

**Textual Transactions:
Recontextualizing Louise Rosenblatt's Transactional Theory
for the College Writing Classroom**

by

Elizabeth Bachrach Hutton

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Doctoral Committee:

Professor Anne Ruggles Gere, Chair
Professor Amanda S. Anderson, Brown University
Associate Professor Gina N. Cervetti
Professor Marjorie B. Levinson

Elizabeth Bachrach Hutton

ehutton@umich.edu

ORCID iD: [0000-0002-1978-6707](https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1978-6707)

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DEDICATION

For my parents,

Gretchen Bachrach and Ernie Hutton,

whose transactional readings and writings were my first inspiration

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation explores the history of Louise Rosenblatt's transactional theory and its implications for college-level instruction in literacy, broadly conceived as a critical and a cultural practice. I argue that Rosenblatt's work proves most significant for framing explorations of reading and writing as two dimensions of a single educative project: this against the many institutional and scholarly trends by which text-based reception and production are understood as belonging to largely separable programs of study. Indeed, it is English studies' long-standing disciplinary habit of disaggregating the work of the writing classroom from the work of literary and cultural study that I see as the fundamental problem that Rosenblatt's work helps to reframe and begin to resolve.

As intellectual history and recontextualization project, this dissertation maintains that the promise of Rosenblatt's work remains untapped if only understood through the lens of the disciplinary schisms that have long structured English studies; and that Rosenblatt's insights gain new relevance when re-situated in their originating philosophical context of the nineteen-thirties. I reconstruct this context—and its significance for Rosenblatt's later transactional theory—through an investigation of Rosenblatt's overlooked early career, output, and key influences, most specifically by reviving the dialogues that her first works of scholarship initiated with a richly interdisciplinary and transatlantic range of early-twentieth-century pragmatic-progressive

thinkers, including Franz Boas, Fernand Baldensperger, I. A. Richards, and John Dewey. Such a recovery shows Rosenblatt's oeuvre, from its earliest scholarship to its final statements, to have constituted a sustained inquiry into an ecological concept of "transaction"—whereby knowledge is understood to emerge from the mutually conditioning interplay between agents, situations and texts—and into the import of "transaction" for a theory of literacy, of literature, and of the reading-writing benefits enabled by what she later terms an "aesthetic" stance. Moreover, the milieu of thinkers consolidated by Rosenblatt's work—all studying various forms of cultural-knowledge-in-transit—offers a provocative challenge to English studies' usual narratives about its reading- and writing-oriented subfields' historical and purportedly proper divisibility.

This recovery also supports my final theoretical intervention—the argument that Rosenblatt's inquiries into transaction and stance are particularly pertinent to current writing studies questions concerning literacy knowledge transfer. I show that Rosenblatt's "aesthetic" and "efferent" stances, once viewed through the lens of her seminal philosophical commitments, offer a newly integrative explanatory model for the dynamics by which learners not only make meaning from texts, but also reinvest and repurpose ("transfer") their literacy knowledge, and not only across new contexts and tasks, but also across the dimensions of text-based literacy itself (reading and writing). Based on the new genealogy I construct for her work, I further posit that Rosenblatt's transactional theory presents literacy as an expansively cultural practice, a paradigm that encourages learners to draw more purposive, self-reflective, and critical connections between their reading and writing, and that helps learners to realize and leverage the ways that culturally supported literacy practices can themselves work to transform cultures in their turn.

Foreword

Rosenblatt's Transactional Theory of Literacy and the Transfer of Reading-Writing Knowledge

In 1983 and 1985, Louise Rosenblatt was invited to speak on the “reading-writing connection” at, respectively, the Modern Languages Association and the Conference on College Composition and Communication—arguably the two most important U.S. scholarly associations, then or now, concerning literature and language, on the one hand, and writing studies and advanced literacies, on the other. For Rosenblatt, these invitations were the “sign of a changing climate in university departments of English” (*Reader* 177): specifically that college-level reading and writing, contrary to long-standing institutional habits, were beginning to be reconceptualized as the interpenetrating dimensions of a unified literacy practice: more as complementarities than as divisible activities set on entirely separable goals.

In the years since such an optimistic appraisal, however, such a climate has, in fact, little changed. As a number disciplinary historians and theorists continue to observe—from Thomas Miller to Robert Scholes to Sharon Crowley—a college-level education in writing and reading still stands as a house divided. At least as manifest in most university English departments and the writing programs sitting uneasily within or beside them, these fields remain structured by what Melissa Ianetta calls an invidious “decoupling” impulse (61): between the developmental or

preparatory issues of acquisition and practice, as mandated for one field, and the higher work of literary, cultural and historical critique, as advanced by the other. Both in the scholarship and the classroom, among instructors and students alike, little travel is enabled or encouraged across these presumptively dissociated spheres.

In many ways, and as my first chapter will show, the career and legacy of Louise Rosenblatt mirrors this decoupling. Among educators and reading researchers, Rosenblatt is well known and well loved. Among literary theorists, by contrast, she is a virtual non-entity, her sacrosanct status in the educational realm having rendered her apparently irrelevant to scholarly questions about “professional” reading and cultural criticism. Her standing in writing studies is even more complex. Although this is the field, in the postsecondary context, in which the teaching and learning of literacy practices are most explicitly investigated,¹ Rosenblatt’s life-long attention both to reading and to the literary runs counter to writing studies’ disciplinary focus on production (as distinguished from reception) and on rhetoric (as distinguished from poetics).

Against such a legacy, this dissertation puts forth two intertwined arguments, one theoretical and the other historical. At the theoretical level, I posit that Rosenblatt’s work speaks exceptionally well to the “reading-writing connection,” especially as this connection can help revitalize the relations between the practices and goals overseen by English departments’ two divided sub-fields. This work is achieved through a “transactional” set of dynamics and principles she

¹ As recently as Yancey and Robertson’s seminal 2014 *Writing Across Contexts*, the authors affirm the extent to which “composition”—and writing studies, by extension—“is, famously, a teaching subject” (1).

ascribed to reading and writing (1978, 1994), and which I will rename in this dissertation her “transactional theory of literacy”—a theory that insists on the fluidly evolving, mutually constitutive relations between text, agent, and situation. Yet even more specifically, I argue that this transactional theory of literacy can also help to transform such a “connection” into a newly integrative theory of *transfer*: a model by which learners can better recognize and apply their varied meaning-making strategies not only across new situations and unfamiliar tasks, but also across dimensions of literacy—the acts of reading and writing themselves. The roots of such a transfer theory, I argue, can be found in Rosenblatt’s claim about those shared “transactions” through which both readers and writers can make more or less critically engaged meanings with texts: especially through the adoption of one or another “stance” towards language and its own sources of meaning; and especially as concerns the self-reflective cultural interventions that, within the humanities, higher education’s literacy practices are expected to entail.

I also argue, however, that these theoretical provocations cannot be understood free of the time- and place-situations in which they have been—and might otherwise be—understood and applied. It is at this second historical level, therefore, that I will also investigate the varied circumstantially inflected paradigms—disciplinary and philosophical—by which Rosenblatt’s work has been valued and interpreted. First, I will analyze the inherited paradigms by which the potential I locate in Rosenblatt’s theories has gone largely unrecognized. Second, I will show how this potential can be better fathomed and exploited through a return to a different framework: this provided by Rosenblatt’s originating influences, many of which predated, and/or evolved somewhat adjacent to, English studies’ now naturalized internal divides, as described

above. In what follows of my preface, and in the dissertation more largely, I toggle back and forth between this theoretical and this more historicizing work.

But before beginning, it is important to establish what Rosenblatt more substantively argues through her core theories of “transaction” and “stance.” Putting a special emphasis on the conviction that, in any literate act—as, indeed, in any act of knowing—the “observer is part of the observation” (“Transaction” 1364), Rosenblatt argues, in her most mature statement of theory (1994), that any instance of text-based meaning results from a *transaction* between three forces: a specific agent, text, and situation;² or—to use her own words—between a “particular” reader-writer drawing on her own “personal linguistic-experiential reservoir” (1367); a “particular pattern of signs” or “text” that the reader-writer activates to achieve communication; and a “particular context” in which that meaning is understood and valued as relevant (1369).³ Crucial to remember is that the term’s more common meaning of an emotionally or socially uninflected back-and-forth exchange is antithetical to what Rosenblatt here proposes; in a move explicitly indebted to Dewey, she explains that her construct of *transaction* is intended rather to highlight

² In this dissertation’s elaboration of Rosenblatt’s theories, I preference the Deweyan term “agent” to the more Cartesian term “subject” in order to highlight the culturally-entangled-yet-still-relatively-purposive nature of the reader-writer-learner, and to move away from assuming this agent’s detachability from her environment or community of practice, as “subject” can imply.

³ Rosenblatt suggests but does not specifically identify “situation” as the third element of any transaction; in describing her transactional theory (1994), she veers between a two-pronged focus on text and reader as themselves constituting “situation” (e.g. “instead of two fixed entities acting on one another, the reader and the text are two aspects of a total dynamic situation,” 1369), and the acknowledgement of the shaping variable provided *also* by contextual situation (e.g. when she argues that “selective attention functions under the shaping influence of particular times and circumstances” as well as by the sign-directives provided by a text, and interests of the agent, 1368). I therefore argue that this contextual and rhetorical situation, in which that larger “total situation” of any literacy act takes place, should be recognized as a third variable crucial to her theory, especially as underscored by her roots in cultural anthropology.

the mutually conditioning nature of any interaction between a “knower” and a “known”; and thus to highlight that, in the intermingling of agent, text and situation, these variables lose their autonomous status and become newly defined by their relation to each other, and by their modifying of each other’s very nature and operations (1364). As such, Rosenblatt argues, we should not imagine that—nor, indeed, pedagogically behave as if—read- or written-meaning can be found within the text alone, or even in an interpretation’s recognition of the text’s interpolation within a context. Instead, as she writes, “‘meaning’ is what happens *during the transaction*” between these *three* mutually constitutive variables and their ever evolving relations (1369). In this, Rosenblatt repeatedly insists that text-based meaning⁴ is an *event* and not an object; is a *practice* and not a product; is mutable and not static; and, above all, that it is fruitfully thus. For, as she suggests, a transactional model of literacy not only recognizes but also helps to encourage those very agentic interventions by which democratic developments are achieved, at the level of both individual growth and larger cultural change, since such recognition helps us as agents to reinforce and to better steer these elements’ mutually conditioning interplay.

Further underlining the pragmatic emphasis Rosenblatt puts on the situated agent’s particularity is Rosenblatt’s theorization of the agent’s *stance* and the attendant construct of the *aesthetic-efferent continuum*. “Stance,” Rosenblatt argues, “reflects the reader’s purpose” (1372), and she distinguishes two main stances by their activation of either a “predominantly efferent” or a

⁴ In *The Reader, the Text, the Poem*, Rosenblatt calls such meaning an “evocation” (30-32), and she calls the coherent experience of such an evocation “a poem” (12), her description for the valued and meaningful work of literature or of culture that the reader attributes to the text or artifact in question.

“predominantly aesthetic” attitude towards instances of text and concerning the source of their linguistic meaning. By her definition, the efferent understands and uses language as “ideas, information, directions or conclusions *to be retained, used or acted on after the reading event*” (1373, my emphasis); such use is achieved by the situated agent drawing mainly on what she understands as the “public” meanings that can be attributed to a certain instance of language (1373). The aesthetic stance, in turn, builds on these largely indexical meanings by adding also more immediate, somatic, personal or “private” associations—attention to the more inchoate, affective, or speculative meanings that involve not only the agent’s well-established, often reflexive linguistic conventions, but also the complicating and non-conventional “residue” of the agent’s “past psychological events involving these words and their referents” (1373). This aesthetic stance, as I will explore in future chapters, is therefore most potent for recognizing the transactional and polysemous nature of language itself, and for suggesting and helping to realize new, alternate, and even divergent, meanings. The efferent stance works mainly by custom, whatever the agent’s customs happen to be; the aesthetic stance builds on such custom by stressing the role played also by the agent’s participation, self-reflection, cross-cultural tolerance and flexibility, as well as more critical forms of attention, as reflected in her more idiosyncratic and often overlooked experiences with language-in-the-world. As I will argue, it is thus the aesthetic stance that allows the agent to lodge and recognize an explicit intervention into the functioning of culture itself—to grasp the ways that agents and meanings can change as they travel; and the way agents, through stance, can more purposively aid in achieving such change.

English studies’ transactions with Rosenblatt, however, have not been as self-critical or as interventionist as they might be, and, especially over the last four decades, Rosenblatt’s theories

of transaction and stance have been understood in overly limited terms: terms determined largely by the post-war anxieties and trends that, for both compositionists and literary scholars, professionalized and naturalized the difference between their fields as a set of increasingly rigid distinctions between the preparatory and applied, on the one hand, and the scholarly-critical, on the other. This dissertation therefore argues that Rosenblatt's theories pertain more productively to postsecondary constructs of literacy, and the transfer between these constructs, when freed from such tendencies, and when viewed instead through the pragmatic-progressive framework suggested by this theorists' little investigated early career and influences.

This framework is one I construct out of a set of early twentieth-century strands of thought from which Rosenblatt drew over her sixty years as a scholar and educator, but which she was first introduced to during the interwar period, when these movements were achieving a particular traction in the American academic scene. As such, Rosenblatt's work as a theorist of reading and writing makes a provocatively interdisciplinary story, emerging, as I will show, from a rich mix of cultural anthropology, experiments in psycho-linguistically-inflected literary criticism and rhetoric, and progressive-pragmatic social, educational, and aesthetic thought. As intellectual history, this offers a new genealogy for the more integrative constructs around which a postsecondary education in writing and reading might be designed, and as suggested by Rosenblatt's own work: one that strives to account both and at once for the pragmatics of literacy instruction and the ethics of engaged and participatory critique.

As I will show, profoundly influential on Rosenblatt, and in many cases serving as her actual mentors, were the figures of Franz Boas, Fernand Baldensperger, I. A. Richards, and John

Dewey, all considered key if not uncontroversial architects of their burgeoning fields. But my interest here will be less in the professionalization of the disciplines than in the epistemological explorations and justifications such burgeoning professionalization required. The cultures of knowledge that these thinkers were working within and constructing from the inside out were open to cross-disciplinary influence while remaining deeply engaged in the work of delineating and justifying each one's own disciplinary niche. Parallel to this work ran an interest in both the generalizing acts of knowledge-building—of articulating phenomenological, physical or metaphysical truths that had genuine moral weight—and in the crucial, and crucially modern, insight that ways of knowing differ depending on one's perspective, or, indeed, one's field. This double consciousness—including the epistemological challenges implicit therein—is alive in Rosenblatt's own work as well, if one looks closely. It is a double consciousness especially visible in her promotion of purposive and democratic-minded literacy practices—approaches to language that account for the ways the situated self and situated object of inquiry act upon each other to iteratively achieve new knowledge, and, potentially, reform. And it is also the double consciousness, I will argue, that recent writing studies theorists (e.g. Yancey and Robertson; Wardle) have found to be most productive for the transfer of knowledge across contexts, practices, and dimensions of literacy.

For specifically uniting these thinkers, I will show, was a shared concern with historically situated reception and perception, and its mutability across time, space, and purpose-driven discipline; with the possibility of self-critical transformations, especially for the observing subject; and thus with a democratic ethos of tolerance and participation that could be enacted through culturally-sensitive constructs of reading and writing. This was a milieu of thinkers

keenly aware of the challenges and benefits of living in a quickly globalizing, diversifying world, and the pluralism therein suggested; and it was a milieu of thinkers specifically interested in the dynamics by which values, habits and information travel and are changed across such acknowledged differences. Moreover, and because of these thinkers' shared concern with learning and education, they conceived these differences not only historically, across time and space, but also epistemologically, across knowledge domains, as well as experientially, across the different kinds of purpose or "stance" that, from within each agent's specific field of knowledge and beliefs, could enable varieties of individually motivated change. Yet undergirding these analyses was also a crucially progressive agenda—one in which agent's very literacy practices were understood as crucial aspects of their interventions into culture and society, with consequences that were both practical and philosophical.

I come finally to argue that Rosenblatt's theories, reconceptualized within this framework, offer us a higher, and thus more integrative, level of generality with which to discuss the dynamics of reading and writing—and, indeed, their politics, largely conceived—than is usually available in the post-secondary writing- and reading-intensive contexts of most English departments and writing programs, where the specific pragmatics of a communicative practice are too often conceptualized as somehow discrete from its ideological allegiances and propositional content. I argue that this is because Rosenblatt's theories require us to view reading and of writing as two dimensions of a single educative project: this against the many institutional and scholarly trends by which they are seen as largely separable programs of study. Her transactional theory, with its pragmatic-progressive roots, requires us to see *literacy as a cultural practice*—which is to say, to view *both* reading and writing as culturally complex and similarly moldable work; inseparably

intertwined at their source attitudes towards language; and thus as equally involved with the pragmatics of communication as with questions of meaning, value, and ethical growth.

* * *

This dissertation will explicitly focus on elaborating the significance of these concepts of transaction, stance and transfer for the kinds of advanced literacy education that I see Rosenblatt’s work to recommend and enable. But what it might mean that these concepts support a construct of “literacy” as a “cultural practice” may still require some introductory definitional work, especially as this dissertation seeks—like much current work in writing studies—to speak across the disciplines in its investigation of the problem of overly entrenched sub-disciplinary divides. I here begin with the term *literacy*, with the stipulation that I will also be defining and exploring this issue in more detail in my fourth chapter. Too often, the terms “literacy education” and “literacy instruction”—even and sometimes especially in the college context—summon up visions of basic language learning: a student mastering the skills apparently required for comprehending (“decoding”) and trading in increasingly “complex” uses of a somewhat fixed language or discourse system (“complex” being a term that the recent Common Core State Standards often uses to discuss the building of reading skills). However, this emphasis on decontextualized and entirely, or reductively, transferable skills—and as my third and fourth chapters will also explore—is one that literacy scholars have increasingly sought to problematize. Theorists such as Brian Street, James Gee and Shirley Brice Heath—similar to much of the last few decades’ work in writing studies and rhetoric, from James Berlin to David Russell—have persuasively argued that even school-based uses of language are always

rhetorically and historically situated, weighted with values and habits of thought that cannot be bracketed off from more purportedly “basic” reading and writing know-how. As such, then, it is important to note that I insist that an exploration of “literacy” at the postsecondary level does not (and indeed cannot) constitute teaching students hard reading and writing skills that are universal or universally transportable. Indeed, the question of transfer that this dissertation also takes on is made particularly thorny by writing studies’ increasing insistence that, to quote Russell, “there will be no academic Esperanto” (*Writing* 33), or magic bullet for teaching craft somehow independent of context. Instead, the “education in literacy” that this dissertation uses Rosenblatt’s theories to promote both acknowledges and explores all acts of reading and writing as socially and culturally embedded practices, and as shaped by deep and meaningful—and often diverse—epistemological allegiances.

As such, and similar to a number of theorists in writing and literacy studies, I understand all students’ and scholars’ literacy acts—communicative linguistic events that include reading, writing, listening, and speaking, as well as the kinds of knowing, believing and even feeling that enable such acts—as taking place in what James Gee recognizes as discourse-specific “communities of practice” (719, after Lave and Wenger) and “cultural models” (720), into and out of which agents can move according to different exigencies and purposes. Moreover, and although Rosenblatt described herself as a literary and reading theorist, it is because of this construct of literacy—one to which she did not seem entirely attuned in her own work—that I feel justified in reconceptualizing her work as specifically pertinent to this field, and especially to the expansive attention New Literacy Studies scholars—such as Brian Street or James Gee—pay to both educative questions of acquisition, and to critical and anthropological questions of

use. For scholars and students, this means attending to the ways that the pragmatics of communication relate to the ever-changing cultures in which such communications take place, and to the differing values with which such communications can be imbued by its users, depending on agents' different experiences and goals. By insisting on this broad view of "literacy" as my explicit (and Rosenblatt's implicit) topic of inquiry, I argue that scholars and students' work in the ideologies of consumption (or reading) cannot be uprooted from their own ideologies of production (or writing), and that the work of evaluative critique is less separable from questions of practice and propriety than current institutional structures might imply.

That said, and as indicated above, Rosenblatt's transactional model does propose a level of generality through which literacy practices can be explained and explored, and in many ways this relates to my conviction that her transactional theory constitutes an investigation into "literacy as a cultural practice"—as habits and behaviors of value-laden participation—and refuses to see literacy as merely as what Elizabeth Wardle critiques as a wholesale "transportation" model for communicative skills, somehow operating independent of the contingencies of context ("Creative" np). Here, too, then, another term should be addressed, one especially controversial to both English and writing studies: what I mean here by *culture* and why I prefer it to "ecologies" or "activity systems," two of the key alternate constructs embraced by writing studies scholars to explain agents' shifting relationship to genres, texts, and contexts.⁵ To be

⁵ Perhaps the most famous proponent of an Bruno Latour-inflected "activity system" theory of writing is David Russell (e.g. 1997). Ecology (a term Rosenblatt also references, as I will later explain) and ecocomposition offer an alternate construct for the dynamics within and from which literacy events and meaning-making take place (e.g. Sidney Dobrin and Christian Weisser, 2002; the edited volume *Ecocomposition*, 2001; or as the concept has more recently be used to develop newly expansive writing assessment models by Elizabeth Wardle and Kevin Roozen, 2012). That said, discussions of literacy and culture often involve ecological views (e.g. Kris Gutierrez et al,

sure, for all the fields here discussed—literary studies, literacy studies, writing and composition studies, even cultural studies itself—culture has remained over the last century a deeply contested term, in many ways because its very ubiquity—not to mention the internal contradictions the term has also come to embody—has diffused its meaning to the point of potential irrelevance. Perhaps most famously, Raymond Williams (1976) notes the varied, distinct and “incompatible systems of thought” for which “culture” has become a central concept. Among its many definitions, Williams notes its major ones to include a teleologically weighted “general process of . . .development” (as in “cultivation” or concepts of enculturation); the more anthropologically inflected “particular way of life” (as in, say “car culture”); or the traditionally Arnoldian “works and practices of intellectual and especially artistic activity” (what might be meant vernacularly by “cultural pursuits”) (*Keywords* 90). Even so, and after Susan Hegeman (1999, 2012), I believe that, because of this very multiplicity of implications, culture remains a key term in thinking through democratic models of literacy and learning, models that attend as much to shifting and varied and often ineffable questions of value, as to the actions, activities, situations and determining histories within which the more functional practices of communication take place.

Moreover, and as I will address more in my second chapter, “culture” vividly captures, as no other term can, the very tensions that Rosenblatt’s work exploits between the different kinds of investigations into social value with which thinkers of the interwar period were experimenting, whether through the relativistic cultural anthropology of Rosenblatt’s college roommate and

2009), and these view do not necessarily conflict with the activity systems model within which literacy events and rhetorical communication can be understood to take place.

close friend Margaret Mead, or through the eviscerating evaluations and often elitist standards evident in much of I.A. Richards's literary critical work. Indeed, as Rosenblatt strove to show, such investigations, despite their differences, also shared many goals, chiefly in the name of yoking together the development of individual critical faculties and the achievement of larger cultural change and non-predictable social progress. As Hegeman argues, this specific period's culture concept "subsum[ed] *both* of the ideas" of anthropological cultural relativism and an "aesthetic ideal" that she finds to align with both formalism and *bildung* (*Patterns* 6, her emphasis).

As such, the term "culture" can be seen to also yoke together—in rich and suggestive ways—the precise approaches that Rosenblatt's work sought to integrate: the tolerant, inclusively relativistic, and descriptive work of social scientist, and the aspirational, evaluative, and diagnostic work of the cultural critic. Yet, in this, Rosenblatt's theories can also be seen as rowing somewhat against the field-specific trends of her time, where such disciplinary projects were increasingly seen to be most rigorous when conceived of as mutually exclusive.

Rosenblatt's first two books (1931, 1938), in fact—as I will show—explicitly critique and provide a theoretical alternative to the increasingly polarizing identities that she saw embraced by many forms of aesthetic thought and certain strains of progressive social science—although, for her, these were trends to which John Dewey and Franz Boas offered crucial exceptions. Indeed, Andrew Jewett (2012) has identified Dewey and Boas as part of group of Columbia-based "scientific democrats" (9, 188) who were as engaged with pragmatic questions of empirically-enabled progress as they were with questions of ethics and "culture" (9)—"focused on making an impact of the minds of citizens" (9) not merely by imparting crudely utilitarian and

objective forms of knowledge, but also “by shaping [citizens’] moral character, normative commitments, and discursive practices” (10). As it appears to do for Jewett, this term of “culture” also allows me to reveal the way that investigation into such “discursive practices” were engaged with shifting questions of value and meaning, and not just bare function, and thus the way that all these thinkers envisioned the pragmatics of literacy to be deeply entwined with what Raymond Williams calls “artistic activity.” While I see Rosenblatt’s theories in clear opposition to the “enculturation” model embodied by E. D. Hirsch’s concept of “cultural literacy” (1987), this dissertation’s emphasis on “culture,” and on Rosenblatt’s re-interpretation of the “aesthetic” as the result of self-critical “transactions,” also refuses to see the innovations realized by aspirational “artistic activity” as irrelevant to an advanced education in writing. Finally, and as to culture’s relation to “artistic activity” itself, and which Rosenblatt later retheorizes as the kinds of engagements activated when an “aesthetic” stance” is taken up, I will show these to be concepts that these thinkers take on quite directly, and whose specific meanings will come into sharper focus as this dissertation continues.

Bedrock to these concepts of “artistic activity,” an agent’s “stance,” and agent-motivated instances of “transfer,” is finally the concept of *practice*, another core idea that this dissertation will rely on, and which has already been somewhat glossed above through my construct of literacy. As previously noted, what I understand as Rosenblatt’s transactional theory of literacy insists on conceptualizing textual meaning as an “event”—a time- and place-specific instance of knowing called up by three mutually conditioning forces: a set of text-signs, a rhetorically and culturally weighted situation, and an agent with both a specific purpose and “personal linguistic-experiential reservoir.” Although this focus on a mutable “event” that is somewhat, but not

entirely, controllable by an agent, Rosenblatt's theories thus suggest a construct of knowledge as more of a practice than a product—similar to the constructs of knowledge that undergird the theories of culture and cultural change explored by Boas, Baldensperger, Richards, and Dewey.

Moreover, “practice”—like culture—can be understood as subsuming the two interpenetrating levels by which literacy, especially in an educational context, operates—the value-laden schema of what-and-how we already know, and the value-laden communicative procedures towards which, as learners, we aspire, or grow. On that first level, “practice” can refer to the largely habitual activities from which cultural meaning and value are made and reproduced. To see reading and writing as these kinds of practices is to recognize these activities' inevitable embeddedness in the everyday work of communication and functioning as enabling a kind of cultural maintenance. At a second level, though, the concept of “practice” also speaks to the discipline of specific methodologies that agents can (relatively) control and reform in order to seek new and newly specific knowledge-making ends. Here, a practice becomes particularly self-reflective and purposive—and, indeed, progressive—work, the kind whose warp may run perpendicular to the weft of habit, on and out of which it builds. As Rosenblatt's emphasis on stance suggests, literacy as a cultural “practice” can thus move between and develop out of a variety of cultures and their attendant allegiances; and at a variety of scales; and with a variety of possible attitudes (more or less self- and world-critical). In this way, and as I will argue, a focus on practice, more than a focus on product, and thus on means and sources more than on ends and conclusions, better enables agent-motivated transfer between what might otherwise appear entirely dissociated spheres.

These chapters will also explore and better define a series of other key terms only glancingly mentioned in this preface, with special attention paid in chapter two to the “progressive-pragmatic” school of thought that I take up from the work of intellectual historian James Kloppenburg (1986) and that I see Rosenblatt as forwarding and applying specifically to literacy and education; and—after the disciplinary historian Thomas Miller (2011)—to the specific virtues of rethinking literary and writing studies as potentially coming to constitute a conjoint form of literacy education. In this, I follow the compositionists and educators Hephzibah Roskelly and Kate Roland’s (1998) focus on American pragmatism as a rich source for reinvigorating more affirmative and participatory models of writing and reading that are both critically engaged and can account for all the learner’s evolving goals and strategies as a literate agent herself. And like these other intellectual histories, this critical reconsideration of Rosenblatt’s work suggests also an attendant reconsideration of the pragmatic-progressive milieu out of which I see her theories to have emerged; in recommending a reappraisal of Rosenblatt I also suggest a reappraisal of the thinkers who I argue most directly influenced her work. As this dissertation will show, Rosenblatt was able to leverage in significantly singular ways this milieu’s concern with reception and “stance,” with self-critical transformations, and with participation in the making not only of knowledge but of the values with which cultures imbue that knowledge, and to subsequently produce a theory of literacy whose implications, I suggest, have yet to be fully exploited, but perhaps whose time has now come.

Melissa Ianetta has noted that “combining the histories of composition and literature more fully...will help us better understand the inadequacy of narrow discipline-based thinking to solve the problems of either field” (56): I suggest that Rosenblatt’s theory of transactional literacy and

the integrative implications of her “aesthetic stance” both emerge from and help to reveal the beginnings of such a broader history, and thus provides the more expansive base for the possible solutions that Ianetta recommends.⁶ As I hope to show, the inter-disciplinary nature of Rosenblatt’s investigations, combined with her insistence that, when it comes to educative concerns, there exists no difference between the ethical, the critical and the practical, can make Rosenblatt’s work feel not only strikingly contemporary but especially crucial to our specific moment as culturally minded scholars and educators, and especially as regards the responsible delivery and content of relevant literacy knowledge.

* * *

I begin this dissertation with an overview of Rosenblatt’s legacy, and the lens it offers on the schisms that, from the post-war era on, have come to shape postsecondary constructs of writing and reading, especially as the mandate of writing programs is seen to relate to other work performed in English departments, where such programs are often housed. I explore the scholarship’s over-focus on Rosenblatt’s theories of reading, isolated from her work’s implications also for writing; on a traditional view of “literature,” uprooted from Rosenblatt’s radical redefinition of the very construct of the literary; and on the softer elements of Rosenblatt’s democratic pedagogies—in which the inclusion of alternate perspectives is treated

⁶ Worth noting is that such an approach has required me to take some unusual methodological steps as a scholar, especially given my reliance on Rosenblatt’s never-before translated (or, indeed, critically investigated) dissertation. Since I was not trained for work in comparative literature, I received grants to hire and closely worked with a translator, so that I might access this key text as well as a seminal essay by Rosenblatt’s mentor, Fernand Baldensperger. See also footnote 7.

chiefly as a charitable value—that ignores the more challenging philosophical implications of the self-world “transactions” that her theories find at the root of all literacy practices. I posit that these tendencies emerge from the same factors that also helped to deepen and justify the gulfs growing between post-secondary constructs of lower-level practical instruction, on the one hand, and higher-level ideology critique, on the other, and which would also come to manifest, in post-secondary education, as an increasing gulf between the developmentally minded teaching of writing, on the one hand, and critically minded investigations of literature and culture, on the other. In such a context, a post-Sputnik, state-endorsed focus on skill-building models of literacy and reading was both reinforced by and defined against the growing conviction that political and critical engagement constituted a largely anti-authoritarian project. In such a context, Rosenblatt was taken up to support a variety of overly extreme positions that actually muffled her theories’ potential to speak across these divides and the implicit questions of transfer thus asked; a number of these positions instead only perpetuated the very social/individual, subject/object and reading/writing binaries that her work had fought so hard to complicate. I thus argue that a return to Rosenblatt’s originating context in the interwar period can help to re-contextualize and refresh her theories in newly useful ways.

In my second, third, and fourth chapters, I build the historical and theoretical framework through which Rosenblatt’s theories can be newly investigated. This critical recovery work combines archival research with intellectual history from a variety of disciplines. My second chapter more specifically explores the influence effected by both Franz Boas’s cultural anthropology—particularly his vision of cultural history and the arts, and his progressive-minded theory of diffusion—and by the Sorbonne-based French comparatists for whom Rosenblatt wrote her

comparative literature dissertation (in French) in 1931, with particular focus on Fernand Baldensperger. I examine the argument and methods of this dissertation—*The Idea of Art for Art's Sake in English Literature of the Victorian Period*—as evidence of Rosenblatt's burgeoning interest in the study of literature less as a product than as an evolving and participatory cultural practice.⁷ It was through such scholarship and interdisciplinary influence, I argue, that Rosenblatt began to see her way towards a new model of literacy, and a theory of cultural knowledge building, that stands in significant contrast to her period's emerging conceptions of critical method, especially as applied to cultural texts. I also posit that, even from its beginnings, Rosenblatt's investigation of aesthetics and the "idea of art" protests the sub-disciplinary divisions that were coming to structure the field of English—between its purportedly higher calling in literary-critical study, and writing instruction's focus on the culturally situated dynamics of literacy. In its place, I find Rosenblatt's early work and influences suggesting a more expansive and integrationist view that combines the self-critical study of literacy practices

⁷ As I will explain in more detail in future chapters, Rosenblatt wrote and published *L'idée de l'art pour l'art dans la littérature anglaise pendant la période victorienne* (*The Idea of Art for Art's Sake in English Literature during the Victorian Period*) in French for her doctorate at the University of Paris (Sorbonne); it has never been translated into English. Thanks to a research grant from University of Michigan's Rackham School of Graduate Studies, I was able to hire Dr. Shannon Winston to translate Rosenblatt's entire 1931 book from the French, along with Fernand Baldensperger's seminal (and never translated) essay "Le Mot et La Chose" ("The Word and the Thing"), written to open the first (1921) issue of *Le revue de littérature comparée* (*The Review of Comparative Literature*), which he founded and co-edited with his Sorbonne colleague, Paul Hazard. All quotations from *The Idea of Art for Art's Sake* and "Le Mot et La Chose" that are included here are thus the translations of Dr. Winston, although it is important to note that throughout the translation process I worked closely with Dr. Winston on both local and global matters, on issues ranging from the wording of Rosenblatt's and Baldensperger's key terms to the historical context and disciplinary conventions informing the production of these works. As such, we combed over all the passages quoted in this dissertation in a particularly collaborative spirit. Finally, and because Dr. Winston's translations are unpublished, page numbers refer to those of the original French texts. Many thanks to Dr. Winston for her detailed, tireless work and her engagement with this project.

with historically situated, cultural-critical engagements—especially through her conception of stance.

My third chapter begins more specifically to contextualize Rosenblatt's later theory of the efferent-aesthetic continuum, by recovering what I see to be the original sources for her transactional theory's two main stances. More particularly, this chapter traces her later construct of the "efferent stance" (1978, 1994) back to her 1938 discussions of "stock responses" in her first, and breakout, work in English, *Literature as Exploration*. I show the ways that this early exploration of the "stock"—which can be defined as an agent's inherited and largely undigested responses to cultural artifacts, often distinguished from more active or authentic forms of cultural engagement—differs in a few significant ways from the prototypically modernist anxiety about newly popular media and modes of reading, the very apprehension that can be seen to have laid the groundwork for certain aspects of the New Criticism specifically, and for literary criticism more generally. In particular, I argue that Rosenblatt's exploration of the "stock" draws on both Boas's culturally relativistic ethos and I. A. Richards's thorny inquiries into rhetoric and communication to develop in a very different direction than most of the New Critical work that Richards as cultural critic is usually considered to have inspired. Indeed, this genealogy of Rosenblatt's concept of the "efferent" sheds light not only on the promise of this work for participatory and inclusive models of post-secondary reading and writing; it also suggests ways that Richards's own work deserves its own reconsiderations. In the end, I show that Rosenblatt's theory of the "efferent stance" challenges the common assumption that high-level critical reading should and does constitute the wholesale rejection of an individual's culturally embedded "stock responses." Instead, I show this early exploration of the "efferent" stance to have laid the

groundwork for her theory of the “aesthetic stance” as a form of self-critical engagement with, and complication of, each reader’s own “stock,” as will be explored in the next chapter.

Yet this next, fourth chapter does not immediately dive into its own genealogy of what Rosenblatt went on to call the “aesthetic stance.” Putting an explicit focus on Rosenblatt’s burgeoning definition of a democratically crucial “cultural approach” to reading, I here begin to also address the need in post-secondary reading- and writing-intensive programs and coursework for a more robust construct of literacy, one that acknowledges the often invisible ways that many school-based reading and writing practices are influenced by normative ideologies and expected outcomes that sometimes undercut instructors’ professed educational and often political aims. Putting into dialogue literary and literacy theorists, ranging from Brian Street to Michael Warner, I argue that reading, and especially critical reading, needs to be theorized both as rigorously and as pragmatically as writing studies has theorized writing; that, further, the connections between critical reading and writing practices can also be strengthened and acknowledged as two inseparable parts of a literacy approach, or “stance”; and that Rosenblatt’s holistic “cultural approach” can begin to achieve this integrative work. As such, I also here connect Street’s inquiries to those of John Dewey, and specifically to Dewey’s emergent and still sometimes implicit recommendations—in *Art and Experience*, and in his educational theory—that cultural engagements between subject and object, or between literate agent and text, are most productive when conceptualized in what he would later define as “transactional” terms. I trace Rosenblatt’s “aesthetic stance,” then, not only to her dissertation’s earlier critique of the “idea of art for art’s sake,” but also to Dewey’s theorization of the social role of art and the social agent’s participation in helping activate such a role. Consolidating her final theory of transactional

literacy with her earlier work on a “cultural approach” to literature, I argue that this “aesthetic stance” performs a crucial retheorization of the textually “aesthetic” as an attitude towards language that is equal parts self-critical and culturally tolerant, and that names the interplay between shared norms and more idiosyncratic, personal reactions as the very means by which agents achieve both communicative self-efficacy and democratic cultural participation.

My final chapter returns to an originating question of my project—the divisions too long presumed, and institutionally sanctioned, between a post-secondary education in applied skills, on the one hand, and in literature, history, culture and ideology critique, on the other, and which have naturalized an attendant and presumed divisibility between one’s practices of reading and one’s practices of writing. Here, I argue most pointedly that a retheorization of Rosenblatt’s “aesthetic stance” contributes specifically to questions about the transfer of literacy knowledge across domains and dimensions. Building on Kathleen Blake Yancey’s and Liane Robertson, and Elizabeth Wardle’s recent work concerning what Wardle calls the creative “repurposing” of writing knowledge (CF), I postulate that a model of transactional literacy can help agents to theorize and reflect on their own practices, and its acts of travel and transfer, in usefully and unusually expansive ways, by envisioning such transfer to not only occur across knowledge domains, but also across purposive stances, and, moreover, dimensions of literacy (e.g. reading and writing). Transaction provides a model of literacy in which diverse cultural perspectives are recognized as more than inevitable but also necessary and highly productive forces in the development of both self-critical and participatory agents and the new knowledge such agents can help to shape. As such, our attitudes towards literacy itself thus emerge as transferable attitudes, assumptions, and agentic stances: as a means of producing meanings and values that

are relevant at various scales, and whose contributions literacy-intensive classrooms can help more explicitly to cultivate.

Chapter One

Rosenblatt's Contested Legacy in English Studies:

A Reception Study and Intervention

Certainly, Louise Rosenblatt is not the only scholar to put forth a call for revitalizing the “reading-writing connection” left largely unexploited by English studies’ divided subfields. One of the richest of such proposals is Doug Brent’s 1992 *Reading as Rhetorical Invention*, which outlines a theory of reading that will “expand[] rhetoric to take account of the social view of knowledge”—for, as he writes,

if the production of all knowledge is an intensely social process, then we should be able to describe in some detail exactly how the process of taking in others' ideas through reading relates to the process, separable from the first in name only, of devising arguments that will persuade others. (xii)

In many ways, this “social view” of knowledge is analogous to the “ecological” paradigm also promoted and explained by Rosenblatt’s transactional theory, in which, as she writes, “organisms” and “environment” forever shape each other’s function and cannot, so should not, be considered independent of each other’s influence (*Transactional* 1364-5). As such, the “expansion” of our visions of reading and writing entails—for Brent as for Rosenblatt—a return to the socio-psychological sources by which readers and writers make meaning; and thus a view,

as Brent writes, of the study of reading and writing as providing “a means of understanding one of the primary mechanisms of understanding itself” (xv).⁸

Brent’s “expansive” interest in reigniting this reading-writing connection has, in the college context, remained largely unmet. Significantly, however, Brent’s attendant “expansive” interest in the “primary mechanisms of understanding itself” has been more wholeheartedly embraced by writing studies, specifically through the field’s recent and influential turn to transfer studies (work to which, perhaps unsurprisingly, Brent has made some key contributions, e.g. 2011, 2012). Over the last decade, this writing transfer scholarship has protested the decontextualized skill-based models of literacy instruction that has long governed college-level writing instruction; in its place, transfer studies has focused on the dynamics by which learners abstract specific literacy competencies and understandings shaped by one field and make them newly relevant and useable for another: what Christiane Donahue characterizes as an act of abstracting “knowledge from its initial context in order to reinvest it in a different context” (111). Further, such work is seen to be enabled, as Kathleen Blake Yancey and Liane Robertson (2014) propose, by a sophisticated form of metacognition, what these authors call a “reiterative reflective practice” that is not “narrow and procedural” so much as “theoretical and substantive”—a “big picture thinking” by which learners “develop *a theory of writing* that can be used to frame writing tasks” across multiple contexts (3, my emphasis).

⁸ Other reading-writing connection calls include those put forth by Wayne Booth, Mariolina Salvatori and Patricia Donahue, and David Joliffe and Alison Harl.

One of this dissertation's core contentions is that Rosenblatt's interest in the "reading-writing connection" is, at bottom, a philosophical investigation into these transfer dynamics, and into that "theoretical and substantive...big picture thinking" by which learners can better understand and exploit their own practices as literate agents, with whatever culture they find themselves transacting, and at whatever scale of intervention and potential reform. Moreover, I posit that this theory of transfer attends not only to agents' "reinvestment" of knowledge across contexts, but to the consequential interpenetrations between agents and contexts that such reinvestment entails; and also to agents' "reinvestment" of knowledge across dimensions of literacy—reading and writing themselves.

This dissertation thus argues that Rosenblatt's transactional theory of literacy, and her attendant formulation of the "aesthetic-efferent continuum," can help to reunite the dimensions of literacy that English studies has traditionally conceptualized as belonging to separate domains of instruction and learning, and especially by addressing what Brent calls the core "mechanisms of understanding itself." Rosenblatt's model of the so-called aesthetic-efferent continuum abstracts agents' culturally shaped attitudes towards language to the extent that this model can be used to describe not only two core *reading* stances, or attitudes towards culturally-embedded language, between which the reader continually shuttles as her purpose, her situation, and the nature of her text-object change, but two core *writing* stances, or attitudes towards culturally-embedded language, between which the writer continually shuttles as her purpose, her situation, and her understanding of her text object change. Yet this transactional theory of literacy also posits a mutually constitutive relationship between the personal development of an individual agent (i.e. one student mastering certain skills and knowledge) and the social and cumulative development

of shared knowledge (i.e. the value, meaning and nature of those skills and knowledge more largely)—exposing and explaining the potent interplay that reading and writing activate between individual practice and development, on the one hand, and changing cultural values and mores, on the other. By this, any literacy practice, whether a student's or a scholar's, is shown to always be a matter of both consumption *and* production, a critical act colored by both pragmatic and theoretical concerns: at once individually strategic as well as weighted with ethical and political import.

Yet what is most germane in Rosenblatt's work—and so crucial to the study of literacy transfer—has also made this work somewhat difficult for scholars in English studies, whether focused on literature or literacy, to recognize, much less to assimilate. Rosenblatt's combined interest in cultural and literary theory, on the one hand, and the culturally embedded dynamics of literate activity, on the other, were precisely what propelled her to theorize the more generalizable dynamics and practices by which cultural meaning and values are made, critiqued, corralled, carried forward, or transformed. Even so, the very conditions of possibility that have shaped English studies' sense of itself over the last half-century has muffled this potential—and has in fact produced a scholarly legacy that in many ways ends up reinscribing the very bimodal thinking Rosenblatt's work seeks to complicate and correct.⁹

Perhaps the most famous narrative about Rosenblatt is a narrative of neglect—this established with particular vigor by John Clifford's 1990 edited volume on her contributions to the college-

⁹ This point has been noted by Mark Faust (2001) but its implications have not been explored in nearly enough detail, either in his own work or in the more general literature, whether methodologically endorsing or critiquing Rosenblatt's theories and legacy.

level teaching of literature (this book's back cover copy describes Rosenblatt as a "teacher's theorist"). Here, Rosenblatt's experiments with a purportedly prescient form of reader response theory, as often attributed to her 1938 *Literature as Exploration*, are framed as an anti-authoritarian challenge to a quickly professionalizing literary critical establishment, especially though the author's commonsensical spirit and pedagogical concerns that are defined in significantly narrow terms (i.e. focused almost exclusively on teacher-mediated student growth). By this argument, Rosenblatt's attention to the classroom (see Mariolina Salvatori), intertwined with her gender status (as a "woman of theory," see Temma Berg), allowed her to be overlooked by literary theorists who prefer their scholarship pure, objective (read: privileged, mostly male), and theoretical or non-applied (e.g. unconcerned with the details of student learning). Nonetheless, Rosenblatt's progressive roots, and her return to the core dynamics undergirding literary activities and literary engagements, are also, within this framework, too often described in reductive, even short-sighted terms—less entailing an expansive, and expansively consequential, theory of knowledge about our "means of understanding" than a resolutely student-centered focus on individual, teacher-mediated development. This chapter thus complicates this story of "neglect" to explore another facet of the Rosenblatt legacy—the extent to which the characterizations and affiliations with which Rosenblatt's work has become encrusted has been problematically shaped by the potent schisms and unproductively extreme either-ors of the disciplinary climate she worked to reimagine.

For even while Rosenblatt's work seeks to reunite as an "ecological" whole literacy's varied forces and dimensions, her legacy among English studies' scholars still emerges from and confirms that most faculty, students and theorists continue to understand its sub-fields—literary

studies and writing instruction—not only as separable, but as serving radically different ends. This is most visible in English studies’ asymmetrical approaches to reading and writing. In composition and writing studies courses, writing is largely understood and studied as an intensely context, purpose and task-dependent, but reading continues to be formulated mainly as a single skill, requiring little from the student beyond a catch-all care or “depth.” In literary and cultural studies courses, in turn, reading is understood as a supremely complex, ever-situated act, but writing is treated more as a transparent window into thought: a relatively autonomous vehicle for the communication of those critical reading skills that the curriculum is set on exercising.¹⁰ Yet the parceling out of these literacy constructs also functions to perpetuate and naturalize the over-determined binaries that have historically come to attach to either side of this schism: between skills and content, practice and theory, and, more generally, between the developmental and/or preparatory work of the novice, on the one hand, and the exemplary, “achieved” work of the expert, on the other. Such divisions reflect, first, the division of labor by which literary studies and writing courses are often taught—with tenured scholars teaching the one, and contingent faculty or a transient graduate student workforce left to shoulder the burden of the other; and, second, an attendant and naturalized schism between secondary-school inflected pedagogical concerns (with writing instruction often framed as “transitional”), on the one side, and, on the other, a kind of knowledge-making conceived more as the training of future academicians. These rifts parallel not only an ideological split between the instrumental and the

¹⁰ As argued in the work of David Joliffe, Allison Harl, Marguirite Helmers, Lisa Bosley and Mariolina Salvatori, and as my fourth chapter will explore in more detail, composition studies has left largely unexplored the complexities of postsecondary modes of reading. Literary studies’ twentieth-century inattention to rhetorically sensitive forms of writing instruction has been noted in a number of the discipline’s histories, e.g. Robert Scholes, Gerald Graff, Thomas Miller, Sharon Crowley.

scholarly, but also between the making of educational policy (with its social, economic, and political—and therefore largely “public”—objectives), and the disciplinary making of specialized knowledge, whose wider applicability is little explored.¹¹ In this scheme, the “applied” work of writing or composition studies and the “pure” work of literary and cultural criticism both look suspiciously upon the means and ends of the other, ironically reiterating the very binaries that each also claims to disavow.

Given such a climate, Rosenblatt’s dearly held characterization as inspirational professor of education also came to guarantee her near-invisibility, if not apparent irrelevance, to literary critics and theorists; and for those literary critics who take up her work, Rosenblatt’s refusal that “the text...and the reader...can be separately analyzed” (*Literature* 100) is read more as a pedagogical homily than a genuine challenge to the very definition and role of the textual object in a cultural education: which is to say, an education in the mutable cultural values of the past, the present, and the imagined future. Rosenblatt’s project is seen to contribute only to immediate classroom operations, rather than to questions about the more generalizable practices and knowledge paradigms by which cultural meanings and values are made, critiqued, corralled, carried forward, or transformed.

¹¹ It is also crucial to remember that this tradition of separating reading and writing instruction, while potent, also has a relatively shallow history in higher education; as many scholars have noted (e.g. Miller, Scholes, Crowley, Guillory), exposure to cultural artifacts and the production of personal expressions were closely knit within the educational traditions of rhetoric, grammar, philology, language study, and the belletristic tradition. By many lights, it was not until the proper expression of one’s own ideas was conceived as a problem to be remediated through practice-oriented composition classrooms (e.g. Harvard’s late nineteenth-century composition courses, see John Brereton), and the proper reading of culture was conceived as a problem to be reformed through literature classrooms and the literary critical method (see Catherine Gallagher), that these divisions set into place.

At the same time, the Rosenblatt's continued focus on reading and literature also seems to have rendered her work irrelevant to most contemporary composition and writing studies scholars, especially those working in transfer studies. Given the divisions that currently structure writing studies' own critical identity and goals, Rosenblatt's desire to theoretically establish and justify substantial reading-writing connections can too often appear little more than a quaintly humanistic throwback: recommending an outdated mode of literacy education in which cultural texts were offered as pure examples of reader-to-writer communication, unmediated by rhetorical exigency, language ideologies, or differences in cultural context.

To be sure, both writing studies and literary and cultural studies have shown a growing interest in investigating and expanding their notion of practice and its contributions to the making of critical knowledge, and in many ways to imagine themselves beyond the calcified constraints of their inherited mandates. Literary critical studies continues to question the field's assumptions about reading method and its attendant constructs of knowledge and critique by exploring alternative approaches involving distance, surface, non-suspicious, hyper or "machine" approaches, and by recasting the roles played, for example, by the affective, the formal, or the "newly" material. Especially through its investigations into transfer, composition and writing studies has similarly revealed an increasing desire to problematize its traditionally preparatory role in higher education and establish itself instead as a substantial and dialogically engaged body of scholarly knowledge with sources in and implications for all aspects of learners' lives, most vividly illustrated by Linda Adler-Kassner and Elizabeth Wardle's field-remapping survey of writing studies' "threshold concepts" (2015's *Naming What We Know*). Especially in light of

the ongoing “crisis of the humanities”—a crisis at which English studies is often positioned at the forefront—these movements signal a new desire for dialogue across knowledge domains, re-establishing these fields’ relevance to a larger public sphere and the array of literacy practices they make available. Nor do these inquiries have merely theoretical import. As higher education becomes increasingly corporatized, as standardized and delocalized college-level assessments are increasingly recommended, and as a cultural emphasis on STEM coursework continues to grow, fields of study whose significance is less quantifiably transferable to future careers will need to justify the kinds of thinking they encourage in newly relevant ways.

