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AN OBSERVATIONAL STUDY OF FILM-MAKING AS

A CLASSROOM ACTIVITY

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of M.A. in Education at Massey University.

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CONTENTS

Acknowledgements	11
Table Of Photographs	iv)
INTRODUCTION	1
AESTHETICS IN EDUCATION	4
Introductory	4
Historical Considerations	5
Inter-disclipinary Considerations	14
Applications in Educational Contexts	17
METHODOLOGY	22
Introductory	22
Structural Requirements	24
Cooperation	25
Data Collection	25
Data Analysis	26
REPORT	31
GENERALISATIONS	63
Introductory	63
Teaching Style	63
Pupil Attitude	66
Modes of Visualisation	68
Aesthetic Involvement	68
CONCLUSIONS	. 71
RIBLIOGRADEV	78

TABLE OF PHOTOGRAPHS

Frontispiece	preceeding	page 1	
The Classroom		3	4
Plate III		4	1.10
"The class were split into (groups	4	6
Shooting began on Wednesday morn	ning	5	7
"Shooting went well"		5	9
Plate VII		6	2



1: INTRODUCTION

In recent years, schools and educationalists have shown an increasing awareness of the function of educational media in the classroom. While much educational media is concerned with presenting or displaying information as an aid to learning, there has also been an increasing awareness that film (or television) production can play a useful part in a school curriculum. (See, for example, Screen Education (1963).

A wealth of instructional texts on film use abounds, but almost all of it is concerned with prescribing appropriate methods for 'handling the hardware' in order to utilise a group of novices in producing a film. (Bownes, 1968; Roberts & Sharples, 1971 etc).

However, in looking for theoretical stances on which to base film-making activities, one discovers that there is an important, and basic omission in the literature. Some theorists (Mchuhan is probably the best known) have made broad assetions about the effects of media use, some research has been done on the psychology of media use (see Mialaret, 1966), research exists in related areas such as the psychology of perception (Vernon, 1971; Ittleson, 1968; Grombrich & Gregory 1973 etc). philosopy of aesthetics (see Rader 1935 for example), but all this work is peripheral, or supplementary to our main concern here, which is involved with a rationale for film use in the classroom.

It is here asserted that it is not sufficient to base objectives for film use on extant theories

which are based on other concerns (perception, aesthetics etc) nor on a generalised estimation of possible media effects. While these may be important ingredients to a theory of film use, a statement of the likely outcomes of film use in the classroom should surely be based on classroom activities as well. This means that, instead of planning class activities on theoretical stances of the outcomes we assume apply to film-making, we should find out what outcomes (and processes) do pertain to film-making classes. Then will be the time to apply knowledge gained from other research.

make films in schools, it is surely good practice to have reasons for doing so. We should have some ideas about what effects are likely to ensue from such a course - so we can base teaching practice on methods designed to maximise the learning opportunities available, and know what objectives it is realistic and appropriate to hold.

The first step in deciding reasons for making films should be (it is suggested) to examine the process of classroom film-making as it currently exists, in order to gain some insight into the educational apportunities which appear to exist, or which seem feasible.

The next step is to utilise research from appropriate areas to gain information on processes and
methods which can be utilised, and to gain some
indication of the likely effects of these processes,
with regard to the, already decided, objectives of
the activity.

This current exercise was concerned to observe a film-making class in action, and to record the progress of the class in such a way as to provide data from which can be identified areas of concern which appear to be appropriate in outlining a

rationale as a basis for providing a field from which feasible objectives for classroom film-making can be selected.

A discussion on the advantages and limitations of this type of exercise, together with an outline of its method, appears in Chapter 3 of this paper: 'Methodology'.

2: AESTHETICS IN EDUCATION

INTRODUCTORY

Film making is not merely a practical activity.

Making a film is not merely a matter of following construction instructions (like building 'kitset' furniture), it is also an art. All films, even 'technical films', are concerned with presenting pictorial crea tions in such a manner as to make their perception a 'pleasing'* occurence. 'Pleasing' is not a wholly satisfactory concept here (see footnote keks below), and the fact that a concern has developed intrying to objectively identify the action of creativity in film production indicates the need for this section.

In that some of the energy expended in film production is necessarily creative energy, and some of the response to produced films is emotional, it seems appropriate that some of the objectives utilised in conducting a film course be concerned with operations in an aesthetic domain.

