The Function of the Symbol in Education

Klaus Mollenhauer
University of Göttingen

Felix Platter, born in 1536 in Basel, reports in his autobiography that his father Thomas, after a secret medical-anatomical dissection of a corpse, dreamt of having eaten human flesh. Felix was just 10 years old then. In the morning Father Thomas had told his dream, and the event remained fixed so vividly in Felix' memory that 50 years later he could depict it as graphically as if it had just occurred (Platter, 1978). Does this experience have something to do with the role that symbols play in education? What is the symbol? Is it the dissected corpse or the dissecting procedure? Or is the symbol the father's dream? Or is the symbol perhaps the scene that the son imagines as a result of being told the dream story?

There is no denying that the events of both the dream and the memory were meaningful. Not every sign can be considered a symbol even when it is so biographically significant as in this case. Six years later Felix Platter began medical training in Montpellier, and eventually he became a prominent physician.

How should we consider other phenomena of the daily life of educating and bringing up children: the teddy bear, the first words *dada* or *mama*, as well as the infant's intense gesticulations, the small child's drawings, the children's play in front of the mirror, the bricks of the Lego box, and later the washed-out or intentionally torn jeans? In question is also the rod of the father, which passed through various educational metamorphoses from Adam's hoe to the shepherd's crook, the cane, and the pointer. All of these are outstanding educational events of a special kind. If I try to avoid scientific orthodoxy, it seems to me that all of the above examples, as differing as they may appear, have something to do with what we usually call symbolism.

Despite the temptation to simply adopt the terms and knowledge already developed by other sciences such as psychoanalysis, ethnology, and theology, theoretical modesty is advisable from the outset of these explorations. Modern education theory has not developed an understanding of the significance of symbols in educational contexts.[1] A trivial but telling indication is the fact that in the 11 volumes of the recent German encyclopedia of education the term occurs only nine times, and even then only incidentally (*Enzyclopädie Erziehungswissenschaft*, 1983/1984). Could it be that the symbol is just not considered a subject for educators except in the highly general sense of linguistic signs? Or do we educators

believe that the topic of symbols is too commonplace for theoretical discussion? Do we rely on psychoanalysis to tell us everything important about symbols? Or should the subject be relegated to the background of other more pertinent educational issues? I would like to set forth my argument in three stages: historical recollection, advances and regressions, and ideas to stimulate the development of an educational theory of symbols.

Historical Recollections

I begin with a broad contrast that may appear dubious to historians. The cathedrals of the late Middle Ages—for example, Autun or Chartres or Siena—were places not only of divine service, but also of adult education for illiterates. They were teaching centers, therefore. The same is true for the Greek temples and the *agora*, the house architecture of tribal cultures, the *Begijnhof* of the Netherlands, the town hall squares of the late Middle Ages, and so on. The teaching centers of *our* century are fundamentally different from these.

The contents of our teachings, the subjects that we consider worthwhile to transmit (or so it could appear to someone who looks at our culture from an ethnological perspective), can no longer be embodied in pictures, regardless of how full of pictures our daily life of illustrated magazines, posters, advertising, and videos may be. *Our* instruction of the next generation, our culturally dominant mode, does not privilege the meaning embedded in the bodily gesture, but rather in the formula, the grammar and syntax, the acquisition of structures and patterns, and the abstract general principles in the operations of cognitive understanding. Structuralist research has shown—what was already known to Herder or Schleiermacher 180 years ago—that even the most primitive myth includes such cognitive structures. But an important difference still remains, at least for educational thought, namely, the form of presentation.

The problem of presentation was a concern of the generation of scholars between 1790 and 1820 who tried to sketch the first outlines of a theory of symbols in regard to cultural development. It was a rather complex undertaking provoked by the assumption that the history of modern civilization could land in the blind alley of a mechanical-rationalist interpretation of human culture. This was inspired by the preference of the 17th century for the machine metaphor. One theoretical forerunner, Lessing, was unique in this regard, although his work dealt only with the field of art theory.

Lessing distinguished between artificial and natural signs. This distinction had important consequences for education. For example, in the Laokoon sculpture, the painfully open mouth at the point of uttering a terrible scream was for him a natural sign. Language, however, was more artificial (cf. Gebauer, 1984), following its lexical and grammatical constituents. As a system of signs, language does not operate necessarily

with physical-gestural equivalents, but with conventions, with discursive rather than with presentational signs, as Langer has pointed out (1979, p. 86 ff). What types of signs have particular functions in furthering human culture?

