"So Open It Hurts": Enabling "Therefore, We Can …" in the Dangerous Secure World of Education

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PROLOGUE

It is dangerous to live in a secure world.

— Teju Cole, *Open City*[1]

Don't be afraid to be confused. Try to remain permanently confused. Anything is possible. Stay open, forever, so open it hurts, and then open up some more, until the day you die, world without end, amen.

— George Saunders, *The Braindead Megaphone*[2]

We have lost the philosophical ground beneath our feet. Cartesian dualism is untenable. Kantian autonomy is discounted. The utilitarian calculus is complicated beyond recognition. Phenomenological access gets only to a socially constructed core. The decentered subject of deconstruction seems wildly out of step with the empirical march of cognitive psychology and neuroscientific research. Concepts are grounded in culture and interaction. Ideas are not good or bad but mine or yours, empowering or dismissive. Human thinking is embodied, evolutionary, universal in its experiential groundedness, preconscious as well as unconscious, metaphoric and imaginative, and emotionally engaged. Yikes! But it does not matter, because nobody listens to us anyway.

And education is not education anymore. It is "learnification"[3] to quote my esteemed predecessor. Tests are trump. Teachers are the least respected — and most reviled and harassed — players in a domain that has been taken over by policy-making youngsters who decidedly don't know what they don't know.

Those youngsters have been fooled into thinking that "intended and imposed ignorance" is a virtue,[4] fooled by those who fund them lavishly and with nefarious intention. "Guerilla pedagogy"[5] seems the only option. And while self-proclaimed educational reformers set about dismantling the school system into something that is not recognizably public, techies with academic credentials are blurring boundaries and hierarchies between reader and author, education and entertainment, container and content until "perspective is more valuable than IQ."[6] The best schoolmaster may be the ignorant one.

Our amygdalas are activated. Uncertainty and unpredictability mark the discourse of the times. We are all always students, locked in the discomfort of learning again and again. This cannot be good for our endocrine systems, can it? Short bursts of adrenaline and cortisol are pleasant, but constant, extended activation is unpleasant, undesirable, and ultimately destructive of the ability to feel and think, to literally "make sense" of experience. All of this excitation is a product of directed attention and desire as much as a function of changing physical and social conditions, and it has been directed and constructed both intentionally and discursively, by those who

would maintain their own privilege by privileging their own understanding and by all — including you and I — who enact and inhabit globalized capitalism. Under these auspices, our excitation is framed as fear, a "wild thing" that comes out to play when the perception of danger calls it.

So what is left to us as philosophers of education facing fear? Just one thing: to enable educators to say, "Therefore, we can …," to encourage them to be open to "permanent confusion" as fiction writer George Saunders espouses, and to act anyway *as well as* to cultivate inaction. This is what is open *to us* as well in the face of life both uncomfortably fixed and discomfortingly fluid. Our thinking and feeling and doing, characteristically philosophical, shifts the possibilities available to us and the possibilities implicit in *others'* thinking and feeling and doing.

In defense of this claim, I offer what might be characterized as a part-postmodern and part-pragmatist practical argument:

1. Life is liquid, changing faster than we can reconstruct the habits of intelligent response that render living manageable. That is, everything is changing.

2. Our living is fixed (that is, made secure) by the very habits that we cannot change because we cannot imagine otherwise. In other words, nothing is changing.

3. The recognition of (1) and (2) together produces a bodily excitation in search of meaning in thought and action.

4. In contemporary consumer culture, this nexus of feeling, thought and act is habituated as fear, a fear of missing out, a fear of falling behind.[7]

5. This so-called "fear" is a token in a narrative that assumes the value of clear thinking and targeted ameliorative action (that is, "fixing"), and discounts the value of confusion and aimless wandering.

6. Clear thinking and targeted action are both useful and dangerous, as are confusion and aimless wandering.

7. Targeted ameliorative action and aimless wandering both require a grounding narrative — or other genre of communication that privileges feeling as well as thinking and doing — in which each makes sense so that educators can stay open to possibility.

8. Philosophers of education have, live, and tell multiple educational stories — and are inventing alternative genres of communication.

9. Therefore, philosophers of education can enable the "We can …" of both ameliorative action and aimless wandering for themselves and for educators.

Note there is no "should" in premise or conclusion in this would-be practical argument, only a "can" made possible by deconstructing the discursive constraints to the openness that makes possible both constructive action and inaction. And note

too that the blank is not ours to fill in for others. Just what follows "we can …" is not our call, unless it is.

My essay will not move sequentially through each premise to a conclusion but will amble a bit, starting with the story of us as philosophers of education.

THE STORY OF US: CRUEL OPTIMISM?

