

Jesse Raber



PROGRESSIVISM'S AESTHETIC EDUCATION

*The Bildungsroman and the
American School, 1890–1920*



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palgrave
macmillan

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ISBN 978-3-319-90043-8 ISBN 978-3-319-90044-5 (eBook)
<https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-90044-5>

Library of Congress Control Number: 2018944606

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Printed on acid-free paper

This Palgrave Macmillan imprint is published by the registered company Springer International Publishing AG part of Springer Nature.
The registered company address is: Gewerbestrasse 11, 6330 Cham, Switzerland

For Clara, who was always in a class of her own

PREFACE

In the beginning, I wanted to trace the genre of the bildungsroman, the novel in which the free individual is reconciled to society by way of aesthetic experiences, in American literature. Then this book took on another dimension, becoming, as well, an attempt to trace the idea of *Bildung*, or something like it, in the American philosophy of pragmatism. As I pursued this theme through John Dewey's writings, I realized that, on the question of aesthetic education's role in a democracy, his most interesting interlocutors were educationists, not other academic philosophers. And the more I studied the writings of these educational thinkers, the more convinced I became that, though infrequently discussed in intellectual histories, these architects of the public school system have exerted a powerful, largely unacknowledged influence on American culture. Instead of looking for US novelists who were taking up European bildungsroman templates, as I had first intended, I started looking for novelists who saw educational debates as significant, who felt that they made a difference to what it means to be an American artist. Once I had this conception of the project, I focused on the Progressive Era because it is a uniquely fertile period in American educational history, when the school system was expanding rapidly and being shaped by many jostling interests.

My greatest regret about this book is its neglect of race. That the Progressive Era's civic idealism was enabled by a brutal exclusion of black Americans, and other racial groups, from equal participation, and even from basic rights, is something that I did not start to see in its proper perspective until the book's shape was already set. I considered several possible subjects for a chapter on African-American experiences of progressivism's

aesthetic education, including the obvious Booker T. Washington and W.E.B. Du Bois pairing, with the latter's *Quest of the Silver Fleece* as a potential bildungsroman-like text that also directly engages with school politics. Sutton Griggs's *Imperium in Imperio*, though, may have been more interesting for its strange resonances with the Society of the Tower plot from *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship*. In terms of educational thinkers, the philanthropists of the General Education Board, and their favored curriculum theorist Thomas Jesse Jones, would have made good starting points. I suspect that I never will write this chapter, or article, now, so I hope someone else takes these hints and runs with them.

A planned chapter on Frank Norris and the kindergarten movement was also left on the cutting room floor. I will leave its central question here as a provocation: Why is Trina McTeague murdered in a kindergarten? That scene has been analyzed through the theme of children, but nobody, I think, has asked why a kindergarten specifically. The answer, I think, lies somewhere near the intersection of Norris's naturalism, Froebel's philosophy, Norris's racism, and the marked Germanness of the kindergarten at that time.

The book that emerged from this circuitous intellectual journey is transdisciplinary in a way that I hope will be stimulating for several different kinds of readers. For students of the bildungsroman, there are three issues that may be interesting: the role of the genre in US literature, where it has been relatively neglected; the relation between the bildungsroman and educationist discourses; and the transformation of the idealist aesthetics of classical *Bildung* by pragmatism. For scholars of pragmatist aesthetics, who have often stressed themes of novelty, flexibility, and reinvention, situating Dewey's aesthetics within his educational thought reveals its concerns with cultural authority, with the terms on which ordinary people and cultural elites participate in a shared democratic community. For teachers of US literature, I wish to inspire a wider interest in educational discourses and educational history, especially below the college level, as contexts for literary study. You don't really know what a writer means by democracy, I would argue, until you know what she thinks about the public schools. Finally, I hope to show students of education, especially those studying to be public school teachers, how fraught with aesthetic and philosophical significance the questions of teaching and administration are, and how the choices made within the school are part of an ongoing inquiry into what democratic culture really can be.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This book began as a dissertation in the Harvard University English Department. There, it was shaped by Louis Menand, who showed me not just what pragmatism is, but how a pragmatist talks, about history, literature, and ideas; by Lawrence Buell, who cheerfully checked my “self-indulgent divagation,” and whose office I always left thinking more clearly than I entered it; and by Werner Sollors, who, whatever strange byways I followed, always knew just who I should be reading there. My closest readers, though, were my peers, especially Nick Donofrio, Lesley Goodman, Maggie Gram, Liz Maynes-Aminzade, and Eitan Kensky. Eitan also taught me Yiddish in his spare time, though he did not teach me the Yiddish phrase, which must exist, for such an act of generosity. I received valuable feedback from many participants in Harvard’s American Colloquium, including Maggie Doherty, Sarah Wagner-McCoy, Dave Weimer, and Kaye Wierzbicki, and later from the overlapping New England Americanists group, where Deak Nabers was especially helpful. Two chapters were workshopped at the Futures of American Studies Institute, where I had fruitful conversations with Winfried Fluck, Jennifer Fleissner, Justin Nevins, Greg Chase, Stephen Pasqualino, and Tom Perrin, among many others. Very late in the game, Victor Kestenbaum gave the Dewey material his close attention and prompted some necessary clarifications.

My wife, Clara Raubertas, talked through this book’s ideas for countless hours, patiently endured my ups and downs as I wrote it, and believed in it unwaveringly. She also, I must admit a little sheepishly, typed up much of the manuscript. For all that and everything else, thanks.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction: Progressivism's Aesthetic Education

What business does a democracy have establishing official institutions of cultural authority? For, in the context of public education, that is what the teaching profession is, especially where the humanities are concerned. This question, about the legitimacy of democratic cultural authority, is adjacent to, but crucially distinct from, that of democracy's relation to scientific knowledge, because while one can acquire a certain kind of expertise in humanistic subjects, expert humanists are not expected to converge on a common understanding of what they study. Likewise, it resembles questions about the role of aesthetic avant-gardes, but differs from them in that a democratic cultural authority (say, the nation's corps of high school English teachers) is supposed to uphold higher standards than those of the average person, while at the same time serving as an agency through which the shared culture of the community reproduces itself. The United States saw the consolidation of such a cultural authority during the Progressive Era, as teaching and school administration took on the status of a self-policing profession at the same time that compulsory attendance laws gave public education an unprecedented importance in national life. (Although there are certainly parallels with the expansion and professionalization of higher education, the case of public school teachers raises the question of legitimate cultural authority more sharply because it is mandatory, and because it is funded entirely by the state.) What did accepting this new form of authority mean for Americans' conceptions of self-government, of

freedom of thought? What did it mean for American artists' and intellectuals' sense of vocation, and of their role within a democratic society? These questions are the subject of this book.

Not everyone, of course, agreed that an official cultural authority could have democratic legitimacy, and certainly not everyone agrees with that idea today. Yet, as perplexing as such authority is, to reject it leaves one with even more troublesome options. One could, with John Holt or Ivan Illich, reject schooling altogether, but, in that case the quality of education a child receives would depend, even more unacceptably than it already does, on the resources available to her parents. Alternatively, one could ask the state to provide funds for parents to spend on privately administered schools (i.e., vouchers), but then the question of cultural authority is merely displaced, as one must ask whether the government will allow the funds to be spent on just any institution claiming to be a school (a recipe for disaster) or whether they will enforce standards about what is and is not a school, in which case those standards become the issue. One voucher proponent, Charles L. Glenn, argues that the standards should concern only the objective, factual side of the curriculum and should not address issues of culture, philosophy, values, and so on, but this distinction is obviously untenable and also too easily allows for public funds to support ideas (say, racist ones) that are corrosive to democracy. A different solution might be to accept a culturally freighted form of public school but to prevent the educational profession from becoming self-policing by insisting on direct democratic control of the schools, unmediated by professional authority; for instance, teachers might serve at the pleasure of elected boards of education, an arrangement that was common in rural areas in the nineteenth century (as depicted in Edward Eggleston's *The Hoosier Schoolmaster* or Joseph Kirkland's *Zurry: The Meanest Man in Spring County*). This arrangement, however, only works if schooling is so limited that the teacher does not need any specialized expertise; if she does require such expertise, then the community is not qualified to judge whether she has it. To consider one last option, in her valuable book *Democratic Education*, the philosopher Amy Gutmann proposes a system of checks and balances in which the government is allowed to set curricular goals but may not compel teachers to violate their disciplinary standards of knowledge (e.g., by forcing a biologist to teach creationism). The problem here is that humanistic disciplines do not generate standards in this way (or at least, much of what they do is not covered by such standards), so it becomes unclear how to enforce Gutmann's division of labor. Suppose, then, that we allow that democratic cultural authority is necessary: it follows

that there must be some form of it that is legitimate; or at least, we can move on to ask which form of it is most legitimate.¹

The questions we are then faced with, of how to reconcile democratic principles of individual spiritual autonomy and self-government with officially sanctioned institutional power over aesthetic and cultural matters, and even over aesthetic subject formation itself, are those of (what I will call) the classical *Bildung* tradition, as developed by Kant, Goethe, and Schiller and as interpreted in the literary criticism of Georg Lukács, Franco Moretti, Marc Redfield, Gregory Castle, Joseph Slaughter, and Jed Esty (to give my own personal and partial genealogy).² The premise of this classical *Bildung* is that cultural authority can be democratic if it relies on genuine aesthetic experience. In aesthetic experience, the argument goes that we are most ourselves, because we are spontaneous and uncoerced and because all facets of our being are involved. Who we are, who we show ourselves to be, during such experiences matters more, is more essential, than the ideas or preferences we express in less complete states of being. If an institution of cultural authority could make itself aesthetically appealing, in this heightened sense, it would be legitimate because it would be helping us become more who we essentially are, even if its legitimacy might appear questionable by mundane standards. In Isaiah Berlin's terms, classical *Bildung* thus claims to promote a kind of "positive liberty," not the liberty to do as one likes but the liberty to become what one

¹ John Holt, *How Children Fail* (London: Pittman, 1969); Ivan Illich, *Deschooling Society* (New York: Harper and Row, 1970); Charles L. Glenn, *The American Model of State and School* (New York: Continuum, 2012); Edward Eggleston, *The Hoosier Schoolmaster: A Novel* (New York: Orange Judd & Co., 1871); Amy Gutmann, *Democratic Education: With a New Preface and Epilogue* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1999).

² Immanuel Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, trans. Paul Guyer (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2001); Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *The Collected Works 9: Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship*, trans. Eric A. Blackall (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1995); Friedrich Schiller, *On the Aesthetic Education of Man*, trans. Reginald Snell (Mineola, N.Y.: Dover, 2004); ; Georg Lukács, *The Theory of the Novel: A Historico-Philosophical Essay on the Forms of Great Epic Literature* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1989); Franco Moretti, *The Way of the World: The Bildungsroman and European Culture* (London: Verso, 2000); Marc Redfield, *Phantom Formations: Aesthetic Ideology and the Bildungsroman* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1996); Gregory Castle, *Reading the Modernist Bildungsroman* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2015); Joseph Slaughter, *Human Rights, Inc.: The World Novel, Narrative Form, and International Law* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2007); Jed Esty, *Unseasonable Youth: Modernism, Colonialism, and the Fiction of Development* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

essentially is.³ If classical *Bildung* is redeemed from the totalitarian associations of Berlin's positive liberty (and that, we shall see, is debatable), it is because the higher nature for which it asks us to sacrifice some of our freedoms is itself characterized by greater spontaneity and self-expression. One argument of this book is that the Progressive Era leaders of the educational profession converged, in varying ways, around something like the classical *Bildung* vision of cultural authority, and that novelists responded to their doing so, producing new kinds of bildungsroman for new kinds of *Bildung*.

This Introduction begins (in the following section) with an overview of classical *Bildung*. It then compares classical *Bildung* with discourses of aesthetic education developed in the formative years of the American public school system, with particular attention to Horace Mann. The subsequent section describes the particular kind of progressivism, which I will label "social action progressivism," which best contextualizes the profiles of progressive educators in the later chapters. Then come summaries of the following three chapters, covering, respectively, Abraham Cahan and the Herbartians, Willa Cather and the Montessorians, and Charlotte Perkins Gilman and the social efficiency educators. The Introduction's final section describes the last chapter, on John Dewey, and offers some conclusions about the value of his version of aesthetic education today.

This book is not trying to make an original contribution to all the subjects on which it touches, and it may be useful to be explicit about that here. In characterizing the Progressive Era, while the phrase "social action progressivism" is new, the basic point echoes classic histories of the period by Daniel Rodgers, James Kloppenberg, and Robert Wiebe. In the history of education, I again rely on well-established accounts, by David Tyack, Herbert Kliebard, Merle Curti, and Lawrence Cremin, among others, but I believe that the studies of the specifically aesthetic ideas of the educators is (with the obvious exception of Dewey) mostly uncharted territory. In literary criticism, my approach has been at right angles to the questions about realism, naturalism, or modernism that often organize studies of this period. Instead, I have thought in terms of "Progressive Era literature" and pursued that category across formal lines. Also, with only a handful of exceptions, there have been few studies of writers' perspectives on public education (though there are more about literature and higher education). This may be, as Maxine Greene so acutely observed in

³ Isaiah Berlin, *Two Concepts of Liberty* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1966).

The Public School and the Private Vision, because America's literary classics have been predominantly concerned with the "darkness" repressed beneath the nation's official account of itself, while America's public schools have tried to polish that account to a bright sheen. If we are interested in writers' conceptions of democracy, though, we should be asking after their conceptions of public education, since the two are inseparable. Finally, in the area of pragmatist aesthetics, while I draw heavily on Victor Kestenbaum, Steven Fesmire, Richard Shusterman, Philip W. Jackson, and others, I ultimately offer what I believe is an original description of the affinity between aesthetic experience and democracy, one based not on the development of new vocabularies (as in Richard Rorty and Richard Poirier) but on the qualities essential to both.⁴

CLASSICAL *BILDUNG*

The generic resources of the bildungsroman are particularly suited to the problem of how to reconcile a democratic ideal of spiritual autonomy with the consolidation of an official, professionally self-regulating cultural authority. The bildungsroman is relevant, here, not so much as the "coming-of-age" novel (despite the representation of schooling that that tends to encompass) but as the novel of *Bildung*, of "aesthetico-spiritual" cultivation. To sketch in broad strokes, scholars of the bildungsroman have seen the process of *Bildung* in three ways, each of which resolves, one way or another, the tension between individual self-development and participation in shared cultural institutions, and each of which differently imagines the ideal school. First, there is the debased variety of "socially pragmatic *Bildung*" in which the individual's character is shaped according to wholly external imperatives, molded to fill certain predetermined economic or societal roles; the school, from this perspective, is a kind of factory or boot camp. Second, there is a kind of *Bildung*, associated with William von Humboldt and with the "Beautiful Soul" of *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship*, in which aesthetico-spiritual development is wholly inward, as the self seeks harmony and well-roundedness within itself and on its own private terms, concerning itself with society only so far as necessary to

⁴ Greene's point about the darkness of classic American literature is from Maxine Greene, *The Public School and the Private Vision: A Search for America in Education and Literature* (New York: Random House, 1965), 2–6. The other authors in this paragraph will be cited later as they are mentioned.

guarantee its freedom to follow this path; in this case, the ideal school is a research university conceived along quasi-monastic lines.⁵ (Hermann Hesse's *The Glass Bead Game* pushes this conception to its limits.) Third, there is *Bildung* as conceived by Goethe and Schiller, in which the spiritual development of individuals is seen as inextricable from that of society, so that harmonious personalities depend on harmonious social arrangements and vice versa; here the school is, to borrow a phrase from Dewey, an "embryonic society" where relations are more perfect than they have yet become in society at large.⁶ The second, Humboldtian version of *Bildung* is perhaps most relevant to higher education, and gears into issues of academic freedom. Public education of minors, meanwhile, with its mandatory attendance and its unavoidable entanglement with questions of social control and human capital, may only be able to preserve its students' aesthetico-spiritual freedom by way of the third, Goethean/Schillerian version. Yet this type of *Bildung* has seemed, to many critics, to be a forced, unstable ideal that tends to collapse, sooner or later, into a particularly subtle and pernicious variation on the first, viciously conformist type. Whether this collapse is inevitable is a question we will, for the moment, hold open.

The Goethe/Schiller kind of *Bildung* succeeds only insofar as it establishes an identity between the seemingly opposite poles of sociocultural order and individual spiritual freedom. As Moretti puts it, it must solve "a dilemma coterminous with modern bourgeois civilization: the conflict between the ideal of *self-determination* and the equally imperious demands of *socialization*." Such a resolution is only possible if the "free individual [...] perceives the social norms as *one's own*. One must *internalize* them and fuse external compulsion and internal impulses until the former is no longer distinguishable from the latter."⁷ If society merely imposes itself on a passively plastic human nature, though, that is, if the individual merely accepts norms from without, then there is little moral appeal to the idea. Instead, this kind of *Bildung*—which we will, with apologies to Humboldt, simply call "classical *Bildung*"—must posit that, within its own essence, human nature harbors a social teleology, that its highest fulfillment coincides with the highest fulfillment of social harmony. Seeking a secular basis for this conception of human destiny, classical *Bildung* finds it in the

⁵ Castle, *Modernist Bildungsroman*, 7, 15.

⁶ John Dewey, *School and Society & The Child and the Curriculum*. (Mineola, N.Y.: Dover Publications, [1901] 2012), 18.

⁷ Moretti, *Way of the World*, 15–16.

aesthetic, that freest, most spontaneous, and most all-inclusive mode of experience. If our social telos is visible within the structure of aesthetic experience itself, then it is no imposition from without. Call an institution that deliberately advances such a concept of aesthetic experience, in order to promote the idea that free individuality and social norms can and should converge, a “Society of the Tower” (following *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship*). Another argument of this study is that, for certain leading figures in the emergence of the educational profession, the American public school system functions as such a Society of the Tower.

Schiller's theory of the structure of aesthetic experience, and its power to reconcile individual autonomy and society harmony, derives from Kant's aesthetics, which we can only briefly touch on here. For Kant, at any given moment one mental faculty temporarily rules over the others, depending on whether they are being employed speculatively, morally, or aesthetically (the domains of the understanding, reason, and the imagination, respectively). However, while in speculation and moral reasoning the understanding and reason, respectively, legislate for the other faculties, in aesthetic judgment the imagination does not dominate but “engenders a free play of the faculties which testifies to the good health of the system.” When perceiving beauty, the imagination removes the narrow-minded understanding from the judgments about utility that usually concern it, including any judgments about the idiosyncratic “agreeableness” of an object. The imagination does this because pure judgments of taste, partaking as they do of reason, must claim universality—the subject must act as if “all other judging subjects ought to agree with the judgment.” Nonetheless, the understanding must participate in the judgment, because its taxonomies, for example, of light as the colors red or blue, are essential to it. “Aesthetic pleasure is the feeling that accompanies and records this harmony” among all the faculties, and is thus associated with the self's well-roundedness and the abolition of internal dissonances. Moreover, because aesthetic pleasure depends on the subject's willingness to check her merely idiosyncratic pleasures, it is also the basis for a harmony between people which, like the harmony of the faculties, can rest on freedom rather than the suppression of difference.⁸

While this connection between aesthetics and politics is somewhat peripheral for Kant, Schiller makes it central. “If we are to solve [the] political problem,” he writes, we must “follow the path of aesthetics,”

⁸ Redfield, *Phantom Formations*, 13.

since “it is through Beauty that we will arrive at Freedom.” The moral law as revealed to reason must be woven into the nonrational cultural and emotional life of the people if it is to really take root. This is the lesson Schiller draws from the French Revolution, which he thought had failed because the cultural ground had not been prepared. After toppling the monarchy and “setting Law upon the throne,” instead of finding “true freedom the basis of political association,” he writes, “we find crude, lawless impulses which have been unleashed by the loosening of the bonds of civil order.” By attaining legal freedom before they had achieved the inner freedom that comes from harmonizing the rational and nonrational sides of the personality, the French people had merely unleashed “barbarity” upon Europe. This inner freedom, Schiller argues, must precede political freedom.⁹

Schiller simplifies Kant’s faculties into “impulses”: the nonrational, “animal” character of humanity corresponds to what he calls the “sensuous impulse,” the rational, moral character to the “formal impulse,” and they are harmonized in the aesthetic “play impulse.” When the subject perceives an object in which sensuous appeal seems organized around a moral idea, or (to put it another way) a moral idea seems to be incarnated in sensuous reality, the impulses achieve harmony. The formal impulse will not demand that considerations of sensuous pleasure or pain be dismissed, as it does when it upholds unpleasant moral laws, and the sensuous impulse will not demand that considerations of morality be dismissed, as it does when it pursues unmoral pleasures.¹⁰ The first two impulses, he argues, cannot be the basis of political progress. Salvation “is not to be found in the natural character of Man,” with its “selfish and violent” nature, nor in his rational character, upon which “the lawgiver can never [...] with certainty depend” as long as it must compete with the sensual. Only the aesthetic character can unite the best aspects of the other two and allow moral growth to occur. “Without impeding the development of the moral character,” he writes, the aesthetic character “might serve rather as a sensible pledge of a morality as yet unseen. [...] Taste alone brings harmony into society, because it establishes harmony in the individual.” By considering the deepest wellsprings of aesthetic pleasure, the subject of *Bildung* discovers that what they truly desire is to so internalize the principle of beauty, its balance between animal self-assertion and

⁹Schiller, *Aesthetic Education of Man*, 34–35.

¹⁰Schiller, *Aesthetic Education of Man*, 30.

rational self-restraint, that it comes to feel completely natural and to govern their social relationships as well as their artistic taste. In Redfield's words, the power of taste "confirms the harmony of individual interest or pleasure with universal law."¹¹

For Schiller, this "reciprocal relation of both impulses" is what is essentially or paradigmatically human, while mere rationality or sensuousness in themselves fall short of this standard. The aesthetic character, he writes, is "the idea of [Man's] humanity, and consequently something infinite to which he can approximate ever nearer in the course of time, without ever reaching it." As the impulse associated with particularity, contingency, history, and embodiment harmonizes more and more with the impulse associated with universality, people's differently particular natures will less and less divide them from the ideal of humanity in general, an ideal which Schiller identifies with a perfected political state. The "pure human being, who may be recognized more or less distinctively in every person, is represented by the State, the objective and, so to say, canonical form in which the diversity of persons endeavors to unite itself." Whereas a state composed of flawed citizens "must ruthlessly trample underfoot" those who do not restrain their selfish desires, when "the inner man is at one with himself" in each citizen, then "the State will be simply the interpreter of his fine instinct, the clearer expression of his inner legislation." That is, he will already have accomplished the regulation of his own particular desires that the state exists to enforce and achieved what Schiller calls "the individual becoming State." Schiller names this political ideal the "Aesthetic State."¹²

Here, as Joseph Slaughter observes, Schiller's lofty ideals show themselves to be something uncomfortably familiar: the transition from the suppressive state based on "the full severity of law" to the state as representation of individuals' "inner legislation" is just what Michel Foucault has described as the transition from "pure subjection" by "the feudal authority of the sovereign" to the "disciplinary routines of self-regulation that are constitutive of the modern subject itself." In this pessimistic reading, the subject's internal congruence with the will of the state is the result not of beautiful moral freedom but of the panoptic prison house of modern power, and "the idea of [Man's] humanity" is merely the idea of the anxiously self-policing political subject.¹³ Critics have read Goethe's

¹¹ Redfield, *Phantom Formations*, 7.

¹² Schiller, *Aesthetic Education of Man*, 33.

¹³ Slaughter, *Human Rights, Inc.*, 8–9.

Society of the Tower in similarly skeptical terms. For Walter Bruford, “Wilhelm’s induction into the Society of the Tower functions as a symbolic affirmation of the very bourgeois society from which he tries to escape ... [he] accepts a form of individualism predicated ultimately on conformity with the state.” For Todd Kontje, Wilhelm “sees an alienated version of attained harmony in the creation of the [Society] and mistakes it for his own.” For Martin Swales, the best that can be said is that “the Bildungsroman dramatizes the dialectical tensions [between] ethical and aesthetic autonomy and the increasingly intrusive pressures of an emergent capitalist state.”¹⁴

While these flaws in Schiller’s Aesthetic State and Goethe’s Society of the Tower manifest on a political level, they are rooted, ultimately, in aesthetic philosophy. Schiller has a chicken-and-egg problem, because the harmonization of the potentially rivalrous formal and sensuous impulses is both a precondition and a consequence of the harmonization of potentially rivalrous individuals in the Aesthetic State. The individual’s approach to the idea of Man’s humanity as incarnated in the ideal state is therefore, paradoxically, both the goal of Schiller’s developmental process and its necessary prerequisite. As Redfield puts it, the “subject’s identification with a hypothetical formal community [is] both the engine and the telos of history.”¹⁵ Schiller attempts to resolve this problem by linking the individual and social plots of harmony with a third such plot that unfolds within each act of aesthetic perception. When perceiving aesthetically, he writes, the sensuous impulse attends to “life,” meaning “all material being and all that is immediately present to the senses,” while the formal impulse attends to “shape,” meaning “all formal qualities of things and all their relations to the intellectual faculties.” So, for example, in a painting of a dog, the sense impulse will see the rich fur and exuberant motions, while the form impulse will see the balance of line and composition. These perceptions are potentially rivalrous: an excessive attention to one might distract the viewer from the other. But if the painting is composed such that the same representations of motion that gratify the senses are also formally pleasing as abstract shapes, then the painting has “living shape,” which Schiller identifies with “Beauty in the widest sense of the term.” Because beauty is “an object for us” and is “at the same time a state of our personality,” its existence located both in the world and in the structure of our

¹⁴ Castle, *Modernist Bildungsroman*, 11.

¹⁵ Redfield, *Phantom Formations*, 22.

faculties, the experience of beauty both depends on and makes possible the individual's psychological harmony, which stands in the same double-bound relationship to the social harmony of the ideal state. Whereas personal and social harmony comes and goes, though, Schiller argues that art marches toward beauty in a linear (if sometimes glacial) manner:

But are we perhaps not arguing in a circle? [...] All improvement in the political sphere is to proceed from the ennobling of the character – but how, under the influence of a barbarous constitution, can the character become ennobled? We should need, for this end, to seek out some instrument which the State does not afford us, and with it open up well-springs which will keep pure and clear throughout every political corruption. [...] This instrument is the Fine Arts, and these well-springs are opened up in their immortal examples. [...] The political legislator can enclose their territory, but he cannot govern within it. He can proscribe the friend of truth, but Truth endures; he can humiliate the artist, but Art he cannot debase.

The work of art thus makes progress possible in an otherwise circular system.¹⁶

However, the chicken-and-egg problem has not really been surmounted, but only subtly concealed. The aesthetic object, or “exemplar” as Redfield calls it, is beautiful and educative only because it realizes the latent potential for harmony in the minds of individuals who behold it. So when individuals seek an exemplar, they seek something whose definition has been transcribed from their own inner nature, even as it enlarges that nature by unveiling more and more of its true outlines. Again, the direction of causality implied here is almost circular; or, as Redfield puts it, it represents “a progress in the form of a spiral or transumptive return, which is the only form of progress possible for a system of exemplarity.” To discover the “idea of Man’s humanity” within oneself, “an identity must be formed through identification with an example: a model that on the one hand is the true identity of the identity-to-be-formed, but on the other hand is separated from the epebe by the temporality or process of *Bildung* itself.” Thus, paradoxically, “the subject must identify with the model in order to become what the subject already is; however, this also means that the subject must not identify with anything – particularly not a master or exemplar – that is not always already the subject itself.” Individuals must look outside of themselves to discover their true identity, and must know

¹⁶ Schiller, *Aesthetic Education of Man*, 113, 120, 76, 122, 51.

their true identity in order to know where outside of themselves to look. They can never wholly confirm that the exemplar is suitable until they open themselves to its influence, at which point they are also fatally exposed to the chance that the exemplar will prove miseducative, even abusive. The exemplar, too, need not be an artwork, but might also be the aesthetic character of another person, or the Aesthetic State itself. Because there is no really sound method for selecting exemplars, social status inevitably distorts the process, and *Bildung* becomes a powerful tool for vested interests, if those interests can make themselves seem exemplary. In Franco Moretti's terms, *Bildung* facilitates a confusion between "ethic" and "practice," repackaging the dominant cultural order as an incarnation of the ideal cultural order, and ultimately eliciting a false "acknowledgement that social superiority and moral superiority are one and the same." Although *Bildung* "manifests the universal disinterestedness of aesthetic culture," Redfield concludes, it "also (therefore) occurs as the accumulation of sensuous forms of this universality, and thus always remains exposed to its seeming opposite, philistinism – and more generally [...] to the commodity form and the ruses of capital."¹⁷

To make matters worse, under the logic of classical *Bildung*, the ephebe does not have the option to forgo the choice of an exemplar, because the self is incapable of finding its own path to inner harmony. As Redfield argues in an ingenious reading of *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship*, Wilhelm's dissatisfaction with the theater as an arena for *Bildung* stems from the fact that he only enjoys playing parts that already resemble his true personality, so he cannot deliberately expand that personality by playing other roles. (Meanwhile, the really talented actors that he meets succeed precisely because they divorce their stage persona from their true personality.) When the Society of the Tower saves Wilhelm's production of *Hamlet* by providing a genuinely scary ghost, thereby helping the untalented Wilhelm pull off the scene, Wilhelm realizes that "identification is [not] an intentional act," that "the self is not an actor" because it "cannot intend the [...] construction" of itself and "the aesthetic power of his performance is the result of an event over which he has no control." If the self knew what kind of self to become, it would already be that self. So personal growth must depend on the intervention of a well-meaning outside force that is able to temporarily disguise itself as an inner prompting. For Schiller, this is just the role played by the Society of the Tower:

¹⁷ Redfield, *Phantom Formations*, 21, 49; Moretti, *Way of the World*, 72; Redfield, *Phantom Formations*, 53.

this idea of mastery [*Meisterschaft*, one name for the hypothetical end state of *Bildung*, as well as a pun on Wilhelm's surname], which is the work of ripened and whole experience, cannot itself guide the novel's hero; it cannot and must not stand before him as his purpose and goal, since as soon as he were to imagine the goal, he would have *eo ipso* already attained it. Rather, the idea of mastery must stand as a leader behind him.

Schiller's comments can be juxtaposed with Wilhelm's own statement of purpose:

The cultivation of my individual self, here as I am, has from my youth upwards been constantly though dimly my wish and my purpose [...] Now this harmonious cultivation of my nature, which has been denied me by birth, is exactly what I most long for.

As Slaughter points out, Wilhelm's double need to both be true to his inner nature, "here as I am," and to cultivate himself into something different from what he already is leads him, necessarily, to rely on the Tower Society as an external supplement to his self. For this reason, in Slaughter's terms, *Bildung* must always be "sponsored" by an outside agent whose interests threaten to diverge from the ephebe's.¹⁸

The subject of *Bildung* is therefore always incomplete, always in need of supplementation from an institution of culture. Thus, as Redfield observes, the uncultivated "'native,' or, mutatis mutandis, the working-class or feminine subject [can] be represented as incomplete rather than different," as a "child" relative to the cultivated and empowered bourgeois white man who better represents humanity as a whole. So "the politics of [*Bildung*] derive from the seeming benevolence and normativity of a pedagogical model," and *Bildung* "receives its most elaborate institutional manifestation in pedagogical contexts," whether these are literal schools, "select circles" of cultivation such as the Society of the Tower, or, for Slaughter, the quasi-pedagogical institutions whose mission is global development. Classical *Bildung*'s logic of exemplarity attracts the genre to what Slaughter calls the "incorporation" of marginal subjects into the projects of "mastery," such as global economic development and international human rights law, which emanate from and often plainly advance interests in the world's cultural capitals, while describing themselves as emancipations of a higher ideal of humanity.¹⁹

¹⁸ Redfield, *Phantom Formations*, 76; Schiller quoted from *ibid.*, 67; *Wilhelm Meister* quoted from Slaughter, *Human Rights Inc.*, 97; Slaughter, *Human Rights, Inc.*, 214.

¹⁹ Slaughter, *Human Rights, Inc.*, 215.

Because, as Schiller writes, *Bildung*'s end state is "something infinite to which [Man] can approximate ever nearer in the course of time, without ever reaching it," its subjects will never grow up. The ephebe can never overtake the exemplar, or at least can never overcome the need for some exemplar. The *Bildung* process will continue to patrol the margins of the capitals of culture, inducting those who are not yet seen as fully human into eternal tutelage. If anyone does go through the *Bildung* process successfully, it is by the sheerest luck, as Wilhelm Meister acknowledges when he says that "I know I have attained a happiness which I have not deserved." Ultimately, Wilhelm does not succeed or fail by his own efforts, but by the fortuitous harmony between himself and the Society of the Tower. Classical *Bildung*, then, is a dangerous, treacherous undertaking. Because it stakes the self in a project that covertly depends on the will of others and on pure chance, the subject that is open to *Bildung* is also open to exploitation, and to spiritual and even bodily mutilation. If, however, *Bildung* is a case of philosophical hubris, of a will to intellectually contain a promise of democratic autonomy that is far more messy and dangerous than its idealized concepts can express, then the bildungsroman, which as literature is more open to the unruliness of lived experience, provides the needed corrective. For Redfield, when *Bildung* "becomes understandable as an ironic predicament and easily acquires the tonality of melancholy," the bildungsroman becomes, in narrating it, a "genre of failure or loss." Once the ephebe has learned enough about *Bildung* to understand its dependence on exemplars, and has learned enough about the world to recognize that all exemplars are fallible, then he or she "'matures,' either in a wry or a pensive mode, by transforming loss into the knowledge of loss." Slaughter takes a slightly more optimistic view of the genre, arguing that when its protégés achieve "consciousness of the sociopolitical complicity of the *Bildungsroman* with particular dispensations of power, which amount to a consciousness of the contingency of the universal, hegemonic narrative of self-determination and human personality development promoted by human rights law," then "*Bildung* becomes *Bildung* to the second degree, in which the *Bildungshelden* affirm the right to free and full human personality development even as they recognize the historical uses and abuses of *Bildung*, the *Bildungsroman*, and the human rights discourse of self-determination and (personality) development." Slaughter's "*Bildung* to the second degree" has a more positive valence than Redfield's "ironic predicament," because Slaughter believes that the rights to free and full development within social life around which *Bildung* revolves are

inherently valuable, whereas Redfield suggests that the whole idea of such development must be understood primarily as a dangerous mask of power, albeit one that remains inextricable from Western subjectivity.²⁰ Castle's reading of the "immanent critique" of *Bildung* performed by the modernist bildungsroman, too, continues to value the *Bildung* process even as it sheds light on its failures.²¹ As we turn to the American context, we will find an approach like Slaughter's, in which practicing literary artists, such as Cahan and Cather, are both drawn to and repelled by the extravagant promises of aesthetic education, particularly apt. We will also, however, encounter others, such as Gilman, for whom some version of a *Bildung* project remains wholly viable.

AESTHETIC EDUCATION AND THE AMERICAN SCHOOL: FROM HORACE MANN TO THE ONE BEST SYSTEM

While classical *Bildung* and its critics offer a rich theoretical language for thinking about how aesthetic education negotiates the tension between democratic autonomy and cultural authority, we should also attend to parallel discourses that emerged in the course of the development of American public education. We can begin with Horace Mann, the early champion of the common school movement, who like the classical *Bildung* theorists sought to reconcile social stability with individual autonomy by promoting a shared culture organized around a balance among mental faculties in each citizen. Much as classical *Bildung* reflected fears of premature democratization raised by the French Revolution, Mann's common school ideal, in which children of diverse backgrounds find common ground in the pursuit of mental discipline, reflected his worry that, with the Jacksonian expansion of the franchise, democracy was being extended to people who would misuse it. "The great experiment of Republicanism, – of the capacity of man for self-government, – is to be tried anew," Mann declared in an 1842 Fourth of July oration; but "wherever it has been tried – in Greece, in Rome, in Italy – [it] has failed, through an incapacity in the people to enjoy liberty without abusing it." By "self-government," Mann meant not just political democracy but individual self-discipline, or "a voluntary compliance with the laws of reason and duty," which the schools

²⁰ Redfield, *Phantom Formations*, 53; *Wilhelm Meister* quoted in *ibid.*, 78; Slaughter, *Human Rights, Inc.*, 269.

²¹ Castle, *Modernist Bildungsroman*, 3.

would teach.²² This argument for the centrality of schools to democracy, as the Progressive Era educational historian Ellwood Cubberly put it, inaugurated “a new conception of free public education as a birthright of the child on the one hand, and as an exercise of the state’s inherent right to self-preservation and improvement on the other.”²³

On the individual level, this idea of self-government is based on the Scottish Enlightenment faculty psychology which, as Daniel Walker Howe has shown, formed the backbone of American theories of the self from the mid-eighteenth to the mid-nineteenth century; in Mann’s case, this psychology dovetailed with the phrenology of George Combe.²⁴ Whereas Schiller saw the drives that were harmonized in aesthetic experience as equal in dignity, the Scottish faculty psychology comprised a hierarchical ordering. “First in order of precedence,” Howe writes, “came the rational faculties of the will: conscience (or the moral sense) and prudence (or self-interest).” In educational circles, the rational will was also subdivided into memory, attention, and other cognitive categories. Below the rational will “were the emotional springs of action, called either by the approving term ‘affections’ or the more derogatory word ‘passions,’ as the context might dictate. Still further down were mechanical impulses like reflexes, not subject to conscious control at all.” Educators often described the faculties as muscles, which would grow if exerted and atrophy if ignored. Whatever hierarchy of faculties a given thinker preferred, education consisted in fitting the higher ones to rule the lower, keeping the most potentially troublesome faculties, such as acquisitiveness, in their proper place. This sort of pedagogy was known as “mental discipline.”²⁵ Mann based his version of mental discipline on the idea that the lower faculties develop before the higher ones. One had to ascend a “ladder” from the passions upward to reason; once reason was attained, it was to chasten and subordinate the

²² Glenn, *American Model of State and School*, 48; Mann quoted in Daniel Walker Howe, *Making the American Self: Jonathan Edwards to Abraham Lincoln* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 161.

²³ Ellwood P. Cubberly, *Changing Conceptions of Education* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1909), 35.

²⁴ Merle Curti, *The Social Ideas of American Educators* (Totowa, N.J.: Littlefield, Adams, 1966), 111.

²⁵ Howe, *Making the American Self*, 130. For the role of the mental-muscle metaphor in the history of curriculum design, see Daniel Tanner and Laurel Tanner, *History of the School Curriculum* (New York : Macmillan, 1990), 41; and William Pinar et al, *Understanding Curriculum* (New York : Lang, 1995), 73.

passions that had paved the way for it. This was accomplished by giving the passions healthy outlets during the younger years, and then gradually training up the rational will (in its various aspects of memory, attention, etc.) with rote learning assignments that were deliberately unappealing to the passions. Although it never played a major role in his thinking, Mann did incorporate the arts into this system. In the eighth of his Annual Reports to the Massachusetts Board of Education, he argues that vocal music in particular promotes health at the level of the automatic functions, by improving lung power; pro-social feelings at the middle level of the affective or passional faculties, since it has a “natural [...] affinity with peace, hope, affection, generosity, charity, devotion”; and acuity of the rational faculties, due to the “mathematical relations” among tones. Music for Mann thus confirms the mutual adaptability of all parts of the psychological system, and thus shows the unity of human nature, much as art does for Schiller. There is, Mann writes, a “preadaptation of the human mind to seek and to find pleasure in music” which is found with “universality” in “each nation and each age.” (On the other hand, Mann distrusts fiction, finding it too often misleading and self-indulgent. Under his leadership, the common school movement in Massachusetts fought for music in the schools, successfully, but left fiction alone.)²⁶

Mann hoped that the pedagogy of mental discipline could provide the sociocultural order that democracy needed to survive, without violating the freedom of spirit that made democracy democracy. This hope rested on mental discipline's curious content-neutrality: because it was unconcerned with communicating particular propositions, it might sidestep the question of indoctrination, while nonetheless training moral character. Mental disciplinarians viewed the curriculum as an obstacle course that would beef up mental muscles, not a menu of ideas to be ingested. As the educator Charles De Garmo facetiously put it in 1895, “It is well, therefore, to cram the mind with the largest possible number of facts in geography, history, and language, it mattering little whether the facts are concrete or abstract, related or disparate, interesting or stupid, since, forsooth, they all train the memory.”²⁷ For Mann's critics, though, in his own time and since, his education reforms have seemed, despite such pretensions to

²⁶ Horace Mann, *Eighth Annual Report of the Board of Education* (New York: Hugh Birch-Horace Mann Fund of the National Education Association, 1950 [1844]).

²⁷ Charles De Garmo, *Herbart and the Herbartians* (New York: C. Scribner's sons, 1896), 38.

neutrality, to be containment strategies in the service of his own social class, intended to pacify the growing industrial working class and tame their delinquent children. As Joel Spring has documented, Mann deliberated for six weeks (May 18–June 30, 1837) before accepting his position at the Massachusetts Board of Education, during which time a hotel he was staying in was firebombed by what he describes in his journal as “a gang of incendiaries” that “infests the city.” “What a state of morals it reveals. Is it possible that such things could be,” Mann writes, “if moral instruction were not infinitely below what it ought to be? [...] When will society, like a mother, take care of *all* her children?” Later during the deliberation period, he saw street fighting between Irish Catholics and native-born Protestants and blamed the violence on a lack of education. “Those who form [...] public opinion are the real culprits,” he concludes. “Nor are those exonerated from guilt who might have done much to reform, to enlighten, to correct, but who have preferred the private indulgence of their own ease.” Two weeks later, he accepted the position with the Board of Education. He would enlighten, he would correct, the unruly masses.²⁸ Mann, of necessity in his view, appealed to capitalists by arguing that state-sponsored public education would advance their interests despite its expense. In his Fifth Report, Merle Curti writes, “we find him constantly endeavoring to prove that universal education would promote prosperity,” and that “educated labor was far more productive and profitable than ignorant labor.” “Education has a market value,” Mann writes, and “the aim of industry is served, and the wealth of the country is augmented, in proportion to the diffusion of knowledge.” Mann and his followers in the common school movement preached a kind of civic education which, while stressing the duty of each citizen to “weed out corruption” and “judge wisely of measures and men,” also taught that “private contracts [...] must be held sacred and irrevocable.” “For most educational writers,” Curti says, “an important part of moral training was the inculcation in the schoolroom of respect for authority in order to prevent the anarchistic dissolution of republican society.”²⁹

Mann also drew accusations of factionalism in the area of religion. While he believed that religion belonged in the schools, as an intrinsic element of the system of faculty psychology (which included a faculty of veneration), he insisted that it be nonsectarian: schools should teach only

²⁸ Joel Spring, *The American School, A Global Context: From the Puritans to the Obama Administration* (New York: McGraw-Hill Education, 2010), 83.

²⁹ Curti, *Social Ideas of American Educators*, 112–113, 58, 60.

“that pure religion of heaven on which all good men agree,” he writes, stripped of doctrinal particulars. This agreeably parsimonious religion, however, bore a striking resemblance to Mann’s own rationalistic, civic-minded Unitarianism, and Catholics in particular protested. In the Massachusetts public schools of Mann’s day, teachers read Bible verses, but avoided the apocrypha that were included in Catholic but not Protestant Bibles. While defenders of the practice argued that schools were using only those writings agreed upon by both Catholics and Protestants, Catholics correctly described the situation as the schools promoting the Protestant Bible. Indeed, the common school movement was rife with anti-Catholic sentiments. “For the most part the simple virtues of industry, temperance, and frugality are unknown” to the Catholic Irish, wrote *The Massachusetts Teacher* in 1851. Their editorial continued: “With the old not much can be done; but with their children, the great remedy is *education*. The rising generation must be taught as our own children are taught. We say *must be*, because in too many cases this can only be accomplished by coercion. [...] The children must be gathered up and forced into school, and those who resist or impede this plan, whether parents or *priests*, must be held accountable and punished.”³⁰ Nobody was more perceptively scathing on the religious biases of the common schoolers than Orestes Brownson, a convert from Unitarianism to Catholicism and a Transcendentalist skeptic of shallow conformity. In an 1839 review of Mann’s second Annual Report, Brownson fulminated against any centralized educational bureaucracy’s pretensions to religious, or political, neutrality. He is worth quoting at length, as a gauntlet thrown down to all who would establish cultural authority via the school system:

General education, which some may term the culture of the soul, which we choose to term the education of humanity, we regard as the first and most important branch of education. This is the education which fits us for our destiny, to attain our end as simple human beings. [...]

Man has a destiny, an end he should seek to gain, and religion is the answer to the question, What is this end, this destiny? According to the principles we have laid down, then, education, to be complete, to be what it ought to be, must be religious. [...] Man is also a social being and needs an education corresponding to his social nature. [...]

Schools for teachers require in their turn teachers, as well as any other class of schools. Who, then, are to be the teachers in these normal schools? What is to be taught in them? Religion and politics? What religion, and what

³⁰ Michael B. Katz, *School Reform: Past and Present* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1971), 170.

politics? These teachers must either have some religious and political faith, or none. If they have none, they are mere negations and therefore unfit to be entrusted with the education of the educators of our children. If they have a religious and a political faith, they will have one which only a part of the community hold to be true. If the teachers in these schools are Unitarians, will Trinitarians accept their scholars as educators? Suppose they are Calvinists, will Universalists, Methodists, Unitarians, and Quakers be content to install their pupils as instructors in common schools?

But the board assure us Christianity shall be insisted on so far, and only so far, as it is common to all sects. This, if it mean anything, means nothing at all. All who attempt to proceed on the principle here laid down will find their Christianity ending in nothingness. Much may be taught in general, but nothing in particular. No sect will be satisfied; all sects will be dissatisfied. [...] If we come into politics, we encounter the same difficulty. What doctrines on the destiny of society will these normal schools inculcate? [...]

We may as well have a religion established by law, as a system of education, and the government educate and appoint the pastors of our churches, as well as the instructors of our children [...] Let the legislature provide ample funds for the support of as many schools as are needed for the education possible of all the children of the community, and there let it stop. The selection of teachers, the choice of studies and of books to be read or studied, all that pertains to the methods of teaching and the matters to be taught or learned are best left [...] under the control of the families specially interested in [the school].³¹

Orestes Brownson: the first advocate for vouchers, and for reasons that are essentially the same as those given by religious conservatives trying to opt out of public schools today. Brownson's logic is powerful, and Mann's sketchy notion of a common faith on which "all good men agree" can hardly withstand such an attack.

Where the negative claim to objectivity, based on the absence of professed doctrines or partial interests, breaks down, a positive claim to objectivity based on scientific facts may succeed. For Mann, faculty psychology and phrenology provided scientific legitimacy, but they left many aspects of education unexplored. Mann was thus intrigued by Pestalozzi, whose detailed theory of learning and teaching promised to put the whole education process on a more scientific footing, as it was seeming to do in Prussia, where his thought had been officially adopted. Pestalozzi himself, whose

³¹ Orestes Brownson, "Education of the People," *The Boston Quarterly Review* 2, no. 4 (1839), 393–434.

chief influence was Rousseau's *Emile*, was as much a romantic as a scientist, and the school for war orphans he opened in Stans in 1798 was intended to restore disrupted childhoods to their natural course of development. In this natural course, he believed, children build up knowledge by moving gradually from simple observations to complex ideas; when education begins with facts or concepts not connected to their concrete experience, it produces empty and disjointed thinking. In drawing, for example, Pestalozzi thought the teacher should start by asking children to observe simple shapes such as long and short lines and different types of curves. Then he should move on to two-dimensional figures such as circles and squares, then complex figures composed of many shapes put together, then perspective and three-dimensional figures such as cubes and spheres, and so on. Pestalozzi taught all subjects in this way, never introducing a concept whose full understanding depended on a simpler concept that had not yet been internalized. The bedrock beneath the simplest concepts was immediate sense impressions, which could be provided by "object lessons," in which particular objects were shown to the class. The educator's task was to devise continuous pathways leading from various sense impressions to the abstract ideas that she eventually wanted to teach.³² The Pestalozzian science of education described the design of such pathways. In terms of its role in character formation, and hence in civic education, Pestalozzian pedagogy was indifferent to faculty psychology and its image of the mind as a set of muscles that needed to be pumped up in a balanced way to produce a coherent self. Instead, it was concerned with the coherence of the student's mental image of the world, with their ability to see how everything is related to everything else; Pestalozzi believed that this sense of connectedness would promote civic responsibility. The politics of Pestalozzianism are complex, however. On one level, Pestalozzi is an early adopter of "child-centered" education organized around the student's distinct perspective. On another level, though, he introduces a fine-grained control over the basic building blocks of cognition that could appeal to educators with undemocratic intentions. In 1835, an English translation of Victor Cousin's glowing report on Pestalozzian pedagogy for the French king appeared in the United States, and while Mann and other school promoters began traveling to Europe to learn the new system,

³² For Pestalozzi's impact on American art education, see Arthur Efland, *A History of Art Education: Intellectual and Social Currents in Teaching the Visual Arts* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1990), 77.

some American writers denounced Pestalozzianism as a tool of tyrannical monarchs and overly centralized government. The earliest appearance of Pestalozzianism in the United States reflects both its radical democracy and its potential as a tool of social control: it was the official educational philosophy of New Harmony, a utopian community in which the school was to be the capstone of a society streamlined into one “total institution[al]” life.³³ In any case, despite the debate it sparked in Mann’s heyday, Pestalozzian pedagogy would only make a significant impact on American educational practice once the system had already been streamlined. Pestalozzi’s methods require small age-graded classes and highly trained teachers, and even in Massachusetts these conditions did not prevail until after the Civil War.

