

The Character of Curriculum Studies

Bildung, Currere, and the Recurring Question of the Subject

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Introduction

The first critical task of genealogy, then, involves distancing oneself from the institution, morality, or worldview that is investigated.

John S. Ransom (1997, 80)

Curriculum is a complicated *conversation*. Structured by guidelines, focused by objectives, and overdetermined by outcomes, the US school curriculum struggles to remain conversation. It is conversation—efforts at understanding through communication—among students and teachers, actually existing individuals in certain places on certain days, simultaneously personal and public. The fact that students and teachers are individuals complicates conversation considerably, and often in welcomed ways, as each person brings to whatever is being studied his or her own prior knowledge, present circumstances, interest, and yes, disinterest. Students' speech and writing enable teachers to assess where the classroom conversation is, what might happen next, and what needs to be reviewed or sometimes sidestepped. Add to these the locale or region where the curriculum is enacted, the nation (its history and present circumstances), the state of the planet, expressed as specifically and mundanely as the weather (with catastrophic climate change threatening us all), and one begins to appreciate just how complicated the conversation about the school curriculum is, can be, and must remain. There is as well the fact of the individual school, although that institution has often been over-emphasized in efforts to improve the curriculum. It is the lived experience¹ of curriculum—*currere*, the running of the course—wherein the curriculum is experienced, enacted, and reconstructed.

The verb form (*currere*) is preferable because it emphasizes the lived rather than the planned curriculum, although the two are intertwined. The verb emphasizes action, process, and experience in contrast to the noun, which can convey stipulation and completion. While every course ends, the consequences of study are ongoing, as they are social and subjective as well as intellectual. The running of the course—*currere*—occurs through conversation, not only classroom discourse,

but also dialogue among specific students and teachers and within oneself in solitude. Because the running of the course occurs socially and subjectively through academic study, the concept of *currere* forefronts the meaning of the curriculum as complicated conversation encouraging educational experience. Indeed, *currere* emphasizes the everyday experience of the individual and his or her capacity to learn from that experience; to reconstruct experience through thought and dialogue to enable understanding. Such understanding, achieved by working through history and lived experience, can help us reconstruct our own subjective and social lives. We can be changed by what we study, but the pronoun is relevant (Winch 2008, 295), as the “I” is a “we,” and the “we” is a series of “I’s.” For Michael Uljens (2003, 46), “[T]he pedagogical paradox is related to the *subjectivity* of the individual: for learning to be possible there must not only *be* a *somebody* whose reflection is stimulated but also a *somebody* whom the individual *becomes*—that is, there must be the idea that the person in some sense *comes into being* through education.” In my terms, educational experience enables subjective and social reconstruction.²

Curriculum conceived as a verb—*currere*—privileges the concept of the *individual* in curriculum studies. It is a complicated concept in itself. Each of us is different, meaning we each have a different makeup, genetically, as well as different upbringings, families and caretakers, significant others, and, more broadly still, in terms of race, class, and gender, inflected by place, time, and circumstances. Informed by culture and by other often homogenizing forces, each of us is, or can be, distinctive. Indeed, we can cultivate that distinctiveness. We can become individualists, committed to actualizing whatever independence we experience and can muster in order to pursue courses of action (including thinking) that we choose as significant. As we will see in chapter 4, the concept of *Bildung* underlines as it complicates this meaning of the individual as self-formation through education.³

BILDUNG

The elevation of the independent, creative, autonomous individual is the heart of the project.

Ilan Gur-Ze'ev (2003, 76)

Declared by some to be among the casualties of postmodernism (Peukert 2003, 105)—wherein so-called master narratives⁴ like “progress” are dumped in conceptual landfills (Marshall 1997, 64;

Autio 2003, 323)—*Bildung* enjoys a remarkable resilience, in part due to its malleability (Baker 2001, 360, 418 n. 73). The contemporary concept starts in the eighteenth century (Løvlie and Standish 2003, 4; Nordenbo 2003, 27), when the formation of the individual was associated with an aesthetic education, a concept with religious connotations.⁵ It was this view of individuality—“different from the competitive individualism of liberal economics and politics,” Luft (2003, 15) emphasizes—that was “at the heart of the religion of humanity that emerged out of the German Enlightenment in the work of Goethe, Schiller, Lessing and Humboldt.” Individuality was, then, not an anatomical given; it was a spiritual-intellectual possibility that required cultivation. Self-formation required, Rauch (2000, 107) points out, participation in one’s traditions, enabling one to interpret experience as cultural and historical. An aesthetic education, she continues, meant the sculpting of the imagination and interpretation through art, for example, the cultivation of judgment and pleasure. By the time the historian George Mosse (2000, 184) encountered the concept, it meant the “usual humanist education which in Germany conferred social status.” As he studied the origins of *Bildung*, however, Mosse (2000, 184) found it very different from the “rote learning” and “strict obedience to rules” demanded by his teachers at the Gymnasium he had attended as a boy in Berlin.