How did you get here? That is, what force(s) moved you to this place and space with these people who identify with philosophy of education? Are you here because, like William James, you are fond of controversy out of liveliness more than belligerence? Are you fascinated, like Jane Addams, by the "revivifying effect of pluralism"? Do you acknowledge educational structures as the site of injustice with W.E.B. DuBois? Do you, like Anna Julia Cooper, recognize the moral poverty of educational practice in a societal context unwilling and unable to recognize the humanity and contribution of all?

Are there any among us who identified "philosopher of education" as a career goal at five or fifteen or even twenty years of age? I suspect not. After all, what rational person would *choose* to be a philosopher of education if she could avoid it? There is not much prestige in the field; there is not a boatload of money to compensate you for your work, and truthfully, there is something a little weird about us.

Consider this characterization in Plato's *Republic*: "People who study philosophy too long become weird, roguish creatures, useless to society."[8] Socrates argues that this is not philosophy's fault, that the fault lay with those who do not know that they need philosophy to make sense out of their worlds, or who do not know that they need to make sense of the world at all. But we philosophers acknowledge our collective weirdness, imagining only that it does not afflict *me*. George Santayana aspired to be "the most normal doctor of philosophy ever created,"[9] not, I think, a very high bar. Judith Butler reports in *Undoing Gender* that at age twelve she wanted to be either a philosopher or a clown. Her ultimate decision, she understood then, would come down to "whether or not she found the world worth philosophizing about, and what the price of seriousness might be." The jury is still out, she suggests, on the answer to that dilemma.[10]

My own concerns were Santayana's, not Butler's. It never really occurred to me that the world was not worth thinking seriously about — or that others did not also think seriously about what the world had to offer. I learned later how alien the disciplined philosopher's stance tends to be to the self-understanding of most people, including my loved ones. I will not call anybody out here, but I am quite sure there are a few of us whose concerns *were* Butler's. Today, on the high side of sixty, I understand her point of view better than I did as a young adult. We are philosophers *and* clowns, and our conscious and unconscious motivations — framed in concepts and dripping in affect — are worth considering.

Deborah Britzman calls each of us to acknowledge that neuroses are played out in the practice of the "impossible profession" that is education. I will not speculate

about the specific childhood experiences of education and miseducation, of philosophy and pseudophilosophizing, that inform the things we say to each other here, to our students, to our colleagues, to the K-12 and community educators with whom we work. Nonetheless, I contend that neurotic content is at least partly determinative of our paths to philosophy of education. What do these motivations, captured in our self-narratives, allow?

Affect theorist Lauren Berlant complicates the issue still further with the intriguing notion of cruel optimism. "When something you desire is an obstacle to your flourishing,"[11] you experience this common paradox. I posit that this is the typical state of most philosophers of education plying our trade in academic positions. We *are* optimistic, if optimism is "a scene of negotiated sustenance that makes life bearable as it presents itself ambivalently, unevenly, incoherently."[12] But our optimism is also cruel in Berlant's sense. We want to be recognized *as* philosophers of education. We pursue that want with an optimism that is also ambition; we secure ourselves in it. Our ambition demands that we publish the requisite (type of) articles and employ identifiable, approved discourses. But, inevitably, we are attached to unachievable fantasies of the good life that is philosophy of education. I am not talking about failed ambitions, about my not being a good enough philosopher of education, but suggesting that the fantasy that *is* philosophy of education is subject to "fraying." And if that is so, what meaning is available to our professional lives? Are our publication demands and discourses getting in the way of the work that called us to become attached to philosophy of education in the first place? Would we be better, more faithful philosophers of education were we not giving papers at the philosophy of education conference? And are there any ways to do philosophy of education that match the fantasy that called us in the first place? We come to the Philosophy of Education Society conference year after year thinking *this time* we will be, and be recognized by whatever audience our fantasy requires, as philosophers of education, and we walk away vaguely dissatisfied. Nothing has changed. That is the cruelty. It is not a cruelty of a failure that can be, even in principal, overridden by success; rather it is the awareness that what has called us is not and cannot be what we thought we were responding to.

The risk of attachment to this calling requires an "intelligence beyond rational calculation" because the "dramas of adjustment" to the contingency of our being philosophers of education evoke affect before understanding, preference before inference, says Berlant.[13] What are we feeling in the face of optimism and ambition, of philosophy's possibilities and impossibilities? How can those feelings find meaning? When the fantasy of philosophy of education frays, affect, thought, and action are all challenged.

So we came here "sideways," we know that we are weird, our neuroses are part of our professional charm, and we are mired in cruel optimism. Even so, we come to Portland, Oregon, with something like a desire for wisdom *and* with thoughtful responsiveness to the educational quotidian. Why? I confess I *feel* understood here, or at least constructively misunderstood. Am I simply hiding in my room, safe within

my room? Am I indulging myself with you, convincing myself that I know something worth knowing? Perhaps, ironically, I am closed to the very reality that animates my professional identity.

