet been assimilated into socially appropriated codes governing aesthetic responses. Stage two, however, involves a developing interest in realism which has existed since ancient times as a prevailing preoccupation within Western art world expectations. Such artistic traditions valorize iconic representations of real world phenomena in relation to the artists ability to offer an illusion of reality faithful to the ideals evident in the forms found in nature. Stage three similarly communicates an expectation of art which has manifest itself as a tenet within



Eurocentric artistic ideals. This stage of development is characterized by an appreciation for art which communicates emotions and expressive content pictorially. Stage four also engenders a representation of well-worn values derived from Western artistic traditions which privilege a transcendental quality inherent within formal arrangements. Parsons ultimately places this form of artistic appreciation within the higher levels of aesthetic awareness. Stage five exemplifies responses to art which are mature in lower level understandings therefore facilitating a more personalized and eclectic selection of concepts in actualizing art criticism and art appreciation promulgated through exposure and disciplined training. The ideological parameters within which Parsons limits his thematic based questioning do not allow for the expression of responses relevant to non-Eurocentric traditions of aesthetics concepts. Recognized are the responses that draw on and reproduce the existing structures within Western traditions in art concerning discussions centered on topics such as those mentioned above, e.g., form, color, expression and technique.

The stages Parsons' (1987) identifies may thus be perceived as serving to valorize only those aesthetic concepts relevant to mainstream agendas while marginalizing alternate perceptions and visual modes of appreciating art. These "instructional" methods, in denying the value of non-dominant art preferences, shape one's appreciation of art through the lens of dominant cultural ways of seeing. Concomitantly, subordinate groups are required to willingly disenfranchise their own cultural heritage as conceptually inferior based on the normative standards conveyed within institutional expectations. Methods of instruction which enforce commodification and consensus within aesthetic awareness to mainstream perceptual systems, may be considered as morally objectionable in that individuals

must undergo a form of “psychological abuse” which, as subtle as it might seem, serves to disparage one’s pride in personalized codes and forms of art appreciation that do not adhere to the readily accepted dominant cultural norms. Similarly, in conveying Eurocentric elitist value systems as absolute, Parsons system of aesthetic development does not engender moral standards in students as they may be determined within an attitude of empathy and appreciation for the possibility of otherness. A theory of aesthetic understanding which constitutes a totalizing perspective of the experience, as it normatively develops within the institutional norms engendering its consistency, thus regulates the imposition of a Euro-Western elitist value system as an ultimate depiction of the aesthetic experience. An understanding such as this bounds and constitutes meaning within the aesthetic experience which denies an awareness of an existing pluralism that more realistically frames the forms of understanding actualized by the increasing numbers of multi-ethnic and non-dominant minority groups which constitute a large percentage of school populations.

## **SUMMARY**

The first section of this chapter offered a descriptive analysis of structuralist theories so as to allow for a critical review of the conceptually biased limitations inherent within such theoretical descriptions. A structural theory which organizes aesthetic responses, as that posed by Parsons (1987), was reviewed so as to illuminate the narrowness of vision which is offered through a structurally and ideologically based methodology that intersects only Eurocentric norms in defining

the nature of aesthetic experience. The second section of this chapter delineates a cultural condition which embraces the multiplicity of needs and interests individuals maintain based on understandings grounded in divergent class, gender and ethnic affiliations. A postmodern appreciation for diversity and otherness was conveyed so as to critically examine the moral, practical and ethical implications imposed on individuals by an ideologically centered system of study such as that proposed by Parsons. Although Parsons' stage theory offers a practical and efficient means for incrementally introducing aesthetic concepts to students, it may be criticized in that it valorizes only dominant cultural discourses while marginalizing alternate aesthetic experiential possibilities. A program of instruction based on Parsons delineation of aesthetic development would serve to disenfranchise and disadvantage individuals within subordinate group populations, thus limiting their potential for success within such partial systems of study. Similarly, Parsons' theory in offering strictly Eurocentric ideals as ultimate in nature, facilitates, by way of modelling, discriminatory programs of study that do not foster empathy for otherness and alternate ways of seeing. Within the philosophical predispositions conveyed in critical pedagogy, the philosophy to be extensively delineated in Chapter Five, educational practices such as those supported by Parsons theory, would impede a critical appreciation of difference among students. Critical pedagogy, moreover, advocates educational programs which allow individuals to view phenomena from a variety of non-self interested perspectives while simultaneously instilling a confidence to actualize a personalized code of possible understandings.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **AESTHETIC DEVELOPMENT AND CRITICAL PEDAGOGY**

#### **CHAPTER OVERVIEW**

This chapter presents a conceptual analysis of critical pedagogy so as to foster a comparative assessment of its “behavioural” objectives in relation to those outlined by Parsons’ (1987) theory of aesthetic development. By delineating the behavioural and philosophical orientation of critical pedagogy, the limitations within Parsons’ developmental theory will implicitly be conveyed. The first section of this chapter will briefly introduce the conceptual precursors of critical pedagogy as they exist in postmodern perspectives in order to facilitate the grounding of a deeper understanding of critical pedagogy itself. The second section of this chapter will characterize critical pedagogy in relation to the conceptual value system it maintains as an educationally based philosophical orientation. A descriptive analysis of its educational goals and practices will offer an understanding of the affective behavioural possibilities such a system of study might actualize within students’ aesthetic developmental understandings. Parsons’ prescriptive delineation of a conceptually defined system for responding to art will thus be brought into question from the postmodern perspective of critical pedagogy.

## **POSTMODERNISM AND ITS INFLUENCES ON CRITICAL PEDAGOGY**

Critical pedagogy has surfaced as a theoretically developed program within education, its philosophical orientation grounded in the discourses of postmodern thought (Giroux, 1988c, 1990; McLaren, 1988). Essentially, there exists within postmodern theories a range of conceptual alternatives which discursively convey the complexity of a contemporary socio-cultural phenomenon reflected in critical pedagogy. The present investigation will examine only the concepts within postmodern arguments that have influenced perspectives maintained in critical pedagogy.

The principle connection to be made between critical pedagogy and postmodern discourses lies in a realization of the limitations and repressive inadequacies within the foundational premises of the modernist paradigm. Postmodern theories aggressively refute modernist belief in the possibility of describing determinate rules and systems which premise a depiction of truth and reality as existing independent of tradition, bias and prejudice (Harvey, 1990; see also Lyotard, 1984). The philosophical groundwork for theorists in the postmodern age who oppose the dissemination of closed, totalizing systems of knowledge (Derrida, 1976; Foucault, 1973; Lyotard, 1984 and others) was laid in the late Nineteenth century by the pre-postmodern philosopher Freidrich Nietzsche who disputed the legitimacy of claims to the possibility of metaphysical truths, self explanatory causal systems or objective conceptions of reality by attacking such absolutist positions as pretentious and illusionary in nature (Best & Kellner, 1991). Similarly, Foucault (1973), although never personally aligning himself to the postmodern cause, offers

an understanding of theoretical constituents which have served to fuel much of the postmodern debate along these argumentative lines of inquiry. Modernist systematized and prescriptive knowledge bases are critiqued as conveying a reductive interpretation of phenomena in that norms are misrepresented as natural and given over being considered as socio-historical constructs of power and domination (Martusewicz, 1992). Postmodern theories in general question modern views of objective knowledge and truth as being essentially repressive and reductionistic in nature. Foucault (1980) illuminates the power/knowledge dependent nature of rationality as it exists formed by incommensurable arrays of hegemonically influenced belief systems. He posits a belief in the need to "respect . . . differences, and even try to grasp them in their specificity" (Foucault, 1973, p.xii) so as to reflect on the inconsistencies within the ways in which the world may be interpreted and read from personalized perspectives. Jencks (1992) similarly reinforces the conception of difference as a hallmark of postmodernism which marks the end of a search for totalizing universals. No longer does (or can) the regional or particular serve as a model for regularizing and systematizing behavioural expectations by suggesting equational absolutes governing phenomena:

