AESTHETIC
EDUCATION
IN
MODERN
PERSPECTIVE

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INTRODUCTION

Writers from the classical era to the present have speculated on the unique role that the arts play in human experience. Although the terms of the question and the form in which it has been asked have varied from period to period, the tendency has been to see art’s typical function as contributing either to human understanding or the freshening and vitalizing of experience. Aesthetic Education in Modern Perspective provides a modern version of the classical maxim that the purpose of the arts is to move, delight, and inform. The theories of three twentieth-century philosophers—Monroe C. Beardsley, Harold Osborne, and Nelson Goodman—indicate that the arts at their best have the capacity to provide a high level of aesthetic gratification (Beardsley), to stimulate direct perception for its own sake (Osborne), and to contribute to understanding (Goodman). In recommending an excellence curriculum for arts education that is committed to developing the ability to appreciate quality in art, I believe that an excellent work of art is one of those things of the world that are a constant reminder of the possibility of transcending the ordinary; good art continually draws us away from a pedestrian existence. Aesthetic education should do no less.
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To adopt the aesthetic point of view is simply to seek out a source of value. And it can never be a moral error to realize value—barring conflict with other values. . . . [T]he objects of aesthetic interest—such as harmonious design, good proportions, intense expressiveness—are not drugs, but part of the breath of life. Their cumulative effect is increased sensitization, fuller awareness, a closer touch with the environment and concern for what is and might be.

Monroe C. Beardsley
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I am grateful to James A. Mason, dean of the College of Fine Arts and Communications at Brigham Young University, for inviting me to present the Dean's Lecture for 1985. The warm hospitality accorded me on the occasion of the lecture by Dean Mason and his staff is greatly appreciated. In addition to Dean and Mrs. James A. Mason, I especially wish to thank Professor Michael Day and Mrs. Virgie Day for their kindness and consideration.

The essay is dedicated to the memory of Monroe C. Beardsley, whose writings about art and aesthetic theory embody a model of humane sentiment and philosophical analysis.
Readers of cultural criticism will be acquainted with Jacques Barzun’s *The Use and Abuse of Art* in which with characteristic finesse Barzun highlights the historical events of the last 150 years that have produced our current cultural situation of unprecedented pluralism, paradox, and contradiction. He further speculates on the meaning of art in our time and what our attitudes toward art imply for the future of culture. Not the least significant paradox Barzun points out is that at a time when art has grown into a vast institution of unquestioned social value artists themselves are creating works that are often trivial and boring or nothing more than off-beat—when, that is, artists purport to make art at all, for one notable aspect of the modern era is the production of anti-art.

The tendency of the phenomenon known as anti-art is perhaps best epitomized by Robert Morris, who in a notarized document stipulated that as of a certain time and date all aesthetic quality and content were to be withdrawn from some works he had previously created. Morris’s deposition symbolizes the deflation of aesthetic value in modern art; his attempted aesthetic withdrawal was but one more move in what the late Harold Rosenberg termed the demolition of existing aesthetic values by vanguard artists. However, as the initial shockwaves of modern art have gradually diminished in intensity, we are beginning to ask whether the de-aestheticizing strand of modern art has been overemphasized and whether another strand that bears a closer relation to the past is proving to be the greater contribution to the history of art. Matisse and Picasso, writes Hilton Kramer, reveal the continuity of culture and renew its deepest impulses, while others, such as Marcel Duchamp, anticipate the end of art. Kramer believes, however, that the debunking of traditional aesthetic values has resulted not only in considerable confusion in our thinking about art but also in countless works of dubious artistic value. The task of criticism thus becomes archaeological; it consists, he says, of “digging out a lost civilization from the debris that has swamped and buried it” (p. 19).

One thing the views of these three critics—Barzun, Rosenberg, and Kramer—have made us aware of is the need for a fundamental rethinking of the nature and functions of art. For, to refer to Barzun once more, a society cannot have things both ways: art cannot be trivial, art-negating, and even life-negating and still claim to be a great social force for the good and demand unquestioned support. Indeed, it avails a society little if its newly discovered appetite for culture is satisfied with art that is merely novel or fashionable. Nor can the ceaseless propagandizing for art be taken seriously without an intelligible theory to guide its efforts.

