

**GREENWICH VILLAGE
AND
THE SOUL OF A WOMAN**

CHAPTER THREE

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Lizka and Sampson who each received her full love and attention until they died. Our own sense of balance most of us had gained from her; she had known the beauty of proportion like a gyroscope. In that balance she achieved great economy of focus and action since inconsequential things and details were pushed aside as was her cancer and other personal distress. Instead she addressed your identity in correspondence with her own in a very elegant way.

In her last months, she devoted an hour on the phone relating to a young friend's new elementary teaching experience in Jersey City. A former Russian colleague recalled her dedicated language preparation and her classes as interactions with the personalities of her students rather than rote learning. The Vassar graduate remembered the 10 p.m. teas she held for her students and the rubbed off dedication and Russianness she and her husband now passed on at the University of Nebraska. A close friend adopted a child following Masha's example of arranging for adoption of a Russian orphan and offering him friendship over the past decade. In awe, the Sloan Kettering doctor had never known a patient who had so many friends that deeply loved her. Uniformly, our thoughts of her undying worth to all around her completely drowned out any remembrance of that fatal September 11, a month earlier.

Clara Mayer, the heart, brains and soul of the New School for Social Research from 1919 until 1960 hired me as registrar, that is, bean counter, during those early WWII years while I was attending Columbia College and awaiting my call up in the U.S. Army Reserve Corps. She wore her black hair in maiden halo braids and could hardly see across the desk through the thickest glasses; from the first moment of that first interview, I stared wide-eyed at *alma mater* to the School. She herself had become the institution which thankfully lacked overbearing administrators and comfortable tenured faculty. An institutionless institution! Head of all nondepartments, Clara personally attracted to the New School, among hundreds, the twentieth-century's cultural icons: Robert Frost, Felix Frankfurter, John Cage, Aaron Copland, Bertrand Russell, Margaret Mead, John Dewey, Meyer Shapiro, Erich Fromm, Roscoe Pound, Erwin Piscator, Lewis Mumford, Claude Levi-Strauss, John Maynard Keynes, Karen Horney, Tennessee Williams, Camilio Egas, Alfred Adler, and Thomas Mann. During her tenure, the New School stood alone advocating academic freedom committed to innovative interdisciplinary knowledge, especially, in emerging fields and underdeveloped, non-conforming disciplines. At the same time, the School barred the door to the physical sciences, business and consumer education.

The secret of Clara's powerful magnetic attraction? She asked the right questions. Did you live outside the box of the boring, time-wasting, distracting, dumbing present? Did your imagination work overtime at the leading edge on how the past constructed the future? If so, you spoke her language. "The deepest counseling with ourselves and our universe begins to apply the past to the future and senses a surging aspiration toward fulfillment very akin to faith." Her own life and thought richly backed this conviction. Knowledge for her and the New School founders meant searching and sharing with humility. Faith for this star-studded, intellectual and spiritual vanguard as for Clara assumed an ordered universe that provides a niche for every believer and creator in and of oneself in that cosmic order. To prove her points, this chapter brings to light her untapped archive as she left it in 1961 when the New School moved backward in lockstep with the older tradition of American higher education to the university.

An aged onionskin paper draft in Clara's dead files, probably composed to herself on September 9, 1955, could apply equally to most humans utterly doomed by the universal now. "In our time and country, words have largely lost their meaning, thanks to advertisers and broadcasters employing epithets in a treadmill culture compelling superficial response to each and every pressure." With an initial educational policy deadset against this common tide, the original New School proved a constant source of annoyance to all established hierarchical institutions and an irritant to all received opinion. As late as October 2001, my brother John and I could still jest that both of us could easily have been blacklisted for life by the FBI for this liberal connection in Greenwich Village. When the U.S. Army called me up, John replaced me for two days at the School until the U.S. Navy coincidentally called him up too. Some leftwingers taught their disciplines there, but wary administrators preempted the FBI by checking all ideological baggage at the door. From its founding, academic freedom at the School did not countenance bigotry, intolerance and totalitarianism.

Even though the public record on Clara Mayer's public acts over four decades at the New School in Chelsea and Greenwich Village shines glowingly regaling her awesome contributions to American higher education, the founders, builders and historians of the New School consistently evaluated her career and the world through that telltale, warped male lens. In life, Clara faced normally unequal gender odds with diplomatic skill. Ah, but from the grave, this cagey lady has now exacted vindicās. Clara has powerfully fought back by creating a hitherto ignored archive. In the New School's ivory tower, sleeping beauty arrayed in long-delayed truth protected by a powder keg of damning exposures with a long fuse lays dreaming of her Prince Posterity innocently stopping by armed only with that single match.

In the course of routinely doing research on the Village and this period of my life for this chapter, the New School librarians graciously gave me access to their dusty, piled high Archive. In wading through huge boxes stacked ceiling-high with her correspondence and printed matter, I stumbled on yards and yards of randomly filed private conversations with herself about her philosophy, policies, associates, affiliations, private opinions and otherwise unrecorded insider anecdotes and insights concerning the New School compiled over these forty years and typed double-spaced with typos and handwritten corrections on faded onionskin paper. Even her parchment degrees from El Bethel, New York City Normal College, Barnard and an honorary doctorate and plaque from the New School, she dumped unceremoniously in the New School Archive, as much as to say, you can take all these pasteboard trophies back for what they're worth. Incredibly, this dream find lay strewn there abandoned all higgledy-piggledy with no one having gone through it either superficially or in depth. In page after crinkled page, year after year, of these until now dormant primary sources, the stark, irrefutable cumulative evidence overwhelmed me like a ton as I realized for the first time in forty years what she had done hands-on in chronicling the New School crises, decisions and tales out of school, while eloquently exposing the egregious state of American higher education and democracy.