Wilhelm von Humboldt (1767–1835) is “inseparably connected” with the formulation (at the beginning of the nineteenth century) of the concept *Bildung*, or “self-cultivation” (Bruford 2009 [1975], 1). Humboldt positioned the individual at the center of the educational process (Nordenbo 2003, 29); it was the individual who, Mosse summarizes, through “constant self-education, could realize the image of his own perfection, which every person carried within him (2000, 184). In addition to this forefronting of self-directed self-reflective study, “education was to be an open-ended process without set goals, except for each individual striving to perfect himself” (2000, 184). In his *German Jews beyond Judaism* (1985), Mosse shows how German Jews internalized this idea—making it a “vibrant heritage”—while many non-Jewish Germans forgot *Bildung*’s emphasis on “individualism and open-endedness” (2000, 184). From the “very beginning,” Mosse (2000, 184–185) concludes, “this ideal, despite its open-endedness, was restricted by incorporating respectability and citizenship as unquestioned virtues, and thus it contained the seeds of its own foreclosure.” Robert Musil (1990, 259) was even more cynical, judging in 1934 that “classicism’s ideal of education [*Bildung*] was largely replaced by the idea of entertainment, even if it was entertainment with a patina of art.”

Theodor Adorno agreed (see Løvlie and Standish 2003, 1). *Bildung* had devolved into distraction, ornamentation, and pretension (see Gay 2001 [1968], 60), self-formation recoded as social conformity⁶ that left it vulnerable to political co-optation (Baker 2001, 372, 413).

How did self-formation become conflated with social conformity? The individual, Daniel Tröhler (2003, 759) explains, was no empirical fact, but a spiritual possibility, realizable through “effort and self-cultivation, or *Bildung*.” Integral to this realization, moreover, was the spiritual life of the “ethnocultural nation” (2003, 759). The individual can realize himself only through his culture and its people—the German *Volk* (2003, 759), defined sometimes linguistically, sometimes racially. “To be free,” Tröhler (2003, 760) summarizes, “meant the embedding of the individual into the harmonious beauty of the whole.” Likewise, the project of culture was always linked to the development of the nation-state,” Guillory (2002, 27) points out, “and that culture, despite its invocation of universalist values, was to be realized in the form of *national culture*.”

Culture, not politics, played the major role in the history of *Bildung*, as culture represented the ideal, even the spiritual, while politics conveyed vulgarity and corruption.⁷ To illustrate this distinction, Peter Gay (1978, 4) quotes Friedrich Schlegel who, in 1800, advised, “Do not waste faith and love on the political world, but offer up your innermost being to the divine world of scholarship and art, in the sacred fire of eternal *Bildung*.” Having earlier affirmed this view (in his 1918 *Reflections of an Unpolitical Man*), Thomas Mann famously reversed himself in 1922, endorsing parliamentary democracy as integral to self-formation (see Gay 2001 [1968], 74; Weitz 2007, 254–55). The admired novelist—in W. H. Bruford’s (2009 [1975], 226) assessment, “the representative of the best German thought and feeling, the enduring German conscience, in the most disturbed and tragic half-century of German history”—now counseled students (in Gay’s 2001 [1968], 142 words) to have “patience” and to acquire an “appreciation of the true freedom that comes with rationality and discipline,” a courageous condemnation of German youth’s seduction by the cult of the irrational, including in politics, most pointedly by the Nazis. After Hitler’s success in the elections of 1930, Mann issued “An Appeal to Reason” in October 1930 at a meeting in Berlin, which only police protection prevented the Nazis from turning violent (see Kaes, Jay, and Dimendberg 1995, 145).

Despite its displacement in some countries by traditional US curriculum theory,⁸ in recent years, *Bildung* has enjoyed something of a revival, thanks in part due to its wedding with democratization

(Gundem, Karseth, and Sivesind 2003, 529; Løvlie, Klaus, and Nordenbo 2003; Kincheloe 2007, 33). Without *Bildung*, Karsten Schnack (2003, 272) asserts, democracy is an “empty shell, a procedure or form of government.” Without democracy, he adds, *Bildung* becomes “reduced to what the leaders of the hour have defined as highbrow culture and good manners” (2003, 272). Commitments to inner development and social democracy are juxtaposed in my conception of curriculum as lived experience: *currere*.

CURRERE

Justice was then not only an arrangement to be realized in any given society, but also a state of the individual which was called a virtue.

George Grant (1986, 54)

While distinctive, then, the individual is comprised of material shared with others. Flesh and blood most materially, but ideas and emotion also come from others; however, they are reconstructed through our individual and socially mediated experience of them. We seek clarification of these domains of imprinting, influence, and resemblance through reflection upon them and through conversation with others. That conversation with others is complicated by the fact of our, and their, individuality, their differing generational, genetic, and cultural locations. It seems we share experience but that experience is always inflected by these separate locations, in historical time and geographical place, and by our distinctive experience of these. The reverberating fact that we are each individuals—however differently—separates us from each other, but it is also what connects us to each other. What we have in common, Kaja Silverman (2009, 4) suggests, is this shared experience of “finitude.” Each of us has a life; each of us dies.

Death provides focus for living. If it seems near-at-hand, death can provide urgency. That sense that each of us has a life, that it is of limited duration, is a fact we share not only with every other human being, but also with every living creature. As Silverman (2009, 4) appreciates, “[F]initude is the most capacious and enabling of the attributes we share with others, because...it connects us to every other being.” This is, in William E. Doll Jr.’s terms, the relationality of life, and this realization characterizes the relationality of curriculum. While we usually think of the curriculum as divided into different courses and concepts, we can also think of it as a “totality,” as a “vast, unauthorized book” (Silverman 2009, 9) still being written,

including ourselves and individual lives. Studying the curriculum, then, connects us to everyone else, “not *in spite of* the particularities of their lives but rather *through* them” (2009, 9). The fact that conversation is, then, complicated is not only a pedagogical problem but also an educational opportunity to understand difference within resemblance, and not only across our species but also within life on earth, as well as within our own individuality, as subjectivity itself is an ongoing conversation (Reichenbach 2003, 101).