. . . the uncontested dominance of the modern world view has definitely ended. Like it or not the West has become a plurality of competing subcultures where no one ideology and episteme dominates for long.  
(Jencks, 1992, p, 11)

There exists a valorization of fragmentation and difference in postmodern rhetoric which suggests a plurality of discourses and modes of power that constitute society today. In identifying the need to be open to an indiscriminate range of possible subject positions, Foucault suggests that:

. . . we must not imagine a world of discourse divided between accepted discourse and excluded discourse . . . but as multiplicity of discursive elements that can come into play in various strategies. (cited in Martusewicz, 1992, p. 147)

Modernist authoritative claims give primacy to Western, cultural reliance while repressing and disenfranchising peoples of marginal group identities based on race, class ethnicity or socio-cultural capital (Giroux, 1988c). Giroux (1988c) points out that postmodernism provides a shift in power references which recognizes the legitimacy of voices sustained within marginalized group representations. Jencks (1992) puts it succinctly in delineating what a postmodern perspective of education involves:

It is crucially important that free communication be safeguarded and a good education provided for everyone. Otherwise, it is quite certain, we will create more vicious divides within society and between cultures, and deepen the shame of a post-industrial society—the permanent underclass. Such moral points are not out of place. . . since every post-modern discourse emphasizes the interconnectedness of things. (p.36)

Corollary to this understanding is the recognition of the indeterminacy constituted from difference which requires a more open interpretive framework upon which understandings can be critically negotiated. Through recognizing differences, power knowledge claims can be sublimated so as to privilege marginalized identities over idealizing norms and enforcing unity within subjects through visible or invisible training, correction and/or normalization (Foucault, 1979).

Lyotard (1984) furthers the argument which aligns the postmodern arena to a network of intersubjective realities, by including computer simulated images and

techno-pseudo realities within contemporary society as serving to complexify diverse power/knowledge struggles that shape multiple possible stances. Simulated realities have so proliferated in contemporary society through video, computer, television and alternate forms of media that the boundaries separating the real from the fabricated are no longer clear. Simulations serve to shape understandings and knowledge, thus imposing a more intricate network of knowledge bases from which subjectivities are realized. A fixed transcendental referent foundationally defining reality within the existing complexity of cultural discourses and power systems thus loses plausibility as a generically normative interpretation of phenomenon. Lyotard (1984) echoes a typically postmodern stance in refuting the foundational claims within modernist universals and metanarratives:

Consensus does violence to the heterogeneity of language games. And invention is always born of dissension. Postmodern knowledge is not simply a tool of the authorities; it refines our sensitivity to differences and reinforces our ability to tolerate the incommensurable. (p.75)

Reflecting a fundamental given within postmodern discourses, the phrase “language games” refers to the incommensurable nature of individual understandings that refuse consensus due to the differing ideological orientations maintained within positional differences. It is suggested that claims to knowledge, then, can only be approached through the process of dissent, whereby the questioning of differing perspectives functions to broaden one’s awareness of alternate discursive possibilities within expression. These discursive possibilities must be scrutinized for their privileging of ideologies and for biased interpretations governing the expression of content. Such is the case within postmodern readings of real-world phenomena which are discursive or textual in nature embodying the



power of an ideologically influenced perspective.

The postmodern relationship to historical knowledge claims is a contested issue within postmodern philosophies. It is generally maintained within postmodern thought that there is an acknowledged break in perspectives from the modern, but where the break leads to in the culmination of the logic of its arguments remains a highly contested issue. Factions within the postmodern debate on one side see our present post-modern condition as an apocalyptic acceptance of an end to history in that all options have been totally exhausted, leaving no future from which to realize the progression of history (see Kellner, 1988; Best & Kellner, 1991). Other more optimistic factions see the current postmodern condition as delineating a representation of the modern by aligning it to discourses of intertextual possibilities (Hutcheon, 1992; Jencks, 1992). Hutcheon (1992) points out that the pluralistic and fragmentary nature of the times have given rise to a need for a new form of theorizing and expression which exist in the complexity of form represented within postmodernism. The complexity of a postmodern awareness is posited that engenders an acceptance, if only a relative one, of the very belief systems it attempts to subjugate and “problematize” by incorporating them within its corpus. In this fashion, perspective standards are immanently assessed so as to allow their “aesthetic forms and social formations to be problematized by critical reflection” (Hutcheon, 1992, p.77). Similarly, Stuart Hall (1986) points out that individuals can no longer uniquely subscribe to absolutes within understandings. It is suggested, however, that systematized traditions offer insightful knowledge claims which may be critically consumed for their relative value as discourses of difference or otherness which strengthen or change the force of old arguments in light of the relative nature of newly incited perspectives. Theoretical absolutes are viewed as

having offered a “series of uneven developments that have emerged out of conflicts between traditional economic models and new cultural formations and modes of criticism . . .” (Giroux 1988c, pp.10-11). Although a postmodern perspective supports an acceptance of plurality and difference, it does so through a critical analysis of the discourse of the arguments posited in order to bring to the surface the unacknowledged or unintentional meanings, positions, etc. In the deconstructing of perspectives, the power of their positions expressed are assessed by way of the traditions which effect their reality. Derrida (interviewed in Kearns & Newton 1980), the author of deconstruction theory (a constituent poststructural perspective within postmodernism) conveys the illegitimacy of considering such a “deconstruction” to be a blind rejection of all knowledge claims:

I would never say that every interpretation is equal . . . The hierarchy is between forces and not between true and false. . . . I would not say that some interpretations are truer than others. I would say that some are more powerful than others. The hierarchy is between forces and not between true and false. There are interpretations which account for more meaning and this is the criterion. (p.21)

This line of argument is pursued to the statement of a position maintaining that some individuals argue that the meaning one engenders to experience is relative to the “external and internal forces” which influence one’s interpretation. The “system of forces” (as Derrida refers to psychologically influenced factors) acting to generate meaning-making potential however is never identical for any two individuals since each individual brings to their own experience a personalized system of experiences and mental attitudes to all experiences which serves to constitute the formation of a personal reality. Derrida (Kearns and Newton, 1980)

further qualifies by stating that.

“No-one is free to read as he or she wants. The reader does not interpret freely, taking into account only his own reading, excluding the author, the historical period in which the text appeared and so on. . . . I think that one cannot read without trying to reconstruct the historical context but history is not the last work, the final key, of reading. (pp.21-22)

Derrida’s argument acknowledges the importance of possible intentional meanings of texts, while simultaneously suggesting that such considerations are but a single agent coloring perceptual experience. Perspectives are not consciously selected but differences within conditional experiences privilege a variety of stances that therefore privilege an indeterminacy of positional definitions.

