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## A GENERAL METHODOLOGY FOR THE SCIENTIFIC STUDY OF AESTHETIC APPRECIATION\*

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### I

Scissors are always scissors. But the tailor, the embroiderer, the gardener, and the surgeon must have different kinds. There is no scientific method good in itself. A good scientific method is one well adapted to the kind of facts to be studied. The experimental and quantitative procedures perfected by contemporary psychology and sociology may be ever so valuable, efficacious, and indispensable, but the worth of the results obtained with them depends upon the nicety of their application to the study of behavior or aptitude, to personality patterns, or to the structures of emotion or opinion. It may be said that certain supposedly scientific investigations of the aesthetic fact give at times somewhat the impression of a surgeon trying to operate on the heart with a gardener's clippers.

The utility of quantitative experimental method (assumed to be familiar to the reader) is not in question here; neither is the speculative possibility of applying it fruitfully to aesthetic research. The sole object of this paper is to inquire how such a method can actually arrive at the aesthetic fact; apply to it and seize it, not obliquely or loosely, but squarely. To study the co-adaptation of the method and the fact naturally provides also a fine opportunity for a better view of the fact.

Though some of the points we are going to bring out are well known, it will be necessary to recall them to make our inquiry clear and well grounded. Other points are known or discerned by some scholars and unfortunately not appreciated by many others. We have not always thought it useful to cite specific examples of this fault. It will suffice if the reader will judge for himself to what extent any study he comes across meets the requirements of a sound method.

### II

What is aesthetic appreciation? It is the evaluation of an object of perception according to what is inherently involved in the exercise of perception.<sup>1</sup> Such a

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<sup>1</sup> This definition will be slightly modified later (Sec. III, 2). There it will be added that perception can be actual or potential. But the definition given here should serve as basis and point of departure. The later correction bears only upon certain exceptional circumstances.

definition does not aim to give a theory of aesthetic value (although closely related to such a theory). The aim is rather to restrict in a preliminary way, with adequate precision, the facts to be studied.

Our definition will do for distinguishing aesthetic from other forms of appreciation; from the logical, the utilitarian, the economic, the moral, etc. In these kinds of appreciation, perception comes in to furnish indirect signs of qualities not present as the object is perceived. If, in looking at a wheat field, I infer, from the color of the spikes, from the general aspect of the mass of vegetation, the way the stalks undulate in the wind, and so on, that this field will yield a big harvest of good grain, the impression of value which I have is not aesthetic. But if the impression of value is directly bound up with the sense quality of coloration, from the perspective of an observer at a certain spot, with the rhythm of the undulating movement caused by the wind, and with the composition of the spectacle as a whole, then we do have a case of aesthetic appreciation.

This preliminary delimitation presents three difficulties. The criterion provided by it: (1) does not always permit easy segregation of the facts; (2) seems to eliminate from aesthetic appreciation what are somewhat exceptional yet important facts, where this appreciation is focused upon the data of imagination rather than of perception; (3) appears, on the contrary, to embrace in aesthetic appreciation certain experiences (such as that of relishing food) which are not usually considered to be aesthetic.

We shall show that these difficulties (taken up in the third part of this paper) do not really count against the preliminary definition we are using. But any misunderstanding on the reader's part must be avoided here: we are faced not with *objections to a theory* but with *practical difficulties in the use of a method*. These difficulties arise from the complexities of the actual facts to be observed. That is why examination of them will give us some important rules of procedure with regard to using the basic criterion.

### III

(1) We have said that aesthetic appreciation is closely linked with the actual exercise of perception; whereas the other kinds of appreciation envisage facts which perception serves to establish more remotely. But often such facts are involved in a complex psychic activity.

On a lovely summer day the owner of a field is pleased to contemplate his ripe wheat. He may have impressions of wealth, splendor, fertility, and success in his work as a farmer. Mixed together are the immediate data, admiration of the field as it actually spreads before his eyes, memories of the past, troubles and worries finally surmounted happily, previews of the future, anticipation of full bins, a swollen billfold, and so on. To discern the place of aesthetic appreciation in such a complex state of mind is not easy. And moreover, has one the right to make an analytic cleavage in an organic whole of this kind? Would that not be a very abstract approach? The only sound method is to say that there is aesthetic appreciation if, in the complex fact, there is a very clear predominance of factors whose presence alone would indubitably constitute such appreciation.

It should not be thought that this complexity or lack of purity is owing to the fact that the subject (the owner of the field) is not an aesthete, or that the object

(the field) is not functionally intended for aesthetic appreciation. Similar observations could be made even about an artist appreciating a work of art. The sculptor considers with ecstasy and pride the statue he has just finished. Confused ideas of glory, triumph in the coming exposition, the envy and dismay of his rivals, the praise of influential critics, purchase by a rich Maecenas, may blend with his admiring contemplation. Or the sculptor may sadly say to himself: "My work is magnificent but the public and the critics are really incapable of understanding it, and no one will buy my statue." One can even imagine that, enraged by such thoughts, he might destroy his work. Berlioz has related<sup>2</sup> that, a certain musical idea having come to him, he was going to his table to write it down, when he reflected: "If I write out this part I feel that I'll let myself go on to compose the rest. . . . I'll have it copied and shall thereby contract a debt of 1000 or 1200 francs. . . ." The result was that he threw down his pen and gave up his idea for the time being. In the case of the sculptor destroying his masterpiece in a fit of rage, or of the composer dropping a fertile idea, one who took account only of the behavior as a whole would see here only depreciation of the work, going as far as rejection, destruction. But it is easy to see that the dominant motives in this depreciation do not at all constitute an aesthetic evaluation.

Three important principles may be drawn from these considerations. (a) Aesthetic appreciation is rarely pure. (b) Practically and scientifically, aesthetic appreciation must be called an evaluation whose *main factors* are those in the definition given above. (c) An evaluation in which the dominant factors do not belong to the immediate exercise of perception is not to be called aesthetic appreciation, regardless of the object of this appreciation, and even if it is a work of art. This last point is methodologically very important; for the omission of it, which is not infrequent, destroys the scientific worth of some inquiries which appear to be well done.