The school subjects themselves codify *conversation*, especially when they are summarized in linear logical fashion in textbooks. The curriculum is a conversation complicated by the singularity of teachers and students, and necessarily so. Teachers cannot teach unless they express themselves through the school subjects they love and feel committed to explain to those often not eager to leave the confines of what they know already. It is this psychological resistance built into the core of study and learning that positions as primary the relationship teachers can forge with students. Only if class size is sufficiently small, and only if the curriculum enables teachers to incorporate their subjective investments and encourage those of their students can such relationships—threaded through the school subjects—form and be expressed. This fact suggests the educational significance of orality (Pinar 2012, 175).

Even when they are avowedly interdisciplinary, the school subjects draw upon the academic disciplines as they are advanced at universities. The academic disciplines represent ongoing conversation among scholars and researchers working with concepts and problems discovered and created by their predecessors, prompted by present circumstances, perhaps even governmental priorities. Often considered to be a series of disciplines separate from human interests, even science is structured by these. Moreover, each academic discipline—like biology or chemistry, to which the school subjects correspond—itself represents an interdisciplinary configuration that changes over time. As Anderson and Valente (2002, 4) remind, “[D]isciplinarity was always interdisciplinarity.” There is no “pure” school subject to be transmitted uncontaminated by those who study and participate in it. That does not mean there are no essential facts in each discipline—what we can call “canonicity” (Anderson and Valente 2002, 13)—but it does mean that these are to be engaged, even translated, if they are to be understood.

While not necessarily its outcome, *understanding* is the *raison d’être* of the curriculum. Understanding is intellectual, and we work toward it through our minds. These days we are reminded regularly

that those minds are housed in our brains and our brains are in our bodies, so we are quite clear that understanding is simultaneously intellectual and emotional, and that it is always embodied, the latter not only conceived as biological and neurological but also as immanent. That means that understanding is individual and social, directed to the present (including our fantasies of the future we experience in the present) as it is informed by the past. In the simultaneity of its sources and the multiplicity of its aspirations, understanding becomes allegorical, “an emotional writing,” Rauch (2000, 129) explains, “that transforms the signs into a mentality or spirit in the effect of the historic remnants on the individual mind.” Emotion is not sufficient, of course, as one cannot experience one’s historicity without factual knowledge of the past, but, Rauch (2000, 130) continues,

What the allegorical intends is not the static knowledge of things but the productive imagination of the individual which can associate and create new ideas about a different and better historical setting. The impact of allegory on cognition causes a constant transformation of attitudes and thoughts about reality.

Juxtaposing facts and lived experience in creative tensionality—in part because “allegory expresses the impossibility of a perfect unity between image and concept” (Jay 1993c, 112)—can trigger transformation. The curriculum recasts intellectual, psychological, and physical facts as allegorical. The world to which the curriculum provides passage is simultaneously empirical and poetical, phenomenological and historical.

The complicated character of understanding has meant that at different times and places we have conceived of communication as only cognitive and at other times as primarily emotional, but each is always historical.⁹ It is, of course, both of these at once, if in varying degrees according to subject matter, again understood as a double entendre. In a letter written to his wife in June 1909, Gustav Mahler depicted “reason”¹⁰—the means of the intellect—as “the limited but necessary means for communicating with the phenomenal world” (McGrath 1974, 124). He wrote:

The rational, that is to say, that which can be analyzed by the understanding, is almost always the inessential and actually a veil which disguises the form. But insofar as a soul needs a body—there is nothing that can be said against that—the artist must pick out his means for presentation from the rational world. (quoted in McGrath 1974, 124)

As William McGrath (1974, 120) points out, Mahler aspired to express “metaphysical concepts in musical terms,” but reason was required not only for such complex composition, but also for expressing in language the content of his music.¹¹

In our time this dualism—between mind and body (Bordo 1993)—seems to have been settled in the body’s favor. We are, it seems, our bodies. Is it capitalism that has made materialists of us all? Ocularcentrism is in play here of course, although its association with science—and racism—complicates speculations regarding its role in the present cultural privileging of material objects.¹² While there may be no homunculus inside the body, no separate soul imprisoned in the flesh, the body does not coincide with itself. This structural noncoincidence¹³ is the space and time of subjectivity. In that time¹⁴ and space,¹⁵ characterizing the body and its being-in-the-world, one knows one is alive. One becomes aware that one is undergoing experience in all its multidimensionality and elusiveness (Jay 2005). It is the structural noncoincidence of the alive body—the time and space of subjectivity—that invites us to experience *experience*, for example, to remember what we have undergone, to forget what we cannot bear to remember, and to understand what we can recall and feel compelled to comprehend. It is subjectivity wherein we begin to know ourselves and the world we inhabit and that inhabits us, for example, “the historicity of understanding” (Rauch 2000, 129).

