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Curriculum and Consciousness

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Curriculum, from the learner's standpoint, ordinarily represents little more than an arrangement of subjects, a structure of socially prescribed knowledge, or a complex system of meanings which may or may not fall within his grasp. Rarely does it signify possibility for him as an existing person, mainly concerned with making sense of his own life-world. Rarely does it promise occasions for ordering the materials of that world, for imposing "configurations"¹ by means of experiences and perspectives made available for personally conducted cognitive action. Sartre says that "knowing is a moment of praxis," opening into "what has not yet been."² Preoccupied with priorities, purposes, programs of "intended learning"³ and intended (or unintended) manipulation, we pay too little attention to the individual in quest of his own future, bent on surpassing what is merely "given," on breaking through the everyday. We are still too prone to dichotomize: to think of "disciplines" or "public traditions" or "accumulated wisdom" or "common culture" (individualization despise) as objectively existent, external to the knower—there to be discovered, mastered, learned.

Quite aware that this may evoke Dewey's argument in *The Child and the Curriculum*, aware of how times have changed since 1902, I have gone in search of contemporary analogies to shed light on what I mean. ("Solution comes," Dewey wrote, "only by getting away from the meaning of terms that is already fixed upon and coming to see the conditions from another point of view, and hence in a fresh light."⁴) My other point of view is that of literary criticism, or more properly philosophy of criticism, which attempts to explicate the modes of explanation, description, interpretation, and evaluation involved in particular critical approaches. There is presently an emerging philosophic controversy between two such approaches, one associated with England and the United States, the other with the Continent, primarily France and Switzerland; and it is in the differences in orientation that I have found some clues.

These differences are, it will be evident, closely connected to those separating what is known as analytic or language philosophy from existentialism and phenomenology. The dominant tendency in British and American literary criticism has been to conceive literary works as objects or artifacts, best understood in relative isolation from the writer's personal biography and undistorted by associations brought to the work from the reader's own daily life. The new critics on the Continent have been called "critics of consciousness."⁵ They are breaking with the notion that a literary work can be dealt with objectively, divorced from experience. In fact, they treat each work as a manifestation of an individual writer's experience, a gradual growth of consciousness into expression. This is in sharp contrast to such a view as T.S. Eliot's emphasizing the

autonomy and the “impersonality” of literary art. “We can only say,” he wrote in an introduction to *The Sacred Wood*, “that a poem, in some sense, has its own life; that its parts form something quite different from a body of neatly ordered biographical data; that the feeling, or emotion, or vision resulting from the poem is something different from the feeling or emotion or vision in the mind of the poet.”⁶ Those who take this approach or an approach to a work of art as “a self-enclosed isolated structure”⁷ are likely to prescribe that purely aesthetic values are to be found in literature, the values associated with “significant form”⁸ or, at most, with the contemplation of an “intrinsically interesting possible.”⁹ M.H. Abrams has called this an “austere dedication to the poem *per se*,”¹⁰ for all the enlightening analysis and explication it has produced. “But it threatens also to commit us,” he wrote, “to the concept of a poem as a language game, or as a floating Laputa, insulated from life and essential human concerns in a way that accords poorly with our experience in reading a great work of literature.”

For the critic of consciousness, literature is viewed as a genesis, a conscious effort on the part of an individual artist to understand his own experience by framing it in language. The reader who encounters the work must recreate it in terms of *his* consciousness. In order to penetrate it, to experience it existentially and empathetically, he must try to place himself within the “interior space”¹¹ of the writer’s mind as it is slowly revealed in the course of his work. Clearly, the reader requires a variety of cues if he is to situate himself in this way; and these are ostensibly provided by the expressions and attitudes he finds in the book, devices which he must accept as orientations and indications—“norms,” perhaps, to govern his recreation. *His* subjectivity is the substance of the literary object; but, if he is to perceive the identity emerging through the enactments of the book, he must subordinate his own personality as he brackets out his everyday, “natural” world.¹² His objective in doing so, however, is not to analyze or explicate or evaluate; it is to extract the experience made manifest by means of the work. Sartre says this more concretely:

Reading seems, in fact, to be the synthesis of perception and creation. . . . The object is essential because it is strictly transcendent, because it imposes its own structures, and because one must wait for it and observe it; but the subject is also essential because it is required not only to disclose the object (that is, to make *there be* an object) but also that this object might *be* (that is, to produce it). In a word, the reader is conscious of disclosing in creating, of creating by disclosing. . . . If he is inattentive, tired, stupid, or thoughtless most of the relations will escape him. He will never manage to “catch on” to the object (in the sense in which we see that fire “catches” or “doesn’t catch”). He will draw some phrases out of the shadow, but they will appear as random strokes. If he is at his best, he will project beyond the words a synthetic form, each phrase of which will be no more than a partial function: the “theme,” the “subject,” or the “meaning.”¹³

