Trouble in Kindergarten: Viktor Löwenfeld’s Pedagogy and the Radicalization of Art

Any material will be suitable for emotional forms of design or abstractions which permits a free use of design forms, without restricting the individual to rigid patterns….Scraps of wood, metal, textiles, plastics, and paper can be arranged in such a way that they produce an excellent “symphony” of textures and shapes.¹

These words by the influential Austrian-American art pedagogue and psychologist, Viktor Löwenfeld (1903-60), might come as a surprise to the scholar of contemporary art. Written in 1947, they appear in Löwenfeld’s wildly-successful manual Creative and Mental Growth, a classic in American art education that has enjoyed eight editions since its initial publication. (Figure 1) Two decades before the rise of “radical” art movements in the 1960s, the book espouses what have since become mainstays of contemporary artistic practice—the reinvention of pedestrian objects, the creative combination of seemingly unrelated mediums, and the emphasis on an evolving experimental process without a fixed aesthetic outcome. The late art theorist Rudolf Arnheim, also a refugee of National Socialism, noted that Löwenfeld’s influence on American culture was decisive. His principles have been so thoroughly “metabolized in the educational practice that one tends to become almost unaware of their presence.”² Such evidence flies in the face of the carefully-crafted genealogy of current art historians, who claim that the postwar neo-avant-garde suddenly came into being when Americans finally discovered Duchamp.³

3 For this thesis, see the entire issue of October 70 (Fall 1994), entitled The Duchamp Effect, which includes by Benjamin Buchloh, Thierry de Duve and Hal Foster.
In this study I build on past scholarship, which has looked to early-twentieth-century Vienna to remap our histories of modernism. When he published his groundbreaking *Fin-de-Siècle Vienna: Politics and Culture* in 1979, Carl Schorske intended implicitly to dislodge Paris from its privileged position as the exemplary locus of cultural modernity.\(^4\) It was, paradoxically, not in an industrial powerhouse—but a crumbling imperial capital still in the clutches of tradition—that key twentieth-century understandings of artistic creativity, the human psyche, architectural style and philosophical logic were born. While now almost exclusively known for his post-exile work in America, Löwenfeld was also a product of this Vienna, where his research and teaching drew from a rich milieu of psychological research, art history and pedagogical thought.

Where Löwenfeld’s work opens new historical avenues, this paper argues, is to reveal how art in Vienna was conceived as a powerful weapon for political transformation. My argument departs from a common narrative, which sees *fin-de-siècle* Viennese art as signaling political retreat among the bourgeoisie. For Hermann Broch, such art arose within Austria’s political limbo in the age of nationalism. In this “value vacuum,” art did not “seek to address social themes, nor [did] it seek to insinuate itself into the social fabric” as an agent for the betterment of society.\(^5\) In a similar vein, Schorske has linked such artistic notions to the collapse of Viennese liberalism in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. Forced out of Parliament and impotent in the face of broad geopolitical change, the liberal bourgeoisie enveloped themselves within an alienated fantasy of literature, art and music.

But beyond the confines of coffee houses, theaters and exhibition halls—those sites typically covered in histories of Viennese art—we find a very different story. Löwenfeld and other reformist educators sought to take avant-garde ideas to the streets—or, rather, to the

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schools. According to Löwenfeld, untrammeled creative expression, freed from conventional representational and aesthetic strictures, was a psychologically and socially liberating force. When cultivated among the youth, this fundamentally irrational creative will could overthrow the conformist pressures intrinsic to coercive political structures. This study first surveys Löwenfeld’s early research and locates its intellectual sources; it then situates these ideas within the political climate of early-twentieth century Vienna; and it concludes by discussing why the school functioned as a particularly radical site for their implementation, as well as what institutional implications this history might have for the contemporary scholar.

