a special or esoteric form of human behaviour but is a normal characteristic of man and must be regarded as a normal function of human reaction to experience, and that this universal process has a special meaning and operates in a specific fashion in the field of aesthetic experience and behaviour.

A detailed examination of this process could best be done by beginning with a consideration of the Gestalt psychology which has its origin in a theory of visual perception and which — as the common noun gestalt is derived from the idea of wholeness — is also related to the concept of holism which formed the starting point of this thesis. (The term gestalt "refers to a theory that all mental experience becomes organised in the form of structures which, when relatively incomplete, possess an immanent tendency toward their own completion. It rejects the assumption that isolated local determination of psychic processes ever occurs and maintains that all organic and inorganic stresses tend toward an end — the state of equilibrium. In its broadest sense, the doctrine of Gestalt is a philosophy of nature and holds for all the sciences and not just for psychology. The external universe, life and mind are composed of gestalten.")

Smuts has said that "what we want is some larger synthesis, some concepts that will bring together the vast details with which we have to deal. There has been an immense

5 George Hartmann: Gestalt Psychology (New York 1955) p. 311
movement forward in science, philosophy and all forms of human development. We are now running the risk of getting lost, becoming submerged in the details, and it is all-important for us to get some larger view of all the vast mass. We want what Professor Hoernle would call after Plato, the "synoptic vision" over all these details," and in referring to his theory of holism he says: "Every whole has its field, and all these fields interpenetrate each other. Thus we have a great community of wholes, each with its own field interpenetrating into the fields of other wholes. I think it is in the intermingling of the fields that the creative element of the universe enters."

"The chief characteristic of the Gestalt psychology is its emphasis on the relative importance of all composite elements with the wholeness as the important control factor. This viewpoint has been developed by two sciences, physics and biology. In this psychology, the whole organism controls its parts, and is more significant than the sum of its parts. For example, the mind of the individual is more significant than the sum total of the individual's experience, for the mind determines and develops the experiences. All the expressions of the individual are the expression of his whole being - his total personality."

The validity of these statements has been accepted, and yet very few philosophers, psychologists or educationalists have suggested the actual methods by which a practical system of education can work in terms of these facts. The most notable contribution towards this end was made by Dr. Herbert Read, as

6 Jan Christiaan Smuts: Towards a Better World (New York 1944) pp. 124, 131

7 Evangeline Reen: A Psychology of Artistic Creation (New York 1942) P. 39, 40

8 Education through Art (Faber and Faber, London)
recently as 1943, but as yet it has not received
the recognition by educationalists which it so
richly deserves. I am convinced that unless
our approach to art training and practice has
its basis in a working cognisance of all the
factors governing human thought, feeling, emo­
tion and expression — with an analysis of
these factors made in the light of the whole —
we cannot hope to arrive at a satisfactory
solution of our problem. It is for this
reason that I have been at such pains to draw
attention to the existence of these factors,
and in this chapter I wish to include the
findings made on an investigation of the crea­
tive impulse of human beings.

The basic ideas and application of the Gestalt
psychology have been presented in many differ­
ent ways, but for the purposes of this study,
the most convenient classification I could
find amongst the publications of Teachers
College at Columbia University has been made
by Dr. Evangeline Rees. She presents the
four principles of this type of psychology as
follows:

1. The Principle of Integration:

In each situation, an individual responds as
a total being to his total environment through
a process of interaction of the two which re­
sults in a modification of each.

2. The Principle of Adjustment:

Each situation and response are of incomplete
structure tending toward one end — a state of
equilibrium, the process of interaction or ex­
perience being one of adjustment in order to
achieve this dynamic equilibrium.

3. The Principle of Purposive Differentiation:

A state of equilibrium is the result of the explication and realization of an intelligible goal of action with a tendency toward a resulting satisfactory feeling tone.

4. The Principle of Pragnanz:

The on-going process of achieving equilibrium will always be as good and as simple as prevailing conditions allow — depending upon the frame of reference of the individual.

Just as the classification of psychological types and human temperaments cannot be regarded as rigid categories, so the principles formulated by the Gestalt psychology interpenetrate and act conjunctively as well as separately.

"THE PRINCIPLE OF INTEGRATION is the most general and inclusive of the four, comprising as it does the initial purpose, the procedure of creating and the ultimate goal. In a certain sense the other principles are merely subdivisions."  