There must be, he is suggesting, continual reconstructions if a work of literature is to become meaningful. The structures involved are generated over a period of time, depending upon the perceptiveness and attentiveness of the reader. The reader, however, does not simply regenerate what the artist intended. His imagination can move him beyond the artist’s traces, “to project beyond the words a synthetic form,” to constitute a new totality. The autonomy of the art object is sacrificed in this orientation; the reader, conscious of lending his own life to the book, discovers deeper and more complex levels than the level of “significant form.” (Sartre says, for instance, that “Raskolnikov’s waiting is *my* waiting, which I lend him. Without this impatience of the reader he would remain only a collection of signs. His hatred of the police magistrate who

questions him is my hatred which has been solicited and wheedled out of me by signs, and the police magistrate himself would not exist without the hatred I have for him via Raskolnikov.”¹⁴)

Disclosure, Reconstruction, Generation


The reader, using his imagination, must move within his own subjectivity and break with the common sense world he normally takes for granted. If he could not suspend his ordinary ways of perceiving, if he could not allow for the possibility that the horizons of daily life are not inalterable, he would not be able to engage with literature at all. As Dewey put it: “There is work done on the part of the percipient as there is on the part of the artist. The one who is too lazy, idle, or indurated in convention to perform this work will not see or hear. His ‘appreciation’ will be a mixture of scraps of learning with conformity to norms of conventional admiration and with a confused, even if genuine, emotional excitation.”¹⁵ The “work” with which we are here concerned is one of disclosure, reconstruction, generation. It is a work which culminates in a bringing something into being by the reader—in a “going beyond” what he has been.¹⁶


Although I am going to claim that learning, to be meaningful, must involve such a “going beyond,” I am not going to claim that it must also be in the imaginative mode. Nor am I going to assert that, in order to surpass the “given,” the individual is required to move into and remain within a sealed subjectivity. What I find suggestive in the criticism of consciousness is the stress on the gradual disclosure of structures by the reader. The process is, as I have said, governed by certain cues or norms perceived in the course of reading. These demand, if they are to be perceived, what Jean Piaget has called a “continual ‘decentering’ without which [the individual subject] cannot become free from his intellectual egocentricity.”¹⁷

The difference between Piaget and those interested in consciousness is, of course, considerable. For one thing, he counts himself among those who prefer not to characterize the subject in terms of its “lived experience.” For another thing, he says categorically that “the ‘lived’ can only have a very minor role in the construction of cognitive structures, for these do not belong to the subject’s *consciousness* but to his operational *behavior*, which is something quite different.”¹⁸ I am not convinced that they are as different as he conceives them to be. Moreover, I think his differentiation between the “individual subject” and what he calls “the epistemic subject, that cognitive nucleus which is common to all subjects at the same level,”¹⁹ is useful and may well shed light on the problem of curriculum, viewed from the vantage point of consciousness. Piaget is aware that his stress on the “epistemic subject” looks as if he were subsuming the individual under some impersonal abstraction;²⁰ but his discussion is not far removed from those of Sartre and the critics of consciousness, particularly when they talk of the subject entering into a process of generating structures whose being (like the structures Piaget has in mind) consists in their “coming to be.”

Merleau-Ponty, as concerned as Piaget with the achievement of rationality, believes that there is a primary reality which must be taken into account if the growth of “intellectual consciousness” is to be understood. This primary reality is a perceived life-world; and the structures of the “perceptual consciousness”²¹ through which the child first comes in contact with his environment underlie all the higher level structures which develop later in his life. In the prereflective, infantile stage of life he is obviously


incapable of generating cognitive structures. The stage is characterized by what Merleau-Ponty calls “egocentrism” because the “me” is part of an anonymous collectivity, unaware of itself, capable of living “as easily in others as it does in itself.”²² Nevertheless, even then, before meanings and configurations are imposed, there is an original world, a natural and social world in which the child is involved corporeally and affectively. Perceiving that world, he effects certain relations within his experience. He organizes and “informs” it before he is capable of logical and predicative thought. This means for Merleau-Ponty that consciousness exists primordially—the ground of all knowledge and rationality.

The growing child assimilates a language system and becomes habituated to using language as “an open system of expression” which is capable of expressing “an indeterminate number of cognitions or ideas to come.”²³ His acts of naming and expression take place, however, around a core of primary meaning found in “the silence of primary consciousness.” This silence may be understood as the fundamental awareness of being present in the world. It resembles what Paulo Freire calls “background awareness”²⁴ of an existential situation, a situation actually lived before the codifications which make new perceptions possible. Talking about the effort to help peasants perceive their own reality differently (to enable them, in other words, to learn), Freire says they must somehow make explicit their “real consciousness” of their worlds, what they experienced while living through situations they later learn to codify. 

