
ANTI-AUTHORITARIAN EDUCATION: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

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At present, an authoritarian insurgency against the institutions of liberal democracy operates along both political-economic and phenomenological axes. By corrupting language and stimulating vigilance, this insurgency endeavors to diminish the perceptual and communicative capacities that allow us to articulate a shared reality and exercise agency within it. Considering education as a political and economic enterprise concerned with attention-formation, public schools present a site battle in which to defend and promote the conditions and practices of a free and democratic society.

AUTHORITARIAN PHENOMENOLOGY

The point is that the impact of factual reality, like all other human experiences, needs speech if it is to survive the moment of experience, needs talk and communication with others to remain sure of itself. Total domination succeeds to the extent that it succeeds in interrupting all channels of communication, those from person to person inside the four walls of privacy no less than the public ones which are safeguarded in democracies by freedom of speech and opinion.

-Hannah Arendt¹

Attention is about personal liberation—liberating ourselves from people who are controlling our minds without our consent.

-Ben Stewart²

Truth, argued Hannah Arendt, is the greatest enemy of authoritarianism; and language, she added, is an indispensable tool for drawing our attention to it.³ Resonant with the 1930's, today's authoritarian leaders aim to conquer reality by degrading language and corrupting attention. Drawing an historical example, the Russian-American journalist Masha Gessen recounts how the former Soviet leadership would describe its 'elections'—in which participation was mandatory and ballots were pre-marked—as the 'free expression of citizen will,' when in fact these rituals were, Gessen reminds us, "not at all free, did not constitute

¹ Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 8th Edition (Cleveland, OH: The World Publishing Company, 1963), 495.

² Ben Stewart, quoted in Johann Hari, *Stolen Focus: Why You Can't Pay Attention and How to Think Deeply Again* (New York, NY: Crown, 2022), 276.

³ Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*.

expression, and had no relationship to citizenship or will.”⁴ Over the course of generations, such malign use of words stripped the Russian language of meaning, rendering people unable to describe and communicate what they thought and experienced: “When something cannot be described,” writes Gessen, “it does not become a fact of shared reality.”⁵ Today, Russian President Vladimir Putin depicts his war against Ukraine as a “peacekeeping operation” and imprisons those who publicly call the war a war. Russian parents avoid this doublespeak in their homes for fear that their children will repeat it at school, which could result in the parents never seeing their children again. Beyond this, Putin has liquidated independent media, outlawed public gatherings, shuttered public institutions, and banished entire schools of thought—including Feminism and Psychoanalysis—from Russian universities, in essence abolishing the intellectual and communicative tools that people use to make sense of and exercise agency in their lives.⁶ Here, in the United States, authoritarians similarly assault the tools of language and thought that we utilize to understand and shape our world.

In the American context, Donald Trump, the alpha male of the Republican Party and avatar of the authoritarian insurgency, has assiduously degraded the English language. During the past half decade, terms such as ‘fake news’ and ‘alternative facts’ have become national shibboleths for whether one inhabits factual reality or the confabulated fever dreams of the authoritarian leader. Former President Trump has, for instance, habitually used the term “witch hunt” to disparage investigations into his many corrupt and criminal acts. Historically, “witch hunt” refers to efforts by the powerful to scapegoat the powerless. By inverting the term’s meaning, Trump, who as President was arguably the most powerful person in the world, turns reality on its head and vicariously fuels his subjects’ sentiments of victimhood.⁷ Following suit, right-wing culture warriors have taken to labeling schoolteachers as ‘groomers,’ a term which victims of abuse have historically utilized to describe the social and psychological process through which sexual predators carry out heinous crimes. Such malign and misleading use of words demeans experiences of actual victims and weakens the tools that people use to articulate shared moral and ethical perspectives. Timothy Snyder, a scholar of fascism who teaches History at Yale, adds that it is not possible to meaningfully debate authoritarians because they do not act in good faith, and lie not merely to deceive, but to demonstrate that they are more powerful than factual reality.⁸ The authoritarian leader is the bully, Gessen illustrates, who has stolen your bike, is sitting on it, looking you straight in the face and telling you that he did not steal it. With lies such as these,

⁴ Masha Gessen, *Surviving Autocracy* (New York, NY: Riverhead Books, 2020), 86.

⁵ Gessen, *Surviving Autocracy*, 86.

⁶ Masha Gessen, *The Future Is History: How Totalitarianism Reclaimed Russia* (New York, NY: Riverhead Books, 2017), chap. 2.