In the definition of this principle we are concerned with the words "each situation", "total being", "total environment", "interaction" and "modification". The term situation applies to the exact moment when the organism reacts to a particular experience, becoming aware of a perplexing set of factors in its way, and requiring a satisfactory reaction. Total being refers to complete personality of the individual, made up of his

10 Op. cit. p.69
physique, mentality, emotions, etc. The term environment covers all the physical and social phenomena which act upon the individual from without; it includes contact with other persons, locations and the innumerable and complex relationships arising out of such contact. Interaction is the relation between the individual and his environment when the activity of each is dependent upon that of the other. The result of this interaction is modification, its extent being determined by the degree that the individual organism has been changed through the influence of the environment, and by the degree that the environment has been changed by that individual.

Life is made up of countless situations, and "the principles of integration must apply to the total as well as to each single situation; it is descriptive of the life process and the creative process. No creative process - in fact, no life process - can be carried on without the operation of the principle of integration. It is life itself." 11

The most characteristic postulation of the Gestalt psychology is its emphasis of the concept of the whole. No psychological process can be adequately understood by a partial response of the individual, nor can a single element in his environment be divorced from the rest. No structure of any kind can be appreciated by a scrutiny of its separate parts alone. There is a vast mass of evidence to prove that all mental life has a basic urge toward a condition in which the individual as a whole finds a satisfactory equilibrium with his environment a whole.

11 Op. cit. p. 70
Such an equilibrium can be attained by the integration of the individual as the necessary attribute of all life adjustments and modifications, and the creative process, as we have seen, is a normal human function, and essential for self-realization. "...the creative process in the arts is not a method peculiar to certain persons, certain ideas, certain conditions of living, but is a typical and characteristic means of adjusting or finding oneself. It is an activity which gives to each person a means of expressing his emotions in his work. Humanity's need for such expression is apparent to any sensitive observer. Studied closely, it reveals itself as the need for giving the whole self in an act which expresses one's entire reaction to the whole of life — a perfect exemplification of the principle of interaction. A person who possesses a well integrated life often seeks opportunity for artistic expression. Many great scientists, medical men and even day laborers participate in their leisure time in some form of artistic execution or creation; the type of work reflects the degree to which the worker is integrated, for his creative process mirrors his life process.... Nor is it the integrated person only who seeks this opportunity for artistic expression. The non-integrated person is constantly searching for his means of becoming integrated; and through a process of remedial treatment, he may find the right medium, the right form of expression, the right idea which will guide him into a condition of integration." 12

As the distinguishing and peculiar characteristic of aesthetic creation is that it involves an objectification of emotion or feeling, covering the whole field of human expression and demanding that the individual who is

12 Op. cit. p. 71
engaged in such creation should put the whole of himself into the process; it is reasonable to acknowledge it as one of the most vital forces in human integration, and the self-realization of total being.

The concept of wholeness should also be applied to the work of art itself. The totality of a work of art lies not only in the sum total of content, pattern, composition, colour, rhythm, balance, structure, design and form organized into a satisfactory equilibrium, but in the emergence of a whole greater than the sum of its several parts.

The process of interaction involves the individual as an active personality and an environment to which he is sensitive. In his search for equilibrium the individual encounters dissatisfaction which can only be dispelled by a higher adjustment. Hence interaction as a phase of life is purposeful, and the determining of means to dispel dissatisfaction requires a creative effort. The individual must form an appreciation of the factors governing his dissatisfaction, and evaluate in terms of himself and his environment; he must formulate a plan of action and act in accordance with it; he acts upon this plan as the result of his own thinking, accepting the consequences and assuming the responsibility for what he does. Into these activities enter all the processes of living: adventuring into the environment and extending it, creating, co-operating with others, judging values, consuming, recreating, recording, practising, obeying and controlling.

"Every force, every object, every person that affects the reactions of an individual in the
...situations he meets from day to day is an element in his environment. Interaction with others is perhaps the highest level of interaction — interaction then becoming evocation and release. Mosman describes the ideal individual attitude: "...each person calling forth from the other his potentialities and each so treating the other that he is freed to act and do his best" and concludes that "If human relationships could be so conducted, personality would flower and the good life would be more prevalent".  

Interaction — the intermingling and interchanging of self with selves, with things, ideas and aims is the life stream of creation. "...it is in the intermingling of the fields that the creative element of the universe enters."  

THE PROCESS OF MODIFICATION. "Involved with the process of interaction, a mutual modification of both the individual and the environment: the adjustment of the environment to the person, or the adjustment of the person to his environment. By accepting either form of adjustment, the individual contributes to his integration; if he does not, equilibrium cannot be attained and a step is made towards the disintegration of personality." "The element of reciprocity within this concept of modification is psychologically explained by the fact that with each change of a single part or phase of the configuration the whole becomes altered. Within this process of integration the two factors — the individual and the situation — are unique. Therefore a definite element..."  

of variability exists - a variability depending upon the speed, depth and simplicity of the integration.