The point is that the world is constituted for the child (by means of the behavior called perception) prior to the “construction of cognitive structures.” This does not imply that he lives his life primarily in that world. He moves outward into diverse realms of experience in his search for meaning. When he confronts and engages with the apparently independent structures associated with rationality, the so-called cognitive structures, it is likely that he does so as an “epistemic subject,” bracketing out for the time his subjectivity, even his presence to himself.²⁵ But the awareness remains in the background; the original perceptual reality continues as the ground of rationality, the base from which the leap to the theoretical is taken. 

Merleau-Ponty, recognizing that psychologists treat consciousness as “an object to be studied,” writes that it is simply not accessible to mere factual observation:

The psychologist always tends to make consciousness into just such an object of observation. But all the factual truths to which psychology has access can be applied to the concrete subject only after a philosophical correction. Psychology, like physics and the other sciences of nature, uses the method of induction, which starts from facts and then assembles them. But it is very evident that this induction will remain blind if we do not know in some other way, and indeed from the inside of consciousness itself, what this induction is dealing with.²⁶

Induction must be combined “with the reflective knowledge that we can obtain from ourselves as conscious objects.” This is not a recommendation that the individual engage in introspection. Consciousness, being intentional, throws itself outward *towards* the world. It is always consciousness of something—a phenomenon, another person, an object in the world: Reflecting upon himself as a conscious object, the individual—the learner, perhaps—reflects upon his relation to the world, his manner of comporting himself with respect to it, the changing perspectives through which the world presents itself to him. Merleau-Ponty talks about the need continually to rediscover “my actual presence to myself, the fact of my consciousness which is in the last resort what the word and the concept of consciousness mean.”²⁷ This means remaining in contact with 

one's own perceptions, one's own experiences, and striving to constitute their meanings. It means achieving a state of what Schutz calls "*wide-awakeness* . . . a plane of consciousness of highest tension originating in an attitude of full attention to life and its requirements."²⁸ Like Sartre, Schutz emphasizes the importance of attentiveness for arriving at new perceptions, for carrying out cognitive projects. All this seems to me to be highly suggestive for a conception of a learner who is "open to the world,"²⁹ eager, indeed *condemned* to give meaning to it—and, in the process of doing so, recreating or generating the materials of a curriculum in terms of his own consciousness.

Some Alternative Views

There are, of course, alternative views of consequence for education today. R.S. Peters, agreeing with his philosophic precursors that consciousness is the hallmark of mind and always "related in its different modes to objects," asserts that the "objects of consciousness are first and foremost objects in a public world that are marked out and differentiated by a public language into which the individual is initiated."³⁰ (It should be said that Peters is, *par excellence*, the exponent of an "objective" or "analytic" approach to curriculum, closely related to the objective approach to literary criticism.) He grants that the individual "represents a unique and unrepeatable viewpoint on this public world"; but his primary stress is placed upon the way in which the learning of language is linked to the discovery of that separately existing world of "objects in space and time." Consciousness, for Peters, cannot be explained except in connection with the demarcations of the public world which meaning makes possible. It becomes contingent upon initiation into public traditions, into (it turns out) the academic disciplines. Since such an initiation is required if modes of consciousness are to be effectively differentiated, the mind must finally be understood as a "product" of such initiation. The individual must be enabled to achieve a state of mind characterized by "a mastery of and care for the worthwhile things that have been transmitted, which are viewed in some kind of cognitive perspective."³¹

Philip H. Phenix argues similarly that "the curriculum should consist entirely of knowledge which comes from the disciplines, for the reason that the disciplines reveal knowledge in its teachable forms."³² He, however, pays more heed to what he calls "the experience of reflective self-consciousness,"³³ which he associates specifically with "concrete existence in direct personal encounter."³⁴ The meanings arising out of such an encounter are expressed, for him, in existential philosophy, religion, psychology, and certain dimensions of imaginative literature. They are, thus, to be considered as one of the six "realms of meaning" through mastery of which man is enabled to achieve self-transcendence. Self-transcendence, for Phenix, involves a duality which enables the learner to feel himself to be agent and knower, and at once to identify with what he comes to know. Self-transcendence is the ground of meaning; but it culminates in the engendering of a range of "essential meanings," the achievement of a hierarchy in which all fundamental patterns of meaning are related and through which human existence can be fulfilled. The inner life of generic man is clearly encompassed by this scheme; but what is excluded, I believe, is what has been called the "subjectivity of the actor," the *individual* actor ineluctably present to himself. What is excluded is the feeling of separateness, of strangeness when such a person is confronted with the articulated curriculum intended to counteract meaninglessness.