In what follows, I explore this possibility. First, I consider the state of the world we inhabit, characterizing it as Zygmunt Bauman does as a world of liquid life and liquid fear in which habits change so fast that there is no background of habituation to anchor a foreground of creativity. Second, I examine *The Life of Pi* for a theory of affect, feeling, and emotion related to fear. Third, I think aloud about how "liquid fear" plays out in present educational practice. Finally I ask, what does all this suggest for the practice of philosophy of education? What are *we* able to do and think and feel, to be, in a professional life that is liquid?

LIQUID LIFE, LIQUID FEAR

It is common to point to 9/11 as the moment of our lost innocence, but 9/11 is not the day it began, just the day we noticed. The "innocence" lost is the illusion of living life fearlessly. Both before 9/11 (think about the Millennium Bug, for instance) and since (mass shootings, major hurricanes, fiscal cliffs, the Mayan Calendar, and even the 2012 election come to mind), world events and the stories we tell about them are framed to highlight a single message: "Be very afraid."

Psychologists, cognitive scientists and neuroscientists, and affect theorists would tell us that we know fear well, far better than almost any other emotion. They tell us that it is one of a handful of basic emotions, that it is a distinctive bodily impulse called forth in threatening circumstances, an affective marker generated automatically in and by the body but not of the mind. Some tell us that fear shows on the face with cross-cultural regularity and identifiability. But none tell us why the focus on fear in this time and place?

Zygmunt Bauman offers a plausible theory in his framing of *Liquid Life*. Says Bauman, the "'liquid modern' is a society in which the conditions under which its members act change faster than it takes the ways of acting to consolidate into habits and routines."[14] The characterizable if not fully predictable process I learned from Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann[15] about the social construction of reality as an undergraduate in the early 1970s — externalization, legitimation, internalization — is spinning faster than we are. Even a whirling dervish is just keeping up with the mundane, never getting ahead into the transcendental; the rest of us are always behind the curve — and it is unsettling. Habits are unreliable; virtues are unstable. "Liquid life is a precarious life, lived under conditions of constant uncertainty."[16]

What is the tail we are chasing? Bauman identifies fears "of being caught napping, of failing to catch up with fast-moving events, of being left behind, of over-looking 'use by' dates, of being saddled with possessions that are no longer desirable, of missing the moment that calls for a change of tack before crossing the point of no return."[17] Obviously, Bauman is talking about more than the well-known stress of change and new beginnings. His point is not a psychological one, but an acute cultural observation: "Liquid life is consuming life. It casts the world and all its animate and inanimate fragments as objects of consumption."[18]

So the social condition of fear adds strength to desire, especially desire for recognition of the self, while the general uncertainty that is liquid life demands constant self-scrutiny, self-critique, and self-censure.[19] Self-recognition is undermined. Ironically, the self's dissatisfaction with itself undercuts possibilities for social amelioration. We have no sense that "we can …." Undemocratic and oppressive structures remain unchanged and unaddressed. The "good society" is dismissed as an ideal.

We withdraw. We trade progress for safety in the face of insecurity and unpredictability or as Bauman limns it, "liquid fear."[20] We stop ourselves from seeking the better if not the good. The sociopolitical argument raging in legislatures throughout the West is not between the risk takers and the risk averse but between the socioeconomic winners who advocate others' "taking risks" (think, for example, of individualized retirement systems and health care) because they personally experience none and the socioeconomic losers who cannot avoid risk because it is everywhere they turn. Those dwindling maybes (what we once called the middle class) are both fearful and puzzled. Do we not live in modern times? Have we not gotten control of nature and ourselves? Are there not answers to some of our questions? Is not the only thing we have to fear fear itself?[21]

But disastrous events, or rather the 24-7 media coverage of these events, disrupt our consciousness on a constant basis, with the one calamity's media coverage lasting just until the next calamity appears on the horizon. (Think about how Sandy Hook shoved Hurricane Sandy out of the spotlight and how the fiscal cliff replaced Sandy Hook.) It is not simply that the news "runs out" but that the quality of the news emerging from these sites becomes largely about the long slow process of rebuilding and rebirth, and that is not the coin of the consumer realm. Instead, life is offered up not in a rhythm of chaos *and order*, of destruction *and construction,* but as a series of punches that come at us from every direction, only rarely punctuated by good news. We are in a defensive posture, looking for the next punch.

Acknowledging the value of Bauman's analysis does not mean that we all feel fearful all the time. This is neither a horror movie nor an apocalyptic tale. In my privilege, I am as secure as one can expect to be; perhaps you are too. But security is illusory. Bauman's liquid fear captures not conscious feeling, but the status and structure of a discursive field of action — and of individuals' consuming-driven activity in reaction. Even when nothing changes, change feels dangerous — to each of us, to all of us.