To confront a subject with an object which one supposes to be functionally destined for aesthetic appreciation (particularly a work of art or reproduction of one), and then to elicit a definitely laudatory or pejorative evaluation of the object (or a preferential classification among analogous objects), does not suffice to establish that the evaluation can be considered aesthetic appreciation. An important special case of the mistake which can be made here is involved in appreciation of representational art, where laudatory or pejorative evaluation takes into consideration only what is represented (the "literary" subject of the picture). In appreciations of this kind the dominant motives are usually unaesthetic: approbation or blame pertains to interests which may be social, moral, political, etc.

When children, or persons who lack both native taste and an aesthetic background, are used as the subjects of experiment, one can be sure that most of them, in being given works of art to classify preferentially, will be guided in their appreciation for the most part by the plus or minus degree of affective, intellectual, or practical interest in the whole set of ideas evoked by the subject matter. Thus the kind of appreciation shown is not aesthetic.<sup>3</sup> It must be noted that

<sup>2</sup> H. Berlioz, *Mémoires*, II (1898), 349.

<sup>3</sup> Caution! I say that for most uncultivated spectators the appreciation of subject matter does not mean aesthetic appreciation. But it is otherwise with subjects who are culti-

even among persons relatively knowing about art it often happens that, in the complex business of appreciating a work, non-aesthetic motives of appreciation outweigh those which are properly aesthetic, such as interest in the color, in the arabesque of the lines, and in the artistically satisfying presentation of the chosen idea.

Here another very important observation must be made. When a person has not reacted (or has reacted non-aesthetically) to a stimulus endowed with aesthetic qualities (say a reproduction of an artwork), one should refrain from concluding that the person is incapable of aesthetic appreciation. It is essential to find out in what circumstances (in the presence of what kinds of stimulus) the person is capable of such appreciation. This is especially the case in studying the aesthetic sensibility of the child. Many children show no genuine aesthetic appreciation in the presence of artworks. But the same children of whom this is true will manifest vigorous, definite, and even quite pure aesthetic responses to other sorts of stimuli: a dewdrop iridescent in the sun, a cheap jewel, an agate marble; and generally to the little things likely to figure in a child's treasure.

So we arrive at the rule: valid aesthetic appreciation cannot be determined without finding out (1) the sort of stimuli in the presence of which the subject comes up with distinctly aesthetic appreciation; (2) to what degree the stimulus offered to him experimentally arouses in him phenomena analogous to those observed in his spontaneous aesthetic appreciations.<sup>4</sup>

Sometimes it takes a long and difficult examination to disclose the ways in which the subject is actually captured by *dilectio aesthetica* (understanding by this not only the capacity to be astonished, but also the general desire or need

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vated and able to feel the correlation of subject matter with its artistic treatment. For the artist the choice of subject matter is always with reference to the artistic treatment which he thinks it will permit. That is why a statistical study of the themes or incidents treated by artists of the first rank is very suggestive and significant. On the other hand, it will not do to interpret such a statistical study as shedding any light on the taste of the public. To show that the frequency of a theme (the swing, a couple walking, an outing in the country) is indicative of the public's taste it would be necessary to take account also of all the second- and third-rate works of art where the theme is used; and of all the reproductions of these (prints, the decoration of common objects, etc.). Thus it is the frequency of the theme at different levels of artistic production which alone is significant. When it comes to retrospective investigations the difficulty of statistics is practically insurmountable. The documentation obtainable from museums cannot cover more than the least part of the total use of a theme, and will tend to emphasize the most artistic treatment of it, which has the weakest popular appeal. A theme may even be excluded from the high places of art precisely because of its superabundance in the lower regions.

<sup>4</sup> I have before me the results of a very careful study of 1,000 children, one of the conclusions of which is that "the aesthetic emotion proper is in the child a product of education." Such a conclusion, I am sorry to say, is absolutely illegitimate, since the study took account solely of aesthetic appreciation of works of art in the field of painting. The investigators were satisfied before they began that a response could not be considered aesthetic unless the object was a work of art, and so classified by the cultivated adult. Perhaps their conclusions would be valid in this form: "A child's aesthetic feeling for a reproduction of a picture is a result of education." But as long as there has been no corresponding study of the ways in which *dilectio aesthetica* comes over the same children in the presence of other kinds of objects, any research of this sort must be regarded as having ill defined its objective.

to admire). But such research can be greatly facilitated by knowledge of the various current categories of capture by *dilectio aesthetica*; for they are not very numerous and usually have a close relation with age, sex, character, and degree of culture. The most important occasions of aesthetic seizure may be noted as follows:

I. Landscapes and natural views, of country, sea, mountains, etc. It is very important to find out whether the aesthetic appreciation envisages a vast ensemble or a detail.

II. Artificial landscapes: urban scenes, parks and gardens, etc. Here the same question must be raised, as to preference for vast ensembles or for restricted scopes.

III. Human beings: of what sex and age; face, body, attitudes, gestures, way of dressing, social condition.

IV. Animals. Note the different categories: small mammals, birds, butterflies, etc. Aesthetic appreciation of animals which are not glorified by conventional appreciation is a very interesting indication.

V. Plant life. In particular, are flowers appreciated or not?

VI. Small natural objects: colored pebbles, fossils, bits of wood, fruits of unusual or regular shapes, etc.

VII. Light effects; color effects; meteorological effects; sights of early morning, broad day, twilight, night, and the changing seasons.

VIII. Artificial objects on the order of knick-knacks.

IX. Artificial objects adapted to precise technical uses: tools and machines, conveyances, household accessories, gear, articles of clothing, fabrics; school supplies, sporting goods.

X. Art objects belonging to classical or universally recognized arts: music, painting, drawing, book illustrating, monuments, films, photographs. Representational and non-representational arts should be classified separately. One should not fail to explore the different artistic levels (works of masters or even illustrations in popular magazines, song hits of the moment, etc.), and should note whether the seizure of *dilectio* belongs exclusively to one of these levels.<sup>5</sup>

XI. Artworks belonging to the minor or nameless arts: oral story-telling, accidental sonorities, humming, impromptu drawing, *marginalia*, informal sculpture and modeling.

XII. Objects made by the subject himself are very important, since children's preferences show here.

<sup>5</sup> One should not jump to the conclusion that the subject who regularly prefers the lowest level is lacking in sensitivity or even in taste (and should not forget that sometimes works on a low artistic level have certain very real aesthetic qualities). From the scientific point of view, the point here is to explore and learn the structure of the subject's aesthetic susceptibilities. It is quite another question to find out whether this structure is good or bad. And sometimes there is more genuine aesthetic capacity, hence more resources for cultivating it, in a subject with vulgar but keen artistic tastes than in a subject whose education has artificially put him in a position to judge the artistic level of works (for example, by knowing the artist's name or the kind of following he has), so that the judgment does not mean a genuine aesthetic appreciation of the work. Finally, it should not be forgotten that many subjects have never had the occasion to be in touch with works of a high artistic level.

