

ECOLOGY OF UTOPIA:
ENVIRONMENTAL DISCOURSE AND PRACTICE IN COMMUNAL SETTLEMENTS IN THE
ANTEBELLUM UNITED STATES

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This dissertation reveals connections between social reform and environmental thought and practice and considers the meaning of “getting back to nature” to radical reformers in the antebellum United States. It examines the circulation of environmental ideas and practices through a broad network of communities that connected political, social, and religious reform movements during the communitarian moment of the 1840s. I argue that members of communal settlements, many inspired by French social thinker Charles Fourier, others known as Universal Reformers, contributed in nuanced and under-examined ways to nineteenth-century environmental and agricultural discourse in the United States.

Antebellum communitarians became investigators, experimenters, and scientists engaged in a project of articulating and adhering to natural laws. As they pursued authentic, transformative means of social and personal reform, members of intentional communities across New England and the Old Northwest produced new forms of social and scientific authority as they grappled with the meaning of “natural.” Through novel beliefs and practices of labor, diet, hygiene, agriculture, marriage, and religion, their experiments in community were experiments in living with a new

orientation to the natural world.

This work engages both environmental scholars and historians of the nineteenth-century United States to tell a new story of antebellum reform and to explore new dimensions of nineteenth-century environmental thought and practice. It builds upon recent scholarship that unsettles core assumptions about nineteenth-century attitudes toward and treatment of the environment and reconsiders the possible futures that were available to Americans before the Civil War.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Maria (Molly) Reed received her BA from Bard College at Simon's Rock, and her MA in the Social Sciences from the University of Chicago. In addition to leading courses on communal history and the history of alternative medicine on Cornell's Ithaca campus during graduate school, she taught college courses in environmental history and US history in New York state prisons for six years with the Cornell Prison Education Program.

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Introduction

Getting Nearer to Nature

Come out of the dark city holes on the one hand, and isolated wilderness on the other; get together in reform neighborhoods, and engage in the cultivation of fruits, which would at once supply the body with healthy food and healthy work. Then persons could live in some measure up to their ideal.

– Annie Denton Cridge, 1858

In the decades preceding the Civil War, novel environmental beliefs and practices moved through a broad network of communal settlements that connected political, social, and religious reform movements. This dissertation addresses the meaning of “getting nearer to nature” to radical reformers in intentional communities in the United States from the 1830s through the 1850s, and traces the connections between social reform and environmental thought and practice. By uncovering new environmental dimensions of the reform impulses of this era, I argue that for many, social reform was an environmental project.¹ This is, then, a story about nineteenth-century Americans and their efforts to reinvent the individual, reimagine society, and refashion the natural world.

This work engages both environmental scholars and historians of the nineteenth-century United States to tell a new story of antebellum reform, and to explore new dimensions of

¹ Classic histories of antebellum reform include Alice Felt Tyler, *Freedom’s Ferment: Phases of American Social History to 1860* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1944); Steven Mintz, *Moralists and Modernizers: America’s Pre-Civil War Reformers* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995). Ronald Walters, *American Reformers, 1815-1860* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1997); and Whitney R. Cross, *The Burned-Over District: The Social and Intellectual History of Enthusiastic Religion in Western New York, 1800-1850*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982). These works situated communities in relation to broader political, cultural, and religious movements in United States history. Another rich vein of scholarship focuses specifically on the origins, lifespan, and significance of individual communities. See, for example, Richard Francis, *Fruitlands: The Alcott Family and Their Search for Utopia* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010) and Christopher Clark, *The Communitarian Moment: The Radical Challenge of the Northampton Association* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1996). This dissertation builds upon these works to consider the environmental dimensions of antebellum reform.

nineteenth-century environmental thought and practice. Working at this scholarly nexus deepens our understanding of antebellum communitarian reformers, and their contributions, motivations, and significance. It also helps us to better understand the rich environmental imaginaries of antebellum Americans.² Perceptions of wild or conquered nature, which have long dominated the historiography of nineteenth-century environmental thought, were less salient for these reformers than their conviction that nature offered rich templates for interdependence and community (an idea that many historians assume emerged with ecologists in the early twentieth century). Connections between “pure” food and “pure” bodies, typically associated with the twentieth-century, were also key for these reformers who explicitly tied their environmental consciousness to the pursuit of health.³ Scholarship in environmental history and the history of medicine have been interwoven in recent years in profitable ways.⁴ This work strengthens these connections; it also demonstrates that stories of environment and health were inextricably tied to ideas about social progress.

The reformers at the center of this study experimented to varying degrees with new forms of socialism, temperance and diet reform, women’s rights, abolition, and free love as they sought

² This dissertation is in conversation with recent scholarship on how nineteenth-century Americans understood, created, and navigated competing and overlapping definitions of nature. See Conevery Bolton Valenčius, *The Health of the Country: How American Settlers Understood Themselves and Their Land* (New York: Basic Books, 2002); Steven Stoll, *Larding the Lean Earth: Soil and Society in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2002); Aaron Sachs, *Arcadian America: The Death and Life of an Environmental Tradition* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013) Rebecca Earle, *The Body of the Conquistador: Food, Race and the Colonial Experience in Spanish America, 1492–1700*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012); and Monique Allewaert, *Ariel’s Ecology: Plantations, Personhood, and Colonialism in the American Tropics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013) and Daegan Miller, *This Radical Land: A Natural History of American Dissent* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2018).

³ See Benjamin Cohen, *Pure Adulteration: Cheating on Nature in the Age of Manufactured Food: Cheating on Nature in the Age of Manufactured Food* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2019).

⁴ See, for example, the work of Linda Nash, Conevery Valenčius, and Gregg Mitman. Nash, *Inescapable Ecologies: A History of Environment, Disease, and Knowledge* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006); Valenčius, *The Health of the Country*; Gregg Mitman, “In Search of Health: Landscape and Disease in American Environmental History,” *Environmental History* 10, no. 2 (April 2005): 184-210.

to remedy the world's social ills. In 1840, Albert Brisbane's translation into English of French social theorist Charles Fourier's *Social Destiny of Man* galvanized self-described reformers across the Northern states.⁵ Fourier's followers embraced the idea of "Association," or collective living in community, as the pathway to the fullest expression and cultivation of each person's soul. Born into a merchant family in Besançon, France, Fourier (1772-1837) served in the military during the French Revolution, worked in trade, and spent his later years refining his social theories. A small group of supporters bolstered Fourier, including Brisbane, a wealthy student of philosophy from New York, whose translation and distillation of Fourier's idea appeared three years after his mentor's death.

Fourier was a self-proclaimed "social scientist" whose vision of social progress drew upon eternal "Laws of Universal Order and Harmony." Fourier fixed European society along a strict linear timeline of progress (which his American followers adopted as well); he held that by the turn of the nineteenth century, humanity had attained "Civilization," the fourth of eight stages of human progress. The human race was then, broadly, "in the phase of its social infancy and childhood."⁶ Fourier's religiously inflected writings reflected his deep concern for uncovering

⁵Albert Brisbane, *Social Destiny of Man: Or, Association and Reorganization of Industry* (Philadelphia: Stollmeyer, 1840). Carl Guarneri's *The Utopian Alternative: Fourierism in Nineteenth-Century America* remains the most important study of Fourierist communities in the United States (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991); more recent work on Fourierist communities has developed Fourierist connections across the Atlantic, and to antislavery, religion, and literary expression in the United States. Mark Lause's work explores connections among communitarianism, party politics, and agrarian reform movements. Sean Griffin, "Antislavery Utopias: Communitarian Labor Reform and the Abolitionist Movement," *The Journal of the Civil War Era* 8, no. 2 (May 25, 2018): 243–68; Amy Hart, "'All Is Harmony in That Department': Religious Expressions within the Fourierist Communal Experiments of the 1840s," *Nova Religio: The Journal of Alternative & Emergent Religion* 23, no. 2 (November 2019): 18–41; Benjamin Joshua Doty, "Fourierism and Nervous Sympathy in The Blithedale Romance," *Nathaniel Hawthorne Review* 45, no. 1 (Spring 2020): 26–45; Juan Pro, "Thinking of a Utopian Future: Fourierism in Nineteenth-Century Spain," *Utopian Studies* 26, no. 2 (2015): 329–348. Mark A. Lause, *Young America: Land, Labor, and the Republican Community* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2005).

⁶ Charles Fourier, ed. Gareth Stedman Jones and Ian Patterson, *Fourier: "The Theory of the Four Movements,"* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 71.

laws of human nature, a project shared by reformers in the antebellum United States. In voluminous writings, Fourier delineated what he held were all of the social types that make up the human world. He outlined what were, in his mind, the best ways for humans to prosper—living in interdependent “phalanxes” of four hundred families, each of which harbored the correct combination of personalities and innate abilities, with all members engaging in cooperative labor according to their own passions. Fourier’s vision of harmony was joyful, opulent, and irreverent. The true Phalanstery would be a mansion in which community members lived lavishly (though notably in different circumstances depending on social class), guided by their natural passions.

While “phalanxes” attracted thousands of Americans in the 1840s, Fourierist communities overlapped with a wide range of socialist communal experiments, some of which predated Fourierism in the United States. The communal landscape of the 1840s and 1850s included communities united by interests in antislavery, egalitarian economic relations, religious principles, or simply “radical reform.” In a very brief flourish of activity (“Fourierites” were later disparaged as “four-year-ites”), Associationists established more than thirty communities across New England, New York State, and the Old Northwest.⁷

Fourierists and other socialist communities emerged from a context of regional religious revivalism, burgeoning industrialization, middle class transformation, national debates over slavery, and American Transcendentalism.⁸ It was a time of social, economic, and religious

⁷ Guarneri, *The Utopian Alternative*, 278.

⁸ For more on the rapid transformations in urban and rural northern communities and the old Northwest in Jacksonian America see Charles Sellers, *The Market Revolution* (Oxford: University Press, 1991); Daniel Walker Howe, *What Hath God Wrought: The Transformation of America, 1815-1848* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009); Paul E. Johnson, *A Shopkeepers Millennium: Society and Revivals in Rochester, New York, 1815-1837* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1978); Joel Myerson, ed. *Transcendentalism: A Reader* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); John L. Thomas, “Romantic Reform in America, 1815-1865,” *American Quarterly* 17, no. 4 (1965): 656–81.

upheaval. As the founder of the Skaneateles community in Central New York put it, “we are in the midst of a mighty moral revolution. All Christendom is unsettled. Its ocean of mind is progressive.”⁹ Americans were asking new questions about societal norms, expectations, and ideals, and in understudied but fundamental ways, all of these communities embraced novel ideas about nature.

Antebellum communitarians became investigators, experimenters, and scientists engaged in a project of articulating and adhering to natural laws. As they pursued authentic, transformative means of social and personal reform—sometimes squabbling over what constituted a true reformer—members of intentional communities across New England and the Old Northwest grappled with the meaning of “natural.” They sought to uncover natural laws through new practices in labor, diet, hygiene, agriculture, marriage, and religion.

Their experiments in community were experiments in living with a new orientation to the natural world. Years after the Skaneateles community ended, a former member of the short-lived experiment mordantly recalled that a radical subset of the community, “for the purpose of living what they considered a strictly natural life...betook themselves to an exclusive diet of boiled wheat, and built themselves a shanty in the woods, hoping to secure long life and happiness by thus getting nearer to *nature*.”¹⁰ In November 1844, a year into the experiment, Maria Loomis, the editor of the Skaneateles Community newspaper, the *Communitist*, questioned the “back to nature” values and aesthetics of her fellow reformers in similarly sardonic terms. “Is it necessary to go quite back to barbarism—let the hair grow out all over your face, go barefoot, and comb your hair with your fingers, in order to bring about a reform? I think not; and yet we have

⁹ John Collins, *A Bird's Eye View of Society As It Is and As It Should Be*, (Boston: J.P. Mendum, 1844).

¹⁰ John Humphrey Noyes, *History of American Socialisms* (New York: Hillary House, 1961), 114.

specimens of radical reformers in this shape, who are trying as they say, to get back to nature!”¹¹

As Loomis illustrates, debates raged among communitarians over what it meant to pursue a natural life.

Emersonian self-culture, Nonresistance, Individual Sovereignty, and many of the health reforms of the age invited new examinations of the self. In the 1840s and 1850s, for those who had experimented widely with movements for social change, community was the ultimate place to practice broad reform. As Maria Loomis understood it: “There are always those who live in advance of society; who have come through other reforms to something higher....those who have waded through the buffetings, and inconveniences of the different reforms of the day, come to something beyond these reforms, something higher and deeper, and which embraces them all.”¹²

Human perfectibility, to many reformers, began with the body.¹³ A natural diet, unrestricted clothing, sunlight, bathing rituals, and labor in nature, were major preoccupations for radical social reformers who envisioned a better world and better people to populate it. As they engaged in the new rituals of everyday life, diet and other health reforms gave Americans the agency to take control of their own narratives of health, but also imposed strict regulatory mechanisms for bodily maintenance.¹⁴ Their discourses of purity and perfectibility inflected how

¹¹ Maria Loomis, “Reformers,” *Communitist*, Nov 13, 1844, 51.

¹² Maria Loomis, “The Community Movement,” *The Communitist*, August 21, 1844.

¹³ Protestant evangelicals, beginning in the 1830s, embraced a doctrine of Perfection, which was greatly influential in reform circles. Perfection was to strive to live free of sin, but it was also to recognize the divinity and sanctity of all people. See Thomas, “Romantic Reform in America, 1815-1865.” Douglas M. Strong, *Perfectionist Politics :Abolitionism and the Religious Tensions of American Democracy* (Syracuse, N.Y. : Syracuse University Press, 1999). As Ronald Walters wrote, “Reformers assumed that a person could not behave in a morally responsible way unless his or her body was unfettered and uncorrupted.” Walters, *American Reformers*, 147. Philip Gura locates the individual soul as the site of 19th century reform in *Man’s Better Angels*. To Gura, this aligns well with capitalist values, and represents the defining feature of Transcendentalism. Philip F. Gura, *Man’s Better Angels: Romantic Reformers and the Coming of the Civil War* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2017). Perfectionism also invokes the Christian perfectionists at the Oneida community, led by John Humphrey Noyes.

¹⁴ Robert Abzug traces the “sacralization of everyday life” from Benjamin Rush through the radical physiological reformers of the 1840s. Robert Abzug, *Cosmos Crumbling: American Reform and the Religious Imagination* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994).

reformers perceived and inhabited the natural environment, and the focus on the perfection of a single individual was tied to a recognition that individual souls are linked to one another and connected to broader nature. Reformers explicitly linked ideas about health, environment, and social progress, often in ways that unsettled the conventional mapping of distinctions among these fields, both in their day and since.

Communities created new contradictions and new possibilities for women and African Americans as they connected their ideas about healthy bodies, regeneration, and encounters with the natural world to antebellum gender and race relations. Many of the most radical reformers of this age simultaneously participated in soaring intellectual and spiritual journeys toward celestial harmony, and in concrete, earthly actions in the field of antislavery and women's rights. But the unrestrained sense of possibility that communities offered could produce violence as well as hope. The vision for utopia, for regeneration, that so many reformers embraced with energy and optimism, while frequently focused on egalitarianism and social justice, aligned easily with a vision for erasure of native people and a rejection of African American personhood.

Reformers also drew upon colonial imaginaries of the New World and the vision of manifest destiny, even as they criticized the spread of capitalism and governmental expansion. The west enabled cheap land, free love colonies, new educational institutions, and new social, moral, environmental laws. While reformers commented on the tragedy of native dispossession, which, as John Wattles said, had left a curse on the land, the story of erecting communities, schools, and "reform neighborhoods" was one of seeking out healthy, cheap land in abundance.¹⁵

¹⁵ Communitarian reformer John Wattles, writing of Fort Defiance in Ohio, while on a boat journey from Cincinnati to Chicago that traveled around Michigan through Lake Huron and then South through Lake Michigan, wrote: "Here they staid and made their depredations on the poor Red Man. Altho this country is one of surpassing beauty and fertility, the curse is on it. The laborers have been killed and the land wants culture – cleansing. Had the first settlers of the country made friendship with the Red Men, this pestilential exhalation would not have been rising to curse the land, but the country would have been as healthy as any other. But God lives and war is opposed to his government.

Communities could be sanctuaries for formerly enslaved and free individuals of African descent. However, they were generally not racially inclusive spaces. Reformers' beliefs about fundamental racial difference sat uncomfortably alongside their faith in the power of social reform to transform human nature.¹⁶ The most prominent and vocal leaders in almost every community, even those dedicated to radical abolition, were educated, white men. While there were instances in which men and women of African descent were treated as full members, those communities that had African American members were not free from racism, just as they were never truly egalitarian with respect to gender and class.

Many in the sphere of communitarian reform argued that slavery was but one example of the oppressed and degraded conditions of contemporary life, a position which led to tensions with the antislavery establishment.¹⁷ The cause of community was resisted by many who had been or knew participating reformers first as antislavery advocates in the 1830s and early 1840s.

The curse will be felt for many ages...Our poor old blood-stained world has yet to choose between gorgons of war and the angels of peace." John Wattles to Esther Whinery Wattles, undated, John Wattles and Esther Whinery Wattles Family Papers, Western Reserve Historical Society.

¹⁶ Cynthia S. Hamilton, "'Am I Not a Man and a Brother?' Phrenology and Anti-Slavery," *Slavery & Abolition* 29, no. 2 (June 1, 2008): 173–87.

¹⁷ For example, Charles Lane, of the Fruitlands community, wrote in the pages of the *Regenerator*, "any one can now see that the liberation of the colored citizens from their present bondage would not achieve all nor even one half of what they want. They would, it is generally confessed, be transferred from one state of slavery to another. For the white hired laborer is not free." Charles Lane, "Marriage," *Regenerator*, May 18, 1844. Abraham Brooke was an esteemed abolitionist and founder of the Universal Reform community at Marlborough, Indiana, who with Collins and several others, formed the Society for Universal Inquiry and Reform in the fall of 1843. In 1845, Brooke wrote to Maria Chapman and other managers of the Massachusetts Anti Slavery Fair advising that not only should they exclude the fruits of slavery, like cotton products or sugar, but they should be thoughtful about "oppression in other forms besides that of American slavery [that] may have rendered the offering unpure." He suggested they also reject those frivolous or indulgent items that are "wholly useless or needlessly calculated to stimulate the evil passions of human nature." Brooke was, moreover, generally skeptical of the goal of raising money as a strategy for combating slavery. He was at many moments too radical for fellow abolitionists, picking arguments with the most prominent proponent of immediate abolition in his day, William Lloyd Garrison. Brooke eventually felt he could no longer subscribe to Garrison's paper the *Liberator*, because to receive mail was to participate in coercive government.

Abraham Brooke to Maria Weston Chapman x

Abraham Brooke to William Lloyd Garrison, January 28th, 1847, Boston Public Library; Hamm, *God's Government Begun*, 107.

During the 1843 Hundred Conventions tour for the American Anti-Slavery Society, John Collins, the general agent for the Massachusetts Anti-slavery Society, came into conflict with Frederick Douglass over the former's new-found passion for communalism. Douglass considered Collins's belief that "to recognize property in the soil is worse than to enslave man," was a betrayal of the abolitionist cause.¹⁸ As Douglass later reflected in his memoir, "Mr. Collins came in with his new friends and doctrines and proposed to adjourn our anti-slavery discussions and take up the subject of communism. To this I ventured to object."¹⁹ Collins defended himself by claiming that he supported "universal" rather than "partial" reform. For Collins, this required starting over, with a select group of likeminded thinkers, on a remote tract of land in Skaneateles, New York.

Other reformers of this moment were put off by the schematic vision of Fourierists, or by the idea of living on top of one's neighbors. Some reformers, after their own experiences in community, leaned more deeply into the truths offered by community in the second half of the 1840s while others washed their hands of the movement and its insights. Maria Loomis, with her husband Thomas Varney (whom she met and married at Skaneateles) published a tract following the collapse of the Skaneateles Community in Orson Murray's *Regenerator*. She wrote of a new-found commitment to individual sovereignty: "I have believed, most thoroughly and ardently, that a union of interests was to be the grand panacea for all the woes of civilization. I now think

¹⁸ Frederick Douglass to Maria Weston Chapman, September 10, 1843, Boston Public Library Anti-Slavery Collection.

¹⁹ Frederick Douglass, *Life and Times of Frederick Douglass* (Grand Rapids: Candace Press, 1996), 283. Though he objected to Collins's ideas, this was not the end of Douglass's relationship with Collins, and he was not entirely dismissive of community. In July 1845, Douglass, in fact, visited the Skaneateles community and reportedly had a very good time. It was reported in the community journal that "He evidently partook of the free atmosphere around him, and enjoyed the life-giving breezes that fan free hearts on this healthy domain. He skipped and jumped, and played and laughed, like a boy just let loose from a tedious school, or a slave who was for the first time released from the shackles. Said he, "I shall live a month today." He has been constantly speaking and confined to artificial society, till his buoyant nature was ready to burst from its fastenings." M., "Frederick Douglass, *Communitist*, July 30, 1845.

the opposite of this: to wit, entire isolation will bring about the desired result.”²⁰

As Ralph Waldo Emerson explained in 1841, many Americans had grown sick of the ineffective squabbling between reformers:

The reforms whose fame now fills the land with Temperance, Anti-Slavery, Non-Resistance, No Government, Equal Labor, fair and generous as each appears, are poor bitter things when prosecuted for themselves as an end. To every reform, in proportion to its energy, early disgusts are incident, so that the disciple is surprised at the very hour of his first triumphs, with chagrins and sickness and a general distrust: so that he shuns his associates, hates the enterprise which lately seemed so fair, and meditates to cast himself into the arms of that society and manner of life which he had newly abandoned with so much pride and hope.²¹

Critics complained that “ultra” reformers, those who focused too narrowly on a single issue, had developed the disease of “monomania.”²² This disease, as noted by a physician in 1837, was “the melancholy result” of “a too constant and intense attention to any one topic, to the...exclusion of every other.”²³ Concerns about losing oneself in a particular cause, or giving too much energy to a cause, were issues that reformers thought about as well. While many embraced the label “ultra,” they also quarreled over what might be that most essential reform that set the stage for all other reforms. In an irony that continues to plague movement-making on the left, reform was both a space in which participants co-constructed new avenues for profound sympathy and mutual inquiry, and fought bitterly over the meaning and the goals of their movements.

This dissertation historicizes the hopes, values, and perspectives of communitarians as utopians, without sustaining focus either on their failures or their achievements.

Communitarians’ environmental thought, I argue, had profound ramifications outside the

²⁰ Maria Loomis and Thomas Varney, “Equitable Commerce or Association Without Combination,” *Boston Investigator*, April 8, 1846.

²¹ Ralph Waldo Emerson, “The method of nature : an oration, delivered before the Society of the Adelphi, in Waterville College, in Maine, August 11, 1841 (Boston: Samuel G. Simpkins, 1841), 22-23.

²² David Meredith Reese, *Humbugs of New-York: Being a Remonstrance Against Popular Delusion; Whether in Science, Philosophy, Or Religion* (New York: J.S. Taylor, 1838), 181.

²³ *Ibid.*, 180.

practicalities of individual experimental communities. I do not aim to rehabilitate the reputations of individual communitarians, many of whom held deeply problematic beliefs or do, in fact, come across as obnoxious iconoclasts. Rather, I reveal that their “reformer” identities were entangled with their relationships to non-human nature, as debates about “natural” practices, environmental degradation, and animal rights inflected their visions for new worlds and new selves. Their radical openness to, and respect for, the lessons offered by the natural world, coupled with their zealous (perhaps toxic) optimism for harmony between humans and the non-human environment forcefully assert that to grapple imperfectly with the ecological consequences of human behavior is nothing new.

Environmentalists in the twenty-first century have learned well that to focus on individual patterns of consumption can weaken efforts to hold institutions accountable and to effect broad structural change.²⁴ Some historians similarly view reformers’ preoccupations with the perfection of individual bodies and souls as diminishing the work of collective social reform. Historians Christopher Clark and Carl Guarneri, for example, both explain the years following the communitarian moment of the 1840s in terms of a shift away from socially inflected activism towards the individual body and reformation of the individual.²⁵ As Carl Guarneri understood this shift, “In much the same way that the “Me Decade” succeeded the turbulent 1960s, utopians

²⁴ See, for example, Morten Fibieger Byskov, “Climate change: focusing on how individuals can help is very convenient for corporations,” *The Conversation*, January 10, 2019, <https://theconversation.com/climate-change-focusing-on-how-individuals-can-help-is-very-convenient-for-corporations-108546>

²⁵ There are many ways to narrate the decline of the communitarian moment (a phrase coined by Christopher Clark in his work on the Northampton Community) and to track how reform evolved, persisted, and faded in the decades following the 1840s. In describing the loss of momentum of the religious perfectionism and associated reform movements that characterized this moment, one historian writes, “it was very hard for persons to maintain the intense religious fervor and unrelenting moral rigor that perfectionism required.” Strong, “Perfectionist Politics,” 154. Another observes, “By the 1850s Fourierism was disintegrating due to its own failures and to sharper divisions between the working and middle classes....Advocates of antislavery and feminism came to recognize by the late 1840s that moral suasion had failed.” Spurlock, *Free Love*, 105. Other scholars have written that following the communitarian moment, reformers focused on “more specific social problems, such as the women’s movement, the temperance reform, and, most notably, antislavery.” David Robinson, “The Political Odyssey of William Henry Channing,” *American Quarterly* 34, no. 2 (1982): 165–84.

during the prosperous 1850s turned from advocating broad structural reform to preaching changes in personal lifestyle.”²⁶ To these scholars, there is a clear tension between reforms focused on the individual and reformation of society.

I see the interplay between selves and the wider world in the antebellum United States as more dynamic than this. For many reformers, before, during, and after life in community, “Changes in personal lifestyle” were viewed as a crucial means of achieving broad structural reform. The reformers in this study formed broad coalitions with labor, antislavery, and women’s rights activists, all of whom drew inspiration from the power of the individual to strengthen their projects of social reform. Importantly, too, the physical and metaphysical encounters between the self and an external world, could transform the wider world, and transform the self.

A similar debate among generations of thinkers and activists, following Marx and Engels’ indictment of Fourierists as “Utopian socialists,” asks whether intentional communities, set apart from the rest of the world, are guilty of a similar move of turning inward, and therefore, away from broad scale solutions to the world’s problems. Communities are cast as spaces of retreat that neither act upon nor reform broader society in meaningful ways. Lurking in this dissertation then, is a broad debate over the relationship between individuals and collectivities, and the meaning of engagement and retreat.²⁷

Yet these reformers were, for the most part, of the world. Communitarians of this period engaged with one another through mutual members and exploratory visits to one another’s communities, and they communicated with each other through the reform press, in lecture halls,

²⁶ Guarneri, *Utopian Alternative*, 349. Clark wrote of the water cure, “its focus on the moral purity of individuals, and on the efforts of individuals to achieve this, detached hydropathy from the earlier communitarian focus on social equality, harmony, and justice. Clark, *Communitarian Moment*, 202

²⁷ Scott Slovic has written eloquently on the tension between retreat from the world and engagement with it from an ecocritical perspective in *Going Away to Think*, (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 2008).

and at conventions where they traded experiences and debated their visions of community. The reform press of the 1840s and 1850s, particularly publications dedicated to the communities movement, captured the liminal space in which communities existed in imagination and practice. In the *Phalanx*, *Harbinger*, *Communitist*, *Regenerator*, *Social Revolutionist*, and *Herald of Reform*, tracts and poems about the meaning and vision of reform and community were published alongside long letters detailing the progress of a community, plans for a community, or a visitor's experiences of day-to-day life in a community.²⁸ These were, in turn, published alongside letters from individuals reflecting on their own insights into and experiments in health and agriculture.

The always 'coming-into-being' quality of most antebellum communities complicates how we narrate their history, a matter further muddled by complex questions of what counts as a community, and of how community borders were defined, erected, and maintained. The passion for "association" that took hold among reformers in the 1840s was never restricted to the physical sites of intentional communities. This work shows that the boundaries of the communities movement were porous; vegetarian boarding houses, water-cure establishments, and manual labor colleges were also variations on the community theme, but have been left out of the literature on communities. In considering this broader definition of community, my methodological orientation has been influenced by recent scholarship in Atlantic history that addresses connectivity, exchange, and the erection and dissolution of state and extra-state borders. I use these tools to trace the movement of individuals and techniques in and out of communal spaces, and to reconsider the spatial and conceptual borders between experimental

²⁸ This project also draws upon the substantial physiological reform press, spiritualist and antislavery publications, as well as periodicals dedicated to non-resistance, moral reform, women's rights, and the agricultural press.

and “mainstream” American spaces.²⁹ Community was only ever one expression of the reform impulse, but it represented an ideal: sites for an immersive practice of reform.

As Fourier-influenced thought moved among physiological and social reformers of the age, they mingled with other radical ideas during a flawed, utopian moment. Many reformers were simultaneously radical antislavery activists and racist phrenologists; many were at once invested in ever-dynamic and expansive possibilities for new natures and in rigid, essentialist definitions of natural laws and moralizing prescriptions for healthy, “natural” lives. For physiological and social reformers of the mid-nineteenth century, utopian, millennial language applied both to the creation of perfect people, body and soul, and a perfect coming environmental state. Reformers demanded connection to a pure and natural life, sacrificing social conventions along the way, and as they faded from public view, their environmental legacy was lost along the way.

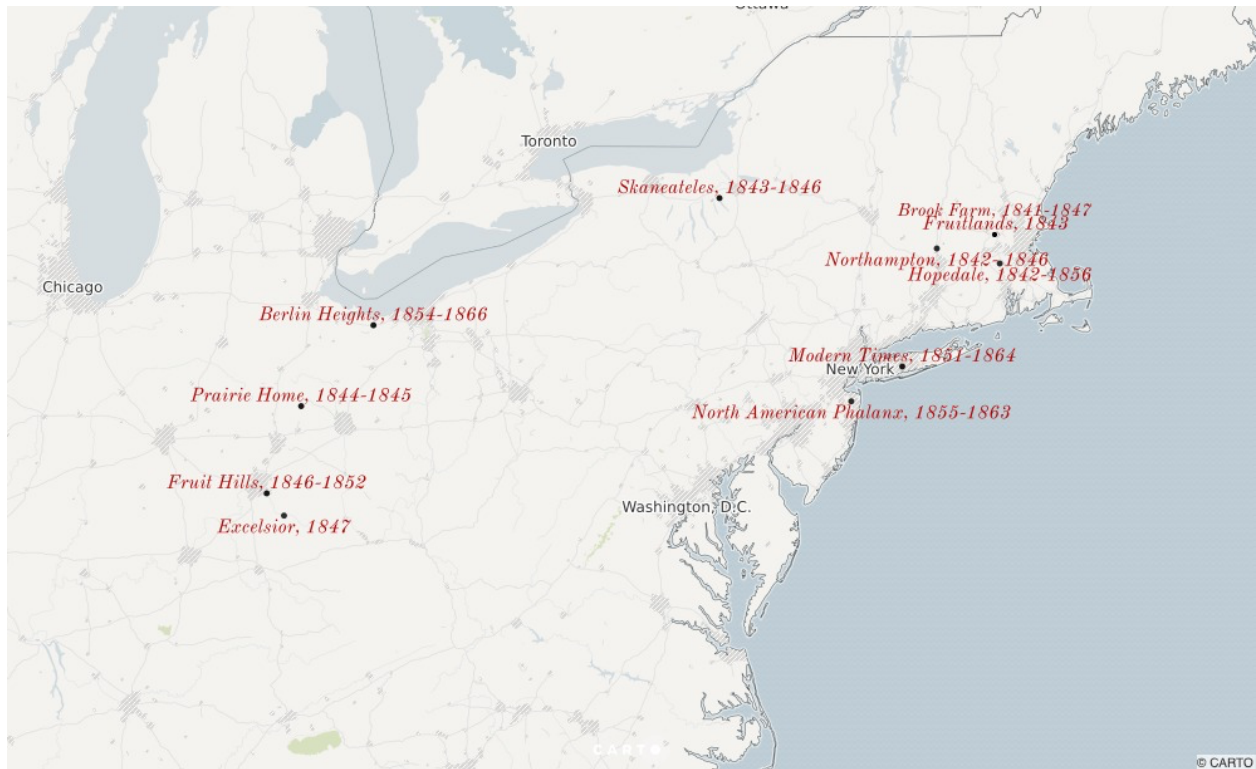
A Brief Guide to Antebellum Communities

This work traces reform currents through collective settlements—many, but not all, of the Fourierist persuasion—from the 1830s to the 1850s. The pathways, both material and intellectual, of individual reformers were entangled with the short lives of a series of intentional communities. A quick introduction to some of these communities, and the ways in which they

²⁹ Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker, *The Many-Headed Hydra: Sailors, Slaves, Commoners, and the Hidden History of the Revolutionary Atlantic* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2000); Ernesto Bassi, *An Aqueous Territory: Sailor Geographies and New Granada's Transimperial Greater Caribbean World* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press Books, 2017).

Linda Marguerite Rupert, *Creolization and Contraband Curaçao in the Early Modern Atlantic World* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2012.).

collided, overlapped, and diverged, will hopefully help to orient the reader through the coming pages.



Map of relevant communities created by the author, 2021.

Fourierism

Led by Fourier's principal disciple and translator, Albert Brisbane, thousands of reformers embraced this peculiar, schematic, "utopian alternative" during the bright, brief, moment of enthusiasm for Association which inspired more than two dozen Fourierist "phalanxes" in the 1840s. Fourier outlined a vision for communal harmony that depended on bringing together roughly 1600 people (men and women who represented the 810 personality types he had identified) to perform the labor that best suited them.³⁰ In practice, Fourierist communities in the United States generally had between 100 and 200 members. Some of these members would live off-site, but were community supporters. Fourierist phalanxes were not egalitarian, but rather joint stock companies in which larger shareholders held more power. This suited Fourier's vision, who believed in the preservation of class hierarchies.³¹ In the 1840s, Fourierist experiments rose in Massachusetts, New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Michigan, Iowa, Wisconsin, and Illinois.

Brook Farm (1841-1847) was among the earliest communities of the communitarian moment and remains the best-known. It began in 1841 as a Transcendentalist experiment in collective rural living in Roxbury, Massachusetts, that celebrated the union of manual and intellectual labor, led by George and Sophia Ripley. Ralph Waldo Emerson declined to join, but he followed the community with interest, as did Margaret Fuller, Elizabeth Peabody, and Bronson Alcott. Notable Brook Farmers include the writer Nathaniel Hawthorne, John Sullivan Dwight, who became an influential music critic, and Charles Dana (cousin to Sophia Ripley), a

³⁰ Guarneri, *The Utopian Alternative*, 122- 126.

³¹ Fourier supported a model, according to one follower, where "large capitalists...will be the first to benefit largely" and "those who reap the greatest advantages in our present state, shall profit still further instead of losing by the new order of things," Terence, "A Short Introduction to the Works of Charles Fourier," (London: Phalansterian Association, 1848).

prominent journalist and Assistant Secretary of War during the Civil War. 1844 was the year Brook Farm, previously a Transcendentalist experiment, adopted the creed of Fourierism.³²

The community of roughly 200 adopted the tenets of Fourierism, following a campaign led by Albert Brisbane. Brook Farm was, for a time, a national hub for Fourierist activity and the community published the Fourierist movement's newspaper, *The Harbinger*. The community attempted to implement Fourierist "series" for collective labor. Community members farmed, but without great success, as the soil was stony and poor. They launched a shoemaking shop and student boarders who studied at the community also provided significant resources.

In March of 1846, a fire destroyed the Phalanstery, the community's symbolic center and its newest and most valuable building. Fourierist hopes for Brook Farm diminished after the fire and the community disbanded in early 1847. The movement's leaders turned their attention to the **North American Phalanx** in Redbank New Jersey (1843-1855) as the prototype for a successful American phalanx. This community of roughly 120 members outlasted other Fourierist ventures of the 1840s and became a prosperous farm. But the North American Phalanx also disbanded following a catastrophic fire and a loss of morale following the exodus of many key members to the nearby Raritan Bay Union in Perth Amboy, New Jersey (1853-1860).³³ Other well documented Fourierist experiments included the **Trumbull Phalanx** (1844-1847) in Eastern Ohio and the **Wisconsin Phalanx**, or **Ceresco**, (1844-1850) led by Warren Chase, who went on to become a State Senator and influential Spiritualist.

³² See Guarneri for a detailed discussion of the continuities and ruptures following the shift from Transcendentalism to Fourierism at Brook Farm. Guarneri argues that Fourier's thought "meshed well" with founder George Ripley's vision for the community. Guarneri, *Utopian Alternative*, 52.

³³ This exodus was led by Marcus Spring and his wife Rebecca Buffum Spring, wealthy benefactors of Associationism with deep roots in reform and literary circles.