Our withdrawal marks this state of affairs as fear. The social imaginary *is* flashing red lights *and* we are stopping ourselves automatically in the face of those red lights rather than checking for oncoming traffic. But response and resistance are possible. To inhabit a world where fear is occasional rather than entrenched requires both the revision of the social imaginary and the literal en-courage-ment of individuals. In fact, it requires that the social imaginary be one of encouragement.

There is no master narrative that dissolves uncertainty, that fixes a path to progress. The history of our work makes that clear. So are we relegated to simply

moving deck chairs on the Titanic, recreating disorienting conditions of uncertainty, just different conditions? Yes and no. Yes, there will be conditions of uncertainty. The question is how uncertainty itself is constructed. When we say with the angels of sacred scripture, "Be not afraid," it is shorthand for illuminating the social terrain, not to excise uncertainty but to recast the role of uncertainty (and error, frustration, discomfort and even terror) as a moment in a rhythm of human life lived communally. In the process, we defuse both the philosophical quest for certainty and the psychoanalytic need for power over another.

As philosophers, we have the capacity to deconstruct narrative(s) of a fearful world and rewrite fear as a strategically valuable response for particular agents in particular moments — and not as a social and economic system that enables some to flourish while others bear the weight of their flourishing. On such a framing, fear becomes not a "basic emotion," not a prior-to-inference instinctual reaction to a certain kind of objective condition, but the *post hoc* descriptor of those opportunities for action when (consciously or unconsciously, voluntarily or involuntarily) I *stop myself*, when I decline — or fail — to stay open.

The Life of Pi

To sort this out requires delineating the relationship between affect, feeling, and emotion. My framing of emotion is pragmatic. That is, I use the term "affect" for *involuntary and unnamed* bodily excitation, "feeling" as consciousness of the excitation, and "emotion" as the name (concept) properly placed on the state of excitation once it becomes conscious *as a state felt and also defined by the action state that accompanies it*.

Consider this scene from *The Life of Pi*. You may recall that Pi is marooned in a boat at sea and begins to realize that he is not alone on the boat. In a mid-tale reflection, Pi offers "a word about fear … life's only true opponent." For Pi, fear (as other emotions) is integrally rooted in body *and* mind.

> It begins in your mind, always. One moment you are feeling calm, self-possessed, happy. Then fear, disguised in the garb of mild-mannered doubt, slips into your mind like a spy. Doubt meets disbelief and disbelief tries to push it out. But disbelief is a poorly armed foot soldier. Doubt does away with it with little trouble. You become anxious. Reason comes to do battle for you. You are reassured. Reason is fully equipped with the latest weapons technology. But, to your amazement, despite superior tactics and a number of undeniable victories, reason is laid low. You feel yourself weakening, wavering. Your anxiety becomes dread.[22]

As Pi describes in detail the way fear inhabits the body *and* the body *inhabits* fear, you feel it with him. And when he notes, "Only your eyes work well. They always pay proper attention to fear," you re-live what it is to be hypervigilant. You know how fear, "which is but an impression" triumphs over you.

Pi captures well the interplay of body and mind in thought, feeling and action in this example. Perception (a mind-body duet) recognizes that which (already) has the capacity to cause you to flee or freeze; that "impression" is, as Pi would have it, "your weakest spot." Your bodily reaction to that is *not* under your control. But neither, as Pi points out, is your mental reaction. The mind is slower than the body,

but the response is still automatic. The very act of perceiving sets both physiological and mental processes in motion.

The same perception also stimulates immediate movement, though not action properly construed. Pi was on a boat and could not flee from Richard Parker, but his movements are revealing, as he leans forward for a closer look and then shrinks back, withdraws, as the reality of "Bengal tiger" becomes undeniable.

We have traditionally constructed both thought and action as intentional and controllable. But just as some bodily processes like heart rate are "turned up" by the presence of certain objects or states, so too are switches flipped for the mind and for movement. There *is* affective automaticity that impacts body, mind and movement, but this automaticity is not the whole story about emotion.

Objects, ideas, and states have this switch-flipping capacity because of "past histories of association" as Sara Ahmed[23] expresses it, of lived experience with that object or idea or state. The affective quality and the behavioral disposition associated with that object — through personal experience or cultural interaction — "sticks to" the notion of that object or idea or state as it circulates. Emotion and affect theorists are quite right that there is an automaticity to one's bodily or affective response, and Pi captures that quite well. But appraisal, the judgment that "this is a case of …," is required both to stimulate initial (and involuntary) affect and to identify any emotion as an emotion. It is perceived recognition of an *object as fearful* that prompts bodily excitation, and it is the action taken, not the subjective report of feeling nor the (observable and measurable) bodily changes, that represents the cash value or meaning of emotion.