Given a degree of overstatement typical of the lecture genre, Barzun’s cultural analysis
captures the present moment in art, culture, and society. His recommendation for transcending our cultural confusion is also challenging; it calls for the restoration of that rarely exercised capacity of the mind called human judgment. To grant this necessity is to acknowledge that the cultural problem of our time is basically an educational one.

If the task of contemporary aesthetic education may be said to consist of building a context for responding to art at a time when the character, meaning, and functions of art have become problematic, how should such context building proceed? What should be its principal, animating concerns? I suggest as an appropriate response to these questions one that takes as the overriding aim of aesthetic education the development of a disposition to appreciate excellence in art for the sake of realizing the kind of worthwhile experience that art at its best is capable of providing. Accordingly, two questions must be addressed before attention can center on curriculum design and teacher preparation: what are the marks of excellence in art, and in what does the worthwhile consist in the notion of worthwhile experience?

Regarding the nature of excellence in art, we may be relatively brief. It consists of the range of features and values discussed by the late Lord Kenneth Clark in his essay What Is a Masterpiece? Though Clark’s account centers on painting, the general qualities he discovers in such masterpieces as Giotto’s Lamentation over the Dead Christ, Raphael’s School of Athens, Rembrandt’s Nightwatch, Courbet’s Funeral at Ornans, and Picasso’s Guernica can be found in all the arts. Among others, they are inspired virtuosity, supreme compositional power, intensity of feeling, masterful design, uncompromising artistic integrity, imaginative power, originality of vision, and a profound sense of human values. Especially significant, says Clark, are the ways in which masterpieces recreate traditional forms and make them expressive of the artist’s own temperament and epoch while maintaining a link with the past.

Regarding the character of the worthwhile in our experience of art, we may say that art at its best is significant for three major reasons: for the peculiar quality of aesthetic gratification it is capable of providing; for its ability to stimulate direct perception for its own sake; and for the special way in which it contributes to new perspectives on the world and the self, or to understanding. I will briefly discuss three twentieth-century philosophers of art whose writings stress one or more of these capacities of art: Monroe C. Beardsley, Harold Osborne, and Nelson Goodman. The ideas of these writers will enable us to see aesthetic education in modern perspective.
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Monroe C. Beardsley: Art as Essentially Gratifying

The late Monroe Beardsley’s Aesthetics: Problems in the Philosophy of Criticism (1958)⁶ has been the most influential work in American philosophical aesthetics since John Dewey’s Art as Experience (1934). The book was intended not only as a work of philosophical synthesis but also as a systematic examination of the presuppositions of criticism; in particular, it was an analysis of the criteria and standards of judgment Beardsley detected in a large number of critical statements made by art, music, and literary critics. Since serious discussions of art must make assumptions about its importance, Beardsley also advances an instrumental theory of aesthetic value that in addition to influencing his analyses of aesthetic topics reveals a concern with the role of art in human existence. Because Beardsley’s writings constantly keep the human values and functions of art in view, his work has inherent educational significance.

The conceptual problem Beardsley wrestled with more than any other was whether there is a kind of human experience that may be appropriately called aesthetic and is not only sufficiently differentiated from other kinds of experience but also significant enough to warrant society’s efforts to cultivate it. He was particularly interested in the possibility that works of art are ideally suited to occasion aesthetic experiences, even though other objects might also possess this capacity in varying degrees. Beardsley never took his success in answering these questions for granted, and he usually expressed some dissatisfaction with his own analytical efforts. Although he modified the details of his theory over the years, he held to the belief that the aesthetic value of a work of art—that is, its distinctively artistic value in contrast to its cognitive or moral value—consists in its capacity to induce in a well-qualified observer a high degree of aesthetic experience. Such experience is valuable for a number of reasons, but mainly for its special feeling of gratification.

If such a theory could stand its ground, Beardsley believed, it might go some way toward solving a number of theoretical problems in the philosophy of art and prove useful in resolving certain kinds of practical disputes. For example, a work of art might be defined as an arrangement of conditions intended to lend an aesthetic character to human experience; one work of art could be judged superior to another on the basis of the quality of the aesthetic experience it afforded; and distinguishing the aesthetic point of view and its peculiar value from, say, the economic point of view might help disputants decide on the relative merits of building a power station on the shore of a scenic lake and of leaving the beauty of the area undisturbed for aesthetic appreciation and recreational uses. Once more,
Beardsley believed that the aesthetic value of art should be defined in terms of the distinctive kind of pleasure, enjoyment, satisfaction, or gratification it provides—the range of terms suggesting the difficulty of saying precisely just what sort of hedonic effect characterizes our commerce with art.