An overview of Löwenfeld’s research
During the early decades of the twentieth century, Viktor Löwenfeld developed a wide-ranging theory of artistic development through the aid of peculiar test subjects: blind and weak-sighted children. From 1923 till the time of the Anschluss, he conducted experiments and collected data on students at the Israelitischen Blinden-Institut in Hohe Warte, a district of Vienna. His teaching and research here eventually culminated into several published studies: Die Entstehung der Plastik, a version of his dissertation at the University of Vienna, published in 1932; Die Plastische Arbeiten der Blinder, which he co-authored in 1934 with art historian Ludwig Münz; and The Nature of Creative Activity, his first English-language work, published in 1939. Before delving into the wider social implications of this research, this paper will first survey how, by studying the art of a demographically-marginal group of children, Löwenfeld paradoxically sought to craft a universal theory of creative production.

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7 While this work is cited in the secondary literature, I have not been actually able to locate a copy anywhere.
For Löwenfeld, the artwork of blind and weak-sighted youth offered an ideal means of empirical access into the primal workings of the creative psyche. Studying such art could help surmount a problem identified by one of Löwenfeld’s associates, Sigmund Freud. Against mechanistic models of experimental psychology, Freud had argued in his essay “Instincts and their Vicissitudes” that the somatic sources (whether chemical or mechanical) of human instincts ultimately lie “outside the scope of psychology.” Under this model, the symptoms of the creative will could be known, but not their inner physiological causes. But the art of the blind, Löwenfeld argued in Plastische Arbeiten, might function as a direct medium for transferring those deep bodily activities into an empirically legible form. To a far greater degree than the seeing, the blind are in-touch with their inner emotions and intuitively recognize their bodies’ relationship to the psyche. He would later describe this kind of “autoplastic” art by the blind as a somatic “ego-linkage.” In seeking out the deep physiological origins of creative activity, Löwenfeld argued against the theories of Wilhelm Voss and other earlier thinkers, who saw artistic production as a function of the superficial faculties of touch or sight.

A sense of such ambitions might be gleaned from the series of haunting clay sculptures featured at the end of Plastische Arbeiten. (Figure 2) In their exaggerated, protruding facial musculature and deeply etched lines of expression, the figures seem to draw their maker’s inner psyche to the surface. Or, perhaps, it seems the artists have stripped the skin off their subjects, to lay bare the psyche’s bodily workings. Löwenfeld explained—perhaps all-too-conveniently—that the blind, in their will to self-representation, immediately gravitate toward modeling the

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10 “Der Blinde hat die fundamentalen Proportionsmaße aus dem eigenen Körpererleben, ohne sie für das expressive Gestalten unwerten zu müssen.” Löwenfeld, Plastische Arbeiten, 103
11 Löwenfeld, Nature of Creative Activity, 4.
human body as the most natural expression of the “condition of the emotional life.” Although he professes a hands-off approach to teaching, to allow his students free reign of their creative processes, the figures’ exaggerated physiognomies suggest a far more calculated approach.

While he condemned academic figure drawing, Löwenfeld directed his students to sculpt “expressive grimaces” such as laughter and surprise. This working process, of course, would inevitably result in works of heightened emotional expression.

Through the course of his research, Löwenfeld formulated a tightly-constructed theory of artistic development. In *The Nature of Creative Activity*, written five years after *Plastische Arbeiten*, Löwenfeld categorized all artists into two distinct types. “Haptic” artists are psychologically predisposed to creating expressionistic representations of their inner emotions, while “visual” types seek to produce visually-accurate accounts of their surroundings. Including the category of the “visual” type obviously required an experimental shift, from the study of totally-blind artists to partially-blind and weak-sighted ones. Underlying this research was a fundamental presupposition, that the partially-blind undergo the identical trajectory of artistic development as the seeing, but that they begin the process with a few years delay. This meant that he could trace the psychological growth of all children, with the benefit of handling manageable test subjects who could articulate the thought processes behind their creative products. Indeed, the very title of his second book declares its universal ambitions: it concerns not just the sculpturing of the blind, but creativity in its full “Nature.”