Non-Fourierist Communities

Fruitlands in Harvard, Massachusetts (1843-1844), like Brook Farm, was launched by a Transcendentalist, Bronson Alcott, in partnership with English radical Charles Lane in 1843. Only a handful of others joined Alcott and Lane, but they were among the radical of reformers in their efforts to consume only raw and living food, and in the case of one of their members, to live without clothing.³⁴ This notoriously unsuccessful agricultural and social experiment disbanded within seven months. The founders dissolved the Fruitlands community because of failed crops, financial struggles, and conflict between Alcott and Lane over marriage, sex, and family (Lane believed all three should be disavowed). The community has been largely remembered as a failure, and the visionaries behind it—particularly Alcott—remembered as impractical dreamers.³⁵ The collapse of the community led Bronson Alcott to a personal crisis and period of profound depression.³⁶ He withdrew from his vigorous engagement in reform circles and ceased to publicly call for the return to the natural mode of life that was so important to him at Fruitlands.

The **Northampton Association** (1841-1846), while not technically a Fourierist association, was intimately connected to Fourierist projects through shared members and mutual participation in reform conventions. This community was better-known for its commitment to racial inclusivity and antislavery values. It shared these values with another important community, **Hopedale** (1841-1856), led by Universalist minister Adin Ballou, also in Western Massachusetts. Hopedale members referred to themselves as “Practical Christians.” Like

³⁴ Isaac Hecker, Samuel Bower, and Samuel Larned shared these values. Hecker went on to become a famous Catholic priest.

³⁵ This reputation owes much to Louisa May Alcott’s satirical memoir, *Transcendental Wild Oats and Excerpts from the Fruitlands Diary* (Harvard, Massachusetts: Harvard Common Press, 1975).

³⁶ Richard Francis, *Fruitlands*.

Northampton, Hopedale had deep ties to radical abolition, and was a site of antislavery meetings, and a temporary refuge for formerly enslaved men and women.³⁷ The radical socialist and Christian vision of this community tied it closely to a network of communities established in the west (Western New York, Indiana, and Ohio), in the early 1840s, loosely grouped under the umbrella of “Universal Reformers.”

Tantalizing threads connected reformers from the East and the old Northwest (meaning what is now the Upper Midwest: Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Wisconsin, and even Western New York State). The leaders of Hopedale, Brook Farm, Fruitlands, and the Northampton Association mingled at community and antislavery conventions with communitarians embarking on projects in the West, many led by Universal Reformers.³⁸

Universal Reformers established several communities in isolated regions in western New York, Ohio, and Indiana in the early to mid-1840s. Several of the leaders of these communities were Hicksite Quakers, members of a sect that like other Protestant reformers of the age, sought to make religious practice more sincere, direct, and personal. Many Hicksite Quakers were sympathetic to the cause of immediate abolition associated with *Liberator* editor, William Lloyd

³⁷ Deirdre Corcoran Stam writes, “former slaves were familiar figures in Hopedale as at least short-term residents and visitors,” in “The Role of Women in Hopedale, a Nineteenth - Century Universalist-Unitarian Utopian Community in South-Central Massachusetts,” *American Communal Studies Quarterly* Vol 7, no 3, July 2013.

³⁸ Universal Reform and Transcendentalism were interconnected and overlapping worlds. While not typically counted among transcendentalists, the Universal Reformers at communities like Fruit Hills and Skaneateles had at least as much in common with Bronson Alcott and Charles Lane as the latter’s Fourierist contemporaries at Brook Farm. Lane wrote to Orson Murray that they each understood “the spirit moving in each other” in fact “that deeper Spirit seems to be One and the same in both.” An important outline for the vision of Fruitlands, “The Consociate Family Life,” penned by Bronson Alcott and Charles Lane but credited to Lane, began as a letter to Universal Reformer Abraham Brooke. Other personal relationships connected these reformers. Nathaniel Peabody Rogers, editor of the *Herald of Freedom* and close ally of Universal Reformers, was influential to Henry David Thoreau; Universal Reformer John Wattles met Bronson Alcott and corresponded with Charles Lane. Radical reformer Benjamin Dyer of Braintree, Vermont, was also a mutual friend of Bronson Alcott, Rogers, and Wattles. In 1843, a reform convention of “Friends of Association” brought together Bronson Alcott, Albert Brisbane, leaders of the Northampton and Hopedale communities, and other reformers of the east with advocates of universal reform like John Collins of the Skaneateles community. Charles Lane, “Dear Friend Murray,” *Regenerator*. October 5, 1846. David P. Edgell, “Bronson Alcott’s ‘Autobiographical Index,’” *The New England Quarterly* 14, no. 4 (1941): 713. Hamm, *God’s Government Begun*, 277.

Garrison.³⁹ Like other communities of the period, including Brook Farm and Hopedale, other members and leaders of Universal Reform communities came from eastern Unitarian, Baptist, and Methodist ministries that flourished following the Second Great Awakening.⁴⁰

Fourierism, not Universal Reform, was the defining community movement of the 1840s. Universal Reform communities like **Fruit Hills, Excelsior, Marlboro, Skaneateles, and Prairie Home** represented a radical fringe, sometimes mocked by the latter for their radicalism. Horace Greeley, one of the most prominent advocates of Fourierism in the country, accused Universal Reformers of adopting a “No-Church, No Government, No- Property platform.”⁴¹ But they also shared members and values in common with Fourierist communities. Universal Reformers believed in Fourier’s concept of “attractive labor” but didn’t accept the class and property structure advocated by Fourierists, which allowed members to purchase greater or lesser stock in the community, which corresponded to profits and to decision-making power. Universal reformers instead embraced simple, egalitarian principles: “The land is free to all. Let those who wish, come and work!”⁴²

As Universal Reformers consciously set themselves apart from Fourierists, they often identified with the egalitarian views of Scottish Industrialist Robert Owen.⁴³ While Universal Reformers generally advocated a “community of goods” model or shared ownership of all property. Universal reformers were obscure and eccentric; they were also bold. Orson Murray,

³⁹ Thomas D. Hamm, “Hicksite Quakers and the Antebellum Nonresistance Movement,” *Church History* 63, no. 4 (December 1994): 559.

⁴⁰ Cross, *The Burned-Over District*.

⁴¹ Orson Murray, “The New York Tribune,” *Regenerator*, February 19, 1844.

⁴² A.J. MacDonald quoted in Hamm, 1995: 124.

⁴³ Robert Owen had led many of the same reformers a generation earlier in the 1820s in his experiment at New Harmony, Indiana. His ideas had launched other communities in the United States in the 1820s and Owen was active in socialist debates until his death in the 1850s. He was an esteemed guest at the Skaneateles Community in May of 1845. His son, Robert Dale Owen, was an influential spiritualist and politician. For more on Owen’s influence, see John Harrison, *Robert Owen and the Owenites in Britain and America: The Quest for the New Moral World* (Taylor & Francis, 2009).

one of the best-known vegetarian infidel abolitionists in the mid-19th century, was reportedly mobbed seven times in Vermont for his antislavery rhetoric.⁴⁴ One young couple's uncompromising and irreligious marriage vows at Skaneateles were reprinted widely in the press by reporters who mocked and vilified them.⁴⁵ John Wattles moved to bleeding Kansas in the 1850s to support the antislavery cause; his brother Augustus was an ally to John Brown.⁴⁶

Like other communities dedicated to Universal Reform in the mid-1840s, **Prairie Home** brought together several families of Hicksite Quakers and New England evangelicals to experiment in communal life and cooperative labor. They operated a flour mill and a saw mill and planted corn, oats, potatoes, other vegetables, and fruit trees.⁴⁷ Community members were farmers, carpenters, blacksmiths and other tradesmen, disaffected clergy, doctors, and other middle-class reformers. Though most were white, several members of the community were African American. The community disbanded in the autumn of 1844 as a result of financial disputes between the membership and the owner of the property, and as one member described, an unwillingness on the part of the membership to deal in matters of money, ultimately meaning that they lost the land they had improved.⁴⁸

Excelsior was established on the grounds of the recently collapsed Fourierist colony, the Fourierist Clermont Phalanx, in the fall of 1847. (Several families who participated in the

⁴⁴ Benjamin Dyer, "Braintree Vt, Oct 4, 1845," *Herald of Freedom*, October 31, 1845.

⁴⁵ "A New Mode of Marrying," *New-Hampshire Gazette*, December 3, 1844.

⁴⁶ Lynne Marie Getz, "Partners in Motion: Gender, Migration, and Reform in Antebellum Ohio and Kansas," *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies* 27, no. 2 (January 17, 2007): 102–35.

⁴⁷ S. Larned, "Prairie Home," *Regenerator*, June 15, 1844.

⁴⁸ For more on Prairie Home and allied communities of Universal Reformers, see Thomas Hamm, *God's Government Begun: The Society for Universal Inquiry and Reform, 1842-1846* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995). There was a tension between the leaders of this community, as with others of this era, about the importance of worldly power and assets and the meaning of egalitarianism in forging a successful community. Community members argued in the aftermath of the collapse of Prairie Home over whether members with greater resources could have prevented the collapse of the community. Valentine Nicholson, "Prairie Home," *Regenerator*, May 12, 1845.

Clermont Phalanx also joined Excelsior.) Like Prairie Home, this was one of a handful of interracial communities established in the 1840s; several African-American families joined Excelsior.⁴⁹

The Excelsior Community had a brief life with a tragic end. The community erected a brick building on the banks of the Ohio river which collapsed during a disastrous flood in December 1847, while several community members and neighboring farmers were taking refuge inside. Seventeen of the thirty-two community members were killed, including John Woodson and at least three other African American community members.⁵⁰ In her autobiography, written decades later, Esther Wattles recounted the harrowing event, and the tragedy of watching her community friends, including whole families, die that evening. Though the Wattles made an attempt to rebuild with a few remaining community members, they were again tested by a tornado in the spring, followed by a large fire in May 1848, which finally broke the community.⁵¹ Excelsior had been funded largely by Universal Brotherhood member Pascal Smith; in April of 1848, Smith was successfully sued by his wife and declared insane for donating a large portion of their land to the Brotherhood's spiritual guide, the mesmerist James S. Mahan.⁵²

The most notorious Universal Reform community survived for three years in rural

⁴⁹ John Woodson, for example, a master carpenter, and officer of the Moral Reform Society in Cincinnati, joined founders Hiram Gilmore, John Wattles, and other Universal Reformers at the Excelsior community in 1847. Historian Nikki Taylor writes that "Deeply committed to racial elevation through a middle-class work ethic and morality, Woodson easily earned the distinction of being one of the most prominent and respected African Americans in Cincinnati before 1840." Nikki Taylor, *America's First Black Socialist*, 22.

⁵⁰ In addition to John Woodson, Charles Lee, Mrs. Hannah Lee and her daughter died in the flood. At least two other unidentified African-American men survived. "Heart-Rending Calamity" *The Portage Sentinel*, December 29, 1847; Nikki Taylor, *America's First Black Socialist: The Radical Life of Peter H. Clark*. (Lexington, KY: University of Kentucky Press, 2013).

⁵¹ Hamm, *God's Government Begun*, 219; "Terrible Calamity" *The Sun*, December 1847, 4.

⁵² "Editorial Correspondence," *The American Journal of Insanity*, July 1848, "The Late Universal Brotherhood," *The Univerſal and Spiritual Philoſopher*, October 21, 1848.

Central New York. In the 1840s, this region was a hot bed of religious revivalism, antislavery energy, and industrial promise. The **Skaneateles Community** was led by a thirty-four-year-old, charismatic, and passionate antislavery lecturer: John Anderson Collins. In the Spring of 1843, Collins broke with the Massachusetts Antislavery Society to pursue his vision for Universal Reform in community. Roughly 300 radical reformers joined Collins at Skaneateles, including fellow anti-slavery lecturers, Nathaniel Whiting and John Orvis. Maria Loomis, a radical reformer from Massachusetts, dedicated to the teachings of the diet reformer Sylvester Graham, became the mouthpiece of the community as editor of their journal, *The Communitist*. Joseph Whitmarsh, editor of the *Health Journal* joined the community for a while, as did Vermont free-thinker Marena Randall, who went on to become one of the first women in the United States with a medical degree.⁵³ Women's rights and antislavery activist Ernestine Rose was also a prominent supporter of the community, though she never lived on site.

The Skaneateles Community admitted all members on equal terms and embraced a reputation for being an open harbor for infidels. This was a label applied both to true religious skeptics and those whose interpretations of religious worship and direct communion with God put them into conflict with organized religion. Universal Reformers reclaimed the label and wore it proudly as they asserted their allegiance to Natural Laws.

With little warning, in May of 1846, the Skaneateles community dissolved, following John Collins' decision to leave the community. The community was by most accounts (not all reliable) highly prosperous, and its land had doubled in value. Though a small cohort of original members remained on the site, the tone of the collapse of Skaneateles was one of disillusionment. It is true that Collins, who less than two years prior had written that political

⁵³ Hamm, *God's Government Begun*, 233.

parties “cause strife, jealousy and war” was now employed as an editor of a political newspaper in Dayton Ohio.⁵⁴ In August of 1846, Nathaniel Rogers’ New Hampshire Antislavery Paper *The Herald of Freedom* – which had once lauded his “very revolutionary principles” published a disgusted column on Collins, who had abandoned his radical views and “Returned to God and the Whig party.”⁵⁵

The zeal of the communitarian moment was followed by movements for individual anarchy, free love, and spiritualism in the 1850s.⁵⁶ Binding spiritualism to politics, physiological reformers Mary Gove and Thomas Low Nichols attempted to launch several communities / educational institutions that taught the doctrine of water cure, individual sovereignty, and spiritualism. Other communities that flourished in this period, **Modern Times**, **Berlin Heights**, and **Kiantone**, to name a few, were populated with communal enthusiasts of the Fourierist era, and continued their work in important ways. This dissertation tracks the circulation of people and ideas through these progressive spaces as they worked tirelessly to know, fix, and live with the natural world.

A Note on Structure

This project begins by exploring the discourse of Natural Laws that moved through reform circles. Chapter One, “Laws of Nature: Cultivating Communal Practice,” considers how reformers took up the project of uncovering and applying laws of nature found within their own

⁵⁴ “John A Collins,” *Herald of Freedom*, August 21, 1846; Hamm, *God’s Government Begun*, 166.

⁵⁵ “John A Collins,” *Herald of Freedom*, August 21, 1846.

⁵⁶ Ann Braude, *Radical Spirits: Spiritualism and Women’s Rights in Nineteenth-Century America* (Indiana University Press, 2001); Robert S. Cox, *Body and Soul: A Sympathetic History of American Spiritualism* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2003); John C. Spurlock, *Free Love: Marriage and Middle-Class Radicalism in America, 1825-1860* (New York: New York University Press, 1988); and Roger Wunderlich, *Low Living and High Thinking at Modern Times, New York* (Syracuse University Press, 1992).

bodies and in external nature. They argued about what these laws were—were beards required to adhere to laws of nature? Nudism? Meat-eating? Traditional marriage?—but they generally agreed that community was the best place to practice them. Reformers believed that close adherence to physiological and social laws of nature would result in a regeneration of individual and society; this chapter considers how reformers at once sought to tell people how to live their lives according to rigid natural laws derived from a range of sources, and offered a novel, experimental approach to the study of the self and the community, and emphasizes the contradictory methodology of communities engaged in democratic experiments in health and social practice alongside despotic rule-making and following. As communitarians put their faith in the transformative power of laws of nature, they also engaged in problematic debates about the people they sought to bring into being, to populate harmonious communities.

Chapter Two explores the dynamic relationship between manual and intellectual labor, as Associationists aspired to craft the model human material for life in community. This chapter, “The Land and the Body: Regeneration Through Manual and Intellectual Labor” addresses tensions and intersections between antislavery and community work, both of which drew on the manual labor school movement of the 1830s, during which reformers established new educational institutions. It also speaks to emergent gender expectations in American culture and in reform circles specifically; discussions about “community character” reflected ideas circulating through broader American society about the constitution of “whole” women and men. Communitarian reformers understood manual labor, and particularly agricultural labor, to be intellectually stimulating and morally beneficial. Labor also gratified laws of nature by enabling an embodied and intimate knowledge of nature. This chapter also addresses how similar ideas moved through agricultural reform discourse. Writings on the merits of scientific agriculture

address questions posed by science and technology studies scholars as well as historians about contested spheres of authority in the nineteenth century.⁵⁷

A narrative interlude connects this large network of little-known and forgotten reformers and their communal projects, by tracing the career of a single serial communitarian. The journey of Ellen Lazarus Allen Shutt and her loved ones through a series of successive experiments highlights the range of ideologies that shaped antebellum communities, and the local, national, and domestic contingencies that shaped a life in reform.

Chapter Three, “The Land and the Body, Part II: The Physiology of Reform,” addresses the ways in which daily, individual practices embodied the work of social reform and how communities became experimental laboratories for health, diet, and bodily practices to explore and develop new reforms. Communitarians drew connections between intimate practices and the broader environment. This section reveals that communities connected their expectations regarding hygiene, diet, dress, and sexual practices to the regeneration of the land and society, and following reformers’ discussions of the natural and hygienic, thus deepens connections between histories of medicine and environment. This chapter builds on Gregg Mitman’s observation that “conceptions of health have been integral to environmental experience and understanding” in underexamined ways.⁵⁸ I identify new connections between medical and agricultural discourse in the mid-nineteenth century, as physiological and diet reformers applied well-established theories of bodily stimulation to soil science and questions of fertility.

The connection between the health of the individual body and the community was an all-important aspect of the communitarian impulse. Diet reformers were deeply concerned with what

⁵⁷ Lorraine Daston and Peter Galison, *Objectivity* (New York: Zone Books, 2010); Tamara Platkins Thornton, *Cultivating Gentlemen: The Meaning of Country Life among the Boston Elite, 1785-1860* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989).

⁵⁸ Gregg Mitman, “In Search of Health,” 185.

we now think of as environmental effects of industrialization on individual bodies. Physiological reform movements were empowering for participants; they represented an opportunity for sick people to seize control of their own health and develop a new pathway to scientific knowledge through the study of an individual body. For these reformers, as for many concerned with ethical relationships to nature since, a vegetarian diet led to greater sensitivity to the world. This chapter reconsiders historical conceptions of the limits of the human body in relation to broader ecologies through not only diet and health reforms but agricultural practice. Reformers also argued that violent agricultural practices of the 1840s damaged human bodies and disrupted the natural metabolism of the earth.

In Chapter Four, “Analogical Ecologies,” I focus on the novel, invisible sites of harmony, analogy, and interconnection between the human body and non-human world drawn by reformers, specifically on the vision of eccentric doctor and social theorist, Marx Edgeworth Lazarus, and his rich analyses of the environmental theories of Charles Fourier. Lazarus’s works on homeopathy, hygiene, and free love were all built upon a religious cosmology derived from Fourier’s theories, merged with the insights of physiological reform doctrine in the 1840s. Psychometers, phrenologists, and spiritualists shared in this work of mapping the invisible, energetic, and electrical connections between humans, and between humans and the broader environment. This chapter interrogates the historical co-production of science and pseudoscience as I reconsider the methods and objectives of emergent sciences of spiritualism, psychometry, mesmerism, and phrenology through an environmental lens. This investigation reevaluates the cultural status of these movements by showing how they intersected with and informed the social and environmental practice of radical socialists, diet reformers, and their many followers. Not only human bodies, but fossils, flowers, and fruit became instruments for reformers’ scientific

investigations into the new sensitivities of this era. Practitioners and theorists of these sciences explored connections between body and mind as well as interactions between the individual body and the broader environment.

The conclusion of the dissertation, “Better Natures,” considers communitarians’ entangled visions for social and environmental improvement and highlights the myriad connections reformers drew between social progress and environmental health. They gave concerted attention to the degradation of the natural world and its redemption through progressive social change. This final section evaluates reformers’ aspirations for a better natural world, a vision which tied improvements in society and individual growth to improvements in external nature. It considers what the ethical implications of such a vision might be.

Chapter One

Laws of Nature: Cultivating Communal Practice

All the laws of nature, which are the laws of God, are in harmony, and discord is the only sin.

– Thomas Nichols, 1854

Thee says, so does nature speak in language not to be misunderstood, that the continual violation of a single principle will eventually prove our overthrow.

– Esther Whinery Wattles to John Otis Wattles, n.d.

John Otis Wattles's "one idea above all others was a community life."¹ Through successive communal experiments before his death at age 50 in 1859, his vision for creating a community of perfectly harmonized individuals never wavered. As a lecturer on the reform circuit in the 1830s and 1840s, Wattles was a lofty, mystical, and passionate orator, but perhaps not always perfectly intelligible; an acquaintance wrote in 1847, "Mr. Wattles will remind you of the Transcendentalists."² Another friend wrote, "colors are more vivid; odors more delicate, flowers more beautiful, and music more thrilling when tested by the senses of J.O.W. than by those of ordinary men."³

Born in New England to evangelical Protestant parents who belonged to a Congregational church, Wattles was a deeply religious individual for all of his adult life. The improvement of the human condition was his calling. In 1833, John Wattles had followed his elder brother Augustus to the Oneida Institute in Upstate New York. Founded by George Washington Gale, a close associate of the famous revivalist Charles Grandison Finney, Oneida was conceived as a space to

¹ "Journal of Esther Whinery Wattles" Wattles Family Papers, 1860-1953, Oberlin College Archives, 3.

² John White, "The Cause of Association in Cincinnati," *Harbinger*, January 23, 1847.

³ Amos Gilbert, "Talk about Communities," *Regenerator*, May 4, 1844.

offer Finney's disciples "practical theological training" and "to train them as emissaries of the new revivalism."⁴

John Wattles's early experiences set him on a radical path and upon graduating from the Oneida Institute, he became an educator, an anti-slavery agent, and an agitator for community. In 1834, Augustus Wattles helped to lead an exodus of students at Lane Seminary who supported immediate abolition. As he had followed his brother to Oneida, John followed him into the ranks of antislavery activists.⁵

In the Spring of 1844, John married Esther Whinery, a Quaker schoolteacher and radical like himself, from Ohio. The couple moved to the Prairie Home community in rural Southwestern Ohio immediately after their marriage. Wattles was one of the prime visionaries behind the community. His faith in what people could do together in a community was limitless, but crucially depended on all members adhering to Laws of Nature. By "bringing his [or her] constitution, both physically and mentally, into harmony with the constitution of Nature," Wattles believed, with myriad reformers of his generation, each individual could achieve perfection. He further reasoned, "were individual perfection attained, social harmony would follow, of course."⁶

This chapter considers how utopians constructed a methodology built on uncovering and communicating natural laws. By the mid 1840s, a wide range of influences, chief among them, Charles Fourier, Religious Mystic Emanuel Swedenborg, Transcendentalist writings, the religious discourse of Perfectionism, recent scientific discoveries, and the physiological doctrine

⁴ Milton C. Sernett writes that Gale's model eventually became the most widely known American version of the social regeneration idea of education combining learning and labor." *Abolition's Axe: Beriah Green, Oneida Institute, and the Black Freedom Struggle* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1986), 32, 34.

⁵ For more on the Lane Rebels, see Lawrence Thomas Lesick, *The Lane Rebels: Evangelicalism and Antislavery in Antebellum America* (Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow Press, 1980).

⁶ John Wattles, "Harmonising," *Herald of Truth*, March 1847.

of hydropaths and phrenologists, offered strategies for knowing and accessing natural laws, which were influential to communitarian thought and practice. Members of communities disagreed about the details of what constituted true natural laws and sometimes imposed the truth of natural laws on one another with tyranny, but in the daily experiment of community, efforts to uncover and apply laws of nature required creativity, flexibility, the audacity to flout convention and a dash of aggressive optimism. The discovery of laws of nature, whether through, “earth baths,” psychic harmonizing, loose fitting clothing, agricultural labor, or observations of plants and animals, was key to the project that was life in community for antebellum reformers. As the latter section of this chapter addresses, communitarians also applied natural laws to the improvement of the human race, focusing specifically on African American and women’s bodies, and sought to populate communities with perfect people.

Philosophers following Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas have grappled with the determined laws of nature, and the agency of “rational” humans. While participating in some ways in a timeless conversation about Nature’s laws and moral authority, antebellum reformers did not associate natural laws with questions of natural rights. Rather, emerging sciences and social theory offered new tools to access these laws. For John Wattles and his reform colleagues, natural laws had urgent, real life applications and were within arm’s reach. They were concerned with direct connection to God and truth, a return to a natural mode of living, and a refutation of the depravities of contemporary society. They believed they could achieve heightened senses and exclusive knowledge as they pursued connections between the natural world and the social realities of their age. In their view, vegetable diet, close attention to harmonies between bodies and the natural world, sunlight and air on the skin, brought unique insights to true reformers.

Wattles wrote extensively in the reform press and in private letters and editorials on what it meant to live according to natural laws. He and his colleagues believed natural laws derived from God, and their violation was sin, and responsible for the present system. Natural laws were reflected in the works of nature – in physical laws of the Universe, in the activities of “lower” animals, in cycles of growth and reproduction in the vegetable world.⁷

Like many other reformers, Wattles was a “comeouter,” who came to believe that sectarianism and large religious institutions were oppressive and corrupt.⁸ As he wrote to Esther in the mid-1840s, “some of thy friends called thee “infidel” did they? Well Esther, thee is not the first that has been falsely so called – I find that Infidelity and Christianity are fast changing places – The Infidels are those who live Christianity and the Christians are those who profess it.”⁹ While it is impossible to divorce antebellum reform movements from the religious currents of the age, these movements also reflected a strong secular impulse. Several of Wattles’s radical reform colleagues – Benjamin Dyer, Orson Murray, Marena Randall, and John Collins – believed they transcended Christianity to access the precise and incontrovertible truth of natural

⁷ These themes were not unique to radical reformers; many antebellum evangelical Christians imbued their practice of faith with a profound connection to nature. Deeply religious individuals felt they could find divinity in nature using “spiritual senses only available to the converted.” While many may think of the divinity of nature as a perspective best articulated by Transcendentalists at this moment in history, historian Brett Grainger has recently shown that connection to nature was a feature of protestant evangelicalism broadly. Brett Grainger, *Church in the Wild: Evangelicals in Antebellum America* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2019), 11. See also, Catherine Albanese, *Nature Religion*.

⁸ For more on comeouterism, see John R. McKivigan, “The Antislavery ‘Comeouter’ Sects: A Neglected Dimension of the Abolitionist Movement,” *Civil War History* 26, no. 2 (1980): 142–60; Ryan Jordan, “Quakers, ‘Comeouters,’ and the Meaning of Abolitionism in the Antebellum Free States,” *Journal of the Early Republic* 24, no. 4 (Winter 2004): 587–608.

⁹ Box 1, Folder 10, John Wattles and Esther Whinery Wattles papers, Western Reserve Historical Society.

laws.¹⁰ These thinkers were guided by skepticism of creeds and hierarchical authority, positions which led many to a personal, sacred, religious practice, and others toward open atheism.¹¹

The belief that coercion in any form violated Christian piety, which reformers termed “Nonresistance,” was a key doctrine in the antislavery movement and a guiding principle for many reformers. Nonresistance was an ideology rooted in a religious view of pacifism. It was also a deep expression of uncompromising individual freedom.¹² For nonresistants and comeouters, their opposition to coercion extended to the imposition of all “creeds.”

Communitarians thus had to navigate tensions between collectively abiding by natural laws and living free from coercion.¹³

¹⁰ For example, in a statement of the ideological principles at the Skaneateles Community, Universal Reformer John Collins wrote: “While we admire the precepts attributed to Jesus of Nazareth, we do not regard them as binding because uttered by him, but because they are true in themselves...therefore we regard the Sabbath as other days [and] the organized church as adapted to produce strife and contention rather than love and peace.” “American Socialisms,” *Circular*, Feb 22, 1869, 388.

¹¹ Ronald Walters identifies reformers as participants in a “nineteenth-century search for new, secular modes of understanding the world.” *American Reformers*, 171. Many of the most radical communitarians were evangelical Protestants: Congregationalists, Baptists, Unitarians, and Quakers.

¹² To radical reformer Benjamin Dyer, most peace activists, narrowly focused on abolishing the gallows and ending war, missed the everyday violence in which they are complicit: “most of them are murderers in their daily life, and that in many ways. Where is the man who does not eat food daily that tends to disease and premature death? Who does not wear out the body by excessive toil, or rust it out for want to exercise? Who does not use the labor of his neighbor without just equivalent, rendered to the producer?... I think it may be time for peace men to pack up their butcher knives, and grease dishes, with bayonets and powder horns. I am incredulous to believe that the human stomach was ever designed to be a grave for the dead, yet those who wish to convert themselves into a walking tomb, have the unrestricted privilege of popular consent.” Benjamin Dyer, “Braintree Vt, Oct 4, 1845,” *Herald of Freedom*, October 31, 1845.

¹³ When early community enthusiast and researcher A.J. MacDonald polled communitarians about their new projects, he inquired whether “pledges, fines, oaths, or any coercive means” were required of new members, and in most cases, received an emphatic no. The Hopedale Community requirement that members make a religious pledge, was controversial with other communities. Wariness of creeds extended to other spheres of reform. Nathaniel Rogers, a radical antislavery newspaper editor, for example, called antislavery societies oppressive to individual rights in 1844 and called for their dissolution, yet he vocally supported the communities movement. This action alienated Rogers from William Lloyd Garrison and his Boston allies. See Rogers’ *Herald of Freedom* for more on these debates. A. J. Macdonald Writings on American Utopian Communities. General Collection, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library.

Intellectual Sources of Natural Laws

Charles Fourier's divinely ordained laws of social and environmental harmony enriched the understandings of natural laws that circulated among reformers in the early 1840s. As reform currents accelerated in this decade, the 1840 English translation of Fourier's *Social Destiny of Man* added fuel to the fire for 'association,' by proposing a specific plan for bringing society into natural harmony through adherence to precise natural laws of social organization. While many of the communities launched in the 1840s fervently rejected the Fourierist label and others disavowed the wilder aspects of Fourier's writings, his theory of the laws of "attractive labor" nonetheless made its way into the discourse of most community projects. Transcendentalist William Henry Channing (nephew of the eminent Unitarian preacher William Ellery Channing) wrote in his journal, *Spirit of the Age*, "It is wonderful to see, how, starting from the observance of natural laws in the humblest spheres, Fourier was led upward to the most vast and profound views of social relations, and of universal destiny."¹⁴

Fourier found that all of nature is connected through the laws of "passional attraction" that paralleled the laws of Newtonian attraction in the physical universe. As he described his own intellectual journey: "I began to decipher the book of nature; one after another, its former mysteries were explained. I had lifted the supposedly impenetrable veil, and now stepped forward into a new scientific world."¹⁵ He believed that every aspect of the natural world and the universe reflected truths of the social world and the human passions through powerful analogies writ by God. Fourier's system involved a precise delineation of analogies found in nature, which held sacred revelations. The Peacock, for example, with its "superb plumage" and "unpleasant

¹⁴ William H. Channing "Letter to Associationists," *Spirit of the Age*, November 24, 1849, 329.

¹⁵ Charles Fourier, *Fourier: "The Theory of the Four Movements,"* ed. Gareth Stedman Jones and Ian Patterson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 16.

voice” demonstrated the contrast between the beauty of social harmony in community and the “mendacious and discordant” voice of the individual. The Giraffe, which may appear “supremely useless” was actually a “hieroglyph of Truth” and demonstrated different manifestations of Truth in its gait, skin, and ossicones.¹⁶

While such revelations were invaluable to Fourier, he also argued that nature would remain incomplete and imperfect, as long as humans abuse and misinterpret their own passions. He believed that by finding a truer path –harmony within ourselves, with one another, and through attractive labor in nature – the natural world would also show exciting improvements. This logic was well received by American reformers of the 1840s who embraced a theological and physiological doctrine of perfection.

Fourier’s laws of social organization offered his followers the tools to enter into harmonious relationships by adhering to their own divine passions. Ultimately, finding the laws of attraction would “[snap] human collectives into step with other planetary and cosmic choreographies.”¹⁷ Fourier’s truest disciples in France, England, and the United States went deep into his teachings, exploring relationships in the natural world and in the rest of the universe, to uncover the pathway to harmony. They explored the “nature and properties of animals and vegetables” through the methods of “observation, experiment and sympathy.”¹⁸ Fourierist disciple and communitarian radical Marx Edgeworth Lazarus argued that for Fourierists, “What we term ‘Law’ is only the mode or form which God appears to use in expressing or manifesting himself in matter.”¹⁹

¹⁶ Fourier, 282–85.

¹⁷ Amanda Jo Goldstein, “Attracting the Earth: Climate Justice for Charles Fourier,” *Diacritics* 47, no. 3 (2019): 88–89.

¹⁸ Marx Edgeworth Lazarus, *Passional Hygiene: Embracing the Harmonies of Man with his Planet* (New York: Fowlers and Wells, 1852), 72.

¹⁹ Marx Edgeworth Lazarus, *Harbinger*, Feb 5, 1848.

Though Fourier also argued that the science of passionate attraction revealed God's truth and God's plan, when his ideas took off in the United States, skeptics worried that Fourier's laws of nature contradicted divine laws given in the bible, particularly his radical views on women's rights and open marriage. His defenders tried to sidestep these concerns by arguing that Fourier's unrestrained enthusiasm for satisfying all human desires did not apply to this world, but to the world that was eventually to be brought into being.²⁰

Nineteenth-century radical reformers also turned to the eighteenth-century Swedish mystic Emanuel Swedenborg for explication of natural laws, harmonies, and correspondences. Swedenborg began his career as a natural philosopher, publishing works on astronomy, metallurgy (Swedenborg was also an assessor of mines), mathematics, and physiology. He incorporated his understanding of these subjects into his robust spiritualist writings, based, he claimed, on his travels to other planets where he uncovered truths of the Christian universe.²¹ Swedenborg had an elaborate view of the relationship between spirit worlds and the earthly realm, which matched Fourier's view of the interconnections among mineral, plant, and animal kingdoms, all related through a "law of correspondence." Like Fourier's system of analogy, for Swedenborg, the natural world corresponds to the spiritual world.²²

Reformers steeped in Fourierism and Swedenborgianism also swam in the seas of Transcendentalism, a movement which has received much greater attention for its contributions to American modes of thought in the antebellum period. Like Fourier, Swedenborg, and religious perfectionists, the leading figure of the Transcendentalist movement, Ralph Waldo Emerson,

²⁰ Horace Greeley and Henry J Raymond, *Association Discussed or, The Socialism of the Tribune Examined, Being a Controversy between the New York Tribune and the Courier and Enquirer*, (New York: Harper, 1847), 67.

²¹ David Dunér, "Swedenborg and the Plurality of Worlds: Astrotheology in the Eighteenth Century," *Journal of Religion and Science* 51, no. 2 (2016): 450–79.

²² John Haller follows Whitney Cross in establishing the link between mesmerism to Swedenborgianism and Swedenborgianism to Spiritualism. John Haller, *Swedenborg, Mesmer, And The Mind/Body Connection: The Roots of Complementary Medicine* (West Chester, New York: Swedenborg Foundation Publishers, 2010), 97.

found that connection to nature, and the divinity expressed in the natural world, revealed the divinity of our individual selves.²³ The communitarian projects Brook Farm (led by George Ripley) and Bronson Alcott's Fruitlands were the most famous Transcendentalist experiments of the age.²⁴ Alcott's ideas about spiritual regeneration through pure bodies and connection to the vegetable world were influential with other communitarians, and all of these movements intersected and overlapped with one another.²⁵ Antebellum reformers were also inspired by the possibilities they perceived in the exciting sciences of electricity and magnetism. The invisible electrical currents flowing through bodies and space also offered lessons in natural laws. Reformers seized upon the capacious metaphors of attraction and repulsion and the interdependence of positive and negative charges to explain natural and social phenomena. For example, one group of free love / spiritualist reformers in New York's Chautauqua county in the early 1850s created a novel doctrine based on the theory that these invisible fluids powered all relations in the Universe.²⁶

Communitarian reformers engaged with the new ideas, hosted lectures, and reviewed and translated influential works in community periodicals. But they also developed their own

²³ Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Nature* (Boston: James Munroe and Company, 1836).

²⁴ It is worth noting that not all transcendentalists were enthusiastic about community; Ralph Waldo Emerson was famously disinclined to participate in Brook Farm, for example. Barbara L. Packer, *The Transcendentalists* (Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 2007), 134.

²⁵ Alcott's view were influential with Universal Reformers, as discussed elsewhere. To offer a few examples of the overlap of these movements: Emerson and Margaret Fuller read Fourier; Emerson and Henry David Thoreau drew upon Swedenborgian correspondence in their own conception of the relation between spirit and the physical world. Barbara Packer writes that Emerson was "strongly attracted" to Swedenborgian correspondence, which "offered hope that nature itself might be a storehouse of meanings more coherent and more universally accessible than Scripture." Henry James Sr. was both a Fourierist, a Swedenborgian, and a close associate of Transcendentalists and Charles Hempel, a homeopath, published a text in the 1840s on the compatibility between Fourierist and Swedenborgian thought, Hempel, *The True Organization of the New Church, as Indicated in the Writings of Emanuel Swedenborg, and Demonstrated by Charles Fourier* (New York, W. Radde, 1848). Brian R. Harding, "Swedenborgian Spirit and Thoreauvian Sense: Another Look at Correspondence," *Journal of American Studies* 8, no. 1 (1974): 65–79. Packer, *Transcendentalists*, 48.