To say all this is to classify Beardsley's theory of aesthetic value as a hedonistic one, but not, of course, hedonistic in any simple sense. Aesthetic gratification is not merely a general state of feeling well. It is not, for example, the kind of enjoyment that attends the informal congeniality of friendly conversation or partisan cheering at sports events. It consists of the sort of gratification derived from knowledgeably experiencing outstanding works of art—a painting by Raphael, a piano sonata by Beethoven, a sonnet by Shakespeare. It should perhaps go without saying that aesthetic gratification can be occasioned by works possessing a range of emotional and other qualities, including those expressing the darker side of human existence. Indeed, it would be a highly unsatisfactory account of aesthetic experience that did not accommodate the great tragic masterpieces.

What was perhaps Beardsley's last writing on aesthetic experience is contained in a volume titled *The Aesthetic Point of View* (1982), a collection of essays assembled by two of his students. In this essay Beardsley asks us to consider a characterization of aesthetic experience having as many as five features, although not all five must be present on all occasions for aesthetic experience to occur. Only the first one is deemed absolutely essential. That is, aesthetic experience does not consist of a single pervasive quality, feeling, or emotion, but rather a cluster of features tending to cohere in certain ways, and it is this special clustering that makes aesthetic experience distinctive. Aesthetic experience is thus both compound and disjunctive.

A compressed paraphrase of Beardsley's characterization of aesthetic experience could run as follows. In our aesthetic experience of an outstanding work of art attention is fixed on an object of notable presence whose elements, formal relations, aesthetic qualities, and semantic aspects are freely entertained. One indication of the presence of aesthetic character is the feeling that things are working themselves out in appropriate and fitting ways. Feelings of object directedness and fittingness, moreover, tend to diminish concern about the past and future in favor of an intense engagement with what is immediately presented or invoked by the object. Aesthetic involvement further consists of a certain emotional distancing of the object that enables persons to rise above rather than to be overwhelmed by any tragic import it may have. The effect of detached engagement does not, however, deny the possibility of feeling exhilarated by the success of one's efforts to
make conflicting stimuli cohere into formal patterns imbued with expressive qualities and human import. Finally, an experience that is notable for its feelings of object directedness, free participation, detached involvement, and active discovery may also result in feelings of personal integration or wholeness and a greater acceptance and expansion of the self.

Beardsley acknowledges that his account of aesthetic experience might well contain more or fewer features than he has indicated; his intention, he says, is to open up rather than close off a line of thought. But for all that may be experienced, felt, or learned through aesthetic experience, what Beardsley believes to be most distinctive about it and what constitutes its unique value is, once more, the quality of gratification it provides. Rare, he says, are those stretches of time during which the elements of human experience combine in just these ways, and when they do the state of being they constitute is one of gratified well-being. We can only agree. When in the course of a typical day do we experience the stimulation, the sense of freedom, the controlled emotional involvement, the feeling of genuine discovery, the self-fulfillment that we tend to feel during the experience of a great work of art? Such a state of mind is a distinctive form of human well-being and therefore a part of any good or worthwhile life. It constitutes a significant realization of value.

To be sure, there are those who suggest that preoccupation with the aesthetic point of view might weaken moral resolve and have adverse effects on persons and societies. George Steiner, our modern mentor in these matters, asks whether there might even be a covert relation between aesthetic sensitivity and inhumanity. But Beardsley is not disposed to overestimate the negative capabilities of art. In a moving passage from “Art and Its Cultural Context,” an essay that attempts to find a proper relation of art to society while preserving art’s autonomy, Beardsley expresses his belief about the important contribution art makes to human life. He emphasizes that, in contrast to natural objects or merely technical things such as tools and machines, works of art feature and display the aesthetic qualities that we as residents of the world impart to things. “In creating works of art,” he writes, “we humanize the earth as we can in no other way, we warm it for ourselves, [and] make it a place where we belong.” But he points out that works of art cannot perform this unifying, reconciling function unless we grant them a sphere of influence all their own, which is to say unless we permit them a measure of independence and autonomy and respect them as individuals. This implies not only approaching works of art in something of a suppliant mood but also momentarily setting aside interest in their causes, effects, and cultural connections. Such a disposition is necessary if, as Beardsley puts it, works of art “are to realize their potentialities and serve us well in their fashion” (p. 370). [5]
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The relevance of Beardsley’s aesthetics to aesthetic education should be readily apparent. He explains not only how art enhances the quality of life in a distinctive way; he also indicates how in certain respects art and aesthetic experience set ideals for human existence itself. Ideas like these deserve a place in any justification of aesthetic education. Developments in modern life, including those in the expressive culture, make it imperative that we stress more elevated, civilized states of human experience, a point emphasized by Harold Osborne.

