

# **Emilia**

## **Or, Going to City**

**A Fragment**

**By  
Robbie McClintock**

I drafted this manuscript during the second half of 1982 and early 1983, partly in hand-written notes and partly on a Vydec text editor. A typist transcribed the manuscript several years later and I have let it stand with some undecipherable words indicated by question marks, all often with peculiar spelling and a run-on syntax characteristic of a rapidly composed first-draft.

If one reads the document, please remember that it is fragmentary draft written a quarter-century ago, with some extreme assertions that might have been qualified in rewriting. At times a small cast of characters interact, although usually it is just Dad and Emilia. I have put some of the last material at the front, as this gives a better idea of the project as then conceived, but have otherwise left everything in the sequence it was drafted.

Early in 1983, I realized that email was becoming the favored mode of communication among the computer literate. This made the way I had plotted *Emilia* untenable and I desisted from the project. I had no illusion that I could draft Emilia's side of the correspondence and had framed the project to consist of the collection of Dad's letters, which were to have been found on some lost floppy disks. In a world of email the correspondence would have had to have been two-sided and I did not think it possible to create that.

I believe, however, that the "going to city" project is something still of great interest, one that we can do through StudyPlace, not by imagining the exchanges, but by actually having them. New York as an educative environment is here all around us and there is nothing preventing us from turning the StudyPlace community into a collective 'Dad,' and 'Mom' I must add, for those who want to go to city in interaction with us.

## Editors Foreword

Readers accustomed to working on a word processor will understand my amazement on encountering the letters that compose the body of this book. I started to draft a report, using a new "floppy disc," the magnetic storage device, something like a cassette tape in the form of a phonograph record, that serves as a basic component in storing and retrieving information in word processing. I tried to store some preliminary paragraphs on the new disc, and the word processor controls warned me that the track I was trying to use already had information stored on it. I began to overstore my draft paragraphs, a simple operation, erasing what was there, but I stopped, wondering what could be stored on a supposedly fresh, unused disc, and instead of keeping my sketch paragraphs, I set about investigating what was already there on the unused disc. I found the text of several letters from a father to his daughter, Emilia, letters guiding her on points about her education.

Suddenly I realized that this disc with the letters on it was the first disc I had used from a new box, from several new boxes, that had recently arrived from the suppliers. Quickly, I surveyed the contents of the box I had just opened -- a box holds ten discs, and each disc can store sixty pages of single spaced text. I found that all ten discs were filled with letters from Dad to Emilia, and so to with a second box, a third, and a fourth and a fifth! And a sampling of what Dad had to say showed the letters to be fascinating reading, so fascinating that I immediately set aside the project of my report, and devoted myself to the study of this cache of letters, about a thousand substantial letters, all in all. A complete inventory established that most were to Emilia, a few to others concerned with Emilia's welfare. In studying the letters, I aimed first simply to figure out from the texts who had written them so I could return the discs to the author of the letters. As we will see one can learn much about both "Dad" and Emilia from the letters, but unfortunately one can trace neither Dad's identity from them nor that of Emilia -- it is not even certain from the letters whether she is real or fictitious.

Unable to trace the author from internal evidence, my first goal was thwarted, but now, having read through the entire corpus carefully, I was all the more convinced that the letters should interest a broader reading public -- most anyone involved in any way in higher education, as a student, teacher, or member of the general public. Accordingly, I consulted a publisher. He agreed that at least a selection of the letters, so fortuitously found, should be published with editorial comment that I would supply. We agreed that royalties generated by the book would be held in escrow, for a time, in the hope that the author of the letters might reveal himself and claim the royalties. Accordingly, a Laboratory for Liberal Education has been established to hold copyright to this book and to receive royalties from it, the accrued sum of which will be protected as principal due to the author of the letters. Until someone proves such authorship, income from the accrued royalties will be used, under the direction of the editor of this volume, to support research and experiment relevant to revitalizing liberal education.\*

In studying the letters I was able to establish a definitive sequence for them -- each was dated with the day and month, but no indication of the year; those on each disc were in a temporal

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\* The present volume includes only about one fifth of the entire corpus of letters in the possession of the editor and publisher. Whoever is author of the letters can prove that fact by submitting to the publisher the withheld text or a commentary on it such as could only be written by the author of it. We do not intend to establish the Laboratory for Liberal Education as a permanent foundation, however, and in the event that the author of these letters does not come forward by January 1, 1990 the accrued royalties, up to \$50,000, will become a prize to be awarded to the author of the best work on liberal education submitted to the publisher of this volume by January 1, 1992. Should accrued royalties at the time of that award exceed \$50,000, the remainder will be given as a capital grant to the institution that, in the judgement of the editor and publisher, has done most for liberal education.

sequence; it was relatively easy, from the dates on the first and last letters on each disc, as well as from internal evidence, to put the many discs in their proper sequence. When so ordered, the letters cover a period of close to five years, beginning when Emilia started her last year of high school and ending some four years after she graduated from it. Internal evidence suggests the sequence of letters began most probably in September 1981, although 1980 and 1982 are possibilities. The entire set of letters sets forth an alternative to college education, states the case for it in full and with elan, and guides Emilia through this alternative with detailed advice and explanations. Emilia has not quite finished the program originally planned in the last letter in our possession, in fact she is in the midst of a terrible trauma the outcome of which we simply do not know. The last letter in our possession ends with the last storage space of a disc -- we do not know whether the letters stop because Emilia possibly had a breakdown as a result of an outrage against her or because she died from injuries sustained in that outrage, or whether the letters more happily continued in another box of floppy discs not included with the five fortuitously sent to the editor. For us these matters will remain in suspense until "Dad" or Emilia can be identified.

If published with no editorial commentary, the complete set of letters would fill four substantial volumes. We have decided to start their publication, however, with a selection which we are calling "The Reader's Edition," in which letters are selected and grouped thematically, so that Dad's explanation of the pedagogical principles guiding the higher education he designs for Emilia can be accentuated. This selection consists of something less than one fifth of all the letters, and, in order to establish the thematic groupings, the temporal sequence of the letters is compromised. I considered the possibility of excerpting from the letters and decided against it for two reasons. First, Dad generally wrote rather thematically unified letters, and by excerpting, I would either do violence to the coherence of his thought were I to leave out much in any particular letter, or I would actually manage to shorten each

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discussion very little were I to keep All that pertained to the theme at hand. Second, by excerpting, I would create a deceptive impression of what the letters accomplish. Dad presented through them both a set of principles upon which higher education should be based and a detailed prescription for the pursuit of higher education according to those principles. By presenting whole letters in a selection that puts Dad's reflections upon principles to the fore, I intend the apparently extraneous material to be really very pertinent, for it will continually remind the reader that Dad's actual enterprise prescribed practice as much as it spun theory.

My aim in editing "The Reader's Edition" of these letters has been to consolidate by selection the theory of higher education to be found in the letters while preserving the intimation of practice suggested by the full text of each of the selected letters. In addition, through commentary, in the form of introductory discussions and editor's notes to points in the text, I have tried to provide further information about the educational program that Dad prescribed for Emilia, as well as to put some of Dad's theoretical statements to Emilia into a broader intellectual context.

It is our aim to publish, as soon as feasible, "The Complete, Student's Edition" of the letters. In this edition, planned for five volumes, the temporal sequence will be preserved and the editorial commentary will be based on the assumption that the intended readers are not all-purpose "general readers," but young, prospective students intent on following Emilia's path, intent, in studying the first volume, on considering whether to pursue the educational alternative she considered, and, with the second through fifth volumes using those plans of study as goads and guides to their own efforts to master the higher learning. But now, the matter at hand is not that full edition, but the shorter selection that follows herewith, with the gratitude of us all to Dad, whoever he may be, and to Emilia, whoever she may be.

[Editor's Notes]

Discussion of whether the letters will be subversive of institutionalized college education. Possibly that will to some degree be the case. What do the letters amount to, however? Not so much a perscription to forego college, advising 'going to city' instead. More importantly, the letters present an idealized education, a statement of one person's view of the best possible education.

Importance of this endeavor -- the great predecessors for it in the tradition.

[September 1, 1983]

Dear Emilia,

You know how, on important matters, I prefer to express myself in writing, so this isn't the first long letter you have received, and it won't be the last -- far, far from the last if you decide in favor of a course I am going to propose here most tentatively.