The "aesthetic profile" given by the subject's reactions in the way of aesthetic appreciation in each of these different categories of stimuli is all the more important because in genetic psychology one can follow at different ages the regular shifting of the maximum seizure of *dilectio aesthetica*.<sup>6</sup> These aesthetic profiles also have quite remarkable social aspects. Thus, in the working class, *dilectio* often reaches its maximum in category IX.

Let us avoid another mistake here. It should be understood that there is no point to asking whether the subject "finds mountains more beautiful than the ocean," or "prefers flowers to butterflies," etc. The point is to find out what kind of sight or object frequently or occasionally gives the subject a more or less intense emotion or sense of admiration belonging unquestionably to the order of aesthetic appreciation. If a questionnaire is used (and it is often the only practical method), great precaution must be taken to make sure that the subject is relying upon clear recall of particular personal impressions, experienced concretely and belonging to perception; not indulging in more or less general mental imagery suggested by the terms of the questionnaire. Every investigator knows how necessary such precaution is in general. But in aesthetic inquiries it is fundamental. It is, of course, not just a matter of keeping the questionnaire from suggesting the reply. In the realm of *dilectio aesthetica* the effect of the direct perceptual stimulus must be distinguished from the influence of the stimulus which is imaginatively evoked, for example, by words. I know of a piece of research published some years ago in a scientific journal, on aesthetic preferences with regard to color (the main ideas being Freudian). The author, using the questionnaire method, seems not to have realized that his procedure was getting hold only of associations of ideas called out by the terms indicating colors; and never for a moment considered whether the subjects had ever had the feelings they described, in the actual presence of a color sample or colored object.<sup>7</sup>

(2) This brings us to the difficulty concerning the intervention of imagination. It is well known that entering into aesthetic contemplation are many facts involving imagination. In certain subjects contemplation engenders a day dream more or less conditioned by the stimulus. Before a landscape such persons' implicit appreciation could be made explicit by saying something like this: "I'd like to take a walk in that setting." Then the subject slips into a sort of waking

<sup>6</sup> The shifting of the seizure is likely to be accompanied by diminution of intensity. Will a highly cultivated adult, before works of the first order, experience wonder and aesthetic emotion as intense as a child will before a drop of water iridescent in the sun? The capacity for wonder dwindles steadily with the changing occasions of seizure.

<sup>7</sup> For example, a subject replied: "I like green because it is the color of deep water, of calm, of peace, etc." These are simply associations called out by the generic word "green." It is impossible to tell whether the subject ever got the feelings he describes directly from a green fabric (and what shade of green?), or from green paper, or from the green in a picture. In the same vein there is a very odd page by a contemporary philosopher and literary man, on sulphur-yellow as the color of anguish, evoking hell, etc. And in this passage it is obviously "sulphur" which is the operative word. One wonders whether the author has had such impressions before, say, a flower of the *Linaria vulgaris*, or perhaps before the yellow curtain of a certain painting by Vermeer of Delft, only because he was thinking of the word "sulphur" while he was looking, so that it was this word and not the chromatic sensation which thus excited his imagination.

dream guided by the picture. In such a case appreciation can still be aesthetic as long as it is clearly controlled by the formal arrangements of the picture, in what is primarily given in colors and lines; or in what is secondarily given in the way of representation. Appreciation ceases to be aesthetic when the picture is nothing more than a pretext for reverie, and when it is the reverie itself which is appreciated. This is likely to be the way children look at illustrations in a book. But here we are dealing with complex phenomena where scientific interpretation becomes quite delicate.

May not the point be reached where the stimulus is entirely imaginative? This does happen in dreams, where actually aesthetic appreciation is often very pure and intense. It happens especially with persons skilled in art, notably in two definite technical situations. The first occurs in the course of original work at the point where the artist is content to imagine or create mentally, and may be filled with admiration or aesthetically shocked by the idea which comes to him in imagination ahead of any material embodiment. Then there is the situation of the experienced and technically qualified artist confronted with a blueprint, a scenario, or other notation indicating what the finished work or performance would be. A musician reading a score has impressions, feelings, appreciations analogous to what he would have in hearing the piece actually played.

Such facts present no difficulty in themselves. A mental image means a grouping of psychic processes much resembling perception in form. If this resemblance is not marked or even lacking we are dealing with abstract ideas. In all the cases we have just considered, the analogy between an image and a perception is very strong. This is so in dreams to the degree of veritable hallucination. Likewise in reading a musical score the imaginative presence is equivalent to all that is given in actual perception: the pitch of the notes, their timbre, etc. Both in reaching for the idea of a fresh work and in reading the score of a finished one, aesthetic appreciation is focused upon perceptual qualities as they are present to imagination. So we need to modify our preliminary definition a bit by adding that aesthetic appreciation consists in evaluating the object of a perception, *whether a direct perception or one represented imaginatively*, according to what is intrinsically given in the *actual or virtual* exercise of perception.

In all other cases, instead of filling out the perception of the stimulus or serving in its place, imagination becomes excessive and must be regarded as disturbing aesthetic appreciation, even vitiating it. In a familiar example the stimulus is a work created by the subject himself (No. XII in our table above). Everyone knows that a youngster appreciating his first poetic efforts, or a "Sunday painter" evaluating the picture he has just finished, will be prone to strange errors and to grossly overestimating his work. We have here what we must call veritable *illusions of aesthetic appreciation*. The cause is not to be sought among the effects of self-esteem. Something else is involved here. The budding artist has had keen feelings in the course of creative labor; his imagination has been very active. He had wanted to achieve, or believed he had achieved, artistic effects capable of expressing or suggesting to others the emotions or mental images which had besieged him, and he deceived himself. His pen or brush failed to salvage from

subjectivity much of all that he thought he had in mind. Yet all of it, with its recent effervescence, comes back into his perception of the work, to over-determine it subjectively, when he looks at it immediately after finishing it. That is why many a painter makes it a rule to turn a fresh canvas toward the wall of his studio, and many a writer puts the freshly written page in a drawer; not to go back to it for self-criticism and revision until the original effervescence has completely died down and no longer threatens to interfere with perception of what is really there.