_Harold Osborne: Art and Intrinsically Valuable Perception_

To realize their potentialities and serve us well in their fashion—the words are Beardsley’s, but they could be those of Harold Osborne, the dean of British aestheticians, who believes that works of art perform well by stimulating and expanding direct perception, or what he calls the powers of percipience.

What is percipience? In the _Art of Appreciation_ (1970) Osborne assimilates percipience to appreciation and aesthetic experience. He describes such experience in the following way.

Our experience of art involves the direction of attention over a limited sensory field during which the field’s qualities are brought into focus according to their own inherent intensity, their similarities and contrasts, and their peculiar groupings. Such perception is full and complete and proceeds without the kind of editing that characterizes our practical concerns and activities. The mental attitude assumed during aesthetic experience, however, is unlike that required for conceptual analysis or for the historian’s rooting out of causes and effects; rather, aesthetic experience involves the exercise of synoptic vision. Identifying the representational contents of Picasso’s _Guernica_, for example, is not the same thing as perceiving its fusion of subject and form in an act of integrative perception.

The kind of rapt attention that marks aesthetic interest also lends aesthetic experience a distinctive emotional color, its mood, Osborne thinks, being one of serenity even when the object being perceived has a dynamic character. It is further important to realize that because we are perceptually absorbed in the object aesthetic interest involves less a consciousness of one’s own feelings than an awareness of the object’s qualities and properties. One lives more in the object, as it were, than in one’s viscera. The demands of perceptual awareness and the obligation to see the object in its full complexity also tend to
discourage irrelevant musings and associations. Aesthetic experience, in other words, has a
caracteristic rigor; imagination is required to apprehend a work's qualities, but imagina-
tion is also held in check. Another feature of aesthetic experience is the priority of
appearance over material existence: the fact that an object is a material thing existing in
the world is of less interest than the imagery the material thing presents. Once more, such
imagery is especially suited to sustain awareness in the aesthetic mode. Absorption in
imagery takes us out of ourselves into new worlds, yet never to the point where ego
consciousness completely disappears; otherwise we would succumb to illusion and lose
contact with the object.

Osborne reminds us that aesthetic percipience is exercised in many areas of human life,
but he thinks that only works of fine art and their counterparts in nature are capable of
expanding it to its fullest. At their best, works of art can extend the perceptive faculties and
demand ever-increasing mental vivacity and grasp to contain them. A heightened aware-
ness of things felt during aesthetic experience is thus central to Osborne's theory: persons
are more vital, awake, and alert than usual, the faculties work with a sense of freedom and
greater effectiveness, and new discoveries are the constant reward.

Because aesthetic perception is different from ordinary seeing and distinctively discurs-
sive activity that seeks solutions to problems, its skills must be deliberately cultivated. A
few words must thus be said about justifying the development of aesthetic skills through
formal instruction. Osborne's approach to the justification problem draws on what he
considers to be the evolution of civilization toward ever-greater opportunities for self-real-
ization. The argument is not novel, but it bears repeating from time to time; it amounts to
an appeal for the significant use of leisure.