Self-knowledge—know thyself¹⁶—is the ancient educational injunction. Such knowledge implies self-reflection, a process enabled by the fact of structural noncoincidence. In different conceptual systems different terminology applies—in phenomenology there is the transcendental ego (Jay 1993b, 145)—but the general conclusion is that we are able to distance ourselves from our experience and the world wherein it occurs, that we can remember (potentially, eventually) what we undergo, and that we can exercise some choice in affirming those elements we want to emphasize (and in de-emphasizing those elements we prefer to devalue). In certain systems—psychoanalysis most prominently (Zaretsky 2004)—the sphere of freedom is modest, as it becomes clear that who we imagine ourselves to be may represent a defensive reconfiguration of what we are in fact. “The more we think about the ‘I,’” George Grant (1966 [1959], 69) reminds, “the more mysterious this subjectivity will appear to us.” Knowing oneself is, then, no simple matter of paying attention to what happens—although it depends on that—as it requires retrieving what has happened already and remains only as residue and sometimes not readily accessible. This ongoing sense of mystery in fact impels self-study and haunts the formation of the subject.

THE RECURRING QUESTION OF THE SUBJECT

Do we still have the strength . . . to oppose the scientific-deterministic worldview with a self that is grounded in creative freedom?

*Gottfried Benn*¹⁷ ([1932], in Kaes, Jay, and Dimendberg 1995, 380)

The idea that there is an individual who can participate in the ongoing reformulation of his or her own character is summarized in the concept of the subject. Often associated with the Enlightenment in Europe—the marker for modernity, that substitution of science for religion as the governing mythology of life—the *subject*, as we have designated the person, emphasizing one’s capacity for agency, can learn to exercise reason. Through reason one might ascertain his or her self-interest and distinguish it from the public interest, although on occasion these have been seen to be closely related. Adjudicating the tensions between the private and public spheres, and those tensions within one’s own psychic life, were appreciated as prerequisite for the subject to achieve emancipation—freedom—from servitude in its several forms, ranging from social conformity to physical enslavement.¹⁸ That latter practice was dependent upon the denial of subjectivity to those enslaved; they were bodies monetized, sometimes sexualized, but always commodified.

Converting subjects to numbers has proved pivotal not only to the sophistication of science but also to its application to practical life in technology. Evidently, we are so enthusiastic about the consequences that we have applied quantification to almost all aspects of life, not only its practical aspects.¹⁹ In the last one hundred years, we have applied it to the education of the child, previously imagined in philosophical then in psychological and social terms (Baker 2001, Autio 2006a). Today we understand education as a series of numerals, as test scores on standardized examinations, a category of assessment to be supplemented, and, if the Obama administration succeeds, by rates of graduation (Dillon March 10, 2011, A22). Not only philosophy, but also subjectivity itself becomes bleached from schooling, itself reduced to test preparation. In the United States, educational institutions have been deformed; they devolve into cram schools. Dewey’s coupling of democracy and education has been superseded by the fusion of business and schooling.

That is the tragic trajectory of US school “reform” since 1968. Something remains, however, if only the school’s noncoincidence with itself. Despite the repression that is school “reform,” students squirm and teachers still struggle to create opportunities to teach.

School “reform” has been my life: I remember how the present came to be. I testify to what has been lost in the rush to reduce students and teachers to numbers. Despite being silenced by the press and sidelined by the government, critique remains required. Indeed, *critique* is one crucial professional practice of curriculum studies.²⁰ Critique implies not only noncoincidence but also reconstruction as questioning, skepticism, forming finally conviction. In such understanding there is created the domain of determination originating perhaps in passion, subjected to evidence, refashioned as ethics or morality, and invoked when present circumstances violate these or others’. Critique is informed by lived experience juxtaposed with academic knowledge and compelled by conviction; it is professed as part of an ongoing conversation. Or in order to restart one, or even to end one.

The “professor”—the key participant in the conversation that is the curriculum—is a teacher: a communicant, knowledgeable and committed to explain and assist students to understand the subject at hand, including themselves as they struggle and sometimes revel in what they read and write and say and hear.²¹ The concept of communication incorporates, as James Carey (1992, 15) points out, ancient “religious attitudes,” now secularized—and naturalized (Garrison 2008, 99)—but still structured by our faith that language can carry us beyond the world we know now, not only to futures foretold (and yet to be told) but also back to the past whose injustices might somehow (through our remembrance of them) stimulate reparation. This “historic religious undercurrent,” Carey (1992, 18) continues, “has never been eliminated from our thought.” Nor should it, I say, as the embrace of the common good constitutes professional ethics for educators of the public. Not transparent sieves nor accomplices of the state, teachers not only have knowledge, they also communicate character.

Employing the etymological method, I referenced this definition of *character* in the preface. In our time “moral excellence” is not necessarily associated with the Word of God, but with the specificities of situation and subjectivity. In *Webster’s*, in fact, most of the eight definitions offered for “character” emphasize its singularity, whether this follows from a “complex of mental and ethical traits [that] individualize a person, group or nation (as in assessing a person’s character)” or from a “main or essential nature, especially as strongly marked and serving to distinguish.” While the former definition acknowledges the internally differentiated complexity of individuality, the latter invites us to associate singularity with culture or nationality or animality, with something essential that is more basic than our

ephemeral and shifting subjectivity, with nature's and culture's and history's imprinting of us and our imprinting of them.