Pi does not withdraw because he is afraid; Pi *is afraid because he withdraws*. And he withdraws not because of an entity "fear" that resides in him ready to be tapped, but because of his own "past histories of association" in the zoo his family operated. These are "impressions," habits of perception and response. Pi responds in a fitting way to objects *that have been framed in experience* as objects-of-agitation-to-be-avoided. Responding in that way is a habit, just as responding to ice cream with salivation, a smile and a ready spoon is a habit.[24]

When one's world is cast as dangerous, it is perceived as such. Withdrawal becomes a habit and life is protected and secured, but severely limited. Gated communities, armed guards in schools, and balkanized academic departments are the result even when we have some inkling that these "security measures" constrain more than they afford. As Pi notes, "only fear can defeat life."[25] Recall Bauman's point that "societal surrender" becomes the norm in the face of liquid fear. The society that marks its institutions in fear is one that disciplines its citizens to avoid the very possibilities of personal and communal growth. Things must change, but, it seems, nothing can.

Enter "Therefore, we can …." Enabling this response (for students, teachers, researchers, and policymakers) is the role I have claimed for the philosophy of education. The withdrawal that is fear can be useful as the involuntary *but temporary* reaction to the perception of danger *and* as the considered response to actual danger.

But to transform an involuntary response into a chosen one, to redirect energy from withdrawal to the courage of engagement, requires complicating the consciousness of feeling in light of ideas and actual and potential acts and consequences. This is an educational task, part of the task we take on as philosophers of education.

SCHOOLED TO FEAR: THE INSTITUTION THAT PASSES ON/PASSES FOR EDUCATION

The 9/11 of mainstream educational practice in the United States, that is, the moment of lost innocence and the replacement of fear as our *modus operandi*, was that devil's bargain between George W. Bush and Ted Kennedy, No Child Left Behind.[26] The development of doubt into fear, of excitation into withdrawal, was gradual — hitting, district after district, administrator after administrator and teacher after teacher, only when the consequences of the rising test standards began to have an impact locally. But the process, though unimaginably acute in the World Trade Towers' destruction and painfully slow in the NLCB-into-Race to the Top transition, is much the same as that described in the excerpt from *The Life of Pi*. Things have changed rapidly. The expectations for "student performance" go up and the available resources go down. As long-time educators withdraw into a protective crouch or an accommodating two-step, fearless reformers have stepped into the spotlight to transform schooling by the force of their own presence.

But the contradictory story is also compelling. Nothing has changed. Administrators are still observing teachers using instruments that seem to make sense and yet seem somehow beside the point. Teachers are still Lone Rangers, ruling a single classroom, teaching for and to norms and normal kids, talking about "differentiating" while depending on teacher-centered strategies, and determining kids' futures through the assignment of grades that could be predicted by socioeconomic status without spending all that money on schooling. Kids still show up with the same baggage — and resistance — they always carried. We are "tinkering toward utopia"[27] without getting any nearer to it. In fact, we seem to be getting further away from *education* all the time, even, perhaps especially, in those places where reformers have had the most influence. Weirdly, we in the United States are demanding far less of our schools, as we accept test scores as a proxy for educational purposes we will not even talk about.[28]

The liquid fear inscribed into the American system of education is a product of this situation of change and no change. It is not simply that the educational world is changing too quickly to keep up. It is that it is changing and not changing at the same time and "keeping up" just does not make any sense.

What Bauman identifies as the consuming nature of liquid life is traced by David Labaree in his all too aptly titled analysis of the American educational system, *Someone Has to Fail*.[29] Labaree documents the reshaping of the purposes of public schooling in America from civic participation to credentializing. Students and their parents have become consumers of education, now a commodity to be traded rather than a process of welcome into a civic community and into overlapping communities of practice and knowing.

Labaree contends that schools simply cannot solve the social problems we charge them with addressing. The fact that we keep piling on new challenges

suggests a kind of political, social, and institutional insanity. But it also suggests a very canny political strategy on the part of those who seek to preserve privilege under the illusion of equity (as Labaree puts it "providing access *and* advantage, promoting equality *and* inequality").

The chronicle of the past twenty years reported by Steven Brill in *Class Warfare*[30] demonstrates how young, naïve reformers have been co-opted by those with a vested interest in the present contradictions, resulting in a curious political alliance. Bright and talented young men and women, self-titled reformers and self-styled liberals, who do not know "the call to teach"[31] have banded together with corporate and conservative "deep pockets" to save our education system by destroying it. The reformers operate from the assumption that teachers just need to work harder and students just need to be more motivated — in other words, be more like them. The funders are wedded to the goodness of their own view of the world, a view threatened by supposedly liberal teachers, the tolerance for diversity they tout, and the unions they join.