In inadvertently awakening her image, an even greater bolt hit me as I read dozens of documents indicating that she had charted every facet of my entire professional life by the force of her dominating presence, as she had undoubtedly done for countless other souls, without ever issuing even one word of advice or warning. Just as the inside story of a major facet of American higher education remained under wraps from the outside world for forty years, so has my unconscious been completely unsighted by me for just about sixty.

Suppose in rummaging this archival cache, lucky-you had just come across a signed personal letter from Albert Einstein to Clara Mayer that the New School librarians had no idea existed? Either intrinsically in context or extrinsically in the collector's marketplace, the letter would seem priceless! Einstein in this discovered letter to Clara dated February 12, 1947, speaks intimately of her "selfless generosity." The atomic scientist knew "very well the enormous contribution which you and Dr. Johnson [co-builders] made to the rescue of the German professors through the University in Exile in those critical years [soon after Hitler came to power in 1933 - not at the last possible moment] and of the very large part you have played in making a

fruitful place [the New School - not the major universities] for them to work in this country."

What's the context? Clara's own higher education assessments used the successes and failures of Columbia University, her own *alma mater*, and the bedrock traditions of European universities from the founding of the medieval universities in the twelfth century as her two learned benchmarks. From the standpoint of higher education, the New School's spiring foremost Jewish and other prominent scholars out of Hitler's new Germany in 1933 and out of occupied France in 1941 had as much to do with his calculated rape of the venerated European intellectual world as with his looming systematic genocide. The New School, not American higher education generally, initiated these precautionary and timely global decisions. While Hitler and Eurocentric higher education in concert generally destroyed, downsized or neglected 'monuments of unaging intellect' outside the physical sciences of the past half-millennium as not germane to modern economic, military and political (EMP) power, Clara had resurrected and preserved them and their votaries alongside new twentieth-century thought that lay beyond the reach and understanding of demagogues and the physical sciences.

Suppose now you wanted to see what historical credit Clara Mayer received alongside the renown of Alvin Johnson, the New School's first President and other prime mover from 1922 until his death in 1971. While Einstein's letter intimates that her contribution to the New School's University in Exile belonged on a par with Alvin Johnson's, male public evidence says otherwise. Except for another buried 15-page document on the New School Graduate Faculty typed by Clara apparently to herself or this posterity guy, all the published evidence points to Alvin Johnson's singlehanded heroic achievement; although it lays buried with her other memoirs, she may have been spurred to compose this 1951 rough draft spilling the beans as a counterweight to Johnson's 1950 published autobiography. She must have seen that his mention of her enormous contributions only twice in it completely contradicted their 30-year partnership; he disingenuously compounded this major discrepancy by his essentially correct, but insincere, inscription in the copy of his autobiography that he presented to her: "To my friend and co-builder of the New School." Except for my discovery of his Janus-duplicity in her seemingly offhand quote in the archive, his public silence otherwise remains deafening.

Like all male mythology, male knee-jerk tendencies to dismiss feminine contributions tend to coagulate over time. A major 1993 book translated from the German, *Intellectuals in Exile Refugee Scholars and the New School for Social Research* devotes 29 pages to Johnson's achievement and mentions the dozens of eminent scholars Clara corresponded with in German, arranged for their living here, cared for and nourished on a daily basis as Director of the Graduate Faculty. Clara Mayer receives no mention. Not even a footnote. Like Clara, the dead refugees have a palpable grievance. Consistently, the 1986 New School history gives all the credit to Johnson for the refugee scholars and none to Mayer. In contrast, Mayer remained always loyal and highly laudatory of Johnson, both professionally and privately, with constant ironic references to her privately professed co-builder and friend for forty years.

In fairness, overall, the 1986 New School history does fully acknowledge Johnson and Mayer's joint policies and goals in building their distinguished center for social research, adult education and modern art. The male historians also give the cosmopolitan Clara credit for working to reshape American culture consistent with the values and behaviors identified with New York. Yet, male historians tend to undervalue her creative curriculum decisions as she singlehandedly moved the New School from the social science orientation, Johnson's original orientation, to welcoming eclectic schools of psychoanalysis, to concentrating on intellectual history and to featuring top of the line workshops in music, dance, plastic arts, drama, writing, religion and architecture.

If male chroniclers have slighted Clara publicly from day one, my membership in the same fraternity has only just lapsed with this chapter. My plea: no one including the living and dead Clara ever informed me that she has influenced my every professional move, day in, day out, since 1942. As Masha's uncommon visage consciously illuminated Brodsky's sight and psyche for a quarter of a century, so Clara like a taken-for-granted pacemaker under my skin enlightened me in absentia for sixty years. Her vision marshalled my thoughts and acts into a unity and divine intent. Fantastically, I discovered at this late stage that she has been my *alma mater*, alive and dead, dictating every career move I have made since we met. And I have made several. But what has always seemed checkered and all over the institutional map to friends and relations - and rightly so - turns out under her unrealized, incomprehensible tutelage to have been progressions dictated by feminine interior logic leading efficiently to life's closure. Efficiency and caring found their seldom marriage in Clara and rubbed off on me. My father teemed with the former, my mother with the latter. And while they shared some overlap and both qualities furthered our survival, we kids could pick and choose between both traits in differing proportions.