Your senior year starts in a few days -- applying to college, awaiting acceptances, deciding where to go will be your most serious concern during the coming months. The course I am going to propose so tentatively here is, simply, an alternative to all that, an alternative to college, and I am going to propose it now with no special preference, one way or the other, but rather with the suspicion that your considering an alternative seriously now, you will come out ahead either way -- should you decide for college, you will choose one more thoughtfully and study there more productively, and, should you decide on the alternative, you will embark on a potentially significant educational experiment. You don't need to decide between college and the experiment right away, of course -- I'd prefer that you postpone that choice until it is time to choose among the schools that have accepted you. And, need I add, in proposing the alternative with no special preference, in proposing it tentatively, I will nevertheless propose it forcefully, fully, with a robust sense of what it might involve and the reasons for pursuing it.

Now what is this alternative that I have in mind? It would be nice if I could simply say, with the confidence that it would be correctly understood, that I'm proposing instead of your going to college for the next four years, your going to the city. Unfortunately, a lot of people who went to City College, especially in its good old days, say "I went to City," which is something very different from what I have in mind, going to city, not the college, but the metropolitan center, with the conscious intention of spending four years making it your place of higher education. To go to city instead of college -- bluntly put, that's the alternative, but it is one that merits elaboration if you are to consider it soundly, which is what I am most concerned that you do now.

I'm not proposing that you consider postponing college, that you take a job or travel for a while before going to college. Rather I am proposing an alternative to college, and I want you to think about it seriously as an either-or, either going to college, or going to city. Your first reaction, Emilia, may well be to say, "Dad, have you gone nuts? Why should a professor propose anything like that!" Well, it may seem strange at first, but I hope you will see before long that I should be proposing, as a matter for consideration, not because I question the value of higher learning, but on the contrary because I do value it and want to help you find the best way to pursue it. Over the coming months, you, along with a million plus other seniors in highschool, will be considering what college to go to. I hope you will, in addition to that, consider whether education by "going to city" instead.

I've told you what my father said to me when I turned twenty-one -- that the most important thing he could possibly give me was not property or money or anything like that, but rather the opportunity for the best possible education that he could find, for the education that one acquires can't be lost or taken away, and it is through ones education, more than anything else, that one will be thereafter shaping the quality of the life that one lives. And I believe my father was right -- the most important thing that a parent can give a child is the opportunity for an excellent education. And on that, your grandfather did well by me, sparing no expense so that I could go to the very best schools I could get into, and I worked hard at those schools and made good use of the opportunities he provided, for education is a tricky gift to give, since the recipient can't simply receive it passively. One can only give the opportunity; the substance of the matter you must take and make your own -- there's no way around that, Emilia, no matter where you go or what you do.

Now I call up these recollections, my sense of the importance of giving you the best possible educational opportunity, because I want it clear that I'm not proposing in miserly manner



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that you avoid the expensive proposition that going to college has become -- I've set aside enough money to pay for your going to whatever college you decide on. Rather, because I am ready to meet the expense, I suddenly saw the alternative and the question it raises, which you and I need to consider: can you get a better education by spending the time and money that would be spent at an elite college pursuing your higher education on your own in New York City?

Princeton, where I went, now charges about \$7,000 a year tuition, and in addition room and board and other expense(s) probably amount to about \$500 a month for an economical but not stinting student. What I propose is giving you a living stipend, on which you can manage frugally for the next four years in New York, and, in addition, an amount equal to tuition and fees at Princeton each year that you can spend to provide yourself with educational opportunities in the city. That's the dollar and cents of it -- cents don't count for much these days, and I'll speak to the sense of it in latter letters. For now, you know me well enough to realize immediately that what I am proposing will not amount to four years of the cushy life in the Big Apple. Nor do I intend to say, "here kid - - take the money and run." What I propose will be as serious, probably a good deal more so, than the work that will be expected of you at any college. Going to city should be a serious endeavor, and before you decide to pursue it rather than college, I am going to set before you the major responsibilities and requirements I would expect you to agree to meet as your part in the adventure of going to city, along with my sense of the reason for them.

Begin to think over what I'm proposing, Emilia -- to give you four years of leisure, in the best sense of the word, to be spent in New York in the pursuit of your education. If it seems at all interesting to you as an alternative to college, let's explore what it would entail and the reasons for it further.

Love,

Dad

September 4, 1983

Dear Emilia,

You seemed somewhat perplexed, Emilia, about what you would do in the course of going to city instead of going to college. Such perplexity is appropriate, for in going to city there would be no schedule of classes, midterms, finals, grade point averages, labs, organized extracurricular activities, and so on. But I said in my last letter that by going to city I didn't intend that you simply take the money and run. I don't intend to leave you floundering in the City with endless time on your hands. Far from it. Education comes about through disciplined activity and if you decide to go to city, you will find put before you an extensive program of activity that I will expect you to pursue with considerable self-discipline.

True, I spoke of leisure in my last letter, but leisure is not a matter of doing whatever you please. Leisure is not doing nothing, and it is not being without routines or constraints. The idea is possibly to let the city be your place of higher education, but not so in passive spontaneity, a precise phrase whose apparent internal contradiction you will learn, before long, to see through. Leisure is activity that you pursue, not merely because it is a means to some other end, but because it is worth pursuing "for its own sake," is often enough used but without its vivid, proper meaning really grasped, and to put effectively to you the alternative I have in mind, I will need to bring this phrase to life. Let's just note now how it complicates the difficulty I mentioned before -- education in any form is a tricky gift to give for all one can give is the opportunity, not the substance, and this is especially true of the leisure requisite for the type of education we are here considering. Leisure can't be given. With respect to leisure, I can perhaps give you the material conditions needed for it, for you need ultimately to find that opportunity itself within you. I can't say, "here, take it, for it will do this or that for you," for by doing that

I will be taking the leisure out of the activity and converting it into something instrumental. a means to some other end. Leisure is essential to the alternative to college that I have in mind ( to my mind, leisure is essential to going to college, as well, although it is hard to get a sympathetic hearing for that on most campuses, these days, and that, in part, is one of the reasons why the alternative is worth considering). The alternative consists of leisure, and hence, to decide for the alternative I will be describing, you will need, really, to feel that doing what it will be doing something you want to do, not because it will serve you some extrinsic, further purpose -- future employability, serviceability to mankind, or what have you -- but because doing these activities strikes you as a challenge worth pitting yourself against for its own sake. Leisure is such activity, worthwhile in and for itself, and you will have to find the opportunity for such activity in yourself.

In my last letter I also spoke of proposing the alternative of going to city tentatively, as something for which I have no special preference. Tentative -- I don't know whether your best course is to go to college or to city and I am ready to back you whichever way you decide. I think you ought to consider the alternative, not that you ought necessarily to choose one side of it or the other. Yet considering the alternative is not all that easy, for the great weight of inertia and familiarity all favor the side of going to college. In counterbalance to that, I shall unfold and describe the alternative of going to city with all the fullness and vigor I can muster. Thus, as I said, I raise the alternative tentatively, for I am not sure which course you should take, but I shall not be tentative in raising the alternative, namely going to city, which I believe has much to be said about it and for it, all of which I shall say as well and powerfully as I can. As Rousseau observed, "if I sometimes adopt an assertive tone, it is not for the sake of making an impression on the reader but for the sake of speaking to him as I think," a statement that can stand here as my own if we change the him to her.

With this said, I can start associating the term "liberal education", not with college,

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where it is presently often uttered however substantively it is hard to find, but with the alternative I am proposing. Really, I have already begun doing this when I recognized that the education to be acquired by going to city is an activity of leisure. The liberal arts were called liberal because they were deemed worthy of study by free men, and a liberal education is an education worthy of acquisition by free persons. Our proclivity to look on life passively persuades us that such a phrase -- "worthy of study by free men" -- means that these were studies that would somehow liberate the men studying them, that would make the men free. That's nonsense. It instrumentalizes the studies and, even worse, conditions the freedom, to hold that somehow, by some alchemy, certain studies will make men free.

You are free, responsible agent, Emilia, that is your human dignity and it can never be taken away from you no matter how terribly the world degrades you, nor can even a single jot be added to it no matter how good fortune may elevate you -- you are free, what studies are worthy of your freedom? The classic answer was those studies you pursue for their own sake, those studies you pursue in the activity of leisure. If that answer leaves you uncomfortable, with a guilty feeling, you will not yet find in yourself, Emilia, the opportunity for a liberal education, and, alas, not alone you will not yet recognize yourself to be a free, responsible agent, one who acts as you act, and not for any further rationalizing reason. A liberal education consists of whatever studies you pursue solely because you, as a free, responsible agent, choose to pursue them. And this proposition says more than it may first appear to say.