As constructed, the character of the subject is in a sense fictional. However constructed—as persona or avatar—its fictional character does not imply its insubstantiality or falsehood. I am a subject, subject to my own life history, reconstructed according to my own dreams and internalized demands, and called into question by those around me. My subjectivity—the personal possessive implies the subject's noncoincidence with itself—is imprinted by culture, nationality, and by historicity itself. There have been those who have been so mesmerized by such internal multiplicity and outer connectivity that they have declared the concept of the subject dead, deconstructed into various often contradictory elements. Instead of a coherent person, today many celebrate prostheses, post-human forms of connectivity, relays of energy, and animation that take momentary form then disappear, sometimes forever, reappearing in different, not always recognizable forms. In such a postmodern condition, the subject fragments, withdraws, becomes a talking head perhaps, images (including photos), text without context, registering what remains of the private on public websites, chronicling the sequence of once-private (if only because one kept them to oneself) events evidently now everyone undergoes and or at least everyone knows. Such public information can be collected and categorized by businesses that target customers, not subjects. That conversion points to another and more prominent (it's number one) definition of character that *Webster's* offers. Character is defined as a “cipher that represents information, also a representation of such character that may be accepted by a computer.” A “cipher,” *Webster's* explains, is a “zero,” a “nonentity.” Does the question of the subject recur because the subject has vanished?

Subjects seem absent in cram schools, where so-called skills replace academic knowledge, decontextualized puzzles preparing for employment in jobs without meaning, itself a casualty of capitalism's compulsion to profit no matter what it takes.²² No longer subjects, students become “ciphers” in cram schools. In these deformed institutions—once sites of complicated conversation, now devolving into test-prep centers—human subjects become numbers, for example, test scores. There can be no structural noncoincidence in ciphers. *Just do it* becomes the anthem of our time: acting now, suspending judgment,²³ and ignoring ethics; only outcomes matter, and outcomes are numbers, only. Representation evaporates, except for the numeral. The subject—the double entendre of the curriculum—becomes subjugated to its reign. We are its subjects. As an academic field committed

to subjects not numbers, the circumstances supportive of curriculum studies fade.²⁴

There is another definition—indeed, it is also listed among the first series of definitions in *Webster's*—of *character*. In this definition character is not a numeral but a “graphic symbol (as a hieroglyph or alphabet letter) used in writing or printing.” This is a definition that reinstalls representation as primary in communication, explicit in an antecedent definition: character is a “conventional graphic device placed on an object as an indication of ownership, origin, or relationship.” Indeed, character—also acknowledged by *Webster's* as “magical”—can denote a “style of writing or printing,” the definition listed just before its computerization (noted above). Writing or printing denotes self-expression, public testimony, and collective remembrance, and these expressive forms and genealogical traces of experience require subjectivity, invoke, in fact, a “person,” in this line (it's 6a if you're checking) of *Webster's* list of definitions for character, “marked by notable or conspicuous traits: personage.” The hieroglyph inspires this series of associations as well, when, as Rauch (2000, 15) suggests, hieroglyph becomes “a metaphor for the remnants of experience that need to be read, put together, instead of interpreted.” Reading *is* interpretation, but Rauch is emphasizing here the archeological demand to which reconstruction responds.²⁵

Reconstruction means reassembling the remains of what was, as in the United States after the Civil War. Reestablishing the past is in principle impossible, but in the effort to reconstruct what was—understanding it on its own terms—one reconstructs what is now. Finding the future, then, means returning to the past, not instrumentalizing the present.²⁶ Especially in an epoch defined by its presentism—a state of mind in which everything is now—we cannot escape the constraints of capitalism (and its educational equivalent: the cram school) from where we are now. Nor can improving what we do now—the ameliorative orientation that has so accented curriculum studies in the United States (Kliebard 1970)—enable the future to unfold. Because it works within the structures of the present,²⁷ amelioration risks only reorganizing, not reconstructing, what is. Regression to the past—reexperiencing prior, even archaic, forms of life—opens paths to the future reorganizing the present occludes.

The educational significance of the past positions history, not mathematics or science, as central to the education of the public. Of course, mathematics and science are historical subjects as well (Shapin 2010), and these histories might be emphasized in the curriculum, in part as a corrective to misconceptions that these subjects are independent

of time, place, and circumstance, including politics.²⁸ And corrective as well to the assumption that mathematics and science constitute contemporary versions of nineteenth-century Latin and ancient Greek: difficult subjects whose mastery muscles the mind, preparing it for any eventuality. History also discloses the shifting character of culture, a concept sometimes misconstrued as timeless, as somehow separate from politics and economics, and in our day ordained as definitive, as “difference.” History includes sexuality, which when contained within biology may be misconstrued as ahistorical or non-cultural, leaving students with the misconception that sexual practices are only “natural” and ahistorical. History makes clear that we ourselves are historical, that what we experience is in part a function of time, and that we are both different and similar to those who have preceded us and from those who will follow. The recognition and reconstruction of such difference enables understanding of our—it becomes, then, educational—experience.