Presciently knowing I would find it early or late, on October 5, 1956, Clara Mayer typed a private memorandum to herself about the unconscious. "My adult life has about coincided with the advent and spread of psychoanalysis in this country." Behind this typically uncongratulatory modesty, lives a truth about her kinetic power. Ironically, what Freud, almost in despair, had tried and failed to accomplish with his Clark University lectures - i.e., to take psychoanalysis away from the limiting, unimaginative controls of the European medical profession and spread it in America with an entirely more pregnant, professional thrust - Clara attempted to bring about almost singlehandedly. Her introduction of eclectic psychoanalytic studies in the twenties and thirties at the New School for Social Research gave American scope and visibility to Freud's pupil Ferenczi, Adler, Horney, Wertheimer and the Gestaltists, Fromm, Asch, Koffka and a host of others in their wake. Her own pithy summation of the unconscious proves why she could attract the leading pioneers in this burgeoning field outside of medicine on a peer basis and, coincidentally, how she tellingly influenced my own unconscious. "The unconscious is irrational only in form, as sensitive as a photographic plate to its inner and outer environment, as sure and as revelatory in its reactions as its owner's interpretive skill, his will to truth, and his courage permit."

If the New School left the physical sciences to its own devices and began with the social sciences, Clara widened its scope as she did mine to changing the

organization and priorities of American higher education across the board. Her new curriculum departures and initiatives for aesthetics, psychoanalysis, dramatic arts, the plastic arts, music, international relations and intellectual history round out a fully realized inter-disciplinary, leading edge and hands-on educational philosophy that place her side-by-side intellectually, culturally, spiritually and dynamically with Einstein and the other prime geniuses of her era with whom she interacted constantly as peer, friend and enabler. Breadth and depth.

Compare the one on one correlation between her curriculum innovations and my motley career. Not only do I hold an M.A. in Dramatic Arts from Columbia, but likewise a Certificate of the University's Russian, now Harriman Institute. My professional madrigal quartet has performed semi-annually for several years and produced a BBC-praised CD. For eight years, I studied eclectically - her approach - the theory and clinical practice of psychoanalytic psychotherapy before practicing for five years within two blocks of the New School. Following an interdisciplinary Ph.D., I have contributed significant seminal new light and taught the works of Shakespeare, Swift, Sterne, Pushkin and Tolstoy at undergraduate and graduate levels. Intellectual history attracts less than one percent of the discipline, but my cross-disciplinary research contributions to Eurocentric development since the fifteenth century in science, medicine, philosophy, religion, belles lettres and polity have received the widest international recognition. My organizational innovations still undergird the City University of New York, particularly the Graduate Faculty. And I have been credited globally with solving the information explosion and raising the clout of the West's information community by initiating the first doctoral programs in information and computer sciences anywhere in response to the 1957 Sputnik crisis. Finally, I did rather poorly in the physical sciences in accordance with her priorities.

We all live with mixed bags of enabling and inhibiting behaviors ingrained from childhood and reenforced along the way. As we reach maturity, the indelible formative influences from grandparents and parents get transferred to other authorities for good or ill. Likes gravitate to likes. When Clara, by chance, happened to lodge as the controlling conscience of my unconscious, her integrated system made uncommon cause with mine and allowed me to pick, choose and discard from among my twenty-year stockpile of behaviors. Like blindman's bluff, she twirled me around three times and sent me off in the direction of autonomy, aka., independence or stubbornness; humanistic knowledge; social responsibility and built-in cautions against illusions.

The greatest mysteries about ourselves lie buried in our unconscious, locked away from our own understanding and from the world at large; they would have remained so forever in my case except for the perspective that comes with age, serendipity occurring in a rare period of time and tranquility, and the clear, compelling voice from within to unleash them. How awesome to discover that one woman with whom I had minimum contact in the 1942-43 academic year had nonetheless through my unconscious guided my every-which-way career decisions since, and fulfilled her and my every expectation along the way. Clara Mayer as her name implies has made my life's path clear and enabled me to recognize, surmount obstacles and cut through underbrush she countenanced along the way.

As an intellectual historian and her lone, unwitting, still living disciple, I feel compelled to tell the long deceased Clara's tragic story aright. Alas, it begins and ends like a broken record stuck in one groove playing the same sour note over and over like Chinese-torture. To get a handle on this gloomy picture, just enclose in parentheses the major achievements for American higher education of the New School and its co-builders Johnson and Mayer between 1919 and 1960. Now look back before 1919 and ahead after 1960 for two similar ugly estimates of human nature.

In 1915, Thorstein Veblen, renowned Columbia professor and one of the New School's original faculty, emitted a crude and noisome Bronx cheer in the direction of the Ivy League and points West: American higher education is a system of status rivalry and class pretension, "a study in total depravity." Veblen mumbled in class so he condemned all student climbers as well as toadying faculty and imperious administration. In 1963, not to be outdone by this original, Clara Mayer published a damning book on American democracy entitled *Manmade Wilderness*; that implicit charge alone is about as close as you can get as a metaphor for total depravity; to her dismay, bad vibes in American higher education and democracy multiplied in force a half-century on. As deterioration progressed coordinate with the century, Goliath had become more gargantuan and David, more of a pygmy.

While they reach this same alarming conclusion circuitously, Mayer, despite enduring more years of bad news, will not abandon hope. After all, Clara stayed the course maintaining her poise and overall affirmation while surmounting bad patches at the New School and universally. She further buttressed her credibility with her compelling evidence, profundity, eloquence, faith in her painful solutions; further, she shrouded herself in the collaborating warnings and wisdom of her friend Einstein and the autobiography of Albert Schweitzer.

Manmade Wilderness educates her informed adult audience, the original New School target, through a series of subtle Elia-like philosophical essays on the state-of-the-art on the human condition by way of her total New School experience. The counterpoint between the noble, enlightened idea of the founders and the money grubbers in the temple of democracy had characterized all of Clara Mayer's writings from the twenties to the sixties, whether they appeared in New School Bulletins or in hasty typescript for her and now our eyes only. Both Johnson and she had spiced their New School Bulletins, weekly listings of guest speakers, concerts, seminars and special occasions, with these 350-word, pithy, thought-provoking essays with little aphorisms. Actually, some of these stylish words of wisdom enlarged on original Bulletin essays, but her 1963 condemnations and last chance prescriptions are far more extensive, rigorous, incisive, damning and her tone, somber. The administrative gloves have come off and Clara hits our individual and collective vulnerabilities; failures she chronicled throughout her twentieth century become even more devastating now.