Osborne recalls how at one stage of evolution human faculties were engaged almost
exclusively in the service of survival. This left persons little time for aesthetic activity,
especially for that kind of detached involvement we associate with the aesthetic contem-
plation of works of art. The burdens of merely staying alive still weigh heavily on much of
the world's population, but the long revolution of liberation from varieties of human
bondage is producing a state of affairs in technologically advanced societies that, depend-
ing on how one reads the signals, heralds either a new era of cultural flowering or
constitutes early warnings of tendencies to avoid. That is, it is not too soon to discuss, in a
manner similar to that of Barzun in his analysis of the relations of art and society, the
question of the use and abuse of leisure and what our attitudes toward leisure portend for the
future of civilization.
Osborne’s argument for deliberately cultivating percipience for its own sake emphasizes the point that such cultivation has always been the motive for the expression of spiritual needs and aspirations. Whatever the ideology, liberation from life’s material constraints for the purpose of realizing more fully and more freely one’s humanity is a near-universal yearning and guiding ideal. Kenneth Clark believes that even in a predominantly secular society the majority of people still long to experience moments of pure, nonmaterial satisfaction and that such satisfaction can be obtained more reliably through works of art than through any other means. 13 This suggests that when we talk about the uses of art we must do so in a very special sense, a sense that is stressed in Hannah Arendt’s observation in The Human Condition. 14 She points out that art is one of those things of the world that give the human artifice stability and a reliable home even though it is, strictly speaking, without any utility at all. Proper commerce with a work of art then does not consist of “using” it. “On the contrary,” she writes, “it must be removed carefully from the whole context of ordinary use objects to attain its proper place in the world” (p. 167). Not only that, works of art gloriously survive their severance from religion, magic, and myth. The remarks anticipate Beardsley’s, and in these days of the politicizing of art the ideas of Beardsley, Osborne, Clark, and Arendt about the proper uses of art deserve special attention.

To help artworks realize their potentialities and serve us well in their fashion and to see their proper place in human existence and the world should be the major concerns of aesthetic education. Reason, too, says Osborne, should be cultivated for its own sake, but reason characteristically finds its outlet and expansion in philosophy, logic, mathematics, and the theoretical sciences. For the majority of persons the arts have far greater appeal, mainly because they are ostensibly more human. There certainly is evidence of this in the great popularity of drama today, whether on the stage, in films, or on television. Notwithstanding the fact that drama has served important functions in previous societies, Raymond Williams 15 remarks in his study of television that never before have so many been entertained and instructed for so many hours of the day, year in and year out, by dramatic form. Yet the quality of the entertainment and the substance of the instruction are precisely what must concern us. For, once again, what shall it benefit a society to achieve affluence and freedom only to indulge in diversions that lack the potential for maturing the powers of the mind? Indeed, what might history record of an era that successfully created the conditions for a truly great civilization but then favored arts that diminished rather than enlarged the imagination? What, in short, will become of a civilization that no longer has to devote most of its time to earning a living? Will it feed upon debilitating and destructive
impulses or recommit itself to civilizing processes?

Osborne envisions a future that is not obsessed with amusement values. Though acknowledging the difficulty of distinguishing the fine arts from amusement arts, he thinks the distinction can be based on the seriousness of the former and the relative unseriousness of the latter. By “seriousness” he means a capacity of works of art, as he has characterized it, to energize perception. Conversely, amusement art involves little vitalizing of mind. In its interpretation of human values and expression of what makes life worth living, amusement art lacks those qualities Lionel Trilling called variousness, possibility, complexity, and difficulty, all distinctive of serious art. Indeed, the pursuit of the trivial in amusement art, or its trivial pursuit, represents the abandonment of seriousness by a leisure society. To put it another way, amusement art provides neither the kind of aesthetic gratification of which Beardsley speaks, the stimulation of intrinsic perception of which Osborne writes, nor, as we shall see, the understanding or enlightenment that Goodman prizes. In brief, a society saturated with amusement values will not help individuals refine their inherent aesthetic capacities to any significant degree.

To counter the tendency of culture toward a reliance on amusement values, Osborne believes it is necessary deliberately to cultivate the powers of percipience and that this should involve not only the training of simple sensory discrimination but also the expanding of the scope of percipience to include perceptual unities and expressive qualities. His paradigm of percipience is the hearing of a melody in its completeness, coherence, and intensity. While, once again, the enhancement of percipience in these directions can occur in a number of departments of life—for example, in life’s various rituals and in the appreciation of natural beauties—Osborne thinks the possibility of its happening is greatest in the study of the fine arts for their own sakes. A work’s capacity to vivify percipience in the senses mentioned even provides something of a definition of art. “Despite all the difficulties of exact definition,” writes Osborne, “we regard any artifact as a work of art which is eminently suitable to exercise, extend and amplify our powers of percipience, irrespective of whatever other values it may have.”