A similar case, not applying to the creative artist, occurs when a work or object is perceived in circumstances unusually charged with emotion which remains associated with it. Such is the piece of music which one can never again hear calmly, since it recalls one of life's high moments. Aesthetic appreciation cannot afterwards focus on the art object itself when held by the whole imaginative and emotional complex which the object brings back, and by which it is in turn over-affected.

On the other hand, it is not necessary to banish from the realm of direct and authentic aesthetic appreciation every instance of this sort. Certain emotional experiences stamp a person's aesthetic sensibility with a lasting effect. Thus a painter, a musician, or lover of the arts will always be on the lookout (perhaps unconsciously) for works or themes which can stir an old emotion. It may be, as with Wordsworth, Baudelaire, and Rilke, something wonderful from childhood. Then it is not a case of the strong influence of memory, but of a profound modification of the structure of aesthetic sensibility itself. The rule here is to eliminate as unaesthetic or suspect, or as not bearing directly upon the object serving as stimulus, any appreciation into which there accidentally enters an affective or imaginative over-influence of subjective or biographical origin—unless the intensity or later frequent repetition of former experiences has brought about a structural modification of the aesthetic sensibility.

It is naturally a difficult question, still awaiting scientific resolution, to know how much weight to assign to each of the three kinds of appreciation we have considered: (1) direct aesthetic appreciation of the stimulus; (2) appreciation conditioned by strong affective influence of the imagination or memory, going back to an unaesthetic or accidental origin; (3) appreciation conditioned by influences originally unaesthetic but having brought about a structural modification of the sensibility. It would be very advantageous to set up systematic quantitative research on this threefold question. In any event it is imperative in statistical studies of aesthetic appreciation, as in any quantitative investigation, to work only with homogeneous classes of data; and of course to classify carefully the facts of appreciation to be studied, under the above three categories.

(3) The last order of difficulties, hence of methodical precautions to be taken in gathering data, raises the following question: Can every kind of perception, regardless of what senses are involved, provide an occasion for aesthetic appreciation? or is this true only of auditory and visual perceptions? We have here an old and well known problem, namely, whether sensations of taste, smell, etc., can give rise to aesthetic appreciation. But this problem has certainly been resolved now. The great majority of contemporary aestheticians, almost all of

them, have got over denying that there can be aesthetic appreciation of an article of food, a perfume, etc.<sup>8</sup> The only remaining moot question in this connection is whether genuine arts can utilize perceptions resting upon the senses sometimes called lower; and this question is not our concern here.

Having established that the distinction between aesthetic and unaesthetic cannot be reduced to asking which senses provide aesthetic experience, we are in a position to face squarely the problem of separating aesthetic appreciation from sensuous *pleasure*. A glutton—or a hungry man—who eats some food or other with intense pleasure, a woman who voluptuously breathes the perfume of a flower, is not going in for any aesthetic appreciation. It is precisely this predominance of the question whether perception is pleasant or unpleasant, agreeable or disagreeable, which excludes the aesthetic attitude. Poles apart from the glutton is the epicure who appreciates the perfection of a dish of quail à la Talleyrand (taking into account the visual effect), or who sips a Meursault wine, trying to decide whether the flinty flavor is a foretaste or an aftertaste. Such a one does not at all abandon himself to his pleasure, or take sensuous appeal as the measure of his appreciation.

Even more clearly, a contemporary music lover who listens with delight to a work by Webern or Boulez does not rely in the least upon his auditory pleasure in order to appreciate it. If he did he would be quite miserable and would cry out for Massenet. For no one can doubt that Massenet's successions of chords of fourths and sixths are more agreeable to the ear than the "thicket of confusion" which Messiaen calls the Boulez units of rhythm. And yet the music of Boulez has its devotees. So we must carefully distinguish the enthusiasm aroused by the perception of certain combinations of data from the sensuous pleasure provided by more or less analogous data.<sup>9</sup> Aesthetic appreciation is linked to the former and not to the latter.

Aesthetic emotion in its most intense and pure forms is the state of *perceiving with intoxication* what is presented, whether it be a symphony, a landscape, or whatever. Actually the aesthetic object has no other use than to be offered to this avid and intoxicating perception, whose symptoms strangely resemble ethyl intoxication in its first stages.<sup>10</sup> Simple perception, apart from taking anything or doing anything, can have this effect. But this *ebrietas animi percipientis*, characteristic of aesthetic emotion in the grand manner, is extremely attenuated in the common or faint variety. There the symptoms of this sort of mental excitement are scarcely more than mild or even subtle modifications of the quieting down of psychic life. In the emotional scale, then, the "soul's transport" gives way to calmer states. These are still intense under the form of amazement or

<sup>8</sup> Compare, for example (to cite two authors of quite different and almost contrary orientation): J. Segond, *Traité Esthétique*, pp. 68-76, and Th. Munro, *The Arts and their Interrelations*, pp. 136-139. It should be noted, however, that M. Pradines (*Traité de Psychologie Générale*, vol. II, pp. 210, ff.) still denies the aesthetic possibility of sensations of touch, taste, and odor. But his main reasons assume the impossibility of basing genuine artistic activities upon these sensations, which raises another problem.

<sup>9</sup> This distinction does not rest solely upon the distinction between aesthetic emotion and pleasure, but also upon that between perception and sensation.

<sup>10</sup> Cf., for example, P. Bjerre, *Zur Psychologie des Rauches*, A. Z. für Ps. und ps. F., 1929.

rapture, then thin out to admiration, to be followed by almost the weakest state (though still involving a very positive appreciation), just a kind of interest which is more or less captive. At the bottom of the positive scale nothing is left but esteem—and everyone knows that in the theater or in painting a *succès d'estime* is very close to no success, a “flop.” But these affective states whose gamut spreads over the degrees of aesthetic appreciation, from the highest to the lowest, are so independent and apart from the feeling of pleasure or an impression of charm, that they may happen to be downright painful, agonizing, a bit hard to take. Pleasure, even when dressed up with the name of aesthetic pleasure, has no connection with a sublime work which overwhelms us, which makes us shudder, or which moves us to the verge of tears. Whoever says he reads the *Prometheus Bound* “with delight,” or that he listens “with pleasure” to the *Ninth Symphony*, classes himself at once with the insensitive. What has pleasure to do with the bitter shivering interest aroused and ceaselessly renewed by Ravel’s *Concerto for the Left Hand*? or with the shock and almost haggard staring caused by Picasso’s “Girls on the Sea Shore”? This cannot be blamed on modernism, for we have only to think of Mozart’s *Galimatias musicum* and Lorenzo Lotto’s “Annunciation.” Finally, if we say of the romance *Cherry Blossom Time* (music by A. Renard), or of the picture “Soap Bubbles” (a painting by Ch. J. Chaplin), “It is pleasant enough,” it is clear that we use this expression both to recognize the reality of the pleasure and, from the aesthetic point of view, to damn it utterly.