The reformers work like crazy for a couple of years as teachers in public and charter schools, declare success, and move on. They reincarnate — after law school or graduate school — as the CEO of a charter school at twenty-four, or as the state commissioner of education of education at thirty-four. They are the offspring of Wendy Kopp and the Koch Brothers. Michelle Rhee is their best-known daughter. Barack Obama is their adopted son. But nothing is really changing except the profiles of those in charge. The new charter schools look very much like the old public schools with similarly mixed results. Learnification is the order of the day.

The ironic result of all this school reform has been to bring social function into line with school practice rather than to have schools serve social interests. Poverty of educational goals is accompanied by, as Doris Santoro illuminates, the demoralization of education's professionals.[32]

Still, there are inspiring educators laboring in and out of all kinds of schools throughout the world, those who have confronted the very thought of education with intelligence and compassion and who face the task (and their students) with the requisite courage and openness day in and day out. There are many who recognize the ways that their putatively educational institutions discipline them to be something other than an educator, but who resist and remain in place. But so much of their energy goes into a resistance that maintains the structures that discipline them. Too few are able to find joy in their work. In the United States, the Race to the Top is a spectacular example of speculation over investment, of consumption over conservation, of fear over collaborative intelligence, and of schoolyard bullying — of using perceived power to alter the behavior of others for no other purpose than to consolidate one's own power.

There is no seeking after wisdom, no thoughtfulness of purpose. We have withdrawn from the effort to educate. There is only an effort to fix an apparent problem, perhaps because the real problems (unemployment, discrimination, poverty, among others) are intractable. And in the process of "fixing" the (largely)

women and children who are teachers and students, we narrow the problematic in such a way that no solution or resolution has any real impact. It is convenient for politicians but deadly for children in urban and rural areas.[33]

Students whose educational experiences, such as they are, are framed/constrained by all this into a competition for the scarce approval of outsiders are also operating in the face of fear. Sadly, they do not fear *being* stupid, but *looking* stupid. They avoid actually learning what is difficult at the hands of teachers who themselves avoid the subjects that they teach, employ the subject matter like a club to demonstrate their own superiority, or bewitch students with their own superior vocabulary. Students either grub for grades or recognize that the grade game is not one they can win and opt out.

Those students whose fears are rooted in a need to control something or someone in a world out of control bully those they cast as different, lending concrete content to the free-floating anxiety of other students. Students who come as immigrants or with immigrant parents are always afraid that the system will cast them out. Homeless students cannot be cast out, but they are not really in either. Quiet girls are invisible. Active boys are trouble and in trouble. African-American boys are dispatched on the school-to-prison pipeline. Pressured privileged teens commit suicide because they cannot measure up. Everybody has a reason to fear, that is, to withdraw, to close up. Is it any wonder that most students are not "engaged"?

I am not making a claim about what we *should* do, but seeking what we *can* do as educational philosophers facing fear. Where are the openings, the places where we ourselves stay open to narratives and possibilities that are confusing? I wonder about the ways that our presence can make a difference, not to control the outcome, but to enable alternate possibilities for education.

We are called — not by me, but by the work we do, cruelly optimistic as it is — to illuminate the ways we have closed ourselves off, stopped ourselves from thinking and feeling and doing what philosophy of education requires. This is to find our own "Therefore, we can …" so that what we desire does not get in the way of our flourishing as persons who are philosophers of education.

Enabling "Therefore, we can …"

"Be not afraid" is an impossibility in liquid times if what is meant by "being afraid" is some affect (some bodily excitation in the face of change and no change), or some feeling (some conscious awareness of that bodily excitation). I accept that. But the dominant social imaginary that supports "Be very afraid" is destructive of the possibility of our being philosophers (because it is an admonition to put on a habit of withdrawal and closing off) and destructive as well of social action toward a life that is better for all (for the same reason). Consider the affect this recognition prompts. That *cannot* be, for if it is, we cannot be. Here is the opening, the "Therefore, we can …." Telling the story of liquid fear enables the telling of a story of encouragement. And the presence of a story supports alternate habits of perception and action. There are new, or at least other, possibilities. Openness is an alternative to withdrawal.

I hope that I have accomplished two things in what may seem like aimless wandering and both are captured in my opening epigrams: (1) to remind you that while an insecure world is unquestionably dangerous, so is a putatively secure world that prevents enacting our own desires; and (2) to encourage you to stay open in both secure worlds and dangerous ones in order to serve our common purpose and be who our attachments suggest we are. Of course, maybe all I have really done is exemplify the "permanent confusion" that Saunders recommends.