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14 While he did not make the same distinction in *Plastische Arbeiten der Blinder*, Löwenfeld anticipated here his later argument by distinguishing “zwei Typen”: one which “aus dem Ganzen die einzelnen Formen herausarbeitet,” while another which “setzt sein Werk aus lauter einzelnen symbolbeladenen Teilen zusammen.” Löwenfeld, *Plastische Arbeiten*, 107.
Creativity, it turns out, unfolds in defined sequential stages. Until age nine—several years in delay of seeing children—his subjects remained in the “scribbling stage,” as their drawing evolved from uncontrolled to coordinated movements. They proceeded then to the “pre-schematic stage,” as they experimented with different forms to represent physical objects. Next they developed “schemas,” or definite symbols (stick figures, for instance), which they could adapt or deviate from for particular narrative or expressive purposes. They exited the realm of childhood art, usually around age fourteen, when they abandoned emotionally-driven expression for “realistic representation.”

Despite societal preferences for visually-convincing pictures, for Löwenfeld haptic art is an equally valid means of personal expression. Nevertheless, young artists, either through personal lack of effort or the intrusion of teachers with prior aesthetic biases, begin forming rigid visual “schemas” when “frequent repetition has crystallised the original experience into a constant formal repetition.”\(^\text{15}\) He argued that apparent visual “distortions” by such artists—from scribbling, to swollen and stretched limbs and flatted spatial representations—actually carried meaningful narrative intent: linked as much to internal psychophysical “muscular innervations, deep sensibilities” as to external visual stimuli.\(^\text{16}\) (Figure 3)

The ambitions of this research, however, extended far beyond the child: her or his creative development, so Löwenfeld claimed, replayed the entire artistic process of human civilization’s development. At the turn of the century, Austrian, German and Swiss art historians had circulated a number of tropes about the art of archaic and ancient peoples. For these scholars, the rigid geometric art of the Egyptians underwent a continuous evolution, which would eventually give way to the more subjectively developed work of the Greeks. Löwenfeld similarly argued that blind artists began by expressing their immediate subjective experiences, creating


\(^{16}\) Löwenfeld, *Nature of Creative Activity*, 82.

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Figure 3: (Above) Example of stereotyped “schema”; (Below) Drawing with swollen head on the left meant to express the feeling of a headache. From *The Nature of Creative Activity* (1939).
sculptures and drawings with “vaguely formulated details” but surprising coherence and naturalism; next, the same artists would rationalize their experiences, producing highly analytical but stilted works composed of geometric forms; only finally did artists successfully integrate both subjective and rational expressions. This process paralleled the development from Paleolithic to Neolithic art to the art of civilized peoples.17 (Figure 4) Far from abandoning pedagogical problems to schoolteachers, early-twentieth-century intellectuals such as Löwenfeld understood childhood development as a scientific “key” with enormous explanatory power for all fields of research.

Although Löwenfeld claimed to draw his conclusions from pure observation, he in fact owed deep debts to diverse traditions of German and Austrian thought. His work with Ludwig Münz, a noted historian of Dutch and Flemish Renaissance painting, would have equipped him with the art-historical tools of the so-called “Vienna School.”18 Löwenfeld’s analyses of student drawings and sculptures, organized according categories of vision and touch, drew from the formalist method pioneered by Alois Riegl. Riegl’s challenge to canonical styles and artifacts constituted a larger forma mentis shared by his contemporary, Franz Cizék.19 Cizék had stirred up controversy within pedagogical circles, by claiming that the seemingly senseless forms of children’s art spring from rich emotional impulses that should be cultivated—not “corrected.” Löwenfeld relied heavily on Cizék’s practices, as evident in Cizék’s methods of clay portrait sculpting. (Figure 5) Yet Löwenfeld introduced to them a scientific dimension Cizék’s did not share.20 He incorporated Freud’s revolutionary studies on the child psyche, as well as the Gestalt

17 Löwenfeld, Nature of Creative Activity, 131-46
19 For an important articulation of the notion that non-canonical styles should not be subjected to the anachronistic preference for naturalistic art, see Alois Riegl, “The Main Characteristics of the Late Roman Kunstwollen” (1901), in The Vienna School Reader – Politics and Art Historical Method in the 1930s, ed. Christopher Wood (New York: Zone Books, 2000).
psychology of Karl Bühler, an experimentalist who studied the mental development of children.21

As will be further discussed, the eclecticism of Löwenfeld’s theories—not just the theories themselves—is significant. Such disciplinary promiscuity had also characterized the work of his intellectual precursors. Their work reflects Vienna’s broader political and cultural fragmentation in the period, when liberal academics invented and assembled new fields of study, in order to carve out intellectual spaces not available in the increasingly reactionary climate of the established academies.