Postmodern discourses engage critical analyses and interpretations which move one beyond the personal idiosyncratic tendency to nurture “blind spots”, over engendering a constant search for the possible in the unlikely or improbable. Such an orientation becomes valorized when one considers Jencks’ (1992) characterization of the postmodern condition:

The uncontested dominance of the modern world view has definitely ended. Like it or not the West has become a plurality of competing subcultures where no one ideology and episteme dominates for long. (p.11)

This complex diversification of perspectives engendered within contemporary societies requires an acceptance of the legitimacy of an interplay among a variety of differing voices rather than their sublimation in monologue of a dominant discourse or metanarratives (Lyotard, 1984). Critical pedagogy offers an educational orientation which is sensitive to the reality of a contemporary postmodern condition, as will be conveyed within the following section.

## **CRITICAL PEDAGOGY**

This section aims to identify the characteristic features of critical pedagogy so as to consider its value within aesthetic education. The conceptual precursors which have influenced the movement will be outlined briefly in an attempt to facilitate a deeper understanding of the philosophical predispositions of the movement itself. Critical pedagogy will be reviewed by offering a description of the socio-cultural situation which exists as fertile grounds for the movement within educational practices in schools. The movement will subsequently be characterized in relation to the conceptual value system it maintains as an educationally based philosophical orientation. In effect, the theorized value of critical pedagogy, as a philosophical foundation for guiding teaching practices, will be presented so as to consider the influence such an orientation might have on the teaching of aesthetic education.

Postmodernism, a societal “condition” of our times, has provided a milieu for the development of critical pedagogy (Stanley, 1992). The term, critical pedagogy, relates and ultimately stems from the postmodern condition which focuses on contextually based possibilities while denying the validity of universals in the form of metanarratives, or self-validating discourse (Kanpol, 1992; Giroux, 1988c; Stanley, 1992). Postmodernism essentially delegitimizes positivist tendencies to supply objectivized solutions to questions regarding truth and reason while appreciating the dependent nature of all understandings relative to unique and multivariate experiences (Giroux, 1990; Lyotard, 1991; Derrida, 1976; Baudrillard, 1983). Within postmodernism, poststructuralism provides a mode of critical analysis which attempts to show how seemingly objective systems of knowledge posited to explain “reality”, or a given phenomenon, contain within the forms of

their expression inherent perceptual biases which are not universalizable or generalizable as an explanation of “truth” (Kellner, 1988). In acknowledging the merits of valid but diversified points of view, postmodernism realizes a respect for understanding the *otherness* and *difference* which exists within all of human experience. Objective definitive interpretations of human behaviours within cultures and societies are rejected to make way for an acceptance of wider interpretive frameworks which deny prescriptive, structural and definitive approaches to knowledge and the interpretive act itself (Kellner, 1989). Poststructuralism encompasses a way of thinking which is highlighted by a rejection of objective and systematic knowledge claims (Cherryholmes, 1988; Lather, 1991). This way of thinking can be perceived as an inherently cynical or “playful” attitude which perpetually challenges ultimate readings as merely relative to situationally viable but potentially variable stances which cannot be attributed to any transcendental basis for their legitimation (Derrida 1976). Poststructuralists identify stable objective knowledge claims as illusionary, grounded firmly in contextual situations which artificially enforce culturally and socially restricted norms. Although poststructural approaches deny objectivity within perception, they do not repress all arguments, but realize arguments not as universals but as perspectives grounded on logical presentations of phenomena that are contextually perceived (Derrida 1976).

Stanley (1992) points out that poststructural conceptions within postmodern arguments serve as a conceptual base which has directly influenced the tenets of critical pedagogy. Because the term critical pedagogy possesses obvious semantic connotations, the early interpretations were taken to imply a form of pedagogy which involves students in overtly critical exercises. The “critical” within “critical

pedagogy" relates to "critical theory" which founds its critical perspective on a Marxist philosophical orientation. Critical theorists argue that individuals should strive to emancipate themselves from political and economic domination (Stanley, 1992; Kellner, 1989). Critical pedagogy emulates this basic philosophical orientation in that it strives to maximize human freedom with a focus moreover on illuminating the oppressive power of the educational institution in deconstructive/reconstructive exercises which valorize potential plurality within perspectives and discourses (Giroux, 1988a, 1988d, Giroux, 1987; McLaren, 1991, 1988).

Many of the tenets of critical pedagogy can be traced back to the writings of Paulo Freire (see Kaplan, 1991). Freire (1970) maintained the contention that educational systems should foster in students the ability to constitute autonomous thinking and actions. Students should be encouraged to take an active role in developing personalized logically based systems of knowledge (see Kaplan, 1991). Freire (1970) points out that subordinate groups within a dominant cultural orientation become alienated within the status quo of the dominant culture. He advocates school systems which perpetuate critical reflection by teachers and students alike so as to cultivate in individuals the ability to actively realize the legitimacy of differences which do not subscribe *a priori* to oppressive structural arrangements determined by authoritative institutional doctrines. The essential exercise necessary in developing "critical literacy" in classrooms is then realized through encouraging students to relay personal experiences so that through reflecting upon their own discourse and that of others, they may actualize provisional but intelligibly framed arguments which are not governed by authoritatively dictated understandings (Freire & Faundez, 1989). For Freire

(1970). reality is not determinate or fixed but continually dependent upon the contextual factors which orient its construction. There is an appreciation for students' personal experience within Freirian pedagogical approaches, although concomitantly, interpretive experience is acknowledged as troublesome if not maintained through a critical discursive awareness which qualifies the legitimacy of each claim as a language of possibility and not as a language of imposition (see McLaren, 1991). Criticism is seen as a means for broadening knowledge through dialogic constructions which often times stem from deconstructive/reconstructive exercises. By challenging arguments through employing critical discourse, students are able to mediate new understandings and circumvent the need to reproduce institutionally endorsed ideologies. Students criticize for the purpose of uncovering new options and thus develop a broader and more encompassing awareness which ideally conceptually augments institutionally provided knowledge systems.

It may be said that critical pedagogy has developed from within a socio-cultural milieu which has been increasingly insensitive to the reality of the postmodern condition in which it exists (Stanley, 1992, Giroux, 1988b, 1988c). Contemporary societies are characterized in terms of a world of difference in which individuals are ultimately considered to be constructed socially, politically, economically, etc. from exposure to a diverse array of images, discourses, codes, etc. (Derrida, 1976; Lyotard, 1992; Giroux & McLaren, 1992; Spivak, 1992). The North American environment exemplifies a community of otherness which houses a wide variety of individuals who maintain difference by affiliations actualized through complex networks of gender, class, race, ethnic and age relations. The individualities which inevitably exist within these societies, however are not given the freedom to

organize and assert personalized identities within school systems. which moreover, enforce subscription to authorized educational norms and policies. The freedom of the individual is thus narrowly determined by the perpetuation of dominant prescriptive understandings enforced through “democratic” rule and rule systems excluding the majority of participants because of their inherent differences.