The "you" I am encouraging here is collective as well as individual. I encourage each of us as agents and all of us as members who shape and are shaped by a community of inquiry. The project is education, an education that moves persons and their worlds in tandem.

What might this look like, this movement toward a world that supports social interactions of encouragement? I offer a promissory note in the form of *a set of* familiar exemplars. William James, Jane Addams, W.E.B. DuBois, and Anna Julia Cooper lived in a time no less objectively liquid than ours. They experienced — and expressed — rich emotional lives, lives that included disturbing bodily excitation and complicated feeling. They had reasons to fear, from James's inherited demons, to Addams's dissatisfaction with her status and options as woman, to DuBois's penetrating awareness of his status as Other, to Cooper's clear framing of the intersection of race and gender. But they did not stop themselves. Each led a life that was an example of fearlessness in their willingness to walk toward, rather than away from, that which discomfitted them. Each understood the nexus of feeling, thinking, and acting. Each deconstructed in greater or lesser ways controlling narratives of their time and place.

I do not hold James, Addams, DuBois, and Cooper up as heroic in character, but as *collectively capable* of acting back on a social world that exerted its own discursive and crudely political forces on them and, in some significant measure changing the discourse. We have much to learn — about enacting justice in complex ways, about acting for good with both imagination and humility, and about the courage it requires to stay open to your own demons as well as the "better angels" of the Other — from a close reading of their lives and work and times.

But I also acknowledge that our lived experience is liquid in three way that theirs was not: (1) that advanced capitalism has evolved in such a way that creating the need for products superseded the creation of products that were already needed; (2) that advanced capitalism created the means to create need; and (3) that the brand of capitalism currently dominant, global and corporate, is focused on consumption rather than conservation, on speculation rather than investment. Speculation and consumption both serve to silence fear while inscribing it, to allow us to run away from what Bauman calls the "rubbish heap" to which the "hindmost" have been consigned.[34] To choose investment and conservation would require the courage to attend to and plan for an imagined future. And there are those among us doing just that. Ron Glass's work with the Center for Collaborative Research for an Equitable California is just one example that encouragement is possible in the face of liquid fear in our time.[35]

Like Cooper, Addams, DuBois, and James, Glass and his colleagues are philosophers of education who recognize excitation as signaling opportunities for growth, and who act back with courage rather than fear. That is, they stay open, sometimes so open it hurts. They are moved not simply by bodily affect, but by ideas and options infused with that affect. And they enable others to do the same.

You and I work every day with practitioners and policymakers and researchers who face their own version of liquid fear. Whether it is the contradictory pressure and support of No Child Left Behind, the socioeconomic disparities wrought by unnuanced calls for equity and excellence, the race to educational performance that is miseducative, or the competition for research funds that privileges studies that will not tell us what we need to know, there are reasons for all in education to withdraw from our own desires. But for philosophers, this is not an option. Instead, like the exemplars I have evoked, we take up deconstructive strategies married to pragmatist goals. Cooper and Addams dissected discrimination directed toward themselves and others and answered with both humility and hospitality. DuBois and James articulated their experiences of *zerissenheit* by maintaining the poles of the tensions they felt and expressing these tensions in language that we find useful still. Personally and professionally, these four put the fantasy of philosophy to good use. Perhaps we can do the same.

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1. Teju Cole, *Open City* (New York: Random House, 2011), 200.

2. George Saunders, "The New Mecca," in *The Braindead Megaphone: Essays* (New York: Riverhead Books, 2007), 55.

3. Gert Biesta, *Good Education in an Age of Measurement: Ethics, Politics, Democracy* (Boulder, CO: Paradigm Publishers, 2010).

4. I borrow this phrase from Jennifer Logue who used this language ("intended and imposed ignorance, concerted and well-funded") at the Ohio Valley Philosophy of Education Society Annual Meeting in Dayton, Ohio, September 2012.

5. This is a phrase I heard Lisa Weems use at the Ohio Valley Philosophy of Education Society Annual Meeting, in September 2012, and I am co-opting it here without suggesting that this is her intended meaning.

6. Nicholas Negroponte, "MIT Media Lab is Vital to the Digital Revolution," *Wired.Co.UK,* November 15, 2012.

7. As will become clear further on, I contend this is fear because it is marked by withdrawal — and there is withdrawal because the experience is characterized as fear.

8. Plato, *The Republic,* 487a.

9. Robert D. Richardson, *William James: In the Maelstrom of American Modernism* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2006), 286.

10. Judith Butler, "Can the Other of Philosophy Speak?," *Undoing Gender* (London: Routledge, 2004), 234.

11. Lauren Berlant, *Cruel Optimism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011), 1.

12. Ibid., 14. Berlant uses the term "scene" to indicate not a thing and not exactly an event, but a new genre for conveying affect meaningfully but not cognitively.

