School Means Leisure,  
So Let’s Employ It.

Economic, political, health, and security challenges of post-industrial societies may find help in old-school humanism.

A. The labor-market crisis intensifies as technology improves [no stopping this]
   - Fewer workers are needed to produce the same level of material goods
   - A corollary crisis is Boredom, nothing to do.
   - Boredom is deadly
   - Leads to depression, statistically shortens life
   - Violence is one response, a danger in ghettos, in refugee camps, etc.
   - School dropout rates are linked -- by dropouts -- to boredom, not poverty.
   - shrinking mental space of populism
§  bored people don’t read; don’t think
§  Maryanne Wolf, *Reader Come Home* . . .
§  impoverishment of perspective
§  rejection of immigrants, sexual preferences, difference in general
   - Another corollary is loss of identity, so long linked to professions
   - Loss of purpose
   - Isolation, without work environment
   - Isolation even with work, when it’s online in virtual space
   - Remedies have been technical, though technology has been the limiting frame
   - Behavioral economics considers existing preferences, not surprise
§  Exceptions may be the rule [Pier Luigi]
§  Swatch and Gehry demonstrate “aggregate beauty” beyond need
   - Creating market desire meets aesthetics
   - Thinking fast and slow targets correct answers, not ‘what if’ speculation
   - Isolation generates production of more apps and robots
   - How should we respond to waning labor markets and waxing socio-emotional dangers?
   - Establish SHOOLS that are intense and unproductive in material terms.
   - We activate a HERITAGE of the ancient academy
§  There no one prepared for a job
§  The pleasure included time-consuming study and debate
§  Acknowledged different approaches and values [e.g. Plato vs. Aristotle]
   - The word school derives from Greek σχολή (scholē), originally meaning "leisure" and also "that in which leisure is employed."
   - Employ leisure is the defining and paradoxical proposal of the ancient elite.
In pleasing and perverse multiplications today, Schools will serve the poor too.  
- This is Hanna Arendt’s defense of the true political life as impractical “vita activa”  
- Not to pacify people, but to activate thought, debate, conflicting perspectives  
- School depends on and builds the skills of sociability:
  § Many points of view  
  § Interpretation, rather than achieving the right answer  
  · The added value of the humanities, beyond art-making  
  · Different from mediation (in design thinking)  
  · Keep options alive simultaneously  
  § Debate / communication  
  § Curiosity  
  - Politics as a taste for the Polis, not wielding of power.  
  o Pleasure in the company of others  

B. Pleasure is vilified by modernity  
- Max Weber worried that we’d be trapped in an “iron cage” of Calvinist duty  
- Contrast with Antonio Gramsci  
  § In spite of pessimism of reason, there is optimism of the will  
  § We can make the revolution through Culture  
  · The social glue of beliefs and relationships  
  · Organic intellectuals ignite change [teachers, priests, journalists]  
  - Neuroscience warning has been read for a century as a Manual for getting trapped  
  - Neuroscience counters with arguments for pleasure as basic to humanity  
  o Stimulates and rewards learning  
  o Improves workplace output  
  o The hidden name for Reward in design thinking  
  o Complex cocktails of countervailing feelings / chemistry  
  § Easy pleasures are not satisfying, but boring  
  o Mix of surprise, effort,  
  § Stimulates reflection  
  · Visceral pleasure leads to cognitive exercise as more pleasure  
  § reinvention of 18th C aesthetics  
  · the difficult sublime is greater than the easy beautiful  
  o Foundation of sociability  
  - But we continue to make decisions that ignore or dismiss pleasure as a distraction  

C. σχολή (scholē), its post-industrial potential  
- Social sculpture/design, in the spirit of Joseph Beuys  
  o Participatory  
  o Ephemeral  
  § E.g. kumbh mela  
  o Always under construction
- Will connect the threads that modernity leaves hanging
  - Fewer paid jobs [so, multiply unpaid intellectual and creative work]
  - Dismissal of pleasure that should drive human life [harness pleasure to thrive]
  - Waning sociability, with technological advances [collaborate on projects]
  - Leisure as an accomplishment threatens security [employ leisure, stay busy]

- Reforms teaching into Facilitation
  - Updates classical dialogue between master and student, one on one
  - Frames collaborations, peer-to-peer learning
    § Trains decentered attention to many participants
    § Develops admiration for each of many participants
    § Multiplies points of view
    § Prefers interpretation to ready-made or most efficient answers
      o Replaces military style rows of students into circles of participants
    § Rows breed authoritarianism
    § Unfair authority generates corruption, violence
      o Correct answers give way to anticipating complexity, delayed consequences