To begin with, it suggests that a liberal education can consist of any particular set of studies --its liberality arises by virtue of the reasons the studies are pursued. Such, I believe, accounts for the potential liberality of a liberal education, but that is not the end

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of the matter, for a liberal education must not only be liberal, it must equally be an education. Here is where discipline enters. Going to city should be an education pursued in leisure, for its own sake, freely chosen. But an education freely chosen is something radically different from an education according to your own passing fancy. Were you an athlete in training, one dedicated to your sport for its own sake, you would be freely choosing a most demanding regimen, seeking to have it set and enforced to the point of pain by a coach, and in doing that your freedom would not be imposed upon in the least. You will be doing the same if you choose to go to city for its own sake, and if you choose to do that, Emilia, I shall be the coach, and I shall set a full and rigorous regimen. But, if your reasons are right, that fulness and rigor will not impose upon you, for when you pursue your education because you choose to do it for its own sake, you pursue it all out, for your commitment to it is unconditioned, not limited by the strength or weakness of your commitment to the extrinsic ends that you may become persuaded an instrumentalized education can be a means of reaching. An education, one in which you will mobilize all your capacities, a full complete education, not in the sense that you will have fully employed your abilities to learn in the course of that education.

In this way, Emilia, should you make the choice, going to city will mean committing yourself for a long while to a full day, daily, of disciplined activity. That's being ready to live life to the hilt, and need I say, Emilia, this readiness to live life to the hilt will be presupposed in what will follow, my fuller setting forth what is to be done while going to city. In doing that, in setting forth what is to be done and why it is to be done, we will find ourselves countering the oft suggested proposition that an education for its own sake can still be very practical, but let's leave all that for future letters.

Love,

Dad

September 9, 1983

Dear Emilia,

In setting forth the program of going to city, I'm going to try to avoid recommending that you make use of institutions of higher education, standard ones or non-standard ones, so far as possible. Going to city does not mean taking a lot of continuing ed courses at NYU or the New School or anywhere else, or working part-time while attending Columbia's school of general studies. My reason for wanting you to avoid all this, in part, is simply that I don't want to bring through the back door what I seem to exclude formally, thus creating a merely apparent alternative to college. A more important reason, however, has to do with the underlying suspicion I have that leads me to recommend your considering the alternative to begin with -- colleges may have begun to atrophy in a fundamental way and we may be at an early stage in the development of the historical alternative to college, a major variant of which will be "going to city, not a further stage in the evolution of colleges, but a different, a sharply different, way to acquire a higher education."

I'll be arguing that undergraduate education has become decadent. No its not decadent to go to college, and most every other college still has wonderful teachers to be encountered, but college programs seem woefully flaccid. A really powerful educational program cannot function, no matter how artful, without making major demands on its students, and colleges have never done this well -- originally having been genteel institutions, they have never had an ethos of making all-out demands on the cultural capacities of their students. Recently, the chronic, financial weaknesses of present-day colleges, combined with their unresponsive governance structures, which too often promote to power men and women who lack pedagogical conviction, however great their administrative expertise may be, diminishes even further the presumption of cultural achievement by the student that is assumed in the design of college programs. When people who have never put all-out intellectual demands upon themselves control the institutions, they cannot manage those institutions so that all-out intellectual demands

are consistently put upon students. The decadence of colleges results because the people in putative control increasingly lack substantive command of that which is the *raison d'etre* of higher education, and lacking substantive command of what they supposedly do, they cannot help creating institutions that are mere appearances. This decadence has existed for some time, but little happened on account of it, for technically no alternative existed. What is changing now is the rise of real alternatives, among them going to city.

Exactly why I think real alternatives to colleges are now coming into being, Emilia, will become clear slowly as our vision of going to city unfolds. We should not, of course, expect to find that the alternative consists entirely of different accomplishments: a higher education is a higher education. Going to city is an alternative, not in the sense that it does something entirely different than going to college does, but in that it does the same thing in a very different way. Thus it is a little hard to respond to your request that I be more concrete in describing what is special in going to city, for many of the particulars to be done are the same in both.

For instance, I'll state the general features of what I expect you to do should you choose the alternative. In going to city, I would expect you to read a lot, particularly in literature, history, philosophy, and political theory, and from time to time to write reflectively about what you read, aiming to publish those reflections. Further, I would expect you to study systematically certain skills -- languages, mathematics, programming, and so on -- aiming to develop real proficiency with those skills. In addition, and this is important, I would expect you to explore and master New York, growing to know its different sections, returning over and over again to its cultural institutions, observing carefully, imaginatively, its peoples. The last of these is somewhat different from the statement of expectations that might be found in a college catalogue, but not that much different. But let's look a bit more deeply for the difference, which may begin to disclose itself if we reflect on how these general features have been phrased.

Such general features are little thin when simply so stated as general features. Actually, the most important feature in them is the "I would expect..." Virtually all colleges function through an elective system -- only the broadest course requirements are set through

distribution requirements and specifications for a major. For the most part, colleges consist of a smorgasborg of courses, and the major differences between college and going to city would be the absence of the elective system in the latter, the substitution for the smorgasborg of a carefully prescribed program of study to be pursued while going to city, I would expect to carry this "I would expect" down to much more detailed specifics. In going to city, you would follow a prescribed course of study, one in which you would have to make numerous real decisions, but one in which the basic choices about what you will study, when and how, will be made by me.

To choose to go to city is to choose to study a prescribed curriculum. Until recently this alternative has existed only in somewhat quirky colleges like St. John's in Annapolis. To me, going to city has become a real, more significant, alternative because it is becoming increasingly possible for individuals like ourselves to return on our own initiative to the detailed prescription of the whole curriculum. Alternatives to college are coming into being at this time because technologies are becoming available by which curricula can be prescribed and delivered without relying on the institutional resources of college and universities. Books have been around for a long time, and these will be among our mainstays. So has the city. But certain other things are relatively new -- the personal computer, video disks, certain testing programs -- all of which greatly facilitates the chances that you can go all-out intellectually while going it alone. My job in the challenge of going to city will be to prescribe what, on the basis of my experience and study, seems to be the fullest, most demanding program of higher education I can and to explain to you the reasons for acquiring it and the means for doing so. Your job will be to execute that plan of study, to exercise your capacities to the full in the work set out for you. such a course is a real alternative to college if the means for so pursuing the higher learning independently are indeed available to individuals such as us, and I strongly suspect they have become so and will try to demonstrate that they have in further letters.

Love,



**Dad**

[Emilia letters]

What it means to go all-out intellectually

The importance of the Socratic question in Protagoras

The meaning of a practical curriculum in comparison to an elective system -- I will speak in detail about books that you shall read, not merely establish guidelines according to which you may select whatever courses you wish to take

The loneliness of the education to be prescribed

[10/09/82]

Dear John and Friends:

Don't you think you are a bit tendentious with Boyer and Hechinger? After all, they do conclude with something like a statement of what the higher learning is, namely the effort "to develop within each student the capacity to judge wisely in the matters of life and conduct." (p. 60) What is wrong with such a statement? Also, tell us a bit more what you have in mind with your intention to have one of us oversee Emilia's higher education. The whole notion strikes me as preposterously paternalistic.

Yours,

Anna

Dear Anna and Friends:

Like Thrasymachus, Boyer and Hachinger finally do state what the higher learning may be, developing the capacity to judge wisely in life and conduct. That is, however, rather like the bald statement, justice is the interest of the stronger, only a bit less shocking. In both cases the formula needs to be subjected to critical elucidation. Actually I grant Boyer and Hechinger too much in likening their statement to that of Thrasymachus; it is more like the statement by cephalus, justice is helping one's friends and harming one's enemies, a not-very-objectionable formula to which most people will superficially assent but which becomes patently untenable when subjected to scrutiny.

Such a definition of higher education is really tautological -- by the education that is "higher," we mean the education that develops the capacity to judge wisely in life and conduct. To go beyond that definitional stipulation, we need to set forth in some detail the program of education that we hold will best develop the student's capacity to judge wisely and to give over reasons for advancing such a program. I think we can say that the proper translation into Contemporary English of the Socratic question, "Can \_\_\_?\_\_\_ be taught?" is one Boyer and Hachinger inadvertently leave their readers with. "Can judgement be taught?" When I asked "What should we take the higher learning to be?" I was asking as well, "Can judgement be taught and if so, how?" The proper course of study for Emilia will become clear as we examine this and I intend not to be

bound by the ready-made possibilities of this particular time and place.

John

[10/09/82]

Dear John and Friends:

Count me out of your scheme, and take my advice, can the whole thing. You're going to mess Emilia up and dissipate the talent of too many in a futile enterprise.

[Emilia --I

10/19/82]

Part I -- The father starts to put the question.

Dear friends:

I've incited you into this correspondence because I want to put certain questions to you to learn your answers to them. In the light of those answers, I want to chose one of you to oversee my daughter's higher education and to enlist the remainder of you as aids and commentators on that undertaking. For now, however, I want simply to put certain questions to you, beginning with a rather simple question, what should we take the higher learning to be?