Nonetheless, as Rosenblatt’s legacy suggests, English studies’ own deeply ingrained divisions can make such inquiries into its own critical practices and their transferability exceedingly difficult to carry out, especially as they attempt to theorize across the scholarly and the pragmatic, the critical and the strategic. Indeed, Rosenblatt’s reputation in the field provides a vivid cautionary tale. Far from uniting the goals of literary and cultural critical study with those of a culturally embedded literacy education, Rosenblatt’s reception has, as I will show below, in many ways more firmly entrenched these spheres’ apparent incommensurability. This legacy reveals the not only the biases undergirding the discipline of English, but their continuing strength: the very conditions (and received assumptions about those conditions) that ended up marginalizing this integrative thinker’s influence. This chapter’s following sections will examine Rosenblatt’s own legacy as it was shaped by those sub-fields she tried to integrate and claim as her own; such an examination will in turn help to explain why the crucial questions about advanced and critically minded literacy and its transfer, which Rosenblatt’s work begins to raise, remain so hard for the field to expansively address—at least if the field continues to normatively

adhere to its traditional boundaries, subfields, and categories of thought. Yet through uncovering the field's own prejudices and blind-spots, this chapter will also point the way to a new framework by which her work's potential can be better understood.

The Making of a Legacy: Rosenblatt's Literature as Exploration

This dissertation maintains that Rosenblatt's later (1978, 1994) theorizations of "transaction"—as the situation and stance-specific dynamics by which read- and written-meaning is made—represent her most crucial contribution to the field of literary studies, writing studies, and literacy studies. Especially in her late essay on the subject, Rosenblatt not only explains transaction in her most concise terms, she achieves the crucial work of abstracting this construct to the extent that it also describes the dynamics of writing—showing both acts as similarly (if not identically) recursive negotiations between convention and invention, self and situation. Moreover, and as I've already argued, this Rosenblattian concept of transaction bears even more specifically on current inquiries into the dynamics of transfer—the way that competencies, whether understood as cultural habits of mind, structures of knowledge, or disciplinary practices, all weighted with complex epistemological baggage, carry over from one domain to another, not through the application of crudely conceptualized "skills" but through the critical transformations required for the making of new knowledge.

However, much of Rosenblatt's reputation—especially among those in English studies—rests less on this later work than on her 1938 (revised 1968, 1995) *Literature as Exploration*, her earliest and, I argue, least philosophically rigorous work on reading theory per se. Rosenblatt's

standing as an exclusively student-centered educator, “progressive” in the most stereotypical terms, is only compounded by this book’s publication history, and specifically its ties to the Progressive Education Administration (PEA), under whose imprint it was published and under whose copyright it remained for close to thirty years. Further highlighting these associations was Rosenblatt’s move, in 1948, from Brooklyn College’s English Department to New York University’s School of Education. For many of her acolytes, this professional shift appears to signal less an experimental expansion of her scholarly concerns and identity, than a frustrated rejection of the literary-critical status quo of the late nineteen forties, and especially the work of the New Critics, a gesture for which she would later be championed, as this chapter will show, by like-minded dissenters from this movement’s apparently monolithic influence on the methods and goals of English studies. Indeed, *Literature as Exploration* remains the primary source of some of the most engaged interventions into and analyses of Rosenblatt’s work as it specifically applies to secondary and postsecondary English studies.¹² A 1998 Robert Innis essay, for example, which promisingly strives to put the Rosenblattian paradigm into conversation with current critical theory—leveraging aesthetic and pragmatic philosophies that range from Michael Polyani’s to Paul Ricoeur’s—relies more on this early work than on Rosenblatt’s 1978 *The Reader, the Text, the Poem*, and makes no mention of her most mature statement of transactional theory (1994).

¹² As I also note below, Rosenblatt’s models of reading have had a rich and complex influence in reading research and literacy studies (see Ruddell and Unrau; Street “Academic,” 2000). In keeping with the rest of this dissertation, however, this chapter will focus on Rosenblatt as she has been interpreted and used by scholars and educators from English studies and its postsecondary context.

I thus argue that *Literature as Exploration*—which, since 1938, has never been out of print, and is often described by its promoters in personally revelatory terms—has functioned as a kind of millstone to Rosenblatt’s reputation. From an authorial perspective, its very success seems to have made Rosenblatt reluctant to rigorously redress many of its vagaries. To be sure, Rosenblatt seemed aware of the greater significance of the later, more highly theorized constructs of reading and writing that she was able to develop, and thus in the 1968 version of *Literature as Exploration*, she inserted a handful of allusions to “transaction.” Even so, these addendums are frustratingly light: transaction’s specific implications—for enabling a reader’s “exploration” of self, world and text through the acts of both reading and writing; for redefining literature itself; or for reimagining what might constitute engaged and participatory (“democratic”) constructs of reading and writing—all remain, in this edition of her influential book, grossly undeveloped, as they do even in the *Literature as Exploration*’s final 1995 edition, glossily repackaged by the Modern Language Association with a somewhat blowsy introduction by Wayne Booth.¹³ Though the pitch of Booth’s introduction is in keeping with *Literature as Exploration*’s own assiduously non-academic tone, the very airiness of his claims give them the feel of a charity plug, unfortunate since Booth’s own under-recognized work in the writing-reading connection, and in the rhetorical modes represented by literature itself, have much in common with the disciplinarily integrative work to which Rosenblatt’s later theories also aspire.¹⁴

¹³ Mariolina Salvatori’s 1991 essay on Rosenblatt’s revisions to *Literature as Exploration* makes a textually sensitive argument but remains overly hagiographic, sidestepping the extent to which Rosenblatt’s revisions also left a number of her theories severely underexplicated.

¹⁴ See, specifically, Booth’s *Rhetoric of Fiction* and “LITCOMP.”

At the level of reception, English educators' and critics' apparent preference for *Literature as Exploration* may also be explained by the fact that literacy-based "transaction" was a theory that Rosenblatt developed far more cautiously than the less challenging concept of "exploration" that grounds this earlier work, a mismatch that may have made the significance of "transaction," for hagiographers and critics alike, more difficult to glean. Rosenblatt first used the term in her 1956 essay "The Acid Test for Literature Teaching"—an essay arguing that "books do not simply happen to people. People also happen to books" (66). Here, however, "transaction" is leveraged purely as a kind of best classroom practice, acting as an undefined placeholder for a reader-sensitive pedagogy, leaving its crucial debt to Dewey unexplained. It was not until a full thirteen years later that Rosenblatt devoted an entire essay to unpacking the concept with her 1969 "Towards a Transactional Theory of Reading," then expanded into her 1978 *The Reader, the Text, the Poem*, and reaching its final, most concise, and most philosophically buttressed statement in the 1994 revision of "The Transactional Theory of Reading and Writing," as referred to above.

Further complicating the impact and the contemporaneous literature's understanding of "transaction" is the fact that, over the course of those same decades that Rosenblatt was developing this theory—the nineteen-sixties through the nineties—interest in Rosenblatt's 1938 *Literature as Exploration* was enjoying a series of so-called "rediscoveries" (e.g. Suleiman 45). This helped to cement an appealing narrative of neglect, tilting many defenses of her work more towards indignation than critical intervention or elaboration. (And despite these great cries of neglect, her even earlier work—her 1931 *The Idea of Art for Art's Sake*—has never, until my project, been translated into English.) Part of this "revival" was the result of happenstance: in

1965, *Literature as Exploration*'s copyright reverted from the then-defunct PEA and back to its author, so that, with rights now returned, Rosenblatt was able to revise a second edition of the book for publication in 1968 ("Retrospect"). But this publication was also serendipitously timed, coinciding with a new culture-shifting interest among English educators in awakening students to the immediate political significance both of literature per se, and of themselves as civic agents, a mandate that in the humanities, many disciplinary historians and theorists have argued, had been profoundly muffled over the two preceding decades, if not longer. Indeed, and by many accounts postwar, post-Sputnik anxieties had thrown into disrepute many of progressive education's more relativistic patience with the provisional, the uncategorical, and the unquantifiable.¹⁵ Resulting standards movements had encouraged new kinds of theoretical and methodological justifications for keeping education and its disciplines appropriately competitive for a quickly growing and diversifying postsecondary student body, calcifying the split between instruction in composition and in literary criticism into a division not just between different kinds of course work, but different fields altogether. By the mid-sixties, however, increasingly agent- and context-sensitive forms of critical theory and linguistic theory, combined with quickly diversifying forms of educational research offered new constructs of knowledge and education; tendencies with which Rosenblatt's roots in a broadly defined educational progressivism seemed to fit well (Alexander and Fox). Indeed, the first of these purported Rosenblatt revivals is not unlike literacy and writing studies' ground-shifting renewal of interest in cultural psychologist Lev Vygotsky, whose myriad early twentieth-century inquiries into the social dynamics of language acquisition

¹⁵ These arguments are put forth in particular detail in the seminal accounts of American educational progressivism by Lawrence Cremin (1965) and Arthur Applebee (1974).

had been compiled and newly translated into English in both the 1962 *Thought and Language*, and, perhaps even more influentially, the 1978 *Mind in Society*.¹⁶

Even so, the exact outlines of Rosenblatt's uptake—as I will investigate below—also illustrate that, despite these smaller, generational rolings, the larger binaries organizing English studies, which had set so firmly into place in the postwar era, have proved much harder to shake. Just as these binaries continued to shape the discipline's understanding of its own separable sets of methods, exigencies, and goals, as theorists of reading, on the one hand, and of writing, on the other, so they also shaped the grounds on which Rosenblatt's work was promoted or marginalized. Indeed, and not unlike Vygotsky's work, Rosenblatt's emerging focus on transaction per se—and the pragmatics of literacy education, broadly understood—have been much more easily assimilated into fields in which reading and writing, research and instruction, had not been cordoned off as self-evidently separable activities with separable goals: her later work in transaction thus became a touchstone most vividly in school-based literacy studies and

¹⁶ Of course, and befitting the scholarly-practical split in which these disciplinary narratives took shape, there is another key thread to this story. A purportedly “purer” intellectual (and less explicitly institutional) history of critical thought traces a line of late nineteenth- and twentieth-century literary criticism that, as influentially and succinctly put by Terry Eagleton, was “marked by a deep fear of the actual social world, and distaste for history itself” (81), and thus assumed in and for literature a comforting and sometimes apolitical stability of values, purpose, and communicative method. As world orders and borders continued to rearrange, however, and education continued to democratize, and as the power of the unconscious, the state, or the episteme were increasingly revealed, literature and culture themselves became newly understood, in Gerald Graff's terms, as “problems of theory” and thus “open to debate” (237). For the rare literary critics who championed Rosenblatt's work—Stephen Mailloux, John Clifford—her theories also provided philosophical firepower to new claims that literature and culture constituted not only a form of socially embedded rhetoric, but a mode of political engagement and critique. Yet, as I will show, Rosenblatt's theoretical contributions were too often undercut by her reputation as promoting only a narrowly psychological and developmental pedagogy.

reading research, whose field of inquiry and implications mainly concern the k-12 context.¹⁷ For postsecondary scholars, in comparison—as for the secondary educators influenced by English studies’ inner-disciplinary divides—it was *Literature as Exploration*, and not Rosenblatt’s later, more integrative work in transaction, that fit more neatly into a predetermined category in which applied pedagogical inquiry was entirely and properly separable from “professional” reading or scholarly critique. Rosenblatt’s purported neglect, in many ways, can instead be understood as a case of overly-strict compartmentalization. And it is one created—to apply Rosenblatt’s own construct—by a series of complex transactions between historical readers, texts, and the situations out of and into which those readers understood these texts as meaningful.

Somewhat to the detriment of her theories’ pragmatic use-value, such categorical tendencies—which were admittedly exacerbated by the ambivalence of the revisions Rosenblatt herself made to *Literature as Exploration*—thus had a striking effect: they came to invest that early book with the strange flavor and status of a paradoxically predictive relic, a work of the nineteen-thirties read through the highly politicized polarities by which postwar English studies had only since come to be understood. Leila Christenbury titles her 1995 essay on Rosenblatt’s nineteen-thirties work “Rosenblatt the Radical”; by the time of her death, she was accorded, among fellow educators in English Language Arts, a “rock star status,” according to Kent Williamson, then the executive director of the National Council for the Teachers of English, the association with

¹⁷ Farrell and Squire’s *Transactions with Literature* provides one example of this, combining essays on reading research, classroom pedagogy and literary theory for an audience of distinctly k-12 instructors. Another example is Robert J. Ruddell and Norman Unrau’s *Theoretical Models and Processes of Reading*, in which her 1994 essay appeared and whose 1994 and 2004 editions include a number of research studies that reference and empirically apply Rosenblatt’s theories of transaction and stance.

whom she had upheld probably the closest professional affiliation (Holley 2). Yet, for postsecondary educators and theorists, what was radical or “new” about Rosenblatt’s work has not been understood to lie in the rigor of her theoretical provocations. Instead, Rosenblatt’s work—again, too often reduced to the claims of her early *Literature as Exploration*—is championed for positions just as predictably oppositional as those they are seen to critique, muffling their integrative potential.

As I will show below, then, Rosenblatt’s legacy among English educators and literary critics has followed the lead set by the more cautious *Literature as Exploration* in three main ways. In the first strand, the scholarship centers on reading alone and largely ignores this theorist’s later inquiries also into writing, and in proving her purportedly prescient forays into reader response theory, ignores her later work’s focus on a more expansive transactional theory of literacy. The second strand follows *Literature as Exploration*’s uncorrected inclinations to sort texts into static categories of the self-evidently edifying and the “trashy” (cite), the literary and the stock,¹⁸ and circles back less to an investigation of “reader response” than to a narrow psychologism, individualism, and attendant traditional construct of literature, ignoring Rosenblatt’s later retheorization of the agent-text-situation transactions that produce and carry forward literary meaning and value—including a text’s own generic identity as literature per se. In the third strand, and in line with the broadly therapeutic tone of *Literature as Exploration*, scholars tend to frame Rosenblatt’s “democratic” pedagogies as a largely liberatory project, defined more by the purportedly anti-authoritarian freedoms it can afford than by its boundedness to an ongoing

¹⁸ I posit this as “uncorrected” because Rosenblatt’s most mature statement of a transactional theory, as I will explain below, calls so profoundly into question the assumption that these categories are innate to the text.

socio-cultural contract (as, indeed, “transaction” suggests); given such a tendency, Rosenblatt’s ethical commitments are framed more as charitable offshoots of, than necessary elements to, a theory of learning and its relationship to the transformation of knowledge (which we might call “transfer”), or cultural change. As such, these accounts share one telling feature: a lingering commitment, on one side or the other, to the very subject-object, individual-communal, liberatory-deterministic, theoretical-applied, scholarly-preparatory, and reading-writing binaries that Rosenblatt’s model of transaction and stance so actively sought to complicate.

First Legacy: Reading, not Literacy, and the Applied-Pure Binary

Although it is a term Rosenblatt herself rarely took up¹⁹, I hold that the central concept of Rosenblatt’s most mature work was literacy, broadly understood. Unlike the distinction that the field of English has naturalized between reading (literature and culture) and writing (or composition), the construct of literacy that I see suggested by her late work encompasses both consumption and production as inevitably intertwined features of any language-based, knowledge-making act. As such, literacy can refer both to linguistic competency as well as to the ideologies that make those competencies in one or another context significant: concerned with both developmental questions about acquisition, context-specific aptitude, and progress, on the one hand, as well as, on the other, more epistemological, anthropological, and, indeed, critical questions about the relative nature and value of one or another linguistic practice. Indeed, such a

¹⁹ In articles like “Retrospect,” Rosenblatt refers to “literacy” to suggest basal and often crude conceptions of linguistic competence, as when she refers to “misguided calls for a ‘literacy’ achieved by rote-acquisition of facts and skills” (18).

construct of literacy offers an inroad into more integratively understanding the crucial twin mandates of a humanities education: fluency in sanctioned skills, and the achievement of a critical distance from such sanctions.

In contrast to this integrative impulse, however, one of the key strands of the Rosenblatt legacy forwards a construct of reading that all but excludes writing from its sphere, and thus eschews the more expansive view of literacy that her late work began to suggest. Such a legacy is especially enabled by the popular assumption that Rosenblatt's focus on the reader constitutes a kind of resolute rejection of the text as at all enabling the making of read-meaning.²⁰ This facet of Rosenblatt's legacy is especially visible through the retroactive affiliation many scholars draw between *Literature as Exploration* and reader response theory, although, depending on their affiliation with educational theory, on the one hand, or literary theory, on the other, these characterizations take on a significantly different cast.

The Experience of Reading, John Clifford's 1990 edited collection is packaged on the very premise that Rosenblatt was an early theoretical proponent of a kind of reader-response. Yet Clifford's account of Rosenblatt, focusing as it does mainly on her work's impact on pedagogical practice, gives very little credence to guiding power that a text's linguistic features have on the making of meaning, or, indeed, on the situated "transactions" that enable such power. In his introduction, Clifford writes that Rosenblatt's work effected the personal realization that "I could simply read the text as I read the world" (5), little acknowledging either the more narrow semiotic dynamics that emerge from specific engagements with language, or Rosenblatt's own

²⁰ Robert Innis especially reads Rosenblatt in these terms.

close attention, in both *The Reader, the Text, the Poem* and in her later essays, to a specifically Peircean form of semiotics (*Reader* 181-2; *Transactional* 1365-6). For Clifford, the “democratic conscience” that Rosenblatt’s theories encourage is thus a consciousness mainly of the “political responsibilities” and “personal commitments” of the self (5) as a relatively autonomous reader-subject (5).

Moreover, this exclusive focus on the reader, as in Clifford’s gloss, suggests its own discipline-inflected Cartesian split between student-reader and text, in which Clifford less reconfigures the New Critical model that he critiques so much as he merely takes up its other side. Here, the pedagogical development of a securely autonomous reader-subject and her constructive knowledge of the world simply replaces the text as the proper focus of literary inquiry. Even more to the point, the scant attention that Clifford’s understanding of Rosenblatt’s work grants to the reader’s reading of a text *as an instance of language* foreshortens this account from also expanding into a discussion of how such work might connect to a writer’s attitudes towards possible instances of language. To be sure, Clifford’s pedagogical concerns are admirably unabashed, and his account of the awakened reading-subject offers an important critique to the hypostatized constructs of text around which many literature classrooms have been, and continue to be, organized. But Clifford’s use of Rosenblatt also reveals the extent to which such pedagogical leanings can, in the specific climate of English studies, almost automatically preclude more theoretically scrupulous questions about the very nature of text-based, literary knowledge itself, not to mention its relation to written production.

Rosenblatt has also been cast as a reader response theorist by those who fall on the literary-critical side of the scholarly-pedagogical divide; and while these characterizations have a different flavor, they are just as revealing as Clifford's of the disciplinary climate out of which they emerged—one where not only the production of criticism and classroom teaching, but also the pure and the applied, are assumed incommensurate. For critics like Carolyn Allen, Rosenblatt's famous "neglect" appears most acute within this sphere of literary reader response theory. But these admittedly scant accounts of Rosenblatt among reader-response critics and theorists also reveal a telling mischaracterization, in which Rosenblatt is described—and often with reference only to *Literature as Exploration*—not as a critical theorist but as a kind of social scientist of the literary classroom. This portrayal may well have been encouraged by Rosenblatt's early association with the PEA, which had its own specific social scientific leanings, then followed by her association with a School of Education during a period when statistically sound, evidence-based research was increasingly becoming the disciplinary method of choice. Such a characterization may also have been promoted by Rosenblatt's famous rejection of the concept of an idealized or "generic" reader (*Literature* 32, *Reader* 141-43)—this standing in contrast to the many reader-response critics and theorists who, no matter how constructive their view of reading, continued to abstract their reader, whether as "fit" (Fish) or "implied" (Iser). For literary critics whose inquiries remained tied to text-based exegeses of meaning, and whose only gestures towards real readers came in the form of general anecdote (e.g. Fish, "Is There a Text in This Class"), such a rebuke to the "generic" may have implied a methodology entirely unfamiliar—even diametrically opposed—to their own. In consequence, Rosenblatt's reformulation of the reader seems to have been understood less as a theoretical provocation about the means by which

literary value and meaning are culturally achieved, than as an indication that her work belonged more to empirical than critical inquiry.²¹

Most literary critics who take up her work, from *Literature as Exploration* on, thus characterize it, somewhat dismissively, as an ongoing report on close classroom observation and study. In her seminal edited volume *Reader Response Criticism* (1980), Jane Tompkins mentions Rosenblatt's work only in a footnoted afterthought to the introduction, describing it as "the first among the present generation of critics of this country to *describe empirically* the way the reader's reactions to a poem are responsible for any subsequent interpretation of it" (xxvi ff, my emphasis).

Published the same year, Susan Suleiman and Inge Crossman's *The Reader in the Text* includes a more apologetic if equally diminutive footnoted reference to Rosenblatt, in which, like Tompkins, Suleiman frames Rosenblatt as the "pioneer" of reader investigations, and presents *Literature as Exploration*—not her more recent work—as Rosenblatt's seminal text (45 ff);²²

²¹ Educational philosopher Jeanne Connell (2001) characterizes Rosenblatt as a "literary theorist" (42) who prefigured and helped to shape reader response literary criticism—"since the publication of *Literature as Exploration*, literary theory has undergone dramatic changes due in part to the influence of Rosenblatt's transactional theory of the literary work" (53), but such hagiographic claims are undercut by the reality of not only her neglect but the mischaracterization I have described above.

²² It is David Bleich, the classroom minded theorist of "subjectivist criticism," to whom Suleiman attributes the recent critical "rediscovery" of Rosenblatt (45). Significantly, however, the scholarly paper trail reveals that Bleich engaged Rosenblatt's work only after he had been prodded to do so in Mitchell Leaska's response to a 1975 essay that Bleich wrote for *College English* ("The Subjective Character of Critical Interpretation"). Following this, Bleich's brief acknowledgement of Rosenblatt's work—in the form of a three-page response to Leaska—centers, like Suleiman's and Tompkins's references—on *Literature as Exploration* and the idea of "transaction" only as it is loosely described therein. Indeed, the mismatch between the undertheorized nature of this weakly revised treatment of transaction in *Literature as Exploration*, and the critically thorny details of his own argument, enables Bleich to dismiss the theoretical solidity of construct (700, "Response"): beginning a trend among literary critics in continuing to revert to this early work and in favor of Rosenblatt's later and more robust explanations of this model.

And as recently as 2011, the otherwise circumspect Thomas Miller characterizes Rosenblatt's *Literature as Exploration* as a "study of student responses" (171), despite the fact that Rosenblatt's book, though promoting the value of social scientific knowledge in the literature classroom, describes and reports on no such systematic study.²³ While early sections of *Literature as Exploration* do contain a few student responses to texts, these function more as a set-up to Rosenblatt's argument than as hard evidence to support it; none of Rosenblatt's key claims emerge from the kind of methodical analysis of reader's reactions that "empirical" and "study of responses" suggest. Finally, and ironically, this categorization has also provided grounds for even more explicit dismissal of her work as, in fact, not empirical enough. The literary theorist Norman Holland (1976), famous for the reader studies he developed to forward his subjectivist brand of reader-response criticism, argues (again, in a footnote) that Rosenblatt's theories suffer for "lacking in-depth case studies of reading transactions or an adequate psychology" (345 ff), conveniently ignoring the fact that Rosenblatt's work never aspired to the kind of research-based educational psychology that Holland assumes to be her aim.

Mariolina Salvatori (1991) has posited that Rosenblatt's long-standing neglect resulted from the theorist's disciplinarily unusual focus on the "classroom as the site for [literary] theory and practice to face and interrogate each other" (49). But such neglect also appears to result from a long-standing tendency to mischaracterize Rosenblatt's work as the kind of qualitative

²³ Compared to Rosenblatt's work, I. A. Richards's *Practical Criticism*—although a key influence on Rosenblatt, as I will discuss in my third chapter—constitutes a far more systematic, evidence-based "study of student responses." Yet Richards's work is rarely described in the terms Tompkins applies to Rosenblatt here—perhaps because that book, despite its study of real readers, also promotes a highly normative vision of the ideal and ideally informed reader, striving towards a purity of evaluative thought that neatly aligns with the goals of subsequent literary critical tradition that he is credited with (and often blamed for) helping to establish.

educational research that tends to be disciplinarily cordoned off as irrelevant to literary reading and theory, if not scientistically suspect.²⁴ Salvatori's focus on the classroom as Rosenblatt's main "site" of inquiry, in fact, can appear to put forth its own polarizing implications—that Rosenblatt's highly theorized models of literacy emerged purely from, and may therefore remain relevant only to, the specific sphere of literary learning as inhabited by teachers and their students. And for less pedagogically minded literary critics, in turn, Rosenblatt's questioning of the purported "purity" of the literary critical project, which is to say, her insistence in grounding this project also in a theory of learning, seemed to make it difficult to recognize her early contributions to reader response theory without also assigning her work to another category of inquiry altogether. To wit: the handful of literary theorists who have substantially engaged her work do so only as it bears—to the exclusion of more critical questions—on the "applied" work of teaching (e.g. the later, more sympathetic essays of David Bleich).

Second Legacy: The Individualized Reading Subject and the Immutable Read Object

In line with applied-theoretical divisions described above, Rosenblatt's devotion to the pedagogical value of literature—especially as expressed in her perennially popular *Literature as Exploration*—seems to have kept many critics from also acknowledging the more radical

²⁴ Worth noting is that recent strands of literary theory have proved susceptible to both quantitative forms of analysis, such as movements in reception-oriented digital humanities or distant reading, or the methods and concerns of the hard sciences, whether neuroimaging or environmental study. The methods of the softer sciences, in contrast—of psychology, cultural anthropology, sociology—have, perhaps because of their educational implications, been taken up much more vigorously by scholars in composition, writing studies and literacy studies. Indeed, the use of such soft science methods may cut too close to literary criticism's own sense of its hard-won critical authority to be fully espoused.

reinterpretation of literature that “transaction” enables—wherein a reader and writer’s literary engagements are as constructive of literary meaning and culture, as literary meaning and culture are of the reader and writer. Indeed, I argue that Rosenblatt’s transactional theory is as relevant for a developmental theory of student learning as it might be for a critical theory of cultural change and agents’ participation therein. Moreover, Rosenblatt suggests that these transformations of the self and her society, resulting from the cultural engagements that literacy enables, do not operate independently but are profoundly intertwined, or, in Rosenblatt’s terms, “conditioned” by and mutually constitutive of each other (*Transactional* 1365). Yet a number of Rosenblatt’s critics and admirers fail to recognize such an integrative impulse, preferring, per disciplinary habit, to see the developing agent and the cultures she studies as entirely separable concerns: revealing the extent to which the sharp demarcation between agentic and cultural accounts of literacy engagements have been baked into English as a discipline.

Indeed, it is worth noting that, towards the end of her 1978 *The Reader, the Text, the Poem*—a book predating much of the Rosenblatt revival in English studies, though little informing them—Rosenblatt recognizes the field’s preference for such a sharp demarcation and attempts to head it off. Here she explains that her pragmatic acknowledgement of and emphasis on a reader’s selective stance and agency (e.g. “personal response”) does not foreclose the equally shaping effects of situation-specific language or context on the literary experience; nor, indeed, does such an acknowledgement and emphasis presume an individualistic, purely mentalistic, or narrowly psychological paradigm, or what she calls “the old separation between the human creature and the world” (172). As she writes, instead,

Insistence on the transactional relationship between organism and environment [of language, of culture, of texts], on *each being a function of the other*, carries with it the recognition that “the mind”—the world of “information processing”—is not limited by the skin. The implication to be rejected, however, is that individual consciousness is somehow a kind of construction, something to be seen as merely a collection or intersection of patterned forces, social and natural. (172, my emphasis)

By organism and environment “each being a function of the other,” Rosenblatt presents transaction as cutting a middle way between a totalizing determinism, on the one hand, and a totalizing individualism, on the other, or by, as she puts it, “reveal[ing] the individual consciousness as a continuing self-ordered, self-creating process, shaped by and shaping a network of interrelationships by its enviroing social and natural matrix” (172). Her theory of transaction, in other words, reveals such apparent individualism as in fact comprised by and of the worlds that the agent moves through, attends to, is molded by, and also helps to mold. Rosenblatt’s 1994 essay is even more concise on this point. Drawing on the language of “ecology,” Rosenblatt argues that “human activities and relationships are seen as transactions in which the individual and social elements fuse with cultural and natural elements”—the same paradigm, she posits, out of which Charles Sanders Peirce developed his Dewey-influencing “triadic model,” which “firmly grounds language in the transactions of individual human beings with their world” (1365), whereby agentic (“individual”) purpose and potential innovation exists in constant negotiation with shifting cultural forces and norms.

Even so, the second strand of the Rosenblatt legacy that I analyze in this section frames Rosenblatt’s contributions to a theory of reading as pertinent only to agent-centered accounts of

development, whether at the level of a reader's evolving skills or ethos. Indeed, such an assumption underpins the Rosenblatt backlash of the last few decades, in which her work is accused of a problematically short-sighted individualism. For John Willinsky (1991), Rosenblatt's later work in stance and transaction entails a reductive inquiry into the "nature of [literature's] psychology," and thus constitutes little more than the acontextual "celebrat[ion of] the individual reader's response to the isolated text" (97). By putting this "narrower concentration on the reader's experience with the text" (85), a Rosenblattian experience of culture therefore should be understood, Willinsky writes, as "above all else a private...event" (93). Picking up on Rosenblatt's association with this "isolated" form of a "psychology" of reading, Peter Rabinowitz and Michael Smith (1998) lodge a similar complaint, faulting Rosenblatt's models for promoting literary responses based only in "personal experience" (123) and thus "neglect[ing] the importance of the conjoint experience" (41): the way that an individual's cultural engagements are irrevocably shaped also by social forces. And from the even more specific perspective of language ideology, Bill Corcoran (1991) describes Rosenblatt's purported individualism thus: that "Nowhere is there an acknowledgement that language predates its users, or that it is always already value laden" (149), with Rosenblatt thus seen to champion the agent's exclusively determinant powers, and discounting the possibility of "textual manipulation" (151).

Over the years, such critiques continued to hold water. A decade after Corcoran's article, Mark Dressman and Joan Parker Webster take Rosenblatt's work similarly to task for what they see as its promotion of a "individualism" that is "facile" and entirely laissez-faire (139-140)—one neglecting the structural and historical forces that, these authors remind us, also shape any

reading event. Even Elizabeth Flynn's more laudatory (2007) exploration of Rosenblatt's literary "ethics"—of a reader's "responsibility to be true" (55) to a text, as I will explore in more detail below—hews to these claims of individualism, reinstating the rebuke that Rosenblatt discounts the "role power plays" in the pragmatics of literary reading (68). By this logic, Rosenblatt's account of literacy and literary engagement can appear a closed system of meaning-making, with early claims like this, from *Literature as Exploration*—"the experience of literature... is a form of intense personal activity" (vi)—assumed to encapsulate her entire final theory. The reader's interactions with literature, by these descriptions, remain a neatly circumscribed affair: defined by a static subject-object relation influencing little more than a reader's discrete conceptual development of and in a social world that remains in itself both impassive and unaffected. This thus suggests, for these critics, a "psychology of reading" very narrowly defined—which is to say, a psychology of reading entirely separable from its politics.

Yet, in themselves, these critiques also rest on their own model of mutual exclusion: that Rosenblatt's interest in the relatively agentic reader in and of itself precludes considerations of culture, language or power. By such habits, Rosenblatt's focus on the ways that "personal response" help to shape meaning is thus repeatedly, even indignantly, cast as a benighted psychologism and denial of situational politics—a model of individual growth carelessly isolated from critical theory, cultural critique, or social thought. Of course, the power of this polarizing paradigm is visible, too, in Rosenblatt's own professional profile as inspiring educator (NCTE's "rock star") for those toiling in the frontlines (e.g. lower levels) of the literature classroom; such a profile reveals how rigidly theories of knowledge-making in English have organized themselves around a widening gulf between secondary and higher education in the humanities,

with the one increasingly geared towards individually preparatory goals (exacerbated by ever greater demands for better outcomes, standards, or what is now called career-and-college-readiness); and the other towards an ethos of distance, organized around its theory-producing, socio-cultural diagnostic goals. In this way, then, charges of the individualism apparently endemic to Rosenblatt's work appear to emerge less from a transaction with the writer's actual oeuvre than from transactions with the conventional outlines of her reputation.

Undergirded by a similar paradigm, but reaching a very different evaluative conclusion, are the scholars who admiringly ascribe to Rosenblatt an argument centered on literature's personal and subject-bound benefits, yet who also tend to presume a fairly traditional view of literature as a static, non-contingent category of text made of self-evidently edifying content. Unlike those who advocate for Rosenblatt as a key proponent of pedagogically beneficial forms of reader response, these scholars assume that inquiries into the reader's agency and development necessarily excludes further inquiries into the nature of literature per se. Many promotions of Rosenblatt's reading theory as performing crucial developmental, even ethical, work on behalf of the reader also leave unscrutinized the very construct of the literary, or the read—or the source of its communicative capacities and crucially mutable cultural value. For these educationally minded critics, it thus seems particularly difficult to recognize Rosenblatt's suggestion—made not only through her construct of transaction, but of the aesthetic-efferent continuum, along which agents travel as they take up (and are encouraged to take up) different culturally inflected stances towards a text—that literature's difference from other text-types is, first, one of degree, not kind; and, second, that it results from variable literacy habits, not immutable codes or static language features. In these readings of Rosenblatt's contributions, politicized questions of critical

intervention and cultural construction are eschewed for a more apparently student-friendly account of developmental growth achieved through the kind of value-sharing that literature, properly read, is here imagined to enable.

William Palmer (1981), for example, explicitly collapses Rosenblatt's transactional theory to a brand of schema theory in which texts are "comprehended" through the interface between a reader's individual stash of "world knowledge," on the one hand, and, on the other, the discrete "text information" (63) that Palmer presumes a work to innately contain. By Palmer's telling, then, Rosenblatt's construct of "transaction" speaks only to the mutable nature of reading itself, but leaves entirely unquestioned the (presumably immutable) nature of the read. Literature's edifying powers are, in this account, located in its apparently unchanging content, what the reader simply needs to be trained (with the right "world knowledge") to properly access. Bruce Chadwick (2012-13) similarly leverages Rosenblatt to justify a pedagogy of highly directive scaffolding, since, as he argues, students alone often "lack 'mental structures' demanded by" one or another piece of literature (16, with internal quote from Bergstrom 748). Like Palmer, Chadwick suggests that students need to be socialized into the proper reading of cultural texts, and for both these critics, Rosenblatt's inquiry into the nature of the reader and reading slips easily into an attendant assumption that literature per se remains a force in and of itself above critique.

Elizabeth Flynn similarly frames Rosenblatt's vision of literature as the mere container for the untroubled transmission of content, and Rosenblatt's theories as germane mainly to the ethical growth of the reader. For Flynn, Rosenblatt's "transaction" explains reading as "exchanges

between and among people” (59), suggesting that Rosenblatt’s conceptualization of literature thus centers purely on its individually sourced and individually effective virtues, to the exclusion of any larger situational or subconscious meanings that a reading event might also bring forth. On behalf of Rosenblatt, Flynn thus ascribes to literature a largely therapeutic function, and thus implicitly attributes to Rosenblatt a psychologically essentializing paradigm, wherein a Roseblattian view of “literature can...enable students to become assimilated into a culture” and “enable[] readers to better cope with the challenges they face” (56).

Flynn champions this Rosenblattian perspective as aligned with a recent “ethical turn” undertaken by “postpoststructuralists” weary of theorists’ endlessly problematizing the communications that literary texts can otherwise be seen to enable (67).²⁵ Yet, as suggested by the full circle that Flynn’s term “postpost” can suggest, Rosenblatt’s theory, in this gloss, also appears fairly reactionary, even retrograde. Confirming critiques made by Willinsky, or Smith and Rabinowitz, “transaction” is here interpreted only by its most quotidian financial implications of a straight exchange, to the benefit of a illusorily isolated reader, and with literary texts only enabling history-transcending communiqués unmediated by the vagaries either of language or of context, now or then. So while Flynn’s account speaks promisingly of the “ethical” concerns grounding Rosenblatt’s theories, it also tellingly reduces Rosenblatt’s view of literature to its most unidirectional instructive function, one dissociated from Rosenblatt’s interrelated investigations into what constitutes literature per se—the nature of its larger social value and the source of its changing functions.

²⁵ This might be meant to include work in affect theory, surface reading, et cetera, but Flynn does not elaborate on these connections. She attributes this movement loosely to the work of Laurence Buell.

In all of these instances, Rosenblatt's construct of the literary is understood to recommend an untroubled transference of unchanging meaning and value between autonomous subject and autonomous object, whether conceptualized as reader and text (Palmer and Chadwick) or reader and author (Flynn). But this polarized reduction also has potent implications for the issue of transfer and disciplinary salience. Narrowing literary pedagogy to a concern only with individual psychology—and thus reducing literacy's ethical and communicative goings-on to the isolated dynamics of the reader's individual mind—suggests that an agent's developmental progress not only *can* but *is better* conceptualized as leaving the larger movements and meanings of culture unaffected; this in turn promotes a vision of a psychologically predictable reader-subject who can herself remain unaffected by larger cultural norms and shifts. The student's own strategic practice as a maker of read- and written-meaning is left estranged from those larger considerations of the larger difference that engaged forms of advanced literacy might possibly make in the world. The politics of reading remains a sphere untouched by the vagaries of the real literate agent's (e.g. learner's) experience, and the psychology of the literate agent untouched by the critical exercises that more politically engaged knowledge building course work is presumably encouraging her to otherwise undertake.

Third Legacy: A Politics of Cultural and Disciplinary "Freedom"

The third strand of the Rosenblatt legacy promotes an idealized form of reading-as-personal-freedom, ignoring her late works' emphases on continua, on contingency, and on the constant agent-culture transactions that Rosenblatt suggests literacy entails. Discounted in such liberatory

explanations is Rosenblatt's acknowledgment—through her very construct of transaction, and the progressive promise that she sees such a theory of reading and writing to hold—of the culturally potent powers implicit in theoretical model and ideological categories of thought to shape or challenge the habits held by hearts and minds. One example of her devotion to the contingency of meaning is her reliance, in her final essay, on Dewey's concept of "warranted assertibility," which guards against "extreme relativism" by attending to the "shared criteria" embraced by specific knowledge-making methodologies, and which are open to new interpretations while remaining grounded in precedent.²⁶ What Rosenblatt here forwards is not the agent's freedom from cultural standards, but agentic forms of reflection on, and intervention into, such standards: what she calls the "explicit" exploration of the "tacit sources" of interpretive "agreement" or "disagreement." I argue that such a return to the source of interpretation as a transactional interplay between agent, text, and situation is pragmatic-progressive to its core, set on encouraging flexible and purposive, but still inherently "transactional" responses to a changing world, thus "creat[ing] the possibility of change in interpretation, acceptance of alternate sets of criteria, or revision of criteria" ("Transactional" 1387).

But for many scholars, Rosenblatt's politics of reading—the relationship of the reader and reading to structures of the socio-cultural powers-that-be—tend to take for granted that the reader's "political responsibilities" and "personal commitments" (5) provide not only the proper

²⁶ Rosenblatt long objected to Stanley Fish's (1980) proposal that readers' interpretations can be explained by the conventions of their "interpretive communities"; for her, the concept was overly deterministic and reinforced the problematic ideal of a cleansed, expert reader best embodied by the professional critic. Pat Harkin (2005) also offers an incisive critique of Fish on this front.

but also the complete ground for all edifying engagements with literature. Such an interpretation gives her core theory of knowledge a misleadingly anti-authoritarian coloration—as a liberatory project focused mainly on self-actualization. Leila Christenbury (2005), for example, praises Rosenblatt’s “democratic” (23) tactics for “upend[ing] the hierarchy of the traditional classroom” by attending to “what the reader brings—what the reader *has the right* to bring” to the reading event (23, my emphasis)—suggesting that Rosenblatt’s theories represent more a readerly call-to-arms than a carefully worked out theory of the literate agent’s cultural embeddedness. Moreover, such a paradigm is often undergirded by an assumption that such a rightful form of profoundly personalized readerly individualism is entirely natural: Probst (1981), using Rosenblatt to champion “response based teaching” and its “highly personal” pedagogy of literature (46), argues that Rosenblatt’s theories are (correctly, in his view) “predicated on the notion that readers are first interested in the work as it touches them” (44); as such, the freedom to be so “touched” becomes all that readers need in order to activate the kind of learning that literature encourages. Like her difficult to dislodge reputation as a pedagogically minded (applied) reader response theorist, these accounts suggest an either-or choice between more personal or public, “democratic” or “traditional,” readerly-affective or teacherly-authoritative theories of learning.

For many of these same critics, too, Rosenblatt encourages not only a rejection of the “traditional hierarchies” implicit in many models of both learning and literature, but also an outright expert-allergic rejection of literary studies’ own roots in literary criticism, more largely, and New Criticism, specifically. And for many, such liberation is not only intellectual but affective, providing for its practitioners a psychic relief from the authoritarian shackles apparently made by

overly objectivist literary scholarship. Christenbury describes Rosenblatt's work as a pure reversal of the "arid" literary "dissections" that Christenbury experienced in her own schooling (22); such freedom, in Clifford's terms, makes for a subjective kind of intimacy too long kept academically verboten by "the remoteness of formalist reading" (1). Here, such a seemingly hardline rejoinder to New Criticism is seen to constitute the essence of her "democratic" theory of learning, whereby the acknowledgement of all subjectivities and diverse forms of cultural knowledge transforms the classroom from a site of mere absorption—the kind of learning that New Critical methods purportedly encourage—to a site of more authentic readerly engagement.²⁷

This ethos of authenticity also underlies the tone of these Rosenblattian discovery (or rediscovery) narratives, wherein celebrants use a trope of highly individualized revelation to describe not only her recommended construct for student reading but also their own responses to Rosenblatt's work, her books here framed as a kind of ahistorical miracle-salve for beleaguered scholar-souls. Critics take an almost therapeutic solace in her work: "fortunately, I discovered *Literature as Exploration*" (3), Clifford writes of his own early disaffection with the academy; Carolyn Allen (1988) describes encountering *Literature as Exploration*, fifty years after its publication, in the farthest reaches of her library's shelves with the realization, "This is wonderful!" (32). Christenbury's discovery narrative, beginning in the same academically weary key as all the others, writes that "when I encountered *Literature as Exploration*, it was a coming home" (23). For many of these critics, then, Rosenblatt provides a retroactive justification for

²⁷ To be sure, it is the very looseness of this oft-championed affiliation with Dewey's educational-democratic ideals to which Dressman and Webster so stringently object in the critical reckoning they perform on Rosenblatt's uptake of transaction in *Literature as Exploration*—although, as I've noted, they neglect in this critique to account for her later, more philosophically textured explanations of transaction.

their own reactions against the disciplinary habits in which they were schooled, and whereby in John Clifford's terms, Rosenblatt's reader-sensitive theories could thus be seen as "simply a generation ahead of their time" (1). With the time-travel logic peculiar to Rosenblatt scholarship, educational philosopher Jeanne Connell (2000) even credits the 1938 *Literature as Exploration* with a critique of New Critical works available only after Rosenblatt's breakout work was completed (e.g. Cleanth Brooks and Robert Penn Warren's contemporaneous *Understanding Poetry* (1938), and Rene Wellek and Austin Warren's 1949 *Theory of Literature*).

Indeed, placing Rosenblatt's in such sharp (and prescient) contrast to the purported "scientism" and "objectivism" of the discipline's more traditional (e.g. New Critical) reading methods, as Flynn does (61), among many others, categorizes Rosenblatt in a few short-sighted ways. First, such a decontextualized characterization fails to account for the particular debt that Rosenblatt's work also owes to the devotedly inductive paradigm promoted by a particular strain of progressive-pragmatic social science and cultural anthropology, as my next chapter will explore. By removing her work from this history, Rosenblatt can be offered to speak, oracle-like, for any dissatisfactions these scholars might bring. Against these polarizing accounts, I argue that Rosenblatt's work does not promise total freedom from English studies' twentieth-century critical project, but an ongoing engagement with the promise and perils of interpretive cultural work, precisely as it "transacts" with historically embedded texts and the various exigencies implicit in any literacy situation. Second, such a characterization frames Rosenblatt as a pure reactionary of the anti-authoritarian, even anti-intellectual, "appreciation" school of literary study. This is what Stewart Justman (2010) later reinterprets as promoting a kind of intellectually lax "bibliotherapy," by which the only alternative to a New Critical objectivism is a deep dive

into highly local, infinitely relative modes of subjectivist reading, ones pertinent only to the reader's own personal development. Here, Rosenblatt's politics of literacy can be understood to promote little more than freeing the reader to attend only to her own "commitments," her personal "home" of what feels true and right, and which can merely be found within.

But such accounts misrepresent the "ecological" and integrative nature of Rosenblatt's transactional theory and aesthetic-effluent continuum, and perpetuate instead an overly rigid distinction between the inherited and the original, between the traditional and the liberated, as well as between the highly disciplined and the purportedly natural, with Rosenblatt representing an extreme version of the latter in all cases. Patricia Harkin is thus enabled to describe Rosenblatt's work as "populist," and as standing in clear contrast to an educational culture ascending, as the postwar period progressed, to increasingly "elitist" forms of "high theory" (415). Such a celebration of "populism" can also be felt in Clifford's, Christenbury's, and Allen's accounts of Rosenblatt's work—whereby any authentic (non-"arid," non-"remote," non-"formal") literary engagements can occur only once the obfuscating veils of critical theory have been properly torn away. In this paradigm, the self-in-society (whether disciplinary or cultural) is imagined less as involved in an ever-evolving contract with potent disciplinary knowledge constructs and traditions, than as an individual seeking change through utter liberation from any normative force.

Overly bound by their own frustrations with the disciplinary status quo, many of Rosenblatt's admirers thus discount the recursive and mutable kinds of knowledge-making that Rosenblatt argues are enabled through transactions with texts, and endorse in its place, a utopian

transcendence of tradition. By this, Rosenblatt's famous promotion of a "democratic" model of literature, culture and learning—in which each and every reader-vote is understood to count—is reduced to its softest implications, in which its core ethical values are assumed to operate independently of, instead of in negotiation with, the various cultures in which they are inevitably embedded. Moreover, the democratic virtues of tolerance and cross-cultural collaboration, and their relationship to progress—so central to Rosenblatt's understanding of culture, as my following sections will show—are seem to do their edifying work as if by magic. Such an account ignores Rosenblatt's later emphasis on the aesthetic-efferent continuum, in which agents engage in constant negotiation with cultural conventions in order to produce interpretations with "warranted assertability" that are neither entirely liberated from their "interpretive communities," not entirely bound and explainable by such communities. By Rosenblatt's argument, instead, the potential innovations and developments that the literate agent enables through reading and writing have larger cultural import: they are neither born of purely personal sources, nor do they have purely personal consequences. Yet college-level constructs of reading and writing have so naturalized the separability of the personal-developmental, on the one hand, and the cultural-critical, on the other, that Rosenblatt's work can only appear to serve the most hard-line partisan goals of the former.

* * *

Rosenblatt's legacy as a solely pedagogical reader response theorist; as a progressive educator leveraging a fairly traditional construct of literature for the good only of highly individualized development; and as the promoter of a liberatory project of disciplinary transcendence, all

describe a figure with little to contribute to the health of a field concerned with both cultural critique and language learning, and with the transferable significance of its lessons. English studies' deeply ingrained disciplinary habits have made Rosenblatt's contributions recognizable only in their most watered down forms. The remainder of this dissertation will argue that Rosenblatt's theory of transaction is better understood outside of these polarizing paradigms, and when returned to its originating context in an interdisciplinary school of thought exploring literature, literacy, and learning as integrated facets of a single inquiry into the dynamics of socio-cultural change, and the agent's role therein. This, in turn, proposes a new theory concerning the transformative nature of transfer as knowledge crosses boundaries.

As the next four chapters will show, Rosenblatt shared with Franz Boas, I. A. Richards and John Dewey an abiding concern with the progressive possibilities and perils of such cultural change and transformative transfer. In their inquiries into cultural change and cross-cultural learning, all focused on the extent to which knowledge cannot travel unchanged from literate agent to literate agent; against a model of spectator learning, all noted the transformations that so-called information undergoes as it is exchanged across individuals, cultures or domains. Yet such contingencies did not mean for these thinkers an extreme or infinite relativism, or that knowledge transfer might constitute an impossible ideal; all also explored the ways that self-critical, self-reflective and purposive agents can learn from such changes (indeed, what Rosenblatt, after Dewey, came to theorize a "transaction") to make themselves and their societies more intelligent, self-knowing, inclusive and flexibly forward thinking.

This dissertation will therefore examine this philosophical milieu specifically for the ways it can help expand and more rigorously ground the promise of Rosenblatt's theories. Most largely, and against much of her varied reputations, I argue that this context helps us to see Rosenblatt's work, at bottom, as concerned less with literature, traditionally conceived, than with literacy and the cultural import of communicative practices (even while it argues that literary and cultural engagement are the supreme means by which reading and writing enable transformations of self and society).

By framing Rosenblatt as "simply a generation ahead of her time," or as the prescient predictor of a later, freer moment from the one in which critics presently find themselves, or even what Harkin calls "a special case" and thus historically unique for the liberating originality of her claims, Rosenblatt has acquired the reputation as an *ex nihilo* savior untethered by any intellectual history of her own. And such a narrative further reflects its authors' own wishful thinking about a model of literacy that can also promise liberation from its own nets of educational and intellectual tradition: suggesting that ideological structures can be toppled by merely being imagined away. Yet for the pluralistic values that now form the foundation of many of our institutions of higher learning, as for Rosenblatt's own originating moment in a rapidly modernizing and globalizing world, even while reeling from the cultural fragmentations of the First World War, this politics of mere populism and liberation offers little help for fostering the kinds of cross cultural communication towards which the humanities have always striven.

Too many uses of Rosenblattian thought, especially those inspired by the stream of revisions and rereleases of *Literature as Exploration*, developed in a misleading relation to Rosenblatt's more

subdued if theoretically ambitious theory of reading and writing (“transaction”) and thus of the nature of cultural participation. That story of neglect and rediscovery that accompanies this 1938 book has proven irresistible to many scholars; yet the appeal of this narrative also ended up dwarfing the more continuous understory by which her theory of transaction developed, somewhat beneath the radar of the postwar politics of postsecondary reading of writing. I argue, in fact, that it is only in her later work, especially of the nineteen-eighties and nineties, that the full force and significance of Rosenblatt’s early influences can be felt, which concerned less the student-centered pieties for which progressive education has since become most famous, and more the complex philosophical and social tenets of progressive-pragmatism, as my next chapter will begin to explain. Equally, it is only through an excavation of this early milieu and its complex set of influences that the import of her later theories—especially for questions of literacy and transfer—can come into complete focus. Expanding on work begun by Ann E. Berthoff and Mark Faust, I thus argue that the real neglect Rosenblatt’s work has suffered can be located in the underexplored relation between this transactional theory of reading and writing and its roots in a pragmatic-progressive school of thought, whose holistic view of culture, practice, language, literature and progress has for too long been almost unrecognizable for the challenges it offers to some of our dearest disciplinary habits. Moreover, her earliest work of 1931—the book she wrote for her French PhD in comparative literature, which hitherto has remained untranslated into English—further establishes the essentially integrative aspirations that I argue have always shaped her vision of reading, writing, and the promise implicit in aesthetic engagement. And it is only with this needful contextualization, I posit, that Rosenblatt’s theories will become newly viable.