In the decades after the Civil War, as the scale of industrial and commercial activities ballooned, Mann’s ideal of a self-governing republic grounded on the internal self-government of each citizen gave way to an educational ideal based on social coordination, on the individual’s recognition of her role within a large and complex system. This new perspective was exemplified by William Torrey Harris, superintendent of the St. Louis schools (1867–1880), first U.S. Commissioner of Education (1889–1906) and editor of the *Journal of Speculative Philosophy* (1867–1893) (where he was the first to tell a young Dewey that he might do well as a professional philosopher). Harris’s Right Hegelian philosophy dovetailed perfectly with his educational role. He learned of Hegel from a German refugee, Henry Conrad Brokmeyer, who believed that his philosophy of man’s realization in the state offered a remedy for his homeland’s failure to achieve social and political unification. Harris, living in a state divided by the Missouri Compromise, and later by neighbor-against-neighbor fighting in the Civil War, could easily sympathize. In the *Journal of Speculative Philosophy*, he insisted on the subordination of “brittle individualism” to an “established law” that would channel people’s energies into a common life. As Commissioner of Education, accordingly, while trying, like Mann, to reconcile individuality and social order, he nonetheless argued for the “repression” of whatever interfered with the development of the “higher ideal nature” that formed the “true inward self of our fellow man,” which impelled each person to recapitulate humanity’s ascent from individualistic “barbarism” to a well-ordered “spiritual establishment.”³⁴ Harris, like

³³ Glenn, *American Model of State and School*, 49.

³⁴ Greene, *Public School and the Private Vision*, 116–117.

Mann and the classical *Bildung* theorists, devised a concept of aesthetic education in which art simultaneously promotes both individual self-realization and social order, and proves by its existence that these goals are ultimately coterminous. In the 1897 tract *Art Education: The True Industrial Education*, Harris begins by linking arts instruction to industrial competitiveness, arguing that

aesthetic education – the cultivation of taste, the acquirement of knowledge on the subject of the origin of the idea of beauty (both its historic origin and the philosophical account of its source in human nature), the practice of producing the outlines of the beautiful by the arts of drawing, painting, and modelling, the criticism of works of art, with a view to discover readily the causes of failure or of success in aesthetic effects – all these things we must claim form the true foundation of the highest success in the industries of any modern nation.

He supports this claim, first, with statistics comparing Sweden (to him aesthetically backward) with Belgium (aesthetically advanced), noting that America imports raw materials from the former and manufactured goods from the latter. When he turns to the question of what constitutes aesthetic worth, however, he abruptly shifts to a highly abstract condensation of Hegelian aesthetics, in which art expresses “the soul[’s] deligh[t] to behold itself” and the aesthetic principles of repetition, symmetry, and harmony mimic the ascending stages of a developing self-consciousness, culminating in an infinite variety of differences becoming unified, not by simple identity, but by fusion in a shared “subservien[ce] to a common purpose.” This final model of the soul’s unity is also, when scaled up, a model of the subservience of the “brittle individual” to the common “spiritual establishment” of the state. Finding the principle of harmony best represented in Greek art, he recommends that ancient Greece be made the center of the American arts curriculum, the better to advance the moral ideal of the republic, and to export premium consumer goods.³⁵

Even as he pushed for a larger, more thoroughly conformist, and more economically focused school system, Harris maintained a genuine philosophical commitment to the self-realization of individuals. The system that he helped usher in, however, was soon inherited by a new breed of educator who, in the words of David Tyack, dropped even the “rhetoric of

³⁵ William Torrey Harris, *Art Education: The True Industrial Education* (Syracuse, NY: C.W. Bardeen, 1897).

individual redemption and moral renewal” and avowedly pursued only “aggregate social and economic aims.” These “administrative progressives” represented the most powerful face of an American educational profession that, in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, had finally achieved something of the self-policing power of the older, more established professions. By 1911, most states (42) required education school training for all teachers, and in addition to credentialing the rank and file, these schools were now granting advanced degrees in administration, preparing (almost exclusively) men to fill the position of superintendent of schools. More and more American cities were hiring these superintendents, who applied their objective expertise (or, for an Orestes Brownson, their knowledge of the mysteries of the educational religion) to responsibilities that would otherwise have rested with boards of education. The rise of the superintendent was in fact part of a wider campaign to limit the powers of local, elected boards, which elite educational reformers saw as too short-sighted, too old-fashioned, too beholden to urban political machines, and, for many at least, too ethnic and too working class to be trusted. With newfound confidence in an increasingly empirical and statistical science of education, the administrative progressives believed that experimental research could discover a “one best system” that would not need input from local boards because “the best is the best everywhere.” Only citizens educated in the one best system would be fit for the complexities of self-government in an industrial age, although these complexities conspicuously failed to include those of cultural pluralism or diversity. In the name of democracy, they made the school into a training ground for coordinated obedience. The purpose of the school, wrote Boston superintendent John Philbrick, is the “imposition of tasks; if the pupil likes it, well; if not, no matter.” For the most part, the ideal of aesthetic education, and the synthesis it was supposed to effect between individual and social prerogatives, was absent from the thinking of the administrative progressives.³⁶

The administrative progressives’ one best system was, far more so than the “pedagogical progressivism” of the project method or the child-centered classroom, the major trend in American education around the turn of the twentieth century. When we turn to the wider intellectual history of the

³⁶ David Tyack, *The One Best System: A History of American Urban Education* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), 29, 40; Robert Wiebe, *The Search for Order: 1877–1920* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2007), 119.

Progressive Era, however, we find a widespread interest in a “politics of personal growth” (described by Randolph Bourne as “an artistic longing for an environment where we [all] will be able to exercise our capacities”) that resembles the thematics of classical *Bildung* that the administrative progressives abandoned. While Mann (and Schiller, for that matter) hoped that aesthetic education might fit people for membership in a society of equals living, as it were, peacefully side by side, and while Harris hoped it would fit them to take their assigned part in great collective undertakings, the Progressive Era saw the rise of a new ideal of aesthetic education that aimed to fit people for social action, that is, for participation in large-scale deliberation.³⁷

SOCIAL ACTION PROGRESSIVISM

This new ideal of aesthetic education represented a new conception of democracy, one that expanded its meaning in the life of each citizen. Each of the versions of aesthetic education we have discussed so far arose in response to some extension of democracy, and that of the social action progressives is no exception. Classical *Bildung* was a reaction to the initial emergence of democracy and its ideals of universal rights. Mann was concerned with the post-Jacksonian expansion of the franchise to all white men. Harris marks a special turn in this: he was not primarily concerned with the, so to speak, quantitative growth of democracy to include new people or places, but with a qualitative growth in the scope of democratic activity, as the state took on more elaborate functions of coordination. The aesthetic education of the social action progressives was based in a similarly qualitative expansion, which Kloppenberg calls a “wider definition of social responsibility than earlier liberals had considered possible or desirable,” a “public sensibility oriented toward the community and away from possessive individualism.”³⁸

If the social action progressives’ aesthetic education is typical of *Bildung*-like theories in its relation to democracy, it is more unusual in its relation to the nation form. Critics of the bildungsroman since Bakhtin

³⁷ Casey Nelson Blake, *Beloved Community: The Cultural Criticism of Randolph Bourne, Van Wyck Brooks, Waldo Frank, and Lewis Mumford* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 6, 63.

³⁸ James Kloppenberg, *Uncertain Victory: Social Democracy and Progressivism in European and American Thought, 1870–1920* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 349.

have affirmed a linkage between the stability of the bildungsroman's narrative and characters and the stability of the nation as a political unit; as Jed Esty puts it, "nationhood ... gives a finished form to modern societies in the same way that adulthood gives a finished form to the modern subject." However, Esty argues, the nation is a highly contingent formation, and "colonial modernity" dissolves "the progressive and stabilizing discourse of national culture by breaking up cherished continuities between a people and its language, territory, and polity." As self-contained nation-states open out into world-spanning empires, they encounter global capitalism as a Hegelian "bad infinity," with "no objective limits," which threatens to overwhelm their capacity for self-determination as peoples, and that of their citizens as persons. Thus, the bildungsroman in the era of European modernism, from the perspective of colonial power or colonized territory, is characterized by deranged narratives of arrested development, "unseasonable youth," premature age, and so on. This dynamic, however, does not describe the bildungsroman, or *Bildung*-like discourses, of the Progressive Era United States. Despite the Philippines, American progressives generally (and in retrospect naively) did not feel themselves forced to choose between nation and empire, but they did see the integrity of the nation as threatened by the intensification of capitalism within its own borders.³⁹ Whereas, in Esty's account, British modernists saw the nation, and its associated form of subjectivity, as unable to withstand the pressures it faced, American progressives, facing similar but lesser pressures, doubled down on the nation and sought to make it strong and flexible enough to safely channel the torrential energies of a heightened capitalism. Thus, the social action progressives' version of *Bildung* underwrites a more optimistically nation-focused kind of bildungsroman than one finds in Esty's account of British modernism. Relatedly, this bildungsroman stands in a different relation to official school institutions than its European modernist cousins. Both Moretti and Castle, though differing widely over the matter's significance, see in the European modernist bildungsroman a form of "resistance to the institutionalization of self-cultivation [...] which had been rationalized and bureaucratized in the course of the nineteenth century."⁴⁰ In the face of the modern school, with its tendency to co-opt "aesthetico-spiritual" development for jingoistic or economic purposes, the ideal of classical *Bildung* must subside (Moretti) or pursue a path of

³⁹ Esty, *Unseasonable Youth*, 4, 6, 27.

⁴⁰ Castle, *Modernist Bildungsroman*, 1.

negative dialectics by moving through “disharmonious social spheres” (Castle). The social action progressives’ aesthetic education, on the other hand, is sympathetic with the increasing systematizing of the American schools, and sees in them a vehicle for bringing aesthetic education, in a sense more or less compatible with that of classical *Bildung*, to students who would otherwise simply drift through mass culture.

The movement I am calling social action progressivism is a specific, coherent, positive response to conditions that were chiefly characterized (at the time and in historical perspective) by breakdown, disorientation, and disorder. During the Progressive Era, the closing of the Western frontier often served as a focal image for this widespread sense of rupture (although it was only indirectly related to its underlying causes). The frontier, for Croly, Lippmann, and Dewey, as well as Frederick Jackson Turner, was not just an ethnic melting pot, but a unique and unstable environment where the untrammelled pursuit of personal wealth temporarily appeared to completely overlap with the social good. As Croly puts it in *The Promise of American Life* (1909), for the pioneers “the test of American national success was the comfort and prosperity of the individual; and the means to that end, – a system of unrestricted individual aggrandizement and collective irresponsibility [...] checked only by a system of legally constituted rights.” When private profit arose from developing land and reinvesting any capital back into further development, it was easy, they argued, to see why the pioneers believed so strongly in doing good by doing well. Thus, the frontier represented a *laissez-faire* utopia in which the free market worked for the good of all. It was also, in the telling of the social action progressives, a place where the essence of democracy was extremely simplified. “Closely connected with [the pioneers’] perverted ideas and their narrow view of life,” writes Croly, was a “homogeneous social intercourse” that was “genuinely democratic in feeling. [...] They felt kindly towards one another and communicated freely with one another because they were not divided by radical differences of class, standards, point of view, and wealth.” Every citizen was more or less interchangeable, so society naturally cohered without individuals changing their behavior on its account, or even thinking very much about it. “The old American dream,” Lippmann complains of frontier society, was really a daydream of “drift with impunity,” of social problems somehow solving themselves while everyone went about their own business. Its ideal citizen, he writes, was a fantastical “omnicompetent democrat” who could solve all the problems

of statecraft by applying down-home common sense.⁴¹ The result was a civic culture inadequate to the complexities of an industrial society. Turner ends his famous essay on “The Significance of the Frontier in American History” on this note:

But the democracy born of free land, strong in selfishness and individualism, intolerant of administrative experience and education, and pressing individual liberty beyond its proper bounds, has its dangers as well as its benefits. Individualism in America has allowed a laxity in regard to governmental affairs which has rendered possible the spoils system and all the manifest evils that follow from the lack of a highly developed civic spirit.⁴²

When, over the final decades of the nineteenth century, industrial consolidation, mass immigration, and rapid urbanization burst in upon this agrarian scene, there were, in Robert Wiebe’s words, no “national centers of authority and information” to “give order to such swift changes.” In the ensuing tumult, the “search for order” took, as Kloppenberg argues, four major forms: the antimonopolism of Woodrow Wilson, which tried to restore something like egalitarian “frontier” conditions of economic competition; the corporate statism of Theodore Roosevelt, which sought mutually profitable coordination between big business and government; the Protestant revivalism of the temperance movement and similar moral crusades; and, finally, the social action progressivism associated with the *New Republic* circle, which included Croly, Lippmann, and Dewey. It is this last group that will be our focus.⁴³

All four varieties of Progressives believed that it was sometimes necessary for the state to interfere with market activity, to a far greater extent than the popular laissez-faire orthodoxy of David Ricardo and Herbert Spencer would admit. Morton White dubs the Progressive Era’s dominant intellectual project a “revolt against formalism,” meaning the codified “natural laws” derived from Adam Smith, John Locke, and John Stuart

⁴¹ John Dewey, *Reconstruction in Philosophy* (New York: Cosimo Classics, [1920] 2008), 127; Herbert Croly, *The Promise of American Life* (New York: Macmillan, 1909), 58, 69; Walter Lippmann, *Drift and Mastery: An Attempt to Diagnose the Current Unrest* (New York: Mitchell Kennerley, 1914), 179.

⁴² Frederick Jackson Turner, *The Significance of the Frontier in American History: Address Delivered at the Forty-First Annual Meeting of the State Historical Society of Wisconsin, December 14, 1893*, 112.

⁴³ Wiebe, *Search for Order*, 12; Kloppenberg, *Uncertain Victory*, 363.

Mill, which describe individuals as autonomous, self-interested atoms bound together only by contracts. In Daniel Rodgers's summary, during the preceding century and a half, throughout the Atlantic world, the market had relentlessly expanded "the primacy of price and profit" into all domains of life, sweeping away traditional customs and loyalties. Left unchecked, the market contributed to new, or newly intensified, ills: widening inequality, the growth of large cities with inadequate municipal services, and a volatile labor market buffeted by a seesawing boom-bust cycle. Laissez-faire formalisms had no answers to these problems, or even any way to recognize them as problems. Into this descriptive vacuum rushed a new popular vocabulary of the "social"—"social problem," "social politics," "social work"—which was shared by many kinds of progressives. To this new orientation the social action progressives brought a second set of ideas, grounded in the radicalized empiricism of academic researchers and pragmatist philosophers. The rise of statistics in the social sciences raised questions about economic formalisms; laboratory work in psychology raised similar questions about psychological formalisms; and pragmatism in philosophy raised questions about the usefulness of formalisms in general, about humanity's ability to discover immutable "natural laws" in any area of inquiry. From this perspective, the market might be not just unreliable, but also unpredictable. In that case, there were fewer problems that could be written off as inevitable, and more need for powerful economic actors to take personal responsibility for the consequences of their actions. As the progressive economist Henry C. Adams wrote, "If it was right for Christ to take the cloak away which covered the sins of men, it is right for me to do the same for that which make mere men think their own acts of injustice are not their acts but the outworking of laws beyond human control."⁴⁴

The keynote of social action progressivism is the idea that, to respond to social problems, a public must coalesce to assert a specific, coordinated solution, arrived at by deliberative methods that are true to the democratic spirit. This is the political philosophy that Dewey develops at length in *Liberalism and Social Action* and *The Public and Its Problems*, and Croly and Lippmann sketch out in *The Promise of American Life* and *Drift and Mastery*, respectively. After the closing of the frontier, Croly writes, when

⁴⁴Daniel Rodgers, "In Search of Progressivism," *Reviews in American History* 10, no. 4 (December 1982): 113-132; Daniel Rodgers, *Atlantic Crossings: Social Politics in a Progressive Age* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1998).

no “preestablished harmony can exist between the free and abundant satisfaction of private needs and the accomplishment of a morally and socially desirable result,” “our national Promise,” consisting of “an improving popular economic condition, guaranteed by democratic political institutions, and resulting in moral and political amelioration,” must become the goal of deliberate social action, “a conscious national purpose instead of an inexorable national destiny.”⁴⁵ Lippmann makes the same argument in slightly different terms. Any democracy worthy of the name, Lippmann writes, is one in which the people’s will guides public policy. Yet on the most pressing questions of the day, he laments, many people seem not to have any ideas at all. Americans are always ready to decry the government’s incursions into private life, but are silent about how it might act on behalf of the public interest. Before empirical policy questions such as “how can the federal government lower the unemployment rate?” the public is paralyzed, and unable to stop private, self-interested actors from manipulating the laws for their own benefit. “What thwarts the growth of our civilization is not the uncanny, malicious contrivance of the plutocracy, but the faltering method, the distracted soul, and the murky vision of what we call grandiloquently the will of the people,” he writes, labeling this passivity “drift.”⁴⁶ While Croly asks Americans to affirm a particular formulation of their national creed, Lippmann wonders whether they can form any kind of conscious purpose at all. The modern democrat “faces an enormously complicated world, full of stirring and confusion and ferment. [...] He can’t, however, live with any meaning unless he formulates for himself a vision of what is to come out of the unrest,” some concrete idea of the national good. He calls the power to formulate such a vision of social action “mastery,” and urges that developing it in the public should be the overarching goal of Progressive politics.⁴⁷

What is the role of the individual citizen in the formation of a “conscious national purpose?” On this point there are tensions among the social action progressives over questions of deliberation, bureaucracy, and expertise. As Edmund Wilson recalls in a eulogy for Croly, the *New Republic* editor wanted “a return to Hamiltonian centralization, but in the interests not merely of the propertied class but of the people as a whole.”⁴⁸

⁴⁵ Croly, *Promise of American Life*, 109–110, 187, 9.

⁴⁶ Lippmann, *Drift and Mastery*, xvi.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, xix, xvi, xx.

⁴⁸ Edmund Wilson, *Literary Essays and Reviews of the 1920s & 30s* (New York: Library of America), 422.

His theory of government calls for a corps of “perfect bureaucrats,” impartial and expert, to carry out the vision of the people as channeled through a charismatic “public man” who would both obey and shape public opinion. Dewey, meanwhile, calls for a fluid, ever-reworkable framework of “political machinery” to harness the plurality of public opinions that emerge, at various scales, in response to new social problems. All of the social action progressives “stressed the themes of moral harmony and community,” Kloppenberg notes, which has led to accusations of sympathy with “the authoritarian organicism of much conservative theory.” Unlike such authoritarians, though, “they conceived of social integration as the product of individual action tempered by an ethic of benevolence, and they contrasted that idea to the paternalism they identified with conservative notions of community. Rather than imposing on the individual a set of pre-existing standards or rules of behavior, they believed that the state should manifest the values of autonomous individuals conscientiously fulfilling their social responsibility.” As Dewey puts it, “the idea of ‘giving pleasure’ to others, ‘making others happy,’ if it means anything else than securing conditions so that they may act freely in their own satisfaction, means slavery.”⁴⁹

While they do not want to subordinate the self to the social order, the social action Progressives do call for Americans to adopt a new idea of what the self is and in what relationship it stands to the political community. They want to do away with an older populist or yeoman idea of selfhood that was based on having a place all one’s own, geographically, economically, and spiritually, where one anchors one’s participation in history. In its place, they want something along the lines of James Livingston’s pragmatist “social self,” a self that “is a social relation or context, not a substance removed from the vicissitudes of time,” and whose “subjectivity [is] more effect than cause of social circumstances,” seeing individuals’ identities as deeply involved in reciprocal relations with others, civic and affective as well as economic. The social action progressives might agree, in a sense, with the moral of Walter Benn Michaels’s notorious reading of “The Yellow Wall-Paper”—that “there can be no question, then, of the self entering into exchange; exchange is the condition of its existence”—but they would not identify this exchange, as Michaels does, with “the triumphant omnipresence of market relations.” Jane Thrailkill gets closer to their sensibility with her concept of “double-feel” in Dewey’s aesthetics, in which one is

⁴⁹ Kloppenberg, *Uncertain Victory*, 357, 359.

made “to realize one’s creative participation in experiencing the text and indeed the world.”⁵⁰ Dewey stresses that the individual exists in and through participation in social life, including its economic as well as its political phases. “To gain an integrated individuality,” he writes, “each of us needs to cultivate his own garden. But there is no fence about this garden ... our garden is the world, in the angle at which it touches our own manner of being. By accepting the corporate and industrial world in which we live, and by thus fulfilling the precondition for interaction with it, we, who are also parts of the moving present, create ourselves as we create an unknown future.”⁵¹ In all cases, the social action progressives were among “those who prize social recognition as key to personal flourishing,” a group who Lawrence Buell observes are the most congenial to the “bildungsroman as a reflector and promoter of the smooth operation of individuation within representative governmental regimes” (as opposed to those, such as Leslie Fiedler’s frontier-chasing protagonists, who are “inclined to suspect social acceptance as compromising to personal integrity”).⁵² (Despite their attempts to free their idea of the social self from authoritarian undertones, though, even their insistence on loyalty to the “common interest” of the public tends, for some critics such as Rivka Shpak Lissak, to shade into “the rejection of class consciousness and class interest,” leading to “the inculcation of the concept of common interest, with the educated middle class as its true representative,” which tends to “counteract the development of a distinct working-class political or cultural identity.”)⁵³

The importance of education for the social action progressives follows from their reliance on the social self. As Kloppenberg writes, they hold that “cultural problems require cultural solutions” and that “substantive political change in a democracy is impossible without profound cultural change; neither can proceed without the other.” “Political progress, as they understood it,” Kloppenberg writes, “cannot result from simple institutional

⁵⁰ James Livingston, *Pragmatism and the Political Economy of Cultural Revolution* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 294, 80; Walter Benn Michaels, *The Gold Standard and the Logic of Naturalism: American Literature at the Turn of the Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), 13; Jane Thrailkill, *Affecting Fictions: Mind, Body, and Emotion in American Literary Realism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), 51.

⁵¹ John Dewey, *Individualism Old and New* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1931), 171.

⁵² Lawrence Buell, *The Dream of the Great American Novel* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2014), 120.

⁵³ Rivka Shpak Lissak, *Pluralism and Progressives: Hull House and the New Immigrants, 1890–1919* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 23.

modifications. Instead reformers must convert their communities to a new way of thinking." Therefore, they reason, education needs to prepare the ground for all other reforms. "Genuine public opinion" has to be specially cultivated, Croly argues, before the public can be trusted with the referendum and other forms of institutional power. Thus, "the real vehicle of improvement" in a democracy is education. "It is by education that the American is trained for such democracy as he possesses; and it is by better education that he proposes to better his democracy."⁵⁴

There is an aesthetic dimension to their education, too. Like the classical *Bildung* theorists, the social action progressives believe that art is necessary to achieve their imagined fusion between individual and social ends. As Frederick Jackson Turner puts it, one of the frontier vices, going along with "selfishness and individualism" and "intoleran[ce] of administrative experience and education," was a "grasp of material things, lacking in the artistic."⁵⁵ This linkage between artistic cultivation and the progressive vision of centralized administration, which is only embryonic in Turner, is substantially developed in Dewey, who writes that "ultimately social efficiency [...] covers all that makes one's own experience more worth while to others, and all that enables one to participate more richly in the worthwhile experiences of others," especially the "ability to produce and to enjoy art."⁵⁶ Other educators, with different relations to the social action ideal, offered variations on this theme, and these will be the subject of the following three chapters. They all agree, though, that unlike classical *Bildung*, which imagines cultivation spreading outward from a few select preserves, their kind of aesthetic education would use the public school system, with its potential for mass social coordination and its complex administrative structures. They would do *Bildung* through, not against, the educational profession.

PROGRESSIVISM'S AESTHETIC EDUCATION: THREE AUTHORS AND THREE MOVEMENTS

The main body of this study examines three authors' engagements with three progressive education movements, which, while expressive of three very different philosophical and social perspectives, share certain features

⁵⁴ Kloppenberg, *Uncertain Victory*, 349, 376; Wiebe, *Search for Order*, 160.

⁵⁵ Turner, *Significance of the Frontier*, 112.

⁵⁶ John Dewey, *Democracy and Education* (Mineola, N.Y.: Dover, [1915] 2004), 89.

common to their moment. First, all of them embrace some form of the social action ideal, although they do so in a way that only partially entrusts individuals with an equitable role in democratic deliberation. Even these partial realizations of the ideal, however, distinguish these movements from the “one best system” of the administrative progressives. On a pedagogical level, their divergence from the authoritarianism of the one best system can be explained by the rise of the “Doctrine of Interest” in elite educational circles, beginning with the Herbartians. We will examine the Doctrine of Interest in detail in the following chapter; in brief, it turns mental discipline upside down by making the scientific claim that students only learn things that they are spontaneously inspired to investigate, rather than things that are presented as stages in an obstacle course that strengthens the will. The doctrine thus turns the ethical commitment to individual autonomy within the educational process into a value-neutral conclusion of the science of education. The increasing prestige of the science of education itself (really of multiple scientific discourses that found homes in elite education schools), as distinct from the holistic and openly value-laden moral philosophy of Horace Mann, is a second trend that applies to all three movements. The third commonality among these movements is their deployment of the category of the aesthetic to illustrate that their theories of education can encompass the full range of human experience, and therefore that their visions of social action do not stifle the full self-realization of free individuals.

Chapter 2 pairs the Russian-American Yiddish/English socialist writer Abraham Cahan with the movement known as Herbartianism. As one of its very few chroniclers, Harold Dunkel, puts it, American Herbartianism, inspired by a half-forgotten founder and itself all but forgotten today, is the protagonist of an “educational ghost story.” Its core ideas were developed by Johann Friedrich Herbart, a German philosopher who died in 1841, and incubated by his disciples in European educational circles, where they were discovered in the 1880s and 1890s by American educators looking to shore up their nascent profession’s intellectual bona fides. As the faculty psychology on which the pedagogy of mental discipline rested lost credibility in the face of new advances in laboratory psychology, with its picture of the mind as a tangle of stimulus-response circuits rather than an elegant hierarchy of distinct mental organs, a new educational psychology was badly needed. Mental discipline, as we have seen, appealed

to educators because it ostensibly both promoted moral virtue and was strictly value-neutral. In Herbart, American teacher trainers such as Charles de Garmo and the brothers Charles and Frank McMurry believed that they had found a way to recreate that powerful combination of attributes in a manner consistent with the most advanced psychological findings. (A 1906 book on American Herbartianism suggests that William James's psychology was particularly influential on the movement, and James himself uses the Herbartian term "apperception mass," with apparent approval, in his *Talks to Teachers*.)⁵⁷

Herbart had been directly influenced by Pestalozzi, whose schools he had visited and whose pedagogy of small, carefully concatenated steps he reinterpreted as a method for constructing a shared culture rather than recovering a lost nature. Unlike Pestalozzi, Herbart was not interested in preserving the concrete reality of the natural world. His concern, rather, was with avoiding large, disjunctive intellectual leaps. According to his theory of apperception, new knowledge can only be interpreted through old knowledge, and so the new should be introduced with as much context from the old as possible. At the level of the individual lesson, Herbart proposed a method, distilled by his disciples into the formula of the "five steps," by which new knowledge is to be integrated with old knowledge. At the level of the curriculum, the watchwords of the American Herbartians were "concentration," the upbuilding of a central highly integrated mass of knowledge, and "correlation," the process by which other subjects were to be approached via the central concentration. These methods for organizing knowledge were thought to produce psychological integration in the student, which would in turn be conducive to social integration as the student came to recognize the thick web of relations surrounding her. In this way, the Herbartian method, like the old mental discipline, would produce morality with merely formal, value-neutral means. The specific nature of this integration was always somewhat vague: Just how could one know whether a new lesson would be well-integrated with an older one? By virtue of what properties was an idea "close to" or "far from" another? If these questions cannot be answered, what use is the method at all? Herbart himself answered them with a highly complex and idiosyncratic

⁵⁷ George Basil Randels, "The Doctrines of Herbart in the United States." (Ph.D. diss., University of Pennsylvania, 1909), 29, 64. "Apperception" is the title and topic of the 14th chapter of William James, *Talks to Teachers on Psychology; and to Students on Some of Life's Ideals* (New York: Henry Holt, 1900).

metaphysics in which reality is composed of monads which combine to form objects and mental states according to an abstruse “metaphysical calculus.” This calculus could never be seen in action, but the proof of its principles, for Herbart, could be found in the experience of aesthetic “perfection,” in which the ideal of an integrated mental event was fully realized. The aesthetic object thus became a visible proof of the invisible order around which his educational thought was organized. The American Herbartians dropped the metaphysical calculus, and in fact deployed art in a slightly different way. For them, art’s importance lay in its power to present things and ideas in any way one could imagine; it could thus be used to link new knowledge to any conceivable apperception mass. The self-evidence of aesthetic value, in turn, reflected the hunger of the perceiver’s mind for such perfect links. This hunger, in general, is what the American Herbartians meant by the “interest” of the student: not so much the concretely expressed desires of real children, but their theoretical agreeableness to certain instructional procedures. As Dewey argued in *Interest in Relation to the Will* and, later, in *Democracy and Education*, the American Herbartians thus maintained a formal fiction of student-centered education, while in fact their whole program rested on the educator’s minute and total control of the smallest steps of the learning process.

As a Yiddish journalist and writer, Abraham Cahan thought of himself as an educator, and his disputes with rivals within the socialist movement frequently turned on pedagogical questions. Cahan was frustrated by other socialists’ attempts to win converts by publishing *ex cathedra* doctrinal statements that could only interest those already initiated into socialist thought. Accusing these writers of ignoring the latest advances in the science of education, Cahan insisted that the truths of socialism had to be carefully couched in terms that would be intelligible to the average worker within their existing frame of reference. In Yiddish works such as the long-running column “*Der Proletarishker Maggid*” (“The Proletarian Preacher”) and the pamphlet-novella “*Vi Azoy Rafael Na’arizokh Is Gevorn a Sozialist*” (“How Rafael Na’arizokh Became a Socialist”), he pursues a Herbartian socialist pedagogy based on the “concentration” of his Lower East Side readership’s knowledge in the thick lifeworld of shtetl and neighborhood experience. His political opponents warned that by meeting his readers more than halfway, he was watering down socialist ideas and failing to win true converts, but Cahan held that it was in fact

possible to lead his audience to a full-fledged socialism without casting himself as a keeper of arcane knowledge. In Cahan's English writings, however, which were published in prestigious venues and directed at intellectuals rather than workers, he wrote from the perspective of Slaughter's "*Bildung* to the second degree." Increasingly disillusioned by the Jewish immigrant community's failure to adopt socialism, but still committed to his pedagogical methods on philosophical grounds, he expressed his pessimism and disappointment in short stories such as "Tzinchadzi of the Catskills," and in his magnum opus, the 1917 anti-bildungsroman *The Rise of David Levinsky*.

Chapter 3 traces the biographical, intellectual, and thematic intersections between Willa Cather and the nascent Montessori movement. Although Montessori schools did not become widespread in the United States until after the Second World War, Maria Montessori enjoyed a brief but intense American vogue between 1911 and 1915. Montessori emerged from the context of Italian Progressivism, which was concerned, even more directly than its American counterpart, with shaping a citizenry capable of steering a modern industrial democracy. "We have made Italy," the slogan went; "now we must make Italians." Montessori's approach was diametrically opposed to that of the American administrative progressives, however. The dysfunction of the Italian government, which during the Progressive Era replaced its Minister of Education more than once a year on average, made her distrustful of complex centralized systems. Working through a network of private patrons, Montessori instead developed an educational idea that was, pedagogically and administratively, extremely simple, while still, from her perspective at least, taking advantage of the latest advances in the science of education. She did indeed make at least one spectacular and empirically verifiable pedagogical advance: the majority of her students in her first school, all of whom came from disadvantaged households, were able to read by age five.

Montessori's idea of social action is, paradoxically, almost libertarian. She believes that human nature is inherently social, but, unlike Herbart or William Torrey Harris, she does not see its social side as something that must be built up; rather, it can be expected to grow or flow (plants and canals are her favored educational metaphors) from any self that has not been distorted by the imposition of others' materialistic agendas. (In this she echoes the Rousseau of *Emile*, a text that looms large in her thinking.) Montessori has a belief, equal parts scientific and religious, in a force called *horme* that permeates all things and directs them in their proper course of

growth. *Horme* naturally steers human beings toward the activities that will lead both to their own flourishing and to the knitting together of a community. The task of education, then, is not to direct the child, but to surround her untarnished hormic energy with protective walls and to provide it with the materials it will need while strictly refraining from telling the students almost anything beyond the names of things. While *horme* is a mysterious energy, the conditions under which it flourishes can, Montessori believes, be placed on a strictly scientific footing. The center of the Montessori classroom is not rows of desks where students transcribe teachers' remarks but a set of custom-designed physical objects, the "didactic apparatus," which is meant to create just the situations that children of certain ages need in order to perform the fixed set of exercises by which *horme* unfolds. In Montessori's aesthetics, meanwhile, the art object is also a kind of glorified didactic apparatus.

For Montessori, technocratic control of the classroom environment combines with libertarianism in teacher/student interactions to produce, theoretically, a spontaneously social self. This blend of science, efficiency (Montessori's schools were extremely cheap to operate), libertarianism, Romantic reverence for childhood innocence, and opposition to the school's entanglement with government and business captured the imagination of many Americans who were following educational debates but unaffiliated with the educational profession itself. Alexander Graham Bell and his wife Mabel Gardiner Hubbard, rather than professional educators, were at the center of an amateur movement to open Montessori schools in the United States. Indeed, the religious basis of Montessori's scientific ideas, combined with her personal drive for total control of her schools and their affiliated teacher-training programs, prevented her from fully engaging with the educational profession and its scientific standards. Rather than being absorbed by the US educational profession, which turned away from her in any case, she built her own independent institutional base.

Montessori crossed Cather's path at a crucial point in the latter's literary development. There is a decisive break in Cather's career between her apprentice phase, which culminates in *Alexander's Bridge* (1912), a "chatty" society novel about an architect, and the mature style inaugurated in *O Pioneers!* (1913), characterized by laconic, imagistic prose and thematically concerned with what she would later call "unfurnished" spaces in landscape and psychology. This break coincided with the grand

tour of America on which Cather's employer, S.S. McClure of *McClure's Magazine*, conducted the Italian educator. As he discusses in his autobiography, which was in fact ghostwritten by Cather herself, McClure took a leading role in explaining and promoting Montessori to an American audience. Cather, it seems, was influenced by Montessori's philosophy of silence, concreteness, and receptivity (rather than, say, the elaborate verbal triangulations of the Herbartians); however, these ideas did not mean the same thing to Cather as they did to Montessori. The human energies that Cather depicts as being released by Montessori methods prove to be inherently excessive and unstable, sources of tragedy as well as progress. Cather's relationship to Montessori, then, is also one of "*Bildung* to the second degree," of irony about the results of a method toward which she nonetheless feels drawn.

Chapter 4, on Charlotte Perkins Gilman and the movement for social efficiency education, offers a closer look at a subset of the administrative progressives who argued that the one best system advanced not just aggregate aims but individual self-realization and even aesthetic cultivation. This movement, a loose grouping including Edward A. Ross, David Snedden, and Franklin Bobbitt, contained a variety of voices, and this chapter will focus only on those that point, however awkwardly, in the direction of a *Bildung* idea. The version of *Bildung* that emerges, especially from Bobbitt, identifies personal growth with the situating of the self in ever larger and more informationally complete contexts; the path of its growth ascends through domestic, local, regional, national, and global communities, be they political, economic, or whatever. The distinctive role of the arts, for Bobbitt, is to make information easier to assimilate, bridging the gap between bare facts and the perceptual sensibilities of the human mind. The self thus realized, however, does not become more well rounded or complete in itself—indeed, as one contemporary critic charged, social efficiency education lacks any concept of “the mind as a unity”—but more narrowly specialized and more beholden to the technicians who alone are able to process the vast quantities of information needed to coordinate the activities of a large group. For Gilman, a friend of Ross's, and a theorist of social efficiency education in her own right, this erasure of what she calls “personality” is itself a great psychological advance. Gilman imagines the social efficiency curriculum as the antidote to the type of neurasthenic introspection that Dr. Silas Weir Mitchell's rest cure only exacerbated. The educational thought that she explicitly formulates in nonfiction such as *Women and Economics*, *Social Ethics*, *Concerning*

Children, and *Our Brains and What Ails Them* defines an upward path from the maddening individuality of “The Yellow Wall-Paper” through progressively saner, happier, and more technocratic arrangements that develop over the course of *Benigna Machiavelli*, *What Diantha Did*, *Moving the Mountain*, and *Herland*. Rather than using literature to express an ambivalent relationship with the educational theory that engrossed her, Gilman, always perhaps more an intellectual than an artist at heart, sets out to correct its flaws so that ultimately no such ambivalence should be called for.

PRAGMATISM’S AESTHETIC EDUCATION

This brings us to Chapter 5, on John Dewey, which is not like Chapters 2, 3, and 4. Pairing Dewey’s theory of aesthetic education with a contemporary bildungsroman writer, perhaps Anzia Yeziarska or the William Carlos Williams of *White Mule*, would certainly be possible, but Dewey’s influence on novelists was relatively modest and reflects only a small part of his thinking. His philosophy matters for humanists today for other reasons: he proposes a form of aesthetic education that professional educators in public institutions might embrace, one that is thoroughly democratic. His version of aesthetic education offers an alternative to other mission statements for the humanities, to watchwords like critical thinking, cultural literacy, or close reading, which while valuable do not fully satisfy the public’s legitimate desire to form democratic subjects nor the students’ and teachers’ legitimate desire for the study of the arts to address the experience of aesthetic value. The ambitions of Chapter 5, which sets forth and partially reconstructs Dewey’s aesthetic education, are therefore philosophical and normative rather than historical and descriptive. The historical chapters illustrate how different philosophies of democratic aesthetic education can affiliate themselves with different artistic, and more broadly cultural, sensibilities. Chapter 5, then, focuses entirely on philosophical questions about the theory of democratic aesthetic education that seems most valuable in our own day, leaving the exploration of its cultural impact for another day.

Dewey is the thinker who most fully reimagines aesthetic education as means to social action. Art, for Dewey, directs us toward feelings of fulfillment that are best realized, outside of the artwork, in the experience of equitable pluralistic collaboration among individuals with their own distinctive interests. The most important difference between Dewey and the other progressive educators discussed in this book concerns the limits of

scientific knowledge. None of these other figures shares Dewey's pragmatist insistence on these limits. Each of them takes some one science (mathematics or logic for the Herbartians, biology for Montessori, and sociology for the social efficiency educators) as adequate grounds for establishing a goal of education and a method to reach it. Dewey, on the other hand, sees all sciences as useful for educators, but argues that goals and methods must ultimately derive from the direct experience of education itself, with its irreducibly qualitative elements.

Dewey's thinking about the irreducibly qualitative dimensions of experience has been well summarized by Victor Kestenbaum as the "primacy of meaning" thesis, which rests on Dewey's distinction between "primary" and "reflective" experience. Dewey argues (most thoroughly in *Experience and Nature*) that while knowledge emerges from experience, it always emerges by collapsing some of the dimensions of experience. "Primary" experience involves the "doings and undergoings" of an embodied mind that reacts emotionally to events which either help or hinder its ability to feel at home in the world. (Physical survival is the basic requirement for feeling at home in the world, but there is no upper bound to the further refinements that can be added to one's sense of at-homeness.) When we experience something, our immediate reaction is not one that involves knowledge or information, but is rather an emotional response, a cringe, smile, or other expression that in some sense involves our whole body—not just the patterns of neural activity in our brains, but our whole physical organism as it interfaces with its environment. While these reactions are extremely subtle, they are simple in the sense that they are just a single felt quality; they just are what they are. They are the "meaning" of an experience in its primary sense. In "reflective" experience, primary experience is filtered through various humanly constructed regimes of knowledge, be they scientific, mathematical, logical, or whatever. In purely reflective experience, whatever is not caught by these filters is eliminated. Thus, according to the primacy of meaning thesis, all intellectual knowledge grows out of and to some extent truncates the meanings found in primary experience. The meanings of primary experience, however, are where we ultimately live, where things matter to us. In Dewey's account, art is one of the techniques that humanity has developed to explore and communicate the meanings of primary experience.⁵⁸

⁵⁸Victor Kestenbaum, *The Phenomenological Sense of John Dewey: Habit and Meaning* (New York: Humanities Press, 1977); Victor Kestenbaum, *The Grace and the Severity of the Ideal: John Dewey and the Transcendent* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002).

To be good educators, for Dewey, is to attend not just to the metrics, outputs, and so on that are formulated by reflective experience (though one can certainly not ignore these, as some self-described “progressive educators” have been tempted to do). One must also attend to transformations of students’ primary experience, to the quality, feel, or meaning of that experience. This claim, if taken as seriously as it should be, has radical implications for the nature of the educational profession. It means that there is no citadel of objectivity, whether the economic objectivity of “human capital” theorists or the scientific objectivity of psychologists and sociologists, that can, by itself, defend educators’ authority. Instead, in the end, that authority must rest on a claim to a certain kind of wisdom, born of the experience of trying to enrich both the primary and the reflective experience of others. Chapter 5 explores just what kind of a claim this is and what sorts of experiential qualities a democratic education should cultivate.

Dewey’s educational philosophy is oriented toward a certain kind of socially participatory experience, which is also distinguished by its being, at the same time, an experience of expansion and revitalization within the individual. Scattered across Dewey’s massive body of work are descriptions of some of the qualities that define such experiences, which are found in personal life, social life, the life of the school, and, especially, in aesthetic experience, where they are thrown into sharpest relief. In the chapter on Dewey, we will discuss four such qualities, which Dewey calls interest, purpose, meaning, and freedom (or integrity). The pursuit of these qualities, like Schiller’s pursuit of the play drive, places art at the center of a project of reconciling the free democratic individual and the stability of the social order. This list of four qualities is intended to be incomplete, and can never be completed; unlike Schiller, Dewey does not rely on a taxonomy of psychological faculties and insists on leaving human nature open-ended. He does, crucially, maintain an ideal of individual and social integrity, or harmony, but refrains from specifying the components to be integrated or the shapes that this (perpetual, unending) integration might take.

The qualities of educational or integrative experience are, in Dewey’s system, most clearly present in aesthetic experience, which gives aesthetic experience much the same function it has for Schiller. Unlike Schiller’s aesthetic experience, however, Dewey’s is composed of elements whose significance remains radically open. Rather than converging on an already-fixed moral law (as Schiller’s *Bildung* converges on Kantian ethics), the social and personal applications of Dewey’s qualities of aesthetic experience always leave room for reinterpretation based on pluralistic deliberation,

which he in turn makes central to his pedagogy and politics. Furthermore, the aesthetic standing of all artworks remains open to reevaluation as both individuals and society update their understanding of the ideal of “maturer experience” toward which Dewey’s education is oriented. Art thus acts as the “growing edge” of individual and cultural sensibilities while nonetheless remaining accessible only through the lens of those sensibilities; it helps us undergo “growth” or “progress,” individually or socially, but in ways that are limited (though not totally determined) by our situated sense of what those eminently contestable terms might mean.

This notion of Deweyan *Bildung* obviously conflicts with the pragmatist aesthetics of Richard Rorty and Richard Poirier, reading, as it does, past “final vocabularies” and the “struggle for verbal consciousness” and into what passes for the metaphysical grounds of pragmatist experience, where it mingles with ethical, political, and psychological considerations. On this reading of Dewey, in the artwork’s movement outside of socially given language that Poirier describes as the “point of incandescence,” one finds not just personal renewal but certain qualities which sustain social life; Rortian “vocabularies” are not just collected and compared but subjected to what Victor Kestenbaum calls “the severity and the grace of [an] ideal” that takes in the whole of lived experience, including its social side. This conflict with Rorty and Poirier, two titans of pragmatist aesthetics, is not one to be taken lightly. On the other hand, it is not one that needs to be undertaken alone, as a growing body of scholarship has already begun tracing the robustly social and ethical side of Dewey’s aesthetics, as in the work of Thomas M. Alexander, Richard J. Bernstein, Maxine Greene, Philip W. Jackson, Victor Kestenbaum, Scott Stroud, and Robert Westbrook. As the presence of Greene and Jackson suggests, I see the idea of Deweyan *Bildung* as engaging with the side of Dewey that continues to appeal to American education schools, where (as I have been arguing throughout this Introduction) the logic of educational professionalism demands what Westbrook calls a “metaphysics of democratic community.” One need not believe, even as a good pragmatist, that educational professionalism is necessary or even good; but if one does believe in such professionalism, then Dewey’s *Bildung* may describe the maximum depth and breadth of importance that it can assign to the arts, and with Maxine Greene we can, as good Deweyans, “make aesthetic experience our pedagogic creed.”⁵⁹

⁵⁹ Richard Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, Solidarity* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2009); Richard Poirier, *The Renewal of Literature: Emersonian Reflections* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988); Thomas M. Alexander, *John Dewey’s Theory of Art,*

In addition to the antifoundationalist objections that a Rorty or a Poirier might raise, Dewey's communitarianism has struck critical education historians such as Clarence Karier, Michael Katz, and Joel Spring, as well as conservatives such as Charles Glenn, as conformist and repressive. They cast him as the grand inquisitor of a church of the "good mixer." This characterization is one-sided, and overlooks the role of dissent in Dewey's thought. Glenn accuses Dewey of making a fetish of "cultural participation," but Dewey's notion of such participation entails reform, not just passive alignment with the status quo. Nevertheless, however consistently nonrepressive Dewey's idea of education may be in theory, its adherents would be foolish to deny that the slipperiness of the concepts of "growth," "educational experience," "maturer experience," and the like, which define the authority of the educational profession for him, makes it just as vulnerable to Redfield's paradoxical logic of "exemplarity," which opens education to "the ruses of capital" and other forms of power, as Schiller's equally slippery regulatory ideal of "beautiful moral freedom." To prevent the autonomy of the educational profession from lapsing into the hermetic self-dealing of the "interlocking directorate" (Arthur Bestor's pejorative term for the self-enclosed world of educational institutions) requires constant vigilance, directed at both the profession and the observer's own values and interpretations of reality.⁶⁰

Throughout this Introduction, I have both insisted on the viability of the Deweyan form of aesthetic education and acknowledged strong objections to it, as well as to the general concept of *Bildung* itself. Many of these objections raise the same problem: How can we ensure that an institution as unaccountable, and as potentially invasive, as the educational profession will not be abused, as it certainly has been often enough? We must frankly admit that we can never ensure this. Nonetheless, there are two good reasons to embrace educational professionalism. First, in many critiques of the

Experience and Nature: The Horizons of Feeling (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1987); Richard J. Bernstein, *The Pragmatic Turn* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2015); Maxine Greene, *Releasing the Imagination* (New York: Wiley, 2000), 133; Maxine Greene, *The Dialectic of Freedom* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1988); Philip W. Jackson, *John Dewey and the Lessons of Art* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000); Kestenbaum, *Grace and Severity of the Ideal*; Scott Stroud, *John Dewey and the Artful Life: Pragmatism, Aesthetics, and Morality* (State College, PA: Penn State Press, 2012); Robert Westbrook, *John Dewey and American Democracy* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1991), 361.

⁶⁰ Arthur Bestor, ed., *Educational Wastelands: The Retreat from Learning in Our Public Schools* (Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, [1953] 1985).