Unfortunately, no 'aesthetic domain' has been identified in a way which can be clearly utilised in this discussion. Bloom's (1956) "Affective Domain" contains some criteria which might apply, but as excellence is an important factor in aesthetic judgements, it is clear that cognitive factors apply - and psychomotor skills are not unimportant, at least in producing artifacts of aesthetic worth.

^{*} Pleasing is not here meant to infer pretty (chocolate box') pictures, but emotionally satisfying or appropriate. (So that 'good' horror movies can be more emotionally satisfying - or horrifying - than 'bad' horror movies.)

Further, it can be argued that an 'aesthetic sense' cannot exist, in that agreement as to aestetic worth must be allowable in a theory of aesthetics. It is less than sufficient to say that there is objectively 'right' and 'wrong' art: that those with a fully developed 'aesthetic sense' will always identify right art as good.

In view of these complexities, it has been deemed adviseable to include here a brief consideration of the place of aesthetics in education, and in particular, to identify the emphasis this writer places on aesthetic objectives, so that their consideration in the Report of the class's film-making activities, and in the Conclusions reached can be assessed.

HISTORICAL CONSIDERATIONS.

There is a considerable literature concerned with the nature of aesthetic values or aesthetic experience: some of itconcerned with explaining its effect in implementing or recommending Fine Arts programmes in schools, or integrated arts programmes based on Visual Arts (such as Education through Art programmes). Interestingly, very little of this investigative and expository prose has any aesthetic value itself. It has not always been so.

Sir Philip Sidney's A defence Of Poetry (written about 1581) describes the poet's function, and that of his work, in a way that stretches and manipulates the language, setting up intonations through connotations which act themselves, as much as the factual descriptions contained in the bare words, too explicate notions of aesthetic worth.

"Among the Romans a poet was called vates, which is as much as a diviner, forseer, or prophet ... so heavenly a title did that excellent people bestow upon this heart-ravishing knowledge ... Only the poet ... lifted up with the vigour of

his own invention, doth grow in effect another nature, in making things either better than nature bringeth forth, or, quite anew, forms such as never were in nature, as the Heroes, Demigods, Cyclops, Chimeras, Furies and such like ... That is to say, a representing, counterfeiting, or figuring forth - to speak metaphorically, a speaking picture - with this end, to teach and delight."

In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries Coleridge and Wordsworth were wrestling with complex ideas about the way language and emotions interact in experiencing literature. In Biographia Literaria, Coleridge says:

"It has been before observed, that images however beautiful, though faithfully copied from na-ture, and as accurately represented in words, do not of themselves characterise the poet. They become proofs of original genius only asfar as they are modified by a predominant passion; or by associated thoughts or images awakened by that passion; or when they have the effect of reducing multitude to unity or succession to an instant; or lastly, when a human and intellectual life is transferred to them from the poet's own spirit."

a principle he tried to put into practice, for example in "Dejection: An Ode" (VII)

"... Thou Actor, perfect in all tragic sounds;
Thou mighty poet, E'en to frensy bold;
What tell'st thou now about?
'Tis of the rushing of an host in rout,
With groans, of trampled men, with smarting wounds -

At once they groan with pain, and shudder with the cold!

But hush; There is a pause of deepest silence; And all that noise, as of a rushing crowd,

is over It tells another tale, with sounds less deep and loud!
A tale of less affright,
And tempered with delight,
As Otway's self had framed the tender lay, 'Tis of a little child
Upon a lonesome wild,
Not far from home, but she hath lost her way:
And now means low in bitter grief and fear,
And now screams loud, and hopes to make her mother hear ..."

From Biographia Literaria:

"The poet, described in ideal perfection, brings the whole soul of man into activity. with the subordination of its faculties to each other. according to their relative worth and dignity. He diffuses a tone and spirit of unity, that blends, and (as it were) fuses, each into each, by that synthetic and magical power, to which we have exclusively appropriated the name of imagination. This power, first put into action by the will and understanding and retained under their irremissive, though gently and unnoticed, control (laxis effertur habenis) reveals itself in the balance or reconciliation of opposite or discordant qualities: of sameness. with difference: of the general, with the concrete; the idea, with the image; the individual, with the representative; the sense of novelty and freshness, with old and familiar objects: a more than usual state of emotion, with more than usual order; judgement ever awake and steady selfpossession, with enthusiasm and feeling profound or vehement: and while it blends and harmonises the natural and the artificial, still subordinate art to nature; the manner to the matter; and our admiration of the poet to our sympathy with the poetry."