It was originally Froebel who tried to develop a phenomenological theory of education out of this line of questioning. If it made sense at all to take an educational account of the contents of early German romanticism, Froebel made the attempt. The essential components of his argument were as follows.

1. A distinction basic for the understanding of human culture is that between Gestalt and form. Froebel (1951) wrote, "Gestalt is the expression of an inner life, of an internal, effective, vivid force; whereas form is mainly dependent on an outer agency. Gestalt is the internal expression of life, form the expression of external harmony via driving power" (p. 45). In this quotation are embedded some earlier arguments. For example, the distinction between *habitus* and *forma* of St. Thomas Aquinas is comparable to Froebel's embodied Gestalt versus the Gestalt forming power. The latter distinguished the two in accordance with the language of that day into the "vivid" Gestalt versus the outwardly determined form (cf. Klünker, 1987). Here is also contained (if only aphoristically meant) the symbol understanding of Schlegel (1967), who wrote in his Athenaeum fragments, "A flowering girl is the most charming symbol for pure good will" (p. 170). The organologic metaphor refers to Blumenbach's (1971) 20-year earlier term of the creative power "nisus formativus," thus placing his view close to that of St. Thomas Aquinas, at least in the terminology. Also, we may think of Philipp Otto Runge, who liked to add a lily or amaryllis to his pictures of children, and whose comments sound occasionally as if they were quotes from Goethe's "Morphology."

2. A second argument of Froebel (1951) is reminiscent also of Goethe and Runge. Between driving power and Gestalt there is a deep connection of such a kind that not only the drive leads to certain designs and these forms again lead to new directions for the drive, but also that a reciprocity of rest and activity becomes evident, even for the child. Froebel wrote, "I myself remember that in my very early boyhood, the observation of harmonious figures and forms and also such flowers filled me with a deep yearning, through which I always intuited that a higher spirit spoke to me out of these forms" (p. 46). Less pathetically expressed (for the yearning does not have to be "deep" nor the spirit a "higher" one), Froebel obviously held the opinion that there are patterns, especially "natural" ones, in which calmness and movement or form and energy become so obvious that this dialectic or reciprocity is communicated to children when they observe something quietly and attentively. This process, thought

Froebel, is prelinguistic and preconceptual. Therefore, it could lead to "anticipation and yearning" (p. 47)—a learning dynamic as in the example of the flower—of the child striving for something in the future while not forgetting the necessary quality of form. Schlegel, Goethe, and Schleiermacher would not have opposed this theory, and the two Brantanos, Bettina and Clemens, would have agreed. The same is true for Schelling, whose work the self-taught Froebel unfortunately hardly studied. It is only a small step from this argument to Schelling's theory of the unconscious (cf. Marquard, 1968).

3. Froebel (1951) called the above relation between child and nature "symbolic ... because *all things* that surround us as natural appearances ... have a symbolic meaning." In order that this not be mistaken as only applicable to *exterior* nature, he added "also *all things* which arise from the human spirit, mind and life" (p. 96). The "symbolic view" of life is the basis of his educational theory, as well as, in his opinion, the basis of his practice in the construction of children's games. With that idea he was already in an ambivalent situation. On the one hand he was a great admirer of Novalis. "Thinking is only a dream of feeling, an extinct feeling, a pale-grey, feeble life." The romantic adoration of the child was evident in this passage, moreover, a strange ontology of the spontaneously expressed gesture that not only represents matters of the inner soul, but also is "symbolic" in the sense that something divine is revealed by it. Goethe was more careful: between word and picture, rational idea and preconceptual, symbolic representation, between thinking and feeling, therefore, there was a relationship difficult to balance. According to Goethe (1952), if this balance was disregarded, "the doubly evil symbolic mystical monsters" would arise (p. 778), against which he recommended an "exact sensual fantasy" (p. 779). The latter he tried to espouse in his idea of the archaic plant, which he had elaborated after an intensive observation of nature. In the metamorphosis of the plant could be envisioned the formative dynamics in general that went beyond plants and animals to cultural development. Certainly Froebel had something similar in mind when he pointed out repeatedly the formative function that the attentive observation of a flower could have as a symbol for living design. In contrast to Goethe, he did not follow the latter's request for a synthesizing perspective. Instead, he followed the educational attitude that had been common in Europe since Comenius, of a division into elements out of which something complete, a living Gestalt, possibly could be built. Goethe was skeptical: "The living is indeed split up in elements, but it cannot be put together out of them and then reanimated" (Goethe, 1952, p. 13). Froebel shared some of this doubt. He never tired of pointing out that there were, after all, "invisible centers" in the elementary forms of ball and cube, something like ideal "seeds" to which every operation of division was related. He was constantly