All of this seems too evident to be worth saying. Yet it is justified by an account I have before me, as I write these lines, of experiments made by a contemporary scientist, bringing together some very important new facts, veritable discoveries, about hearing and the production of vocal sounds. He has had his subjects classify musical compositions under two heads: “pleasant or unpleasant” without bothering (at least in the account he gives of his research) to find out whether the judgment was about the sensuous pleasure of sonorous qualities or about the aesthetic worth of works. If we understand him correctly, he does not seem to see any difference. In case he was dealing with aesthetic appreciation, having chosen records for the purpose, why was he not anxious to ask whether such appreciation was concerned with the relative appeal of pieces written in the same musical style? or had to do with comparing the use of the regular tonal system with that of the twelve-tone scale? Why did he not ask whether attention was on the timbre of the oboe and the violin, compared with that of the piano, etc.? or upon the conformity of the pieces with the musical habits and culture of the subject? In the latter case it would be important to know whether the subject praised or condemned aesthetically, or whether he just sensed as pleasant or unpleasant the mere fitting of a piece with his habits, or noticed more or less originality.

This does not mean that experiments concerning the pleasure or displeasure afforded by the stimulus are without interest or importance. But the following rule must be observed. Every experiment focused on the agreeable or disagreeable impression of a work of art must carefully inquire whether this impression is owing to the bare sense data (colors, sonorities, etc.), or to the artistic use

made of the data in the work. And it must be asked further, whether the impression is in accord with the aesthetic appreciation of the stimulus. Theoretically, there is no constant correlation between the pleasantness of the sense data and aesthetic appreciation. When there is such a correlation (whether of accord or the contrary), this fact involves the structure of the subject's sensibility. As a general rule, the more cultivated a subject is aesthetically the more rarely will a favorable aesthetic appreciation go with pleasure in the sense data. Moreover, it is necessary to keep track of the duration and repetition of the presentation of the stimulus. Often a work which is aesthetically appreciated in a favorable manner contains sense data which at first sight are shocking, unheard of, or disagreeable. Such is the apple-green band on the tunic in the "Knight's Vision" of Raphael; the juxtaposition of blue and mauve in certain paintings by Matisse; the sequence of parallel fifths in Debussy. As the subject becomes familiar with such a work, however, the impression of something unacceptable weakens, and he ends up with his sensibility inverted, so that the anomaly which at first had been hard for him to take gives him a very special enjoyment. Thus the subject's pleasant or unpleasant impression has aesthetic significance only in relation to a stimulus (or analogous stimuli) more or less familiar to him.

It should also be common knowledge that when an oral statement is basic to inquiry about pleasure or displeasure, great attention must be given to the manner in which the question is put and to the way in which the reply is phrased. But that is a further point, to be taken up later. Here we shall observe only that often the simplest means of conducting the inquiry and of getting a sincere answer is to put the question in vague terms (for example, "Do you like that or not?"). But the significance of statements thus elicited becomes very ambiguous. Is it possible to know whether the subject is thereby registering a genuine impression of pleasure, particularly a pleasure of sense, or a whole range of quite different facts? Among these the following are especially to be noted: (a) an aesthetic or even artistic appreciation of a technical character;<sup>11</sup> (b) a desire to prolong, to renew, or, on the contrary, to cut short the perception of the work, in order to make it part of the familiar things of life or thrust it from them;<sup>12</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Examples: "I don't like that," with the later comment brought out by questioning: "because the resolution of the appoggiatura to the consonant is very clumsy, and because there are parallel octaves which could easily have been avoided by inversion;" or, again: "because in the foreground the painter has juxtaposed three equal values, thinking thus to bring out the foreground, whereas this makes it recede."

<sup>12</sup> First example (beginning with a recording of Japanese music): "I don't like that," with the comment, "It is certainly very interesting but it gets on my nerves unbearably." Another example (using a Picasso): "I don't say it isn't very beautiful, but hell! I couldn't stand having that thing around all the time." Another example is of questions put to a nine-year-old child: "Which of these six pictures do you like best?" The child is hesitant: "Perhaps this, or this" (they are the "Bell Lilies in a Copper Vase" by Van Gogh and "The Queen of the Fairies" by Jessie Bayes"). A further test: "I'll give you one of the six. Which do you want?" The child *immediately or briskly* indicates a third picture "Officer of the Imperial Guard Charging" by Géricault! "What will you do with it?" Reply: "I'll put it on the wall in my room." Either the child did not dare to say it was really this one which he would prefer, fearing this choice would count against him (until his hesitation was overcome by the pleasure of owning the picture); or he thought (not without reason)

(c) an affection akin to love.<sup>13</sup> This last classification has to do with very definite and often very intense emotional phenomena. One can actually fall in love with a work of art, above all in music, as Swann did with the "little phrase" of Vinteuil in Proust. It may be a melody, a piece for the piano, a recording of orchestral music. One is eager to hear it again, repeats it mentally with exquisite enjoyment, is haunted by it. And then little by little, as with so many other loves, one becomes indifferent, one forgets. Can such experiences be reduced to a question of pleasure and displeasure? As long as they last, does not a person give himself to them with all his heart?

## IV

We come now to questions about the expression of aesthetic appreciation proper. It can be of two sorts: tacit or put into words.