Again we can turn to Coleridge's own poetry for an exemplification of these proposals. From "Dejection: An Ode" (V):

"... Joy, virtuous Lady! Joy that ne'er was given,/Save to the pure, and in their purest hour,/Life, and Life's effluence, cloud at once and shower,
Joy, Lady! is the spirit and the power,
Which wedding Nature gives us in dower
A new Earth and a new Heaven,
Undreamt of by the sensual and the proud Joy is the sweet voice, Joy the luminous cloud We in ourselves rejoice!
And thence flows all that charms or ear or sight,
All melodies the echoes of that voice,
All colours a suffusion from that light ..."

From Biographia Literaria:

"A poem is that species of composition, which is opposed to works of science, by proposing for its immediate object pleasure, not truth; and from all other species (having this object in common with it) it is discriminated by proposing to itself such delight from the whole, as is compatible with a distinct gratification from each component part."

In short, Coleridge is concerned with the operation of words in stimulating the 'imagination' of the reader by "the pleasurable activity of mind" excited by the "esemplastic" qualities of the words and phrases chosen. And this he sees as a prime concern. From Biographia Literaria:

"... if in after time I have sought a refuge from bodily pain and mismanaged sensibility in abstruse researches, which exercised the strength and subtelty of the understanding without awakening the feelings of the heart; still there was a long and blessed interval, during which my natural faculties were allowed to expand, and my original tendencies to develop themselves: my fancy and the love of nature, and the sense of beauty in forms a nd sounds."

Wordsworth and Coleridge, who were neighbours, worked together on "the two cardinal points of poetry, ike the power of exiting the sympathy of the reader by a faithful adherence to the truth of nature, and the power of giving the interest of novelty by the modifying colours of imagination" (Ibid). Together they planned The Lyrical Ballads which Wordsworth eventually produced alone. And despite Coleridge's seeming refutation" of the "Preface to the Second Edition", much of the spirit of the writing agrees with his own published views.

Prom the "Preface to the Second Edition:"

"The principle object, then, which I proposed to myself in these Poems was to choose incidents and situations from common life, and to relate or describe them, throughout, as far as

[&]quot;With many parts of this preface in the sense attributed to them and which the words undoubtedly seem to authorise, I never concurred; but on the contrary objected to them as erroneous in principle, and as contradictory (in appearance at least) both to other parts of the same preface, and to the author's own practice in the greater number of the poems themselves." (Biographia Literaria)

Possible, in a selection of language really used by men; and, at the same time, to throw over them a certain colouring of imagination. whereby ordinary things should be presented to the mind in an unusual way; and, further, and above all, to make these incidents and situations interesting by tracing in them, truly though not estentaciously, the primary laws of our nature: chiefly, as far as regards the manner in which we associate ideas in a state of excitement. Low and rustic life was generally chosen, because in that condition, the essential passions of the heart find a better soil in which they can attain their maturity, are less under restraint, and speak a plainer and more emphatic language; because in that condition of life our elementary feelings coexist in a state of greater simplicity, and. consequently, may be more accurately contemplated and more forcibly communicated: because the manners of rural life germinate from those elementary feelings; and from the necessary character of rural occupations, are more easily comprehended; and are more durable; and lastly, because in that condition the passions of men are incorporated with the beautiful and permanent forms of nature."

Wordsworth sees the "purpose" of his poems as being to "illustrate the manner in which our feelings and ideas are associated in a state of excitement" (Ibid). He describes the production of poetry thus:

"I have said that poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings: It takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquility: the emotion is contemplated till by a species of reaction the tranquillity gradually disappears and an emotion, kindred to that which was before

the subject of contemplation, is gradually produced, and does itself actually exist in In this mood successful composition generally begins, and in a mood similar to this it is carried on; but the emotion, of whatever kind and in whatever degree, from various causes is qualified by various pleasures. so that in describing any passions whatsoever. which are voluntarily described, the mind will upon the whole be in a state of enjoyment. Now. if Nature be thus cautious in preserving in a state of enjoyment a being thus employed, the Poet ought to profit by the lesson thus held forth to his. and ought especially to take care, that, whatever passions he communicates to his Reader, those passions, if his Reader's mind be sound and vigorous, should always be accompanied with an overbalance of pleasure." (From "Preface To The Lyrical Ballads")

And there is ample evidence in Wordsworth's poetry to support these principles. (See "The Prelude", or examples from The Lyrical Ballads such as "Simon Lee", Michael", "Lines Composed A Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey" etc.)