²⁶ John Buescher, *The Remarkable Life of John Murray Spear: Agitator for the Spirit Land* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2006).

inquiries and experiments, as pioneers in practice, getting nearer to nature.

Natural Laws in Community

Community, unfettered by social conventions, and populated only with the truest reformers, offered a perfect opportunity to access and apply natural laws. John Wattles was, by 1844, a “Universal Reformer.” At the Prairie Home community in 1844, he and Esther and around 40 compatriots briefly lived by Natural Laws in reported “joy and heaven.”²⁷ Contemporary descriptions from members and visitors describe Prairie Home as a beautiful, fertile piece of land, on which a collection of vegetarians, abolitionists, and free thinkers assembled, largely in chaos and confusion for six months in 1844-1845.²⁸ Esther’s relative William Whinery wrote, “The power of peace and love, echoes and re-echoes from heart to heart. The kingdom that is to be on earth, is manifesting itself among the brethren and sisters here. They are cleansing and purifying the temple in which they dwell, that the mind may unfold in it the living knowledge of the Creator.”²⁹ Community members lectured locally on violations of “the laws of life and health” and while almost all members of the community were “living exclusively on vegetables” they were not subject to any external “laws or regulations but that which each and all feels inspired with.”³⁰ Wattles believed that communities were ordained by God and that principles of cooperation were reflected everywhere in external nature. As he wrote in 1844:

If we should study the laws of the God of Nature more, we should see that he is a God of communities. – The bees sing their community songs as they carry on their community labors together. The ants build their pyramids, and pile their mountains, as they labor in harmonious action together...The planets with their

²⁷ S. Larned, “Prairie Home, *Regenerator*, June 15, 1844.

²⁸ See descriptions in the *Communitist* and the *Regenerator*.

²⁹ W.H. Whinery, “Brother Murray,” *Regenerator*, May 25, 1844.

³⁰ S. Larned, “Prairie Home, *Regenerator*, June 15, 1844.

satellites, the sun with its planets, and the system with its worlds, are communities and parts of communities, all making up a universe full of communities, moving round the common center, the God of the universal community.³¹

Close colleagues of Universal Reformers established a community at Skaneateles, New York. Members of the Skaneateles community described the ways in which their communal experiment allowed them access to natural laws. They would become “scholars of ourselves and understand the laws of our own being.”³² Uncovering natural laws of “bodily and mental constitution” according to these communitarians, required an experimental laboratory in which humans were free to live natural lives. A community provides “both the time and the means to study ourselves,” the freedom to live outside of social conventions and “stand up on the dignity of our nature, and think for ourselves.”³³ When planning a new communal vision in 1846, envisioned as a manual labor college, Wattles wrote that the goal of the community would be “to secure a system of education that shall be adapted to the whole Constitution and nature of man... making the study of man the primary object of the Institution.”³⁴

The ultra abolitionist, Orson Murray, another Universal Reformer and close colleague of John Wattles and the Skaneateles communitarians, created a valuable forum for debates about communities and natural laws with his radical reform journal, *The Regenerator*. Though spiritual regeneration was a common theme for Protestant reformers, the title of his journal was not a reference to any theological position. As he put it, “the regeneration needed is, to find out [true natural laws] and observe them.”³⁵ Murray believed that taking an experimental approach to studying oneself was the true path of the reformer: “the *Regenerator* will base its work on what

³¹ John Wattles, “Community,” *Regenerator*, January 29, 1844, 19.

³² “Social Reform,” *Communitist*, July 10, 1844, 23.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ “Western Educational Association” *Herald of Progression*, April 1846, 54.

³⁵ Orson Murray, “Introductory,” *Regenerator*, January 1, 1844.

is to be found in man.”³⁶ He adamantly rejected “mysteries” and at that point in his career was essentially an atheist. This put Murray far beyond other reformers. It is hard to overstate how radical and marginal his views were for most Americans in 1844. Prominent reformers like Horace Greeley of the *New York Tribune* denounced Murray. Yet the Western communities of Universal Reformers attracted many likeminded young reformers. Murray started the journal shortly before joining the Prairie Home community and soon thereafter the Fruit Hills community in Ohio.

When Maria Loomis of the Skaneateles community complained of those radical reformers who liked to grow long beards in order to get nearer to nature, she may have had Murray in mind. The unnatural practices of “shaving and shearing” was one of many subjects Murray took on in the *Regenerator*, and he defended his long beard passionately.³⁷ The meaning of *natural* was itself debated and contested in the *Regenerator*. While Murray’s object was to find and observe natural laws, reformers disagreed about the details. In a series of letters with a correspondent known as “Knox,” Murray avoided tricky questions about why, with so much evidence to the contrary, nature is presumed to be benevolent or how one can be sure which behaviors adhere to or violate natural laws. In frustration with Knox’s befuddling philosophical questions, Murray even disavowed the terms natural, unnatural, or laws.³⁸

In the *Regenerator*, another Universal Reformer, and close colleague of Murray and Wattles, abolitionist and communitarian Abraham Brooke, explained the laws he sought to live by, all taught to him through his own human constitution. Natural laws related to physiological

³⁶ Orson Murray, “Introductory,” *Regenerator*, January 1, 1844.

³⁷ Some of Murray’s interlocutors, including P and Knox, were unconvinced by his arguments. P pointed out, among other objections that a beard of Murray’s length would no doubt catch more “crumbs and slops” than a shorter beard. P., “To Orson S Murray” *Regenerator*, January 22, 1844; “The Growth of the Beard Medically Considered,” *Regenerator*, March 11, 1844; Orson Murray, “Physiological,” *Regenerator*, July 21, 1845.

³⁸ See, for example, “Natural and Unnatural-Cookery,” *Regenerator*, July 13, 1846.

concerns: “respiration, food, labor, clothing, sleep, and cleanliness,” as well as sex and reproduction. Other laws pertained to the mental sphere and were guided by Phrenological discourse. Social laws required loving our neighbors and living without selfishness and separate interests from the rest of humanity.³⁹ To Brooke, this last consideration required administering medical services without charge, and paying no taxes for his property. Brooke penned a poem in the Skaneateles journal the *Communitist* that spoke to his vision for reform, and highlighted tensions between the antislavery movement and Universal Reform.

Reform that ends when chattel slaves
Are from their bonds set free,
And leaves man dupe to priests and knaves
Is not reform for me.
But that reform whose scope includes
Earth’s peeled and stricken multitudes
Whate’er, where’er they be
Oh that a reform for me...
Mankind perceive the truth at last,
And soon shall be made free,
In blest community—
That whole reform for me.
A brotherhood the human race,
Where interests all agree;
Though hypocrites with pious face
Teach us this can never be.
To close this selfish strife for pelf
Love each neighbor as himself—
All nature’s laws obey—
This is community.
This is reform for me.⁴⁰

In the rich metaphors that reformers drew to illustrate their visions, communities were often gardens and reformers were plants, who needed air and sunlight to grow. After visiting a lush greenhouse outside of Cincinnati, Ohio, likely that of spiritualist reformer, Daniel Gano, of

³⁹ Abraham Brooke, “Oakland, Ohio, Feb 4th, 1844” *Regenerator*, Feb 29, 1844.

⁴⁰ Abraham Brooke, “Community,” *Communitist*, July 2, 1845.

the Kiantone community, Maria Loomis posed the simple question, “if plants and trees require this amount of air and sunlight... why do we not require the same amount of air and sunlight?”⁴¹ Samuel Bower of the Fruitlands community believed so strongly in the power of sun that he felt wearing clothing defied natural laws. Being without clothing would give reformers the opportunity to “keep in communication at every point with the outer world.” He urged reformers to “Let rains or rivers wash thee, Let the tonic air blow on thee. Above all, let the sunbeam reach thee, let it play on and around thee, everywhere, at every point.” If humankind could receive “the whole of the health law,” be made “pure-blooded with vegetables and fruits” and brought “within the influence of the all-preserving sun, [then] human love and intelligence will have fulfilled its mission.”⁴² Other reformers, interested in the health-giving power of dress reform, wrote in similar terms about the beneficial effects of breezes and sunlight in cultivating the human spirit.

Growing facial hair, like novel practices of bathing, and the disuse of tight clothing and down pillows, were strategies for getting nearer to nature; they were also ways that reformers set themselves apart and above the rest of society. They claimed that the smallest details of daily life held true importance for social progress. As reformers argued for intense inward scrutiny, they sometimes paralleled, sometimes complemented, but frequently departed from, the moralizing rhetoric of the church, which also called for internal scrutiny and scrubbing of individual souls. This careful attention and valuation of personal habits involved exhaustive navel gazing, but it also gave reformers new tools to critique industrializing society.

Reformers drew on vegetable physiology and “lower animals” to elucidate natural laws of cooperation. Like his friend and colleague John Wattles, John Collins of the Skaneateles

⁴¹ Maria Loomis, ART. X.--LETTERS FROM THE QUEEN CITY.", *Herald of Truth: A Monthly Periodical; Devoted to the Interests of Religion, Philosophy, Literature, Science & Art*, January 1, 1848.

⁴² Samuel Bower, "New Views on Health," *Water-cure Journal, & Herald of Reforms*, November 1, 1850.

community argued that non-human nature provided lessons about social organization and health. Animal and plant communities revealed the laws that dictate fellowship and cooperation. They called for a practice of observation of nature, invoking the methods of natural history. Collins urged fellow communitarians to “Listen to the voice of nature and hearken to her commands:”

It is always safe to follow her directions. Wherever we look, whether in the planetary, the vegetable, mineral, or animal kingdom, combination and communion are legibly written. . . Behold the beaver, and the result of his combination! Watch the bees in their order and combination, and mark the result of their union. Witness the ant, and the white Termites upon the coast of Africa, and observe their dwellings, and beautifully constructed piles.⁴³

Non-human animals also radiated health, the condition many reformers sought above others. On behalf of like-minded reformers, Lucius Hine wrote “we proceed to assert that every thing in nature is beautiful, and whatever is ugly or disagreeable is unnatural.”⁴⁴ He lamented that humans departed from “the lower animals” which universally showed lovely symmetry and grace. But Fourierists disagreed with Hine. As discussed in coming chapters, they believed that lower animals often demonstrated undesirable features, for they were the products of a disharmonious Universe. While they differed with respect to the perfection of animals and plants, Fourierists and non-Fourierist reformers agreed that flawed human bodies reflected social disease. Hine noted that “almost every individual of the human family is more or less deformed,” and these deformities, or ugly physiques, were always caused by “the violation of Natural Law.”

Hine explained how bad habits affected white bodies – for example, eating meat created an ugly temper of mind which would “[manifest] its character in the ugliness of the person.” Too much or too little physical labor also produced deformed, unattractive bodies. In another violation of natural law, all sins of parents would be visited upon their offspring, thus we gain

⁴³ John Collins, *A Bird's Eye View of Society As It Is and As It Should Be* (Boston: J.P. Mendum, 1844).

⁴⁴ “Beauty and Deformity,” *The Herald of Truth*, Jan 1, 1847.

heritable diseases. This doctrine was commonplace in the writings of physiological reformers.⁴⁵

Race, unsurprisingly, figured in reform discourse of perfect present and future selves. Reform literature on natural laws, and perfect states, was rife with racist speculation about either the “purity” or “degradation” of non-European bodies, particularly. As Hine illustrated in an article titled “Beauty and Deformity,” in yet another tension, while communitarians were both opposed to expansion and defenders of the rights of dispossessed Native Americans, imperialist and nationalist identities clearly figured in reformers visions of themselves.⁴⁶

Hine relied on racist tropes in wide circulation among physiological reformers: Pacific Islanders like Melville’s “inhabitants of the Typee valley” were closer to nature than other human communities and therefore more perfectly formed; in contrast, Native Americans had been physically ruined by violence, meat, and poor hygiene. In their exploration of natural laws, many utopians eagerly read about and considered questions of racial science.

By the early 1840s, among the many pseudo-medical sciences of the self that captured the imagination of radical reformers, phrenology, the science of reading character traits by the contours of the skull, was one of the most influential. Pioneered by Viennese physician Franz Gall in the late 18th century, phrenology is largely remembered as a racist science, which it was. Leading phrenologist lecturer and publisher, Orson Fowler, wrote, for example, “Creoles have generally better heads than those of pure African blood, but not as good as Caucasians.”⁴⁷

⁴⁵ See, for example, Thomas Low Nichols, *Esoteric Anthropology: (The Mysteries of Man): A Comprehensive and Confidential Treatise on the Structure, Functions, Passional Attractions, and Perversions, True and False Physical and Social Conditions, and the Most Intimate Relations of Men and Women* (W. Foulsham, & Company, 1853).

⁴⁶ Amy Greenberg, *Manifest Manhood and the Antebellum American Empire* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

⁴⁷ Orson Fowler, *Hereditary Descent, it's Laws and Facts, Illustrated and Applied to the Improvement of Mankind with Hints to Women including Directions for Forming Matrimonial Alliances so as to Produce in Offspring, Whatever Physical Mental and Moral Qualities may be Desired, Together with Preventives of Hereditary Tendencies* (New York: O.S. and L.N Fowler, 1843), 36.

Phrenology was a science of comparison – creating taxonomies and evaluating body parts based on ideal models – which were inevitably drawn from white European bodies. But it was also a science of categorizing and capturing character. Phrenologists sought insight into the essence of people – revealing aspects of self that might be obscured. They also believed that through the cultivation of physical, mental, and moral hygiene, people could change. The shapes of brains revealed mutable qualities of personality, morality, and intellect. While the most prominent advocates of phrenology argued consistently for the racial superiority of European Americans, many antislavery advocates accepted phrenological doctrine, from the perspective that the brain was malleable, and that character evolved and changed with circumstances and with “exercise” of various organs.⁴⁸

Phrenologists claimed as their authority the science of natural laws. Orson Fowler, with his brother Lorenzo, and later their colleague, Samuel Wells, established a publishing house, Fowler and Wells, that published works on phrenology, hydropathy, farming and horticulture, antislavery, marriage, domestic life, temperance, physiology, women’s rights, and socialism. In 1855, they published Walt Whitman’s *Leaves of Grass*. In a treatise on phrenology, Orson Fowler explained that laws of nature were available for anyone to access:

Nor are these laws a sealed book to man, nor hidden in labyrinthian mazes, ready to spring upon him like serpents from the grass or tigers from their lairs... They are open, palpable, and lighted up by the full blaze of both philosophy and perpetual experience.... Those who cannot discern them, not as in a glass, darkly, but clearly and fully, as in the noon-day sun, are either blinded or stupid.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ See Cynthia S. Hamilton “‘Am I Not a Man and a Brother?’ Phrenology and Anti-slavery,” *Slavery and Abolition*, 29:2, 173-187, 2008. In 1837, Orson Fowler addressed the charge that Phrenology was a fatalistic science, that eliminated human agency and reduced “moral actions and moral conduct” to biological determinism. He scoffs at the assumption that “to admit the truth of phrenology... is to destroy all free-agency, and all power of voluntary choice, and, with them, all moral accountability, all virtue, all vice.” Orson Squire Fowler, *Phrenology Proved, Illustrated, and Applied: Accompanied by a Chart, Embracing an Analysis of the Primary Mental Powers ... Together with a View of the Moral and Theological Bearing of the Science* (Philadelphia: Fowler and Brevoort, 1839), 380-381.

⁴⁹ Orson Fowler, *Physiology, Animal and Mental: Applied to the Preservation and Restoration of Health and Body, and Power of Mind* (New York: Fowlers and Wells, 1847), 25-26.

The heady possibilities of living according to natural laws led reformers in the Perfectionist / Phrenological tradition like Hine, to believe that they could create better people, including bringing African and Native Americans in the United States closer to white Europeans. While advocating for better conditions for enslaved men and women in the United States, Hine reported cheerfully, “instances are known where slaves have changed their black complexion for white, and their wooly hair for straight and beautiful locks.”⁵⁰

The tension between living by natural laws or inventing them through radical reform practice was paralleled in the tension between beginning with perfect people or creating them through radical reform practice. Ideas about radical transformation often focused on non-European bodies, as shown here, but also on white women, and children. All of these figures were frequently treated as blank canvasses for coming reforms and simultaneously described as irreversibly blighted by contemporary society.

Many tracts by radical reformers focused simultaneously on the degraded condition and the radical potential for white women of the future. Thomas Low Nichols described the coming age for women specifically in *Woman in All Ages and Nations* (1849). “Woman will be another being, in health, beauty and virtue.”⁵¹ She will “find the domestic relation one of uninterrupted felicity” and will “[bring] forth children without pain or danger.” As woman is “the mother, the teacher, the guiding spirit of the race,” Nichols argued, she would lead the way in the progress of the race.⁵² This meant recognizing and living by natural laws of health, violation of which was the root cause of disordered and broken society.

⁵⁰ “Beauty and Deformity,” *The Herald of Truth*, Jan 1, 1847.

⁵¹ Nichols, *Woman, in All Ages and Nations: A Complete and Authentic History of the Manners and Customs, Character and Condition of the Female Sex, in Civilized and Savage Countries from the Earliest Ages to the Present Time* (New York: H. Long, 1849), 216.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 224-225.

In 1870, spiritualist, women's rights reformer, and advocate of community Annie Denton Cridge published a utopian novella, *Man's Rights*, in which she explored a fictive universe with reversed gender roles. In the conclusion of this tale, told through a series of dreams, Denton Cridge describes an agrarian utopia populated by women who find their independence, health, and cause by tilling the soil. At a magnificent Women's Agricultural Fair, Denton Cridge found:

Here was gathered all the beauty belonging to the vegetable kingdom. Here fruits, flowers, spreading branches and crossing vines were woven into a thousand floral arches over our heads – formed into summer bowers, grottoes, shady walks, secluded retreats. There were miniature lakes, waterfalls, fountains, fish ponds that surprised and delighted my eyes. Here were gathered specimens of all flowers, edible fruits, grains and vegetables grown in the United States. Ladies – only ladies – presided over all this wealth of beauty.⁵³

The passage celebrates the health and self-sufficiency of farm labor and the close connection it fostered to the natural world: "Nature has taken her children to her home and heart." For many communitarians, labor, specifically agricultural labor, was key to uncovering the natural laws that act upon society. Literary scholar Lance Newman noted that for the Brook Farm transcendentalists and their friend Henry David Thoreau: "Labor on the farm is isolated as the ideal means of discovery, for it puts one in direct contact with nature, the better to apprehend its laws."⁵⁴

In Denton Cridge's world of reversed gender roles, those men who could be taught to labor productively had joined women in this agrarian project, while "fashionable," "little-brained dandies" who were too weak to perform manual labor were left behind in the disease-ridden cities. The year following the publication of this novella, Denton Cridge herself attempted to put

⁵³ Annie Denton Cridge, "Man's Rights: How Would You Like It?" *Woodhull and Claflin's Weekly*, November 19, 1870.

⁵⁴ Moreover, "the laws of human nature, discoverable through labor in nature, are the laws of his own nature, of his potential spiritual perfectibility. For the Brook Farmers, these same laws were the bedrock on which they hoped to build new, natural social institutions." Lance Newman, "Thoreau's Natural Community and Utopian Socialism," *American Literature* 75, no. 3 (2003), 531.

her feminist agrarian vision into practice. She left her family in Washington DC and moved to Riverside California and planted an orange grove.⁵⁵

Much more widely read than the works of Denton Cridge or Nichols was Margaret Fuller's 1845 work, *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*, an ode to the potential of perfect relations between men and women and the creation of perfect selves, that also acknowledged the fluidity of gender identities. Though Fuller writes of the cultivation of perfect souls, rather than the physical perfection of women's bodies that captured the imagination of radical reformers, the millenarian impulse prevailed in her work as well. She wrote with caution of the laws that "physiologists" attempted to map onto men and women.

Male and female represent the two sides of the great radical dualism. But, in fact, they are perpetually passing into one another. Fluid hardens to solid, solid rushes to fluid. There is no wholly masculine man, no purely feminine woman. History jeers at the attempts of physiologists to bind great original laws by the forms which flow from them. They make a rule; they say from observation what can and cannot be. In vain! Nature provides exceptions to every rule. She sends women to battle, and sets Hercules spinning; she enables women to bear immense burdens, cold, and frost; she enables the man, who feels maternal love, to nourish his infant like a mother.⁵⁶

While Fuller embraces the possibilities for both women and men to transcend natural law and defy physiologists, many radical reformers argued that perfect men and women required fundamentally remaking the social and material world. The enthusiasm for blank slates and pure bodies led many communitarians to the insight that what was really needed to regenerate society was a crop of pure children. As one communitarian reformer wrote, 'Reform must begin with the little girls. They must be physiologically and phrenologically educated before they become

⁵⁵ Cheryl D. Edelson, "A 'Coterie of Spiritualists and Free Thinkers'—Spectral Riverside," *Pacific Coast Philology* 50, no. 2 (2015): 149–62.

⁵⁶ Margaret Fuller, *Woman in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Greeley & McElrath, 1845), 103.

mothers. Before any healthful impression can be made upon the present perverse state of society, a race of people must be manufactured for the occasion.”⁵⁷

John Wattles showcased his own efforts to transform the youth around him, when asking after his nephews in a letter to Esther:

Do they govern their own appetites? Do they rise early, and do they have “morning all day”? Do they feel as though they were teachers of all the little immortal ones around them? Do they feel that they shall form the characters of some of these children and that their eternal happiness will depend on them? Do they think that all they say and do while they are with the little ones will help make up their characters after which hangs their immortal destiny? Do they try to grow better every day?

Wattles then expressed the hope that these boys would come to Fraternal Vale (a name he had been using for a dreamed-of community since 1844), to become “God like and noble” and learn “to overlook the wicked, and sensual, and ignorant boys, who will not attempt self-government and self-culture.”⁵⁸ A letter from the Northampton community testified to similar concerns in their community context, “We are anxious to begin with children of not bad habits. For our own children have not been in training long enough to be beyond the reach of disturbing influences.”⁵⁹

These notions correspond with Bronson Alcott’s controversial theories of education. Before his communitarian project, Alcott worked as a progressive schoolteacher, and saw his sacred task as teasing out the innate perfection in little children. In 1836, he scandalized theologians, editors, and elite Bostonians with his frank text, *Conversations with Children on the*

⁵⁷ W.O. Duvall, “Agricultural College,” *Herald of Progression*, April 1846, 51. In a concrete example of attempts to create perfect children, the Oneida community of self-described Perfectionists, led by John Humphrey Noyes, engaged in experiments in eugenics, which they termed “Stirpiculture.” Noyes selected community members to have children together, who were then raised collectively by the community. While Oneida was a closed religious community, Noyes’s ideas were influential with other reformers.

⁵⁸ John Wattles to Esther Wattles, undated letter from Mercer Co, Western Reserve Historical Society.

⁵⁹ David Mack, 1844, Northampton Association Papers, American Antiquarian Association.

Gospels.⁶⁰ Like many of his colleagues in reform, Alcott believed that purity and sanctity were modeled within uncorrupted children.

Making People Anew

While they may have disagreed intellectually about what constituted natural laws and how to get nearer to nature, communitarian reformers agreed that new relationships were demanded of this moment, and new women and men. A little-known communitarian observed that community members, as the seeds of a community, were more important for success than the environment they found themselves in, or the soil.

In the vegetable kingdom there is much if not more dependance on the healthy condition of the germ or scion from which it springs than of the fertility of the soil: and if I may be allowed to reason from cause to effect, this band of brothers here at Union Home, being vigorous, concentrating as they do, a full maximum of virtue and wisdom...will in the natural course of human events, hold the ascendancy, and consequently repulse, or choke out all noxious encroachments.⁶¹

As a Universal Reformer (perhaps Wattles) explained in 1844, in community, “unlike and dissimilar characters can no more be united, than atomic particles, which are unlike and dissimilar and which have no affinity, can be made into a solid.”⁶²

Adhesion is to the mental world what cohesion is to the physical. Particles of wood and stone can not unite, but wood with wood, and stone with stone, gold with gold, and diamond with diamond. A city or village, state or nation, a sect, party or association, of unlike characters, will soon dis sever and crumble to pieces. This age will be distinguished for the collecting of like characters.⁶³

Two years later, Wattles expanded on these themes in a piece entitled, “Harmonising.”

⁶⁰ Amos Bronson Alcott, *Conversations with Children on the Gospels* (Boston: James Munroe and Co., 1836). Emerson echoed these ideas in *Nature*, when he wrote, “The lover of nature is he whose inward and outward senses are still truly adjusted to each other; who has retained the spirit of infancy even into the era of manhood. His intercourse with heaven and earth becomes part of his daily food.” Emerson, *Nature*, 9.

⁶¹ “Letter from W. Rufus Merine,” *Herald of Progression*, July 1845, 16.

⁶² “The Present,” *Communitist*, June 4, 1845 (originally from *Herald of Progression*).

⁶³ *Ibid.*

Like minds are already seen moving through the mental mist, tending towards some gathering place. The old order of coercive collection is passing away, and a new and beautiful system of affinitive assimilation is taking its place. Associations and communities are thus appearing in various parts of the world; their characters varying, according to the characters who compose them—each collection approximating the True Social Order, according as the individuals who compose it approximate the True Character.⁶⁴

The truest, deepest connection between community members would result in a melding of their souls. In his reflections on “Harmonising,” Wattles gave instructions for two reformers to practice sitting together in a room in a state of meditation, concentrating all of their good will towards one another, “Their minds as near as may be, should be blended, and their feelings mingled.” Eventually, as a result of this exercise these two will “begin to *feel* each other’s mental presence,” and the more frequently they meet in this way “the unity becomes perpetual.”⁶⁵ This vision of interconnection was informed by sciences of phrenology and mesmerism as well as religious experience, as shown in coming chapters. These principles were also applied to excising community members. In 1848, Albert Brisbane informed an acquaintance that the North American Phalanx “was composed of a small body of persons, who have eliminated many members from time to time until they are quite [a small and close knit community]. A kind of *esprit de famille, ou peut-être de clique* reigns among them and they will accept none but those who can unite with them in their feeling or spirit. They wish no discords, and they... attain it by bringing in only those who can feel and sympathize with them.”⁶⁶ Abigail Alcott wrote of the Fruitlands experiment, “If we can collect about us true men and women, I know not why we may not live the true life.”⁶⁷

⁶⁴ John Wattles, “Harmonising,” *Herald of Truth*, March 1847.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*,

⁶⁶ ‘Albert Brisbane to Angelique le Petit Martin, February 15, 1848.’ Angelique Le Petit Martin Papers, Marietta College Library.

⁶⁷ Abigail Alcott journal, June 1, 1843.

Lurking in numerous communitarian descriptions of the ideal people they would bring together or create through community was the notion that borders must also be erected against undesirables. Scholars on communitarianism at this moment have noted that the “secular” experiments like Fourierism, as opposed to closed religious societies of Shakers or the Oneida Perfectionists, reinforced rather than challenging American values like the nuclear family and religious diversity. As Dan McKanan argues, drawing on the conclusions of Oneida founder, John Humphrey Noyes, such communities lacked the communal glue – the spiritual afflatus that held together religious communities. McKanan argues that were they to follow Noyes’s example such communities “might have lasted longer, but they wouldn’t be Associationist communities.”⁶⁸ Yet it’s clear from Wattles’s and others descriptions of affinities, soul to soul connections, and the cultivation of perfect community members, that a communal glue between members was a meaningful force for members. Participants in communities like Brook Farm, which Charles Lane of Fruitlands once referred to as “an aggregate of persons” rather than a true community, also participated in religious communities with stronger mechanisms for community cohesion.⁶⁹

After her first experience in communalism, twenty-five-year-old Esther Whinery Wattles felt that she had seen “how little we were prepared to live a community life,” but her husband did not share her pessimism. John and Esther moved to Cincinnati, where John worked with a fellow Ohio abolitionist and reformer, the Reverend Hiram S. Gilmore, in the antislavery cause and

⁶⁸ Fourierism scholar Carl Guarneri convincingly argued in the 1990s that Fourierists were not out to disrupt fundamental American values and norms. Dan McKanan agrees Fourierists as “not truly countercultural” as they reinforced rather than challenging American values of “religious freedom, social equality, and familial integrity.” McKanan, “Making Sense of Failure,” 177.

⁶⁹ John Orvis, who was a previous member of the Skaneateles community, and went on to be a member of the Spiritualist association at Kiantone, for example.

education. In 1844, Gilmore founded the African American Cincinnati high school.⁷⁰ Esther Wattles was a teacher of Primary Studies at this institution for two years.

During this period, Wattles and Gilmore began to commune with fellow Cincinnati reformers Lucius Alonzo Hine, Moses Cornell, and Pascal Smith, who together formed a new social and spiritual organization “The Universal Brotherhood” and launched a journal dedicated to Universal Reform, *The Herald of Progression*.⁷¹

In January 1846, Wattles and Gilmore announced plans for a self-supporting model manual labor school and agricultural college. Wattles and Gilmore, veteran communitarians at this point, designed their proposed educational institution to serve as a “transition step from the Present to the Future.” Wattles and Gilmore sought to develop a model school dedicated to the development of “community character.”⁷²

⁷⁰ Gilmore’s school was reportedly an impressive “three-room schoolhouse on Harrison Street, complete with a chapel, a playground, and gym equipment.” At this institution, children were given a classical education. They studied Latin, Greek, music, elocution, geography. Taylor argues that at this institution, “African American children learned with dignity, without the stain of inferiority.” Nikki Marie Taylor, *America’s First Black Socialist: The Radical Life of Peter H. Clark* (University Press of Kentucky, 2013), 29–30. In an 1848 letter to Frederick Douglass’s *North Star*, the African-American abolitionist Martin Delany described it in less complimentary terms: “The location is an out-of-the-way, back-ground place, and appears as though it were chosen to hide the pupils from public view.” Moreover, the students were themselves a disappointment to Delany: “most of them have learned comparatively nothing.” Delany acknowledged that the school had a strong reputation as a colored school in Cincinnati, but as he pointed out, “viewing it in the light of a colored school, it probably was very good, not having it in my power to determine what qualifies a colored school; but one thing I do know – it was very far from being a good school.” Martin Delany letter to Frederick Douglass, *the North Star*, May 20, 1848. Many graduates of this school went on to Oberlin, with its commitment to manual labor, in the 1840s.

⁷¹ These Universal Reformers were in the Cincinnati High School’s orbit. One of the primary funders of Gilmore’s school was Pascal Smith, a Universal Brotherhood member who was later found insane for his spiritual philanthropy in 1849. Cincinnati High School student Peter Clark went on to apprentice to a white stereotypist, Thomas Varney, a rare occurrence at this time. Thomas Varney had married Maria Loomis at the Skaneateles community of Universal Reformers a few years before. Clark’s biographer describes the Varneys as “the most radical couple in antebellum Cincinnati.” Clark’s apprenticeship was of short duration as the Varneys abruptly left town for California. Clark would go on to become a prominent black public intellectual and socialist leader in the 1870s. Taylor, *America’s First Black Socialist*.

⁷² Gilmore and Wattles made the announcement in a circular published in the reform journal edited by Wattles, the *Herald of Progression*. Hiram Gilmore and John O. Wattles, “Manual Labor School,” *Herald of Progression*, January 1846.

Wattles and Gilmore's descriptions of their model manual labor school aligned with other descriptions of community in Wattles's journal the *Herald of Progression*. Indeed, this project erased any distinction between educational institution and communal settlement. They wanted to create an ideal environment for scientific inquiry into natural laws, an undertaking which might attract "students" of all ages. This was to be a school "from which none need graduate," for it would offer "a permanent home for the pupils if they chose to remain."⁷³ Like other communities of the era, the school would serve not only as a pedagogic space, but an experimental space to determine the natural laws acting upon moral behavior, bodily health, and social organization. The community thus reflected ideas in wide circulation about the pathways to social and spiritual regeneration. The need for such an institution also reflected the failure of over twenty emerging communities in the early 1840s due to debt and other financial struggles, poor site selection, internal dissension, and conflict.⁷⁴ Wattles and Gilmore argued that this community would focus on cultivating those skills required for life in community.

In the early spring of 1846, a broad network of reformers responded enthusiastically to Wattles and Gilmore's announcement of their new community project in the *Herald of Progression* and their circular was widely reproduced. Like these men, most of their colleagues were radical reformers, comfortable with the label "ultra" and dedicated to come-outerism.⁷⁵ Most advocated the immediate abolition of slavery, women's rights, and temperance. In building

⁷³ "Visit to the Country," *Herald of Progression*, June 1846.

⁷⁴ For an early, robust account of many community failures see, Noyes, *History of American Socialisms*. For details of the decline of Fourierist and Universal Reform communities see Guarneri, *Utopian Alternative*, and Hamm, *God's Government Begun*.

⁷⁵ Antislavery proponents of come-outerism seceded from Presbyterian, Baptist, and Methodist churches for the worldly corruption of these institutions. See William Goodell, "Come-Outerism: the duty of secession from a corrupt church." New York: American Anti-Slavery Society, 1845. Ryan Jordan, "Quakers, 'Comeouters,' and the Meaning of Abolitionism in the Antebellum Free States," *Journal of the Early Republic* 24, no. 4 (Winter 2004): 587–608; John R. McKivigan, "The Antislavery 'Comeouter' Sects: A Neglected Dimension of the Abolitionist Movement," *Civil War History* 26, no. 2 (1980): 142–60.

communal experiments, they sought to establish a pure environment, populated by pure reformers, who shared these ideals. They vigorously debated what bodily, moral, and intellectual attributes should constitute the *raw material* of communities. Adin Ballou of the Hopedale community in Massachusetts wrote of the circular, “The attempts made within a few years to found Associations on a new basis, several of which have failed, seem to have taught their projectors the necessity of a better *formation of character* in persons who are to compose the new communities.”⁷⁶

The idea of paving the way, or laying groundwork for future, superior, generations was not universally popular among radical reformers. As an outspoken free-lover proclaimed in the early 1850s, “We do not believe in getting ready to live; we believe in LIVING.”⁷⁷ Through the discourse of natural laws, communitarians engaged in a contradictory methodology as they embraced both rigid, received doctrine, and experimented with uncovering and creating new laws. They similarly vacillated between faith in beginning with pure beings and pure bodies, and bringing them into being, as they aspired to prepare for, and create, the coming world.

⁷⁶ Adin Ballou, “Manual Labor School, or Agricultural College,” *Practical Christian*, April 18, 1846.

⁷⁷ Spurlock, 772.

Chapter Two

The Land and the Body: Regeneration Through Manual and Intellectual Labor

It is not right or natural that a being endowed like man with numerous and various faculties should only employ one! By so doing man violates the laws of his nature, and he is justly punished by mental and physical degradation.

– American Union of Associationists, 1847

John Wattles and Hiram Gilmore drew upon influential ideas about the power of combined industrial and intellectual labor when describing their model community and manual labor school in the pages of the *Herald of Progression*. They believed that manual labor played a vital role as a check to the enervating effects of the intellectual labor of social reform. Physiological and social reformers' beliefs about manual and intellectual labor in the 1830s, 1840s, and 1850s were both strategies for getting nearer to nature and reclaiming health, and strategies for reimagining race, gender, and class relations. This chapter begins by discussing how communitarians participated in antislavery work and outlines the connections between antislavery and manual labor schools, which gained popularity in the 1830s. Manual labor schools became sites of multiple utopian aspirations: dissolving hierarchies of race and class, reclaiming masculinity, and living closer to nature. The majority of the chapter considers how Fourierists and Universal Reformers conceptualized ideal labor relations *in community*. The last section of the chapter opens up these observations about the cultural significance of manual and intellectual labor in the Antebellum United States to consider related debates within the agricultural press.

Communitarianism and Abolition

For antebellum reformers, ideas about labor were entangled with ideas about class and gender, but especially with ideas about race and the institution of slavery. Many communitarian

reformers had significant backgrounds with the antislavery movement, and to some abolitionists, the sweeping enthusiasm for community in the 1840s signaled a dismissal of the antislavery cause. Indeed, historians have disagreed about whether communities of the 1840s were important sites of politics for Garrisonian abolitionists that brought together a forceful critique of the connections between capitalism and slavery and demonstrated the intersectional concerns of abolitionists, or, were characterized by ambivalence toward slavery.¹

Several Universal Reformers, and members of the Universal Brotherhood, worked directly with African American communities to aid in emancipation efforts, and education for free black men and women and enslaved individuals. These communities, particularly in the west, were more radical than many Fourierist communities, though plenty of Fourierists were also abolitionists. Universal Reformers collaborated with African American reformers to build communities. Prior to and following their experiences in communities, men and women like Orson Murray, Valentine Nicholson, Abraham Brooke, Esther and John Wattles, and John Collins worked as teachers, lecturers, agents of the underground railroad, and in the fight to make Kansas a free state.² This work drew upon theories of the regenerative power of manual labor.