_Nelson Goodman: Art and Understanding_

In addressing the work of Nelson Goodman, we confront ideas that reflect a line of thought that originated less in eighteenth-century aesthetic thinking than in modern
developments in the theory of knowledge and the logic of symbolic systems. Not only is Goodman’s perspective novel, it is generally agreed that its implications for understanding art are radical. Regarding the importance of Goodman’s work, Francis Sparshott has likened the appearance of Goodman’s *Languages of Art* (1968) to a shadow cast by a giant rock upon a dreary field, while Howard Gardner (in a bit of overstatement) expressed the opinion that overnight Goodman single-handedly transformed aesthetics into a serious and rigorous field of study. Beardsley likewise testified to the enormous value of Goodman’s aesthetic writings. Such encomia certify Goodman’s stature, and there is no question that his major thesis—that art is essentially cognitive—has encouraged educational theorists to use his ideas to ground more firmly a justification of aesthetic education.

The central proposition of Goodman’s *Languages of Art*, one that immediately sets it apart from Beardsley’s and Osborne’s writings, is that art is a symbolic system of human understanding and shares with other forms of inquiry, including the sciences, the human quest for enlightenment. Condensed accounts of Beardsley’s and Osborne’s ideas of aesthetic experience having been provided, here is how Goodman describes our engagement with art. Our aesthetic experience of art, he writes, “is dynamic rather than static. It involves making delicate discriminations and discerning subtle relationships, identifying symbol systems and characters within these systems and what these characters denote and exemplify, interpreting works and reorganizing the world in terms of works and works in terms of the world. Much of our experience and many of our skills are brought to bear and may be transformed by the encounter. The aesthetic ‘attitude’ is restless, searching, testing—is less attitude than action: creation and re-creation” (pp. 241–42).

In these words we detect what is shared with and what is different from the accounts of aesthetic experience given by Beardsley and Osborne. All three—Beardsley, Osborne, and Goodman—acknowledge that perception is dynamic, discriminating, and interpretive, which is to say cognitive, and that a person’s view of the world may be transformed by aesthetic encounters. Goodman’s account is distinguished by what he does and does not emphasize. Identifying symbol systems and characters within these systems has a technical meaning in Goodman’s theory; it involves awareness of the ways in which the characters of works of art denote and exemplify. What Goodman’s idea of aesthetic experience does not feature is any special quality of gratification occasioned in percieptents by works of art. The criterion of the aesthetic, he says, is not to be found in a superior quality or quantity of satisfaction. And though he emphasizes that in art the primary purpose is cognition in and for itself, he does not stress cognition for its own sake in the way that Osborne does. For
Osborne, it is sufficient that the cognition of art animate and strengthen the faculty of percipience; Goodman goes beyond this to stress the role that cognition plays in the shaping and reshaping of worlds, in short, in providing understanding. Goodman thus plays down a peculiar quality of mind or state of well-being which some have thought distinctive of our commerce with art. Instead, he places emphasis on the symbolic functioning of artworks and the enlightenment they yield, and this is what constitutes the pedagogical relevance of his theory for aesthetic education.

When Goodman claims that the aim of art is similar to that of science—to yield understanding—it is important to point out that he does not imply by this that works of art are propositions which can be true or false; rather, like designs generally, works of art can only be right or wrong. What is characteristic of artworks is that they have qualities which enable us to see and hear differently, to detect new patterns, and to make connections between things. Again, this is what Goodman means by understanding. And when this is said some of the differences between Beardsley, Osborne, and Goodman begin to fade, though others still remain. We should also realize that Goodman’s theory of art is less a detailed account of the nature of perceiving and appreciating works of art than it is an explanation of their cognitive status. What Goodman calls the symptoms of the aesthetic—syntactical and semantic density, syntactical repleteness, and exemplification—are not aesthetic qualities but technical terms which refer to the functions of characters in a work of art construed as a symbolic system. They explain how works of art may be said to refer to something, even in the case of nonrepresentational or strictly formal works of art. This symbolic, referential capacity of art may be illustrated with Goodman’s concept of exemplification.