American education system, “the *problem* of social existence is overlooked,” as Maxine Greene writes, “along with the inescapability of relationship for those who must learn to be human in a not always sustaining world.” Joel Spring, for instance, grounds his thinking in opposition to “the existence of the state in any form because it destroys individual autonomy.” In Spring, Karier, and like-minded critics, one finds a good deal of keen observation, but also (again quoting Greene) a “strange, innocent optimism that leads to setting aside the problem of socialization” in favor of maximal liberty for the lone person. Greene compares this attitude, loosely but with justice, to the asocial individualism of Quentin Anderson’s “imperial selves.” They abandon the Progressive aspiration to deliberately craft a pluralistic democracy capable of coordinated action in the face of antidemocratic forces, particularly the plutocracy that thrives under Lippmannian “drift.” As analysts of the educational scene, such critics are frequently insightful, but the alternatives they suggest are hardly more viable or appealing than the present system, imperfect as it is. Is, say, the “free-range child” of John Holt’s unschooling philosophy really better off, on average, than the public school student? As Dewey says, “it may be a loss rather than a gain to escape from the control of another person only to find one’s conduct dictated by immediate whim and caprice.” Recognizing that, with all its imperfections, the inheritance of the common school may still be preferable to other alternatives, Greene calls for “a more complex, a ‘darker’ approach.” “The tension between individual and civilization has been and will be irreducible,” she goes on. “Education, because it takes place at the intersection where the demands for social order and the demands for autonomy conflict, must proceed through and by means of this tension.” To the utopian imagination in which the irrepressible self is thought to be capable of escaping this tension, Dewey’s educational ideas may seem exceedingly conformist. To the imagination that embraces this tension as a basic fact of social existence, however, Dewey may make the best of the world as it really is.⁶¹

If this first reason to embrace Dewey’s aesthetic education elevates tension and darkness above “innocent optimism,” the second reason does the opposite. This second reason is, as Rorty would say, social hope. The most audacious assumption of Dewey’s idea of aesthetic education is that in a

⁶¹ Maxine Greene, “Identities and Contours: An Approach to Educational History,” in *History, Education, and Public Policy*, ed. Donald R. Warren (Berkeley: McCutchan, 1978); John Dewey, *Experience and Education* (New York: Touchstone, [1938] 1997), 55–56.

democracy it is possible to live thoroughly *with* others in a way that also allows us to live with ourselves, to maintain individual integrity even as we pursue social integrity. Everywhere we look, however, we see that this double integrity is not, and never has been, realized. For Dewey, nonetheless, this is no cause for despair. “The idea of the whole,” he writes, “whether the whole personal being or of the world, is an imaginative, not a literal, idea. The limited world of our observation and reflection becomes [a whole] only through imaginative extension. [...] Neither observation, thought, nor practical activity can attain that complete unification.” Dewey’s vision of interlocking psychological, social, and aesthetic integrities, that is, is and must remain an object of faith, available only to those with a will to believe in it, though no less plausible for that. Ultimately, then, William James’s words about his own melioristic faith describe my attitude toward Dewey’s aesthetic education: “I can not speak officially as a pragmatist here; all I can say is that my own pragmatism offers no objection to my taking sides with this more moralistic view.”⁶²

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⁶²Dewey quoted in Kestenbaum, *Grace and Severity of the Ideal*, 180; William James, “Pragmatism and Religion,” in *Writings, 1902–1910* (New York: Library of America, 1988).

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CHAPTER 2

The Doctrine of Interest: Abraham Cahan and the Herbartians

This chapter pursues an extended comparison between the pedagogical and aesthetic ideas of Herbartianism, one of the first organized progressive education movements, and those of Abraham Cahan.¹ While there is some reason to think Cahan was aware of specific Herbartian theories, the connection between them mostly rests on their similar responses to similar educational situations, rather than direct influence. As a journalist and writer of fiction, both of which he saw as educational roles, Cahan adopted the persona of the “native guide,” the popularizer, translator, or mediator, presenting unfamiliar cultures and ideas in familiar terms—as Jules Chametzky puts it, he sought to “familiarize, not defamiliarize” the world.² As the editor of the *Jewish Daily Forward*, he insisted that he

¹Biographical details throughout this chapter are drawn primarily from Abraham Cahan, *The Education of Abraham Cahan* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1969). They are also informed by Jules Chametzky, *From the Ghetto: The Fiction of Abraham Cahan* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1977); Irving Howe, *World of Our Fathers: The Journey of the East European Jews to America and the Life They Found and Made* (New York: New York University Press, 2005); Sanford E. Marovitz, *Abraham Cahan* (New York: Twayne, 1996); Ted Pollock, *The Solitary Clarinetist; A Critical Biography of Abraham Cahan, 1860–1917* (Ph.D. diss, Columbia University, 1959); Moses Rischin, *The Promised City: New York’s Jews 1870–1914* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1962); and Ronald Sanders, *The Downtown Jews: Portraits of an Immigrant Generation* (New York: Dover Publications, 1987).

²Jules Chametzky, *Our Decentralized Literature: Cultural Meditations in Selected Jewish and Southern Writers* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1986). For an overview

would not print a word that the paper's elevator operator did not understand. Further, even while writing in socialist publications, he was at pains not to alienate the common reader by being polemical, believing that "the people" cared nothing for "partisan disputes." These commitments to a pedagogical mode appearing both familiar and unbiased were also central for the Herbartians; both he and they adopted them in order to achieve coordinated social action without insisting upon it, by exercising a virtuosic control over the psychology of attention while refusing to openly avow their aims. This approach, of course, placed limits on the educator's self-expression and made sincere communication difficult, as detractors of both Cahan and the Herbartians pointed out. Cahan was sensitive to this criticism, and so, in addition to writing a kind of bildungsroman that imagines education along Herbartian lines, *Vi Azoy Rafael Na'arizokh Is Gevorn a Sozialist*, he also wrote another bildungsroman, *The Rise of David Levinsky*, which inverts the Herbartian perspective as a way of imaginatively exploring a road not taken.

CAHAN AS JOURNALIST

As a Yiddish writer, Cahan is a great popularizer. While he shares the common feeling that, in the migration from the shtetl to the metropolis, a cohesive culture was threatened by centrifugal forces, questions of cultural preservation interest him less than questions of access to information. As a young man he chafed against the tightly prescribed curriculum at his government-run school (the Vilna Teacher Training Institute (VTI)), and Tsarist censorship of the socialist underground, his other major intellectual resource, drove him to emigrate to the United States after he was nearly caught hiding contraband literature. In New York, a newsstand openly selling anarchist papers was one of the first things he noticed, and when he realized the relative freedom of the US press, he began working to spread knowledge among the city's Russian Jewish population. In contrast with the partisan polemics of much of the radical Yiddish press, accessible summaries of political and scientific ideas became a centerpiece of his journalism, especially at the *Arbeiter Tzeitung* and the *Forward*. At the same time, though, looking at the "yellow" press, he feared that valuable ideas might be cheapened beyond recognition in the contest for popular attention.

of work on Cahan as a cultural mediator, see Marshall Wilen, "Citizen Cahan." *Prooftexts* 7, no. 1 (1987): 89–96.

Cahan saw himself holding a middle ground between, on one side, a preoccupation with ideological argument that repelled the average Jewish worker, and, on the other, attention-seeking tactics that failed to uplift the audience they captured. He wanted to attract attention and direct it toward higher truths.

As Cahan sought his home among the rival factions of the New York left, he was guided by this concern with the nature of the communication between intellectuals and everyday people, as much as he was by any particular political vision. He often mocked people whose supposedly humanistic ideals cut them off from human life as it is actually lived, as in “A Story of Cooper Union” (1897), about a poet who is so determined to “fill the universe with a new sort of sunshine” that he feels that “to marry and be bothered with a wife and children and the sordid details of family life would be a crime against the interests of humanity”; when the poet gets his wish and avoids marrying, he finds that he is too lonely to write.³ When Cahan arrived in Manhattan, he thought of himself as an anarchist, meaning a revolutionary socialist who refused to work within the official political process. As he recounts, though, in his memoir *Bleter fun Mayn Leben (Leaves from My Life)*, the sight of the anarchist newspapers at the newsstand showed him “the differences between Russian and American circumstances,” which “the Russian terrorists themselves had acknowledged [...] were crucial.”⁴ It was one thing to reject an illiberal government, but quite another to reject a constitutional republic with press freedoms, and Cahan thought it absurd to stick to a principle regardless of changing circumstances. On the other hand, he was equally repelled by Samuel Gompers and the American Federation of Trades, who were so focused on tactical victories that they lost sight, in Cahan’s view, of any larger transformative program. In the Socialist Labor Party (SLP), which he joined in 1886, he found what seemed the right balance between programmatic rigidity and rudderlessness. Method, however, proved as much a concern as substance. Although he approved of the SLP’s general orientation, Cahan was troubled when one of its leaders, Daniel De Leon, used tactics that he saw as unworthy of the party’s ideals. To maintain his preferred platform—with which Cahan did not take issue—De Leon fudged vote counts, bullied opponents out of leadership roles, ridiculed people’s

³ Abraham Cahan and Moses Rischin, *Grandma Never Lived in America: The New Journalism of Abraham Cahan* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985), 159.

⁴ Cahan, *Education of Abraham Cahan*, 256–257.

religious beliefs, and, most disastrously, practiced dual unionism against other left-wing parties (forming rival unions within the same workforce), a form of factional hardball that only strengthened employers' hands. This heavy-handed, top-down leadership was unacceptable to Cahan regardless of what ends it served.

As a socialist journalist, Cahan was just as repelled by the "scholastic quarrels of Yiddish radicalism" playing out in the Yiddish press as he was by De Leon's divisive tactics.⁵ In Roland Sanders's words, his credo was, "What was socialism about if not the people? And what did the people care about partisan disputes?"⁶ At the *Arbeiter Tzeitung*, he created a popular feature called the "*Proletarishker Maggid*" ("Proletarian Preacher") that exemplified his ideal of the intellectual as "folk teacher," speaking plainly and drawing on everyday examples. Cahan's *maggid* put a socialist gloss on the weekly Torah portion, denouncing Jewish bosses who exploit Jewish workers with Joseph's line, "I am your brother whom you sold into slavery," or comparing breaking a strike to breaking the Sabbath:

Today our Biblical portion is about strikes. The cloak makers still have a little strike to finish up, the shirt makers are on strike, the pants makers are striking, even our teacher Moses called a mass meeting to talk about a strike. *Va'yak'hel Moish*e, Moses gathered the children of Israel together and said to them: *Sheysbes yommin te'asseh m'lokhob*, more than six days a week you shouldn't work for the bosses, the seventh day you shall rest.⁷

The *maggid's* colloquial language is significant, too, since when Cahan arrived in Manhattan in 1882 many radical intellectuals thought of Yiddish as a crude "*zhargon*," unsuitable for serious discussions. Russian Jewish intellectuals favored the Russian language, in which many of them had been educated, either in Tsarist schools or the socialist underground, or "*daitchmerisch*," a stilted, over-Germanized variety of Yiddish favored by those who wanted to build up a Yiddish cultural sphere while maintaining a traditionally learned style. Cahan was unusual in his early insistence on the "*mamaloshn*," the Yiddish "mother tongue" as it was spoken in the home. The *mamaloshn* suited his preference for concrete examples over

⁵ Howe, *World of Our Fathers*, 524.

⁶ Sanders, *Downtown Jews*, 206.

⁷ Quoted in David Philip Shuldiner, *Of Moses and Marx: Folk Ideology Within the Jewish Labor Movement in the United States* (Westport, CT: Bergin and Garvey, 1989), 40.

abstract principles, since it could be richly descriptive of everyday life, while many theoretical terms were available only as German or Russian loanwords. Here again Cahan cared most about popularization.

While some writers chose Yiddish in order to preserve a distinctive Jewish culture, for Cahan it was simply the best way to reach the audience he knew best. He was perfectly happy to publish Yinglishisms like “*Ich vel scrobbin dem floor, klinen die vindes, un polishen dem stov*,” if that was how people talked.⁸ He even looked forward to the day when Jewish workers would speak English, a language in which they would have wider access to information. In an English piece that Cahan wrote for the *Commercial Advertiser* in 1898, he describes how, when Jews read Yiddish newspapers, “they become interested in the world outside of their own district and become ambitious to know English in order to read the English papers. After they have learned that, they discard Yiddish altogether and read nothing but English.”⁹ In the preface to a Yiddish *History of the United States* (1910), he writes:

We will not be drawn into a discussion concerning the ultimate fate of Yiddish in America. The children of our immigrants do not speak Yiddish, but English (and there’s no use bemoaning this); as long, however, as there are Jewish immigrants to America, Yiddish will be the language of the majority.¹⁰

Hostile, like many Yiddish journalists, to excessive cultural nationalism, Cahan’s passion for intellectually engaging his fellow Jews merrily ignored stylistic boundaries.¹¹

While the radical Yiddish press suffered, in Cahan’s view, from esoteric infighting that baffled the common reader, the wider world of Yiddish journalism was also plagued by the opposite problem, the use of *shund* (“trash”) to appeal to the lowest common denominator. Doctrinal squabbling was what moved him to leave the Yiddish press—in 1897, Cahan

⁸ Cahan, *Education of Abraham Cahan*, 356.

⁹ Cahan, *Grandma Never Lived in America*, 290.

¹⁰ Quoted in Werner Sollors and Marc Shell, eds. *The Multilingual Anthology of American Literature: A Reader of Original Texts with English Translations* (New York and London: New York University Press, 2000).

¹¹ On cultural nationalism in the Yiddish press, see Philip Joseph, “Literary Migration: Abraham Cahan’s ‘The Imported Bridegroom’ and the Alternative of American Fiction,” *MELUS* 27, no. 4 (2002): 3–32.

departed the *Forward*, which he had helped create in order to escape De Leon's combativeness, when its board insisted on running denunciations of De Leon very much in his own style—but he had been concerned about shund, too, especially regarding the serialized fiction that ran in many papers. Seeking a middle way between propaganda and shund, Cahan began working for Lincoln Steffens at the *Commercial Advertiser*, who was wrestling with similar problems.

As Steffens saw it, New York's English newspapers were polarized between the yellow journalism of Hearst and Pulitzer and the timid "just the facts" style of the *Evening Post* and *New York Times*. Steffens, who like Cahan brought a sense of literary vocation to the business of journalism, wanted the news to both delight and instruct, and he sought "fellows [...] whose professor of English believed they were going to be able to write and who themselves wanted to be writers, provided, however, that they did not intend to be journalists."¹² He assigned Cahan to the police beat, telling him, as he recalled, "Here, Cahan, is a report that a man has murdered his wife [...] If you can find out just what happened between that wedding and this murder, you will have a novel for yourself and a short story for me."¹³ Steffens's literary sensibility was basically sentimentalist; "the true ideal for an artist and for a newspaper," he wrote, is "to get the news so completely and to report it so humanly that the reader will see himself in the other fellow's place."¹⁴ At the same time, Steffens's sympathy was "scientific": "Mercy is scientific," Steffens argued. "If our evils have causes," if there are "diseases" or "temptations" to account for individual "crimes," then "the doctrine of forgiveness instead of punishment for the sinner is sound, scientific, and—it is natural. It appeals to some instinct in man."¹⁵ Cahan did not share Steffens's literary ideas nor his scientific theory of behavioral determinism, nor, indeed, his general concern with sentimental issues of sympathy and forgiveness. Steffens wanted to present the facts of city life in a way that would lead his readers to feel for their fellows, while Cahan wanted his readers to think. Nonetheless, Cahan learned much at the *Commercial Advertiser* about how to advance a political point without actually stating it, allowing the facts to coalesce into stories.

¹² Lincoln Steffens, *The Autobiography of Lincoln Steffens* (Berkeley, CA: Heyday Books, 2005), 316.

¹³ Steffens, *Autobiography of Lincoln Steffens*, 317.

¹⁴ Steffens, *Autobiography of Lincoln Steffens*, 317.

¹⁵ Steffens, *Autobiography of Lincoln Steffens*, 317, 671.

On his return to Yiddish journalism, Cahan brought the *Commercial Advertiser's* human interest ethos with him. When he resumed the editorship of the *Forward* in 1902, he warned the staff that, given the exodus of Jewish readers to more attention-grabbing English papers, “if the *Forward* remains what it is, it won’t get very far. It won’t get to a very large audience because it doesn’t interest itself in the things that the masses are interested in when they aren’t preoccupied with their daily struggle for bread.”¹⁶ Compelling stories would draw eyes to the *Forward's* pages, and socialism would be expounded only when it did not detract from that overriding concern; gone was the pushier style of the “*Proletarishker Maggid*.” The first issue under Cahan’s new regime clearly reflected these priorities. It led with an announcement that “the news and all the articles will be written in pure, plain *Yiddishe Yiddish*, and we hope that every line will be interesting to all Yiddish-speaking people, big and little,” and ran quasi-literary stories in the *Commercial Advertiser* mold, such as “In Love with *Yiddishe Kinder*,” a collection of vignettes about interfaith romances. It also included pieces with a more direct connection to socialism that still led with anecdotes, such as “Protzentniks [Percenter] in Sweatshops,” about bosses who made high-interest payday loans to their own employees.¹⁷ As the *Forward* flourished under Cahan’s leadership, no feature represented his vision better than the “*Bintel Brief*” (“bundle of letters”), a write-in column that Cahan hoped would turn the public from “readers of the *Forverts*” into “writers for the *Forverts*,” filling the paper with “stories ‘from life itself,’” “curious events of the sort that would be created not on the desk of a writer but in the dwellings, in the factories, in the cafes – every place where life puts on its own plays.” “The plan,” Cahan recalled, was “to extract from reality as many interesting events as possible.”¹⁸ At first, Cahan tried asking the public for “true novels,” literary accounts of real events, but he found the submissions overwritten and, ironically, insufficiently realist. Here, at least, was a limit to his willingness to bow to popular taste. The feature changed to a standard advice column, with letters from readers seeking counsel and Cahan (or perhaps, at times, some other “Editor”) giving a reply. Sometimes Cahan would turn the exchange in a socialist direction, as when he ascribed a husband’s jealousy of his

¹⁶ Quoted in Sanders, *Downtown Jews*, 250.

¹⁷ Sanders, *Downtown Jews*, 254.

¹⁸ Quoted in Steven Cassidy, “‘A Bintel Brief’: The Russian Intellectual Meets the American Mass Media,” *East European Jewish Affairs* 34, no. 1 (2004), 104.

wife's reading to "the whole dark enslavement of the female sex of today's working class" and the couple's "condition as a worker's family in today's order."¹⁹ More often, though, he simply offered practical advice with no obvious political valence.

The concept of "interest" plays a crucial role in Cahan's ideas about journalism and, as we shall see, about literature. We have already seen him call the "*Bintel Brief*" a mine of "interesting events" and warn the *Forward* staff that it must "interest itself in the things that the masses are interested in." (He uses the Yiddish cognate "*interes.*") While the word choice in these cases may seem unremarkable, Cahan uses "interest" as a definite term of art in the long section of *Bleter fun Mayn Leben* devoted to his school years. His teachers at the VTTI, he recounts, had been hired based on their willingness to follow a curriculum that advanced the official ideas of Tsarism. The student was required to learn by rote from approved textbooks, and was expected to become, as Cahan puts it, a mere "reading machine" or "phonograph." Those who put ideas in their own words, even approved ideas, were given failing grades, for the purpose of the school was as much to teach them who was permitted to think as what thoughts were acceptable.²⁰ (Cahan is probably recalling the VTTI when, in *The White Terror and the Red*, his protagonist is radicalized by seeing a teacher exiled to Siberia for deviating from the approved textbook.) Summing up his critique of the institute, he writes that "modern pedagogy condemns memorizing entire lessons," a practice which "stifled able children and deadened their initiative" because "interest precedes retention, not otherwise." "Interest precedes retention, not otherwise": this could have been Cahan's motto during his feuds with the De Leonists and the Yiddish grammar purists, during his foray with Steffens, and when he conceived the "*Proletarishker Maggid*" and the "*Bintel Brief*."²¹

THE HERBARTIANS AND THE DOCTRINE OF INTEREST

"Interest" was perhaps the most important term in pedagogical circles during the 1890s and 1900s, when Cahan developed his major journalistic and aesthetic ideas. It was, specifically, the rallying cry of the Herbartians,

¹⁹ Quoted in Cassedy, "A Bintel Brief," 114–115.

²⁰ Cahan, *Education of Abraham Cahan*, 112.

²¹ Cahan, *Education of Abraham Cahan*, 124.

a transatlantic movement based on the philosophy of Johann Friedrich Herbart with German, British, and American branches. In Germany, the Herbartians had a considerable effect on the school system, and were internationally prominent as theorists of education. In America, though less immediately involved with schooling, the Herbartians influenced educational thought via the widely used normal school textbook of Charles de Garmo and Frank McMurry, and via the conventions and publications of the National Herbart Society. The Herbartians were among the first to challenge the traditional American pedagogy of mental discipline, which, like the pedagogy of the VTTI, emphasized rote memorization. Rather than asserting strict control over the contents of lessons, though, mental discipline was almost indifferent to them, focusing instead on strengthening various mental “faculties” such as memory, attention, and, above all, willpower. Against this theory the Herbartians advanced the “Doctrine of Interest,” the notion that no real education can occur unless students are drawn to their lessons rather than forcibly marched through them. Dewey, writing for the *National Herbart Society Yearbook* in 1895, called this “profound contradiction in current educational ideas” the “lawsuit of interest versus effort.”²² Although it is unclear if Cahan was reading the Herbartians themselves, his assertion that “modern pedagogy” finds that “interest precedes retention” suggests a fairly specific awareness of the debates in which they were engaged.

Herbartianism is best understood as a reorientation of the romantic pedagogy of Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi for the purpose of reinforcing, rather than challenging, social conventions. Strongly influenced by Rousseau’s *Emile*, Pestalozzi believed that children are inherently disposed to learn from their natural environment, but that as civilization estranged them from nature, the natural learning process needed to be artificially recreated in the school. The chief feature of natural learning, for Pestalozzi, was continuity, the absence of disjunctive leaps from one idea to the next. Children naturally move from simple observations to abstract ideas, he believed, in a gradual unbroken manner. As one educational historian puts it, “from the measurement of sound one is led to the study of rhythm in music, while from the measurement of form we are led to

²² John Dewey, “Interest in Relation to Training of the Will,” in *National Herbart Society Supplement to the Yearbook for 1895* (Bloomington, IL: Public School Publishing Company, 1896), 6.

geometry in drawing,” and so on in other subjects.²³ A Pestalozzian teacher would begin instruction in drawing, for example, by asking children to observe simple shapes such as long and short lines and different types of curves. From there she would move to two-dimensional figures such as circles and squares, then complex figures composed of many shapes, and so on. Pestalozzi taught all subjects in this way, never introducing a concept that depended for its full understanding on a simpler concept that had not yet been fully internalized. The bedrock beneath the simplest concepts, he believed, was immediate sense impressions. Any abstraction that was not derived from these impressions in an unbroken manner was never really understood, he held, so the educator’s task was to devise continuous pedagogical pathways leading from various sense impressions to the abstract ideas that she eventually wanted to teach. Pestalozzi thus favored the “object lesson,” in which particular objects, sometimes natural objects such as plants, sometimes special objects designed specifically for Pestalozzian pedagogy, were introduced in order to initiate this process.

Pestalozzi’s ideas about the ordering of subject matter lent themselves to a kind of superficial hybridization with mental discipline, because of the latter’s relative indifference to subject matter. In a series of *Forum* articles from 1891 to 1893, Joseph Mayer Rice describes students undergoing memory drills about musical notation in which information seems to be arranged in a Pestalozzian order, beginning with the definition of a musical note as “a sign representing a length or duration in time” (rendered by a harried student as “Notsinrepti length d’ration time”). In the same article, Rice describes children being similarly drilled on the difference between straight and crooked lines, an early step in Pestalozzian art instruction.²⁴ The Herbartians, too, would integrate Pestalozzi’s ideas into an educational philosophy quite alien to his original intentions, but in a far more systematic way.

While Pestalozzi was largely self-educated, Herbart held the philosophy chair at the University of Königsberg, and, after visiting Pestalozzi’s schools, he worked the latter’s insights about continuity into a far-reaching philosophical framework. Herbart’s psychology (which in some ways anticipates much later informational accounts of consciousness) is thoroughly

²³Dewey, “Interest in Relation to Training of the Will,” 6.

²⁴Lawrence A. Cremin, *The Transformation of the School: Progressivism in American Education, 1876–1957* (New York: Vintage, 1974), 3–7.

connectionist, and describes the mind as entirely a thing of patterns, of links between basic mental elements whose monadic nature is ultimately inscrutable. Thus, being solely a matter of connecting many nodes, psychology is essentially geometrical; the qualitative variety of conscious experience (“presentations” or “*Vorstellungen*”) expresses changes in the underlying mental geometry. As Dewey puts it in the chapter of *Democracy and Education* devoted to Herbartianism, all mental events, “attention, memory, thinking, perception, even the sentiments,” arise, for Herbart, from the mathematical interactions, the “arrangements, associations, and complications” of presentations. “Perception, for example, is the complication of presentations which result from the rise of old presentations to greet and combine with new ones; memory is the evoking of an old presentation above the threshold of consciousness by getting entangled with another presentation, etc. Pleasure is the result of reinforcement among the independent activities of presentations; pain of their pulling different ways, etc.”²⁵ As this last sentence of Dewey’s suggests, Herbart’s ideal of moral development is a harmony among the mind’s patterns, which he describes as a unification of the will. Herbart proposes a five-pronged approach to unifying not just the individual will, but the harmony of many wills in society. These all, from the introspective ideal of “Inner Freedom” to the outward-directed ideal of “Retribution,” apply two criteria: eliminating discordances within or among wills, and expanding the will’s “magnitude,” i.e., the “variety of objects compassed.” Pleasure, for Herbart, is the mind’s response when its innate impulse to grow along these lines is satisfied.

Herbart’s fundamental pedagogical concept, “apperception,” updates Pestalozzi’s idea of continuity in light of this program of unifying the will. Apperception is not simply the appearance of an object (or idea) before the mind’s eye, but is the interaction between such an object and the mind’s preexisting geometrical structure. The American Herbartian Charles de Garmo describes apperception with an extended architectural metaphor. Each new perception reacts with “the ideas possessed by the mind,” he writes. “It repels everything contrary to it that may be in consciousness, and attracts or recalls all similar things, which now rise [to meet it] with all their connections.” The new perception is, for de Garmo, a kind of magnet that draws toward itself every appropriately

²⁵ John Dewey, *Democracy and Education* (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications [1915] 2004), 54.

charged element within the mind. If it exerts enough attractive force on these elements, it can dislodge them from their existing arrangements and cause them to be rearranged into a structure of greater unity and magnitude. De Garmo's figure for a perfect mental structure is an arch: "The stimulated mass of ideas raised simultaneously" by the new perception "may be likened to an arched vault extending in all upward directions from the centre. As long as this arching continues, the central perception has, by virtue of its stimulating power, the controlling influence in consciousness." At first, the perception attracts ideas that are fresh in the mind; if these ideas are consistent with the perception, then they become part of the "arch." Many of these ideas, however, will be contrary to the perception, and throw their weight against it. If the perception is too weak or vague, then this opposition may end the process of apperception, and only a small rearrangement of mental contents will have occurred. If the perception is strong enough, however, then the opposing ideas will be "check[ed]," and older ideas that accord better with the perception will be stirred up, "rise, and gradually form the apex of the arch," which "becomes the more raised or pointed the longer the entire process lasts." Even a strong perception, though, is not powerful enough to rearrange the *entire* mind, so the new structure is "adjusted into the system of ideas already in the mind, and is thus assimilated or apperceived" into the larger mental architecture.²⁶ Depending on the fit between existing ideas and new perceptions, this rearrangement may bring greater unity to the mind, or it may simply add complications. The educator's job is to manage the apperceptive process so that the former, rather than the latter, results.

From this psychological theory, which is properly Herbart's, the later Herbartians developed applications in classroom teaching and curriculum design. Their most lasting innovation (still sometimes found in education school textbooks today) was the "Five Steps" lesson plan, designed to encourage harmonious, mind-unifying apperception. When introducing a new idea, the Herbartian teacher was to follow this procedure:

- I. "Preparation"—Before introducing a new idea, the teacher reminds students of similar ideas with which they are already familiar.
- II. "Presentation"—The teacher reveals the idea itself, using physical objects and images when possible.

²⁶ Charles De Garmo, *Herbart and the Herbartians* (New York: Charles Scriber's Sons, 1896), 34–35.

- III. "Generalization": The idea is compared to the familiar ideas from Step I, reinforcing some and forcing the modification of others.
- IV. "Application": The idea is extended to cover novel examples.
- V. "Recapitulation": The teacher quickly runs over the first four steps again. (This step is sometimes omitted in Herbartian lesson plans.)

Dozens of lessons following this format can be found in volumes like M. Fennell's *Lessons from the Herbartian Method* (1902), on topics ranging from "The Spider," "The Horse," and "Sugar" to "The Transitive and Intransitive Verbs," "The Career of Oliver Cromwell," "The Physical Features of Switzerland," "The Mercurial Thermometer," and "Quadratic Equations." These lessons are too long to reproduce here, but Dewey gives a condensed example of a Herbartian lesson in *How We Think* (1910):

- I. Preparation: "When pupils take up the study of rivers, they are first questioned about streams or brooks with which they are already acquainted; if they have never seen any, they may be asked about water running in gutters. Somehow 'apperceptive masses' are stirred that will assist in getting hold of the new subject."
- II. Presentation: "Pictures and relief models of rivers are shown; vivid oral descriptions are given; if possible, the children are taken to see an actual river."
- III. Generalization: "The local river is compared with, perhaps, the Amazon, the St. Lawrence, the Rhine; by this comparison accidental and unessential features are eliminated and the river concept is formed: the elements involved in the river-meaning are gathered together and formulated."
- IV. Application: "The resulting principle is fixed in mind and is clarified by being applied to other streams, say to the Thames, the Po, the Connecticut."
- V. (Dewey omits Recapitulation.)²⁷

Note that, like Pestalozzi, the Herbartians prefer to begin with objects rather than concepts, since they regard them as more psychologically elemental.

²⁷ John Dewey, *How We Think* (Boston: D.C. Heath, 1910), 202–203.

In curriculum design, the chief Herbartian concepts, “concentration” and “correlation,” also build on the theory of apperception. The preexisting arrangement of the mind, which determines how a new perception is received, is known as the “apperceptive mass,” and Herbartian curriculum theory revolves around the upbuilding of shared apperceptive masses among students. “Concentration” involves the development of a dense apperceptive mass by locating a certain subject such as history, science, or literature at the center of the curriculum, as a base from which forays can be made into other subjects. (Much of the internal debate among the American Herbartians concerned which subject should be the main concentration.) “Correlation” involves presenting tributary subjects (i.e., those that are not the main concentration) according to the relationship to the central subject. For example, some Herbartians suggested that Longfellow’s *Hiawatha* could be the central subject for one school year, with study of the poem leading outward to geography (lakes, rivers, forests), history (of Native Americans and European contact), and so on. The overall goal was the presentation of knowledge as continuous and unified, each part related to many others, in contrast to the mental discipline curriculum’s tendency toward seemingly arbitrary lists of factoids.

Herbartianism was appealing from several different perspectives within the nascent progressive education movement. Like G. Stanley Hall and the “child study” movement, Herbartianism promised a pedagogy in line with the latest findings of laboratory psychology, which were undercutting the faculty psychology of mental discipline. While “learning by heart, which occupied so large a place in the traditional public school curriculum, was always defended on the ground that it strengthened the memory” and, in general, “our educational literature as well as our practice, is completely adjusted to the notion that the mind is an aggregate of more or less independent faculties,” De Garmo argues that these are not “the conclusions of the current educational psychology.”²⁸ Like the social efficiency educators and other “administrative progressives,” too, the American Herbartians promised to save time and money, as a teacher trained in Herbartian methods “will secure the attention and order of a large class without difficulty, and his lessons will be better arranged so as to teach a larger amount in a shorter space of time.”²⁹

²⁸ Henry L. Felkin and Emmie Felkin, “Introduction,” in *The Science of Education and The Aesthetic Revelation of the World*, by Johann Friedrich Herbart, trans. Felkin and Felkin (Boston: D.C. Heath, 1896), x.; Harold B. Dunkel, *Herbart and Herbartianism: an Educational Ghost Story* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), 23–26.

²⁹ Oscar Hart, “Preface,” in Herbart, *Science of Education*, vii.

Finally, Herbartianism played into the ideal of social action that was (as discussed in the Introduction) so central to intellectuals' conception of progressivism across many fields. The characterological ideal of mental discipline was the self-governing individual, whose moral and intellectual integrity would make America a self-governing society. Walter Lippmann mockingly dubbed this figure the "omnicompetent democrat," the good citizen who did not need to learn anything in particular because he was clever enough to puzzle through any question as it arose. Rejecting this ideal, US progressives looked to the school to provide social coordination in an increasingly interconnected and technologically sophisticated economy. They wanted schools to provide specific, up-to-date skills and information, and to actively encourage students to see themselves as participants in a shared national project. In a democratic context, of course, it is difficult for the schools to promulgate a moral vision without violating students' freedom of conscience, and educational philosophers have repeatedly sought ways to frame such efforts in the politically neutral terms of science, efficiency, or good character. The Herbartian ideal of the unified will, operating at both individual and social levels, provided such terms. De Garmo, for example, asserts that "the ultimate purpose of the Herbartians may be said to be the development of character, not in a narrow subjective sense, but in a broad social one. They seek to fit the child for every important phase of family, social, civil, religious, and economic life – to develop, in short, the whole boy or girl."³⁰ As with other progressive education movements, though, the American Herbartians' approach to democratic character education shared many of the qualities of covert, disavowed discipline that critics have noted in the *Bildung* tradition: the gestures in the direction of personal autonomy that turn out, on closer inspection, to be ruses of power; the simultaneous recognition and dismissal of individual difference. Note how De Garmo slips from developing character to fitting the child for social life, as if these two are almost indistinguishable.

Like the classical *Bildung* theorists, the Herbartians deployed the aesthetic at this particular juncture, to describe what they hoped would be a convergence between individual autonomy and socialization. For Herbart, the basis of ethics is the unification of the will, and this was also the basis of aesthetics, which he sees as a rule-bound process of judging the fitness of abstract "relations between elements" in the mind. "A single note, say

³⁰Dunkel, *Herbart and the Herbartians*, vi.

middle C, is not in and by itself [...] pleasing or displeasing” for Herbart, but “becomes so only in relation to another note” in a chord. Just as music theory describes intrinsically good and bad arrangements of notes even when abstracted from the specific instruments involved, Herbart’s general theory of aesthetics describes good and bad arrangements of the monadic constituents of the mind. This sense of good and bad is simultaneously ethical and aesthetic, or, as the educational historian Herbert Dunkel puts it, for Herbart “ethics [is] an application of aesthetics,” relating to the arrangement of social rather than, say, tonal elements.³¹ Meanwhile, the aesthetic also turns out to be identical with the pedagogical concept of interest. Interest, for the Herbartians, is simply the feeling that always accompanies the will’s unification in a successful act of apperception during which (in Dewey’s words) “ideas fuse; the new and the old join hands.” Dewey continues, summarizing the Herbartians: “This fusion (the essence of apperception) gives a certain pleasure, the sense of ease. Hence a peculiar kind of feeling, known as interest. The demand, not for any special idea, but for the repetition of the apperceptive process, for the repetition of this junction between new and old, is interest.”³² “Interest,” that is, is identical with “pleasure” caused by aesthetic harmony among the elements of the mind, and is also identical with the learning process itself.

Thus, interest proves to be grounded both in the subjectivity of feeling and aesthetic response, and in the objectivity of the Herbartians’ geometrized theories of psychological and social harmony. While to child study enthusiasts like G. Stanley Hall and Francis Parker the Doctrine of Interest meant that knowledge is only retained if it is acquired out of personal curiosity, the Herbartians held that interest could always be generated by a skilled teacher based on awareness of her students’ apperceptive masses (i.e., their previous educational experiences). It was, accordingly, possible for a teacher to plan interesting lessons for any group of students, once the students’ initial apperceptive mass was established; it was not for individual students to find ideas interesting or not according to personal taste. When Francis Parker, an early pioneer of progressive education, argued that educators should organize the curriculum around the interests of children as they were expressed by the children themselves, Charles de Garmo shot back, in his capacity as president of the Herbart Society, that the curriculum’s organizing principle was not the needs of the child, but rather “the

³¹ Dunkel, *Herbart and the Herbartians*, 5, 87.

³² Dewey, “Interest in Relation to Training of the Will,” 35.

principle of philosophical unity that binds all nature into one,” that is, the geometrical harmony of the will.³³ In response to such statements Dewey declared that “Herbartianism seems to me essentially a schoolmaster’s psychology, not the psychology of a child.” Born of Prussian regimentation, Dewey argued, “It is the natural expression of a nation laying great emphasis upon authority and upon the formation of individual character in distinct and recognized subordination to the ethical demands made [...] by that authority. It is not the psychology of a nation which professes to believe that every individual has within him the principle of authority, and that order means coordination, not subordination.”³⁴

The validity of these criticisms could be seen in Herbartian lesson plans, one recurring feature of which was the act of drawing ideas from the class. Ostensibly, drawing from the class was a way to ensure that the course of the lesson was dictated by the students’ interests. The line between the teacher drawing out an answer and suggesting it herself could be quite thin, however. In the Application step of Fennell’s lesson on Oliver Cromwell, for instance, the teacher is told to “Draw from class that, though Cromwell succeeded in acquiring power, it did not make him happy, because not lawfully acquired.”³⁵ Fennell disregards the possibility that the class might include, say, students with anarchistic or revolutionary sympathies. Fennell implicitly encourages the teacher to go fishing for responses that agree with her own, to dismiss others, and to treat the resulting conclusions as coming from the class rather than herself. The Herbartian notion of interest thus proves, like classical *Bildung*, to be a technology of social control, a way of imposing order that presents itself as a way of accommodating individual preferences.

CAHAN’S AESTHETICS: THE THRILL OF TRUTH

Although Cahan was probably not a close student of the Herbartians’ works, his pedagogical ideas resemble theirs and reflect their wide, if somewhat indirect, influence on educational discourse. Specifically, his concept of interest-based pedagogy and his vision of the relationship

³³William F. Pinar et al., *Understanding Curriculum. an Introduction to the Study of Historical and Contemporary Curriculum Discourses* (New York: Peter Lang, 1995), 87.

³⁴Dewey, “Interest in Relation to Training of the Will,” 29.

³⁵M. Fennell, *Notes of Lessons from the Herbartian Method* (London and New York: Longmans, Green, 1902), 108.

among teacher, student, and curriculum resemble theirs. Like them, he believes that great pains should be taken to present new ideas in terms of familiar ones and that concrete images should be preferred to abstract formulations. He shares their view that the teacher should entice and cajole her students through a complex curriculum, but that, ultimately, this curriculum must be followed regardless of student preferences. He shares, too, the resulting ambivalence about the extent of students' agency in the learning process, about the difference that their wishes really make—that is, about whether they are the subjects or the objects of education. As with the Herbartians, for Cahan this ambivalence stems from a psychological theory that makes the mind an objective, predictable thing, so that students can be trusted to arrive at certain preordained conclusions even when not overtly forced to do so. Finally, like the Herbartians, and like the theorists of classical *Bildung*, Cahan contains this unstable relationship between individual agency and cultural authority within the category of the aesthetic, which attests to both the freedom and the determination of the mind's spontaneous, uncoerced responses to experience.

While Herbartianism's psychological and aesthetic theory is rationalistic, even mathematical, Cahan's is empirical and biological. He shared, for a time at least, the widespread US enthusiasm for Herbert Spencer, rejecting his laissez-faire social Darwinism but admiring his attempt to link the study of society to an evolutionary account of the material universe, from the formation of the solar system through the development of life and consciousness. Cahan was convinced by Spencer, as Ronald Sanders puts it, that "patient inquiry would discover a key to social behavior that applied equally to ants, primitive societies, and the chaotic sophistication of life in a city like New York," and he became determined to write a grand synthesis of Darwin and Marx, showing how the laws of evolution led irresistibly to socialism.³⁶ Although he abandoned this project, he remained true to its spirit. In 1894, under Cahan's editorship, the socialist monthly *Di Tsukunft* declared its inaugural issue that "the workman must know more than how he is oppressed economically and swindled politically [...] He must also understand how mankind attained its present level, how it lived earlier and how it developed. We want him to understand Darwin's teachings about the struggle for existence equally with Karl Marx's theory of surplus value."³⁷ In short, for Cahan, socialism was a science. Responding

³⁶ Sanders, *Downtown Jews*, 180.

³⁷ Rischin, *Promised City*, 152.

in 1904 to a series of lectures by the scholar Hayim Zhitlovsky on “Marxism and Synthetic Monism,” Cahan waved away Zhitlovsky’s philosophical criticisms of Marx on the ground that, as Irving Howe summarizes, “Marx was not a philosopher at all, but rather an analyst of society,” and that because Marxism did not depend on “philosophical claims,” it was incapable of philosophical self-contradiction.³⁸

He saw aesthetics, too, as a branch of evolutionary science. In “Realism,” an 1889 *Workman’s Advocate* essay, he posits that the mind has evolved a special pleasure response, which he calls the “thrill of truth,” that is activated by authentic acts of imitation. Perception, he argues, always involves the construction of an inner image of an object, and imitation (his example is realistic painting) works by evoking inner images that are, to the viewer, indistinguishable from really seeing the object being imitated. Thus, as Cahan puts it in a summary of “Realism” in *Bleter fun Mayn Leben*, “the power of realistic art arises from the pleasure we derive from recognizing the truth as it is mirrored by art [...] it is truth we admire and that is the source of aesthetic enjoyment.”³⁹ The basis of aesthetics, for Cahan, is thus an empirical correspondence between mental structures that leaves no room for divergent interpretations.

It was Cahan’s conception of socialism as scientific that allowed him to assign radical political significance to an idea of art that was grounded in verisimilar representations of concrete objects for which “lifelikeness clothed in the simplest forms of expression” is “the *sine qua non*.”⁴⁰ In science (at least on Cahan’s baldly positivist understanding) if a theory is correct, then all accurate observations of nature will lend it further support. So, because socialism is a correct scientific theory, it gains strength from any work of art that faithfully imitates human life. Realism, therefore, is inherently opposed to capitalism. “It is truth that we admire and that is the source of our artistic delight,” Cahan writes; “but capitalist critics don’t want the truth. It disturbs the class they serve.”⁴¹ This means, for Cahan, that art can advance ideas without actually having ideas; as he puts it as an essay on “The Younger Russian Writers” (quoting the critic Nikolai Dubrolyubov), “A work of art may be the exponent of an idea, not because the author conceives this idea upon addressing himself to his task, but

³⁸ Howe, *World of Our Fathers*, 241.

³⁹ Cahan, *Education of Abraham Cahan*, 405.

⁴⁰ Cahan, *Education of Abraham Cahan*, 405.

⁴¹ Cahan, *Education of Abraham Cahan*, 405.

because he has been struck by *those facts of life from which the idea follows as a natural inference.*"⁴² Thus a writer like Chekov, who claims to have no political ideas but is a master of realistic observation, advances the socialist cause more than Ignati Nicolayevitch Potapenko, a more overtly radical writer but a sloppy observer. (In "Realism," Cahan singles out William Dean Howells as another good realist who serves socialism despite himself.)

In Russia, Cahan claims, conditions favor this kind of indirectly socialist realism. Under Tsarist censorship, he writes, "the reformer is forced to call upon the novel to convey his message. This is the characteristic feature of Russian letters." While elsewhere radical literature tends toward "that species of sermon-novel which is a bad sermon and a worse novel," in Russia "sermonizing is just what the censor will not allow," and so "the novelist must try to make his pictures talk, to let life expose its own wounds." "For," Cahan continues, "like those well-bred ladies of whom Thackeray tells us that they did not mind looking at the trousers of hundreds of men, though they would have been shocked to hear the word uttered, the censor, as a rule, does not prevent a subject of the Czar from painting a spade, but he will not let him call it by its name." At the same time that their censorship suppresses the overt expression of ideas, it also creates an expectation, "in a country where the poem must take the place of the editorial," that fiction will offer "a criticism of life," and that the "facts" of a story are always meant to be politically suggestive. For Cahan, this reliance on suggestion rather than declaration does not introduce any political ambiguity because the process of "natural inference" is predictable, following clear psychological rules and bound to agree with clear social-scientific conclusions. (In this, he anticipates Steffens's ideas about "mercy" having a scientific basis, and may indeed have shaped Steffens's thinking on the subject.)

Beyond supplying accurate social data, realism has political value for Cahan because of the kind of interest it elicits from the audience. In a series of *Arbeiter Tzeitung* essays that ran from December 1893 through January 1894 on the difference between true literature and *shund*, Cahan asks "How should the novel create pleasure for the reader? How should it arouse his interest?" In *shund*, interest is so focused on "events" that "if a murder could take place, for example, without a murderer and without a

⁴²Abraham Cahan, "The Younger Russian Writers." *The Forum*. September 1899: 119-128. Emphasis mine.

victim,” Cahan writes, “it wouldn’t matter because the murder is the main point of the story. The more unusual, the more densely intertwined, the more frightening the events are, the better.” “This is what the interest consists of,” he laments, “when you look only for a story in a novel.” Shund’s interest, that is, ignores character, and isolates it from event. Conversely, as Jules Chametzky observes, Cahan disdained the “genteel chromo-sentimentality” of the prestigious English-language magazines that portrayed idealized characters and relationships instead of accurately observed “realities of the spirit.” In realism, for Cahan, interest arises from the interplay *between* character and event. As Ellen Kellman summarizes the *Arbeiter Tzeitung* essays, Cahan argues that, in realism, “through the many details that comprise each moment of a character’s consciousness, the reader comes to understand the emotions that drive him or her, and through this, to empathize profoundly with the character. Rather than focusing on the events that take place in the story, an appreciative reader savors the nuances in the writing and is moved by the characters’ emotional responses to events as they take place.”⁴³ Realism shows how everyday things become meaningful to people, and, thus, in addition to supplying psychological data points (which, like all data points, advance socialism), it builds the habit of finding greater significance in simple facts, of pursuing the “natural inference” on which socialist art depends. So, like the Herbartians, Cahan distinguishes between what people seem to find interesting (sentimentalism and shund) and what truly deserves to be called interesting (realism).

Cahan’s idea of realism, centered as it is on imitation, makes recognition, rather than revelation, the artist’s chief concern. As he puts it in an 1896 *Tsukunft* article, “The artist–novelist paints an image that the ordinary man recognizes but that the ordinary man himself would not be capable of summing up in his thoughts. The artist selects those conditions that underscore, draw attention to, certain interesting phenomena in the life of men.”⁴⁴ There is knowledge latent in the reader’s mind, Cahan argues, of which the reader herself is not consciously aware, so that the

⁴³ Ellen Kellman, *The Newspaper Novel in the Jewish Daily Forward, 1900–1940: Fiction As Entertainment and Serious Literature* (Ph.D. diss, Columbia University, 2001), 33, 39. Another of Cahan’s discussions of realism, from the *Commercial Advertiser* period, is quoted at length in Moses Rischin, “Abraham Cahan and the New York *Commercial Advertiser*: A Study in Acculturation,” *Publications of the American Jewish Historical Society* 43, no. 1 (1953): 10–36.

⁴⁴ Quoted in Cassedy, “Bintel Brief,” 117.

artist must acquaint her with her own knowledge. This means that if the artist knows things of which the reader is truly ignorant, she cannot share her knowledge without violating realist strictures. She must descend to the reader's level. As Cahan once remarked, "If you want to pick up a child from the ground, you first have to bend down to him. If you don't, how will you reach him?"⁴⁵ The risk, of course, was that once the artist had bent down and grasped the "child," there was no guarantee that she would be able stand upright again. As Franco Moretti, Marc Redfield, and Joseph Slaughter have argued, Schiller's model of aesthetic education requires the ephebe (the person seeking aesthetic education) to give herself over to the exemplar (the provider of aesthetic education) without first certifying that the exemplar is trustworthy, since by definition the ephebe does not possess the knowledge that would allow her to judge the exemplar.⁴⁶ Cahan's model of aesthetic education, while suffering from the same problem, also exposes itself to its opposite: the risk that the exemplar, in lowering himself to the level of the ephebe, may not be promoting learning but only removing knowledge from the conversation. Cahan cannot decide what kind of authority the artist (or journalist) can legitimately claim, nor what deference he owes to the tastes and capacities of the public. According to the *Forward* writer Binyomen Bialostotski, Cahan "*wanted to love the common people, but he also disliked them, and arrogantly and domineeringly held himself above them.*"⁴⁷ There was a part of Cahan that wanted to ask the people what socialism really meant, and an equally important part of him that wanted to tell them. He squared this circle by deciding, as Kellman puts it, that "the mission of a working-class paper was to arouse the social awareness of its readers and *direct them in a course of self-education.*"⁴⁸

RAFAEL NA'ARIZOKH AS A HERBARTIAN BILDUNGSROMAN

Cahan's most ambitious attempt to realize his ideal of aesthetic education is the didactic novella *Vi Azoy Rafael Na'arizokh Is Gevorn a Sozialist* (How Rafael Na'arizokh Became a Socialist), which might be called the

⁴⁵ Quoted in Sanders, *Downtown Jews*, 263.

⁴⁶ Franco Moretti, *The Way of the World: The Bildungsroman in European Culture* (London: Verso, 1987); Joseph R. Slaughter, *Human Rights, Inc.: The World Novel, Narrative Form, and International Law* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2007); Marc Redfield, *Phantom Formations: Aesthetic Ideology and the Bildungsroman* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1996).

⁴⁷ Quoted in Kellman, 33.

⁴⁸ Kellman, *Newspaper Novel*, 33, emphasis mine.

keystone of his Yiddish fiction oeuvre. *Rafael Na'arizokh* was serialized in the *Arbeiter Tseitung* from 1894 through 1899, and subsequently enlarged and reissued as an 80-page pamphlet. Cahan continued to add to it through a total of six editions, the last of which, running to 199 pages, was published by the *Forward* Association in 1917.⁴⁹ The period of composition and revision, 1894–1917, includes, more or less, Cahan's entire literary career.