Chapter Two

Literacy's "Total Situation":

The Origins of Rosenblatt's Transactional Theory in Boasian Anthropology and French Comparatism

It is a central contention of this dissertation that continuing to view Rosenblatt's theories of reading and writing through the lenses by which they have been most commonly understood does her work, especially as it might apply to higher education, a serious disservice. Indeed, the legacies described in the previous chapter all re-inscribe those very dualisms that Rosenblatt's transactional theory—and, indeed, her entire oeuvre as a thinker—sought to complicate.

Rosenblatt's transactional theory posits agents and their cultures as mutually constitutive, and, through this theory, she presents reading and writing practices—and the "stances" these practices entail—as one key means for activating agents' critical participation both in their own literacy development and in the larger cultural change that they help to carry forward. Claiming such individual and cultural reformations to be inextricably intertwined, Rosenblatt's transactional theory thus challenges the higher-education convention that such engagements—literacy-centered skills-building, on the one hand, and culture-centered critical analysis, on the other—are best performed and conceived as taking place in separate spheres.

As my last chapter also showed, however, such separate-spheres thinking is difficult to avoid: binary distinctions between theory and practice, between scholarship and pedagogy, as well as between achieved and preparatory forms of knowledge-making, are as thoroughly baked into current conceptualizations of higher-level reading and writing instruction as they are into these sub-fields' sense of their own disciplinary roots. Indeed, these dualisms even shape much of the current writing transfer literature, which tends to analyze college-level writing, or student's practices of production, largely in isolation from learners' reading practices and courses of study. This habitual blind-spot in the learning transfer research stands as yet another symptom of the bi-modal structure that has organized English departments and writing programs for too long, with writing instruction presumed to be entirely separable from—and intellectually subordinate to—the historical and interpretive work entailed in literary and cultural critique.

This chapter offers a new paradigm by which to understand Rosenblatt's theory of transaction as it specifically applies to the college writing classroom, where addressing the question of transfer—how literacy knowledge moves across contexts and can be repurposed for new tasks—is a longstanding disciplinary mandate and continuing central concern. By doing so, this chapter also begins to offer an alternative framework by which to understand the writing classroom itself, as a site entailing inquiry not just into writing, but into text-based literacy more broadly, or what this dissertation calls learners' "textual transactions." In this, I argue, too, for a more expansive understanding of how, when and where writing—and literacy knowledge transfer—may be explicitly taught and explored in the college context.

I build this theoretical framework from a new genealogy of Rosenblatt's earliest influences—what I argue are the philosophical foundations of her later transactional theory and its attendant concept of stance. In this, I contend that Rosenblatt's own earliest scholarship, and not her retrospective descriptions of it, serve as the best guide. By that retrospective telling, Rosenblatt's theory of transactional reading and writing emerged purely from the late work of John Dewey, who, in collaboration with Arthur Bentley, articulated the philosophical concept of "transaction" in the co-authored 1949 *Knowing and the Known*.²⁸ Indeed, it is by this provenance that most historical accounts have explained (see Allen; Faust)—and critiqued (see Dressman and Webster)—Rosenblatt's devotion to this concept. I posit in this chapter, however, that the significance of Rosenblatt's transactional theory of reading and writing can be even more comprehensively understood when its origins are traced back further still: to the interwar period of her earliest published writing, and the dialogue she activated as a young scholar with certain strains of the pragmatic-progressive philosophy suggested by Boasian anthropology.²⁹

In fact, Rosenblatt's earliest work of scholarship, her 1931 dissertation, which has never before been translated into English or analyzed for its key role in Rosenblatt's intellectual development, reveals Boasian anthropology and analogous philosophies undergirding French interwar comparatism to have been a far better fit for her burgeoning interest in literature's connections to literacy-building than the post-secondary conceptions of "English" she was exposed to during

²⁸ See, for example, *Literature as Exploration*, fifth edition (1995) 291.

²⁹ This is an influence that Rosenblatt herself only passingly acknowledged, and little explained: e.g., in her 1998 essay "Readers, Texts, Authors," she writes, "The view of language basic to my transactional theory owes much to Charles Sanders Peirce, William James, and John Dewey, reinforced by study of linguistics with Franz Boas..." (890).

her college years at Barnard and her early career as a professor in that field. As I will show, these practice-focused fields of cultural anthropology and French comparatism emboldened Rosenblatt to imagine, in her first scholarly project, literacy and literature in far more integrative terms than the traditional English departments of Columbia and Barnard were able to accommodate.

Through the paradigms offered by these more anthropologically minded fields, Rosenblatt found new ways to attend to literary habits, artifacts and ideas, and especially to the processes by which cultural change is effected by interpretive engagements and the interpenetrations such engagements activate between embedded agents, texts, and situational norms. This new framework helped her to begin to interrogate the models by which we conceptualize our most agentic and edifying critical reading and writing practices, and to see the interlocking interdependencies between production and reception. At the level of her own legacy—and in response to my previous chapter—the new historical account I offer here also defies common characterizations of Rosenblatt as an intellectual curiosity, whether sprung fully formed from nowhere, or significant only as a prescient predictor of later theories and concerns, as with John Clifford’s claim that they were “simply a generation ahead of their time” (1). Against this, I insist that Rosenblatt was profoundly and crucially *of* her time, and, as such, relevant to ours in previously unforeseen ways; but that a new, wider lens is required for us to understand exactly how.

Disciplinary historian Thomas Miller has made a similar plea for a wider lens, especially as it applies to our understanding of English departments’ current balkanizations. In his recent *The Evolution of College English*, Miller critiques histories of English studies for their over-emphasis on literary studies—at the expense of also accounting for the discipline’s sustaining roots,

structural and philosophical, in composition, rhetoric, education, and language studies. Miller further charges these histories with having paid too “little attention...to the pragmatic alternatives that were available to college English at the origins of the profession” (11). My new lineage of Rosenblatt’s theories of “textual transaction” offers an answer to both of these complaints. First, I show that Rosenblatt’s own interests in learning theory, literacy and literature—as illustrated by her 1931 dissertation in comparative literature, as this chapter will explore—consolidates dimensions of text-based knowledge-building that, over the intervening years, have too often been disaggregated and assumed to constitute properly discrete disciplinary endeavors. Second, I present Rosenblatt’s early career as helping to round out our understanding of one of these specific “pragmatic alternatives,” especially given her literacy theory’s philosophical foundations in schools of inquiry other than American and English literary criticism and composition, traditionally understood. Against more disciplinarily unilineal narratives, in which composition and literary studies are seen to emerge from the study of language, literature, and rhetoric alone, Rosenblatt’s early transatlantic work reveals a different strand of influence. Although neither Boas nor Baldensperger wrote directly about the literacy dynamics Rosenblatt would later theorize, these thinkers’ shared convictions about the situated mutability of perception and meaning-making, and the subsequent necessity that we reflect on and account for, to use Baldensperger’s terms the “mobility of our maps,” or varied schema for understanding (26 “Comparative”), reveal the integrative philosophical foundations out of which emerged Rosenblatt’s core inquiries into literacy, transaction and stance.

Indeed, Rosenblatt’s intellectual grounding in this paradigm suggests that literacy be conceptualized not just as a communicative practice, but as a cultural practice as well. As I will

show, Boas and Baldensperger not only studied the ways that cultural knowledge, as it travels, affects the agent and her more personal, educational development; they also studied—and inspired Rosenblatt to theorize—how knowledge is in itself affected by such travel, as from the inside out, and moreover can be modified by cultural agents with greater or less degrees of purposiveness, depending on the agent’s level of self-critical reflection—or what Rosenblatt would later suggest is a “transactional” ethos of volitional participation in the making of potentially transformative meaning. Such a lineage highlights the crucially situated but agentic nature of Rosenblatt’s concept of transaction and stance, and, further, shows this concept to have underlain Rosenblatt’s thought far before she took up the term itself.³⁰

This chapter has two intertwined aims. Most broadly, it begins to recontextualize Rosenblatt’s most mature work within Boasian anthropology and the analogous work of French comparatism of the early part of the last century. But at a more granular level, this chapter also shows the ways these influences manifest specifically in Rosenblatt’s 1931 dissertation, *The Idea of Art for Art’s Sake in English Literature of the Victorian Period*—offering an explanatory account of the significance of her first work of scholarship, not only as containing the philosophical seeds of her most mature work, but as exemplifying a crucially interdisciplinary and integrative strain of pragmatic-progressive philosophy as it can be applied to the practice of text-based cultural

³⁰ The same can be argued for Dewey, whose 1948 concept of “transaction” functioned less as a radical shift in his thinking than as the rechristening of a longtime commitment. In his 1938 *Experience and Education*, as one example, Dewey describes “interaction” as a “chief principle for interpreting an experience in its educational function and force” because it “assigns equal rights to both factors in experience—objective and internal conditions. Any normal experience is an interplay of these two sets of conditions...” (42). This notion of “objective” and “internal conditions” existing in constant “interplay,” and moreover in having “equal rights” in shaping the nature of experience’s “educational function and force,” are arguably the most essential features of “transaction,” as he and Bentley later describe it.

engagement, or what this dissertation calls “textual transactions.” Indeed, this earliest work of scholarship—written in and published in French—can, through our current frameworks, appear a mere oddity, a scholarly relic with little current import, especially for the fields that I argue it strives so determinedly to integrate. Because it can neither be fit neatly into current literary studies nor current writing studies,³¹ it has suffered unwarranted, if understandable, neglect.³²

Yet I argue that a new framework helps to frame Rosenblatt’s dissertation less as a literary study than an early form of literacy study—or an innovative integration of the two—and thus as directly presaging her later work in transaction and stance. At one level, her dissertation is a typically progressive-minded provocation: mapping the various contextual forces that encouraged British adherents of this artistic movement to develop the concept of “l’art pour l’art” into some of its most famous expressions, Rosenblatt historicizes one of literature’s dearest

³¹ For writing scholars, this project’s fixedness on Victorian poet-critics, as well as its focus on the literary and the contested concept of the “aesthetic,” can seem a problematically a-rhetorical, even antiquated concern. For those in literary studies, in turn, the “extrinsic” nature of Rosenblatt’s methods—her emphasis on reader-writers within their milieus, and her resolute avoidance of any interpretively conclusive close reading of these authors’ textual objects themselves—can also appear entirely unrelated to the modes of text-centric cultural critique that the field, over the last eighty-odd years, has come to favor, whatever method of reading (distant, close, symptomatic or recuperative) a critic may more specifically espouse.

³² Also worth noting in regards to a neglect of Rosenblatt’s early career is Rosenblatt’s status as a female scholar, and a Jewish one at that, during a time of entrenched sexism and anti-Semitism, both outside and within the academy, with the latter, of course, being granted even greater political powers as the century continued. Though such analysis is beyond the scope of this study, I would speculate that these identities contributed both to her specific interest in progressive social change and to her maverick, outsider tendencies. Yet Rosenblatt’s own refusal to claim these identity markers as central either to the content of her theories, or to her early influences as a scholar, seems to have also contributed to the scholarship’s striking lack of interest in her early intellectual milieus. From our current perspective, her gender and ethnic background must have been defining facets of her early work; for her to have left these cards unplayed, even unacknowledged, may have only contributed to current perceptions of her work as in itself apolitical (for that explicit critique of Rosenblatt, see, for example, Dressman and Webster).

transhistorical ideals—the autonomy of the artist and the art object. But Rosenblatt’s study is not purely an example of literary history and sociology; most significant, I argue, is the strong philosophical claim it also makes for a newly holistic approach to aesthetics itself, work also shaped by the influence of Boasian anthropology.

For by her dissertation’s conclusion, Rosenblatt critiques late aestheticism most specifically for the balkanizations she sees it to have too successfully promoted, and that “having devoted themselves above all to negative definitions,” such aesthetic movements “contributed very little to defining the exact nature of the artistic experience.” Bringing this argument up to her present moment, she then argues that too many adherents of the “art for art’s sake” movement have remained overly complacent—“along with Kant”—to bracket off the very “utility and good” that Rosenblatt sees as deeply implicated in the use and understanding of art (309). As with her later work, Rosenblatt’s dissertation shows her working to unite the study of literature—or culture, defined aesthetically—with the study of culture, defined more anthropologically: to link, in other words, the “literary” with the varied human practices that enable such an experience, and freight those practices with enduring, and even transferable, import for human lives. And understood thus, Rosenblatt’s earliest work, and its originating milieu, shows a striking overlap with literacy studies scholarship produced more than five decades later—evoking, as one example, Deborah Brandt’s 1990 insistence on the “context bound” nature of text-based meaning, born as such meaning is of the “here and now relationship of readers and writers at work” (*Literacy* 4). As Franz Boas did in his ethnographies, and Baldensperger in his literary comparatism, the young Rosenblatt positioned herself as in collaboration with the poet-critic-readers whom she studied, striving to recognize them not only as objects of analysis, but also as culturally embedded

subjects in their own right: working to account for what Rosenblatt would later call, in her 1978 *The Reader, the Text, the Poem*, the “total situation” of reading and writing (17).

This chapter’s following sections begin with an analysis of the strain of Boasian anthropology that I argue is most essential to Rosenblatt’s later explorations of this “total situation” of text-based meaning making, explorations that I posit are also so suggestive for the study of literacy knowledge transfer. I then outline the crucially progressive goals that directed Boas’s and Rosenblatt’s study—the emphasis these theorists put on the interplay between cultural context and agentic interventions, and the new methods they strove to articulate for encouraging agents’ critical participation in culture. Following this, I analyze the parallels between Boasian anthropology and the largely forgotten school of French comparatist thought, to which Rosenblatt’s 1931 dissertation is most explicitly indebted, especially through the stated goals of her dissertation advisor, the French comparatist Fernand Baldensperger. I then show how her dissertation began to articulate a new model for literary study *as* literacy study, in ways that would be largely unrecognizable without this anthropological framework. In so doing, I highlight the significance of this work for her later development of a transactional theory of reading and writing, especially as relates to the progress-minded advancement of edifying interplays between production and reception, between the artist and a public, and between cultural inheritance and creative innovation.

Early Twentieth-Century Cultural Anthropology and Literary Study: “History” and “Patterns”

Though unquestionably a key architect—if not *the* key architect—of twentieth-century US cultural anthropology and ethnography, Franz Boas is not an uncontroversial figure in his field: scholars still debate the implications of his intellectual legacy (see, for instance, Stocking, Darnell, Bunzl, Lewis). In claiming Boas as a main influence on Rosenblatt’s later theories of transaction of stance, I am also aligning myself with a particular perspective on Boas’s work and its interpenetrations with other fields of inquiry. Rosenblatt’s later theorization of the “total situation” of reading and writing directly parallels the holistic “culture concept” that Boas instituted as central to his field—wherein tastes, behaviors, and values were seen not to be governed by universal laws and functions, but by a situation-specific cosmography of its own. Yet I resist understanding such an interest in holism—in the ecological interconnectedness that determines cultural meaning and value—as reducible to a proto-structuralist pursuit of determining patterns, as so-called “modernist” anthropology is sometimes characterized, and as I will discuss below. Instead, I will show Rosenblatt to have been impacted more by the ways that Boasian holism was nuanced with an attendant interest in both process and progress. I argue in this chapter that Boasian thought was particularly crucial for Rosenblatt’s forays in literacy study; moreover, the impact of Boasian thought highlights the relevance of her theories for a new model of transformative transfer of knowledge across boundaries, whether imagined as different “communities of practice”³³ or different dimensions of literacy. This influence shows Rosenblatt asking, even from early in her career, about both the stable elements of literacy learning, which enable developmental advances, and about the cultural contingencies of such knowledge, which destabilize predictive models of cultural achievement and instead attend to the dynamics

³³ Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger coined the term “communities of practice” (1991) to describe individuals’ participation in different domains were centered on common understandings or performances of practice, not just shared discourse or locations.

enabling innovation and transformation. Like Boas, Rosenblatt's early theories thus focused on the mutability and unpredictable contingencies of developing cultural values and norms, especially as they were effected by individual practice—whether as an everyday partaker, or as a more formal student, of culture.

The particular uptake of Boasian anthropology that I attribute to Rosenblatt, first for her work in comparative literature and its literacy study of Victorian poet-critics, and then later in her theorizations of reading and writing, and recommendations concerning its instruction, runs counter to a number of narratives about how this period's anthropological inquiries were related to early twentieth-century literary study. First, and at the broadest level, Rosenblatt's integration of literary study and cultural anthropology and literary study belies the presumption that these fields were defined by mutually exclusive methods and goals. Such conventional wisdom—as articulated, for example, by Elizabeth Wilson's "Short History of a Border War"—frames the emergent disciplines of literary studies and social science as characterizing themselves in polemical opposition to each other, especially through the 1930s development of their respectively "aristocratic" (literary studies) and "progressive" (social sciences) ideals.³⁴ In his otherwise persuasively argued history of English studies, the aforementioned Thomas Miller, for example, builds somewhat blithely on Wilson's claims that progressives of the period adhered purely to a social science-oriented curriculum; upon this presumption, Miller argues that this movement's forward-thinking, student-centered pedagogies largely eschewed art and literature,

³⁴ By Wilson's overly partisan telling, "the response of the New Humanists and the majority of the academic literary establishment to the social phenomena of immigration and urbanization was to retrench behind a tradition of aristocracy. The progressives, in contrast, sought to integrate new populations into the structures of American society," especially by reforming traditional curricula and pedagogies (724).

or imagined them as providing little more than a vehicle for individually developmental or sociological inquiries (e.g. 165). And such conventional wisdom continues to reign, especially as it justifies composition studies scholars' common claims that their own progressive pedagogies have little use for literature or the literary. This is an argument that Rosenblatt's retheorization of literacy instruction and aesthetics can help to dismantle, a dismantling that is especially crucial for writing studies scholarship, which still harbors a deep suspicion of the uses literature might hold in the writing classroom.³⁵

Complicating accounts such as Wilson's are disciplinary histories that propose a tighter set of shared concerns between these burgeoning disciplines. In his 2013 *Composing Cultures*, Eric Aronoff troubles the story that the modernist version of high "Culture" was essentially conservative—"universal, hierarchic and exclusionary"—and that the more recent cultural studies model, in sharp and significant contrast, is grounded in the comparably innovative forms of "multiculturalism, or cultural pluralism" (184) that 1930s cultural anthropology are said to have inspired.³⁶ Instead, Aronoff argues that "the modernist conception of culture as meaningful whole" was itself, in many cases, pluralist and reform-minded, "mobilized precisely to counter the imperialism of the nation state" and its potentially racist, nativist policies (185). Supporting and preceding Aronoff's work was Susan Hegeman's 1999 *Patterns for America*, one of the foundational re-examinations of the fruitful cross-pollinations between these two fields,

³⁵ The most famous expression of this skepticism is Erika Lindeman's 1993 "Freshman Composition: No Place for Literature."

³⁶ In the introduction to their edited volume *Disciplinarity at the Fin de Siecle*, Amanda Anderson and Joseph Valente similarly seek to complicate cultural studies' claims that its anti- or inter-disciplinarity makes it more "free" than other disciplines were at their inception, or are today (2).

especially as concerns the study (and articulation) of different civilizations, their linguistic artifacts, and the publically influential “hierarchies of taste” implied by the uses to which these cultural artifacts were put (5). Indeed, Hegeman argues that the new critical attitudes of the 1930s, significant both in the public sphere and in an array of academic fields, were rooted in that shared “culture concept,” an anthropological innovation she largely attributes to Boasian anthropology—in which cultures are viewed not evaluatively and on evolutionist terms (per much of nineteenth-century anthropology), but relativistically, each possessing their own equally valid, inner logic. And Marc Manganaro’s 2002 *Culture, 1922* extends Hegeman’s claims back a decade, seeing in the disciplinary foundation-laying of 1920s that potent “culture concept” that attempted to explain both and at once a society’s more “common, shared system” of everyday interaction, and its more select “elite products,” especially in the form of literature (14).

Reassessments like these are especially crucial for English studies, since the field constitutes both deeply pragmatic, progressive-minded functions (continuing literacy instruction in our cultural habits of communication) and more purportedly high-minded scholarly-critical functions (the study and theorization of our culture’s most valued or telling artifacts, including literature). That these equally culturally attentive goals remain, in most college classrooms, both structurally and philosophically discrete—with few theories of transfer connecting the two—only underlines the need for more historically and philosophically integrative work that can complicate the

conventional wisdom about English's original mandates and political allegiances. Indeed, this is a tradition with which I align my own reinterpretation of Rosenblatt's work.

Significantly, however, even these admirably integrative studies show how difficult it can be to escape one's own field's long-built-in biases, especially about the nature of its methods and goals: these studies often end up reiterating the very binaries they seek to rebut, especially concerning the "synchronic" paradigm by which they claim these movements understood their objects of study (see Hegeman 51).³⁷ Here, Rosenblatt's "progressive alternative" becomes germane, especially as her anthropologically inflected concept of transaction stands in contrast to this more traditionally modernist focus on the aesthetic object, whatever anthropologically pluralist politics they argue might undergird it. For, and as Brad Evans has pointed out, it is only in the "classical, modernist sense" that the idea of "culture" explored by Hegeman and others "was conceptualized not as a process but a thing" (429). Indeed, what Manganaro calls "Anglo-American modernism, broadly conceived" (9) is the presumed bedrock upon which he, Hegeman, and Aronoff build their cross-disciplinary arguments. Such insistence on "modernism" as the single grounding paradigm of these varied movements of the interwar period weights these reassessments towards a particular conception of the aesthetics of autonomy—one not unlike the view Rosenblatt, seventy years earlier, critiqued in *The Idea of Art for Art's Sake*. For all the interdisciplinary energy implicit in their sources, these arguments remain overly bound to their discipline's own presuppositions about early twentieth-century production, criticism and reception. They remain overly bound, in other words, to a narrative focused, sometimes to a

³⁷ Hegeman even admits as much, arguing, in a clever turn, that she "replicates" this "bipartite history of culture...in order to refute it" (7). But I would argue that, in *Patterns for America*, Hegeman's replications sometimes come through more clearly than her refutations.

flaw, on the very “thing”-iness, as Evans might have it, of that period’s conception of culture; and they are attendantly neglectful of the underlying, varied, and agent-centered “processes” that also imbue such “things” with their continuing meaning.

Most specifically, all three scholars take as foundational Hegeman’s description of the Boasian culture concept as necessarily implying a “spatial” model (4)—in which cultures and their artifacts are imagined as incommensurate and static units, discrete from their historicity or more variably pragmatic use-value. All three scholars stress the extent to which this relativistic vision of culture, especially as implicated by the kind of proto-structuralism for which Boas’s students were later famous, thus “turned on issues of form” (Aronoff 14), was bound up in an “aesthetic ideal” (Hegeman 6), and understood its objects as each constituting a “complex whole” of its own (Manganaro 4). For these critics, this interest in form also self-servingly accompanied an increasing (and increasingly restrictive) professionalization of academic disciplines and of critical thought; as well as accompanying, I would add, this field’s increasing divisibility from literacy instruction, which was, and continues too often to be, conceptualized as contrastively existing along a generalizably developmental (and thus a less synchronic, and a more traditionally “diachronic”) track. As Aronoff most explicitly argues, this period’s culture critics conceptualized these synchronically conceptualized cultural “wholes” as necessitating expert and specialized reading techniques, different in kind, not only degree, from other literacy practices;

indeed, they positioned such artifacts as distinct from any other category of legible text on the basis of their status as “objects *requiring* analysis” (“Cultures” 187, his emphasis).

Boas’s 1887 essay “The Study of Geography” suggests a different narrative, germane to Rosenblatt’s later experiments in literacy study; this work, I will show in the next section, reveals more interest in the process-focused specifics of change than it does in the transcendent generalizations that the “spatial model” can imply. Boas’s interest in the geographically spatial is thus better understood more as literal and pragmatic than figural or paradigmatic—less as a theoretical inclination towards transcendently “whole and complex” conceptualizations (it was instead a number of his students who would tend towards this form of cultural structuralism), and more as exemplifying an anthropological devotion to the expanding diversity of cultural phenomena observable mainly through field work. I argue that this essay exemplifies the key foundation Boas offered to Rosenblatt’s work, especially by Boas’s setting himself against the deductive methods underlying the armchair anthropology of the generations proceeding him (see Darnell, *Invisible* 13). Boas aimed to study both cultures not as syllogistically arrived at abstractions but as they variously existed, enduringly in flux in time and space. Far from embracing a purely spatial model, then, I understand Boasian historicism as striving to account for spatial features (such as patterns and coherence) while still acknowledging these features as also and necessarily time- and place-sensitive, provisional and fluid—not static, immutable, or purely reducible to the formal, or, indeed, at all readable if removed entirely from context. As Darnell (*Invisible*) and Judith Berman (“The Culture”) remind us, Boas’s collaborations with natives suggest the extent to which Boas attempted to hold his scholarly expertise in a dialogic

balance with the more immediate and embedded knowledge available only through people raised within those cultures, for whom such cultural knowledge was normative.

Rosenblatt's work, and her particular uptake of Boas, reinforces this approach and educational justification for the study of culture. Her work also offers new insight into Boasian anthropology as well. Rosenblatt's focus on transaction as a process and practice that cannot be uprooted from history shows that the "spatial model" was not the only new knowledge-making paradigm available to literary and literacy critics during this interwar period, any more than it was the only paradigm suggested by Boas's own work. At the largest philosophical level, this Boasian approach aligns with the progressive-pragmatic school of thought described by James Kloppenberg, a turn of the century philosophy build from an historicism in which "knowledge can neither be abstracted from nor entirely reduced to the historical circumstances of individual lives" (4). For Kloppenburg, this philosophy's innovation thus lies in its determined moderation, its seeking out a "via media" between the nineteenth-century's philosophical idealism, on the one hand, and scientific positivism, on the other.³⁸ Such historicism entails a pragmatic focus on the inevitability of shifting contexts and one's perceptions of them, and thus a refusal to abstract from history absolute or predictive laws; it recommends a "sensibility" that is, indeed, "profoundly historical" in its devotion to the observable variety of agents' problems and solutions, and their flexible adaptability to such unpredictability (4). Yet Kloppenberg additionally underscores how this historicism's skepticism of deterministic accounts—biological, geographical or economic—also contains a crucial strain of optimism about the possibility of

³⁸ Kloppenburg describes such positivism as "denying that anything spiritual holds the key to change" and as holding that that progress proceeds by an "altogether naturalistic dynamic" (21).

purposive invention and thus of progress, or what Kloppenberg calls “the individual’s creative role in cultural change” (9). Herbert Lewis’s recent reconsiderations of Boas have suggested that the particular philosophy Kloppenberg here describes can rescue some of Boas’s own intellectual roots and intentions from the charge of obscurantism or aimless relativism; I argue Kloppenberg’s framework can do the same for Rosenblatt. Kloppenberg describes the *via media* philosophers (including Dewey) as rejecting a Cartesian dualism of subject and object (48), materialism (49), and an acontextualized, static conceptualization of the mind (52); Boas similarly highlights, as in the conclusion to his 1928 *Anthropology and Modern Life*, that “individuals and society are functionally related” (246), just as Rosenblatt later writes that “organism and environment” are “each...a function of the other” (172 *Reader*)—all insisting that such forces are mutually reinforcing agents of change, equally suggestible to each other’s influence.

I thus argue that, for Rosenblatt, the pragmatic-progressivism informing Boas’s cultural anthropology allowed her to frame—to return to Brad Evans’s terms—the “process,” even more than the “thing,” as the essential point of her inquiries into literacy dynamics and the virtue of literary study. In contrast to a “spatial” model and its subsequently traditional “aesthetic” ideal—detached from the uses and ethical problems of history—Rosenblatt was able to center her attention on the provisional fluidity of meaning and attendant need for a “sympathetic” method, and not the self-contained atomizations read into this relativism by others.³⁹ Brad Evans calls

³⁹ As Stocking, Darnell and many others have noted, Boas’s own anthropology was interpreted and professionalized in multiple different ways by his students, including Margaret Mead, Ruth Benedict, Edward Sapir, and Robert Lowie, among others. Scholars seem to agree that a single method or ethos cannot be extrapolated from Boas’s enormous body of work or from the intellectual legacy manifest in his many students’ influential work. For this chapter, and because

this a progressively philosophical concern with “circulation” (429). For Boas, and as I will discuss in more detail below, it was more specifically an interest in “diffusion.” For the French literary comparatists among whom Rosenblatt produced her dissertation it was a focus on the problematics of *fleure* (flow) and interrupted “influence,” which included questions about transmission, translation, and the inevitable variations that emerge as values, forms and textual content are adapted by different agents in different contexts. And for Rosenblatt, in her dissertation, this became an interest in the quintessentially democratic problem of the individual literacy act undertaken in the context of an increasingly diverse, diversely literate, and potentially mobile public; and the subsequent struggle of critics and practitioners to articulate the “idea,” as Rosenblatt calls it, that a written production could appear valuable both and at once as a single, “autonomous” time-travelling artifact (Aronoff’s “object”), as well as a deeply interpretable, context-dependent, stance-dependent (and thus “historical”) “process” or “experience.” Rosenblatt’s questions of 1931, I thus contend, are little different from the questions posed by the New Literacy Studies of the last three decades, about the relation between cultural values and the dynamics of acquisition and use; moreover, they can re-energize current questions about the relationship between broad-based, developmentally minded literacy

of my own interests in Boas’s influence *outside* of his then-emergent discipline, I am drawing mainly on Boas’s general justifications of anthropological study, including those geared particularly for the public sphere, more than on the specifics of his anthropological practice. Although in his introduction to *The Shaping of American Anthropology*, George Stocking argues that “in practice, Boas conceived of history in rather traditional and indeed somewhat positivistic terms” (13), Stocking also points to Boas’s many methodological and philosophical innovations, especially in terms of his “critical” work promoting the reform not only of existing anthropological paradigms but also, as I will argue later in this chapter, the larger (and to his mind, problematic) cultural assumptions and habits that enabled such paradigms (see 14-5, *The Shaping*). As Judith Berman argues, in reference to Boas’s sometimes “paradoxical” conception of the anthropologist as both “bias-free” outsider and intimately enmeshed insider, “it would hardly be fair to Boas to criticize him for failing to resolve a paradox whose existence could not even have been imagined before his contribution” (250).

education and its relationship to the study of literature, and the construct of “the aesthetic,” as Rosenblatt’s eventual retheorization of that term will reveal.

Boasian Relativism, Historicism, and Perceptual Variety

When Rosenblatt describes the influence that Boas had on her as a young woman taking his undergraduate and graduate courses at Barnard and Columbia in the early 1920s—along with her roommate and close friend Margaret Mead—it is the revelation offered by his particular brand of cultural relativism that she extols the most. She portrays this core value of the discipline as having both methodological and ethical effects: not only pushing students to consider and acknowledge the “individuality of different cultures and so on...the recognition of the pluralism, of the relativity of values...” (*Reminiscences* 38), a perspective gained only by attempting a certain “objectivity” when studying other cultures, but also encouraging students to reflect upon their own social habits and values more critically (*Reminiscences* 42)—such relativistic objectivity thus leading to a kind of refreshed and crucially expanded experience of one’s own permeable subjectivity. Inside Boas’s famous cultural relativism, therefore, was also an acknowledgement of agents’ perceptual mutability; and—as Rosenblatt would later echo in her dissertation—distrust of an aestheticism that saw itself as separable from, to return to Brandt’s terms, the pragmatic, purposive, and historically contingent “here and now of readers and writers at work.”

But in that pragmatic “here and now” of literate agents “at work,” Rosenblatt would sift out from all the cultural contingencies a set of attitudinal approaches to meaning making—what she more

largely described as “stance”—that shape the kinds of knowledge that agents make. Franz Boas’s “On Geography” laid out a similar taxonomy.⁴⁰ In this essay, Boas defines geography one of the two main branches of empirical science: geography, Boas argues, is primarily historical; physics, primarily physical (138). Boas then aligns these branches with two distinct methods: history with the inductive, by the logic that history garners its knowledge from a “thorough understanding of the phenomena studied” (138); and physics with the deductive, by the logic that the physicist “isolates the general phenomena which is common to all” with the aim less of describing facts or uncovering origins than articulating “the general law alone” by which such phenomena operate (138). While both seek “eternal truth” (139) through the study of “facts” (138), these two sciences differently conceptualize the role of such “facts,” or found evidence. For the historian, the “facts are the object which are of importance and interest” (138), but for the physicist, facts are the means to a far more abstracted end. Even more crucially, Boas argues that the historian, unlike the physicist, explores a phenomenon as it is holistically embedded in circumstances, in which, as Boas writes, “the knowledge of its existence and evolution in space and time fully satisfies the student, without regard to the laws which it corroborates or which may be deduced from it” (138). The historian’s work, then, centers on what Boas calls a “subjective” connection between student and object of study, a connection “originating in the mind of the observer” (138); it is a mode of engagement driven by “feelings” and by the “affective impulse,” in which

⁴⁰ Boas scholars George Stocking and Matti Bunzl acknowledge that Boas’s long, varied career supplies plenty of evidence for a number of sometimes contradictory paradigms; yet both also consider his early essay “The Study of Geography” a foundational statement of Boas’s philosophy of science (“Boasian” 5; “Franz Boas” 17). As Stocking argues, when Boas was editing *Race, Language and Culture*, his career-crowning 1940 selection of his own writing, he still considered this short piece, written more than five decades prior, fundamental enough to stand as the collection’s concluding essay.

“the mere occurrence of an event claims the full attention of our mind, because we were affected by it, and it is studied without any regard to its place in a system” (139).

Yet just as Rosenblatt would later theorize all literacy acts as existing on a continuum with one another, Boas also refuses to except study in the physical sciences from the dimensions of either emotion or belief; of the physicist, Boas writes “Joyfully he sees that every process and every phenomenon...is a link of a long chain” (140). Boas does not suggest that these practices exist independently of emotion or subjective perception; instead this disciplinary outlook is geared towards different goals and operates by different methods. Even more specifically, Boas grounds the physicist’s deductive work in what he calls “aesthetic wants” or an “aesthetical disposition, which is offended by confusion and want of clearness” (139). Where Boas sees historicism is directed towards an explanation of the affect-inflected and highly particularized “subjective unity” one feels between one’s historical self and one’s historical objects of inquiry, he understands physics as driven instead by those very abstracting and atomizing mode that neo-Kantians were also employing to describe the history transcending experience of beauty and its purer form of poetry.

Similar to an argument Rosenblatt will later make in her *Idea of Art for Art’s Sake*, Boas thus distinguishes such aestheticism from other, more “historical” forms of cultural engagement, which he describes as “closely related to the arts, as the way in which the mind is affected by phenomena forms an important branch of the study” (140). Parallel to Rosenblatt’s expressed interest in seeking a “positive definition” of the “nature of the artistic experience,” Boas suggests that, in the case of the “arts,” the reverberations registered in the observer’s mind constitute an

integral feature of its meaning; or, in other words, that the embodied observations of the observing subject, as they evolve in tandem with the observed object, entail a key facet of one's inquiry. To return to Kloppenberg's terms, this mode of engagement is "profoundly historical," indeed.

Boas's broad-based meta-disciplinary distinction also reveals the roots of Rosenblatt's later taxonomy of reading and writing (1978, 1994). To be sure, Rosenblatt would come to retheorize the term "aesthetic" to describe what for Boas is historical and resolutely non-aesthetic, and to adopt the term "efferent" to describe what Boas references as "aesthetic." Nonetheless, Rosenblatt's "aesthetic" and "efferent" stances—the two main approaches she argues an agent can take in approaching a text, as reader or writer (1978, 1994)—can not only be traced to, but better illuminated by, the distinction that Boas here draws. Rosenblatt's "efferent" stance, like Boas's concept of the aestheticizing work of the physicist, entails an attitude towards language and phenomena that preferences objectivity and what Boas calls "clearness," and that brackets out the potential vagaries "originating in the mind of the observer" in favor of distilling purportedly universal meanings (what Boas calls detail-transcending "laws"); as such, Rosenblatt defines this efferent stance as one in which "attention...is concentrated on what is to be assimilated for use after [one] has finished reading" (24 *Reader*). Yet, like Boas, Rosenblatt's emphasis on this as a "stance," or purpose-driven approach to experience, or knowledge-paradigm, also refuses to reduce that which she described as efferent entirely to the instrumental. Instead, the efferent is merely one of two purposive approaches to knowledge: a culturally

embedded, and affectively and perceptually inflected attitude towards phenomena, and which has particular uses for communicative efficacy.

In turn, Rosenblatt's construct of the "aesthetic" stance —the complement to the efferent— parallels the historically minded and affect-sensitive attitude towards phenomena that Boas here recommends for the student of culture ("geography"). As part of a continuum, however, this stance is not free of instrumental tendencies (what she calls in her dissertation "utility") so much as it is an expanded version of such tendencies, adding to one's instrumental attitudes towards textual communication a self-reflective and ethically minded acknowledgement of the very contingency of one's own responses and thus one's own values and habits. As Rosenblatt would later argue, the aesthetic stance is one in which "the reader's attention is centered directly on what he is living through during his relationship with that particular text" at a specific time and place (*25 Reader*); like Boas's historicism, "the way in which the mind is affected" is accounted for as closely as the phenomena that inspired such effects; such affectedness, in fact, stands as an integral ingredient of that phenomenon. Overall, then, just as Boas's vision of the physical sciences adopts an utilitarian view of its materials, bracketing out its subjective elements, so does Rosenblatt's efferent stance view and use "language...as basically an impersonal medium" (37). And, in contrast, both Boas's historicism and Rosenblatt's aesthetic stance can be seen to entail, in their turn, a kind of metacognition, what Rosenblatt later describes as an "intense concentration" on one's own reaction—not one in which the reader focuses merely on the textual

features, as close reading so often claims to do, but one in which “the reader contemplates his own shaping of his evocation from the text” (*Reader* 31).

Also relevant to Rosenblatt’s emerging theory of literacy is Boas’s stated dissociation from an atomizing nineteenth-century natural sciences model, and what Boas frames as its law-driven paradigm of knowledge. Like Rosenblatt’s objection to aestheticist claims to a disinterested “idea of art,” Boas forwards a subject-sensitive construct of the nature and role of the “arts,” in which diffuse and diverse instances of cultural expression and reception are valued over uniformity, predictability, and formalized systems of cause and effect. Boas’s influence highlights the significance of Rosenblatt’s growing conviction that cultural phenomena—and any study of them—needs to be understood as embedded in the variabilities of subjective situatedness, and thus in our own historicity as literate agents.

These parallels reveal the extent to which Rosenblatt’s model of literacy relies on what she would come to call a “new paradigm”—one she attributes in her later work to Thomas Kuhn (“Transactional” 1364), but which I argue can also be traced more to the early impact of cultural anthropology. By this specifically Boasian framework, the study of culture (or “geography” as a form of historicism) is necessarily relativistic not only to its own context but to ours as well. For Boas, as for Rosenblatt, this suggested that cultural study necessitates a constantly recursive form of metacognition, of a kind that the physical sciences can bypass in their pursuit of more absolutist laws. Moreover, the adoption of one or another of these attitudes towards knowledge—metacognitive and relativistic, or absolutist and apparently objective—constitutes a choice that the student of the natural and cultural world will constantly be making, a choice

reflective of that student's specific purpose. For Rosenblatt, too, the aesthetic and efferent stances are approaches to text and meaning that the literate agent selects as her purpose shifts.

Even so, the historicist study of culture, for Boas and for Rosenblatt, should not be reduced only to the inward-looking study of the "way the mind is affected"; their study of culture also entails an examination of how these dynamics "transact" with and thus affect larger cultural change, and the examination of how such dynamics can be better corralled to encourage progressively more sensitive and purposive instances of such cultural change. Boas's influence highlights Rosenblatt's nascent theory that a literate agent's stance towards the world—one that is more or less self-reflective, and self-reflectively "transactional"—should be understood as significant not only to one's individual development, although it does have bearing on those pedagogical concerns. As my next section will show, Boas's theory of diffusion, also fundamental to Rosenblatt's emerging theory of the mutually impactful interpenetrations between literary meaning and individual's literacy practices, explains the "transactional" nature of the relationship that also exists between an agent and a larger culture, enabling engagement with—and participation in the reformation of—that culture's meaning and values.

Boasian Diffusion and the Potential for Progress

Many recent cross-disciplinary studies of this period's developing "culture concept" emphasize Boasian anthropology's "modernist," largely formalist, and even purportedly aestheticist paradigm, one understood to result from a shift in the anthropological method from diachronic to synchronic analysis. This shift is widely explained by its political origins, as a rejection of the

often racially inflected social evolutionism that the diachronic view could be used to promote. Less acknowledged, however, is that this synchronic or “spatial model” was not the only anti-evolutionist innovation of its time. Equally significant to Boas’s conception of cultural study is his theory of diffusion, which works to explain cultural-change-over-time-and-place, and in this way refutes a static, “synchronic” explanation of cultural habits. Indeed, as my last section argued, Boas set his own approach against the decontextualizing tendencies of aestheticism, and saw his historicism instead as “closely related to the arts,” especially because of the account an historical explanation offers for the particular modes of cultural uptake engaged by different individuals at different places and times. As this dissertation argues more largely, this attention to the relation between culture and individual uptake is what Rosenblatt would later theorize as the transactions activated by culturally embedded agents, and which I also argue can be understood as a figure for a subject and situation-sensitive construct of transfer. Further, and as this section argues more specifically, this theory of diffusion—how cultural meanings and values change as they are travel across time, space, and distinctive agents—can also be seen to undergird Rosenblatt’s own interests in developing an ethics of democratic cultural engagement.

Before discussing the ethical implications of agents cultivating a self-reflective form of cultural diffusion, it is first important to distinguish the progressivism implicitly embraced by this chapter’s philosophical milieu from the crudely evolutionist “progressionism” they refute.⁴¹

“Progressionism” should be understood, as George Stocking argues, as that social evolutionism that saw in civilized (Western, white) cultures empirical proof of the inevitable march of human

⁴¹ In *Patterns for America*, Hegeman’s only indexed references to progressivism can more accurately be described as references to progressionism. Her book therefore gives the impression that the 1930s intellectual uptake of culture concept was generally anti-progressivist, instead of being more narrowly anti-progressionist.

advancement, and based its arguments about racial superiority on artefactual evidence of different populations' technological and cultural achievements (70, *Culture and Evolution*).⁴² By this paradigm, progress proceeds by a single standard, with its attainment seemingly hard wired into certain ethnic groups. The progressivism I attribute to Boas and Rosenblatt, by contrast, is structured by a non-deterministic belief that improved social functioning—like the productively self-reflective kinds of literacy that Rosenblatt recommends—are achieved not by innate ability but by the active, conscious, and entirely unpredictable, participation and intervention of a society's members in the making of meaning. As such, and since this progressivism advocates for reform and innovation on the grounds of the “diffusion” of habits and values across agents and milieus, “improvement” cannot be imagined as taking place independent of this agent-based form of participation. Where progressionists tended to see in their current social reality a progress achieved by dint of natural laws, and thus according to some greater plan independent of its people's attitudes, actions, or circumstances, the moderate school of progressives in which I argue Boas and Rosenblatt belong—as particularly exemplified by their involvement with pragmatic questions about education—was inspired by the inequities of the modern condition to intervene into social functioning, especially as it related to populations who had little access to elite knowledge-making cultures or opportunity for social mobility. As such, this form of progressivism was also a model that saw specifically democratic participation as its best hope. Indeed, this philosophy undergirds the very kind of participatory literacy that Rosenblatt would

⁴² For his part, Ernst Mayr (1972) describes progressionism as structured along a “ladder of perfection,” a term that highlights the theory's significant strain of creationism (983, 989). As do Stocking, and Lewis after him, Mayr also crucially distinguishes between, on the one hand, progressionism's belief—to many, a perversion of true Darwinism—that the world and thus the modern condition constitutes an improvement-through-time enacted by some force, natural or supernatural, larger than individuals themselves, and, on the other, a more nuanced understanding of Darwinian evolutionary thinking, which—despite its later uptake of social evolutionists—“by no means necessitated continuous betterment” (988).

later theorize as the “aesthetic” stance, which sought to leverage, for both individual and social reform, the innovations made available by an especially self-critical, experience-sensitive attitude towards texts and their meanings.

The concept of diffusion makes possible Boas’s theory of progressive, agentic, yet non-predictive cultural change. Indeed, anthropological historiographer Regna Darnell describes diffusion—which she argues was for Boas a “primary mechanism of history”—as the “alternative theoretical concept enabling Boas to attack the premises of the evolutionary method” (49), or the crude social evolutionism that undergirded many of the period’s approaches to cultural study. Such social evolutionism was validated by the concept of “independent invention” (49), which, on the basis of deduction, claimed that the worldwide existence of similar cultural artifacts—from tools to linguistic features, and which nineteenth-century anthropologists were beginning to collect and compare—resulted from inevitable-because-universal human tendencies (“invention” denoting the spontaneous expression of such elemental interests and skills). By the progressionism implicit in such a theory, different national or racial groups could be understood as developing, or as having developed, along a single teleological scale, and any distinctions between these groups, ranging from skull size to language use, could be explained by their position on that scale, or the extent of their achievement by that scale’s one standard of “progress.” By this paradigm, cultural differences merely constituted instantiations of cultural attainment, sorted hierarchically. In contrast, Boas’s theory of diffusion posited that such similarities and differences should be understood less as the success or the failure of attainment, than as the consequence of human travel and uptake. The varieties of cultural habits resulted not from some inevitable movement forward along a single scale of progress, but from dispersed and

web-like radiations and unpredictable trajectories, attributable to environment, accident, and, even more crucially, to key differences in perception, or the way that newly diffused habits or artifacts are contextually understood, valued, and put to use.

Given its acknowledgement of what Boas calls, in a Darwinian key, “individual variation” (*Mind* 181), the theory of diffusion thus rejects the positivist concept that as traditions spread—whether through accident or deliberate forms of education—they remain static in their meaning. Indeed, with this emphasis on variation and spread, Boas’s model recalls Darwin’s theories more accurately than the rough use made of those theories by the period’s social evolutionists. For as habits and artifacts travel through space and time and interact with new environments and agents, Boasian diffusion insists that their social uses and significance also undergo modifications: so that cultural “facts,” by definition, are immanently interpretable. Even so, such interpretation is not entirely free; whichever subject approaches such facts, whether her own or someone else’s, from the past or from the present, Boas’s relativism also asserts that that subject’s interpretations remain ineluctably grounded in her own relative sense of meaning and value. By this logic, individual subjectivity helps meaning not only to travel but also to transform and diversify.

To be sure, such a theory counters diachronic models of social achievement by so determinedly relativizing its objects of study—contending that different cultures, like different individuals, can operate by different aims and rules. Yet this theory also conceptualizes cultures, and the individuals within them, as more permeable than bounded, more fluidly historical than synchronically spatial, and more recursively transactional and unpredictable than socially determined. The very volatility of Boas’s construct of perception thus returns us to the promise

that such a theory holds for the study of “art” itself less a purely physical (or “formal”) artifact than as a complexly “historical” site in which the interplay between tradition and innovation, between the socially shared and the individually idiosyncratic, might be investigated with particular focus.

It is also important to note that Boasian historicism does not necessarily imply ethical anti-foundationalism. While Boas’s theory of diffusion was founded on a deep skepticism of deductively arrived-at universalism, it was not founded on the belief that there were no universal dynamics of culture-improving critique that might still unify the human race as one, and provide models for its edification. Boas’s philosophy of history should not be reduced to the “infinite relativization” that critics such as Frederic Jameson have suggested (53), by which the willful, free and subjective meaning of an ever fluid present can erase the actuality of a situational past, or the possibility of gleaning new explanatory paradigms for a better future.⁴³

Indeed, Boas’s *Mind of Primitive Man* strives to theorize how progressive knowledge is and can be developed through an agent-inflected version of diffusion, and moreover, how greater clarity about our shared moral foundations might be reached: showing his cultural relativism still to be

⁴³ In “Marxism and Historicism,” Frederic Jameson writes that “existential historicism” is “to be found . . . in American anthropology, in the school of Franz Boas, explicitly antigenetic and antievolutionist” (50), and Jameson critiques such historicism both for the agency and freedom it assumes in its observing scholar-subject; and for a relativism it assumes to be genuinely value-neutral. For Jameson, this model, while it should be lauded for the new sense of “urgency” it inserted into cultural inquiry, forwards historical inquiry as a problematically “transhistorical event” (51): the scholar’s “complacent aestheticizing contemplation” (57) of some “given synchronic cultural complex from the past” (51). Indeed, Hegeman’s interpretation of Boasian anthropology appears to grow directly out of this appraisal.

bound by a foundational ethics, and by a crucial aspiration towards social and cultural progress. To be sure, Boas does not conceive progress as inevitable, genetically predetermined, or innately bending towards justice. Instead, such progress requires maintenance and flexibility—and was conceived less as a template of morals than as a theory of moral education. For Boas, modern knowledge-making is itself a means of the reform and social improvement of which individuals are both the bearers and the innovators: “In the advance of civilization,” Boas writes, we can see people’s increasing ability to “free themselves from the fetters of tradition” (206 *Mind*), and to critically examine the bases of their ideas—even if such fetters could never be entirely discarded. Further, Boas suggests that the interventions enabling such “advance” or social progress are achieved by the very knowledge-making practices of his own discipline: “the general valuation of human activities, as developed by anthropological research, teaches us a higher tolerance than the one which we now profess” (*Mind* 209).

Moreover, Boas’s longstanding and progress-minded argument with nineteenth-century progressionism and social evolutionism reveals one of the philosophical foundations for Rosenblatt’s critique, in her dissertation, of both nineteenth-century English didacticism, on the one hand, and aestheticism, on the other. By Rosenblatt’s understanding, both of these nineteenth-century approaches to art too often tended to construe the nature and value of culture in rigidly absolutist terms, as either a functionalism that assumed social values to be universal and universally legible (what she calls in her dissertation “Victorianism”), or a separate spheres argument of beauty that purportedly transcended the varied exigencies of the social (as her dissertation sees forwarded by a number of late aesthetes). In contrast to these claims, Rosenblatt’s dissertation sought a more Boasian and holistic explanation of “art,” one that

showed that art's meanings and values—its beauty, use, and good, all and at once—are ever intertwined and contingent, subject to interlocked and interlocking modifications as their instantiations are reinterpreted through time and space and across agents, and even if their larger “culture,” nationally conceived, appears to remain relatively stable. Further, this Boasian view of cultural study led Rosenblatt to develop a theory of literacy learning—and the edifying value of literary study—quite different from those she had observed in her own time, in which the pedagogies of literature largely hewed to the same camps staked out by the overly instrumental Victorianism, on the one hand, and the overly disinterested aesthetes, on the other, that her first scholarly work critiques.