¹ Sinha and Miller take the former position, identifying leading communitarians as antislavery allies. Sinha, *The Slave's Cause*, 354-357; Miller, *This Radical Land*. Carl Guarneri writes, "only a tiny minority of abolitionists endorsed associationism and those who did tended to leave abolitionist rhetoric and affiliations behind as they joined phalanxes or promoted local Fourierist unions." Guarneri identifies clear instances of racism among several members of Fourierist phalanxes. Guarneri, 255, 257. A recent article by Sean Griffin on communitarianism, the labor movement, and abolition nuances Guarneri's argument, showing much greater cross-pollination between communitarianism and antislavery. Sean Griffin, "Antislavery Utopias: Communitarian Labor Reform and the Abolitionist Movement," *The Journal of the Civil War Era* 8, no. 2 (May 25, 2018): 243-68.

² John Collins was a valued agent of the American Anti-Slavery society, lecturing alongside Frederick Douglass and Abby Kelley, before he started the Skaneateles community. Orson Murray was a prominent abolitionist and "ultra" reformer and editor in Vermont, and an original founder of the American Anti-Slavery Society. Hamm, 8-21. Abraham Brooke, a Hicksite Quaker, became a Garrisonian abolitionist and founding member of his local antislavery society in Marlborough Ohio in 1836. He soon became involved in the work of aiding fugitive slaves, and in the process, got arrested, confronted pro-slavery mobs, and faced legal battles. Hamm, 42-47. Orson Murray was the New England anti-slavery association agent for Vermont and also encountered significant mob violence. Thomas Hamm, "Murray, Orson S. (1806-1885), Baptist minister, editor, and radical reformer," *American National Biography* (February 2000). Esther described her own background in antislavery, growing up around radical abolitionists like Abraham Allen and Edward Brooks, who were disparaged by others in the community as "slavestealers." She explains how she educated herself about slavery and came to share their beliefs. Journal of

The manual labor school tradition which had an early impact on the abolition movement also influenced the communities movement.³ As Associationists aspired to create model members for future communities, they developed theories about labor, particularly agricultural labor, which supported this goal. The discourse on labor and “community character” --the model material for life in community-- also reflected ideas circulating through broader American society about the constitution of “whole” women and men. Like, men, women were subject to, and subjects of, gendered fantasies about the meaning and value of labor. Even radical reformers like Esther and John Wattles cultivated identities around gendered labor.⁴ Housework, like agricultural labor for men, was naturalized for women as restorative, health-giving activity and healthy work by women in the home was a value actively promoted by physiological reformers.

As Universal Reformers, Wattles and Gilmore represented an extreme radical fringe of the communities movement in many respects. However, their theories of the regenerating power of manual and intellectual labor were shared by a wide range of reformers of the period, including the founders of Brook Farm and Fruitlands in the east. For all of these reformers, ideas about laboring in nature were tied not only to ideas about race, but to class mobility, and to emerging gender identities for men and women who considered themselves reformers.

This chapter expands the sphere of communal reform, by showing that manual labor schools, like other spaces where reformers met, socialized, experimented, and shared ideas, were

Esther Whinery Wattles, n.d., Wattles Family Papers, 1860-1953, Oberlin College Archives.

26. In the 1850s, after John Wattles’s death, Esther continued to support the antislavery cause in Kansas, and, on one occasion, harbored thirteen African Americans liberated by John Brown in her home in Kansas, alongside her brother and sister-in-law, Augustus and Susan Wattles.

³ Paul Goodman, “The Manual Labor Movement and the Origins of Abolitionism,” *Journal of the Early Republic* 13, no. 3 (1993): 355–88.

⁴ Journal of Esther Whinery Wattles, n.d., Wattles Family Papers, 1860-1953, Oberlin College Archives. Esther was no stranger to difficult work. Her own account of her industrious past affirms the nineteenth-century axiom that “when it was executed correctly by a good and healthy woman, housework actually comprised uplifting and rejuvenating activities.” Ann Chisholm, “Incarnations and Practices of Feminine Rectitude: Nineteenth-Century Gymnastics for U.S. Women,” *Journal of Social History* 38, no. 3 (2005), 740.

themselves intentional communities that bled into the communitarian moment. In expanding the scope of antebellum communal reformers, we can also draw ideological connections between social reformers and antebellum agricultural reformers. In terms that overlapped with, but also departed from communitarian ideology, agricultural reformers engaged in debates about connections between character, labor, and social regeneration, as they advocated “improvement” for farmers and sought to elevate the status of farming communities. This chapter thus elucidates the connections between community character and agricultural character, highlighting the ways in which agricultural and communitarian reformers shared a discourse of regeneration that relied on combined intellectual and manual labor.

Manual Labor and Antislavery

In the 1830s, Theodore Dwight Weld, prior to his career as a prominent abolitionist and agent for the American Anti-Slavery Society, served as the general agent of the Society for Promoting Manual Labor in Literary Institutions (referring to seminaries, colleges, and perhaps informal literary societies). Weld was one of the first students at the liberal seminary, The Oneida Institute, where he was a mentor and friend to John’s brother, Augustus Wattles, and thereafter a vocal advocate for the manual labor school model. The Oneida Institute introduced the manual labor college to the United States. It was founder George Washington Gale’s vision, building upon European theories of education, to “unite classical education with agricultural, horticultural, and mechanical labor.”⁵

⁵ Sernett, *Abolition’s Axe*, 33. The manual labor school principle was built on the ideas of Phillip Emmanuel von Fellenberg, a Swiss educator. At Oneida, Wattles encountered the antislavery vision of Beriah Green. After creating controversy at Western Reserve College in Ohio over the question of abolition, Green was invited to take over the leadership of the Oneida Institute in April 1833. John Wattles joined as a student two months later. Sernett, *Abolition’s Axe*, 25–27, Hamm, *God’s Government Begun*, 5.

It is no coincidence that Weld went on to lead his fellow students at Lane Seminary on the path to immediate abolition; from the beginning, manual labor institutions were connected to promoting equality among the classes and reclaiming the sanctity of labor. The denigration of manual labor in the mid nineteenth century was a sectional issue. Proponents of the healthful, moral qualities of manual labor in both the North and South argued that Southerners recoiled from labor because they associated it with the work of slaves.⁶

Manual labor schools, which began as schemes to make religious training more affordable in seminaries, were also incorporated into plans for emancipating African Americans from slavery. Black and white abolitionists collaborated in movements for African American and racially integrated manual labor schools.⁷ In 1831, the national black convention, led by black abolitionists in New York focused their meeting on a black manual labor school proposed in New Haven.⁸ In 1833, white radical abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison traveled to Britain to raise funds for a black manual labor school.⁹

The manual labor school movement defined labor as vital human activity, a position which critiqued both the brutal labor regime imposed on enslaved African Americans in the south and the growing movement for wage labor in the north. Theodore Weld and fellow proponents of manual labor schools viewed them as a pathway to disrupt the class positions of

⁶ Danny Ray Frost “A Confederate Education in the New South: Southern Academia and the Idea of Progress in the Nineteenth Century,” Doctoral Dissertation, Louisiana State University and Agricultural & Mechanical College, 1994, 35. These questions of class relations and the denigration of labor illustrate how the focus on individual bodies was not always apolitical but could also inform movements for social change.

⁷ Paul Goodman, “The Manual Labor Movement and the Origins of Abolitionism,” *Journal of the Early Republic* 13, no. 3 (1993): 355–88.

⁸ Sinha, *The Slave’s Cause*, 209.

⁹ Sinha, *The Slave’s Cause*, 221. Arnold Buffum and William Lloyd Garrison sought to establish a “seminary on the manual labor system for the education of colored youth of both sexes, where at the same time the males are instructed in such useful employments in agriculture and the mechanic arts, and the females in such domestic concerns, as will qualify them for extensively promoting the improvement of the condition of the people of color in our country, they will also be educated in useful literature and science, and where the most careful and preserving guardianship will be exercised over their habits and morals, and all those virtues which adorn life and render it a blessing, may be cultivated.” Arnold Buffum, “School for Colored Youth,” *The Liberator*, September 29, 1832.

“laborers” and “non-laborers.” As Paul Goodman has argued, the manual labor school movement, “registered a deep disquiet with aspects of a market culture that put a cash value on human relationships.” To Goodman, such institutions “became islands of communitarian fraternalism in a sea of competitive individualism” and were crucial to launching the movement for immediate abolition that took hold in the early 1830s.¹⁰

Weld chose Lane Theological Seminary in Cincinnati to be the future site of the premier manual labor school in the country, following his exertions on behalf of the Institute for the Promotion of Manual Labor in Literary Institutions. Having enrolled as a student at Lane in 1833, Weld famously led his fellow students in abandoning institution the following year, when the administration refused to take a strong abolitionist stance. John Wattle’s elder brother Augustus was among the “Lane Rebels” who left the seminary.¹¹ Many of the Lane rebels migrated to the recently founded Oberlin College, which was also committed to the manual labor school model and admitted women and African American students.¹² Augustus instead chose to leave school and work directly in the African American community for reform.

The lives of John Wattle, his brother Augustus, and Theodore Weld intersected repeatedly through their contributions to successive waves of educational and social reform movements. John Wattle studied at the Oneida Institute in central New York from 1833 to early 1836, while the school was under the leadership of the outspoken abolitionist Beriah Green.

¹⁰ Paul Goodman, “The Manual Labor Movement and the Origins of Abolitionism,” *Journal of the Early Republic* 13, no. 3 (1993): 360–61. Many of the leaders of the manual labor school movement went on to join the growing abolitionist movement in the 1830s. Well-known antislavery supporters, Lewis and Arthur Tappan, for instance, were financial supporters of the Society for Promotion of Manual Labor in Literary Institutions.

¹¹ O. E. (Emma) Morse, “Sketch of the Life and Works of Augustus Wattle,” *Collections of the Kansas Historical Society* 17 (1928), 295.

¹² The Oneida institute and Oberlin College admitted African American students in the early 1830s. Oberlin also admitted women, and paid women for their domestic labor. Brent Morris, *Oberlin, Hotbed of Abolitionism: College, Community, and the Fight for Freedom and Equality in Antebellum America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press), 2014, 77-80; Goodman, “The Manual Labor Movement and the Origins of Abolitionism.”

Theodore Weld and Augustus Wattles had formerly studied at the Oneida Institute as well. Augustus Wattles had been president of the Colonization society (which advocated sending enslaved individuals to Africa through gradual emancipation) at the Oneida Institute before embracing immediate abolition and rejecting colonization.¹³ After leaving the Oneida Institute in early 1836, John Wattles joined his brother Augustus's antislavery and education campaign in Ohio. Weld shared with his communitarian associates a passion for antislavery and faith in the manual labor school model as a pathway to social reform. While John Wattles was a tireless communitarian, his brother grew cynical following his own experiences with communal settlements. Theodore Weld later went on to a career in community. With his wife, Angelina Grimké, Weld became the director of education at the Raritan Bay Community, near the site of the North American Phalanx, in Red Bank New Jersey in the 1850s.¹⁴

Augustus and Susan Wattles's Antislavery Pathways

Following the exodus from Lane Seminary, Augustus Wattles began to found schools across Ohio for free and formerly enslaved African Americans.¹⁵ By his own report, Augustus Wattles established twenty-five schools for African Americans in the 1830s.¹⁶ His brother John, always a close collaborator, soon followed him to Cincinnati.

To read the sources left by abolitionist communitarians, Cincinnati, "the Queen City," comes across as an exciting center of progressive reform. But for individuals of African descent,

¹³ "Lane Seminary," *Liberator*, 3 May 1834, 71.

¹⁴ Raritan Bay was an off-shoot of the successful Fourierist community, the North American Phalanx. Robert Abzug, *Passionate Liberator: Theodore Dwight Weld and the Dilemma of Reform* (Oxford University Press, 1982); Lawrence Thomas Lesick, *The Lane Rebels: Evangelicalism and Antislavery in Antebellum America* (Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow Press, 1980).

¹⁵ William and Aimee Cheek described Augustus Wattles as "a dedicated white abolitionist who as a young man immersed himself in black community life." William F. Cheek and Aimee Lee Cheek, *John Mercer Langston and the Fight for Black Freedom, 1829-65* (University of Illinois Press, 1996), 50.

¹⁶ Morse, "Sketch of the Life and Works of Augustus Wattles," 290-299.

Ohio was known for open racism, oppressive black laws, kidnapping and white mob violence. In 1841, Cincinnati had been the scene of a violent attack on the black community by a white mob.¹⁷ It was also known as an educational hub of economic opportunity and strong cultural and religious institutions for African Americans.¹⁸ Schools like Hiram Gilmore's Cincinnati High School and Augustus Wattle's projects were bolstered by and paralleled by efforts begun within the black community.¹⁹

After hearing Augustus Wattle speak in New York in 1834 about his work in the free black community, Susan Lowe, a student at a manual labor school for women, left the east with two friends to join him and teach in African American schools themselves. Susan and her friends became famous as "the Cincinnati sisters."²⁰ She married Augustus in June of 1836.

Augustus and Susan moved to a remote tract of land in Western Ohio where they established a school and community: Cartaghena. They began this settlement with three African American families in Mercer County, Ohio in an area that was "almost unbroken wilderness, difficult of approach and but little known."²¹ Their vision was an African American farming community and school, purposely established away from Cincinnati, in "the country" in order to shield students "from those contaminating influences which had so far crushed them in our cities and villages."²² This was a manual labor school, in which students worked on the farm to support the school and their tuition. One of the agricultural schemes at this community site was growing

¹⁷ C. G. Woodson, "The Negroes of Cincinnati Prior to the Civil War," *The Journal of Negro History* 1, no. 1 (1916).

¹⁸ Cheek and Cheek, *John Mercer Langston and the Fight for Black Freedom, 1829-65*, 49.

¹⁹ Cheek and Cheek, 54.

²⁰ Kabria Baumgartner, "Building the Future," *Journal of the Early Republic* 37, no. 1 (Spring 2017): 117-45.

²¹ The Emlen Institution," *Friends' Review*, January 21, 1854, 298-300.

²² Henry Howe, *Historical Collections of Ohio: Containing a Collection of the Most Interesting Facts, Traditions, Biographical Sketches, Anecdotes, Etc., Relating to Its General and Local History, with Descriptions of Its Counties, Principal Towns and Villages* (Cincinnati: Derby, Bradley and Co, 1847), 356.

silkworms and creating silk, a classic nineteenth-century utopian plan.²³ But this was also a functioning farm. A contemporary visitor wrote of the African American farmers he encountered at this community, “it was surprising to see how those men worked when they found they were really working for themselves on their own freehold, and the whole fruit of their labor to be enjoyed by themselves and their children after them.”²⁴

In the course of a couple of years, the settlement grew to take on fifty children, and the community consisted of several adjoining farms on over 3000 acres.²⁵ By the early 1840s, as many as eighty African American families settled at Cartaghena.²⁶ As the business side of the school did not flourish, in 1842, Augustus Wattles merged the school with the estate of Samuel Emlen, a wealthy philanthropist from New Jersey who left substantial funds for the education of African American and Native American children.²⁷ The influx of money breathed new life into the Mercer County settlement; it also meant oversight from a team of outside managers. The Wattles’s school was a model for self-sufficient communities as centers for moral uplift and regeneration. Though Augustus would express skepticism of the communities movement in letters to John, published in the *Herald of Progression*.²⁸ John did not agree. He wrote glowing reports of his brother’s institution, which he clearly believed to be an important step on the way to Universal Brotherhood.²⁹ In a letter to Esther from the summer of 1848, while visiting the

²³ “Real Colonization,” *Emancipator*, February 14, 1939.

²⁴ “Journal Continued,” *Emancipator*, October 1, 1840.

²⁵ Ulrich F. Mueller’s problematic *Red, Black, and White* claims that 10,000 acres were held by African Americans. (Cartaghena, Ohio: Cartaghena Parish, 1935).

²⁶ Mueller, *Red, Black, and White*.

²⁷ Emlen Institution for the Benefit of Children of African and Indian Descent, *Report of the Trustees of the Emlen Institution for the Benefit of Children of African and Indian Descent* (The Institution, 1875). There is no record that any indigenous children came to Cartaghena.

²⁸ See, “Letter from Augustus Wattles, *Herald of Progression*, January 1846, 34.

²⁹ John Wattles’ Report of 1847 was an introduction to the Universal Brotherhood, concluding thus: “we would say, that we fully believe the day is not distant, when national distinction shall not be known; when rank, and power, and color, and caste, shall be overgrown by the soul of man in its progressions toward Divinity; that geographical demarcations will be lost in the Past, and the human family dwell in peace on the earth, bound together by the bands of ‘Universal Brotherhood.’” John Wattles Report, 12.

school, John Wattles wrote, “there is more moral worth and mental cultivation in this settlement than in any I have met with either white or black in the western tier of counties.”³⁰

Despite John’s enthusiasm, there are plenty of ways in which the Emlen Institute fell short of egalitarianism and progressive change. It isn’t clear that all of the children at this school were there by choice.³¹ Contemporary accounts of the flourishing community also describe the need for “supervision” and “management” of the colored population by white overseers.³² Augustus and Susan Wattles left the Emlen Institute in 1848, the former, somewhat cynical and despondent about interpersonal and financial struggles.³³

Augustus Wattles’s project shared much with the community built by Gerrit Smith at North Elba in the Adirondacks, which in vision and practice, brought African Americans together for communal labor on the land. As historian Daegan Miller reminds us, apart from the back to land vision shared by Smith and his African American colleagues, the experience of the farming in the Adirondacks facilitated new connections to wilderness for African Americans that have been left out of the canon of the wilderness tradition.³⁴ An even earlier model abolitionist community was Fanny Wright’s community at Nashoba, Tennessee, part of the wave of communal experiments inspired by Robert Owen in the 1820s. These early communities all employed the principles that giving individuals land and the opportunity to labor collectively for

³⁰ John Wattles to Esther Wattles, undated letter from Mercer Co, Western Reserve Historical Society.

³¹ A report on the state of the Institution by one of the Emlen trustees notes that “as the settlers had very generally been in a state of slavery, they revolted almost to a man at the proposition of binding their children under any circumstances. To obviate this it was agreed to admit some of the neighboring children as day scholars, they paying a small sum for their tuition, but orphan and *indented* boys were always to have a preference.” In other words, the best pupils, were those who could be put to work for their education, and did not have the option of leaving. The Emlen Institution, *Friends’ Review*, January 21, 1854, 299, my emphasis.

³² In the words of the report: “Again, when it is remembered that the Institution is located in the midst of a large community consisting exclusively of colored people, the difficulty of obtaining the needful supervision will readily be perceived.” The Emlen Institution, *Friends’ Review*, January 21, 1854, 299.

³³ Struggles over leadership, and dwindling resources were hardships in this period, the community was also attacked by a proslavery mob on at least one occasion. Sinha, *The Slave’s Cause*, 357.

³⁴ Daegan Miller, *This Radical Land: A Natural History of American Dissent* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2018).

mutual benefit was a pathway to self-sovereignty and a thriving community. The communities of the 1840s operated on the same principle.

The Manual Labor School Tradition

In the early 1830s, Weld was commissioned by the Manual Labor Society in New York City to help find a site for a new manual labor school – the site he chose was the recently founded Lane Seminary. His 1833 *Report on Manual Labor in Literary Institutions* relied heavily on testimonial evidence provided by physicians, clergy, and educators which described the benefits of physical activity for scholars. As with other utopian blueprints for reform, Weld diagnosed the entrenched problems facing scholars in the nineteenth century and offered a clear pathway to a better world. Weld’s report suggested alienation from “natural” modes of labor and evoked the corrupting influences of civilization—popular themes for later communitarians like Wattle and Gilmore. This was a moment of changing ideas about work, and particularly a strong emerging distinction between manual and intellectual labor. During the Antebellum period, many Americans transitioned away from farming and craft production toward white collar clerical work and industrial manufacturing, prompting a broad redefinition of agricultural and other forms of manual labor.³⁵

The system of education in 1833, according to several of Weld’s experts, violated established “laws of nature.” Weld wrote in his report of a “revelation” by God to man “upon the subject of education:”

It is written in the language of nature and can be understood without a commentary. This revelation consists in the universal consciousness of those influences which body and mind exert upon each other—influence innumerable, incessant, and all controlling; the body continually modifying the state of the mind, and the mind ever varying the

³⁵ Nicholas Bromell, *By the Sweat of the Brow: Literature and Labor in Antebellum America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 22.

condition of the body. These two make up the compound which we call man; not the body alone, not the mind alone, but both conjoined in one by mutual laws.³⁶

There were three problems that manual labor proponents like Weld perceived: men were diluted, labor was degraded, and class was hierarchical. Weld colorfully described the dangerous emasculation of educated men in his report. He argued that a lack of physical activity produced numerous evils among scholars: reducing mental abilities, encouraging tendencies toward vices, and generally emasculating and weakening young men. As one contemporary put it, “the terms invalid and student are nearly synonymous.”³⁷ Weld’s document clearly shows anxieties about the meaning of masculinity in the 1830s. Protestant reformers self-consciously offered new visions for middle-class manhood and womanhood, that in the former case, challenged the image of drunk and raucous masculinity.³⁸ The vision for masculinity that emerges here draws on the self-made-man who emerged through a transition from patriarchal agrarian to commercialism, but with a moralizing, perfectionist twist. As others have shown, antebellum masculinity was contested for reformers, who, on one hand, asserted a new story about the manliness of moral righteousness, but also waded uncomfortably into traditionally feminine spheres of benevolent charity.³⁹

In a mixed review of Weld’s *Manual Labor Treatise*, the *Christian Spectator* wrote, “We have long been in the habit of considering the drunkard as a culpable suicide; but we have almost forgotten the fact that the minister who knowingly ruins his constitution, and puts an end to his means of doing good, by the indulgence of his appetites, or the neglect of exercise and

³⁶ Weld, *Report on Manual Labor*, 10-11.

³⁷ “Promotion of Health in Literary Institutions,” in *The Quarterly Christian Spectator* (New Haven: Stephen Cooke, 1833), 380.

³⁸ Bruce Dorsey, *Reforming Men and Women* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006); Holly Berkley Fletcher, *Gender and the American Temperance Movement of the Nineteenth Century* (London: Routledge, 2012).

³⁹ Bryan C. Rindfleisch, “‘What It Means to Be a Man’: Contested Masculinity in the Early Republic and Antebellum America,” *History Compass* 10, no. 11 (November 1, 2012): 852–65.

relaxation, is also a *guilty self-murderer*.⁴⁰ As emphasized everywhere, health was a moral choice.⁴¹ Those who argued for the moral imperative to exercise drew connections between moral and physical health that were directly borrowed from the logic of the temperance cause. Weld also lectured on temperance during this period. His ideas about the effects of bodily choices on the mind reflect the linkages between diet and exercise put forward by temperance experts and physiological reformers of the 1830s.⁴²

For Weld, agricultural and mechanical labor, together constituting manual labor, offered different advantages. Mechanical laborers included carpenterers, tanners, factory workers, butchers, and ploughmen.⁴³ Mechanical labor had some practical benefits: “[it] is more cleanly, generally more profitable and can be performed in all weathers and seasons,” but these advantages were undercut by the fact that mechanical labor tends to engage the same parts of the body over and over. Citing medical and religious men among other expert authorities, Weld argued for a *variety* of tasks, noting that repetition of the same action, be it ploughing or manufacturing, would have numerous detrimental physiological effects.⁴⁴ In this early moment of industrialization, he notes the deadening effects of repetitive labor.⁴⁵

“Agriculture and gardening” to Weld, “afford a much greater variety of muscular exercise than mechanical labor. They have the advantage of purer air; they habituate the student

⁴⁰ Ibid, 388.

⁴¹ See Harvey Green, *Fit for America: Health, Fitness, Sport, and American Society* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988).

⁴² See, for example, Sylvester Graham, *Lectures on the Science of Human Life*, (Boston: Marsh, Capen, Lyon and Webb, 1839) and William Alcott, *House I Live In; or The Human Body. For the Use of Families and Schools*. (Boston: Charles H. Pierce, 1837).

⁴³ Bromell describes the flexibility of ‘mechanical’ labor as employed during this time, *Sweat of the Brow*, 257 n8.

⁴⁴ Weld cites the expertise of Dr. John Bell, editor of the *Journal of Health* on the advantages and disadvantages of mechanical versus agricultural labor. Theodore Weld, *Report on Manual Labor in Literary Institutions* (New York: S.W. Benedict and Co., 1833), 64-65.

⁴⁵ The Lowell Mills served as a national model for industrialization at this moment; the pioneering factories established in Massachusetts two decades prior, gained notoriety in the 1830s for labor uprisings among the Lowell mill girls. Howe, *What Hath God Wrought*, 546-547.

to atmospheric changes, enable him to endure hardships, and can be engaged in without a previous apprenticeship.” In practice, manual labor schools sometimes employed agricultural labor and sometimes mechanical labor. At the Oneida Institute, students did farm work for three and a half hours a day. At Andover Theological Seminary, where Skaneateles community founder John Collins was educated, students manufactured furniture.⁴⁶

Weld was invested in a discourse of “natural” labor. He argued against the artificiality of “gymnastic exercises” or the non-productive repetition of physical gestures, for students. Instead, he argued that physical activity should be *productive*, and take place in fields and workshops, thus engaging man’s natural propensity for labor. “That agricultural and mechanical employments are natural to man is an obvious inference from the arrangements of Providence.” Writing of the European gymnastic exercises in vogue, he asked, “Can human ingenuity devise an *artificial* system better adapted to the necessities of man than that which God has prescribed?”⁴⁷

Productive labor was “better adapted to promote the healthy and vigorous action of the system” and “better fitted for the promotion of health and sound morals.”⁴⁸ Weld’s experts also argued that manual labor provided greater intellectual stimulation than gymnastic exercise. Manual labor, Weld and his colleagues argued, “furnishes exercise adapted to interest the mind.” The variety of tasks involved in manual labor, the range of skills such tasks required, and the

⁴⁶ *Educational Review* (New York : H. Holt, 1891), 377–78. Over the course of the 1830s, many manual labor schools were established in the United States but met with little success in terms of their financial viability, and critics argued that the skills required for scholars, mechanics, and farmers did not overlap. L.F. Anderson, “The Manual Labor School Movement,” in *Educational Review*, November 1913, 383–84.

⁴⁷ Weld, *Report on Manual Labor*, 56, original emphasis; George H. Taylor, *An Exposition of the Swedish Movement-Cure ... Together with a Summary of the Principles of General Hygiene*. (New York: Fowler and Wells, 1860).

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, This recalls Adam Smith’s distinction between productive and unproductive labor. Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* (London: Oxford University Press, 2008).

satisfaction of reaping the rewards of one's labor and the perception of material transformation wrought by one's own hands, were important effects of manual labor.⁴⁹ As Thomas Grimké, the brother of Weld's future wife Angelina, wrote in Weld's *Report*, "Agricultural and mechanical employment...manifestly exercis[e] the mind greatly and effectually in common with the body, much more than [gymnastic exercises] can."⁵⁰

Weld was writing for and about current students and their families at manual labor institutions. But he also had a broader audience in mind. He argued that the separation of intellectual and physical labor denigrated the latter, which exacerbated social division in antebellum society:

The learned are inactive; the unlearned labor. The former stands aloof from all the employments of common life; the latter are in the midst of them. Hence learning comes to be associated as a matter of course with inactivity, puts honor upon it, and buoys it upward; while ignorance becomes associated with labor, cleaves fast to it, sits upon it as an incubus, and crushes it into the dust.⁵¹

Manual labor schools shared with the explicitly socialist communities of the 1840s, a belief in the regenerative power of manual labor, and agricultural labor particularly. They also shared an economic model: students or community members labored for board and sustained the community. But, given the work that so many communitarians had done in integrated educational communities prior to the communitarian moment, it is easy to see why allies like Frederick Douglass were unimpressed with back-to-the-land communities populated largely by white abolitionists.

The ideas about manual and intellectual labor that were influential with universal reformers also informed the projects of eastern reformers, though these communities did not

⁴⁹ Weld, *Report on Manual Labor*, 56-57.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 57.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 42.

share the same antislavery commitments as their western counterparts. While members of these communities did not all come out of the seminary tradition of manual labor schools, they were animated by similar questions of equalizing society, redefining masculinity, and getting nearer to nature.

Fourier and Attractive Labor

Though Wattles and Gilmore did not adopt Fourierism, and instead referred to themselves as “Universal Reformers,” they engaged with many of Fourier’s ideas and associated closely with many of his followers. Though written decades earlier, Fourier offered novel ideas about labor that captivated reformers and celebrated the union of manual and intellectual labor. Fourier advocated that the Phalanx was a place for everyone, the odder the better. His totalizing vision of life in “Harmony” drew upon and repurposed qualities that could be considered destructive to social cohesion, such as avarice, intrigue, and rivalry. He considered the desire to “flutter from pleasure to pleasure” to be one of the reigning passions governing humanity, passions which were poorly understood and detrimental in present society, but would prove to be valuable assets in Harmony.⁵² This idea became broadly popular among communitarians of the 1840s as the doctrine of attractive labor. Fourier based this guiding principle for labor in community on what he perceived as the natural impulse for variety. Attractive labor was in essence, the notion that people should be drawn to their work and that humans are diverse enough to be drawn to all the tasks that constitute necessary labor. Moreover, humans crave variety, and should perform multiple jobs, always working collectively. A tract on association published in 1847 by the

⁵² Jonathan Beecher, *Charles Fourier: The Visionary and His World* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 228.

American Union of Associationists, a national organization dedicated to the promotion of Fourierism, described attractive labor:

It is not right or natural that a being endowed like man with numerous and various faculties should only employ *one*! By so doing man violates the laws of his nature, and he is justly punished by mental and physical degradation. Variety of work thus appears necessary to make labor engaging and to do justice to the nature of man.⁵³

Weld and other proponents of manual labor schools in the 1830s shared with Fourier an interest in varying the tasks and forms of mental and physical stimulation. Fourier was also deeply invested in the aesthetics of labor and believed that part of its elevation depended upon laboring in beautiful, well-ordered, rational surroundings. Fourier's disciple Albert Brisbane gave the following description of Fourier's vision for attractive labor, noting that it was merely an abstract concept, though it might appear "chimerical:"

It is by a minute division of...details; by convenient and labor-saving machinery; by healthy, even elegant workshops, where a certain refinement could be introduced, and scientific thought combined with the pursuits of industry; by short sessions of labor, and the prosecution of all its branches by groups of persons united in taste and in sympathy of character, thus bringing the play of the sentiments into industry...⁵⁴

Fourierists and other communitarians stridently advocated scientific industrial and agricultural methods; they joined the notion of large-scale, labor-saving technologies with traditional agrarian values, and a new emphasis on aesthetics. His vision for harmony incorporated efficient, sustainable technologies and tools of every day life. For example, one of Fourier's predictions for the age of Harmony was that articles of clothing would eventually be so well made that they would never require replacement.⁵⁵ Though his aesthetic tendencies were

⁵³ American Union of Associationists, *Association as Illustrated by Fourier's System* (Boston: Crosby & Nichols, 1847).

⁵⁴ Redelia Brisbane, *Albert Brisbane; a Mental Biography: With a Character Study* (New York: B. Franklin, New York, 1969), 177.

⁵⁵ Fourier, *Fourier: "The Theory of the Four Movements."*

somewhat more agrarian than industrial, Fourier imagined Harmony as “a technicolor kaleidoscope of gardens and civic arcades that ‘bear no resemblance to our urban or rural buildings’ and will not sort into country or city.”⁵⁶

Brisbane emphasized that elevating labor’s status within a broader cultural consciousness (as Weld similarly sought to do) was crucial to the success of Fourier’s scheme. He believed the success of attractive labor depended upon “a clear appreciation on the part of humanity of the importance of these labors as regards their influence on the cultivation of the globe, and through that cultivation, on the whole economy of our planet.”⁵⁷ Brisbane’s explication of Fourier demonstrates the optimism about the application of science to industry and agriculture which was a common feature of communitarian thought in the 1840s.

Communitarian reformers, with proponents of manual labor schools, were thus engaged in a conversation about the meaning and value of work.⁵⁸ Expansion of transportation infrastructure, the growth of cities, and wage labor meant attendant shifts in labor and expectations for gendered and family labor. As they (theoretically) disrupted class relations, gender roles, and racial hierarchies, reformers sought to reimagine labor: what motivated people to work, what counted as productive labor, and what the outcome or product of labor might be.

While Universal Reformers applied theories of manual labor that sought to end slavery, some proponents of Fourierism sought to apply attractive labor to enslaved workers. Fourierist

⁵⁶ Goldstein, “Attracting the Earth,” 86. Carl Guarneri describes how Albert Brisbane updated Fourier’s vision for a “preindustrial utopia” when he introduced Fourierism to American audiences. Carl J. Guarneri, *The Utopian Alternative: Fourierism in Nineteenth-Century America* (Cornell University Press, 1994), 181.

⁵⁷ Redelia Brisbane, *Albert Brisbane*, 177.

⁵⁸ Recent work by David Graeber and Scott Sandage help to situate the historical specificity of cultural meanings of hard work and success in the United States, revealing the creation of the productive worker alongside his/her undesirable, indolent, or idle shadow. Sandage (2005) argues that the social category of ‘failure’ emerged with new means of record-keeping and “objective” measures of character and success. Graeber’s recent work on “bullshit jobs” traces the social construction of labor to the twenty-first century, when work has become the performance of labor, rather than the production of useful goods and services (2018).

and homeopathic physician Marx Edgeworth Lazarus, for example, claimed that enslaved men and women who were happier, and better educated would be more productive and profitable. In his view, if slaveholders adopted “serial arrangements” the fact that men and women were enslaved would “be forgotten.”⁵⁹ In William Channing’s *Spirit of the Age*, Lazarus published his beliefs about emancipation in a series of articles in 1850. Lazarus believed he had special insight into the institution of slavery and its abolition, because of his own experiences in a slaveholding family. Lazarus sought to work with slaveholders, by encouraging them to create their own Fourierist “series and groups in the labors of the field and workshop.”⁶⁰

Lazarus believed the best way to liberate enslaved people was for well-intentioned northerners to move to the south, purchase between 400 and 1600 enslaved men and women (hopefully in cooperation with enlightened and benevolent southern slaveholders). “They will proceed during the first two or three years without mentioning emancipation, but conducting the farm work as if with the sole view of pecuniary interest, so that their farm should be

⁵⁹ Marx Edgeworth Lazarus, “Emancipation by means of Association,” *Spirit of the Age*, February 23, 1850.

⁶⁰ He did not believe in immediate emancipation, or necessarily in emancipation at all. In his view, if enslaved people could work in Fourierist series, the fact that they were enslaved would “be forgotten.” Lazarus believed that enslaved men and women who were happier, and better educated, would be more productive and profitable for slaveholders. Taking Haiti as a cautionary tale, he notes that this “incoherent” form of emancipation sent formerly enslaved people of African descent backwards on the march towards Fourierist perfection, returning them to “a savage life.” He also made the argument, as did his reform colleagues in Phrenology, that individuals of African descent that one might encounter in the north were “here precisely because they were exceptions, because they have more energy and more love of liberty than their fellows, and are fitter to be trusted with liberty.” Lazarus recommended that antislavery advocates purchase enslaved men and women and set up colonies based on Fourierist principles and hygienic practices. Lazarus envisioned reasonable working hours, regular feasts or balls a la Fourier, sun-worship ceremonies, a healthy diet of fruits vegetables and other wholesome food, free from meat and “ardent spirits.” “Every day, before or after work, the whole population will march to the river or the bathing-house, and swim or perform general ablutions. In his benevolent vision “the lash is not even to be named,” and “crime is always to be treated as a disease” but those truly intractable folks should be sold, lest they negatively influence their peers. What the fate might be of these sold individuals, Lazarus doesn’t offer any further thoughts. Lazarus envisioned all of this as a step towards “progressive emancipation.” After several years, enslaved African Americans could purchase their freedom and the “reimbursement of the original capital will enable the association to make new purchases of slaves, to whom the same advantages may be extended.” He described antislavery workers as self-interested and interested in “getting paid for [their] bitter declamations which are so well in keeping with the narrow and contentious spirit that pervades this age.” Lazarus, “Emancipation by means of Association,” *Spirit of the Age*; Edgeworth, “Refuge of Oppression,” *Liberator*, October 15, 1847; “Abolition of Slavery” *Spirit of the Age*, November 17, 1849; “Abolition of Slavery: Number 2,” *Spirit of the Age*, November 17, 1849.

distinguished from those around only by the more numerous branches of industry connected with its greater numbers and means.”⁶¹ Lazarus argued that all evidence suggested that “the abolition of chattel slavery in civilized countries [was] far from being a feature of harmonious progression but would in fact “[cause] countries to retrograde to the savage state.”⁶² He was contemptuous of abolitionists, arguing, “if the glory of emancipating the Negro race be achieved by any special movement, it will not be one of garrulous fanaticism, but of that cool, practical, constructive, persistent heroism.”⁶³ His abhorrent ideas show the breadth of perspectives in the radical reform community. *The Liberator*, in 1847, published a version of Lazarus’s plan from the Harbinger, calling it a “precious farrago of inhuman nonsense.”⁶⁴

The principle of attraction that was so influential among communitarians as they thought about labor also influenced their debates about community character. We have already seen how communitarians of the 1840s employed the discourse of adhesion and affinity to drawing members together; they also frequently employed the metaphor of a nucleus of core membership held together through processes of mutual influence and attraction. Morally and socially superior community members “attracted” similar members. Maria Loomis, Skaneateles communitarian, radical reformer, and editor of the *Communitist*, described the process thus:

Not only is it necessary that suitable materials be collected for a nucleus [sic], but that favorable circumstances be thrown around the individuals so collected. The nucleus of a community being pure, the principle of attraction will work admirably; for no vicious individual would feel attracted towards such society, and if he should happen to get among them, he would not remain; it would be a fiery furnace to him, a lake of fire and brimstone...⁶⁵

⁶² Lazarus, “Abolition of Slavery: Number 2,” *Spirit of the Age*, November 17, 1849.