This attitude is taken by a number of critical pedagogues (McLaren, 1988, 1991; Kanpol, 1992; Giroux, 1988a; Smyth, 1987) who ultimately question school rituals because they establish and perpetuate conformative behavioural expectations within students which exist as insensitive to the knowledge systems they hold in relation to their personalized codes and forms of discourse (Giroux & McLaren, 1992). Students are forced to comply with and commodify their knowledge toward the status quo so as to succeed within the delineated parameters of a schools hegemonic order. As is maintained by Apple (1992, 1990), Bourdieu, (1984), Giroux (1988a, 1990), Lather (1991) and Cherryholmes(1988), the dominant cultural orientation transmits value structures within educational programs and endorses certain forms of knowledge and behaviours which facilitate its reproduction and valorize its superiority over “lower level” understandings thus creating a hierarchy based on conformity. Individuals from lower status groups thus enter school systems at a disadvantage due to their relatively limited awareness of “dominant culture” forms of knowledge. The understandings subordinate groups bring to the school setting are not supported by the hegemonic order of school curricula. An individual’s class, gender and racial identity can work against their attaining the optimum benefits provided from school systems which do not embrace the marginalized knowledge forms subscribed to within non-dominant world views. Because North American societies increasingly constitute a



heterogeneity of populations and peoples, such a phenomenon within the educational enterprise fails to offer a form of pedagogy which exists as necessarily effective for a large portion of groups represented within society. School systems often exhibit little appreciation and sensitivity to the understandings and potential divergent interests of “lower status” groups (Giroux & McLaren, 1992 ).

Kanpol (1992) identifies the importance of privileging differences by pointing out the need to supersede theories which highlight totalizing universals for an attitude which embraces the validity and legitimacy of differences. He similarly identifies the need individuals have to be members of social subgroups. Individual differences are appreciated while the existence of inherent identities relative to group membership must concomitantly be acknowledged. Kanpol (1992) conveys this understanding in the following passage:

Of course what must be established within schools are personal struggles that are not only separate and different—by race, class, or gender—given their discursive nature, but also intimately connected by their commonalities. (p. 220)

Critical pedagogy values norms as far as they exist within communities of difference. The purpose of educational practices is then seen as a program which facilitates and instills an empathy for otherness through critical reflection on discourse. Teachers facilitate this exploration of plausible perspectives by way of dialogues which essentially illuminate a network of existing realities (Bromley, 1989). Through dialogue, differences are understood and then woven into interpersonal understandings for the purpose of an enriched perceptual reform. Young (1990) points out that for this genre of constructive learning to take place, classroom discourse must necessarily be reciprocal and should thus encourage

students to critically analyze the teachers' as well as fellow students' statements for the purpose of expanding their own views. Critical pedagogues attempt to instate the teacher's and students' authorities within the educational milieu for the purpose of identifying content relevant to the students' experiences which are not encased in the modulated programs handed down through the preplanned and prepackaged curricula of the ministry (Stanley, 1992).

Towards this end, critical pedagogy does not identify predetermined and definitive learning outcomes. It allows the interpretive bias of individuals to realize the central logic of presented areas of study beyond the confines of a delimited perspective offered by a given "dominant group" reading. Michael Apple (1990) points out the indoctrinating powers of the institution through citing the practice of distribution of ready-made instructional packages which bypass any critical role the teacher or student might play in selecting materials for the learning process. Teachers and students alike are seen as cogs in a network governed by external managerial organizers. A trend towards accountability, competence, excellence, and so on instated by standardized, measurable curricula enforce conformity for the purpose of economic productivity and technological development (Stanley, 1991; Kellner, 1988 ; Giroux, 1988a). Such mainstream approaches to education tend to undermine the interests of marginal groups in that they promote inequality while claiming to reduce it through the provision that an equal education is provided to all (Bourdieu, 1984). Giroux (1988a) maintains the need to reevaluate schooling systems which treat students and teachers as consumers of commodified knowledge. He identifies the plight of critical pedagogy which aims to actualize in individuals their active potential to counter domination through developing a facility for critical discourse which frees individuals from the need for rote-learning

(Goodman, 1988).

As a theorist who has offered the most systematic outline of the merits and parameters of critical pedagogy, Giroux (1988a, 1988b, 1988d) maintains the importance of unveiling the oppressive element of institutionalized knowledge. The following quotation by him exemplifies the philosophical nexus of critical pedagogy which favors practices:

That use the lived experiences in which students discover how they give meaning to the world and how such meaning can be used reflectively to discover its own sources and limits. (Giroux. 1990, p. 29)

Within this self-reflexive experiential framework, pedagogy draws upon the students' awareness as a source of informational logic and interpretation guiding and motivating critical thinking relative to the act and function of learning. Giroux (1988a, 1988c, 1988d, 1987) emphasizes developing confidence in students to voice ideas and not to veil and submerge the tacit, or more experientially derived, forms of understanding available to them. This process of applied reasoning can be, as Blatz (1989) notes, "understood as the deliberate pursuit of well supported beliefs, decisions, plans, and actions" p.107. Such pursuits are accountable to the logic brought through the individual's own schemas of understanding as influenced by gender, race, class, age and so on. Through fostering in students and teachers a critical voice to analyze and add to perspectives presented, "subordinate" group understandings and perceptions are given the opportunity to be realized. Critical pedagogy thus teaches students an acceptance of a variety of perspectives, including their own by affirming difference through the problematized analysis of possibilities (McLaren, 1988). As McLaren (1988) suggests:

Critical pedagogy is positioned irreverently against a pedantic cult of

singularity in which moral authority and theoretical assurance are arrived at unproblematically without regard to the repressed narratives and suffering of the historically disenfranchised. (p.73)

Critical educators are not interested in subscribing to “effective methods” for the efficient consumption of knowledge content. Knowledge does not reside as a commodity to be given and “consumed” but as an entity which requires understanding through its analysis—it is an understanding which stems from a highly personalized basis of experience and interpretation (Giroux, 1987).

The goal of critical pedagogy is to empower students with the ability to think and act reflectively as individuals who have formed a conscious self-awareness tainted by multiple affiliations and worldly transactions. That a students’ experience must be maintained as an element and component within a theory of learning is important. As Giroux (1988d) points out:

...students have experiences and you can’t deny that these experiences are relevant to the learning process even though you might say that these experiences are limited, raw unfruitful or whatever. Students have memories, families, religions, feelings, languages and cultures that give them a distinctive voice. We can critically engage that experience and we can move beyond it. But we can’t deny it. (p.99)

Individuals are seen as maintaining understandings which are continually subject to change and reevaluation as experience enriches and/or alters their rational stances (Giroux, 1988d). Critical pedagogues aspire toward elevating the consciousness of their students so as to inspire within them the confidence to actively examine themes relative to the students own ever expanding experiential understandings (Kaplan, 1991).

This is not to say that teachers are stripped of the right to voice and to convey their own understanding of historically based knowledge for as Giroux & Simon (1988) put it:

Indeed, the pedagogical struggle is lessened without such resources.

However, teachers and students must find forms within which a single discourse does not become the locus of certainty and certification. Rather, teachers must find ways of creating a space for mutual engagement of lived difference that does not require the silencing of a multiplicity of voices by a single dominant discourse; at the same time, teachers must develop forms of pedagogy informed by a substantive ethic that contests racism, sexism, and class exploitation as ideologies and social practices that disrupt and devalue public life. (p.16)

The discursive presentation of knowledge is valuable in that academic accomplishments are acknowledged by critical educators to be rich bodies of knowledge which ultimately warrant examination and interrogation (Giroux & McLaren, 1992). Scholarly discourse is to be approached however, not as sacred areas of institutionalized understanding guarded against any argument or controversy, but as perspectives that speak through a voice and merit examination as such. Through conceptual dialogic deconstruction and developments students grapple with the relevancy of knowledge claims as far as they resonate a valid critical argument. Discourse serves as the medium from which students practice their power to problematize and realize identities and subjectivities while keeping in mind the exploitation and alienation which may arise when knowledge claims are taken to be absolute or normative and not simply as an interpretation that can be enriched by adding minority and popular experiences to its possibilities.