switching between organologic symbol theory and geometric systems theory, as we would call them today. It was a vacillation between understanding the symbol as the presentation of the conceptually unknown versus the presentation of a rational construction of formative principles, as the presentation of the comprehensible but particularly individual versus the generic, even cosmic general, as the presentation of the more spontaneous versus the more receptive aspects of formative processes.

4. Such difficulties become clearly evident in Froebel's critical discussion of the "Orbis pictus" of Comenius. Comenius, as we know, was a rather ambivalent figure in the history of European liberal arts. On the one hand, he was still inwardly bound to the symbolic gestures of the late Middle Ages—this is why Descartes was unable to relate to him. On the other hand, he was the inventor of methodically and rationally constructed curricula spanning different phases of life. His *Orbis pictus* is the popular version of his educational philosophy, a picture book in which unified symbolizations of important life situations are mixed strangely with an anatomic-analytical interest in dissection. Froebel (1951) diagnosed the Orbis pictus as a symptom of a precarious cultural movement. In the language of idealistic philosophy, he wrote, "The surrounding world alienated to child and to man now became a *painted* world for him" (p. 52). The picture was an incomplete substitute for the lost contact to the "things themselves" and this loss was irretrievable. Picture books, therefore, were necessary, although perhaps dangerous. His diagnosis, however, was too brief, and even contrary to what he explained elsewhere as the symbolism of the things themselves. Had his aesthetic sensitivity been somewhat keener, he could have noticed that there are indeed various kinds of pictures. For instance, with regard to Comenius, the cultural-historical difference between the Middle Ages and modern times is not that nowadays pictures appear as educational media, but rather that there are differing pictures. The physical gestures in the church reliefs of the late Middle Ages or those in miniature painting have nothing in common with the pedantic woodcuts in Comenius' book. Froebel did not notice this, nor did he realize the contradiction between his own book illustrations and learning instructions and his statements dealing with the nature of children. For example, Froebel (1937) wrote, "In the activity and play of the child, especially in the early years, there develops, in coordination with the quiet, unperceived influence of the child's environment, not only the *seed* but also the *heart* of his whole future life with regard to all we must recognize as already given within a seed and a heart, that is, individuality, a sense of self, and identity of personality" (p. 66). Here the symbolism of the expression of the child's play is the issue, and it is couched in symbolic or metaphorical words (seeds and heart). At the same time, Froebel outlined a childhood curriculum in which he

disregarded that same type of speech. For instance, his manifold divisions of the cube as basic play material and as instrument for training cognitive operations are historically more closely connected to the Bauhaus and Lego building units than to his speculative references to nature, wholeness, or "life integration."

Steps Forward and Steps Backward

The authors I have grouped around Froebel put together a theoretical program that is, in its first outlines, acceptable to us. Yet reading their lectures may not always be pleasant for the modern intellectual. There are two reasons, I suppose, for this unpleasantness. The historical gap of more than 150 years is not only a distance between manner of speech and expectations of theoretical precision; it is also a distance between an interest in projects having to do with questions of meaning versus an interest in more conceptual and empirical questions today. Whatever we may think about the idealistic, the Platonic, and the excessively religious components of those projects, they include nevertheless the plausible hypothesis that the process of a person's broad education is in part brought about by a type of experience that reaches consciousness not via speech, but rather via preconceptual observation. In order for this observation to have a formative effect, there is need for an objective Gestalt that contains the educationally effective qualities in a sensually evident manner. The late idealistic-romantic view proposed to identify this idea in various directions. On the one hand, there was the direction of "meaningful" forms such as Goethe's "archaic plant" as a pattern for developmental metamorphosis, Runge's lily unfolding to the light and associated play of colors at different times of day, Goethe's picture collection of the "educational province" (probably thought of in a classicist manner), or the forms handed down through the history of myths. On the other hand, reflections about the meaning of symbols for education took an "elementary" direction, above all among educators. As if they had studied Nikolaus Cusanus, they searched for the origin of every sort of broad learning in the simplest forms such as the circle, triangle, square, ball, or cube, in which something cosmic was represented and that, therefore, could be considered of universal and fundamental origin. Both directions followed a normative interest; they wanted to prescribe the proper process of education.