⁶³ “Abolition of Slavery,” *Spirit of the Age*, November 17, 1849.

⁶⁴ Edgeworth, “Refuge of Oppression,” *Liberator*, October 15, 1847.

⁶⁵ Maria Loomis, “The Community Movement,” *Communitist*, August 21, 1844.

Established communities obsessed over the delicate balance required to achieve harmony in their community and were thus wary of inviting new members. John Wattles agreed with Loomis about the important role of attraction in creating community character and in establishing strict boundaries that ensure only “correct” members join a community. In his view, “the gathering minds must be in themselves correct, and attract none but the correct, until enough are collected to form a sentiment, which shall be the sentiment of the community.”⁶⁶

Elizabeth Peabody, in “Plans for the West Roxbury Community,” similarly described the power of attraction at Brook Farm. “Minds incapable of refinement, will not be attracted into this association. It is an Ideal community, and only to the ideally inclined will it be attractive; but these are to be found in every rank of life, under every shadow of circumstance.”⁶⁷ Like Hopedale and Northampton, Brook Farm was founded by educated members of the middle-class, and in Brook Farm’s case specifically, an intellectual elite. Despite Peabody’s claims for the egalitarian spirit of the community, which would transcend class relations, in practice, Brook Farm both challenged and reproduced class tensions.⁶⁸

For communitarian reformers, self-regeneration through bodily and intellectual improvement created the pathway for social regeneration, through processes of mutual influence. Communitarian attitudes toward character were, as Wattles and Gilmore’s experience shows, connected to the reputation of communities as sites of failure. Through the principle of attraction, reformers found an escape from this narrative, and reaffirmed communities as the ideal sites for the regeneration of the individual and the reimagination of class, race, and gender relations.

⁶⁶ John Wattles, “A Community Character,” *Herald of Progression*, May 1845.

⁶⁷ Elizabeth Peabody, “Plan of the West Roxbury Community,” *The Dial*, January 1842.

⁶⁸ While some working-class men and women joined Brook Farm after the shift to Fourierism, they were not always treated as equal members of the community. See Guarneri, *Utopian Alternative*.

Manual Labor Among the Transcendentalists: Alcott and Ripley

While Wattles and Gilmore's plans for a model manual labor school and communitarian activities have been largely overlooked, scholars of this period remember George Ripley and Bronson Alcott, who founded Brook Farm and Fruitlands, respectively, for seeking to rehabilitate the status of farmers and manual labor. Like Wattles and Gilmore, they framed this as part of their project for social and environmental regeneration, particularly Alcott. He wrote in the Transcendentalist journal the *Dial*:

Our present modes of agriculture exhaust our soil... This Beast, named Man, has yet most costly tastes, and must first be transformed into a very man, regenerate in appetite and desire, before the earth shall be restored to fruitfulness. Then shall the toils of the farm become elegant and invigorating leisures... Labor will be attractive.⁶⁹

Alcott here invokes the notion of regeneration which was so important for reformers, both of manhood and the earth itself, and the notion of attractive labor popularized by disciples of Charles Fourier.

Brook Farm, founded in 1841, became committed to Fourierist principles in 1844. But the idea of attractive labor was with the community long before this transition. Ripley was a member of the Transcendentalist club and helped manage the *Dial* prior to the Brook Farm experiment. He was also a Unitarian minister and, like many fellow communitarians and reformers, left his ministry in 1840 to devote himself to what he believed to be a more authentic practice of faith and social reform.⁷⁰ When Ripley wrote to Ralph W. Emerson in 1840 encouraging him to join the community, he wrote that their goals were "to insure a more natural union between intellectual and manual labor than now exists; to combine the thinker and worker,

⁶⁹ Amos Bronson Alcott, "Orphic Sayings VIII: Husbandry," *The Dial*, April 1842.

⁷⁰ Gura, *Man's Better Angels*, 34–35.

as far as possible, in the same individual; to guarantee the highest mental freedom, by providing all with labor, adapted to their tastes and talents.”⁷¹

Ripley and his colleagues at Brook Farm, like Wattles and Gilmore, blurred the distinction between a self-sufficient community and an educational institution. According to the articles of association for Brook Farm, “[t]he object of the Association is to purchase such estates as may be required for the establishment and continuance of an agricultural, literary, and scientific school or college.”⁷² Elizabeth Peabody described the members of Brook Farm as “the Faculty of the Embryo University.”⁷³ As she wrote, “they have bought a farm, in order to make agriculture the basis of their life, it being the most direct and simple in relation to nature.” She discussed the labor scheme at Brook Farm at length, noting that all community members will perform manual and intellectual labor, to their own tastes. “This principle, with regard to labor, lies at the root of moral and religious life; for it is not more true that ‘money is at the root of all evil,’ than that *labor is the germ of all good.*”⁷⁴ Agricultural labor was especially important to communitarian reformers. The Hopedale community in Western Massachusetts felt it was their mission to “gardenize the earth – to restore land and man to their Eden-like condition.”⁷⁵

Peabody emphasizes both the simplicity of agriculture and farming life and the intention of farmers at Brook Farm to be scientific in their endeavors. “As agriculture is the basis of their external life, scientific agriculture, connected with practice, will be a prominent part of the instruction from the first.” Moreover, Peabody addresses the intellectual benefits of farming:

Many a young man leaves the farmer’s life, because only by so doing can he have intellectual companionship and opportunity; and yet, did he but know it,

⁷¹ George Ripley to Ralph Waldo Emerson, November 9, 1840, reprinted in Octavius Brooks Frothingham, *George Ripley* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1882), 307–8.

⁷² Frothingham, *George Ripley*, 112.

⁷³ Elizabeth Peabody, “Plan of the West Roxbury Community,” *The Dial*, January 1842.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, original italics.

⁷⁵ “Address on Agriculture” *Practical Christian*, May 11, 1850.

professional life is ordinarily more unfavorable to the perfection of the mind than the farmer's life; if the latter is lived with wisdom and moderation, and the labor mingled as it might be with study. The community will be a school for young agriculturalists, who may learn within its precincts, not only the skilful [*sic*] practice, but the scientific reasons of their work, and be enabled afterward to improve their art continuously.⁷⁶

John W. Browne, a supporter of Ripley and Associationism, captured the conceptual linkages between Brook Farm's principles and the ideas expounded by Weld and other manual labor advocates. Browne wrote to his old school fellow and friend Charles Sumner, prior to the latter's career in politics, in defense of Ripley's ideas about labor. In Browne's view, Sumner, like many others before and since, reduced Ripley's prescriptions to gross oversimplifications. Browne stated, "You spoke of George Ripley as if he believed in the redemption of man to consist in turning him into a farmer. You mistake him—you mistake those who are with him in views."⁷⁷ Sumner's younger brother Horace was living at Brook Farm during this period, and Browne admonished Sumner for believing that Ripley would counsel Horace to be "occupied in the labor of oxen."⁷⁸

Browne's letter simultaneously connects several aspects of communitarian philosophy. Self-sufficiency was of central concern to Browne. He wrote derisively of urban elites' dependence on "starving" factory workers for "our clothes, blankets" and "crushed slaves" for cotton. He described miners as "a race transformed from men to pale shades of men, [who] prepare the metals by which the acts of civilization carry on their works." All of this serves the ultimate goal, "[t]hat you and I might transform ourselves from men to scholars." Browne, like manual labor proponents before him, posed these questions to Sumner: "Are you a man? Am I a

⁷⁶ Elizabeth Peabody, "Plan of the West Roxbury Community," *The Dial*, January 1842.

⁷⁷ John W. Browne to Charles Sumner, 1844, John Thomas Codman Brook Farm Collection, 1840-1901, Houghton Library, Harvard.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

man?" Browne answered that they are partial men, broken down by market relations and too much, or at least flawed, education.⁷⁹

Browne rejected Sumner's characterization of Brook Farm, and instead clearly articulated the close relationship between farming and the sustenance of healthy, whole bodies.

Let us not any longer think that at Brook Farm man shall be taught to glory in the goat, drive oxen, and be occupied in their labors. He shall not. He shall be taught so to be occupied in labor on the soil as to produce therefrom the simple elements of a pure diet, for a sound, and healthy, and rejoicing body.⁸⁰

Browne ends his letter by echoing the ideas of the western reformers described above, arguing that as Ripley and "those who feel with him" continue on their path, they will give up their dependence on animal labor and animal products, for "[a]s long as man exercises dominion over the animals, abusing them for labor and murdering them for food, he cannot have the glad heart of a lover in the creation."⁸¹ As with other reformers, Browne emphasizes diet, and the wholesome production of pure food through labor in nature, as key to creating whole men and women.

The community at Fruitlands, founded by Bronson Alcott and Charles Lane, famously enacted radical, and unsuccessful experiments in diet reform, in an effort to engage in a more "natural" mode of life. Alcott's disastrous six-month experiment at Fruitlands has long epitomized the antebellum utopian community: populated by uninformed armchair farmers, rhetorically elevating manual labor, but lacking the skills, knowledge, endurance, *essence* to farm successfully. As Carl Guarneri notes, such characterizations create "a false dichotomy

⁷⁹ Joel P. Davis expressed a similar sentiment in his response to the manual labor school proposed by Wattles and Gilmore. Davis wrote to congratulate Wattles and Gilmore on "the good work going on for the connecting of soul and body together – the uniting of labor with study – the unfolding of the WHOLE MAN." Davis noted, "[t]he old system confines a portion of mankind to labor, another portion to study, and so spoils both. The one gets a body, the other a piece of a mind. But the fact is, neither one can be well developed without the other. Both must go together." Joel P. Davis, "Letter from Joel P. Davis," *Herald of Progression*, May 1846.

⁸⁰ John W. Browne to Charles Sumner, 1844.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

between ‘workers’ and ‘reformers’” and elide the fact that many Associationists were working class men and women.⁸² Putting aside unhelpful debates about whether communitarians were “real” farmers or “real” workers, it is clear that manual labor, and farming particularly, in concert with the idea of attractive labor, had powerful rhetorical significance for antebellum communitarian reformers.

As other scholars have pointed out, Transcendentalists, like their communitarian counterparts elsewhere, also perceived didactic value in their performance of labor, as a lesson to others.⁸³ Many of these reformers were committed to the principles of moral suasion, and rejected force in all forms as a tactic for enlightening others. Leading by example was a powerful moral strategy for communitarians, who sought to convince the world of the benefits of community by showing their successes. John Allen of Brook Farm wrote in a letter to fellow reformer Mehitable Eastman, co-editor of *The Voice of Industry*, that he wanted “to make...our actions leaves of inspiration.”⁸⁴ Fourierists at Brook Farm, including John Orvis and John Allen, became active in the labor movement following their experiences in community and successfully promoted cooperative stores and workshops across the country.⁸⁵

The didactic function of community, so important to communitarians—who constantly discussed the greater good that would be served by a single successful model community—again

⁸² Guarneri, 293. Despite broad-based participation in communitarianism in the 1840s, the movement also relied upon essentialized portraits of poverty and working people to make their case. Lance Newman points out the fetishized rhetoric of the poor in the years of economic depression following the Panic of 1837, as poverty became aestheticized into what he terms “soft-focused markers of a degraded social order.” Newman argues that the interest of Transcendentalists like Ripley and Henry David Thoreau in uplifting the poor was secondary to their interest in saving the souls of their spiritually corrupted middle-class peers. This tendency is also visible in the rhetoric of the *Herald of Progression*, which suggests that Wattles, Gilmore, and their colleagues, though committed to broader class transformation, primarily concerned themselves with the regeneration of themselves and their friends. Newman, “Thoreau’s Natural Community and Utopian Socialism,” 526.

⁸³ See Michael Newbury, *Figuring Authorship in Antebellum America*. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997).

⁸⁴ John Allen to Mehitable Eastman, October 1, 1845. Brook Farm Collection, Middlebury College.

⁸⁵ Guarneri, *The Utopian Alternative*, 306–20.

invokes the importance of education in communitarian thought and practice. Influential educators and scholars populated both Brook Farm and Fruitlands; Bronson Alcott, in fact, was one of the most progressive educators of his age. Ironically, these community members' status as memorable thinkers and educators has diminished their authority as farmers in the historical record, roles which they perceived as interdependent. The Unitarian preacher William Ellery Channing wrote of Alcott: "One of my dearest ideas and hopes is the union of labor and culture. I wish to see labor honored and united with the free development of the intellect and heart. Mr. Alcott, hiring himself out for day labor, and at the same time living in a region of high thought, is perhaps the most interesting object in our commonwealth."⁸⁶

In practice, all communities of this era involved significant manual labor performed by community members – clearing land, erecting saw mills, building homes and communal structures, sowing crops, and launching industries. While these activities were not always profitable, or fully completed, they were generally physically exhausting. A community life was not generally a very easy life, though it could be greatly rewarding. In records, letters, and memoirs, members both celebrated and complained about the physical energy expended in constructing community.⁸⁷

In November of 1846, seven months after their initial circular announcing plans for a model manual labor school or agricultural college, Wattles announced in the *Herald of Progression* that plans for the model manual labor school were delayed due to the insufficiency of funds contributed by supporters, and the fact that the vision for the school had broadened.

⁸⁶ William Ellery Channing and William Henry Channing, *Life of William Ellery Channing* (American Unitarian association, 1896), 514. Channing expressed similar views in his "Lecture on the Elevation of the Laboring Classes."

⁸⁷ Nathaniel Hawthorne famously complained about labor at Brook Farm. Accounts of Skaneateles, Prairie Home, and other Universal Reform communities, the Northampton community, as well as Fourierist settlements in New Jersey, Rochester, Wisconsin, and Ohio all address significant daily labor requirements.

Wattles wrote enigmatically that the leaders of this movement decided to “exten[d] their plans of operation, to a larger field, which will cause some delay, but only to effect success the more certainly.”⁸⁸ Rather than their manual labor school, Wattles and Gilmore established a community, Excelsior. This interracial community was barely off the ground before a massive flood in December 1847 killed seventeen community members. Hiram Gilmore was reportedly “greatly shocked by this disaster, and after two years [of] fret and worry died in 1849.”⁸⁹

Following the tragedy at Excelsior, John Wattles, still deeply immersed in the currents of reform, traveled, lectured, met with reformers, and contemplated another communal venture in Lake Zurich, Illinois. This too would be a “community college – or manual labor institute or something of that kind.”⁹⁰ The founders could not agree upon a shared vision for the community however, and the Wattles soon departed. But John’s community aspirations were not dimmed. As Esther later recounted, “John had lent a horse to a community out in Indiana, on the Grand Prairie. In midwinter he went to that place and all promised well for another trial.”⁹¹

This next communal venture was the Grand Prairie Harmonial Institute, established with a fellow antislavery and physiological reformer, and fellow member of the Universal Brotherhood, Valentine Nicholson. Horace Greeley, one of the most famous advocates of Fourierism, was a trustee of this community.⁹² The Grand Harmonial Institute was to be a “school wherein shall be studied the Nature and Constitution of Man, with a view to harmonize man with man, man with nature, and all with God.”⁹³ The intention was to “secure the education,

⁸⁸ “Agricultural College,” *Herald of Progression*, November 1846, 48.

⁸⁹ Isaac Martin, *History of the Schools of Cincinnati and Other Educational Institutions, Public and Private* (Board of Education: Cincinnati, 1900), 185.

⁹⁰ John Wattles to Esther Wattles, undated, Western Reserve Historical Society.

⁹¹ Journal of Esther Whinery Wattles, n.d., Wattles Family Papers, 1860-1953, Oberlin College Archives.

⁹² In 1844, Greeley had given a speech called “The Relations of Learning to Labor,” at Hamilton College in which he argued for manual labor as a crucial aspect of higher education. Bromell, *By the Sweat of the Brow*, 17.

⁹³ “Declaration of Sentiments of the Grand Prairie Harmonial Institute” Box 1, Folder 41, Wattles Papers, Western Reserve Historical Society.

elevation, unity and purity” of all members through three departments: “educational, agricultural, and mechanical.” All departments would be committed to “the cultivation of both body and mind,” “living the true life,” and fostering “a community character.”⁹⁴ “Physical labor to the amount necessary for bodily health and vigor” was required for each member of the college

Lucius Hine, another member of the Universal Brotherhood and member of the short-lived Excelsior community, expanded on the vision for such an institution in an 1852 tract on “Harmonic Education.”⁹⁵ Hine’s tract helpfully expands upon and elaborates the limited description of a model manual labor school mentioned so often, with few details, by Wattles and Gilmore in the *Herald of Progression*. In 1847, Hine had joined Wattles in publishing the *Herald of Progression*, merging it with his own *Quarterly Journal and Review*.⁹⁶ In “A Plea for Harmonic Education,” Hine wrote that the Oneida Institute, Oberlin College, and the other manual labor schools established in the 1830s never fulfilled their radical potential as truly egalitarian spaces. In Hine’s view, all of these schools “have thus far incorporated themselves within the aristocracy of idleness and the servility of menial drudgery.”⁹⁷ Hine wanted to see a school in which professors and students labored side by side for equal pay. Moreover, to Hine, “No school exists in our country where the whole man is developed.”⁹⁸

Hine invoked “the laws of physical and mental health” to prove his point. He believed that “Every farmer should vary his toils as much as possible. Dividing his labors between his fields, his orchards, his gardens, his stock, and his readings in literature and science, he will find

⁹⁴ Grand Prairie Harmonial Institute, Constitution, Art II, Box 1, Folder 41, Wattles Papers, Western Reserve Historical Society.

⁹⁵ The term “harmonic” would have evoked the theories of Charles Fourier, for antebellum reformers; Fourier’s utopia was termed Harmony, by himself and his followers. It is also an allusion to the harmonial school of Andrew Jackson Davis.

⁹⁶ Hamm, *God's Government Begun*.

⁹⁷ Lucius Alonzo Hine, *A Plea for Harmonic Education*, 198.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 174.

far more happiness and security.” Moreover, “Every mechanic should have variety of labor in the garden, and of study in the library. Every clergyman, lawyer, physician, merchant, and clerk, should have similar variety, because it is absolutely indispensable to health.”⁹⁹ Like Weld, Hine understood variety in terms of mutual interdependence and highlighted the degeneracy caused by a lack of physical activity for students and rejected the notion that “gymnastics” are an adequate substitute for labor. “There is just energy enough in the world to do the world’s work, and no more. Those...who do no physical labor, or get exercise in the gymnasium, waste energies that would do much to relieve the overtasked serviles of labor.”¹⁰⁰ Hine combined these ideas about education, informed by “laws of health,” with insights into land reform and the national labor movement.¹⁰¹ He sought to increase the moral connection between manual labor and self-sufficiency.

Hine described this new manual labor school as a self-contained, self-sustaining association, “a self-supporting miniature world.” This language echoed his comrade John Wattles on the subject of communities. In May 1845, in his article entitled “A Community Character,” Wattles wrote that “a true community is a world in miniature.”¹⁰² Both Hine and Wattles viewed self-sufficiency as an important strategy for finally making their model communities financially viable and sustainable for participants, and an essential tactic for buffering community from broader society.

Hine’s writing, along with Wattles and Gilmore’s earlier efforts, suggests the ways in which the communitarian impulse found expression through other forms of social organization,

⁹⁹ Ibid., 180.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 188.

¹⁰¹ *A Plea for Harmonic Education*, 188. See also Hine, *Earth and Man. Being a Vindication of the Relations of Man to the Soil*. (The author, 1852).

¹⁰² John Wattles, “A Community Character,” *Herald of Progression*, May 1845.

including manual labor schools, Grahamite boarding houses, and water-cure establishments. For antebellum reformers, the theory that character and manhood were formed through a naturalized blend of manual and intellectual labor worked to subvert essentialized categories of laborer or non-laborer, and represented an important pathway to social reform. Moreover, this notion was, for many reformers, directly tied to ideas about the land. To Hine, to be without manual labor is to be starved of a connection to the natural world. In an 1850 article on agricultural and mechanical colleges, published in the *Ohio Cultivator* and reprinted in the *Massachusetts Ploughman and New England Journal of Agriculture*, Hine wrote,

“Those who delight in the beautiful feel a spiritual void when shut out from the foliage and the flowers. They long to be with nature, and to engage in the cultivation of the grains and grasses, vines and flowers... Those who are disconnected from nature become physically dyspeptic, intellectually whimsical and morally unamiable.”¹⁰³

Hine, no doubt, was influenced by the literary culture of his time – Emerson’s philosophical observations, Margaret Fuller’s travel narratives, or William Cullen Bryant’s romantic poetry, but he also engaged with the discourse of agricultural reform. To Hine, “Every one has intellectual and moral powers which go out toward nature, and the pursuits of agriculture and horticulture supply these powers with their only means of discipline.”¹⁰⁴ Hine, with other antebellum communitarian reformers, understood manual labor, and particularly agricultural labor, as intellectually stimulating, morally beneficial, and gratifying laws of nature, by creating embodied and scientific knowledge of nature.

Lucius Hine, John Orvis, John Allen and many other communitarians of the 1840s became key players in the mid-nineteenth century land reform and labor movements.¹⁰⁵ These

¹⁰³ Lucius Hine, “Colleges, Agricultural and Mechanical,” *Ohio Cultivator*, May 1, 1850.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ See Mark A. Lause, *Young America: Land, Labor, and the Republican Community* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2005).

movements focused explicitly on the rights of workers to own the land, and in theorizing these rights, reformers invoked the sacred connections between soil and air, social and physical regeneration. Annie Denton Cridge, for instance, connected the demands of the labor movement to the project of “physical regeneration:”

the land being locked up in the hands of a few, and wild lands kept from the millions who rightfully own them, by a tyrannical government, high rents are exacted by capitalists, who live like leeches on the life-blood of the worker. True physical regeneration commences, first, with the right to the soil and a home in the country; fruit and grain raising to be substituted for cattle and hogs; rooms large and lofty, especially bed rooms; ventilators, baths ; washing, knitting, sewing and ironing machines ; so that woman's indoor labor being lessened, she, the mother, may have a chance for physical regeneration by working in the open air. Not milking cows, feeding hogs, chickens, etc., but working in the soil, and so strengthening her muscles, and inhaling the spirit of the earth ; pruning, gathering fruit, the tendency of which is to regenerate her spiritual as well as physical nature. This should be done in reform neighborhoods so that co-operation may lessen the hours of labor, that the affections and sympathies may not be starved for want of congenial companionship. Thus the whole being will be cultivated. Will not those who aim at physical regeneration try to put themselves in conditions for its realization?¹⁰⁶

Labor and the Agricultural Press

Agricultural journals were also key sites in which Americans addressed questions of laboring in nature and manual labor’s elevating or denegrating effects. Although the connections agricultural reformers drew between manual and intellectual labor frequently carried different class implications, like communitarians, they also carefully considered the moral, social, and intellectual benefits of labor on both individual bodies and broader society.

Agricultural reformers also sought to uncover and employ natural laws as they tied manual labor to the formation of agricultural character, rather than community character. The *American Agriculturalist* wrote in 1844 in gratitude to “the devoted sons of genius, who have given a portion of their time to the elucidation of the principles of agriculture, and who have

¹⁰⁶Annie Denton Cridge, “Physical Regeneration no IV,” *The Vanguard*, March 20, 1858.

begun a systematic investigation of the laws of nature.”¹⁰⁷ With what they termed “pattern farms,” agricultural reformers sought to create model institutions for the discovery of natural laws of agriculture, a model that parallels the function of communities for radical social reformers.¹⁰⁸

The *Albany Cultivator*, *New England Farmer*, and *Ohio Cultivator* and many similar journals published numerous editorials on the moral benefits of labor and the importance of a union of physical and intellectual labor. For agricultural journals, the connection between manual and intellectual labor found an analogy in the relationship between practical and book farming. Recent scholars have addressed the complex dynamics at work in the creation and dissemination of agricultural knowledge, moving beyond a simplistic dichotomy in which practical farmers supposedly relied on folk wisdom and experience for education, while book farmers were theoretically and scientifically oriented.¹⁰⁹ Agricultural reformers frequently addressed the need to combine these strategies, to achieve a better informed way of knowing the land and to combat the degradation of the agricultural class.¹¹⁰

Though efforts by farmers and farm journals to merge theory and practice through the marriage of intellectual and manual labor appear highly practical and support a rational narrative of progress toward scientific mastery of agriculture, agricultural reformers were concerned with

¹⁰⁷ “Agricultural Colleges,” *American Agriculturalist*, 1844, 52.

¹⁰⁸ As historian Timothy Minella writes, “In their arguments for the establishment of pattern farms, promoters put forward an account of agricultural science that stressed the discovery of the natural laws that governed the growth of vegetables and animals.” Timothy K Minella, “A Pattern for Improvement: Pattern Farms and Scientific Authority in Early Nineteenth-Century America,” *Agricultural History* 90, no. 4 (Fall 2016): 443.

¹⁰⁹ Emily Pawley, *The Nature of the Future: Agriculture, Science and Capitalism in the Antebellum North* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2020)

¹¹⁰ For example, highlighting the importance of a union between manual and intellectual labor, Maine politician Francis O.J. Smith noted in a speech to the Kennebec County Agricultural Society: “[I]t is among the impossibilities of human life that man should become a farmer in even the second degree of merit, without much reading, much reflection and much study, [and] it is equally impossible for a man to become a farmer of the first degree without combining with much reading, much reflection and much study, years of personal practice and experimental observation upon the soil itself.” R.L. Allen, “Agricultural Colleges,” *American Agriculturalist*, February 1844.

social as well as scientific questions. Reformers sought to highlight and strengthen the moral integrity of farm families. Previous scholars have drawn connections between agricultural practice and social status, or between cultivation of the earth and cultivation of community and character.¹¹¹ Writing about antebellum Bostonian horticulturalists, for example, historian Tamara Thornton pointed out that “the true object of [horticultural] reform was none other than the reform of American character.”¹¹² As discussed above, many middle-class communitarian social reformers similarly connected the cultivation of crops with the cultivation of personhood and perceived a connection, as Thornton writes, between farming and “the ability to cultivate man, morally, intellectually, and physically.”¹¹³ Hine, however, with his socialist contemporaries, embraced a much more radical view of the connection between agriculture and cultivation of character than agricultural and horticultural reformers, who viewed genteel cultivation as an antidote to the evils of commercial worldliness.

Throughout the 1830s and 1840s, contributors to agricultural journals debated the best strategies for educating farmers. Responding to Theodore Weld’s 1833 report, the *Albany Cultivator* supported the idea of manual labor schools but argued that labor shouldn’t simply be viewed as strengthening intellectual abilities. Rather, the author argued, one must apply rigorous mental activity to agricultural labor and farm according to scientific principles.¹¹⁴ Intellectual

¹¹¹ Other scholars have considered the cultural meanings of agricultural transformation in the colonial and antebellum period. See, for example, Benjamin R. Cohen, *Notes from the Ground: Science, Soil, and Society in the American Countryside* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009). Gayle Samuels, *Enduring Roots: Encounters With Trees, History, and the American Landscape* (Piscataway, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1999); Michael Tomlan, *Tinged With Gold: Hop Culture in the United States* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1992); Thomas J. Campanella, *Republic of Shade: New England and the American Elm* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003); Tammy Horn, *Bees in America: How the Honey Bee Shaped a Nation* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2005).

¹¹² Tamara Plakins Thornton, “The Moral Dimensions of Horticulture in Antebellum America,” *New England Quarterly* 57, no. 1 (March 1, 1984): 8.

¹¹³ Thornton, “The Moral Dimensions of Horticulture in Antebellum America,” 19.

¹¹⁴ “Mr. Weld’s Manual Labor Report”, *Cultivator: A Monthly Publication; Devoted to Agriculture*. May 1, 1839.

labor, for many farm journals, was important in so far as farmers ought to be improving themselves with the latest literature in scientific agriculture, and a humanistic education was sometimes viewed as detracting from that object. The *American Agriculturalist* argued that books “in the country schools” “should contain more upon the subject of agriculture, horticulture, stock-breeding, and mechanics; and less of mere literary matter. Poets, orators, and fine writers, are not as much wanted as good farmers and mechanics.”¹¹⁵

The tropes about men and women and gendered labor popular with physiological and social reformers echoed and dialogued with similar concerns in the agricultural press. The *American Agriculturalist* was filled with laments about the degeneracy of boys and young men who would not work as hard as their fathers did.¹¹⁶ The *Ohio Cultivator*, with other publications in the farm press, advocated for healthful dress reforms and “physical education” of women.¹¹⁷ Like other reformers, these women’s rights advocates explicitly described manual and intellectual labor as interdependent for farm women. Overly urbanized and cultivated women were, like educated young men, plagued with “feeble bodies and diseased nerves.” Writing of the mind and the body, “If the latter is diseased and enfeebled, the former must be weak; but give tone and energy to the physical system, and mental vigor will generally be proportionate.”¹¹⁸ Conversations about labor and reform in agricultural journals frequently focused on the laboring bodies of women. The *Ohio Cultivator* discussed women’s rights and place in society in terms which connected agricultural character to progressive reform. Letters published in the Ladies Department of the *Ohio Cultivator*, as one reader noted, “breathe of the spirit of progress and

¹¹⁵ “A Farmer’s Education,” *American Agriculturalist*, January 1844.

¹¹⁶ See Octogenarian, “Development of Character,” *American Agriculturalist*, June 1842.

¹¹⁷ Linda Borish, “Benevolent America: Rural Women, Physical Recreation, Sport and Health Reform in Antebellum New England: Vol 22, No 6,” *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 22, no. 6 (2005): 946–73.

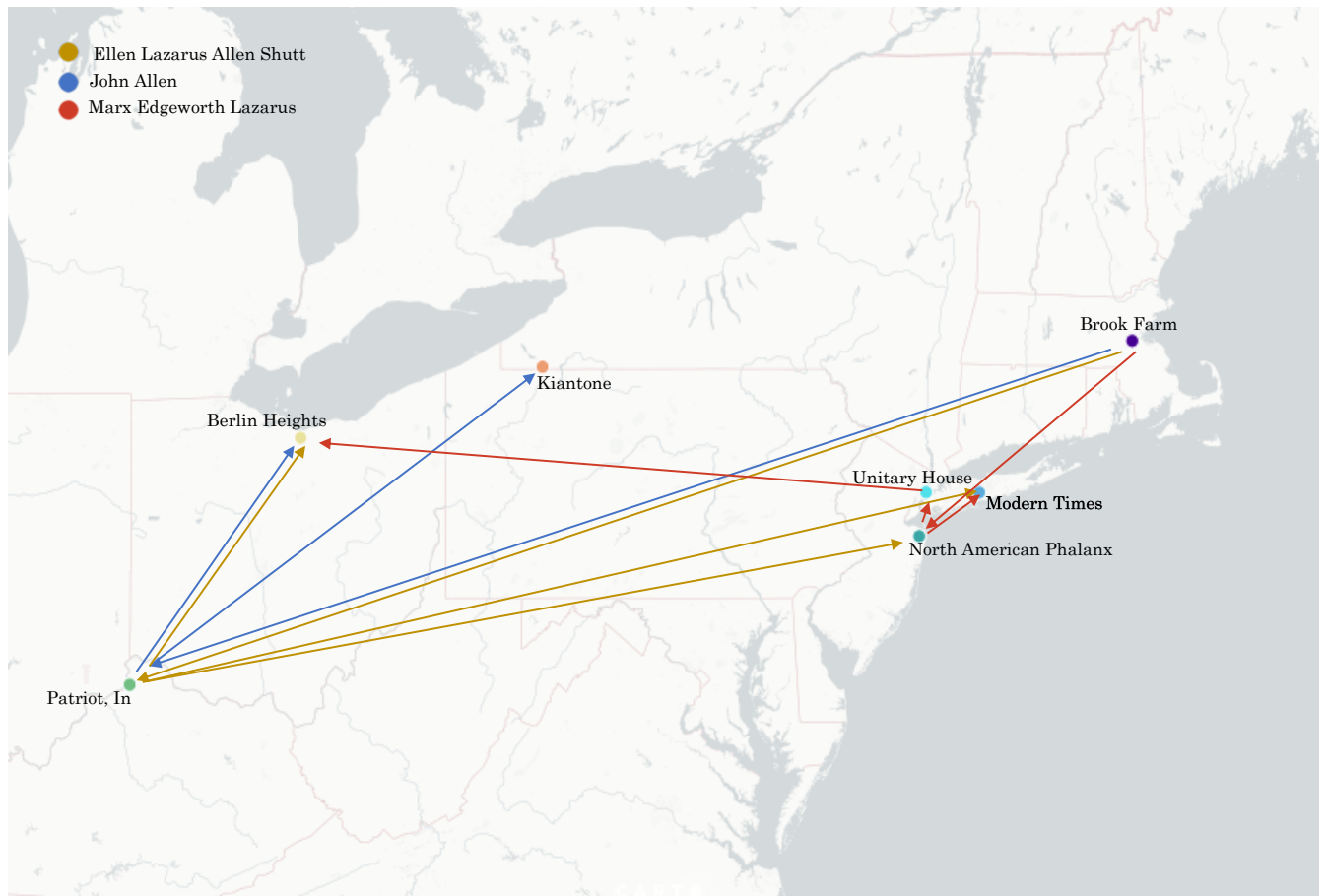
¹¹⁸ Josephine Bateman, “Ladies Department: Social Reform, and Physical Education of Women” *Ohio Cultivator*, December 1, 1844.

reform in the fullest sense - social, physical, moral and intellectual.”¹¹⁹Agricultural reformers, with social and physiological reformers, then, turned to gendered fantasies of laboring in nature to reimagine and improve society.

For communitarians invested in theories of regeneration, the discourse of laboring bodies was inextricably concerned with other ins and outs of the body. Not only the manual labor school tradition but Grahamite physiological reform, which took root among many of the same reformers in the 1830s, created new relationships to nature for communitarian reformers in the 1840s.

¹¹⁹ “Letter from Huron County,” *Ohio Cultivator*, 15 September 1850. See also, Frances W. Kaye, “The Ladies’ Department of the ‘Ohio Cultivator,’ 1845-1855: A Feminist Forum,” *Agricultural History* 50, no. 2 (1976): 414-423.

Interlude



Map of community movements created by the author, 2021.

In the autumn of 1845, 20-year-old Ellen Lazarus traveled North from Richmond in search of health, to Providence, Boston, and New York City. For years she had suffered from debilitating headaches and backaches, diagnosed as neuralgia and hysteria.¹ An orphan, she was in the charge of her sweet, eccentric, and over-serious older brother Marx (he was 21) who was so

¹ Emily Bingham, *Mordecai: An Early American Family* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2004), 207.

carried away with his zeal for Fourierism and homeopathy that his friends would “hide when they [knew] he was coming.”²

While a student at New York University’s Medical College, Marx became acquainted with radical health reformers Joel and Mary Louise Shew, and their friend, the women’s health lecturer, Mary Gove.³ The Shews and Mary Gove were active promoters of hydrotherapy, or ‘water cure’ which was gradually supplanting Sylvester Graham’s temperance and diet reform movement as the leading school of health for progressive reformers.⁴ Mary was a well-known and controversial advocate of women’s rights and health education, who was in a bitter and public custody battle with her former husband, and in need of money. Marx proposed that Mary’s “simple mode of living, on vegetables, fruits, and grains, ... cold bathing, and the magnetism of [her] affection” might bring Ellen health.⁵

While Mary tolerated Marx and his philosophical excesses, she adored his sister. When Mary first met Ellen, she experienced “one of the sunniest visions I ever saw.” Ellen was a “beautiful blossom girl” with “her own and her brother’s share... of common sense.”⁶ Mary suggested gymnastic exercises, and loose healthful clothing for Ellen’s health. Mary moved into a large house on Tenth Street in New York City financed by Marx with a number of other young radicals in 1846, and while Ellen’s concerned relatives refused to allow her to live there, this house became her social center and her first experience with communal life.⁷

² Mary Gove Nichols, *Mary Lyndon: Or, Revelations of a Life* (New York: W. A. Townsend and Company, 1855), 284.

³ *General Alumni Catalogue of New York University, 1833-1907* (New York: General Alumni Society, 1908), 14.

⁴ Joel Shew was founder of *The Water-Cure Journal*; Mary Gove apprenticed to Shew, served as an editor of the *Water-Cure Journal* herself, and was a water cure physician in her own right.