⁷ Gessen, *Surviving Autocracy*, 91.

⁸ Timothy Snyder, “We Should Say It. Russia Is Fascist,” *New York Times*, May 15, 2022, <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/05/19/opinion/russia-fascism-ukraine-putin.html>.

authoritarians compel us, under a heightened state of vigilance that they induce, to choose which reality we want to live in: factual reality or the reality of their lies, the latter of which requires that we ignore our own thoughts and experiences.⁹

Concurrently, American politicians are intensifying legislative efforts to restrict teachers' use of language and ideas in schools. Throughout the country, school districts have enacted bans on thousands of books related to race, gender, sexuality, and controversial aspects of American History.¹⁰ In numerous Republican-dominated states, memory laws encourage parents to snitch on their children's teachers for offenses that may include teaching about slavery or displaying pictures of their same-sex spouse.¹¹ In one recent example, North Shore Elementary School in Tampa, Florida, responded to a parent complaint by removing *Ruby Bridges*, Disney's 1998 film about the six-year-old Black girl who faced racist attacks while integrating a New Orleans elementary school in 1960, from its Black History Month curriculum.¹² Meanwhile, Ohio's Orwellian Higher Education Enhancement Act, or Senate Bill 83, proposes to ban discussion of "controversial beliefs or policies," including climate change, immigration, abortion, and other topics from publicly-funded college classrooms. SB 83 additionally requires institutions of higher education to publish undergraduate course syllabi, searchable by key words and phrases, along with faculty bios and descriptions of all course texts, lectures, and discussions. The law also compels colleges and universities to discipline and publish the names of faculty who violate its codes.¹³ Florida's HB 1069 appears to go even farther toward criminalizing schools of thought such as Critical Theory, Gender, and Race studies in both K-12 and post-secondary schools.¹⁴ The law also criminalizes use or recognition of gender pronouns that do not align with a person's biologically defined sex.¹⁵ In effect, these laws induce fear and

⁹ Gessen, *Surviving Autocracy*, 99-111.

¹⁰ Karis Rogerson, "The State of Book Bans in the U.S. in 2023," *PEN America*, February 15, 2023, <https://litreactor.com/columns/more-the-state-of-book-bans-in-the-us-in-2023>.

¹¹ House Bill 322 – Ohio 134th General Assembly (June 10, 2021), <https://ohiohouse.gov/legislation/134/hb322>. Also, House Bill 327 – Ohio 134th General Assembly (May 21, 2021), <https://ohiohouse.gov/legislation/134/hb327>. Also, House Bill 1557 – Florida State Legislature 2022 (July 1, 2022), <https://www.myfloridahouse.gov/Sections/Bills/billsdetail.aspx?BillId=76545>.

¹² Edward Helmore, "Florida School Pulls Anti-Racism Film Ruby Bridges After Parent Complaint," *The Guardian*, March 28, 2023, <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2023/mar/28/ruby-bridges-florida-school-anti-racism-film-parent-complaint>.

¹³ Senate Bill 83 – Ohio 135th General Assembly (March 14, 2023), <https://www.legislature.ohio.gov/legislation/135/sb83>.

¹⁴ House Bill 1069 – Florida State Legislature (July 1, 2023), <https://www.flsenate.gov/Session/Bill/2023/1069>.

¹⁵ Prem Thakker, "Florida Republicans Pass New Bills Guaranteed to Destroy Academic Freedom," *The New Republic*, May 3, 2023,

suspicion, render minority and non-conforming persons ‘unspeakable,’ and deprive students of tools with which to understand themselves and the world.

In addition to impairing their abilities to communicate the truth, authoritarian leaders seek to diminish their subjects’ capacities to perceive reality by stimulating vigilance. An atavistic form of animal attention, vigilance is a non-reflective, reactionary mode of consciousness commonly triggered by fear and anger.¹⁶ Distinct from authoritarian propaganda of the previous century, which steadily reinforced a particular narrative, twenty-first century authoritarian propaganda seeks to befuddle the public with multiple, incoherent narratives and shape-shifting pictures of reality.¹⁷ The documentary filmmaker Adam Curtis illustrates this dynamic in his 2016 picture for the British Broadcasting Corporation, *Hypernormalization*. Here, Curtis argues that Vladislav Surkov, a young man from the Russian theatre industry who became Putin’s propaganda minister, attempted to manipulate the images and narratives of the mass media in order to undermine people’s perceptions of reality to such an extent that no one could ever be sure of what was actually happening. By funding opposing political parties and instigating clashing fascist and anti-fascist protests, Surkov found that he could not only distract people from the oligarchic corruption eating away at Russian society, but also instill such uncertainty and anxiety in the population as to obliterate politics altogether. Borrowing this strategy, which he has referred to as “flooding the zone with shit,” Steve Bannon, Trump’s former chief strategist, has sought to undermine the press’s authority as gatekeeper of truth in order to generate mass epistemic hysteria.¹⁸ Saturated with information and mis-information, Bannon assumed that people would become, as Sabrina Tavernise and Aidan Gardiner put it, “numb and disoriented, struggling to discern what is real in a sea of slant, fake and fact.”¹⁹