Rafael Na'arizokh is structured much like a Herbartian "Five Steps" lesson on the topic of socialism (though, like many such lessons, it omits the last step, "Recapitulation," as redundant). The first of the Herbartian steps, "Preparation," involves summoning up familiar experiences that provide the background for approaching a new idea. This step corresponds to the beginning of the novella, in which we find Rafael living a simple shtetl life, working as a carpenter and fascinated by the potential of labor-saving machines, which he loves to invent. When an economic downturn forces him to emigrate to New York, the second step, "Presentation," might be said to begin, as he is confronted with new experiences that nonetheless resemble those he knows. Rafael gets a job as a carpenter in a furniture factory, where machines enable him to produce very quickly (so far, so familiar), but he finds that, while his employer grows rich, he is working more and earning less than he did in his village. The lesson in industrial economy is then underway. In the third Herbartian step, "Generalization," "unessential features are eliminated," as Dewey writes, and "the concept is formed," and this is what happens during the next six months of Rafael's life as he puzzles over the nature of his economic situation. First he blames machinery itself, but he soon decides that the problem is not their existence, but the fact that they are owned by one person and operated by another. He ponders increasingly over large-scale solutions, involving cooperation among more and more people: he could buy his own machine, but one machine by itself is not very efficient; workers could, perhaps, share ownership of a group of machines, but such a cooperative factory could not compete with established, exploitative factories; eventually, he concludes that collective ownership of all the means of production is the only way that humanity can live with machines. The main idea now fixed, he is ready for the fourth step, "Application," in which the new concept is extended to novel examples. These new data are supplied

⁴⁹The fullest discussion of the chronology of *Rafael Na'arizokh* is Pollock, *Solitary Clarinetist*, 195–196.

by Vicker, a café intellectual who hears Rafael's idea, tells him it is called socialism, and shows how it must be expanded to include not just equality among men but equality between men and women. It is, of course, doubtful that Cahan had the five Herbartian steps in mind when he wrote *Rafael Na'arizokh*, but they are, after all, natural features of a pedagogy whose ideal is to assiduously smoothe the transitions between the familiar and the new.

In the classical bildungsroman, the adult social role the hero eventually adopts is presented not as a concession to arbitrary custom but as the realization of his own true nature, of what Schiller calls the "idea of Man's humanity" within him, and an experience of spontaneous aesthetic pleasure is supposed to testify to his genuine satisfaction with his lot. These are the conditions under which the bildungsroman obscures the difference between imposing a political order from above and the flowering of individual freedom from below, and *Rafael Na'arizokh* certainly fulfills them. At the end of the novella, someone asks Rafael why he should become a socialist. Will it put money in his pockets or improve his lot in the afterlife? No, Rafael responds; socialism "makes one neither richer nor more pious, but more of a man [*mensch*]." ⁵⁰ When he feels like a man in his old village, he sings the *na'arizokh* (hence his name); when he is degraded by capitalism, he stops singing; and when he recovers his manhood through socialism, he sings again, but now his song is the "Marseillaise."

There are, however, important differences between a "Herbartian bildungsroman" like *Rafael Na'arizokh* and the classical bildungsroman. The classical bildungsroman is concerned, above all, with the formation of sensibility, and especially with what attitude to take toward the social establishment, with the prerogatives of upstart individual "pride" versus those of indurated collective "prejudice." Its plot, paradigmatically, is the dialectical resolution of this question via a clash of personal philosophies (as Wilhelm grapples with those of Werner, Serlo, and the "Beautiful Soul" before throwing in with the Abbe), followed by the attempt to create a space (Schiller's "Aesthetic State") in which the prevailing philosophy can be adopted as a way of life. *Rafael Na'arizokh* does not follow this template. Rather, it does just what bildungsroman theorists such as Franco Moretti and Gregory Castle say the genre cannot do: it leans into collectivity, organization, even bureaucracy. It has no clash of philosophies, for its scientific outlook can hardly recognize philosophical differences. Instead,

⁵⁰ Quoted in Chametzky, *From the Ghetto*, 47.

its plot is the inexorable expansion of the breadth of experience and knowledge from village to city to global movement, and the accompanying need for more and more coordination with others in order to exercise agency at these larger scales. It concludes not when the hero has learned what attitude to take toward the world, but when he has discovered how to play his part, however small, in world history. This kind of educational orientation is what Cahan thought necessary for socialism, and also what the American Herbartians thought necessary for a well-coordinated capitalist industrial democracy.

CAHAN'S ENGLISH FICTION

For all his devotion to this kind of gradualist, popularizing education, though, Cahan did acknowledge the limitations it placed on him, the contraction that came from always “bending over to pick up the child.” Other Yiddish intellectuals pointed out the problem often enough. The literary critic Shmuel Nizer warned, in 1908, that since the Yiddish press did not value literature for itself, but only “as a device for educating the Jewish masses,” it left no room for originality. “The dissemination of culture becomes the goal of an intelligentsia only when it despairs of its own creativity,” he declared; “when intellectuals lose sight of their highest goal, cultural creativity, they become enamored of a surrogate goal, cultural dissemination.” Hayim Zhitlovsky feared that Cahan’s hostility to anything that might seem abstruse would drive away the best Yiddish-speaking minds. “We must create an atmosphere which will provide the Jewish intellectual with as excellent fare as he obtains in other tongues,” he argued in 1910. “Otherwise, he will abandon us, and leave us with nothing but *melamdim* [teachers of young children].” “Cahan doesn’t seem to realize,” he quipped, “that in order to popularize one must first have knowledge.”⁵¹

As a Yiddish writer and editor, Cahan ignored these criticisms, maintaining that the highest priority for Yiddish socialists must be, for the time being at least, the enlightenment of the Jewish masses. In his English fiction, though, he grappled seriously with them. As Alice Nakhimovsky has noted, many of Cahan’s English stories feature characters whose cultural pursuits isolate them from their communities, such as Shaya from “The Imported Bridegroom” (1898) and Tatyana Markovna

⁵¹ Quotations from Howe, *World of Our Fathers*, 504–508.

from “Circumstances” (1898).⁵² As an English writer, Cahan is often discussed as a mediator or interpreter who represents Jewish life to the gentile American mainstream. In this sense, he is telling “you” (gentiles) about “us” (Jews). However, in another sense, he aligns himself with his English readers, uniting them in a “we” defined by intellectualism, as against the “they” of the uneducated masses. While his Yiddish work appeared in popular newspapers, his English stories were published in magazines, like *Scribners* and the *Atlantic Monthly*, with a genteel, cultured audience. In their pages, he could speak, as it were, not as a teacher to his students but as a teacher to other teachers. What he wanted to talk to them about was just how much intellectual integrity one can maintain while remaining connected to the people.

At stake here, for Cahan, is his sense of literary vocation, which jostles uneasily with his beliefs about pedagogy and aesthetic education. His original literary heroes were Russians who were shaped, as he was, by the position of intellectuals under Tsarism, and who could not have debased themselves by popularizing even if they wanted to. “Upon the whole,” Cahan writes, “the fiction printed in the Russian magazines is of an unusually high order” because “the average of tastes they have to deal with is exceedingly high.” “This would not be the case, perhaps, if the magazine-reading public in Russia were as large as it is in countries where education is much more evenly distributed than it is in the dominions of the Czar,” he muses. “But the Russian monthlies cater to a small, intellectual minority.”⁵³ Cahan, while feeling that it was wrong to regret the advances of democracy and popular education that made it impossible to recreate this cultural milieu in America, nonetheless felt a deep nostalgia for it. Describing the wave of Russian Jewish intellectuals who emigrated to America, Cahan writes in *Bleter fun Mayn Leben* that along with the Yiddish language, “in our hearts we also brought our love for enlightened Russian culture. We had transported from Russia the banner of idealism, scarred and bloodstained in the Russian revolutionary movement.” Linking the literary ambitions of Russian high culture with its desperate political situation, he recalls that he found it difficult to adjust to the idea that in America he would never become a martyred truth-teller or bomb-thrower. “The power of deeply rooted beliefs is greater than the power of

⁵² Alice Nakhimovsky, “The Russian-Yiddish-English Writer Abraham Cahan,” in *East European Jewish Affairs* 38:2 (2008), 159–167.

⁵³ Cahan, “Younger Russian Writers,” 128.

logic and common sense,” he ruefully admits. “Socialism itself teaches that the special circumstances of each time and each place must be taken into account in formulating tactics. But the romantic stimulation of danger is powerful. If all is permissible and danger is absent, socialism becomes diluted and revolutionary heroism becomes impossible.”⁵⁴

Wholeheartedly as he disdained the misplaced heroics of anarchism in America, in the literary realm laying haughty idealism aside took a severe emotional toll on him. As Irving Howe puts it, “There is a certain Litvak dryness to Cahan’s Yiddish, as there is to his memories, indeed to his very soul. He seems to have felt that to allow himself spontaneity of expression might threaten the role he had chosen as mentor of immigrants and guide into the new world.”⁵⁵ In a 1902 *Forward* column, Cahan discusses this feeling of dryness. As a young man, he writes, he imagined “How terrible my life would be if my idea did not continue to glow!” Now, years later, he thinks, “Oh! But now I am a practical man; I am no longer a greenhorn. [...] I know that I am right in being like this, that twenty years ago I was too green, but nevertheless [...] I yearn for my greenness of old. I yearn for my yearnings of twenty years ago.”⁵⁶

Such yearning is the subject of “Tzinchadzi of the Catskills,” which appeared in the *Atlantic Monthly* in 1901. On one level, the story is about how painful it is to trade in Russian heroism for America’s mild gregariousness. Tzinchadzi was once the greatest horseman in the Caucasus, who won a riding contest for the hand of the beautiful Zelaya. Zelaya, however, rejected him, and as the story opens we find him doing equestrian tricks for a Catskills circus, still consumed with bitterness over his lost bride. The story’s narrator, an assimilated American Jew, tells Tzinchadzi to move on, and he takes the advice. They meet again six years later, and Tzinchadzi is now “Jones,” a prosperous real estate dealer. Jones confesses that he is more miserable than ever. “I have money and I have friends, but you want to know whether I am happy; and that I am not, sir,” he says. “Why? Because I yearn neither for Zelaya, nor for anything else. I have thought it all out, and I have come to the conclusion that a man’s heart cannot be happy unless it has somebody or something to yearn for.” So far, Tzinchadzi seems to represent Cahan’s own nostalgia for Russian emotional intensity.

⁵⁴ Cahan, *Education of Abraham Cahan*, 225, 228.

⁵⁵ Howe, *World of Our Fathers*, 527.

⁵⁶ Quoted in Sanders, *Downtown Jews*, 267–268.

On another level, though, the story criticizes this intensity, not by comparison to American alternatives, but on its own terms. Zelaya refuses Tzinchadzi because she thinks he does not care about people—"You are without a heart," she tells him. Later, as "Jones," he tries to share his feelings with the narrator, but finds he cannot: "I can't tell you what I feel. Maybe if I could I shouldn't feel it, and there would be nothing to tell, so that the telling of it would be a lie."⁵⁷ Tzinchadzi carries, at his emotional core, a kind of idealism that is inherently isolating, that cannot enter into relationships with other people. He is, thus, an inverted image of Cahan the Yiddish writer, who places the need to communicate, to speak in a way that others will understand, above his own potential for individual creativity. Cahan seems to see an either-or choice between these two paths, between an idealism that isolates and an accessibility that enervates. It is difficult to imagine either option as satisfying, which may account for the persistent sadness of Cahan's fictional worlds. The most he can do, confronted with this impasse, is to elegantly describe it. As Irving Howe writes, "only in the theme of unfulfillment does his literary gift fulfill itself."

THE RISE OF DAVID LEVINSKY

The theme of unhappiness brought on alternately by hewing too closely to a spiritual code and by abandoning it altogether, presented only germinally in "Tzinchadzi of the Catskills," is fully developed in Cahan's great bildungsroman of unfulfillment, *The Rise of David Levinsky*. In both narratives, Cahan imagines a character who, rather than following his own practice of "bending down" to find an accommodation between the high principles of his youth and the realities of American life, maintains an unbending idealism until he reaches the breaking point and collapses into utter philistinism. While Tzinchadzi is debased only once, though, for Levinsky debasement is a recurring pattern set by his attitude about the relation of eternal truths to varying circumstances, of exalted ideas to everyday realities. In Herbartianism, the highest ideal is simply the harmonious interweaving of all one's interests into a unified line of activity, and this view (common also to the pragmatism of James and Dewey) is more or less shared by the Cahan of *Rafael Na'arizokh* and the "*Bintel Brief*," where socialism emerges from initial investments in woodworking,

⁵⁷ Cahan, *Grandma Never Lived in America*, 234–239.

tinkering, payday loans, marital jealousies, and so on. Levinsky, on the other hand, is defined by an opposite view in which the ideal and the everyday are inherently opposed, such that whatever satisfies the one must frustrate the other.

As to why Levinsky feels this way, many reasons might be given. Isaac Rosenfeld argues that, insasmuch as diasporic Judaism nurtures a mood of perpetual yearning for a lost holy land, to the point that “the yearning itself is Jerusalem” and is never meant to be realized in this world, Levinsky is a representative “Diaspora Man.” Further, Rosenfeld suggests, the Protestant work ethic buttresses this attitude by valuing provision for the future but not enjoyment of the present.⁵⁸ Louis Harap reads Levinsky as a product of unbridled capitalism, whose insistence that the real world has no truck with the ideal is a convenient excuse for rapacious business practices.⁵⁹ Or, turning from the social to the personal, one might describe Levinsky’s inflexible idealism as a symptom of his failure to mourn his mother, who is the source of his first notions of holiness. For our purposes here, though, the question is not why Levinsky is the way he is, but whether his way of being is any good, whether it is more satisfying, at least, than what Cahan feared was his own tendency to allow the dictates of the popular to constrain the ideal. The answer Cahan gives is a resounding “no”: Levinsky ends the novel spiritually arrested and fragmented, complaining, tellingly, of his “lack of anything like a great, deep interest.”

The division Levinsky enforces between the everyday and the ideal is consistently represented in terms of divisions between sacred and profane places and between the mind or soul and the body. In his home village of Antomir, holiness resides in the temple and *bes medresh* (study house), while its opposite is relegated to a certain “sinful” street which his mother forbids him to visit. Later, the sacred space will be City College, which he

⁵⁸ Isaac Rosenfeld, “David Levinsky: The Jew as American Millionaire,” in *Preserving the Hunger: An Isaac Rosenfeld Reader*, ed. Mark Schechner (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1988), 157–159. For another diagnosis of Levinsky’s problem as American materialism, see Ludger Brinker, “The Gilded Void: Edith Wharton, Abraham Cahan, and The Turn-of-the-Century American Culture,” *Edith Wharton Review* 10, no. 2 (1993): 3–7.

⁵⁹ Louis Harap, *The Image of the Jew in American Literature: From Early Republic to Mass Immigration* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2003), 487. Richard S. Pressman, however, reads the novel as at least partially a defense of capitalism. See Pressman, “Abraham Cahan, Capitalist; David Levinsky, Socialist,” *Studies in American Jewish Literature* 12 (1993): 2–18.

calls “my temple” of learning, or the feminized sphere of family and domesticity, while the profane spaces will be places of business. At other times, as in his conversations with Mr. Tevkin, Russia becomes the sacred space and America the profane. The borders are redrawn but the basic pattern persists. Meanwhile, Levinsky also habitually opposes the ideal to the bodily, including sex but also food and comfort. Witnessing his first wedding, he feels that “the ceremony was a poem to me, something inexpressibly beautiful and sacred,” until his friend makes a sexual joke, after which “the poem vanished” and “the beauty of the wedding I had just witnessed, and of weddings in general, seemed to be irretrievably desecrated.” He associates school with his teacher’s pinching and slapping and the study house with hunger. When he starts eating regularly, he finds that “now that I did not want for food [...] my former interest in the Talmud was gone,” and, spiritually, “life was devoid of savor.”⁶⁰ Later, he will at times worship Herbert Spencer, whose social Darwinism makes the attainment of physical and sexual comforts into the highest good; this apparent reversal, though, still leaves the body to its own devices and fails to imagine it united with a spiritual principle. Levinsky’s persistent opposition of physical and mental fulfillment makes it inevitable that, at the novel’s conclusion, his “present station, power, the amount of worldly happiness at my command, and the rest of it, seem to be devoid of significance.”⁶¹

In Cahan’s aesthetic terms, Levinsky’s refusal to connect the world of things and the world of ideas, the everyday and the significant, makes him an anti-realist. With remarkable consistency—indeed, it is one of his most enduring traits throughout his metamorphoses—Levinsky exhibits just those aesthetic preferences that Cahan most likes to attack. At one point he admires Madam Klesmer, an actress who “speak[s] like a prophetess in ancient Israel” even though this delivery is “unnatural” for her modern Russian character, because “I thought it perfectly proper that people on the stage should not talk as they would off the stage. I thought that this unnatural speech of theirs was one of the principal things an audience paid for.” Later, he prefers the grotesques of Dickens, whose novels are “so full of extraordinary characters, unexpected wit, outbursts of beautiful rhetoric, and other wonderful things, that their author appealed to me as something more than a human being,” to the realism of Thackeray, whose

⁶⁰ Abraham Cahan, *The Rise of David Levinsky* (New York: Penguin Books, [1917] 1993), 14, 59.

⁶¹ Cahan, *David Levinsky*, 526, 3.

“men and things were so simple and so natural that they impressed me like people and things I had known.” Still later, he goes through a brief art-for-art’s-sake phase, believing that beauty surpasses all merely material phenomena. None of these tastes proves lasting, and Levinsky eventually loses his appetite for art. Cahan seems to suggest that here, too, Levinsky cannot develop a “great, deep interest” because the kind of interest he takes in things is superficial or forced. He has Levinsky confess that, for no reason that he can explain, “deep down in my heart I enjoyed Thackeray more than I did Dickens.”⁶² Once again, Cahan is willing, like the Herbartians, to distinguish between what one says is interesting and what really proves itself interesting in the wider view.

Levinsky’s formative trauma, the murder of his beloved mother by an anti-Semitic mob, cements a connection between his feminine and religious attachments, one that begins before her death when she sacrifices her own meals to support his Talmudic studies. Thereafter, all of Levinsky’s spiritual transformations are paralleled, and to a large extent expressed, by his relationships with women. These relationships are as polarized between the base and the exalted as the rest of Levinsky’s life. As a child, he distinguishes “two kinds of kisses: the kiss of affection and the kiss of Satan”: the former are the chaste kisses he gives his mother, and the latter are the kisses he shares with Red Esther, a sexually precocious playmate. As he grows older, he realizes that “even the love of the flesh might be of two distinct kinds,” that “there is love of body and soul, and there is a kind of love that is of the body only [...] There is love and there is lust.” Let us, for the sake of consistency, call Levinsky’s three kinds of attraction *affection* (soul only), *love* (body and soul), and *lust* (body only).⁶³ While Levinsky can see, at times, that love is what he needs, his romantic life is dominated by affection and lust. Even when he wants love (as with Anna Tevkin), he does not know how to get it.

Like a pendulum slowly coming to rest, Levinsky swings back and forth from romantic and spiritual nobility to debasement, but in each arc the inflection points become less extreme until he reaches a final stagnation. In the first arc, his spiritual ideal is Orthodox Judaism, and his ideal woman is his mother; as we have seen, at this early stage he holds affection and lust to be poles apart. His friend Naphtali confuses his categories by describing the courtship of Abraham Tevkin (whom Levinsky will later meet) in

⁶² Cahan, *David Levinsky*, 161, 165.

⁶³ Cahan, *David Levinsky*, 44, 119.

whose famous love letters physical and spiritual attraction coexist. Levinsky sees that this love of the whole person, body and soul, is good, but knows that Orthodoxy does not recognize it. So begins his slow secularization, and he begins to fall for Matilda, a young woman of beauty and genteel culture. Matilda wants to share body and soul with him, but insists that the latter is impossible until Levinsky becomes more a man of the world. To become worthy of her love, he accepts her suggestion that he move to America. Once he arrives in New York, though, he finds only grinding competition as a pushcart peddler. Shut out of secular culture, he becomes reluctant to part with his Orthodox identity, but is persuaded that he must shave his beard and act American in order to make money. Now, having completely exhausted his spiritual resources, he feels like a mere animal body, and begins to feel attracted to his brutish landlady (named, absurdly, Mrs. Levinsky), who reminds him of Red Esther, she of the old “kiss of Satan.” Mrs. Levinsky rebuffs him, and he starts sleeping with prostitutes. So ends the first arc.

The second arc begins when Levinsky, having resigned himself to a life without affection or ideals, sees how one of the prostitutes he visits, Argentine Rachel, is able to be a loving mother to her fatherless child, and to treat Levinsky (himself the fatherless child of a similarly devoted mother) with genuine tenderness. She proves to him that poverty alone cannot crush the spirit, and he resolves to pursue an American higher education. He gazes longingly at the campus of City College, which he calls “my temple,” and dreams of enrolling when he can afford time off from work. Around this time he manages to start his own small garment shop, which does well, but instead of making time for school he finds that his growing business now demands all his attention; it seems that both struggle and success keep Levinsky from reaching his “temple,” implying some underlying aversion. What this difficulty might be is suggested by his fondness, in this period, for Madam Klesmer, whose appeal lies in the way she idealizes modern characters by playing them with “unnatural” ancient manners. Spiritual grandeur, she proposes, does not really belong to everyday life; it is better to mourn its absence, to yearn for it from afar. This Levinsky does, all the while becoming more unscrupulous in his business dealings. His appearance of longing for higher learning soon endears him to Dora, the wife of his friend “Maximum Max.” Dora, married by arrangement to a man who is her intellectual inferior, feels that if only she were single she could become a cultured woman, and she bonds with Levinsky over their shared, thwarted educational ambitions. They carry on a chaste affair for

some time, until Levinsky finally pressures her into sex and Dora realizes that he is more interested in thinking of himself as a gentleman than actually acting like one. She breaks with him, and, embittered, he forgets his dreams of college and once more becomes, entirely, the unscrupulous man of business.

A third arc begins when, once again, Levinsky finds a new source of idealism that pulls him out of his disillusioned materialism. He discovers Spencer, whose “cold, drab theory of the struggle for existence and the survival of the fittest” becomes “the only thing I believed in.” Along with Spencer, Levinsky recalls, “My business life had fostered the conviction in me that, outside of the family, the human world was as brutally selfish as the jungle,” while, on the side of the ideal, “self-sacrificing devotion to one’s family was the only kind of altruism and idealism I did not flout.” Having given up on romantic love, chaste “dreams of family life became my religion,” whose goddess is Fanny Kaplan, an insipid girl from a devout family that emigrated from Antomir. Although Levinsky and Fanny are engaged to be married (through her father, in the old-fashioned way), Fanny does not appeal to him as a person, but merely as a symbol of all the idealism excluded from his Spencerian business philosophy.⁶⁴ Their relationship is brittle and easily shattered by the first opposing force, which displaces Levinsky’s Spencerism along with his religion of domesticity.

This force, which initiates a fourth and penultimate arc, is the art-for-art’s-sake philosophy that Levinsky develops as he discovers the possibilities of leisure and financial speculation. Stopping, en route to Fanny’s country retreat, at a Catskills resort, he finds himself enjoying his first vacation. Suddenly, as he relaxes on the veranda, the natural world seems to exceed Spencerian rules of evolutionary struggle. “The bewitching azure of the sky and the divine taste of the air,” he thinks, “seemed to bear out a feeling that it was exempt from any law of nature with which I was familiar.”⁶⁵ Once the overly rigid “laws” of Spencerism give way, Levinsky, as usual, swings to the opposite philosophical extreme and begins thinking of nature as a beautiful picture, seeing the sky as a “play of color and light,” an “evensong of color,” as “rose lapsed into purple, purple merged into blue, the blue bordering on a field of hammered gold that was changing shape and hue.”⁶⁶ This fantasy of nature as a mere backdrop on which

⁶⁴ Cahan, *David Levinsky*, 380.

⁶⁵ Cahan, *David Levinsky*, 406.

⁶⁶ Cahan, *David Levinsky*, 437.

the mind projects itself has its corollary in the displacement of production by speculation in his economic imagination. At the resort, he notices the guests constantly gambling, and he compares the rising and falling fortunes of women trying to snag a rich husband to the fluctuations of the stock market. He also meets Anna Tevkin, daughter of the Abraham Tevkin whose love letters he admired, and perceives her as a “Greek statue,” a creature of pure beauty and spontaneity who seems free of all the “conventional lies” of life. Angling for her hand, he abandons Fanny and becomes close to the Tevkins, going so far as to read her father’s Hebrew poetry. Abraham Tevkin goes even further than the new aesthetist Levinsky in affirming the mind’s transcendence of natural laws, as in his poem, “Poetry”:

The children of Israel have been pent up in cities. The stuffy synagogue has been field and forest to them. But then there is more beauty in a heaven visioned by a congregation of worshipers than in the bluest heaven sung by the minstrel of landscapes. They are not worshipers. They are poets. It is not God they are speaking to. It is a sublime image. It is not their Creator. It is their poetic creation.⁶⁷

Tevkin, fittingly, is wild about speculation, and keeps asking Levinsky for money to invest in real estate, which he plans to resell without ever physically altering.

Levinsky proves sadly mistaken about both father and daughter Tevkin, which sours him on aestheticism as he has soured on his other ideals. Abraham Tevkin, who separates the sacred and profane as thoroughly as Levinsky ever did, and affirms that “business is business and poetry is poetry,” cares nothing about Levinsky’s artistic ideas, but only humors him until he can secure a loan.⁶⁸ When he and Levinsky go in on an investment which fails horribly, Levinsky decides that speculation is just a kind of mania that “addled” the brain. Meanwhile, he alienates Anna by wrongly assuming that she shares her father’s literary views. Levinsky notices that “the atmosphere surrounding the books and authors she named had a genuine fascination for her,” that “there was a naïve sincerity in her rhetoric, and her delivery and gestures had a rhythm that seemed to be akin to the rhythm of her movements in the tennis-court.”⁶⁹ What

⁶⁷ Cahan, *David Levinsky*, 451–452.

⁶⁸ Cahan, *David Levinsky*, 457.

⁶⁹ Cahan, *David Levinsky*, 409, 380, 416.

Levinsky fails to see, but readers familiar with the arc of Cahan's career can hardly miss, is that Anna's literary creed is not, as Levinsky believes, art for art's sake; rather, she articulates Cahan's own theories of literary realism. "The newspapers are life," she observes; "and life is the source of literature, or should be." She rehashes some of Cahan's ideas about the superiority of realism to both sermon novels and *shund*. "If you're bored by [Ibsen] it's because you're probably looking for stories, for 'action,'" she says. "But art is something more significant than that. There is moral force and beauty in Ibsen which one misses in the old masters. [...] In good literature the moral is not preached as a sermon [...] It naturally follows from the life it presents. Anyhow, the other kind of literature is mere froth. You read page after page and there doesn't seem to be any substance to it." The consistency between her tennis-playing and literature-reading interests does not indicate, as Levinsky believes, that she has made her everyday life conform to the standards of art, but rather that she sees a continuity between an unpretentious, natural style of living and a realist literature that shares those qualities. Levinsky, of course, is constitutionally incapable of accepting her literary ideas. He tries to get her attention with a lame remark about "the discrepancy between the spiritual quality of the sunset and the after-supper satisfaction of the onlookers," thinking that she will be impressed by the contrast he draws between the exalted and the everyday, but she takes "no notice of the remark."⁷⁰ Disgusted with the Tevkins, Levinsky falls back into his old Spencerism, but half-heartedly.

At last the swinging pendulum of idealism and disillusionment comes to rest in a final inertia. Now well into middle age, retired from business, Levinsky finds one last chance for love as he befriends a beautiful, cultured, and wealthy woman in his apartment building. However, she is a gentile, and for all he has betrayed his old Orthodox convictions by his actions, he cannot bring himself to officially renounce them once and for all by marrying her. Over and over, he has tried to find some way to live out his original idealism in altered form, but, failing to do so, he retreats into nostalgia, confessing that "When I take a look at my inner identity, it impresses me as being precisely the same as it was thirty or forty years ago."⁷¹ Dividing his world, and his self, between ideals that refuse realization and a hard-nosed business realism that refuses to be idealized, he never finds a way of being that expresses his whole self. His sad fate

⁷⁰ Cahan, *David Levinsky*, 413, 415–416, 439.

⁷¹ Cahan, *David Levinsky*, 526, 3.

represents not Cahan's verdict on Judaism in America, nor even Orthodoxy in America (for which Cahan, unlike many Jewish socialists, urged toleration), but on Levinsky's conception of what ideals are and in what relation they stand to everyday life.⁷² Through Levinsky, Cahan, while perhaps unable to deny the price he paid for his own insistence on the submission of idealistic intellectuals to the limits of everyday people's interests, did deny that the alternative was any better.

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⁷²This reading of the novel complements those of David Green, David Engel, and Adam Sol, all of whom stress Levinsky's failure to harmonize his past and present selves. Green argues that Levinsky's fragmentation stems from the cultural gap between shtetl and metropolis, while Engel blames a more generalized modernist sense of historical disjunction. Sol, however, points out that other characters in the novel, with backgrounds similar to Levinsky's, are able to mediate between past and present selves, suggesting that the problem is personal to him. Green, "The Price of Success: Use of the Bildungsroman Plot in Abraham Cahan's *The Rise of David Levinsky*," *Studies in American Jewish Literature* (1981-) 12 (1993): 19–24; Engel, "The 'Discrepancies' of the Modern: Towards a Reevaluation of Abraham Cahan's *The Rise of David Levinsky*," *Studies in American Jewish Literature* 2 (1982): 36–60; Sol, "Searching for Middle Ground in Abraham Cahan's *The Rise of David Levinsky* and Sidney Nyburg's *The Chosen People*," *Studies in American Jewish Literature* 16 (1997): 6–21.

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CHAPTER 3

The Classroom Démueblé: Willa Cather and Maria Montessori

This chapter traces connections between the lives, and parallels between the work, of Maria Montessori and Willa Cather, both of whom believe that the best response to social complexity is a heightened commitment to simplicity. As discussed in Chapter 1, one influential group of thinkers identifies progressivism with the social action ideal, arguing that, rather than trusting the invisible hand, Americans must collectively form “a conscious national purpose” and take responsibility for the direction of society.¹ Complexity, though, makes such social action difficult. As Walter Lippmann puts it in *Drift and Mastery* (1914), the modern democrat “faces an enormously complicated world, full of stirring and confusion and ferment” and must “formulat[e] for himself a vision of what is to come out of the unrest.”² Though never sharing the politics of Croly or Lippmann, Cather does understand the distinctiveness of the Progressive Era in similar terms. “The life of the peasant today is less independently personal, more complex than that of the Argive kings,” she writes in a 1900 *Lincoln Courier* article. “The life and fortunes of the humblest laborer today are influenced by telegraph reports, stock markets, questions of transportation. So the art that expresses life today must be more

¹Herbert Croly, *The Promise of American Life* (New York: Macmillan, 1909), 109–110, 187, 9.

²Walter Lippmann, *Drift and Mastery: An Attempt to Diagnose the Current Unrest* (New York: Mitchell Kennerley, 1914), xix, xvi, xx.

complex than the art of the Homeric Greeks.”³ Progressive education, in all of its different forms, sought to train Americans for social action either by restoring an imperiled ideal of deliberative democracy, in which citizens talk through problems to reach a shared decision, or by envisioning social action without deliberation. To restore deliberative democracy, Dewey called for the school to become a site where all social institutions could influence the curriculum, which he imagined as a kind of conversation among different parts of society; similarly, the Gary Plan, brainchild of one of Dewey’s protégés, made the school into a literal community center.⁴ Social efficiency educators like David Snedden, meanwhile, sought a non-deliberative form of social action by turning schools into component parts of a system of administration by experts, extending from business to government. In their different ways, these approaches called for the school to turn outward and articulate with other agencies, in contrast with the inward focus on the self-government of each pupil that characterized Horace Mann and the common school movement.

Montessori, however, turns the school inward with a vengeance, banishing the social world from her classrooms, even getting rid of clocks. What she wants is an empty room. One observer drew a contrast between the average American classroom, crammed with rows of desks, and Montessori’s, which was

a large, high-ceilinged, airy room, furnished with tiny, lightly-framed tables and chairs which, however, by no means filled the floor. There were big tracts of open space, where some of the children knelt or sat on light rugs. One was lying down on his back, kicking his feet in the air.⁵

The seed of Cather’s own ideal of the unfurnished novel may have been planted in this unfurnished classroom. There is an aesthetic dimension to Montessori’s thought, one that defines aesthetic experience as the epitome of a state of freedom from distraction, a kind of fortified blankness into which can flow a delicate inner energy that impels the individual to join others in a social organism. Cather’s ideas about art, we shall see, are not

³Willia Cather, *The World and the Parish: Willa Cather’s Articles and Reviews, 1893–1902*, ed. William M. Curtin (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1970), 745.

⁴John Dewey, *The School and Society and the Child and the Curriculum* (Chicago: University of Chicago, [1901] 1915); Randolph Bourne, *The Gary Schools* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1916).

⁵Dorothy Canfield Fisher, *A Montessori Mother* (New York: Henry Holt, 1912), 8.

so different. The Nebraskan novelist shares the Italian educator's disdain for the machinery of reform, both personal and political, and shares her sense that the best way to encourage progress is to let things strategically alone. Cather differs from Montessori, though, in her evaluation of what we can really expect from progress, for people or for communities. Where Montessori is an optimist, Cather is, at best, a stoic.

Several avenues of influence link Cather and Montessori. One is Dorothy Canfield Fisher, a close friend of Cather's from her Lincoln days, whose 1912 *A Montessori Mother* was a popular early digest of Montessori's ideas. Another is *McClure's Magazine*, which introduced Montessori to American readers, and whose owner, S.S. McClure, was Montessori's publicity agent on her first US tour. Cather was the associate editor of *McClure's* and, later, the managing editor. She was not only a confidant of S.S. McClure's but even ghostwrote his 1913 autobiography, which devotes a few pages to the magazine's reporting on Montessori.⁶ Around this period, when Montessori was involved with McClure, Cather was undergoing a difficult transition from progressive journalist to politically ambivalent novelist, and from the early Jamesian prose style of *Alexander's Bridge* to the distinctive mature voice she developed in *O Pioneers!*

Here is a chronology of these interrelated threads. Cather wrote the first draft of *Alexander's Bridge* from spring through autumn of 1911, and began *O Pioneers!* that winter, finishing it in early 1913.⁷ Between 1906 and September 1911, she was editing *McClure's*. In the winter of 1910, McClure heard about Montessori's experimental school and commissioned Josephine Tozier to write an article about it.⁸ Tozier's article appeared in the May 1911 issue of *McClure's*. It seems, based on Cather's letters, that because McClure was abroad, Cather herself oversaw this whole issue, and thus would have read Tozier's article closely.⁹ Tozier's

⁶Robert Stinson, "S.S. McClure's Autobiography: The Progressive as Self-Made Man," *American Quarterly* 22:2 (1970), 206. During the composition of the autobiography, each day McClure would speak to Cather for several hours in his apartment while Cather jotted down short notes, after which she would return home and write out what she had been told. Most decisions about language and style can therefore be attributed to Cather.

⁷Susan Rosowski, *The Voyage Perilous: Willa Cather's Romanticism* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska, 1986), 33, 45.

⁸S.S. McClure [Willa Cather], *My Autobiography* (New York: Frederick A. Stokes, 1914), 252–253.

⁹In a letter of May 25, 1911, Cather writes that "Mr. McClure stays abroad for months and months, and won't be home until July." Andrew Jewell and Janis Stout, eds., *The Selected Letters of Willa Cather* (New York: Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, 2014).

piece was such a hit that *McClure's* had to print extra editions, and the magazine became a nerve center for the nascent American Montessori movement, publishing letters from parents, educators, and doctors and reporting on the progress of the English translation of Montessori's first book. In January 1912, while Cather was working up *O Pioneers!* from a pair of 1911 short stories, another Tozier article appeared describing Montessori's trademark "didactic apparatus," the custom-made physical objects that play a central role in her pedagogy. Montessori herself wrote an article for the May 1912 *McClure's*, on "Disciplining Children," and around the same time *The Montessori Method* appeared in English.¹⁰ In the winter of 1913/1914, McClure conducted Montessori on a grand tour of America, introducing her to the public and showing slide photographs of the *Casa dei Bambini*.¹¹

FIRST THE EDUCATION OF THE SENSES

Today most Americans associate Montessori with a somewhat freewheeling kind of education in which children go at their own pace and choose what they want to learn; they may think of it as a gentler alternative, favored by wealthy parents, to the disciplinary regime of public schools. As Dorothy Canfield Fisher's book was perhaps the first to attest, Montessori did quickly appeal to affluent Americans who worried that their children's "free natural growth" suffered under a seeming "cult of efficiency."¹² Originally, however, Montessori rose to prominence based on what she could do not for the most advantaged students, but for the most disadvantaged, the children of the urban working class whose education was a primary concern for progressives in Europe and the United States alike. Also, as often happens where the education of "their" children rather than "our" children is concerned, it becomes difficult, with Montessori and her wealthy backers, to disentangle emancipatory goals from those based on social control. One of her early influences was the criminologist Cesare Lombroso, who believed that lawbreakers were "degenerates," with abnormal skull shapes and other deformities, who could only be reformed

¹⁰Rita Kramer, *Maria Montessori: A Biography* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1976), 160–162.

¹¹Kramer, *Maria Montessori*, 172, 182.

¹²Fisher, *A Montessori Mother*, 161, 236.

if they received proper education at a young age.¹³ Montessori, who had begun working with mentally disabled children as a medical student, hoped that by teaching them, she could alleviate the urban vice and crime that Italian progressives saw as obstacles to the nation's modernization. On the strength of this idea, she successfully lobbied for the creation, in 1900, of the Orthophrenic School at the University of Rome, which she codirected. In 1906, she began working with developmentally normal children when a Roman real estate developer offered to fund a school for her inside a tenement building in the San Lorenzo neighborhood, which exemplified Italy's new urban poverty. Thus began Montessori's *Casa dei Bambini* (Children's House); it would be several more years before schools modeled after it would enroll privileged children like Dorothy Canfield Fisher's.¹⁴

From these origins in special education for the mentally disabled, Montessori retained a sense that the ultimate foundations of education were not intellectual but behavioral or even physiological. Whereas Dewey and his followers hoped to teach students how to deliberate, Montessori's credo was "First the education of the senses, then the education of the intellect," and the physical always enjoyed pride of place. She drew on the work of the French physician Jean-Marc-Gaspard Itard (1774–1838) and his pupil Edouard Seguin (1812–1880), who taught reading, writing, and job skills such as sewing to "backward children."¹⁵ Focusing on sensorimotor skills, rather than ideas, Seguin created simple devices with which his pupils could practice threading beads, lacing cloth, identifying textures, and so on. Montessori synthesized Itard and Seguin's sensory training with the educational romanticism of Rousseau and Pestalozzi, for whom all learning is gradual, incremental, and dependent on the student's self-motivated engagement. While Pestalozzi broke complex concepts into simpler ones, teaching points before lines, lines before polygons, and so forth (as discussed in Chapter 2), Montessori simplified actions. Beginning by practicing simple movements, her early students progressed through Froebel mats, which teach basic weaving, to sewing real garments. Nothing should be asked of students, mentally, until the

¹³ Kramer, *Maria Montessori*, 81.

¹⁴ Kramer, *Maria Montessori*, 109–111.

¹⁵ Edouard Seguin, *Idiocy: And Its Treatment by the Physiological Method* (Albany, NY: Brandow [1866] 1907).

groundwork was laid physically: “we should really find the way to *teach* the child *how*, before *making him execute* a task,” she proclaimed.¹⁶

Her great coup was applying this method to early literacy, which proved that it worked on traditional school subjects. She had the children trace over wooden letters, first with their fingers, then with a little stick that was held like a pencil, until they could form their shapes; soon they could write the whole alphabet on a chalkboard, although they did not yet understand the idea of letters standing for sounds in a word. This conceptual content was introduced last, using a set of flashcards that paired letters with pictures of objects. Once all these preliminary pieces were in place, her students simply figured out how to write words on their own. In *The Montessori Method*, she describes this famous “explosion into writing”:

The child looked at me, smiled, remained for a moment as if on the point of bursting into some joyous act, and then cried out, “I can write! I can write!” and kneeling down again he wrote on the pavement the word “hand.” [...] After the first word, the children, with a species of frenzied joy, continued to write everywhere. [...] In these first days we walked upon a carpet of written signs.¹⁷

To teach children of four and five to write at all was uncommon. To do it so unobtrusively that the children felt that they had simply “grown old enough” to write, as if it were a natural endowment, was astounding. To perform this feat with poor, city-dwelling children, made her, as Tozier put it, “An Educational Wonder-Worker.”

Extending her sensation-first approach to other subject areas, Montessori developed the “didactic apparatus,” a set of specialized educational objects designed to guide children through basic concepts. Josephine Tozier’s *McClure’s* articles highlighted the didactic apparatus with over a dozen photographs, choosing, in addition to the writing apparatus, a girl “learning the difference between rough and smooth by running her fingers alternately over coarse sandpaper and smooth cardboard,” a boy “learning to distinguish different shapes by fitting geometrical insets into place blindfold, guided only by his sense of touch,” and children “learning to distinguish colors by arranging colored silk on card bobbins, according

¹⁶Kramer, *Maria Montessori*, 87.

¹⁷Maria Montessori, *The Montessori Method*, trans. Anne E. George (New York: Schocken [1912] 1964), 280–281.

to gradations of shade.”¹⁸ The whole didactic apparatus, Tozier noted, emphasized “reflex actions” in “inferior nerve centers with which the brain has little or no concern,” even going so far as to favor the sense of touch over “the organs most closely associated with the brain – the eyes.” With conceptual content kept to a minimum, there was little room for misunderstanding. Furthermore, the didactic apparatus was supposed to be self-correcting, each element having only one obvious solution (e.g., the square inset fitting in the square hole, the round inset in the round hole). Rather than explaining things to the children, therefore, the Montessori teacher (or “Directress”) could remain largely silent, focused on maintaining peace and quiet in the classroom, while the students could conduct their “auto-education” at their own pace, lingering over some exercises and breezing through others according to personal preference.

Montessori’s philosophy of auto-education assumed that children have a general drive, rooted in the body, below the level of conscious decision-making, toward the acquisition of adult powers. As Fisher put it, Montessori saw education as the “unchaining of great natural forces for good which have been kept locked and padlocked by our inertia, short-sightedness, [and] lack of confidence in human nature.”¹⁹ In Montessori’s words, when one cuts through the artificial, superficial desire for “tangible object[s],” one finds that the child’s “own self-development is his true and almost his only pleasure.”²⁰ So, as Fisher wrote, the job of teachers (and parents) was to “clear away from before the child the different obstacles to the free natural growth” of the “desirable instincts of human nature.” Some of these obstacles were physical, such as tight clothing, but the more serious ones were the harassing timetables that adults imposed on children. Marveling at the unhurried pace in the clockless *Casa dei Bambini*, Fisher recalled her “scorn of the parties of Cook’s tourists, clattering into the Sistine Chapel for a momentary glance at the achievement of a life-times of genius, painted on the ceiling, and then galloping out again for a hop-skip-and-jump race through the Stanze of Raphael.”²¹ The guardians of most American children, she worried, were “dragging them headlong on a Cook’s tour through life.” Instead of trying to make children take an interest in things that adults thought important (the main concern of the Herbartians), Fisher argued, the ideal educator

¹⁸ Josephine Tozier, “An Educational Wonder-Worker: The Methods of Maria Montessori,” *McClure’s Magazine* 37:1 (1911), 3–19.

¹⁹ Fisher, *A Montessori Mother*, 40.

²⁰ Montessori, *Montessori Method*, 358–360.

²¹ Fisher, *A Montessori Mother*, 161, 22.

tak[es] advantage of her knowledge of the fact that water runs down-hill and not up [...] In other words, she sees that her business is to make use of every scrap of the children's interest, rather than to waste her time and theirs trying to force it into channels where it cannot run; to carry her waterwheel where the water falls over the cliff, and not to struggle to turn the river back towards the watershed.²²

(Irrigation metaphors, even more than botanical ones, were central to Montessori discourse, as we will continue to see.)

The theory behind the didactic apparatus may appear contradictory, in that it posits, on the one hand, that child development is too idiosyncratic for a uniform linear curriculum, but also, on the other hand, that a single set of objects, each with a single proper use, suffices for all children. Montessori reconciles these positions by describing individual variations as irregularities introduced by the external world into a developmental process that is, according to its own internal logic, uniform. For instance, she argues, most children learn to speak around the same age, according to a universal biological law. In some cases, however, speech fails to begin at the proper age, not because of physical impediments such as deafness, but for purely "psychopathological" reasons, such as "a struggle, a dread, [or] a reverse of some kind." In such cases, Montessori writes, "it is plain that everything was already prepared in [the child's] inmost being, but that some obstacle prevented it from showing." Montessori's term for these mishaps was "regressions," and she warns that they can become "permanent inferiorit[ies]" if the child is not permitted to work through them at her own pace, without interference. Regressions are the only way that Montessori's theory takes account of individual differences; otherwise she always writes about "the child" rather than "children." Since regressions can be subtle and unpredictable, Montessori argues that schools should provide opportunities for children to practice using all of the basic skills they need to develop, but should refrain from rushing or directing them, for fear of causing regressions themselves, thereby becoming "responsible for anomalies that last a lifetime." "Always must our treatment be as gentle as possible," she admonishes.²³

²²Fisher, *Montessori Mother*, 181–182.

²³Maria Montessori, *The Absorbent Mind* (Chicago: Northwestern University Press, [1949] 1988), 118–119.

Although regressions can occur more or less randomly, the trajectory of what Montessori calls “normal” development is a biological constant, “like an arrow released from the bow, which flies straight, swift and sure.” The comparison to a bow and arrow is apt, because for Montessori the child’s progress is the outcome of a preexisting impetus; the child is the arrow, but does not draw the bow. “A vital force is active within him,” she writes, and this, rather than his conscious mind, “guides his efforts toward their goal.”²⁴ She calls this mysterious force “horme,” from the Greek for “impulse,” and argues that as the organizer and driver of human behavior, it might be “likened to will-power,” but that “the idea of will is too restricted, too much a part of the individual’s awareness.” “*Horme* belongs to life in general, to what might be called the divine urge.”²⁵ Again she takes language learning as an example, writing that “its work begins in the deepest shadows of the unconscious mind; there it is developed and the product becomes fixed. Then only does it appear in the open,” like a photographic “development” that is “done in the dark.”²⁶ For Montessori, this hormic darkroom, this divine alchemy, runs deeper than not only the conscious mind but also physical nature itself. “Man’s will proceeds from a great universal power (*horme*),” she writes, and “this universal force is not physical, but is the force of life itself in the process of evolution,” a process which, she insists contra Darwin, “does not occur by luck, or by chance, but is governed by fixed laws,” the divine laws of *horme*.²⁷ The constraints of biology, which can be rigorously measured to create the didactic apparatus, are also part of a divine order that demands to be worshipped, not tampered with.

Horme presides over not just each individual’s development, but the collective evolution of all creatures. “Every living being,” Montessori writes, “has its own characteristic movements, and its own pre-established goals, and in creation there is a harmonious balance between all these different activities which are coordinated to achieve some purpose.” This natural “purpose” is not a “goal chosen by the creature” but a cosmic plan in which every life form depends on directed movements which have effects beyond their conscious aim. The agent of harmony and progress is, for her, not the individual, nor even the group, but the mysterious energy

²⁴ Montessori, *Absorbent Mind*, 76.

²⁵ Montessori, *Absorbent Mind*, 76.

²⁶ Montessori, *Absorbent Mind*, 126–127.

²⁷ Montessori, *Absorbent Mind*, 230.

that directs birds to fly, plants to grow, and children to learn.²⁸ Auto-education with the didactic apparatus, which liberates hormic energy from regressions, should produce not just sensible, competent individuals, but also “a harmonious and peaceful society and the elimination of wars.” These results, Montessori reasons, will follow from her pupils’ reclamation of “a psychological type common to the whole of mankind [which was] invisible before, because hidden by characteristics not proper to the child.” This new psychological type, which she calls the “normalized personality,” is characterized by the integration of its various physical and psychological powers into an organic whole, first within the individual and eventually among individuals. The didactic apparatus, taken as a whole, is designed to facilitate a sequence of activities that “engage the child’s whole personality” throughout each stage of its early development, until the normalized personality is formed.