This attitude could not be maintained against the development of science, even though educational theory was noted to be preoccupied with normative problems. Today, if we want to be liberal, we can still follow Creuzer's 1810 definition of the symbol: "In the symbol, a general concept takes on an earthly garment, and appears as a meaningful picture in our mind's eye." It remains "in the most sensual clearness," in "persistent figurativeness" (Creuzer, 1982, p. 50). With regard to the significance it could have in the process of education, a liberation from the normative seemed necessary. This progress emerged from two fronts, Vienna and

Geneva. In the climate of art nouveau, which fostered an organologic body symbolism, Freud developed his theory of dream symbols. At another location, somewhat later, Piaget described the symbol as a necessary medium for the balance of assimilation and accommodation in the development of intelligence. In both cases, the authors' interest was an empirical explanation of a factual situation. Both gave careful advice about symbols.

Both authors, different as their scientific styles may have been, had several things in common. They shared the opinion that symbols are pictures, real or imagined, that are forerunners of consciousness articulated in speech. Symbols are somehow prior to speech. Both authors assumed, the one for dreams, the other for symbolic play of the child, that these pictures were indicators for what is developmentally formative. That is why for Freud the analysis of symbolism served the reconstruction of one's earlier biography, and for Piaget it served the understanding of difficulties in learning to think, for adults as well as for children. In both cases, the interest was also causal-regressive. The process of coping with difficulties was described by means of clarifying what hinders or advances progress to higher forms of consciousness. The symbolic was indeed generally human, but somehow "primitive."

We were freed from the mythical and normative speculations of the romantic educational theory, but at what price? For romanticism, the concentration on the life significance of symbols was not just a technique to clarify early or unconscious material, nor an intellectual instrument for the construction of curricula suitable for children (although this component is unmistakable with Froebel). It meant reflection about the prospective function of symbols in human life, considering the history of the species as well as the entire lifespan of the individual. Thus romanticism had a general theory of human education in mind. In regard to the romantic conception, the arguments of Freud and Piaget were not strictly progressive. They were steps forward in their degree of preciseness; they were steps backward in splitting up the state of the problem. First these theories were split off from the possible vision of a productive, lifelong function of symbols. Moreover, only those parts of the phenomenon were examined that describe so-called earlier stages of development. It would seem as if rationality—reasonableness in discursive argument—would apply the central perspective. However, the central perspective is in itself a symbol, namely an historical one. As we know, ever since the romantic pictures of Friedrich, Turner, Runge, and much later Monet and Cezanne, we are not limited to see the world perspectively. For about 300 years, from the 15th to the 18th century, perspective was not only a useful but also a most appropriate and successful metaphor for the relation of the person to the world, for the organization of individual life, and for the determination of what we call *identity*. What is implied in the vanishing point of this central perspective metaphor, of this symbol for organizing ways of symbolic presentation and learning? Could we think

up a different sort of painting, organized symbolically according to other rules?

Jung developed some ideas in this direction. His arguments "make the critical reader sometimes uneasy," as Piaget (1969, p. 251) observed tactfully. But if we concentrate on the picture material presented by Jung and his followers (e.g., Jung, 1968), we see that obviously the surface (how the elements are positioned to each other) was more important for them than the perspective. The affectionate irony with which Piaget called Jung's arguments "great hypotheses" could, after all, point to a dimension of the problem that is more "progressive" than the central perspective designs of modern identity theorists. If we read Jung not as scientists sharing in a rational-empirical discourse, but in the same manner as we read the old texts of Runge, Novalis, Schlegel, or Froebel, that is, as sensitive formulas for problems of that time, then a panorama results that gives the symbolic forms of understanding self and world both a general and an equal place within educational orientations—next to discursive speech. In any case, no longer a central perspective!

These discussions, partly along the lines of psychoanalysis and partly along the lines of cognitive theory, ran parallel to educational theory. Reflection about symbols in child rearing took place in psychoanalysis and developmental psychology. After Froebel education has handed over the subject as a sort of division of labor, as is commonly done by modern science. Is this a step backward or forward? After Freud and Piaget it was no longer possible to talk about the significance of symbols as naively as before. However, this rational progress caused a kind of stagnation in education. Obviously, if the important problems were being dealt with elsewhere in a reliable way, education could withdraw to its own alleged business—the instrumentation of possibilities for the next generation regarding modern cultural forms suited to the times. Like Froebel, one could speculate about forms and symbols, about forces and their uncertain consequences, or write occasional texts about these themes, but in the end the question that remains to be answered is how the forces of socialization of the person can be directed.