In parallel, the authoritarian insurgency avails itself of the business model of *surveillance capitalism*, which malignantly incentivizes the corruption of attention. Surveillance capitalist giants such as Alphabet and Meta, parent companies of Google and Facebook, respectively, achieve their profits primarily by stealing and selling users’ digitalized behavioral data, which we generate through our clicks, swipes, likes, shares, and other multitudinous, digitally interfacing activities, which may include shopping, exercising, driving, eating,

<https://newrepublic.com/post/172416/florida-republicans-pass-bills-destroy-academic-freedom>.

¹⁶ Johann Hari, *Stolen Focus: Why You Can’t Pay Attention—and How to Think Deeply Again* (New York, NY: Crown, 2022), 172.

¹⁷ Sean Illing, “Flood the Zone With Shit,” *Vox*, February 6, 2020, <https://www.vox.com/policy-and-politics/2020/1/16/20991816/impeachment-trial-trump-bannon-misinformation>.

¹⁸ Adam Curtis, *Hypernormalization*, British Broadcasting Corporation (2016), <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p04b183c>.

¹⁹ Sabrina Tavernise and Aidan Gardiner, “No One Believes Anything: Voters Worn Out by a Fog of Political News,” *New York Times*, November 18, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/11/18/us/polls-media-fake-news.html>.

sleeping, or watching television.²⁰ By feeding masses of behavioral, psychological, and demographic data through predictive algorithms, surveillance capitalists identify users' emotional triggers—fear and anger being the most powerful kinds—in order to target behavioral reinforcements calculated to lead to addictive patterns of engagement. Illustratively, the words 'hates,' 'obliterates,' 'slams,' and 'destroys' recently ranked as the four most common words in YouTube's top video titles.²¹ Conditioning us to attend to other people's anger, surveillance capitalist enterprises engender states of vigilance that diminish our capacities to perceive, reason, and empathize.

In 1976, the Ivy League psychologist Juilan Jaynes published a theory of what he called *the bicameral mind*. Until roughly the end of the Mediterranean Bronze Age, Jaynes submitted, the human mind consisted of one part that spoke and acted, and another part that listened and obeyed. The heroes of Greek epic poetry, including those chronicled by Homer, argued Jaynes, appear to have believed the voices in their heads to be the voices of the gods. This bicameral mentality would, in effect, have been a form of non-introspective and non-metaphorical consciousness. The soldiers who fought the Trojan War, Jaynes bids us to imagine, would have marched and died as unthinkingly as pawns on a chess board.²² Whether Jaynes intended *the bicameral mind* to be interpreted literally or allegorically, the theory resonates with contemporary warnings about ways that power operates in our digital society. Aza Raskin, the software engineer responsible for inventing the infinite scroll, and the son of Jeff Raskin, who designed and named the first Macintosh Computer, alleges that highly influential tech designers envision themselves in the role of the old Bronze Age gods. Major tech companies, as Raskin illustrates, assemble 'voodoo dolls' of users based upon the demographic and behavioral information that they gather: age, gender, race, marital status, health, intelligence, shopping habits, sexual interests, anxieties, political affinities, emotional triggers, etc. By testing how a user will react to all manner of stimuli, engineers resolve how to prod the doll in order to get the living person to click a link, share a story, purchase a product, donate money, holler about 'evil CRT' at a local school board meeting, menace a drag queen story hour at a public library, or storm the U.S. Capitol Building. Malevolent actors, fears Raskin, are infiltrating the human subconscious and becoming the voice inside people's heads that grants them permission to surrender to their darkest impulses. Resisting their spell involves settling our atavistic neurocircuitry and opening the apertures of awareness.