The politics of child art

While Löwenfeld purported to distill trans-historical, scientific principles of artistic development, within the immediate context of pre-World War II Vienna, his arguments conveyed a resounding political message. Following the fin-de-siècle demise of bourgeois liberalism, debates over the nature of “good” and “bad” art functioned as barometers for Austria’s ever-deeper political rifts.22 A 1923 newspaper parody of Franz Cižek’s teaching methods, which celebrated the unbridled artistic expression of children, reflected contemporary Viennese anxieties about the link between art pedagogy and social disintegration:

Therefore, Peperl say this to your parents: If they uprightly vote Social Democrat, next school year you’re allowed to cut up paper and splash around with paste; but if they vote Christian Socialist, you must learn to read, write and add up!23

On one side were members of the rabidly anti-Semitic Christian Socialist Party, which had gained ascendancy in Parliament in 1907.24 Such conservatives saw the attack on pedagogical

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standards as an underhanded assault to overthrow the social order. On the other side were those in the political minority, such as Löwenfeld. These liberals, by contrast, equated doctrinaire artistic convention with social and political oppression.

Löwenfeld’s research and teaching combated the prevailing political and educational establishment on several fronts. They sought, first of all, to overturn the conservative association of non-naturalistic art with socio-biological degeneracy. Löwenfeld’s very decision to study blind children would cast the physically-disabled not as abnormal biological specimens, but as privileged exemplars of all humanity. Such an elevation of “degenerate” art—produced literally by the physically-impaired—would moreover contradict the prevailing aesthetic prejudice for the perspectival “naturalism” found in the work of Classical, Renaissance, and academically-trained modern painters and sculptors. According to the intellectual historian Martin Jay, this bias sprang from a deep-seated Western culture of “ocularcentrism,” which has equated the faculty of sight with that of reason. Löwenfeld not only argued against privileging such aesthetic ideals, but even implicitly favored non-naturalistic art as more authentic expressions of the self. Though he argued for a fair consideration of haptically- and visually-oriented artists, Löwenfeld clearly favored the ones who create exuberant expressionist forms. His appeal to alternative experiential-affective avenues for artistic production offered a new means of theorizing the image. The invisible somatic sources of the artist’s creativity could be channeled into sculptural moulding, which would result in visually-sensible—but not visually-reducible—forms.

Löwenfeld not only selected marginalized artists, but also marginalized subjects for representation—the mentally disturbed, and the poor and working classes. Among the clay

sculptures in *Plastische Arbeiten* is the figure of a “Lauter Wannsinniger” frozen in a soundless scream. Enveloped in a tangled mass of unkempt hair, the insane subject seems to index a mental state in similar disarray. Also depicted is an emaciated “Armer Märtyrer.” He displays his physical abjection with eyes sunken deep into their sockets, and flesh gouged from the sides of his face. Two rows of masks are featured, which look less like faces than a welter of partially-developed noses, eyes, lips and indistinguishable fleshy lumps. Dissolving almost into formlessness, these evoke the subhuman, as though to suggest the primordial genesis of flesh from earth. There is even a priapic “Proletarier,” whose oversized head sits atop powerful square shoulders. With its exposed genitalia and matted chest hair, the demotic figure recalls the subjects of Successionist painters, who caused scandal among polite Viennese circles. (Figure 6)