Between the rationalism of the outlines of Jung's symbol theory and the following attempt to define the educational function of symbols, there is in our recent history a warning signal that poses a demand on nearly all assenting components of a process that could be called *education via the symbol*. Every rational and political-historical determination of symbol function that is not carefully defined can present a destructive threat, especially with respect to the cultural limits that have to be set for the symbol. The fascist educator Baeumler presented the following train of thought in his inaugural lecture at the University of Leipzig on May 10, 1933 (Baeumler, 1934). The new student (Baeumler referred to the National Socialist student groups) with an image of coming events, "may not yet express this image in words." Words could not be called for, if it

was a matter of "change of face." The word had to be withheld, for only the "imagination of the symbol as the exhaustive presentation of an idea" could reveal a practical, historical direction. In this way, Hitler became a symbol for more than words could say: "Hitler is not less than the idea, he is more than the idea, because he is real." Only with such a symbolic education could the new prototype be formed. "To this type of person whose picture is a model for us we give the name Political Soldier. The word is eloquent ... the symbol is of a different kind. The symbol is silent, its understanding takes place immediately." Therefore, one should "dive into the world of symbols" since the time for "de-glorification of the word" has come. "The symbol never belongs to an individual, it belongs to a community," it belongs to the "celebrated muteness of the source." "Only where there is a standard, a solid system of customs, an educational system which begins with the body," only then can "the expansion of the intellectual world" take place. The salute, the flag, and the leader, so the author believed, would open the intellectual horizon and make way for education. In the 20th century we should not forget the destructive power that can lie in theories about the function of symbols in educational contexts. With the experience of fascism it behooves us to observe theoretical caution. Whoever reflects on symbols nowadays, particularly in educational connections, cannot afford to ignore historical theories that had evil consequences.

Toward an Educational Theory of the Symbol

Reflecting on the significance of symbols in educational processes was thus banished from the field of education, in any case from "general" education. Symbol theory seemed a superfluous and peripheral subject, interesting only for theorists of early childhood, educational counselors, art teachers, and occasionally sociologists of youth studying juvenile subcultures. Even so, interest in symbols kept appearing indirectly in marginal contexts. School theorists still draw our attention to "overlooked sensuousness." Teachers and counselors participate in various self-awareness courses that favor bodily forms of expression over discursive communication. Philosophers speculate about the "consciousness of the senses." Others analyze the history of education since Rousseau with an attitude of objectivity and with a paradoxical formulation as an attempt to construct the "anthropomorphic human being." Also interesting are the literary forms where such subjects are reported: the autobiographical texts, so-called rich description, essays containing experiences, language rich in metaphors, allusions, and fantasy. All these are attempts to go beyond the conceptually set forms of speech. They have something to do with symbols. Therefore, I would like to risk discussing some guidelines to characterize educational symbols with their possible cultural function. And I would like to outline an area for further exploration.

1. Symbols are metaphorical. Like discursive speech, symbols bring something to light or to consciousness, but in a different manner. A metaphor teaches us "to see something as or like" (Ricoeur, 1986, p. 192 ff). Piaget's child playing sees the snailshell *as if* it were a cat, but can also recognize that it is at the same time a snailshell. That is not just a mastered and then forgotten precursor of intellectually enlightened behavior, but rather the beginning of the development of an intelligible relation to the world. The differentiated form consists of the following components: the perception of A and its speech-discursive representation, the metaphoric icon B which allows A to be seen as if it would be B, and finally the bridge C between the two, often called (although imprecisely) a likeness or similarity. The placing of this bridge is a cognitive achievement of the ego. C is successfully produced because both the sensually presented icon and the nonsensual, discursive component can share a common ground of meaning, even though between the two there arises a meaning boundary that separates the "imagined" from the "real." In the tension between the two lies that which is in motion, that which is vivacious, just as was pointed out in 1820 as the culture forming quality of the metaphor and symbol. Of course, there can be dead metaphors, those that have become stagnant or trivial. If I say, "As a result of the competing theories of the symbol, my thoughts in this lecture have landed in a dark tunnel without a glimpse of light at the end," then this is indeed a metaphor. But besides being misplaced, it is incapable of bringing anything into motion, either for myself or for you. It is the same type of conventional rhetoric as the expression of the discouraged youth: "I'm mad at you." These types of dead metaphors or clichés have exhausted their symbolic quality, as have the security blanket, the tennis shoe, or the baby doll with a punk hairstyle.