Schutz writes:

When a stranger comes to the town, he has to learn to orientate in it and to know it. Nothing is self-explanatory for him and he has to ask an expert . . . to learn how to get from one point to another. He may, of course, refer to a map of the town, but even to use the map successfully he must know the meaning of the signs on the map, the exact point within the town where he stands and its correlative on the map, and at least one more point in order correctly to relate the signs on the map to the real objects in the city.³⁵

The prestructured curriculum resembles such a map; the learner, the stranger just arrived in town. For the cartographer, the town is an “object of his science,” a science which has developed standards of operation and rules for the correct drawing of maps. In the case of the curriculum-maker, the public tradition or the natural order of things is “the object” of his design activities. Here too there are standards of operation: the subject matter organized into disciplines must be communicable; it must be appropriate to whatever are conceived as educational aims. Phenix has written that education should be understood as “a guided recapitulation of the processes of inquiry which gave rise to the fruitful bodies of organized knowledge comprising the disciplines.”³⁶ Using the metaphor of the map, we might say that this is like asking a newcomer in search of direction to recapitulate the complex processes by which the cartographer made his map. The map may represent a fairly complete charting of the town; and it may ultimately be extremely useful for the individual to be able to take a cartographer’s perspective. When that individual first arrives, however, his peculiar plight ought not to be overlooked: his “background awareness” of being alive in an unstable world; his reasons for consulting the map; the interests he is pursuing as he attempts to orient himself when he can no longer proceed by rule of thumb. He himself may recognize that he will have to come to understand the signs on the map if he is to make use of it. Certainly he will have to decipher the relationship between those signs and “real objects in the city.” But his initial concern will be conditioned by the “objects” he wants to bring into visibility, by the landmarks he needs to identify if he is to proceed on his way.

Learning—A Mode of Orientation

Turning from newcomer to learner (contemporary learner, in our particular world), I am suggesting that his focal concern is with ordering the materials of his own life-world when dislocations occur, when what was once familiar abruptly appears strange. This may come about on an occasion when “future shock” is experienced, as it so frequently is today. Anyone who has lived through a campus disruption, a teachers’ strike, a guerilla theatre production, a sit-in (or a be-in, or a feel-in) knows full well what Alvin Toffler means when he writes about the acceleration of change. “We no longer ‘feel’ life as men did in the past,” he says. “And this is the ultimate difference, the distinction that separates the truly contemporary man from all others. For this acceleration lies behind the impermanence—the transience—that penetrates and tinctures our consciousness, radically affecting the way we relate to other people, to things, to the entire universe of ideas, art and values.”³⁷ Obviously, this does not happen in everyone’s life; but it is far more likely to occur than ever before in history, if it is indeed the case that change has speeded up and that forces are being released which we have not yet learned to control. My point is that the contemporary learner is more likely than his predecessors to experience moments of strangeness, moments when the recipes he has inherited for the solution of typical problems no longer seem to

work. If Merleau-Ponty is right and the search for rationality is indeed grounded in a primary or perceptual consciousness, the individual may be fundamentally aware that the structures of “reality” are contingent upon the perspective taken and that most achieved orders are therefore precarious.

The stage sets are always likely to collapse.³⁸ Someone is always likely to ask unexpectedly, as in Pinter’s *The Dumb Waiter*, “Who cleans up after we’re gone?”³⁹ Someone is equally likely to cry out, “You seem to have no conception of where we stand! You won’t find the answer written down for you in the bowl of a compass—I can tell you that.”⁴⁰ Disorder, in other words, is continually breaking in; meaninglessness is recurrently overcoming landscapes which once were demarcated, meaningful. It is at moments like these that the individual reaches out to reconstitute meaning, to close the gaps, to make sense once again. It is at moments like these that he will be moved to pore over maps, to disclose or generate structures of knowledge which may provide him unifying perspectives and thus enable him to restore order once again. His learning, I am saying, is a mode of orientation—or reorientation in a place suddenly become unfamiliar. And “place” is a metaphor, in this context, for a domain of consciousness, intending, forever thrusting outward, “open to the world.” The curriculum, the structures of knowledge, must be presented to such a consciousness as possibility. Like the work of literature in Sartre’s viewing, it requires a subject if it is to be disclosed; it can only *be* disclosed if the learner, himself engaged in generating the structures, lends the curriculum his life. If the curriculum, on the other hand, is seen as external to the search for meaning, it becomes an alien and an alienating edifice, a kind of “Crystal Palace” of ideas.⁴¹

There is, then, a kind of resemblance between the ways in which a learner confronts socially prescribed knowledge and the ways in which a stranger looks at a map when he is trying to determine where he is in relation to where he wants to go. In Kafka’s novel, *Amerika*, I find a peculiarly suggestive description of the predicament of someone who is at once a stranger and a potential learner (although, it eventually turns out, he never succeeds in being taught). He is Karl Rossmann, who has been “packed off to America” by his parents and who likes to stand on a balcony at his Uncle Jacob’s house in New York and look down on the busy street:

From morning to evening and far into the dreaming night that street was a channel for the constant stream of traffic which, seen from above, looked like an inextricable confusion, for ever newly improvised, of foreshortened human figures and the roofs of all kinds of vehicles, sending into the upper air another confusion, more riotous and complicated, of noises, dusts and smells, all of it enveloped and penetrated by a flood of light which the multitudinous objects in the street scattered, carried off and again busily brought back, with an effect as palpable to the dazzled eye as if a glass roof stretched over the street were being violently smashed into fragments at every moment.⁴²

Karl’s uncle tells him that the indulgence of idly gazing at the busy life of the city might be permissible if Karl were traveling for pleasure; “but for one who intended to remain in the States it was sheer ruination.” He is going to have to make judgments which will shape his future life; he will have, in effect, to be reborn. This being so, it is not enough for him to treat the unfamiliar landscape as something to admire and wonder at (as if it were a cubist construction or a kaleidoscope). Karl’s habitual interpretations (learned far away in Prague) do not suffice to clarify what he sees. If he is to learn, he must identify what is questionable, try to break through what is obscure. Action is

required of him, not mere gazing; *praxis*, not mere reverie.

If he is to undertake action, however, he must do so against the background of his original perceptions, with a clear sense of being present to himself. He must do so, too, against the background of his European experience, of the experience of rejection, of being “packed off” for reasons never quite understood. Only with that sort of awareness will he be capable of the attentiveness and commitment needed to engage with the world and make it meaningful. Only with the ability to be reflective about what he is doing will he be brave enough to incorporate his past into the present, to link the present to a future. All this will demand a conscious appropriation of new perspectives on his experience and a continual reordering of that experience as new horizons of the “Amerika” become visible, as new problems arise. The point is that Karl Rossmann, an immigrant in an already structured and charted world, must be conscious enough of himself to strive towards rationality; only if he achieves rationality will he avoid humiliations and survive.

As Kafka tells it, he never does attain that rationality; and so he is continually manipulated by forces without and within. He never learns, for example, that there can be no justice if there is no good will, even though he repeatedly and sometimes eloquently asks for justice from the authorities—always to no avail. The ship captains and pursers, the business men, the head waiters and porters all function according to official codes of discipline which are beyond his comprehension. He has been plunged into a public world with its own intricate prescriptions, idiosyncratic structures, and hierarchies; but he has no way of appropriating it or of constituting meanings. Throughout most of the novel, he clings to his symbolic box (with the photograph of his parents, the memorabilia of childhood and home). The box may be egocentrism; it may signify his incapacity to embark upon the “decentering” required if he is to begin generating for himself the structures of what surrounds.

In his case (and, I would say, in the case of many other people) the “decentering” that is necessary is not solely a cognitive affair, as Piaget insists it is. Merleau-Ponty speaks of a “lived decentering,”⁴³ exemplified by a child’s learning “to relativise the notions of the youngest and the eldest” (to learn, e.g., to become the eldest in relation to the newborn child) or by his learning to think in terms of reciprocity. This happens, as it would have to happen to Karl, through actions undertaken within the “vital order,” not merely through intellectual categorization. It does not exclude the possibility that a phenomenon analogous to Piaget’s “epistemic subject” emerges, although there appears to be no reason (except, perhaps, from the viewpoint of empirical psychology) for separating it off from the “individual subject.” (In fact, the apparent difference between Piaget and those who talk of “lived experience” may turn upon a definition of “consciousness.” Piaget, as has been noted,⁴⁴ distinguishes between “consciousness” and “operational behavior,” as if consciousness did *not* involve a turning outward to things, a continuing reflection upon situationality, a generation of cognitive structures.) In any case, every individual who consciously seeks out meaning is involved in asking questions which demand essentially epistemic responses.⁴⁵ These responses, even if incomplete, are knowledge claims; and, as more and more questions are asked, there is an increasing “sedimentation” of meanings which result from the interpretation of past experiences looked at from the vantage point of the present. Meanings do not inhere in the experiences that emerge; they have to be constituted, and they can only be constituted through cognitive action.

Returning to Karl Rossmann and his inability to take such action, I have been sug-



gesting that he *cannot* make his own “primary consciousness” background so long as he clings to his box; nor can he actively interpret his past experience. He cannot (to stretch Piaget’s point somewhat) become or will himself to be an “epistemic subject.” He is, as Freire puts it, submerged in a “dense, enveloping reality or a tormenting blind alley” and will be unless he can “perceive it as an objective-problematic situation.”⁴⁶ Only then will he be able to intervene in his own reality with attentiveness, with awareness—to act upon his situation and make sense.