The goal of democracy is the integrating of forces. The goal of good life is the integration of values. The goal of each individual is the integration of personality. Integration then is the sumnum bonum for each one of us."

THE PRINCIPLE OF ADJUSTMENT. Every normal individual has an inherent urge and also the dynamic power to make his environment relate more favourably to himself, involving thereby both modification and adjustment in order to attain equilibrium. The Gestalt psychology considers mental life as a continuous dynamic rhythm of the opposing forces of equilibrium and disequilibrium, rather than an affair of simple response to the impact of stimuli. "Our direct responses to stimuli are receptor processes which in many cases will be on the mental perceptive level: such a direct response is, however, only the beginning of the total response: the perceptive issues in action according to its constitution, the action is a natural continuation of the perceptive process and is determined by it, and not by pre-established connection bonds. Change of response to a constant stimulus does not take place by alternation in the function of ready-made devices, but is a result of a change in the perceptive process produced by the stimulus.

Lastly, a stimulus upsets an equilibrium on the receptive side of the system; this upset equilibrium results in a movement which tends to bring the system to a new equilibrium and

consequently the reaction must vary with the way in which the equilibrium was disturbed, that is, with the receptive process, with the phenomenal situation."

The effect of emotional stimuli is described by Dewey as follows: "...when excitement about subject matter goes deep, it stirs up a store of attitudes and meanings derived from prior experience. As they are aroused into activity they become conscious thoughts and emotions, emotionalized images. To be set on fire by a thought or scene is to be inspired. What is kindled must either burn itself out, turning to ashes, or press itself out in material that changes the latter from crude material into a refined product. Many a person is unhappy, tortured within, because he has at his command no art of expressive action. What under happier circumstances might be used to convert objective material into material of an intense and clear experience, seethes within in unruly turmoil which finally dies down after, perhaps, a painful disruption." 7

The disintegrating consequences of such maladjustment are self-evident, and Dewey clearly implies that creative expression affords a unique and effective means for the greatest possible adjustment of the individual. This adjustment, which can be both conscious and subconscious, is the process of


17 John Dewey: Art as Experience (New York 1934) p.65
resolving equilibrium out of disequilibrium, and through this process the individuality or self emerges. The creative spirit is nourished within this process—a product of conflicting forces that contributes to a rich and integrated existence.

THE PRINCIPLE OF PURPOSIVE DIFFERENTIATION. "Through the process of interaction and its element of goal-seeking there comes the explication and realization of an intelligible goal of action at the final point of equilibrium. There will be a satisfactory feeling-tone present at the time when equilibrium is reached if the person has adjusted himself to each situation within the process and has achieved thereby a greater integration of personality." Evangeline Rees: Op. cit., p. 111

Four distinct processes are here involved:
(a) interaction and goal seeking, (b) the explication of an intelligible goal of action, (c) the realization of an intelligible goal of action, (d) a resulting satisfactory feeling-tone.

The first, interaction and goal seeking, takes place between the individual and his environment—between personality and its field of action. The individual becomes aware of a condition of disequilibrium in which adjustment is necessary for his own satisfaction and further activity. The goal

is not at first distinguishable, but through the first stage of interaction the purpose is seen and the conditions set for the explanation of his goal. The forces directing him towards this are the productive mood, the "well", the will, the imagination, the inspiration and the insight.

The productive mood is present during the time when all the forces within the individual point in a single direction. When, as John Dewey describes it, the emotional stimulus "seethes within in unruly turmoil" and seeks to convert objective material into a material of an intense and clear experience. 19

The well lies between consciousness and unconsciousness. It is the storehouse of all knowledge and experience which the individual has acquired, and the poorness or the richness and fullness of this storehouse will colour the personality of the individual.

The will is the driving force behind all creation. In the case of artistic creation it is the urge for the conversion of an emotional and personal stimulus into some tangible form which objectifies the experiences that provoked it.

The imagination "is revealed as the common factor in all the subjective aspects of art.

19 Op. cit. p. 65
and as the factor which reconciles their diverse subjective aspects with the invariable laws of objective beauty, the more than usual state of emotion with more than usual order" and "we are endowed with a mind that desires to create and adventure beyond the given. We are endowed, that is to say, with a free will, and in virtue of this freedom we strive rather to avoid the fixed and regular features of the laws of nature and to express instead a world of our own—a world which is a reflection of our feelings and emotions, of that complex of instincts which we call the personality."