This question is more difficult than it may seem. I am of course not asking in complete innocence. I've read a number of college and university catalogues and various reports and statements by sage or repute. Almost invariably these statements about the higher learning, higher education, call it what you will, all err in a surprisingly elementary manner: unable to say what the higher learning is, they describe instead what they believe the higher learning does.

You will, I'm sure, recognize a little piece such as Higher Learning in the Nations Service, a Carnegie Foundation essay by Ernest L. Boyer and Fred M. Hechinger, as a typical example of this endemic error. This essay merits some attention because it shows how seductive the error has become, for the authors begin by recognizing, by almost recognizing at least, the problem that here concerns us. They observe, page 6, that "it must be candidly acknowledged that higher education itself, like much of the rest of society, seems to have lost confidence in its own purpose and goals."

To renew confidence in its own purposes and goals, those engaged in the higher learning need to make clear what the activity, the higher learning, higher education, the university, is. Explain what it is and its purposes and goals will be clear, but Boyer and Hechinger, and countless other commentators, essay no such explanation. Instead, the immediately incant pieties about what the higher learning has accomplished and can accomplish if all will fall in behind the banner herewith waved before the world. The higher learning Boyer and Hechinger suggest, accomplishes service to the nation in a two-fold manner, directly by developing and disseminating the knowledge needed to attain "the national agenda" and indirectly by acting "as conscience and critic of society". (p.20) The problem for these authors comes down to deciding what the

higher learning needs now to do so that it can further extend this two-fold service to society.

It never ceases to amaze me how putatively educated persons can write with such inattention to their own learning. Surely educators like Boyer and Hachinger have read the elementary Socratic dialogues and surely such educators followed there hoe Socrates stipulated that describing the benefits potentially derived from a human activity in no way suffices to define the nature of that activity. Yet when it comes time to seek the purposes and goals proper to the higher learning, educators like Boyer and Hachinger immediately jettison their own education, drop the question they raise, and substitute for it Sophistic praise of the benefits that the higher learning has and may accomplish.

So, with the question I put -- what should we take the higher learning to be? -- let me lay down at the outset that I want no one to play Protagonists for me or my daughter. When we inquire into what the higher learning is we do not inquire into what due attention to it will accomplish, for that latter query assumes that we all know and agree on what the higher learning is. I am going to slink neither effort nor expense in providing for my daughter's higher education. Can any of you tell me what it is that I am thus seeking for my daughter?

Does participation in public life conduce to mediocrity?

Plato considered long ago whether the philosophers could be true to truth and be active in the life of the polity. This doubt persists throughout the history of the West and the urge for the thoughtful is always strong to withdraw from worldly concerns and to devote one's energies to enduring, significant matters of the spirit. Now Plato's doubt arose only in part because of the disaster that befell Socrates. At its most extreme, the doubt questions whether the life of the polity can tolerate the philosopher taking an active part in it. But, and this is far more serious, especially under conditions such as ours, can the life of the philosopher tolerate his taking an active part in the polity?

Does participation in public life conduce to mediocrity? to indiscriminate mindlessness? We never question whether power is the purview of elites. Rather regularly you will encounter in commentary one of the pompous profundities of journalistic sycophants -- "the office brings out the best in the man". But does it? What has the man had to submit himself to in order to get the office?

[Invitational Letters]

One must create one's own alternative to corrupted current practice.

Note, Emilia, a passing observation by M.L.  
W. Laistner in his little book on Christianity and Pagan Culture in the Later Roman Empire. He speaks of Quintilian, the Roman educationist -- "thus, while paying homage to a vanished ideal, he shows unmistakably that the commonly accepted practice of his day was different." (p. 20) This is the weakness of most current discussions of liberal education -- the homage they pay to vanished ideals shows that current practice is different and for this reason it is essential to follow one's own program, to educate oneself.



[Invitation Letters]

See Leo Strauss, "Liberal Education and Responsibility,"  
Liberalism Ancient and Modern esp. p. 23, on the  
danger of flacid standards in higher education

The education to be set before Emilia is one that goes all out to open as much as possible to fruitful study, sparing no expense or effort. Such an education, on the level of the public, could be delivered to only a very, very few, and only a small part of those to whom it was delivered could \_\_\_?\_\_\_ it, but that does not change the fact that such an education is not necessarily elitist. Educators who do not keep before themselves and their students the very highest standards of achievement shortchange everyone by purveying mediocrity. Strictly speaking the only educational practices that cannot properly be stigmatized as elitist are those in which all people succeed equally and completely. For practical purpose, questions of "democratic education" can only be questions about how the cultivation of elites can best conduce to an effective democratic politics. There needs to be more pursuit of an all-out education.

[Emilia

10/23/82]

The failure to create worthy audiences.

Develop in Emilia a critique of the American University for its failure to sufficiently concentrate the proper audiences for serious thinking. There are too many institutions with the result that there is no sense of arrival and occasion, and equally no really effective critical pressure. If everyone who is someone in a broad field has to be at one or another of a few places, it is telling where they prove to be and where they prove not to be, and the thinker who can be relatively sure of how to find his or her audience will maintain the vigor of effort better.

[Emilia

12/06/82]

Movement through program with series of significant choices have to be made -- these are the equivalent of research assignments. Their rationale will be fully explained. Emilia will be allowed to research the issue as carefully as she would wish and she can open one, close one, mark two for probable return, and two for probable closing.

Apprenticeship and travels -- Placing one's education.

How can the choices be programmed to be for real?

Sequence of questions must be answered correctly in order to get code that will enable return to earlier turning point.

Multiple level work builds up.

The questions will vary according to the user of the program -- name and birthdates set up a code, pre-selecting questions from a menu with the result that each user will have a unique combination of questions.

Maximum capacity small disks -- how to handle the transition from one disk to the next?

At the end of one disk a code will be given that will activate the next sequenced disk, but not the others.

Sequences: Program that will read onto disks screen -- feeds so that the user is forced to pick-up again approximately where he or she left off.

Think through how to build towards a path parting and how to inform the choice at the parting. Also how it is to be programmed.

---  
World Literature  
English Literature  
American Literature

---  
Expository Literature

---  
The Anthology of Art  
The Anthology of Music  
The Anthology of Science

---  
philosophy  
Political Thought  
Economic Thought  
Social Thought

---  
Anthology of French Literature -- in French  
Anthology of German Literature -- in German  
---

Storage and distribution --> approaching 0

Why will people write?

How will people write?

What will people write?

What is writing -- a more generic activity than the superficial sense of what it is.

How can a curriculum be devised for coming conditions

A wage book for computer culture

Laboratory for Liberal Education

The availability of intellectual resources -- the electronic library

The development of an electronic curriculum.

"Ceci Tuera Cela" -- electronics and architecture the end of the campus

Emilia, or Liberal Education The Reader's Edition

Editor's Foreword

Part One Preliminaries

- 1) Putting the alternative
- 2) Making the choice
- 3) Setting up

Part Two Fundamentals

- 4) Pedagogical principles the Bildungsroman
- 5) Urban Orientation
- 6) Thinkers in history
- 7) Economic assignments
- 8) Contemporary criticism
- 9) Scientific reflection
- 10) Art and the city

Part Three Dramas

- 11) Loneliness
- 12) A summer with the ancients
- 13) Medieval and early modern itineraries
- 14) Enlightenment and revolution
- 15) The new face of Europe
- 16) Coping with chaos

## Invitational Letters

Why is it important to go all out in your higher education, Emilia? Particularly, why is it important for you as a woman to go all out? You will be seventeen -- the pace, the discipline, the trajectory that you set for yourself over the next four, five or so years, will very probably shape, limit, characterize, and empower the life you lead for the next sixty years, plus or minus. If you cannot go all out now, if you cannot sustain great demands from yourself now, will you be able to generate the will to excel later? There is a terrible waste that the woman's movement has not yet eradicated -- far too few people, and especially far, far too few women ever learn to push themselves to the limit of their capacity. There is nothing ontological in this condition; as men and women we all mature in a culture committed to a codling comfort. Within that culture a larger proportion of men, owing to various rituals of masculinity, will happen to test their limits through sport and competition. Become what you are.

## Curriculum ???????????

In praise of decadence, anger

What, over-all, Emilia, should be the tone of the curriculum you will make your own? It is the tone of New York, that great American exception. And not that of the suburbanized New York, of the very rich, of those who can find New York comfortable and easy. No, the curriculum you should make your own should be the tough New York, the city at its hardest, in its teeming fullness, moving fast, ever pushing people to demanding performance. The tone should be that of New York as a European city, a place where culture is uncompromising.