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²⁰ Shoshana Zuboff, *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism: The Fight for a Human Future at the New Frontier of Power* (New York, NY: Public Affairs, 2019).

²¹ Hari, *Stolen Focus*, 131.

²² Julian Jaynes, *The Origin of Consciousness in the Breakdown of the Bicameral Mind* (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin, 1976).

The formation of the faculty of attention is the true goal and unique interest of all studies.

-Simone Weil ²³

Mindfulness can help us get beyond the habits and thought patterns we take for granted and experience the world differently. It can help us develop the ability to reflect, contemplate, exercise wise discernment, and look behind outer appearances to see interconnections and deeper truths.

-Thich Nhat Hanh & Katherine Weare²⁴

According to ancient tradition, human consciousness functions as a two-way radio, with sending and receiving functions. During the Middle Ages, church scholars referred to analytic and discursive modes of attention as the *ratio*, and wrote of receptive, intuitive, and aesthetic modes of attention as the *intellectus*.²⁵ Whereas the former entails muscular and productive effort, the latter is more akin to passive, effortless awareness. Full humanity, Thomas Aquinas maintained, requires balanced cultivation of both *ratio* and *intellectus*.²⁶ Drawing from this model, Simone Weil, the early-twentieth century mystic philosopher, depicted mature attention as a form of libidinal desire, free from ego, which allows us to be deeply receptive to the thoughts and feelings of others. Deep attention, she argued, is foundational to moral and ethical life. Committed to respecting the will and consent of the other, it serves as a foundation for true love and friendship, as well as an antidote to the will to power.²⁷ Considered through a phenomenological framework, democracy entails a commitment to respect the will and consent of the other. Hence, democratic education requires systematic cultivation of attention. As an enterprise of attention formation, schools can help students practice habits of mind with which to navigate the vigilance-inducing conditions of twenty-first century American society. Through a holistic curriculum that exercises the neural pathways of awareness, reason, and compassion, students can enhance their abilities to perceive, understand, and ultimately change their circumstances.

For half a century, however, neoliberal policies have poured acid on mental health and the habits of deep attention. Atomized, overworked, indebted, sleep-deprived, and ubiquitously confronted with a digital business model of attention-capture, Americans report suffering unprecedented levels of stress-

²³ Simone Weil, "Reflections on the Right Use of School Studies in View of the Love of God," in *Waiting for God*, trans. Emma Craufurd (New York, NY: Harper Perennial, 2009), 57-65.

²⁴ Thich Nhat Hanh & Katherine Weare, *Happy Teachers Change the World* (Berkeley, CA: Parallax Press, 2017), 225.

²⁵ Joseph Pieper, *Leisure the Basis of Culture* (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 2009), 28-29, 49.

²⁶ Pieper, *Leisure the Basis of Culture*, 50.

²⁷ Weil, "Reflections on the Right Use of School Studies."

related attention problems.²⁸ In truth, schools bear a fraught historical and contemporary relation to the aims of democracy and healthy mindedness. Formed during the Industrial Revolution, the modern school has served a principal division of labor in the reproduction of political-economic exploitation. Endowed with vestiges of Calvinist ideology, the institution has frequently served to break wills and frustrate healthy desires. During the past half century, neoliberal education policies have undermined conditions for healthy mindedness by constraining free play and inquiry, and by cutting funds that schools require to provide rich learning environments and to employ highly trained teachers, counselors, and specialists in sufficient numbers to meet student needs. These austerity policies have condemned students to chaotic classrooms in which they vigilantly scan their environments for threats of shouting teachers, ritualized performances of academic inadequacy, or the taunts, fists, and behavioral outbursts of classmates crying out in futility for attention from a caring adult. More recently, in response to the extension of fuller rights of citizenship to a broader diversity of Americans, authoritarians have sought to censor teaching about the nation's radical history of struggles for freedom and instead endeavored to bind their subjects in a negative solidarity of shared grievance against criminalized and dehumanized 'others.' These intensifying attacks against public education suggest that the institution remains capable of threatening authoritarian ambitions.

In the present context, teachers combat authoritarianism by building healthy habits of attention, individually through mindfulness, and collectively by encouraging the conditions for healthy mindedness in their schools and classrooms. Emphatically, mindfulness is not a cure for the attentional-carcinogenic conditions of poverty, malnutrition, pollution, and violence. No reasonable person would claim that we can solve deep structural and institutional problems simply by meditating. However, to the extent that consciousness mediates our lives, mindfulness can help us to become more aware, understanding, and empathetic. For teachers, this entails being calm, present, and attentive to their students' thoughts and feelings. Just like parents in the home or managers in the workplace, teachers are the emotional weather in the classroom. If teachers are preoccupied and anxious, the class will be stressful for students. However, if teachers embody compassion and joy, the class can become a happy and loving place.