Students and teachers must work together to appreciate otherness while simultaneously bridging the span between difference through empathetic understanding and rationality (Stanley, 1992). The postmodern condition, as it engages the need to develop a sensitivity for otherness over a submission to culturally dominant narratives, is clearly conveyed in the following passage by Giroux (1990):

This must be a discourse that breathes life into the notion of democracy by stressing a notion of lived community that is not at odds with the principles of justice, liberty, and equality. . . . This points to the need for educators to prepare students for a type of citizenship that does not separate abstract rights from the realm of the everyday, and does not define community as the legitimating and unifying practice of a one-dimensional historical and cultural narrative. Postmodernism radicalizes the emancipatory possibilities of teaching and learning as part of a wider struggle for democratic public life and critical citizenship. It does this by: refusing forms of knowledge and pedagogy wrapped in the legitimizing discourse of the sacred and the priestly; reflecting universal reason as a foundation for human affairs; claiming that all narratives are partial; and performing a critical reading on all scientific, cultural, and social texts as historical and political constructions. (pp. 24-25)

Giroux is sensitive to the need for an educational program which functions within the realm of lived aspirations, needs and understandings of reality. He is aware of how the condition of postmodernism can offer an intermeshing of possibilities within rational discourse which have important educational implications. Education may thrive on difference and otherness as it offers a wealth of knowledge claims to

be worked through analytically by students and teachers alike in their quest to develop a discriminating but not restrictive understanding of perspectives. The enforcing of presynthesized learning materials is ultimately seen as serving to deny students the ability to analyze and interrogate arguments based on their own critical powers of perception. Totalizing systems of education offer experiences which can limit and falsely represent knowledge by not conveying its subjective nature.

## CONCLUSIONS

Within recent philosophically based research in aesthetic education, there has been an increasing awareness and interest in facilitating within students the ability to realize the expression of a confident identity of otherness and difference (Young, 1990; Hart, 1991; Congdon, 1991). Multiculturalism and gender issues have become a focus within such studies, thus demonstrating the postmodern need to appreciate the proliferation of diversity and the cultivation of a means for expression of alternate ways of knowing. This may be realized educationally through the lens of a critical pedagogy which aims at establishing a questioning and self-reflexive consciousness in students (Freire, 1970, Giroux, 1988a, McLaren, 1991). It would allow students to actualize a personalized awareness for aesthetic preferences which is not mandated by dominant cultural discourses, thus allowing them the freedom to frame rational arguments based on their own personal experience.

The nurturing of a critical awareness in aesthetic education which maintains an informed sensitivity to the power/knowledge function of discourse, would enhance students' abilities to reflect on and appreciate the multiple influences and sources for aesthetic understanding. Students would consequently not be restricted in their

aesthetic responses by way of conformative dominant cultural norms. They could be encouraged to search out the uniqueness of their own situations and to find relevancy within the positions they maintain regarding their personalized aesthetic preferences. Educating students, by way of critical pedagogy, to appreciate difference, as it exists within their own perceptions as well as in those of others, ultimately facilitates the development of an understanding of aesthetics rich in networks of plausible affiliations and possibilities. Marginalized groups, enfranchised through critical pedagogy, may gain confidence and a sense of self-esteem in the legitimation of personalized perceptions. Concomitantly a critical awareness and respect for alternate possibilities which serves to inform and enrich personalized aesthetic responses may be engendered through a developed ability to actively problematize knowledge sources for their potential strengths. From a critical pedagogical standpoint, the culturally defined and structurally closed educational imperatives inherent to Parsons' stage theory exist as limiting and falsely representative of potentials individuals maintain within their aesthetic experiential possibilities.

A postmodern perspective, as reconceptualized for educational purposes within critical pedagogy, emphasizes a rejection of structures which dominate and legitimate behavioural claims about populations and societies as a whole. Critical pedagogues view normative developmental phenomenon as a stifling outgrowth of influences afforded through institutional and dominant cultural norms and power sources. Their approach to teaching which celebrates difference, plurality, heterogeneity and the voicing of a diversity of positions delineates a stance diametrically opposed to that of Parsons which in itself outlines specificity, uniformity and consensus within aesthetic developmental possibilities. Ultimately,



critical pedagogy, within aesthetic education, opens up the potential for the recognition of alternate forms of understanding which exist outside the norms of Western elitist aesthetic traditions. Critical pedagogy thus brings into question the value of Parsons' behaviourally definitive stage theory of aesthetic development.

### **CHAPTER SUMMARY**

In the first section of Chapter Five, the theoretical positions addressed within postmodern perspectives were selectively reviewed with the intent of supplying an understanding of the biases which have affected critical pedagogy. Subsequently, in the second section of this chapter, Critical pedagogy, as an approach to teaching, was delineated so as to allow the reader an understanding of the conceptual and philosophical orientations which are engendered within its educational premises. This conceptual delineation allowed for a recognition of the limitations and restrictions inherent within Parsons' stage theory of aesthetic development as they are evidenced through a perspective of critical pedagogy.

## **CHAPTER SIX**

### **SUMMARY OF THE STUDY**

During the past two decades, aesthetics has achieved recognition as an important component of school art curricula. Actualizing in classroom practice a curricular mandate which includes aesthetics as a subject of study in schools however has proved to be a difficult objective for many teachers. The complexity of the subject itself does not lend itself to a prescriptive conceptual format offering simple and clear objectives on which to base teaching practices. As a result, aesthetic education has lacked formal arrangement of concepts and consequently has also lacked the presence of structure for teachers to use in its presentation. Although Parsons' (1987) theory attempts to counter such a void within art curricula by offering structured order for the presentation of aesthetic concepts, there ultimately exist inherent limitations within the definitive sequencing he posits in the theory conveyed. The present study considers the theoretical, methodological, practical, moral, and ethical limitations of Parsons' theory by way of a postmodern critique as reconceptualized within critical pedagogy.

Chapter Two presented a detailed review of aesthetic theories so as to provide a conceptual delineation of the phenomenon which Parsons attempts to describe and organize through a sequential ordering of aesthetic conceptual understandings as they are normatively acquired by individuals in Western societies. A review of theories which have sustained recognition as rhetorically valid claims descriptive of the aesthetic phenomenon clearly denote the complexity of the subject of aesthetics. The divergence of arguments, presented within Chapter Two, make clear the plurality of possibilities from which one may actualize aesthetic appreciation. In

juxtaposing divergent theoretical presuppositions maintained within aesthetic understanding, the dynamic and changeable nature of the phenomenon itself is revealed as an experience which does not suggest absolutes and finite attributes within its fundamental nature. That aesthetic perception offers a “vivid experience” of heightened awareness may be accepted as a given to the phenomenon itself. The catalysts engendering these experiences, however, lie within the conceptual and perceptual predispositions of the viewer, as is evidenced through the ardent critical arguments which serve to legitimate the divergent positions taken.

Chapter Three presented the inherent biases evident within Parsons’ (1987) research methodology. Similarly, studies by Machotka (1966), Moore (1973), Gardner, Winner & Kircher (1975), Rosenstiel, Morisen, Silverman & Gardner (1978), which support the behavioural trends identified by Parsons, were reviewed for the ideological biases limiting the generalizability of their theoretical constructs. Within the studies reviewed, aesthetic understanding is conveyed as exhibiting developmental patterns which are specifically defined relative to determinate age related visual preferences existing in students. The program of inquiry employed by Parsons and the related cited studies reflect a biased research itinerary which does not take socio-historical influences into consideration as possible determinants in the commodification of norms within aesthetic experiences. The denial to provide a research methodology which challenges the possible effects of contextual influences, renders claims to the organismic nature of aesthetic development as insufficiently substantiated by the research procedures implemented. The studies presented exemplify a direct interrelationship between the researchers’ biases and the realities uncovered in that the researchers’ ideological orientations manifest a methodological program (e.g., subject selection, questions posed, stimuli selected,

etc.) which maximized the likelihood of identifying consistency within subject responses. The research findings cited convey a fragmentary representation of phenomena in that they do not consider the shaping and behaviour framing potential inherent to discourses of dominant cultural power systems.