1. This essential fact is to be noted first: *Aesthetic appreciation, when spontaneous, direct, and normal, is tacit.* The factors which constitute it, and can serve as concomitant symptoms of it, not only do not belong to the order of language (interjections or exclamations are very rare and almost always are a matter of sociability), but above all it must not be forgotten that silence itself is one of the most striking signs of aesthetic emotion or attention, and is generally the result of aesthetic appreciation which is deep and sincere.<sup>14</sup>

As for the usual symptoms which are easy to observe (turning red or pale, having moist eyes, difficulty in breathing followed by sighing), without being extremely rare they occur only in extreme cases. They are more readily brought about by the theater arts, by poetry and music, than by painting, drawing, or architecture. Aesthetic appreciation of a canvas or a print (even if it brings very strong value-responses into play) is scarcely revealed except by the relatively important behavior of lingering for a while, more or less prolonged, in contemplation. Such behavior can easily be studied by a very simple experimental de-

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that "liking" was not strong enough for the kind of admiration he felt for this picture; and that such an expression was used to ask him merely to point out the prettiest or most charming of the pictures. Or, finally, he had at once classified this picture in a category separate from the others (possibly through association with imagined adventures, since the parents say that in the child's room there were already two photographs of knights from the movies). At any rate, the second test profoundly modifies the interpretation of the first, and only the second brings out what the child actually felt.

<sup>13</sup> In Alfred de Musset's *Carmosine*, Act III, Scene 1, Carmosine says: "Go, Love, and tell the cause of my distress . . ." How that song delights me, my dear Minuccio." See comment on this later.

<sup>14</sup> I know a very beautiful view which is found by going to a certain place about sixty yards off the highway, where I have often taken friends. Conversation is likely to stop when we arrive at the point where the view opens out. I can testify that those who calmly go on talking after reaching that spot, with that landscape before their eyes, are totally lacking in aesthetic sensibility, at least with regard to that kind of sight, if they have not been told in advance that it is something to admire. Such a test is much more revealing than a reply to a questionnaire. Moreover, all artists accustomed to perform in public know well that a certain quality of silence (the cessation of the conversational murmur or more or less lowered voices, with attenuation of physiological noises such as coughing and the use of the handkerchief) is the best sign of success and the best promise of applause to follow.

vice. Give the subject an album of reproductions of artworks to leaf through freely, and time his consideration of each. In normal and average conditions the time is likely to vary between one and ten seconds; and this variation is in direct relation to aesthetic appreciation.<sup>15</sup>

The preceding note indicates a significant fact which must be taken seriously. The subject, after having gone past a picture, to consider some others, turns back for another look. Turning back indicates, for one thing, the continuing effect of the stimulus, which cannot be regarded as a simple act of memory, but is tied up rather with the nature of the aesthetic experience itself.<sup>16</sup> It shows moreover a need of perceiving (afresh), which must be basic to aesthetic appreciation itself, as we have defined it provisionally. This suggests that scientific utilization, as for example by means of a questionnaire, of the memory of an aesthetic appreciation calls for considerable caution. It cannot be lightly lumped with other forms of memory. In the realm of memory there are special kinds of be-

<sup>15</sup> Take for example an experiment using an album of 36 photographic plates in black and white, folio size, and all presented from the same point of view (this is very important), reproducing paintings by English portraitists of the 18th century and the first half of the 19th (quite homogeneous material). The subject *N* leafed through the album in one minute and 23 seconds (This is a normal amount of time to take: a little over two seconds per plate). But the time of observation varied from less than a second to a little more than seven seconds. Minimum, "Mistress Ferguson" by Raeburn; maximum, "Pope Pius VII" by Lawrence. On an average the subject, who was male, looked a little longer at portraits of women than at those of men; but the longest times (over five seconds) were all spent on portraits of men. The subject turned back, however, after glancing at two more plates, to look again at "The Shrimp Girl" by Hogarth. These results are easy to interpret aesthetically, even without the aid of the subsequent questioning, in which the subject was asked to look again at the pictures in order to give reasons for the varying amounts of time he had spent on them. Concerning "The Shrimp Girl," the subject, who had genuine aesthetic sensitiveness but little knowledge of the history of art, answered that he was "very surprised that such a picture had been painted by an Englishman, and especially in the 18th century."

Statistical use of basic material of this sort presents no difficulty, and can be managed according to the classic methods. It is unwise to regard turning back for another look as a prolongation of consideration: it is better to classify something like this separately. There is also good reason for classifying apart experiments done with subjects specially trained in the history of art or in pictorial technique; or with subjects having no such special training. With the latter, it is safe to call the amount of difference between the various looking-times a sure index of aesthetic sensitiveness. If the times were the same a weak degree of sensitiveness would be indicated, at least for the kind of stimuli used as material in the experiment. But with well trained subjects technical matters are noticed (regarding certain details, the composition, the pictorial methods) which interfere with the main process of appreciation, and may greatly prolong consideration of a picture. There may also be turning back for the sake of comparison. And finally, some times are short because the subject already knows the work used as stimulus. These things can easily be brought to light in the subsequent questioning of such a subject (who is usually well able to explain his behavior).

<sup>16</sup> Baudelaire, who called attention to such turning back (*Aesthetic Curiosities*, Salon of 1859), considered it important enough to characterize art fundamentally, calling it "a mnemotechny of the beautiful." Such a speculative conclusion is no doubt exaggerated. It is nonetheless true that the prolonging of the psychic impression, in its continuance after the disappearance of the stimulus, is full of aesthetic significance.

havior to be classed as aesthetic, relating to the phenomena of love and obsession, and even of the fixed idea, mentioned above.

To these psychological symptoms of aesthetic interest can we add some belonging to practical and social behavior, such as efforts to see or hear certain works, or to see or hear them again (visiting museums, going to concerts, buying records)? spending more or less money in these ways? supporting societies for aesthetic purposes? studying to be a performing artist? These last symptoms are very ambiguous and must be used with great care when individual acts are involved in collective acts. They can be used as important individual symptoms only if it has been verified that they actually are individual (by ascertaining that they refer to the subject's personal appreciations) and are not collective (referable to social phenomena which may be unaesthetic).<sup>17</sup> It goes without saying that applause belongs among the complex and ambiguous phenomena which cannot be used as basic in a serious study of individual aesthetic appreciation.<sup>18</sup>

To sum up: scientific study of unspoken aesthetic appreciation is based upon the observable aspects of behavior which (a) form an integral part of the process of appreciation or directly depend upon it; (b) and delicately vary with the degrees of appreciation. No other data can be considered except as ambiguous and rough indications, which will be of scientific use only if their correlation with observable behavior has first been made clear. This order of procedure must not be reversed.