The primacy of the temporal in the curriculum—one among several breakthroughs made by the canonical curriculum theorist Dwayne Huebner (1999, 131–142)—means that it matters who said what when. That phrase can conjure up cross-examination in a courtroom, but only the aspirations (not realities) of attentiveness, civility, and argumentation associated with litigation are pertinent to the open-ended, often judgment-free, ongoing effort to express oneself, understand the other, and communicate with everyone that characterizes the complicated conversation of the school curriculum. The temporal, then, animates what is spoken and studied as it underscores how memory structures what we experience in the present, and how new experience enables us to reconstruct what we remember and can foresee. We say we learn from experience, but unless there is experience—embodied, temporally structured—there is nothing to learn from. In the curriculum, temporality structures *orality*.²⁹

Orality is not necessarily speech, not necessarily behavioral at all. Certainly it is not chatter, saying whatever comes to mind without rhyme or reason. Nor is it clever talk designed to impress the teacher or another classmate or oneself. It is not simply the right answer to a question posed by a teacher confined to a lesson plan or exhibiting a “best practice.” Orality references the temporally structured—and structuring—expression of subjectivity through text, a physical text and/or, more broadly, the text that constitutes the ongoing class discussion. It is saying what you think and/or feel, preferably after you’ve thought about it, although spontaneity can disclose something unforeseen, enabling the speaker to know more about himself

or herself and/or his or her academic subject. Orality is an ongoing and reconstructed form of self-conscious intertextuality, acknowledging that one's statements have antecedents, public and private, past and present.

Even without knowing the details of one's students' lives—in most publicly funded schools this isn't possible given the excessive size of classes—the teacher can hear the multi-referentiality of the students' statements, provided she is attuned to this variegated temporal character of conversation. On many occasions statements are simple and straightforward, but as memory and openness allow, one can register the past when it is heard in the present. Simple exchange of information is no instance of orality, even when that occurs through speech, unless there is intertextuality or intentionality. Simply saying stuff is simply saying stuff; it is not conversation.

It is tempting to confine such chatter to the Internet, but clearly it occurs everywhere, even in families where personal histories are often in members' faces, as we say. While the Internet is no friend of orality, it does not preclude it either. Face-to-face speech lacks orality when it amounts to the anonymous exchange of facts, or is a medium of seduction or exploitation, and when it is reduced to giving instructions or obtaining “feedback.” Orality requires the articulation of embodiment, of personification, acknowledgement, and engagement, so that the distinctiveness of those present becomes audible in what they say, discernible in how they act, not as an ornamental flourish to an already full act (expressing one's “style”), but as registering the originality and creativity that subjectivity can convey when one is embodied in the present moment. On occasions playful and on others utterly serious, such complicated conversation enables students to experience social democracy, mocked by politicians who are polarized by ideology.

Social democracy is not personal posturing or groupthink but, rather, the engagement of others in deciphering the intersubjective reality³⁰ in which all are embedded and participating, even when they are withdrawn. Such discernment occurs in solitude as well, but among others one hears firsthand, with the “firsthand” of the other (e.g., his or her distinctiveness), how things (or one thing, an idea or a fact or a feeling) look or feel to him or her, what they seem to those assembled. Codes of conduct, rules of engagement, rites of civility, questions of conformity, performance, ulterior motives, and social sincerity: all these require the physical presence of others so you can sense what's going on. Online you can sometimes tell when someone is pulling your leg, but the body gives off more than odors as so-called nonverbal communication nestles words as they are uttered.

Organizing such conversation goes only so far. No format forms forever, even the relative absence of formats as in the encounter groups in which I participated 40 years ago.³¹ Sharing a circle with 12 (or so) others, one waited for someone to speak, and so it began. Unguided—on occasion there were interventions from the group leader, often in the form of questions, but infrequently as prohibition or reprimand—the conversation became a projective screen for the preoccupations of those present. Without a shared history or an assigned task, group members made it up, as it quickly became clear to everyone. There was nowhere to hide, as those who had spoken and felt exposed sometimes demanded reciprocity. There was a point to these often unnerving exercises, of course. Not only did group process become visible—how what one said produced that response, becoming a crescendo or ensuring silence—but also this produced no nomological law, as the particularity of individuals was inescapable, and what became summarized as “social constructivism” was irremediably concrete and personal. No one could deny people were making *this* up.

Its constructed character hardly rendered this speech false, however. What became clear is that social reality is comprised of falsehood as well as factuality, as well as all points in-between. Over time, groups acknowledged past events internal to the group and began referencing new statements in terms of previous ones, noting differences and repetitions. Often there was an appetite for new material; other times there was determination to work through puzzles left over from the past. Sometimes the former depended on the latter, and vice versa. The rules of engagement were few, precisely because the ongoing character of group encounter meant that judgments must be made in the moment, to which other judgments would be added. The direction any stream of conversation was headed could be changed by the wave of a wand—a word spoken, a gesture, or a sense of something not yet articulated—and the content of conversation could change as well. There was a quality of adventure—and danger—in a process where some safety was assured but the destination was unknown.

That—the loss of adventure—is the catastrophe of objectives, especially when their “implementation” is assessed by tests. The creativity, spontaneity, and originality of conversation are converted to puzzle solving, task completion, and what is left of group process becomes social conformity funneled toward a predetermined end. The curriculum becomes a tax audit. Receipts are always necessary, as no one takes your word for anything. Professional judgment is replaced by regulation, playfulness by wisecracks, and sincerity by cynicism: just

do it, damn it. Working to find out “what works” we converted the classroom to cram school, the contemporary version of the factory, an assembly line wherein mechanical behavior and efficiency replace inventiveness and memory. Regulation is now internalized, through objectives whose implementation will be assessed later, over and over. Teachers and students still talk, but now as if in prison, exchanging information while walking to the next station, always under surveillance, even if that panopticon is now internally installed. Doing time can be an adventure, but its destination takes the tension out of the unknown and attaches it to others, against whom one aggresses for the sake of a fantasized placidity always extrinsic to the “empty stare” (Grumet 1988, 116), of the cram³² curriculum.