It would help if the looming structures which are so incomprehensible to Karl were somehow rendered cognitively available to him. Karl might then (with the help of a teacher willing to engage in dialogue with him, to help him pose his problems) reach out to question in terms of what he feels is thematically relevant or “worth questioning.”⁴⁷ Because the stock of knowledge he carries with him does not suffice for a definition of situations in which porters manhandle him and women degrade him, in which he is penalized for every spontaneous action, he cannot easily refer to previous situations for clues. In order to cope with this, he needs to single out a single relevant element at first (from all the elements in what is happening) to transmute into a theme for his “knowing consciousness.” There is the cruel treatment meted out to him, for example, by the Head Porter who feels it his duty “to attend to things that other people neglect.” (He adds that, since he is in charge of all the doors of the hotel [including the “doorless exits”], he is “in a sense placed over everyone,” and everyone has to obey him absolutely. If it were not for his repairing the omissions of the Head Waiter in the name of the hotel management, he believes, “such a great organization would be unthinkable.”⁴⁸) The porter’s violence against Karl might well become the relevant element, the origin of a theme.

Making Connections

“What makes the theme to be a theme.” Schutz writes, “is determined by motivationally relevant interest-situations and spheres of problems. The theme which thus has become relevant has now, however, become a problem to which a solution, practical, theoretical, or emotional, must be given.”⁴⁹ The problem for Karl, like relevant problems facing any individual, is connected with and a consequence of a great number of other perplexities, other dislocations in his life. If he had not been so badly exploited by authority figures in times past, if he were not so childishly given to blind trust in adults, if he were not so likely to follow impulse at inappropriate moments, he would never have been assaulted by the Head Porter. At this point, however, once the specific problem (the assault) has been determined to be thematically relevant for him, it can be detached from the motivational context out of which it derived. The mesh-work of related perplexities remains, however, as an outer horizon, waiting to be explored or questioned when necessary. The thematically relevant element can then be made interesting in its own right and worth questioning. In the foreground, as it were, the focus of concern, it can be defined against the background of the total situation. The situation is not in any sense obliterated or forgotten. It is *there*, at the fringe of Karl’s attention while the focal problem is being solved; but it is, to an extent, “bracketed out.” With this bracketing out and this foreground focusing, Karl may be for the first time in a condition of wide-awakeness, ready to pay active attention to what has become so questionable and so troubling, ready to take the kind of action which will move him

ahead into a future as it gives him perspective on his past.

The action he might take involves more than what is understood as problem-solving. He has, after all, had some rudimentary knowledge of the Head Porter's role, a knowledge conditioned by certain typifications effected in the prepredicative days of early childhood. At that point in time, he did not articulate his experience in terms of sense data or even in terms of individual figures standing out against a background. He saw typical structures according to particular zones of relevancy. This means that he probably saw his father, or the man who was father, not only as bearded face next to his mother, not only as large figure in the doorway, but as over-bearing, threatening, incomprehensible Authority who was "placed over everyone" and had the right to inflict pain. Enabled, years later, to confront something thematically relevant, the boy may be solicited to recognize his present knowledge of the porter as the sediment of previous mental processes.⁵⁰ The knowledge of the porter, therefore, has a history beginning in primordial perceptions; and the boy may succeed in moving back from what is seemingly "given" through the diverse mental processes which constituted the porter over time. Doing so, he will be exploring both the inner and outer horizons of the problem, making connections within the field of his consciousness, interpreting his own past as it bears on his present, reflecting upon his own knowing.

And that is not all. Having made such connections between the relevant theme and other dimensions of his experience, he may be ready to solve his problem; he may even feel that the problem is solved. This, however, puts him into position to move out of his own inner time (in which all acts are somehow continuous and bound together) into the intersubjective world where he can function as an epistemic subject. Having engaged in a reflexive consideration of the activity of his own consciousness, he can now shift his attention back to the life-world which had been rendered so unrecognizable by the Head Porter's assault. Here too, meanings must be constituted; the "great organization" must be understood, so that Karl can orient himself once again in the everyday. Bracketing out his subjectivity for the time, he may find many ways of engaging as a theoretical inquirer with the problem of authority in hotels and the multiple socio-economic problems connected with that. He will voluntarily become, when inquiring in this way, a partial self, an inquirer deliberately acting a role in a community of inquirers. I am suggesting that he could not do so as effectively or as authentically if he had not first synthesized the materials within his inner time, constituted meaning in his world.