Disturbed Influence: Comparatism, Reception, and the Reinterpretation of Culture

For all the power of Boas's influence on her career as a scholar, Louise Rosenblatt did not, like her friend and roommate Margaret Mead, go on to immerse herself in anthropological fieldwork. In her first extended work of scholarship, Rosenblatt turned to Pater and Swinburne, Ruskin and Wilde: Victorian culture critics and the thorny history of English aestheticism as was largely searchable in the British library. Yet by taking on this topic, Rosenblatt is able to challenge directly what Boas references only obliquely in the “Study of Geography”—the devotion to universality and autonomy that supported some of the most potent theories of nineteenth-century aestheticism. This further move was enabled, I argue, by Rosenblatt's introduction to the school of French comparatism centered at the University of Paris (Sorbonne); and it was from the center of this comparatist movement, bolstered by the influence of Boas, that Rosenblatt launched her scholarly career: Fernand Baldensperger, founder of the program, was her dissertation chair,

along with Louis Cazamian and Émile Legouis⁴⁴, and she took courses with Paul Hazard, co-founder with Baldensperger of the influential *La revue de littérature comparée*.

Indeed, Boasian historicism and the early twentieth-century French comparatism consolidated by Rosenblatt's early scholarship were not as philosophically discrete as they may from a distance appear. Of course, this was a period of rich cross-fertilization between the Americans and the French, and Rosenblatt's decision to study in Grenoble, with Paul Hazard, and then to pursue her doctorate at the Sorbonne is not so unusual when one remembers the fellow American she met on her travels—Allen Tate, Caroline Gordon, Gertrude Stein, and Aaron Copeland, among others (*Reminiscences* 97, 101, 68). Less well known is the travel that also took place in the other direction, especially by the French Sorbonne comparatists with whom Rosenblatt would study: that her dissertation chair, Fernand Baldensperger, served as a visiting professor to Columbia between 1917 and 1919, and Paul Hazard held the same position for five semesters between 1932 and 1940⁴⁵; and that another advisor, Louis Cazamian—a professor of literature at University of Paris who wrote, with Emile Legouis, a well-known history of English literature (footnote this)—held a year-long post at Columbia for the 1928-29 academic year. While I've found no evidence that, while at Columbia, these French scholars interacted directly with Franz Boas, John Dewey, or the young Rosenblatt herself, or with the important promoters of

⁴⁴ In her *Reminiscences*, Rosenblatt describes finishing her dissertation in 1929 with Cazamian, Baldensperger and Legouis as main readers (126). She describes courses with Hazard and his method of *explication de texte* (66).

⁴⁵ Compagnon provides further evidence that Hazard was continuously courted with a post at Columbia's Department of Romance Languages and Literature after Adolphe Cohn left in 1917.

American progressive or “New” history, James A. Robinson or Charles Beard⁴⁶, these thinkers’ proximity suggests that their philosophical affinities—which I will outline below—may not have been entirely coincidental.⁴⁷

Disciplinarily, Boas and the University of Paris comparatists—including Rosenblatt—were engaged in different work: the one primarily in the field, the other in the library. Yet they were bound by a similar concern with reception—both on the part of the analyst, such as Boas’s “student” of the discipline, and on the part of the people studied, themselves also considered agentic *recepteurs* of cultural ideas. From both schools of thought, Rosenblatt was encouraged to see that historical change need not be explained purely by sociological movements bigger than individuals themselves; instead, her work rests on a conviction that habits, artifacts and even knowledge move (and “diffuse”) through culturally embedded agents who had the potential to reinterpret the meaning and value of that cultural material. For the anthropologist, such innovations were technological, while for the comparatist, they were intellectual or artistic: yet both sets of scholars centered their inquiries on the shifting contexts in which such forms, ideas or artifacts were promoted, and the differently modulated uses to which, through time, these forms, ideas, and artifacts were put by varied agents.

⁴⁶ Beard resigned from Columbia in 1917 after a dispute with university president Nicholas Murray Butler; Robinson resigned in solidarity two years later and went to teach at Dewey’s newly established New School downtown—where Boas and Ruth Benedict also had ties.

⁴⁷ Antoine Compagnon has assiduously reconstructed the details of these visiting professorships, although he does not make as much of their philosophical implications as he might. Compagnon also (to my mind, inaccurately) describes these French academics’ comparatism as a form of “French positivism” (195).

For Rosenblatt, the most influential element of Baldensperger's comparatism appears to be the emphasis he put on reception as a means of reinterpretation. Such an emphasis was also what most vividly distinguished Baldensperger's new form of comparatism from the nineteenth-century approaches that preceded it. By disciplinary historian Ulrich Weisstein's account, Baldensperger objected specifically to earlier comparatists' theory of literary change, "which presupposes a historical development that proceeds from cause to effect almost mechanically and leaves no room for creative spontaneity" (177)—an objection comparable to the challenge Boas also put to social evolutionists' progressionist and often essentializing determinism. In place of Hippolyte Taine's explanatory theory of *race, milieu, moment*, then, Baldensperger sought to reinsert the interactive role of the agent in the meaning-making act. Whereas comparatists' nineteenth-century "influence" studies, Weisstein argues, worked to articulate the "relations existing between finished literary products," Baldensperger's and his colleagues' newly networked form of reception study attended to "a wider range of subjects, namely the relation between these works *and their ambience*, including authors, readers, reviewers, publishers, and the surrounding milieu" (48 my emphasis). This new form of comparatism thus sought to understand cultural products not only in context but also in process—in flux. Claudio Guillen describes this comparatism in even more explicitly anthropological terms: as a "study of literature...returned to the street, to the crossing of chance with idea" (54). By his telling, the Sorbonne comparatists' sought to reveal "the unpredictable, capricious and tangled events" (55) through which literary works are affected by and affect the various cultures in which they come to be significant. Like Boas's, then, this is also a historicism focused on the interplay between the force of cultural habits and the possibility of individual expression and modification, given the varied kinds of reinterpretation to which cultural values and meanings are inevitably subject.

Such correspondences between these fields enabled Rosenblatt to take Boas's theory of diffusion, and his promotion of its possibly progressive interventions, and apply it specifically to literacy practices—and to an investigation of the kinds of reading and writing “stance,” as she would later name it, that best encourage the participatory thinking she saw a democratically minded education to require. Moreover, comparatism appeared to offer a set of emphases and methods—and a conception of literary study—not available to her in her English coursework as an undergraduate. Like anthropology, French comparatism of this period thus provided a significant alternative to the two main schools with which a young literary scholar such as Rosenblatt was confronted in the American literary scene of the 1920s. First, this comparatism offered an alternative to the forms of literary history and philology then ascendant in American literary scholarship and instruction.⁴⁸ Yet it also served as an alternative to the extreme modes of aestheticism—often attended by an increasingly resolute ahistoricism—that had informed much late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century criticism both in Europe and the United States, an approach that had not yet become institutionalized as a form of academic training or scholarship, but that soon would become codified through certain strains of the New Criticism, as future chapters will explore. In contrast to all of these, French comparatism focused on the fluid and multi-faceted *cultures* of literature and reading: less on the collected and achieved artifacts of purportedly unilineal human development, and more on the complex dynamics of literary production, reception and innovation. Such work allowed Rosenblatt to realize, as she writes in her *Reminiscences*, her long held but as yet unexploited “belief that in dealing with literature I

⁴⁸ In her *Reminiscences*, Rosenblatt recalls that, as an undergraduate, “I was not happy with the discipline of English literary history and criticism. I was not happy, really, therefore, with the way in which literature was taught...” which was limited, she later says, to the most quotidian “historical and philological approaches...” (135).

could also deal with comparative cultures” (78), the very kind of comparative work she had undertaken as an undergraduate in Boas’s anthropology courses.⁴⁹ Indeed, it was that very modernist-literary interest in aesthetic autonomy—the “idea” of the aesthetic that her dissertation’s title is careful to highlight—that Rosenblatt was able, from within this discipline, to subject to a kind of Boasian anthropological investigation, and to expose at least partly as a social construction.

French comparatism’s application of an anthropological kind of “diffusion” is made especially visible in the modifications this movement made to the concept of historical *fleure* (flow). Guillen describes *fleure* as a “positivist conception of literary influence,” assumed, in a nineteenth-century natural sciences framework, “to obey the principle of the conservation of matter” (56, *Challenges*), in which the transmission of formal trends or ideas is figured as the “uninterrupted passage from one thing to another” (57). In contrast, Baldensperger’s investigations of reception and reinterpretation—similar to Boas’s theory of diffusion—refuses this notion of “uninterrupted passage,” and works instead to tease out those interruptions, as manifest through the revisions readers and writers make to value and meaning, and revealing, as they do, the ever-contingent nature of what can seem aesthetic universals.

⁴⁹ In her *Reminiscences*, Rosenblatt writes that in America, and at Columbia and Barnard in particular, in the 1910s and 20s, “the whole concept of comparative literature was absent” (119)—showing that little effect had been felt in the field by Hazard and Baldensperger’s visiting professorships. Although Columbia had chairs in comparative literature (J.E. Spingarn, who coined the term “new criticism”—albeit in a somewhat different tenor from its later manifestations—held one), this was hardly the international comparatism practiced by the French school with which Rosenblatt came into contact in Paris.

Rosenblatt's entire project in *The Idea of Art for Art's Sake* typifies this goal. Organized to reveal the complex genealogy of English aestheticism, the study's purpose, most fundamentally, is to refute the theory (and socio-cultural possibility) that these aesthetic principles were inherited wholesale—in “uninterrupted passage”—from the French. To counter that theory, Rosenblatt sets out to prove two comparatist maxims: that cultural “ideas” evolve through embedded agents' complex interactions with a wide array of milieus and socio-cultural influences; and that such evolutions depend not only on the geographical spread of ideas across boundaries, but also on varied context-specific reinterpretations these ideas are subjected to, by the various critics who take these ideas up. For Rosenblatt, mere evidence of historical “rapport de fait” (correspondences of fact or action—say, that one poet's book was found on another poet's shelf) was insufficient evidence for the claim that the English learned their art-for-art's-sake doctrine mainly from Flaubert and Baudelaire. In fact, the culturally relativistic perspective promoted by both Boas and the comparatists shows such a claim to rely more on correlational than persuasively causal logic. A bedrock assumption of Rosenblatt's dissertation is that readers are incapable of absorbing cultural concepts that are entirely foreign to their own values, assumptions, or what Dewey would later theorize as “experience.” Influence—and thus the historic *fleure* of cultural ideas—works by means that are neither so transparent nor so straight. Attention to the mutability of reception, the “mobility of our maps,” and the inevitability of reinterpretation turned Rosenblatt's attention to a new issue: different readers' and writers' culturally embedded but highly individuated meaning-making schema.

As Rosenblatt writes in *The Idea of Art for Art's Sake*, this is an “axiom of comparative literature,” one fundamental to Baldensperger's work: “that only the elements capable of

assimilation at a given moment pass from one literature to another” (59, my emphasis). Since, as Rosenblatt argues in one example, “English writers owe much to German philosophy, but their borrowings often assume a different meaning in their application” (59), Rosenblatt concludes that “the influence of German philosophy” was therefore “more indirect” (62) than less relativistic critics of the movement would admit. In her dissertation’s conclusion, she credits Baldensperger directly for this point, quoting from his own famous reception study (1920), *Goethe en France* (3):

It is very certain that a literary era, as soon as it discovers and annexes ideas and exotic forms, only tastes or truly retains the elements it incorporates [lit. “carries with it”], as the result of its own organic evolution, or the intuitions and desires inherent within that period. Foreign influence ... never consists of only a conformity to those foreign tendencies. (qtd in *Idea of Art* 295, my emphasis)

From an educational perspective, Rosenblatt uses such a claim to also argue against a morally polemical and psychologically behaviorist view of the relation between agents and culture, and to protest the reigning Victorian notion that, as she puts it “literature is capable of directly influencing the behavior of men” (*The Idea* 17). While Rosenblatt certainly sought in this earliest scholarship to discern and articulate generalizable norms and attitudes of this time and place, she also, like Boas and Baldensperger, put a new focus on the particular and sometimes idiosyncratic “way the mind is affected” more than the overarching tendencies that one or another set of cultural norms could also be seen to exemplify. Her dissertation’s exhaustive and endlessly qualified set of case studies thus stands as an inquiry into the multiple ways that Victorians culture critics’ “minds were affected” not only by the many competing forces exerted by their

times, and by their more immediate peers, but also by their own more personal perceptions and aims when making meaning from and through texts. Perhaps the most fundamental presumption of Rosenblatt's dissertation, then, is the constant dialectic that she saw the reading and writing of literature to enable between agent, situation and text. For Rosenblatt, a text's social force—not only its beauty, but its “utility,” or real function in the everyday world—emerges from such interplay. Cultural meaning and value are thus acknowledged as both contingent and potent, and art defined by its double capacity to transform and also wonderingly endure.

Baldensperger's scholarship suggests that art's double capacity also requires a kind of double-consciousness in its students: an attitude towards knowledge, and a sense of scale, somewhat different from those that “close reading” and “intrinsic” criticism would soon come to demand of the field's scholarly practitioners.⁵⁰ In his 1921 “Comparative Literature: The Word and the Thing,” Baldensperger outlines both of these new requirements, which help explain the now-unusual methodology and goals that I argue undergird both Rosenblatt's dissertation and her future work recommending the kinds of cultural participation that are enabled by self-critically transactional modes of reading and writing. First, Baldensperger recommends a kind of methodological humility similar to Boas's allergy to over-confident deductions: whereby “comparative literature,” as Baldensperger approvingly describes it, has “inserted itself more willingly in the wings than center stage” (26), spotlighting more the variegated complexity of

⁵⁰ Indeed, Baldensperger's comparatism would soon be dismissed by René Wellek's 1959 condemnation of the “crisis” of comparative literature, somewhat in line with Leslie White's 1962 condemnation of Boasian anthropology—both accusing their predecessors as practicing as a mere particularism that was too determinedly atheoretical. Far more than White's, Wellek's dismissal has had far reaching implications for our conception of the methods of comparative literature and its history, both in the U.S. and in Europe, all but erasing Baldensperger and Hazard from the field's history.

one's object of inquiry than the totalizing explanatory power of one's own theorizing. Second, Baldensperger argues for a more expansive and self-critical view of literature and culture themselves; indeed, this is the only scale by which one can trace the travel of texts and ideas through various receptors across multiple borders, and give equal attention both to their ideas' changing function and to the cultural schema through which these functions might be understood as meaningful. He writes, in this strain, that "instead of considering great reputations [of literary artists] as stars we could follow as they ascended and orbited in a fixed sky [of literature], it is important to realize the mobility of the maps themselves" (26). For Baldensperger, it was by this realization that his discipline of comparative literature had "found...a new condition of activity" in which literature could be seen as constituting "manifestations which have all participated...in the continual associations and dissociations of forms and tendencies" (25-6) that such an historically integrative view of fluctuating cultures can illustrate. Literature can thus be understood as a network of what Baldensperger calls "living relations" (5); moreover, the "maps themselves"—the frameworks by which agents attribute value and meaning to these apparent works of art—become also objects of inquiry, especially once they are recognized as mobile and no longer as the fixed categories by which works of cultural value are more commonly, unquestioningly, and indeed, conventionally, identified and ordered.

Baldensperger's insistence on the "mobility of the maps themselves" can also be understood to lie at the root of Rosenblatt's later theorization of "stance"—her claim, specifically applied to literacy, that an agent's attitude towards a text and text-based meaning is shaped by the extent to which that agent acknowledges that her interpretive schema are dynamic and mutable.

Baldensperger's insistence on these maps' "mobility" also undergirds Rosenblatt's attendant

theory that the adoption of a more or less self-critical, self-reflective stance inevitably affects the meaning one makes and the use-value of the knowledge thereby learned. As such, encouraging readers to explore and exploit the perceptual elements that can and do disturb the *fleure* of culture can enable their critical interventions into meaning and value—interventions that are inevitably embedded in a culture but that also refuse to merely recapitulate to the meanings that cultural artifacts can sometimes appear to univocally and transparently offer, and as I argue in my next chapter on “stock responses.” Indeed, Rosenblatt would suggest that such interventions constitute a self-conscious and indeed progressive form of participation that can in turn plant the seeds for larger reform—as the concluding sections of Rosenblatt’s dissertation begin more to explicitly explore.

Towards a Progressive Aesthetics: Rosenblatt’s “Idea of Art”

Rosenblatt’s dissertation draws on a number of Baldensperger’s and Boasian commitments to stage her own historical intervention into nineteenth- and early twentieth-century aesthetic thought: to propose a “positive definition” of aesthetics that, on the one hand, refuses to bracket off art from “utility and good,” or from its own cultural historicity, while, on the other, also refusing the crude instrumentalism that she here calls “Victorian” and presents as the prime antagonist for the dissenting aesthetic movements her dissertation analyzes. In this way—and despite its sometimes antagonistic approach—Rosenblatt’s *Idea of Art for Art’s Sake* shows a distinct sympathy for such aestheticism, and especially for the innovative uses to which its proponents, as both readers and writers, were able to put inherited cultural ideas. Even so, and especially through the examples of Wilde’s and Swinburne’s legacies, and of Mallarmé’s

philosophy, Rosenblatt alerts readers to the aestheticist dangers of an autonomous and disinterested construct of art, culture, and literature, especially for its failure to acknowledge the significance of art's utility and art's inevitable entanglements with its many publics. In place of that public-neglecting form of aestheticism, Rosenblatt's dissertation begins to explore the kinds of self-aware transactions with text, self and situation whose dynamics she later theorizes are enabled best by her new "aesthetic stance."

Rosenblatt's dissertation traces the way that idea of "art for art's sake" changes as it travels through different agents and milieus, offering a Boasian and Baldenspergian history of how this cultural concept had been variously written, read, rewritten, and reread. Most squarely, Rosenblatt focuses on the way that her poet-critics' idiosyncrasies—as read through literary and philosophical reinterpretations of cultural norms—activated varied "diffusions" of artistic values and meanings. Nonetheless, like Boas, this work also resists an antifoundational relativism, and Rosenblatt's works also comes, in its final pages, to articulate a progressive-minded critique and intervention into the aesthetic—presaging her later retheorization of the very concept. In this way, Rosenblatt aligns herself most explicitly with nineteenth-century aesthetes for the varied critiques she sees them to be performing on their period's most prevalent constructs of art, and of this period's attendant maxims of literate engagement—even while careful to highlight that these critiques cannot entirely escape or remake the cultural concepts and practices they seek to reinterpret. In an anthropological tenor, Rosenblatt describes these larger cultural concepts and practices as the period's "dominant attitude" (2), which—extending Baldensperger's theatrical metaphor—she figures as a "*toile de fond*," or backdrop (2), against which all interpretations and productions of texts inevitably take place and are understood by their practitioners. For the

Victorians, she describes this backdrop as entailing the “moral attitude that industrial life demanded” (3), resulting from “an era of bourgeois superiority” (2), and thus emphasizing specifically “practical and materialist” philosophies (3). At the level of literature, she argues, such an attitude encouraged for most readers and writers a highly instrumental view of art’s function in the world, and a unwaveringly “moralizing tone” as regards art’s educative value (38). Rosenblatt thus posits that nineteenth-century English aesthetic thought—from Keats to Arnold, from Pater to Yeats—involved less an absolute rejection of, and more a historical and transactional response to, this “dominant attitude” and its attendant construct of art’s nature and purpose.

So while Rosenblatt admires these aesthetes’ critique of such “dominant attitudes,” she also acknowledges all the ways these cultural agents are still subject to them. Framing these poet-critics as dissidents, or embedded *recepteurs*, of this leading paradigm, Rosenblatt challenges their self-descriptions as operating somehow free of social tugs and twinges. In a somewhat Foucauldian key, Rosenblatt even argues that “the idea of art for art’s sake” should not be considered a “philosophical theory” in itself; instead it is “an idea born out of a need to react, and pronounced in particular conditions of controversy” (141). As one example (of many), she points to Swinburne, both as a producer of texts and ideas, and as his ideas and texts live on in a legacy made by others’ reception of his work—and she sociologically analyzes his career to prove this very point. For Rosenblatt, these experimental writers are not independent of society altogether so much as they are able to carve out what Wolf Lepenies would later call “a society within a society” (392). By this logic, Rosenblatt argues that Swinburne’s innovations are called into being as much by the author’s own “audacity” as by the availability of sympathetic ears: in this

case, the fact that Rossetti and Morris afforded Swinburne, as Rosenblatt writes, “a milieu in which he could make himself understood” (141). Rosenblatt thus reveals the reception-sensitive dispersions by which Swinburne’s influence is activated and made specifically valuable, reader by reader. Moreover, she shows the *fleure* of such meanings through time to be constantly interrupted and ever subject to reinterpretation, since, as she elsewhere puts it, such “influences were not produced on a tabula rasa” (249).

Of course, Rosenblatt’s exclusive focus here on poet-critic’s innovations, and her presumption that more popular forms of literary engagement, such as those practiced by the “press,” are more submissively in thrall to “dominant attitudes” (e.g. 9) than figures like Swinburne, shows that Rosenblatt still subscribed to a certain version of artistic exceptionalism. Yet it remains significant how repeatedly she insists that artists cannot take credit alone for such exceptional status. Instead, as she argues through her analysis of Oscar Wilde, such exceptionalism is the combined product both of an individual’s own tendency towards the new, a particular cultural inheritance, and particular modes of cultural receptivity. Specifically, Rosenblatt argues that Wilde’s work had its effect not only because of his cultural productions, textual and otherwise, but because the wider public to which he offered his work was by then relatively accustomed to the “tendencies in poetry” that previous artist-critics, such as the pre-Raphaelites, had promoted (247)—just as Wilde’s trial and ostracism emerged also from the preexistent biases of the time. Unlike a method that merely traces the “stars in the sky,” producing the kind of great man or great text narratives that Baldensperger also critiques, Rosenblatt thus finds, through an anthropologically inflected analysis of these writers, a continual and dynamic relationship between the artist and the public—indeed, the very same dynamic relationship she would later

posit between a text and its culturally situated reader or writer, and between writing and reading as literacy acts. Wilde, in her view, thus did not just shape, but was profoundly shaped by, the spheres through which he moved, such that “Wilde, in his eccentricity, offered a theatrical protagonist,” as she puts it, to a play that was already well in progress (252).

At the same time, Rosenblatt shows herself also unwilling to reduce the study of art to its barest sociological function—as either a symptom or mirror of its age, even if drawn with particular density or clarity. As *The Idea of Art* proceeds, the beginnings of Rosenblatt’s own aesthetic theory—one for which she aspires to give a more “positive definition”—begins to emerge. Once all contingencies have been exposed, Rosenblatt argues that artists remain exceptional for a kind of Wildean “eccentricity” (252): not that they are able to achieve freedom from such existent habits, forms or ideas, but, instead, that they are able to put these inheritances to new use.

Indeed, it is an artist’s reliance on existent ideas, forms, and habits that makes her innovations at all recognizable to one or another milieu of readers. Moreover, and although these existent ideas, forms and habits transform as they “diffuse” through the different instantiations of culture that the artist offers with his work, as either reader or writer, Rosenblatt is also careful to highlight the ways that they do not transform wholesale. They remain—as Rosenblatt will argue later, in *Literature as Exploration*—a part of the world, and a part of the agents, through which they travel.⁵¹

⁵¹ See specifically her passage on literary history (*Literature* 139), as I will discuss in more detail in my fourth chapter.

Rosenblatt further argues that denying such an integrative view—as certain aesthetic constructs might recommend, in their claims to disinterest or a separate spheres philosophy—has perilously anti-democratic implications. Rosenblatt explores this most pointedly through an elaboration of Arthur Symons’s gloss on Mallarmé’s “l’idée de l’art,” in a move that highlights the committed politics inherent to her theories of literature. Disregarding the details of Mallarmé’s poetry itself, Rosenblatt attends instead to the poet’s stated philosophy of art. Specifically, Rosenblatt points to Mallarmé’s distinction between “intelligible meanings,” on the one hand—defined by their “habitual goal of being logically intelligible”—and “images, emotions, sentiments and atmospheres” on the other, whose felt significance is, by contrast, not only affective and perceptual, but also somewhat ineffable (290). To be sure, such distinctions in many ways presage those that Rosenblatt would draw, seven years later, between “stock responses” and “aesthetic experience,” as my next chapter will show, as well as her later theorization of the aesthetic and efferent stances. Yet even in this early work, Rosenblatt questions the use-value of such distinctions if they are drawn so rigidly that their differences becomes naturalized into self-evident polarities. Paraphrasing Symons’s assessment of Mallarmé’s taxonomy, she writes that this theory is, in fact, “the expression of an aristocratic sentiment of the creative artist in its most dangerous form” (290), most especially for its reliance on the binary opposition between the intelligible and the poetic, which produces an “aristocracy of artistic sensibility” defined precisely by a “complete divorce from the public” (291). Taken to such an extreme, she argues, this mode of thinking thus frames any intelligibly realized work as a “concession to the crowd, a sort of vulgar and ostentatious proof of aesthetic experience” (290). Particularly significant is the scorn, suggested through that word “proof,” that Rosenblatt attributes to this perspective, whereby Mallarmé’s construct rejects both deduction and induction: any method that would

search experience for anything like legible evidence. She sees Mallarmé to recommend instead that art should more properly remain entirely aloof from such empirical forms of inquiry. Indeed, failing to maintain such aloofness would constitute a capitulation to “vulgarity” and “ostentation,” and thus to the purportedly frightening and debased logic of the crowd—a view whose inherent elitism Rosenblatt is careful to underline.

For Rosenblatt, this specific brand of late aestheticism can therefore also surface the relationship between class and what we would now call discipline, including a field’s value-laden methodologies. She critiques the social snobbery underlying Mallarmé’s constructs of artistic production and reception, whereby the “average” public reader is positioned diametrically against an exceptionally “artistic” minority, a minority whose “isolation” is kept “only valuable to [the artist] himself” and whose work’s very “incomprehensibility” is a sign of its “aristocracy” (290). By this model, public forms of communication—what we might call rhetoric—are seen to operate purely by habit, logic, and the basest levels of intelligibility (in whose description one can also hear the threat of the impersonally technocratic); and artistic engagement, by contrast, can completely transcend, and disavow, any relation to such a *toile de fond*.

For Rosenblatt, the enforcement of such stratification is one of the most significant hazards of too divisive a construct of the “society within a society” whose boundaries are so resolutely policed. In place of such a construct, Rosenblatt’s study attends not only to the reality, but also the virtue, of the permeability and overlap that exists between such spheres, and between their respective categories of communicative activity. Given her own aesthete-friendly flourishes, Rosenblatt certainly continues to hold, to the end of this 1931 work, that “art should not limit or

lower itself to the level of a mediocre reader”; but she also writes that “one does not like to think that the only solution to this dilemma is the development of an artistic elite” (308). Such elitism, after all, justifies the separability of beauty, use and good, and indeed sees ethical and pragmatic constructs of discourse as a “concession to the crowd,” rather than a sign—as she would later argue—of innovative cultural engagement.

Rosenblatt’s aestheticist sympathies are thus tempered with a crucially historicizing and public-minded impulse, aligning her with the pragmatic-progressive philosophy of her time while putting her also at odds with an emerging modernist, or at least devotedly synchronic, paradigm of literary engagement. To be sure, Rosenblatt still refuses to renounce, in her dissertation’s final pages, the possibility of aesthetic difference. After all, as she suggests, art’s innovations—“the vitality of artistic inspiration” (293)—cannot do its important social work without being defined as somewhat distinctive from more “habitual” uses of language. But by this analysis, the “aesthetic” is no longer defined by purported autonomy and disinterest, and is instead justified by the central role it plays in the pragmatic evolution of cultural thought defined most broadly, as well as most democratically and integratively: by standing somewhat apart from the mainstream uses to which representational language can be put, but not so far apart that it can claim dissociation. As future chapters will show, the question of our communicative conventions and their ability to travel (or “transfer”)—if not as codes per se, than as means of understanding—would prove central to her emerging theory of literacy.

Moreover, such a standing apart—as a complementarity, not an absolutist contrast—helps Rosenblatt to later transform the positions laid out by Mallarmé into a set of two agentic stances

that less concern ideas of “art” than ideas of literacy and language more largely, and whose movements along a continuum highlights the continuity between the aesthetic and other modes of reception and communication. Rosenblatt’s theory of these two stances, as my next chapters will discuss, theorize the nature of these differences—the varied “ways that the mind is affected”—as the somewhat purposive variations between different agents’ uptakes of cultural artifacts, and their expressive contributions back into culture. But such transactions are not confined or only relevant to specialized fields of one or another “artistic elite.” As Rosenblatt would later argue, and here begins to imply, transactions through which agents, situations and texts make ever-evolving cultural meanings work best when they work democratically, integrating a variety of perspectives without erasing difference, or, more precisely, the difference that such differences can make.

In the final pages of *The Idea of Art*, Rosenblatt makes a call for “new theoretical methods” that would more appropriately describe art’s social and cultural role, especially by considering how experiential factors (“the complex phenomenon of the human spirit in the presence of a work of art”) can help us better understand the dynamics underlying both production and reception (“the nature of artistic creation and ...artistic experience”) as well as the ethical reforms that such “artistic” engagements can inspire (310). Here, she advocates for a Boas-inflected pragmatic-progressive flexibility, one which admits to pluralism as bedrock for any innovative mode of problem-solving. As she write, “the present époque can neither return to the insouciance of the eighteenth century, to *assume* a fixed code, nor to the moralizing desire of the Victorians to *impose* a fixed code” (305).

Moreover, and by the ambitious framework that she here begins to consolidate from both cultural anthropology and French comparatism, Rosenblatt can also be understood to be proposing a new theory of textual engagement that can encompass both literacy *and* literature, and the iterative interplay of practice and product as they move through and constitute multifarious cultures. Here she seeks to integrate what she calls the “psychological” with a new phenomenology of reading, and to probe the connections between production and reception. It is this work, I suggest, and its grounding in the philosophies and methods of Boas and Baldensperger, that allow her to speculate about whether a new theory of learning—the purposive negotiations with which an agent engages her culture—might provide a crucial grounding for such integrations.

Chapter Three

The Problem with “Stock”:

The Origins and Implications of Rosenblatt’s Efferent Stance

In 1936, Louise Rosenblatt published a short essay in the journal *Ethics*⁵² titled “The Writer’s Dilemma,” an analysis of Robert Louis Stevenson’s authorial career, which her subtitle describes as a “case history and critique.” As “case history,” her essay reexamines Stevenson’s biography to argue that this writer’s private ambitions were set on producing novels quite different from those upon which his success was built. As “critique,” this essay then meditates on the disappointing “compromise” Rosenblatt sees Stevenson’s career to exemplify, torn as he was—as she describes it—“between his own nature and his need of a wide reading public that would also be a generous patron” (195).

On its surface, Rosenblatt’s essay might appear to regret in Stevenson a failure to realize what Douglas Mao calls the “crucial modernist stance,” which Mao defines as an artist’s “antagonism to any complacencies its audience might bring” (304). In Stevenson, Rosenblatt seems to have

⁵² The journal, in print since 1880 out of the University of Chicago, was then called the *International Journal of Ethics*; it changed its name to *Ethics* in 1938. What is now known as the *International Journal of Ethics* is an entirely different journal.

found a writer who, in practice, tabled his ideals and choose instead to accommodate his output to the norms of a “wide reading public.” Stevenson’s devotion to “public” patronage meant that he could not meet his readers’ “complacencies” with the bracing challenge that—so Mao’s logic describes it—truly modernist literature was considered almost ethically obliged to provide. In many ways, Stevenson offers a reverse example for Rosenblatt’s previous 1931 analysis of Mallarmé—a poet who defined aesthetic achievement by the virtue of disinterest and, in her description, by a “complete divorce from the public” (*The Idea* 291). As Rosenblatt’s dissertation and her small essay both suggest, such an “idea of art” turns on a variety of antagonisms—between private and public, innovation and convention, artistic “nature” and material “need.” Except that in this essay, as in her dissertation’s critique of the late aesthetes, Rosenblatt does not recommend these antagonisms; she regrets, instead, their ongoing power.

What Rosenblatt thus sees as the continuing “writer’s dilemma” of her time is less a classically aesthetic than an attitudinal one. Such a dilemma, she suggests, results from a growing social propensity towards ideological polarization. In her view, both as introduced in *The Idea of Art* and further developed in this essay, the modern reading public, on the one hand, and its adversarial-minded aesthete-writers (whose ideals Stevenson had absorbed), on the other, were too apt to position their pursuits as inherently at odds. Indeed, she characterizes this as “the problem of the relation between the writer and the public *today*” (195, my emphasis)—a problem whose structuring binaries, while potent, she understands to be historical, not natural or universal; nor, indeed, as providing the necessary conditions for the production of properly serious art. Such oppositions, instead, are the core dynamic of a literary and pedagogical *zeitgeist* into which she will spend the rest of her career attempting to intervene.

Echoing her dissertation's objection to the nineteenth-century's neo-Kantian divisions between beauty, use and good, as glossed in the previous chapter, Rosenblatt concludes this short essay by imagining an alternate paradigm for the modern age, in which writers like Stevenson would not feel their principles and practice inevitably leading them to the psychically disabling either-or's that her essay describes. Such a new paradigm would entail, she writes, a society in which "the artist might be completely sympathetic, and in which he would function normally as an integral member" (210). But such a sea change—freed of the ideals of aesthetic disinterest, and of dialectical confrontations—would require, Rosenblatt knows, widespread cultural transformation. These transformations, as such, would need to be activated less by specific writers, critics, or their individual works (although this is what the most influential of her literary critical peers were coming to argue—and as my next chapter will more specifically address), than by groundswell shifts in the active receptivity of society as a whole: by what she calls "an aggressive public sense of the artist's right to tread seemingly dangerous ground, and a willingness on the part of the reading public to have its fundamental prejudices and presumptions challenged" (210).

Written only five years after her first work of scholarship, this 1936 essay emerges very naturally from the core literary-critical concerns of that 1931 dissertation. But considering that it was also written only two years before her first attempt at reading theory—her breakout 1938 *Literature as Exploration*, which this chapter will additionally discuss—her essay can be further understood as a transition point for Rosenblatt, bridging that earlier study of aesthetic-minded reading-and-writing as a "profoundly historical" set of practices, with her later, more pedagogically-minded

explorations of how literature and literacy should therefore be taught for our current age, and why. Indeed, “The Writer’s Dilemma” comes to suggest, as her mature work of the 1990s most fully realizes, that it is specifically through education—and through forms of education closely knitted to anthropologically-informed social thought and its attendant theories of learning—that critical text-based engagements can be most proactively achieved by all the literate agents that make up a writing-reading “public.” In a significant turn, then, Rosenblatt’s essay transforms its titular “writer’s dilemma” into a dilemma equally shared by the writer *and* reader. As such, the core question this essay poses is as sociological as it is moral, attempting to reintegrate, as was her dissertation’s eventual wish, the categories of ethics, beauty and use, asking: what exactly should the critical-minded writer-reader’s relationship be to the various cultural drifts of her time? And how is that relationship best modeled, and managed? Building on the paradigms established in her dissertation, this work begins even more pointedly to articulate new methods for connecting literary studies and literacy studies, and to investigate the ways that teaching geared towards *all* students, and not just towards scholars-in-training, requires instructors to rethink the relationship between genuinely critical and innovative engagement with culture and the more customary forces of a “public.”

Louise Rosenblatt, of course, is most well-known for theories of reading too often imagined to stand independent of writing. Not until her work of the nineties did she articulate a transactional model generalizable enough that it could show reading and writing to operate by similar attitudinal and social dynamics, and through similar activations she would name the aesthetic and the efferent stances. “A Writer’s Dilemma,” however, reinforces what my last chapter also argued—that Rosenblatt’s work was always driven by these integrative impulses, although the

current frameworks through which scholars too often understand her work can make these integrative impulses difficult to discern. Indeed, and against most iterations of her legacy in the scholarship, I argue that “A Writer’s Dilemma” and *Literature as Exploration*, both of the 1930s, reveal Rosenblatt’s first explorations of literacy produced for English studies not to center only on issues of reception, exclusive from concerns with either the conditions of production or the shaping power of a dominant culture or “public.” Although strongly influenced by Boas’s interest in the more individualized question of how “the mind is affected,” her transactional theory’s grounding in a progressive-pragmatic school of thought also highlights Rosenblatt’s conviction—shared by Boas and Baldensperger—that that individual, with her personal responses, and her environment or culture, with its powers to shape those attitudes and responses, do not exist as “presumptively detachable entities,” to use Rosenblatt’s later terms; instead, the observer, the observed, and the knowledge thereby produced “are seen as aspects of ‘one process.’ Each element conditions and is conditioned by the other in a mutually constituted situation” (“Transaction” 1364). By this transactional paradigm, individual and environment are both and equally responsive to and productive of each other.

Rosenblatt’s later use of the concept “schema” is one way to understand the complexity of these interpenetrations she describes between the literate agent and her cultures, or value-freighted environments. In a 1998 essay, Rosenblatt attributes interpretative acts to an agent’s “calling up of schema and assumptions about language and the world” (“Readers” 888). Yet Rosenblatt’s lexicon also reveals some the slipperiness inherent to this concept, as when, in this same essay, she objects to a literacy model that only accounts for the learner’s application of what she calls the “stencil of schematic categories” (895)—suggesting that one’s schemas—at least if employed

in certain ways—can also encourage the mere implementation of predetermined formulae. Here as elsewhere, Rosenblatt offers her “aesthetic” stance—through which the reader attends also to the “personal, affective, associational aura” that situation-specific uses of language may have for her alone, and which may not be included in a culture’s more dominant schemas (894)—as an additional, and often over-looked, feature necessary for any critically engaged text-based event of meaning-making.

That said, ‘schema’ is not a concept mentioned in Rosenblatt’s early work; as this chapter will explore, Rosenblatt’s literary theorizations of the thirties instead take up the notion of “stock responses” to analyze an analogous set of custom-culture complications. This topic was a means, I argue, for Rosenblatt to investigate the nature and value of the organizing scripts that individuals inherit from their culture, and more specifically the way such scripts can sometimes tend towards the “schematic,” or an under-scrutinized overreliance on cultural drifts. Framed as “response,”—as housed in the agent at a highly individuated, even somatic level—the concept of “stock responses” also helped Rosenblatt begin to investigate the dynamics that would support a learner’s self-reflective, potentially agentic interventions into those schemas and the meanings thereby inspired. Moreover, Rosenblatt’s inquiries into “stock”—especially as influenced by literary critical and anthropological inquiries into context-sensitive meaning-making, as found in the work of I. A. Richards and Franz Boas—provides a new genealogy of Rosenblatt’s later “efferent stance.” Such a lineage is especially significant for showing the efferent stance to have emerged from Rosenblatt’s early ambivalence about an emerging ideal of literary critical thought: that agents be trained to entirely transcend their culturally determined scripts; and this lineage underscores Rosenblatt’s efferent stance as a purposive, attitudinal position that, even

while it attends to features of language that can appear transcendent and universally legible, remains inevitably embedded in context.

As my first section below will discuss, Rosenblatt's theorization of the "stock" reveals some internal conflict. In many ways, her discussion of the topic in *Literature as Exploration* reinforces the period's crudest—and most potentially elitist—anxieties about mechanization and the psychology of mass thought. But, as I will also show, this concept's grounding in not only a literary critical but also an anthropological paradigm of culture aids her in also analyzing "stock responses" through a more relativistic and pragmatic lens than some of her contemporaries—and helps her, in her future work, to apply the knotty issue of stock responses not just to the reading of literature per se, but to her study of all our critical engagements with culture, whether as readers or as writers. Indeed, through this concept of "stock responses," Rosenblatt can be seen extending Stevenson's authorial "dilemma" to all literate agents—asking how to explain the dynamics undergirding creative innovation while acknowledging the potent reality of a more convention-supporting "public." This issue of stock responses, then, is fundamental to her building of a model of transactional literacy that can show agents as culturally situated but not as entirely slavish—and that also does not encourage the pretense of total detachment, as many of her dissertation's late aesthetes did.

Such a lineage is important to both of the subfields of English studies that this dissertation seeks to reunite. Indeed, I posit that the issue of stock responses—although not named as such—continues to constitute a key problematic in the discipline of English, especially at the post-secondary level. Readers' capitulation to some or another form of customary response, and as my

next chapter on the “aesthetic stance” will also explore, has long provided the negative example by which various strands of critical reading have been theorized and taught. And whether such responses are to be resisted, demystified, reformed, transcended, or historically analyzed, and why, has remained perhaps the most significant contention point of the field. Indeed, literary theorist John Bowen has argued that the field’s prohibition of “stock responses”—which I will touch on in the next section—has produced a literary critical model that

seeks to produce an impossible, impossibly sincere ‘personal response’ and equally an impossible consensus of socially produced evaluations. It is between these two poles, these two impossible demands, that students of English have had to pick their way ever since, condemned to a plausible ventriloquism, which is offered back to them, assessed, as their own response. (91)⁵³

Bowen’s claim for the discipline-structuring power of “these two poles, these two impossible demands” parallels the dilemma Rosenblatt outlines in her essay on Stevenson, and with which the aesthetes of her dissertation also struggled—whether by merely accepting the “consensus” provided by a “*toile de fond*,” backdrop, or “dominant attitude” (*The Idea 2*) that the bulk of a society’s members adopt without question; or, in contrast, by assuming an equally rigid Mallarméan rejection of public tastes and communicative norms.

Further, English studies’ long-held proscriptions against customary responses—while providing, for the discipline’s privileged class, a clearly bounded field in which its internal controversies can be debated—have also helped to maintain the larger hierarchies of the discipline itself, and

⁵³ Bowen attributes this prohibition entirely—and I believe unfairly—to I. A. Richards. Part of the goal of this chapter is to rescue Richards from shouldering the blame for a field that took his investigation of stock responses to sometimes unwarranted extremes.

which this dissertation, following Rosenblatt's lead, seeks to reimagine. As this chapter will show, Rosenblatt's inquiry into stock responses as grounded in both literary critical thought and anthropological investigations of the self's relation to culture, begins to suggest a more integrative approach to a pedagogy of critical text-based engagement, one that entails self-reflective participation, not disinterested transcendence. To be sure, and especially through her analysis of the efferent stance, Rosenblatt suggests that reader and writers need to be assisted in wrestling with, and not just capitulating to, cultural habits of knowing, which can too easily default to the thoughtless application of whatever convention is nearest at hand. But Rosenblatt's transactional theory also posits that learners need further assistance in recognizing all the ways that their literate activities emerge from, and are supported by—and have real impact on—such public values and meanings.

The issue of agents' relationship to their own stock responses—and the source of these responses—also bears directly on the issue of transfer as it may exist between the subfields of literary and literacy studies, and instruction in the dimensions of literacy these subfields have divided up between them. The largely spatial models by which most literary critical reading methods have been and continue to be explained—whether close (Gallop) or distant (Moretti), deep or surface (Love, Marcus and Best), or in Eve Kovovsky Sedgwick's conciliatory terminology, "beside"—reiterate a static and "synchronic" text-reader binary that justifies the purportedly higher value of literary reading at the same time that it elides knotty questions about the learner's purpose, situation and development-through-time. This in turn has helped push any inquiries into the specifics of an agent's distinctive practice and process outside the purview of most college classrooms devoted to practicing literary critical skills. As such, and as I will

explore in my next chapter, attending to the actual interplay between original thought and communicative convention is punted instead to the purportedly remedial work of the composition classroom and the writing center. Continuingly blanket prohibitions about uninformed or unoriginal “stock responses”—which Rosenblatt’s work names and then complicates—reinforce this decoupling tendency, whereby the achievements of literary/cultural critical work is defined oppositionally against, instead of complementarily with, the more processual, subjective and often custom-sensitive operations by which read and written meaning is actually made, in this case by situated agents (e.g. students).

Moreover, such hierarchies also reinforce a problematic construct of the specific kind of transfer too often expected to take place across contexts and domains, a construct that itself relies on a model that might be described as “stock” for entailing the application of internalized and under-scrutinized formulae presumed to be entirely accessible, or “public,” to all, regardless of varying circumstances or purpose. This is the conception of transfer that writing studies scholar Elizabeth Wardle describes as relying on “a simplistic ‘carry and unload’ model” (“Creative” np), and built on an assumption that “learning something writing-related is a simple matter of skill acquisition, and that such a skill, once acquired, should be easily usable in another setting or when completing another task, no matter how different that setting or task might be” (“What” 144). Rosenblatt’s later development of the efferent stance, especially given its roots in an anthropologically inflected understanding of “stock,” exposes the presumption that given conventions are universal truths to be an attitudinal and epistemological choice, not an ontological reality; this, in turn, complicates the transfer model so central to the asymmetrical hierarchies that organize college-level literacy learning, by which writing is assumed to be a

transparently “transferable” skill. Especially as continuous with the aesthetic stance, this concept of the “efferent” upholds instead a more situation-sensitive and mutable construct of how knowledge is “reinvested,” in Christiane Donahue’s terms, in new contexts or domains. This supports the more transformational construct of transfer that this dissertation recommends, and which aligns with Wardle’s somewhat transactional insistence that, in any event of writing knowledge transfer, “there is some combination of responsibility distributed” across “individual, context, and task,” since, as she underscores, “individuals and contexts never exist independently of one another” (“What” 146).

Given Rosenblatt’s early exploration of “stock,” and its basis in the developing literary critical and anthropological thought of her early career, Rosenblatt’s efferent stance thus stands as a challenge to pedagogies of high-level critical reading or writing that attend to textual features but purport to exclude more varied, wide-ranging, and, indeed, “public” schema that literate agents bring to their reading and writing tasks. At the same time, this efferent stance is also shown to complicate pedagogies of high level critical reading and writing that forward purely subjective liberation from convention, as a number of Rosenblatt scholars claim on her behalf (and as outlined in my first chapter; e.g. Clifford, Christenbury). A pedagogy of “teaching for transfer,” in writing-transfer parlance (see Yancey), could draw on transactional theory’s exploration of the “efferent” and the “stock” to increase learners’ awareness of their own agentic possibilities as well as their limits, and to help them explore the way other readers and writers transact both and at once with environments and texts as a way to participate in, learn from, and critique the cultures of which they are invariably a part. Moreover, and as I’ve outlined in the previous chapter, this dissertation’s reconceptualized notion of textual transactions also highlights

potential transfer—or reinvestment of knowledge—across the dimensions of text-based literacy, or reading and writing themselves. As Rosenblatt’s 1936 disquisition on Stevenson suggests, the problem of the writer’s “relation to the public” is usefully analogous to the reader’s relation to a “public”—the “dominant attitudes,” as Rosenblatt calls them in her dissertation, or “stock,” as she calls them in her early work, which we ought to know and critique, but which can never fully escape.

Literature as Exploration *and the Fundamental Problem of Stock*

When read in isolation from its originating context, as it so often is, *Literature as Exploration* does not do full justice to Rosenblatt’s transactional paradigm and its contributions to a theory of literacy knowledge transfer. The issue of stock responses illustrates this failing well, especially if detached from what I argue is Rosenblatt’s later theorization of the stock as the “efferent stance.” In many ways, to be sure, Rosenblatt’s objections to the “stock” map well onto a progressive paradigm. Against those spectator modes of learning that Dewey worked so hard to philosophically unpack, Rosenblatt—as this and the next chapter will show—proposed an alternative model of actively undertaken individual mindfulness, in which, as she writes, “the literary experience gains its significance and force from the way in which the stimuli present in literary work interact with the mind and emotions of a particular reader” (*Literature* 35).⁵⁴

Literature as Exploration most essentially argues that the most edifying forms of literary engagement should seek to challenge, elevate, and transform one’s inherited senses of the world,

⁵⁴ Unless otherwise noted, all of this chapter’s quotations from *Literature as Exploration* are taken from the original 1938 edition.

and at the level of learners' very structures of thinking and feeling. Nor can this transformation—by which, as Rosenblatt puts it, readers reading literature can “assimilat[e] emotionally and intellectually...new understandings” (326)—be achieved merely through the “absorption” of literature's content, or merely by comprehending the “*portrayals* of the problems or conditions” that literature describes (vii, my emphasis). Instead, Rosenblatt posits that fully edifying literary engagement requires a self-reforming kind of “imaginative participation in...alternate philosophies and patterns of behavior” (326). Even more specifically, Rosenblatt argues that such reformations can be attained only when readers venture into the uncharted terrains of emotion and thought made available by the cross-cultural experience she sees literature to offer. The stock response, as a kind of cultural piety, stands as a main impediment to such engagement, privileging “dogmatic, platitudinous ideas” in place of what Rosenblatt calls “fresh insight” and “flexibility of mind” (122-3).

However, Rosenblatt's theorization of the “stock response” can also work to simply re-inscribe rigidly categorical distinctions between scripted mass thought, on the one hand, and, on the other, the more edifying meanings that literature is supposed to enable for the properly trained reader. In this way, Rosenblatt's construct of the “stock response” can in places contradict—as it can for I. A. Richards, too—some of those main tenets of the progressive-pragmatic educational philosophy to which I argue her work, at bottom, was most devoted. This philosophy's reliance on a socially sensitive, culturally relativistic theory of literary value is diminished by the polarizing condescension in Rosenblatt's claim, in reference to this concept of “stock,” that “the very essence of literature is a rejection of such stereotyped, superficial, and unshaded reactions” as might be called up “in the commercialized appeal to stock sentiments represented by Mother's

Day or Father's Day" or found in "popular songs," or even "in the newspapers and moving pictures, or on the lips of the man on the street" (122).⁵⁵ Especially when read independent of her other work, the intensity with which Rosenblatt worries her students' reading misadventures can give *Literature as Exploration*'s analysis of "stock responses" a distastefully elitist cast: as if "stock" reactions were little more than unproductive social detritus that it was the job of the literary classroom to remake or altogether remove. In this way, Rosenblatt's problem with stock can sometimes appear to reiterate a traditionally chauvinistic progressionism (which many aspects of educational progressivism sought to counteract): in which the edifying enrichments of high culture are easily and universally distinguishable from the intellectual sterilities of custom.

Further unresolved in *Literature as Exploration* itself—that is, if read free of its originating context—is how exactly the jettisoning of such custom might be achieved, and how such stubbornly appealing "ready-mades" of thought (113) might be distinguished, individual by individual, from "fresh insight" (122). Indeed, it is Rosenblatt's crucial theory of "imaginative participation" (326) (and later formalized into her theory of transaction) that complicates the apparent tidiness of this formulation of "stock" as impulses to be altogether rejected. If readers learn not merely by absorbing literary content as onto a "tabula rasa," as Rosenblatt also argues in her dissertation (*The Idea* 249), but by "assimilating" its "patterns of thought" into their own already existent and evolving questions and concerns, how are readers to tell or separate the

⁵⁵ In the 1995 edition, these claims underwent only minor revisions, with "moving pictures" replaced with "mass media" and "man on the street" with "everyday conversation" (98)—despite the fact that her theory of transaction had already begun to call into question whether such polarities were as self-evident as she here implies.

obfuscating stuff of so-called “stock” from the more essential personal ideas and beliefs that undergird and enable such progress?