The parts to be integrated into this whole personality are, in the beginning, “hormic nebulae,” or biological predispositions toward specific powers: When children learn reading and writing by means of the didactic apparatus, for instance, they coordinate among nebulae concerned with touch, sight, sound, the movement of hands and mouth, et cetera. Montessori calls this kind of learning the formation of a “psychological embryo,” knitting itself together analogously to a physical embryo in the womb. The nonnormalized personality, meanwhile, failing to integrate, is pushed and pulled in contradictory directions and liable to become blindly impulsive, even to the point of being “delinquent” or “insane.” It cannot trust itself. To avoid self-destruction, it must surround itself with strict rules, or submit itself to the will of a wiser authority. These strategies of stricture and submission, however, inhibit the free-flowing constructive activity that leads to normalization, so Montessori banishes them from her schools. The normalized personality, on the other hand, does not need such rules or rulers because it has “a *true* wish to become better” that is rooted in the mysterious promptings of hormone. It has an “attraction to perfection,” by which Montessori means that it wants to add to the spiritual possessions of the human race. Eventually, just as hormone knits the growing body and personality together, it brings forth “the society of little children who are guided by the magical powers of nature,” whose construction “may be compared to the work of the cells in the growth of an organism.” She calls this process, which is only possible in a group of

²⁸ Montessori, *Absorbent Mind*, 134–135.

“normalized” people, “the almost divine and mysterious creation of a *social embryo*,” a community of freedom and cooperation that becomes possible when the psychological embryo is properly formed.

Although Montessori herself took an active part in feminist and socialist politics, from the perspective of her educational philosophy the social embryo is a kind of anti-politics, a politically charged way of avoiding political questions. The “natural social solidarity” represented by the social embryo is not to be confused, she insisted, with “the organization of adult society which governs man’s destinies.”²⁹ Only once this social embryo is formed is it possible to properly consider questions of law and government. So, while Montessori acknowledges the importance of institutions, she is uninterested in reforms that do not originate with the personal transfiguration of normalization. “I began as a sympathizer with political revolutionists of all kinds,” she writes to Helen Keller. “Then I came to feel that it is the liberation of this, what we have in our hearts, that is the beginning and end of revolution.”³⁰ So, she argues that the fine sensory discriminations trained by the didactic apparatus can make political innovations like the Food and Drug Administration unnecessary:

Almost all the forms of adulteration in food stuffs are rendered possible by the torpor of the senses. [...] Fraudulent industry feeds upon the lack of sense education in the masses. [...] We often see the purchaser depending on the honesty of the merchant, or putting his faith in the company, or the label on the box. This is because purchasers are lacking in the capacity of judging directly for themselves.³¹

Her pedagogical libertarianism, then, is to a degree linked with a political libertarianism, with something like William James’s opposition to “bigness and greatness in all their forms,” which was consonant with certain Wilsonian strands of US progressivism.³²

Another element of her American appeal was her claim to place education on a modern scientific footing. Especially since E.L. Thorndike’s attack on “transfer of training” (discussed in Chapter 4), the theory of mental discipline had been falling out of favor, and Montessori’s successful

²⁹ Montessori, *Montessori Method*, 3, 184, 185–188, 212–214.

³⁰ Kramer, *Maria Montessori*, 196.

³¹ Quoted in Kramer, *Maria Montessori*, 142.

³² Robert D. Richardson, *William James: In the Maelstrom of American Modernism: A Biography* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2006), 384.

literacy teaching was another nail in its coffin. Adherents of mental discipline saw her as a foe, particularly in her refusal to impose tasks on children; one resident of North Dakota complained, in a letter to a newspaper, of Montessori's "fallacy that willpower and self-sufficiency are developed by self-indulgence." "The children are being petted and allowed to have their own way until they get an exalted idea of their importance," he warned. Another letter writer, however, responded that Montessori "teaches self-reliance and not self-indulgence, and gives full sway to the child's bent, always with a life-size picture of George B. Consequences in the background."³³ In the humor columnist Bert Leston Taylor's 1921 poem "A Montessori Child," too, Montessori education is depicted as anything but self-indulgent:

I know some little girls and boys
 Who play with blocks and other toys;
 But no one offers toys to me
 Except to use as "stimuli."

I look at children romp and shriek;
 They play a game called hide-and-peek;
 They run and hide, and shout and run,
 And have the greatest lot of fun.

But where I go they only play
 To gather knowledge day by day.
 And so absorb an education
 Through "muscular coordination."

They gum rough letters on a board,
 I learn them of my own accord;
 I play at hide-and-peek with these,
 And thus I get my A, B, C's.

Some children have a game called war.
 They march lead soldiers on the floor;
 But where I go it is enough
 To know that things are smooth or rough.

While other children call it "fun"
 To hop and skip and jump and run,
 I do these things unconsciously
 To set my little spirit free.

³³Kramer, *Maria Montessori*, 181.

While other children merely play,
 I garner wisdom every day.
 I'm never up to childish tricks.
 Yes, ain't I cute? I'm only six.³⁴

Montessori's odd blend of rigor and mysticism, and of addressing and ignoring the era's social problems, endeared her to many American progressives. The crowd at the 1912 Progressive Party convention comprised, according to one observer, "young matrons who are 'up' on everything from Ibsen to the Montessori method, and embody the modern spirit in its quintessential and perhaps most terrifying form."³⁵

Social action progressives, however, were not impressed. In 1914, after Montessori had finished her tour of the United States with McClure, William Heard Kilpatrick, a leading disciple of John Dewey's and the highly influential president of Teachers College, Columbia, published a critical booklet about her work, *The Montessori System Examined*, that turned the American educational establishment against her for decades to come. Kilpatrick argued that Montessori's central doctrine, that the teacher "should tend the child as the gardener does the plant, assured that the natural endowment would properly guide its own process of unfolding," undervalued cooperation and adaptation to novelty, two social action touchstones. While Montessori pupils were mostly isolated, each at her own desk or mat, Kilpatrick held that a truly democratic education would "put the children into such a socially conditioned environment that they will of themselves spontaneously unite into larger or smaller groups to work out their life-impulses," just as adult citizens would. He also faulted Montessori for failing to prepare students for "self-directing adaptation to a novel environment," which they would need to master a dynamic, modern social world. "If development be but the unfolding of what was from the first enfolded," as Montessori assumed, then, he reasoned, "the adaptation is made in advance of the situation, and consequently without reference to its novel aspects. [...] With man, however, each generation finds – and makes – a new situation." Montessori's insensitivity to historical change was mirrored, he argued, in the inflexibility of

³⁴ Bert Leston Taylor, "A Montessori Child," in *A Penny Whistle: Together with the Babbette Ballads* (New York: Knopf, 1921), 56–57.

³⁵ Robert Crunden, *Ministers of Reform: The Progressives' Achievement in American Civilization, 1889-1920* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1982), 211.

the didactic apparatus, in which “with each piece one, and only one, line of activity is feasible.” With the cylinder box, the largest cylinder must go in the largest hole, and so on; “any side suggestion, as improvising a wagon, is effectually suppressed,” he lamented.³⁶ *The Montessori System Examined* ensured that Montessori’s ideas would not be adopted in American education schools, and hence, because of the growing power of those schools, would not play an important role in public education. Rather, they would survive in independent organizations such as the American Montessori Association, which continues to administer private Montessori schools to this day.

MONTESSORI AESTHETICS: THE IRIDESCENT SHELL

Aesthetic experience, for Montessori, is (along with religion) the completest expression of home, and as with the classical *Bildung* theorists it is the highest fulfillment of both individual and social self-realization. In keeping with her view of education as an unfolding of what is already present within, she sees art as the discovery, rather than the invention, of new ways of being. Montessori discusses the aesthetic under the rubric of the imagination, which she divides into four categories. These categories can be plotted on two axes: their realism with regard to the external world and their realism with regard to the hidden materials of the unconscious. The “frivolous imagination” is unrealistic in both dimensions; it is mere “unbridled divagation of the fancy” among “images of light, colour, [and] sounds.” While harmless enough, it leads nowhere. The superstitious imagination, meanwhile, deals with real unconscious impulses, but does so by distorting the laws of nature; pitting feeling against reason, it disintegrates the personality. Montessori critiques all forms of make-believe, or, as she puts it, “attribut[ing] characteristics to objects which do not possess them,” such as a child “whipping his father’s walking-stick, as if he were mounted upon a real horse,” as incipiently superstitious. The “scientific imagination” devises new arrangements of the material world that are consistent with natural laws, but it does not interact with the unconscious.

The “artistic imagination,” finally, shares with science a scrupulous respect for reality, but adds to that an intuitive sensitivity that allows it to

³⁶William Heard Kilpatrick, *The Montessori System Examined* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1914), 9, 8, 20, 65, 10, 31–33, 52.

peer inside the hormic darkroom and reveal new truths about humanity's spiritual endowment.³⁷ She does not mean, though, that art must be superficially verisimilar; her highest praise is for Dante. Rather, she wants art to reflect a close study of material and spiritual reality. For instance, she admires a poet who compares servants agitated upon learning of their employer's return to a pack of hunting dogs who have just sighted the fox. Had the poet not closely observed both the human psyche and animal behavior, she argues, the lines would have been a failure, but when the analogy succeeds, it goes beyond previous observations and illuminates reality in a new way.

Because Montessori's artworks synthesize conscious and unconscious knowledge, to understand their function we must describe her theory of the unconscious in a little more detail. We have already discussed her idea of an unconscious knowing-how growing from within. She also recognizes an unconscious knowing-about, an awareness of the world operating below the level of cognition. This is her notion of the "absorbent mind," a "special kind of vital memory, that does not remember consciously, but absorbs images into the very life of the individual." This process is strongest in children: We adults may "remember an environment," she writes, but "the child absorbs it into himself. He does not remember the things that he sees, but he forms with these things part of his psyche." Once absorbed, consciousness can only access this material if it is linked with an "emblem," such as a religious icon or a work of art. Through these emblems, "the mind can succeed in expressing infinite immensities in a determinate form."³⁸ Without the emblems, the unexpressed inner "immensities" are cut off from the conscious parts of the mind and, thus, give rise to inner divisions that prevent the normalization of the personality. With them, the artist, and her audience, can reach new levels of understanding, of the nature of humanity and its place in the world, that are inaccessible to science alone, although a scrupulous respect for science is a prerequisite of artistic greatness "Like the tiny bird which hid under the wing of an eagle about to soar and when it had been thus borne up to an immense height, disengaged itself from the eagle and began to fly still higher by its own efforts," Montessori writes, "so too is man, who at first holds fast to

³⁷ Maria Montessori, *The Advanced Montessori Method* (Cambridge, MA: R. Bentley, 1964), 191, 198.

³⁸ Montessori, *Advanced Montessori Method*, 171–172.

Nature, attaches himself to her by means of the most severe speculations, and with her soars aloft in search of truth; then he disengages himself from her and his imagination creates over and above Nature herself. [...] Thus the flights of the imagination will start from a higher plane henceforth, and the intelligence will be directed into its natural channels of creation.”³⁹

Aesthetic education, for Montessori, thus begins, like scientific education, with “sensory education which prepares for the accurate perception of all the differential details in the qualities of things.” Sensory education, Montessori argues, “helps us to collect from the external world the material for the imagination.” From there, the aesthetic imagination can develop more and more refinements on the normalized personality. As with all kinds of education for Montessori, though, this development depends on the normative personality’s protection, during its unfolding, from the violent and authoritarian disturbances of nonnormalized personalities. Throughout history, Montessori observes, art is found “scattered like crumbs of gold” wherever “the intelligence had time to mature in peace.” Where there was peace, she argues, we “find local artistic types of work, of furniture, of poetic songs and popular music.” Montessori’s whole theory of education is built upon this notion of protecting the mind so that it may “mature in peace”; that is how she advances the education of the senses and the formation of a peaceful society. The education of the artist, then, can be seen as the climax of her program. “A true preparation” for the artistic life, she writes, means creating channels for a preexisting natural energy; the teacher simply “digs the beds where the waters which well up from [the mind] will flow in smiling or majestic rivers.” “In the matter of causing the springing up of these rushing waters of internal creation,” though, “we are powerless.” Finally, once created, the artwork itself becomes a protective vessel in its own right, the “environment in which the intelligence of the child is destined to form itself” in the future, as the next generation spends its absorbent years surrounded by this generation’s emblems. The work of art, writes Montessori, is a “creation of the inner man” that “enfolds him and protects his spirit in its intellectual needs, just as the iridescent shell encloses the mollusk”—not a pearl, but an enclosed form in which pearls can grow.⁴⁰

³⁹ Montessori, *Advanced Montessori Method*, 187–189.

⁴⁰ Montessori, *Advanced Montessori Method*, 191, 194–196, 189, 197, 196.

CATHER'S DESIRE

For Cather, too, creativity, artistic and otherwise, is a matter of carefully channeling a force that is both sub- and superconscious, both instinctual and cosmic. (Though, as we shall see, the force has a different character for Cather than it does for Montessori.) Of course, it is hardly surprising that a self-described Romanticist should emphasize the unconscious and impulsive side of art. Cather faulted the composition process of her early novel *Alexander's Bridge* for lacking "the thing by which our feet find the road home on a dark night, accounting of themselves for roots and stones which we had never noticed by day."⁴¹ She contrasts that experience with the writing of *O Pioneers!*, her first major novel, which "was like taking a ride through a familiar country on a horse that knew the way."⁴² *Alexander's Bridge*, a novel about a bridge-builder who forces connections and structures that cannot be sustained, and whose writing Cather experienced as the "building of [an] external stor[y]," gives way to the mature style of *O Pioneers!*, a novel about letting the land "work itself" and growing rich "just from sitting still," whose writing she experienced as "accelerating a natural process" that existed outside her conscious mind.⁴³ In *The Song of the Lark*, Cather's semiautobiographical bildungsroman of 1915, she describes Thea Kronborg's creativity as an indwelling presence with a life of its own, "more like a friendly spirit than like anything that was a part of herself. [...] The something came and went, she never knew how."⁴⁴ This description of art as channeling a force that wells up unbidden from within conforms to other statements Cather makes about creativity. "If only I could nail up the front door and live in a mess, I could simply become a fountain pen and have done with it – a conduit for ink to run through," she writes in a letter.⁴⁵

Where Cather's similarity to Montessori becomes clearer is in her refusal, despite all this emphasis on the artist's receptivity, to glorify

⁴¹ Willa Cather, *Alexander's Bridge*, ed. Frederick M. Link (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska, [1912] 2007), 195.

⁴² Willa Cather, *O Pioneers!* (New York: Oxford University Press, [1913] 1999), 171.

⁴³ The phrase "accelerating a natural process" is from Cather's approving description of the art of the Mesa Verde people. Willa Cather, "Mesa Verde Wonderland Is Easy to Reach," *Denver Times* (January 31, 1916): 7. Cather, *O Pioneers!*, 49, 65.

⁴⁴ Willa Cather, *The Song of the Lark* (New York: Oxford University Press, [1915] 2000), 72, 258.

⁴⁵ *Selected Letters of Willa Cather*, 185.

complete openness to experience. Almost the opposite: to hear the voice within, one must shield it from noise. Thea's "obligation" to her friendly spirit is to preserve its "secrecy," to "protect it even from herself" and to keep it "from being caught up in the meshes of common things."⁴⁶ Cather frequently recurs to images of creativity flourishing within an isolated stronghold, such as Thea's upstairs room and Panther Canyon hideaway in *The Song of the Lark*, or Godfrey St. Peter's study and the Blue Mesa in *The Professor's House*. Alexandra Bergson of *O Pioneers!* sees her own task as providing a structured sanctuary in which the creative energies of both land and people can work themselves out. With her "most unusual trimness and care for detail," the "order and fine arrangement" with which she manages her farm, she enables the land to "wor[k] itself."⁴⁷ The energy that pours through these protected channels is not chaotic or irrational, but is governed, like Montessori's home, by an overriding but ineffable logic. As she stakes her future on the "Genius of the Divide," Alexandra Bergson takes comfort from the "ordered march" of the stars: "It fortified her to reflect upon the great operations of nature," Cather writes, and to contemplate the "law that lay behind them," even though no human being is wise enough to precisely formulate that law in its entirety.⁴⁸

Cather's ideas about how to cultivate this creative energy reflect Montessori's at many points. In her personal department, Alexandra is much like a Montessori directress, "armored in calm," slow to anger, and sparing of both praise and blame. Thea Kronborg's childhood home life sounds like the ideal household Fisher describes in *A Montessori Mother*. Thea's mother maintains a clean, well-ordered, well-stocked home in which all the children have the liberty and resources to follow their inclinations. "Mrs. Kronborg's children," we learn, "were all trained to dress themselves at the earliest possible age, to make their own beds," and Mrs. Kronborg "let her children's minds alone. She did not pry into their thoughts or nag them. She respected them as individuals." Thea's artistic spirit thrives in this atmosphere of self-reliance and freedom of thought. The process by which Thea Kronborg masters musical pieces, as witnessed by her piano teacher, recalls the explosion into writing as reported in Tozier's articles:

⁴⁶ *Selected Letters of Willa Cather*, 187.

⁴⁷ Cather, *O Pioneers!*, 49, 65.

⁴⁸ Cather, *O Pioneers!*, 42.

Until she saw it as a whole, she wandered like a blind man surrounded by torments. After she once had her “revelation,” after she got the idea that to her – not always to him – explained everything, then she went forward rapidly. But she was not always easy to help. She was sometimes impervious to suggestion; she would stare at him as if she were deaf and ignore everything he told her to do. Then, all at once, something would happen in her brain and she would begin to do all that he had been for weeks telling her to do, without realizing that he had ever told her.⁴⁹

One might even argue that Cather’s style makes her relationship to her readers analogous to the Montessori teacher/student relationship. Describing the tone she sought for *My Ántonia*, Cather told Elizabeth Sergeant “I want my heroine to be like [... an] object in the middle of a table, which one may examine from all sides.” How similar this is to Montessori’s desire to teach almost entirely with unique objects in an otherwise empty room.⁵⁰

These correspondences suggest a new way to look at Cather’s call for “The Novel Démueblé,” as an echo of Montessori’s classroom démueblé, that “airy room” with its “big tracts of open space.” The kind of minimalism Cather describes in “The Novel Démueblé” is not, say, that of Hemingway, which is based on a revulsion against fraudulent abstractions and bankrupt ideals—Hemingway was disgusted by Cather’s decision, in *One of Ours*, to take the Wilsonian argument for the First World War rather seriously. Nor is it like the minimalism of shame that Mark McGurl detects in Raymond Carver, grounded in a sense of social abjection and emotional paralysis—one never feels, in Cather, the frustrated need to speak, the pained quality of silence, of Carver and his heirs.⁵¹ For Cather, reticence is a pleasure, a way of creating an open, empty space which the spirit—“the glory of Pentecost”—might enter. Instead of “talking all the time,” she proposes, novelists should “leave the scene bare for the play of emotions.” Cather’s readers, like Montessori’s students, need not be told things—they simply need a quiet space, stripped of all but the essentials, in which they can discover what they already, on some level, know.⁵²

⁴⁹ Cather, *O Pioneers!*, 166.

⁵⁰ Sergeant quoted in James Schroeter, ed., *Willa Cather and Her Critics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1967), 121.

⁵¹ Mark McGurl, *The Program Era: Postwar Fiction and the Rise of Creative Writing* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2009).

⁵² Willa Cather, “The Novel Démueblé,” in *Willa Cather on Writing: Critical Studies on Writing as an Art* (New York: Knopf, 1920), 35–43.

The energy we would channel, though, is not Montessori's horne, but something much more ambivalent, which she calls "desire"—or, in *The Professor's House*, capital-D "Desire." While Montessori's theory of horne expresses her belief in the cosmos's benevolence toward human aspirations, Cather's idea of Desire reflects, as Susan Rosowski has argued, a Romantic problematic of disjunction between the "synthesizing or creative powers" of the human spirit and an "alien or meaningless material world."⁵³ The contrast between the two is most pronounced, perhaps, in their relationship to death. Montessori is uncomfortable with mortality. As a medical student she disliked handling corpses, and she almost left the field after her first dissection. She changed her mind when, walking in the park, she met a beggar woman and her two-year-old child, who was playing with a scrap of paper. Montessori told her first biographer that the child's happy absorption in its play, which blinded it to its depressing surroundings, gave her the courage to continue her studies.⁵⁴ At the origin of Montessori education, if we read into this episode a bit freely, is a determination to conquer the fear of death, or, like the beggar's child, to become blind to it. At the root of Thea Kronborg's art is opposite determination, the will to remember death always. As a child Thea must attend prayer meetings, where she meets people who are "preparing to die." She initially finds these meetings a depressing contrast to the glittering world of art that she encounters in *Anna Karenina*. However, "years afterward, when she had need of them, those old faces were to come back to her" and "would seem to her then as full of meaning, as mysteriously marked by Destiny, as the people who danced the mazurka under the elegant Korsunsky." This prophesy is fulfilled when she first performs Elizabeth in *Tannhauser*, while her own mother is on her deathbed. "I could see her anxiety and grief getting more and more into the part," a friend remarks. "The last act is heart-breaking. It's as homely as a country prayer meeting: might be any lonely woman getting ready to die."⁵⁵ The acceptance of death, too, is the subject of many of the artworks mentioned in *The Song of the Lark*, including *Hamlet*, William Cullen Bryant's "Thanatopsis," Addison's *Cato*, Gluck's *Orfeo*, and the Gerome painting "The Pasha's Grief."

⁵³ Rosowski, *Voyage Perilous*, x.

⁵⁴ Kramer, *Maria Montessori*, 44.

⁵⁵ Cather, *Song of the Lark*, 112, 115, 379.

Death, though, is only the most obvious of the ways that reality disagrees with the human spirit, and Thea's general understanding of finitude and limitation is the source of her power to deeply affect other people with her art. As Archie puts it, Thea seems to understand "what he had hoped to find in the world, and had not found"; she alone can communicate the full, unrealizable extent of "our original want," which provides the "drama" of human life. This original want is not a special possession of artists, but something that is "formed in us in early youth, undirected, and of its own accord." Only artists, however, know how to speak about it. Thinking of Ray Kennedy, Wunsch, Archie, and Spanish Johnny, Thea muses that "each of them concealed another person in himself, just as she did," a second self defined by the inner struggle of Desire with despair. "How deep they lay, these second persons, and how little one knew about them, except to guard them fiercely. It was to music, more than to anything else, that these hidden things in people responded." Art's task, for Cather, is to help people develop, not Montessori's "normalized" personality that surfs on the waves of *horme* toward increasing personal and social perfection, but a personality both open to Desire and accepting of its discontents. Where Montessori imagines the individual being woven into increasingly intricate harmonies, Cather hopes only to impart the "exalted power to bear" the suffering life brings.

Desire, like *horme*, figures as water, a substance that cannot be created but can be channeled. Because Desire is excessive over reality, though, flooding and overflowing recur in its imagery, as when, awakening to the passions hidden underneath everyday life, Thea has a vision of the "long-vanished sea" that "for many thousands of years actually washed over that desert."⁵⁶ Cather is fond of Dumas's saying that to make a drama one needs only "one passion and four walls." Where Montessori sees existing realities as "the beds where the waters which well up from [the mind] will flow," Cather sees them as "four walls"; where Montessori sees a channel, Cather sees a box that is liable to burst from the pressure of what it contains. "The world is little, people are little, human life is little," declares Thea's childhood teacher, Professor Wunsch (German for *wish*). "There is only one big thing – desire. And before it, when it is big, all is little."⁵⁷ To be closed off to Desire is to live a life without drama, but as soon as Desire

⁵⁶ Cather, *Song of the Lark*, 36, 45.

⁵⁷ Cather, *Song of the Lark*, 69.

is admitted there is too much of it, and the excess must be somehow disposed of. Somewhat as individuality emerges, for Montessori, from idiosyncratic regressions from a uniform human nature, Cather's characters are distinguished by how they deal with this problem. In *O Pioneers!*, for instance, the pious Ivar, who is "subject to every kind of temptation" from his "rebellious body," gives complete freedom to his feet, even "trampling in filth when my desires are low." The feet are "free members," he reasons, because "I indulge them without harm to any one," and "they are quickly cleaned again." Others, like Emil and Marie, choose to break against the rocks of reality and die rather than restrain their Desire. Spanish Johnny and Professor Wunsch fill the gap between passion and walls with drink. Sadistic characters such as Frank Shabata and *Song of the Lark's* Madison Bowers vent their disappointment by trying to make other people as unhappy as they are.

The best thing that can happen with hormone is accumulation: the irrigation of more and more of it into our otherwise parched lives. The best thing that can happen with Desire, which like water can both nourish and drown us, is circulation. Across her oeuvre, Cather represents healthy and unhealthy relationships with Desire in terms of circulation and stagnation. One of the most common failed strategies for coming to terms with Desire, in Cather, is nostalgia, which she imagines as treating the past as still pool of meaning that one fears to disturb. In *My Ántonia*, stagnant water is implicated in the deaths of two nostalgic characters, Gaston Cleric and the suicidal tramp. Cleric, who cares only for classical antiquity, ruins his health by contracting a fever on a visit to Roman ruins surrounded by "marsh grasses." The tramp, meanwhile, appears one day at the Norwegian farms where Ántonia works, complaining that the polyglot country isn't "Americy" anymore, and that "the ponds in this country is done got so low a man couldn't drown himself."⁵⁸ After the tramp takes his own life, the Norwegians find his copy of "The Old Oaken Bucket," an 1817 poem by Samuel Woolworth in which a well represents the reservoirs of meaning stored up in "scenes of [...] childhood."⁵⁹ To these examples of bad

⁵⁸ Willa Cather, *My Ántonia* (New York: Penguin [1918] 1994), 197, 139.

⁵⁹ The last stanza of "The Old Oaken Bucket" reads:

How sweet from the green mossy brim to receive it,
As poised on the curb it inclined to my lips!
Not a full blushing goblet could tempt me to leave it,

stagnation, we might add the (other) suicidal tramp from *The Song of the Lark*, who drowns himself in a standpipe, and Mrs. Archie, whose fondness for tinned fish—the ocean trapped in the paltriest confines—reflects her meagerness of spirit. Thea Kronborg’s artistic greatness, on the other hand, is represented in terms of the circulatory movement of water. Consider her famous epiphany about art as a sheath:

[W]hat was any art but an effort to make a sheath, a mould in which to imprison for a moment the shining, elusive element which is life itself, – life hurrying past us and running away, too strong to stop, too sweet to lose? The Indian women had held it in their jars. In the sculpture she had seen in the Art Institute, it had been caught in a flash of arrested motion. In singing, one made a vessel of one’s throat and nostrils and held it on one’s breath, caught the stream in a scale of natural intervals.

When Thea speaks of herself as a jug, and of “imprisoning” life, she does not imagine holding Desire still but transporting it from one place to another, perpetuating a cycle, as when, singing in the Mexican settlement, she and her audience “debouch” into each other like water pouring back and forth between two pitchers. In the novel’s epilogue, when the residents of Moonstone take “real refreshment” from Thea’s artistic success, they are likened to “the many naked little sandbars which lie between Venice and the main-land, in the seemingly stagnant water of the lagoons,” which “are made habitable and wholesome only because, every night, a foot and a half of tide creeps in from the sea and winds its fresh brine up through all that network of shining water-ways.”⁶⁰ “My point was not the development of a genius,” Cather writes in a letter about *The Song of the Lark*; “my point is always Moonstone, what she got from it, what she gave back to it.”⁶¹ As the tidal lagoon metaphor suggests, the movement of spiritual energy is cyclic, not progressive.

The brightest that beauty or revelry sips.
And now, far removed from the loved habitation,
The tear of regret will intrusively swell,
As fancy reverts to my father’s plantation,
And sighs for the bucket that hangs in the well
The old oaken bucket, the iron-bound bucket,
The moss-covered bucket that hangs in the well!

⁶⁰ Cather, *Song of the Lark*, 258.

⁶¹ *Selected Letters of Willa Cather*, 218.

CATHER'S PROGRESSIVISM: MIRACULOUSLY PRESERVED
YOUTHFULNESS

This cyclical perspective colors Cather's resistance to political progressivism, which she regards as a distortion of a certain conception of the life cycle that she develops with striking consistency across her novels. Cather breaks life into four stages, childhood, youth, maturity, and age, each defined by a different relationship to Desire. In childhood subject and object, Desire and world are not differentiated. Rather than feeling trapped by reality's four walls, children become one with their environment. Little Jim Burden feels "dissolved into" his grandmother's garden, and for Godfrey St. Peter, "Lake Michigan, the inland sea of his childhood [...] ran through the days like the weather, not a thing thought about, but a part of consciousness itself." This childhood oneness of mind and world shatters with the onset of youth (or "adolescence"), when Desire, in the form of sexuality and creativity, makes its first appearance. Thus, for Thea Kronborg, erotic and artistic awakening go hand in hand, and together displace a childhood self that was at one with nature. On her 13th birthday, Professor Wunsch asks her to interpret Heine's poem "*Im leuchtenden sommermorgen.*" When Thea shows that she understands the poem, about a remorseful lover, Wunsch concludes that she has "*der Geist, die Phantasie*" ["the spirit, the imagination"], the intuition of what makes "the rose to red, the sky to blue," "*ohne dieses giebt es keine Kunst*" ["without which there is no art"]. After this lesson, she is fascinated by sexually suggestive "yellow prickly-pear blossoms with their thousand stamens." Contemplating the blossoms, she senses her childhood oneness with nature slipping away, being replaced by something else. "She looked at the sand hills until she wished she *were* a sand hill. And yet she knew that she was going to leave them all behind some day. They would be changing all day long, yellow and purple and lavender, and she would not be there."⁶² No longer taking nature into her "consciousness itself" like the child St. Peter, she now only wishes that she could, and this moment of estrangement is also one of aesthetic awakening. This is the essence of Cather's "youth."

Maturity, for Cather, arrives when we perceive the mismatch between Desire and reality, and start to develop our various strategies for coping with it. While the transition between childhood and youth is triggered by the onset of puberty, the move from youth to maturity seems to be

⁶² Cather, *Song of the Lark*, 72.

unmoored from biology. Thea asks Archie to “stay young” for her, as if he had a choice, and Cather seems to agree that he does. This juncture, then, is when Cather’s characters get some say in the process, and is, as we will see, the site of her politically charged coming-of-age narrative. Finally, biology reasserts itself in the arrival of old age, which Cather imagines as a recession of Desire that restores one to the condition of childhood. “Look at Thor, now,” Thea says of her toddler brother; “he’s just a little old man.”⁶³ The best-known description of old age in Cather is that of Godfrey St. Peter. He reverts to a “boy” for whom subject, objects, and even verbs have all collapsed into a unity, for whom “sun sunned and rain rained and snow snowed.” Ridding himself of the remnants of his youth and maturity, which he calls “his nature as modified by sex,” he comes to “the root of the matter [...] under all desires,” which is that “he was earth, and would return to earth.”⁶⁴ The life cycle really is a cycle, ending where it begins. The adventure of youth and Desire, however high it might soar, is only an interlude.

To be a “progressive,” for Cather, is to fail to grasp this point, to mistake youth for life itself. Cather’s progressives refuse the passage from youth to maturity; rather than accepting “the dictum of old Dumas,” they go on believing that one passion might eventually thrive inside four walls, if only the walls were somehow reformed. Taking the promise of perpetual growth at face value, they never attain the critical perspective of “*Bildung* to the second degree.” Rather than accepting the frustration inherent in life, they try to avoid it by restlessly altering social conditions. Jim Burden’s wife, facing a disappointment that should have dispelled her youthful optimism, thumbs her nose at the reality principle by marrying outside her class and supporting strikes, suffragists, and bohemians. Cather sees both bohemianism and the suffrage movement as quixotic. “In its essence Bohemianism is a rebellion against all organized powers,” she writes, “and that in itself is a defect, for victory is with the organized powers of the universe.”⁶⁵ She places the odious Mrs. Cutter among a type of woman seen “all over the world; sometimes founding a new religion, sometimes being forcibly fed,” the latter phrase almost certainly referring to the

⁶³ Cather, *Song of the Lark*, 74.

⁶⁴ Willa Cather, *The Professor’s House* (New York: Vintage Classics [1925] 1990), 275, 219, 264–265.

⁶⁵ Quoted in Heather Love, “The Lure of Impossible Things,” in *A New Literary History of America*, ed. Greil Marcus and Werner Sollors (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012), 520.

suffragist Alice Paul's famous hunger strike. Even when she portrays progressives with sympathy, they come off rather naive. Mrs. Tellemantez tells Dr. Archie that he will never understand the madness of Spanish Johnny, for whom any "little thing" in the world is pregnant with the "big" force of Desire, because "you are progressive." His progressivism, like his "magnificently preserved youthfulness," springs from the fact that he simply "won't admit things" that would disenchant him.⁶⁶ His political party, centered on a "reform gang" of "young fellows," tries to rejuvenate society by tearing down entrenched liquor and prostitution interests, but fails because, in the new state of Colorado, "you've got nothing to reform out here."⁶⁷ Purveyors of vice thrive simply because people want them to, but that is one of the things that Archie won't admit.

If progressivism is a kind of arrested development, or more charitably a "miraculously preserved youthfulness," then Cather's ultimate progressive is Godfrey St. Peter, whose long struggle against the end of youth expresses her most bitterly ironic take on the hormic ideas of personal and social development. Like Dr. Archie, and like a certain Spanish adventurer, St. Peter is tantalized by the fantasy of perpetual youth. St. Peter's fantasy, though, involves not just his personal life cycle but the longer arcs of the Progressive Era, of American history, and of the ancient struggle between civilization and its enemies. In the widest angle, he sees himself as, via Tom Outland, the heir to the cliff-dwellers, a society that epitomizes the Montessori ideal of spiritual development in a quiet, protected space. The Blue Mesa recalls the Montessori Casa. In "this stronghold where they were at once so safe and so comfortable," they led an "orderly and secure life," excelling in "the arts of peace." Some of their pottery designs are "identical" to ones found in ancient Crete, implying that they express some universal human potentiality. This civilization, growing as the natural consequence of peace, security, and access to literal and figurative deep springs, falls when they leave their mesa to gather food, and, careless of danger, are massacred by another tribe.

Outland, inspired by their culture, hopes that where the stronghold of the mesa failed, a different kind of stronghold, the product of a more advanced time and environment, will succeed: the Smithsonian Institution, which will "revive this civilization" by "interpret[ing]" its artifacts. The cliff-dwellers, according to Outland, were "too far advanced for their

⁶⁶ Cather, *Song of the Lark*, 42–43.

⁶⁷ Cather, *Song of the Lark*, 314, 333.

time”; perhaps, it seems before his fateful trip to Washington, the world has made enough progress to pick up where the cliff-dwellers left off. In the American capital, however, he finds only the rapacity of their destroyers, and, losing the artifacts, he loses hope in the nation. Here, though, begins a new round of efforts to salvage the cliff-dweller project. Outland comes to believe that spiritual achievements cannot be bequeathed as institutions or artifacts, but only as “religious emotion,” which he returns to the mesa to cultivate. The mental clarity he finds there leads, eventually, to the scientific discovery that makes his fortune. His “bulkheaded vacuum,” a device that helps airplanes fly by creating a sealed-off interior space, can be read as a legacy of the walled-in, sky-gazing cliff-dwellers, a spiritual product that survives despite the loss of their material artifacts. If the vacuum helps humanity soar to higher realms of insight, then perhaps the cliff-dwellers can still be the source of an upward march of progress, albeit a discontinuous one. Instead, however, the vacuum is immediately installed in RAF planes, becoming a weapon in the war that shattered Progressive Era optimism. Outland himself dies in the war, and the profits from his vacuum finance “Outland,” the elaborate house that inverts the values of the Blue Mesa: where the cliff-dwellers’ arts expressed a universal, indwelling human spirit, the Marselluses are preoccupied with fleeting trends and status symbols, and where the mesa is a secure, even secret place for the human spirit to unfold, the house is an ostentatious tourist trap. The cliff-dwellers’ project, which Outland thought he had saved, is once again lost.⁶⁸

Zooming in to the personal arc, St. Peter, in turn, is a spiritual heir to Outland, who is inspired by his student in much the same way that Outland is inspired by the cliff-dwellers, and committed to somehow redeeming his loss. St. Peter, like Dr. Archie, refuses to accept such defeats, but while Archie wages a self-conscious and lonely battle not to “admit things,” St. Peter is nourished by successive infusions of youth from others that keep him from even realizing his situation. First, there is his own biological youth, when he is too exuberant with the expansive energy of his Spanish adventurers to “car[e] a whoop” about the future, followed by a time when his spirits are bolstered by a few “young men” disciples. Then, “along came Outland and brought him a kind of second youth,” a youth freighted with Outland’s love of the cliff-dwellers, which draws St. Peter

⁶⁸ Cather, *Professor’s House*, 201, 250, 258.

into that long cycle of destruction and redemption.⁶⁹ Trying to remain true to Outland's spirit, he tries to defend the spiritual fastnesses where his protégé felt at home. One of these is the university itself, which is falling prey to a "cult for efficiency," personified by Horace Langtry, a history professor whose "uncle was president of the board of regents, and very influential in State politics," that threatens the slow revelation of human potential represented by St. Peter's life of study. Another is his house, from which his family, with their "violent loves and hates," would displace him for status' sake. Yet while the cliff-dwellers knew only steady progress in the arts of peace, cut short by a sudden massacre, St. Peter gains enough perspective to see that what goes up must come down, that they, and he, can merely stave off, rather than transcend, the human destiny of violence, perversity, and disappointment. Finally, his near-suffocation in his hermetically sealed upstairs study, his own personal Blue Mesa, marks the final conclusion of the novel's multiple trajectories of retreat into ever smaller and more rarefied strongholds. This is as far, for Cather, as one can push Montessori's faith that if only you carve out a channel for it, humanity's goodness will enter and redeem the world. The transitoriness, even self-destructiveness, of all the novels' protected spaces of quiet growth, including the Blue Mesa, Outland's vacuum, the university, and the study, marks once again the second degree in Cather's "*Bildung* to the second degree."

In sum, then, Cather shares Montessori's imagination of human development and social progress as products of simplicity and receptiveness, of unfurnished classrooms and silent teachers, and of freedom from chatters and busybodies, but she ascribes this dynamic to a single life stage—the adventure of youth—rather than to life itself. By identifying progressivism with youth, Cather is able to express both her sympathy for it and her criticism of it; toward it she adopts the warm but patronizing attitude of a woman who seems to have deliberately cultivated matronliness, who has known youth and felt its appeal but soured on its false promises. For Montessori, making politics a question of personal rather than institutional change is a way to claim more political significance than her project really has; Cather, meanwhile, denies politics by making it *merely* personal, and, more than that, merely a youthful fancy. What is needed, in Cather's moral universe, is not for such fancies to wholly succeed, but for people to learn to commiserate over their failure.

⁶⁹ Cather, *Professor's House*, 257, 275, 138, 55, 33–34, 258–261.

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CHAPTER 4

Herland and Zond: Charlotte Perkins Gilman and the Social Efficiency Educators

Does Charlotte Perkins Gilman want to unshackle female individuality, or does she want to unravel it? Since the 1970s, “The Yellow Wall-Paper” has been read as a portrait of female selfhood disintegrating under patriarchal domesticity. More recently, however, critics have detected a hostility in her fiction, not just toward whatever robs women of their selfhood, but also, paradoxically, to the idea of selfhood itself. This anti-individualist interpretation might be said to begin with Walter Benn Michaels’s notorious reading of “The Yellow Wall-Paper” in terms of the self’s dissolution into the economic circulation of signs. It is in *Herland*, though, where Gilman’s skepticism of selfhood takes its clearest narrative form. Via *Herland*, Katherine Fusco identifies a “commitment to understanding people as the products of systems,” resembling Taylorist “discourses of industrial organization” that see “the human as too individualistic and inefficient,” as Gilman’s “primary aesthetic and ideological framework.” In the Herlanders’s practice of collectively planned parenthood, their substitution of social control for individual sexual desire, she finds “an account of the world in which the world’s primary business is the systematic production of people” and in which “all expressions of difference, including racial and class-based difference” are decried as selfish and unproductive.¹ Kristin Carter-Sanborn goes further than Fusco, arguing that Gilman’s distrust of individual agency leads her to write off agency as such, whether exercised

¹Katherine Fusco, “Systems, Not Men: Producing People in Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s *Herland*,” *Studies in the Novel* 41, no. 4 (2009): 423, 420, 425, 430.

by people or groups. In Gilman's "sociobiological" outlook, Carter-Sanborn claims, an evolutionary drive for efficiency leads to an "ideally organized world, where 'nothing is wasted,'" but wherein "the space between knowledge and action, what we might call politics or agency, has also been narrowed" to the vanishing point. Noting the beehive imagery used to represent the Herlanders's solidarity, she compares the well-coordinated women to "creepy bug armies," who not only do not deliberate but do not even really think. Instead, they have "so clear and quick a connection between conviction and action that it was well nigh impossible for them to know a thing and not do it."²

Gilman's nonfiction amply supports these anti-individualist readings. She often writes against the deformations of "personality," her term for a selfhood that looks inward rather than outward for fulfillment. Women's entrapment in domesticity stunts them, but so too does the self-involvement of the romantic subject. "We exist, function, and develop in organic relation, not as distinct individuals," she declares in *Social Ethics*.³ "A man or woman to-day, who has no interest beyond the directly personal," she writes elsewhere, "is as out of place among real human beings as an ape would be – almost." ("The Yellow Wall-Paper" narrator, deprived of all social intercourse, becomes such an ape as she "creep[s] around" on all fours.) Gilman concedes that "we visibly *are* individuals" when "microscopically examined," but she is, in the words of a contemporary reviewer, "more a telescope person than a microscope person." This reviewer praises Gilman for anticipating "a time when – with the growth of the social consciousness – the poet will conclude to remove his analytical microscope from the contemplation of his private emotions [...] to submerge himself in the national life of his people."⁴

² Kristin Carter-Sanborn, "Restraining Order: The Imperialist Anti-Violence of Charlotte Perkins Gilman," *Arizona Quarterly* 56, no. 2 (2000): 19, 20; Walter Benn Michaels, *The Gold Standard and the Logic of Naturalism: American Literature at the Turn of the Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009).

³ Charlotte Perkins Gilman, *Social Ethics: Sociology and the Future of Society*, ed. Michael R. Hill and Mary Jo Deegan (Westport, CT: Praeger, [1914] 2004).

⁴ Cynthia J. Davis, *Charlotte Perkins Gilman: A Biography* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 2010), xvi; Charlotte Perkins Gilman, *Herland, The Yellow Wall-paper, and Selected Writings*, ed. Denise D. Knight (New York: Penguin, 1999), 182; Joanne B. Karpinski, ed., *Critical Essays on Charlotte Perkins Gilman* (New York: G.K. Hall, 1992), 58, 45.

While Gilman does have a real distrust of individual agency, however, she also believes that a higher selfhood can emerge once people move beyond the normal understanding of personality. Challenges to the ideal of the free and unitary self, as Jennifer Fleissner has argued, need not always reinforce “the bleak reading of modernization as an extension of proto-Taylorist principles of industrial organization to private life.”⁵ Instead of staging a debate between pro- and anti-individualist readings, then, we can combine their perspectives via another lens, one focused on narratives in which perfect individual self-cultivation ultimately converges with perfect social integration: the lens of bildungsroman criticism. Gilman does not embrace the psychological truncations of Taylorism, but she does attempt to make social efficiency the basis of a new kind of self-development in the *Bildung* mode.

SOCIAL EFFICIENCY, SOCIAL SERVICE, SOCIAL CONTROL

Gilman develops her idea of how self-cultivation leads to social participation most fully in her educational thought. Like Abraham Cahan, Gilman is both a novelist and an educational theorist in her own right. She places schooling and childrearing at the center of tracts such as *Concerning Children* (1900), *Our Brains and What Ails Them* (1912), and *Social Ethics* (1914), as well as her first two utopian novels, *Moving the Mountain* (1911) and *Herland* (1915), and her coming-of-age novel *Benigna Machiavelli* (1916). As an educational thinker, Gilman is linked by intellectual affinity and personal connections with the movement known as social efficiency education, whose central ideas drew on Lester Frank Ward, a hero of Gilman’s to whom she dedicated *Women and Economics*, and Edward A. Ross, Gilman’s longtime correspondent and Ward’s nephew by marriage. The leading theorists of social efficiency education also included David Snedden, Ross’s student and Massachusetts’s first Commissioner of Education, and Franklin Bobbitt, a University of Chicago professor who led the new field of scientific curriculum design. Though not household names even in their own day, “insofar as effect on actual school practice is concerned,” as the educational historian Herbert Kliebard observes, “the prominence and persistence of [their] basic ideas

⁵ Jennifer Fleissner, *Women, Compulsion, Modernity: The Moment of American Naturalism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 10.

[...] indicates that someone like the relatively obscure Bobbitt may have been far more in touch with the true temper of his times than the world-renowned Dewey” (105).

Lester Frank Ward’s theory of “telic evolution,” as developed in his *Dynamic Sociology* (1883), inspired many progressive educators, including Dewey, as well as the social efficiency educators.⁶ Like Herbert Spencer, William Graham Sumner, and other Darwinian social thinkers, Ward believes that people are shaped by their environment. Unlike Spencer and Sumner, though, he argues that humanity is intelligent enough to create its own environment, and thereby to direct its own evolution. Describing himself as a “Neo-Lamarckian,” he holds that in the long run social change can alter human nature itself (as in H. G. Wells’s *The Time Machine*). In his hands, then, rather than raising the specter of determinism, Darwinism expands the field of human agency. Ward’s aim is to overturn false doctrines of necessity, such as the theory of laissez-faire, which prevent society from choosing its own fate. The only constant, for Ward, is humanity’s capacity to formulate plans, which he calls the faculty of “conation.” The purpose of the social sciences, he argues, is to extend that power of coherent willing from the individual to society as a whole. He is, thus, a quintessential social action thinker.

In the hands of Edward A. Ross, Ward’s ideas take a discomfiting turn toward the disciplinary. For Ross, human malleability promises not existential freedom but “social control,” the “ascendancy over the aims and acts of the individual which is exerted on behalf of the group.” Like pedestrians at a busy intersection, Ross argues, one should expect that “men living in propinquity will continually fall afoul of one another” unless some combination of habits and laws prevents them from doing so. The only way to prevent the political principle of individual freedom from devolving into “man-to-man struggle,” Ross warns, is for a prudent elite to restrain people using cultural norms, to “bind from within,” leaving the prideful citizen with “the illusion of self-direction even at the very moment he martyrizs himself for the ideal we have sedulously impressed upon him.” This program is not so far from Schiller’s, which uses *Bildung* to prevent democracy from becoming anarchy. For Schiller, however, the influence of cultural elites is justified only when it expresses an “inner legislation” native to the human heart, and thus does not infringe the

⁶See Lawrence Cremin, *The Transformation of the School: Progressivism in American Education, 1876–1957* (New York: Knopf, 1961), 96ff.

individual's self-determination, not even secretly. For Ross, on the other hand, inner legislation is simply external pressures that have been internalized. "There are, of course, no abstract, indefeasible rights belonging to man as man," he declares; "there are no 'immutable laws' or 'eternal principles' limiting the interferences of the state." "It is sometimes well to act as if there were," he concedes, if only because people who feel free are easier to manage. Ross argues that authority should rest with a self-regulating clique of sociologists who, rather than acting directly, merely counsel the leaders of the courts, the church, the press, the school, and other "radiant points of social control." The school is especially important, Ross notes, because children are more "suggestible" than adults, and the "subtle Jesuitry" of the new sciences of education will only make them more so.⁷

As the educational historian Walter Drost observes, the social efficiency movement is a hybrid of Ross's ultra-technocratic "social control" and the ethos of "social service" associated with the Teachers College professor Samuel Dutton, who was also a teacher of Snedden's. Like Ross, Dutton would subordinate the individual to the social order, but unlike Ross he expects people to like it. It is through such selfless service to society, Dutton argues, that people achieve self-realization. "The whole creation," he sermonizes in *Social Phases of Education in School and Home* (1899), "reflects the idea that life exists for life. [...] Certain plant forms render aid to others by furnishing shade and protection and by conserving moisture. The social spirit exhibited by certain animals," such as a bird that cleans the teeth of crocodiles, "may well put to shame the selfishness revealed in some phases of human conduct." What is true of plants and animals is doubly true of people, and he declares that "man's physical, moral, and spiritual welfare are best conserved through [socially] useful activity." Society, for Dutton, is an interchange of mutual sacrifice that tends to become more complex over time and, hence, more in need of education for its members. "It is essential," he writes, "that toilers of every class should be conscious of their social obligations, that they should have a friendly regard for those who render service in other departments."⁸ He proposes, therefore, that schools get students involved with local business, government, churches, and so on.

⁷ Edward A. Ross, *Social Control: A Survey of the Foundations of Order* (Honolulu, HI: University Press of the Pacific, [1901] 2002), 3–5, 244, 420.

⁸ Walter Drost, *David Snedden and Education for Social Efficiency* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin, 1967), 47; Samuel T. Dutton, *Social Phases of Education in the School and the Home* (New York: Macmillan, 1900), 3, 8, 12.