The analogy to the curriculum question, I hope, is clear. Treating Karl as a potential learner, I have considered the hotels and the other structured organizations in his world as analogous to the structures of prescribed knowledge—or to the curriculum. I have suggested that the individual, in our case the student, will only be in a position to learn when he is committed to act upon his world. If he is content to admire it or simply accept it as given, if he is incapable of breaking with egocentrism, he will remain alienated from himself and his own possibilities; he will wander lost and victimized upon the road; he will be unable to learn. He may be conditioned; he may be trained. He may even have some rote memory of certain elements of the curriculum; but no matter how well devised is that curriculum, no matter how well adapted to the stages of his growth, learning (as disclosure, as generating structures, as engendering meanings, as achieving mastery) will not occur.

At once, I have tried to say that unease and disorder are increasingly endemic in contemporary life, and that more and more persons are finding the recipes they habitually

use inadequate for sense-making in a changing world. This puts them, more and more frequently, in the position of strangers or immigrants trying to orient themselves in an unfamiliar town. The desire, indeed the *need*, for orientation is equivalent to the desire to constitute meanings, all sorts of meanings, in the many dimensions of existence. But this desire, I have suggested, is not satisfied by the authoritative confrontation of student with knowledge structures (no matter how “teachable” the forms in which the knowledge is revealed). It is surely not satisfied when the instructional situation is conceived to be, as G.K. Plochmann has written, one in which the teacher is endeavoring “with respect to his subject matter, to bring the understanding of the learner in equality with his own understanding.”⁵¹ Described in that fashion, with “learner” conceived generically and the “system” to be taught conceived as preexistent and objectively real, the instructional situation seems to me to be one that alienates because of the way it ignores both existential predicament and primordial consciousness. Like the approach to literary criticism Abrams describes, the view appears to commit us to a concept of curriculum “as a floating Laputa, insulated from life and essential human concerns. . . .”⁵²

The cries of “irrelevance” are still too audible for us to content ourselves with this. So are the complaints about depersonalization, processing, and compulsory socialization into a corporate, inhuman world. Michael Novak, expressing some of this, writes that what our institutions “decide is real is enforced as real.” He calls parents, teachers, and psychiatrists (like policemen and soldiers) “the enforcers of reality”; then he goes on to say:

When a young person is being initiated into society, existing norms determine what is to be considered real and what is to be annihilated by silence and disregard. The good, docile student accepts the norms; the recalcitrant student may lack the intelligence—or have too much; may lack maturity—or insist upon being his own man.⁵³

I have responses like this in mind when I consult the phenomenologists for an approach to curriculum in the present day. For one thing, they remind us of what it means for an individual to be present to himself; for another, they suggest to us the origins of significant quests for meaning, origins which ought to be held in mind by those willing to enable students to be themselves.

If the existence of a primordial consciousness is taken seriously, it will be recognized that awareness begins perspectively, that our experience is always incomplete. It is true that we have what Merleau-Ponty calls a “prejudice” in favor of a world of solid, determinate objects, quite independent of our perceptions. Consciousness does, however, have the capacity to return to the precognitive, the primordial, by “bracketing out” objects as customarily seen. The individual can release himself into his own inner time and rediscover the ways in which objects arise, the ways in which experience develops. In discussing the possibility of Karl Rossmann exploring his own past, I have tried to show what this sort of interior journey can mean. Not only may it result in the effecting of new syntheses within experience; it may result in an awareness of the process of knowing, of believing, of perceiving. It may even result in an understanding of the ways in which meanings have been sedimented in an individual’s own personal history. I can think of no more potent mode of combatting those conceived to be “enforcers of the real,” including the curriculum designers.

But then there opens up the possibility of presenting curriculum in such a way that it does not impose or enforce. If the student is enabled to recognize that reason and order may represent the culminating step in his constitution of a world, if he can



be enabled to see that what Schutz calls the attainment of a "reciprocity of perspectives"⁵⁴ signifies the achievement of rationality, he may realize what it is to generate the structures of the disciplines on his own initiative, against his own "background awareness." Moreover, he may realize that he is projecting beyond his present horizons each time he shifts his attention and takes another perspective on his world. "To say there exists rationality," writes Merleau-Ponty, "is to say that perspectives blend, perceptions confirm each other, a meaning emerges."⁵⁵ He points out that we witness at every moment "the miracles of related experiences, and yet nobody knows better than we do how this miracle is worked, for we are ourselves this network of relationships." Curriculum can offer the possibility for students to be the makers of such networks. The problem for their teachers is to stimulate an awareness of the questionable, to aid in the identification of the thematically relevant, to beckon beyond the everyday.