Within Chapter Four, it is identified that Parsons' (1987) theory exemplifies a structuralist approach to knowledge claims. Phenomenological variables are not accessed so as to identify potential contextual actants that serve to shape consistency within aesthetic understanding. In relating developmental patterns within subject responses to *a priori* biologically determined structures, Parsons suggests uniformity within responses to be a consequence of maturing faculties that exist outside of cultural and societal determinants. Parsons research findings delineate only responses which conform to Western fine art traditions. The moral and ethical implications inherent to an instructional itinerary that enforces strictly Western dominant cultural belief systems on marginalized group populations is thus brought into question. By limiting the aesthetic conceptual possibilities at each stage to a Eurocentric elitist itinerary of possibilities, Parsons' theory valorizes only Western dominant cultural discourses therefore marginalizing subordinate group understandings as qualitatively inferior. Similarly, in that Parsons' theory uniquely conveys Eurocentric ideals as ultimate in nature, it engenders, by way of modelling, discriminatory programs of study which do not engender in students an empathy for otherness and alternate ways of seeing

In Chapter Five critical pedagogy is defined as an educationally based philosophy which derives its theoretical presuppositions from understandings based within selected postmodern belief systems. Postmodern paradigms that maintain an appreciation for the diversity, plurality and relativity of interpretive possibilities.

deny the value of structured, definitive prescriptions within human behaviour, such as those posited by Parsons' stage theory. It is pointed out that implicit institutional mandates limit one's ability to access personalized frames of reference which depart from dominant cultural expectations. Critical pedagogy serves to empower students with the ability to realize subject positions which exist as relative to one's diverse affiliations and socio-cultural influences. A school system oriented within the tenets of critical pedagogy aims to foster in individuals the ability to actively realize the legitimacy of differences outside of dominant cultural expectations determined within restrictive and oppressive institutionalized norms. In this respect, critical pedagogy is posited as an educational itinerary which could serve to confound the normative developmental trends upon which Parsons sanctions his stage theory of aesthetic development.

Ultimately, it is intended that the presently delineated conceptual analysis serves to bring into question the value of Parsons' stage theory of aesthetic development as it may be understood by way of the theoretical presupposition inherent to critical pedagogy.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

The following is a distillation of the main conclusions which were drawn from the present study:

- 1) Parsons' (1987) theory of aesthetic development, which delineates specific concepts to be realized in an ordered framework, limits aesthetic possibilities to objective definitives. Such an instructional program would not allow for a critical awareness of personalized aesthetic experiences to be actualized through

engendering an appreciation for the indeterminacy of options which may validate aesthetic experiences that exist outside of the sequentially delineated and conceptually defined normative expectations.

2) Parsons does not allow for the possibility of socially coercive practices shaping responses before attributing conformity to essentialist behavioural norms. Had he excluded the effect of overt and covert socio-cultural expectations as influential in instilling consistency within subject behaviours, the researcher may have strengthened the credence of his claims relating existing generalized patterns as developmentally and objectively determinate. Not having done so, the methodology Parsons employs does not allow for a stage theory of aesthetic development to be validly claimed as sound knowledge based on the procedures engendering its formation.

3) Pedagogical practices based on established *a priori* structured systems should be evaluated for their suitability to the different socio-cultural populations they affect before being implemented as standard educational itineraries. Subordinate group populations are disadvantaged in school programs that convey only dominant cultural value systems, in that their own cultural capital must be denied so as to allow for their successful integration within mainstream expectations. In this respect, Parsons' stage theory of aesthetic development which restricts behavioural expectations to Eurocentric normative standards, imposes on students understandings which exclude non-mainstream knowledge bases maintained in relation to personalized codes and forms of discourse. By restricting aesthetic possibilities to a designated sort of reasoning at various developmental levels, Parsons sets up a rigid and "correct" structure within aesthetic understanding which does not allow for an empathy of otherness to be fostered. Similarly,

Parsons' program of instruction, based on a Eurocentrically defined itinerary of aesthetics, serves for the disenfranchisement and disadvantaging of individuals within subordinate group populations.

4) A critical pedagogical approach to teaching that enfranchises difference, plurality and otherness by ascribing to the legitimacy of diversity within subject positions, offers an educational orientation which counters Parsons' closed systematization of conceptual sequentially defined possibilities within aesthetic understanding. Ultimately, critical pedagogy within aesthetic education encourages the recognition of alternate forms of understanding which exist outside the norms of Western elitist aesthetic traditions. Critical pedagogy thus challenges the limited behavioural dictates identified within Parsons' stage theory of aesthetic understanding.

5) The validity and value of Parsons' theory of aesthetic development is ultimately brought into question when considered from a conceptual orientation of critical pedagogy.

### **IMPLICATIONS FOR THEORY**

The multiplicity of perspectives which may be maintained within aesthetic perception must be acknowledged so as to allow for a breadth of aesthetic possibilities to be realized in pedagogy. It must be noted that curricular programs which instill closed systems of instruction limit the potential for non-mainstream understandings to be supported, thus limiting the realm of aesthetic understandings offered to students. Within a program of study such as that developed by Parsons, which is based on the imperatives of Western traditions in art, students do not

develop an empathy for difference and otherness as it exists within the context of North American school populations. Parsons' instructional itinerary serves to disenfranchise non-dominant perspectives, therefore implicitly conveying the inferior status of such alternate possibilities. Structuralist educational mandates based on dominant cultural understandings serve to increase difference by reinforcing discriminatory hierarchies within education. For this reason Eurocentrically biased educational agendas should be critically analyzed for their cross-class, cross-race, cross gender, etc., suitability before being implemented into school practice. Critical pedagogy may be considered as an educational agenda which offers a philosophy sensitive to the needs of multicultural student populations in that it encourages a critical awareness of dominant as well as subordinate group understandings within student's aesthetic responses.

### **IMPLICATIONS FOR RESEARCH**

The present study exemplifies the need for research to be understood and examined as ideologically driven praxis. Consequently, the ideological underpinnings and biases specific to each form of inquiry should be identified in order to view the findings in relation to the subject positions from which they are derived. Similarly, because the present study offers a strictly conceptual analysis and criticism of Parsons' theory, empirical studies are needed to substantiate the claims made within such theoretically based research. These being: a) a study which would challenge the universalizable and sequentially invariant nature of Parsons' stage theory; and b) a study of aesthetic responses which would delineate the affective learning outcomes of an educational agenda based on the tenets of



critical pedagogy. Before empirical research may be conducted which considers the effects of an educational program based on the philosophical tenets of critical pedagogy, a methodological program which serves to facilitate its implementation into classroom practice must first be developed.