⁵ Gove Nichols *Mary Lyndon*, 303.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 306.

⁷ Bingham, *Mordecai*, 243-247.

Among Ellen's many new acquaintances in the world of physiological and social reform were her brother's friends and fellow Fourierist agitators at Brook Farm, including the 31-year-old Reverend John Allen. Allen joined the experimental community in Roxbury Massachusetts in the spring of 1845, bringing his infant son Freddie and the body of his recently deceased wife, Sarah.

By then, Allen was long familiar with the embattled life of a reformer. With other Unitarians of his generation, including Brook Farm founder George Ripley, Allen left his parish to seek a more authentic mode of social progress. After leaving his pulpit in rural Massachusetts, Allen deepened his agitation for abolition; as he wrote to his friend Mehitable Eastman in 1845, "It was Anti Slavery that made me."

In the recollection of a fellow Brook Farmer, John Allen did not have "a fine face." In fact, "His features were not large, and, if we except the full forehead, not very attractive. His mouth was small, and his dark brown hair asserted its rights in spite of brush and comb." His features "added to the look of determination there was in the little man's countenance ... a 'hold on' expression which so well coincided with his character." Despite his lack of beauty, or perhaps as compensation, John Allen was "very enthusiastic."⁸ John's enthusiasm threw him into a series of causes: not just antislavery, but temperance, physiological reform, labor, socialism,

⁸ John Codman, *Brook Farm: Historic and Personal Memoirs*, (Boston: Arena Publishing Company, 1894)122-123. Among John Allen's many early projects was a short-lived newspaper devoted to the related projects of bodily reform and sweeping social change: the *Social Reformer and Herald of Universal Health*. Allen and Joseph Whitmarsh launched the *Social Reformer* in September 1844. Its twin goals were to advance "the exposition of the science of Universal Unity and the laws of Attractive, Organized Industry, discovered by Charles Fourier" and to acquaint readers with "the Physiological Law," which was to the editors' minds, "one of the great and universal laws of unity and harmony a knowledge of which is needed...by all associationists." Whitmarsh, "The Social Reformer," *Social Reformer and Herald of Universal Health*, June 1, 1844. Brook Farmers Charles Dana, Parke Godwin, and John Orvis contributed to this publication, as did physiological reformers like H.H. Brown, and Mary Gove. The *Social Reformer* was to be combined with the *Phalanx*, the organ of the Fourier cause, at Brook Farm. In 1845 he also edited and published a labor paper, the *Voice of Industry*, on behalf of workers in Lowell, MA.

and finally spiritualism. His life's work was to foment: at the lectern, in the reform press, by joining successive communal ventures for the rest of his life.

John's years at Brook Farm were supposedly "the happiest and most useful part of his life," though marred by tragic events.⁹ In the winter of 1845, an unvaccinated Freddie Allen caught smallpox from Milton Clark, a fugitive slave harbored at his aunt's house in Boston.¹⁰ Upon returning to the community, he infected 30 Brook Farmers, including John. While everyone survived, the danger, social isolation, and enduring scars affected the community spirit.¹¹ In March of 1846, while away from the community on a lecture tour to advance the cause of Fourierism, John learned of the fire that destroyed the Brook Farm Phalanstery. Again all survived, but the community would never recover.

While John Allen may have been at his happiest at Brook Farm, he never quit the lecture circuit and was constantly away, leaving Freddie in the care of the community. Though he grumbled about the poor accommodations, poor attendance, and poor compensation, John seemed to thrive on the road, and enjoyed his nightly performances. After the fire, he continued to agitate for the Fourierist cause. When traveling through the northeast lecturing on Association in the summer of 1847 with his friend and fellow Brook Farmer John Orvis, Allen was "full of Ellen Lazarus."¹² Ellen was twenty-two, on fire for Fourierism, water-cure, diet reform, and women's rights, and in a protracted struggle for independence from her Southern aunts and

⁹ A. Gage, "The Departure of John Allen," *Agitator*, November 1, 1858.

¹⁰ John's sister, Elizabeth, with her husband George, had been Brook Farmers before John, but left in 1843 to launch a Grahamite hotel; this establishment was also a harbor for self-emancipated men and women.

¹¹ Brook Farm Correspondence, Middlebury College Special Collections and Archives.

¹² John Orvis to Marianne Dwight Orvis, Brook Farm Correspondence, Middlebury College Special Collections and Archives.

uncles, who viewed associationism and health reform with the deepest skepticism.¹³ Allen was anxious that she was not returning his letters.¹⁴

Ellen and John were married October 4, 1848. In the Roxbury marriage registry, John gave his occupation: reformer.

* * * *

After the wedding, the Allens almost immediately set out for the west, where John had been recently fomenting in Cincinnati. He intended to spread the gospel of the “Church of Humanity” as an ordained minister of William Channing’s Religious Union of Associationists.

In 1849, Ellen and John purchased a 93-acre farm on the Ohio River in the small community of Patriot, Indiana. Given that both of them were veterans of the temperance cause that defined health for reformers of their generation, it is ironic that they decided to cultivate grapes and produce wine in Indiana. But the vision for their vineyard was rooted in reform. As Ellen’s brother Marx, a fellow passionate disciple of Fourier articulated so well, grapes represented and encouraged harmonic friendship – the basis for community. “The vine reveals this to every eye conversant with vegetable physiognomy, in its twining attachments and numberless tendrils which turn themselves to embrace every object in contact.”¹⁵ John apparently also believed that his grapes might offer “lessons in heredity” that could advance humanity.¹⁶

¹³ Emily Bingham, *Mordecai*, 203-217.

¹⁴ John Orvis to Marianne Dwight Orvis, August 1847. Brook Farm Correspondence, Middlebury College Special Collections and Archives.

¹⁵ Marx Edgeworth Lazarus, *Passional Hygiene and Natural Medicine: Embracing the Harmonies of Man with His Planet* (New York: Fowlers and Wells, 1852), 28.

¹⁶ Buescher, *The Remarkable Life of John Murray Spear*, 155.

Life on the frontier was not easy for these idealists. They were in constant need of money and always on the verge of finally realizing a profit, reaping a robust crop, but the good fortune, the abundance, the easy life did not manifest. Ellen and John increasingly relied on her uncle for financial support. John Allen may have been made by Anti-Slavery, but he was now supported by a slave-holding family. (Before their deaths in her teenage years, Ellen's parents owned several enslaved men and women who labored for the family. In 1831, Uncle George had gone to see William Lloyd Garrison lecture on antislavery on a whim; he was unmoved by the legendary orator.¹⁷)

While the Allens continued to pour their own and their relatives' money into their vineyard and numerous projects on the land in Patriot, Ellen continuously spoke of leaving. As she put it, after less than two years in this new home, "the country and the society are killing us body and soul."¹⁸ The problem wasn't only with Patriot, though, as a sympathetic friend wrote, "the social atmosphere of the town is itself enough to engender moral disease and spiritual death,"¹⁹ As Ellen's sister Julia somewhat disloyally informed their uncle and benefactor, "a still life is not congenial to [John's] taste, and has if possible, still less attraction for sister Ellen... They never will have any permanent home."

Like their brother Marx, Julia was a comrade in socialism and health reform, and a member of the household for lengthy stretches in the early years, sharing in the labor of the farmstead and the care of John and Ellen's children. At this dreary time, Ellen was particularly

¹⁷ More accurately, George was greatly "vexed" by what he heard. Bingham, *Mordecai*, 107.

¹⁸ Ellen Lazarus Allen to George Mordecai, January 1851, George W. Mordecai Papers, Southern Historical Collection, The Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

¹⁹ "John Allen," *Agitator*, November 1, 1858.

grateful for the companionship of her 21-year-old sister. Julia was vibrant, energetic, sweet, and though she had long suffered from poor health, seemed to find the country air restorative.²⁰

Over the next several years, the grape crop continued to disappoint, their wine was undervalued and unsold, reliable help could not be found, and Ellen grew increasingly disgusted with the local communities they encountered in the west. For all of her hopes for social progress and unitary homes, Ellen was a bit of a snob. John was apparently more sanguine. For all his enthusiasm and righteous anger when it came to social change, he was, to Ellen, too trusting, a pushover, blind to his neighbor's faults. In this respect, John was a classic reformer.

The Allens did have a few friends in their neighborhood and maintained connections to the vibrant reform community in Cincinnati. Benjamin Urner became a particular friend to the family. In July of 1850, they named their daughter after him: Mary Catherine Urner. Beginning in 1852, he was one of the visionaries for La Reunion, Victor Considerant's Fourierist experiment in Texas, which John Allen also was an eager participant in. In April 1853, Considerant himself, the new hope for Fourierism in the United States, traveled to Patriot with Albert Brisbane. There he met John, Ellen, and their four-year-old, Victor Considerant Allen. Considerant wrote that his namesake was a boy "who chirps like a bird, who doesn't cry when he hurts himself, and who has just this minute brought me a chain he made out of dandelion stems."²¹

And in July of 1853, Considerant returned to France from New Orleans. Allen made his way home to Patriot. Brisbane presumably made his way home to New York. All were full of hope for the Texas colony.

²⁰ Ellen Lazarus Allen to George Mordecai, February 22, 1852, George W. Mordecai Papers.

²¹ Jonathan Beecher, *Victor Considerant and the Rise and Fall of French Romantic Socialism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 305.

In April 1854, things were finally looking up for Ellen; the farm and the family were thriving. In her words, “I have not enjoyed my life at any time before so much as I do now.” In October of that year, she gave birth to her third child, Ernest (Urner) Allen. Soon after, John left with his son Fred to support the colonists at La Réunion.

When Considerant returned to Texas in June 1855, after a six-month journey, almost two hundred men and women had come in advance to begin the experiment at La Réunion, and the vibe was anarchy.²² John Allen had been one of those working to prepare the way for Considerant and the coming age of harmony, but he left in September of 1855, “disgusted and disheartened.”²³

The colony brought gifted musicians and new botanical and agricultural expertise to the area; colonists also established the first brewery and butcher in the region (these were not Grahamites).²⁴ But by 1859, the experiment at La Réunion had officially ended, though many French settlers, including Considerant and his family, remained in Texas.

* * * *

Marx was not a man of business. Despite degrees from Johns Hopkins, the University of Pennsylvania, and New York University, he never found steady employment. In a shock to his family, he married a young woman, Mary Lawrie, in Indiana, in 1854, and the couple intended to move to La Reunion but his resources were scant. In April 1855 he informed his uncle that his sister Julia was paying all of his expenses and was running out of money herself. In the same

²² Rondel V. Davidson, “Victor Considerant and the Failure of La Réunion,” *The Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 76, no. 3 (1973): 284-285.

²³ Julia Lazarus to Emma Mordecai, August 31, 1855, George W. Mordecai Papers.

²⁴ Davidson, “Victor Considerant and the Failure of La Réunion,” 295.

letter, he noted that he had procured the services of Daniel Drowne Smith, an electrical healer and homeopathist, to treat Julia's chronic illness.²⁵ When her uncle expressed disapproval of Marx, Julia wrote, "All that I can say is, that he is like no other, that his views and actions must be judged by a standard differing from any ordinary one, and that I trust you will forgive in him, what would be inexcusable in another." Marx reminded their aunt Ellen of Mr. Skimpole in Charles Dickens's *Bleak House*, a character famous for his charming ineptitude and endless debts.²⁶

In May of 1855, Marx was receiving reports, perhaps from John, of the terrible condition of the colony at La Reunion, and felt he could not bring his wife there, but had nowhere else to go. Julia, meanwhile, had begun a lengthy and intense treatment involving "animalized" electrical currents with Smith, was reaching her "crisis," the goal of alternative medical treatments at this moment.²⁷ Smith began his career as a Universalist Minister, like so many. In 1829, he married Lucinda Hatstat; his father Elias Smith presided.²⁸ The details of what happened next in his marriage have been lost to the historical record, but Julia moved into his home in New York City for her treatment.

Marx's wife Mary died in October 1855. Six months later, Marx and Julia traveled to Paris, as did Dr. Smith. Julia's relatives worried greatly.²⁹

Where Ellen was warm and ingratiating in her letters to their upright and wealthy relatives, Julia was forthright and zealously committed to her own path. On the subject of the "miserable doctor," as her uncle George referred to him, she admitted, "if all were explained,

²⁵ Marx to George Mordecai, April 8 1855, George W. Mordecai Papers.

²⁶ Ellen Mordecai to George Mordecai, April 25, 1855, George W. Mordecai Papers.

²⁷ Julia Lazarus to George Mordecai, GMP, May 6, 1855. May 24, 1855, George W. Mordecai Papers. Cayleff, *Wash and Be Healed*.

²⁸ They were married August 7, 1829, according to Massachusetts Vital and Town Records.

²⁹ Julia Lazarus to George Mordecai, April 22, 1856, George W. Mordecai Papers.

you would still disapprove, and be pained.”³⁰ In February 1856, Ellen warned her Uncle George that her sister Julia had been taken in by a fraud. Dr. Smith was not only a quack, he was a womanizer.³¹ Five months later, Julia wrote from Florence that she was married, obviously to Dr. Smith, but she was forced to write, “It is my husband’s wish that I should not, at present, name him.” Two months later Julia wrote to ask, “whether you received a letter from me dated at Florence about the middle of July?” If her uncle hadn’t yet read it, “it is now immaterial.”³² Julia’s relatives were apoplectic.

As her brief marriage and seemingly tortured relationship with Dr. Smith fell apart, Julia’s misery, humiliation, and regret were profound. To her uncle George’s suggestion that “drugs” may have influenced her, she responded that “he could exert the same power of fascination over me, that some animals can over others. It was and is, incomprehensible to me, but think, feel, resolve what I might, nothing could stand before this influence, it rendered me powerless and overmastered me...In reflexion upon the past, my course seems as foreign to my nature, as it would have appeared in anticipation, could I have foreseen all...” Her brother Marx, meanwhile, “pursues his studies, with, if it is possible, increasing assiduity, refusing to take part in anything which might distract him for a moment from the acquisitions to which he is devoting himself.”³³

Julia returned to the United States in March of 1857, leaving Marx to his studies. Her devotion to her brother was unchanged. Ellen had been her brother’s protégé in New York when she was a young woman; her sister Julia stepped into this role more completely than Ellen had ever wanted to. Julia informed her uncle and guardian that in her self-imposed exile it was her

³⁰ Julia Lazarus to George Mordecai, May 1, 1856, George W. Mordecai Papers.

³¹ Ellen Lazarus Allen to George Mordecai, February 4, 1856, George W. Mordecai Papers.

³² Julia Lazarus to George Mordecai, September 22, 1856, George W. Mordecai Papers.

³³ Julia Lazarus to George Mordecai, November 22, 1856. George W. Mordecai Papers.

intention to use her inheritance to fully support her brother, “for his maintenance and the pursuance of his studies.”³⁴

* * * *

By October 1856, Ellen’s desperation had returned. Ellen wrote to her uncle George that her situation had become untenable – a question “almost of life or death.” The grape crop had failed again, and they suspected their rogue tenants of burning their hay crop. She wrote that they intended to go to New York in November to remain for the winter at least, “and see what can be done for the future.” Her husband’s postscript emphasized the dire situation. Given her childrearing and household duties and “the wearing monotony of farm-life,” ... “it has proved that she is not able to bear it.” John went on, “for the last year she has been troubled with a rush of blood to the head, a numbness of the upper portion of the brain, and at times, a complete nervous prostration, loss of memory and even power to think or act.” Her physicians agreed that “a change of scene and an entire freedom from anxiety or care of any kind” was essential for her health.³⁵

It was another six months before the Allens finally left Patriot, with the hope of starting over. They began in Cleveland but soon Ellen and the children had decamped to the free love colony at Berlin Heights, Ohio, where they spent the summer and winter. Life at the community was luxurious compared to Patriot, and Ellen felt that she was again amongst her people. “The climate is the most delightful I have ever experienced. The air is remarkably pure and clear, the light elevated, commanding a view of Lake Erie.” Meals were prepared for them, linens were

³⁴ Julia Lazarus to George Mordecai, March 27, 1857.

³⁵ Ellen Lazarus Allen to George Mordecai, October 15, 1856, George W. Mordecai Papers.

provided, Ellen could breathe.³⁶ Ellen's account leaves out the dramatic scenes of conflict between free lovers and concerned citizens of Sandusky, Ohio, who in the fall of 1857 destroyed the November issue of the community's publication the *Social Revolutionist*. Her letters also pointedly leave out the free love. Community members at Berlin Heights understood free love as a statement of women's rights and an institutional critique of marriage and its many harms, and they grounded their doctrine in practices of physiological reform and efforts to uncover natural laws. As an article in the *Social Revolutionist* asserted, "had the same amount of talent, thought and investigation been directed to the study of the natural laws of our being, as developed in the constitutional nature of man, as for the last thousand years, has been wasted over the mystic pages of the bible, the earth would have been blessed with the millennial reign of peace harmony, love and freedom."³⁷ Five years previously, Marx had published his notorious free love text *Love vs. Marriage* and catalyzed a debate between Fourierist reformers in the pages of the *New York Tribune*.³⁸

Between the summer of 1857 and October 1858, Ellen and John frequently lived apart. The Patriot vineyard still required attention, and John, along with his old friend John Orvis, had become swept up in spiritualist circles in the west and now had a new cause to champion. Kiantone was a community in Upstate New York built upon the ideas of abolitionist, prison reformer, and former Universalist minister John Murray Spear. Spear's followers were among the most boldly in favor of free love, an issue that caused great tension within the spiritualist community.

³⁶ Ellen Lazarus Allen to George Mordecai, August 21, 1857. George W. Mordecai Papers.

³⁷ "Criticisms," *Social Revolutionist*, August 1857.

³⁸ Stephen Pearl Andrews of Modern Times, Henry James Sr., and Horace Greeley participated in this debate. Joanne Ellen Passet, *Sex Radicals and the Quest for Women's Equality* (University of Illinois Press, 2003).

During the winter of 1858 Ellen and her children had moved to the former site of the North American Phalanx, but found, like so many places, that it was too expensive for them, as it was, as she put it "a resort for fashionable summer boarders from the city." By July of 1858, Ellen wrote that she had "found a place on Long Island about 2 hours from New York where we can live much more comfortably for any means than here."³⁹ The place was Modern Times, a community of individual anarchists, many formerly of the Fourierist persuasion, led by Josiah Warren and Stephen Pearl Andrews.

While Ellen was renting rooms for herself and her children at the community, she learned from her siblings of John's death on October 2, 1858. He was 43 years old. Lengthy obituaries in the Spiritualist press followed. His friend Alexander Gage wrote that "there is no one as a theorist who can fill his place.... He was ever to me a source of knowledge and a fountain of new and beautiful thought."⁴⁰

Julia and Marx had been visiting John; thus, it was not Ellen, but her sister, also a member of John's spiritualist circle of friends, who cared for him at the end of his life. Julia was particularly intimate with the family of Loraine and Daniel Gano, also believers in the spiritualist vision of John Murray Spear. (In 1853, the Ganos had named their daughter Julia Ellen.) In April 1859, the spiritualist journal *The Agitator* published an account of John's posthumous visit to Julia, through the medium E. M.

Surrounded by beautiful children, outside a jeweled mansion, John Allen asked, "what have I done in life to deserve such happiness?" He was accompanied by Benjamin Urner, Charles Fourier, and "many others" known to the medium.⁴¹

³⁹ Ellen Lazarus Allen to George Mordecai, July 19, 1858, George W. Mordecai Papers.

⁴⁰ A. Gage, "Departure of John Allen," *Agitator*, October 15, 1858.

⁴¹ "JOHN ALLEN," *Agitator*, April 1, 1859.

* * * *

It is comforting that things turned out so well for John after his death, for by many accounts he died a frustrated man. “Poor John has seemingly spent his life to no purpose, at least, he never realized what he had set his heart upon and spent his life for.”⁴² Marx noted that Allen was “as little fitted for business and money-making as I am,” which was certainly a harsh indictment. Allen had recently been disappointed in the failure of a new publishing scheme and was “very much broken hearted by Albert Brisbane’s recent perfidy towards him.”⁴³

What could be gleaned from the contents of a man's stomach in 1858? John Allen’s innards were carefully removed and reportedly shipped to Cincinnati following his death, for as noted in The Republican paper the *Indiana Reveille*, “It was feared by many that there was something wrong about it.”⁴⁴ It isn’t clear that the stomach really made the journey to Cincinnati but doctors, E.S. Gale, R.R. Ruter, and A. Humphrey sliced open the rubbery pouch, examined its interesting fillings, and gave a report to a jury at a Coroner’s inquest in Switzerland County. The verdict of the inquest: “poison administered by some person unknown to the jury.”⁴⁵

In 1860, Ellen was living at the site of Modern Times, with her four children, eldest 11 and youngest 2. She was 35 years old, occupation: widow. For years following John’s death, Ellen was harassed by the details of managing the estate. Disreputable folk poured out of the woodwork, calling in supposed debts. Even Marx and Julia sought money from their sister. Ellen wrote of Marx, “He wrote so shamefully about me and warned John against being

⁴² A. Gage, “Departure of John Allen,” *Agitator*, October 15, 1858.

⁴³ Marx Edgeworth Lazarus to George Mordecai, Oct 2, 1858, George W. Mordecai Papers.

⁴⁴ “Death notice for John Allen,” *The Indiana Reveille*, October 6, 1858.

⁴⁵ Coroner’s Inquest,” *The Indiana Reveille*, October 20, 1858.

influenced by me not to pay him, at the same time refusing to receive anything of my hand.”⁴⁶ As for Julia, “I should think she would blush to allude to my refunding her” the money that Julia had forced upon the well-intentioned, but weak willed, John Allen.⁴⁷

Ellen also did not know what to do with John’s son Freddie, who was apparently in poor health; she feared he “would not live long.” The farm was eventually sold to Allen’s spiritualist comrades at Kiantone, including John Orvis, for \$12,000, who dreamed of establishing a “unitary home” on the property and continuing with John Allen’s agricultural experiments. Very little of the \$12,000 was ever collected.

For a brief moment in 1860, as Ellen sought to reshape her life with four children and no husband, and no permanent home, she determined to “unite and form one family” with her colleagues at Modern Times, Mr. Edger and his wife and children. Henry Edger was a positivist – one of Auguste Comte’s 10 disciples. In 1859, Ellen was part of Henry Edger’s “positivist band.” In 1860, Ellen and the Edgers proposed “mutually adopting one another.” “We desire that it be a real, spiritual, indissoluble union, on the part of all.”⁴⁸ Her Uncle George did not support this plan. He bought Ellen and her children their own house.

* * * *

Tucked away at Modern Times, Ellen confessed to her Uncle in December of 1860, “I hear next to nothing of politics in this quiet place and see no papers.” For the next several months, she urged George to think positively about the state of the country and was “deeply grieved” that he remained “still so hopeless and depressed” about the prospect of a coming war. When the war at

⁴⁶ Ellen Lazarus Allen to George Mordecai, October 18, 1858, George W. Mordecai Papers.

⁴⁷ Ellen Lazarus Allen to George Mordecai, April 22, 1860, George W. Mordecai Papers.

⁴⁸ Ellen Lazarus Allen to George Mordecai, January 15, 1860, George W. Mordecai Papers.

last came, and New York's streets were lined with spectators of Major Anderson's regiment, Ellen met it with a wistful patriotism, choking back tears while "meeting soldiers at every step." They were "brave youth preparing for a terrible family feud."⁴⁹

As Ellen insinuated, the Lazarus family was divided by the war, perhaps forever. Marx and Julia moved back to the South and supported the confederacy. In 1861 Marx joined the Norfolk "City Light Guards" as a private with the hope of serving as a surgeon; he did not last very long. In under a year he was pursuing medical practice in Asheville, North Carolina.⁵⁰ Ellen admitted in an 1863 letter to a former Brook Farmer that she had "no information of Dr. Lazarus."⁵¹ John's son Freddie Allen did not live long, as Ellen predicted; he died less than four years after his father as a Union soldier at the battle of Vicksburg, twenty years old.

In March of 1861, Ellen took on an English tenant, Walter Shutt. They were married January 15, 1862. Walter had at least two grown sons of his own; Ellen and Walter would have three more children together.

Julia lived out her life with Southern relatives and died in North Carolina in her early forties. Marx continued his itinerant ways. He appears in an 1870 census in Berlin Heights, the site of the former free love colony. He ultimately settled in Guntersville, Alabama, where he continued to practice medicine and contributed to national anarchist publications through the 1880s. He gained a reputation as an eccentric hermit and became a figure of local legend before his death in 1895.⁵²

⁴⁹ Ellen Lazarus Allen to George Mordecai, May 17 1861, George W. Mordecai Papers.

⁵⁰ Julia Lazarus to George Mordecai, April 1861, October 1862, George W. Mordecai Papers.

⁵¹ Ellen Lazarus Allen Shutt to Fred Cabot, January 11, 1863, Brentwood Public Library.

⁵² H.L. Holley. "A Century and a half of the history of the life sciences in Alabama. Dr Marx Edgeworth Lazarus: the Sand Mountain Hermit." *The Alabama Journal of Medical Sciences*, 14, (1977), 377-378.

As for Ellen, as the Allens had struggled, the Shutts struggled. For Ellen, the sense of drowning in daily domestic toil, a never-catching-up, and a constant yearning for a change of scene and a fresh start must have felt familiar. Their hardships were of the most mundane variety but she acknowledged, “my children are growing up with no social or educational advantages, which will be an abiding source of regret to me and of misfortune to them.”⁵³

As one strategy to alleviate the burden of her children’s education, Ellen deposited her teenaged daughter “Minnie,” or Catherine, and her son Ernest with the Shaker community in Mount Lebanon during the war. Both children took to the community. In June 1868, Ellen implemented an elaborate and successful plan to kidnap her Ernest back from the Shakers.⁵⁴ Minnie, unfortunately, had convinced her mother to indenture her until her eighteenth birthday. Ellen fretted about getting Minnie back: “she is so bent on remaining and they have gained such an influence over her religious nature to make her feel it is her highest duty to remain.”⁵⁵ It is plausible that Ellen, who had disappointed and scandalized her family with her unconventional choices for 20 years, would empathize with her daughter’s decision, but she was convinced as her Aunts and Uncles had been, that the child was brainwashed. Shaker Eldress Catherine Allen would become well known to the wider world for her activism and scholarship.

In 1870, Ellen and Walter Shutt donated a lot purchased by Uncle George to erect an Episcopal Church in their community. Ellen Lazarus Allen Shutt died at 93, in Brentwood Long Island at the former site of Modern Times.

⁵³ Ellen Lazarus Allen Shutt to George Mordecai, February 9, 1869, George W. Mordecai Papers.

⁵⁴ Ellen Lazarus Allen Shutt to George Mordecai, June 22, 1868, George W. Mordecai Papers.

⁵⁵ Ellen Lazarus Allen Shutt to George Mordecai, March 23, 1868, George W. Mordecai Papers.

Chapter Three

The Land and the Body, Part II: The Physiology of Reform

Social reform is talked, political reform is talked, religious reform is talked, bodily reform only is acted by the masses of the people.

– Samuel Bower, 1843

The communitarian moment of the early 1840s was followed by movements focused on the rights and experiences of individuals. Spiritualism, individual sovereignty, and anarchism, to many, represented a rejection of the possibility of community. Yet, as participants in communities of the 1840s and supporters in the reform press recognized, the communitarian movement also *emerged from* individual health and physiological reform movements that began a decade earlier. This chapter considers how, beginning in the 1830s, diet reformers, following the Reverend Sylvester Graham, created a new discourse about earthly and human connection and the maintenance of healthy bodies.

Graham's theories of bodily purity inflected the vision for community as laboratories in which to uncover natural laws. This is where humans were their purest, and where conditions would be created to produce models for society. Communitarians played with the possibilities of perfecting themselves and the human race, with all the optimism and darkness such a project suggests. They also worried about the "purity" of what they put into their bodies, their relationship to capitalism, and the ailing health of the natural world.

For Samuel Bower, (quoted in the epigraph) and his peers, daily, individual practices always embodied the work of social reform. To Bower, the false reformer was the man who "drinks, eats, and clothes himself as other men do; he seeks wealth, marries, and roots himself in society pretty much in the same style as the rest of the world," though he also maintains "a separate identity put forth, from time to time, in books, speeches, and other ideologies." In

contrast to these armchair reformers, the true reformer begins with acts of “personal purity” and “never forgets that the first principle of reform is “self-denial.”¹

Physiological reformers were concerned with “the air we breathe, the sounds we hear, the odors we inhale, and the objects we see” all of which contributed to the “diseases which afflict and scourge our ailing race.”² Most particularly, they were concerned with those aspects of bodily experience of environment that were subject to discipline and regulation: washing, sleeping, exercise, sex, eating, and drinking.

Yet despite their attention to the human body, many of these reformers understood that the body was not a discrete object in the world, but always connected to other species, other times, and otherworldly realms. They created spaces for experimentation in which to cultivate a body’s sensitivity to the broader human—and more than human—environment. This took the form of rigorous attention to bodily practices, but also relied on faith in emergent sciences of interconnection like mesmerism, psychometry, and spiritualism, as explored in the next chapter.

Sylvester Graham and Physiological Reform

Sylvester Graham became famous in the 1830s for his lectures and writings relating to human bodies and human behavior—what, when, how much people should eat; how they should bathe and dress; how much and by what methods to exercise and engage in sexual activity—and the effects of these behaviors on the nervous system, brain, and internal organs.³

Graham lived an embattled life. Born in 1794, he was the youngest of seventeen children, and his father died while Sylvester was in infancy. His mother, left to raise seven children,

¹ Samuel Bower, “New Society,” *Liberator*, October 13, 1843.

² American Physiological Society, “American Physiological Society Annual Report,” (Boston: Marsh, Capen and Lyon, 1837), 8-9.

³ Stephen Nissenbaum, *Sex, Diet, and Debility in Jacksonian America: Sylvester Graham and Health Reform* (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger, 1980).

suffered from mental illness in Graham's youth; he was consequently passed around among various neighbors and family members. He stumbled through the first decades of life without great confidence but with increasingly fastidious habits. Though he became a Presbyterian minister in the mid 1820s, it was as a Pennsylvania temperance lecturer in 1830 that Graham found his voice.⁴ With other temperance advocates, he found connections between physical and moral health and began to seriously study human physiology from an ethical point of view, resulting in his widely influential series of lectures, "The Science of Human Life," published in 1839 and serialized in the *Graham Journal of Health and Longevity* and later the *Health Journal*.

Graham's lectures and writing touched on every aspect of physiology and hygiene, but especially the dangers of consuming 'animal food.' Graham believed that meat, like other rich, concentrated foods, overstimulated human bodies. He was outspoken regarding the ill effects of refined flour which diminished the healthful character of wheat in commercial bread. Bread should be baked with love by moral women in their homes; eating bread should be an effortful undertaking, requiring "exercise of the teeth."⁵

Graham is justly remembered as a stern moralist who railed against most of the enjoyments of contemporary life. Much of his later career was spent writing about the damaging effects of masturbation and urging married adults to have less sex. He also expressed xenophobic anxieties; his support for bland food was related to concerns about the spices of the sinful/carnal Far East.⁶ Despite these strains of conservatism, Graham moved in progressive, even radical, circles in his day. In the 1830s and 1840s, his dietary prescriptions and insights about the body

⁴ Adam D. Shprintzen, *The Vegetarian Crusade: The Rise of an American Reform Movement, 1817-1921* (University of North Carolina Press, 2013), 16–18.

⁵ Sylvester Graham, *A Treatise on Bread and Breadmaking* (Boston: Light and Stearns, 1837), 25.

⁶ See Kyla Wazana Tompkins, *Racial Indigestion: Eating Bodies in the 19th Century*, 53-88; Katharina Vester, *A Taste of Power: Food and American Identities* (Oakland, California: University of California Press, 2015), 49-53.

were taken up by radical reformers of the Universal Reform persuasion, as well as by many phrenologists, abolitionists, and women's rights activists including Horace Greeley, David Ruggles, Mary Gove Nichols, Theodore Dwight Weld, and the Grimké sisters. Beginning in the mid-1830s, "Grahamite" boarding houses sprang up in eastern cities, in which disciples of Graham's teachings ate Graham bread and other plain vegetarian food, bathed in cold water, and debated the various physiological and social reforms of the age.⁷ These boarding houses anticipated the communities movement that began in the early 1840s, and many future communitarians passed through such establishments.

Graham's genius was to expand the rhetoric of temperance reform to draw new connections between diet, lifestyle, and moral integrity, and repackage these ideas for a broad public through his lectures and publications. Dietetic reform and temperance rested on shared concerns about over-stimulated bodies, sounding the alarm about the powerful properties of alcohol and animal food. For Graham and reformers of his generation, unnatural stimulations throbbed and wormed through all facets of life in Jacksonian America and lurked behind every corner. Few worried about the dangers of under-stimulation, but in all things stimulating or exerting (thinking, exercise, eating, drinking, sex) the conventional wisdom was not to overindulge. The notion that food and drink, like air and climate, determined fundamental aspects of a person's character and appearance was not a new idea.⁸

Like his social reform colleagues, Graham despised the avarice and "cannibalistic" trends in capitalist production. He developed a trenchant critique of nineteenth-century society's

⁷ Whorton, *Nature Cures: The History of Alternative Medicine in America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002); Shprintzen, *Vegetarian Crusade*, 27-28.

⁸ For instance, Rebecca Earle's recent work explores the ways in which Spanish settler colonists understood indigenous bodies in the New World to be shaped by diet and climate. Rebecca Earle, *The Body of the Conquistador: Food, Race and the Colonial Experience in Spanish America, 1492-1700* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 24-26.

misplaced priorities that simultaneously indicted appetites for capital accumulation and rich food and drink. His fellow Americans were “entirely given up at present, to gross and promiscuous feeding on the dead carcasses of animals, and to the untiring pursuits of wealth.”⁹ Changes in diet, according to Graham and his followers, resulted in greater sensitivity to other violations of natural laws. This was one step on a progressive pathway to new knowledge, renewed health, and a better world. The radical communitarian and women’s rights advocate Maria Loomis wrote in the mid-1840s that “Diet is the beginning place for reformers.”¹⁰ Grahamites like Loomis believed their new dietary practices were essential to remaking the body, and that such physiological reforms were “the foundation of all other reforms.”¹¹

For nineteenth-century Grahamites, food was one of the most important spaces of encounter between human bodies and their natural environments, and by cultivating a heightened awareness of taste and sensation, they believed they could access the overstimulated, exhausted earth directly. By following food to its source, Graham argued that avaricious Americans were complicit in invisible patterns of environmental degradation. He and his colleagues in physiological reform not only created a powerful discourse about the notion that “you are what you eat,” but encouraged Americans to understand the experience of nature, or pollution, as discernable through taste and sensation. Physiological reformers thus connected clean food and hygienic agriculture to a “natural” mode of life. While their criteria for wholesome food, sustainable agriculture, and “natural” differ from twenty-first century ideas, these reformers strengthened an association between “clean” and “natural.”

⁹ Graham, *Lectures on the Science of Human Life*, 419.

¹⁰ Maria Loomis “Diet,” *Communitist*, April 9, 1845, 87.

¹¹ Abolitionist and non-resistance reformer Benjamin Dyer put it thus: “the time has come when information on the subject of Physiological reform is called for and devoured with great avidity and delight. The reform itself lies at the foundation of all other reforms.” “Communications,” *Health Journal, & Advocate of Physiological Reform*, March 12, 1842.

Grahamites argued that the palate became more sensitive to the nuances in flavor of fruits and vegetables after one abandoned a rich and stimulating diet. “[F]eed us on fruit and farinaceous articles, and our fondness for excitement and our hankering for exciting drinks and condiments will, in a few generations, die away.”¹² To William Alcott, a vegetable diet “greatly improves, exalts, and perfects the senses. The sight, smell, and taste are rendered greatly superior by it.”¹³ Alcott was Graham’s most influential colleague and occasional rival; he was the first president of the American Physiological Association and an important author and temperance and diet reform advocate in his own right. Alcott and Graham together had a wide sphere of influence and contributed frequently to reform periodicals throughout the 1830s and 1840s.¹⁴ With their colleagues in health reform, these men helped to revolutionize popular conceptions of health.

Physiological reform movements, including vegetarianism, the popular practices of phrenology, and the water cure, were successful because they represented an opportunity for individuals and families living with physical complaints to seize control over their destiny and to become informal scientists and doctors through the study of their own and their loved ones’ bodies.¹⁵ The new physiological treatises and self-help manuals of this age, alongside

¹² William Andrus Alcott, *Vegetable Diet* (New York: Fowlers & Wells, 1838), 36.

¹³ Alcott, *Vegetable Diet*, 238.

¹⁴ Alcott was the author of over ten books including, *The Young Man’s Guide* (1834), *The Young Woman’s Guide* (1840), and *The House I Live in, Or, the Human Body* (1847). *Graham’s Lectures on the Science of Human Life* (1839) was extremely popular, and he was a regular contributor to *The Graham Journal of Health and Longevity* (1837-1839) and the *Health Journal, & Advocate of Physiological Reform* (1840-1842).