2. A word remains to be said about oral expression of appreciation. Everyone knows in general what difficulties are encountered, what rules must be followed and precautions taken, not only in collecting judgments by word of mouth but in arranging them statistically (see the special studies on this subject). The reader will realize that our purpose here is solely to point out what the *special* characteristics of the *aesthetic* are, and how the general rules must be adapted to the study of it. The most important point is, to repeat, that when aesthetic appreciation is first-hand, normal, concrete, and vivid, it is unspoken; and may even resist the effort to find words. To gauge the importance of this fact, it suffices to see how different this situation is from that which can be observed in other kinds of appreciation: the moral and social, for example (judgments relative to approval or disapproval of conduct, or to good comradeship and friendly relations). Here one is led so spontaneously and naturally to put judgments into words at once that here one ought to admit the homogeneity and close interde-

<sup>17</sup> J. S. Bach made a long and difficult trip on foot across the Lüneburg Heath to hear a French harpsichord player who interpreted the *gruppetto* in a particular way. Such an undertaking is clear and important proof of personal interest. But if a party had been organized for an excursion on this occasion it would plainly have been necessary to find out how much the reason for going was aesthetic for each member of the party.

<sup>18</sup> (1) Collective factors, some of which are clearly unaesthetic, outweigh the individual factors in applause. (2) It cannot be determined whether the object of appreciation is the work, the author, the performer, or non-aesthetic social circumstances. (3) The amount of applause depends upon a motor excitement which has no precise and direct connection with aesthetic appreciation. It is easy to observe that at the theater or a concert the applause is in general distinctly proportional to the expenditure of energy by the performers. Every performer knows that there are definite technical means, some of them non-aesthetic, by which to incite applause.

pendence of silent and spoken appreciation; and perhaps even that verbal expression is especially revealing. It is not the same in aesthetic appreciation. *There* saying something after a silent response adds a new fact, quite distinct from the first. What is added has its own characteristics, and brings its own problems. It activates categories of appreciation different from those of the silent kind. We need to realize that appreciation in the form of speech often is an "artifact," an artificial product of an *ars dicendi* which can be acquired or developed through special training. At any rate, the documentation which can be gathered on it has no regular correlation with unspoken appreciation.<sup>19</sup> And when the form of appreciation which can find words accompanies the kind for which none can be found, the first must be regarded as a peculiar and distinct activity that blurs the other.

In short, we come to four propositions. (1) To ask the subject for a verbal appreciation of a stimulus which is qualified to bring out aesthetic impressions (and especially to demand that his wording itself have a clearly aesthetic character) *is to impose upon the subject a special exercise*. (2) The performance and the results of this exercise should be considered *quite distinct* from what is gathered from silent appreciation. (3) This verbal exercise reveals primarily *the greater or less ability of the subject to use language in the realm of ideas defined by the conditions of the test*; a domain in which subjects without special verbal training are often ill at ease. (4) To carry out this exercise simultaneously with speechless appreciation disturbs the latter and impedes its normal course.

There is, however, an interesting verbal exercise which ought to be mentioned on the side. It consists in applying to certain stimuli (works of art, manufactured objects, human beings, animals or plants, scenes in nature, etc.) epithets chosen among adjectives commonly accepted as having definite aesthetic meaning. This exercise deserves special comment, because from the point of view of research it has the great advantage that, by using established classical methods, it is easy to work out a list of adjectives chosen in a systematic way which will gauge

<sup>19</sup> It is easy to verify this by returning to the method of leafing through an album of reproductions. If the subject is asked to comment aloud on them, his timing on them will be very different. Take, for example, a verbal control-test of the subject *N* who was presented a while back. For "The Shrimp Girl": "Very interesting, very strange, very pretty . . . It is lively . . . And besides . . ." Here the subject stops talking and suddenly imitates in a striking way the facial expression of the girl in the picture. It is clear that he has had a vivid impression of this physiognomy which he has not been able to put into words. On the other hand, in commenting sarcastically and at length upon the "Portrait of Gibbon" and upon "Garrick Between Tragedy and Comedy," both by Reynolds, the subject has no trouble finding comical things to say. He has great difficulty in expressing his other tonalities of appreciation. Before "Pius VII," which on his first test kept him looking longest, he remains silent and finally declares, "I don't know what to say." Other subjects (especially those not very sensitive) give a sort of enumeration of things represented ("There is a dog . . . It is in the country . . . There are some clouds"), and let it go at that. Of course, the more details there are in the picture the longer such a commentary is. Other subjects make up an anecdote, a sort of little story to explain the composition of a painting (usually when they have no background). All this gives information which may be very interesting about the psychology of the subject; but how it relates to aesthetic appreciation is vague. And often a test of this sort brings out things which obviously have nothing at all to do with aesthetic appreciation.

scientifically the whole range of shades of aesthetic qualification. As ordinarily used with a group of a certain linguistic and cultural background, such an exercise can be controlled with precision,<sup>20</sup> and is most valuable. It is a delicate matter, however, to adapt it to the study of aesthetic appreciation, which concerns us here, and the following points should be noted.

(1) The exercise of fitting adjectives to things presented as stimuli is obviously complex. Two factors are involved: (a) appreciative perception of a stimulus; (b) choice of adjective. Unusual use of an adjective is equivocal, since it may be owing either to an appreciative perception out of the ordinary or to an odd mode of expression. This question must be carefully cleared up before drawing any conclusions from the results obtained.

(2) Two sorts of aesthetic adjectives must be distinguished: (a) those which characterize qualitative aesthetic categories (tragic, comic, dramatic, and their intermediate nuances; joyful, melancholy, graceful, triumphal, etc.); (b) those which constitute appreciative judgment proper, being more or less laudatory or pejorative (magnificent, colossal, sensational, exalting, satisfying, displeasing, boring, ungraceful, etc.). In practice it is very difficult to find adjectives which, for most subjects, belong without doubt to one or the other group.<sup>21</sup>

(3) As for terms concerning the designation of aesthetic categories (which may be accounted for by studying the history of word-formation), if the test demands that *only one* adjective in a list be applied to each stimulus, this stipulation is likely to interfere with appreciation. (a) It often happens (especially in contemporary art) that aggressive refusal of certain aesthetic categories (the refusal of grace, harmony, joy, or serenity) is the clearest aesthetic characteristic of a work. Thus it is well to take account not only of the adjectives on an accepted list but of their negatives (which are not to be confused with unfavorable judgments). (b) The aesthetic savor of certain works is owing to the rare or odd harmony of two tones which seldom go together, or which seem contradictory at first sight, or for a subject without much background.<sup>22</sup> And I need not say that,

<sup>20</sup> Cf. P. Farnsworth, "A Study of the Hevner Adjective List," *JAAC*, XIII: 1 (September 1954).