The issues are no longer mainly intellectual, but spiritual; the concerns, the botch the male animal has made of God's garden. Her previous affirmation of life only after all the painful facts surfaced give way to despair. Her suppressed *cri de coeur* alerts us to the extent of our wilderness: "an abyss

of error deepened by vested interests. And the stakes? Civilization and the human soul." She has entered Donne's world. It's all too painful for adults in arrested maturity and economically productive American higher education to fathom. Although published in 1963, the New School did not acquire her book until after my 2001 visit; the Firestone Library at Princeton finally acquired it in 1986, but only two others had charged it out since. Obviously, the pain experienced among educated Americans confronted with reality has become too excruciating.

Clara Mayer's revealing buried typescripts to herself leading up to the *Manmade Wilderness* encompass 1958 to 1963, years of heretofore untold agony as she saw the original dreams of the founders, Johnson and herself slipping exponentially away from the New School. Both the 1986 New School historians and Clara recorded man's inhumanity to women and to American higher education. But, what they found in the New School archive needs supplementing with what I found. In 1959, Henry David became the School's fifth president. According to the history, he characterized Clara's personalized style of direction as a 'mom and pop' operation sorely in need of a rational and bureaucratic organization. In seeking "to place the school on a more businesslike footing," he immediately asked for Clara's resignation as dean of the Adult Division.

Her expressed agonies in her secret files gain from juxtaposition with the 1986 School history. After rummaging in these ashes of the early years, I found suppressed feeling added to historical fact. Appalled and embittered, she nonetheless gave the 1961 Commencement address and squirreled the draft ending with a stinging Kipling quote without its final clause. "If you can trust yourself when all men doubt you, if you can bear to hear the truth you've spoken twisted by knaves to make a trap for fools, or watch the things you gave your life to, broken and stoop and build'em up with worn-out tools ----" Fill in the blanks.

While Clara's psyche suffered greatly, her firing proved far more disastrous for the School. According to the historians, David had misunderstood the New School and in one masterless stroke had "lost its most loyal administrator, the generous financial support of her family, the backing of its German-Jewish constituency, and the loyalty of much of its most effective faculty." Some legacy down the drain. In the final paragraph of their 1986 history, the authors accurately list the original dreams of the New School: academic freedom and a democratic community informed by concern for the world we live in. True enough, but the historians themselves neither understood nor believed in the New School cornerstone. Their conclusion categorically denied the energizing premise of the founders and the co-builders Johnson and Mayer: the past defines the future. Restated: the future must catch up with the past. That is no dream! To paraphrase Mayer, without every adult in a democracy taking to heart and mind the painful lessons of the past, the perpetual present rests with the connivance of fools and knaves. Clara's tenure ended with a warning of ceaseless nightmare.

The skewed histories of the New School leave an informed public with a male-biased, fragmented understanding of the role of the New School and of its larger frame, American higher education, in the twentieth century. These

secondary male sources include the 1950 Alvin Johnson autobiography and the 1986 and the 1993 histories of the New School. Meanwhile Clara's 1963 little-circulated *Manmade Wilderness* concentrates on universals with no particulars on the New School itself.

The historians who founded the New School - as opposed to the historians of it - had read their Henry Adams and believed there existed a decline and fall of American higher education similar to the holes the historian Adams found in *The Degradation of the Democratic Dogma* (1919). To fill this abyss on their terms, let us search the historical warehouse that still stocks my large scale order for some credibility and panache. Add some primary nitty-gritty and gossip. If we could just read about the backstairs, hands-on kitchen version of the triumphs and failures of the New School's co-builder's policies and practices, we could finally fill in some serious gaps and blunders.

Once again, peeping Ken looked in on sleeping beauty. At last, the gold mine! Lost for all these years in the slumbering and somewhat chaotic New School Archive, I came across Clara's untitled, undated 27-page typescript giving an intimate picture of her long friendship and unique collaboration with Alvin Johnson over the course of their joint tenure. Internal evidence says she wrote this separate story in 1961 or 1962 after the fifth president pushed her out and while still working on the 1963 book, a separate project. This typical first draft scarred with typos, run-ons, write-ins and with blank spaces left for incidental facts to look up later would obviously have been discarded if superseded by a cleaner draft or published final text. Neither surfaced. I know why. Sooner or later, she must have realized that she simply couldn't pass this exposé around any further among the living. Written in a conversational, funny, idiosyncratic anecdotal style and naming names, it would be telling all the embarrassing insider tales out of school. Unvarnished truth makes enemies. So she presciently left the buried evidence lay there entombed with all its sins upon it for some diligent, fellow squirrel to scavenge and crack open untold years later.

Before we come to this one of a kind, purposely-buried, uninhibited story, let us clear away the underbrush of the male histories. Like all stolid institutional histories, the 1986 New School history recorded primary sources and marshalled all the facts accurately. How could we not be grateful? But when the careful authors attempt to interject the spirit and the flavor of the time, the setting and the institution, they betray an inclination for limiting stereotypes, clichés and prejudices which miss the deeper, subtler, informal tone of the day-to-day crises, cast of characters, storyline, ambiance and lasting truth portrayed by Clara, the one principal intimately engaged full-time on the premises. Should we mine for dross or for gold? As an example of blinkered vision, let us look first at Greenwich Village through the eyes of the New School historians. These disappointing, tut-tutting, parental authorities reduce the Village ethos to "informal, rebellious and irreverent." In contrast, Clara, Alvin, Masha, Brodsky and a host of Village poets and artists rather affirm the Village ethos as autonomous freedom for responsible acts eliciting spontaneity, creativity, non-conformity and pioneering. Village-oriented folk frequently yield substantive contributions to the quality of New York life.