In the nineteenth century, John Ruskin preached the need for a reawakened artistic faculty to an Industrialising England. Concentrating on painters, sculpters and architects as exemplifiers of the age's artistic endeavours, he saw civilisationéntering a crisis of ugliness and wrote at length on the need for aesthetically satisfying environments as a social necessity.

"I s-ay that the art is greatest which conveys to the mind of the spectator, by any means whatsoever, the greatest number of the greatest ideas; and I call an idea great in proportion as it more fully occupies, and in occupying, exercises and exalts, the faculty by which it is received." (From Modern Painters)

On the perception of art, he says:

"And thus, unless the minds of men are particularly directed to the impressions of sight. objects pass perpetually before the eyes without conveying any impression to the brain at all ... With this kind of bodily sensibility to colour and form is intimately connected that higher sensibility which we revere as one of the chief attributes of all noble minds, and as the chief spring of real poetry. I believe this kind of sensibility may be entirely resolved into the acuteness of bodily sense of which I have been speaking, associated with love, love I mean in its infinite and holy functions, as it embraces divine and human and brutal intelligences, and hallows the physical perception of external objects by association, gratitude, veneration, and other pure feelings of our moral nature. And although the discovery of truth is in itself altogether intellectual, and dependant merely on our powers of physical perception and abstract intellect, wholly independant of our moral nature, yet these instruments (perception and judgement) are so sharpened and brightened, and so far more swiftly and effectively used, when they have the energy and passion of our moral nature to bring them into acti n - perception is so quickened by love, and judgment so tempered by veneration, that, practically, a man of deadened moral sensation is always dull in his perception of truth. " (From Modern painters)

So, in criticising the "dead void of uniform grey" depicted in "the distant city on the right bank of the river in Claude's Marriage of Isaac and Rebecca, in the National Gallery", he says: "Nature would have let you see, nay, would have compelled you to see, thousands of spots and lines, not one to be absolutely understood or or accounted for, but yet all characteristic and different from each other; breaking lights on shattered stones, vague shadows from waving vegetation, irregular stains of time and weather, moulding hollows, sparkling casements; all would have been there; none indeed, seen as such, none comprehensible or like themselves, but all visible; little shadows and sparkles, and scratches, making the whole space of colour a transparent, palpitating, various infinity."(Ibid)

The conclusion he works towards, and which forms a basis of all his writing is stated, in Modern Painters, thus: "that the greatest thing a human soul ever does in this world is to see something, and tell what it saw in a plain way. Hundreds of people can tell for one who can think, but thousands can think for one who can see. To see clearly is poetry, prophecy and religion* all in one". I understand this to mean that "seeing" in this way is "poetry" in that it is to recognise beauty in the natural world. It is prophecy in that this enlarged porception enables us to order our world by recognising a reality (infinity in each spot) which makes general principles apparent to us which are available for application in social management. Divinity becomes apparent in the combination of these faculties.

This brief, and somewhat superficial overview of some explorations in aesthetics in other times than our own displays, I believe, a concern with values and emotions which have proved difficult for social scientists to isolate. In our time Social Science seems to have acquired a reputation for dissection

^{*} Underlining is mine.

and atomisation as a means to identification, and measurement as a way of arriving at, or moving towards description and prediction.

INTER-DISCLIPINARY CONSIDERATIONS.

In order to more clearly see the field in which social scientists are currently operating, let us consider, briefly, some of the directions which the psychology of perception and the psychology of aesthetics are currently taking. There are, of course, many other areas in which research is pertinent to this theme (notably studies into Creativity) but these two topics will suffice as illustration.

Researchers in the psychology of perception, following general theorists such as Piaget, and early researchers such as Ames, have used illusions as 'toels' for discovering processes of perception and for providing key ideas and facts about reality. Association, or correspondence is a key term in this field:

"there appears to be identifiable evidence that what we see is determined not only by whatever is "out there" but also by what we contribute thru our own activities of looking and seeing" (Ames in Ittelson (ed) 1968, Pg.13).

Early experimentation consisted mainly in identifying which combinations of events typically promoted
which perceptions. Carmichael, Hogan and Walter
(1932) showed that characteristic modifications were
made in a subject's reproduction of shown drawings
a-coording to the verbal information given at the
drawing's presentation.