2. Symbols play with the difference between the conceptual and the preconceptual. Symbols can maintain their potential function for education only if they do not become conventional parts of the environment. Just as the metaphor as a form of speech can be either conventional or idiomatic, iconical representations can also turn into artificial signs, irrelevant for the learning dynamic of our organism. The milieu of the ordinary household is often an arsenal of the dead symbol world. Family photos, inherited furniture, wall posters in the children's rooms, art reproductions—all seem to blend together without differentiation. They display a certain standard of living but evoke no further dynamic, except, of course, if a sensitive artist would arrange or interpret them in some refreshing way. They are "affirmative" in that they serve only syntactically as an element of order. However, occasionally their semantic function can be regained, as Proust (1982) showed in his description of an apparently drab hotel room. What really happens in these kinds of situations? I see the following components. There arises a precarious balance between assimilation and accommodation (in Piaget's terminology), between receptivity and spontaneity (in the language of Schleiermacher).

The aesthetic symbol strengthens my perception and inner activity, and my receptivity for the object-character of the sensual impression is especially well developed. The situation is productive, because in this balance the conceptually structured orientation can be suspended and the meaning of preconceptual experience of the senses can be activated without forgetting entirely the structures and the concepts. All this is possible because the basis of self-understanding, the basis of self-assurance, can be sought apparently not only in cognition, but also just as much in the meaningful traces of the self (cf. Pothast, 1987). Symbols such as the cross, the Cadillac, the concrete wall, the dream figure, the childish scribble, the familiar melody, the father's desk, and Proust's hotel room always possess the possibility of a dual function: They are "socializing," therefore, society-enhancing to the extent that they belong to the cultural arsenal. They are presocializing, preconceptual, and reflectively effective to the extent that they are able to bring into motion a certain cultural style.

3. In educational contexts, symbols are "transitional objects." To claim that symbols in educational contexts are transitional objects may at first appear to use a psychoanalytic term in an inadmissible way. After all, Winnicott (1989) reserved the term for explaining the special relationship between mother and child in the time of infancy (cf. Mollenhauer, in press). I think that, in view of the conditions that Winnicott set for the concept, it is permissible to make a comparison or analogy. The transitional object, such as the stuffed animal and the pacifier, stands for the mother's breast in one sense, but in another sense in the experience of the child it stands for a separate object of outer reality. This allows for the easy oscillation between the "purely objective" and the "objective," between inner and outer world. The object can fulfill such a function only if it has a quality of physical familiarity. It has an emancipatory function in helping the child to become free of the confines of given parenting relationships. It serves a regressive function in allowing the child to withdraw in situations of corporeal experience. These descriptions must not be limited, I think, to early childhood. According to their structure, they can be linked to the success or failure of broad learning processes. The term *regressive* should not be misunderstood in the context of developmental psychology. It is just this symbolically mediated return to the primary meaning of physical experience that provides the last reasonable basis of what Apel (1973) called "transcendental communication community." Against the notion of a behavioristic semiology, he used the term to refer to the sensual quality constituted in the context of discussion partners trying to reach agreement. This line of thought can be expanded further. If the discussion follows conceptually ordered contours of meaning, then the symbolic regression can provide an additional level of possible understanding. Even though that level must be clarified verbally afterward, nevertheless its basis lies in the understanding of physical experience and preconceptual certainties. Winnicott's idea of transitional

objects gives us the arguments while earlier arguments relied on the available romantic and aesthetic theories.

4. An educational theory of the symbol is a theory of the aesthetic dimension of all broad learning. Everything said about the educational effect of symbols was already outlined as questions in aesthetic theory, as far as the latter was concerned with the developmental and cultural function of aesthetic events. I would like to claim, perhaps too simplistically, that ever since Kant's Critique of Practical Reason and his Critique of Judgment, there is one consistent thread that has run through art and music theory up to the present day. It is the clarification, extension, and modification of Kant's assertion that aesthetic judgment is "reflective." Not as a Kantian interpretation, but rather as a description of this thread, as well as a concluding summary of the three major thoughts (1 to 3) I present, I wish to risk several assertions.