Historians and genealogists I've met communicate on different planes. On one hand, historians simply cannot limit readers to the begats of genealogy. You certainly need precise and accurate facts - *sine quo non* - but only when you arrange them in coherent patterns will they mean something. You need to hear the baby squalling, see the married couple kick up their heels, and revive the dead. On the other hand, the historical novel or the apochryphal anecdote err in the opposite direction by turning real people into cult heroes and universal truth into national myth. Pap for the insidious pop culture. The credible historian, biographer or poet reconstructing a particular place and century needs to be on intimate terms with who, then and there as well as us here. Whether hanging out in the street, court, tavern, bedchamber or battlefield, Shakespeare lived alongside and inside his characters, whether ancient, fictional or contemporary. Keats called Shakespeare's incomparable knack, negative capability: the ability to get inside the sparrow and peck amidst the gravel. Clara called invading these hidden feelings "the very tissue of life."

Abandonning male historians, we now let Clara tell her own archival story. About 1917, Clara, the daughter of a wealthy New York realtor, developed a crush on her distinguished Barnard history professor, James Harvey Robinson, for his radical ideas and his provocative and inspiring delivery. With Europe already at war, change was heavy in the air; in this watershed between the centuries, two generations, professor and student, had met on their own battlefield fighting for brand new academic freedom, intellectual liberalism, social activism and pragmatism.

Robinson believed the New School would mark the emancipation of the social sciences in the twentieth century as conclusively as Darwin's emancipation of the natural sciences in the nineteenth century. While Robinson was cocksure of his new history, Clara flaunted her typical Barnard role readiness and confident eagerness to implement his agenda. When he left Columbia for the New School in 1919, she followed. For her, his courses in both settings became "a turning point in life, a sudden consciousness of its possibilities and its hardships, of realities on a bewildering scale." Translated, the New School dedicated to modernity became a laboratory that encapsulated the past century's generational, gender, philosophical, higher education and American society conflicts, contrasts, changes, aspirations and failures.

In tracking her informal story, I too can distinguish between my superb traditional male education at Columbia University from 1940 until 1967 and the transcendent continuing inspiration and goal direction of Clara and her masterpiece, the New School. It is indeed her adaptation of the ideas of the New School founders that led her step-by-step over 40 years from their commitment to the social sciences and an informed electorate in American society towards the wider vision of Joseph Brodsky's aesthetics and consciousness raising as a multi-cultural exercise.

The founders Robinson, Charles Beard, Veblen and John Dewey wanted to change democracy. Take it out of the hands of an Ivy hierarchical elite. These leading national authorities had already made towering boat-flooding waves in American philosophy and European history. Convinced that traditional university studies were burdened with academic irrelevancy, administrative

highhandedness and beamed to a self-perpetuating, self-satisfied few, these reformers believed American democracy would ultimately stagger without a more broad based adult citizenry informed in the social sciences. Initially, the New School would be a research institution, a secular pragmatic monastery, with distinguished thinkers devoted to churning out social action programs based on their new assumption-challenging philosophy and new cross-disciplinary history. For the first time, research in political science, sociology and anthropology would link the selective past with the otherwise problematic future to build a communally-responsible, rather than simply an economically-productive, distracted, electorate. An informed electorate? Multi-disciplined? Multi-lateralism? Hierarchies everywhere will have none of the above unless it suits their convenience. Dreams and ideas of the disaffected Columbia faculty tangled with the reality of entrenched power and lost. It is the history of democracy in the twentieth century. League of Nations and Wilson. United Nations and Roosevelt. Civil rights and Johnson. Global warming and victims of climate change. Nuclear disarmament and the six billion. The planet can no longer accommodate both nature and human nature. One of them has to give.

The faculty founders of the New School had left Columbia specifically to get out from under administrative control in the first instance and to dedicate themselves solely to research. While they hoped the spin off would lead to social action through wide textbook publication, monographs and public lectures, neither graduate nor adult nor college students were originally in the mix as witness that academic charmer Veblen. By 1922, the founders had stumbled badly economically; they needed an administrative savior to translate this milestone in American higher education into a viable, longterm enterprise.

Saviors arrived on cue. Fortunately, two unusually brilliant administrators who consciously subscribed to the founders' far-reaching goals were waiting in the wings: Alvin Johnson, editor of the *New Republic* and a New School trustee from the outset, and the student Clara Mayer. Johnson, highly praised at every critical stage, and rightly so; but, not for his one masterstroke: giving Clara Mayer her head. He anointed the humble, but equally powerful visionary Clara with greater responsibilities and more titles at every live or die crisis point during their hectic first decade. They both had complementary and overlapping gifts and they were made for each other. Both believed strongly in the power of intellectual ideas; but each had complementary institutional ideas that enlarged the scope and enhanced the stability of the School. They both were adroit in bailing out of a crisis; while Johnson took deserved bows for imaginative big projects, Clara handled the day-to-day operations with smoothness and aplomb and without ego maintenance.

In 1922, Johnson fearlessly confronted an incorrigibly fractious faculty - ultimately firing some of them - bringing fiscal sleight of hand, his own creativity, initiative and charisma and by 1924, wisely handing the day-to-day ball to student visionary Clara. Parenthetically, research disengagement from Columbia and then New School led the original distinguished founders to publish, rather than teach, important works and standard social science texts selling copies for high schools and colleges in the hundreds of thousands. In

tandem with them, Johnson's own publishing contribution of a monumental *Encyclopedia of Social Sciences* built on the original research principles of the New School and his successful earlier career as editor of the *New Republic*. Students read books then.