This chapter argues that Rosenblatt’s later construct of the efferent begins to answer the questions that Rosenblatt’s work here begins to ask. In essence, the efferent stance can be understood as providing an explanatory model for the source and governing dynamics of stock responses—how they came to be, in the culturally embedded literate learner, as well as how they can be identified, and how they might otherwise be used. Rosenblatt defines the efferent stance as entailing an attention focused on “ideas, information, directions or conclusions to be retained, used or acted on after the reading event” (“Transactional” 1373). This use of a textual engagement, moreover, achieves its instrumental and future-facing aims by relying mainly on what Rosenblatt calls “public” meaning and what I understand as conventional schema whose historical and situated complexities, for the purposes of efficient communicability, are left in and of themselves unquestioned. For Rosenblatt, however, the efferent does not entail a valueless or mindless capitulation to custom—although she can sometimes imply this in *Literature as Exploration*. Instead, she theorizes the efferent to involve a purposive and useful emphasis on textual event’s more customary meanings, undertaken in the context of a particular set of cultural conventions. The “efferent” thus takes a new angle on the stock, less derogatory because more relativistic, and more pragmatically focused on immediate use-value. For if “a stance reflects a reader’s purpose,” (“Transactional” 1372), as she argues, the efferent is somewhat agentic. Further, and by explaining the efferent as on a continuum with the aesthetic, then even what counts as stock is relative to the reader’s purpose and the circumstances from which these conventions emerge. Indeed, I will show below that this more relativistic concept of the “stock,”

as Rosenblatt retheorizes it into the efferent stance, becomes more visible once the problem with stock is understood as also emerging from a Boasian anthropological paradigm.

Yet Rosenblatt does not, in her later work on the “efferent,” trace the genealogy of this stance back to her early inquiries into the “stock”; by using this new term instead, the rich literary critical and anthropological significance of this concept is obscured. Efferent is a neurological term—one that describes the nerves and neurons responsible for outgoing information that travels from the brain to nerve networks throughout the body. Although Rosenblatt does not acknowledge this etymology, this medical definition aligns with her theorization of the efferent as designating a literate agent’s “taking away” of information from a text and from her own schema, attending less to a transaction’s experiential and idiosyncratic qualities than to its indexical and applicable abilities elsewhere. (Afferent nerves, by comparison, bring information from receptors *to* the brain—somewhat like Rosenblatt’s “aesthetic” stance, this then describes movements or attentions that are directed inward.)⁵⁶

Admittedly, Rosenblatt’s concept of a *stance* that is efferent—the term *stance* implying an element of the attitudinal and purposive—challenges the relevance of this term’s neurological etymology. Nonetheless, Rosenblatt’s use of this neurological term can also threaten to hypostasize a model that I argue is clearer and more useful when understood as theoretical, and moreover as grounded in cultural, not biological, inquiry. Because the concept of stock shows

⁵⁶ The *Concise Oxford Medical Dictionary* defines efferent, more precisely, as an adjective “designating nerves or neurons that convey impulses from the brain or spinal cord to muscles, glands, and other effectors; i.e. any motor nerve or neuron. 2. designating vessels or ducts that drain fluid (such as lymph) from an organ or part. Compare afferent” (n.p.).

such rich roots in both literary criticism and the anthropological thought of Rosenblatt's originating philosophical milieu, it provides important context for Rosenblatt's later figure of the efferent.⁵⁷ Rehabilitating this "problem of stock" that her early work identified—especially as it was central to interwar, interdisciplinary investigations into the relation between individual interpretation and the cultural habits of thought upon which those interpretations are inevitably built—offers a more robust model of how the efferent might be seen to operate in text-based engagements, and as my next section will show.

The Stock: A Literary-Critical Genealogy

In his 1929 *Practical Criticism*, I. A. Richards describes "stock responses" as an "important, neglected, and curious topic" (240). And although Rosenblatt only devotes a few pages explicitly to this topic, her entire *Literature as Exploration* can be seen as a response to the gauntlet that Richards here throws down. How can literature encourage in learners the kind of intellectual and moral growth that is securely built on existent beliefs and experience, but does not merely reproduce already knowns? More largely, what kinds of practice (or stance) enables this growth, and how does it travel across, and integrate, traditionally separable domains?

Despite the significance of this concept to *Literature as Exploration*, Rosenblatt's use of I. A. Richards's work is one of the least remarked upon aspects of her early career and theory

⁵⁷ Rosenblatt does use this term "stock" in her 1994 essay to describe how these "public" meanings become "internalized," arguing that "any interpretations or new meanings [read into or written through a text] are restructurings or extensions of the stock of experiences of language, spoken and written, brought to the task" (1368); but the concept here passes unremarked.

formation. Some of this is arguably the result of disciplinary habit, and the increasing distance that literary critics have desired to draw between its own goals and methods and those articulated by Richards, specifically as understood through his reputation as the premiere architect for a New Critical mode of ahistorical formalist criticism and its sometime attendant materialist theory of mind (cf McCallum, Bredin)⁵⁸. Yet the fact remains that Rosenblatt's *Literature as Exploration* picks up so explicitly on Richards' positioning of "stock responses" as a key impediment to a properly conceptualized literary reading practice that her discussion of the topic simply reproduces, in many instances, Richards's core ideas and examples.⁵⁹ That said, neither Rosenblatt nor Richards were unique for their fixation on the construct, although the concept took on a particular urgency among nineteenth- and twentieth-century educators. Even so, returning her work to this context shows that Rosenblatt's inquiry into stock—like Richards—offers a few new crucial points of emphasis.

The most obvious precursor for a literary "problem with stock" can be found in one of Matthew Arnold's most influential formulations. In his 1869 *Culture and Anarchy*, "recommending" and defining "culture" as "a pursuit of our total perfection by means of getting to know, on all the

⁵⁸ Materialist because, by Bredin's telling (1986), of Richards purported belief in the "radical and essential privacy of all experience" (30) and conviction that "a mind" is reducible to "a nervous system and an experience is a particular state of a particular nervous system" (30)—and both are thereby reducible to brain enclosed in a skull and a network of nerves enclosed in a body.

⁵⁹ In *Practical Criticism*, Richards supports his concept of "stock responses" and "stereotyped reactions" being formed by lived experience with the example of "a London child [who] grows up without ever seeing the country or the sea" (246). Rosenblatt, in turn, muses on the fact that "this inadequacy of experience may take the form of the city child's inability to respond fully to country imagery" (*Literature* 125).

matters which now concern us, the best which has been thought and said in the world,” Arnold argues that such cultural “knowledge” has the effect of

turning a stream of fresh and free thought upon our *stock notions and habits*, which we now follow staunchly and mechanically, vainly imagining that there is a virtue in following them staunchly which makes up for the mischief of following them mechanically. (6, my emphasis)

By this model, “stock” is the internalized manifestation of both inherited content (“notion”) and behavior (“habits”). It constitutes not only the rigidly complacent, but also the received and thus historical concepts that readers use in their everyday functioning, and which—by Arnold’s lights—an active and organic “stream” of culture can help individuals reevaluate, resist or even dislodge.

Yet Arnold here reveals an even more historically specific anxiety, fretting, like his contemporaries the Pre-Raphaelites, over the culturally-specific “mischief” of the “mechanical.” Sixty years later, Rosenblatt and Richards both register a similar fear that human consumers of such assembly-line fabrications will fall prey to the same automaticity by which new forms of reading material are generated. Rosenblatt expresses distress over her students’ attraction to “‘trashy’ or ‘pulp’ writings” such as found in “the pseudo-literature of the popular magazine and cheap novel” (75)⁶⁰; Richards defines stock responses “ready-made,” “like a stock line in shoes and hats” (241). Indeed, the very quantity of such products—proliferating like castoffs, or “trash”—appears to be as worrisome to these critics as these products’ potentially shoddy

⁶⁰ Again, Rosenblatt’s 1995 revision little modifies the misleading snobbery inside these statements, and which her later concept of transaction works to unravel (59-60); “lurid drugstore paperbacks” (59) is her replacement for the “cheap novel.”

quality. Stock here represents not only the low but the overused and widespread—a kind of devolving group oblivion that contrasts with the purer independence of mind that art is imagined to afford.

Of course, this historical worry is consistent with much nineteenth- and early twentieth-century anxiety about the alienations implicit in industrialization and what Walter Benjamin calls the mechanical reproductions therein enabled. As Rosenblatt explores in her dissertation, the various “ideas of art” put forth by many nineteenth-century poet-critics argued that art be understood as a cure for such disenfranchisements: that its varied forms of engagement and estrangement can refresh us to ourselves, and remind us of our ethical responsibilities to constantly re-evaluate our roles in a changing world. It is on precisely these grounds that both Rosenblatt and Richards critique “stock” readings of literature: that the humanizing idiosyncrasies of art cannot be accounted for by the blunt instruments of contemporary society’s most reflexive formulae. In *Literature as Exploration*, Rosenblatt characterizes stock responses as “fixed attitudes and automatic responses” (116) that encourage in the student the use of “cruder standards than are worthy of the kind of literary experience made available to him” (120); in *Practical Criticism* Richards defines stock responses as “fixed conventionalized reactions” (240) that disallow the “peculiarities of art to be realized” (241).

Moreover, these thinkers’ reaction against the stock was not merely theoretical; their focus on this phenomenon also highlights a more professional and disciplinary unease, not just about literature per se but also about learning, literacy, and practice—concerns which become especially clear when compared to Samuel Johnson’s more hierarchical and metaphysical

typology of poetic wit. In *Lives of the Poets*, Johnson defines poetry's "most noble" and genuine "strength of thought" by its contrast to the lesser form of wit that is merely a reproduction or a retelling. The latter he describes through Alexander Pope's formula of "what oft was thought / but ne'er so well expressed," wherein the "oft thought" becomes in Johnson's lights the "obvious." Johnson's better "strength of thought," as inspired by the best poetry, and contra Pope, is distinguished, instead, by being "new," and thus by resisting the mere repetition of what we might call the stock or already-known:

If by a more noble and more adequate conception, that be considered as wit which is at once natural and new, that which, though not obvious, is, upon its first production, acknowledged to be just; if it be that which he that never found it, wonders how he missed. (liii)

As Johnson suggests, such newness and trueness together (e.g. wit that is both "new" and "just") have a productively unsettling effect on the reader: by disrupting her more quotidian (again, what we might call "stock") procedures and turning her back on her own habits, they force her to "wonder how [s]he missed" a poetic observation that she must also "acknowledge[] to be just." The virtue of such thought is that it remains actively geared towards genuine discovery and learning: it forces in the reader some kind of intellectual, ethical or emotional recalibration. Yet for Johnson, such an internal disruption remains predictable and rational, or what he here calls "natural"—not only reasonable in its content, but honest and unfettered in its process. Overall, Johnson here valorizes a particularly experiential form of knowledge—a knowledge that operates as a "partaker[] of human nature," not merely as an objective and uninvolved (without

“interest” or “emotion”) “beholder” of its “vicissitudes.”⁶¹ Unlike Arnold, Johnson thus sees these mental activities inspired entirely by the virtues of literature itself; the reader merely follows the lead set by the literature into its inevitable surprise. Arnold, in contrast—and Richards and Rosenblatt after him—acknowledges the predictable as a matter rather of internalized “notions and habits”—those that “culture” has the potential to overturn, but which belong to the reading agent just as much as to the object read.

For Arnold, then, the already-known of the “stock” does not merely inspire a weaker experience of thought, as it does for Johnson. Arnold’s stock “notion and habit” instead seems to entail a *lack* of thought—an absence of learning—as defined by that trope of the automatic. Indeed, Arnold’s cultural counterpart to the stock develops beyond Johnson’s concept of the “natural and new” to require a more classically liberal concept of culturally engaged thought as being relatively “free.” Johnson treats “what oft was thought” in its purportedly universal form, but he does not worry the course by which such a nugget of cultural knowledge may have lost its power to surprise; Arnold’s objection to automaticity, in contrast, exposes a new focus on practice—on the “stream of fresh and free thought” that cultural engagements can afford, and that can stand in contrast to the mind’s more “mechanical” “followings” as encouraged by “stock notions and habits.”

⁶¹ This Johnson puts in contrast to the metaphysical poets that this famous disquisition also critiques. As he writes, the metaphysical poets “never inquired what, on any occasion, they should have said or done, but wrote rather as beholders than partakers of human nature; as beings looking upon good and evil, impassive and at leisure; as epicurean deities, making remarks on the actions of men and the vicissitudes of life, without interest and without emotion” (liv).

Inside this worry, of course, is a decided hint of behaviorism, which both Richards's and Rosenblatt's early work also takes up: that readers can be stimulated to predictable reactions by repeated or particularly irresistible exposures.⁶² In *Literature as Exploration*, Rosenblatt voices this worry when she writes that

Much of what the student reads and sees will tend to coarsen his sensibilities...we cannot afford to ignore the crude pictures of human behavior and motivation offered to their millions of readers by the newspapers, or by the oversimplified and false images of life presented by the pulp magazines. (108-9)

Even more portentously, Richards hints that the technologically enabled speed of industrialized output may have irreversibly damaging consequences not only on *what* its consumers think but on *how* its consumers think—on the mind's processes itself, not just its contents:

It is arguable that mechanical inventions, with their social effects, and a far too sudden diffusion of indigestible ideas, are disturbing throughout the world the whole order of human mentality, that are minds are...becoming an inferior shape—thin, brittle, and patchy, rather than controllable and coherent. (*Practical* 320)

By these degredationist proposals, Arnold's "stock notions and habits" thus become, for Rosenblatt, as for Richards before her, the very material of modernity, threatening to overwhelmingly assimilate readers to its own mechanical modes of production.

⁶² John Paul Russo persuasively dismantles the charge that Richards should be categorized as a behaviorist per se; but he argues that the influence of John Watson and B. F. Skinner—even as inspiring adversaries—is unmistakable in Richards's work, especially given what Russo calls Richards's "quasi-behaviorist neurophysiological model" of meaning-making (175).

Even so, and unlike Arnold—and as the above begins to suggest—Rosenblatt also insists that such kinds of “stock” are not just socially specific, internalized “notions and habits.” Her inquiry, inspired by Richards, moves one step further—that “stock” is also constituted by relatively agentic and, perhaps even more crucially, mutable “responses.” As responses, meaning is understood to be constituted by both input and uptake, and that uptake is framed as housed in and shaped by the learner’s highly individuated mind and body, and not merely formed (as Arnold’s formulation can suggest) by the well-designed curriculum or set of exposures. In this way, and even more than Arnold, Rosenblatt’s investigation into the nature of “stock” also offers the beginning seeds of a theory of literacy learning, albeit one specific to the literature classroom. By her logic, it is not culture in and of itself that can “turn[] a stream of fresh and free thought upon our stock notions and habits,” but our own responses to that culture that activates such a thinking stream. Like many of the critics of her generation—and as my next chapter will also address—Rosenblatt thus expands her understanding of the subject of literary study (“culture” as hypostasized object) to also consider, in a Boasian key, its proper methods of inquiry.

Even more specific to her pedagogical interests, Rosenblatt’s *Literature as Exploration* empathizes with the literature student who, in the face of such “facile conversational patter” as she sees the field having come to encourage, falls back upon stock responses because “he feels that in the presence of such works ...there are proper ways to react...his remarks on the work must satisfy the teacher’s already crystallized ideas about it” (76). Capitulation to the stock is therefore neither an inevitable nor a natural inclination, but one that is learned—a cultural habit in and of itself, of deferring to another’s interpretive authority in one’s educationally situated

engagements with culture and literature. Richards likewise describes the goal of *Practical Criticism* as “prepar[ing] the way for educational methods more efficient” (3), and he condemns the meandering and nonsystematic “critical chitchat” (318)—a phrase that Rosenblatt’s “conversational patter” seems to echo—of contemporary instruction in literary interpretation. Although, in its broadest argument, Arnold’s discussion of the stock sounds similar alarms, and was similarly situated to promote a new kind of progressive education, Arnold’s *Culture and Anarchy*, published serially in the highly popular general interest magazine *Cornhill*, was written in the grandest manifesto terms for a largely defined Victorian public, and leaves its core theories of learning unexamined. Rosenblatt’s and Richards’s works, by contrast, was directed more pointedly towards an audience of fellow educators and critics, with classroom specific reforms as their goal, and begin to pave the way for the transactional theory of literacy that Rosenblatt’s model would finally promote.

Yet Rosenblatt, like Richards, was also a creature of her time, prey to her period’s anxieties about new media, mass cultural movements, and the Arnoldian “anarchy” such developments are feared to foment. Both *The Idea of Art for Art’s Sake* and *Literature as Exploration* adhere to a certain amount of the artistic exceptionalism that, say, F. R. Leavis describes in his 1932 *New Bearings in English Poetry*: “The potentialities of human experience are realized in any age by only a tiny minority, and the important poet is important because he belongs to this . . . He is unusually sensitive, unusually aware, more sincere and more himself than the ordinary man can be” (13). With *Literature as Exploration*’s idolatrous excerpting of poetry—often citing the more propositional claims of Keats and Wordsworth as self-evident tidbits of wisdom (e.g. 137)—Rosenblatt can in many places imply that an artist’s message can transcend its contingency on

cultural ideologies and normative strategies. Moreover, she sometimes also suggests in this early work that the poet's socially legislative, even socially transformative, abilities are qualitatively different—in kind, not degree—from the more static and merely reflective functions played by institutions like the press, or by the writers and readers who work within such lowlier milieus (as with her frequent swipes at newspapers).

Rosenblatt's progressive explorations of these transformative powers, however, should not be entirely collapsed with Leavis's ultimately transmissional views about the means by which culture and its purported standards persist, as most famously exemplified by Leavis's early brochure "Mass Civilization and Minority Culture." In investigating the best practices for a pedagogically valuable and ethically valid method for the reading and making of meaning, Rosenblatt's largest aspirations as a literary and literacy theorist are not geared towards cultural maintenance; nor are her most suggestive theories of learning based on a model of trickle-down enculturation. Instead, as her essay on Stevenson also suggests, Rosenblatt takes an integrative approach to the dilemma of the social antagonisms that haunt the modern reader and writer. Further, Rosenblatt does not intervene on this dilemma through a theorization only of literature per se—concerned with only the semiotic features that can appear singly to grant literature its exclusive status; nor does Rosenblatt's theory of literary engagement promote the kind of purportedly disinterested criticism that literature, so defined, would appear to demand. Instead, Rosenblatt—inspired not only by Boas's and Baldensperger's cultural analyses, but also by Richards's psycholinguistic inquiries—turned her attention to theorizing the socio-cognitive dynamics by which more or less edifying meaning might be made.

To be sure, Rosenblatt shares with the “modernist stance” described by Mao many originating concerns, and especially a focus on the socially habituated “complacencies” encouraged by “stock” ideas. However, and as shown by her later emphasis on an efferent-aesthetic continuum, by which these stances intermingle and whose approaches exist in constant dialogue, she also does not recommend between critical agents and the larger “public” a relation of necessary “antagonism.” Further, it is not new art, new information, or even a new mode of criticism itself that alone can justify literature as an educational pursuit in the newly diverse and diversely literate modern age in which this thinker found herself. Rosenblatt saw it as her duty to articulate instead a new epistemological model: one in which literary culture, on the one hand, and a broader anthropological concept of culture, on the other, might be helped to work more sympathetically in tandem, for both the benefit of the learner and the evolving culture in and about which she learned.

Indeed, Rosenblatt suggests in *Literature as Exploration* that the source for stock responses or “snap judgments” (23) are actually largely external and social: they are ideas and reactions that students are apt to “unquestioningly adopt” (19) from elsewhere, and that they are apt to “docile[y] repeat” (62). Even so, she does not recommend in their place their purported opposite—the concept that “valid judgments of the world” might be made instead purely “on the basis merely of one’s own meager experience” (20-1). Rosenblatt is perhaps most famous for her more obviously progressive critique of the former: that “the practices and much of the tone of literature teaching . . . place a screen between the student and the book or poem or play,” which “often leads to a feeling on the student’s part that literature is something . . . remote from his own present concerns and needs” (74-5). But less well remembered is that Rosenblatt was also

writing at an interwar moment when literary studies had not yet coalesced around a concept of the “critical”; the discipline, at least as she knew it at Barnard and Columbia, was organized instead around what she calls “literary history,” a method that she finds, for students, “of very little help in the handling of their unvarnished primary personal responses” (77).⁶³ As such, Rosenblatt’s critique is aimed less at the New Critical methods she was so often championed for deriding, and more at the antiquarian historicism that Boas was also seeking to overturn—or, more precisely, to radicalize.⁶⁴ Indeed, this is the same tradition that New Critics such as Robert Penn Warren and Cleanth Brooks, in their own progressively pedagogical way, also rejected and replaced with their proposed methods of close textual analysis. Similar to the New Critics, then, Rosenblatt was also struggling to articulate an educative method by which students’ “unvarnished primary personal responses” might be better, or more edifyingly, “handled” as these responses are developed into edifying interpretations and evaluations. And “stock,” of course, was what proved for many students the tempting but inadequate substitute for that development of hard-won meaning.

For Rosenblatt, then, it appears to be not the absolute avoidance but the acknowledgment of “stock” that provides a crucial step in helping the student achieve the kind of learning that literature can promote. Rosenblatt, like Richards, explicitly references Arnold when she proposes that only the “free play” of the thinking mind’s “experience” can provide proper conditions for

⁶³ Although Rosenblatt’s comment here references the specific U.K. readers that Richards studied, she suggests this formulation is equally apt for her own U.S. students.

⁶⁴ As I argue in my previous chapter, Boas’s paradigm can be described by the progressive-pragmatic paradigm Kloppenburg describes as “profoundly historical” (4).

discoveries of the literary kind (*Principles* 202; “Writer” 210).⁶⁵ Yet such classically liberal claims about the mind’s “free play” are, and in both theorists’ work, consistently counter-balanced with an acknowledgement of the socially embedded realities and sometimes unavoidable exigencies of practice that also inform any pedagogically viable readerly (or writerly) practice. Rosenblatt’s and Richards’s liberal subject is perhaps not so liberal as she can sometimes appear. How then might such self-society negotiations be carried out? Rosenblatt suggests that it is only through a process of self-aware self-criticism, a consciousness of one’s own processes: “when [the student] attempts to understand *what in the work and in himself* produced that reaction, and when he goes on to *thoughtfully modify*, reject, or accept it” (88-9, my emphasis).

By a model like Johnson’s, the already knowns of “stock” represent a kind of customary script that the mind is free to reject and move beyond. By an Arnoldian model, stock makes up the social “notions and habits” that individuated “free thought” can refresh and help us re-evaluate. But Rosenblatt’s newly relativized vision of stock begins to suggest, in its turn, a new devotion to a theory of learning that acknowledges a closer interrelation between everyday custom and elevating culture, between the familiar and the new. Moreover, Rosenblatt’s later transformation of “responses” into stance, like Richards’s similar investigations into perceptual mutability in *Philosophy of Rhetoric*, as I will show below, emphasizes a practice of constant self-reflection,

⁶⁵ In *Principles of Literary Criticism* (which Richards described as a companion to *Practical Criticism*), Richards uses an Arnoldian turn of phrase to recommend the “free play of experience” in place of the “actually inapplicable” thinking of “stock conventionalized attitudes” (202). In her turn, Rosenblatt writes in her 1936 essay of the need to “become conscious of the automatic tendencies in our culture,” whose “irrationality...will stifle the free play of the mind” (210).

equally self- and world-critical. Rosenblatt's development of the concept of stance emerges from her inquiry into the proper "handling" of stock, which would require, in an anthropological key, what Richards calls a culturally relativistic "alienists' attitude," in which "the mental operations" that give rise to meaning are scrutinized as much those operations' apparent content (7).

The Stock and Custom: An Anthropological Perspective

While anxiety about the effect of "stock" on students' critical practices has a long history in literary studies, this worry is not unique to literary criticism. Rosenblatt's interest in this issue should also be understood in the context of her philosophical grounding in Boasian anthropology, and especially its investigations into linguistics; and specifically into the relationship between our cultural schema and the meanings we attribute to given instances of situated language, and the relative control we might develop, as literate agents, over this relationship. As this section will show, I. A. Richards's understanding of "stock responses" is also nuanced by this anthropological perspective, in the 1936 study of rhetoric he produced after his seminal literary critical texts (his 1924 *Principles of Literary Criticism*, and his 1929 *Practical Criticism*). This expanded philosophical context, I argue, highlights the philosophy behind Rosenblatt's emerging reconceptualization of the stock: as posing a question not only about the problematic automaticity of the modern condition, but about the methods by which we might most sympathetically and critically read and write across cultural difference. Indeed, and as her later work shows, Rosenblatt's theory of the efferent stance was grounded in her conviction that agents' "stock" was always relative and relational; and, moreover, that "stock" does not constitute customs that should either be universally applied, or merely be shucked off

via critique. Instead, this more relativistic vision of stock shows itself to be the common ground necessary for any act of production or reception, whether that act is largely reproductive of cultural norms, or innovatively invested in reforming those norms.

To begin, though, it is worth reiterating that I. A. Richards's work—even more extremely than Rosenblatt's—is not often understood in these terms. Some of the most influential critiques of Richards's literary criticism present him as promoting a categorical distinction between the psychologically developmental work performed by literature, on the one hand, and, on the other, the damaging “stock” ideas that threaten to hold such development back. For Terry Eagleton, Richards's conception of literature—or, indeed, of the reader's appropriate response to it—originates from a problematically naïve “‘conflict free’ model of society” (47), in which progress can only proceed by the shedding of yesterday's outdated habits, whose undesirability is purportedly universal; by this explanation, stock responses might be understood as that very “wreckage of history” from which, in Eagleton's wry description, critics such as I. A. Richards claimed that “the poem”—as well, implicitly, as the reading self—“must be plucked free” (48). Thirty years before, one of Eagleton's key influences, Raymond Williams, finds in Richards' treatment of stock responses a similar neglect of the real, lasting and complex power of the social; Williams frames this as a capitulation on Richards's part to the “essential passivity” embodied by the previous century's idealization of “Aesthetic Man—alone in a hostile environment, receiving and organizing his experience” (*Culture* 252).

Following Williams and Eagleton, Pamela McCallum has further argued that, in their “search for a synthesizing critical method,” Richards, along with T. S. Eliot and Leavis, “rethematizes the

Arnoldian culture/society problematic” (7)—or the very culture/custom binary that Boasian cultural relativism, among other anthropological movements, was seeking to complicate, if not to undo. To be sure, many aspects of Richards’ investigations of literary reading can support McCallum’s charge. In the seminal study of reading that *Practical Criticism* describes, Richards famously stripped a variety of poems, both canonized and not, of any contextual information related to author, period, or genre, before distributing them to a group of participants for literary evaluation and analysis; this study design has often been understood as recommending that literary reading ought always to be conducted through such a determinedly decontextualized approach. By this logic, Richards’ desire that students be taught to better resist “stock responses”—and let blossom in their place some purer, freer form of appropriately literary response—has, in turn, often been understood to encapsulate that now infamously ahistorical, New Critical devotion to the unscaffolded “text itself.”

Against this, however, I would further argue that such a take on Richards itself constitutes a relatively decontextualized understanding of the theorist’s ethnographic aims more largely, and of his investigations of stock responses more specifically. To be sure, Richards’s study methods in *Practical Criticism* are shoddy by today’s scholarly standards; but his investigation into reading was also one of the first of its kind, and radical for pedagogically progressive ambitions and its attention to practice, as exemplified by its new qualitative methods of study. In this way, his decontextualizing design can be read less as the enforcement of a new program for reading than an experiment in removing those specific variables that he suspected had come to constitute, for many of these readers, a worrying readerly crutch. Rosenblatt, in fact, reads Richards’s work in precisely this way: as a “systematic documentation” (77) of the “facile flow of conversational

patter” that had problematically come to constitute an education in literary and cultural engagement. Indeed, the impact of Richards’s work on Rosenblatt—most explicitly in *Literature as Exploration*, though also visible in her later inquiries into the dynamics of literacy—supports such a reassessment.

Richards’s actual grounding in an anthropological paradigm of culture is most vivid in his 1936 work on rhetoric, where Richards argues that no language can be presumed legible if read free of its social context. In *Philosophy of Rhetoric*—devoted to dismantling what he calls the “proper meaning superstition” that every word has a single and correct referent—Richards tellingly offers an image of travel to illustrate his philosophy’s relativistic leanings:

Anyone who has visited a sufficiently strange country and come into close contact with its life knows how unsettling and disorienting is the recognition of the place of conventions in our mental world. (42)

This is a lesson Richards appears to have experientially learned from his own visiting professorships to China, undertaken between 1929 and 1938, and which profoundly shaped his investigations into linguistics⁶⁶; but it is also a lesson that puts him—as Rosenblatt’s consolidation of their influences reveal—on philosophical ground quite close to Franz Boas. In Boas’s 1911 *Mind of Primitive Man*, which drew on fieldwork but was written largely for a non-academic audience, the anthropologist notes that the traveler to new cultures is often apt at first to “measure” foreign behavior by “his own standards”; but the “closer contact” that Richards describes—similar to that promoted by a culturally relativistic form of ethnography—reveals such measurements as inappropriate, since culturally specific “customs and restrictions”

⁶⁶ See, for example, Russo 362-4; 404-409.

determine and distinguish the communication habits both of ourselves and of whatever “strange country” one might observe (106). For both Boas and Richards, such a revelation, as it was for many of this period, is “unsettling and disorienting” precisely because it reveals that our own “stock” habits of communication and interpretation may well be normative constructions, rather than instances of universally applicable attention.

In light of such relativism, Bredin’s claim that Richards adheres to an isolationist view of cultural meaning-making—to “a belief in the radical and essential privacy of all experience,” whether purportedly poetic or more commonly customary (30)—appears short-sighted. Indeed, Richards insists in *Philosophy of Rhetoric* that such travel allows us to “rediscover that the world—so far from being a solid matter of fact—is rather a fabric of conventions” (42). And given such a fabric, Richards argues later, meaning must be understood not positivistically but relationally; not essentially but contextually and provisionally (e.g. 72). Indeed, the conviction that meaning “can be judged...good or bad, correct or incorrect, in isolation” is an “evil” (51) that

takes the senses of an author’s words to be *things we know* before we read him, fixed factors with which he has to build up the meaning of his sentences as a mosaic is put together of discrete independent tesserae. (55, my emphasis)

Richards here makes a strongly anti-essentialist argument, also relevant to the question of transfer to which Rosenblatt’s work is also germane: disputing the notion that language, or skill with language, may consist of portable “things we know” whose predictable effects or uses exist independent of context. By this, a reader’s or writer’s blanket acceptance of those “stock responses” that Richards critiqued in his earlier work of literary criticism can be understood as

the misconception—what Richards calls in this work “misunderstanding” (e.g. 4)—that language-based meaning emerges results solely from inflexible “fixed factors” and “independent tesserae.” Such a misunderstanding refuses to acknowledge the mutable “fabric of conventions” that gives language or behavior any truly relevant force in the world.⁶⁷

Richards is probably most famous for his kooky flirtations with a kind of proto-neurolinguistics in the 1929 *Principles of Literary Criticism*—suggesting, for many critics, that texts work on minds to produce meaning by universally predictable and transparent stimulus-response mechanisms. But his later *Philosophy of Rhetoric* explores a series of counterclaims to these earlier speculations, about both the contextual variability and individual agency involved in readerly reception, literary and otherwise. Here, Richards argues firmly, for example, that humans do not have “sensations” (as “pure datum”) so much as they have “perceptions, responses *whose character comes to them from the past as well as the present occasion*” (30, my emphasis); and that whatever constitutes that specific past and present thus provides, he explains, the “governing conditions of an interpretation” (33). By these lights, meaning is not made merely from “impressions,” or from some reflexive act of ingestion, but from “sortings, recognitions, laws of response,” as well as “recurrences of like behavior” (37 check). Here, Richards insists that responses are shaped not merely by the natural, biological “laws” of contemporary psychology, but also by the specifics of cultural habit (“like behavior”), individual

⁶⁷ In a similar spirit, literary theorist Ming Xie has recently described Richards as a “pioneer” in “intercultural and comparative studies” (279), Richards’s work highlighting the many ways that differences among literary understanding or instances of reception are often “cultural rather than linguistic” (281).

associations (“recognitions”), and a sense of purpose that can more or less actively be employed (as in the William Jamesian concept of “sortings”).

Given this, a “stock response,” or the application of known schema to new contexts, might itself be considered an exemplar of “like behavior” with which we are designed to ordinarily make sense of the world—and which, as such, cannot be entirely shed. But “come” as such “responses” do “from the past as well as the present occasion,” our reactions can also, Richards suggests, be purposively recalibrated to result in a newly flexible approach to the varied contexts with which the modern individual may be confronted. As Rosenblatt later will, by recommending for learners a self-consciously transactional approach to reading to writing, Richards endorses “a hearty skepticism of all immediate intuitions” (*Principles* 45) as in and of itself sufficient for fully engaged literacy learning—since such intuitions are, as he argues, always socially mediated and deeply relative to the specifics only of circumstantially supported habits.

In *Mind of Primitive Man*, Franz Boas registers an anxiety similar to Richards and Rosenblatt about such “automatic” intuitions; and he describes this social automaticity in the same ethical terms used by Richards and Rosenblatt. By Boas’s argument, stock ideas, or what he calls “custom,” can habituate us to our own intolerance of difference, normalizing and naturalizing the “displeasure” that such difference can inspire in the observer:

Custom is obeyed so often and so regularly...the habitual act becomes automatic; ...[and] the more automatic an action, the more difficult it is to perform the opposite action, that it

requires a very strong effort to do so, and that ordinarily the opposite action is accompanied by strong feelings of displeasure. (281)

In contrast, the “critical faculty,” as Boas calls it, can allow us to see the actual cultural causes of such “intuitive” reactions. In *Principles of Literary Criticism*, Richards recommends a similar contextual adaptability as essential to the ethical comprehension of cultural phenomena, especially in the modern globalizing world. Given that he sees the world changing with alarming rapidity, Richards eschews the purportedly universal codes by which we are used to ordering our lives. With strikingly current imagery, he argues instead that a “more adaptable morality” becomes “an efficient aeroplane in which to ride...the turmoil of change” (57). And the pragmatic flexibility promoted here is crucial to fully understanding Richards’s critique of the stock. Indeed, and investigating the ethics of cross-cultural literary study, Li Hao has similarly observed that the kind of “subjectivity” Richards promotes is not a fixed or “intact subjectivity” (157), what can withstand challenges and remain in itself essentially unchanged; but a more fluid and provisional sense of the knowledge-making self, one able to progressively evolve to fit new circumstances. So although, using a favorite term from *Rhetoric*, Richards does often seek to “remedy” such cross-cultural problems in what now seem naïve or utopian ways (such as his devotion to a universal program of “Basic English”⁶⁸), Richards also explored such problems with an inventiveness quite different from many of the literary critics who would claim him as their progenitor. Such polymath enthusiasms are perhaps what lead Richards from literary studies to Harvard’s Department of Education. Richards’s was a move eerily similar to Rosenblatt’s to NYU’s School of Education in 1948. Significantly, Richards’s was also a move that, by her own report, deeply puzzled the young Helen Vendler, whose New Critical training

⁶⁸ See, again, Russo, 362-367.

seemed to disallow her from recognizing any connection between his literary critical leanings and his interest in educational psychology, psycholinguistics, or literacy studies.⁶⁹

Further uniting Richards's and Boas's critiques of customary automaticity is their similar linking of such intellectual inflexibility to undemocratic regimes. In 1929's *Practical Criticism*, Richards contrasts the conventionalized thinking exemplified by stock responses with the grandest social goals of his time:

If we wish for a population easy to control by suggestion we shall decide what repertory of suggestions it shall be susceptible to and encourage this tendency except in the few. But if we wish for a high and diffused civilization, with its attendant risks, we shall combat this form of mental inertia. (314)

Though I have found no biographical evidence that either man was at all aware of the other's work, Boas's 1929 *Anthropology and Modern Life* shows a strangely similar turn of phrase:

If we wish to educate children to unreasoned mass action, we must cultivate set habits of action and thought. If we wish to educate them to intellectual and emotional freedom, care must be taken that no unreasoned action takes such habitual hold on them that a serious struggle is involved in the attempt to cast it off. (184)

Yet how exactly might such "mental inertia" or "set habits of action," once identified, be transformed? The replacement model for the stock response that is offered by Richards—and

⁶⁹ In a review of Russo's biography of Richards, Vendler remembers wondering at the fact that "Richards—in one of the many anomalies attending his life—was not a member of the department of English, but rather was a university professor based in the Harvard Graduate School of Education," in the next paragraph wondering again "what he was doing in the School of Education" (np).

later by Rosenblatt—often revolves around that progressive keyword “experience,” as when he writes, “if we consider how responses in general are formed, we shall see that the chief cause of ill appropriate, stereotyped reactions is *withdrawal from experience*” (246, Richards’ emphasis). From a stereotypically New Critical angle, this emphasis might be understood as promoting the kind of merely heightened attention that close reading is imagined to exercise. But Boas’s more specific sense of the more collaborative “critical faculty” that can intervene on automaticity offers a new way to understand the method that Richards here recommends—and which Rosenblatt later, and more explicitly, exploits in her more mature theories of stance.

Indeed, while Boas’s cultural relativism is most commonly understood as motivated by his opposition to the racist and nationalistic strains running through much anthropological study of the time, this relativism can also be tied, as we’ve seen, to his more phenomenological interest in the apparent vagaries of observable facts, or, more precisely, in our subjective perceptions of them. Boas’s own doctoral dissertation was a poetically titled study of the “color of water”; his early claim-staking article “On the Study of Geography,” as noted in my previous chapter, promotes his version of cultural anthropology as a field in which “the way in which the mind is affected forms an important branch of the study” (140).

Such apparent vagaries of phenomena and/or perception pose obvious problems for the researcher or reader of culture, whether her object of inquiry is a cultural habit or artifact. How can our own subjective limitations be overcome such that progressive knowledge might be made? One solution, of course, and which Boasian anthropologists famously popularized—in contrast to “armchair” anthropologists of the century preceding theirs—was the practice of

fieldwork, with its ethos of cultural embeddedness. By this system, a specific culture was best understood from within: by attending to the logics that govern the observed culture. This version of relativism is, as I've argued before, one that recent critics have persuasively tied to a series of New Critical impulses, by which the poetic text too is seen as possessing its own autonomous governing logic, a logic to which the investigator, as by an emic model, must wholly and impersonally submit.⁷⁰ By this scheme, meaning is imagined to live in the artifact or habit alone, and the reader or critic of the "problem" of such knotted up cultural "meaning" is thus a subject-observer with particularly good "close reading" skills. However, Boas's relativism suggests another model for cultural comprehension. In his 1889 essay "Alternating Sounds," which Boas scholar George Stocking argues "contains in germ most of Boasian anthropology" (*Shaping* vi), and in his theory of secondary explanations, Boas poses a problem that individual embeddedness, or "close reading," cannot solve alone: the inevitability of personal perceptual vagaries dogging any attempt to glean meaning from a culture or linguistic act that may work by a system different from one's own repertoire of schema, "stock," or perceptual categories.

Boas's essay on "Alternating Sounds" (1889) argues that ethnographers, because of their own culturally informed habits of listening, can be misled into thinking that foreign languages are filled with inconsistencies ("alternating sounds" or distinctive vocalizations of the same words) and that these languages are therefore unformed or primitive. Led by such misperceptions, even such purportedly impartial observers at first tend to understand cultural phenomena only in highly limited ways: only so far as such phenomena confirm or disrupt—or are relative to—the

⁷⁰ Thomas Barfield's *The Dictionary of Anthropology* defines "emic" and "etic," as developed by Kenneth Pike, as terms "used by ethnoscientists" to describe an "insider's and outsider's perspective on a culture, respectively" (166).

observer's own cultural habits. Boas refutes the very existence of alternating sounds, stating that "alternating sounds are in reality alternating apperceptions of one and the same sound" (79); in other words, whatever consistency or inconsistency an observer might hear in a string of language sounds may be less a matter of actually phenomenal than of "psychical causes" (73), or of the originating context that informs the kind of "attention bestowed" upon the received sensations (74). For Boas, as with Richards, there is an important distinction to be drawn between "sensations," as objective phenomena, and "perceptions," as subjective phenomena by which inevitably contextual meaning is generated.

Boas's theory of "secondary explanations" shows a similar worry, as it relates even to native people's understanding of their own cultures. As Boas explains it, people's justifications of their cultural traditions often fail to consider the diverse factors that have informed these traditions' historical development. Instead, Boas found, most will offer rationalizations that merely confirm present-day systems and schemas, since, as Boas explains, the "present associations" with which "we explain habit[s]...probably differ from the associations prevailing at the time when the habit was established" (*Mind* 220). Further, the "existence of such secondary explanations is one of the most important anthropological phenomena...hardly less common in our own society than in more primitive societies" (226), important because the phenomenon helps us recognize the extent to which such habits of thought are determined by habit more than by any "reasoning" with which we might be apt to congratulate ourselves (226).

Although explicitly set against a construct of "reason," both of these theories also make a provocatively anti-empiricist claim: against the notion that individualized observation of

phenomena constitutes a kind of free-floating, impartial activity that allows complete cultural comprehension of any object it takes up. In other ways, however, Boas's own relativized empiricism as well as his progressivist optimism are also evident, especially in the way that his early essay on "Alternating Sounds" proceeds—as he begins to gesture towards an alternate method, or a kind of attention, that a "trained observer" might employ. With the proper approach, he writes, it need not remain "necessary that . . . sounds are always apperceived by means of one's native language" ("Alternating" 76). As a solution, Boas reframes linguistic transcription, which we can parallel to the self-aware critical stances that Rosenblatt would promote in their place, as the relativistic comprehension of a communicative event as it operates within the context of a culture's other habits and values. And whose habits and values? Given the vagaries of perception, Boas implies that such meaning-sensitivity is always double edged: requiring reflection on both the observed culture's habits and values as well as the observer's own. Boas attempted to achieve this sensitivity through his famously collaborative methods, which entailed continual iterative dialogue between so-called natives and so-called observers, and which provided insight into cultural "meaning" that was, Boas suggests, by very definition more than the sum of its parts.

By these lights, as Regna Darnell has described it, Boas's method presumed that "native peoples are subjects and collaborators, not objects for study" (17). And as Boas writes in *Anthropology and Modern Life*, the anthropologist, once "supplied with [anthropological] knowledge, reaches a standpoint that enables him to view our own civilization critically, and to enter into a *comparative study of values* with a mind relatively uninfluenced by . . . automatically regulated behavior" (207, my emphasis). Yet as the phrase "comparative study" suggests, such "freedom

of judgment,” (207) as Boas terms it, needs to be understood less as autonomy than as a kind of deliberate and context-dependent sensitivity to the environments both from which one emerges and upon which one fixes one’s curiosity. In Boas’s scheme, then, neither the scholar, nor the native, nor the situation, can be supremely determinant of knowledge. But by understanding the relativizing effects of situation, the speaker’s and the listener’s normative (“stock”) habits can be made visible across cultural differences, and thus also be made subject to transformation. This is, I argue, the same collaborative and transactional work that Richards gestures towards, and that Rosenblatt would later argue that literacy enables—communication across cultural differences that does not merely reproduce one subjectivity or another, but enables newly relevant knowledge to be built. Indeed, as her transactional paradigm underscores, this knowledge invariably changes as it travels, though it can retain both useful and symbolic value.

The Stock, the Critical, and the Development of the Efferent Stance

As I’ve already argued, Rosenblatt’s exploration of “stock responses” surfaces what I argue remains a key problematic for the pedagogically minded work of literary reading. Especially put into conversation with Boas and with Richards, and with her own later work, Rosenblatt’s “problem with stock” also helps reveal some of the structural and epistemological antagonisms that keep work in literacy (and more practical uses of “language”) so determinedly divorced from postsecondary instruction in literary and cultural critical reading. Rosenblatt’s devotion to a mode of self-reflection achievable only in collaboration or dialogue with difference—and as the agentic taking of a more or less self-critical stance *towards not only one’s given subject, but also towards one’s own schemas*—provides a figure for a kind of text-based attention whose freedom,

because “transactional,” is always relative and contingent. This, in turn, provides an alternative to the almost exclusively spatial and synchronic figures through which literary studies’ main reading approaches have so often been explained and defended; figures that—similar to what I have argued in the previous chapter—often short-circuit their own usefulness as workable methods for an historically specific, developmentally minded and, indeed, teachable reading (and, by extension, writing) practice.

John Bowen has argued that Richards might be held responsible for shifting the concern of literary study from “conscience” (which we might understand here as a nineteenth-century pedagogical focus on ethics and content) to “consciousness,” from “principle” to “practice”; and, as such, from “aesthetics and scholarship” to “criticism and teaching” (83). Indeed, this focus on “consciousness”—not what the student knows, but *how* the student knows—was the founding principle that gave what Catherine Gallagher has called this period’s “idea of the literary” (144) any of its original traction. What the New Critical methods soon to become bedrock to literary studies had inherited from Richards’s literary critical work, and so successfully exploited, was an idea Rosenblatt shared: that attending to a text in a particularly literary key was somehow distinctive from other kinds of textual engagement. Even so, Richards’s focus on consciousness per se also proved relatively short-lived in literary studies’ larger evolution through the subsequent decades. As my next chapter will further discuss, attending to the vicissitudes of agents’ situated consciousness and attitudes towards language was passed over in favor of attending to an idealized form of stock-transcending critical technique. With the vivid exception of Kenneth Burke, these New Critical approaches to literature largely ignored Richards’s attendant proposal that text-based engagements are also always rhetorical—which, by Richards’s

definition, means that their communicative circuits remain ever-grounded in subjective perceptions of meaning and in individual's socially embedded practices.

Such trends can be explained by the period's own historical circumstances and resulting schemas. In the larger social-scientific, post-Sputnik atmosphere in which the subfield of literary studies developed, "consciousness"—along with its connection to experience and practice—seems to have appeared to many too soft a concern to survive as anything more than a minor offshoot of experimental educational theory, soon to be shunted off to the questions posed by compositionists about process, pedagogy and personal growth, and to the learner-centered reader response theorists addressed in my first chapter. And even those reading response and reception theories—as Pat Harkin and Janice Radway have separately argued—often maintained a focus on textual interpretation that sidesteps questions about the mutable and varied forces inherent to the actual readerly practices of the critic. In this way, one might argue that New Criticism transformed "reading" into a text-centric gerund, its emphasis less on the developing reader than, as Umberto Eco has framed it, on the purported "rights of the text" (as if text were itself a liberal subject, entitled to a freedom of expression all its own) (7). In the development of literary studies, the problem faced by modern readers and writers became instead a problem of the statically conceived *written* and *read*—what Deborah Brandt would later call, in *Literacy as Involvement*, a "strong text" approach to literacy instruction (2). As Brandt explains, such a "strong text" paradigm leads to a "decontextualized" view of written language, and to the assumption that, as such, written language is largely "self-referential"; this, in turn, encourages a purportedly "objectified" form of thought and attendant "heightened consciousness": the reader's entry into "a world of pure words" that is "no longer beholden to the ordinary world"

(3). Historically, it can be argued that this “strong text” approach, coupled with an expectation that critical “responses” be appropriately cleansed of their stock affiliations, offered literary critics an hypostasized object of inquiry newly deserving of disciplinary prestige. And similar to Brandt’s critique, Rosenblatt’s inquiry into the nature and role of “stock responses” in our literacy engagements works to interrogate and complicate that static and autonomous conception of so-called literary language.

In this way, Rosenblatt’s conception “stock responses”—especially as this idea was later reinterpreted into her efferent stance—should be understood to represent less the symptoms of underscrutinized and internalized schemas, than as one of two continuous and interpenetrating modes of cultural attention. By this model, and standing at one end of the “efferent-aesthetic continuum,” the efferent stance constitutes the wholesale application of some text-based habit to a new textual transaction. In some ways, to be sure, Rosenblatt uses the efferent—like the stock—as a negative example helping her to better define the nature of the more edifying, innovative, democracy-supporting engagements with culture that her aesthetic stance enables. Reading *Literature as Exploration* alone, this attentional mode—described here as “stock”—could be understood as a type of indiscriminate engagement in which, by Richards’s terms, “some dear habit has to be abandoned if we are to follow it” (*Practical* 254). Readers unable to abandon such habit, Richards implies, have narrowed the breadth of their cultural intake so that their responding uptake only reaffirms “ideas and feelings that we already possess” (252). And such a formulation suggests that the stock is therefore overly personal (“dear”) and overly historical (“habit”).

Yet Rosenblatt's efferent stance crucially reverses this formulation—as one could argue Richards also begins to do, in his *Philosophy of Rhetoric*—to suggest that these apparently “public” and conventional meaning are limiting not for their historicism, but instead for their pretense to an ahistoricism. Thus recontextualized, Rosenblatt's problem with stock shows such responses to be less a case of wrong-headed meaning per se than a case of a static (non-progressive) form of context-inappropriate application of inherited schema—the mere reproduction of meaning rather than the production of new solutions to what, in a transactional paradigm, are inevitably new communicative and interpretive problems. This problem with stock thus shows Rosenblatt understanding culture less as concerning objective phenomena than subjective phenomena, or, more precisely, their inescapable interrelations, much as Boas argues in his essay “On Geography,” and as I discussed in my previous chapter. Understood thus, “stock responses” do not constitute mind-work that needs to be transcended; instead, they represent mind-work that needs to be brought back down into the particulars of experience and history, where it can be interrogated. As education theorist King Beach would argue, decades later, in his own retheorization of overly static models of knowledge transfer into a new model of “knowledge propagation,”⁷¹ static-seeming models of knowledge and theories of learning result from enormous social energy being expended to uphold a status quo, and to actively reproduce some set of norms: “If a context [for learning] does appear unchanging, it is because much collective effort is being put into maintaining it in its place. Similarly, if an individual [who is learning] appears constant, effort is usually being put into maintaining that constancy” (47). The

⁷¹ Beach prefers the concepts “knowledge propagation,” “consequential transitions” and “generalization (constancy and change)” (39) to describe the phenomenon of knowledge transfer; by his argument, these concepts better explain the means by which individuals knowledge is used and transformed “through contexts” (40) and better account for how “mental representations” and “external environment” relate (40).

efferent stance—and stock responses—are one way to understand the means by which certain of our textual transactions can activate such reproductions. The challenge for literate agents—if they are to become fully and self-consciously agentic—is to recognize the labor involved in both reproduction and innovation, and the use-value of the varied modes of interpretation and production these stances make available.