The notion of exemplification, which has perhaps intrigued philosophers more than Goodman’s other symptoms of the aesthetic, is essentially an explanation of artistic expression. How does exemplification work? In The Theory of the Arts, 19 Francis Sparshott provides a succinct account. “To express a quality [in Goodman’s terms] is to exemplify the quality, that is, to have the quality and to refer to it by having it (as a swatch of tweed exemplifies the cloth it is); and to say that it [the work of art] has it [the quality] is to say that labels meaning the same as our name for the quality denote it. Expression differs from straightforward exemplification in that the denotation is metaphorical” (p. 544). Sparshott further writes that “if a sad tune expresses sadness, it is metaphorically sad in such a way that the metaphorical sadness is part of its meaning, i.e., our attention is called to the fact that a word like ‘sad’ could be applied to the work.” And this is to say that “any quality
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that is metaphorically exemplified is expressed” (p. 597). Or, “A thing exemplifies what it expresses; it does so metaphorically; and it refers to a label of what is expressed” (p. 653). So much for Sparshott’s explanation of Goodman’s notion of exemplification in art. Another illustration might bring us closer to understanding it.

An example of exemplification that encompasses more than a general expressive quality such as sadness is Beardsley’s semantic explication, in Goodman’s terms, of Beethoven’s Sonata no. 28 in A Major, Op. 101, which belongs to Beethoven’s late period.20 What, Beardsley asks, does Beethoven’s sonata exemplify? What qualities does it express that it refers to by expressing them?

Beardsley follows an interpretation of Beethoven’s sonata by musicologist Kay Dreyfus and quotes her as saying that the work is concerned with “the gradual discovery and unleashing of a capacity for growth and sustained development” (p. 69), especially with regard to the material introduced by the opening idea of the first movement. This is what the sonata features or refers to, what it exemplifies. Summarizing Dreyfus, Beardsley further writes that the music moves from extraordinary constriction and constraint in the first movement to great assertiveness and breadth of activity in the finale, such that the full import of the piece cannot be grasped until the finale is heard. How all this comes about is a function of the musical patterns and business of the first movement and transition parts, but what is important, says Beardsley, is that in the brief span of nineteen and one-half minutes we are given a striking and memorable pattern of growth presented in concentrated form and displayed for our cognition. This is what the music means, what it refers to, what it metaphorically expresses. And in providing such a remarkable expression of growth the sonata does what Beardsley thinks music itself does best: it exploits and glories in those “aspects of change that are among the most fundamental and pervasive characteristics of living” (p. 70). Beardsley believes that as pure process music illuminates better than anything else the continuations and kinetic qualities of life, while also creating new qualities and continuations. Music thus instructs us about life by conveying concepts that can make the processes of life more vital and significant.

But in selecting Beethoven’s sonata for an illustration of Goodman’s notion of exemplification, in showing how the music can encourage us to see or hear life in ways that might prompt the reorganization of experience, we have coincidentally illuminated Beardsley’s and Osborne’s theories as well. While Beardsley provides a Goodman-like semantic explication of Beethoven’s sonata, the sonata also lends itself to a configurational understanding of the music in terms of its overall pattern and qualities, a type of understanding
favored by Beardsley and Osborne. Nor can there be any serious doubt that the sonata
affords an occasion for the kind of aesthetic gratification of which Beardsley speaks or for
the stimulation and expansion of percipience by which Osborne sets so much store. Can we
deny that during our experience of Beethoven’s sonata we may well have feelings of object
directedness, free engagement, active discovery, and personal integration? And does not
the sonata further extend the capacities of perception, demanding mental vivacity and
grasp to contain the music’s dramatic sweep and development? Is it not also plausible to
hold that the fulfillment in the music can occasion a feeling of fulfillment in the listener?
The fact that Beethoven’s sonata can serve to illustrate inherently noncognitive as well
as emphatically cognitive theories of art suggests that we are not compelled to choose
among them but can rather accept what each contributes to our understanding and
appreciation of art and life. We can move among them as suits our purposes. The three
theories further help address the tasks described in my opening remarks, the reconstituting
of judgment in the society and the framing of an appropriate definition of aesthetic
education, to which in conclusion I now return.

Conclusion: The Reforming of Aesthetic Education

Osborne accepts the traditional belief that philosophers of art in examining aesthetic
topics from a philosophical point of view should do so with the advance and progress
of humanity in mind. Not only Osborne but also Beardsley and Goodman do this and thus
provide material for a justification of aesthetic education.