Alvin and Clara had as many problems to solve from disunity within as from hostility without. Her discovered intimate history speaks of Johnson "picking up the pieces" as the New School's first President in 1922 after a fundamental policy split on the board over making it a research or teaching institution. The board had also eliminated the single administrator, Robinson's secretary, leaving him "indignant", and Beard, "disgusted".

Their long friendship began when Johnson chose Clara a student trustee in 1924. Johnson had been very shrewd in his appointment of Clara as student trustee on countless scores as she tells it. Originally, according to Clara, the power brokers had insinuated themselves over the reformers for student membership on the School Board. Johnson appointed no one. He waited two years for the power campaign to simmer down and only then he quietly chose Clara. He told her then, it was an important New School-type step because most boards of higher education practiced religious discrimination fearing that "the Jews would take over;" she says he then added that he considered her "safe", perhaps because she was a student; she doesn't say, but does give us an insight into this Nebraskan's Western ambivalence.

Once on the Board, nothing stopped this woman with a democratic mission. She soon became Board secretary and, before long, Associate Director claiming to have learned tremendously from the multiple methods of her new idealized mentor: "organizing, appraising, editing, writing, translating, expanding and intensifying her intellectual interests." One discerns that her mind now encompassed both ideas and administration to accomplish personally the New School's agenda. From her standpoint, the practical entrepreneurial Johnson had not replaced, but complemented the idealistic professorial Robinson.

Alvin and Clara and the New School ideal all desperately needed one another. That ideal? The mission of bringing the leading edge of modern thought to the consciousness of a drifting national adult psyche remained a constant. Neither the founders nor the two co-builders ever doubted for one moment during their tenure from 1919 until 1962 that they were filling a massive vacuum in the higher education systems throughout the misnomered democratic Eurocentric world. Not a single one of the already compromised institutions in learning, governance, industry and the media had the essential ideas, professionals, means and intention to create this new paradigm.

In the 1960s, I personally knew Francis Horn, president of the University of Rhode Island, then a final nominee for the fifth presidency of the New School who lost out to the ill-chosen David. He confided that he too despaired of reasonably managing the patently unmanageable state university: prodigality and intransigence at every level. Without the essential philosophy, policies and preeminent cogent minds the New School provided, American higher education and democracy itself would continue on the ropes perpetually. Let the rest of the world concentrate on the ameliorating, utilitarian physical sciences for all the ironic good they did. For as long as the male-dominated marketplace

world had top priority, no other viable discourse, forum or action center would exist for the constructive ideas and ethics to reverse threatened global disaster. Failure to address these vital non-scientific issues left all economically-driven institutions of higher education collusive; vital issues left adrift at the low end of the economic scale, largely dependent on governmental or industrial subsidies and when unfunded, turned irrelevant.

Irony of ironies, one day the New School idealists themselves had run up against the marketplace which dominated the democratic world they intended to awaken. Ironies multiply. If Clara proved a worthy disciple as well as an innovator in her own right during the School's first decade, her manifold bounty in the second transformed its outreach. As the ten-year Chelsea brownstone lease drew to a close at the end of the twenties, the New School realized it needed to expand its quarters substantially. At crossroads of this economic magnitude, the clockwork team of Johnson and Mayer had no educational and economic parallel in all of New York City. After all, Johnson was an economist and Clara's family was rich. There never would have been the treasured eight-story building at 66 West 12th Street in the Village without her and her family's good offices, special qualifications, affluence and philanthropy.

Tragically, my unconscious never picked up on her independent wealth. She had never relayed that aspect of her being to me. Unlike the savvy Johnson's knowledge of Clara's wealthy New York connection, my silent unconscious had no way of knowing before this archival research that Clara's brilliant gestalt contained a rich New York economic and social framework to which I myself was never heir. Consequently, my uneconomic unconscious proceeded along its merry, lifelong way following the intellectual, spiritual and administrative mind, heart and character of Clara, may I say unphased - no, completely oblivious - that I owned nary an additionally enabling economic and social attachment from the past, in the present nor towards the future.

Johnson pulled off extraordinary coups in his own right, but at those institutional crossroads where he needed to surpass himself, Clara stood loyally in the wings with all the right strings backstage to make him look like even more of a genius outfront. As far as Clara minded, Alvin could always have the stage to himself and she applauded. The New School belonged in Greenwich Village and Clara's insider story originally for her eyes only tells how her combined efforts and the co-builders' crafty ingenuities put this otherwise unaffordable architectural and adult education wonder on site at 66 West 12th Street. Clara's brothers Charles and Albert owned a major construction company that turned over profits yearly in at least the five figures to each of the family including Clara. She deposited her nifty financial statements in the archive.

Not only did the Mayer family significantly fund the new building at its several financial crisis points including the 1929 Crash, they brought in the architect Joseph Urban and their construction firm built it. As Clara tells it, A.J., that's Johnson, inspired the thrilled Joe Urban so much that he conceived of his assignment "as the embodiment of ideas in some physically appropriate and beautiful form in the vanguard of the 'functional' and the 'modern'." What a salesman A.J.! What an architect Joe Urban! Yet even in

the Village, stuffy types hold forth. Clara: Protesting the design and very possibly the encroachment, the Washington Square Association claimed the proposed building utterly lacking in architectural harmony with existing Village architecture. Johnson kissed them off effectively. What made the Association think the Village had any architecture? Johnson further defused the opposition by arranging for the Association to hold its annual meeting in the new building at its completion.