In her study of teaching expertise in three cultures, the educational anthropologist Akiko Hayashi interviews scores of veteran educators who attest that learning to teach is, in substantial part, a matter of learning how to pay attention. Novice teachers, these veterans assert, "don't [yet] know how to pay attention."²⁹ Similar to beginners in other fields of endeavor, new teachers are

²⁸ Hari, *Stolen Focus*, 172.

²⁹ Akiko Hayashi, *Teaching Expertise in Three Countries: Japan, China, and the United States* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 2022), 159.

‘too much in their own heads:’ preoccupied by their own thoughts, anxious about how others perceive them, narrowly focused on lesson plans, and unable to “truly see, hear, and therefore learn from the children in front of them.”³⁰ As teachers become more practiced, however, they gain confidence, composure, and patience that allow them to be more attentive to their students’ thoughts and feelings. With greater awareness, experienced teachers describe themselves as more capable of quickly and effectively intervening when needed, but also better able to stand back and allow students time and space for productive struggle or conflict. As a result, Hayashi’s respondents tell her, their classrooms become more trusting and self-disciplined.³¹

Many early childhood educators cultivate mindful and attention-healthy classrooms through an approach known as *Conscious Discipline*, designed by Becky Bailey, an expert in developmental psychology. By helping children recognize, name, and calm their powerful emotions, Bailey claims that the practice lays groundwork for compassion, self-discipline, and intrinsic motivation.³² Advocates maintain that conscious discipline is an embodied pedagogy that teachers implicitly convey to students. A teacher’s calmness, composure, and presence communicate to students that they can express themselves without fear.

Toward the end of incorporating mindfulness into the lives of teachers, organizations such as Plum Village, a Buddhist retreat in southern France, founded by the Vietnamese Zen Master Thich Nhat Hanh, lead teachers in the practice of techniques such as mindful breathing. By focusing attention on their breath, practitioners learn to find joy and composure in this simple and readily available act. Extending the same principle to mundane activities of work and home, including cooking, eating, cleaning, and conducting a classroom, practitioners build habits for sustaining joyful and loving awareness. Plum Village graduates claim that these mindfulness practices allow them to exercise greater conscious control over their experiences of, and responses to, powerful emotional states. They also describe finding themselves better able to cultivate the kinds of classroom environments that aid students in discovering their own deep reservoirs of attention.³³

Anti-authoritarian education does not simply guard students’ minds from vigilance-inducing stimuli; it actively fills them with activities that evoke deep attention. Human beings feel most alive when engaged in meaningful activities that challenge us to the edge of our abilities. Artists, athletes, and scientists engaged in their crafts often describe losing their sense of time and self, and merging their awareness with the task at hand. Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, once head of the department of Psychology at the University

³⁰ Hayashi, *Teaching Expertise in Three Countries*, 41.

³¹ Hayashi, 58-63.

³² Becky Bailey, *Conscious Discipline: Building Resilient Classrooms* (Oviedo, FL: Loving Guidance, INC., 2015).

³³ Hanh & Wear, *Happy Teachers Change the World*, xxvi-xliv.

of Chicago, describes this as a *flow state* and claims that it is one of the deepest forms of attention that humans practice.³⁴ Flow states, he discovered, require singular focus; they are fragile and easily interrupted. For children, free play is a primary state of flow that lays deep neurosynaptic tracks of attention. However, according to research by William Stixrud, a clinical neuropsychologist, and Ned Johnson, an expert on student performance and anxiety management, today's children enjoy far less free play than did preceding generations.³⁵ In response to growing inequality and precariousness, Stixrud and Johnson argue, parents have increasingly organized and directed their children's time and activities toward instrumental ends—taking up sports, arts, and clubs as work rather than leisure.³⁶ At the same time, critics bemoan the ways in which the past four decades of standards-and-accountability reforms have stripped free inquiry from school curricula and overwhelmed teachers with duties of bureaucratic conformity—including data collection, test preparation, and rigidly prescribed lesson plans—that steal their attention from students.³⁷ Teachers, laments Doris Santoro, professor of education at Bowdoin College, “are being asked to do things in the name of [accountability] that they believe are mis-educational and harmful to students and the profession.”³⁸