### **IMPLICATIONS FOR EDUCATION**

Professional development must be offered to teachers in a number of areas if they are to provide students with an education which engenders an appreciation for the possible diversity of aesthetic belief systems maintained within multicultural populations. Teacher education programs need to be implemented in the following areas: a) educators should be introduced to the limiting and conceptually restrictive nature of structural curricular agendas in that these can serve to disenfranchise subordinate group understandings; b) art educators must be allotted instruction relevant to the study of aesthetics in order to allow them the expertise to offer a knowledgeable presentation of aesthetic theories within their teaching programs; and c) professional development relevant to the subject of critical pedagogy should be made available to educators so as to foster in them an understanding of the importance of enfranchising subordinate group understandings within teaching practices.

## CRITICAL REFLECTIONS

Art exists as an area of study which is laden with rich and ever expanding bodies of knowledge. Expertise within its historical, practical, critical and aesthetic dimensions is acquired through extensive involvement, study and practice with the concepts and skills pertinent to the field. Because of the quantity and complexity of topics and skills involved, educators cannot be expected to offer expertise in all possible theoretically and practically based areas relevant to its study. What may be expected, however, is that students are exposed to educational situations which initiate knowledge and an appreciation of the main disciplines encompassed within its content possibilities. Aesthetics, the focus of the present study, exists as an important dimension of art in relation to its experiential possibilities. As a subject of study, it offers philosophical complexities which remain academically challenging for both teachers and students. Most teachers are not afforded the training necessary to gain comprehensive expertise in aesthetics that would allow them to offer students a formal program of instruction in the subject area. Although this rests as a point in fact, it does not justify the limited recognition aesthetics is allotted within school art curricula.

Through aesthetic contemplation, individuals develop the ability to recognize elements within one's visual field which can allow for the actualization of richer experiential possibilities. Aesthetic understandings thus enable the contemplation and appreciation of visual phenomena for the breadth of heightened visual experiences they may afford. These heightened visual experiences can be derived from a simple sensual appreciation of color harmonies and cadences, or from the

intricate cognitive challenges illuminated in an art work, or again, from a diversity of alternate experiential catalysts. There is diversity and variance in the motivating sources of aesthetic responses and only through exposure to art, art discourse and formal guidance and training can individuals gain developed insight into the range of its possibilities. The aesthetic understandings individuals maintain, regulate the pleasure they are able to attain from visual experiences. One's sensitivity to potential aesthetic experiences can be developed so as to allow for a richer appreciation of perceptual merits encased and coded within art works. Experience allows for the attainment of confidence in the legitimacy of personalized visual preferences which is not encumbered by the fear of misunderstanding the possibilities of art. Through exercising preference by comparing and contrasting works while learning to discriminate the beautiful, or aesthetic, from the common, or mundane, relevant to one's personalized perceptions, individuals come to realize, through practice, the existent aesthetic possibilities of art.

Education programs that do not touch on aesthetics as a relevant component of art, thus omit important facets of students' developmental potential. As previously stated, the complexity of aesthetics has resulted in its being omitted within many school curricula. Parsons' (1987) research may be acknowledged for identifying phenomena which depict norms within aesthetic development perceived in subject populations within Western society. It cannot, however, be said that such normative standards exist as biologically developmental stages universalizable in nature or inherent to all experience. The present study suggests that although Parsons' stage theory might serve to order the complex topic of aesthetics into a manageable itinerary of workable grade specific concepts, it does so at the expense of the intricate richness of experiential possibilities aesthetics may offer students. If

education is to engender for students, learning opportunities which optimize the actualization of an understanding that encompasses true insight into the nature of the subject studied. Parsons' stage specific conceptual itinerary then may be seen as limiting in that it restricts rather than optimizes aesthetic experiential possibilities.

Critical pedagogy has been considered as an aesthetic program of study that could more fully allow for a diversity of response preferences to be realized by students. It is pointed out that critical pedagogy aims to instill within individuals a respect for the multiplicity of values and perspectives which may be maintained based on race, class, gender, or age specific affiliations. It exists as an educational philosophy which incorporates lived experiences and perspectives as an integral component within instructional programs. Aesthetics, if it is to achieve legitimacy for students, must be relevant to their perceptual preferencing system in that aesthetic responses are based on the quality of experience evoked through the perception of an art work. Critical pedagogy allows for acknowledgment of the subjective nature of aesthetic experiences, thus enfranchising individuals with the power to legitimate and give credence to their own perceptual understandings. Both teachers (who are likely to possess the richest source of aesthetic knowledge) and students become active members in the learning process through relaying personalized aesthetic understandings. Aesthetic possibilities are illuminated in order to initiate a critical examination of the logic, value and legitimacy of identified differences existing relative to subject specific responses. An active critical presentation of aesthetic concepts affords one the opportunity to realize legitimate biases within personalized art preferences while engendering an appreciation for difference which concomitantly may serve to broaden, or heighten aesthetic understandings.

Critical pedagogy proposes the implementation of an educational philosophy which attempts to offer legitimacy and relevancy to non-dominant group understandings while simultaneously conveying a respect for the legitimacy of dominant modes of thinking and experiencing. An educational ideology which conveys a respect for diversity within perspectives may be questioned on the grounds that it emanates an “anything goes” type of orientation. This however is a misguided representation of critical pedagogy in that although critical pedagogy encourages individuals to enact their own biases and perspectives, it simultaneously entails the process of an active challenging and problematizing of concepts in order to allow the value and merit of possibilities to be critically analyzed. Perspectives are to be understood as biases shaped and formed through personalized affiliations which are maintained by divergent subject positions and perceptions.

In theory, critical pedagogy offers a means from which to illicit an open respect for the subjective nature of aesthetic possibilities. It must be acknowledged, however, that to actualize a program of study based on critical pedagogy, practical guidelines are needed from which teachers may base methodological considerations. What has been developed within the research literature to date offers valuable insights into the underlying societal conditions, value systems and generalized behavioural objectives characteristic of the focus of critical pedagogy. Yet, although these theoretical developments provide for an extensive understanding of the philosophical presuppositions and biases underlying critical pedagogy, the means from which teachers can actualize a working methodology of the philosophy has not yet been provided or fully articulated for praxis in educational contexts. Further conceptual development is necessary so as to provide practical guidelines for educators interested in implementing a program

representative of critical pedagogy within the contexts of their own classrooms.

In developing such a program for the instruction of aesthetics in schools, practical guidelines need to be developed which support an educational agenda that strives to offer equality of opportunity within its teaching practices. The expertise teachers bring to the classroom allows them the power to offer students knowledge claims which may too easily be taken at face value as universalizable truths. Ways of presenting information and concepts that are not dogmatic and which engender critical reflection need to be identified. Teachers must become sensitive to the fact that every individual possesses the right to a personal point of view, regardless of how immature, different, etc., that point of view may initially seem. It is through sustained critical reflection and exposure to alternate aesthetic possibilities that individuals develop and mature in their aesthetic understandings. It becomes essential that educators work towards instilling in students the confidence to realize views which differ from those expounded by the status quo. Thus, teachers must be trained in the ability to challenge student perspectives while simultaneously not discouraging them from voicing their own understandings. Educators must learn to foster an openness and appreciation of otherness that serves as a model for students to develop in themselves an empathy and appreciation for divergent ways of perceiving and appreciating art. Pedagogical methodologies must be developed which incorporate student experiences as relevant curriculum content and encourage the development of an active critical awareness in students enabling them in turn to problematize their own as well as other perspectives taken.