In Clara's private memoir, the hilarious Uncle Dan runs away with the credits and the story line for the new building. Privately, the two leaders had a code word for Daniel Crawford Smith, their sugar daddy extraordinaire: Uncle Dan. Only two clever foxes like Alvin and Clara could have picked Uncle Dan's pockets clean for twenty years while leaving him smiling and fulfilled for life. Uncle Dan, a business man, owned the 12th Street property they coveted and sacrificed his equity for the benefit of the School. He had been an overly assiduous student at the School in Chelsea from age fifty and became a celebrated fixture and trustee at the new New School until he died twenty years later. Before becoming that prime benefactor, he had made his reputation in class as a talker you just couldn't shut up. As Uncle Dan owned three adjoining houses between Fifth and Sixth Avenues that the School wanted, A.J. made him a proposition he couldn't filibuster. "All we'll do is to lift you up in the air, garden and all. You'll spend the rest of your life in the penthouse apartment, and you know the School is at least half your life."

With all this altitude, Uncle Dan would enjoy penthouse, hothouse, terrace, a view and free tuition at any and all the classes on the eight floors below. The well-to-do student Clara had already come through in the twenties; why not another rich student, Uncle Dan in the thirties. Under the spell of the great persuader, the talkative student, finally out-talked, agreed and took \$155,000 in second mortgage bonds for his equity which he ultimately gave to the School. Meanwhile, the astute economist Johnson parlayed this gift by borrowing an additional \$200,000 on Uncle Dan's first mortgage.

Affectionately, Clara describes Uncle Dan as a large man in every dimension. Finding him symbolically significant as representative of the New School - and Greenwich Village, I might add - he belonged under "the heading of humanity with its necessary component of non-standardization." Through the years he grew larger, physically and spiritually, demonstrating in the classroom the large distances he had traversed in his adult education. "He had become so wise that he never talked unless he had something to say!"

Pivotal partners with mutual trust, they all lived happily ever after. Uncle Dan was at home to all school visitors. Whenever the New School got stretched, Clara levitated to Uncle Dan and borrowed \$10,000 on the spot without a receipt. He had a principal interest in folk dancing. On his seventieth birthday, the entire building was turned over to a folk dance. At the time, Dr. Johnson wrote a beautiful and deserved tribute to this student-trustee-benefactor, briefly quoted on the memorial tablet of the fifth floor classroom, "Proof of our hopes, the symbol of our aspirations."

Eloquence, understanding, gratitude and corresponding power. Johnson possessed all of the above in a very high degree and Clara admired him

gratefully for it. When it got too tough to market Uncle Dan's second mortgage bonds, Clara's mother kicked in \$100,000 in memory of Clara's recently deceased father. Johnson's tribute inscribed on the aluminum tablet of the Bernhard Mayer Auditorium, Clara said set the pattern for the school. But between the lines we read, even more critically, parents subconsciously set the pattern for their children. "To Bernhard Mayer, an upright man and just, with the justice that is one with mercy. In an age of all-pervading change he maintained unchanged the simplicity and serenity of one whose vision is fixed upon the values that endure."

To reconstruct those 'values that endure,' the New School returned to the origins of the European universities in the twelfth century. Role and time reversal set in here because twentieth-century American higher education had turned university priorities upside down. Medieval Bologna and Paris represent our two separate university traditions, Clara subscribing to the former, the disaffected Columbia faculty belonging to the latter, and the New School's first president, Alvin Johnson, the mediator between both factions. At Bologna, student organizations or guilds - heirs of aristocratic families - ran the university hiring the masters at will and imposing on them rigid and detailed academic discipline. Bologna became the model for Italian, Spanish and Portuguese universities. The masters' or faculty organizations ran the University of Paris. The faculty run University of Paris became the model for most of the German universities and Oxbridge.

In 1924, five years after opening, role reversal set in at the New School: faculty autonomy gave way to student autonomy; social research, to swift curricula transfer; the lost medieval ideal of Paris, to the lost medieval ideal of Bologna; the negative founder Veblen, to the affirmative implementer Clara. In 1922 in the midst of financial crisis, Alvin Johnson, an original board member and brilliant pragmatist, became president. Almost immediately, he recognized and gave the student Clara her head enlisting her for successful fund raising, placing her on the board, raising her to assistant director and then dean of adult education, and, followed her advice to the letter on curriculum and student coordination. By 1923 before joining the board, Clara muted social sciences in favor of psychology, philosophy, intellectual history, literature and the plastic arts. As early as 1923, this new cultural orientation attracted Lewis Mumford, Aaron Copland and dozens of their scope across a wide cultural bandwidth. A pragmatist, like her co-builder the economist Johnson, Clara's courses depended on tuition. She controlled the hiring, caring and feeding of the faculty. Her course content defined modernity as artistic creativity, social research, academic freedom and democratic reform. She yoked public and intellectual topics and brought the latest discoveries to public attention.

Today, universities and the institutions they cater to are living in their own dark ages. In the fullness of time, the university has great difficulty focusing on educational values and the student-faculty principals. Now you navigate through top heavy layers of power above - administrators, trustees, legislators, corporations, sports complexes - before you reach down to the Faculty Senate, a rat race, and the Student Union, a pleasure dome. Learned missions and knowledge itself have been compromised by what conglomerate, corporate and political leaders in that order deem useful and not upsetting to

societal stability. Until WWII, 80% of American students went to private institutions of higher learning; now, the figures have been reversed. If implanted administrators and trustees ruled the university roost from the early nineteenth century onward, legislators and other political types along with sports divisions now upstage them on funding and concentrations and even standards. Now we toss education and utilitarian standards around as both political shibboleth and pork barrel.