<sup>21</sup> For some subjects "serious" and "boring" are close to meaning the same thing. "Grandiose" almost always is pejorative; "tragic" is almost always laudatory. Usage of laudatory terms evolves quickly in the life of words. "Gratuitous" formerly was on the whole pejorative (having the sense of something without sufficient artistic justification, as in not contributing to the general effect, or not involving the character of the persons who appear, or not being demanded by the action, in the theater or the novel). Now, under the influence of existentialism, "gratuitous" is on the way to becoming laudatory (with the sense of that which belongs not to reasoning and calculation but to inspiration; being unexpected yet justified by itself or by the exercise of the artist's liberty). An important work in progress, the *Vocabulary of Aesthetics*, being prepared by The French Society for Aesthetics, is gathering a great many facts of this nature.

<sup>22</sup> An example is the "majestic comic" accompaniment of the entrance of the head of the family in the *Coffee Cantata* of J. S. Bach. Another is the comic use of the bassoon, an instrument often considered "pontifical," in *The Camp of Wallenstein* by Vincent d'Indy. Again, there is the "melancholy gaiety" of the *Passepied* dance in the *Bergamask Suite* of Debussy, which was composed to go with these lines of Verlaine:

. . . masques and Bergamasks  
Playing the lute and dancing, and almost

mathematically, fifty adjectives paired two by two among themselves, and with their negatives, make 5,050 combinations!

We are far from concluding that such a methodical set of adjectives cannot be useful! Quite on the contrary, it is, I repeat, of great value. But remember that it should be used very flexibly in order to have the advantage of all the combinations it offers. Only then can it be adequately adapted to the richness and suppleness of the facts of aesthetic experience. Even the simple exercise of picking one adjective from a list to fit a work can be highly rewarding. But it must not be forgotten that this exercise can give only a loose characterization of those facts which are the simplest and commonest, while letting slip through the net the very delicate and original. The catch is that the latter count most in the field of aesthetics.

When art criticism is undertaken in a literary manner, the search for unusual adjectives or new juxtapositions of ordinary ones plays a considerable role. This is not necessarily owing to opposition of the literary to the scientific spirit, but may result from the critic's groping for means of expressing what is rare, new, and original in the aesthetic atmosphere of a work. The historically important artistic or literary work is generally the one which, as Victor Hugo wrote to Baudelaire, "endows art with a new shudder of emotion." Clearly it would be absurd and vain to hunt for a term characterizing this new emotion in a list of ready-made terms chosen precisely for their aptness in describing the qualities of a large group of previous works.

What is interesting and fruitful is to find out whether, with the resources of a verbal medium quite different in nature from the literary, especially by methodical combinations of a limited number of adjectives whose meaning and range are rigorously defined—in short, by means which would satisfy what Blaise Pascal called "the spirit of geometry"—it is possible to compete successfully with the resources of the "spirit of finesse."

I think it can be done—but only if we see clearly the problem to be solved; and do not let ourselves be lulled into confidence that because we use scientific tools our results must be scientific. The proper use of these tools is no less essential than they are, and especially the technique enabling us to reach by means of them the facts we seek. In some fields it is very useful to get at the facts a bit loosely and crudely, as long as we are steadily and surely closing in. But in the field of aesthetics the essential thing often is in a subtle nuance whose objective grounds are very difficult to uncover.<sup>23</sup> Therefore, to get at the aesthetic heart of the

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Sad beneath their fantastic masks . . .  
 Although singing in a minor key  
 About love victorious and life in keeping,  
 Their happiness they do not seem to see.

Putting together "fantastic," "sad," "happiness," "minor key," etc., is essential to the atmosphere of the whole poem and of the whole musical piece (in which especially the technical fluctuation between the major and the minor is essential).

<sup>23</sup> For example, there is the difference between the original painting by a master and even a very good copy; between the first prints of an etching (or a woodcut) and prints made when the plate is somewhat worn; a musical work interpreted by performers who are first class and by those who are second class (or under the direction of two different

matter the approach of scientific experiment is not going to be enough. *Then the whole art of the experimenter is to reach the zone where the differentiation of nuances begins.*

## V

We have not in the least wanted to criticize the use in aesthetics of experimental methods based on quantitative considerations. On the contrary, we believe them to be indispensable and excellent if they are properly used. We have merely wanted to search methodically for some practical guiding principles for their use, in order to obtain that efficacy which the scientific character of the procedures (and the fact that they have proved themselves in other fields) does not suffice to assure, unless account is taken of the *inherent difficulty* of getting at aesthetic appreciation through experiment. It is this difficulty which has concerned us.

The underlying reason why it is not easy to study this field is the following. Aesthetic sensibility, when well developed, is a personal instrument of appreciation whose subtlety and power are both really prodigious. Its functioning rests upon the qualitative diversity, the rapidity, intensity, and instability of total emotional reactions; conditioned by the objective dispositions of the stimulus (its proportions, harmonies, morphological variations, structural correlations with the subject's psychic life as a whole) for which this sensibility constitutes a kind of psychic resonator and detecting apparatus as delicate as efficient.

It is extremely difficult to substitute for such precious personal sensibility any objective methods of appreciation which can get as good results. But if we work through that sensibility instead of bypassing it, and make it the very object of study, then the methodological procedure which we endeavor to apply to it should not itself be less delicate or less subtly adapted to that sensibility than the latter is to its object.

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orchestra conductors); the treatment of the same subject by different illustrators (say, Cinderella's fairy and carriage done by Gustave Doré, Arthur Rackham, and Walt Disney); a photographic portrait done with and without good lighting. Not only will a lover of the arts or a professional expert find profound differences in such cases (often backed up by enormous differences in price) but many persons without any special background, yet well endowed with aesthetic sensibility, appreciate the differences clearly and readily. I have obtained from children of ten to twelve some excellent aesthetic judgments of the comparative worth of the first and last prints of etchings.