Only through a praxis based agenda which organizes a method for the implementation of critical pedagogy, may such a pedagogical option be taken seriously as a program of instruction which would challenge Parson's stage theory

of aesthetic development. Aesthetics exists as a valuable component of the art experience and it is essential that teacher education programs contribute to its inclusion within art education programs. Similarly, critical pedagogy merits recognition as a valuable component within teacher training programs in that it offers an educational program that is sensitive to conceptual perspectives maintained by multicultural populations. If teachers are to work towards developing, refining and expanding student's personalized aesthetic biases through an active critical analysis of its possibilities, there needs to be made available to them an education which engenders an understanding of theoretical and methodological possibilities of both critical pedagogy and aesthetic theory.

Educational philosophies and practices are constantly shifting in an attempt to increase the effectiveness and value of the programs offered to students. Because aesthetic development offers individuals valuable life enhancing skills, it should not be overlooked as a component of art education practices. Coming to understand the breadth of conceptual possibilities that inspire heightened visual experiences allows one a rich source from which to draw upon in the appreciation of art and visual phenomena in general. An educational itinerary that attempts to illuminate the wealth of possibilities within aesthetic responses fosters in individuals the engendering of a perceptual vocabulary that enriches life's experiential possibilities. Teacher education programs and art education curricula should thus convey the importance of incorporating the study of aesthetics into art education practices, not so as to close its possibilities to a designated few conceptual itineraries, but so as to encourage an open recognition and appreciation of the breadth and ultimately subjective nature of its possibilities relative to the interests and biases of the individual.

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**Appendix A**  
**Parsons' Stage Theory**  
**(Summarized for Thesis Presentation)**

The ways people understand art is sequentially manifest in a certain order by Parsons, consequently, the five stages he delineates are sequential, hierarchical and continuous: Stage one comes before stage two, stage two before stage three, etc.

Stage One:

This stage is usually found in subjects during their preschool years and is characterized by idiosyncratic preferences to art works. Individuals generally exhibit an attraction for both abstract or realist works with a marked attraction to color.

Stage Two:

During elementary school years subjects generally demonstrated stage two responses to art works which is marked by a strong preference for realism and morally correct subject selection.

Stage Three:

Stage Three responses are generally conveyed in students' understanding of art during their high school years. This stage of development is characterized by an appreciation for art which communicates emotions and expressive content pictorially.

Stage Four:

At stage four, the viewer constructs a framework for understanding art works that is based on an objective analysis of style, technique, historical and social issues

relevant to art world traditions.

Stage Five:

At this stage a subjects evaluation of an art work becomes personal. Understanding artistic traditions serves to give one the authority to transcend the dictates of society and make personal judgements.

## **Appendix B**

### **(Selective Chapter Summaries for Thesis Presentation)**

#### **Chapter Three**

##### **Identifies the Biases Inherent within Parsons' Research**

- It is pointed out that objective knowledge, as it is elucidated through research programs, has come into question based on a growing awareness of the relativistic and socially constructed nature of phenomena.
  
- Parsons' findings are considered as relative and dependent to a given context and not as fundamental and universalizable in nature
  
- Parsons' hypothetically "objective" and value neutral methodological program is critically analyzed in order to identify how researcher values permeate the forms of inquiry and effect the conclusions drawn.
  
- Parsons' methodology discloses a value based program of inquiry which regulates and biases the findings in the following ways:
  - A homogeneous subject population increases the likelihood of consistency within responses.
  - Stimuli selections from which responses are derived are comprised of strictly Western fine art examples.
  - All questions asked touch strictly on traditional Eurowestern expectations of art
  - No attempt is made to consider how attitudes might be experientially formed

or effected.

- The researcher fails to challenge the developmental sequence by considering the potential effect training might have on subject responses to art.

- It is pointed out that Parsons' ideologically biased research methodology does not determine universalizable aesthetic development in that the effects of dominant cultural influences are not analyzed or ruled out.

#### **Chapter Four**

##### **Identifies the Moral and Ethical implication of Parsons' Stage Theory**

- Parsons' theory exemplifies a structuralist approach to knowledge claims. Phenomenological variables are not accessed so as to identify potential contextual actants that serve to shape consistency within aesthetic understanding.

- Within Parsons theory there is no acknowledgment of the differences and counternarratives which may be perpetuated in a society that constitutes alternate group representations based on race ethnicity, class and gender affiliations.

- It is questionable whether a pedagogical methodology which normalizes behavioural expectations to the status quo, justly serves the needs of all individuals concerned.

- Members of lower status groups are disadvantaged in school systems which transmit only dominant cultural value systems in that their own cultural capital must



be repressed so as to allow for successful integration within mainstream expectations.

- What is implied by an adherence to the hierarchical and sequential progression delineated in Parsons' stage theory, is the suppression of human agency which would personalize, through experiential variance, aesthetic behavioural expectations and endeavours.

- Parsons' aesthetic theory, although it may offer effective means for transmitting aesthetic value systems, does not provide for the development of moral standards engendered within the fostering of an empathy for otherness and alternate ways of seeing.

- A program of instruction such as Parsons' which enforces commodification and consensus to Western art world traditions serves to disenfranchise and disadvantage understandings maintained by subordinate group populations, thus limiting their potential for success within such a partial systems of study.

### **Chapter Five**

#### **Aesthetic development and Critical Pedagogy**

- A conceptual analysis of critical pedagogy is provided so as to foster a comparative assessment of its "behavioural" objectives in relation to those outlined by Parsons' theory of aesthetic development
- Critical pedagogy exists as a theoretically developed program within education

which grounds its discourses on postmodern thought, in that there exists the need to supersede theories which highlight totalizing universals for an attitude which embraces the validity and legitimacy of differences.

- Critical pedagogy fosters an acceptance of a variety of perspectives through the problematized analysis of possibilities.
- Critical pedagogues attempt to instate the teacher's and students' authorities within the educational milieu for the purpose of identifying content relevant to the students' experiences.
- Educating students to appreciate difference, as exemplified within their own perceptions as well as those of others, ultimately facilitates the development of an understanding rich in networks of plausible affiliations and legitimated experiential possibilities.
- Critical pedagogy delineates a stance diametrically opposed to that of Parsons' which in itself outlines specificity uniformity and consensus within aesthetic developmental possibilities. Ultimately, critical pedagogy, within aesthetic education, opens up the potential for the recognition of alternate forms of understanding which exist outside the norms of Western elitist aesthetic traditions.
- Parsons' prescriptive delineation of a conceptually defined system for responding to art is thus brought into question from the perspective of critical pedagogy.

## **APPENDIX C**

### **Aesthetics and Critical Pedagogy: A Critique of Parsons’ Stage Theory of Aesthetic Development Conclusions (Summarized for Thesis Presentation)**

1) Through conveying numerous exemplar definitions of aesthetics, it is made evident that the aesthetic phenomenon exists as a complex network of alternatives which is open to subjective and personalized interpretations. Diverse aesthetic possibilities gain credence through the power of critical argument. Parsons’ developmental theory, however, designates and limits aesthetic possibilities in relation to sequentially defined experiential expectations.

2) The ideological biases inherent within Parsons’ research methodology serve to limit the generalizability of his findings.

3) Parsons’ structural theory in its Eurocentrically biased conceptual itinerary, is critically assessed for the moral and ethical implications it imposes on subordinate group populations. It serves to disenfranchise the understandings of these marginalized groups while concomitantly exhibiting a hierarchical preferencing of views which fail to instill in individuals an empathy and appreciation for difference and otherness.

4) Critical pedagogy taken as an educational orientation exposes the limiting

and restrictive nature of an educational agenda which offers a definitive and closed system of developmental possibilities.