¹⁵ Homeopathy, Thomsonianism and other alternative medical movements of the nineteenth century similarly sought to empower individuals living with illness, and to challenge the heroic tendencies of regular medicine. As new movements in medicine sought to make health more democratic, followers of self-taught herbalist Samuel Thomson, arguing for the exclusive use of botanical or vegetable treatments derived from nature, put forth the creed, “Every man his own physician.” Thomsonians effectively fought licensure requirements for physicians and equipped home-practitioners with medical treatment manuals and access to botanical supplies. Hydropathy and homeopathy were part of the broad paradigm shift in medical science. Medical wisdom changed over the course of the nineteenth century, from a focus on treatment of the individual body, out of step with his or her own equilibrium, to treatment of generalized bodies experiencing objective conditions of health and disease. At this moment of contestation and transition, physiological reformers created new laws to live by, in concert with new social theories of how to live

publications like *The Water Cure Journal*, *Herald of Health*, and *Graham Journal of Health and Longevity*, and the *American Phrenological Journal*, all sought to empower health seekers. They all also participated in a movement to build a better world. Letters and editorials in these papers help to demonstrate how Graham's physiological prescriptions were taken up, but also revised, challenged, and pushed to new and radical places.

The physiological reform press (along with abolitionist, socialist, evangelical publications) also contributed to debates about the communities movement, beginning in the early 1840s. The *Health Journal and Advocate of Physiological Reform*, for example, helped to document the rise of the communities movement, through the contributions of many key players. The *Health Journal* followed the *Graham Journal of Health and Longevity* as the mouthpiece of Grahamism and acknowledged that its primary purpose was to "advocat[e] the peculiar views of Sylvester Graham" yet assured readers that it was not the man, but the truth he allowed access to, which the journal was concerned with.¹⁶

Joseph Whitmarsh took over publication of the journal in August 1841, writing in a new introduction: "The business of this Journal cannot be to talk about eating and drinking merely, but to show if it be possible, the truer and better way of life ... to show what in nature man is and requires."¹⁷ John Otis Wattles was a correspondent to the *Health Journal* as were Henry Gardiner Wright, Charles Lane, and Bronson Alcott of Fruitlands. For a short time, Joseph Whitmarsh was a member of the Skaneateles community; he also sought admittance to Brook Farm.

well. Whorton, *Nature Cures*; John S. Haller, *Medical Protestants: The Eclectics in American Medicine, 1825-1939*, (Carbondale, Illinois: Southern Illinois University Press, 2013); John Harley Warner, *The Therapeutic Perspective: Medical Practice, Knowledge, and Identity in America, 1820-1885* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2014).

¹⁶ "To Our Friends and the Public" *Health Journal and Advocate of Physiological Reform*, May 6, 1840.

¹⁷ Joseph Whitmarsh, "Introduction," *Health Journal and Advocate of Physiological Reform*, August 28, 1841.

Graham's Influence in Communities

In 1837, Bronson Alcott attended Graham's lectures and began to engage seriously with his ideas. He noted in his diary after attending four of Graham's lectures in January 1837 that "I, by no means, adopt his theories... on any physiological subject," yet he appreciated Graham's "efforts to make man acquainted with the laws of their animal nature." He referred to Graham as "the prophet of the body."¹⁸ And he valued Graham's attention to the interconnection between body and spirit, noting that, "Hitherto, men to whom the interests of the soul have been entrusted, have been ignorant of the laws of its organic tenement; while those given to the study and welfare of the body, have known little of the soul."¹⁹ Three months later, Alcott appears to have been fully won over to Graham's perspective: "his doctrines meet my sense, and win my practical adoption."²⁰

Alcott spent a formative period in England in 1842 communing with the dietary and social reformers inspired by the work of a spiritual and hygienic guru, James Pierrepont Greaves. Greaves and Graham were connected thinkers along many lines – they both argued for abstention from sex and warned of the dangers of meat, cooked food, and manured land. Greaves, however, named his institution for Amos Bronson Alcott, his closer intellectual ally. In 1842, he and his followers established a school, Alcott House, and a journal, *The Healthian*.²¹ Graham's views were also influential with this school of physiological and social reformers in the United Kingdom, who, like Graham, helped to shape the communities movement in the United States.

¹⁸ Larry Carlson, "Bronson Alcott's "Journal for 1837" (Part One)," *Studies in the American Renaissance*, 1981, 47, 44.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 72.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 76.

²¹ Though the *Healthian* was dedicated to promoting a vegetable diet, the editors noted that in contrast to Graham's emphasis on the "physiological," the *Healthian* was concerned with creating physical conditions which were in harmony with the "intense purity [of] the spirit." "The Pythagoric Life," *The Healthian: A Journal of Physiology, Diet and Regimen*, January 1843, 102.

Questions of physical purity and connection to a more-than-human environment figured into a loftier spiritual discourse for these thinkers. In his rich chronicle of the communitarian experiment at Fruitlands, Richard Francis argued, “Greaves philosophy was a seductive mirror image, reflecting and enforcing Alcott’s own ambiguities and confusions.”²²

With the financial support of Ralph Waldo Emerson, Alcott ventured to England to meet Greaves, but after a three-week journey learned that Greaves had died months earlier. While Alcott was greatly disappointed, he was welcomed by Greaves’ disciples, among them, Henry Gardiner Wright, and Charles Lane, editors of the *Healthian*, and Owenite, utopian thinker, and nudist, Samuel Bower. All of these men would pursue physiological and social reform currents in the United States. In late September, Alcott, Lane, and Wright sailed for Boston with a vision for community.²³

Bronson Alcott is remembered for his friendship with Ralph Waldo Emerson, his influence among New England transcendentalists and contributions to the *Dial*, his unusual educational philosophy, his famous daughter, and finally, for his notorious communal experiment at Fruitlands. In the spring of 1843, Charles Lane and Bronson Alcott embarked on this novel communal experiment in Harvard, Massachusetts. Wright found their dietary prescriptions too severe, and moved to Lynn, Massachusetts to the home of a prominent physiological reformer in her own right, and recent divorcee, Mary Gove.

Alcott, Lane, Alcott’s wife Abigail, and his daughters persevered with the community project. Fruitlands was uniquely committed to the idea that transformation of the individual body, particularly through relations to the land, was the pathway to spiritual salvation and social

²² Francis, 37.

²³ Francis, 69-90.

regeneration. When their community commenced, Lane explained that “our outward exertions are in the first instance directed toward the soil.”²⁴

Samuel Bower agreed. Shortly after his stay at Fruitlands—he departed in August of 1843—Bower wrote, “Our terrestrial existence seems to have a two-fold purpose, the cultivation to perfection of the earth, and the maintenance of the body.” Bower, like other reformers, viewed physiological transformation as a basis for other reforms, specifically, new kinds of “connexion with the soil.”²⁵

While at Fruitlands, surrounded by such visionary friends, Bower set himself apart with his commitment to nudism, compelled by the health-giving powers of the sun. Several years after the community ended he authored a piece in *The Water-Cure Journal* entitled “New Views of Health” in which he explained, “Neither the temperance and diet reforms in particular, nor, generally, those numerous other reforms for which the age is distinguished, can be completed or made permanent, unless the field of reform be opened to its widest possible extent.” His argument, to *true* reformers, was that they must forego clothing: “Why does civilized man put on, at all seasons, over that natural garb which the all-provident Creator has given him, his clothing?” Bower believed that the reformer “has bestowed thought enough on the stomach, let him turn his attention to the skin.”²⁶

The Fruitlands communitarians were committed to a vegetarian diet. Their values, following from Alcott House, projected a communion with the natural world that forbade violence toward animals or plants. They followed the “lovely spirit” to the logical conclusion that “the food conditions of [the idealized future] will be found in those fruits of trees, shrubs,

²⁴ Charles Lane, “The Consociate Family Life” *New-York Tribune*, September 1, 1843.

²⁵ Samuel Bower, “New Society,” *Liberator*, October 13, 1843.

²⁶ Samuel Bower, “New Views on Health,” *Water-cure Journal, & Herald of Reforms*, November 1, 1850.

and plants which give off their produce periodically, without interfering in any manner with life.”²⁷ Raw food was also more nutritious, and less injurious to the body than cooked food.

The Fruitlanders were, perhaps unsurprisingly, fans of fruit. In a chart ranking “physical circumstances” from best to worst, Fruitlands co-founder Charles Lane put in the top column under Food, “Ripe uncooked saccharine fruits.” Fresh fruit was “best, for the spirit nature,” and superior to “green or succulent vegetables.”²⁸ Other communitarian reformers echoed Lane. As one community supporter put it, “Man, when he ceases to be a bloody warrior, must be a fruit eater.”²⁹ Maria Loomis wrote, “if the human species have a natural instinct in common with the animal world for a particular kind of food, it is for fruit.”³⁰ Fourier, who believed achieving social harmony required celebrating pleasure and desire, was also passionate about fruit.

The market for fruit was indeed rich in the 1840s, and the fruit orchards were national symbols of a union between scientific rationality and natural abundance that allowed agriculturalists to participate in a version of manifest destiny.³¹ But for radical reformers, fruit carried significance as living, raw food. Some reformers, following Fourier, believed that fruit offered intimate knowledge of the natural world, as we will see in the next chapter. Fruit cultivation continued to be popular among intentional communities through the 1850s. For many communities, growing fruit was a smart business strategy; it also represented an opportunity to experiment in breeding, and a moral ideal. The Berlin Heights community site was chosen in part for its climate conducive to fruit growing; the primary industry at the North American Phalanx was production of apples, pears, and peaches.³² Numerous community tracts in the *Regenerator*,

²⁷ Samuel Bower, *A Brief Account of the First Concordium* (Ham Common, Surrey: The Concordium, 1843), 7.

²⁸ Francis, *Fruitlands*, 160.

²⁹ Benjamin Dyer, “Braintree Vt, Oct 4, 1845,” *Herald of Freedom*, October 31, 1845.

³⁰ Loomis “Diet.”

³¹ Erica Hannickel, “A Fortune in Fruit: Nicholas Longworth and Grape Speculation in Antebellum Ohio,” *American Studies* 51 (2010): 89–108.

³² Joanne Passat, “Beyond Berlin Heights: The Free Lovers in History or Memory,” *Communal Studies*, 25 (2005):

Herald of Progression, and *Communitist* highlighted the value of fruit orchards to community.³³

Some communitarians in the 1850s engaged in hybridized fruit experiments which relied on the idea that a spiritual environment could generate superior flora and fauna.³⁴

Morbidly Excited Soils

Graham worried about where food came from and about industry's effects on non-human nature. In his view, nineteenth-century society's coercive tendencies had natural correlates: causes and effects not only in the body, but also in the environment. His conception of bodily reform through diet and digestion informed a philosophy of nature that drew connections among the digestive powers of the land, humans, and other animals. Graham observed that as a result of the "artificial" practice of applying human and animal manures to the land, cattle and sheep were "fed and fattened on the produce of an exceedingly depraved, and if I may so speak, morbidly excited soil, which has long been subject to the forcing and depraving processes of modern agriculture."³⁵

Graham's theory of morbidly excited soil reflected the anxieties he shared with other temperance advocates about the stimulating effects of alcohol, sugar, tea, coffee, and meat on the human body. Graham observed that these substances initially stimulated the body, but then

92. Francis Barry described fruit cultivation as "the most healthful, attractive, and profitable employment in the world." "Practical Socialism," *Social Revolutionist*, September 1856. Charles Sears, *The North American Phalanx: An Historical and Descriptive Sketch* (Prescott, WI: John M. Pryse, 1886).

³³ Orson Murray, for example, wrote of the importance of fruit to his own family's health (while living at the Fruit Hills community). Weaned children, instead of consuming unclean animal milk, should eat fruit. In his experiments with his own children this diet produced happy results." Orson Murray, "Improvement in Eating and Drinking," *Regenerator*, May 18, 1846.

³⁴ The community at Kiantone, led by John Murray Spear, for example, embraced these principles, as discussed in the next chapter.

³⁵ Graham, *Lectures on the Science of Human Life*, 374. For more on antebellum attitudes toward manure, see Stoll, *Larding the Lean Earth*.

produced languor, resulting in new susceptibility to “morbid excitement.”³⁶ Poetry and masturbation also caused morbid excitement, according to Graham. The rule for all of these stimulants was that “increased action is always followed by diminished power.”³⁷ By emphasizing overstimulated soil’s depravity, Graham portrayed manure as a similarly immoral stimulant; agricultural inputs over-stimulated, or “unnaturally forced” the land.³⁸ The notion of morbidly excited soil drew upon the popular understandings of the dangers of over-stimulation, as well as the concept of miasma (the diffusion of toxic air and emanations) which was central to nineteenth-century understandings of health and disease.³⁹ Imagining that excessive fertilizer use caused the land to become diseased and exhausted, he sought a return to an original, uncorrupted soil.

The Fruitlanders shared Sylvester Graham’s view of morbidly excited soils. Bronson Alcott shared Graham’s perspective on “the narrow covetousness which prevails in trade” and which “ends in depraving the land.” He looked forward to a coming age, informed by the “New Ideas,” in which “the soil... debauched no more by foul ordures... shall recover its primeval virginity.”⁴⁰ To these communitarians, as for Graham, the coercive tendencies of nineteenth-

³⁶ On Graham’s theories of stimulation and debility, see Nissenbaum, *Sex Diet and Debility in Jacksonian America*.

³⁷ “Stimulation,” *Health Journal, & Advocate of Physiological Reform*, March 24, 1841.

³⁸ An 1837 Grahamite article on “Diseases Resulting from Bad Cultivation” noted that fruit “raised in nursery grounds for many years, and unnaturally forced by manure,” was both ill-flavored and unwholesome.” *Graham Journal of Health and Longevity*, November 28, 1837.

³⁹ This theory, with Greek roots, persisted into the nineteenth century. Valenčius explains the flexibility of the “ill-defined identity of miasma” in the nineteenth-century United States; doctors did not understand this malevolent force in terms of a strict theory of etiology, though they could recognize miasma through practical experience with its devastating effects. The influence of miasmatic logic on Grahamites is clear, “miasmas were produced by rot and decay of all kinds. Anything decomposing... was potentially harmful,” and often signified the disruption of a balanced natural system. Conevery Valenčius, *The Health of the Country*, 126, 127. For further discussions of miasma see Nancy Tomes, *The Gospel of Germs: Men, Women, and the Microbe in American Life* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1998); Peter C. Baldwin, “How Night Air Became Good Air, 1776-1930,” *Environmental History* 8, no. 3 (2003): 412–29.

⁴⁰ Amos Bronson Alcott, “Orphic Sayings VIII: Husbandry,” *The Dial*, April 1842.

century society had natural correlates, causes and effects not only in the body, but also in the environment.

The discussions of Graham and his interlocutors reveal that Americans were not only thinking about environmental dangers to human bodies: more broadly, these reformers perceived a close connection between human/animal metabolism and the metabolism of the land.⁴¹

Graham's position that the earth was a human-like body asks what our obligations might be to the soil, as we feed and tend to it. Such a claim reflected the broad awakening to new possibilities in social and ecological relationships embraced by reformers.

Grahamites were alive to the negative outcomes of an unnatural chain of connections between plants, animal diets, and animal feces. Diseased crops, grown on diseased manure, resulted in diseased human bodies. Even worse, cows that fed on diseased crops became diseased meat, which, in turn, sickened the humans who ate them. Humans who fed on diseased animal meat produced diseased waste, which contaminated the land. And so the cycle continued.

These anxieties fit neatly within a larger conversation around animals, hygiene, and disease. Many non-Grahamite farmers believed that human-derived night soils had different qualities than the dung of vegetarian grazing animals precisely because "excrement arising out of animal food [or, meat] is of a more active nature than that which is the produce of vegetable diet." Advocates of this position argued that night soils were consequently more potent

⁴¹Linda Nash and Conevery Valenčius have demonstrated that Americans drew clear connections between environmental conditions and human health long before the late twentieth-century environmental movement. Linda Nash, *Inescapable Ecologies*; Conevery Bolton Valenčius, *The Health of the Country*. My work builds on this scholarship, highlighting new connective threads between bodily experience, environmental knowledge, and social reform discourse. As literary studies scholar Josh Doty writes, "the sense of the continuity between the reform of individuals' bodies and that of the nation inflects practically every health reform discourse of the antebellum period." Josh Doty, *The Perfecting of Nature: Reforming Bodies in Antebellum Literature* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press Books, 2020), 4.

fertilizers: “stronger and hotter.”⁴² Grahamites agreed with this claim but viewed this potency as morally hazardous and unnatural. Similarly, farmers and diet reformers employed the term “fattening” to describe the action of animal fertilizers, though with different implications. Farmers’ metaphor of “fattening” the soil with manure, or “larding the lean earth” with fertilizer, was essential doctrine for agricultural improvers like the Allens.⁴³ Like other agricultural reformers, Grahamites desired to halt the abuse and neglect of farm land but viewed the application of “forcing” manure as contributing to, rather than solving the problem.

Thus, for Grahamites, fattening the land with manure mutually constituted the evil effects of fattening of human and animal bodies. William Alcott, who shared Graham’s critique of conventional agriculture and its subjection to market imperatives, argued that fattened people physically manifested the indolence and gluttony that plagued society, as did fattened land and fattened animals. “Every fashionable process of fattening and even of domesticating animals, induces diseases,” Alcott reasoned. “As most of the animals we use for food are domesticated or fattened, or both, it follows that most of our animal food, whether milk, butter, cheese, eggs, or flesh, is diseased food, and must inevitably, sooner or later, induce disease in those who receive it.”⁴⁴

For physiological reformers, the “disease” produced by food “unnaturally forced by manure” was the result of “improper juices extracted from the exhausted earth” which then encouraged “insects and parasitical plants.”⁴⁵ Such farm products were noticeably less delicious, especially to the discerning palate of a Grahamite.⁴⁶ Diet reformers frequently observed the

⁴² “Night Soil,” *New England Farmer, & Gardener’s Journal*, June 28, 1837. The material properties of manures do, of course, have different effects; omnivore manures, containing a higher nitrogen concentration, will be ‘hotter.’

⁴³ Stoll, *Larding the Lean Earth*.

⁴⁴ William Alcott, *Vegetable Diet Defended*, 11.

⁴⁵ “Diseases Resulting from Bad Cultivation,” *The Graham Journal of Health and Longevity*, November 28, 1837.

⁴⁶ Some Grahamites made practical efforts to obtain agricultural products grown without the use of animal fertilizer. In 1840, H.O. Sheldon and co. described their process of making Graham flour, beginning with the wheat selection.

effects of disease not only on the nutritional quality, but on the *flavor* of vegetables, meat, and by-products like butter, milk, and eggs.

Drawing on Graham's conception of metabolism, the Fruitlands community aspired to restore the land's "pristine fertility" and to do away with the use of cattle in agriculture. Farm animals were responsible for "debauchery of both the earthly soil and the human body."⁴⁷ In practice, the Fruitlanders reluctantly employed the labor of farm animals left behind from previous tenants; this was meant to be a temporary arrangement, but unfortunately the community did not survive their first Massachusetts winter.

Meanwhile, in the fall of 1843, as Fruitlands was beginning to unravel, other communities were gaining momentum. Brook Farm, Northampton, the North American Phalanx, and other Fourierist experiments had Grahamite members and Grahamite tables.⁴⁸ Universal Reformers were even more zealously committed to diet reform. Leaders of this movement, including John Otis Wattles and Orson Murray, were open admirers of Alcott and Lane and Universal Reformers also used Sylvester Graham's prescriptions in the *Science of Human Life* as a guiding framework for life in community.⁴⁹

To many Universal Reformers, unsurprisingly, pure community members required a vegetarian diet, à la Graham. In the context of community, the physiological practices of potential community members were crucial considerations to the success and "health" of the

"We select, as the farmers bring it in, the very best wheat, grown on new land, which has been threshed by a machine or by hand, (not trod out by cattle or horses)." The letter introducing this account to the *Health Journal* advised readers that "wheat raised on land manured from...stables, partakes of the uncleanness and stimuli of the manure used..."⁴⁶ Grahamites in Boston could purchase this Graham flour along with other healthful articles at the American Physiological Society's Provision Store.

⁴⁷ Charles Lane, "The Consociate Family Life" *New-York Tribune*, September 1, 1843.

⁴⁸ John Thomas Codman, *Brook Farm: Historic and Personal Memoirs*. (Boston: Arena Publishing Co, 1894), 119–20; Clark, *Communitarian Moment*, 196; Charles Sears, *The North American Phalanx: an Historical And Descriptive Sketch* (Prescott, Wis.: J.M. Pryse, 1886), 10-11.

⁴⁹ For more on diet reform and Universal Reformers see, Hamm, *God's Government Begun*, 180-184.

community itself. Physical and moral health were entangled for communitarians, both were required for a successful community. A diseased community, like a diseased body, was the result of incoherence with natural laws.

Vegetarian reformers invoked vivid images of their own pure, bodies, alongside disturbing imagery of their worldly, omnivorous counterparts. The Grahamite parallel between bodies and land extended to the insight that bodies were ecosystems in themselves, or at least, extensions of the earth. Samuel Bower wanted reformers to address “the melioration of that little of earth which each carries about with him in his own person.”⁵⁰ The stomach of meat eaters was “a grave for the dead,” “a walking tomb.”⁵¹

Henry Clubb, an original member of Alcott House, emigrated to the United States and established a short-lived vegetarian colony in Kansas in 1855. This community tied vegetarianism to the abolition movement; members were committed to ensuring that Kansas become a free state, following the passage of the Kansas-Nebraska Act.⁵² Clubb and his collaborators envisioned producing vegetarian articles for mass consumption of the “best quality” based on “physiological principles.”⁵³

Communitarian reformers of the physiological persuasion believed “food in its natural state” was best without processing, fermenting, or cooking.⁵⁴ As John Wattles put it, to eat meat was to consume “vegetable once digested;” meat was “one remove further from the original

⁵⁰ Samuel Bower, “New Society,” *Liberator*, October 13, 1843.

⁵¹ Benjamin Dyer, “Braintree Vt, Oct 4, 1845,” *Herald of Freedom*, October 31, 1845.

⁵² See Shprinzen, *Vegetarian Crusade*, 78-90. Clubb was also a participant in a “temperance garden allotment” project in 1850, in which members of the Temperance Society raised physiologically sound crops on soil free from animal waste. “The Cultivation of Land Applied to the Promotion of Temperance, Health, and Industry.” Published as a Supplement to the *Vegetarian Messenger*, No 21, 1851.

⁵³ Miriam Davis Colt, *Went to Kansas: Being a Thrilling Account of an Ill-Fated Expedition to That Fairy Land, and Its Sad Results: Together with a Sketch of the Life of the Author, and How the World Goes with Her*. (Watertown, NY: Printed by L. Ingalls, 1862), 288; *The Illustrated Vegetarian Almanac of 1855*, ed. Henry S. Clubb (New York: Fowler and Wells, 1855), 24.

⁵⁴ Sylvester Graham, *A Treatise on Bread, and Bread-Making*. (Boston: Light & Stearns, 1837), 17.

elements of purity, and one remove nearer putrefaction or decomposition.”⁵⁵ A wide range of thinkers in the reform press in the 1840s expressed the view that communities should not be populated by meat eaters.⁵⁶ As one visitor to a community in Indiana wrote, “here let me say that I do not believe that meat eaters and vegetable eaters can live happily together in community. I think if they want pure bodies for pure minds to dwell in, they must not fill up these bodies with all manner of dead animals.”⁵⁷ An 1843 article in *The Healthian*, which had found a new readership in the United States, returned to the subject of appetites. “We must have a pure appetite before we can joyfully prefer pure food... for by the clean only is the clean desired.”⁵⁸

In January 1846, Benjamin Dyer, Vermont farmer, community enthusiast, and friend of Bronson Alcott, wrote to visionary community builder John Otis Wattles on community: “In forming a community, great care should be taken in selecting the materials... Nothing short of a new birth can fit a man for community and give vision to the blind. Men must be converted from animal cannibalism, and from all the customs of this present world.”⁵⁹ Dyer considered moving to the Skaneateles community, but, after visiting, left with a deep impression of the autocratic leadership of John Collins.⁶⁰

The influences of Grahamite dietary reforms, along with phrenology, dress reform, and the water-cure were particularly strong at the Skaneateles community. Members abstained from animal products, alcohol, and tea.⁶¹ In 1844, Loomis addressed prospective members with the following advice: “He should use a pure diet... He or she should be ready to conform to Physiology in dress, allowing the growth of the body to be proportioned in its parts, instead of

⁵⁵ John Wattles, “Dietetics,” *Herald of Progression*, October 1845.

⁵⁶ E.J., “Dietetic Reform must Accompany Communityism,” *The Practical Christian*, October 30, 1847.

⁵⁷ “Letter from Brother Johnson,” *Herald of Progression*, February 1846.

⁵⁸ “Review,” *The Healthian: A Journal of Physiology, Diet and Regimen*, October 1843, 82.

⁵⁹ Benjamin Dyer, “John O. Wattles,” *Regenerator*, February 9, 1846.

⁶⁰ Benjamin Dyer, “Community,” *Regenerator*, December 14, 1846.

⁶¹ Marena Randall, “Report from Skaneateles,” *Herald of Freedom*, April 19, 1844.

cramping some, and leaving other parts untrammelled—free to the circulation of the blood within, and the air without.”⁶²

Reformers were also concerned about the use of heroic medical treatments. Physiological reformers believed that all human illnesses resulted from inattention to natural law and that changes in diet and lifestyle were the primary means of obtaining health. The American Physiological Society, with William Alcott as President, recommended against the use of medicine in any circumstance, arguing that “all medicine as such, is, in itself considered, an evil.”⁶³ Though cathartics, emetics, blisters, and bleeding may have sought to reduce stimulation, Grahamites viewed these heroic interventions as offering unnatural and superficial solutions. They viewed the use of medicines as simply another link in the socio-ecological cycle of debilitating stimulants. As Charles Lane, English diet reformer, reader of Graham and member of the Fruitlands community, argued in 1843:

The land is scourged for crops to feed the animals whose filthy ordures are used under the erroneous supposition of restoring lost fertility; disease is thus infused into the human body;

⁶²Maria Loomis, *Communitist*, August 21, 1844.

⁶³ *Third Annual Report of the American Physiological Society*, 1839, Massachusetts Historical Society, 29.

stimulants and medicines are resorted to for relief, which end in a precipitation of the original evil to a more disastrous depth.⁶⁴

As Graham and his colleagues pushed for their theories in a cacophonous medical landscape of competing philosophies and practices, physiological and diet reformers' concerns about diseased human, animal, and earthly bodies they both reflected and challenged contemporary ideas about the definition, origins, and treatment of disease. Dissatisfaction with modern medicine, and anxieties about the toxicity of the broader environment led to new enthusiasm for simple, "natural" treatments. As Grahamite diet reform's star began to fade in the early 1840s, hydrotherapy, or "water cure," took its place as the latest trend in physiological or hygienic reform, and was also broadly influential in the communities movement.⁶⁵

⁶⁴ Charles Lane, "The Consociate Family Life" *New-York Tribune*, September 1, 1843. As we are thinking about cycles, disease, manure, and food, it seems relevant to point out a contemporary debate around "natural" diets that centers around similar questions in the distinct context of twenty-first century industrial agriculture. A controversy has emerged in the last decade over the fact that beef cattle are frequently fed a primary diet of "poultry litter" or chicken feces. One of the concerns with this practice is that chickens are themselves occasionally fed a diet of cow parts, and when cows eat chicken feces, they run the risk of ingesting cow material, potentially leading to mad cow disease. Talk about sick cycles. To the Grahamites, the adoption of a vegetable diet resulted in greater sensitivity to the tastes of diseased or morbidly excited creatures, plants and their products. For the commercial beef industry in the twenty-first century, such distinctions have disappeared, and tasting where their food comes from is not a serious possibility for beef consumers. The University of Missouri Extension, while noting that chicken feces are a safe and nutritious diet for cows, recommends not feeding poultry litter to cows "less than 21 days before slaughter" not because of concerns about the taste of the meat for consumers, but because "the residues of certain pharmaceuticals used in poultry production may be present in poultry litter." Thus, stimulating medicines make their way into this modern cycle or stew of bodies, excrement, and food. On the ongoing conversation about mad cow disease and poultry litter, see, for example, Jerry Hirsch, "Ban on Feces in Cattle Feed Urged," *Los Angeles Times*, October 31, 2009, accessed January 1, 2021. <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-2009-oct-31-fi-feed31-story.html>; Aerin Einstein-Curtis, "USDA: Feed not likely disease pathway for US BSE-positive cow," *feednavigator.com*, July 22, 2017, accessed January 1, 2021. <HTTPS://WWW.FEEDNAVIGATOR.COM/ARTICLE/2017/07/22/USDA-FEED-NOT-LIKELY-DISEASE-PATHWAY-FOR-US-BSE-POSITIVE-COW>; Jay Daniel and K.C. Olson, "Feeding Poultry Litter to Beef Cattle," University of Missouri Extension, October 2005, accessed January 1, 2021. <https://extension.missouri.edu/publications/g2077>.

⁶⁵ Susan Cayleff, *Wash and Be Healed: The Water-Cure Movement and Women's Health* (Temple University Press, 2010).

The Water Cure Craze

Many of the same prominent Grahamites advocated the water cure movement; water cure was never separated from diet reform and numerous articles in the *Water Cure Journal* were dedicated to vegetarianism and insights from Sylvester Graham. Vincent Priessnitz, a Prussian self-taught practitioner, popularized the water cure in the early nineteenth century, with his highly successful treatment center, Grafenberg, in Silesia, which opened in 1826.⁶⁶ In the early 1840s, followers of Priessnitz popularized and adapted his treatments in the United States, which included regular bathing, bath treatments, and the application of wet sheets. Henry Gardiner Wright of Alcott House in England helped to popularize this movement among reformers, and first introduced prominent water-cure practitioner Mary Gove Nichols to the treatment.⁶⁷

Water cure practitioners in the United States, like advocates of other physiological reform movements, consciously reexamined assumptions about women's health and physiology and enabled new roles for women in the practice of medicine. Mary Gove Nichols, Thomas Low Nichols, Russell Trall, and others advocated for women's control over sex and reproduction, for example. Some also argued that water cure's 'mild' and 'natural' treatments were well suited to women's natures, or that in the interest of modesty, self-doctoring in domestic settings, or women doctoring other women was an advantage of the water cure system.⁶⁸

In the mid-1840s, a Northampton Community member, African American abolitionist David Ruggles, became one of the best-known water cure practitioners among radical reformers. On the recommendation of the editor of the *Antislavery Standard*, Lydia Maria Child, Ruggles joined the Northampton Community in western Massachusetts in November 1842, six months

⁶⁶ Cayleff, *Wash and Be Healed*, 21-24.

⁶⁷ P S Brown, "Nineteenth-Century American Health Reformers and the Early Nature Cure Movement in Britain.," *Medical History* 32, no. 2 (April 1988): 178.

⁶⁸ Cayleff, *Wash and Be Healed*. 54-57; 66-68.

after the community formed. (The Northampton Community is remembered as one of only integrated communities of this era.⁶⁹) Northampton was founded by William Lloyd Garrison's brother-in-law George Benson and the community was a stronghold of Garrisonian abolitionists. Ruggles soon became an integral member of the community. When a young white couple married themselves outside of the church in July of 1844 (as communitarians of this era loved to do), it was Ruggles who took them aside and let them know that they had breached community values and needed to depart.⁷⁰

Ruggles was born in 1810 near New London Connecticut to parents of African descent with esteemed roles in their community. His father was a skilled blacksmith and his mother, a well-respected cook and caterer.⁷¹ After leaving home, Ruggles traveled as a sailor, and settled in New York City as a grocer.⁷² He soon became involved in reform circles and gained a reputation as an articulate and uncompromising orator on abolition, who was also committed to direct action. He founded the New York Committee of Vigilance in 1835, an organization dedicated to emancipation of enslaved people and standing up to kidnappers and slave catchers in the North.

Ruggles's work as an antislavery activist in New York was effective and dangerous. He helped to directly aid hundreds of formerly enslaved individuals, including Frederick Douglass, and liberated many more. Visible support for antislavery was a dangerous occupation in New York city, and Ruggles was beaten, jailed, and subject to mob violence during his tenure in the city. In the early 1830s, he also became a temperance advocate like so many reformers of his

⁶⁹ Northampton is one of few communities with prominent African American members; several other communities, however, were stops on the underground railroad. A. J. Macdonald Writings on American Utopian Communities. General Collection, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library.

⁷⁰ Dolly Stetson to James Stetson, June 19, 1845, Historic Northampton Museum. The couple, Sydney Southworth and Harriet Hayden, relocated to John Wattle's Prairie Home community in Ohio, which did not survive for long. Both returned to Northampton a year later, very ill. Harriet died at the community in June of 1845.

⁷¹ Graham Russell Gao Hodges, *David Ruggles: A Radical Black Abolitionist and the Underground Railroad in New York City* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 12–14.

⁷² Ruggles also worked as a printer and a bookseller.

day.⁷³ Ruggles reminds us that temperance and abolition were deeply entwined movements.

Temperance advocates referred to alcoholics as *slaves* to their appetites, and abolitionists emphasized the role of alcohol in maintaining the oppression of enslaved individuals.⁷⁴

Ruggles struggled with health issues, like so many nineteenth-century Americans, and like many of his fellow abolitionist and temperance reformers, he found healing in hydrophathy or water cure. At thirty-two, he moved to Northampton to try life in community and to improve his health – he was going blind. Ruggles was an early adopter of the water cure and through correspondence with a German hydrophath based in Boston, Robert Wesselhoeft, he educated himself as a water-cure physician. Before his death in 1849, Ruggles had built a thriving water-cure establishment in Northampton, adjacent to the community, which could accommodate 30 to 40 patients.⁷⁵ William Lloyd Garrison spent several months under Ruggles care and afterward wrote “most heartily do I recommend all those who are broken down in constitution to go to a Water-cure institution, in preference to any other contrivance to find restoration. The practice is simple, yet powerful, and will be the death of all quackery.”⁷⁶

Ruggles experimented with hydrophathic techniques and developed pioneering practices that were controversial in the water cure community. Through his own experiences and medical practice, and through his reading in mesmerism and related sciences of the body, Ruggles developed a unique method of diagnosing disease through touch. He also developed an original theory of how electrical currents in the body signified health or disease. He believed that “the human body in a healthy condition is in a positive electrical state.” He believed he could

⁷³Hodges, *David Ruggles*.

⁷⁴ See, for example, Frederick Douglass, “Temperance and Anti-Slavery: An Address Delivered in Paisley, Scotland on March 30, 1846.” *Renfrewshire Advertiser*, April 11, 1846; John Blassingame, John McKivigan, and Peter Hinks, eds. *The Frederick Douglass Papers: Series One—Speeches, Debates, and Interviews* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979), 205.

⁷⁵ Clark, *Communitarian Moment*, 198.

⁷⁶ William Lloyd Garrison, “Home Again,” *The Liberator*, November 10, 1848.

perceive positive and negative “electrical emanations” from the skin and concluded “that in all cases where the wrist, stomach, or lungs are in the electro-positive state, (however disturbed) there is hope of a cure; but when those parts of the body are in the electronegative state, hydropathy can afford no relief.”⁷⁷ Ruggles’s methods, especially his beliefs about his ability to perceive electrical currents, were debated within the physiological reform community, though many of his contemporaries made similar claims about electricity and its bodily effects, as we will see in the next chapter.⁷⁸

Before his death, Ruggles defended himself against his critics, arguing that his observations related to “electrical emanations” from healthy bodies were “in harmony with natural and physiological laws.”⁷⁹ The skepticism voiced by some had no effect on Ruggles’ business. In addition to Garrison, Wendell Phillips, Mary Ann Brown (wife of radical abolitionist John Brown), and other prominent antislavery colleagues visited his establishment for treatment. While at the Northampton community and as a hydropathic practitioner, Ruggles continued his work for abolition, and increased the reputation of the village of Northampton as a haven on the Underground Railroad.⁸⁰ Sojourner Truth joined the Northampton community a year after David Ruggles. Like Ruggles and so many other reformers, she was a dedicated abolitionist, as well as a practitioner of physiological reform, and a proponent of women’s rights and spiritualism.⁸¹

⁷⁷ “Water-Cure at Northampton,” *Water-cure Journal, & Herald of Reforms*, October 1, 1849.

⁷⁸ Mary Gove Nichols apparently believed Ruggles used “too much and too cold treatment for delicate and cold patients.” She blamed his death on “this ill-judged and unskillful practice.” La Roy Sunderland, an influential spiritualist and Fourierist, was also skeptical of Ruggles’s understanding of electrical currents. Mary Gove Nichols, “Errors in Water-Cure,” *Water-cure Journal, & Herald of Reforms*, July 1, 1850. La Roy Sunderland, “Northampton Water Cure,” *The New England Botanic, Medical and Surgical Journal*, July 1, 1847.

⁷⁹ “Electricity and Hydropathy,” *Liberator*, October 13, 1848.