I am a psychological and historical structure, and have received, with existence, a manner of existence, a style. All my actions and thoughts stand in a relationship to this structure, and even a philosopher's thought is merely a way of making explicit his hold on the world, and what he is. The fact remains that I am free, not in spite of, or on the hither side of these motivations, but by means of them. For this significant life, this certain significance of nature and history which I am, does not limit my access to the world, but on the contrary is my means of entering into communication with it. It is by being unrestrictedly and unreservedly what I am at present that I have a chance of moving forward; it is by living my time that I am able to understand other times, by plunging into the present and the world by taking on deliberately what I am fortuitously, by willing what I will and doing what I do, that I can go further.⁵⁶

To plunge in; to choose; to disclose; to move: this is the road, it seems to me, to mastery.

Notes

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3. Ryland W. Crary, *Humanizing the School Curriculum: Development and Theory*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1969, p. 13.
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5. Sarah Lawall, *Critics of Consciousness*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1968.
6. T.S. Eliot, *The Sacred Wood*. New York: Barnes & Noble University Paperbacks, 1960, p. x.
7. Dorothy Walsh. "The Cognitive Content of Art." Francis J. Coleman, (ed.) *Aesthetics*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1968, p. 297.
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9. Walsh, *op. cit.*
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11. Maurice Blanchot. *L'Espace littéraire*. Paris: Gallimard, 1955.
12. See, e.g., Alfred Schutz, "Some Leading Concepts of Phenomenology." Maurice Natanson, (ed.) *Collected Papers I*. The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1967, pp. 104-105.
13. Jean Paul Sartre. *Literature and Existentialism*. 3rd ed. New York: The Citadel Press, 1965, p. 43.
14. *Ibid.* p. 15.
15. John Dewey. *Art as Experience*. New York: Minton, Balch & Company, 1934, p. 54.
16. Sartre. *Search for a Method. op. cit.*, p. 91.
17. Jean Piaget. *Structuralism*. New York: Basic Books, 1970, p. 139.

18. *Ibid.*, p. 68.
19. *Ibid.*, p. 139.
20. *Ibid.*
21. Maurice Merleau-Ponty. *Phenomenology of Perception*. London: Routledge Kegan Paul Ltd., 1962.
22. Merleau-Ponty. *The Primacy of Perception*, *op. cit.*, p. 119.
23. *Ibid.*, p. 99.
24. Paulo Freire. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. New York: Herder and Herder, 1970, p. 108.
25. Schutz. "On Multiple Realities." *op. cit.*, p. 248.
26. Merleau-Ponty. *The Primacy of Perception*, *op. cit.*, p. 58.
27. Merleau-Ponty. *Phenomenology of Perception*, *op. cit.*, p. xvii.
28. Schutz. "On Multiple Realities." *op. cit.*
29. Merleau-Ponty, *op. cit.*, p. xv.
30. R.S. Peters. *Ethics and Education*. London: George Allen and Unwin, 1966, p. 50.
31. R.S. Peters. *Ethics and Education*. Glenview, Ill.: Scott Foresman and Co., 1967, p. 12.
32. Philip H. Phenix, "The Uses of the Disciplines as Curriculum Content." Donald Vandenberg, (ed.) *Theory of Knowledge and Problems of Education*. Urbana, Ill.: University of Illinois Press, 1969, p. 195.
33. Philip H. Phenix. *Realms of Meaning*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1964, p. 25.
34. *Ibid.*
35. Schutz. "Problem of Rationality in the Social World." Natanson, (ed.) *Collected Papers II*. The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1967, p. 66.
36. Phenix, "Disciplines as Curriculum Content," *op. cit.*, p. 195.
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41. Cf. Fyodor Dostoevsky. *Notes from Underground*, in *The Short Novels of Dostoevsky*. New York: Dial Press, 1945. "You believe in a palace of crystal that can never be destroyed . . . a palace at which one will not be able to put out one's tongue or make a long nose on the sly." p. 152.
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43. Merleau-Ponty. *The Primacy of Perception*, *op. cit.*, p. 110.
44. Piaget, *op. cit.*
45. Richard M. Zaner. *The Way of Phenomenology*. New York: Pegasus Books, 1970, p. 27.
46. Freire, *op. cit.*, p. 100.
47. Schutz. "The Life-World." Natanson, (ed.) *Collected Papers, III*. The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1967, p. 125.
48. Kafka, *op. cit.*, p. 201.
49. Schutz. "The Life-World." *op. cit.*, p. 124.
50. Schutz, "Leading Concepts of Phenomenology," *op. cit.*, p. 111.
51. G.K. Plochmann. "On the Organic Logic of Teaching and Learning." Vandenberg, *op. cit.*, p. 244.
52. Cf. footnote 10.
53. Michael Novak. *The Experience of Nothingness*. New York: Harper & Row, 1970, p. 94.
54. Schutz. "Symbols, Reality, and Society." *Collected Papers I*, *op. cit.*, p. 315.
55. Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, *op. cit.*, p. xix.
56. *Ibid.*, pp. 455-56.