13. Ibid., 2.

14. Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Life* (Cambridge, UK: Polity, 2005), 1.

15. Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge* (New York: Anchor Press, 1967).

16. Bauman, *Liquid Life*, 2.

17. While I obviously think there is something quite useful in Bauman's analysis, I have two further reactions. The first is simply that all humans have lived under conditions of uncertainty. That uncertainty is in part linked to the unpredictability of both Mother Nature and Human Nature — and even to those Frankensteins and cyborgs that humans create to establish control. We are not in control, even of ourselves. At the risk of being glib, so what? The second is that this strikes me at least partly as a male malady and Bauman's analysis cries for a feminist critique that I will not stop to offer here, except to say that I sometimes wonder whether the roots of consumer culture can be traced back, as so many things can be, to the simple fact that women know who their children are and men never do (in the absence of DNA tests anyway). Is the desire to possess (one's children) linked to the desire to consume?

18. Bauman, *Liquid Life*, 9. One might legitimately ask whether this is a problem. Can and should we escape consumerism? What is the pay-off of liquid life? Of life as consummable? And for whom? What power relations are inscribed and strengthened in such a discursive regime? One obvious answer is "follow the money." Corporate capitalism persists unbowed and unabashed. (As I write this essay, there is an announcement of a grand settlement with respect to mortgage foreclosures that benefits the banks rather than those who were "robbed" of their homes.) It is beyond the scope of this essay to explore this fully, but I suggest that the pervasive presence of media outlets in daily life, the invasive possibilities of social media, the development of digital tools like the ability to track cookies left after web searchers provide marketers with unprecendent access to and control of individuals as consumers. We are, it seems, consuming even other humans, a fact exemplified in Washington Redskins "consumption" of quarterback Robert Griffin III left competing in a play-off game despite an ACL injury.

19. Bauman, *Liquid Life*, 10–11.

20. I note in passing that the original source of this admonition is not Franklin Roosevelt but Montaigne, at least according to historian Corey Robin. See "Fear Itself," *Chronicle of Higher Education,* August 13, 2004, http://chronicle.com/article/Fear-Itself/20652.

21. Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Fear* (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2006).

22. Yann Martel, *The Life of Pi* (Boston: Harcourt Books, 2001), 161–162.

23. Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (New York: Routledge, 2003).

24. But every actual perception of and encounter with an object of the fear-associated kind results not in the same emotion over and over, but in a unique emotional moment because the circumstances of self and situation are always different and the ultimate action outcome is not determined. John Dewey makes this point in *Human Nature and Conduct* (New York: Henry Holt, 1922).

25. Martel, *Life of Pi*, 161.

26. I would contend that, if we are honest with ourselves, we can trace that moment back to A Nation at Risk in 1981 or even to the National Defense Education Act in 1957. What that suggests for educational policy or for present political reality goes beyond the scope of this essay.

27. The phrase is, of course, David Tyack and Larry Cuban's. See *Tinkering Toward Utopia: A Century of Public School Reform* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997).

28. I have in mind here such purposes as the development of critical and creative thinkers, active and informed citizens, good neighbors, faithful friends, loving partners, collaborative and productive workers, and parents who are not afraid to parent.

29. David Labaree, *Someone Has to Fail* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010).

30. Steven Brill, *Class Warfare* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2011).

31. David Hansen, *The Call to Teach* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1995).

32. Doris A. Santoro, "Good Teaching in Difficult Times: De-moralization in the Pursuit of Good Work," *American Journal of Education* 118, no. 1 (2011): 1–23.

33. There is a similar dynamic at work in the realm of educational research. As in teaching and leadership and policymaking, there are many good people laboring mightily and courageously to understand with compassion and to act with care. And there are those who are reinventing what it means to study educational phenomena (including learning) while acknowledging the fruits of previous efforts. Design

studies, for example, can coexist with, inform, and be informed by experimental and quasi-experimental investigations. But educational researchers are also wading in a liquid terrain in which they must fund their own work or sink into the mud. Or perhaps funding their own work *is* sinking into the mud of researching what is fundable (in the current political environment) rather than investigating what is critical for understanding. *And* there is pressure from within (disciplined by the preferences of government and private funders) to produce "results," to offer justification for this policy or that pedagogical strategy, while also trying to carve out space for — at least rhetorical acknowledgment of — traditional educational concerns.

34. Bauman, *Liquid Fear*, 3.

35. Pia Lindquist Wong and Ronald Glass, *Prioritizing Urban Children, Teachers, and Schools through Professional Development Schools* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2009). See also the website for the University of California Center for Research for an Equitable California at http://ccrec.ucsc.edu.