Franklin Bobbitt's perspective differs from that of Ross, for whom individualism is merely "the illusion of self-direction," and that of Dutton, for whom it is something to be ecstatically transcended. For Bobbitt, "social service does not mean self-renunciation" for "self-interest cannot be eliminated." Self-interest can, however, be "enlightened," and the citizen can be shown that "individual welfare at its highest comes only through general community welfare at its highest." This higher, pro-social self-interest is only possible, he argues, when each kind of work is "given its proper measure of social reward and honor." Pleading that enlightened self-interest is "the steam that runs the whole machine" of society, Bobbitt rejects the "feudal" idea of Taylorism, which alienates workers' self-interest from the self-interest of their employers, and calls for more worker control in business. "Recognized as men, they become men," he writes, and "act like men; and the curve of their operative efficiency mounts rapidly upward." The efficiency of group processes is paramount for Bobbitt, just as much as for Ross, but for Bobbitt individual autonomy is itself a source of efficiency, whereas for Ross it is merely a useful fiction.⁹

For David Snedden, the bluntest and most institutionally influential member of the social efficiency movement, the idea of individual autonomy is hardly important enough to mention. Snedden, a consummate administrative progressive who was known for such phrases as "Education for the Rank and File" and "education for followership," takes it for granted that the school system's purpose is to train people to fill the industrial economy's rapidly multiplying vocational roles, however unpleasant and unappreciated some of these roles might be. To do this job efficiently requires, he argues, that educators "determine the probable destination" of each student based on his or her membership in a "case group," Snedden's euphemism for a social class. There is "immense wastage involved," he maintains, when society leaves vocational training to the "accident or uncertainty of individual choice." The best thing one can do for someone bound to be a carpenter, for example, is, for Snedden, to make him a very good carpenter who can command high wages. Although he insists that the assignment of a student to a case group should be made after consultation among the student, her parents, and school officials, in practice John Dewey's accusation that Snedden promoted "social predestination, by means of narrow trade-training" seems justified.¹⁰

⁹ John Franklin Bobbitt, *The Curriculum* (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin, 1918), 61–62, 79.

¹⁰ Drost, *David Snedden*, 4, 41, 43; David F. Labaree, "How Dewey lost: The Victory of David Snedden and Social Efficiency in the Reform of American Education," in Daniel

The school's role in subject-formation, for Snedden, boils down to the imperative that the student "have his social tendencies developed, and his unsocial tendencies thwarted in their development." These tendencies, far from constituting an integral mental architecture, are simply an unstructured grab bag of more and less useful instincts. "It is desirable," he observes, "usually to increase and widen sympathy with suffering, and to diminish the instinct to fight; it is desirable to stimulate the emotional tendencies which make for cooperation, and diminish those which make aggressive and selfish rivalry too prominent. It is desirable to promote an appreciation of the value of persistent and honest labor and to lessen the tendencies to profit at the cost of some one else." In encouraging the socially useful and discouraging the socially harmful tendencies, Snedden, unlike Ross, sees no need to conceal his agenda.¹¹

Social efficiency educators like Bobbitt and Snedden share a version of the social action ideal, but theirs is quantitative, value-neutral, and technocratic, concerned with rallying citizens behind experts' decisions rather than with democratic deliberation. It is for "sociology," Snedden writes, to "answer endless questions as to what is 'the good community life,'" determining efficient policies in immigration, housing, education, and so on. Politicians, for Snedden, should be limited to faithfully executing sociologists' ideas, thereby providing a "specialized service for which compensation is given as in other fields," while "voting" should be seen as "simply collective employment of this specialized service." "The essence of general civic education," writes Snedden, is "to produce good employers of civic workers [...] who will know how to choose efficient and honest employees."¹²

Their approach to civic education draws on the hard-nosed psychology of Edward Thorndike, who, denying the existence of broadly defined, morally fraught "mental faculties" such as reason, judgment, and imagination, insisted that the only way to prepare someone for a task was to train them in that particular task. Echoes of Thorndike can be heard in Bobbitt's assertion that "human life, however varied, consists in the performance of specific activities" and that "education that prepares for life is

Tröhler, Thomas Schlag, and Fritz Osterwalder, eds., *Pragmatism and Modernities* (Rotterdam: Sense Publishers, 2010), 167.

¹¹ Drost, *David Snedden*, 41.

¹² David Snedden, "The Socially Efficient Community," *Journal of Educational Sociology* 2, no. 8 (1929), 464; David Snedden, "What of Liberal Education?," *The Atlantic* 190 (1912), 114.

one that prepares definitely and adequately for these specific activities,” or in Snedden’s declaration that “‘culture,’ ‘mental training,’ ‘aesthetic appreciation,’ ‘the scientific spirit,’ are all too uncertain, too complex, and perhaps, in their general aspects, too impracticable of realization, to serve usefully as formulated goals of educational effort.”¹³ Rejecting broadly defined faculties, Snedden proposes a curriculum of hyperspecific “peths” (from a Welsh word meaning “little piece”): a peth “might be a single spelling word, the multiplication table of nine, or the proper pronunciation of a particular syllable.” These peths are classified into “strands” (specific “life activities,” of which he estimates that the average adult has over 2000) and parceled out to students in the form of “lotments,” sixty-hour work units that can be arranged according to convenience.¹⁴ In the dissolving acid of this psychological and curricular theory, it is unsurprising that citizenship becomes a mere assortment of civic “functions,” such as “keeping the city clean,” “prevention of flies and mosquitoes,” and “care of insect-destroying birds.”¹⁵ So conceived, civic education becomes a dauntingly complex task requiring an expert manager whose concerns are logistical, not moral.

BRAINPOWER AND THE HUMAN GAME

Gilman, too, wants to reduce civic questions, and indeed all moral questions, to technical ones. To accomplish this reduction, she seeks a single, objective moral framework that identifies the good of society with the good of each individual in it, but within this framework there is some ambiguity about how these two goods are reconciled. Sometimes she insists, like Bobbitt, that enlightened self-interest converges on social service. Here, for instance, is part of a catechism for children from *Social Ethics*:

Q: What is to be said of a man who raises poor food, who manufactures bad food, who puts poison in food to sell – that he himself may make more money?

A: He is a traitor, and enemy of society, and a fool.

Q: Why a fool?

¹³ Snedden, “Liberal Education,” 116.

¹⁴ Bobbitt, *The Curriculum*, 42; Drost, *David Snedden*, 168–169.

¹⁵ Bobbitt, *The Curriculum*, 142–143.

- A: Because society is one living thing; and to poison anybody is also poisoning oneself. It is like a man injecting poison into his own foot and denying that it hurt him, on the ground that it was a long way off.
- Q: But cannot a man injure a great many other people, and yet live comfortably himself – he and his family?
- A: Yes – so long as he is a fool. He does not see the evil he has done, and he does not see how it affects him, and his family. He could not be ‘comfortable’ if he were wiser.

At other times, like Dutton, she casts social service as a kind of self-abnegating altruism. In *Moving the Mountain*, her near-future “baby utopia,” a WPA-like “Social Service Union” carries out public works projects, and it is never short-staffed despite the fact that nobody needs such jobs to support themselves anymore. “The same spirit that used to give us crusaders and missionaries now gave plenty of enthusiastic workers,” someone explains. Rather than “work for oneself,” in this better world “work is social service—social service is religion—that’s about it.”¹⁶

Gilman, scion of the Beechers, is quite serious about social service being a religion. As a teenager she began to develop the creed that eventually appears in *Moving the Mountain*. In it, the individual soul serves as a channel for a divine “Energy.”¹⁷ Humanity, in this religion, is the leading edge of the process by which everything in the universe becomes (echoing the social action progressives’ sense of their own historical moment) more complex, specialized, and interdependent. A character in *Moving the Mountain* summarizes:

The business of the universe about us consists in the Transmission of Energy. Some of it is temporarily and partially arrested in material compositions; some is more actively expressed in vegetable and animal form; this stage of expression we call Life. We ourselves, the human animals, were specially adapted for high efficiency in storing and transmitting this energy; and so were able to enter into a combination still more efficient; that is, into social

¹⁶ Gilman, *Social Ethics*, 94; Charlotte Perkins Gilman, *The Herland Trilogy: Moving the Mountain, Herland, with Her in Ourland*. ([S.l.]: Wilder Publications, Limi, [1911, 1915, 1916] 2011), 55.

¹⁷ Charlotte Perkins Gilman, *The Living of Charlotte Perkins Gilman: An Autobiography* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, [1935] 2013), 38–42.

relations. Humanity, man in social relation, is the best expression of the Energy that we know. [...] All [we have] to learn is the right expression of [our] degree of life-force, of Social Energy.¹⁸

From this perspective, social action, individual self-realization, and technocratic efficiency are all different ways of talking about the same thing, the same “business of life.” Ethics, biology, and even physics and mathematics become a single set of rules; she calls ethics a science, arguing that “where we find any process going on, with observable sequence of cause and effect, we can instantly call its regular fulfillment ‘right’ and any error or failure ‘wrong,’” so that a crystal, for instance, might be described as “good” or “bad” depending on how well it exhibits the general properties of crystals. One of Gilman’s names for her unified religio-ethico-scientific system is “the Human Game,” which she says “we are here to learn to play.” “Humanity,” she writes, “is engaged in an enormous game. We are set to learn How to Live Together [...] to the best advantage, with the least waste of effort.”¹⁹ This metaphor of life as a game dovetails with Gilman’s technocratic outlook, in that it too suppresses the possibility of disagreements over values. As the philosopher Samuel Scheffler puts it, “games create what might be thought of as self-contained bubbles of significance. The rules of a game determine what matters or is important to the players within the context of the game,” temporarily suspending the otherwise endless dialogue over what matters.²⁰ Gilman’s religion makes this suspension permanent.

Just as Gilman conflates disparate fields of biology, sociology, ethics, and religion in the Human Game, her psychology collapses all mental functions into the concept of “brainpower,” a measure of the mind’s efficiency as a channel for the divine force.²¹ If the mind is a medium for the “Transmission of Energy,” then, she argues, “the human creature does not originate nervous energy, but he does secrete it, so to speak, from the impact of natural forces.” The brain is a kind of processing station, able to “receive, retain, and collate impressions” from the natural world and

¹⁸ Gilman, *Herland Trilogy*, 98.

¹⁹ Gilman, *Social Ethics*, 29, 32.

²⁰ Samuel Scheffler, *Death and the Afterlife* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 56.

²¹ Like Thorndike and the social efficiency educators, Gilman rejects the view of the mind as composed of a group of faculties, within each of which “transfer of training” is possible. While they posit no faculties, however, she posits one superfaculty that governs the entire mind, and holds that transfer of training is possible across all mental activities whatsoever.

transmute it into the higher, more “efficient” level of organization she calls “Social Energy,” which is characterized by cooperation and foresight. Brainpower enables complex planning by empowering one to hold a conception firmly in mind and “wor[k] steadily for a desired object,” acting “judiciously” rather than “indiscriminately from the latest [mental stimulus] or from any that happens to be uppermost.” The more brainpower one has, the more one will be able to perceive “the laws about him” and participate in rational social progress.²² Thus brainpower enables one to do one’s work, fulfill one’s religious duty, of channeling energy from merely physical to intentional and social forms of organization. Social Energy, in turn, is simply brainpower at the level of the group rather than the person: it is the name for the “thought” of society as a whole.

Gilman’s real problem with “personality” is that it stymies brainpower. If we prevent the larger “social energies” that circulate through the individual from receiving their “natural expression [in] world-service,” Gilman writes, they will “work morbidly in manifold disease.”²³ By “world-service,” Gilman means something one does for the public, not just for one’s self or one’s family. Of course, she argued throughout her life for giving women access to professional careers and for the replacement of unpaid domestic labor with professional cooks, cleaners, and so on. These arguments gear into her theories of brainpower and the Transmission of Energy, so that her sense of “work” takes on the meaning of “calling.” Gilman identified her own work, in a diary entry, as being “a perceiver and transmitter of truth and love,” not one who expresses herself but one who lets something pass through her.²⁴ In another entry, she resolves to “leave one’s self an open door, a free unconscious channel, for the deep rushing flood of life to pour through.”²⁵ To take in truth as widely as possible, and then to give away all one’s insight to others, thinking always of society, never of the self—this is Gilman’s calling, and although its focus is all outward, it is nonetheless a personal project of self-enlargement and self-realization, one specific to her and able to give her life meaning.

²² Charlotte Perkins Gilman, *Concerning Children* (Boston: Small, Maynard & Co., 1900), 47–48, 54.

²³ Davis, *Charlotte Perkins Gilman*, xvi.

²⁴ Denise Knight, ed., *The Abridged Diaries of Charlotte Perkins Gilman* (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 1998), 231.

²⁵ Davis, *Charlotte Perkins Gilman*, 178.

The aim of education, for Gilman, is to maximize individual and collective brainpower. Gilman's curriculum emphasizes pattern recognition, transmuting rote-learned "Incidents" into the rationally apprehended "Principles" or "laws" of Energy, which we must understand if we are to accomplish complex coordinated tasks.²⁶ In the educational system of *Moving the Mountain*, for instance, someone says that "We used to teach mostly facts, or what we thought were facts. Now we teach processes."²⁷ The most important principles, for Gilman, are those by which the individual is embedded in society and the human race is embedded in the larger evolution of the universe. When the child can "generalize at all," she recommends, "a new history, taught by story and picture, should show it the upward steps of Baby Humanity," illustrating the long chain of causality linking "the story of the building of the earth, the budding of the plant, the birth of the animal, [and] the beautiful unfolding of the human race, from savagery toward civilisation."²⁸ In this clarification of patterns, Gilman's utopia reverses the dystopia of "The Yellow Wall-Paper," where the heroine's madness is triggered, in part, by her powerlessness to "follow that pointless pattern to some sort of conclusion."²⁹

Although, like Samuel Dutton, Gilman sees participation in social action (and, as it were, cosmic action) as the highest fulfillment of each individual's personal calling, she nonetheless feels, like Edward A. Ross, that teachers should not tell students the real purpose of their education. They should conceal their aims, as Ross puts it, with a certain amount of "subtle Jesuitry." What Gilman hopes to avoid, though, is not political unrest but a kind of awkward personal self-consciousness. She insists, therefore, on a pedagogy of "unconscious growth." The girls of Herland "grew up as naturally as young trees, learning through every sense, taught continuously but unconsciously – never knowing they were being educated," and she advises teachers that any "desired improvement" in a student "should be made by the skillful educator without the child's knowledge."³⁰ The reason for this, once again, is brainpower. Brainpower develops, Gilman argues, via a circuit in which experience gives rise to action, which produces new experience, and so on. When teachers tell

²⁶ Charlotte Perkins Gilman, "Our Brains and What Ails Them," in *Forerunner* 3 (1912), 25.

²⁷ Gilman, *Herland Trilogy*, 82.

²⁸ Gilman, *Herland Trilogy*, 147; Gilman, *Social Ethics*, 86.

²⁹ Gilman, *Selected Writings*, 172.

³⁰ Gilman, *Selected Writings*, 195; Gilman, *Concerning Children*, 17.

students what they must do instead of simply guiding them to new and valuable experiences, they “insert an arbitrary force *between impression and expression*” and weaken the mind.³¹

The ideal setting for unconscious education, for Gilman, is an environment so interesting that students are hardly aware it is a school at all, one in which the distinction between school and society weakens or collapses. “More and more to-day is the school opening out,” Gilman writes. “It connects with the public library, with art and industry, with the open fields; and this will go on till the time is reached when the child does not know that he is at school,—he is always there, and yet never knows it.”³² *Moving the Mountain*’s “Reception Room” for new immigrants, occupying all of Long Island, has schools, but “you won’t know when you do see them,” because properly speaking the whole island is a school. That novel’s “baby-gardens” (pedagogical day-care centers) minimize the role of the teacher and focus on ensuring that youngsters’ all-important “impressions” (the raw material on which brainpower works) are “planned and maintained with an intelligent appreciation of [their] mental powers.”³³ In *Concerning Children*, she imagines the sequel to the baby-garden: a vast urban park designed for the free-range education of children. For a chapter, we follow an energetic boy as he visits a museum, an archery range, and a garden of anthropological dioramas. “There were many parks in the city,” we learn, “with different buildings and departments; and in them, day by day, without ever knowing it, the children of that city ‘went to school.’”³⁴ This ideal city takes its place in a series of totally administrated educational environments, of increasing scale, that Gilman imagines over the course of her career, from the rooftop for babies, to the park for children, to the “Reception Room” for immigrants, to the self-contained nation of Herland, where “the children in this country are the one center and focus of all our thoughts” and “every step of our advance is always considered in its effect on them.”³⁵

Gilman’s vision of the interpenetration of the school and society builds on the ideas of contemporary educators. In his 1899 address “The Usurpation of the Home by the School,” for instance, Denver superintendent Aaron Gove calls for a longer school day that takes place “in the

³¹ “Our Brains,” 276.

³² Gilman, *Concerning Children*, 145.

³³ Gilman, *Herland Trilogy*, 44, 52.

³⁴ Gilman, *Concerning Children*, 144.

³⁵ Gilman, *Selected Writings*, 157.

forest, on the playground, in the public garden, and amid collections of animals” as well as in the classroom. Pushing the issue to its utopian limits, in its placement of all social institutions under educational management, Gilman’s ideal converges with an imaginary realm of perfect social efficiency described by David Snedden called the “Province of Zond.” Zond is a self-contained realm, isolated by high mountains, whose economy and government are centrally coordinated, and which “expects all adult members to be especially strong in conformist civic virtues – especially to the will of the majority as formally expressed in laws, ordinances, etc.” The majority, in turn, is expected to conform to “eudemic programs” to “conserve and advance social efficiency,” devised by professional sociologists. Zond’s school system coordinates among all the minutely specified cogs of this social machine. In a Zondian shoe factory, for instance, “will be found two hundred distinct vocations,” each requiring a different educational background; to transfer jobs, one must first go back to school.³⁶

Zond uncannily resembles Herland, another mountain-ringed realm where children learn only things related to “the national prosperity,” and where social life is coordinated by an educational elite, giving the cities a look of “order [...] something as college buildings stand in their quiet greens.” Herland, like Zond, is ruled by a caste of experts, recruited from children “who showed an early tendency to observe, to discriminate, to suggest” and receive “special training for that function,” eventually wielding authority over all aspects of society. This authority does not rankle, though, because the Herlanders, being “smoothly and firmly agreed on most of the basic principles of their life,” have little need for democratic deliberation.³⁷ This educational technocracy is already well under way in *Moving the Mountain*, where standards of “efficient motherhood,” systematized as the “new science of Humaniculture,” are regulated by a federal “Department of Child Culture,” and adult education is handled by a “Commission on Human Efficiency.” (Elected boards of education, on the other hand, are never mentioned.) For the present she recommends, in *Social Ethics*, a “College or Commission of Social Ethics, selected from the best and wisest,” “bas[ing] its labors on Biology and Sociology,” to “prepare, for the use of schools and churches, certain plain and unquestioned records of fact” about questions like “What is social progress?” and “By what conduct is social progress most advanced, and most impeded?”³⁸

³⁶ Snedden, “Socially Efficient Community,” 464, 465, 468.

³⁷ Gilman, *Selected Writings*, 199, 133, 215.

³⁸ Gilman, *Herland Trilogy*, 44, 52; Gilman, *Social Ethics*, 114.

THE FEARFUL FIGURE OF DUTY

Gilman's concerns about how to develop brainpower are deeply personal. Her preference for unconscious education by means of a structured environment, rather than the strenuous individual effort prescribed by the traditional pedagogy of mental discipline, is consistent with contemporary educational research. At the same time, though, she is thinking through her own life, using her educational philosophy to process the lingering pain of the nervous collapse depicted in "The Yellow Wall-Paper."³⁹ She assigns some responsibility for that breakdown to her first husband, Walter Stetson, and some to the constraints of Victorian femininity, but she also blames "the rigid stoicism and constant effort in character-building of my youth."⁴⁰ As a young woman, she kept up a strenuous regimen of gymnastics and extracurricular studying (her formal schooling was, for a woman of her social class, rather scanty). A proud descendent of the Beecher clan, she too hoped to be a crusader and moral exemplar, and took this responsibility as one of life's givens. "Let us premise and agree upon before starting," she demands in *Women and Economics*, "that the duty of human life is progress, development; that we are here, not merely to live, but to grow, – not to be content with lean savagery or fat barbarism or sordid semi-civilization, but to toil on through the centuries, and build up the ever-nobler forms of life toward which social evolution tends. If this is not believed, if any hold that to keep alive and reproduce the species is the limit of our human duty, then they need look no farther here." This heroic attitude took its toll, however. For the young Charlotte Perkins, her friend Alexander Black recalls, "at the elbow of all possible benevolences lurked the fearful figure of Duty. The thing that was right dominated all other things. Beauty and happiness had always to be justified – or was it excused?" This stern discipline was all the more draining because, rather than giving herself over to some preexisting, socially sanctioned program of uplift, she took it upon herself to develop, and prove the validity of, her own system. "No picture could be more disturbing, more profoundly pitiful, than that of a child building a conscious system of ethics," writes Black. "Yet this is the picture I see in the adolescent years of Charlotte Perkins. The brain carried by that energetic body began, before it should have been through

³⁹ For the social efficiency educators' embrace of kindergarten methods, see David Snedden, "The New Basis of Method," in *Problems of Educational Readjustment* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1913).

⁴⁰ Gilman, *Living*, 98.

with dolls and dryads, to grapple with abstractions, to diagram this duty matter, to piece together an original formula for explaining the world.”⁴¹ Stetson told Silas Weir Mitchell that his wife’s breakdown was “the result of a mistake as to one’s strength [...] Charlotte, dear girl, strove for self culture, and carried it mentally, physically for five years or more to a perilous extreme.” Gilman herself, in a letter to Mitchell, speculates that her depression stems from her efforts to make “mind and body ... strong and willing servants” under “constant self supervision and restraint.” When an interviewer asked her, in 1901, what her greatest regret was, Gilman alluded to a “too lavish expenditure of nerve force” in her youth, resulting from a “feverish struggle” to discipline her will.⁴² Taking upon herself (or, considering her isolation and the shortcomings of her parents, forced to take on) the functions of subject formation that are normally shared with other people proved psychologically impossible.

The deepest purpose of Gilman’s educational thought is to create a world in which a young person like herself could reach her full potential at less psychological cost. After her collapse, she does not swerve from her devotion to brainpower, does not fall back on the notion that there are more important things in life than intelligence. Instead, she faults society for valuing brainpower so little that she had to take her education so entirely, and disastrously, into her own hands. “Virtue is a social development,” she writes in “Our Brains and What Ails Them”; and yet, she laments, “we generally believe that goodness is a private affair, and self-development our duty.” If her ideal of maximizing brainpower had been more widely shared, she could have offered and enjoyed mutual support. “Any brain able to think at all, able to see what conditions are necessary to right brain growth for all of us,” she writes, “should set itself at once to bring about such conditions. This is the broad, open path of social progress.” While Black’s “fearful figure of Duty” still looms behind this statement, when Duty directs one’s attention toward the social environment rather than the self, it involves, as Gilman puts it, no “self-conscious puttering with our individual brains, but the smooth, full sweep of social action, the rapid development of such laws and such conditions as shall ensure to every child that is born the fullest development of every power.”⁴³

⁴¹ Charlotte Perkins Gilman, *Women and Economics: A Study of the Economic Relation between Men and Women as a Factor in Social Evolution* (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, [1898] 1998), 102; Karpinski, *Critical Essays*, 59.

⁴² Davis, *Charlotte Perkins Gilman*, 94–95, 254.

⁴³ Gilman, “Our Brains,” 330, 333.

Constant unconscious education, maintained by all for the benefit of all, is the full realization of this ideal, and the inversion of her lonely autodidacticism. (Part of Gilman's character-building, incidentally, was physical, and her ideal education systems offer convenient opportunities to exercise with other people. These socialized workouts contrast with Gilman's youthful habit of doing calisthenics alone in her room, which she recalls in "The Yellow Wall-Paper" by placing old gym equipment in the narrator's chamber.)

GILMAN AND THE BILDUNGSROMAN

Turning to Gilman's semiautobiographical novel *Benigna Machiavelli*, we find that it too criticizes "self-conscious pattering with our individual brains." There is a certain resonance here with bildungsroman theory, since that genre has, since Goethe, also been concerned with the limits of educational self-sponsorship, with Wilhelm Meister's need for the Society of the Tower, with the subtle process by which the modern individual's "beautiful moral freedom" is co-opted by conservative forces seeking "the legitimation of the social order in its fullest sense." Alongside these readings of the bildungsroman's skepticism of individual agency, though, are feminist interpretations that see the genre's denial of autonomy to women as criticisms of patriarchy. For Susan Fraiman, while in the male bildungsroman the hero's discovery of his ultimate dependence on society can be greeted in a "wry or pensive mode" as an inevitability of the human condition, in the female bildungsroman the heroine's proper response to the fact that "formation is foisted upon them, that they are largely what other people, what the world, will make of them" is "righteous anger at a corrigible social evil." "Progressive development' and 'coherent identity' are, to some extent," Fraiman writes, "enabling fictions whose limited availability to women has hurt us, and I therefore hesitate to give them up entirely." Another complementary approach in feminist bildungsroman criticism, developed in the anthology *The Voyage In*, edited by Marianne Hirsch, Elizabeth Abel, and Elizabeth Langland, has been to valorize the inward, psycho-spiritual turn that women characters, beginning with the "Beautiful Soul" of *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship*, take when they are excluded from full participation in society. Rita Felski, meanwhile, argues that a third alternative to rage and withdrawal has been the cultivation of a female public sphere, a hospitable community in which women can develop a coherent selfhood. "If, to offer a somewhat schematic overview," Felski writes,

“the eighteenth-century novel is unable to conceive of conscious rebellion on the part of the heroine, and the nineteenth-century novel traces an inward awakening and resistance which is, however, crushed by the intransigent social order, then the contemporary narrative of female self-discovery plots a story of resistance and survival made possible by the mediation of the women’s movement.”⁴⁴

As a bildungsroman writer, Gilman does not fit neatly into any of these critical frames. For her, after all, the challenge is not how to acquire autonomous selfhood, but how to divest herself of it. If the bildungsroman must describe the protagonist’s search for self-realization, she would rather not have to write a bildungsroman at all. When she writes about society as it exists, her characters are introspective and unhappy, while the closer she moves to utopia, in the semi- or “baby utopia” of *Moving the Mountain* or the full-fledged utopia of *Herland*, the less attention people give to their own minds, the more they focus on maintaining an educative environment for the sake of society, and the more contented they are. When Gilman’s ideal of unconscious growth is realized, there will be no friction in the individual’s development into her social role, and hence no story: the background of Ellador, the most fleshed-out of the Herlanders, is recounted in a single paragraph. In Ourland, on the other hand, individuals must struggle to develop their brainpower in relative loneliness, though their success will help usher in a world where their ordeal will no longer be necessary. Successful *Bildung*, for Gilman, reforms society in ways that socialize the responsibilities that the *Bildungsheld* has worked alone to meet, and eventually obviates the bildungsroman form itself.

Benigna Machiavelli is Gilman’s portrait of a young woman who takes her self-development fully into her own hands, without help from parents, teachers, or even books. At a young age, Benigna begins to “see the kind of character I wanted,” as a sculptor “sees the statue in the block,” and sets out to “build” her new self using “the power of one’s own will over one’s

⁴⁴Marc Redfield, *Phantom Formations: Aesthetic Ideology and the Bildungsroman* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1996), 53; Susan Fraiman, *Unbecoming Women: British Women Writers and the Novel of Development* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 12, x; Marianne Hirsch, Elizabeth Abel, and Elizabeth Langland, eds., *The Voyage In: Fictions of Female Development* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1983); Rita Felski, *Beyond Feminist Aesthetics: Feminist Literature and Social Change* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), 133.

own body, *and* mind.” She even sets up a secret gym in her attic, recalling the similarly placed exercise equipment in “The Yellow Wall-Paper.” “Mother has no idea how far I can jump or how many times I can chin,” she boasts; “I’m ever so strong and nobody knows it.” For all her self-control, though, she cannot quite decide what to do with herself. As she prepares to embark upon life, she makes a Franklinesque chart of her abilities, which concludes with two “Purposes in life”: “A. To grow. To be as big as I can – in every sort of way. / B. To use my powers to straighten things as far as I can.” She confesses that her notion of “straighten[ing] things” is “rather misty,” pointing toward no particular kind of life. At the end of her tale, she remarks that “I see how absurd it is for novelists to try to ‘end’ a story.” For Schiller, the story of *Bildung* can end when the hero has made his soul a microcosm of the harmonies between reason and passion that characterize the Aesthetic State; that is, when he reaches a certain inner equilibrium. Gilman’s idea of self-improvement, on the other hand, proceeds toward ever-increasing power and efficiency, an open-ended trajectory which offers no particular stopping points. Indeed, *Benigna Machiavelli*, rather like *Robinson Crusoe*, ends abruptly at a seemingly random point in the midst of the hero’s adventures.⁴⁵

As Jed Esty has argued, the bildungsroman can reach a conventionally happy ending only while it imaginatively inhabits the nation form. *Benigna*, feeling herself a part of no nation, of no specific human community at all, has no stable social telos. Ultimately, her unfocused self-conception springs from her inability to form the reciprocal relations with other people on which political community is based. In the classic bildungsroman schema, inner equilibrium must develop alongside a social equilibrium, so that the hero’s private perspective converges with the common sense of her social group. As Lukacs puts it, “the inherent loneliness of the soul is surmounted; and this in turn presupposes the possibility of human and interior community among men, of understanding and common action in respect of the essential.” This integration of the person into the community is based, for Lukacs, on “personalities, previously lonely and confined within their own selves, adapting and accustoming themselves to one another,” in a process that resembles the Deweyan ideal of ongoing demo-

⁴⁵ Charlotte Perkins Gilman, *Benigna Machiavelli* (Santa Barbara, CA: Bandanna Books, [1914] 1993), 47, 57, 59, 167.

cratic deliberation.⁴⁶ Benigna, by contrast, does not feel safe disclosing her real motivations. In her culture, she observes, the intelligence and initiative that she prizes in herself are stigmatized. The “villains” of her story-books, she complains, “always went to work with their brains and accomplished something,” while the “heroes and middle ones were mostly very stupid. [...] Whatever the villains planned for them to do, they did, like sheep.” Thanks to such books, “if people think you are a ‘schemer,’ as they call it, they are suspicious, and it makes it harder” to help them. Rejecting her culture’s conventional notions of good behavior, she resolves to become a “good villain,” to “do things – wonderful things – without ever being suspected of it,” helping everybody but trusting nobody.⁴⁷

This commitment to secrecy pains her—“Being understood. How we do ache for it,” she muses—but if she were understood, she asks, “where would all my plans be?” In one of her exercises in self-discipline, she trains herself to “put my foot on that little desire” to be understood, so that she can focus on “trying to understand other people.” If the culture were more accepting of brainpower she might be able to open herself to them. In Herland, instead of the “fearful figure of Duty” imposing its crippling moral self-consciousness, “shortcomings and misdeeds in childhood never were presented to [children] as sins; merely as errors and misplays – as in a game. Some of them, who were palpably less agreeable than others or who had a real weakness or fault, were treated with cheerful allowance, as a friendly group at whist would treat a poor player.” Since the poor players feel no shame, there is also no reason for the exceptionally good players to keep their skills secret. In Herland, that is, Benigna could afford to be understood.⁴⁸ In Ourland, however, any real exchange of views, or in other words any ideal of democratic deliberation, is impossible, and social progress will continue to depend on a technocratic elite acting for rather than with the public. Social action, in *Benigna Machiavelli* as in social efficiency education, occurs not just without the input, but even without the knowledge of the public, as Benigna tricks people into carrying out her various reform schemes.⁴⁹

⁴⁶ Jed Esty, *Unseasonable Youth: Modernism, Colonialism, and the Fiction of Development* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 154; Georg Lukács, *The Theory of the Novel: A Historico-Philosophical Essay on the Forms of Great Epic Literature* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1989), 137.

⁴⁷ Gilman, *Benigna Machiavelli*, 41, 59.

⁴⁸ Gilman, *Social Ethics*, 123; Gilman, *Herland Trilogy*, 98, 200.

⁴⁹ Gilman, *Benigna Machiavelli*, 153, 162–163.

GILMAN'S AESTHETICS: THE SMOOTH-GROUND LENS

Gilman's idea of aesthetic education, like her educational philosophy in general, begins from premises shared with the social efficiency educators but ends up taking the individual's search for self-realization much more seriously than they do. What Gilman shares with the social efficiency group, in contrast to other theorists of aesthetic education, is the assumption that the artist is just one social role among others. For Schiller, Horace Mann, Montessori, or the Herbartians, the well-ordered society is reflected in microcosm in the identically well-ordered mind of each citizen, and just as there is a single ideal of social order, there is a single ideal of mental order, which the great artist best exemplifies. For the social efficiency educators, on the other hand, social order depends on differentiation of function. "The more perfect the differentiation of labor and exchange of product," Gilman writes in *Women and Economics*, "the more perfect is that civilization." The obvious advantage of specialization is that it creates efficiencies. For Gilman, Bobbitt, and Dutton, however, it also promotes the altruistic ethos of social service, since the specialist, by definition, does not participate in all of the activities necessary to sustain her own life. "To develop [sic] special functions, so that we depend for our living on society's return for services that can be of no direct use to ourselves, – this," Gilman writes, "is civilization, our human glory and race-distinction." In *Social Ethics*, after listing several eternal human virtues, she adds a new one that gains in importance as civilization progresses: "integrity of function," which she defines as "doing the special work one is meant to do in the world, the fulfillment of a real social service." Integrity of function is a virtue because it implies service to others; it is also, for Gilman, a form of self-realization. If laborers in all fields could understand that the very narrowness of their working life is responsible for the breadth of social life, she argues in *Our Brains and What Ails Them*, then industrial society would not feel so alienating. "If the master plumber could discourse upon the sanitary system in Knossos, the Cloaca Maxima, the giant sewers of Paris; and if the young plumber, learning, learned the breadth of all modern sanitary knowledge, and gloried in his work as vitally essential to our social life," she predicts, "we should find an improvement not only in plumbing, but in plumbers."⁵⁰

⁵⁰ Gilman, *Women and Economics*, 4, 37; Gilman, *Social Ethics*, 58; Gilman, "Our Brains," 217.

For Gilman, every kind of work, including those typically held too sacred to be considered in terms of “exchange of product,” should be treated as such a specialization. She is, of course, well known for making this argument about traditional women’s work, from cooking and cleaning to looking after young children. As she argues in *Women and Economics, Concerning Children*, and *The Home* (1903), and dramatizes in the novel *What Diantha Did* (1910), these tasks can be performed more efficiently by dedicated specialists than by unpaid wives and mothers, whom Gilman sees as hapless amateurs. In the city, she calls for apartment buildings to establish communal kitchens, laundries, and nurseries; in the country, she imagines that houses can be connected, via tunnels, to outbuildings where these services are provided. Under this plan, women, liberated from unpaid domestic labor, will be free to pursue their own specialized work, even if that work happens to be cooking or cleaning. Women’s ennobling experience of specialization is, for Gilman, a more important source of empowerment than suffrage itself. “The banner advanced [by the women’s movement] proclaims ‘equality before the law,’ woman’s share in political freedom,” she observes; “but the main line of progress is and has been toward economic equality and freedom.”⁵¹

Even motherhood itself—meaning, Gilman is careful to specify, the rearing of young children, not the biological function—should not be left to the unprepared everywoman, the “natural mother” who “loves and labours without knowledge.” She calls for the rise of the “unnatural mother,” who “has added a trained intellect to a warm heart” and applies this expertise in the nursery, preschool, or classroom, “lifting the standard of child-culture for all.” The unnatural mother is all the more necessary because childhood itself has lengthened with the progress of civilization, and specifically with the intensification of occupational specialization. “It does not take very long to mature the group of faculties required for maintaining individual life,” Gilman asserts, but “it does take long to mature the group of faculties required to maintain social life.” She posits that “the less developed grades of society, filling those simpler social functions which require less specialisation” marry and become self-supporting at a relatively young age, while the classes destined for more specialized roles take longer to mature.⁵² Specialization, for Gilman, is not just the end goal of

⁵¹ Gilman, *Women and Economics*, 72.

⁵² Gilman’s biologized notion of class bleeds into her reprehensible racial ideas. “In the South,” she writes, “it was common to set a little black child to take care of an older white one: the pickaninny matures much more rapidly.”

education, but the secret purpose of childhood itself. Far from representing an imposition on a capacious human nature, it is the thing that most distinguishes humans from “the animals.”⁵³

For the social efficiency educators, art is not only a specialization, but a subordinate one. It is a vehicle for conveying knowledge discovered in other fields, not a source of distinctive truths. It is thus, for them, the servant of other disciplines. Ross therefore criticizes artists who “resenting the yoke of morality, have coined the absurd phrase ‘art for art’s sake.’” “What madness,” he exclaims, “when we are all the time besetting the individual with our theologies and religions and ideals, and can scarcely keep him in order at that, to let the irresponsible artist get at him and undo our work!” Ross sees art, one might say, as a kind of colored glass, whose purpose is to cast a warm glow on socially beneficial “ideal types” (the ideal mother, the ideal soldier) and a chilly one on social undesirables.⁵⁴ Bobbitt, meanwhile, looks to art for vicarious access to concrete experiences that are not available in students’ daily lives. In *The Curriculum*, he recommends a reading program that moves the student through space via such genres as “travels, geography, ethnology, descriptive sociology,” and “anthropology”; through time via “biography, travels (during past ages), history, memoirs,” and “evolutionary sociology”; and into microscopic and abstract realms via “science readings, mathematical, physical, biological, sociological [and] technological” texts. “‘Literature,’ in the narrower sense,” he argues, “appears simply to be the adequate presentation” of any of these topics. Writing becomes literature, for Bobbitt, when “it presents a clear window through which one can look out upon existence.” Accordingly, he discourages calling students’ attention to aesthetic technique, to the artificiality of the text. “Reading should be [...] an illusion of human life,” he argues; “All that the spectator wants is illusion.” When watching a play, for instance, a “man need know nothing about the various devices that were employed by the playwright in producing the effects. As a matter of fact, the more he knows about the technique of securing effects and the more he sees the stage machinery, the less is the play a real illusion of life. It becomes but a tissue of technical devices. [...] In the same way, an undue consciousness on the part of the reader as to technical literary machinery not only does not further the fundamental

⁵³ Gilman, *Concerning Children*, 277, 293–294.

⁵⁴ Ross, *Social Control*, 256–264.

purposes of the reading, but may actually hinder.”⁵⁵ Snedden, too, affirms that “content rather than form” is what makes literature educationally valuable, and that trying to make students “conscious of bad form” or good form is not worthwhile. It would be like taking a field trip on a glass bottomed boat and talking about the glass instead of the fish.⁵⁶ In the National Education Association’s highly influential report *Cardinal Principles of Secondary Education* (1918), coauthored by Snedden’s protégé Charles Prosser, art is a foreign body lodged in the curriculum. While most of the report’s recommendations can be linked to social efficiency in a fairly straightforward way, education in the appreciation of “literature, art, and music” aims only at “emotional response” and “enjoyment.” The report hints at art having a secondary social purpose in that “recreational activities” such as “pageants” and “festivals” can “contribute simultaneously to other ends of education,” presumably by giving substantive learning a patina of fun.⁵⁷ There is not much here to encourage an exalted sense of artistic vocation.

Gilman, despite her insistence on the dignity of all specialized work, cannot quite bring herself to make “artist” merely one more career. Where Bobbitt wants art to be a clear window looking out onto experience, Gilman wants it to be a magnifying “lens” for the divine force. She wants art neither to tint reality with false colors (the Herlanders’s art is “*true*, true to the living world about them”) nor simply to fill out a world picture peth by peth.⁵⁸ Rather, as Gilman’s poem “The Artist” (1911) attests, art intensifies the process by which humanity organizes cosmic energy:

Here one of us is born, made as a lens,
Or else to lens-shape cruelly smooth-ground,
To gather light, the light that shines on all,
In concentrated flame it glows, pure fire,
With light a hundredfold, more light for all.

⁵⁵ Bobbitt, *The Curriculum*, 230–239.

⁵⁶ Snedden, David, *Problems of Educational Readjustment*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1917, 184.

⁵⁷ *Cardinal Principles of Secondary Education, A Report of the National Education Association’s Commission on the Reorganization of Secondary Education* (Washington, DC: National Education Association, 1918).

⁵⁸ Gilman, *Selected Writings*, 201.

Come and receive, take with the eye or ear,
 Take and be filled, illumined, overflowed;
 Then go and shine again, your whole work lit,
 Your whole heart warm and luminous and glad;
 Go shine again – and spread the gladness wide;

Happy the lens! To gather skies of light
 And focus it, making the splendor there!
 Happy all we who are enriched therewith,
 And redistribute ever, swift and far.

The artist is the intermediate lens
 Of God, and so best gives Him to the world,
 Intensified, interpreted, to us.⁵⁹

“The early life forms received power and transmitted it instantly,” Gilman writes elsewhere, “as a pane of glass transmits light, acting only from immediate stimulus”; only the later forms, and especially humanity, are capable of “retaining impressions; of checking expression; of managing a steadier current of conduct,” and hence of producing Social Energy. The lens thus is a fitting image for a mind whose function is to transmit Energy without the addle-pated “diffusion” that Gilman defines as the antithesis of brainpower. For Gilman, this power to deliberately manage the current of conduct (again, echoing Ward’s account of “conation”) allows individuals to coordinate among each other and produce the social mind, which is a still more transparent medium for the cosmic energy. Individuals become “the assembled instruments through which, when properly attuned, the symphony may be heard.” Thanks to the unique curvature of her mind, the artist plays a leading role in this performance, receiving a greater inflow of truth, whole telescopic “skies of light,” and translating it into a “concentrated flame” that can be perceived by the average person. As she puts it in a chapter of “Our Brains and What Ails Them” called “Effects of Literature on the Brain,” “To feel and see some vital phase of human life; to throw that feeling, that perception, into such forms as to be easily assimilable to others – that is the art of fiction. [...] It translates the general into the particular and presents it to other minds; which, impressed by the particular instance, can re-generalize again in its own brain.”⁶⁰

⁵⁹ Gilman, *Selected Writings*, 340.

⁶⁰ Gilman, *Selected Writings*, 340; Gilman, “Our Brains,” 49–51, 138.

The idiosyncrasy of individual vision, whether arising from inborn differences or “cruelly smooth-ground” into the artist by experience, thus matters for Gilman in a way that critics who focus on her anti-individualism overlook.

The artist, then, presents a limit case of the identification of specialization with both individuality and social service.⁶¹ More so than other specialists, the artist’s work depends on her unique perspective, on the unique curvature of her mind, but the value of her art lies in its power to build a shared social consciousness. Art may begin in individuality, but it must end in social service. Gilman must, then, differentiate her position both from pure subjectivism, which she associates with art for art’s sake, and from conventional moralism, which has no room for divergent perspectives. “It is in recognition” of the centrality of his own “special development” to his work, writes Gilman, that the artist adopts his “theory of self-fulfillment,” namely “To thine own self be true, / And it shall follow as the day the night / That thou canst not be false to any man.” This maxim, however, makes the artist a passive recipient of perceptions, like “the early life forms,” rather than a human being capable, using brainpower, of deliberately focusing on some things rather than others. “If our social growth were as unconscious as the accretion of a coral island,” she concedes, “to thine own self be true [...] would be enough. But in our stage of organic interrelation, it is not always a safe guide.” To express the possibilities of social action or Social Energy, she urges, artists should think of their own selfhood, of human society, and of the art object as all sharing a form of organization with the brain. “The book is part of the brain,” she writes; it is simply stored outside the body rather than inside. Just as “the brain itself consists of myriad cells, stored with impressions, transmitting energy modified by these impressions,” so the artist must see her work as a storehouse and transmitter for truths that she does not originate.⁶²

Because the artist is responsible to something beyond herself, Gilman reasons, although “there may be no ‘morals’ in literature,” in the sense of fixed commandments and prohibitions which one must obey, “ethics there

⁶¹ In fact, the lens-grinding imagery of “The Artist” also figures, in *Our Brains and What Ails Them*, for specialization and the service ethos: “If, for instance, a man’s service to the world is grinding lenses, an operation in itself not developing to the brain, he should on the one hand have an extended culture, and on the other he should be recognized, not as one grinding lenses for a living, but as one by whose aid we study the stars.”

⁶² Gilman, “Our Brains,” 134.

is,” and the chief ethical concern is truth.⁶³ The artist has duties and work to do. Because Gilman’s ethics is a science, one advanced by understanding facts, she approves of writers like Dickens and Stowe who expose hidden facets of society. As with all pedagogy, too, she recommends that the arts foster unconscious growth, which is the best way to transfer knowledge regardless of medium. In the literature of Herland, for instance, Van sees how their “great artists” make “simple and unfailling in appeal to the child-mind,” following a “gradation of simple repetitive verse and story” up through “the most exquisite, imaginative tales,” while remaining rigorously “*true*, true to the living world about them.” In *Moving the Mountain*, also, we learn that “we wish to have the first impressions in our children’s minds, above all things, true.” Certainly, “all the witchery and loveliness possible in presentation” should be employed, but reality should never be distorted.⁶⁴

One might wonder, then, why Gilman chooses science fiction over the realism she praises in other novelists. Her reason seems to be that the science of ethics depends even more on laws than on facts. The literature in *Moving the Mountain* portrays not just “real events” but “natural laws and processes.” Whereas the literature of the 1900s was, according to that novel, fixated on the past (the only thing visible to a windowpane empiricism), the literature of 1940 is full of “stories of the future,” and “leaves the child with a sense that things are going to happen – and he, or she, can help.” It reinforces the human capacity to extend sequences of cause and effect into the future. “One of the most distinctive features of the human mind is to forecast better things,” Gilman writes in the preface to *Moving the Mountain*. “This natural tendency to hope, desire, foresee and then, if possible, obtain” has been diverted into dreams of the afterlife or far-fetched utopias set in a future too remote to contemplate, but this novel, she promises, simply expounds “existing possibilities. It indicates what people might do, real people, now living, in thirty years—if they would.” Possibilities as well as facts make up the light that the artist focuses.⁶⁵

Indeed, Gilman is relentlessly focused on change, for individuals and for society. Thus it is not the case that, as Jane Thrailkill argues, Gilman “draws attention to therapeutic moments of dynamic equilibrium that are modeled on particular sorts of aesthetic experiences,” leading to “a coherent and

⁶³ Gilman, “Our Brains,” 137–138.

⁶⁴ Gilman, *Herland Trilogy*, 201, 84.

⁶⁵ Gilman, *Herland Trilogy*, 84, 5.

calming experience.”⁶⁶ Rather, instead of a soothing fusion of subject and object, Gilman’s aesthetic experience channels superhuman energies through the person in a process that is destabilizing, even explosive. “One girl reads this, and takes fire!” she writes in her journal. “Her life is changed. She becomes / a power – a mover of others – / I write for her.”⁶⁷ As in the corrosive satire of her poem “Similar Cases,” which imagines contemporary gender norms receding into evolutionary oblivion, art leads not to composure, but to a headlong forward plunge in which much of the present, including its idea of “personality,” will be left behind as so much backwardness.

Although Gilman’s drive for scientific progress and social efficiency is socially and psychologically destabilizing, her aesthetic education does, like classical *Bildung*, eventually tend toward equilibrium. As the artist, “God’s intermediate lens,” shepherds her audience gradually upward along the path of human progress, she closes the gap between her exceptional perceptiveness and their narrower perspective. “The business of the artist,” she writes in “Our Brains and What Ails Them,” is to “lift and carry less favored souls into a richer life [...] to be a special sensorium for the world, and to build up and tenderly develop its capacity for higher perception.”⁶⁸ “World knowledge in world-wide use is what we need, not ‘scholars,’” she advises elsewhere; “a universal ability to learn to reason and act, not a few philosophers and a race of helots.” Her utopian writings show the gap between the brilliant and the mediocre narrowing as aesthetic education gradually redistributes brainpower. In *Moving the Mountain*, as society becomes more enlightened, “instead of those perpendicular peaks of isolated genius we used to have, surrounded by the ignorantly indifferent many, and the excessively admiring few, those geniuses now sloped gently down to the average on long graduated lines of decreasing ability.” “The geniuses seemed to like it too,” we are told. “They were not so conceited, not so disagreeable, not so lonesome.” As the perpendicular peaks of artistic greatness level off into the plateau of a broadly elevated culture, art starts to become not only widely intelligible, but, like Gilman’s ideal schools, indistinguishable from everyday life. In *Moving the Mountain*, “the great word Art was no longer so closely confined to its pictorial form,” but rather released into “the atmosphere in

⁶⁶ Jane Thrailkill, *Affecting Fictions: Mind, Body, and Emotions in American Literary Realism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), 120, 145.

⁶⁷ Knight, ed., *Abridged Diaries*, 234.