Avoid American mediocrity, a tone most dominant in the educational institutions. American educators forever falsify culture by denying the dark side of life. Les fleurs de mal.

[Attack the mediocrity of part-time professors, the atmosphere of study where everything is broken into feasible assignments, the example set by philosophers who never take work home on weekends.....]



[2/5/82]

What happened between 1850 and 1950  
Early letter setting the Problem.

I've said a lot about pursuing things for their own sakes, but that doesn't really say much about what you should peruse. By the time it's all done, you will be able to answer diverse questions about diverse people and things, and even more, to pose numerous questions for which you won't have answers ready to hand, although you will have the capacity to pursue those answers without help from anyone else. In its largest sense, however, your considerations will throughout be motivated by a seemingly simple question -- What happened, if anything, of historical significance to Western culture between say 1850 and 1950?

[2/6/82 #2]

Does participation in public life conduce to mediocrity?

Think of the American presidency. What concrete influences of routinized behavior will squeeze toward him on a great ooze of intellectual sludge for his decision. Everything will come at him as banality -- banal prose, banal situations, banal people. Virtually nothing will be genuine.

What happens to people as they take part in public life? Terrible things. But can people risk, for the sake of their personal excellence, not to take part in public life? That does simply leave the structures of power to the yet more banal and everyone suffers the consequences. The basic question: what conditions of participation in public life best conduce to making it effectively educative for those who take part in it and how can those conditions be prompted?

[2/7/82]

Man measures everything

[An important basic theme: The formulation attributed to Protagoras, that man is the measure of all things, should be replaced by an active verb -- men measure everything. The whole object of education, particularly Emilia's education, is to become adept at measuring things.]

[Measuring things inside and outside -- measuring the relationship between qualities --]

[2/08/82]

Emilia, should people really discourage the amount of effort you are putting out? Are they being sound in doing that, or are they somehow venting their resentment at something they secretly wish they had the capacity to do? For instance, do the same people object that young athletes training for the Olympics are wasting their time, putting themselves through useless effort? I doubt it, but a great runner or swimmer must devote themselves to the sport. Why shouldn't you do any less? Or, even more strongly, if getting into top shape to run a race merits total effort, shouldn't getting into top shape for a lifetime of cultural creativity merit at least equal effort, if not far greater effort? What sport have you gone out for? To my mind you are training for the competition to advance the Western tradition another notch forward in history, and you play for team Greater New York, along with a few others, who have all selected themselves for the team and who don't know each other, and who are playing against other teams, people from other potential centers of cultural creativity, and all will play their best -- live work and die-- without knowing whether they have won or lost or even played the game very well, for they will be over-praised and over-scorned by those who are less capable than themselves, and no one can really say who has or has not won the prize, for the prize can be awarded only by posterity, which will single out some thinkers from some generations as worthy of enduring attention, admiring or critical as the occasion may be. This competition is le sport, par excellence, and I hold it worth your while to train all out for participation in it. And I think you train for that competition, at this stage at any rate, by building up your capacity and strength to deal with four questions: what is the Western tradition? What happened to it between roughly 1850 and 1950? What resources do you need to master in order to live a life and work that merits enduring attention in the future of that tradition? How can you situate that life and work from the particular locus into which you were born?

[2/11/82]

Why should you seek in such detail to learn what happened in the Western tradition between 1850 and 1950? Why not simply furnish your mind with reading a few good surveys of the change? Doing what would seem more efficient, to be sure, but it would be less educative. Take the example of travel -- guidebooks well used are useful and one can learn a great deal about far off places without ever venturing outside your study. But traveling solely to look at what the guidebook instructs you to look at becomes tiresome, and vicarious travel through picture books should properly count as a kind of masturbation -- it can temporarily sate a wanderlust, but it does not substitute for actually going and seeing new places. In real travel, you do your own creative work, deciding what to attend to and finding, yes, and sometimes losing, your own way. Your task in pursuit of your education will require you to travel in historical imagination, not simply to know a bit about this period of transition, but to discover the experiences you will have when you take yourself there, intent on getting to know it as well as you possibly can, to understand what was happening there. In pursuing your education you do not seek merely to acquire knowledge; rather you seek to expand your experience you try to experience certain states, diverse conditions, the perplexing, the troubled, the masterful, and all, that other humans have achieved, and since we can't experience everything we try to select those states that we are going to experience as fully as possible so that they provide us with the experience that will allow us to deal well with the challenges of our lives. In order to appropriate to ourselves the experience of others in this way, in this way, we need to acquire knowledge, not because it stands as the end of education, but because it serves as a means to experience. Again take travel as an example -- you can learn a lot as a mute tourist, one unable to converse in the language of the land. But without knowledge of that language, much that will be happening around you you will be unable to experience. for you lack the knowledge necessary for it to be accessible. In trying to understand what happened between 1850 and 1950, you will be trying to experience great events of immense complexity -- you will need to acquire much knowledge to make these events accessible to you, but the knowledge is not the goal; it is merely the threshold; the experience of this watershed is your goal, for such experience will thereafter become a great watershed for you in collecting the potentialities of your life.

{Here is the difference between the humane student who goes all out and the grind -- the latter seeks knowledge as an end; the former knows that fullness of experience can be won only through a fully active fully disciplined life.}

[2/12/82]

In asking what happened between 1850 and 1950, Emilia, we refrain, however much the appearance may suggest the opposite, from intending to generate a thorough-going history of this period of great transition. I shall prescribe a full, very full, program of study, that will occupy all your energy for four years, taking further a part of your time in the year before, and undoubtedly spilling out into the years following that four year block. You can read and consider a lot in that time and not a few decent histories have been researched and written in such a period. But you will try, during those four years of solid work, to master something less than the history of the period, but then again to master something more than the mere history of the period.

Destructive consequences for the quality of the education have followed from the professionalization of scholarship. You should understand this situation at the outset -- even should you go to college, such understanding will help you develop remedial strategies. What consequences have I in mind? Professionalized scholars create a pedantic curriculum -- the problem amounts simply to that. Back when the elective system spread through higher education, the innovators spouted a mass of cant about how knowledge was expanding, a giant puff-ball filling full of hot air. So expanded, the corpus of higher learning could not be contained longer within a common curricular synthesis and the choice between the integral fragments of the various specialties had to be left to the aspiring student, who would elect this or that domain of professionalized study as his specialty, unable to sample both at once with intellectual profit. Pedantry characterizes a curriculum of elective courses in a radical sense -- no sovereign sense of significance rules the whole.

A curriculum designed to make available all possible domains of professional scholarship will differ fundamentally from a curriculum designed to confront a student with the most educative possible selection of cultural experiences. Some may cavail at this assertion: What is educative aside from acquiring knowledge, they ask; and what merits the encomium knowledge aside from professional scholarship, they further ask; and hence conclude, the curriculum designed to make all possible domains of professional

[2/12/82 Continued]

scholarship will confront the student with the most educative possible selection of cultural experiences. Such reasoning expresses the prejudice of pedants, nothing more -- the educative entails more than acquiring knowledge. Rather, in pursuit of the educative, one acquires knowledge, not as the end of the process, but as the means to the end, as a means of gaining access to the educative material. Now, Emilia, I will try my best to select for your study those matters most educative in the Western tradition, and I will order them for your study around the question, what happened between 1850 and 1950. In doing this, I will be asking you to think about this question, not in the absolute, as if you or anyone could exhaust all the material, but in the relative perspective of those works and achievements that seem particularly educative in the period. Thus, we might trespass the question -- what happened to the educative resources generated in the West between 1850 and 1950?

I've just been hard on the curricular developments of the very period at issue and I want to qualify my criticism a bit. The old prescribed curriculum embodied a sterile dogmatism. Roughly one prescription concerning the educative was to have sufficed for all, minor variations in patterns of institutionalization notwithstanding. I agree with proponents of the elective system that one single selection of cultural experiences cannot prove the most educative possible for all -- humans vary infinitely within the species and so too must their educations. I'm not going to try to select for everyone, Emilia, just for you, and I aim to explain my selection to you, not to the world. Properly speaking, a prescribed curriculum ought not to become a patterned curriculum, for one encounters the important matter in it, not on institutionalizing what it prescribes, but in criticizing and perfecting the reasons why it prescribes what it does. Prescribed curricula, when continually rethought with new circumstances and persons in mind, drive a reasoned debate in the cultural life of the tradition about what works well as the educative and why. Without this debate a tradition will lose its pedagogical convictions -- you and I, Emilia, need to do our small part to renew that debate, to challenge the pedagogy of pedantry that dominates virtually all institutions of higher education.