As early as 1954 at West Virginia University, we faculty exchanged the apocryphal anecdote of the legislator who turned down the University's library budget one year because they already had more books than anyone could read in a lifetime. With the advent of the community college in the 1950s, consumer education and distributive technology are in and county executives become re-electable barons. A one-woman band, Margaret Thatcher on her own savaged the British red-brick universities by eliminating university departments and making transients of the remaining faculty as underpaid circuit riders.

Originally, universities had three divinely-oriented missions: systematic accretion of knowledge in archives or libraries; adding new knowledge by pioneer research at the perimeter, and finally, orderly transfer of these first responsibilities to the next generation. The maze of university libraries at Oxford elegantly attend to that first mission. The collections attract us from all over the world for their antiquity and completeness; they function because of their controlled and sophisticated professional access. Since the New School had no chance to enter that league, the founders gave their all to leading edge knowledge leading to social action, the university's second mission. Clara dedicated the New School to orderly transfer of this pioneer knowledge to adults, not university students, the generational third mission.

The deleterious conditions in American higher education that brought the New School into being in 1919 have escalated throughout American society ever since. Inundated with the business of living, most of us do not enjoy her stated ideal of time and tranquility. Or can we find time for consciousness raising and informed knowledge for social action. Even Clara Mayer acknowledged that part-time, one semester evening courses to raise adult consciousness did not necessarily have lasting value; what's more, they competed with full-time employment, family living and the other demands of daily life. While the new administration sought to transform the New School to a university and pushed her aside in the early 1960s, I taught night courses in English at Queens College. One evening in the middle of a session, a minority student burst into uncontrolled sobbing. Inviting him outside the classroom, I listened to a litany of family and economic pressures overwhelming this conscientious adult; adding night school which would advance his career had suddenly become the final straw. Without the G.I. Bill after WWII, most of us in his late twenties age and economic bracket would also have found our obligations overwhelming our opportunities.

The greatest lesson of the original New School may be that we need mature leaders throughout democracy in order to realize the ideal of an informed electorate. The anomalies of the New School and Greenwich Village in American culture come about through acts of bravery and eloquence of rare, dedicated

leaders and isolated enclaves that refuse to celebrate the *status quo*. The American founders and a handful of succeeding presidents with vision carried out just such democratic revolutions and humanitarian reforms, but *only* when they could bring the mainstream along with them. Clara's essay on American democracy in *Manmade Wilderness* calls for leaders of personal grandeur, that is, having style, displaying the discriminating elegance of Johnson and Mayer. Qualities she lists: intimacy, individuality, maturity, tolerance, a spirit of inquiry, architects of the future, giants of intelligence and spirit who lift the stranded. Without honor in a purposely distracted, pop culture, American higher education does not seek out or nurture this breed. On the contrary, the egalitarian leveling process gravitates to mediocrity, common denominators, economic saviors, organization persons, utilitarian scientists, technocrats and cult heroes.

Both her 1963 book and her scattered archival papers show her increasing concern with extraordinary leadership combining intellectual, spiritual and ethical values. Thus she ends her essay on American democracy, "It begins to become clear, dazzzlingly clear, that education needs ethical values and seven-league boots to catch up with other forms of communication." Among other private papers in the same neglected folder that housed the unpublishable 1961 or 1962 insider's history of the New School, I also found a three-page memo dashed off to herself, two typed and one, handwritten in a beautiful script. She had typed out St. John 1:1 as her title as if delivering herself a sermon. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." Ignoring John's concept of Logos, her self-sermon begins with a wholesale denunciation of ethic-less media practices stemming from pure commercial intent. "Characteristic of our time and our country words have largely lost their meaning." The sermon ends quoting Albert Einstein in longhand. "The unleashed power of the atom has changed everything save our modes of thinking, and thus we drift to unparalleled catastrophe." She might also have quoted Einstein's other considered warning that points the finger away from Lucretius and towards the random, unreasoned actions of humans. "I cannot believe God played dice with the universe."

Along with Einstein, her private musings ranging between pessimism and optimism indicate a growing conviction of the downward trend in all human society which she predicts will exponentially grow worse by the end of the century. At the same time, her hopes for adult education and an informed electorate can only be evaluated in this deleterious climate where momentum increasingly flows towards pain avoidance, comfortable facades and away from taking responsibility for freedom. The contents of these private files extending from the twenties to the sixties increasingly reveal a need to go public with her carefully honed belief system. Without a public rendering of her policies, philosophy and experience, American higher education leaves yet another wide gap in our understanding of necessary democratic missions neglected, and, consequently, unfulfilled. In her private conversations with herself left on the cutting room floor so to speak between 1958 and 1963 - the dates of her two separate prefaces indicative of her indecision and delay - she got caught between damning the *Manmade Wilderness* that has relegated the original dreams of the New School to a universally barren terrain deprived of intellectual sustenance or affirming adult education and spiritual issues, both now untended.

Curse man and die. Or hold out hope. Schweitzer had that same problem in his 1932 autobiography, *Out of My Life and Thoughts*, and Clara latched on to it for dear life. Even though a 1933 English translation of this German work exists, Clara felt compelled on October 16, 1950 to translate two pages on her own from this *Sturm und Drang* opus for the *New School Bulletin*. It was another find I too latched on to among her unsorted typescripts. The Epilogue to her 1963 *Manmade Wilderness* ends with his, her and my ambivalent positions. "I am pessimistic in my judgment of humanity's position." Then we screen down to his and her ending. "Because I trust in the power of truth and the spirit, I believe in the future of mankind." She calls these opposing convictions, "a kind of closing exhortation to the human confraternity (those males?) not to abandon to fear and fatigue in the struggle of the ages for the Use of Reason."