⁶⁸ Gilman, “Our Brains,” 134.

which all children grew, all people lived.”⁶⁹ The artist, as an accelerator of progress, thus works toward a world where people will be able to engage with art in a more moderate, less self-conscious way. This process culminates in the festivals of Herland, where all types of people and varieties of cultural activity are harmoniously interwoven, and nothing marks artists off from nonartists:

There was a most impressive array of pageantry, of processions, a sort of grand ritual, with their arts and their religion broadly blended. The very babies joined in it. To see one of their great annual festivals, with the massed and marching stateliness of those great mothers, the young women brave and noble, beautiful and strong; and then the children, taking part as naturally as ours would frolic round a Christmas tree.⁷⁰

Here, then, is Gilman’s “Aesthetic State,” the endpoint of *Bildung* posited by Schiller in which all friction between individuality and society has been smoothed away because art has come to permeate all of life, and pedagogical institutions are nowhere to be seen because all experience provides aesthetic education. However, while Schiller is anxious to assure us that the individual is in no way subsumed in this situation, since aesthetic experience always testifies to the presence of the whole self, for Gilman aesthetic experience, while powerfully asserting an individual vision in the present, will usher in a future in which people will be free to stop thinking about themselves in terms of personal uniqueness. This ideal of aesthetic education reflects Gilman’s personal experience as someone for whom self-consciousness was deeply painful. It also represents a creative reappropriation of social efficiency education, usually thought of as a philosophy that ignores the social fabric and the whole person in favor of narrowly economic ends, for a utopian project of aesthetic education that is just as concerned with personal growth, social harmony, and the integrity of aesthetic experience as that of the classical *Bildung* theorists.

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⁶⁹ Gilman, *Herland Trilogy*, 302, 92, 91.

⁷⁰ Gilman, *Selected Writings*, 198.

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CHAPTER 5

Living Has Its Own Intrinsic Quality: John Dewey's Aesthetic Education

From Horace Mann onward, promoters of American public schooling have responded to democratic-pluralist objections to state control over individual subject formation, like those voiced by Orestes Brownson, by invoking theories of aesthetic education. Can this defense of officially sanctioned cultural authority ever really succeed, by democratic lights? As discussed in the Introduction to this study, school promoters' versions of aesthetic education often resemble the classical German idea of *Bildung* as developed by Kant, Schiller, and Goethe, in which aesthetic experience is identified as the paradigmatic human experience, the condition toward which all other experience aspires, or, as Schiller calls it, "the idea of Man's humanity." We can call this assertion that the aesthetic epitomizes the human "aesthetic humanism"; by means of aesthetic humanism, classical *Bildung* claims that imposing aesthetic experience on students does not violate their right to spiritual self-determination, but rather introduces them to their own human nature in a higher, purer form than they could articulate themselves. However, because the existence of humanity, as embodied beings as well as conscious subjects, is not a purely rational affair but one riddled with natural and historical contingencies, such a universally shared ideal of the paradigmatically human—that is, an ideal on which we could rationally expect everyone to agree after due consideration—can never be arrived at through reason alone. The closest we can actually come is to identify certain existing examples as its best approximations, and this choice of examples becomes a site of political conflict. The bildungsroman

scholar Marc Redfield calls this slippage, from an ideal based on universal rational principles to an ideal limited by the examples we happen to know of, “subreption” (adapting the term from Kant).¹ Advocates of classical *Bildung*, by refusing to acknowledge that subreption is unavoidable within their framework, allow those with the most cultural capital to lay spurious claim to the mantle of the paradigmatically human, imposing their own parochial aesthetic standards while purporting to speak for humanity as such. These aesthetic standards, in turn, are always linked to subject-forming discourses of character, excellence, virtue, creativity, and so on.

When educational institutions take advantage of this slippage, they become like the Society of the Tower in *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship*, which Redfield, Franco Moretti, Joseph Slaughter, and other bildungsroman scholars have persuasively described as a quiet gatekeeper of “fully human” status that draws a false legitimacy from its misappropriation of the “idea of Man’s humanity.” The Society of the Tower is what the educational profession is always in danger of becoming when it comes in contact with aesthetic humanism. The question this chapter raises is whether John Dewey’s theory of aesthetic education, which is clearly a kind of aesthetic humanism, can provide a philosophical grounding for the authority of the educational profession to teach the arts that does not betray the ideals of democratic pluralism by making that profession into a Society of the Tower.²

EDUCATION AS GROWTH

The legitimacy of educational professionalism, in the context of compulsory mass schooling, has always rested on some ideal of the fully human derived from philosophical or scientific claims about human nature. For Horace Mann, knowledge of human nature came from faculty psychology, a quasi-science with one foot in moral philosophy, and from Pestalozzi, whose systematic theory of learning was grounded more in sentimentalism than experimentation. With these ideas, products of a predisciplinary era, Mann hoped to persuade local and state boards of

¹Marc Redfield, *Phantom Formations: Aesthetic Ideology and the Bildungsroman* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996), 15–18.

²For an analysis of how the tension between democracy and cultural hierarchy in Dewey’s thought influenced a literary contemporary, see Patrick Redding, “‘One must make a distinction, however’: Marianne Moore and Democratic Taste,” *Twentieth Century Literature* 58:2 (2012), 296–332.

education to embrace the idea of general educational expertise and to fund teacher-training institutions. In the Progressive Era, however, more strictly scientific credibility seemed necessary to justify the transfer of power from elected boards to appointed bureaucrats, and from laypeople to graduates of the new university-controlled education schools. Different progressive educational movements imagined the science of education differently: the Herbartians sought curricula and lesson plans with certain geometrical mathematical properties of symmetry and balance, properties which also described ideal social and aesthetic forms; Montessorians looked to biology, making the teacher the custodian of a process of unfolding from within dictated by evolution; social efficiency educators championed sociology, which would determine the school system's goals for vocational training, cognitive skill building, and character formation. Unlike these contemporaries, Dewey, while encouraging professional educators to draw on both philosophy and science, denies that any scholarly discipline can be the basis of educators' professional authority. For Dewey education is an art, a transformation of and within human experience, which makes it both too concrete, too grounded in lived experience, and too entangled with the imagination to be fully grasped by academic study of any kind.

Dewey's evaluative standard for the art of education is "growth," a process by which experience becomes broader and deeper. Growth, for Dewey, means an expanding adjustment to the world that, as it proceeds, must constantly reevaluate its own progress. Growth is inherent in life itself, which consists of "phases in which the organism falls out of step with the march of surrounding things and then recovers unison with it," that is, of a rhythmic alternation of equilibrium and disequilibrium between the organism and its environment. In "a growing life," he writes, this rhythm is also a form of progress, as the recovered equilibrium is "never mere return to a prior state," but rather is "enriched by the state of disparity and resistance through which it has successfully passed." As the organism refines its habits in response to environmental challenges, rendering certain problems easy or even trivial, it encounters new challenges that demand a "more extensive balance" of energies, never reaching a final resting point³

Although growth emerges from intrinsic features of experience, not all experience is equally conducive to growth. Some experience has "the

³ John Dewey, *Art As Experience* (New York: Perigee Books, [1934] 2005), 36, 13.

effect of arresting or distorting the growth of further experience.” Growth, being a form of adjustment to one’s surroundings, requires “sensitivity” and “responsiveness,” so experiences that “land [one] in a groove or rut,” or make one “scatter-brained” by their disjointedness, are miseducative. Such bad experiences may even involve some amount of growth. A “career of burglary,” for instance, may increase one’s power over one’s environment, but because it creates “conditions that shut out the person who has grown in this particular direction from the occasions, stimuli, and opportunities for continuing growth in new directions,” it is not truly educative. “When and only when development in a particular line conduces to continuing growth,” Dewey stipulates, “does it answer to the criterion of education as growing.” The educator’s art, then, is to lead students away from miseducative experience and into educative experience.⁴

A person’s growth, for Dewey, cannot be evaluated in purely conceptual terms; rather, it is ultimately a question of what Dewey calls the “quality” of their experience. “Living has its own intrinsic quality,” he writes, and “the business of education is with that quality.” Quality, in Dewey’s philosophy, is what is immediately felt in experience, as distinct from what is known or believed. Qualities can be sensory (cold, red) or emotional (calm, terror), and they persist before, after, and alongside conceptual thought. Dewey’s qualitative understanding of growth contributes to the charge of vagueness often leveled at it.⁵ Ideas about growth are essential, and not to be scorned, but growth, like experience itself, exceeds what he calls the “knowledge-relation.” As we shall see later in this chapter, the qualities of experience that lie beyond ideas are not (like, say, the “real” in Lacan’s psychology) inaccessible to us; rather, they are accessible as

⁴John Dewey, *Experience and Education* (New York: Touchstone, [1938] 1997), 25, 36.

⁵John Dewey, *Democracy and Education* (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, [1915] 2004), 36. Those who have charged Dewey with vagueness, of style or thought or both, include Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr., who said “so methought God would have spoken had he been inarticulate but keenly desirous to tell you how it was”; Richard Hofstadter, who writes that Dewey “wrote a prose of terrible vagueness and plasticity”; Martin Dworkin, for whom “his style was often opaque, his terminology ambiguous”; and Charles L. Glenn, who faults Dewey for rejecting Whitehead’s dictum that “a certain ruthless definiteness is essential in education.” Robert Westbrook, *John Dewey and American Democracy* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1991), xiii; Richard Hofstadter, *Anti-Intellectualism in American Life* (New York: Knopf, 1963), 361; Martin Dworkin, ed., *Dewey on Education* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1971), 13; Charles L. Glenn, *The American Model of State and School* (New York: Continuum, 2002), 205.

emotions, to which we can attune ourselves. So, although the progress of growth cannot be entirely mapped in any rational space, its curvature can be felt and followed.

The best guide we have toward the qualities of educative experience, for Dewey, is art. Or, more precisely, aesthetic experience, since for Dewey “the true work of art is not the object,” with its “formal properties internal to the work itself,” but rather the “experience occasioned” by making and appreciating artworks.⁶ Like the classical *Bildung* theorists, Dewey sees aesthetic experience as paradigmatic of the best in human experience, and thus as a goal that should be shared by everyone regardless of their differences. “Esthetic experience,” Dewey writes, is “experience in its integrity,” or “pure experience,” “experience freed from the forces that impede and confuse its development as experience; freed, that is, from factors that subordinate an experience as it is directly had to something beyond itself.” Thus aesthetic experience sets “standards for the worth of [other] experiences,” by highlighting the “elements of enjoyable worth” that are potential to them. It can “arouse discontent with conditions which fall below [its] measure,” and “create a demand for surroundings coming up to [its] own level.”⁷

Just as not every experience is educative, though, not every aesthetic experience is paradigmatic of pure experience. Indeed, identifying truly aesthetic experiences is just as difficult as identifying educative experiences. (And of course, aesthetic and unaesthetic, like educative and miseducative, are ends of a spectrum, not clearly demarcated categories.) As with educative experiences, aesthetic experiences can come to seem spurious in hindsight. A highly aesthetic experience, Dewey writes, might leave one in a state of “fine rapture,” but sometimes later reflection will reveal that “the particular thing in question was not worthy of calling out the rapt seizure; that in fact the latter was caused by factors adventitious to the object itself,” such as the company in which one enjoyed it. In fact, the object, while immediately enjoyable, insightful, or whatever, might, if taken as an exemplar of artistic excellence, lead to a narrowing of one’s aesthetic vision, just as the career in burglary, while a kind of growth, narrows one’s future avenues of growth. Only time and reflection will tell, and then only subject to revision after more time and reflection.⁸

⁶ Philip W. Jackson, *John Dewey and the Lessons of Art* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 5, xiv.

⁷ Dewey, *Art as Experience*, 286; Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, 174.

⁸ Dewey, *Art as Experience*, 152.

Growth and the Authority of the Educational Profession

Dewey's qualitative approach to educational goals diverges from attempts to establish a science of education, and in doing so it forfeits the most popular method of legitimating the authority of the educational profession. However, the authority he seeks is in a sense wider, since he would have the educational profession be autonomous with respect to the sciences as well as the public. For Dewey, education, as an applied art and not a science, happens in uncontrolled situations, where unforeseen considerations are bound to arise. It is, however, "an art that progressively incorporates more and more of science into itself," drawing opportunistically on many different fields. There is, for Dewey, no one kind of science with inherent educational relevance; rather, science becomes educational science when it is actually used to improve education. "Results may be scientific, short of their operative presence in the attitudes and habits of observation, judgment and planning of those engaged in the educative act," he writes in *The Sources of a Science of Education*, "but they are not educational science short of this point. They are psychology, sociology, statistics, or whatever." As with Theodore Roosevelt's "man in the arena," it is the person in the classroom who counts. For that person, scientific findings are "sources to be used," according to the dictates of practical wisdom, "to make educational functions more intelligent." Just as a physicist would not necessarily make a competent engineer, despite knowing all the scientific principles that inform the art of engineering, educators must resist looking to psychologists, sociologists, and other scientists for any "rule which is to be uniformly adopted." To accept such rules would be "destructive of the free play of education as an art," effacing the particularities of personality, social environment, and curriculum which is the teacher's task to harmonize. It would also be a blow to the educational profession, since if science could lay down specific rules, there would be no need for distinctively teacherly wisdom. Furthermore, Dewey argues, the mind is so entangled with its cultural environment, and cultural change is so open-ended, that "the potentialities of human nature" can never be conceptually delimited in any case.⁹

Education's relation to science, where facts are concerned, is mirrored, in Dewey's thought, by its relation to philosophy where ends and values

⁹John Dewey, *The Sources of a Science of Education* (New York: H. Liveright, 1929), 13–14, 32; John Dewey, *Freedom and Culture* (Buffalo: Prometheus Books, [1939] 1989), 88–89, 26, 96, 98.

are concerned. Only “concrete educational experience” can “determine educational ends”; it “sets the problems, and tests, modifies, confirms or refutes the conclusions” of any “intellectual investigation” into education, whether scientific or philosophical. Although educators are closest to this concrete experience, even they do not quite have the final say in determining educational ends and values. Rather, the pursuit of education has a life of its own, and those who engage in it, teachers and students alike, should expect it to change them in fundamental ways. “Education is itself a process of discovering what values are worth while,” Dewey writes, in which activities are allowed to influence a developing human life, and are then retrospectively judged by their consequences for the students’ growth. This process is “by its nature an endless circle or spiral,” which unceasingly “sets more problems to be further studied, which then react into the educative process to change it still further, and thus demand more thought, more science, and so on, in everlasting sequence.” So, in education, there is “no such thing as a fixed and final set of objectives, even for the time being or temporarily,” and “no way to discover what is ‘more truly educational’ except by the continuation of the educational act itself.” “The discovery is never made,” Dewey insists; “it is always making.” What philosophy offers to educators is merely a degree of patience and disinterest. While practicing educators are liable to become “preoccupied with more immediate urgencies and results,” philosophers can “consider obscure collateral consequences that show themselves in a more extensive time-span” and examine the actual accomplishments of education “in the light of a general scheme of values.” As with science, though, the findings of philosophy only become properly educational when they actually help educators “carry on their work in a more liberal spirit, with escape from tradition and routine and one-sided personal interests and whims.” “The proof of the pudding,” as Dewey puts it, “is in the eating. The philosophy of education not only draws its original material as to ends and value from actual experience in education, but it goes back to these experiences for testing, confirmation, modification, and the provision of further materials.”¹⁰

In the aesthetic education of classical *Bildung*, the problem of “exemplarity,” as described by Marc Redfield, is that in order to accept the authority of the teacher (or artwork) to shape one’s own character, one must first accept that they represent one’s own higher self, a self which by

¹⁰Dewey, *Freedom and Culture*, 57–58, 74–76.

definition one does not yet understand. In Dewey's theory, by contrast, neither the teacher nor the artwork is meant to be exemplary in the sense of representing a more perfect version of the student's current self. Rather than a higher self, these educative agencies are simply larger selves, ampler selves, selves that have grown more, in certain directions, than the student has. While the higher self is a unitary ideal, moving the student toward a fixed characterological goal, the larger self is always just one among many possible larger selves. Dewey's pedagogy always assumes that the student is interacting with multiple teachers, each with a degree of independence. At Dewey's Laboratory School at the University of Chicago, each subject teacher would lead her class autonomously, but the teachers would convene regularly to ensure that the curriculum stayed reasonably integrated; no one, including Dewey as the school's principal, had final say. Also, Dewey sees the school as a mediator among other educative social institutions such as the home and the workplace, which furnish their own role models. (Whereas *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship* sharply excludes Werner, the voice of commerce, from Wilhelm's education, seeing him as a hostile alternative to true culture, Dewey makes the Werners of the world valued contributors, if peripheral ones, to an ideal education.) Because of this assumption of multiple teachers, to allow any one figure to influence one is not such a weighty decision as it is in classical *Bildung*, in which an initial mistake can prove difficult to correct. So, for Dewey, while the school remains an agency that profoundly shapes students' sense of self, this power is not nearly so terrible as that of the Society of the Tower in the new bildungsroman criticism. In exchange, though, as it were, the Deweyan school must accept some internal dissonance and cross-fertilization and rule out any overly definite ultimate goals.

Using the qualitative standard of education as growth, Dewey is, then, able to imagine a robust and authoritative educational system without violating students' autonomous selfhood. The professional teacher's authority over her students rests on her "greater maturity of experience," her status as a larger self, which puts her in "a position to evaluate each experience of the young in a way in which the one having the less mature experience cannot do."¹¹ While most adults have maturer experience than most children, though, the educational profession must establish its authority not just over students, but over parents and members of school boards. Here teachers cannot claim a generally superior experience, but they can claim a maturer experience of certain distinctively educational

¹¹ Dewey, *Experience and Education*, 38.

problems. These fall into two broad categories: first, those Dewey discusses in *The Child and the Curriculum*, which concern the mediation between child psychology and adult ways of organizing knowledge, and second, those he discusses in *The School and Society*, which concern the mediation among different branches of learning and different educational agencies inside and outside of the school system. While the educational profession cannot claim that it has a special science of education to address these problems, it can claim a depth of practical wisdom about them.

THE QUALITIES OF EDUCATIVE EXPERIENCE

In this section, we will examine in detail what Dewey means by the intrinsic quality of educative experience. In one sense, the cycle of growth has a single general quality, to which we can try to attune ourselves. This quality will be easier to grasp, however, if it can be analyzed into several more specific qualities. We will consider four such qualities, which recur throughout Dewey's philosophy: interest, purpose, meaning, and freedom (or integrity). These qualities are all mutually interdependent, so it is not possible to treat one as a foundation for the next. Here, they are ordered in terms of what can roughly be called increasing complexity. The quality of interest concerns the basic dynamics of experience as a transaction between self and environment, rather than something that exists as purely inward subjectivity or as purely objective events. The quality of purpose concerns the extension of this transaction through time, so that we adjust to the future as well as the present. The quality of meaning concerns (in addition to certain direct relations with qualitative experience) the reflection of purpose's excursions into the future back into an enriched present, a present whose immediacy is now pregnant with possibilities. The quality of freedom concerns the mutual adjustment of our many interests, purposes, and meanings, and the need for this mutual adjustment is also, in a sense, the source of the other qualities. We will trace these four interdependent qualities through four areas of application that are equally interdependent in Dewey's thought: psychology, society, the school, and the arts.

Interest

Interest concerns the attitude of the self toward the world. If we want to really learn from it, Dewey thinks, the world must matter to us as much as we matter to ourselves. We attain this attitude not by altruism—by learning

to value things other than ourself—but by realizing that we cannot finally distinguish between our self and our environment. As Richard Bernstein has carefully shown, the model of experience as an “organic coordination” that Dewey develops in his early article, “The Reflex Arc Concept in Psychology,” is the basis for many concepts in his later philosophy, and the quality of interest is among them. In “The Reflex Arc,” Dewey argues that the response creates the stimulus: the person creates her environment, which also creates her, in an ongoing series of transactions. Nothing in experience is a purely inner possession, nothing a purely given external fact. This is so because “the environment is not simply the facts which happen objectively to lie about an agent,” but is rather “such part of the facts as may be *related* to the capacity and the disposition and gifts of the agent,” so that two individuals “may have what, to the outward eye, are exactly the same surroundings, and yet each may draw from these surroundings wholly unlike stimulus, material and motives.”¹² Experience has interest, for Dewey, when we feel about something not just that it makes a difference to our sense of self, but that, really, it is part of our sense of self. “The genuine principle of interest,” he insists, “is the principle of the recognized identity of the fact or proposed line of action with the self; that it lies in the direction of the agent’s own growth, and is, therefore, imperiously demanded, if the agent is to be himself.”¹³

As we saw in Chapter 2, in the context of Progressive Era educational debates, Dewey’s idea of interest is opposed to that of the Herbartians, who argue that school topics should be “made interesting” by attractive and relatable means of presentation, and also to the older (but still prevalent) theory of mental discipline, which argues that, since life “is full of things not interesting, but which have to be faced none the less,” students

¹²Richard J. Bernstein, *John Dewey* (Atascadero, CA: Ridgeview, 1981), p. 18; John Dewey, *Outlines of a Critical Theory of Ethics* (Ann Arbor: Register Publishing Co., 1891), 99, 100.

¹³Dewey, *Art as Experience*, 12. Jonathan Levin explores this notion of the self arising from transactions with the world in his *Poetics of Transition* (Durham: Duke UP, 1999), stressing that the self’s openness to outside forces makes it subject to a “pervasive [...] restlessness” (x). Stable identities and even concepts are decentered in favor of “alertness to possibilities of meaning as they lurk in the always dynamic margins of experience” (xii). As Levin acknowledges, though, for Dewey (unlike, say, Emerson) these margins are valuable not in themselves, but as part of an ongoing dialectic with the central or habitual self; stability is just as important as change.

should be made to work at uncongenial tasks. Dewey objects that both the Herbartians and the mental disciplinarians have made the mistake of assuming that the lesson is something “outside the sphere of the self,” which must be integrated into the self, either by means of a pedagogical spoonful of sugar or by exerting “the sheer power of ‘will.’” They fail to see that in experience “the career and destiny of a living being are bound up with its interchanges with its environment, not externally but in the most intimate way.”¹⁴ In educational practice, Dewey’s conception of interest leads him to treat activities (transaction between selves and environments) as basic curricular units. In *The Child and the Curriculum*, he describes the teacher’s role as a mediator between the “logical” view of the curriculum, as a body of knowledge that students will need to master if they are to fully participate in society, and the “psychological” view, as a sequence of activities that truly interest the children. Because Deweyan interest depends on the individual personality rather than on fixed standards of attractive presentation, this task is bound to remain an unpredictable one, although, unlike “child-centered” curricula, its content remains fixed from the “logical,” or subject-facing, side.

Interest inheres in the individual’s transactions with the human, as much as the natural, environment. Because of our shared interests in things, and also because “certain capacities of an individual are not brought out except under the stimulus of associating with others,” we find that “social modifications are the only means of the creation of changed personalities.”¹⁵ In the social context, the principle of interest leads Dewey to conclude that the growth of an individual is inseparable from the growth of society itself, and from the growth of its other individual members. By the growth of society, Dewey means just the same thing as individual growth: a wider, deeper equilibrium with the natural and human environment. With the advance of science (which gears into social and individual growth in ways that exceed the scope of this chapter), people become increasingly interconnected by networks of commerce and communication. The result is increasing interdependence, a “widening [...] of the range of persons whose interests have to be taken into account in action,” tending toward a situation in which, “in theory, the community

¹⁴John Dewey, *Interest As Related to Will* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, [1895] 1899), 6–9, 13.

¹⁵Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, 12, 220; Dewey, *Reconstruction in Philosophy* (New York: Cosimo Classics, [1920] 2008), 195.

of interests and ends is humanity itself.” This interdependence creates problems that can only be addressed via coordinated social action, so each member of society must learn to see her actions in wider and wider contexts. At the same time, to compensate for this ever-expanding accountability to others, interdependence also causes social roles to become more varied, and these “new divisions of labor” multiply the possibilities for each individual to grow into “specific powers” and “distinguishing traits.”

But growth along the lines of specialization and cooperation is impossible unless others are growing along those lines too. Specialists exist more easily in a society full of other specialists, and the same obviously goes for cooperators. Thus, each individual needs the others’ growth to achieve her own. So, Dewey argues, “our interest in others is not satisfied as long as their intelligence is cramped, their appreciation of truth feeble, their emotions hard and uncomprehensive, their powers of production compressed.” Both for the others’ sake and for one’s own, one should “will the freeing of all their gifts to the highest degree.”¹⁶ This is the basis of Dewey’s “creative democracy,” his vision of democracy as a society dedicated, in the words of the philosopher Richard Shusterman, to “the creation of a real community devoted to the positive joys of self-fulfillment in associated living and committed to collective action so that each member can realize herself while (and through) contributing to the common good.” In addition to this investment in other individuals, the citizen of a Deweyan democracy will naturally have an interest, in the Deweyan sense, in “direct and active participation in the regulation of the terms upon which associated life shall be sustained and the pursuit of the good carried on,” that is, in the workings of government and of other social institutions such as workplaces.¹⁷

Dewey finds that “the ideal of interest is exemplified in the artistic attitude” because the “uniquely distinguishing feature of esthetic experience” is the total transcendence of any “distinction of self and object” in the perfected process of emotional expression. (This idea of collapsing the boundary between self and world does not, for Dewey, as it might for a different kind of philosopher, imply a distancing from one’s own particular subjective position, although it does involve accepting a dynamic,

¹⁶Dewey, *Outlines of a Critical Theory of Ethics*, 209, 123, 132.

¹⁷Richard Shusterman, *Practicing Philosophy: Pragmatism and the Philosophical Life* (London: Taylor and Francis, 2016), 72, 74.

changeable sense of self.) Both “expression” and “emotion” are terms linked to Dewey’s concept of interest.¹⁸ Emotions are permutations of interest, which arise when an interest cannot be directly acted upon. When the adjustment between the individual and her environment goes smoothly, running in the grooves of habit, “the feeling element drops out,” but when habit proves insufficient she experiences a “tension,” a “disturbance or agitation,” which Dewey identifies with emotion. In this account, emotion’s role is to “secure a sufficient arousing of energy in critical periods of the life of the agent,” to “brace [...] the agent in coping with the novel element in unexpected [...] situations.” The emotions associated with relief, relaxation, and so on are, of course, the other side of this coin.¹⁹

Expression, meanwhile, concerns the process by which emotion, once aroused, develops in transaction with the environment. “Significant” emotions, for Dewey, are “qualities [...] of a complex experience that moves and changes,” unfolding in time like a “drama,” and in order to do justice to their variety one must make careful use of the environment. Slamming a car horn might express anger, but it cannot capture the difference between minor irritation and towering rage. In the best case, as it proceeds, “the emotion operates like a magnet drawing to itself appropriate material[s]” that have “an experienced emotional affinity for the state of mind already moving.” This, for Dewey, is the act of expression. When expression is perfected in aesthetic experience, the “materials” of one’s environment (including the cultural environment that is language) become “eloquent medi[a]” that body forth fully developed qualities of “emotional value.” The “dynamic force” governing the “selection and assemblage” of these materials is interest, the matrix from which emotion arises. As this interest works itself out in expression, the self, as in any realization of interest, is transformed, altering its relation with “external materials” by “incorporating them in an individual vision and expression.” “The self,” Dewey writes, is “created in the creation of objects.”²⁰

¹⁸ Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, 100–101; Dewey, *Art as Experience*, 259.

¹⁹ John Dewey, “Interest in Relation to Training of the Will,” in *National Herbart Society Supplement to the Yearbook for 1895* (Bloomington, IL: Public School Publishing Company, 1896), 5, 15, 20–21.

²⁰ Dewey, *Art as Experience*, 43, 63–80, 277, 293; John Dewey, *Experience and Nature* ([S.l.]: Read Books Ltd, [1925] 2017), 318. As Levin remarks in *The Poetics of Transition*, in pragmatist aesthetics art exists not to serve our interests but to transform them (67). What is missing from Levin’s view, though, is that art does not just turn some (old) interests into

To properly express emotions, often one must divert them into “indirect channels” that are particularly well suited to their dramatic possibilities. “Impatient irritation,” for instance, might be worked through and “tranquilized” by cleaning a room, so that, as the emotion subsides, “the orderly room reflects back to [the individual] the change that has taken place in himself.” His emotion becomes “objectified” in the transformation of the room; his activity, while not necessarily mimetic of his emotion, gives it a nicely calibrated outlet, which allows it to work through its transformations. This kind of indirection is the basis for Dewey’s understanding of “fine art.” While cleaning a room can be both useful and expressive, one is sure to experience emotions that elude expression in any activity that serves an extraneous purpose. These emotions need to be expressed in activity specially tailored for them. Although he resists any strict separation of the two, Dewey calls that which is both productive and expressive “useful art,” and that which is purely expressive “fine art.”²¹

Purpose

While the quality of interest may seem to exist in a perpetual present tense, one moment forgotten as it permutes into the next, the quality of purpose concerns the role of memory and foresight, without which we could hardly develop interests in the first place. Purposes involve (but cannot quite be reduced to) foreseen goals, or “ends-in-view,” which are based on a different kind of ends embedded in nature itself. Nature can be seen, for Dewey, as a network of crisscrossing “intrinsic continuities.” While some natural processes, like waves moving back and forth in a pond, are “a mere serial aggregate” of events, which might have occurred in any order, in a process with intrinsic continuity (Dewey’s example is bees making honey), “each prior event leads into its successor while the successor takes up what is furnished and utilizes it for some other stage, until we arrive at the end, which, as it were, summarizes and finishes off the process.”²² Natural ends are termini of intrinsic continuities, and a “purpose,” for Dewey, represents a conscious interest in the realization of some such end, or ends. A purpose therefore “must be an outgrowth of existing conditions,” and

other (new) ones—rather, it refines our interests, making them more deeply and lastingly interesting.

²¹Dewey, *Art as Experience*, 238.

²²Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, 76–78.

since conditions are unstable in Dewey's "aleatory universe," it should be a "mere tentative sketch" which we expect to develop as we go; it should be "experimental, and hence constantly growing as it is tested in action."

The stress Dewey lays on the flexibility and open-endedness of purpose leads him to reject any hard distinction between the attitudes of work and play, and between goal-oriented activities and those without clear goals. As for work and play, Dewey says that in play our interest is "in an activity just as it flows on from moment to moment," while in work our interest is in "an activity as tending to a culmination": that is, work involves both interest and purpose. When we work, our interest in following a certain "thread of continuity" to its conclusion carries us through stretches that are not especially interesting in themselves. Work thus involves "mediate interests," which take on value only within the "larger whole" of purpose. Yet both work and play represent phases in the construction of purpose. Play, by following the "unfolding" of a process "on its own account," leads to the discovery of continuities in the world, while work pursues continuities that have already been identified. To be both focused and flexible in our aims, we must alternate between these two modes. Or, better, be "playful and serious at the same time," which Dewey describes as "the ideal mental condition." Work and play are not opposites, but are collectively opposed to "drudgery," or activity lacking interest.²³

As for the nature of goals, we can begin by noting that the idea of the ongoing transaction, the "intimate interchanges" between self and environment, governs purpose as well as interest. "The doing with the thing, not the thing in isolation," is the proper end, Dewey writes; our goal should be to do something more, something larger, than we can at present.²⁴ This expanded doing at which we should properly aim, moreover, has an open-ended quality. Because it exceeds our present capacities, we cannot really know what it will involve until we achieve it. As we move toward this vague horizon of widened activity, we can pick out definite aims that will help us on our way, but, especially in undertakings directly concerned with the enrichment of experience in the broadest terms, including education, art, religion, and some aspects of politics and psychotherapy, there can be no "final goal," but only a sense of gaining or losing

²³ John Dewey, *How We Think: A Restatement of the Relation of Reflective Thinking to the Educative Process* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1998), 164; Dewey, "Interest as Related to Training of the Will," 16–17; Dewey, *How We Think*, 19.

²⁴ Dewey, *How We Think*, 19.

ground, of “directions of change in the quality of experience.” In such fields, “growth itself is the only moral ‘end,’” and we must embrace its distinctive dynamic of the “endless circle or spiral” that demands “more thought, more science, and so on, in everlasting sequence” as we continually redefine it. Since our more immediate aims should always subserve this sort of generalized “freeing of activities,” the qualities of experimentalism, idealism, and so forth that characterize good educational and aesthetic practice are always present as a trace within our most concrete plans.²⁵ As Victor Kestenbaum writes in his much-needed book on the role of the ideal in Dewey’s philosophy, Dewey would have us do two things at once. One is “to see, to view, to form ends-in-view, in short, to work toward tangibility.” The other is “to be mindful of what is not seeable or viewable as ends or terminations, mindful, that is, of the intangible ideal,” since “what can be foreseen in our plans and efforts, that is, ends-in-view, draw upon what cannot be distinctly seen; they borrow from ‘what outruns the seen and touched.’”²⁶

As with interest, the quality of purpose depends on social arrangements as well as individual habits of mind. Bad social conditions interfere with this quality by relying too much on “adventitious” motives, extrinsic rewards and punishments that turn work into drudgery by separating it from the wider quest for fuller activity. This critique encompasses all kinds of work that is done solely for money, with no feeling for its intrinsic value (though the target of Dewey’s criticism is always the economic system, not the individual worker). In a workplace where each worker “operate[s] simply for the sake of a separate result—his own pay,” the process as a whole is deficient in purpose, even though each worker’s “respective doings contribute to a single outcome.” If, on the other hand, each worker were interested in the product as well as the paycheck, he would “view the consequences of his own acts as having a bearing upon what others are doing” and vice versa, leading to a truly “common intent.” This purpose would not be common in the sense that it would be identical for each participant, but in the sense that each participant would be involved in its revision. Only under such conditions can individual experience retain the quality of purpose in social life. “Full education,” as Dewey puts it, “comes

²⁵ John Dewey, *Reconstruction in Philosophy* (New York: Cosimo Classics, [1920] 2008), 177; Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, 77.

²⁶ Victor Kestenbaum, *The Grace and the Severity of the Ideal: John Dewey and the Transcendent* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2002), 47–48.

only when there is a responsible share on the part of each person, in proportion to capacity, in shaping the aims and policies of the social groups to which he belongs."²⁷

The political corollary to that idea is democracy, specifically "deliberative" (or "participatory") democracy, which emphasizes collective decision-making, or, in the terms of this study, social action. Rather than identifying democracy with "some form of government," Dewey insists that "it is but a name for the fact that human nature is developed only when its elements take part in directing things which are common, things for the sake of which men and women form groups: families, industrial companies, governments, churches, scientific associations and so on." His more oft-cited definition, from *The Public and Its Problems*, runs: "Wherever there is conjoint activity whose consequences are appreciated as good by all singular persons who take part in it, and where the realization of the good is such as to effect an energetic desire and effort to sustain it in being just because it is a good shared by all, there is in so far a community. The clear consciousness of a communal life, in all its implications, constitutes the idea of democracy." In both of these instances (among many others) Dewey identifies democracy with the ongoing work of finding shared purpose via dialogue, a task that both enables and depends upon purposeful individual lives.²⁸

It is important to Dewey's conception of deliberative democracy that it is not simply a method for weighing different values, but a crucible in which values are transformed. As the political scientist Jason Kosnoski puts it, for Dewey "effective political dialogue alters not only individual interest but also moral perspectives and self-interpretations."²⁹ Thus, as the philosopher Steven Fesmire observes, the ideal participant in Deweyan democracy is someone "who *risks* striving toward a democratic ideal," subjecting their most dearly held values to the possibility of reconstruction. To expect people to treat their values this way is asking much, but is reasonable in light of what the literary scholar Giles Gunn calls Dewey's "functional view of value formation," in which values "take on the

²⁷ John Dewey, *The Public and Its Problems* (Athens: Swallow Press, [1927] 1997), 211; Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, 26; Dewey, *Reconstruction in Philosophy*, 209.

²⁸ Dewey, *Reconstruction in Philosophy*, 209; Dewey, *The Public and Its Problems*, 148; Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, 64, 75; John Dewey, *Liberalism and Social Action* (Amherst, N.Y.: Prometheus Books, [1935] 2000), 61, 59.

²⁹ Jason Kosnoski, "Artful Discussion: John Dewey's Classroom as a Model of Deliberative Association," *Political Theory* 33, no. 5 (2005): 654–677, 657.

character of critical solutions to cultural problems.” Values, for Dewey, are not unchallengeable intuitions but “forms of purposive activity,” mental tools that we use to point experience in the direction of growth. We can thus make “intelligent inquiry into the conditions and consequences of a value object”; we can “examine the garments of cultural sense-making we call values to see what the wearing of them does to us and what happens to them when we put them on.”³⁰

Deweyan classroom practices are designed to develop the quality of purpose for each student, which necessarily means also developing it for the classroom community as a whole. The two-pronged approach of *The Child and the Curriculum*, mediating between the “logical” and the “psychological,” can also be seen as a mediation between the purposes of individual students, to ignore which leads to drudgery, and the *sensus communis* which is needed to build shared purposes. At the Laboratory School, teachers used a “two-dimensional curriculum,” describing each lesson on two separate forms. One, “From the Child’s Standpoint,” described the curriculum as a sequence of (hopefully) interesting activities that would lead students to formulate purposes (e.g., to complete a model house); the other, “From the Teacher’s Standpoint,” described it in terms of the skills and knowledge the children would gain from these activities, which should be similar for all students.³¹

In addition to facilitating the formation of shared purposes, the Deweyan teacher can promote habits that make it easier for individuals to form their own purposes. Forming purposes involves “stoppage of the immediate manifestation of impulse until that impulse has been brought into connection with other possible tendencies to action so that a more comprehensive and coherent plan of activity is formed”; it requires, that is, certain habits of patience, observation, and memory. The teacher can steer her students toward these habits without compromising their freedom, since they are themselves constituents of that freedom.³² Thus, unlike child-centered education, Dewey’s education maintains a major

³⁰ Steven A. Fesmire, “Dramatic Rehearsal and the Moral Artist: A Deweyan Theory of Moral Understanding,” *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society* 31, no. 3 (1995): 568–597, 588; Giles Gunn, *Thinking Across the American Grain: Ideology, Intellect, and the New Pragmatism* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1992), 91.

³¹ Dewey, *Experience and Education*, 56; John Dewey, *School and Society & The Child and the Curriculum* (Dover Publications, [1901] 2012), 81; Laurel Nan Tanner, *Dewey’s Laboratory School: Lessons for Today* (New York, N.Y.: Teachers College Press, 1998), 47.

³² Dewey, *Experience and Education*, 70–72.

role for the authority of professional educators in the classroom, over curriculum and individual conduct, as a means of promoting individually purposeful lives.

Aesthetic experience is preeminently purposeful in two ways. First, the act of emotional expression through media exemplifies the blending of work and play that characterizes purposeful experience. Bad artists, Dewey writes, are either too exclusively playful, “preoccupied overmuch” with the locally interesting possibilities of their “means and materials” at the expense of a controlling emotional vision, or too exclusively serious, letting their “animating idea” exceed their “command of method.” In the well-performed expressive act, on the other hand, “the thought of the end becomes so adequate that it compels translation into the means that embody it”; the materials, organized by a flexible but controlling purpose, become true media. While this feat is “typical of the artist,” for Dewey it reflects a general quality of educative experience, and “may be displayed in all activities.” The teacher who cultivates this quality is therefore also an artist, whose “rank” is “measured by his ability to foster the attitude of the artist in those who study with him,” to “nurture inspiring aim and executive means into harmony with each other.”³³

The second way that aesthetic experience exemplifies purpose is that, because it need not subordinate expression to other concerns, it can allow expressive purposes to work themselves out entirely on their own terms. In a paradigmatically educative experience, “resistance and conflict” in experience give rise to “emotions and ideas so that conscious intent emerges,” and this emergent purpose, in turn, overcomes the initial resistance by harnessing the power of natural continuities until equilibrium is restored on firmer footing and the cycle of growth begins anew. In everyday experience, however, “there is distraction and dispersion,” Dewey laments; “We put our hands to the plow and turn back; we start and then we stop,” but “not because the experience has reached the end for the sake of which it was initiated.” We do not finish weaving our interests into a purpose; we follow loose threads. For experience to be fully educative, “the material experienced” must “ru[n] its course to fulfillment,” its intrinsic continuities fully explored, as when “a piece of work is finished in a way that is satisfactory; a problem receives its solution; a game is played through; a situation, whether that of eating a meal, playing a game of chess, carrying on a conversation, writing a book, or taking part in a

³³Dewey, *How We Think*, 219–221.

political campaign, is so rounded out that its close is a consummation and not a cessation.” In a fully aesthetic experience, similarly, the potential emotional consequences latent within its media and subject matter are fully integrated into a single expressive purpose. The singularity of such a “finished” experience (aesthetic or otherwise) leads Dewey to describe it as “*an* experience,” marked off from, though not disconnected from, the general welter of life.³⁴

Meaning

While purpose looks backward and forward to become aware of continuities in experience, the quality of meaning concerns the absorption of this awareness into our perception of things (though that does not exhaust its role). Dewey rejects the traditional philosophical account in which “an object, stone, orange, tree, chair, is supposed to convey different impressions of color, shape, size, hardness, smell, taste, etc., which aggregated together constitute the characteristic meaning of each thing.” Rather, he insists, “it is the characteristic use to which the thing is put, because of its specific qualities, which supplies the meaning with which it is identified. A chair is a thing which is put to one use; a table, a thing which is employed for another purpose; an orange is a thing which costs so much, which is grown in warm climes, which is eaten, and when eaten has an agreeable odor and refreshing taste, etc.” “When things have a meaning for us,” as he puts it, “we mean (intend, propose) what we do” with them. Thus we can say, preliminarily, that until we have thought (consciously or not) about the purposes to which something might be put, it cannot have a meaning for us. But this statement will need to be qualified in important ways.³⁵ For one thing, although meaning is acquired by way of purpose, it need not always be experienced in the context of purpose formation. Once an object acquires meanings, they become integrated into it and can be experienced appreciatively, as part of the enjoyment of equilibrium. A map, say, may have initially become meaningful to someone in the context of a definite purpose, such as planning a trip, but if she later frames it as living room décor, she can appreciate it while she is unthinking and relaxed. These moments of appreciation remind us of the many features of the world with which we are currently in equilibrium, and, in doing so,

³⁴ Dewey, *Art as Experience*, 36, 41.

³⁵ Dewey, *Art as Experience*, 14; Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, 25.

they prepare us to better handle the inevitable moments of disequilibrium, since the meanings involved in the appreciative, equilibrated phase of experience are the same as those involved in the intelligent, disequilibrated phase. This is one of the “rhythms” that, in *Art as Experience*, Dewey identifies as a basic structure in experience.³⁶

Another of experience’s structuring rhythms is the alternation between concrete and ideal meanings, or, as Dewey calls them, the “foreground” and “background” of experience. Meanings, for Dewey, include perceptions of the relations among things; but, as Henry James says, “really, universally, relations stop nowhere.” While deliberation always involves “selecting some foreseen consequence to serve as a stimulus to present action,” the outcome we desire is “set in an indefinite context of other consequences” which we can never fully understand. The ends that we foresee and adopt as our own only “mark out a little island in an infinite sea.” Intelligence “but throws a spotlight” on a “little part of the whole.”³⁷ We can become aware of this “dim and total background consciousness of every distinct thought,” but the background can never enter thought as one of its definite terms. Or rather, if part of it does rise to the foreground of consciousness, an infinitely vast background still remains. Our relation to the background is thus twofold. Without the frequent excursions made by definite thinking, its castings of light into the darkness, our intuitions about the background would be impoverished. Our relation to the background as an enduring fact, however, rather than as material to bring into the foreground, is not intellectual but emotional. (“Though consciousness of [the background] cannot become intellectualized,” Dewey remarks, “yet emotional appreciation of it is won only by those willing to think.”) At the limits of our intelligent foresight, we have feelings about ideas, objects, and events. This “background of feeling, of diffused emotion [...] forms the stuff of the ideal,” in the sense that it orients our immediate purposes toward our vague sense of the workings of the universe as a whole. Because relations stop nowhere, “in a genuine sense every act is already possessed of infinite import” as its consequences ripple out. Our emotional awareness of the background colors our evaluation of our specific meanings, which can evoke positive or negative emotions depending on how well they square with our ineffable intuitions about

³⁶Dewey, *Art as Experience*, 14.

³⁷Henry James, *The Art of the Novel: Critical Prefaces* (New York: Scribner, 1962), 5; Dewey, *Art as Experience*, 14.

how the world hangs together. Meanings that align with these intuitions take on a glow of idealism; those that do not so align will feel, in some nebulous way, false or shallow. We know, on some level, that they will lead us out on isolated limbs, away from the common world that underlies shared purposes. Thus, for Dewey, “the sense of an extensive and underlying whole is the context of every experience and it is the essence of sanity. For the mad, the insane, thing to us is that which is torn from the common context and which stands alone and isolated.” As Victor Kestenbaum argues, it is through the ideal background that Dewey allows for qualities denied to him by those who see him only as a level-headed antifoundationalist: qualities such as nobility, faith, and self-transcendence. The background, after all, being beyond our formulated concepts, is beyond our concept of ourself. By facing it, by asking it what it demands of us, we can get beyond ourselves, even if we can only face it obliquely, relying on practices of humility, receptivity, circumspection, and so on.³⁸

To the extent that meaning builds on purpose, shared meanings build on shared purposes, and hence on common experiences. Dewey thinks of language as a set of sounds and images which have acquired shared meanings in much the same way that a chair or an orange acquire their meanings. When hunting together, for instance, if “a certain signal meant ‘move to the right’ to the one who uttered it, and ‘move to the left’ to the one who heard it, they obviously could not successfully carry on their hunt together. Understanding one another means that [...] sounds have the same value for both with respect to carrying on a common pursuit.” What goes for sounds, of course, also goes for other objects which take on meanings in the context of shared activities. (However, Dewey’s refusal to sharply distinguish between linguistic and nonlinguistic meanings is a point of serious friction with neopragmatists such as Richard Rorty, Richard Poirier, and, to bend the category a bit, Stanley Cavell.)³⁹

While shared purposes are needed for publics to realize themselves in social action, it is through shared meanings that publics come together in the first place. Here, too, ideal meanings play an important role. In *The Public and Its Problems*, Dewey argues that publics are constituted in response to externalities, consequences suffered by a group because of decisions in which they took no part. As externalities are recognized by

³⁸Dewey, *Experience and Nature*, 306; Dewey, *Human Nature and Conduct*, 263; Dewey, *Art as Experience*, 202.

³⁹Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, 15.

the people they affect, publics emerge to address them with collective action. It is not always easy to identify externalities, however. Often, Dewey observes, they “are felt rather than perceived; they are suffered, but they cannot be said to be known, for they are not, by those who experience them, referred to their origins.” It is the task of scientists and journalists to identify the obscure causes of suffering—by, say, tracing toxic manufacturing byproducts, finding out where they originate and what they do to people. They must, in other words, establish the meaning of the externalities. In politics as elsewhere, however, these definite, intellectualized meanings are only part of the story. There is also the background to consider. Intelligible meanings, the kinds created by scientists and journalists, are embedded within intuitions about the “hopelessly complicated muddle of considerations” that surrounds all specific plans. If publics are an artifact of meanings, then behind the specific meanings that give rise to specific publics, there is a singular (if shifting) ideal background of meaning that corresponds to a singular (if shifting) ideal public, the public that we might have if we knew how all of our activities would cash out in the future. This ideal public, which we can access only as a feeling, should play the same role in the formation of specific publics that ideal meanings play in relation to specific meanings. In *The Public and Its Problems*, Dewey calls this ideal public the “Great Community,” meaning the whole human race made fully aware of its interdependence.⁴⁰

⁴⁰Dewey, *The Public and Its Problems*, 52, 131. The relation between meaning and purpose in Dewey’s philosophy is controversial, and perhaps we should pause to clarify where we stand. At issue, here, is whether Dewey’s is a philosophy for doers, taking an active posture to be paradigmatic, or whether contemplative, devotional, or receptive states play a more important role. Meaning is part of the apparatus, governed by purposiveness and reflective thought, that allows us to resolve well-defined “problematic situations” and realize specific “ends-in-view”; but is it *merely* that? If it were, then even the appreciative phase of meaning would have value only because it eventually helps us to achieve our chosen goals. Against this reading, which is taken for granted by Stanley Cavell, Kestenbaum argues that for Dewey meaning “outruns” purposes, for two related reasons. The first has to do with the background: when we face it, we encounter meanings that exceed our formulated purposes, and because the background is the matrix from which all thoughts arise, the meanings with which it is imbued must exist before, and after, the process of purpose formation. The second reason is the “primacy of meaning” thesis (discussed in the Introduction to this study). “Reflective experience,” which is the domain of purpose, always proceeds by simplifying and streamlining the embodied immediacy of “primary experience,” which is the domain of meaning. As the very term “primary experience” suggests, this relation is asymmetrical: primary experience comes first, analytically, in the human lifespan (we feel before we think), and in history (since Dewey believes that the life of hunter-gatherers has more immediacy than

Dewey designed his curriculum at the Laboratory School to introduce his students to the widest possible range of meanings, both concrete and ideal, that is compatible with the need for meanings, if they are to take root within the self, to be closely interwoven with each other rather than diffusely scattered. The basis of this curriculum was teaching via simplified versions of real adult occupations, which would extend meanings outward from the classroom toward both nature and society. In an 1894 letter to his wife, Alice Chipman Dewey, he outlines the idea:

There is an image of a school growing up in my mind all the time, a school where some actual and literal constructive activity shall be the centre and source of the whole thing, and from which the work should be always growing out in two directions – one the social bearings of that constructive industry, the other the contact with nature which supplies it with its materials. I can see, theoretically, how the carpentry etc. in building a model house shall be the centre of a social training on the one side and a scientific on the other, all held within the grasp of a positive concrete physical habit of eye and hand.⁴¹

To take an example used at the Laboratory School, the cereal-making occupation involves students in continuities intrinsic to nature (those pertaining to growing and cooking grains) and to society (the arrangements

ours). Despite this asymmetry, though, in another sense the relation between primary and reflective experience is reciprocal. As Kestenbaum remarks, for Dewey, in deliberation, “the distinction between valuation and evaluation, the sensed and the reflected, the qualitative and the known, is *blurred*,” as “appreciations and appraisals test each other and are brought into accord.” “Principle must be fitted to the qualitative, the qualitative fitted to principle,” as we pursue our best selves. In theory, some meanings may be innocent of any entanglement with our definite thoughts. In practice, though, it is more accurate to say that while a meaning may be prior to some particular thought, our impression of what sort of thing we are looking at, as well as the tastes and values to which it appeals (or doesn’t), has been shaped by our earlier thinking. It is the “Reflex Arc” argument again: stimulus (perception, primary experience, meaning) is not just given from without, but is always shaped by our prior acts of response (thought, reflective experience, purpose). Thus, most of the time, experiences of meaning draw, to some extent, on purposive thought. However, far from elevating the active life over the contemplative or appreciative, this reading should lead us to see that each is enriched by the other. To repeat Dewey, though our relation to meaning cannot become completely “intellectualized,” yet “emotional appreciation of it is won only by those willing to think.” See Victor Kestenbaum, “Preface,” in John Dewey, *Theory of the Moral Life*, ed. Arnold Isenberg (New York: Irvington, 1996), xviii.