[2/12/82]

In putting the basic question to Emilia, the question what happened to Western man between 1850 and 1950, Dad needs to show that entertaining the question in any real sense means proceeding while knowing that one does not know the answer. So much of "education" consists in a deadening substitution of answers, on slightly greater levels of complexity, for questions that one never feels as real. Unless the question becomes one's own question, the answer, simple or complex, has no value. Philosophy begins in wonder....

[2/14/82]

## The danger of intellectual boredom

Careful, Emilia, eschew "intellectual boredom," one of the great scourges of intelligence. What do I mean by intellectual boredom? Simply that superficial taste for the extreme, for the ever-new, for the shock without purpose, a superficial taste that vitiates the power to create. Intellectual boredom afflicts the poseur who would affect a cultural reputation without the willingness to work for real cultural worth. Such a person, bored by real intellect, will not take the trouble to discriminate between deservedly well-known greatness and over-worked mediocrity and dismiss both with a blase shrug. In most cases, intellectual boredom results in undernourished accomplishments, for the person suffering from this cannot form his or her powers by absorbing the real resources that would be available were the boredom not so blinding.

Unfortunately, intellectual boredom presents a seductive danger, for the intellectually bored usually gravitate to the most difficult standards -- they appear to possess the very virtue opposed to their veritable vice, the virtue of discriminating sophistication. But their attachment to the most obscure and difficult forms disguises their indiscriminate sloth, or rather, it seems to legitimize it -- who can expect the master of the esoteric to discriminate soundly across the whole range of excellent achievement? The truly esoteric engenders cultic followers, that we grant, but the intellectually bored will engender the seemingly esoteric so that they can become, without further bother, its cultic followers, and when they flag in following one esoteric standard, they will arbitrarily gravitate to another in a never-ending evasion of their basic boredom.

Do you know the basic test, Emilia, for identifying the intellectually Bored? Look all celebrities in the eye and estimate their intelligence and alertness for yourself. Listen to what they say and judge directly of its substance. You can rely on no automatic mechanisms to make evaluations for you. "How bourgeoisie!" the bored will say. "The truly talented wouldn't need such advice, which sounds like Ben Franklin being ever so tedious." Smile, Emilia, and ask such speakers whether Ben Franklin actually so bored them or whether they might not be incanting a cliché as justification for not bothering to make their own minds up about Franklin, or about most

[2/14/82      Continued]

anyone else for that matter. You'll then be able to discriminate between the evasion of the intellectually bored and the thoughtfulness of those who have considered Franklin and found him wanting, and those latter won't mind the impertinence of your question, for they've asked it too.

[2/17/82]

The need to concentrate on activities  
of intellectual substance

The same constraint that needs to be kept in mind in choosing the objects of one's intellectual attention should also inform the choice of activity that one makes day in, day out. The price and benefit of foregoing power, involvement in the flow of activities. It is the phrase on how power corrupts from the opposite direction. It is not that power corrupts in such a positive sense -- The modes of action that truly educate, that allow one's intellectual capacities to unfold, are not the activities of power. Power corrupts because it does not educate; because it leaves the soul unnourished. Choose activities for their permanent worth to one's life.

Nietzsche -- living life, the quality of life question -- write up notes from class reflection last night.

[2/25/82]

### Setting Up for Going to City

It will be necessary to start working out the economics and logistics of going to city. Do not loose sight of the opportunity to contest the advantages here, building up a permanent possession, a library, intellectual tools, etc., rather than spending most of one's time in consumption, i.e. tuition as consumption.

[3/14/82]

Report the Other Worldly

cf. Abrams. Natural Supernaturalism

We who have grown up in a secular age in which the daily Times has displaced prayer and its Sunday version substitutes for the sabbath services need nevertheless to review our respect for the otherworldly, for the faith that the trials of this world count in the end for nought. We do this with difficulty for the \_\_\_?\_\_\_ of worldly virtue are forever celebrating one another in every way they can -- to be subjected systematically to the celebration of such mediocrity constitutes one of the defining characteristics of living in a secular age. Mediocrity, however, is mediocrity, no matter how important for our own security or welfare its celebrants may claim this or that particular appearance of it to be. And mediocrity kills; it maims; it destroys. For mediocrity consists of power without understanding, comprehension; mediocrity is blind -- the banality of evil; evil as a deficiency of the good. Woe to a people who cannot raise to power the best among them, for then they will have to submit power wielded by the mediocre. The other-worldly will always merit respect for it is that ideal realm where each power is wielded only by those who merit doing so.

The Pedagogical Problem -- Not to be made less than it is at this  
historical juncture

Letter objecting to the trivial book educators put before  
students in planning their programs.

Western culture is in dissolution.

The Pedagogical Problem is to lay the foundation for the  
reconstruction of Western culture -- the need is for something as  
historically pregnant as the rule of St. Benedict.

Goals of personal advancement or socio-economic engineering  
are really trivial -- the real need is to lay a foundation for cultural  
creativity.

For this, mastering of the tools, mastering of the tradition, and  
thorough absorption of modernism are important, especially the last,  
or more precisely, not especially, but in addition the last.

What historical perspective should we put the modernist  
critique into? If there is an indefinitely, further-unfolding, historical  
perspective, then in it the modernist critique can only know the close  
of the post classical, Christian millennia -- our task is to educate the  
founders of the most great historic epoch.

Abstraction as a way of life  
Abstraction expresses a form of living

Note the integral relation between a form of reasoning, choosing, perceiving, etc. and a form of life, of living, as for instance Nietzsche called attention to it. Nietzsche, Ortega, others (Tracey B. Strong's Friedrich Nietzsche...p.45+/-). What changes in late-nineteenth-century life did the originators of abstract painting express in their art? How can we explain the resistance to a new form of painting if we understand it, following Nietzsche, as the expression of a mode of living? -- We explain it by remembering that living takes place, not in our objective world, but in an Umwelt (?), a vital surrounding so many forms of living can coexist with in single human habitats. -- The ecology of education: which forms spread and become dominant; which contract and die out?



[Kandinsky Letters]

Having to enter into the \_\_\_?\_\_\_  
whatever opportunity invites

Intellectual experience is such, Emilia, that one can't always proceed according to the most rational plan. Opportunities must be taken as opportunities arise. Hence, Emilia, even though you have not fully made your commitment to 'go to city', you should not let the *Kandinsky in Munich* exhibit at the Guggenheim slip by you. Use it, instead, as an opportunity to test out what it will be like to go to city.

Kandinsky lived a life you need to try to understand.

## New York City Letter

### The history of NYC in relation to the history of technology

The shell of life changes in the latter half of the 19th century and into the twentieth. Mass produced clothes, mechanized transport, iron and glass building materials, machine power, industry, etc., etc. As Gideon put it, mechanization takes command. One must develop a sense, an understanding of this change. For that the history of New York City -- its architecture, culture, and daily life is important; combining that with a study of the history of technology and the history of popular culture.

Landes. The unbound Prometheus.

## Kandinsky Letters

### Kandinsky in Munich as a link to New York

Compare Kandinsky in Munich to the Morgan Library and the work of Milken, Mead, and White. Question: Why did the move toward abstraction in painting take place in Europe rather than the U.S.? What was the role of art nouveau architecture in N.Y.C. -- very little I think?

Read on NYC architecture, crafts, design, circa 1900

Read on Art Nouveau

Read on the history of the abstract movement

Why were there American patrons to "modern art", to Kandinsky, but not, in a sense, American participation -- ex patriots: T.S. Elliot, ?????????????? James in part --

Question: Is it a sign of having gone beyond the divide that the U.S., that N.Y.C. can become cites of innovation in world culture?

Need for a letter defining culture.

[7/21/82]

### The Intellectual Character of John, the Veblenite

John remembers the remark of Henry Rolfe, Veblen's friend and colleageu at Stanford, likening Veblen to Heine, "like a Heine who was always kindly, never sardonic, yet just and a bit grim." [Quoted by Dorfman, TVAHA, p.276] Inspired by that description the otherwise unliterary John has read Heine Thoroughly and has insightful if idiosyncratic literary views based on his reading of Heine.

Veblen as the economist who denies the validity of mere economic expansion as the norm of economics. The human use and value of economic activity ... the instinct of workmanship.

[7/22/82]

Structural Components of the Work (not exhaustive)

John, the father, the Veblenite, the successful technological entrepreneur -- his views are very intelligent, grounded mainly in Veblen and ideas he came to as a connoisseur of Veblen --

Jack, the uncle, the academic, a wide-ranging student of 19th & 20th European literature and thought.