Beardsley contributes to humanistic objectives and a solution to the justification
problem by telling us how to distinguish superior from less excellent works; we do so by
assessing the capacity of works to afford a higher or lower level of aesthetic experience. By
supplying criteria of aesthetic value, he helps us to discern the differences between works
the purpose of which, in the words of one psychedelic impresario of the sixties, is to
vaporize the mind by bombarding the senses and works that energize rather than devastate
the mind. Speaking of certain kinds of happenings and other assaults on human sensibility
perpetrated in the sixties, Beardsley remarks that aestheticians should not of course
ridicule such things but try to discover whatever value they might have. But, he says, when
the experience “is largely painful, when it consists more in blowing the mind than in
revitalizing it, when it involves no exercise of discrimination and control, we must frankly
say that what it provides is not much of an aesthetic experience, however intense it may be. And so its goodness, if it has any, cannot be strictly artistic goodness” (p. 90).

Osborne contributes to humanistic objectives and the justification of aesthetic education by describing the quality of experience excellent art is capable of engendering in contrast to the impoverished experience afforded by amusement art. He further discriminates among styles of vanguard art. In Abstraction and Artifice in Twentieth-Century Art (1979), a highly original interpretation of modern art, he clearly prefers those styles which present significant new ways of viewing reality. He thus thinks that the art of the Impressionists and of Cézanne, Matisse, and Picasso is far more likely to have staying power than the work, say, of conceptual artists.

Goodman’s powerful and persuasive case for art’s cognitive character has the effect of diminishing the distance between the two cultures of scientific and artistic understanding. He accordingly helps to establish the seriousness of aesthetic studies in a way that should make justifying aesthetic education less difficult. As Goodman puts it in Languages of Art, in art (as in science) the primary purpose “is cognition in and for itself; the practicality, pleasure, compulsion, and communicative utility all depend on this.” That is, in both art and science “the drive is curiosity and the end enlightenment” (p. 258). Under the direction of Howard Gardner and David Perkins, Harvard Project Zero, a research unit founded by Goodman in 1967, has been investigating the dynamics of artistic cognition in both the creation and appreciation of art. Such work is helping us to understand better some of the ways artistic creation and appreciation might be taught.

But so much for the general justification task before us. What should be the nature of a curriculum geared toward context building and the development of aesthetic capacity? What should be its irradiating center? As stated at the outset, an appropriate curriculum for our time is one that takes as its overarching goal the building of a disposition to appreciate excellence in art for the purpose of realizing the worthwhile experience that art at its best is capable of providing. The principal capabilities of such a disposition would be historical understanding, aesthetic appreciation, and critical reflection. Such capabilities (that is, requisite skills, values, attitudes, etc.) would be developed in a number of contexts of instruction, namely introductory, historical, appreciative, critical, creative, and service. An excellence curriculum, especially at the secondary level, would thus not only introduce the young to the world of art but also build in them a sense of an artworld with which to think about and experience art. Such a curriculum would enable students to walk proudly with their cultural tradition, to appreciate the peculiar character and function of aesthetic
communication, and to take their first steps toward achieving autonomy of judgment in the aesthetic realm—all revered aims of humanistic education.  

A curriculum devoted to these goals and objectives implies a type of teacher not usually attracted to arts education, and so there is a task of recruitment. The teachers of an excellence curriculum, moreover, should receive their training in an atmosphere of scholarship where commitment to the study of the best that has been said and created is taken for granted and does not have to be constantly defended. Can the preparation of such teachers of art, who would be essentially humanities teachers, be undertaken by colleges of education and schools of fine art as currently organized and staffed? This question should be on the agenda of every department, school, or college concerned with teacher education in the arts. Indeed, to see aesthetic education in modern perspective is not only clearly to understand what aesthetic education can contribute to the education of the young and to society, but to realize the need for restructuring arts education and reforming teacher preparation. Let us thus begin and perhaps, as Barzun suggests, we will eventually get the kind of art and civilization we want.
NOTES


25. Such goals were suggested by Albert William Levi’s redefinition of the traditional liberal arts as the arts of continuity (or history), the arts of communication (or languages), and the arts of criticism (philosophy). See his *The Humanities Today* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1970), and "Literature as a Humanity," *Journal of Aesthetic Education* 10, nos. 3–4 (July–October 1976).