Osterieth's 'Complex Figure' test (1945) demonstrates a developmental aspect of perception from perceiving discrete components to perceiving whole figures and relating interior details to their function in the complex figure. More recent research has focussed on how these effects might be produced from a physiological or neurological point of view. Blakemore, Muncey and Ridley (1971) explored a process termed 'adaption' (if they a-re repetitively shown a strong stimulus, most neurons rapidly fatigue and are less sensitive to further stimulation) which can account for the gradual 'disapearance' of a high contrast grating.

In this paper in Illusion in Nature and Art (1973) Colin Blakemore concludes thus:

> In less than a century physiology has made considerable advance in the understanding of perception. We now have a good idea how one sees shape and movement, position and size. and even how stereoscopic vision works. On the other hand it is impossible to comprehend how the monocular perception of distance is achieved .. New methods are expanding the experimental assault onthe brain. Extraordinarily sensitive anatomical methods, following the passage of radioactive materias through individual neurons. are telling us more about the connections between cells. New physiological techniques allow the injections of substances onto or into single neurons to try to discover their properties. "

pic analysis can, I believe, be discovered. In the field of psychological aesthetics the major concerns appear to be global ones: questions of method and of appropriate fields or avenues of enquiry. Perhaps this indicates the comparative sparsity of study in this field until recently.

In 1959 M.A. Wallach noted that "most experimental psychologists have shown ... little interest in the study of aesthetics" and proposed "an approach to aesthetics which will generate questions answerable

to psychological experimentation ... (to) operationalise and test views on the nature and function of art."

c A Mace (in Osborne (ed), 1968), proposes an inter-reliance between psychology and aesthetics based on hypotheses that aesthetics "opens the way to a distinctively human psychology in which psychological needs are clearly distinguished from the simpler physiological or biological needs"; and that explanations of concepts such as "Aesthetic satisfaction " may be sought in psychological terms such as "goal Percepts"."

In 1973 Martin S Lindauer, in a carefully documented article titled "Towards a Liberalisation of Experimental Aesthetics", noted that "although Wallach's comments were made over a decade ago, experimental aesthetics has still not emerged as a major topic of psychology". He notes a variance between a reductionist, atomistic approach of most psychological studies dealing in areas related to aesthetic concerns, and the broader, phenomenological approach he sees as being inherent in most studies in aesthetics. He proposes "several reconsiderations and reformulations of experimental aesthetics ... concerned with its methodological and conceptual aspects". Notable that "the rigors of experimentation and the precision of quantification need not be sacrificed in the face of the phenomina characteristics of the aesthetic experience"; and "The empirical use of non-objective are .. (as) .. a reasonable compromise between the necessary artificiality of the laboratory and the richness evoked by various forms of art in realistic settings." "These methodological extensions to research as a result of aesthetic considerations - the inclusions of stimulus and response dimensions of art other than complexity and preference, the addition of different types of art

and tasks for subjects - attest to the compatibility of aesthetics to scientific enquiry."

avenues of enquiry into aesthetic concerns, mention must be made of the most common approach to aesthetic questions: the philosophic discourse. Major philosophical questions abound in the area of aesthetics: What is beauty? What counts as an aesthetic experience? To what extent are the emotional response of the audience or the adjudged 'worth' of the work of art relatively important in deciding the aesthetic value of the experience?

recessary to limit ourselves to any particular school of thought. It is sufficient to note that these questions exist. We do not need to confine our understanding of 'aesthetic worth' to one school but can accept the totality of ideas and persuasions that encompass the whole field of aesthetics. We can accept all the ideas that are pertinent to aesthetics as possible evidence for any case. Choices between persuasions have to be made when decisions for action are made. Such decisions are best made in the light of all the available evidence.

At this point it is sufficient to recognise that the philosophy of aesthetics comprises a vast literature which, by the nature of its size, depth and complexity furnishes us with a wealth of reasoned ideas and concerns on which to base decisions together with warnings of some of the implications inherent in taking those courses of action.

APPLICATIONS IN EDUCAT ONAL CONTEXTS.

We can now look at this brief overview of aesthetic concerns and try to identify factors which may be worthy of consideration in a modern, educational context. Two dimensions have been explored:

a longitudinal, historical dimension and a broader 'cross discipline' one.

man's own. The interesting facet of this is that, while time and progress in many fields (notable scientific fields) have let to 'improvements' and new ideas which have superceded old ones, 'artistically valuable' works produced by philosophies of bygone ages tend to still be regarded as artistically valuable now. Whatever we think of the reasons for holding those philosophies, we tend to still recognise their aesthetic viability.