In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, perennially among the most frequently banned books in the world, Paulo Freire reproached the modern school for distracting students from their lived experiences of oppression and diverting their attention away from the feelings and intuitions that can ultimately lead to political consciousness and agency.³⁹ Freire, like Simone Weil before him, encouraged students to attend to their emotions as guides to identifying the most relevant problems facing them. Motivated by intrinsic desire, both believed, education could lead students toward conscientization, a growing awareness of reality and appreciation for possibilities to change it. Throughout the past decade, the teaching profession has demonstrated itself to be among the most well-organized forces for democracy in American society. In the years prior to the covid-19 pandemic, teachers built coalitions with parents, students, and citizens to win significant concessions from political leaders that enhanced teaching and

³⁴ Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience* (New York, NY: Harper, 2008).

³⁵ William Stixrud & Ned Johnson, *The Case for the Self-Driven Child: The Science and Sense of Giving Your Kids More Control Over Their Lives* (Penguin Books, 2019).

³⁶ KJ Dell’Antonia, “How High School Ruined Leisure,” *New York Times*, May 18, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/05/18/opinion/sunday/college-admissions-extracurriculars.html>.

³⁷ Katherine Marsh, “Why Kids Aren’t Falling in Love with Reading,” *The Atlantic*, March 22, 2023, <https://www.theatlantic.com/books/archive/2023/03/children-reading-books-english-middle-grade/673457/>.

³⁸ Quoted in Thomas Edsall, “There’s a Reason There Aren’t Enough Teachers in America,” *New York Times*, December 14, 2022, <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/12/14/opinion/teacher-shortage-education.html>.

³⁹ Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (Bloomsbury Academic, 2000).

learning conditions.⁴⁰ By securing funding for healthcare, counseling, healthier food, smaller class sizes, developmentally appropriate curricula, better pay, and greater professional autonomy, this movement promoted conditions for healthy mindedness in schools across the nation. Although the pandemic halted much of this educational labor activism, teachers have begun re-organizing and stepping up to defend their students and colleagues whom the authoritarian insurgency has targeted for criminalization and dehumanization.⁴¹

Almost twenty years ago, David Foster Wallace, in his Kenyon College Commencement address, stated that the true purpose of education, “Capital-T True,” as he emphasized, is the ability to exercise some control over how and what we think. It is all too easy today to swim merrily along in the pool of fear and anger and worship of self. If we do not systematically cultivate the arts of perception and language, we will, to quote Wallace, “get totally hosed.”⁴² Like Aldous Huxley, Wallace believed that human beings can learn to exercise a meaningful degree of conscious control over how they experience and live in the world.⁴³ Today, an authoritarian insurgency aims to thwart this educational aim by corrupting language, criminalizing tools of thought, and encouraging violence from an increasingly fearful, angry, and vigilant population. Nonetheless, there are resources at our disposal with which to effectively respond. Although traditional tools for healthy mindedness may not eliminate the primary sources of vigilance—poverty, hunger, pollution, precarity, etc.—they can strengthen our phenomenological defenses and help us to better perceive and understand our circumstances. As a public enterprise concerned with attention formation, and while recognizing their fraught history, schools offer a site at which to defend and promote the conditions and practices of a free and democratic society. Throughout the past decade, few organizations have flexed as much democratic muscle as our professional teachers. Along with them, students, parents, and engaged citizens have won funding to pay teachers, materially improve schools, and offer students the variety of social, psychological, and emotional resources that they need. Each of these gains contributes to a healthier environment in which to develop the faculties of perception, reason, and compassion.

⁴⁰ Jack Crosbie, “As the Strike Approached in Chicago, Teachers Taught Labor,” *The Atlantic*, October 24, 2019, <https://www.theatlantic.com/education/archive/2019/10/chicago-teachers-explained-strike-students/600667/>.

⁴¹ Tim Walker, “Educators Fight Back Against Gag Orders, Book Bans and Intimidation,” *neaToday*, July 28, 2022, <https://www.nea.org/advocating-for-change/new-from-nea/educators-fight-back-against-gag-orders-book-bans-and-intimidation>.

⁴² David Foster Wallace, “This Is Water,” Kenyon College Commencement Address, May 21, 2005, <http://bulletin-archive.kenyon.edu/x4280.html>.

⁴³ Aldous Huxley, *Island* (New York, NY: Harper Perennial, 2009), chap. 7.