An aesthetic object cannot be understood by subsuming it or its elements under culturally fluctuating concepts of understanding. The object contains in itself much more a kind of call to reflection, an invitation to find a suitable concept for the effect the object has on me. This is also true for the case of the symbolizing activities of children and youth. These are reflective actions in search of concepts. Such actions stage a play between reason and sensuality (as Schiller and Kant pointed out), between the feeling and the thinking person (as Ciompi, 1989, described). In any case, they are dependent on unconditional physical experience in the service of our senses. The process is a reflective one that renders improbable two types of reaction. First, the message of the symbol or the aesthetic event cannot simply be added to the historically conventional arsenal of signs, whether they be linguistic or iconographical signs. Moreover, the message cannot be subsumed under the themes of daily, familiar physical experience and corresponding feelings; otherwise it could not be called a reflective process. Instead, it sets up a different psycho-intellectual level or region that lies somehow between the others. This assertion, already formulated precisely by Schiller, is expressed positively in recent aesthetic theory of music. Taking up the controversial 19th-century attack of Hanslicks against the "rotted feeling aesthetic," Dahlhaus (1975) wrote "that the feelings out of which the music seizes precision are in no case stimulants which exist apart from the music, as if the music would be their tonal representation." They are instead special qualities, in every case music as music and not as a replaceable conventional stimulus, "the other expression of other feelings." I can generalize this (in my opinion) irrefutable statement and say: The educational effectiveness of symbols has as its basis the attainment of a zone, a region, a level of the self in which the ego is differently generated than it is in daily practice or in epistemological theory.

To say it concisely and more graphically, in symbolic play when the child cuddles the teddy bear, pretends that the snailshell is a cat, stages the

gestures of pointing to something, the child brings its ego forth as something that enjoys two relative freedoms: first, freedom from daily practical demands, from expectations and corresponding effects or feelings (of course, children themselves can produce whatever they want to feel); and second, freedom from the difficulty of being bound to know. It is no different for perceptive adults when they look at a drawing of Joseph Beuys or Cy Twombly, or when they listen to the "children's scenes" from Robert Schumann. (However difficult the question of musical theory is constituted—whether or not there can be such a thing as musical semantics apart from the conventional connotations—in any case, as I see it, until now no one has been able to identify any musical archetypes.) We experience via realizing or "feeling" a particular symbolic, aesthetic effect and concentrating on this feeling just like the child at play, we feel in a special way "free."

The German romantic, particularly the early romantic, possessed an intuitive subtle sense for this particular manner of freedom of the ego with the idea that there must be an "aesthetic ego" along with other egos. Froebel even made an educational attitude out of the notion and threaded the aesthetic, symbolic components of the self and world experience of the child into a conventional curriculum. His romantic predecessors—Novalis, Kleist, Karoline von Guenderode, Clemens Brentano—had something else in mind. As shown above, in all their correspondence they meant that there could be a particular aesthetic symbolic life style, and this idea, naturally, led to failure. In the fragmentary rubble between concept and sensuality, between conventionally expected daily routine with its signs and a permanent destabilization of these signs via symbolization (which exactly the otherness of the conventions shows) no lasting everyday life can be established. These particular romantics ended as dandies, as religious converts, or suicidal individuals. In the sense of modern existence, it remains correct that—besides the curricula of social learning and cognitive concepts, and the assimilation of knowledge—one is dealing with a third component of culture, the role of which is to hold fast contact of the head with the entire organism, and to connect the individual with the broad species, as well as the species with nature.

The famous philosopher Schleiermacher was admired and esteemed by educators and theologians. He was the youthful friend of Schlegel, the university teacher of Froebel, and the friend in old age of Bettina Brentano. As Herrenhuter, minister in Berlin, and courageous liberal in the face of European political reactionist tendencies in the years after 1815, he did not shy away from presenting his listeners and readers with a daring metaphor in his "Talks about Religion" presented in 1800. It dealt with the explanation of his philosophically difficult assertion that religion is "the feeling of the utter dependence of the human being on the universe." In order to clarify further this statement, he selected a particular picture—the image of man and woman joined in the sexual act: a

metaphor, a symbol, an aesthetic notion, in any case, then as today, conceived as unreal.

Notes

1. This is valid with one exception, national socialist education. Compare as a source work, for example, Baeumler (1934).

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