The carefully-curated works of Löwenfeld’s students appeared to react against a culture of social and architectural façades, which pervaded all scales of Viennese public life. As Hermann Broch has eloquently noted, bourgeois Viennese art “cosmeticized and transfigured” the otherwise ugly realities of late- and post-imperial Austria.27 As if peeling away the ornate historicist incrustations of a bourgeois townhouse, artworks by Löwenfeld’s students seem to remove the surfaces from their figures to expose the “muscular enervations” of their unvarnished selves to their viewers. And they could well have elicited comparison with the works of Schiele and Kokoschka, who similarly defied the aesthetic primacy of the ideal classical nude. Interestingly, Kokoschka himself described his experience of viewing a “primitive” Polynesian mask in strikingly similar terms, as one which provoked a bodily reaction of “facial nerves reacting to cold and hunger.” He would later find inspiration from this experience for his 1909 creation of a grotesque self-portrait bust of unfired clay.28 Conservative critics decried such

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27 Broch, *Hugo von Hofmannsthal and His Time*, 34.
works as evidence of their artists’ criminal aberrance; Löwenfeld’s scientific approach attempted to normalize this same aesthetic.

Artworks shown in The Nature of Creative Activity take this imagery even further. With the shift in this second book, to the exclusive use of partially-sighted artists, Löwenfeld could widen the array of his media, bringing drawings and paintings into his data set (not only tactile expressions in clay). Whereas the clay sculptures illustrated earlier were—by virtue of their medium and makers—necessarily monochrome, the use of color in the paintings enriched the possibilities of artistic expression. Paintings of faces are garish with reds and pinks, as if to expose unwittingly the artist or subject’s skinless flesh. Löwenfeld, it seems, selectively gathered visual evidence that would provide a recognizable, even “scientific,” look of interiority—finding examples which resembled the anatomical diagram of facial muscles and tendons included in Plastische Arbeiten der Blinder. (Figure 7) If critics faulted Adolf Loos’s unadorned Goldman & Salatsch building on Michaelerplatz as “eyebrow-less,” these works enact similar disfigurement (or better yet, defacement) by means of violent removal.

For a Jew living in a period of heightened anti-Semitism, there was cause to reverse the prejudicial hierarchies of the artistic canon. Conservative scholars at the time had appropriated Alois Riegl’s racialist formal-analytical method and transformed it into a racist one. Using Riegl’s framework, the Nazi sympathizer Hans Sedlmayr saw in German academic naturalism proof of the “Indo-Germanic” tribe’s superior creative genius—a genius allied with the greatest periods of classical Greek, Roman and Christian art. If Riegl had discovered a convergence of science and subjectivity in Renaissance “perspective, painterly composition” and rational “representations of phenomena,” Sedlmayr would also bemoan its dissolution: the incoherent clash of colors and forms in Pieter Breugel’s paintings forecasted the degeneracy of modern art.²⁹ By contrast, Löwenfeld believed that both “haptic” and “visual” artists exist in all periods.

of history, not only the “degenerate” ones. By both subjecting these artistic traits to the contingency accompanying all human birth and stripping them of cultural specificity, he dumped the racial determinism which underlay prevailing analyses.

For Löwenfeld, then, the field of pedagogy became an ideal disciplinary nexus for the politicization of art. In the preceding decades, biologists, psychologists and historians had given “scientific” legitimacy to the study of art and the creative spirit—subjects, within the domain of the Geisteswissenschaften, once thought beyond the reach of empirical quantification. After the course of his eclectic academic training, Löwenfeld was well equipped with this intellectual armory. If conservatives appealed to biology to craft racist theories of social and cultural degeneracy, Löwenfeld, too, could wield the empirical sciences to give objective justification to the controversial avant-garde aesthetic developed at the end of the nineteenth century.