The questions Rosenblatt poses in “The Writer’s Dilemma”—questions about how readers might be better educated to gain from literature’s edifying challenges, through a more sympathetic approach to the way environment, agent, and text interact to produce different kinds of meaning—would go on to shape, I argue, her entire future oeuvre. By today’s terminology, we can see this question as asking what the appropriately critical reader should do when she approaches a text, in relation both to that text and to her own “intuitive” responses, as Boas and Richards would call them. This question brings Rosenblatt one step closer to answering her plea, from her dissertation, for “new theoretical models” that would resist both didactic “Victorianism”—which claims custom and stock knowledge as all-powerful, and transparently transferable—and aestheticism’s promotion of a total detachment from more “public” forms of “use” and “good,” and, indeed, from the stock foundations upon which all social interactions (and thus all textual transactions) are built. This is precisely what Rosenblatt’s theory of the transactionally-grounded aesthetic-efferent continuum would go on to propose: that reading and writing both constitute a consistently “dynamic” (1369) practice entailing two general approaches an agent can take towards a text—two different attitudes towards the relationship between one’s own immediate experience with language-in-the-world, and one’s varied inherited scripts by which that language-in-the-world makes meaningful sense. On one side of the

continuum, the efferent stance not only draws on conventional codes but leaves uninterrogated the specific context that makes those conventions meaningful. (One example is an exit sign: whether in a movie theater or a classroom, whether neon-lit or painted, whether described in a police report or a novel, its meaning for many readers will appear static and purportedly autonomous—which is to say, the way its contextual situatedness shapes its use and meaning is not relevant to its use and its meaning.) On the other side of the continuum, and as my next chapter will more specifically analyze, the “aesthetic” stance recognizes these codes as contingent—as situated—and recognizes alternate meanings that an instance of language might also inspire, which, in other words, entails subjecting instances of language to an historicizing and self-reflective scrutiny by also drawing on one’s own more time- and place-specific reactions, which Rosenblatt frames as “personal” because they are immediate and determinedly, individually, experiential.

Yet unlike a polarizing rejection of the stock—as is sometimes expressed in *Literature as Exploration*—the aesthetic stance, as explained in her most mature theorizations, is framed as continuous with and partly constituted by the efferent; indeed, this model’s grounding in anthropology highlights the fact that a foundation of efferent meanings or “stock responses” are necessary for any effectively communicative event to take place. The aesthetic stance, then, draws on the universal seeming scripts of the efferent stance, but adds to these an additional layer of attention to the more self-questioning and “personally” associational aspects of any interpretive or communicative act, in work that enables across contexts the potential transformations of knowledge—and not the (equally effortful) reapplication of knowledge.

Moreover, and as my next chapter will discuss in more detail, Rosenblatt's theorization of the efferent stance and its intertwined relationship to the aesthetic offers an important alternative to the more spatial models of closeness and distance with which critical reading is often understood: models that, as Hegeman and others have suggested, can merely reinforce old oppositions between literate subject and cultural object, as well as between customary modes of literate engagement as bad habits to be shed, and more cultured modes of literate engagement as the higher and categorically separable ground into which the properly educated have been uniformly inducted. Stock notions can be refreshed, as Arnold's famous formulation argued, by the exposure to new systems of thought; but "stock," or the "efferent stance," cannot, and nor should it be, altogether removed. Instead, the attitudes towards texts entailed by this concept must be recognized as the "fabric of convention" that undergirds all that we communicatively and interpretively do as social beings. As such, stock notions are an inevitable aspect of what—in terms recalling Richards—Rosenblatt later describes as one's "inner capital": each literate agent's "linguistic-experiential reservoir.... Embodying funded assumptions, attitudes and expectations about language and about the world" (1367). Key here is Rosenblatt's term "funded"—insisting that our schema are always socially supported, if also subject to personal revisions by being filtered through highly individuated circumstances, preferences, and interests. By these lights, the kind of critical reading encouraged by the "aesthetic stance"—whatever text it happens to take up (even, indeed, an exit sign)—should not define itself against a concept of "stock" as an expugnable cliché; it should define itself with the "stock" of a foundational and intersubjective structuring system of one's past transactional engagements. And it is through such self-reflective collaborations across time or cultural difference that—Rosenblatt suggests—

new knowledge and meanings can be incrementally made, not only by the individual but also by the society in which she is embedded and which she transactionally helps to shape in her turn.

Chapter Four

Art and Innovation:

The Origins and Implications of Rosenblatt's Aesthetic Stance

In 1936, University of Chicago President Robert Hutchins published *The Higher Learning in America*, his influential case for a “great books” curriculum, to which an aging but tireless John Dewey soon fired off a pointed critique. Hutchins was writing from the very school where, more than a generation before, Dewey had started his major work in progressive educational and social theory;⁷² as a young and idealistic administrator, Hutchins presented his program, as described in this 1936 book, as the cure for the crude utilitarianism into which he saw post-secondary education having recently devolved, apparently under the influence of Dewey’s own ideas. In response, Dewey depicted Hutchins’s program as a retrograde mistake, and especially Hutchins’s proposed “emancipation” of cultural masterworks from any “practicality.” By Dewey’s description, Hutchins’s pedagogy would encourage only an escapist “aloofness...from contemporary life” (“Rationality” 950-1).

This is a debate that can be used—as it has been by Gerald Graff, in his 1987 history of English studies, *Professing Literature*—to exemplify what can seem the period’s deep-set partisanship:

⁷² Dewey taught at University of Chicago from 1894-1904, during which time he established his Lab School and wrote *The School and Society*; after disagreements with the University of Chicago’s administration, he moved to Columbia University.

in this case, between a traditional humanistic liberalism, on the one hand, focused on the virtues implicit in the “text itself,” and by what Deborah Brandt would call a “strong text” paradigm of literacy learning⁷³; and a present-minded progressivism, on the other, focused instead on a learner’s own context-based “experience” and the varied “practical” uses to which “great” books could be put. Like many debates of the period, this one also turned on the new “culture concept” (Hegeman 5), one internally divided between an historically leisure-class notion of the civilizing “arts,” and newer strains of anthropological relativism. Moreover, and as my previous chapters have shown, such a debate did not just concern one’s object of inquiry—whether plural and varied (cultures) or more monolithically unilineal (Culture); it also surfaced epistemological questions about the nature of one’s inquiry, or the methods, attitudes, and kinds of attention activated by the learner herself, asking how various cultural habits and artifacts might be most edifyingly conceptualized and used, or—from a literacy standpoint—read, and then reinvested in one’s own productions, or writing.

However, as a number of scholars on this interwar period in U. S. social and literary critical thought have also argued, the period’s variety of developing disciplinary approaches to these questions, and sub-disciplinary arguments about them, are sometimes less partisan than they may from a distance appear. Nor, would I add, is Dewey’s progressivism, as evident in this 1936 essay, as barn-burningly empiricist as his emphasis on presentist styles of readings may make him seem—or as many characterizations of his thinking, such as Graff’s, can suggest. Dewey

⁷³ Previous chapters have offered a closer gloss on Deborah Brandt’s description and critique, from *Literacy as Involvement*, of a “strong text” approach to literacy instruction, in which written language is assumed to be largely “self-referential” and “no longer beholden to the ordinary world” (2)—or, indeed, to the everyday uses of languages undertaken by time- and place-specific “readers and writers at work” (4).

does not repudiate Hutchins on the level of his program's content, or even its aims: the significant role that a humanistic conception of "culture" can play in a properly progressive education. Overall, in fact, Dewey finds Hutchins's critique of current higher education "trenchant," particularly as regards the increasingly "anti-intellectual" flavor of higher education's newly professionalizing tendencies ("Rationality" 949)—tendencies that constituted, as Dewey well knew, overzealous applications of some of his own theories.⁷⁴ For Dewey, the problem lay elsewhere—in Hutchins's conviction that great books do their work merely through the decontextualized pedagogy of reading that Hutchins's program promoted—a program that presumed to be able to transmit isolable and autonomous bundles of knowledge to isolable and autonomous reader-receptors.

Dewey's critique of Hutchins, then, also offers a glimpse of a crucial argument about art, or what Rosenblatt calls in her 1931 dissertation "the nature of the artistic experience" (309)—an argument that, like Rosenblatt's later theorizations, is intricately knit up with a larger pragmatic-progressive philosophy concerning the nature of learning and the dynamics of social change. After all, it was only one year before, in 1935, that Dewey published *Art as Experience*, his thorny if often romantic defense of art as the supreme means by which social morals are developed; and this is a book that I argue provided Rosenblatt with a crucial interlocutor for her later theorizations of the "aesthetic stance"—by which an agent's most self-reflective and critical textual transactions can be undertaken. For Dewey, as for Rosenblatt, cultural artifacts do not

⁷⁴ Indeed, Dewey's 1938 *Experience and Education* was written to correct some of the educational progressivists' overzealous applications of his own theories of education, especially as put forth in his 1916 *Democracy and Education*, as when he argues in that later book that "an educational philosophy which professes to be based on the idea of freedom may become as dogmatic as ever was the traditional education which is reacted against" (22).

accrue significance as extractable doses of universally valid ethical guidance. This Rosenblatt argues most vividly through her denial, in *Literature as Exploration*, that there exists such a thing as the “generic reader” or the “generic literary work” (32)—readerly responses or textual stimuli whose meanings are entirely stable and predictable.⁷⁵ Cultural meanings, these theorists argue, are more accurately understood as relational instances of self-world interaction and knowledge-building. Dewey writes in *Art as Experience* that “art” may be housed by a “product,” but that its essence, its value and meaning, is never absolute; this essence is constituted instead by “what the product does with and in experience” (3). In *Literature as Exploration*, published only three years after Dewey’s tract, Rosenblatt applies this concept specifically to the literary work, describing the reading of literature as producing a similar intermingling of the materially original—“the creation of something that has not existed before”—and the reader-specific interpretations that activate a text’s relevance, or add for each new reader “a new element of experience to life” (36). Through the lens of these experience-based claims, Hutchins’s “great books” proposal—and its attendant theory of literacy learning—counts as a misstep not for promoting a shared cultural program, but rather, as Dewey puts it, for its tacit “belief in the existence of fixed and authoritative principles as truths that are not to be questioned” (951).

I have argued before that Rosenblatt’s most mature theorization of what I call in this dissertation a “textual transaction”—by which textual engagements with culture, through reading and writing, are understood to activate a reciprocally conditioning relationship between agent,

⁷⁵ Unless otherwise noted, all of this chapter’s quotations from *Literature as Exploration* are taken from the original 1938 edition.

environment, and cultural meaning⁷⁶—undergirded all of Rosenblatt’s inquiries from the very beginnings of her career, although not named as such; and that this paradigm was influenced even more by early twentieth-century Boasian anthropology, and Fernand Baldensperger’s and I. A. Richards’s anthropologically-inflected investigations into literary comparatism and rhetoric, respectively, than by Dewey’s mid-century explication of transaction, as articulated with Arthur Bentley in 1949 in their co-authored *Knowing and the Known*. In this chapter, I go one step further, to suggest that—because of Rosenblatt’s early devotion to a pragmatic-progressive philosophy that was distinctly transaction-like—Dewey’s earlier forays into the philosophy of art (like his interventions into Hutchins’s “great books” program) are also more relevant to Rosenblatt’s developing theories of transaction and stance than that later work of Dewey’s, in which the term transaction was first actually used in this sense. Understood thus, Rosenblatt’s transactional theory—and specifically her retheorization of aesthetics into the “aesthetic stance”—did not emerge chronologically from Dewey’s late work; nor does it stand—as some critics claim that it does—as a pale imitation, or even misapplication, of Dewey’s late philosophies of social thought (e.g. Allen; Dressman and Webster). Instead, I show in this chapter that Rosenblatt’s work—and specifically her work on the “aesthetic stance”—developed in close but transformational dialogue with Dewey’s work of the nineteen-thirties, just as much as it developed out of close but transformational dialogue with the literary critical and cultural-anthropological thought of her time.

⁷⁶ As when Rosenblatt argues that transaction describes the way that “each element” in a literacy event—agent, environment, and the meaning attributes to an instance of language—“conditions and is conditioned by the other in a mutually constituted situation” (“Transaction” 1364).

What constitutes these transformations? First, Rosenblatt was unique among members of this milieu for inquiring—even in her earliest work—specifically into the dynamics of reading and writing, and, moreover, for beginning to theorize these activities as interrelated practices. As previous chapters have explored, Rosenblatt, Boas, Baldensperger and Richards shared a progressive-pragmatic framework that strove to integrate the reality of perceptual variety and inherited biases (“stock”) with the continued conviction that carefully undertaken cross-cultural inquiry could foment both personal and social renovations. Unlike these peers, however, Rosenblatt mined these convictions for their specific implications for literacy instruction, and moreover, for literacy instruction that focused on literature but refused to capitulate to both the aestheticist ahistoricism and the dusty antiquarianism that she saw as the two polarized approaches that interwar U.S. literary studies, as a discipline, presented as its main methodological options.⁷⁷ As this final sections of this chapter will show, Rosenblatt’s *Literature as Exploration* reveals a relationship to Dewey’s work similar to that she had to the work of Boas, Baldensperger, and Richards. Dewey’s *Art and Experience* applies his pragmatic-progressive commitments to the realm of art, and explores the kinds of “consummatory experience” (163) that he sees cultural engagements alone to allow; Rosenblatt applies like commitments more specifically to agents’ engagements with literature or cultural texts, and to the specific ways the classroom can encourage such engagements.

Indeed, this particular focus on the classroom constitutes the second way that Rosenblatt’s work can be seen not as a mere application but as a transformation of Dewey’s inquiries into the nature

⁷⁷ Of course, Rosenblatt’s 1931 dissertation in French comparatism offered a third alternative to these conceptualizations of literary study.

of art and its social uses. Rosenblatt's *Literature as Exploration*, especially in light of her later theories, can be read as launching a defense of a Deweyan aesthetics specifically for English studies pedagogies, and defending the way that such an aesthetics can be pedagogically utilized for—and can transfer across—a range of critically engaged literacy acts, whether traditionally “aesthetic” (i.e. literature-focused) or not. And it must be noted that this marks a surprising departure from Dewey. As I will show below, the Dewey of *Art as Experience*—even given his well-known innovations as a philosopher of learning and supreme fountainhead of progressive education—hesitates over the immediately practicable educational uses he sees his theory of art to enable. Rosenblatt shows no such hesitation. Instead—if with a sometimes heedless edge of bravura—Rosenblatt justifies literature, as she later justifies her “aesthetic stance,” as the best means by which learners can understand the dynamics by which culturally relevant meaning is made, and the best means by which learners can be encouraged to participate in, and even help to reform, the larger cultures in which they live. This provides the more integrative model of the “artistic experience” that Rosenblatt pled for—on specifically pedagogical grounds—as early as her 1931 dissertation, despite that project's generic status as a scholarly work of literary comparatism.

The genealogy of the “aesthetic stance” offered by this chapter moreover highlights the significance of Rosenblatt's later retheorization of the “aesthetic” as, in of itself, a “stance”—an attitude, or epistemological position, towards one's own engagements with cultural texts, and towards one's own engagement with the literacy dynamics that this dissertation describes as undergirding “textual transactions.” Of course, the aesthetic's complementary, Rosenblatt's “efferent stance,” aligns with the implicit learning theory that Dewey repudiates in Hutchins's

curricular proposals. Just as Rosenblatt's efferent stance constitutes an attitude towards literacy that presumes text to be universally legible, univocal, and meaningful independent of immediate context, so does Dewey critique Hutchins's unchecked presumption that cultural objects do their most edifying work when considered vehicles for entirely stable and therefore detachable cultural ideals. The difference between Dewey and Rosenblatt is that Dewey's critique leaves implicit the distinctions that Rosenblatt's later work makes explicit, especially as this cultural theory might apply specifically to literacy events. While Rosenblatt's "aesthetic stance" can be understood as fulfilling Dewey's recommended replacement for a "great books" paradigm, promoting a mode of cultural attention that tends towards self-critical and situation-aware participation in the making of meaning from texts, this focus on "stance" as the enabling force for such participation is not work that Dewey himself performs, as relates specifically to reading and writing. This chapter also thus shows this "aesthetic stance" to develop not only from the implicit dialogue Rosenblatt initiates with Dewey, through the distinctions she draws, in *Literature as Exploration*, between the "artistic" and the more purely and problematically "esthetic" paradigms of literature. Her "aesthetic stance" thus also develops from her more pointedly anthropological inquiry into what she calls, in 1946, a "cultural approach" to reading literature—work crucially distinct from emerging U.S. New Critical theories about literature's edifying qualities, and literature's subsequent best uses for the classroom, especially as understood through Cleanth Brooks and Robert Penn Warren's *Understanding Poetry*, published the same year as *Literature as Exploration*, and John Crowe Ransom's 1941 *The New Criticism*. Indeed, Rosenblatt's focus on stance—which, she later explains, "reflects a reader's purpose" (*Transactional* 1372), in contrast to a New Critical focus on technique and the kind of readerly hygiene also discussed in my previous chapter—allows Rosenblatt to underscore and more

closely investigate the relatively agentic powers held by the situated reader and writer as she navigates acts of meaning-making through and with a given set of linguistic-cultural norms. I argue that Rosenblatt's "aesthetic" forms of reading and writing thus help learners discover the main mechanism by which their literacy knowledge, more largely, is developed.

To be sure, and I will explore in this chapter's final sections, Rosenblatt's late-career uptake of the term "aesthetic" might be considered a branding mistake, especially when the term is understood more colloquially: implying a universal set of principles about artistic merit, often considered discernable in the object alone (or manifest in purely "formal" features). I would argue, in fact, that the baggage this term carries has kept the implications of Rosenblatt's theory from being fully realized in the both the writing studies and the literary studies literature, regardless of how well her transactional paradigm aligns with current inquiries into the ecological means by which reading and writing events produce meaning, from both a literary critical and a writing studies perspective. Moreover, and as I will show, Rosenblatt herself displays ambivalence about the felicity of this inherited concept of the "aesthetic," at least in her early work, before she reinterpreted the term for her more mature theorization of transaction. My second chapter outlined the argument her dissertation took up with late Victorian aestheticism, and the similarity between this critique and Boas's analysis of the "aesthetical dispositions" ("Study" 139) that prize deduction, abstraction, and ahistoricism, and that willfully discount the ways that observers' subjectivities effect meaning-making variety. This chapter shows Rosenblatt's *Literature as Exploration* continuing to manifest markedly mixed feelings about the term "aesthetic," rejecting the deliberately dilettantish absorptions implied by a "purely esthetic" style of literate engagement, and preferring the term "artistic," arguably for its connotations of a

more active and constructive literate agent. This contextualization helps to underscore the extent to which her later “aesthetic stance” needs to be understood as a rigorous retheorization of the term aesthetic itself.

Thus recontextualized, this “aesthetic stance” can be recognized as relevant to more than a narrowly defined subfield of student-centered literary studies or reader-response theory, as Rosenblatt’s legacy can sometimes imply. As Rosenblatt begins to explore in *Literature as Exploration*, a more integrative view of the aesthetic begins to link production and reception as unified by a shared attitudes towards the mutability of text-based meaning and towards the self as a constructive cultural participant. Where efferent reading and writing acts are equally unquestioning of the customs and agendas that invariably shape the meanings that these acts produce, and reproduce, aesthetic reading and writing acts are equally self-reflective about their own generative yet culturally situated powers. By recognizing and purposively activating this “aesthetic stance,” then, the literate agent can better recognize and activate the essential ethical role she can play not only in cultural appreciation but also cultural reform.

Transaction shows literacy to be most properly understood as a cultural practice, whether the agent recognizes it as such; the “aesthetic stance” encourages such recognition, as well as the active “exploration,” as Rosenblatt might have it, of the powers of the cultural practitioner to not only transfer but transform culture knowledge. In this way, Rosenblatt’s “aesthetic stance” offers a particularly pointed contribution to college-level literacy learning and instruction, as relates to both reading and writing—but only once “literacy,” not only as a practice of decoding, but as a

practice of making culturally situated and culturally relevant meaning,⁷⁸ is itself conceived in its broadest, most culturally embedded, or, in Brian Street's nomenclature, "ideological" terms. Indeed, Rosenblatt's aesthetic theory gains new force for questions of transformational transfer—across both intercultural domains and intrapersonal dimensions of literacy—when contextualized within this broader construct of literacy. And while this was a construct of literacy that Rosenblatt never acknowledges in her work, I argue it should still be understood as bedrock to—and illustrative of—her own progressive-pragmatic commitments and aspirations.

Autonomous and Cultural Constructs of Literacy and College-Level Literacy Instruction

My previous chapter described an autonomous construct of transfer—a “carry and unload” model, in Wardle's terms—which, somewhat like Hutchins's implied theory of learning, imagines agents' literacy efforts to effect only the reapplication of isolable literacy knowledge and skills; and directs those efforts towards the replication of norms, not the critical investigation and reformation of those norms. Such an “autonomous” construct of transfer rests on and enables in turn the autonomous construct of literacy that this section will outline. This is a construct that I will argue still undergirds a great deal of college-level literacy instruction, whether explicitly focused on reading or writing, literature or composition—and to which Rosenblatt's “aesthetic stance” offers a key alternative. Especially if learners can recognize, theorize, and undertake Rosenblatt's aesthetic stance purposively, it can encourage in them a new meta-awareness about

⁷⁸ Here I draw too on Street's 1997 definition of literacy, as grounded in his concept of a literacy practice, which, as he writes, accounts for “not only the observable behavior around literacy...but also *the concepts and meanings brought to those events and which give them meaning*” (“The Implications” 50, my emphasis).

the transactional nature—culturally embedded, experientially varied, but relatively agentic—of their own practices as readers and writers. But first the nature and pervasive quality of this autonomous model of literacy itself needs to be glossed.

Brian Street's 1984 *Literacy in Theory and Practice* identifies this autonomous model as constituting the West's dominant understanding of literacy. Consolidating a theoretical movement that had been long brewing within sociology, anthropology, linguistic and educational theory, Street's book launched a full-frontal attack on this paradigm, which he saw to undergird not only most literacy programming and policies but also the social hierarchies such programs and policies reinforced. Street's objection rests on two main reproofs.

Street's first key observation—made in a culturally relativist tenor similar to Boas—is that literacy capabilities have been most often framed in problematically progressionist terms, whereby, as he writes, there is a presumed “single direction in which literacy development can be traced” (2). Such a presumption colors our understanding of language-based change as it takes place both in the individual and in society (5): with the student seen to move from the darkness of illiteracy to literate enlightenment—even, of course, as the standards for what counts as “literate” continue to shift; and with cultures likewise considered by many to move from primitive to civilized, oral to written, or developing to developed.⁷⁹

⁷⁹ Carl Kaestle, among others, attests to these fluctuating definitions of literacy and their relation to both technological and socio-cultural changes. Consider the different and shifting implications and values that have historically been ascribed to “signatory” literacy, “functional” literacy, “cultural” literacies (as this chapter will discuss), “new media” literacy, or a variety of “critical” literacies.

Street then observes that such progressionist and unilineal assumptions rely on an essentializing, skill-focused definition of what it means to know how to read and write. This is the paradigm he calls the “autonomous” model of literacy, one that imagines communicative competency as an “independent variable,” a catch-all ability applicable to any kind of linguistic content, in any situation, as long as its language, broadly understood, remains constant (2). Especially by the standardized constructs of reading and writing know-how that emerged with the common schools, literacy is thus imagined as a feature of progress unrestricted by context and whose benefits are universally transportable—a model that also supports the “carry and unload” understanding of transfer that this dissertation sees Rosenblatt’s transactional theory to challenge. This idea of autonomy, applied to reading and writing, has implications for social thought: it helped to perpetuate what in 1979 Harvey Graff characterized as the “literacy myth”—the enduring belief that an education in reading and writing will automatically and by itself advance any individual’s well-being and social mobility. Even more specific to instructional practice, this “autonomous” model also perpetuates the belief that reading and writing abilities constitute little more than “skills in a box” (Schoenbach et al 7)—“developmental” features of lower-level education that need to be mastered before learners can take on higher-level tasks such as interpretation or critique, or intervene into the production or reformation of culturally significant arguments.

In contrast to these assumptions, Street posits that the values and benefits ascribed to literacy acts are never universal; and, as such, that these acts cannot be considered as governed by a single skill set. Instead, acts of reading and writing—or, more precisely, the values and capabilities they are considered to represent—are culturally specific and various. As Street influentially suggests,

“we would probably more appropriately refer to ‘literacies’ than to any single ‘literacy’” (8)—a multiplicity of behaviors particular to different histories, different present contexts, and different communicative interests. Indeed, and by such pluralism, literacy should be conceptualized as a “social practice” (10) inseparable from “particular social institutions and functions” (97). For Street, this understanding of literacy represents a more appropriately “ideological” model—ideological because, by this dissertation’s understanding, it is cultural, shaped by the various exigencies or social demands of a particular time, place, and situation.

At a thirty year remove, and from the perspective of critical theory, Street’s culturally sensitive argument may seem largely self-evident. As literacy has successfully morphed into literacies, so has literature into literatures, culture into cultures, and even theory into increasingly varied, specialized and relativized explorations of media and method. As educational researchers now situate reading and writing practices within the specifics of context, motivation and identity, so has it become orthodox for literary and composition scholars to situate their own approaches and materials within the socio-cultural allegiances that they see such approaches and materials to inevitably imply. Yet Street’s critique of “autonomous literacy” remains germane because still unheeded within the most practical and explicit instantiations of literacy instruction, even—even especially—at the college level. It is at this level—involving the often naturalized expectations post-secondary faculty hold about students’ performances of reading, often gleaned through their writing—that Rosenblatt’s aesthetic stance can provide particular guidance. As Street suggests, the autonomous model is particularly powerful wherever readers’ and writers’ core practices remain unscrutinized, and when a situation’s conventions become naturalized because

unexplicated. Rosenblatt's retheorization of the aesthetic, however, describes the agentic meaning-making dynamics that can activate such scrutiny and explication.

More particularly, where, in college-level English studies classrooms, can we see this autonomous model of literacy at work? It might be argued that all that English studies scholars and instructors do is scrutinize and explicate their "literacy practice"; after all, scholarly methods for reading—including various forms of close, resistant or symptomatic reading—have been, for almost a century, endlessly theorized and hotly contested. But I argue that these methods mostly constitute broader analytics for reading, not descriptions of, or investigations into, the core dynamics of learners' reading. In many cases, in fact, these core dynamics of reading are rationalistically overleaped, or willfully dismissed, in the search for purer (e.g. more scholarly) approaches to text, as I also explored on my previous chapter on "stock responses." Michael Warner has characterized this attenuated, academic conceptualization of reading as one that concerns not "reading per se" but instead one or another "style of rereading, or a discourse about reading" (15); in other words, this mode of "reading" focuses not on what readers *do*, but on what readers *ought* to be doing with what they have *already read*. Instead of offering new understandings of the reading experience itself—the way that, say, different kinds of attention, generic features, conventional purposes, imaginative powers, belief systems and preconceived notions interact—such methods instead prescriptively delimit the purportedly proper boundaries of that experience, making a paradigm in which the reader is recognized less as an individual agent, replete with idiosyncratic habits and interests, than as a carefully calibrated instrument designed to carry out a highly idealized form of critique.

None of this is to suggest that such “discourse about” reading—including, as my last chapter explored, recent theorizations of close, distant, deep, surface or recuperative approaches—is not a crucial aspect of any inquiry into the value and nature of literary and cultural study, or that it is not crucial to classroom investigations of these issues. All rigorous disciplinary work relies on carefully theorized methods and aims. What remains problematic, Warner suggests, is that academic modes of reading—which Warner specifies as “critical reading”—have become, in an unwitting echo of Street’s own terms, “the folk ideology of a learned profession, so close to us that we seldom feel the need to explain it” (14). I would go even further: that in many cases, because such folk ideologies also exchange description (of process) for prescription (of theoretical approach), even the most abstracted “discourse about reading” are allowed to masquerade, even by its very nomenclature, as the rigorous exploration of “reading per se.” As a result, and often because of a scholar-instructor’s eagerness to discuss and teach what Warner calls his field’s “discipline of commentary” (23), what are assumed to be universal are perhaps the most potent differences to be found between readers, in the form of the original text-reader-context dynamics (“transactions”) that underlie their experiences with “reading per se.” Left buried are the bedrock engagements, hesitations, and subjective speculations upon which rest all of our convictions about the value or accuracy of one or another claim to meaning; little admitted is the fact that every event of reading, from the most “academic” to the least, are all supported by values contingent on context, interest, habit, knowledge, and credulity. Moreover, and as my last chapter also suggested, such an autonomous model of reading makes it particularly easy to also adhere to an autonomous model of writing—one autonomously independent not only of culture, but also of an agent’s attendant practice of reading itself.

Such a trend also carries over into writing and composition courses, those places where explorations of literacy's processes and ideologies are often the presumed point—yet where practitioners often continue to conceptualize “reading” in its gerund form, and as a product, not a process, of intellectual effort.⁸⁰ While acts of reading are certainly central to the tasks of the writing classroom, reading tends to be conceptualized as a transparent conduit either for content or for text features seen to embody generic writing conventions. And given this static conception, the skills one brings to bear during such acts are mostly discussed as a matter of intensity, approaches distinguished merely as better (closer, deeper, slower) or worse (more superficial). This makes a progressionist scale of its own, one neglecting to acknowledge that different tasks (reading, say, a textbook to study for a test, a peer's draft to offer feedback, or an historical document to reconfirm already-known facts), once taken up by different readers with different interests, might require more individuated approaches for the making of knowledge relevant to that specific transaction. The same way that literary studies has shunted off any responsibility for investigating writing as a situation-specific process, the field of writing studies has taken little account of the mutability and particularities of the grounded, individuated practices of different readers. Lisa Bosley's 2008 study of critical reading constructs in college composition courses—aptly titled “I Don't Teach Reading”—offers suggestive evidence of this habitual disregard. Although the composition courses she studied, like many, were built around the principle and practice of “critical reading,” Bosley found that even being asked to define that foundational academic reading construct “made most [college English instructors] uncomfortable” (292)—one instructor even calling it “a slippery term” (298). One can hardly imagine instructors

⁸⁰ Over the last two decades, a number of scholars have noted writing studies' historic and continued neglect of reading (e.g. Jolliffe, Donahue and Salvatori). Recent work has begun to retheorize this connection (e.g. Sullivan, Jolliffe, Carillo).

responding the same way when being asked to define “brainstorming,” “argumentation,” “peer review,” or “analysis,” or any of the other well-theorized practices around which such student-centered writing courses are frequently organized, set as many of them supposedly are on a kind of academic demystification.⁸¹

In both of the cases discussed above—the classroom devoted to literary or cultural studies, and the classroom devoted to composition—a largely after-the-fact conception of reading enables the presumption that “reading per se,” in all its experiential variety, is not the college-level instructor’s concern. As a result, and perhaps because reading is such a pervasive factor of postsecondary learning, the specifics of one or another more context-specific practice (as determined by one or another instructor, or one or another set of academic goals) can become tacitly naturalized as constituting a capability that should, at least by the time we reach the college classroom, be common to all. At another level, too—in a long tradition justified by the connections between religious textual exegesis and contemporary hermeneutics—reading (not unlike writing) is also most often conceptualized as a reverentially private act: a chamber of knowing defined by remaining sealed, whose public registration can only speak to its after-effects. As such, what Rita Felski rather mystically calls “the mysterious event of reading” (11)—in which she means “reading per se”—is largely considered both beyond and beneath the

⁸¹ The most recent 2014 WPA (Writing Program Administrators) Outcomes Statement for First Year Composition is instructional in this regard: although the subcategory “Critical Thinking, Reading and Composing” comprises one of only three main outcomes (the others being “Rhetorical Knowledge” and “Processes,”) “critical reading” itself is never defined, or even referred to again in either the overview or the details of this subcategory. All instead is subsumed under the evaluative and analytical work performed by “critical thinking”—as if reading itself were merely the transparent vehicle for such thinking, and did not warrant any further explanation. Needless to say, the specific processes, practices and conventions that constitute writing do not, in this document, suffer this same obfuscation.

scholar's purview, at once a dimension of learning too basic, on the one hand, and too psychologically, psycholinguistically, or even possibly even spiritually, inaccessible, on the other, to warrant much direct investigation. Consequently, most readers in the college context tend to assume that, no matter the different texts, situations, questions and interests they may bring, the readings they do alone with their books all tap the same general set of capabilities—whether considered already-known or altogether unknowable, or some mystified mix of the two.

Setting his sights on more integrated views of literacy, some of Brian Street's work of the previous two decades, often in collaboration with Mary Lea, has begun to research the extent to which writing in the postsecondary realm is understood in similar terms—as constituting autonomous skills that can (or possibly should) remain unexplicated, even as facility with writing is used as the main gauge for instructor's evaluation of learning, through classroom performance, essays and exams (e. g. 2013, and with Mary Lea 2010, 1998⁸²).⁸³ For Street, this shows more than a mismatch between learning outcome and evaluative method. By his pithy argument, an “absence of explicitness” at the level of literacy expectations also means that “variety becomes a problem rather than a resource” (“Academic” 198). Because an unexplicated set of writing standards can appear to represent a kind of universalism, a paradigm of literacy can be produced that can neither account for, nor capitalize on, differences between student capabilities, interests and values. This is an obvious shortcoming as concerns the inevitable diversity that students

⁸² In a 2010 article, Lea and Street also connect “academic literacy” to k-12 education, which brings their concept closer to the conversations in k-12 education research and theory currently centered on “disciplinary literacy.”

⁸³ In this, of course, Street joins a decades-long tradition in writing studies scholarship that has sought to “right” the “misconception,” as Douglas Downs and Elizabeth Wardle have put it, that students can be expected to master—and writing courses can be expected to provide an education in—a “unified academic discourse” and attendant set of universal skills (“Righting” 552).

increasingly bring to the classroom, as access to higher education continues in many ways to democratize and globalize, and, moreover, as higher education administrators continue to claim such change as an advantage. But, as Street begins to suggest, this lack of explication is also a shortcoming in regards to disciplinary growth, at the level of both the individual and of the field—that is, if by growth we mean the development of new and varied knowledge from established already-knowns. For while many students arrive at college appropriately “skilled” in one set of literacy conventions, Street observes (after Mary Lea’s research findings) that “the demands of academic literacy seem to deskill them” (“Academic” 197)—to devalue the established abilities they come in with, as indicating a deficit, even while expecting new college-level abilities, since conceived of as a universal skill, to have been already established. This phenomenon paradoxically results from what Street calls the “technicist” attitude towards literacy (198 “Academic”): by which students can be branded incapable of performing a purportedly common capability, and thus short-circuited from the production of new knowledge through writing.

The prevalence of this autonomous paradigm is also revealed by the way that many academic modes of critical reading can insist upon a kind of readerly hygiene: a stripping away of the inherited and presumptuous already-knowns that the reading subject would otherwise tend—or, more precisely, has already inevitably tended—to “read into” a text. As literary theorists’ long standing problem with “stock responses” shows, and as my last chapter explored, much post-secondary reading instruction implicitly considers itself a sort of cure for existing bad habits: for the fact that students “read in all the ways they aren’t supposed to,” as Warner wryly puts it, whether too sentimentally, or too literally, with too much presumption, or too much reverence

(13). But ignored in this work of critical cleansing is of course the whole host of sentiments, presumptions, literal-minded acceptances and moments of reverence that are not only disciplinarily acceptable, but necessary for the fulfillment of one literacy task or another—and which constitute what Street calls the “ideologies” that undergird all literacy acts.

Many conceptions of specifically literary engagement thus continue, albeit innocently, to rest on the autonomous literacy model that Street rebukes: both by reinforcing the assumption that there exists some core practice of reading that is in and of itself developmentally basic and transparent; and, relatedly, by failing to own up to, or to make explicit, their own culturally specific allegiances, allegiances that of course in themselves belie the presumption of a single common skill. Even so, ideologies of the kind that Street describes run deep—ideologies conceived not merely as deterministic and often totalizing forces from without, but which, in a more pluralistic and interactional key, also constitute internalized cultural structures that are also variously shaped by the agents who take them up and make them their own. Unpacking these autonomous models of literacy and language can thus be belief-bendingly difficult to accomplish, especially for readers practicing at the achieved end of their literacy paradigm. For, as Street reminds us, “the faith... in the consequence of a particular literacy practice” is always supported by an attendant “faith in the particular social conventions within which such practice became established” (*Literacy in Practice* 29); reading and writing practices, for students and scholars alike, are bound up in institutional and personal affiliations that can go to the very core of one’s sense of self and agency. Nonetheless, current college classrooms’ habitual silence on matters of “reading per se,” combined with the continued trend towards outsourcing writing instruction to writing courses that operate on a preparatory model, can have invidious effects, not least for

implying that difficulty with a literacy task is more the sign of student deficiency than a necessary by-product of any engagement with new materials, methods, or scholarly aims.

Against such habits, Rosenblatt's "aesthetic stance" can help learners account more self-consciously—and thus exploit more purposively—the transactional dynamics undergirding "reading per se," and their relation to writing per se, as well as helping them to recognize different literacy practice's often naturalized but culturally specific underpinnings. While Rosenblatt certainly acknowledges the power of applied method—the shared norms and affiliations that help constitute what Warner calls a "discipline of commentary" (23)—her transactional theory also insists on acknowledging as equally important the more idiosyncratic forces that any literacy event necessarily brings into play: the relational and mutable systems of individual meaning-making that imbue any literacy act with any agent-specific sense of relevance and value. By this, read- and written-meaning is irreparably shaped for the agent by her ever-changing diversity of experience; and this is a diversity that can be tracked both within one agent across time and between agents in one moment of time. For, as Rosenblatt argues, all literacy acts necessarily avail themselves of reader's own "residue of past psychological events involving words and their referents" (1373): of the individual's own ever evolving store of experience with language's memorable allusions to world. Or, as also quoted in the previous chapter:

the residue of the individual's past transactions—in particular, natural and social contexts—constitutes what can be termed a linguistic-experiential reservoir. [...]

Embodying funded assumptions, attitudes and expectations about language and about the

world, this inner capital is all that each of us has to draw on in speaking, listening, writing or reading. (1367)

Such “funded assumptions”—distinct to each agent, and inevitably coloring the meaning that each agent makes—can be understood as instances of the socially embedded if changeable and varied cultures that Street insists so profoundly shape each literacy event. And as such, the very “discipline of commentary” that Warner observes most literary and cultural studies classrooms to organize themselves around is itself a moving target, undergirded by varied cultures of practice; as Rosenblatt observes, “any secondary frameworks, such as schemata or strategies, are not stable entities but configurations in a changing dynamic process.” Indeed, these cultures of practice are ones that “center on the human being speaking, writing, reading and transacting with a specific environment in its broadening circles of context,” whether highly personal, disciplinary, or cultural, at its various possible levels of specificity (1392).

In this way, Rosenblatt’s aesthetic stance also helps to expose the explanatory limits of an autonomous model, at whatever developmental level it is being assumed. For if we admit that all literacy acts are constituted by fluid and evolving, situation-specific aims and forces that emanate from within but that are also forever colored by without, then a literacy practice cannot be considered the mere application of a masterable set of skills, skills that offer the reader a purportedly transparent lens through which meaning ought to be accurately gleaned. Instead, the work of critical commentary is shown to be always intimately connected to—indeed, necessarily continuous with—original, experiential, and purposeful engagements. As a result, any “discourse about” reading or writing cannot presume to undertake wholesale renovation of readers’ responses or cultural allegiances; rather, such reading and writing models—here in line with

Street's point—need to account for those cultural allegiances as the inevitable ground upon which all acts of cultural engagement and criticism take place. As my last chapter also showed, the datable and socio-historical colorations that in their early work Rosenblatt and Richards were tempted to reject wholesale may be the only available lenses through which subjects access and reconstruct culturally relevant meaning at all, at least in their first steps of approaching and interacting with a text. These colorations, as Rosenblatt would later argue, provide the foundation for all meaning; the trick is to be able to reflect upon this fact—to recognize our habits as habits, and so to potentially reform them.

Yet Rosenblatt's model of the aesthetic-efferent continuum—describing the different and ever-changing attitudes that readers can take, whether consciously or not, towards their textual object of inquiry, and towards themselves as situated literate agents—also helps to explain the stubborn appeal of this autonomous model, especially in the critical imagination. Rosenblatt's emphasis on stance undoes the assumption that our responses, or the meaning we make of cultural artifacts, is determined simply by the nature or content of cultural input or an examined artifact, once it has been understood “correctly.” Instead, the agent's pragmatic stance towards her object of inquiry—which Rosenblatt argues “reflects the reader's purpose,” whether consciously or not (1372)—also shapes the meaning and value that a cultural artifact comes to represent at one historical moment or another. By this logic, the apparent “autonomy” of an instance of read language for a reader may indicate not the achievement of transcendent meaning, but an instance of a text's conventional codes having become, for a specific reader, so thoroughly naturalized that they *appear* universally valid or absolute. For expert readers, this phenomenon can happen with more than just a case of reductively indexical language (say, what a No Smoking sign in a

restaurant is seen to mean to signify); such naturalization can also occur with cases of more nuanced linguistic figures or moves (say, what may seem to a literary scholar the irrefutable use of irony in the voice of Henry James narrator). Rosenblatt's specific "efferent stance"—in which, as she describes it, the reader "disengages his attention as much as possible from the personal and qualitative elements in his response" (*Reader* 27)—can be understood as this very *presumption* of autonomy (whether presumed for the sake of efficiency in communication, or because of the kind of nativism that discursive expertise can foster).

In the following sections of this chapter, I show how a recontextualization of Rosenblatt's aesthetic stance shows this stance to provide the perspective necessary to challenge that nativism that the efferent stance, on its own, can promote, as equally in readers as in writers. As Rosenblatt suggests, the aesthetic stance, of the two, activates the more self-consciously situated approach to textual meaning, an approach that recognizes, questions and even expands the cultural conventions that can otherwise appear to make meanings and their values seem static and unconditional, non-contingent. This aesthetic stance, as she puts it, encourages "recognition of the individual consciousness mediating between symbol and referent," (*Reader* 43); it is through the aesthetic stance that Rosenblatt suggests that the dynamics undergirding reading can be most fully and self-consciously explored. In this way, Rosenblatt's aesthetic stance also can be mobilized to inspire the very reflections on culturally embedded features of literacy that Street obliges instructors, researchers, and learners to acknowledge—the deep assumptions and biases that undergird any instance of reading and writing, and especially those acts of reading and writing that a dominant culture has deemed most edifying or valuable.

Rosenblatt and the “Aesthetic”: an Early Genealogy in Literature as Exploration

Yet why is it the “aesthetic”—and specifically the literary—that Rosenblatt posits as crucial for the self-knowing activation of, and intervention into, the transactions produced by any literacy act? This section will explore Rosenblatt’s continued reliance on—and transformation of—that very aesthetic construct that her dissertation historically contextualized and critiqued. To be sure, Rosenblatt does not formally theorize her “aesthetic stance” until her later work in the 1978 *The Reader, the Text, the Poem*. Yet as early as *Literature as Exploration*—and even in her 1931 dissertation—Rosenblatt’s struggle to articulate a theory of artistic value stands as a significant attempt to begin to redefine aesthetics itself. For Rosenblatt—as the title of her first book in English suggests—“literature” is most edifying when considered as a form of “exploration”: an “event,” as she would put it in a later essay involving a self in time and space (“The Poem”).

In short, Rosenblatt should be recognized as setting herself, very early on, against Street’s later model of “autonomous” literacy, which positions literate agents as uniform receptors of text, and texts as static repositories of uniformly legible meaning and value. As one of her most famous passages from *Literature as Exploration* attests:

There is no such thing as the generic reader or a generic literary work; there are in reality only the potential millions of individual readers of the potential millions of individual literary works. The novel or poem or play exists, after all, only in interactions with specific minds. The reading of any work of literature is, of necessity, an individual and

unique occurrence involving the mind and emotions of some particular reader. We may generalize about similarities among such interactions, but we cannot evade the realization that there are actually only innumerable separate responses to individual works of art.

(32)

To be sure, this early passage does not recognize as much as her later work would explore—or, indeed, as much as her earlier work in comparatism so explicitly explores—the ideological or cultural situatedness of any individual literacy event. Yet Rosenblatt still strongly insists here on the constructive singularity of the context-specific reading experience, which she would later parallel to the constructive singularity of the context-specific writing experience. Moreover, she extends this focus on the reader’s experiential singularity to make a claim also about the experientially singular nature of literature—that this construct can itself be defined by its context-specific nature. Literature is not literature, she suggests, if read otherwise.

My last chapter posited stock responses as a central problematic to *Literature as Exploration*, as well as a central problematic for English studies more largely, asking how—without capitulating to an psychologically retrograde, didactic theory of literacy learning—readers learn from the experience of literature without merely reading into that literature their own already existent presuppositions. As I showed, Rosenblatt theorized the efferent stance as that tendency to rely too exclusively on such presuppositions; so that efferent readings, left uncomplicated by more “aesthetic” inquiry, do not engender effect transformations by and through the text, but only engender the replication of already-knows. That said, the efferent stance is also a crucial feature of text-based communication—the unreflecting foundation of all literacy acts. The efferent stance promotes the reproduction of meanings and values across boundaries, through the use of

codes that are assumed to be largely transparent and univocal. The aesthetic, in its turn, initiates more experientially and situationally sensitive reading and writing. Yet neither stance should be conceptualized as entirely separable from each other. Although a largely efferent stance may encourage either-or paradigms of literacy, such paradigms are an illusion that the transactional model belies. Rosenblatt, therefore, is careful not frame these stances as polarities; she rather describes these them as attitudes towards text, situation, and the role of the literate self that strengthen and recede, “bringing certain aspects [of the literacy experience] into the center of attention, and pushing others to the fringes of consciousness” (“Transaction” 1372). Required for a genuine genealogy of this relativistic aesthetic stance, then, is a careful unpacking of Rosenblatt’s own evolving critique, in *Literature as Exploration*, of these more rigid and autonomous forms of aestheticism, as they manifest in the classroom.

A key tension in *Literature as Exploration* can be found in Rosenblatt’s attempt to articulate an alternative to—or, more precisely, to cut a middle way between—the two reigning but traditionally opposed educational uses of literature that she saw the American academy over the last fifty years as having developed: what Rosenblatt calls the “social approach,” on the one hand—which “see[s] in literature only social documents” (31)—and what she calls the “purely esthetic approach,” on the other, in which art is seen as “a refuge from brute reality” (4). Her title’s proposal that literature stands as a form of experiential “exploration” can be understood as an attempt to integrate these two perspectives, as can her later emphasis on the continuum that, by definition, links the efferent and the aesthetic. But a challenge remains—which in many ways is a complement to the “stock responses” problematic: how to remove the aesthetic from its

separate-spheres connotation, and to reconceptualize it as a question of stance, without yet robbing literature of what Rosenblatt understands as its special, innovating force.

The so-called “social approach” is one of *Literature as Exploration*’s prime targets of scorn; it is paralleled to an historical educational didacticism that she characterizes, arguably after the work of her dissertation, as “Victorian,” and which, by her telling, “demonstrated the sterility of seeking in literature only moral lessons” (4). But such didacticism is problematic not for its assumption about the social uses of literature per se, since Rosenblatt is careful to defend literature’s social relevance throughout *Literature as Exploration*, encouraging teachers to choose literature closely connected to the interests and experiences of student-readers, and to help students to draw rich connections between literature and their own lives. Instead, Rosenblatt’s critique centers on this approach’s assumption about the nature of reading, and of the reading subject—an approach that assumes, as she writes, “the reader as a blank photographic plate upon which was projected the series of images offered by a literary work” (232). The theory of learning that undergirds this use of literature, then, is not so far from Hutchins’s presumption, in Dewey’s assessment, that texts present a vicarious experience of “truths that are not to be questioned,” but can merely be prescribed and swallowed like the good medicine they’d been long assumed to be.

Nor was Rosenblatt alone in this critique of the didactic uses of literature. Brooks and Warren’s field-defining *Understanding Poetry*, published the same year as *Literature as Exploration*, posits a similar claim: just as Rosenblatt argues that “it would be unfortunate if the literature teacher should look upon books only as a series of documents illustrative of various

psychological, sociological, or philosophical problems” (35), so do Brooks and Warren write that “Nor is [the poem] to be thought of, as the ‘message hunters’ would seem to have it, as a kind of box...in which a ‘truth’ or a fine ‘sentiment’ is hidden” (18). Like many scholars of the burgeoning discipline of literary studies, Rosenblatt was in search of a new theory of literary value, as well as a new model by which it might be accessed and assessed by the reader, and thus most effectively taught in the schools. In her *Reminiscences*, Rosenblatt recalls her “dissatisfaction with what I felt to be a kind of treatment of literature”—in the American academy, at least—

in which somehow the essential nature of literature was neglected. After all, my dissertation was on art for art’s sake and ‘art as experience’...was somehow being neglected in all of these historical and philological approaches to literature (135).

As my previous chapter began to explore, Richards’s entire output as a literary theorist—especially in *Practical Criticism* and *Principles of Literary Criticism*—expresses a similar impatience with the didacticism of antiquarian histories or philosophies, and similarly promotes in its place a form of reading centered instead on exploring that “essential nature” of the literary encounter. Even more pointedly, Warren and Brooks conceive their textbook’s chief aim as helping the student to “grasp the poem as a literary construct” (iv).

Unlike Brooks and Warren, however, Rosenblatt also stipulates a definition of literature whose meaning and value is contingent on—and even constituted by, as exemplified by her protest against the concept of a “generic reader”—“interactions with specific minds” (32). Though refusing the “social approach,” Rosenblatt still refuses to retreat to its opposite shore: that “purely esthetic point of view,” so troublesome for both neglecting the situated nature of the

reader and the situatedness that imbues art with significance—or, as she puts it, for “ignoring the fact that the person experiencing the work comes to it out of a particular world and will return to it” (28), and for thus conceptualizing art to be “irrelevant to immediate human concerns” (4). Even more provocatively, Rosenblatt also suggests that such “pure” aestheticism is undergirded by the same problematic theory of learning that supports the “social approach”—this being a theory that discounts the agent-specific ideologies that color and shape all claims to meaning and worth. In this—and similar to her dissertation—Rosenblatt begins to imply that such aestheticism, in its most extreme form, is not so different from the “Victorian” idea of art against which this movement appeared to have so strongly reacted, even in its progressively updated (e.g., perhaps, Hutchins’s) “social approach.” For while the didactic and disinterested constructs of literature’s value may be distinct for their different goals, both presume a similarly predictable literate agent, or more precisely, a similarly predictable literacy practice and set of meaning-laden outcomes.

Yet Rosenblatt’s exposé of these various literary constructs—a crude instrumentalism, on the one hand, and a transcendent idealism, on the other—also shows that neither extreme gives an accurate picture of the more integrative modes by which literary experience actually enables new knowledge, or some form of learning, for and by the reader. As approaches, these may seem to manifest different kinds of attention, but as facets of the literary experience, they ought to be conceptualized as more holistically interconnected: or, as she puts it, “though the social and esthetic elements in literature may be theoretically *distinguishable*, they are in actuality *inseparable*” (31, her emphases). As such, Rosenblatt should not be seen, even this early on, as renouncing the “aesthetic” altogether—either as a literary element or a mode of attention.