Inspiration "is the instantaneous grasping of a solution to the situation at hand. On the surface it appears mysterious but in the light of Gestalt psychology, a sudden clarification is possible under right conditions", namely, "perfect integration, and development of a situation to the point at which a sudden adjustment may be made.

"Inspiration has its source in the environment; it is not a direct product of will. To be valuable...it must be followed by objectification."

"Insight, on the other hand, includes the element of imagination; it is however of longer duration and involves seeing one's way clear through to the end. Inspiration gives to the artist only a preconceived idea,

20 Herbert Read: Art through Education (London 1943) pp. 30, 31
but insight produces the visualized image of a future work carefully laid out as to materials, tools, even to colors, words, movements, or shape."

This realisation of an intelligible goal of action completes the process of bringing reality to a creation of the human mind, and which by elaboration of these stimuli and pursuing the procedure and technique with which the individual objectifies himself and his expression of his personality results in the created object.

THE PRINCIPLE OF PERSAGNANZ. In the foregoing there has been constant reference to the influence of environment, of surroundings, of circumstances which in themselves are so important psychologically that they justify a separate consideration covered by the heading of Prágaanz under which was previously noted "the on-going process of achieving equilibrium will always be as good and as simple as prevailing conditions allow - depending upon the frame of reference of the individual."

"Gestalt psychology is to a great extent based upon experiments in the field of perception, and the many generalizations of this psychological thought grow out of such experimentation. It has been clearly shown that in looking at any object we tend to see the simplest and most intelligible shape. This is the result of many contributing

factors, such as past experience, learning, level of adjustment, degree of integration, and the influence of prevailing conditions. This simple perceptual reaction may be considered an attribute of the whole individual as well as are his more complex reactions. The law of Prägnanz includes all the attributes of the whole in each instance of application.

"We see, then, that this on-going process in the search for equilibrium is a matter of organisation; and in turn that this organisation is a resultant of the fields from which the individual views each new situation -- prevailing conditions, the individual himself, and the environment in which he lives." 22

In the creative process this principle is of particular application to the artist, who, by virtue of possibly a more sensitive make-up than the average individual, will respond more sensitively to the physical, mental and emotional sensations that emerge from his environment, but it is no more the special province of the artist alone, than the creative process is the prerogative of painter, sculptor, musician or writers only.

Rees has divided the principal aspects of the creative process as it relates to the principle of Prägnanz into four categories.

1. The on-going process is a search for equilibrium which demands the interaction of the whole individual within the process. Only a process in which each level of adjustment achieves a dynamic equilibrium and serves as a stepping-stone toward an ever forward moving goal of higher adjustment can be considered on-going.

2. The on-going process will always be as good and as simple as prevailing conditions allow and the first of these prevailing conditions is the sensitivity of the individual and the resultant responsiveness both to his environment and to the factors assisting him in adjusting his equilibrium.

3. The environment acts as a control on creative expression, and changes in environment will bring changes in the expression of the artist. The individual will therefore tend to seek surroundings which will give him peace, comfort and encouragement and will be maladjusted in an environment which denies him these things.

4. Each person reacts and creates in the light of his own values — of his frame of reference, interacting with the prevailing conditions of his environment, and able to overcome obstacles in this environment in proportion to the strength and scope of his set of values.

Although we have seen that the creative process is a common human attribute and finds expression in all fields of human activity,
there is a sufficiency of evidence to prove that from the psychological point of view, self expression reaches its highest objectification and co-ordination in the visual arts, and we are therefore justified in assuming that for the highest possible integration of human personality a study and practice of self expression in the arts provides one of the best means of fostering the conditions of a good life for the individual and an ultimate construction of a better world. "The desire for a specific state of living can...never be translated into practical terms unless the individual is capable, firstly of formulating the nature of the necessity, secondly of giving tangible or limiting dimensions to its expression, and thirdly of devising a code of material construction. It is the function of the artist to extend our visual horizons, to complete and give shape to our half-formed half realized images. It is through his special sensibility and capacity for organization that the intuitive and fragmentary can be given visible and significant expression."25

The intelligent application to our educational systems of Gestalt psychology and the principles outlined in the preceding chapters will promote the welfare of the whole child and the whole adult in a wholly democratic way of life. Art, we have seen, can be the means of self-expression which is essential for the development of an integrated personality. Schools and universities, as instruments of society have the responsibility of

25 Rex Martienssen: Constructivism, University of the Witwatersrand 1939, pp. 22, 23
Author: Hendrikz Willem De Sanderes
Name of thesis: Essential Considerations In Designing A New System Of Art Education For South African Schools And Universities. 1945

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