⁴¹ Quoted in Westbrook, *John Dewey and American Democracy*, 95–96.

by which the grains are cultivated, transported, processed, and sold). “The children,” Dewey assured parents, “get a good deal of chemistry in connection with cooking, of number work and geometrical principles in carpentry, and a good deal of geography in connection with their theoretical work in weaving and sewing. History also comes in with the origin and growth of various inventions, and their effects upon social life and political organization.” Meanwhile fine arts were used, in connection with the occupations, to address ideal meanings. Just as intelligence must be pushed to its limits before there can be a really fruitful encounter with the ideal background, Dewey holds that “genuine art,” which represents the “idealization” of “all the work carried on” at the school, “grows out of the work of the artisan,” and does not “spring up in a separate atmosphere” away from definite everyday purposes and activities. Art shows how the occupations can become “instrument[s] of expression” for the emotions through which we relate to the ideal, as when weaving (another Laboratory School favorite) is used to make beautiful tapestries.⁴² At the same time as they open out toward these horizons, though, the occupations also give focus to meanings. They “articulate a vast variety of impulses, otherwise separate and spasmodic, into a consistent skeleton with a firm backbone.” (Here Dewey employs the Herbartian concept of “concentration” in the curriculum, which, as discussed in Chapter 2, calls for areas of deeper focus to serve as intellectual home bases from which to explore other topics.)⁴³

Aesthetic experience promotes the ongoing reconstruction of meanings for individuals, and the communication of meanings among people. To begin with the case of individuals, art heightens the interplay between background and foreground that characterizes deeply meaningful experience, in which ideal meaning “suffuses, interpenetrates, colors what is now and here uppermost.” In a stage play, for instance, each moment of the action is colored by the “suffusive presence” of prior moments which cannot hold our direct attention without distracting us from “what is now said and done.” These prior moments, of which we must be aware in order to understand the play’s ongoing action, but which we cannot directly consider without losing the thread, constitute a background, different in scale from the larger, all-pervading ideal background, but identical in its

⁴² Dewey, *School and Society and the Child and the Curriculum*, 54–55.

⁴³ Katherine Camp Mayhew and Anna Camp Edwards, *The Dewey School: The Laboratory School of the University of Chicago, 1896–1903* (New York: Atherton, [1936] 1966), 40; Dewey, *School and Society and the Child and the Curriculum*, 87.

relation to our present awareness. As we follow a good play, the mass of meanings accumulated since the curtain rose is “integrally carried in and by the incidents now happening,” which develop these earlier meanings but, at the same time, give them “an unexpected turn.” In general, it is this “double relationship” between background and foreground, of “carrying forward” on the one hand and of “deviation” on the other, which defines, for Dewey, the “focalization of meanings which is consciousness.” Thus, for Dewey, “drama is an enhancement of the conditions of consciousness,” because good dramatists, in expressing a unified but dynamic emotion, construct sequences of present moments that preserve this double relationship to their past. All arts, however, not just drama, fill this role; the “sense of the including whole” is “rendered intense within the frame of a painting or poem” in analogous ways. A good work of art kindles our emotions about the ideal, “elicits and accentuates this quality of being a whole and of belonging to the larger, all-inclusive, whole which is the universe in which we live.”⁴⁴

Kestenbaum suggests that attunement to the close relationship between the foreground and the background should teach us “vigilance,” a habit which “impedes or slows the natural momentum of our habits of mind in order to bring to presence the possibilities of meaning” that these habits leave out, what Dewey calls those “indirect and hidden factors which determine the origin and career of what is present.” Such vigilance, Kestenbaum claims, helps us put our own “principles, values, and commitments” in their proper perspective. “What makes my convictions worthy of my courage and continued affirmation is not confidence in their truth and absoluteness,” he writes, “but my vigilant attention to what is present and absent from their perspectives.”⁴⁵

The composition of meanings into wholes, into worldviews, relies on another psychological function that is epitomized in aesthetic experience. “Imagination” is Dewey’s name for the process in which older meanings are ripped out by their roots and rearranged into new meanings. Meanings are organized into bodies of knowledge (for intellectual meanings) and structures of feeling (for emotional meanings), and in cases of really novel experience these categories must break down. Before they can be reorganized to reflect a fresh encounter with the world, though, they must pass through a state of transition in which old habits of mind are weakened and

⁴⁴ Dewey, *Experience and Nature*, 306; Dewey, *Art as Experience*, 201.

⁴⁵ Kestenbaum, *Grace and Severity of the Ideal*, 78, 87, 91.

everything is up for grabs. "There is always some measure of adventure in the meeting of mind and universe," Dewey writes; "and this adventure is, in its measure, imagination." Imagination would thus be a chaotic force, if not for the encompassing sense of the ideal, the emotional awareness of the world as thoroughly interrelated. Indeed, although imagination is an unmooring of meanings, Dewey also defines it as "a *way* of seeing and feeling things as they compose an integral whole." The fine arts give us a special opportunity to avoid subordinating the adventure of imagination to some more immediately utilitarian purpose, without losing it in mere daydreaming.⁴⁶

As for aesthetic experience promoting the sharing of meanings among people, this idea, like so much in Dewey's aesthetics, hinges on the notion of expression. Dewey believes that the artist can achieve successful expression, finding media that are fully adequate to her emotion. But is this expression always understood by the audience? How much room is there for divergent interpretation? There is no guarantee, for Dewey, that the meanings put into the object by the artist will be the same as the meanings the audience draws from it. Art opens us to the ideal, and no two people will experience that in the same way. So, as Dewey argues, the relationship among artist, artwork, and audience involves several translations. The artist turns her materials into media by arranging them according to her own scheme of meanings, but they remain, in themselves, mere materials still. When the audience encounters the artwork, they see that its materials have served as media for the artist, and they then make the materials into media according to their own scheme of meanings. They hopefully experience a meaning which bears some family resemblance to the artist's original meaning; no closer identification is possible. The artwork is constructed for one act of imagination and is capacious enough to host some others, but not all others, like a zoo exhibit, designed for egrets, which might sustain an indefinite variety of birds, but not, say, hummingbirds. All sharing of meanings, however, involves this kind of mediation. Rather than finding art inferior to more constrained forms of language, Dewey sees it as the perfection of an inherently imperfect process. "Communication," he writes, "is the process of creating participation, of making common what had been isolated and singular" by giving a shared "body and definiteness" to "the experience of the one who utters

⁴⁶Dewey, *Art as Experience*, 278.

as well as to that of those who listen,” without making those experiences themselves completely shared. “The expressions that constitute art,” he avers, “are communication in its pure and undefiled form.”⁴⁷

For Dewey, then, art does not recreate a single universal human experience, but invites the viewer to experience certain ideal qualities on her own terms. The “boasted ‘universality’” of classic artworks is not “a synonym for monotonous identity,” but rather a testament to their power to “continuously inspire new personal realizations in experience.” So, while “it is simply an impossibility that any one today should experience the Parthenon as a devout Athenian contemporary citizen experienced it,” and while “the enduring art-product [...] was called forth by something occasional, something having its own date and place,” “*what* was evoked” in the artwork itself is “a substance so formed that it can enter into the experiences of others and enable them to have [...] more fully rounded out experiences of their own.” The “universality” of an artwork’s appeal is both dynamic (works that command widespread appreciation today are not guaranteed to do so in the future) and polyvalent (the kind of appreciation they elicit will always vary). While Dewey’s vision of aesthetic education implicitly encourages the accretion of shared canons (i.e., shared worlds of meaningful objects), these canons should be subject to dynamic revision, and cannot be expected to produce uniform responses, although they can be expected to promote the qualities of educative experience.⁴⁸

To offer a paradigm of “experience in its integrity,” the art object does not need to be exemplary of any specific ideal of full humanity; it is enough for it to spur each person toward her own ideal of a somewhat fuller humanity than she has yet known. Dewey’s vision of aesthetic community, unlike that of classical *Bildung*, thus allows for a real pluralism about human nature. Yet, unlike, say, Rorty, Dewey also holds out for a measure of human unity in aesthetic experience: different interpretations of an artist’s work are not entirely a matter of “external accident,” but are bounded by “the nature he shares with others,” which will produce certain interpretive commonalities. So, regarding the unity of human aesthetic experience, and therefore of human experience in general, Dewey might say, with William James: “Provided you grant *some* separation among things,

⁴⁷ Dewey, *Art as Experience*, 283, 253.

⁴⁸ Dewey, *Art as Experience*, 253.

some tremor of independence, some free play of parts on one another, some real novelty and chance, however minute," one can admit "any amount, however great, of real union."⁴⁹

Freedom

The quality of freedom marks both the beginning and the end of the cycle of growth. The desire for freedom is what initially gives rise to interest, the first of our four qualities, and interest is finally satisfied only when freedom is attained. By freedom, Dewey means a quality of coherence or integrity among our many transactions with the environment, a oneness with oneself that is also a oneness of action in the world. As we saw at the beginning of this chapter, Dewey sees human nature as a partially describable menagerie of instincts, or "native impulses." The native impulses are our embodied attractions and aversions, to such things as heat and cold, or hunger and food, or, in a certain dumb way, to solitude and companionship; shapes, colors, and sounds, too, strike us as pleasant or unpleasant at this level of blind instinct. These impulses are artifacts of natural selection, and, since nature selects among random variations, keeping whatever proves compatible with survival, they do not sort themselves into elegant systems, like those of faculty psychology or classical *Bildung*.⁵⁰ Part of the human condition, for Dewey, is that our native impulses can come into conflict with each other, but that these conflicts can be resolved. Suppose, for example, that we are meeting our friend for dinner, but we get hungry an hour beforehand. Now the impulse to eat conflicts with the impulses bound up with human companionship. We can satisfy one impulse at the expense of another, or we can use reflective thinking to find a way to satisfy both impulses (say, by having a light snack now, then dinner in an hour). By such weaving together of impulses into more comprehensive courses of action, simple wants are "enlarged" and take their place in our "whole life." Further, because of the interdependence of human interests, the basic desire for food helps to organize not just "one life singly," but "the family, etc., connected with the single life." In that case, Dewey writes,

⁴⁹Dewey quoted in Scott R. Stroud, "Dewey on Art as Evocative Communication," *Education and Culture* 23, no. 2 (2007): 6–26, 20; James quoted in Richard Shusterman, *Pragmatist Aesthetics: Living Beauty, Rethinking Art* (Lanham, Md: Rowman & Littlefield, 2000), 83.

⁵⁰Shusterman, *Pragmatist Aesthetics*, 5.

“the material well-being of the family becomes one of the objects of desire into which the original impulse has grown. By like growing consciousness of the meaning of the impulse, production and exchange of commodities are organized. The impulse for food is extended to include a whole range of commercial activities.”⁵¹

It is only when all of our impulses are thus coordinated (either by chance or via the intervention of purpose) that we are fully equilibrated with the environment, and within ourselves. Ideally, then, we come to have “not a series of disconnected impulses, but one all-inclusive activity” without inner conflicts. Dewey calls this ideal “freedom.” “Freedom is what we want,” he writes, “and freedom means full unimpeded play of interests, that is, of conscious impulses.” When we lack this freedom, we are at odds with ourselves, and we can only resolve this dilemma by reconstructing ourselves. This striving within one’s self ultimately, for Dewey, generates interest, in whatever will free our activity. Well-formed interests are thus inseparable from our drive for a coherent “character,” an integral personal identity. Ill-formed interests, springing from impulses in their immediacy rather than sharing a “temper and color” with “all other activities” of the self, leave “life [...] portioned out into strips and fractions.” The Deweyan subject, then, is a physical unity, a “live creature,” striving to become a unity of desires, a “character.” Of the “good man,” Dewey says “his character is compact, coherent; he has *integrity*.” By contrast, the “bad man” has “no consistent line of action” and is “not one person, but a group of conflicting wills.” “So far as he is really bad,” Dewey writes, “he becomes as many persons as he has desires.” Growth moves from the relatively bad, disintegrated self with divergent and relatively blind impulses toward the relatively good, integrated self with impulses that are made to converge by conscious effort.⁵²

Like the other qualities of educative experience, freedom depends on social conditions as well as individual habits. “A divided world, a world whose parts and aspects do not hang together, is at once a sign and a cause of a divided personality,” Dewey warns, while a “fully integrated personality” depends upon a “world of related objects,” an interweaving of shared interests.⁵³ Dewey evaluated social institutions’ friendliness to freedom with

⁵¹ Dewey, *Outlines of a Critical Theory of Ethics*, 22.

⁵² Dewey, *Outlines of a Critical Theory of Ethics*, 23–24, 28; Dewey, *Reconstruction in Philosophy*, 167; Dewey, *Outlines of a Critical Theory of Ethics*, 216.

⁵³ Dewey, *The Public and Its Problems*, 191; Dewey, *Experience and Education*, 44.

two criteria. First, the more “interests consciously communicated and shared” via a social institution, the more it can contribute to a world of shared interests for its members. Second, the more “varied and free points of contact” exist with other social institutions, the easier it will be to share interests across the whole social landscape. In a very bad form of association, such as a gang of criminals, we find that “the ties which consciously hold the members together are few in number, reducible almost to a common interest in plunder,” and that the gang’s activity is “of such a nature as to isolate the group from other groups with respect to give and take of the values of life.” Dewey’s example of a very good association, by contrast, is a happy family, with “material, intellectual, aesthetic interests in which all participate,” and which “is not an isolated whole, but enters intimately into relationships with business groups, with schools, with all the agencies of culture, as well as with other similar groups, and that it plays a due part in the political organization and in return receives support from it.” The quality of freedom flourishes when bad institutions are made more like good ones, or are abolished, and also when new institutions arise to allow the sharing of previously isolated interests.⁵⁴

These standards of “endosmosis” of interests, meanings, and purposes among the groups in society and among the members of a group are simply scaled-up versions of the standard of interplay of interests within the individual which Dewey identifies with good character. Blockage of this interplay at one level inevitably affects the others. A person with a “disintegrated” personality will be satisfied with narrow associations such as the robber band; the robber band, then, becomes lodged in the social environment and forces even a good association like the model family to mistrust its neighbors and close in on itself; finally, other people who are educated in this fractured environment will become relatively disintegrated, and the cycle of miseducation is complete. In light of these interrelationships, Dewey argues, against educators such as David Snedden, that “social efficiency” is not a matter of becoming a cog in the well-oiled social machine, but rather “means neither more nor less than capacity to share in a give and take of experience,” to “ge[t] things into connection with one another, so that they work easily, flexibly, and fully.” “It covers,” he goes on, “all that makes one’s own experience more worth while to others, and all that enables one to participate more richly in the worthwhile experiences of others.” While this notion of efficiency embraces many

⁵⁴ Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, 63–65.

different talents and dispositions, the “ability to produce and to enjoy art, capacity for recreation, the significant utilization of leisure” are especially “important elements in it,” since these allow for the communication of the ideal as well as the intellectual side of experience.⁵⁵

The school has a special role to play in the promotion of social endosmosis, by cultivating the interchange of experience both within its walls and between itself and other associations. “It is the office of the school environment,” Dewey declares, “to balance the various elements in the social environment, and to see to it that each individual gets an opportunity to escape from the limitations of the social group in which he was born, and to come into living contact with a broader environment.” On one level, this balancing requires the old common school ideal, dating to Horace Mann, of “the intermingling in the school of youth of different races, differing religions, and unlike customs.” On another level, it involves osmosis within these identity categories. Even in a monocultural community, “one code prevails in the family; another, on the street; a third, in the workshop or store; a fourth, in the religious association.” “As a person passes from one of the environments to another,” Dewey writes, “he is subjected to antagonistic pulls, and is in danger of being split into a being having different standards of judgment and emotion for different occasions. This danger imposes upon the school a steadying and integrating office.” In *The School and Society*, Dewey illustrates this “integrating office” with a series of charts showing the school as a nexus for the “interplay of influences, materials, and ideas” among home life, the life of business and industry, the natural environment, and other branches of the education system.⁵⁶

Furthermore, as mentioned earlier, the integrating office operated at an even smaller scale within the Laboratory School itself by means of regular staff meetings to coordinate among the various sub-environments within

⁵⁵ Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, 89; Dewey, *School and Society and The Child and the Curriculum*, 40. Although these specific passages are not cited (to my knowledge), Dewey’s sense of the interdependence of personal and social freedom is central to his place in two important books by Ross Posnock on pragmatism and culture: *The Trial of Curiosity* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1991) and *Color and Culture* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1998). For Posnock pragmatism, in its Jamesian and Deweyan varieties, is a solvent of “identity logic,” unraveling exclusive social categories (such as race and nation) and promoting an ethos of interchange and curiosity. Dewey, for Posnock, is, unlike William James, a pragmatist who, instead of encouraging individuals to step back from social institutions in all their “bigness” and crudity, asks them to enter them and, when needed, to loosen them up.

⁵⁶ Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, 18–19.

the school. As different teachers' classes moved in different, somewhat unpredictable directions (within the basic rubric of the occupation curriculum), maintaining schoolwide equilibrium was an ongoing effort. "Constant conference was needed to achieve unity," reports Katherine Camp Mayhew, a Laboratory School teacher. (As the educational historian Herbert Kliebard observes, these ideas represent the influence of the Herbartian concept of "correlation." While "by correlation, the Herbartians meant, generally, the interrelationship among school subjects," Kliebard notes, "Dewey conceived of this unity in terms of the child's overall experience," not just as a principle of curriculum design.)⁵⁷

In aesthetic experience, the expressive act coordinates the self with the world, and unity of purpose and liberation of the imagination coordinate thoughts and feelings within the self. Aesthetic experience thus has a special power to promote the coherence of living that produces the quality of freedom. When all of our impulses coalesce into a single line of activity, when we readjust the whole self at once to the world as a whole, we experience what Dewey (somewhat confusingly) calls an "impulsion." "Impulsion' designates a movement outward and forward of the whole organism to which special impulses are auxiliary," he writes. Dewey sees this "movement of the organism in its entirety" in the experience of a wild animal, which is "fully present, all there, in all of its actions: in its wary glances, its sharp sniffings, its abrupt cocking of ears." For the animal, this sureness of action comes at a cost: its memory and foresight work only on small scales, so it cannot adjust to a great deal of novelty. These capacities are greater in humans, and so we can adjust to more novelty, but we are therefore more subject to their miseducative forms: memory can lead to slavish repetition of past behaviors, while foresight can lead to an ends-justify-the-means attitude that deadens our sensibility. Rather than positing a trade-off in which we are alienated from impulsion as the price for our intelligence, however, Dewey argues that art, in which these miseducative tendencies can be overcome, is "living and concrete proof that man is capable of restoring consciously" the "union of sense, need, impulse and action characteristic of the live creature." Thanks to the intervention of memory and foresight, we can realize impulsions with greater "power of selection," and enjoy moments of grace far subtler, more varied, and more far-reaching, albeit rarer, than those of animals. In channeling our activities

⁵⁷ Mayhew and Edwards, *Dewey School*, 367; Herbert M. Kliebard, "Dewey and the Herbartians: The Genesis of a Theory of Curriculum," *Counterpoints* 70 (1999): 68–81, 75.

toward these moments, our most valuable resources are, immediately, a feel for the qualities of educative experience which are perfected in art, and, as a mediating concept, “the *idea* of art as a conscious idea,” which we can use to seek these qualities in an organized way.⁵⁸

Because of the transactional nature of experience, its location at the intersection of self and world, an impulsion brings not only “a fulfillment that reaches to the depths of our being,” but also “an adjustment of our whole being with the conditions of existence.” It is an experience of finding one’s grounding in the world, which, even after the “phases of perturbation and conflict” that are sure to follow, leaves one with “the deep-seated memory of an underlying harmony, the sense of which haunts life like the sense of being founded on a rock.” These moments ratify our sense of the ideal, of an underlying way in which the world hangs together, in a way that allows our self to hang together too. This sense of the ideal is both the goal of the adventure of imagination and its necessary condition. Every complete aesthetic experience enriches it, and as it is enriched, we become capable of even more expansive aesthetic experiences in the future. As we have seen, though, like education in general, aesthetic education—the development of expressive and appreciative power—is an endless circle or spiral in which new experience can lead us to revise our estimates of the value of older standards. So, no experience of grounding is ever secure against later reevaluation. Although aesthetic experience may show us what it feels like to be “founded on a rock,” it never actually takes us all the way to “the bottom of being,” in William James’s phrase.⁵⁹

The aesthetic education of a culture is just as much a circle or spiral as that of an individual. The “underlying harmony” of individual experience that is both the ground and the effect of art is inextricably linked to an analogous harmony in social experience. By bringing coherence to the self, aesthetic experience demonstrates that there are “no intrinsic psychological divisions” among thinking, feeling, and doing, or among any human faculties (for Dewey, like the classical *Bildung* theorists, aesthetic experience attests to the possible harmony of the whole human system). But Dewey concedes that most of the time “the well-rounded man and woman are the exception,” and whole “classes of individuals” develop lopsidedly into those who are “dominantly executive or reflective,” those

⁵⁸Kliebard, “Dewey and the Herbartians,” 18; Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, 26; Dewey, *Art as Experience*, 60.

⁵⁹Dewey, *Art as Experience*, 16.

who “engage in routine bodily activity,” those who “specialize in intellectual inquiry,” and so on. “It is the office of art,” Dewey declares, to “compose” these differences, to “do away with isolations” in our minds and in our culture (not by flattening differences, but by loosening rigid divisions). At the same time, however, art requires a certain degree of social and cultural integration to perform this office. The more “attitudes that are taken for granted in the basis of civilization and that form the subsoil of conscious beliefs and efforts,” the thicker the nimbus of shared meanings surrounding specific words, ideas, and objects, the greater will be the “integration in the matter [...] of the arts.” Conversely, the “disruption of consensus” causes “diffuseness and incoherence” in art.⁶⁰ For Dewey, what vitiates shared purposes and meanings is the drudgery begotten of unjust hierarchies, which replaces the back-and-forth adjustment that characterizes freedom with partial and one-directional action. “Oligarchical control” over “the processes and the products of work,” Dewey argues, is “the chief force in preventing the worker from having that intimate interest in what he does and makes that is an essential prerequisite of esthetic satisfaction,” and the same criticism applies to oligarchy in politics and elsewhere. In short, as long as there is political or economic compulsion, we cannot fully experience impulsion. But whatever degree of impulsion we are granted gives us a taste of the experiential qualities of a world without compulsion.⁶¹

THE AFFINITY BETWEEN AESTHETIC EXPERIENCE AND DELIBERATIVE DEMOCRACY

The foregoing “intrinsic qualities” account of the function of aesthetic experience stresses plasticity and novelty, and it shares this trait with many neopragmatist theories of aesthetics. Poirier and Rorty look to art as a way of escaping the ruts laid down by one’s cultural precursors (by becoming an “ironist” or a “strong poet”) or by one’s own personal history (by “writing off the self”). Jonathan Levin describes a “poetics of transition” that maintains the self in a state of perpetual becoming. Giles Gunn notes that, “like Shelley,” for Dewey the imagination’s “function” is to “liberate all the meanings of which experience – any experience, all experience – is capable,” and thereby to “provide the fullest possible realization of all that

⁶⁰ Dewey, *Art as Experience*, 16, 258, 354.

⁶¹ Dewey, *Art as Experience*, 357.

is potential” in experience, which allows “the actual” to transcend its givenness and be “viewed in light of its own potential.”⁶² Nicholas Gaskill locates art, and especially literary language, between conceptual thought and qualitative meanings, and sees its function as the crystallization of “new configurations of experience” along this border; “once emerged,” Gaskill writes, these novel elements “enter into the reconstructive social process as elements of real relations that determine behavior,” enabling the formation of “new habits of relating that alter the possible configurations of self and community that inform social practice.”⁶³ The interpretation of Dewey’s aesthetics advanced in this chapter is sympathetic with all of these ideas, up to a point.

While these theories emphasize escaping from a restrictive past into a more open or fluid future, however, on the “intrinsic qualities” reading we do not only “write off” the past, or merely write our way out of something; we also write *into* something, something whose properties are, if not wholly definite, not wholly ineffable either. We need aesthetic experience to show us how growth feels. As the education scholar Philip Jackson writes, for Dewey the arts “reveal the rewards of bringing experience to fruition” and “hint at what life might be like if we sought more often to shape ordinary experience in an artistic manner.”⁶⁴

The idea of writing off or writing out is linked, for Rorty at least, with an ideal of “personal negative liberty,” a vision of democracy as a “band of eccentrics collaborating for purposes of mutual protection.” The idea of writing into the quality of growth, on the other hand, demands a more participatory or deliberative conception of democracy, as the kind of society that promotes the sharing of interests, purposes, and meanings without which individual interests, purposes, and meanings cannot fully develop. There is thus an affinity between aesthetic experience and deliberative democracy, and this affinity has been well described by Steven Fesmire. Fesmire points out that for Dewey, “the good is ‘a working harmony among diverse desires,’” or what William James calls “the richer and

⁶² Richard Poirier, *The Renewal of Literature: Emersonian Reflections* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988); Richard Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1989); Jonathan Levin, *The Poetics of Transition Emerson, Pragmatism, and American Literary Modernism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012); Gunn, *Thinking Across the American Grain*, 92.

⁶³ Nicholas M. Gaskill, “Experience and Signs: Towards a Pragmatist Literary Criticism,” *New Literary History* 39, no. 1 (2008): 165–183, 174.

⁶⁴ Jackson, *John Dewey and the Lessons of Art*, 6.

more *inclusive* arrangement,” the one that helps us “to satisfy at all times *as many demands as we can*.” Both within the self and among people, we must look for “an integrative value to emerge that will blend and fuse conflicting values so that we may *mutually* grow,” and this search constitutes deliberation. In successful deliberation, “we deal fruitfully with the whole system of desires pressing for recognition and resolution in a problematic situation, such as conflicts of long-range ends and short-range ends-in-view, along with pressing needs, desires, and ends of our own and those of others.”⁶⁵

As Fesmire observes, this “pattern of maturation,” in which “the energies active in the experience must be allowed to do their work,” is just what Dewey calls “*an* experience” in the context of aesthetics. So, we can say that “Dewey’s moral standard is personified by the refined imagination of a ‘moral artist.’” In aesthetic experience and democratic deliberation, we seek an outcome “that is *felt* as the culmination and resolution of the process,” one that “expresses coherently the conflicts that originally set the problem” and leaves us with “a feeling of the connectedness and continuity of the whole deliberative process, and of the chosen course as the best at hand for reestablishing fluent activity.” Thus, the kind of moral life needed in democracy is not a matter of “one’s capacity to follow moral laws or rules,” but of “hue” or “tonality,” the “felt sense of closure” and the “feeling of fluid development that suffuses and unifies the whole experience.” So, Fesmire writes, “the aesthetic is the opening of awareness of a situation’s latent possibilities for growth and meaning,” in the act of deliberation just as in the experience of making or appreciating art. It is this connection between aesthetic experience and democracy, not the neo-pragmatist connection based on novelty and plasticity, that should be emphasized in a democratic theory of aesthetic education.⁶⁶

Democracy Within Education

If there is an affinity between aesthetic experience and deliberative democracy, does this mean that institutions of aesthetic education, especially

⁶⁵Fesmire, “Dramatic Rehearsal,” 569–581. John Beck’s book on Dewey and William Carlos Williams, *Writing the Radical Center* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2001), is one of the few studies of Dewey’s literary influence to pursue this analogy between aesthetic form and the form of democratic community.

⁶⁶Fesmire, “Dramatic Rehearsal,” 569–581.

schools, should themselves be administered as deliberative democracies? If so, what would be the role of the educational profession? Is there not something antithetical to deliberation in the idea of professional authority over the discursive situation? Jason Kosnoski attempts to preserve a strong sense of deliberation in the school by narrowing the teacher's authority, arguing that, in Deweyan education, teachers should be "deliberative moderators who encourage general interest in discussion, not specific goals or values," who "expand the context of deliberative solutions" by introducing "larger and larger spatial and temporal environments" and wider philosophical and political perspectives. When dealing with controversial subjects, Kosnoski writes, the teacher "need not necessarily subtly impose her will on the outcome of discussion," but can simply maintain the "flow of conversation" and encourage an "attitude of mutual respect." While this approach sometimes has its merits, it unacceptably restrains the teacher from sharing her "maturer experience" with her students in a straightforward way. Yet, if we sacrifice the deliberative ideal for the sake of professional educators' authority, how can the educational profession be of value to democracy?⁶⁷

At issue here, as the political philosopher Amy Gutmann puts it, is "how much internal democratization of schools is desirable in a democracy?" Or, in other words, what exactly is the meaning of Dewey's description of the ideal school as "an embryonic society?" Must the school be a microcosm of an ideal democratic society? But an embryo is not a microscopic model of a grown person; it has features (such as gill slits, say) that adults lack. The democratic school should abide by democratic principles where adults are concerned (in its administration and its dealings with parents and boards of education), but where students are concerned, it should merely strive to "cultivate the prototypically democratic virtues." Some of these virtues, in Gutmann's formulation, are "participatory virtues," which prepare students to take an active role in deliberative democracy, and if these virtues were all that mattered an approach like Kosnoski's would be ideal. However, democratic citizenship also calls on "disciplinary virtues," cognitive skills and bodies of knowledge without which one cannot meaningfully contribute to deliberation. With regard to these disciplinary virtues, it is appropriate for teachers to assert greater experience than their students (and, in some respects, than other adults). Thus, Gutmann argues, the ideal democratic school, like Dewey's Laboratory

⁶⁷ Kosnoski, "Artful Discussion," 655, 665.

School, should “balance the participatory and disciplinary purposes of education, leaving some significant educational decisions [...] largely (but not entirely) to the determination of teachers and administrators.” The “educational standard dictated by democratic values” is to “democratize schools to the extent necessary to cultivate the participatory along with the disciplinary virtues of democratic character,” but no more.⁶⁸ In general, institutions of democratic aesthetic education need not be radically democratic in their relation to their students or audiences, although the more they can engage the participatory virtues without undermining the integrity of their educational mission, the better. The participatory virtues should be bypassed only for the sake of promulgating in other ways the qualities of growth, which are also the qualities of deliberative democracy.

RECONSTRUCTING DEWEY: EXISTENTIALIST CHALLENGES

Vital and necessary though it may be, even sympathetic interpreters have found something lacking in Dewey's ideal of individuality realized in a democratic community by the grace of aesthetic education. Stanley Cavell, who has done as much as anyone to keep pragmatist questions alive in American philosophy departments, turns from Dewey to Emerson and Thoreau because, he says, Dewey seems oblivious to the problem of “spiritual disorder”; Dewey figures, for Cavell, as a thinker who is right as far as he goes, but who leaves too much unaddressed. Similarly, Maxine Greene, the educational philosopher who has probably done more than any other person to advance Dewey's thought in American education schools, finds that Dewey overlooks existentialist difficulties. They raise, in a sense, the same question that Rorty raises about Dewey: Is he really able to give an account of human experience that rests on solid foundations? An account that allows us to say what is paradigmatic of such experience and what is merely incidental, what is central and what is peripheral? Like Rorty, Greene and Cavell have doubts—call them antifoundationalist, existentialist, or Wittgensteinian—about how closely projects of meaning-making can be linked to persistent facts about experience, or about humanity, or about the universe. The meanings we make, they suspect, are more free-floating than that. Unlike Rorty, though, Greene and Cavell

⁶⁸ Amy Gutmann, *Democratic Education* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 93–94.

still promote participatory democratic versions of aesthetic education in which art helps free individuals build lives in common; while they both argue that art speaks to and from the depths of radically private experience, they see in even this more subjectivized idea of art the possibility of a profounder communitarianism. They lead us to ask, then, how much skepticism about the stability of human experience Deweyan aesthetic education can withstand, and how its conceptions of democracy, aesthetics, and the educational profession might need to bend to accommodate that skepticism.

Greene draws on the existentialism of Camus and Merleau-Ponty to ask how one can join in a Deweyan exchange of experience if one's own experience is of ennui, or absurdity. Though his pragmatism has "good sense," she writes, the "experience of nothingness," or of "pervasive boredom," or of the existential "predicament" of having a generalized "feeling of homelessness," are conditions "of which Dewey (in his healthy mindedness) seemed to know little."⁶⁹ (Greene once said that Merleau-Ponty's admission that he "never recovered from a happy childhood" would also apply to Dewey.)⁷⁰ Dewey might be able to help us feel increasingly more at home, or less bored, but he does not know how to make the jump from nothing to something. Greene thus adds, as it were, an extra dimension to paradigmatic, or educative, experience: it must include, along with the qualities of interest, purpose, meaning, and freedom, an initial impetus to care about one's experience in the first place. She asks how we can patch up Deweyan aesthetic education to help people out of a state of being trapped inside themselves, and hence unable to take part in social action.

Greene's educational vision builds on Dewey's, supplementing rather than challenging it. To his ideas about classroom dynamics, she adds a concern with the proper balance between emotional risk and emotional safety. "Teaching and learning, if they are to happen meaningfully," she writes, "must happen on the verge. Confronting a void, confronting nothingness."⁷¹ This verge of nothingness is where, for Camus, one finds oneself "a moral agent condemned continuously to choose," and Greene hopes that students and teachers can be jolted into recognizing each other as just such agents. The verge of nothingness, an inner vacancy which also

⁶⁹ Maxine Greene, *Teacher As Stranger: Educational Philosophy for the Modern Age* (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 1973), 130.

⁷⁰ Victor Kestenbaum reported this remark to me in conversation.

⁷¹ Maxine Greene, *The Dialectic of Freedom* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1988), 23.

forms a chasm between people, is where we might succumb to despair, but if we manage not to succumb, it is also where we are compelled to project positive visions of ourselves and our communities. When, in a pluralistic democratic society, “multiple interpretations constitute multiple realities” and “the ‘common’ itself becomes multiplex and endlessly challenging, as each person reaches out from his/her own ground toward what might be,” Greene says that “all we can do is look into each other’s eyes and urge each other on to new beginnings.”⁷² We are then called to daring acts of “releasing the imagination,” especially the “social imagination: the capacity to invent visions of what should be and what might be,” and Greene argues that “the extent to which we grasp another’s world depends on our existing ability to make poetic use of our imagination, to bring into being the ‘as if’ worlds created by writers.”⁷³ Because this valiant imaginative upbuilding of selves and worlds emerges from the frightening verge of nothingness, she also calls for an emotional safety net, for “care,” “warmth,” and a kind of existentialist respect. Imagination, she argues, “is in a large degree dependent on membership in a community of regard,” and she would have the classroom be such a community. In order to lead it, she asks the teacher not necessarily to “perceive his existence as absurd,” but at least to “struggle against unthinking submergence in the social reality that prevails,” including prevailing standards of “intelligence, rationality, or education.”⁷⁴

Greene also incorporates the verge of nothingness into her conception of aesthetic experience, in two ways. First, while she agrees with Dewey that the artwork receives its meanings not just from its creator, but also from its audience, in a communicative meeting of minds, a creation of common ground, she also sees art as an existential proving ground where we must confront the possibility of our own aloneness in the universe. “Experiences with the arts offer possibilities for self-confrontation and self-identification,” she writes, and to realize these possibilities “the students must embark on their own journeys – and no one can accompany them.”⁷⁵ Second, for Greene, art involves projecting something vital and sustaining into a condition of existential deficiency. In aesthetic experience, therefore,

⁷² Greene, *Dialectic of Freedom*, 20–21.

⁷³ Maxine Greene, *Releasing the Imagination: Essays on Education, the Arts, and Social Change* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, Inc., 1995), 4.

⁷⁴ Greene, *Releasing the Imagination*, 39; Greene, *Teacher as Stranger*, 269.

⁷⁵ Greene, *Teacher as Stranger*, 291.

people do not just express the self they already have, but summon a new self into being. Dewey's "imagination" is essentially recombinatory, rearranging the parts of the self into new patterns, while for Greene imagination needs to originate something new in the self, especially new feelings of courage and hope. What we need from imagination is not heightened perception but sheer invention.

While Greene demands that educators pose some scary questions about the arbitrariness of our constructions of meaning, she is confident that these questions will ultimately receive good answers, that when we stare down the void together, the void will retreat. So, although she criticizes Dewey for being too focused on problem-solving rather than existential predicaments, she ultimately sees those predicaments as, in effect, another problem that we can solve, that each of us can outgrow. Not so with Stanley Cavell. For Cavell, the persistent privacy of the individual, her tendency to become profoundly estranged from community life even under the best conditions, is a standing challenge to any idea of aesthetic education grounded, like Dewey's, in an ideal of participatory democracy. Where Dewey extols communication, Cavell tells us that dialogue can only be sincere if it is permitted to reach a point at which it breaks down and people do not know how to go on together. This insistence on the possibility of communicative breakdown applies to pedagogy and art perhaps even more than to other forms of conversation, which leads Cavell to a version of aesthetic education quite different from Dewey's, and less compatible with public schooling.

For Cavell, following Wittgenstein, communication is only possible via a shared set of "natural reactions," embodied dispositions that are the raw material with which language works. We cannot entirely enumerate these reactions, and we cannot always assume that our reactions are shared with others. Communication thus becomes a question of "attunement," of discovering which reactions we share—and a question of discord, when we find that our reactions are not shared, or not anymore. Education, for Cavell, is thus, in addition to its role in transmitting knowledge, a "turning of our natural reactions," a reexamination of our most basic impulses; as Naoko Saito and Paul Standish write, for Cavell "education leads not so much upward, toward some kind of ethereal transcendence, as downward and back to the rough ground."⁷⁶ Because we are rooted in these grounds

⁷⁶ Stanley Cavell, *The Claim of Reason: Wittgenstein, Skepticism, Morality, and Tragedy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 125; Naoko Saito and Paul Standish, *Stanley Cavell and the Education of Grownups* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2012), 7.

below the level of consciousness, though, we cannot fully explain them to our children or our students, nor can we fully control the signals that we send about them. Cavell typically conceives of the educational encounter as occurring across generations—it always features someone in the role of the “child” and someone in the role of the “grownup,” even when we are adults talking to other adults, or to ourselves. The grownup, for Cavell, is the one who has been initiated into the way “we” do things, and the child is the one seeking to be initiated, but in the process the child leads the grownup, sometimes, to question these practices into which they have been initiated. In a celebrated passage Cavell writes: “If the child ... asks me: Why do we eat animals? Or Why are some people poor and others rich? Or What is God? Or Why do I have to go to school? ... I may find my answers thin ... In the face of [such] questions ... we [find that we] are children; we do not know how to go on with them, what ground we may occupy.”⁷⁷ So, when we tell a pupil why “this is what we do,” then, as Vincent Colapietro notes, “the appeal to *what is done*, to our practices, is here sounded not in the confident voice of the pragmatist, especially the Deweyan, but in the uncertain voice of an exemplar all too conscious of limitations, doubts, and inadequacy.”⁷⁸

For Cavell, then, unlike Dewey and the classical *Bildung* theorists, we cannot speak of what is paradigmatic of all human experience, but only of “what we do,” a set of habits bounded by attunements that are always liable to change. Or rather, all we can confidently say about human experience is that it is bounded by attunement in this way. Cavell’s concerns are always with the shifting edges of our humanity, with the question of where it runs into the inhuman: the monster, the automaton, or, more prosaically, the false life of merely conventional ways of being. This focus on borders can be contrasted with Dewey’s search for a *center* of human experience—the quality of growth—that takes ethical priority regardless of instability around the margins. Another way to look at this contrast is that Cavell cares about the *inventory* of our natural reactions, or native impulses, while Dewey cares about their harmonious *arrangement*; Cavell worries about “fraudulent” reactions passing themselves off as real, while Dewey worries about some of our real impulses being smothered by others equally real. Finally, we might compare the goals of the ethical life projects of

⁷⁷ Cavell, *Claim of Reason*, 124–125.

⁷⁸ Saito and Standish, *Education of Grownups*, 126.

these two philosophers. The goal of Dewey's growth is increasing "integrity," which involves becoming a more coherent self and also a larger self. The aim of Cavell's "moral perfectionism," meanwhile, is what he calls the "next self," which is simply a self freed from whatever inauthentic habits have accumulated in the current self; and because this accumulation is constant, the search for the next self is a matter of spiritual "housekeeping," of regular cleaning rather than progressive upbuilding. The ideal of the next self, unlike that of the larger self (or the higher self in classical *Bildung*), does not allow for comparisons between people as more or less advanced; each person pursues her next self differently and separately from all others. The next self, also, unlike the larger self, does not immediately concern one's capacity to act in the natural and social world. In sum, Cavell's approach to the question of the paradigmatically human is narrower and more introspective than Dewey's, but it also grapples more seriously with the difficulty of stabilizing the concept of "human experience" within the chaotic "whirl of organism."⁷⁹

Art, for Cavell, is an especially powerful way of finding, and breaking, attunement. It can express dispositions that are too deep for normal speech. "I find that if I really want to say 'The world does exist,'" the most basic thing we should be able to agree on, he says, "I want a gesture[,] perhaps poetry," and not a literal statement. Because it operates on this extraconceptual level, through aesthetic experience we can enter a free-wheeling "exploration or education or enjoyment or chastisement of taste and of decision and of intuition," and artworks serve as "objects in response to which we are enabled, but also fated, to explore and educate and enjoy and chastise" our natural reactions, developing new ones and becoming disaffected with old ones. The question of artistic merit, in turn, becomes part of the broader question of the borders of our shared humanity, and this is why we "invest" artworks with "a value which normal people otherwise reserve only for other people – *and* with the same kind of scorn and outrage," why artworks "*mean* something to us, not just the way statements do, but the way people do."⁸⁰ Just as Thoreau goes to Walden to sort out his authentic thoughts and feelings from those he has accidentally adopted from his neighbors, with art we need to be on the lookout against what Cavell calls the "fraudulent," that which is too stifled

⁷⁹ Stanley Cavell, *Must We Mean What We Say?: A Book of Essays* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 52.

⁸⁰ Cavell, *Claim of Reason*, 123; Cavell, *Must We Mean What We Say?*, 198.

by conventions to speak in its own, properly human voice. We will never fully know what we mean by “properly human,” but it nonetheless falls to us to denounce art that is not “directed from and to” some person’s “genuine need.”⁸¹

The aim of aesthetic education, for Cavell, is to find one’s own voice in these matters, to become a full participant in the conversation of aesthetic judgment, which is a precondition for “full citizenship” in a culture, for full involvement in the discourse about who “we” are. Since it is just this discourse, this endless tug-of-war, that is paradigmatic of human experience, we can say that for Cavell, too, aesthetic education is something that all people should desire, and hence something that belongs in a democratic educational system. Further, Cavell’s aesthetic education supports pluralistic participatory social action, albeit in a way quite different from Dewey’s. Dewey is concerned about the legitimacy of the deliberative process by which society, like a “moral artist,” acknowledges the voices of its members. Cavell is also concerned with legitimacy, but for him the issue is not whether our voice is heard, but “whether the voice I lend in recognizing a society as mine, as speaking for me, is my voice, my own.” “To speak for oneself politically,” as part of a “we,” Cavell writes, “is to speak for the others with whom you consent to association, and it is to consent to be spoken for by them – not as a parent speaks for you, i.e., instead of you, but as someone in mutuality speaks for you, i.e., speaks your mind. Once you recognize a community as yours, then it does speak for you until you say it doesn’t, i.e., until you show that you do.” We therefore need to ask, even when by all political-theoretical accounts society *has* attended to our voice in a satisfactory way, whether the voice we have lent to society is authentic or fraudulent. Thus, Cavell’s aesthetic education becomes a necessary supplement to conceptions of democracy, such as Dewey’s, that are based on recognizing people’s voices.⁸²

For all its necessity for democracy, Cavell is not sure if aesthetic education, or its cousin philosophical education, belongs in school. He calls these kinds of education the “soul’s journey,” and he wonders “whether the soul’s journey is any part of a university’s business, hence to what extent, if it is an essential part of philosophy’s business, philosophy is left out of the university.” Just as we can only find attunement by risking the

⁸¹ Cavell, *Must We Mean What We Say?*, 191.

⁸² Stanley Cavell, *Conditions Handsome and Unhandsome: The Constitution of Emersonian Perfectionism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 26–27.

chance of discord, the soul's journey demands "allowing a text to assault you," to unsettle your deepest convictions. "How deep are you allowed to dig into these students' lives," though, as a teacher, "is something that is perplexing." "To a certain extent, it has got to hurt or it is not education, but how can you dish this out," Cavell asks, "what is ok?" Also, while "we are all cautious about saying that the teacher is a friend," to help people come to grips with art or philosophy requires "a certain kind of friendship." All this leaves Cavell at sixes and sevens with educational professionalism, though not exactly opposed to it. He seems to want a teaching force that is a bit raggedy, plucky, "all in" in a very personal way. "It's a kind of tragedy in American education that philosophy is not taught in high school," he writes. "But if I ask who's going to teach philosophy, are you going to put these things or those on the curriculum, how will it be and what will students do about it – in some way I don't care. What I care is that somebody does it. You don't know if you are going to respond to this or not, but if somebody feels they know why they've studied philosophy, let them try and teach it. And [maybe] you don't know what you're doing. And that's ok by me." The classroom, for Cavell, is not, as it is for both Dewey and Greene, a place where common purposes and projects arise, but something like D.W. Winnicott's notion of a "holding environment," a place where people feel safe exposing themselves. "A classroom is also a kind of holding environment," he says. "I mean you are not going to settle everything here, but we're going to admit that we're in this mess together." Cavell writes about the Thoreauvian "Friend" as not a "Confessor" but an "Acceptor," "one to whom, and from whom, everything to be said can be said, as it is there to be said," and this seems to be a quality he seeks in a classroom teacher, as well. Although Greene shares these concerns with safe environments and friendship, while Greene says, effectively, we're in this mess together and with warmth and friendship we can get out together, Cavell says, this mess is the human condition, so let us get comfortable in it together.⁸³

If, as professional educators, we are to do justice to Dewey and Cavell, the task we face is somehow, simultaneously, to promote, with Dewey, a vision of growth as a deeply rooted quality of experience that pushes us toward a generalized habit of participatory pluralism, and to feel, with Cavell, that the human condition is basically a mess, riddled with fraudulence and what Cavell calls "misplaced desires." Can we live out both of

⁸³ Saito and Standish, *Education of Grownups*, 186–187.

those truths at once, be exemplars of the wisdom of growth and fellow travelers in perplexity? Perhaps we can, by allowing Cavell's thought to chasten Dewey's without entirely contradicting it. Kestenbaum's concept of vigilance may once again prove helpful here. For Kestenbaum, as we have seen, vigilance limits our investment in foregrounded meanings by "presenc[ing] the absence" of background meanings, reminding us that the area in which we can think clearly is not just bounded, but everywhere underlain, by that which we can only access via intuition, emotion, and so on. As an educational ideal, we might embrace a Deweyan "integrity" subjected to another kind of vigilance, one that presences the absence not of the ideal, but of the authentic in Cavell's sense. Dewey, with his image of educational experience as a spiral, already tells us that we can look back and discover that we did not know what would really help us grow, help us get where we were trying to go. As we pursue Cavell's "soul's journey" in search of the next self, we can also look back and find that we did not know who we really were, that what seemed to speak to our "genuine need" really did not. So, our educational experience always rests on foundations that are liable to shift, for reasons both, so to speak, pragmatic and existential. That does not mean that nothing can be built there, or that, once we have decided to build, Deweyan integrity will not tell us how to go about it. As educators, we just need to learn to feel out those moments, those aspects of situations, where the Deweyan project brushes against Cavellian instabilities, and how to modulate our relations with our students accordingly, how to be wiser than they are in some ways and just as disoriented as they are in others. This kind of tact cannot become a science of education, but it can, and should, serve as the ideal of a democratic educational profession.

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