- a) John and Jack discuss the aims of liberal education
- b) Jack invites Emilia to go to city with comments on the discussion by John to Jack.
- c) Jack directs Emilia's encounter with the fundamentals of Western civilization and of urban culture.
- d) Jack directs Emilia's study of modernism and the cultural enterprise of a new millennium, a new civilization.

[7/30/82]

Veblen's views of the "historical school" in economics bear investigating. See, for instance, his review of Gustav Schmoller's *Über einige Grundfragen der Socialpolitik und der Volkswirtschaftslehre* in *Essays, Reviews and Reports*, pp 471-6. The possible connections between Weber and Veblen should be thought out, also those between Dilthey and Veblen -- by connections of course, I mean something less than direct influences and more commonalities of concern.

Now the John-Jack letters should turn on the question of the proper purpose of education, of Emilia's education. In that, John, the Veblenian, expresses the distaste of conspicuous consumption, but not to argue the rejection of the market, of emulation, etc., but rather to propound an agnostic attitude towards them, so-to-speak. Emilia is to be educated on the premise that her eventual functioning as a consumer is to be a matter of her eventual choice, just as one will now bring up a child with the assumption that his or her eventual functioning as a religious person is to be a matter of his or her mature choice. In doing this with respect to the market, one is doing something very radical, namely, one is asserting indeed that Emilia's status as economic person is entirely optional, further, the sort of status she will accept as economic person, if any, is a matter of her choice. Emulation can continue, but compulsory emulation is obviated by no longer accepting the market, the necessity of participating in pecuniary culture, as a feature of the given, ineluctable human condition.

[8/02/82]

### Not the Origin of Cultures, but Their Character.

In the discussion between John and Jack, the point should be developed that the origins of cultural practices have undoubtedly been manifold. Hence the habitual position of an Un-?????? is not only beyond the reach of possible knowledge, but it is conceptually irrelevant to what really was significant.

Primitive Anthropology shows that human cultures can merge according to numerous generative principles. One can postulate that the generative principle will always trace back to unique, local stimuli. What is significant is not the generative principle which in truth is in the plural and is not reducible to one, but rather the principle of consolidation, the ground on which elements of each particular culture are preserved as that circumscribed particularity merges into a larger system. What needs explanation is not the origin and source, but the secret of the staying-power, the capacity to spread --.

Domination and incorporation; emulation and industry; male and female? ..... Armour propre and amour de soi. The polarity as making possible the dialectical movement -- the question before us is not which pole to stake our all upon, but how to achieve sufficient control of ourselves to bring the force of the dialectic tension under our humane control.

(Read the Dilthey - York letters)

In this sense, Rousseau may have perpetuated the urge to choose one or the other pole.

The problem in controlling the dialectic -- at any particular juncture one side seems to come naturally to one or other temperament necessitating the willed cultivation of the other side exclusively.

[8/8/82]

John, Jack, and Julia should discuss in an extended exchange of letters the prospective education of Emilia. In this, John, as Emilia's father, should mount an extended critique of colleges. Among the points he will make should be the criticism of their governance structure as one that disables the colleges and universities for making educational decisions in any basic sense -- governance of the institutions is in the hands of people who lack the skills needed to make cultural, educational, judgements. The basic question in academic leadership is the question that will inform the exchanges between John, Jack, and Julia -- what is the educative value of different possible courses, of different cultural works that might be studied. Boards of trustees and the chain of responsibility that culminates in them are fundamentally ill adapted to deciding this question. The preliminary exchanges between John, Jack, and Julia will amount to considerations pertinent to this question and the actual pedagogical exchanges between Jack and Emilia will be one operative answer to the effort to determine the educative value of various cultural achievements. John will represent the Veblenian critique of the going system, a critique that will not only attack the irrelevance of that system to the higher learning in the sense of the pursuit of idle curiosity, but also the irrelevance of the system to humane pedagogy in the sense of developing the person's full workmanlike potentialities -- disinterested scholarship based on polytechnic skills, that is the full Veblenian concept of education.



[8/10/82]

One of the themes that will need to be spoken to is the matter of religion and a position of positive agnosticism should be developed. We suffer from a heritage in which the inflation of religious commitment is habitually practiced. Religion is significant for those who believe in the strong sense of the word, for those who define their status as human beings as being Christian, being Jew, being Islamic, or Buddhist, etc. Being religious in this sense means holding consciously to the fundamental beliefs and living with rigor according to the standards that flow from those beliefs. Few of us are in this sense Christian, Jew, Moslem, or what have you. The position that should be put before Emilia is that if she wants to be religious in the real sense of the word, fine -- she should go and do so. Otherwise, she should realize, that she, like most people, is not religious and that she should strive to see through the inflation of the religious denotation -- there are no Christian societies, properly speaking, but groups of Christians within secular societies, etc. Emilia should learn about the cultural heritages associated with the major religions and one should strive for the capacity to draw on all of these cultural heritages in doing what one has to do. but one is no more a Jew in doing that than one is a pagan in quoting Plato; one is no more a Catholic in quoting Aquinas than one is a Zoroastrian in quoting ancient Persian myths, etc.

Emilia needs to learn to ask the question -- what must one believe or hold in order to be a Christian, a Jew, a Moslem, etc. and who believes or holds those tenants?

Such a disinflation of past religions is essential to developing an education that is properly and fully post-modernist, for if modernism is the critique of the exhaustion of the past era, the capacity to move beyond that critique arises only with the disinflation of jejune characteristics -- religious creativity becomes a possibility only as sterile religions are left behind.

Another aspect of the matter is to distinguish between religions and the religious, understanding the former as systematized bodies of belief and the latter as a general sensibility. The religious may be an important, enduring feature of life, but it can be rediscovered as such only after the disinflation of religions as set forth above.

[8/13/82]

In developing the rationale for Emilia's study, I need to distinguish between the study of history for the sake of informing policy and the study of the historical works of man for the sake of informing one's potential as a human being -- the difference between formed character and possessed knowledge. One problem will be how to avoid accusations that in doing this one is merely dusting off the German tradition of Bildung (for we all know what disabilities that tradition brings with it!). Probably the best way to deal with that is to take it on directly, to argue that Bildung is a good basis of education of the person, the best such basis, provided that the political content communicated in the process is not as passive as the political content of classical German Bildung is reputed to have been. Die Entstehung des Deutschen Bildungswesens needs to be read along with Krieger, etc.

This is a theme and task to be thought about while reading Krieger, etc. How do I distinguish Emilia's undertaking from that of classical German Bildung? One way of doing that, an important way, is to recognize that Bildung pursued primarily in English is not classically German, however effectively it may be Bildung. The role of Rousseau, the role of the classical, and the cosmopolitan problem need all to be in the forefront.

[8/15/82]

## On the Difficulty of Producing Social Change through Education

Have you ever noticed how professional craftsmen seem to do things the slow way, or a way that appears to be slow -- they deliberately measure something and make all the other requisite preparations before doing the decisive operation, cutting the wood or whatever it is they are going to do. The reason for this is not that they are slow or unadventurous or what have you; it is simply that they are experienced in their craft and know that the decisive operation is decisive and must therefore be done correctly at the risk of decisively botching the job. Emilia should learn this sense of emphasis, this willingness to take sufficient care to do the decisive thing correctly.

Unfortunately, educators do not attend well enough to this sense of the decisive. The proclivity to ignore it is what vitiates most concepts of reform through the reform of education. In the design of a curriculum and educational program, the stuff of the program usually has the same incremental weight as any other part of the stuff -- lesson one, lesson two, lesson ..... Selection of the decisive operations is not made and the proper preparations for those decisive operations is not therefore taken. In the course of a person's education, what character, what outlook on life, what pattern of fundamental valuations, are they to develop? What concept of the good life characterizes the education they are undertaking and how is the decisive operation, their conversion to that concept of the good life, to be prepared. Most educational theory is amateurish in that too little attention is paid to properly preparing this decisive operation.

This issue should be examined fundamentally in setting out the principles upon which Emilia is to be educated, and her education should exemplify the taking care for such preparatory work.

## Themes of Liberal Education

### The Critique of Wealth

Going to college, Emilia, constitutes one of the great extravagances of the wealthy. This may seem rather peculiar, but however peculiar, it is true all the same. College and universities represent vast endowments and the state supported institutions are very substantial appropriations of public funds. The function of these institutions, of this vast appropriation of wealth, is basically to form the intellect and taste of the children of the wealthy and the whole endeavor is extravagant, outrageously extravagant because the process is organized to cost far more than it needs to cost in order to fulfill the function well and it performs the function far less effectively than alternative ways of doing it would. This extravagance is of no concern to the very rich -- they can afford it. More basically, the extravagance is highly functional for the very rich, for the less rich mindlessly emulate them and misappropriate their more limited resources, channeling them into inefficient endowments that serve their children ineffectively. Learn, Emilia, to understand the moral failure of the apparently excellent. \_\_\_?\_\_\_ (?Veblen) and the critique of American Wealth.