The concern of most academic studies seems to be to make disciplines accountable - to explain and rationalise them. And this is evidenced by the increasing amount of research identified in the 'cross discipline' part of this summary.

The effect of such rationalisation, when it is applied to physical or concrete phenomina, tends to bring to light factors which support or refute the basic ideals held about the structure of that entity. So that every refutation has the effect of throwing into doubt those basic ideals.

Now, aesthetics are largely a matter of value judgements. So while the objects, or beliefs which are held valuable may be liable to these changes in basic ideals (as with changes from Classical to Romantic act) the quality of the values themselves remain independent of those changes. This enables us to admise both surrealism and Etruscan art and to recognise both schools as being aesthetically valuable.

Education, of course, is a somewhat pragmatic discipline: what is needed in the classroom are courses of action based on viable reason. Two questions apply, then, with regard to aesthetic objectives in

education: is this a concern which should be part of an educational enterprise, and

ii) if it is, then how does a teacher go about managing it?

paper on the question to what extent education implies aesthetic elements and what they might be. It is sufficient for this exercise to recognise that creative activities are fostered as part of the programme of educational institutions: schools and universities do teach art, music, poetry writing etc.

The second question is of direct relevance to a course of film-making. In that films express and communicate their maker's ideas in an abstract form which infers that those ideas are manipulated in the medium for effect, it is safe to suggest that film production infers that aesthetic judgements might properly be called on in producing and viewing the end product. And if producing film requires aesthetic judgments, it would seem proper that teaching film-making should ideally require that the teacher consider the management of his students' aesthetic values.

To return to the second question, then: how, and to what extent should a teacher direct his pupils aesthetic judgements. Two extremes can be dismissed as improper. To direct students to hold a particular value as right and to produce a work which the teacher directs as being valuable, per se, is inappropriate because, in effect, the pupil's values are not being considered; and, as this section has been at pains to demonstrate, no particular ideal can rightly be considered the intrinsically correct ingredient of any aesthetic experience. On the other hand, it is equally improper for the teacher to do nothing, but accept all content without regard to value judgements, for the reasons discussed in the

in the previous paragraph.

It has been shown that aesthetic value is independent of particular beliefs but that it relates to personally held values. It has also been shown that it is possible to identify some of the elements involved in both the examination and the production of work as aesthetic. To what extent, then, are we able to formulate grounds for holding objectives with regard to pupils' aesthetic productions?

It is the contention of this writer that aesthetic value' is a real phenomenon, and further, that aesthetic judgements can be made about imaginative creations. It is suggested, as value judgements have been posited as important ingredients, that the extent to which these are held may be a factor in the aesthetic quality of the process and its outcome. It is further suggested that, while it seems possible that continued research may identify the nature of aesthetic processes more clearly, it may be of less concern to the classroom teacher that he understand these processes as a means to providing guidlines for appropriate action than that he be aware of the nature of the process as a means to understanding the meaning of (and therefore operating with) the concept *aesthetic1 .

In fact, in view of the nature of aesthetic judgements as examined throughout this section, it seems somewhat inappropriate that 'cookbook' guilines to teaching actionbe formulated. Some concerns should, however, be familiar to teachers proposing to manage the creative undertakings of their students. These could be summarised as follows.

(i) Student action is important. It has been suggested that it is insufficient for the teacher to directly control the content of the work produced.

- Value judgements should be held by students.

 While it is not necessary, or appropriate,
 for the teacher to direct what values should be
 held, he should ensure that the student holds
 the purpose of his endeavour in some value.
- iii) Teacher awareness of aesthetic principles and concerns is important. In view of the nature of the aesthetic enterprise, i t would be beneficial in managing pupils' progressif the teacher was familiar with many aspects of the place of aesthetics in education, as summarised here, so that his judgement of actions taken in his classroom may be supported by evidence from the many areas which have been identified as being pertinent to that concern.
- 1929) that some of a work's aesthetic value is a function of its complexity. This might be taken to mean that an element of the work is 'complex' to the extent that it interacts or interrelates with other elements and with the viewer's fund of experience and knowledge, so as to present associations of greater intrica-cy among that experience and knowledge. Towards this end, the teacher can encourage students to reason the connections between elements in their work, thus providing an increas-ingly complex network of associations.