- Pier Luigi’s Culture 3.0, participant as producer and consumer of culture
  - Student is Agent of his/her learning
  - foundation for European Commission’s vision for behavioral change
    o Critics are many
    § A practice in art studios
      o They do more than approve or disapprove
    § They recommend and thereby co-create
      o Trial and error develops “an inner voice”
    § Aesthetics calls this judgment
      · not rationally right or wrong but a new good
      o “weak signs,” harbingers of creativity in design
    § Called “structures of feeling,” in art-speak, see Raymond Williams
      o Performs heritage, that it interprets cultural elements
    § Heritage can be a conservative force if its meaning is pre-established
    § It’s a platform for self and co-creation if meaning is re-interpreted
    § The difference is profoundly political
    § Raymond Williams recognized two meanings for culture:
      · Patrimony and art-making
      · Both are necessary, convergence and divergence

D. Our proposal occupies the 17th tile in the corner of the UN’s Sustainable Goals.
  - We identify the interactive space as Culture
  - It’s where the weave of threads needs to form to connect the other 16 Goals
  - Social relations
Grammar as opposed to isolated elements [ref. to Wittgenstein]

We take a lead from Hanna Arendt,

- She understood Kant’s Third Critique on Aesthetic Judgment as his politics

- Recognize beauty as a surprising cause for delight
- Because the surprise doesn’t fit existing categories, it stimulates doubt
- Doubt drives subjective experience to seek out inter-subjective validation
- Absurd to talk of a personal aesthetic experience
- Aesthetics is always social; the ambition is universal
- Judging levels differences of class, education, gender, etc. democratizes.
- Habermas’s “communicative action” to construct universals starts here

**Pre-Texts, a shape for this new School**

Many educators today share the goal of student-centered learning and strive to promote 21st century skills. These are important and apparently challenging objectives as technology and migrations strain existing educational systems and practices. *Pre-Texts* brings the goals into reach. It is a user-friendly and intuitive protocol that achieves both academic and social development through “acupuncture” prompts and universal participation. With Pre-Texts students hear a complex text read aloud and ask it questions (about vocabulary, concepts, intention, anything). Then they propose activities to tackle understanding, that is to wrestle, attack, and engage the text as raw material for making art. Proposals invite fellow students to co-create a session. This makes 21st century skills (creativity, critical thinking, communication, and collaboration) follow from improvising lessons with a text that students might not have chosen. But they do choose their culturally preferred activities. How else can learning be student centered? Without participatory construction of projects, teachers will continue to impose obligatory curricula and predictable approaches. The co-creation of new approaches to a text through dance, or rap, song, drawing, calligraphy, film, fashion, sculpture, photography, etc. requires and therefore develops a range of skills and capacities.

With a simple prompt: “Use the text to make art,” facilitators achieve educational acupuncture, pressing on academic material to fire the pleasures of creative autonomy. Those pleasures drive literacy, innovation, and citizenship like gears of a holistic system that supports young citizens. The next prompt, “go off on tangents” to bring in material related to the required text, ignites intellectual curiosity along with appreciation for culturally diverse classmates who multiply perspectives and deepen interpretation. Cognitive and emotional learning go together here. The invitation to play with complex texts fuels critical thinking, enjoyment of one’s own particularity, and admiration for others.

See Pre-Texts: Theory of Change

Notes to us:
Pier Luigi and I talked about using this as a 3-member Case for Culture on Dec 4. He will add a page or two on measuring impact towards behavioral change, the kind of change that Humanists hope for but haven’t measured.
Also, Pier Luigi and I talked about using the prototype we’ll develop for Cases for Culture as a tool to follow up from the April 2020 meeting. It would oblige researchers to participate in hybrid projects and generate essays that will have a family resemblance, be readable across fields.
Background/Summary Statement

Students develop as artist-intellectuals through Pre-Texts. They tackle difficult material with the pleasure of autonomy and collaboration. The simple prompt — “Use the text to make art” — produces educational acupuncture to achieve 21st century skills along with academic growth. Cognitive and emotional learning go together here as students propose culturally appealing activities to explore curricular materials.

Inputs (human, material, financial resources available to enact the ToC)
- Required or related text, chosen by teachers
- Basic arts and recycled material
- Teachers and facilitators, trained over 15 hours of PD with Pre-Texts
- Follow-up regular meetings to brainstorm developments
- Capacity builders from Pre-Texts

Activities

Art-Making and Interpretation Activities

Outcomes (short-term: what we expect will be different after Pre-Texts)
- Improved writing skills
- Improved speaking skills
- Improved listening skills
- Improved reading skills
- Improved ability to collaborate
- Improved engagement in learning
- Improved reading comprehension
- Improved multi-tasking
- Appreciation for difference as enrichment
- Improved self-efficacy

Impacts (longer-term)
- Cultural/linguistic sustainability
- Student self-concept as artist/intellectuals

Student Outcomes
- Improved literacy skills
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- Improved listening skills
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Assumptions (environmental factors assumed to exist in order to enact ToC)
- Schools that can provide instructional content
- Teachers/principal' motivation
- Time/compensation for classroom and training teachers