**The classroom as battleground**

In all this theorization, Löwenfeld largely re-purposed theories of artistic perception and creation developed by artists and experimentalists of the preceding decades, a topic Eric Kandell has recently explored.\(^{30}\) What was novel was the *site* of his artistic practice. For liberals, left almost totally out of political order by the 1920s and 30s, the school seemed like last bastion of resistance. Whereas Coffeehouses and exhibition halls were self-indulgent spaces of private aesthetic experience, schools were public battlegrounds where art had real political consequences. Recalling his childhood education, for instance, Stefan Zweig found in the visual austerity of his school the evidence of an insidious political reality. The building’s “cold, badly whitewashed halls, its low classrooms without pictures or any other decoration that might have delighted the eye” were not just aesthetically unappealing,\(^{31}\) this school was “exploited...as an

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instrument” by the crumbling Austrian regime for the “maintenance of its authority.”

Members of the liberal bourgeoisie blamed this educational system for inculcating students with politically conservative ideology. On the other hand, if they could stem these reactionary tendencies at their source, then presumably they could eventually transform the political order as a whole.

Viennese anxieties about reformist education reflected a disturbing political reality. As scholars have recently demonstrated, the planting of new schools by pedagogical activists played a key role in the nationalization process at the blurry “linguistic frontiers” of Hapsburg Austria. Liberal educators, such as the Viennese intellectual Robert Scheu, sought to standardize education in regions where multiple languages and cultures had long existed; by transforming these diverse and culturally-permeable areas into a patchwork of strictly-delineated “national” groups, they threatened the supranational policy of the imperial administration. I suspect that conservatives saw the emergence of reformist schools in the capital city through the lens of such national fragmentation at Austria’s edges. Such would have been the case of Cižek’s art school for children, opened in 1897, which offered classes free of charge to those living at Vienna’s social and economic margins. The Hohe Warte Institute, where Löwenfeld taught and conducted research, served a similarly marginalized group in Vienna—the Jewish community. Both at the local and geopolitical levels, such reformist pedagogical projects offered alternative spaces of social and cultural identification, which inhabited the interstices of a political order coming apart at the seams.

Vienna’s liberal bourgeoisie recognized such schools as among the most potent sites of political change. Löwenfeld’s frenetic academic eclecticism had resulted from his own

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34 Kelly, *Uncovering the History*, 84-86.
difficulties navigating several systems of Vienna higher education. Having found the rigid classical training at the Akademie der bildenden Künste deeply troubling, he sought out new mentors at the Kunstgewerbeschule and University of Vienna. His experience had been shared decades earlier by Cižek. It seems to have even been a rite of passage among members of the liberal intellectual elite to withdraw for a few years from the established academy to teach at reformist schools or to serve underprivileged children. As Malachi Hacohen has shown, Karl Popper’s socialist politics in the 1920s involved work at various Viennese daycares, the proletarian Kinderfreundeschule and the Pedagogical Institute. (As if echoing Löwenfeld’s call for tactile artistic engagement, Popper even supplemented his own education with a brief stint as a cabinet maker.) Wittgenstein’s less successful experience teaching in the countryside derived from similar cultural impulses. At such schools Löwenfeld and others transcended mere aesthetic-intellectual rebellion and carved out real institutional alternatives.

Löwenfeld instrumentalized the field of psychology toward such ends. Such politically-inflected uses of science extends Kandel’s argument, that the symbiotic relationship of fin-de-siècle art historians, practitioners and experimental psychologists (in particular, that of Ernst Gombrich and Ernst Kris) generated novel understandings of artistic perception during the 1920s and 1930s. In Gestalt psychology Karl Bühler, Löwenfeld and others found a powerfully optimistic pedagogical model, which insisted that all children can constantly learn new things. For Löwenfeld perception is a dynamic process, which drives the mind to creatively synthesize ever-different “wholes” [Einheiten]. This theory contradicted the Akademie’s dogmatic