## Themes of Liberal Education

### The Worth of Wealth

*Noblesse oblige!* The worth of wealth is in its power to funnel creative activity. Wealth as investment is worthwhile; wealth as consumption is a destructive waste. Militarism as the culmination of the consumption economy. Societies turn to consumption when their elites suffer from a failure of creative imagination and can find nothing to do with their wealth beyond conspicuous consumption, leading the whole society towards the many forms of wasting wealth.

The problem -- to perceive that wealth misused is the great danger mankind presents to itself, while wealth well used is the basic source of the power by which mankind can humanize itself.

The moral task of liberal education -- to build up the fullest possible understanding of the use and abuse of wealth.

## Themes of Liberal Education

### Epiphanies of the insecurity of the Wealthy as Human Beings

Emilia, have you noticed yet how the rich and powerful belie their human insecurity. Take a minor instance -- The other day I was driving through a small town behind a big Mercedes, wider than ordinary, a well machined body, to the very eye wrought of heavy guaged steel, affixed with all possible appointments. A handsome man drove, still young but with the confident appearance of a very successful person; his wife sat next to him, slim, blond, beautiful. They must must have been nearing their destination and the wife started primping herself before a good sized hand mirror, in silver frame and handle, the sort that suit expensive boudoir sets. The man pulled his car to the curb so his wife, that beautiful animal, could put her face in final order attendant to their entrance. Why should the rich, powerful, and successful be anxious about such trivia? *Je le doute .*

[Kafka Letter]

[1/23/82]

Dear Emilia,

How depressing to contemplate the way a sensitivity so fine as Kafka's can be cruelly mispercieved, suppressed by those who presume to care for him. This is not true, I suppose, of his peers, if Max Brod, can be called his peers. But it is true of his family and his would-be family. I do not understand how Kafka tolerated living so long with his parents, how he persisted in such a mistake with Felice, so incapable in her solid conventionality of nurturing the artist she professed to love. I do not understand this -- but I really say more, for the anger I feel on Kafka's behalf is really anger I feel for myself, at myself, anger over similar lapses have allowed in my own past experience.

Do not, Emilia, please, please do not suffer people who would change you, change what is essentially you. That is the obscenity that Kafka subjected himself to -- it may seem excessive, but it feels time to me to say that the unfeeling inhumanity of Kafka's parents was as terrible, tragic, awful as was the inhumanity of those who perpetrated the holocaust. Do I mean this? Yes -- no, not if we are thinking about the scale of evil, for then, the two matters are simply incommensurate. But yes, yes if we are thinking about the rot of the evil, for both arise from an incapacity to recognize the humanity of the human. In some ways what Kafka experienced was worse than what those consumed in the horror of the holocaust experienced, for the incomprehension, the smug, ignorant, denial of what was essential to Kafka as a human person, came, not from the other, but from father, mother, lover.

Why did Kafka submit? Why did the victims of genocide, of other massed terrors, not desperately rebel? Why did I ??????? live for too long with someone who could not care for what I am? Emilia, learn from our mistakes, from our perplexities, incapacities from who-knows-precisely-what, so that you will not have to ask someday such questions of yourself, or have them asked with shaking head on your behalf.

The difficulty of "being literature"

A letter, centered on Kafka, about the difficulty people have accepting the possible public reality of their calling, for example, Kafka's inability to communicate to others his sense of his being as literature. This situation presents a significant problem -- was the bottling up of the reality of Kafka's life for himself as literature essential to that life, to that literature? Might Kafka have been able to write just as well as he did without the degree of torment he had to suffer? Or was it necessary for Kafka to be the writer that he was for him to feel the torments, the loneliness, that he felt? This is a question pertinent not only to Kafka.

Diaries I 298-300

Letters to Felice 308 + much else

Why was literature so difficult a being for Kafka? Why is that which one is yet that which one finds it impossible to be -- this situation so difficult? It arises, I think, where the matter to which one is called, in Kafka's case, to create literature, is one to which the honest person cannot make a public claim prospectively. In such a situation, prior to the completion of the calling, prior to achievement of it, the person must submit to a false public presentation of himself. Kafka, despite his early death, was a late bloomer -- he recognized himself to be literature; but he could not define himself in the world as that without gross presumption; hence he had to acquiesce to a false definition of himself. This conflict was necessary given the situation -- that we can grant. The question is whether it is necessary as a course of his being as literature. This is more dubious. The situation arose from his being, not vice versa -- to reverse it is to romanticize suffering.



[Kafka letters]

Emilia should be asked to ponder Kafka's job, his social circle. What sort of position did he have? What was it's status? How did it work? What were the expectations playing upon him? What do we learn from it about class society? What was the anxiety of early 20th century life? etc.

See Letters to Felice 10/23/1912 (p.10), 10/31/1912 (p. 19)

[Kafka letter]

For the first or second Kafka letter -- Emilia

Put the question to Emilia why Kafka had his breakthrough as a writer in September 1912 with the composition of "des Usteil" What was the role of Felice? What was the role of his diary? Did his reading have an effect -- Goethe + Flaubert? Was it a breakthrough -- suddenly the story -- or did Amerika also have a place? What did Kafka's practice of writing dreams down contribute, etc.etc.? Freud? and so on.

See contra Canetti -- 11/1/1912 (p.21) Felice did not release Kafka's writing -- his writing gave him strength to turn to her.

## A letter on Social Class and the Options for Women

\_\_\_?\_\_\_ , in working on Kafka and other writers, to understand the change of options that were affecting women. For instance, note Kafka's sense towards Oltla (Letters to Police, pp. 185-6) that she was still a child even though she was 20 1/2. Yet Felice traveled -- thus the visit to the Brod's at which Kafka met her. And Kafka earlier met Hedwig W. at 19 or so when she was living as a student away from home. Be on the look-out for signs of the change in mobility open to young women and the reasons making that change possible as material for letters on conceiving the reality of alternatives and as basic research for the next bode on the Anxiety of Elites.

See Letters to Felice, P. 240

[Emilia]

The importance of "editing" minimizing the intellectual junk you occupy yourself with, maximizing the special substance with which you feed your \_\_?\_\_. (World?)

See Brod, Kafka, p.41 (From letter to father)

And do not oversimplify -- the world of human culture is a world of complexities.

[Montaigne Letter]

James Olney. Metaphors of Self p.53

"As Montaigne made himself in making his book -- and in revisions remade both together -- so the reader creates and recreates himself (not Montaigne) in his response to the Essays."

~~Woodrow W. Free. A Short History~~

Bruno Kisch. Scales and Weights: A Historical Outline  
Yale University Press. 1976, 318pp.

P. H. Sydenham. Measuring Instruments: Tools of Knowledge  
ISBN 0-906078-19-2 {Prof.M.: I can't be sure if it is really a  
\$61.50 7 or maybe a 4 in the ISBN #}

Britannica  
Weights and Measures  
Measurement - 2 articles  
Instrumentation  
Classification

## Uncle Henry Letters

### Dad's Rousseauism

Do not, Uncle Henry, try to quote Rousseau, knowing my admiration for him, in an effort to sway me from my purpose. Yes Rousseau raised Emile away from the city in the rural simplicity. But Henry, Paris of 1760 differs from New York of 1980; and, more telling yet, the rural communities of the haut-Savoy differ totally from the suburban societies of Scarsdale and the like. If you are going to quote Rousseau to me, you will have to do it with a firmer command of Rousseau than that left in the residue of your freshman humanities course so long ago. The pretentious triviality that beguiles someone like yourself into believing that you can impose your own conventionality on others with smug sophistries passively at hand -- precisely that Rousseau opposed with all his being. He could withdraw to the country; now one must swim in the city.

[John-Jack

Word play]

The Rousseau Key

Dear John,

Jack rues so much his mistake that he wants to make amends.



## The City Chart

Emilia needs to design and keep up a "City Chart", which, along its horizontal axis will be a calendar and along its vertical axis a listing of cultural events in the city.

Exhibitions	a	
	b	also Lectures, Dance
	n	
Theater	a	
	b	These charts need to be designed
	n	and then compiled and special
Concerts	a	effort needs to be made to show
	b	interrelations within cultural
	n	concerns that show up in the
Movies	a	chart --
	b	
	n	
TV Shows	a	36" X 24" frame mark off 12 3"
	b	wide columns; 16) 1 1/2" rows
	n	mark frame 1" X 2 5/8" address
		labels.