Instead, *Literature as Exploration* attempts to articulate a more synthetic view of textual engagement, which disciplinary habit has disaggregated into overly extreme understandings of literary value. Rosenblatt certainly repudiates what she calls a “purely esthetic” view of literature—which is to say, extreme and ahistorical. Yet she also recommends, in its place, a more moderate, variable, human form of aestheticism, or what she calls the “personal esthetic experience of the works themselves” (35); indeed, it is this “personal esthetic experience” that, she argues, gives the “literary experience...its significance and force” (35). Moreover, Rosenblatt insists that this more properly conceived aesthetic experience cannot be dissociated from its socio-cultural sources, any more than from its socio-culturally significant reverberations. She thus embraces a pragmatic view of what might be considered, after William James, the “variety of aesthetic experiences” and the variety of the context-specific benefits such varied experiences can provide for learners. While Rosenblatt certainly objects to the reductively instrumental and one dimensional views of “use” that some educators promoted, she also refuses to embrace the separate-spheres argument that sometimes appeared its natural or only alternative, on the grounds that neither accounts enough for the situated (“cultural”) nature of the practice of reading itself, as my next section will explore.

“Towards a Cultural Approach”: Rosenblatt’s Pluralistic Turn

Read acontextually, as she often is, Rosenblatt’s varied theorizations of literacy and of literature can appear somewhat discontinuous; her work does not reveal as well as it might an historically grounded development of a fairly coherent set of inquiries and goals. As my first chapter showed, this is exacerbated by the uneven revisions Rosenblatt performed on her own projects,

and her sometime complicity in cementing the legacy of a radical unbound by any one school of thought. In speaking truth to power, she sometimes seems to assume a view from nowhere.

That said, her little read 1946 article “Towards a Cultural Approach to Literature” articulates in a way only hinted at in her earlier books the profound influence of cultural anthropology, and its attendant pluralism, on her later articulation of the “aesthetic stance.” Here she posits that “anthropologists ... have provided us with the ideological framework for our problem” (459)—a problem she defines as the attempt to reconcile acknowledged pluralism with the classic progressive goals of social betterment. Most largely, this article puts out a call for new form of postwar global solidarity—not only through the exposure to varied types of cultural content, but through a new agentic method; not only through the study of “foreign literature,” but a crucially “receptive attitude” (464) to the more local diversities of response available in the American classroom itself. By this method, and in a move Street would endorse, given his critique of pedagogies that promote a process of “de-skilling,” these immediate cultural complications that face the modern reader are therefore framed as a benefit, not a deficit; Rosenblatt argues that, by this model, “unity need not mean uniformity,” and that, moreover, “differences can be welcomed as ... a condition making for cultural fertility” (464). As such, Rosenblatt also comes to recommend a version of literature that is “not a mere mirror of life”—or a dissociable and crystalline reflection of a fixed moment of time—but instead is “itself an integral part of culture” conceived anthropologically. At this level, such a “cultural approach” also offers a significant rebuke to the newly critical approach taking root in the schools.

This is not to suggest that Rosenblatt's "cultural approach"—like her future "aesthetic stance"—does not entail its own construct of the critical. Hers, however, is a paradigm of the critical with a particular pragmatic-progressive coloration, one "based on a vital awareness of democratic values" (465) that, even more specifically,

respects the validity of other cultures and does not seek stupidly to impose our own...
yet, at the same time, discriminates between those patterns that threaten and those that
serve...the mutual helpful relations between people. (465)

As she here suggests, the "receptive attitude" she promotes as central to the "cultural approach" necessitates turning a "critical" attention not only to others or to an artifact, but also to one's own "active set of values" (465)—active because recognized as ever in play with other forces. By this model, a text's meaning is not only made or understood, but also remains constantly under revision. The "cultural approach," as such, requires the reader to navigate between what Rosenblatt calls "provincialism," on the one extreme, and a "sterile relativism," on the other, (465)—between meanings conceived, on the one hand, in such local terms that they appear naïve and incommunicable, or, on the other, in such proliferated terms that they have no relevant traction. By this, one's literacy practice can be recognized as pragmatically agentic ("active") at the same time that it is resolutely situated ("cultural") in one or another specific set of meanings and values. As an alternative to the "social approach" Rosenblatt so disdained in *Literature as Exploration*, she offers this more Boasian and subject-sensitive form of cultural engagement.

As a precursor to her later "aesthetic stance," this "cultural approach" also continues to stand in contrast to the "spatial figures" of culture that theorists like Hegeman have attributed to many cultural critics of this period, offering instead a model that is, in Kloppenberg's terms, not only

global, but “profoundly historical” (4), at the level of both its read object and its reading subject. Such resolute historicism, in fact, complicates the traditionally hard distinctions that can be drawn between read object and reading subject—and, as such, between the immediacy of practice and the apparently more permanent gains that literate agents are seen to make once they have been inoculated with skills instruction. Even so, it is important to remember that Rosenblatt—as also suggested above—did not present this philosophy of continuity as collapsing all cultural, or, indeed, epistemological, difference or distinction. Which is to say that, both here and later, Rosenblatt’s “relativism” should never be understood as absolute: it is not the sort of relativism that she disavows in a late essay as “extreme” (“Retrospect” 106). Instead, such relativism remains culturally grounded, pragmatic and relational, what she characterizes as early as 1938 as a healthy “relativity of standards” (*Literature* 144): a philosophy that admits to what Barbara Herrnstein Smith would later theorize as the “contingency of values,” but whose contingency—as Smith goes on to explain—need not sap values of their power.⁸⁴

Further, and even more sharply than in *Literature as Exploration*, Rosenblatt’s “cultural approach,” and her subsequent work defining the nature and value of literature and the literary experience, help reveal a more precise distinction between her emerging theories and those of her contemporaries. Rosenblatt differs most significantly from Brooks and Warren, for example, not by her well-known focus on the reader, but for this emerging construct of culture, literary method, and literature per se, as exemplified by the different uses to which these theorists put the concept of the “organic.” In *Understanding Poetry*, Brooks and Warren emphasize poetry itself

⁸⁴ By Smith’s useful formulation, cultural “value”—and its attendant sense of “meaning” (10)—are crucial social forces that still must be acknowledged as “always in motion” (9).

as a natural living force, yet they also posit this as a force separable and different from the human. While the poem, they argue, is not to be compared to “bricks...put together to make a wall” (19), they also resist grounding the poem’s life-source in the reader or history: instead they explain their “literary construct,” like Richards before them, as “something organic like a plant” (19),⁸⁵ with the kind of autotelic communicative quality that is bedrock also to Imagistic claims about poetry.⁸⁶ While Brooks and Warren do acknowledge that this poetic object is “rooted in experience,” or, to be more precise, in the experience of the writer (9), they do not, and in sharp contrast to Rosenblatt, suggest that the poem in itself might *constitute* experience, or, indeed, might constitute that anthropological construct of culture that shapes all that we think and do. Brooks and Warren’s “poem” instead is an outgrowth of experience, an eternal plant-like communication *of* culture, emerged from human soil, but now become its own separable being—somewhat like that “spatial figure” that Hegeman describes the New Critics as inheriting from cultural anthropologists of the period.

In contrast to Brooks and Warren’s formulation, Rosenblatt does not present literature as organic in and of itself, but the “organic expression”—meaning and value put into human words—of a particular agent-initiated meaning-making event (139 *Literature*). Indeed, what Brooks and Warren call the “poem” refers to the “organic” meaning made by the formal features that constitute it on the page. But what Rosenblatt calls the “work”—and later, in *The Reader, The Text, The Poem*, the “poem”—is a force she crucially distinguishes from the “text,” the latter

⁸⁵ In *Philosophy of Rhetoric*, Richards writes in a strikingly similar set of images that “We should do better to think of a meaning as though it were a plant that has grown—not a can that has been filled or a lump of clay that has been moulded” (12).

⁸⁶ Per Archibald MacLeish’s prescriptive “A poem should not mean / But be.”

being merely “marks on the page” (*Towards* 34), and the former being activated as literature only when taken up, given life, and experienced by a specific interpreter. In *Literature as Exploration*, Rosenblatt describes her construct of literature and its history as inevitably woven into the fluid, time- and space-specific movements of the everyday engagements in and by which literature occurs. Indeed, as the following passage shows, the reader’s “reactions” and the “work of art” are equally and interrelatedly bound by this relational sense of history. As she writes,

There will be profit in our seeing that our own reactions, like the work of art, are the organic expression not only of a particular individual, but also of a particular cultural setting. Literary history will not seem like a clear stream flowing between banks which enclose but do not affect it. Rather it will be seen that the literary stream is fed by thousands of rivulets which have their source in the surrounding intellectual and social conditions. (139)

Here, Rosenblatt updates the comparatist’s nineteenth-century concept of *fleure*—as discussed in my second chapter—which imagines cultural texts and their context to relate as a “clear stream flowing between banks which enclose but do not affect it” in any other ways other than by providing a generally determining outline. Against that understanding, she begins here to articulate a model closer to her later transactional paradigm, accounting both and at once for the mutually reciprocal forces of literature and the social conditions of both its production and its continuing reception. The river here is a rich figure for the innumerable fluid interpenetrating effects of “our own reactions” and “the work of art” on the living constitution of that work of art. Most of all, this image provides a crucial counter to Brooks and Warren’s conception of “organic” literature as a more static, separable, and even ornamental kind of greenery.

Further differentiating Rosenblatt from Brooks and Warren is the kind of response that these theorists differently expect from such a construct, or what constitutes and instantiates the critical. Like Richards in *Practical Criticism*, Brooks and Warren seek, in the opening pages of their textbook, to “dispose of a few of the basic misconceptions with which the teacher is usually confronted in the classroom” (xii); but unlike Richards, they do not overly worry the rhetorical habits by which those “misconceptions” are absorbed. (In this way, I would argue that Rosenblatt proves a more resourceful and nuanced reader of Richards’s entire oeuvre than these scholars.) More singled-mindedly than Richards, but less subtly, Brooks and Warren seek a *cure* for such misconceptions—gained through attention only to the specific features of the poem—instead of trying to locate, as Rosenblatt and Richards try to do, the complex source of the originating symptoms. As such, Brooks and Warren instead propose a kind of readerly hygiene that Richards in places also suggest (but, as my previous chapter has shown, he also denied in other moments): to cleanse minds so that students can then “enter upon an unprejudiced study of the actual poems” (xii) and become “competent readers of poetry” (xiv). Brooks and Warren consider “literature” as an end in itself, the “construct” that analysis—at least, if properly done—can realize. Rosenblatt, in contrast, suggests that literature *is* exploration: a medium for historicizing, transactional investigations into the ways of the self-using-language-in-the-world. If Rosenblatt is most concerned with the nature of the “literary experience,” and the nature of literature thereby defined, *Understanding Poetry* is most concerned with the nature of the analytic intervention. Moreover, where Rosenblatt continues to focus on realizing more fully the real uses to which she sees engaged readers having *always* put cultural artifacts, Brooks and Warren suggest that the “literary construct”—an idealized form of literature—is made meaningful only through establishing a *new* kind of diagnostic: a distinctive method (attention to the holistic and

discoverable “intention of the work”) aimed at distinctive teachable response (decidedly non-impressionistic comment). And beneath this is the field-defining implication that, lacking such an analytic, no “literary construct” could even be discerned.

In his influential “Wanted: An Ontological Critic”—published only three years after *Understanding Poetry* and *Literature as Exploration*, and four years before Rosenblatt’s “Cultural Approach”—John Crowe Ransom goes even further than Brooks and Warren, suggesting that without *criticism* (Warner’s “disciplinary comment” drawn with an especially sharp edge) no literary construct could even be discerned. Here we see the disciplinary justification for the very subject-object dualisms that Rosenblatt’s future insistence on practice and contingency would work so hard to undo. While Brooks and Warren distinguish the “something” of poetry (1) from pure information, they also emphasize that the human “business of discourse” is not as purely “practical” as often thought, and thus that the lines between “scientific statement” (4) and “communication in poetry” are not as clear as often assumed: that, in short, “formal poetry itself represents, not a distinction from, but a specialization of, thoroughly universal habits of human thinking and feeling” (9). In this way, Brooks and Warren appear to waver momentarily in a Rosenblattian-Richardsian philosophy. For Ransom, in contrast, the construct of the “literary” is organized by strictly drawn oppositions: between kinds of texts (“prose discourse” and poetry); the kinds of “meaning” such texts were seen to embody (suasively “determinate” and poetically “indeterminate”); and kinds of readers (those who ignored and those who illuminated such distinctions) (1, 18). The influence of such a paradigm was far-reaching: by many tellings (e.g. Graff, Gallagher), the new form of “criticism” that Ransom promoted—which entailed the successful illumination of such distinctions—superseded

Brooks and Warren in helping the field of literary studies to achieve what it had long lacked: not only a clear object of inquiry, but a clear subject-position, in the respective forms of the newly delineated literary object and its critical reader. And, as Catherine Gallagher has argued, even those most famous challenges from within the field to literature's purported "disinterest" and "autonomy"—de Man's version of deconstruction and Fish's of reader response—have not fundamentally disrupted the primacy of critical interpretation as the discipline's defining vocation, one Gallagher characterizes as "the elucidation" of those technical aspects of text that "make meaning problematic" (140).

In contrast, Rosenblatt's theorization of the aesthetic "experience"—which she later argues the aesthetic stance helps learners to more purposively activate and self-consciously track—is a thoroughly context-specific fusion of meanings generated by interlocking personal, social and material forces. Her transactional theory suggests that the making of literary meaning is less a sourcing of the textually "problematic"—which only a critic could do— than a tapping of the dynamics by which cultures and their individual readers develop such meaning, which all readers engaging actively with literature already do, and have always done, whether they knew it or not. Rosenblatt's goal is thus to make visible for students the naturally transactional nature of literary engagement and communication through literature and the "aesthetic stance"—which describes any attitude towards textual reception or production that draws on immediately experiential and personal associations; and to help students exploit this stance as a means of reflecting on the mutually constitutive interplay between the individual and her culture. As such, and while Rosenblatt strives to limn the specifically literary aspects of reading, she does not—in contrast to Brooks and Warren—presuppose "impressionism" or its purported subjectivity as a categorical

barrier to proper literary understanding; nor—in contrast to Ransom—does she presuppose the even stronger claims that kinds of texts, kinds of meaning or kinds of readers are so categorically separable or static. Rosenblatt’s work thus provides more than a progressive alternative to, but also a significant repudiation of hard criticism as the premiere means by which minds can be changed.

Indeed, as Rosenblatt developed her theories, she came to insist more and more on collapsing the distinction between ordinary and professional reader, as well as between practice (Warner’s “reading per se”) and critical technique (Warner’s “discourse about”). As she would argue in her 1978 *The Reader, the Text, the Poem*, “the distinction between ordinary reader and critic is a vague and wavering one” (138). Indeed, her “complaint against” the methods of the New Criticism as used in the schools can be located in their insistence on reinforcing such a fragile distinction: she argues that the New Critic’s “faulty theory of the nature of the poem often led them...to neglect the living work of art as they concentrated on an allegedly impersonal analysis of form and technique” (139). Echoing her 1931 critique of Mallarmé, she faults the New Critics for a literary paradigm in which “literary works of art are envisioned as the province only of a small highly trained elite” (143). As such, she rejects the concept of “critic-as-surrogate-reader”—whether ideal or cleansed—preferring to think of the critic as a devoted and articulately self-aware reader-writer-cultural-participant-instructor, who “seeks to develop the ability to communicate his experience to others” (147). Moreover, Rosenblatt argues that such communication ought to be open to more capacious accounts of the literary experience on the democratizing grounds that ordinary “readers may bring to the text experiences, awarenesses, and needs that have been ignored in traditional criticism” (142).

Indeed, Rosenblatt's 1946 "Cultural Approach," like her later work and its implicit repudiation of a cleansed form of the critical, also has crucial political connotations, and offers an important corrective to the then powerfully assimilationist, melting-pot paradigm, as it existed both at the larger social level, and within the disciplinary classroom (English) that she was about to leave (or attempt to remake, from the new vantage point of a School of Education). To be sure, and from an almost seventy year remove, this essay can feel musty in its allegiance to underscrutinized progressive ideals. Undergirding many of her claims is a Pollyanna-ish faith in those "democratic values" (465) and the way they are presumed to enable productive "interchange with an ever widening circle of peoples in the future" (464). Compared to the heightened precision and skepticism of work like Ransom's—or, indeed of Rene Wellek's, so vociferous in his takedown of Rosenblatt's advisor, Fernand Baldensperger—arguments like Rosenblatt's can sometimes seem baggy and naive. This is partly because, like Dewey, Rosenblatt is not a writer given to self-meditation; in contrast to a contemporaneous critic like Lionel Trilling, the liberal scourge she offers her readers faces determinedly out, not also partially (and more modernistically) within. In this way, indeed, Rosenblatt herself is less a critic than a philosopher: the literary exercises she recommends for other readers are not ones she herself also performs. In fact, literary "performance" is anathema to her very philosophy of literacy.

In this way, however, and like Dewey, this prose style and method can also be understood as part of a larger resistance to an increasingly professionalized and disciplinarily cragged school of thought that was coming to posit cultural reading more as critical *product*—again, what we might call "discourse about"—than as critical *practice*; more as end-stopped and essayistic

performance of interpretation, than as an act of ongoing cultural and interpretive participation. As my first chapter described, the discipline begun by Boas was being similarly transformed, by both acolytes and critics, by increasingly structuralist analyses of culture, next to which Boas's studies could look almost determinedly inconclusive. Indeed, Rosenblatt never found a vehicle by which to translate her theories into sustained interpretive engagements with literature. While her philosophical and theoretical work is robust and increases in coherence as her models grow more intellectually refined, her critical output—whether “readings” of literature, per se, or of other contemporary theory—is scanty and often thin⁸⁷; her work never achieves the balance, now become normative to the field of literary criticism, between detailed theorization, on the one hand, and, on the other, the application of theory to either specific text or specific instances of reading. Nonetheless, such a continual focus on “literature as cultural practice”—especially as it would increasingly be influenced by Dewey—paves the way for her later retheorization of the aesthetic and the literature-mobilizing “aesthetic stance,” as my next section will explore.

Art as Experience and the “Aesthetic” as “Stance”

In her work of the sixties and beyond, and in her revisions to *Literature as Exploration*, Rosenblatt is explicit in her debt to Dewey's concept of transaction. Less explored in either the scholarship or in her own retrospectives is the impact of Dewey's aesthetics, and her transformation of his specific aesthetic philosophy into her theory of what I call “textual transaction”—one based on a concept of stance, or one's attitude towards one's own individually

⁸⁷ See in particular her overly broad and sometimes tin-eared critiques of contemporaneous literary theory in the final chapters of her 1978 *The Reader, the Text, the Poem*.

situated experience and the impact of this experience on the production of text-based meaning. Yet, as outlined here, the influence of Dewey's work, and Rosenblatt's differences from Dewey, not only cast Rosenblatt's commitments in a sharper light. This influence also underscores the relevance of Rosenblatt's theories for the question of transfer, and a model of transfer than effects change not only in the individual, but "transactionally" in culture more largely.

Dewey's 1934 *Art as Experience* is perhaps most famous for its call to remove art from the sacralized position into which high culture had thrust it; and his concurrent claim that the category of aesthetics be expanded to include both artifacts and events not traditionally associated with the fine arts. However, Dewey's aesthetics should not be understood as merely a project bent on the absolute relativization of values, and whose final goal lay in "upending traditional hierarchies," as Leila Christenbury wrote of Rosenblatt. Dewey's aesthetics, and his conception of "art as experience," emerge from a commitment to the kind of progress made by critical engagements both across difference as well as with one's own inescapable historicity. This entails a theory of learning and a theory of social change. Moreover, Dewey's rejection of a sacralized construct of art does not undo his bedrock devotion to aesthetic engagement as the supreme means by which cultural reform can be achieved.

Certainly, the Dewey of *Art as Experience* rebukes the conception of "art" as a static object resonant with eternal significance, and he replaces this figure with a conception of the aesthetic "experience" as an interaction between agent and meaning that generates fluid and usable meanings and values. By this, Dewey strives to complicate the sharp distinctions that traditional aesthetes had come to draw between the aesthetic and the everyday, suggesting that great works

of culture (“art”) do their edifying work only when activated as inescapably continuous with all other forms of social practice. Art is thus conceptualized to operate not only on the object-based level of consumption and production—personal input and output—but also on the larger social levels of where transformative meanings can lead to action-inspiring knowledge-reform. None of this was inconsistent with Dewey’s social and educational theory: in Casey Haskins’s terms, Dewey’s critique in this book of the “compartmental conception of art” (101) runs parallel to his life-long critique of the “compartmental conception of the self” (102): binaries that, for Dewey, have more than theoretical consequence, but lead, as Haskins puts it, to the “institutionalization of an invidious distinction between the individual and society” (“Dewey’s Romanticism” 102).

Yet this does not mean that, for Dewey, all experiences are thus rendered equally valuable, or productive of equally valuable kinds of meaning. While positing the “aesthetic” as continuous with everyday practice, *Art as Experience* aims, like *Literature as Exploration*, to define that aesthetic as an experience of a distinctive kind, with distinctive powers: as manifested, in Dewey’s gloss, through the difference between “experience,” most broadly, and “*an* experience” (35), more specifically, the former constituting a kind of passive absorption and the latter an “active and alert commerce with the world” (19). Dewey’s own theory of art thus rests on—and can be seen to presage—a similar argument as Rosenblatt’s efferent-aesthetic continuum. Rosenblatt distinguishes between these stances on the grounds that an agent taking an efferent stance, as quoted above, “disengages his attention as much as possible from the personal and qualitative elements in his response” (27) and that the aesthetic stance, in contrast, encourages “recognition of the individual consciousness mediating between symbol and referent” (*Reader* 43). Dewey similarly distinguishes between types of meaning making that enact, on the one

hand, enact a “submission to convention,” and, on the other, a heightened and interactive form of “esthetic” meaning-making that stresses “unity of experience” (40).

Moreover, as these distinctions between types of experience shows—the one requiring far more agentic activity than the other—it is a mistake to put too much emphasis on the representational aspects of Dewey’s argument: to assume that his democratizing impulse can be boiled down merely to a newly inclusive curriculum with an expanded canon and thus new opportunities for exposure. For the theory of “spectator learning” that undergirds such arguments about objective representation was one that Dewey’s educational philosophy was most actively set against.

Indeed, and predicting his later move to a transactional paradigm, Dewey here resists the idea that knowledge is a static body of content unchanged by the agents who take it up. Against “what philosophy calls hypostatization” (129) of either the knowledge object or the observer’s belief, Dewey explains that experience’s “active and alert commerce with the world” comprises “complete interpenetration of self and the world of objects and event” (19). Further, and when “at its height” (19) or “carried to the full,” experience becomes “a transformation of *interaction* into *participation and communication*” (22, my emphases). Indeed, the difference between such the culminating experience of learning that Dewey defines as “esthetic” (“*an* experience,”) (e.g. 35), and experience more generally constitutes a difference such active “participation” and what Dewey, like Richards, as seen in the previous chapter, characterizes as “withdrawal” (22). In withdrawal, as Dewey writes, “things happen, but they are neither definitely included nor excluded; we drift... One thing replaces another, but does not absorb it or carry it on” (40). Such withdrawal thus lacks not only purpose but also, Dewey argues, a sense of “progress”

characterized by an accumulative kind of transformation. In contrast, *an* experience, transformative and progressive, requires not only curation and evaluation, but even more crucially that the subject reconceptualize herself as a bearer of mutable knowledge. By acknowledging oneself as a participatory agent who “carries” such knowledge “on,” the agent also, in a sense, becomes a feature of such knowledge, or “culture”—through her ability, as Dewey puts it, to “communicate.” In this way, aesthetic experience is, Dewey writes, the place “the philosopher must go to understand what experience is” (274). Aesthetic experience reveals, in other words, the integrative pragmatics by which new knowledge can be made.⁸⁸

Yet, for Dewey—unlike for Rosenblatt—the challenges implicit in such a theory of aesthetic participation were too great for him to imagine ever being fully realized or assimilated into the schools. Though Dewey argues persuasively that it is through communion-like “communication” with socially embedded individuals that “art becomes the incomparable organ of instruction,” Dewey also acknowledges that “the way... is so remote from that usually associated with the idea of education... that we are repelled by any suggestion of teaching and learning in connection with art” (347). Dewey thus understands his provocative redefinition of art—centered

⁸⁸ But this theory of continuity and experience upon which Dewey’s theory of aesthetics rests does not render questions of representation and content entirely moot. If the student can only truly learn when given the opportunity to see knowledge as integrated into and relevant to her life, through the real work of inquiry and the real stakes provided by questions of judgment and belief, the teacher is obliged to provide knowledge-content that is both connected and challenging to the student. This is also a question Rosenblatt takes up in *Literature as Exploration*, arguing that assigned reading ought to correlate with students’ interests and abilities, and that teachers ought to provide, along with carefully curated works of literature, the knowledge from other domains that would help students to make the most holistic, relational and experiential sense of these works as they possibly can. But these question of representation are also ones that Rosenblatt increasingly moves away from as her reading theory develops, and that Dewey subordinates to more bedrock theories of learning engagement.

more a subject's culturally sensitive participatory practice than the autonomous seeming absorption of an "hypostatized object"—to stand in such extreme contrast to his period's long-standing conception of education that he supposes the two to be able to exist in nothing less than absolute and mutual antipathy. And, indeed, Dewey's theories—especially in combination with the neglect that hounded Rosenblatt's own vision of the aesthetic—invite us to reflect on the extent to which these antipathies still might be true in our classroom uses of literature. The aesthetic philosopher Maxine Greene, herself a student of Rosenblatt, suggests such a claim to be still true decades later: in a 1976 essay, she protests that while art and literature may have long been school subjects, but as such have still not in themselves "been treated as art" (61), at least by the expanded definition that Dewey proposes.

Nor does Dewey's prediction seem to me to be farfetched. As my previous sections have argued, a product-oriented construct of the critical would, postwar, become the method of choice for fields like literary study, and this is a paradigm in which, as my first chapter showed, Rosenblatt's continued attention to the aesthetic experience could achieve little credible foothold. Indeed, Dewey's investigation of the conflict between current theories of learning and his theory of art help reveal the governing logic behind Rosenblatt's marginalized position in the discipline of English. In many ways, Dewey's theory of learning parallels Rosenblatt's objection to the learning theory undergirding both a "social" and "purely aesthetic" approach, as previously glossed; as Dewey writes, "theories that attribute direct moral effect and intent to art" are shortsighted because they do not "do not take account of the collective civilization that is the context in which works of art are produced and enjoyed," because theories that conceptualize "the moral function of art in terms of a strictly personal relation between the selected works and

a particular individual” assume that the communions enabled by aesthetic interactions occur as if by osmosis and in a social vacuum (346). As a result, and although Dewey’s insists in *Art as Experience* that “esthetic effect is found directly in sense perception” (115), the learning theory undergirding Dewey’s aesthetics—like Rosenblatt’s—needs to be carefully distinguished from the purely object-focused “inductive” approach promoted by Brooks and Warren (ix), or indeed, the “ontological” criticism recommended by Ransom. Dewey refuses to grant that art’s moral or social effects are achieved at a purely literal level—through the kind of transparent transmission that his theory of learning critiques, and as his denunciation of Hutchins’s educational project exemplifies.

Yet, as Rosenblatt would after him, Dewey still holds that the experience of art, while situated in shared, communal ethos, is nonetheless also always filtered through a person’s own perceptual framework. Like Rosenblatt’s conviction that there is no generic work, but only work realized by innumerable readers, Dewey writes that a “work of art...is actually, not just potentially, a work of art only when it lives in some individualized experience” (108). Rosenblatt later theorizes that this “individualized experience” entails a kind of culturally embedded but not culturally determined “stance” taken toward the world. Moreover, I would suggest that Rosenblatt’s conception of the efferent-aesthetic continuum, built from that new focus on stance, entails not only a rejection of the product-oriented critical model, as described above, but a careful elaboration the concepts of “recognition” and “perception” that Dewey then develops in *Art as Experience*. As Rosenblatt later would with her two stances, Dewey pragmatically distinguishes these types of perceptual experiences by the different purposes they serve. Dewey’s concept of “recognition”—implying a kind of unquestioning comprehension of what some cultural artifact

innately is—involves, like the efferent, a somewhat narrow and functionalist view of why an agent activates meaning in the world: merely to grasp what is already immediately available. Dewey thus describes recognition as “arrested before it has a chance to develop freely...it is arrested at the point where it will serve some other purpose” (52)—this purpose being “other” because it is a purpose easily separable, in other words, from the multifarious alternate potentialities also conceivable in both the observing agent and the observed. Rosenblatt’s efferent stance similarly views such detached “other purpose” as entailing a kind of impeded development, defining this stance as set on the “carrying away” of meaning from the yeasty promises of its source, and so put to highly instrumental, often univocal ends.

What Dewey calls “perception,” in comparison, is an attitude that takes into account its artifact’s larger context (what Rosenblatt in her 1946 essay would call “culture”). Dewey thus describes “perception,” albeit somewhat mystically, as “the act of the going out of energy in order to receive, not a withholding of energy” (53).⁸⁹ Even more crucially—and as Rosenblatt later argues when promoting the educational benefits of the meaning-rich aesthetic stance—Dewey writes that if the subject “perceives esthetically, he will create an experience of which the intrinsic subject-matter, the substance, is *new*” (108 my emphasis). “Perception,” then, like Rosenblatt’s “aesthetic,” is itself a form not only of recursive participation in culture, but of cultural production in and of itself. As such, “perception”—like the aesthetic—is also a transformational, “creative” act, imbuing the object of inquiry with a relevance and meaning that was not so superficially obvious in it before. Moreover, Dewey here suggests a constructive link

⁸⁹ This outward-inward dynamic also recalls the neurological etymology Rosenblatt summons up with her term “efferent,” as discussed in my previous chapter.

between acts of production and reception—acts that, if “perceptive,” or “aesthetic,” do not just reproduce meaning, but generate new significance, reliant not only on the quality of the cultural object, but the quality of the agentic attention turned upon it. And that constructive link is one that Rosenblatt later exploits by extending her transactional theory of reading to include writing as well. The transformational nature of Rosenblatt’s “aesthetic stance”—especially seen in light of Dewey’s theories—explains our most generative forms of reading and writing as emerging from the same attentional source, one as aware of its own constructive powers as of its inevitably situated limits, and working at a culture’s growing edge to bear such culture on.

From the Aesthetic Stance to Literacy Learning

As with Dewey’s concepts of recognition and perception, the distinctive features of the “aesthetic” and the “efferent,” as well as the continuity that links them, thus need equal emphasis in understanding the full implications of Rosenblatt’s theory of transactional literacy. As my last chapter showed, Rosenblatt’s “efferent stance” can be understood as a reinterpretation of the prototypically literary-critical concept of the “stock response,” or the pre-digested and seemingly automatic ideas that many cultural theorists of the nineteen thirties and forties saw as a sign of uncritical provincialism—a kind of literal-minded acquiescence to inherited meanings, values and structures. Such a pervasive worry among critical theorists was of course due in large part to the changing educational landscape, growing literacy rates, and new diversity of media emerging in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century—and neither Rosenblatt, Richards, nor Dewey were themselves entirely free of such worry. But, as her theory of the efferent-aesthetic continuum was refined in her later works, Rosenblatt came to suggest that what she previously

considered response was better understood as stance—and thus less a matter of expendable social conventions, to be entirely embraced, or entirely (and often artistically-slash-critically) transcended, and more a matter of the inevitable “fabric of conventions,” in I. A. Richards’s suggestive term, by and within which all culturally enmeshed agents make communicable meaning. Through such a turn, Rosenblatt is also able to acknowledge the apparent univocality or “provincialism” of the “efferent stance,” or what Dewey calls “recognition,” as having real cultural and historical, if somewhat limited, use. Indeed, the efferent can be understood as the means by which meaning is efficiently reproduced, and communication, in its most fundamental forms, enabled.

As a result, Rosenblatt further comes to suggest that the aesthetic stance, as a kind of “perception,” entails a cultural reflexivity and acknowledgement of contingencies, not to be diametrically opposed to the efferent or more conventional uses of text, but put in active and self-critical conversation with them. In this way, the aesthetic stance does not only enable a heightened and transformative kind of transactional agent-text-self experience, it also reveals the transactional nature of literacy itself. By engaging purposively in such transactions, by making personal relevant but self-critical and thereby potentially new cultural knowledge, the agent taking up the aesthetic stance is also invited to reflect on the way that cultural-knowledge-through-language can be formed and reformed. The efferent stance, by comparison, overlooks this transactional nature of language-use, assuming, for largely reproductive ends, that meaning is universal. Even so, both stances appear equally necessary for democratic functioning—the latter to promote stability, continuity, and to reinforce the possibility of communicating across difference; the former to promote innovation, progress, and the kind of critical engagement

driven by a pragmatic obligation to remain flexible in a world of change and expanding perspectives.

Dewey's figures of arrestment and withdrawal, on the one hand, and a cultural "carrying on" on the other, also highlight Rosenblatt's implication, in her final work, that the aesthetic stance does not constitute the attenuation of the so-called efferent, but an expansion of that stance into new kinds of attention as well. The aesthetic, by her final theorization, constitutes an attention that is not satisfied only to draw on "public" meanings, but adds to such meanings the more idiosyncratic, time-, place-, and person-specific "sensations, images, feelings, and ideas" that also undergird any literacy event (1373). The aesthetic stance thus achieves resonance and relevance that is both personal and culturally significant by putting habitual and largely reproductive codes in ongoing dialogue with alternate meanings that are drawn from the individual's own fluid store of experience with language's memorable allusions to and action in the world. In her final writing on the matter, Rosenblatt is therefore careful to explain that these stances cannot exist independent of each other; every literacy event is a combination of the two, although in varying ratios. A reader's complete absorption in the efferent—as the anxieties undergirding "stock responses" also suggest—would produce an inhuman automaticity, like the pre-programmed decoding of a computer; a reader's complete absorption in the aesthetic, in contrast, would produce entirely personal and thus non-communicative nonsense, language become non-language because loosed, at least during the moment in question, from any denotative function. As I suggested in my earlier chapter on the late aestheticism of Mallarmé, Rosenblatt worries this very issue as early as her 1931 dissertation historicizing some of her period's most recent and influential conceptualizations of aesthetics and the nature of literary

language, and critiquing these conceptualizations as “aristocratic” and “dangerous” definitions of an asocial art (290), defining itself by its “complete divorce from the public” (291) or larger culture from which its impulses were inevitably born.

In this way, the “aesthetic stance” offers its most important complication to current postsecondary assumptions about the literate agent not by a shift to literate agent per se—as those who understand Rosenblatt as reader-response theorist would suggest—but by a shift to this expanded view of situated experience as the source of any text’s progressive value and meaning: a view that accounts for the agent—as Dewey also argues—but is not reducible to it. For Rosenblatt, it is not texts alone, or their language technologies, that are in themselves literary; what is literary is the way that such texts work and are put to work in the world. As such, and just because such literacy events are grounded in what she calls “the residue of past psychological events involving the words and their referents” (1373), they are not entirely “free,” to return to that much-contested Arnoldian term; they emerge neither from the feeling self alone nor through a kind of stripping away of wrong assumptions.⁹⁰ To be sure, such literacy experiences can *feel* mainly private and interior—and this is a somatic reality with which Rosenblatt’s theories, especially in its earliest forms, often struggles, and to which certain New Critical theories altogether relinquish themselves. But seen in the context of Dewey’s aesthetics—and indeed, as an application of Dewey’s aesthetics to issues of literacy and literacy learning—Rosenblatt shows the extent to which her ambitions were running against both the emerging literary and literacy theories of her time, many of which continue to structure our own

⁹⁰ Such “stripping away” is best illustrated by Wimsatt and Beardsley’s identification of fallacies and the reading prohibitions thereby developed in *The Verbal Icon*.

pedagogical habits. More specifically, this context shows her aesthetic stance as one that seeks to break down, like Dewey's theory, such bounded autonomies as private and public, suggesting that such responses are not in fact purely private and interior. In this way, Rosenblatt's aesthetic response constitutes a kind of expanded attention: still based in an individual's sense of language's most utilitarian functions, but also sensitive to meanings—more circuitous, more indirect—either local to the individual's own idiosyncratic experience, or indicative of the as-yet-unspoken or half-spoken aspects of cultural life. Aesthetic response does not thus unhitch from convention; it works on its margins, its growing edge. And it is at this edge, Rosenblatt's theory suggests, that new habits or meaning networks develop, both in the reader and in the world. Within such an understanding of culture, linguistic networks and the institutions they comprise are able not only to reproduce, but also to shift in meaning.

Rosenblatt's aesthetic stance, thus understood, therefore offers an alternative to both the compartmentally critical paradigm of reading (“discourse about reading”), on the one hand, and a purely constructivist paradigm on the other. Rosenblatt's emphasis on stance rebukes the very notion that even in the literary experience—that *especially* in the literary experience—meaning is somehow innate to the very structures of the text itself. But neither does Rosenblatt suggest that literary meaning—what acquires value and use within a cultural context, however specialized such a context might be—is accomplished by the literate agent alone. Doubly informed by both the habitual meaning codes with which context-specific language conventions work, on the one hand, and the meaning codes that draw more allusively on what feel like personal, private memories and sensations, on the other, the aesthetic stance becomes a practice that does not merely reflect culture—even by critical comment upon it—but also acknowledges the way that

literacy acts can change that culture from the inside out. By this logic, the meaning of culturally relevant text is never static, never discoverable in a final form. Such meaning is rather renewed or transformed by the ways in which it is understood, experience by experience. Of course, some modes of understanding are more sensitive to the qualities of situation, self and text than others. But situation, self and text are also, in this scheme, ever moving targets.

Rosenblatt and Dewey's aesthetics can be understood as together struggling to theorize cultural artifacts as relationally embedded in social practice and norms as well as eminently capable of enabling real cultural shifts. Indeed, Haskins describes the middle way that Dewey seeks between such cultural relativism and such humanism as a kind of dialectic, one embodying the fact that "art in the twentieth century *is* the tension between the myths of aesthetics and aestheticism" ("Dewey's Art" 245, his emphasis): a view of the artistic experience or stance as both historical and aspirational. Rosenblatt's own move in the nineteen-twenties and thirties from a history of "the idea of art" to a philosophy of "the idea of art" exemplifies a similar tension. That the reigning Western concept of art in our current century—and literary studies with it—continues to thrum with a similar tension makes these thinkers' work, I argue, a continuingly rich source for literary studies' own lasting questions: whether the power felt to emanate from its chosen subject of literature is constructed or inherent. Dewey's and Rosenblatt's theories of aesthetics as applied to literary and literacy studies suggest that the experience of art allows a purposive sense of the kinds of "communication" that in themselves can effect meaning change—and thus cultural change—from the inside out, not as critics of art *per se* but as critics of our own responses to it, as perceivers who see ourselves as participating actively in the making of cultural values. The experience of literature is distinguishable from the

experience of other texts only on the basis of the use we make of it and the value of such use—which lives in history, which *is* history, but as such is never bound by a single instantiation of it.

Rosenblatt's "aesthetic stance" can also be seen as an intervention into what Leah Price has called the "received skepticism" that now structures much of reading and literacy studies, encouraging projects Price has described as "more notable for the generalizations they debunk than those they develop" (316). Such a tendency can be seen even in Warner's own essay, in which he questions the tenets undergirding the current academic conceptions of critical reading, but appears to feel no compunction to offer, for instructors or students, any kind of replacement model. Nor does this constitute a critique of Warner's essay itself; the decoupling of pedagogy from scholarship seems such a deep-rooted disciplinary habit for literary scholars as to automatically forestall any discussion of reading that might relate back to existent student practice or its attendant theory of learning.

Indeed, the debunking tendency that Price identifies constitutes its own "discourse about reading" that leaves unexplicated the existent dynamics by which readers continue to make productive and credible meaning from texts. And such "received skepticism," as Price calls it, can leave the literacy instructor—and most college instructors are literacy instructors, Street would remind us, at some level or another—at somewhat of a loss: for if all practices are rendered equally suspect, what remains the ground for any educational program that still seeks to encourage any approaches to reading and writing that might have lasting or transferable power? For, as I've shown, literary studies' resurgent interest in "discourse about" reading still remains problematically uprooted from any exploration of this field's literate agents' actual ground-level

practices, whether involving reading or writing, or, as my final chapter will address, the necessary interrelation between the two.

One replacement model, suggested by this aesthetic stance, is to consider literacy as a cultural practice, one embedded in but not determined by the various values and meanings that, Dewey and Rosenblatt argue, cultural engagements (through both recognition and perception) enable. Literacy as a cultural practice is a construct of literacy that refuses the autonomous model critiqued so persuasively by Brian Street, and that also refuses the sharp divisions that this model subsequently encourages between different kinds of engagement (high or low, efferent or aesthetic, strategically communicative or dispassionately critical), as well as between different dimensions of literacy (reading and writing) through which these engagements are realized. This construct of literacy as a cultural practice rests on a theory of learning as bootstrapping between the already known and the new, as well as a theory of culture and social change as bootstrapping between the pragmatically prevalent and the progressively aspirational.

Just as Dewey writes, in *Art as Experience*, that “To esthetic experience, then, the philosopher must go to understand what experience is” (274), I argue that Rosenblatt’s aesthetic stance provides the place the literate agent must go to understand what literacy is. Indeed, the goal of such a self-knowing form of transaction is not just to *realize* such a stance—as one naturally does when one reads with a heightened degree of emotional and intellectual involvement—but also to *reflect on* the contours of such a stance in order reveal the integrative dynamics by which new knowledge can be made, across agents or contexts; and by which it can be transferred and

reinvested and can thus effect genuine change that is developmental and cultural, both and at once.

Chapter Five

The Reader in the Writer:

Textual Transactions and the Transfer of Literacy Knowledge

As Jessie Moore and Chris Anson have recently put it (2016), scholars and instructors of college-level writing have long relied on assumptions about transfer, but “until recently... those assumptions were largely untested” (3). Only over the last decade has the field come to explicate and explore transfer’s work of reinvestment—the ways that writing knowledge travels and is reapplied across contexts and domains—as a topic in and of itself. That said, writing transfer studies has now blossomed into a full sub-field of its own, with proliferating numbers of articles, monographs, and special collections advancing a number of debates about both the very metaphor of transfer and the many variables entailed in its achievement (e.g. Beaufort; Yancey and Robertson; Nowacek; Wardle; Anson and Moore).⁹¹

The fields of literary and culture study, however, have remained largely impervious to writing studies’ increasingly complex inquiries into this topic. For many of these fields’ scholars, the issue of transfer appears to ask a question better left to the educational psychologists: whether

⁹¹ Although I prefer the terms reinvestment, repurposing, generalization and expansive learning (see C. Donahue, Pressley, Beach), I here use the word “transfer” in the interest of keeping this work legible to those unfamiliar with learning transfer theory, albeit while acknowledging the limitations of “transfer” as a productive figure for active and transformative literacy learning.

and how learners might traceably repurpose specialized scholarly knowledge for dissimilar tasks or settings. Educational researchers Patricia Alexander and P. Karen Murphy have defined “transfer” as the learner’s “process of using knowledge acquired in one situation in some new or novel situation” (561); for many disciplinary specialists, this framework can present not only a philosophical imponderable, but can also threaten to edge their instructional work towards the distastefully instrumental. Indeed, the fact of these very different disciplinary attitudes towards the question of transfer—writing studies embracing the question, and literary and cultural studies leaving it largely unexplored—offers yet another instance of these fields’ increasing tendencies to “decouple,” in Melissa Ianetta’s terms (61). As many scholars have noted, and as my first chapter reviewed, the schisms now structuring English studies can suggest to students and faculty alike that the hard work of writing is somehow of a different order than the hard work of reading; the asymmetrical attention paid to the question of transfer adds to these divisions the further implication that learners’ fluent productions of texts draws not only a set of skills, but a set of educative concerns, that are entirely separable from their instruction in interpretation and critique.

In my previous chapters, I have argued that Rosenblatt’s transactional theory offers a new way of understanding and interrogating these schisms, especially as they relate to the teaching of reading and writing as either properly divisible and distinct, or as properly interdependent because emerging from the same base dynamics and subsequent attitudes towards the making of text-based meanings. In this chapter, I describe how Rosenblatt’s transactional theory is specifically germane to certain strains in current writing transfer scholarship, and I argue that this transactional theory can help expand these explanations of transfer by also considering and

leveraging the fruitful interpenetrations between students' reading and writing. More specifically, I find Rosenblatt's work pertinent to current explorations of learners' orientations towards knowledge, and in particular to Elizabeth Wardle's recent exploration of sociologically internalized "dispositions." Compared to that dispositional construct, however, I also argue that Rosenblatt's specific concept of stance—which she defines as a learner's "readiness to respond in a particular...way" (*Reader* 43)—provides an even more volitional, expansive, and language-sensitive model of the agent-centered dynamics that enable transfer across fields and practices.

As this dissertation has already suggested, the issue of how knowledge travels through agents—and how agents might reform such knowledge as they apply it new to contexts and goals—was also a fundamental concern for the early twentieth-century pragmatic-progressive milieu in which Louise Rosenblatt first developed her theories of reading and writing. These thinkers explored such travel and transformation of knowledge through a variety of angles, methods and disciplinary nomenclatures: Boas's anthropological investigations into "diffusion" (*Aims* 251) and "secondary explanations" (*Mind* 225), or what Mead calls the inevitability of "reinterpretation" (*Inquiry* 9); Baldensperger's literary-historical examinations of the dynamics of influence and reception, and the varied schema by which cultural texts are made differently meaningful; Richards's critique, in his *Philosophy of Rhetoric*, of a universalist "doctrine of Usage," and his study of the fluid, relational, and situated nature of comprehension (51); Dewey's theorization, in *Art as Experience*, that cultural experience enables "active and alert commerce with the world" (26), a concept upon which Rosenblatt would later draw in renovating the very concept of "aesthetic," which formed the basis of her later theorization of the self-consciously transactional "aesthetic stance." Indeed, I argue that Rosenblatt's increasing

emphasis on the concept of “stance” emerged from these interdisciplinary conversations about cultural agents’ situated and active forms of reception and response, and from Rosenblatt’s growing conviction that all literacy acts involve a purpose-driven negotiation between an agent’s self and her potent context, and never involve the mere production or absorption of static information. Cultural meanings and practices—whether involving the “ideas” about art that Rosenblatt explored in her 1931 dissertation on nineteenth- and turn-of-the-century art for art’s sake movements, or the disciplinary habits she explored in her later, more pedagogically minded work—are neither universal, as Boas taught her, nor do they travel unchanged.

Even so, and as my previous chapters have also shown, none of these explorations should suggest these thinkers’ mere acquiescence to the endlessly provisional nature of all meaning and value—nor should they suggest, in terms more germane to this chapter, the impossibility of transfer, or of the deliberative repurposing of knowledge. For all these thinkers, and Rosenblatt perhaps most prominently, the possibility of “reinterpretation,” and of the resulting “transactions” thus facilitated between a self and her various worlds, represent more than just social inevitables, revealed by the jostling diversities of modern reality. Such “transactions” also keep knowledge productively in play, a realization that pushes into relief the crucial opportunity that cultural engagements can offer agents—the occasion to dynamically participate in the reproduction and remaking of those meanings and values, in which agents might reform both themselves and the cultures in which they stake a claim. In this, and as I’ve previously suggested, I find it more accurate to categorize this milieu not as “modernist”—those for whom the modern condition was an essential dilemma—but as prototypically pragmatic-progressive. Louis Menand has written of Dewey that, “unlike almost every other serious thinker of this time,

he was at home in modernity” (237), and this dissertation extends that claim to all the figures here discussed: that they saw modernity’s challenge to previous certainties as more of a boon than a loss, and worked to emphasize their present condition’s continuities more than its disruptions; and, further, that the work of education was to exploit the lessons of such diversity, not to cleanse students’ minds of the sundry habits, values or exposures that in the postwar literacy and literary learning landscape many thought would cloud or demean the work of higher learning. The thinkers that Rosenblatt’s work consolidates all therefore understood the act of meaning-making, and the transfers of knowledge thereby entailed, in terms that can seem strikingly contemporary—as a stubbornly recursive, networked and continuous critique of the world’s many givens and differences, and as a means by which individuals might apply and reapply these given variables to the present and to what is to come.

As my first chapter has argued, the last century’s varied intellectual winds provide crucial context for understanding the different ways that Rosenblatt’s theories can be brought to bear on writing studies. It was during the postwar and Cold War context—whose traditions still organize many English departments today—that Rosenblatt’s richest contributions to college classroom constructs of literacy first became obscured. This was when the disciplines centered on literature (or Culture) and literacy (or composition) began to professionalize and thus to naturalize their respective autonomies—and divisibility—as subjects for teaching. Against such tendencies, this chapter posits that a re-contextualized understanding of Rosenblatt’s concept of stance can emphasize instead the fluid continuities between these spheres of inquiry and between the

attendant dimensions of a literacy practice that these fields have unnaturally divided up between them.⁹²

It is at two levels, then, that I see Rosenblatt's aesthetic stance offering a newly dynamic explanatory model for the more expansive view of transfer that writing studies appears increasingly to desire to promote. At the first level, Rosenblatt's model substantiates transfer as the forms of "generalization" and "expansive learning" recommended by Michael Pressley (e.g. 1990), and suggestively expanded upon by King Beach (2003). These views of transfer work to debunk the presumption that ideas and skills can merely be reproduced across agents and situations; instead, these theories frame transfer as entailing the mutually constitutive intermingling of changing selves and situations. In writing studies, and most recently, these interminglings have been explored most prominently through Elizabeth Wardle's Bourdieusian model of learners' transferring "dispositions"—which, as she writes, "are embodied not only by individuals but by what Pierre Bourdieu calls 'fields,' and the interaction between the two" ("Creative" n.p.). As I will show, Rosenblatt's transactional theory provides a new literacy-specific grounding for such a claim; and her concept of a learner's movement between stances adds to this Bourdieusian model a strongly purposive element that I argue is crucial to a participatory classroom and construct of knowledge. At a second level, however, and in comparison to Wardle's analysis of learners' internalized dispositions, Rosenblatt's concept of

⁹² To be sure, and as previous chapters have explored, literature, at both the secondary and the post-secondary levels, has long been used to "teach writing"; even so, such programs rarely conceptualized the challenges of writing at the same level of complexity as they conceptualized the challenges of reading. Writing in these realms was often viewed as constituting largely de-contextualized (and indeed apolitical) skills, often in inverse relation to the extent that the politics of reading was granted status as a supremely contentious and thus scholarship-worthy topic of inquiry.

stance also suggests that such repurposing is a matter not only of writing but also of reading; and, even more crucially, suggests that these two dimensions of literacy are dynamically interactive in the making of culturally impactful meaning, emerging as they do from the same base dynamics. Here, I show how Rosenblatt's aesthetic stance provides a particularly useful model for critical engagement across literacy practices, dimensions, and fields. I further argue that this stance-focused explanation of transfer is especially pertinent for a classroom's cultivation of inclusive pedagogies, in which not only acknowledging but encouraging diverse perspectives and practices becomes a necessary element for the promotion of self-critical and world-critical conversations—or, indeed, transfers—across cultural differences.