36 See in particular chapters 11 and 12, “Discovering the Beholder’s Share” and “Observation is also Invention: The Brain as a Creativity Machine.” Kandel, The Age of Insight, 185-213.  
37 For a discussion of how Bühler’s challenge to Wilhelm Wundt’s associationist psychology fit into an Austrian reformist educational agenda, see Hacohen, 135-142.  
38 “Der Lehrer darf die Aufmerksamkeit des Blinden nicht auf Details richten wollen, durch die allenfalls der eigentliche Ausdruckswert der jeweiligen plastischen Arbeit verloren ginge.” Plastische Arbeiten, 103. -“Ganz
historicism which, as Čižek observed, sprang from the defeatist attitude that modern art students could never accomplish (let alone surpass) the singular creative genius of past “masters.” And it upset the static genetic determinism, which underlay the psychological structuralism of Wilhelm Wundt, as well as the strict linear trajectory of Ernst Haeckel’s recapitulation theory. Löwenfeld argued that the child’s irrational will, rather than being suppressed, should be embraced and cultivated for its unforeseen creative potential. Löwenfeld’s artistic-pedagogical project—to harness these psychological building blocks of the next generation—would exemplify a strain of modernist utopianism, which held out for the future the possibility to recreate society on a vast scale.

Although Löwenfeld did not know it at the time, the upheaval of the Anschluss would also accompany unexpected advantages. Across the Atlantic Löwenfeld finally witnessed the widespread acceptance of his theories in a nation undergoing vast industrial and cultural transformations. While art and education reform symbolized the alienation of a narrow cultural class in Vienna, the same took on national dimensions in the United States. Here Löwenfeld’s reformist artistic and psychological theories fit snugly within the populist framework of early-twentieth-century American political progressivism. They would even have seemed familiar within the frameworks of pragmatist education and functional psychology pioneered by John Dewey and William James, as well as theories of child development by Stanley Granville Hall. The fruits of these transatlantic exchanges culminated in Löwenfeld’s most famous publication, the wildly popular 1947 book Creative and Mental Growth. Praising Löwenfeld’s “truly revolutionary principles” as evidence of the “radicalism of the true reformer,” Arnheim revealed

anders ist der Vorgang beim Schaffen. Hier muß die ganze Vorstellung simultan als Einheit vorhanden sein; denn ohne sie wäre ein schöpferisches Gestalten unmöglich.” Löwenfeld, Nature of Creative Activity, 106.

40 For a useful discussion of these intellectual sources, see Alice Smuts, Science in the Service of Children, 1893-1935, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006).
how formerly marginalized pedagogical models, once re-contextualized, could finally effect real societal change.

Given this warm reception in the United States of Löwenfeld’s thought earlier in the twentieth century, I would like to close by reflecting on why art history has neglected of these politically radical dimensions of Viennese artistic thought. At the expense of figures like Löwenfeld, we exalt contemporary Jewish-Austrian émigrés such as Erwin Panofsky—who in their own day were deemed to hold reactionary intellectual positions. After the Second World War, Panofsky would uneasily defend his life’s investment in the Viennese art-historical tradition as “free from what may be suspected as retroactive German patriotism,” for “I am aware of the dangers inherent in what has been decried as ‘Teutonic’ methods in the history of art.”41 While we can hardly fault Panofsky for the fascists’ exploitation of classical and Renaissance styles, we should nevertheless recognize that his impassionate defense of the Western canon was politically fraught. Panofsky’s *Perspective as Symbolic Form*, which idealized the idea of “rational” perspectival naturalism, would likely have propounded ideas Löwenfeld considered ideologically suspect.

Our partial reading of Vienna’s artistic past should give us pause about our own academic subjectivity. That Löwenfeld’s thought should not have a place in our art history is less the function of its actual influence, than of institutional changes in the past century—which have dissolved the scholarly theorization pedagogical practice as either a serious intellectual pursuit, or a meaningful sphere of political influence. While Harvard’s Department of Fine Arts was initially founded on progressivist principles, around the period of the German-Jewish “intellectual migration” such institutions shifted to connoisseurial and philological models of art

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history. As a result, the rich exchange exemplified by Löwenfeld—between reformist Central European intellectuals and American progressivist philosophers—no longer strikes us as art-historically interesting. One wonders whether even the thesis of Schorske’s own publication, which appeared on the eve of the culture wars, reacted unconsciously to growing popular hostility against the academic establishment. Löwenfeld’s story forces us to ask ourselves, to what degree the vision of an apolitical fin-de-siècle Vienna is the projection of own value vacuum.