The excitement of education may have been excised by “reform,” but curriculum-studies scholars have kept up appearances. Without jurisdiction—for many heartbreaking, for the field castrating, for the schools devastating—we encouraged enactment of orality through the elaboration of concepts—such as “complicated conversation”—knowing that these would be kept out of schools, themselves shut down, sometimes physically, always intellectually, as the adventure of the unknown journey is replaced by the proceduralism of the tax audit, wherein test-item completion substitutes for thinking, especially for the critical and creative kinds. Not immobilized by their severance from the schools, US curriculum studies scholars kept hope alive by remembering the past, reworking the present, and imagining the future. Forced to the sidelines by government intervention, curriculum studies scholars switched from supervising curriculum development in schools to understanding the curriculum in schools, often providing occasions for critique and demanding testimonies to possibility. Nowhere is the latter louder than in the still-reverberating work of Maxine Greene, whose talks to teachers at Lincoln Center in New York I discuss in chapter 7. In those you can hear the frustration of being sidelined, the dignity required for carrying on despite this incomprehensible calamity, and the affirmation of action possible through the imagination.

Action inspired by the imagination is one consequence of complicated conversation. “Aesthetics,” Mosès (2009 [1992], 104) asserts, “provides the language through which the fundamentally political nature of history is revealed.” Working through the imagination enables us to work creatively within and through constraints. Those constraints are external and political, but they are also internal, emanating from our psychic (what Freud called primary) processes, visceral and unconscious. Despite the weight of the past and the power

of the present, breakthroughs are possible. “Each moment of time,” Mosès (2009 [1992], 108) tells us, “bears judgment on moments that precede it.” Breakthrough, what for Walter Benjamin was “redemption” (Silverman 2009, 179), can occur at any moment, breaking the inertia of the present, bringing a new insight, or a new reality into the world. This is no quantitative or cumulative conception of historical time, but an idea, as Mosès (2009 [1992], 108) explains, “borrowed from Jewish messianism, of a utopia appearing in the very heart of the present, of a hope lived in the mode of today.” For me, “determination” is sturdier than “hope” but each is attuned to the immanence of worldliness (Pinar 2009, ix).

While a fact of life—however obscured it becomes in instructional schemes sequencing so-called skills in some grand Ponzi scheme wherein investments now presumably lead to payoffs later—the possibility located in each and every moment can be activated through juxtaposing the past with the present. Such juxtaposition and the creative tension³³ it installs can lead to what gets called a “third space,” as Hongyu Wang explains in chapter 7. This third space—what intellectual historian Martin Jay (1993c, 8) depicts as a “force field”—does not subsume the past and present into some third common category, as in dialectics, but preserves the distinctiveness of each as a new reality struggles to be born. It requires us to enact the noncoincidence of subjectivity with reality through the cultivation of distance, even estrangement and exile, demonstrated through Wang’s self-study that I depict in chapter 7.

Distance has gotten a bad rap in recent decades, as the identity politics of the women’s movement and African American affirmations of cultural heritage insisted that experience is the primary prerequisite to knowledge. Only a woman or a black man could know what sexism or racism is, what whiteness communicates. While acknowledging an important fact, such insistence also overstates the authority of experience as it understates the significance of study. While it can—often does—provide invaluable knowledge, experience can also provincialize and even mislead: experience is not always reliable. Men can understand sexism and its institutional and psychic structuration as masculinity through academic study, if they distance themselves from—indeed question—their own self-evident experience and listen to the testimonies of others’ firsthand experiences. Those of European descent can understand racism and whiteness as well, despite cultural predispositions to substitute identification for empathy (Hartman 1997, 18), reiterating the arrogance of cultures whose science encouraged them to imagine that their knowledge was applicable everywhere.

While experience is invaluable, understanding also takes, as Maxine Greene (2001, 53) knew, “a kind of distancing,” and for Greene such distantiating was always infused with the immediacy of the aesthetic moment. Others—like Jane Roland Martin (2008, 126)—have been even more confident, asserting that “the greater one’s distance from one’s object of study, the better one can understand it.” In Humboldt’s letters to his wife, Bruford (2009 [1975], 23) tells us, Humboldt too spoke “repeatedly” of “the need” he felt for “cultivating detachment.” Obviously Humboldt was not “completely detached,” Bruford (2009 [1975], 23) comments, “or he would not have become one of Prussia’s leading statesmen . . . offered so important and congenial a task as the reorganization of the Prussian educational system.” It was through the imagination, Humboldt said, that reality affected him (Bruford 2009 [1975], 26).

For Pasolini, it was indirect discourse—the “contamination” of public aesthetic forms with private passion (Pinar 2009, 185 n. 32)—that installed distance while preserving identification. Such aesthetic formulation of lived experience—what Markus Gabriel (in Gabriel and Zizek 2009, 76) terms “objectification”—represents “our being-in-the-world,” so that “we recognize ourselves.” Aesthetic creation is also “capable of rendering the ‘spirit’ of a life-form, of an epoch, of a typical life in our century, of an atmosphere” (Gabriel and Zizek 2009, 76). In contrast, reification splits off knowledge from subjectivity, installing it as independent of those persons and processes constructing it. Scientism is one familiar form of reification, as it—in Gabriel’s language (in Gabriel and Zizek 2009, 77)—“denies the paradoxes and antinomies which lie at the basis of determinacy and accredits itself the capacity to investigate into the conditions of possibility of determinacy (of meaning, truth, etc.)” Through distance and engagement one discerns the paradoxes and antinomies of determinacy. Distance and engagement are two intertwined if tensioned modalities of study, always altering their forms and intensities according to the project at hand, its historical situatedness, its subjective meaning, or its social significance.