Dispositions and Stance: the Agent's Facilitation of Transactional Transfer

Elizabeth Wardle, who has done some of the most productive thinking on transfer and writing studies in recent years, has launched an especially potent critique of the “transportation model” of transfer—in which knowledge of and about writing is conceptualized to be largely transportable, unchanged, across situations (“Creative” n.p.). Like Rosenblatt critiquing, as early as 1938, the notion of the “generic reader,” or generically literate agent (*Literature* 32), Wardle protests the notion that writing studies is merely a matter of teaching context-transcending skills that can be presumed as indiscriminately applicable to agents' different intentions and situations. Yet in her research and teaching, Wardle has also observed in students and classrooms evidence of knowledge transfer, or what she prefers to call “creative repurposing”—the productive employment of prior knowledge for new situations and unforeseen problems (n.p.). So how, Wardle wonders, are writers enabled to fruitfully realign this prior knowledge to fit new

contexts, even if it does not travel unchanged from domain to domain? Wardle suggests that such repurposing results from an agent's and a field's intertwined epistemological attitudes towards inquiry: attitudes that she calls "dispositions."

Drawing on Bourdieu's concept of habitus, Wardle argues these Bourdieusian dispositions are features of both individuals and situations. As they do in Bourdieu's sociology, such dispositions enable transfer—whether through the maintenance or transformation of social norms—because they suggest "durable, generative and transposable" (n.p.) ideologies about knowledge that can carry over into new contexts. By Wardle's telling, such dispositions come in two essential forms: "answer getting" and "problem-exploring." Wardle describes the first as a kind of surface problem-solving which, having been acclimated to and by "well-structured problems," does little more in new settings than reproduce past habits. Wardle describes the second as more tolerant of "messy" or "ill-structured" problems, and as yielding more creative forms of "repurposing" and "deep learning" (n.p.). As she then explains, a field or habitus that favors quick solutions also tends to assume—as attested by the premium it places on efficiency—that these solutions are universally valid. In contrast, a field or habitus that shows a "problem-exploring" disposition embraces inquiries into questions for which multiple solutions are not only permitted but expected (n.p.). At the level of agent, an "answer-getting" disposition describes learners who "seek right answers quickly and are adverse to open consideration of multiple possibilities." "Problem exploring" dispositions, in comparison, "incline a person towards curiosity, reflection, [and] consideration of multiple possibilities" (n.p.).

In some ways, and as I will explore in more detail in my following section, Wardle's two dispositions map neatly onto Rosenblatt's theorization of the "efferent" and "aesthetic" stance, the two basic orientations that Rosenblatt argues an agent can take towards the making of textual meaning. Indeed, the similarity between Wardle's dispositions and Rosenblatt's stances underlines the relevance of Rosenblatt's transactional theory for issues of transfer—the way a literate agent's "durable, generative and transposable" attitudes towards meaning-making can transcend purely local conventions and demands, even while they can also make specifically local accommodations. As such, both Wardle's concept of Bourdieusian dispositions and Rosenblatt's of transactional stances encourage particularly fine-grained analyses of the interactions between field and agent, and the effect of such interactions on writing processes and practices. The Bourdieusian notion of internalization, like Rosenblatt's of transaction, shows these practices to be shaped not purely by bedrock or inborn traits, but by the mutually constitutive, recursive relationships that agents have with their environments. In this way, both constructs are more sociological than psychological, focused less on isolating the idiosyncrasies apparent in each learner, than on understanding and harnessing larger trends in agents' orientations towards and adoptions of larger cultural habits. As a result, these are also models that can attend closely to the conflicted nature of the literacy itself, as the site where previously engrained habits and concerns meet new demands, or as-yet-untapped interests.

In acknowledging the importance of agents' orientations towards knowledge, both Wardle's and Rosenblatt's models speak to writing transfer scholarship's increasing interest in the central role that the individuated learner plays in the work of reapplying knowledge. It must be noted, however, that this is complicated territory for ecologically minded writing studies scholars, as

evidenced by the varied and complex ways that individuals' transferring dispositions have recently been theorized in the field (e.g. Driscoll and Wells, 2012; Driscoll et al., 2017; Baird and Dilger, 2017; Kraemer, 2017). For much of the last century, the field of composition was defined almost exclusively by its student-focus, and by the most quotidian aspects of pedagogy that followed such an interest in students' "process" and "practice." Arguably, the subsequent influence of literacy studies' "social turn" proved so potent because of the thorough rebuke it offered to the notion that writing studies should be so defined: purely by its traditionally preparatory and pedagogical functions. With the field's new insistence that any literacy construct, event, and act of instruction is also and always undergirded by a complex politics of its own, inextricably networked to social and cultural systems, the discipline gained much needed distance from its apparently exclusive obligation to the real-time development of its learners. Even so, and like much recent critical and literary theory that has complicated overly identitarian or totalizingly structuralist explanations of meaning, attending instead to more affective, recuperative, and embodied dimensions of reading and interpretation (e.g. Sedgwick, 2003; Felski 2015), so has transfer scholarship begun to return to questions about the individuated nature of the agent and her work, while still resisting outdated presumptions about that agent's communicative autonomy.

Writing studies scholar Stuart Blythe, for example, while admitting to the "powerful heuristic for examining a situation" that much recent transfer research has helped to shape, has also crucially observed that, within such analyses, the "subject"—or the specific reader-writer—has remained "essentially a black box in the theory" (50). In a 2016 article, Anson concurs, arguing that some of the forces most essential to successful or imaginatively satisfying transfer involve not only

what is “outside” the reader—and which writing studies has theorized fairly thoroughly, whether regarding the activity system within which the writer attends to a task, the rhetorical work that a task is understood to do, or the content knowledge also necessary for that task (Beaufort 2007)—but also what he calls “less explored writerly factors.” For Anson, these include “aspects of the writer’s identities, cultures and prior experiences in particular communities” (539); and, even more crucially, the fluid relations between such insides and outsides, or what he describes as the writing event’s “unique amalgam between situation and human agency” (540).

Indeed, this “amalgamous” nature of writing, especially as concerns self and situation, describes the very amalgam that Rosenblatt theorizes as “transaction.” Wardle’s important claim that fields, as well as writing subjects, have dispositions—attitudes about inquiry that can encourage certain practices—highlights her work’s correspondence to Rosenblatt’s model even more pointedly, reinforcing their shared conviction that transfer always constitutes a relational mediation between a writer and a context-specific set of exigencies (with Wardle’s most damning example being the large-scale student-assessment-based “disposition” found in too many U.S. secondary school writing tasks and student responses, n.p.). These different scholars’ models both insist that agent and field are shaped by specific, intermixing, and sometimes potentially conflicting, attitudes towards inquiry.

Even so, and as concerns the learner herself, I argue that Wardle’s Bourdieusian concept of “disposition” can also suggest that a writer’s rhetorical choices are determined more by an agent’s or field’s existent temperament than by a conscious, time-specific, purposeful, and, moreover, changeable, set of choices made about language and meaning. Especially compared to

Rosenblatt's construct of stance, these two Bourdieusian dispositions—while wonderfully illustrative of the transactional nature of knowledge—can, in their emphasis on the power of social tendencies become internalized, leave somewhat underexplained the more individual and volitional forces that also determine agents' uptakes and applications of writing knowledge. Christiane Donahue's 2016 overview of transfer scholarship outside of the U.S., and outside of writing studies per se, suggests an analogous set of concerns about current writing transfer scholarship, especially through the emphasis Donahue puts not only on the subject, but on the unpredictable nature—and indeed the politics—of a classroom's inevitable diversity of agents, imported fields, and the varied and shifting goals that are thus brought into play. Indeed, Rosenblatt's 1931 investigations, in her dissertation, of the decidedly “interrupted” nature of the “diffusion” (or *fleure*) of knowledge (or “ideas” about art) as they passed through different and differently situated agents parallels the current European scholarship on transfer, which, by Donahue's telling, forefronts the “fluidity” of both knowledge and of the “community boundaries” between which such knowledge moves and changes meaning (112). For Donahue, “more fixed models” like “communities of discourse” cannot account for the dynamic and often innovative ways that agents take up given information and put it to use for new problems or goals. Nor, Rosenblatt might add, can such “fixed models” account for the way that such dynamic repurposing inevitably changes the nature of such information and its apparent cultural value, yet without draining such information or practices of its cultural potency. Indeed, understanding knowledge as “transversal,” in the terms that Donahue suggests (112), is to understand what keeps such knowledge potent and alive.

Strikingly, and although she does not mention Rosenblatt in this most recent overview of global transfer scholarship, Donahue also underlines the notion of “stance” as a necessary entry-point for investigating how knowledge travels and might be repurposed by different learners. Drawing on David Perkins’s seminal work on learning transfer, Donahue observes that

stance has enormous importance... Teachers can organize experiences, but students engage with those experiences through their own interests, dispositions, and skills... They might take a deep or surface approach; they might be strategic or unsystematic in their learning... The same context can be ritualized routine for some students and genuine inquiry for others. (113)

Indeed, and as my second chapter illustrates, this is the very argument that Rosenblatt makes in her investigation of nineteenth-century aesthetic movements and aesthetes: that readers and writers take up and produce texts in varied and unpredictable, if always situationally supported, ways, affected equally by their own idiosyncratic interests, goals and strategies (or lack thereof), as by the intellectual drifts of their times, and by the specific milieus that were available as interlocutors. As Rosenblatt would later come to theorize, this question of uptake can most generally be explained through this concept of stance: as the attitude one takes towards the making of text-based meaning, and the extent to which this attitude activates a transformative dialogue between the given and the new. Indeed, and as Donahue here suggests, the notion of a “disposition”—a tendency, whether sociological or more characterological⁹³—can count as one aspect of stance; but it does not in itself offer as expansive an explanation of a learner’s attitudes towards text as the wider, more holistic notion of stance can imply.

⁹³ Driscoll and Wells (2012), and Driscoll et al (2017), offer a more psychological construct of “disposition” than Wardle’s self-consciously sociological use of the term, as my article-in-development (“Transferring Dispositions”) explicates and explores in more detail.

Even more crucially, Donahue goes on to suggest that this construct of “stance,” and its emphasis on volitional if not entirely autonomous uptake, offers an opportunity to return writing transfer theory to the politics of college-level literacy instruction. Indeed, an agent’s ability to choose one or another stance towards a given text or task complicates what Donahue critiques as one of writing transfer’s chief (and not unproblematic) pedagogical aims in the U.S. scholarship: what she calls “a goal of assimilation and integration” (113). Such a goal, Donahue charges, often papers over the contentious nature of transfer: who or what has authority in the value-laden definition, dissemination and culture-specific application and maintenance of knowledge. Even Blythe’s interrogation of the subject’s role in transfer—from the same volume as Donahue’s analysis—leaves under-examined a number of rich questions about the power dynamics that inevitably structure the relation between subject, situation, and the making of meaning. Blythe’s focus on writers’ success or failure at “understanding the rhetorical situation and constructing an appropriate response” (60) suggests that the “propriety” of such “understanding” and “response” is fixed and unquestionable, above either analysis or critique. As Donahue is quick to point out, and as Blythe’s work unwittingly exemplifies, many theorists and researchers, in their enthusiasm to understand harness transfer, can sidestep, and leave un-interrogated, crucial inquiries into *whose* values and meanings are being encouraged and reproduced, and why; and, moreover, whether these values and meanings might be more edifyingly resisted or changed.

It is my contention that Rosenblatt’s concept of stance—by facilitating, through different literacy practices, different kinds of transaction between subjects and situations—expands on Wardle’s significant contributions to writing transfer theory while also answering to Donahue’s concerns

about agents' responsibilities and capacities to resist. With its focus on the "mutually conditioning" nature of transaction ("Transactional" 1368)—by which both agent and situation are changed—Rosenblatt's model attends to Anson's and Wardle's focus on the "amalgam" of field and writer, and the relevance of such an amalgam in considering a writer's abilities and relative success, while also striving to account for the nature of that writer's relative agency across a variety of such fields. In this way, stance also offers a fruitful alternative to the more slippery concept of "disposition," which often suggests more intractable traits than flexible orientations that a student and curriculum can redirect. Indeed, and unlike the concept of "disposition," Rosenblatt's use of stance emphasizes the powerfully fluid, purposive, and even politically resistant and transformative nature of a writer's possible orientations towards a text. Finally, I argue that Rosenblatt's model achieves this level of generality by incorporating into this implicit theory of transfer an element that much of writing studies' transfer literature has too long ignored—the crucially related role of reading and the reader.

After all, and reflective of more general trends in composition and writing studies, theories of writing knowledge transfer have attended little to the role of reading in their analyses of the field's own transferring "threshold concepts." Indeed, Linda Adler-Kassner and Elizabeth Wardle's recent *Naming What We Know*—a comprehensive manifesto on writing studies' "core principles of knowledge," as the book's website frames it—hardly mentions reading at all, and when it does, leaves the practice unscrutinized, thus perpetuating the fields' tacit assumption that the activity of reading is not only largely separable from writing, but that its theorization can be left entirely to other disciplines. Significantly, reading emerges as a topic—albeit in passing—when the authors and their contributors turn most explicitly to the issue of transfer in their

twelfth chapter. Here, the book's various research studies' subjects discuss reading as a key aspect of the literacy practices normative to one or another discipline: regarding the "beliefs, knowledge and conventions" that undergird any culturally specific communicative practice (190). For, and as is argued elsewhere in this important book, it is only by generalizing such practices—sifting out their context-specific conventions from more fundamental critical moves—that learners can, in Howard Tinberg's description, "not just... produce effective writing" but also to gain the "consciousness of process that will enable them to reproduce success" (75). As Tinberg goes onto argue, making an even more pointed pitch for the role played by such self-consciousness in the effective repurposing of knowledge, "it is metacognition that endows writers with a certain control of their work, regardless of the situation in which they operate" (76). Yet the detailed work entailed in such consciousness—how, exactly, one's specific reading processes and practices might help to enable such "success"—remain here, as elsewhere, underexplicated; the dynamics activating critical reading are not taken up as central to the exercise or production of writing or writing knowledge, or to its transfer.

Ellen Carillo (2014) has more specifically explored the relation between such metacognition, transfer, and reading, through her promotion of a self-conscious form of reading pedagogy that she calls "mindful." Given her specific nexus of concerns, however—which are quite similar to mine—Carillo sees herself working largely in the wilderness, and much of her book is therefore spent summarizing the extent to which, especially in the last two decades, the field of composition has overlooked the significance of reading, in both its scholarship and its pedagogical recommendations. As such, her book functions less as a new and robustly theorized set of principles about reading, writing, and literacy knowledge transfer than as a kind of call to

arms, advocating “making students more conscious readers” (117) and the future development of a loosely defined “metacognitive framework that fosters generalizations” (147). Carillo’s more recent work (2017) presents an array of pedagogical interventions into such a practice—but still leaves the dynamics of the reading-writing connection itself largely unexplored.

I argue that this dissertation’s re-theorization of Rosenblatt’s aesthetic stance offers a specific model for how learners might understand such a metacognitive framework and foster such generalizations. Carillo’s study takes an important stand against the more autonomous models of reading that I also theorized in my last chapter, and which unfortunately remain the default for many in both composition and English studies—in which the practice of reading is presumed either value-neutral, or reducible (or, indeed, purifiable) to a single interpretive frame, whoever the reader. In place of such an understanding, I argue that a focus on stance, and the aesthetic stance in particular, can offer a usefully vivid and expansive replacement model for this disciplinary habit.

In this way, Rosenblatt’s concept of stance contributes to a discussion of writing-reading knowledge transfer in two ways. First, it insists on the real and powerful existence of the reader in the writer, which is to say, the reader (albeit one encompassing multiple purposes and identities) who also constitutes the writer, and through each step of the composing process draws as much on textually interpretive as rhetorical habits. Second, this concept of stance also insists that the writer account for the fact of the unknown future reader who, by reading, will keep the writer’s text both alive and ever shifting in its situation- and agent-specific meaning. Both of these readers are equally political figures, equally mutable and equally capable of bringing

different stances or approaches to knowledge to bear on their literacy practices and specific events. Moreover, and by Rosenblatt's suggestions, as I will outline below, both are transactionally integrated within a Bourdieusian field—and indeed can never operate free of any field—yet both are also capable of moving out of their field, or, indeed, of changing their field from within, through resistance, persuasion, innovation, or critical mass.

Yet Rosenblatt's construct of stance has another benefit in the theorization of reading-writing transfer. Given its expansive understanding of text-based literacies as entailing not just rhetorically sensitive choices among pre-existent conventions but also more personally idiosyncratic or contestable interpretive mutabilities, Rosenblatt's concept of stance provides a model for the *sources* of the agent's production of new knowledge, whether written or read. As such, Rosenblatt's theorization of these fluid and time-specific stances helps to account—and in ways that most writing studies' work on disposition or writer's orientations do not—for the reasons *why* such “problem-exploring” dispositions are not only “transposable,” but also “generative.” Rosenblatt's model explains, in other words, the self-situation dynamics by which certain attitudes enable the agent's imaginative production of new knowledge. Moreover, I argue that Rosenblatt model helps explains writing transfer at this level of source because her theory of the aesthetic-efferent stances not only addresses attitudes towards knowledge, but also addresses attitudes towards *language itself*. By applying transaction to the specific level of textual engagements—which, it deserves repeating, Dewey did not do—Rosenblatt's concept of the aesthetic stance explicates how agents actually arrive at their repurposing solutions; it also allows Rosenblatt to show the transformational impact such solutions can have on both the

immediate rhetorical “problems” faced by writers, and the varied cultures in which such problems live.

For many transfer theorists, such self-awareness about practice is a cornerstone of a transfer-focused pedagogy, as when Kathleen Yancey and Lianne Robertson’s define their “teaching for transfer” program as emphasizing “the importance of helping students understand the logic and theory underlying practice if we want students to practice well” (2). For both the reading- and the writing-intensive classroom, this means, for these authors, more specifically promoting “contexts in which we incorporate theory *into* the practice as a mechanism for supporting students’ development of practice” (3, their emphasis). In Rosenblattian terms, this work can be reframed as explicit investigations into the transactional nature of literacy itself, and attention to the attitudes towards text-based meaning-making that underlie all our acts of reading and writing. By Rosenblatt’s argument, as my next section will overview, explicit activation of the “aesthetic” stance can help students to explore and critique these attitudes and the meanings they produce, in both their own practices and the practices of others.

The Reader in the Writer, “Meaning,” and the Question of Interpretation

In her most mature statements on the matter, Rosenblatt argues that all text-based literacy events mediate between situation, text and agent: mediations that together help to construct cultural meaning in its varied and fluid iterations. As such, and by her work of the 1990s, Rosenblatt insists that all literacy acts are transactional: that, as she puts it, “‘meaning’ is what happens during a transaction” (“Transactional” 1369). Even more specifically, and predicting much of the

terminology that has emerged in recent writing on transfer, Rosenblatt posits that such meaning emerges from “restructurings or extensions of the stock of experiences of language, spoken or written, brought to the task”—constituting a “mutually conditioning” interplay between the agent’s past experiences and understanding, and how these experiences might be now applied to new situation-specific demands and goals (1368). Further, and while she admits to the many ways different dimensions of a literacy practice differ from one another, she still insists that, nonetheless, “. . .speech, writing and reading share the same basic process—transacting with a text” (1368), because, as she goes on to argue, all these “linguistic experiential . . .restructurings” are manifestations of meaning-making, or “interpretation” (1368). Especially through this mutual attention to reading and to writing—and specifically to the reader in the writer, as well as the writer in the reader—Rosenblatt’s focus on stance suggests a model for “transactional” transfer that does not just chase “assimilation and integration,” but is always also constituted, whether the agent knows it or not, by the agent’s “restructuring” of new knowledge—ideas, beliefs and habits that, in each new literacy act, are given both and at once an agent- and a situation-specific shape and gloss.

Ann E. Berthoff has argued—drawing on the same integrative, pragmatic-progressive framework that Rosenblatt had long recommended for the teaching of specifically participatory forms of literacy—that text, on the one hand, and meaning, on the other, are never not “mediated” by different agent-specific acts of “interpretation” (9). Indeed, to think otherwise, Berthoff posits, “makes teaching impossible,” because such a denial removes the mutabilities of the learner from the equation, collapsing reading and writing both to mere “binary code” (10). Rosenblatt’s determined emphasis on “interpretation,” as quoted above, makes a similar suggestion. If, as

Rosenblatt posits, all acts of human reading and writing are, at the highest level of generality, acts of “linguistic-experiential...restructurings,” then neither reading nor writing can be understood as acts of mere decoding, or, indeed, mere formulations of what Blythe calls “appropriate response.” If such meditational interpretation is as basic to all acts of meaning-making as Rosenblatt claims, then all acts of reading and writing are acts of transfer, and profoundly intertwined as so: putting the lie to the institutional structures that try to teach us otherwise, or, indeed, that an agent’s culturally critical readerly work is somehow separable from her practical writerly expressions. Both reading and writing, Rosenblatt insists, are filtered through the subject’s situated (and ever relative) interests and experiences, and are grounded in what Berthoff calls “the dialectic...of self and society” (10). And, even more crucially for transfer studies, understanding such meditational interpretation as bedrock to any linguistic act puts a pedagogically useful focus, as glossed above, on the way that language assumptions affect our own attitudes, during any literacy act, about the relationship between prior knowledge and present demands.

In this way, Rosenblatt’s famous 1938 protest against the concept of the “generic reader” (*Literature* 32) can thus also be read as a protest against the generic writer—the idea that content and skills will (or, indeed, should) be taken up in the same way by all similarly trained agents. Yet in accounting for this variety, her theory still explains two of the main ways that textual knowledge—for readers or writers—can be made and understood. Like Wardle’s dispositions, Rosenblatt’s two stances strive to explain the different levels of “creativity” with which agents can approach textual problems; and, as such, do not pretend to predict the specific interpretations that will emerge. Unlike Wardle’s dispositions, however, Rosenblatt’s stances do not assume that

some agents, via Bourdieusian internalizations, are better equipped for such “creative repurposing” than others. Instead of accounting only for *levels* of transactional creativity, as Wardle’s “dispositions” seem to, Rosenblatt’s stances account for the *roots*—and procedural dynamics—of such transactional creativity: what it is exactly that the agent draws on to produce interpretation-inflected meaning, and the kind of meditational relationship to and attitude towards prior knowledge and present demands that one or another stance implies.

To be sure, Rosenblatt insists that all literacy events and practices are transactional—that, and as applies specifically to writing, “the writer is always transacting with a personal, social and cultural environment” and “thus, the writing process [like the reading process, as she argues earlier and elsewhere in this essay] must be seen as always embodying both personal and social, or individual and environmental factors” (“Transactional” 1379). The difference that Rosenblatt articulates between the efferent and the aesthetic stances towards language and meaning, then, involves the extent to which that the agent can recognize and activate such transactions in more or less participatory ways. Further, and as my previous chapters have shown, the agent’s adoption of one or another stance or purpose will determine what kind of “stock”—or literacy habits and material—the agent emphasizes in her making of meaning; as Rosenblatt puts it, “efferent and aesthetic apply...to the writer’s and reader’s selective attitude towards their own stream of consciousness during their respective linguistic events” (1373). More specifically, Rosenblatt suggests that a largely “efferent” stance towards the practice of reading or writing remains mostly focused on what are assumed by the agent to be what she calls “public” or conventional meanings—and while these will always and inevitably be newly articulated meanings, and thus “transactional” at their core, they are also meanings that the agent herself

nonetheless chooses to understand, whether consciously or not, as the relatively pure replication of a situation's norms, and so shapes accordingly. In contrast, a more self-consciously transactional "aesthetic" stance will add to these inherited conventions—which incorporate both prior knowledge and the more familiar elements of a rhetorical situation's demands—an agent's more idiosyncratic experience of word and world, or what Rosenblatt calls more "private" dimensions of "sense" (1375), and puts the two in sometimes contentious dialogue.

Taking up the former efferent stance, then, relies on an agent's working assumption that language is largely univocal or unambiguously indexical; and the kinds of "restructuring" such a stance allows would largely constitute the reproduction of already existent and inherited habits and ideas. This is, in many ways, the "answer-getting" disposition that Wardle described—set on what, in Rosenblatt's words, can be "extracted and retained" from a literacy event (1372). Yet to Wardle's concept, Rosenblatt's theorization adds another layer: that the efferent stance is also one that renders the fact of literacy's transactional nature invisible. In contrast, the aesthetic stance—which in some ways parallels Wardle's "problem exploring" disposition, with its tolerance for multiple perspectives—requires, as my last chapter overviewed, an agent to adopt a more self-critical and world-critical attitude towards such the existence of such inherited meanings. Like Wardle's "problem exploring" disposition, this requires the agent to understand, through the very act of putting these meanings in dialogue with one's own more fluid, time-, place- and goal-specific experience of language, that such meanings are endlessly mutable. The aesthetic stance is one, then, that renders the dynamics of transaction visible—and thereby renders linguistic meaning, and meaning-making, actively transformable.

As such, the model provided by these two stances can help students understand their reading and writing as interdependent parts of their larger literacy practices, made up by more general attitudes towards text's relationship to meaning. Indeed, these practices and attitudes constitute what Shirley Brice Heath (1983) has called a "way with words," and which entail a set of related assumptions about what language in one or another situation can or should do. While the efferent and the aesthetic do not describe all possible ways with words, they do describe two of the main ways literate agents in the modern education system might conceptualize the innovative potential within all agent-driven uses of language—the extent to which situated texts can be considered to be either already imbued with given meaning, and thus as universally legible, or as relatively and relationally mutable, and, as such, agent-, context-, and task-sensitive. In some cases, of course, pondering the mutability of language is a hindrance, a waste of time. A multiple choice test, a news article, the ingredients on a box of cereal—in these instances, what can be "extracted" as universally legible from a textual event often takes precedence over the potential multiplicity of meanings such an event might also enable. Moreover, the conventions that can organize such extraction will change from case to case. Yet leaving the notion of such conventions unscrutinized in and of itself can suggest to learners that their inability to achieve what Stuart Blythe calls an "appropriate response" to one or another text-based task is the sign of a universal flaw, not a situation-specific blind-spot. Additionally, identifying the fundamental difference between these stances and their attitudes towards language can help learners better understand not only how meaning is made, but how they can, if they wish and deem it appropriate, participate in that making of meaning. As Rosenblatt emphasized in all her work, from *Literature as Exploration* to her final statements on transaction, these stances thus represent a particularly important pair of orientations for students to learn to identify and exploit as they

continue to develop their literacy knowledge—at least if their reading and writing practices are expected, as they often are in a democracy, to facilitate growth into new vistas, and among ever-changing perspectives.

In this way, one of Rosenblatt's crucial contributions to current transfer discussions is her insight that "prior knowledge"—that element that, by transfer's requirements, must productively interact with new and unforeseen demands—can be defined not merely as classroom-acquired writing knowledge, strategic or conceptual, but also as the broader but sometimes inchoate and identity-specific literacy "experience" that Boas, Richards, and Dewey also theorized it to be alongside her. Rosenblatt describes the internal source for such literacy experience as a "a personal linguistic-experiential reservoir," one that "embod[ies] funded assumptions, attitudes, and expectations about language and the world" (1367). By such logic, the aesthetic stance thus encourages an agent to understand the meanings she makes, or could make, as emerging from an interplay between this "personal linguistic-experiential reservoir"—with its ever-changing and potentially singular responses to instances of language—and the larger norms of a situation that make communication possible. As such, Rosenblatt describes this stance as putting into conversation "not only the public referents of the verbal signs, but also the private part of the 'iceberg' of meaning: the sensations, images, feelings, and ideas that are the residue of past psychological events involving these words and their referents" (1373). In such an instance of aesthetic transaction, in other words, the agent feels, at one level or another, her own status as an interpreter and mediator of meaning, and may even be emboldened to recognize all the literate agents around her also as interpreters and mediators in their own right. This shifts the burden of

meaning-making from the text to the transactional event—to the way reading-writing subjects, texts, and situations interact.

For a writer as for a reader, the mediation between self and situation that the aesthetic stance enables thus results in more interactive, purposive, and potentially innovative attitudes towards specifically textual problems: whether concerning how an argument should unfold over the course of an essay, what a certain abstract term might more concretely connote in the mind of a reader, or the affective reverberations an agent feels to emerge from her engagement with a certain image or turn of phrase. Further, the validity of such decisions are reinforced not merely as a matter of identifying the extent to which a text can or does match some pre-established norm, but of examining those norms as they relate to one's own more specific experiences, reactions, and even intuitions. Given this model, readers and writers can understand themselves to make language-based meanings that can both strive to communicate within recognizable rhetorical boundaries, at the same time that such meanings may push against those boundaries with the influence of the writer's own more singular interests.

But even more crucial is the fact that Rosenblatt refuses to describe this stance as an either-or—thus implying (although this has been vastly misunderstood, as my first chapter showed) that meanings are never entirely private nor entirely public, but always a mix of the two, albeit in different and fluid ratios. Because the agent's experience of stance is conceptualized as moving, or traveling, on an ever-shifting and purpose-driven continuum between more “aesthetic” and more “efferent” tendencies, students can thus understand their text-based work—and their attitudes towards the various literacies their multi-faceted lives require, or inspire them at

different times, to take up—as always participatory, not split rigidly between dutiful rule-following, on the one hand, and entirely expressive, or entirely free uses of language, on the other. As my previous chapters have shown, Rosenblatt’s underscores these continuities between readers’ and writers’ variant literacy attitudes and practices—continuities that exist as much between these different stances as between the self and society negotiations that these stances help agents to mediate. As Rosenblatt’s comparative study traced, even the nineteenth-century aesthetes most devoted to an autonomous, transcendent or disinterested conceptualization of art, text, and meaning were profoundly shaped by the various overlapping cultures that made up their context. Indeed, these concepts of autonomy emerged out their authors’ constant conversation with the real uses to which these concepts’ textual instantiations were continuing to be put, and thus changed, in the world.

In this, Rosenblatt’s construct of stance also stands in contrast to the harder line that Wardle sometimes suggests between an answer-getting and problem-exploring disposition. To be sure, Rosenblatt often (and misleadingly) deploys her efferent stance as a kind of negative example against which she can better promote the more imaginative, self-reflective, and critical approaches to meaning-making that a more aesthetic stance exercises. Even so, her most mature statements of theory begin to insist that, during any agent’s process of reading or writing (at least in legible prose), these stances always exist in fluid and intermixing dialogue with each other. Rosenblatt’s model of the continuum offers the crucial reminder that a stance drawing exclusively on “public” sources for meaning, and having no trace of transactional self-awareness, would constitute little more than computer code—purely automatic, preprogrammed, inhuman. Likewise, a stance drawing exclusively on “private” sources of meaning could easily devolve

into the sealed up, private language that, as her dissertation reminds us, promotes its own elitist construct of literacy through its devoted resistance to communicative use, interest, or purpose of any kind. The reading and writing demands that students must meet, especially in the college context, often require work that is simultaneously purpose-driven and rhetorically canny, on the one hand, but also based in agent-specific interpretive discovery and the generation of relatively original solutions, on the other. I argue that such demands can be best met by that “problem-exploring” aesthetic stance that, Rosenblatt suggests, allows a rich, flexible, and purposive dialogue between these two attitudinal extremes. Indeed, and as Moore and Anson point out, recent research has shown that “routinized” and more “transformative” modes of transfer should not, in most cases, stand as mutually exclusive categories of thought (7), and are perhaps most fruitfully conceptualized for students as themselves ever in dialogue over the course of any task. In this way, questions about knowledge transfer—explicit investigation into its dynamics—can remind students and instructors alike that one reader or writer’s “transformation” may in fact constitute another’s “routine,” and one’s bold and hard-won interpretation, another’s self-evident comprehension, all depending on the diverse experiences and aspirations that each individual brings to a task.

I have argued throughout this dissertation that Rosenblatt’s transactional theory of reading and writing is most useful to higher education in general and writing programs in particular when understood as a theory of text-based literacy. As such, the politically charged pedagogical implications of this theory comes into even sharper focus when put into conversation with recent work in learning transfer and in literacy studies, such as Mary Lea and Brian Street’s recent research into U.K. undergraduate students’ “academic literacies”—their different practices

across disciplines—and which can be understood as investigating these questions of “transformation” and “routine” at the same expansive level as Rosenblatt’s theorization of transaction. Lea and Street’s work examines not only the ways that writing and reading practices inevitably change in meaning and value as they travel from one domain to another, or from one agent to another (e.g. student to teacher), but also the ways that such transmissions are consequently and inevitably “contested” and contestable (“Student” 172). For Lea and Street, bringing such an “ideological” lens to bear on students’ literacy practices force questions that go far beyond rhetorical propriety, or what they describe as “academic socialization” (158). And while Lea and Street’s work in academic literacies does not take on the notion of transfer directly, Donahue, as I’ve already noted, has begun to suggest ways to bridge these two strands of thought. Donahue finds that, in most writing studies transfer work, “the pedagogical model remains focused... on optimizing integration” (113), the kind of assimilationist economy that Lea and Street’s model strives to move beyond; in its place she recommends, like Lea and Street, closer attention to the alternate “exploration[s] of resistance, negotiation” that transfer can also facilitate (113). Indeed, Donahue suggests the “repurposing” of literacy knowledge might do more than just help students succeed within the given parameters of one field or another. Such repurposing can also help students “reshape the landscape” of those given parameters, from the position less of novices than of deliberative and critically rigorous practitioners negotiating between their own contested perspectives and what might be conflicting literacy norms (113).

As such, Lea and Street have described their model of literacy learning as “focus[ing]...less upon disciplinary genre knowledge and more upon issues of subjectivity and agency” (Russell et al “Exploring” 407)—and Rosenblatt’s transactional model can be used to steer conversations

about transfer towards a similar goal. As these sections have shown, such attention to “subjectivity and agency” first helps to ground writers’ practice not only in the hard work of production but the hard work of interpretation, by underlining the generalizable dynamics that animate both reading and writing. Such a focus on the volitional powers of the literate subject and her taking up of stance reminds learners that the approach they bring to bear on an event of reading can be fruitfully carried over to the approach they bring to bear on an event of writing, and vice versa. A model of stance can thus help students more closely consider and harness the procedural dynamics by which text-based meaning itself is generated, especially on the granular level of one’s attitude towards language and its sources of its live significance. Rosenblatt’s aesthetic stance thus helps explain the complex, self-critical, and generative interplay that any literacy event activates: between a text, a situation’s apparent norms, and a purpose-driven agent’s more idiosyncratic “linguistic-experiential reservoir.” The learner can thus understand her own literacy practices, as a reader and a writer, as ever constituting a “choosing activity” as Rosenblatt calls it, citing William James (“Transactional” 1368)—in which the agent is forever in some ways affirming and in other ways calling into question the use-value of one or another set of literacy conventions and beliefs. Finally, and as a result of such understanding, this expansive vision of agent- and situation-specific literacies can also underline the reformative and participatory potential all agents have for purposively “transacting” with a rhetorical situation—for entering its conversation, and even “changing its landscape,” instead of merely reproducing its conventions.

Yet there is a final facet to this aesthetic stance and the contributions that such a stance can make to the way theorists and students conceptualize transfer across field-based domains, agents, and

dimensions of literacy. This is the crucial account that Rosenblatt's transactional model offers of literacy not just as an academic practice, but as a cultural practice. Here the transactional transfer of knowledge can also help instructors and students address—and benefit from—the cultivation of inclusive pedagogies as necessary to a fully self- and world-critical construct of reading and writing. This very thorny issue of transfer through and across different cultures—whether disciplinary, professional, or personal—is what this chapter's final section will take up.

Dimensions of Literacy: Transaction and the Making of Culture

“People do not read themselves into literacy—they have to be talked into it.”

- Deborah Brandt, *Literacy as Involvement* (113)

Most largely, this dissertation focuses on knowledge-in-transit, and the ways that knowledge can be understood to transactionally travel through and across agents' practices and events of reading and writing. I argue that Rosenblatt's transactional theory of literacy, and attendant theory of the efferent and aesthetic stances, offer a set of crucial explanatory models for how learners can more deliberately activate such travel, or what education scholars call knowledge transfer.

But I have further argued that Rosenblatt's theories show how these acts can be conceived as the means towards a specifically progressive goal—which is to say, aimed at achieving interlinked personal and social growth. Transaction, and, even more specifically, the aesthetic stance, can help learners purposively cultivate the critically engaged habit of reinvesting their already-knowns of language—whether forms, terms, or ideas—for new uses. Investigating their own

writing as a kind of transaction, as initiated by the interplay between these “aesthetic” and “efferent” stances, learners can engage the self-reflective “big picture” thinking (Yancey and Robertson 3) that writing scholars have recently recommended for their more flexible and transformational activations of transfer.

Yet this model does not only help learners, in Yancey and Robertson’s terms, “develop a theory of writing that can be used to frame writing tasks” across multiple contexts (3). Transaction and the aesthetic stance can more particularly help learners develop a connected theory of reading—and “theory of literacy”—in which their text-based practices are revealed to be unified by similar dynamics, attitudes, and kinds of attention. As such, Rosenblatt’s theory of stance expands writing knowledge transfer to also include reading, and expands the possibilities of what should constitute the shared aims of English studies’ classrooms, whether more focused on poetics or rhetoric, literature or composition. Transaction helps learners to recognize and harness the interplay between their own idiosyncratic (what Rosenblatt called more “aesthetic”) experiences, associations and speculations, on the one hand, and more efferent communications and conventions, on the other, that they might transactionally achieve, through their literacy practices themselves, interpenetrating interpretations and productions can feel—in Samuel Johnson’s poetry-minded terms—at once both “new” and “just.” And at the larger level of English studies’ entrenched sub-divisions, a theory of transaction and stance can also link learners’ investigations into these dimensions of literacy that higher education has too long kept disaggregated.

Yet the intellectual history of my previous chapters also suggests that these questions of transfer and literacy practices deserve an even wider frame. This frame can be provided by the richly

interdisciplinary “culture concept” that I argue grounds Rosenblatt’s theory of transaction and stance, and that should be understood as central to her work’s contemporary relevance. This expansive vision of culture is one that attends to questions of edifying, “civilizing,” progress-minded engagements, such as those we enable, as readers and writers, through our experiences with what Dewey, Hutchins, or Rosenblatt would call “great books”; yet this vision of “culture” also attends to the varied behaviors, situations and determining histories within which our more functional and strategic practices of interpretation and communication take place. This expansive vision of culture is thus as attuned to an anthropological relativism and contingency of values as it is to the Deweyan, “consummatory” ideal of aesthetic experience, encounter, and edification. Moreover, I have argued that it is this very culture concept—and, indeed, its relevance for transfer—that is absent in so much of the English studies-oriented scholarship on Rosenblatt’s work, much because that very culture concept challenges the disaggregations that English studies has continued to reinforce, despite its own claims to the contrary.

As outlined in my first chapter, these disaggregating tendencies have three main strands. First is the strand of scholarship that characterizes Rosenblatt’s work as an early instantiation of highly subjectivist, reader-response theory, with little relevance either for writing, or for the historically grounded and agent-specific interplays that exist between production and reception. The second strand follows this first in its devotion to an individualistic paradigm of literacy development, but also sees Rosenblatt as leveraging a fairly traditional and even static view of literature itself. A third strand rests on an ideal of literate agents’ liberation from established norms, neglecting the crucial contributions that Rosenblatt’s work makes not only to a theory of our constructive

engagement with existent ideas, but to a theory explaining our constructive attitudes toward language itself.

As this dissertation's intellectual history explores, these each constitute a shortsighted understanding of Rosenblatt's significance for a contemporary college classroom devoted to culturally sensitive literacy instruction, whether focused on literary or rhetorical norms and innovations. Rosenblatt's early work's inquiries into the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century concept of "stock" and the "aesthetic" reveal her, from the beginning, to have to been searching for new paradigms by which to retheorize the transformative powers of literature, specifically, and text-based literacy events, more largely, without capitulating either to extreme subjectivism or relativism, on the one hand, or, on the other, a didactic, "Victorian," "spectator" theory of learning. Moreover, Rosenblatt's early grounding in cultural anthropology and literary comparatism shows her to have always been as curious about writing as about reading—and about the reiterative work of cultural reinterpretation that links these activities together, agent by agent, and milieu by milieu. Indeed, I show that Rosenblatt's later theory of transaction—which I argue is best conceived as a theory of transactional literacy—was nascent in her work long before Dewey began circulating the term (1949) and Rosenblatt recognized the term's pertinence for her ideas. This concept's presence in her early work—albeit as-yet-unnamed—is visible in the dialogues she initiated with literary criticism, anthropology, rhetoric, and aesthetics, and reveal a vision of literacy learning that attributes the construction of meaning to the mutually conditioning interpenetrations of an agent, situation, and text. This also has significance as a learning theory, entailing a larger critique of what Rosenblatt later calls "the simple stimulus-response model" that she found to problematically support too many contemporaneous

explorations of, and prescriptions concerning, reading and writing. Aligning herself instead with Dewey, and with William James before him, Rosenblatt argues that “the living organism selects from its environment the stimuli to which it will respond,” thus arguing that literacy acts, and, even more largely, that “knowing is a transaction between a particular individual and a particular environment,” in which neither is ultimately determinant of, nor can remain unaffected by, whatever knowledge results from that literacy transaction, moment by moment (*Reader* 17).

Rosenblatt’s development of the concept of “stance”—another way of describing what and how the “living organism selects”—is, I posit, a particularly crucial element for the transactional making of text-based meaning, and for fully realizing the import of her culturally-inflected understanding of literacy. Stance explains the relatively agentic but culturally supported means by which readers and writers can innovate within given customs, and can find themselves, and the knowledge that they are making, thereby transformed by the encounter. Such a theory not only shows literature to be an “event”—the result of the specific transactional engagement with text—but shows readers and writers that their personal development also impinges upon, and effects change, in the larger value-laden environments (“cultures”) through which they move. In fact, to distinguish too sharply between a cultural agent and her culture is to misunderstand the mutually constitutive nature of both of these elements involved in what Rosenblatt calls the “total situation” of text-based literacy practices. As it applies specifically to English studies, the issues of transaction and stance further call into question the propriety of higher education’s own habits of distinguishing too sharply between pragmatic issues of student development, per the “preparatory” writing classroom, and the more theory- and critique-oriented questions that organize literary and cultural studies classrooms. Indeed, I argue that Rosenblatt’s transactional

theory of literacy and stance suggests that these two instructional mandates are deeply interconnected and reciprocally involved as two parts of a single inquiry into “literacy as a cultural practice”—and that educators and students would do better to self-reflectively and explicitly recognize them as such.

Through her reinterpretation of Dewey’s *Art as Experience*, as it might more specifically and optimistically apply to the high-level reading and writing classroom, Rosenblatt’s “aesthetic stance” offers one manifestation of the “pragmatic alternative” that Thomas Miller recommends for the literary studies/writing instruction schism that currently structures college-level literacy learning. As my last chapter argued, Rosenblatt should not be sharply contrasted with New Critics so much as understood to have forged a different path from similar impulses. Rosenblatt’s aesthetic stance shows a way that the study of literature—once it has been conceived as a transactional construction of innovatively various cultural uptakes of innovatively various cultural productions—is relevant for the writing classroom not merely for transmitting ideas or forms, as on a “blank photographic plate,” as she puts it (*Literature* 232). Instead, Rosenblatt suggests in her final work that the aesthetic stance that we practice as engaged readers of culture is built from the same kinds of self- and world-critical attentions and attitudes that can make us engaged writers of culture. This aesthetic stance approaches cultural texts not from a paradigm of “answer-getting,” as Elizabeth Wardle would have it—whereby text-based knowledge-making practices are imagined to be largely static and stable. Instead, this aesthetic stance approaches cultural texts from a paradigm of “problem-exploring,” whereby text-based knowledge-making practices are recognized as fluid, contingent, constructed, and thereby transformable across contexts and tasks. Yet—and as part of a situated, time-specific and purpose-driven continuum—

this aesthetic stance also explains the balance that critical readers and writers need to strike between idea-generation and sensitivity to norms. The aesthetic stance presents cultural innovation as a kind of attention that remains attuned to the personal, marginalized, or as yet unexpressed, and yet that does not “divorce” itself entirely from its “public,” as Rosenblatt argues in her 1931 dissertation.

Moreover, the concept of literacy as a cultural practice—which I would suggest is a concept Rosenblatt most explicitly recommends as early as 1946 (“Towards a Cultural Approach”)—also accounts for culture as it exists beyond the academic sphere. As to this aspiration, too, Rosenblatt’s aesthetic stance provides a vivid model. Indeed, as a number of recent literacy theorists have reminded us (e.g. Brandt, Street, Russell), the transfer-transformations discussed above do not occur only through texts, just as Dewey reminds us that a culture of great books does not live only in the great books themselves. To assume they do would assume the wholesale transmission vacuum that that Boasian anthropology and Deweyan social thought set themselves against, and sought to show otherwise—the first through fieldwork, and the second through philosophical proofs. Rosenblatt, in even more specific dialogue with Richards and Baldensperger, can be understood as applying this conviction with special and century-spanning vigor to the realm of literature and of literacy, insisting again and again that knowledge cannot travel culture to culture, agent to agent, uninterrupted or unchanged. Literature *is* experience, nothing more and nothing less, as the title of her first book in English unequivocally claims; and literacy, she further suggests, is best revealed by that heightened form of self-society experience that the literary experience can so vibrantly enable. Moreover, and as Boas’s historicism insists, and even Rosenblatt’s earliest work traced out, texts do their work in minds and bodies that are

also deeply enmeshed in the world, or in varied worlds; and they do their work not only through other acts of reading and writing, but—among many other forces, of course—those two other key instantiations of language, speaking and listening (and which too many college classrooms encourage students to think of representative of their more banal, everyday, and even “stock” responses or practices). In contrast to those habits, Rosenblatt’s vision of culture is not only integrative, but determinedly permeable and inclusive.

For Rosenblatt, indeed, the classroom is a crucial space for the refining exercise of students’ interpretative and critical muscles, but not only because the classroom makes available the teacher’s expert perspective or forms of support. The classroom also offers proof of the polysemous nature of “textual transactions” and varied forms of text-based problem-solving, by exposing the learner to all of her peers’ multifarious criteria, responses, and reinvestments, making a microcosm of the “culture”—the value-freighted social habits and texts—in which the learner is also a meaning-making participant. By this vision, collaboration and cross-cultural dialogue will achieve different ebbs and swells of what we might call “critical mass,” wherein various terms and ideas take on new shadings or moral weight, and wherein the greater the inclusive spirit, and the more critical one’s self- and world-reflections, the more genuinely transformative an individual’s constructions of meaning will be. In such a vision, one’s own differences—one’s particular inherited “stock” combined with one’s more personal or as-yet-inchoate associations and convictions—can be recognized and valued as some of the key elements spurring innovation in the making of text-based meaning. And through exchange with others, these alternate forms of engagement can then be evaluated and integrated into, to use Rosenblatt’s terms, one’s own “linguistic-experiential repertoire” (“Transaction” 1367), elements

from which can then be reinvested into future reading and writing acts, or passed onto the new readers and writers that future literacy acts will make available. By this paradigm, the classic comparatist notion of *fleure*—the flow of cultural habits, forms and ideas through history—can never be purely reproductive; it is constantly, challengingly, and fruitfully interrupted by diverging perspectives, schemas, and uses of language.

From this culturally inclusive perspective, the aesthetic stance and the transactional paradigm that supports it also help to reframe transfer in the transformative terms that recent writing studies scholars have come to recommend. Indeed, this transformative view of transfer can be made particularly visible in the classroom devoted to cultivating an aesthetic stance—or the generation of socially aware but personally inflected “explorations,” as Wardle might have it, of communicative “problems,” or the puzzles of difference and correlation that any instantiation of a culture in a democracy will invariably present. Through the figure of the classroom, literacy can thus be conceived as a cultural practice in which agents variously participate through their reading and writing. By this, literacy cannot be imagined, as by an “autonomous” model, to merely support cultural continuance; nor can it be conceptualized as only entailing the value-neutral skills one needs to craft proper responses to predictable demands. Instead, the aesthetic stance—by which language is realized as polysemous and open to change—helps show the cultural practice of literacy as a means of cultural reform. Agents are changed by entering into transactions with a texts—actively engaging, at one level, with what text-based uses of language might mean in their most conventionally communicative and apparent straightforwardness (which of course depends on one or another set of presumed conventions), as well as, at another, with what of the agent’s own experience might help to specifically enlarge or shift in that

meaning. Discussing these alternate approaches, and offering new language to describe their interpretations or mutating values, then pushes learners to pass the lessons of their transactional experiences on, as well, to others. Extending even further outward, too, having transacted both together and alone with texts in these ways, learners can then apply this imaginative stance and these specific terms newly to their own productions outside the classroom, encouraging others to newly value or interpret or put to use such transformed language, schemas, and ideas.

For, as Rosenblatt is careful to emphasize throughout her work, knowledge entails not just content but habits and practices of thought. Rosenblatt's great defense of literature depends on her insistence on individuals' pragmatic agency in the making of culture. We are not *tabula rasa*, she tells us again and again, utterly determined by history, exposures, or biological fate. We can shape—resist, embrace, reinterpret—whatever culture we come in contact with. Of course, there are cases in which one's interpretations or reinterpretations go unnoticed, undervalued, or unsupported; *Literature as Exploration* can be retheorized as constituting a powerful plea against such marginalizing pedagogies. And, of course, there are also cases where one's reinterpretations are insufficiently self-critical, or what Boas forwarded as “collaborative”—where they do not acknowledge as much as they could either the shaping powers of situation, or the historical density that makes language historically meaningful. Moreover, there are certainly cases in which one's inherited already-knowns are quite properly ascendant—when the “efferent” stance proves the sensical stance to take in choosing an action or passing a judgement; and when the mere reproduction of language-based norms may be necessary to enable and communicate non-language-based innovations. Yet it is ethically questionable, as Boas and Richards most explicitly suggest, to arrive at the cross-cultural exchange and to merely apply one's own stock

communicative frameworks without questioning whether such a presumption is warranted. A self-critical aesthetic stance, as its corrective, attunes agents to such habitual presumptions, as well as to the differences and contributions that might be made by adopting a less familiar or alternative lens. The aesthetic stance—which, Rosenblatt suggests, is what we already use when engaged in the “consummatory experience” of being somehow lifted up, challenged, or changed, by a text-based engagement with what we’ve come to call “art”—is the stance in which the literate agent looks inward and outward at once; when she considers the new tacks, and follows the new speculations, that an instance of language can suggest, whether contemplating a line from a poem, or a term around which an unfolding argument might come to revolve.

The pragmatic-progressive school of thought out of which Rosenblatt wrote suggests that there is not only real social benefit but ethical necessity in such self- and world-critical flexibility and experimentation. Rosenblatt’s application of this philosophy—especially given its emphasis on the mutability of reception and perception; on the interpenetrating interplay between self and society; and on the bootstrapping recursivity of innovation and convention—has, I argue, concrete implications for the reading and writing classroom. As this section’s opening quotation from Deborah Brandt argues, our literate abilities expand not only through reading and writing, but also through being “talked into” that experience of reading and writing by others: by being invited to see our literacy practices as cultural practices interrelated with each other, and with a larger web of language-based communication and spheres of influence that are loaded with shifting and shiftable, shaping and shapeable, meanings and values.

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