Rather than the silence produced by the self-segregating smugness of identity politics—with its inverted reinscription of stereotypes—the character of curriculum studies is communicative, committed to dialogical encounter across difference. In what James Carey (1992, 18) calls a “ritual view,” communication becomes less a transmission of messages, an “act of imparting information,” as it is the “representation of shared beliefs.” Such communication is associated with concepts of “sharing,” “participation,” “association,” “fellowship,” and “the possession of a common faith,”³⁴ as it recalls the etymological roots of

the terms “commonness,” “communion,” “community,” and “communication” (Carey 1992, 18). Rather than “the extension of messages across geography for the purpose of control,” Carey (1992, 18) continues, this “archetypal” conception of communication is as “the sacred ceremony that draws persons together in fellowship and commonality.” Communication, then, is an ongoing social ceremony aspiring to shared understanding while engaging difference and protecting dissent. It contributes to the creation of community.³⁵

Not every classroom matches that description nor should it. There is no formula for “what works,” nor should there be. If there is to be communication characterized by the concepts listed above, the forms it will take will differ, even among the same participants on different days on different topics. The vitality of conversation depends in part on its momentariness, how it communicates what it felt or heard or remembered and in ways aligned with the texts and talks that have (re)structured the class thus far. Certain forms of talk—hate speech, for instance—are excluded from classroom conversation. An ongoing aspiration to authenticity is mediated by commitments to civility, personified in individual teachers who regulate—at the beginning of the year and on any particular day—what the range of possible expression can be. Not only is the character of conversation shaped so individually, so should be, I suggest, the syllabi.

While I no longer oppose governmental curriculum guidelines—they are preferable to contentless curriculum organized around skill-based standardized tests—I insist on institutional support for teachers’ academic freedom to teach the material that teachers deem appropriate and in the manner suitable to that material and to those studying it, these judgments to be made by individual teachers, if in consultation with colleagues and others (including colleagues at the university) and with students themselves. From large and heterogeneous to small and specialized schools emphasizing curricular themes and serving specific populations, schools’ organizational structures ought to be as malleable as teachers and students request them to be. As I show in chapter 5, emphasizing organizational structures over intellectual content risks undermining the vitality of the curriculum, even when reorganization is undertaken in the name of curricular reconstruction.³⁶

While democracy depends on citizens and other residents capable of dialogical encounter with the difference they personify, experience, and express, demanding such encounter by forcing students from all backgrounds to enroll in the same classes is not only politically ill-advised in a democracy but also, in practical terms, pedagogically

Sisyphian. Still, some schools could be established—I am endorsing here a model of largely self-governed publicly funded independent schools—that forefront dialogical encounter across social difference, just as others could cultivate the internal differentiation of shared identity, religious or cultural or political.

There can be no Nazi schools, however, just as there can be in a democracy no accommodation for nondemocratic, intolerant religious schools either. The protection of religious freedom is limited to worship, not to be extended to publicly funded instruction where secularity must be—in general, with specific and relative exceptions—institutionalized if democracy is to prevail. In a time of terrorism sometimes stimulated by religious zeal, it is appropriate to err on the side of secularism, even though religious expression, when not politically intemperate, ought not be repressed in public. In a different era—not our own, but one marked by religious quietism rather than politicization—more exclusive and experimental religious schools could be encouraged. This same temporally tempered—avowedly historical—view of what is educationally appropriate obtains in questions of multiculturalism, as becomes evident in chapter 3.

A cosmopolitan curriculum, then, acknowledges difference in efforts to understand reality, as it was, is now, and might be. The verb is crucial, as the promotion of difference, or particularism, is a provincialism. Like education itself, cosmopolitanism is imperfect, as Sharon Todd notes (2009). Like multiculturalism—as Sneja Gunew (2004, 1) explains—cosmopolitanism is also situated, to be invoked when affirmations of difference become politically and educationally appropriate, that is during times of trouble. Cosmopolitanism is no eleventh commandment, no transcendent demand for human holiness. On the contrary, to be cosmopolitan commands contempt for intolerance, as, for instance, Pasolini personified (Pinar 2009, 99–142). And it can be expressed in quiet concern for one’s neighbors, however local and global one’s neighborhood is conceived to be, as in Jane Addams’s case (Pinar 2009, 59–82). Cosmopolitanism occurs, then, in the world, not in some split-sphere of (postmodern) abstraction where self-righteousness gets smuggled in, passing for cultural critique and ethical judgment.

The character of curriculum studies is cosmopolitan, encouraging the ongoing understanding of the world as historical, as always changing and different, and as always unchanging and the same. Allegory conveys this simultaneity of the mythological and the historical, the cultural and the individual, and the abstract and the concrete. When I teach the character of curriculum studies, I am also

communicating what history expresses through me, as my professionalism as an educator laboring in the public interest requires not only disciplinary expertise but also the commitment to communicate that understanding in variable and always-changing social settings. In teaching, then, we are not implementing objectives or preparing students for tests but testifying every day in every way to the human capacity to understand the world and its personification in our subjectivity. Seeking such knowledge is the recurring question of the subject.