⁸⁰ Bruce Laurie, *Rebels in Paradise: Sketches of Northampton Abolitionists* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2015), 33-59.

⁸¹ Truth moved to another community following her experiences at Northampton in Battle Creek, Michigan, dedicated to Spiritualist practice. Margaret Washington, *Sojourner Truth’s America*, (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2011).

Like Grahamite boarding houses prior to the communitarian enthusiasm of the 1840s, water cure establishments did much of the same work as more formal intentional communities in facilitating interaction among reformers and creating new spaces for social and physiological education and experimentation.⁸² Though on the surface less radical and transformative than community, the most notorious water cure sites, like those established by Mary Gove and Thomas Low Nichols, never shied away from associating physiology with ideas about women's rights, socialism, free love, and spiritualism.

Much scholarship on health reform movements, including water cure, understandably focuses on the specter of disease in nineteenth-century society. Common treatments for debilitating diseases, including mercury and calomel, often carried their own physical cost.⁸³ Many individuals found their way to reform through their own physical ailments. But just as Spiritualism did more than fill a void when loved ones had died, health movements were (and still are) about a lot more than getting well. Health and disease were bound up with how nineteenth-century Americans perceived the world around them.⁸⁴ Health reformers, more zealously than the rest, through practices of self-examination, produced new reform cultures, new technologies, and new values.⁸⁵ And, significantly, many communitarian reformers who did not suffer from illness adopted these attitudes and tools.

In the reflexive examinations of this moment, physiological reformers also contributed to new understandings of what constituted the body as they connected their daily practices to

⁸² Christopher Clark describes water cure institutes as “new versions of utopian communities.” *The Communitarian Moment*, 200.

⁸³ John Harley Warner, *The Therapeutic Perspective: Medical Practice, Knowledge, and Identity in America, 1820-1885*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2014).

⁸⁴ Valenčius, *The Health of the Country*.

⁸⁵ Catherine Mas, “She Wears the Pants: The Reform Dress as Technology in Nineteenth-Century America,” *Technology and Culture* 58, no. 1 (February, 2017): 35–66.

broader ecologies and social movements.⁸⁶ The connections that Grahamites drew between feeding bodies and feeding the earth demonstrated the ways in which the metaphor of healthy bodies was applied to communities, as shared ecosystems.

As the next chapter explores, during and following the communitarian moment, reformers built upon the sacred, individual revelations of the body to create new spaces of mental, emotional, and spiritual connection between one another. Reformers like Marx Edgeworth Lazarus, Joseph Buchanan, and psychometers like Anna Parsons and Annie Denton Cridge explored the invisible connections *among* bodies and other objects in nature. In so doing, they raised questions about the limits of the physical body in the world, and further embraced connections to non-human animals and plant life. In short, communal and individual practice cultivated new environmental awareness.

⁸⁶ Monique Allewaert, Conevery Valencius, and Joshua Doty have considered how white and African American bodies were isolated or connected to broader landscapes in the nineteenth century. Doty emphasizes the “malleability” and “bioplasticity” of bodies for health reformers and antebellum literary figures like Whitman and Thoreau. Doty, *The Perfecting of Nature*; Monique Allewaert, *Ariel’s Ecology: Plantations, Personhood, and Colonialism in the American Tropics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013); Valencius, *The Health of the Country*.

Chapter Four

Analogical Ecologies

Hast thou marked the embroidery of the stars, the crossing of their aromas, and the mystic words that they write on the earth and in the seas? – concrete words: shell, flower, animal, and character!

– Marx Edgeworth Lazarus, 1852

Prior to the Spiritualist explosion of the 1850s, during the communitarian moment of the 1840s, Antebellum America was awash in vital currents – in moving energies, and “imponderable agents.”¹ Knowledge of the invisible power of electrical currents, and the ill-bringing vapors of miasmatic landscapes, intersected with emergent theories of psychology and interconnection between human minds. This chapter explores the environmental character of mesmerism, psychometry, Fourierism, and the Spiritualist enthusiasm that followed. It tells a fuller story of the physiology of reform, connecting physiological and social reform in the mid-nineteenth century not only to new ideas about human and earthy bodies, but to an expansive view of the vibrant agency of the non-human environment.

In the Spring of 1844, twenty-eight-year-old Marianne Dwight wrote to her friend Anna Parsons that she had met “an interesting and delightful young man” who could read “characters thro’ letters.”² John Orvis, the young man, was visiting Dwight’s community home at Brook Farm. Orvis, at twenty-seven, had recently decamped from the Skaneateles community and was soon to become a member of Brook Farm himself. Orvis turned out to be Marianne Dwight’s future husband; they married in 1846.³

¹ Joseph Rhodes Buchanan, “To the Readers of the Journal of Man,” *Buchanan's Journal of Man*, January 1, 1849.

² Marianne Dwight to Anna Parsons, April 27, 1844, Brook Farm records, 1842-1901, Massachusetts Historical Society.

³ Though they appear in census records as remaining in West Roxbury for the rest of their long lives, Orvis remained an itinerant lecturer for the causes of Fourierism, labor, and Spiritualism.

Parsons would have been interested in Dwight's news, as she was also giving performances of her own psychic abilities at the home of Transcendentalists Anna and James Freeman Clarke in the winter and spring of 1844.⁴ Parsons, like Orvis, was a psychometer, or, an "instrument" for measuring souls. Those gifted with the skill of psychometry would hold letters up to their foreheads to read the character of the letter writer by communicating soul to soul. She was also a committed Fourierist. Friends admired Parsons' skill at divining the character of Ralph Waldo Emerson and Margaret Fuller.⁵

The science of psychometry was born of mesmerism. In the eighteenth century, German medical practitioner Franz Anton Mesmer discovered the healing powers of the invisible fluid of animal magnetism. In the 1830s, traveling mesmerists would magnetize individuals, inducing a state of trance for medical treatment.⁶ In the 1840s, Dr. Joseph Rhodes Buchanan of Kentucky found Mesmer's ideas compatible with the science of Phrenology; he merged the two in his doctrine of Psychometry. Buchanan was a rigorous scientist and in well-documented experiments performed throughout the country, he demonstrated the powers of soul to soul communication.⁷ Psychometers, like spiritual mediums, were usually women, the logic being that women's passivity rendered them more appropriate vessels or channels for spirit messages.⁸

⁴ For more on James Freeman Clarke's enduring interest in mesmerism, see Deborah K. Manson, "Science with a Soul: James Freeman Clarke and the Promise of Mesmerism," *Studies in Religion/Sciences Religieuses* 47, no. 2 (June 1, 2018): 246–62.

⁵ Fuller was Parson's friend; Emerson, an acquaintance. Parsons also read the characters of Aaron Burr, Harriet Martineau, John Keats, and other celebrities. Manson, "Science with a Soul," 257; Mills, *Poe, Fuller, and the Mesmeric Arts*, xii, 3.

⁶ Robert C. Fuller, *Mesmerism and the American Cure of Souls* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1982).

⁷ Psychometry was a branch of the new science pioneered by Buchanan labeled 'Neurology.' These experiments were documented in his own *Journal of Man*.

⁸ Cameron B Strang, "Measuring Souls: Psychometry, Female Instruments, and Subjective Science, 1840–1910," *History of Science*, May 13, 2019, 1-25. Recent feminist readings of mesmerism have written against the narrative that women were merely passive vessels in mesmerism and have focused on the trance experience as a liberating form of labor. Rachel Blumenthal notes that Margaret Fuller viewed the symptoms of nervous disease as opportunities to develop women's skills in "brilliance, clairvoyance, and transcendence." Mesmerism in this reading, was for Fuller, "a method of enhancing and channeling mental illness." Rachel A. Blumenthal, "Margaret

In the United States, the longings of 1844, and the promise in the air, paved the way for a new movement. In three years, Andrew Jackson Davis would publish *The Principles of Nature, Her Divine Revelations*, a work that would guide the new generation of Spiritualists. In four years, the Fox sisters would hear the rappings in their Rochester home that electrified the nation, and showed to those willing to listen that their departed loved ones maintained an earthly presence.⁹ Many of the reformers at the heart of this study -- John Wattles, Maria Loomis, John Allen, Mary Gove Nichols, to name a few -- would soon dive off the cliff of social reform into the welcoming waters of Spiritualism. In the mid-1840s members of the Skaneateles Community were already experimenting with contacting spirits.¹⁰ In 1848, Anna Parsons reported that members of the Religious Union of Associationists (many, former Brook Farmers) were reading and discussing Andrew Jackson Davis's work with great interest.¹¹

Reverend Adin Ballou of Hopedale became a prominent Spiritualist, as did Giles Stebbins and Sojourner Truth of the Northampton community. Horace Greeley and Albert Brisbane embraced spiritualism, as did, according to one scholar, "virtually every Fourierist of note in the country."¹² Warren Chase, the leader of the Ceresco Phalanx, a Fourierist community in Wisconsin, also became a leader in Spiritualist circles.¹³

Fuller's Medical Transcendentalism," *ESQ: A Journal of the American Renaissance* 61, no. 4 (December 5, 2015): 558, 559.

⁹ Adam Crabtree, "Mesmerism and the Psychological Dimension of Mediumship," in Cathy Gutierrez, ed., *Handbook of Spiritualism and Channeling* (Boston: Brill, 2015), 7-31.

¹⁰ Lause, *Free Spirits*, 9.

¹¹ Anna Parsons to James Fisher, December 29, 1848, James T. Fisher Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society.

¹² Lause, *Free Spirits*, 93.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 27.

Fourier's Environmentalism in Translation

This chapter traces the intellectual pathways of a thinker who merged the insights of psychometry with Fourier's social science in a radical environmental vision: the serial communitarian, Marx Edgeworth Lazarus. We have seen how Lazarus applied Fourierist ideas to slavery in the American South in ways that reflected comfort with racial hierarchy and the institution of slavery. Paradoxically, (and hypocritically), alongside his racist views, he cultivated an environmental vision that celebrated uniqueness, freedom, and expression. The warmth of feeling that Lazarus demonstrated as he explored the sensitivities of his fellow men in his rapturous writings on communions of souls and nature, was starkly lacking in his treatment of the souls of African Americans.

Lazarus championed and reworked the complex environmental universe of his intellectual idol, Charles Fourier. Unlike many of his fellow American Fourierists, he read all parts of Fourier's oeuvre, and embraced many of his most outlandish and unlikely ideas. In addition to his insights into cooperative living, Fourier also argued that nature, like humanity, was in a state of poor health and his writings sought to elaborate poorly understood social analogies in non-human nature. They revealed specific predictions of the coming age related to climate and non-human species. These aspects of Fourier's work seized Lazarus's imagination.

Lazarus was a frequent contributor to the Fourierist organ, the *Harbinger*, based at Brook Farm. He also became a core member of the Religious Union of Associationists.¹⁴ This

¹⁴ Lazarus was born Jewish, though his mother converted to Christianity. His ideas about religion in adulthood were complex. The Religious Union of Associationists was informed by the radical Unitarian thought which led Brook Farmers like George Ripley and John Allen to leave their pulpits and seek purer forms of religious connection in community. Though Lazarus was a leader in this group, his commitment to Christianity was certainly never zealous. He wrote, for instance, "When I use the word God in relation to social affairs, I mean precisely that, which is to humanity collectively, or rather, to our planet, of whose life humanity is one phase (as the animal, vegetable and mineral Kingdoms are other phases) what the impelling and controlling principle of our internal organic or visceral life is to us individually. The heart and circulation, the stomach, bowels, and nutrition..." digesting and breathing, this was God. "This visceral consciousness... repairs our waking hours and tends incessantly to the internal harmony

organization was led by William Henry Channing, and formed in the waning months of Brook Farm's activity.¹⁵ Anna Parsons was also an active member of the Religious Union of Associationists. Lazarus, like the practitioners of psychometry at Brook Farm, was a student of the movement of vital energy and currents between bodies, species, and the natural world and in his Fourierist work, *The Human Trinity*, acknowledged Parsons psychometric gifts.¹⁶

When Lazarus is remembered today, it is usually for his spirited defense of free love doctrine, but this legacy ignores the broad planetary vision for social and ecological reform which was an enduring feature of his writing and thinking and which cannot be disentangled from his views on romantic relationships. While a lifelong student of Fourier, phrenology, psychometry, mesmerism, and magnetism also proved inspirational for Lazarus's theories of the invisible sensitivities and patterns of communication between humans and the non-human world, and directly between sensitive human bodies.

Lazarus attempted to articulate the connections between the sciences of magnetism, health reform and Fourierism in a series of works published in the early 1850s. He drew upon Zoroastrianism, Phrenology, St. Simonianism, Swedenborgianism, Fourierism, in his insights into hygiene, which he viewed as the relationship between the self and the eternal world.¹⁷ He developed a rich environmental epistemology in works like *Vegetable Portraits of Character*, and *Passional Hygiene and Natural Medicine: Embracing the Harmonies of Man With his Planet*. Though these texts were never widely read during Lazarus' lifetime (nor since), they reveal his perspective on the mysteries of human physiology and the invisible connections

or health of our organism. It is the God within us." "Abolition of Slavery," *Spirit of the Age*, November 17, 1849. 308—309.

¹⁵ William Henry Channing, nephew of Unitarian theologian William Ellery Channing, was an important spiritual and social justice leader for Brook Farmers.

¹⁶ Marx Edgeworth Lazarus, *The Human Trinity; Or Three Aspects of Life: The Passional, the Intellectual, the Practical Sphere* (New York: Fowlers and Wells, 1851), 12.

¹⁷ Lazarus, *Passional Hygiene*, 12-15.

among strangers, loved ones and enemies, and between humans and non-human animals and plants.

Lazarus, a medical doctor, with degrees from the University of Pennsylvania and New York University, was also a student and practitioner of homeopathic medicine and he combined his Fourierist beliefs with insights from the health community. He embraced the homeopathic doctrine of Samuel Hahnemann (1755-1843), which was gaining popularity in the United States in the 1840s. As a homeopath, he held the theory that “like cures like” and believed in administering tiny doses of medicine. Nineteenth-century homeopaths argued that the smaller the dosage, the more powerful the effect of their drugs – a position widely mocked by skeptics. Lazarus went even further, arguing that *true* medicines, “should in their most perfect preparation lose the visible and tangible qualities of crude matter, and attain like diseases, the aroamal state.”¹⁸

Unlike the violent purging and bloodletting of standard nineteenth-century medical practice, Lazarus believed that medicine, like so many parts of experience, belonged to a plane that transcended sensory perception. He believed ordinary senses could only recognize “the lowest and feeblest order of forces in nature. Every thing beyond mere bulk and weight belong to another field of experience. Steam, the expansive force of heat, light, electricity, galvanism, magnetism, nervous power, morbific and therapeutic agents; and the still higher forms of power such as those of passion or will, of love and intellect, rise beyond all estimation of the sense, except through their results.”¹⁹

¹⁸ Marx Edgeworth Lazarus, *Homoeopathy: A Theoretic Demonstration, with Social Applications* (New York: William Radd, 1851), 14.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

To Lazarus, all the most powerful forces of the world were invisible. In opening up these fields of experience, he articulates the novel environmental vision that reformers in secular intentional communities of the antebellum United States drew upon as they infused their writings on social reform with a new understanding of connection to the natural world. These reformers were concerned with the degradation of human relationships to nature and committed to the redemption of such relationships through progressive social change.

Lazarus vacillated between his commitment to theory or practice at many points in his professional life; he wrote tomes describing his insights into physiology, hygiene, and planetary forces, but would impulsively decide to abandon all writing projects in favor of treating patients.²⁰ Guided by friends like Mary Gove Nichols, he also advocated the water cure, physical exercise, loose clothing, earth baths, and plain vegetarian fare. He recommended immersive experiences in nature to his patients, as well as electrotherapy. Lazarus was fully committed to the position that the disharmony of the modern world was a result of incoherence with natural laws.

His works on homeopathy, hygiene, and free love were all built upon a religious cosmology derived from Fourier's theories merged with the insights of physiological reform doctrine in the 1840s. With these theoretical tools, he sought to uncover novel sites of harmony, analogy, and interconnection between the human body and non-human world. With fellow health reformers, he incorporated Fourier's unrestrained environmental insights and prescriptions with an environmental ethos which engaged more with themes of bodily purity and natural simplicity.

Lazarus specifically merged physiological reform thought popular in antebellum New York with Fourier's concept of "Universal Analogy" – a doctrine of interconnection. According

²⁰ Marx Edgeworth Lazarus to George Mordecai, March 1859. George Mordecai Papers.

to the principle of Universal Analogy, the same divinely ordained *passions* were present in every aspect of human relationship and the natural world. Passions were at the center of Fourier's thought; he believed that exactly twelve inherent passions motivated all individuals and governed experience. Five of these passions were the senses: taste, touch, sight, smell, and sound. Four more were the affective passions of family feeling, romantic love, friendship, and ambition. Three more passions of a higher order governed the distribution of these nine. Though often undesirable or misunderstood in civilization, these last passions – the cabalist, which reflected the urge to gossip, conspire, and create intrigue, the butterfly, which inspires men and women to enjoy diverse interests and to travel from pleasure to pleasure, and the composite, which unites the mundane passions of the senses with the elevated passions of the soul – represented the height of human experience. In his articulation of the composite specifically, Fourier's ideas resonated with reformers like Lazarus who shared an awareness of the connection between spiritual regeneration and corporeal sensations of eating, drinking, bathing, and considered the damaging effects of odors and sounds on the human spirit.²¹ For Fourier and his disciples, universal analogy meant that, “the different kingdoms of nature... form an immense museum of allegorical canvas on which the crimes and the virtues of humanity are painted.”²² Lazarus painstakingly detailed this museum in his works on *Vegetable Portraits of Character*, and *Passional Hygiene*.

When Albert Brisbane initially introduced United States audiences to the ideas of Charles Fourier with his extremely popular *Social Destiny of Man* (1839), he excised the French social thinker's more outlandish environmental and social theories, though he was himself, a true

²¹ Jonathan Beecher, *Charles Fourier: The Visionary and His World* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 226–28.

²² Marx Edgeworth Lazarus, *Comparative Psychology and Universal Analogy, Vol I: Vegetable Portraits of Character* (New York: Fowler and Wells, 1852), 17.

believer.²³ Nonetheless, many nineteenth-century readers of French and more recent scholars of Fourier's texts have long been exposed to Fourier's ideas about copulating planets or the warming seas losing their saltiness and gaining the character of lemonade. Many have marveled and tittered at Fourier's claims that lions and other vicious carnivores would gradually be replaced by "Anti-lions" – cuddly agreeable creatures, though such theories were usually de-emphasized on the lecture circuit and tracts by promoters of Fourierism.

In his 1844 pamphlet, "Popular View of the Doctrine of Fourier," Brook Farm collaborator Parke Godwin included many of Fourier's wildest ideas, with the caveat: "we approach frankly and fearlessly all the questions that Fourier has raised, well-assured that he who understands them will confess— not their truth in all cases— but the magnificence of the intellect and the nobleness of the heart in which they were born."²⁴ Lazarus, in contrast, was among those true disciples who embraced many of Fourier's most controversial claims, including his ideas about natural history and philosophy and his radical doctrine regarding free love.

Lazarus, drawing on Fourier, argued that the expulsion of Adam and Eve from Eden was intimately entangled with nineteenth century disharmony with nature. When humankind fell, "he [drew] the earth back with him into that hell of discords whence we now seek to extricate ourselves."²⁵ A major consequence of this disharmony was that Earth was exiled to "quarantine" and "excluded from communication with the other planets and stars."²⁶

²³ The tendency to divide Fourier's work between practical insights and fanciful riffs has endured in the scholarship on Fourierism in the United States: as one scholar has noted, "because American proponents of social reform took pains to disassociate themselves from the relatively uncensored version of the theory presented by Fourier himself until his death in 1837, this "true" Fourierism has been considered irrelevant to American intellectual history." William Hall Brock, "Phalanx on a Hill: Responses to Fourierism in the Transcendentalist Circle" (Ph.D., Loyola University Chicago, 1995), 27.

²⁴ Parke Godwin, *A Popular View of the Doctrines of Charles Fourier* (New York: J. S. Redfield, 1844), 74.

²⁵ Lazarus, "Cannibalism, cont." March 27, 1847.

²⁶ Lazarus, "Cannibalism, cont." April 17, 1847.

As explained by his British follower and translator Hugh Dougherty, Fourier believed that the planets were simultaneously male and female and were “living beings of a higher order than the men and animals living upon their surface.”²⁷ As a more recent writer cogently explains, Fourier’s planets were “androgynous and bisexual. Fourier’s whole universe is queer.”²⁸ Explorations of intimate relationships between the planets represented a core aspect of Fourier’s environmental philosophy, that, in turn, informed Lazarus’ thinking about correspondences and connections among planets, between humans (especially lovers, parents and children), external nature, and the planets that birthed our world.

Planets communicated with one another through an “ethereal fluid” that Fourier termed aromas, responsible for reproduction between planets.²⁹ Planetary “creative” semen moved from “planet to planet by electro-ethereal currents, as magnetism from one body to another, or as the pollen of plants from one flower to another.”³⁰ Planetary aromas feature prominently in Lazarus’s writings. His attention to their movements and subtle influences demonstrates his sensitivity to the richness of invisible environmental forces. These aromas contributed to healthy and happy bodies and souls.

As he unpacked the passional qualities of plant and animal life, Lazarus sought to trace the presence of planetary aromas and their effects in the natural world and in human interactions. He noted that the complex diffusion of aromas in our midst explained those harmful and salutary airs or miasmas that were ubiquitous in nineteenth-century medical literature, and their diverse

²⁷ Charles Fourier, *The Passions of the Human Soul: Vol 2*, ed and trans. Hugh Dougherty (London: Hippolyte Bailliere, 1851), 253.

²⁸ Mckenzie Wark, *The Spectacle of Disintegration: Situationist Passages out of the Twentieth Century* (Verso Books, 2013), 66.

²⁹ Fourier marked a distinction between the fluid “which serves as semen for the procreation of sidereal bodies” and “that which serves as semen for the creation of animals and vegetables on the surface of each globe.” Fourier, *The Passions of the Human Soul*, 254.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

effects on human health. Yet, according to his logic, it was only through living in disharmony with nature that miasmas were harmful forces; he believed that “even the miasms which destroy some constitutions, are innocent or friendly to others.”³¹

Lazarus believed that the circulation of sensitivities and sympathies invoked by practitioners of mesmerism and psychometry reflected the invisible world of connection created by “aromal currents.” He understood Fourier’s aromas to be related to both Mesmer’s fluid and the “Odic force” described by Charles von Reichenbach in the 1840s. As aromas influenced and were influenced by non-human nature, he believed that great care must be taken in choosing one’s environment and sphere of influence noting that “each of us has many friends and foes among living plants, as well as animals or men and women...much of the harmony of life depends on grouping them around us in obedience to the laws and instincts of organic and passionial affinities.”³²

Most Americans, according to Lazarus, were insensible of the importance of the local aromal conditions of their immediate environment. As he explained, “the totality of influences or aromas from the soil, waters and vegetation of each district, forms the basis of that instinct of home which attaches every one to the place of his birth, by the most subtile [sic] yet powerful associations at once physical and spiritual.”³³ Lazarus, a southern transplant in the north, thus held a romantic attachment to place. He observed that an important source of strength for indigenous communities like the Comanche nation of the Great Plains and southwestern United States was “that they live at HOME.” He noted that in contrast, “‘The Yankee’ ...makes himself every where at home after his fashion.” He was “greedy and destructive, with little sense of

³¹ Lazarus, *Passional Hygiene*, 185.

³² Lazarus, *Passional Hygiene*, 185.

³³ Lazarus, *Passional Hygiene*, 185.

harmony, expelling nature to make room for puritanical hypocrisy and the exploitations of trade.” The consequences of living in such a disordered state, for nature and for men, were dire.³⁴

Lazarus drew upon Joseph Buchanan’s psychometric research in his own explications of aromal currents. Buchanan similarly sought to identify the currents coursing through the human and natural world.³⁵ Electricity, to many reformers, was another term for the invisible fluids that flowed through the world. Buchanan noted that the many “vital influences emitted from the human constitution” were commonly referred to as electricity, but he believed this was inaccurate.³⁶ Buchanan was confident that other forms of “imponderable and invisible agency” apart from electricity “affect the constitution of man, and the development of animal and vegetable life.”³⁷ Buchanan wrote in 1849,

“I believe that I have proved by experiment, that every substance which exists has more or less medicinal effect upon the human constitution – that every plant which grows, every substance which constitutes a part of the soil beneath our feet, everything in the air or ocean, is capable of producing an important effect when applied to the human constitution.”³⁸

He had a rich understanding of other entangled forces operating on human bodies and affecting their health and experience. These forces naturally included diet (and Buchanan acknowledged with Grahamites that “a gross and carnivorous style of living, with a free use of alcoholic stimulants, will degrade and destroy all our moral and intellectual faculties.”) Other forces were medicine, broadly construed, also the gases and chemicals in the atmosphere, and the

³⁴ Homesickness, for example, by Lazarus’ account, was “not infrequently” a fatal disease, and while some people were blessed with the ability to “easily assimilate all aromas,” “the greater part of mankind” if they travel abroad “will always be as aliens and pilgrims on the earth, conscious of something wanting to their life, until they return.” Lazarus, *Passional Hygiene*, 215; 216; 186.

³⁵ For discussions of Buchanan’s influence, see Marx Edgeworth Lazarus, *The Human Trinity; Or Three Aspects of Life: The Passional, the Intellectual, the Practical Sphere* (New York: Fowlers and Wells, 1851).

³⁶ “ART. V.--SYMPATHETIC DIAGNOSIS OF DISEASE,” *Buchanan's Journal of Man*, January 1, 1849.

³⁷ “ART. VIII.--TO THE READERS OF THE JOURNAL OF MAN,” *Buchanan's Journal of Man*. January 1, 1849, 46.

³⁸ “ART. VIII.--TO THE READERS OF THE JOURNAL OF MAN,” *Buchanan's Journal of Man*. January 1, 1849, 45.

“imponderable agents” of light, heat and electricity, colors and “magnetic influences.” Humans were also affected by the shapes of mountains, trees, and clouds. The last crucial force that Buchanan identifies is the fine arts. Colors and music corresponded to one another and had specific psychological effects on the mind.³⁹

Such ideas aligned closely with the vibrant, rich, ebullient worldview of Fourierism and indeed, Buchanan was himself a supporter of the Fourierist cause. At a celebration of Fourier’s birthday led by John Allen in Cincinnati in April 1848, Buchanan gave a well-received speech celebrating Fourier’s vision and the “grand and glowing future” opening up before socialists.⁴⁰ Buchanan was also a member of John Wattle’s circle in Cincinnati, and the Universal Brotherhood.⁴¹

For Lazarus and Buchanan, health was paramount, and harmony with external nature and the world’s athermal currents was a pathway to health. The social world that these men occupied was a motley assortment of communitarians, phrenologists, spiritualists, and other social reformers, but health was an important site of hope and progress for these thinkers. Mary Gove recounted that in the New York City boardinghouse she shared with Lazarus and several other characters in the late 1840s, “not one of us had health. All were waifs and strays from a sick world, seeking to go higher.”⁴² But health for these seekers could not be disaggregated from morality, social harmony, and bright futures.

³⁹ Ibid., 45-47.

⁴⁰ “The Seventh of April in Cincinnati,” *Harbinger*, May 6, 1848.

⁴¹ Lause, *Free Spirits*, 9.

⁴² Gove Nichols, *Mary Lyndon*, 311.

The Lessons of Universal Analogy

Parke Godwin helped to explain Universal Analogy by posing the question to his readers, “Who can not see... marked analogies between the moral qualities of men and animals, and the specific properties of vegetables and minerals? Between vegetables that afford pleasant and wholesome nutriment, the mild races of animals, and the unperverted feelings and thoughts of man?”⁴³

Lazarus shared this lens, and also worked to tease out connections between human qualities and the non-human world. The animals in close relationship to humans expressed particular passions: “the dog, for example, is very clearly a living expression of the passion of Friendship, the horse of ambition.” Moreover, “[distinct] varieties of dogs will type the different species and varieties of Friendship.”⁴⁴

Though he may have believed that the most powerful forces in the world were invisible, sensory experiences also created profound connection with wider ecologies for Lazarus.

It is the enjoyment of the senses which transport us most vividly towards unknown worlds. Incense and music, whether under the vaults of the cathedral or in the breath of flowers, the song of birds and murmur of tree tops in nature’s sanctuaries of the forest and the mountain, are the most powerful agents of religion.⁴⁵

Albert Brisbane also believed the visual impact of “geometrical and colored harmony,” the sound of complex musical harmonies, and rich harmonies of taste and smell would allow humans to achieve the equilibrium with nature that comes naturally to animals in the wild. According to Brisbane, “man is not happy, has not attained his destiny, has not fulfilled his functions on the planet until he creates a complete system of material harmonies.”⁴⁶

⁴³ Godwin, *Popular View of the Doctrine of Fourier*, 108.

⁴⁴ Lazarus, *Passional Hygiene*, 72-73.

⁴⁵ Lazarus, “Society, an Aspiration, or, the Actual and the Possible.” *Harbinger*, January 9, 1847.

⁴⁶ “Functions of Man,” unpublished treatise, 1867, Albert Brisbane Papers, Part A, Folder 3, Illinois History and Lincoln Collections, University of Illinois Champaign Urbana.

Universal Analogy had the power to teach us to love natural creations because they show us “a mirror of our souls, of the play of our passions.”⁴⁷ Lazarus believed that humans should uncover analogies and draw lessons from plants and other creatures; and that they should do all they could to live more directly with nature. Beyond his vivid illustrations of the principle of analogy, he proposed that direct interaction with and immersion in nature was the pathway to harmony. One scholar observed that for Lazarus and his peers “an almost erotic bonding with nature was seen as a prelude to healing.”⁴⁸ It’s true that Lazarus, like Fourier, sought greater intimacy with the natural world in the language of passions, affections, and conjugal harmonies.

For Lazarus, all of this was connected to principles of hygiene; the more harmonized one’s own hygienic practices, the more acutely one could feel the sympathies between individuals and the movement of aromal currents. Cultivating physiological awareness of the world through hygiene – appropriate food, clothing, sleeping, exercise, bathing, sex -- was key to the methodology by which knowledge of nature ought to be gleaned, according to Lazarus, for whom “the nature and properties of animals and plants are revealed to us by observation, experiment, and sympathy.”⁴⁹

Between 1851 and 1852, Marx Edgeworth Lazarus unleashed his intellectual production on the world, publishing, at his own expense, ten volumes on Fourierism, health, nature, and sexuality. One of these works was a treatise on the dangers of “involuntary seminal losses,” often a consequence of self-abuse, self-pollution, or masturbation. Headache, weight loss, abdominal disorders, loss of sight, hearing, smell, and taste were some of the physical consequences of self-pollution. Lazarus himself suffered from what looks to be debilitating depression and anxiety

⁴⁷ Lazarus, *Comparative Analogy*, 18.

⁴⁸ David S. Reynolds, *Walt Whitman’s America: A Cultural Biography* (New York: Vintage, 1996), 273.

⁴⁹ Lazarus, “Cannibalism cont.,” *Harbinger*, April 17, 1847.

(from a modern vantage point) as a result of his own struggles with seminal losses. In 1848, he sought electromagnetic treatment for his condition.

As he wrote in *Involuntary Seminal Losses*, the person with tendencies toward self-pollution and seminal losses, was a fragile, sensitive soul. Lazarus noted that the invisible influences of others could produce a negative, overpowering effect on someone with these conditions. One solution was healthy sexual activity, as defined by Fourier, or sexual relationships guided by passional attraction, rather than the stifling etiquette of nineteenth-century marriage. Another part of the solution was to become better acquainted with natural laws and connections to nature. Citing the example of Robinson Crusoe, Lazarus wrote, “it is not until man is thus abstracted from the leading strings which attach him to society, and from the preponderating influences of habits, formed without reference to his self preservation, that he learns to weigh, to comprehend, and to fulfill those relations in which he individually stands toward sun and earth, air and water, plant and animal.”⁵⁰ Self-pollutors were particularly susceptible to the influences of forces around them, especially magnetic influences of other people. Unable to properly attend to their own needs, Lazarus directed them to “the solitude of nature” while they sought recovery.⁵¹

Food was also of great importance, and another pathway to intimacy with nature, as Lazarus married Fourier’s gastrosophy to contemporary conversations in reform circles about pure diets. Like Graham and so many hygienic and physiological reformers, he was appalled at the consumption of meat and its disastrous effects. He titled a series of articles written for the *Harbinger* in the spring of 1847 “Cannibalism,” a reference to humanity’s tendency to abandon

⁵⁰ Marx Edgeworth Lazarus, *Involuntary Seminal Losses; Their Causes, Effects, and Cure* (New York: Fowler and Wells, 1852), 40.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

“the natural position of a frugivorous creature” in favor of “the state of moral incoherence” expressed “in the habit of killing and eating his humbler fellow creatures.”⁵²

With other antebellum reformers, Lazarus argued that dietary changes, like the practice of agriculture or sex, resulted in greater awareness of ecological relationships and responsibilities to the non-human world. “The more refined and exquisite sensibility of our various organs, developed under the use of a vegetable diet... multiplies and intensifies our relations with nature.” He acknowledged that it could be helpful sometimes to fortify oneself with animal food to deal with the brutality of this world, but, ultimately, when “we are ready to enter a higher life, to organize relations of love and harmony through unity of interests, then we may, nay, we must, cease from our cannibalism, our bloody incoherence with the animal world.”⁵³ In an early meeting of the Religious Union of Associationists, Lazarus introduced the topic of animal rights and eating meat, which enthralled his listeners, among them, Dwight, Orvis, and Parsons.⁵⁴

For Lazarus, plant and animal food both reflected human qualities and influenced them. By consuming “the peach, the pear, the apple and the glass of wine,” he argued, we can “get at their consciousness, or at the passional principle pervading them, through the changes in our own.”⁵⁵ Lazarus noted that in terms of the passions they expressed, fruit “in general correspond

⁵² Lazarus, “Cannibalism,” *Harbinger*, March 6, 1847.

⁵³ Butchers, “who live amid the streams of blood” were, ironically, among the “healthiest” men as they were the “most integrally adapted to the state of incoherence” that characterized society. The butcher’s counterparts – the soldier, or “man butcher,” the merchants and lawyers, were also, to Lazarus, aligned with the “law of force” that governed the mid-nineteenth century. Lazarus, “Cannibalism cont.,” *Harbinger*, August 7, 1847.

⁵⁴ In her lengthy correspondence with Parsons, Dwight described the collective caretaking of community dogs and cats at Brook Farm, noting, “Nothing speaks to me more eloquently of the repose and love spirit that shall prevail in Association, than the social state of animals with us.” Marianne Dwight to Anna Parsons, May 16, 1845, Brook Farm Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society.

⁵⁵ Lazarus, *Passional Hygiene*, 27. The inclusion of a glass of wine is a reminder that Lazarus, unlike many of his fellow reformers, though in many ways an adherent of Grahamite philosophy, was not a temperance advocate. He believed that powerful stimulants like wine and chocolate “[exalt] our organic and spiritual life, concentrating...the power and susceptibility of many hours in a few.” Such experiences should be “reserved for the habitually temperate,” as “any excess or abuse forfeits them.” A glass of “good wine” however, when enjoyed moderately, had the power to “elevate us for a little while to spiritual towers, whence we gain clear and extensive views of the panorama of life, its destinies, and possible conquests. We must, however, descend to the plains and streets again

to the affections.” In contrast, “grains and fibrinous food [correspond] to the intellect and executive faculties.” As grains have disproportionately “predominated in our diet,” “the affections have been starved.”⁵⁶

In the late 1850s, Lazarus lived in Unitary House, a Manhattan community inspired by the theories of individual anarchist Steven Pearl Andrews. This was at least the third communal venture Lazarus participated in during the middle of the nineteenth-century.⁵⁷ Though he craved community in theory, unlike more dedicated communitarians, he never seemed to stay long. Literary critic and poet Edmund Clarence Stedman recounted the summer adventures he shared with Lazarus during the Unitary House years, escaping the city for the country air of Monmouth County New Jersey at the site of the recently disbanded North American Phalanx. The Phalanx had formally dissolved in 1856, yet many former Associationists persisted in the neighborhood, which retained a community character. Stedman paints a vivid image of Lazarus during their summer holidays, as the latter sought the “vitalizing” properties of “torrential rainfall...clad only in undershirt and cotton trousers,” and recounts a memorable occasion, when Lazarus scandalized a group of “children and nurses” by climbing naked into a hole for an “earth-bath.”⁵⁸ Lazarus, like his idol, Charles Fourier, was perceived by his contemporaries sometimes as a genius and often as an oddity.

Lazarus decried the alienating and “barbarous jargon” of the botanist (“tragopodon, mesembryanthemum, tetandria, rhododendron”) and in the introduction to *Vegetable Portraits of Character*, he described the yearning to connect to nature that characterized modern life.⁵⁹

before we can traverse what we have seen, or realize the ideas we have gained.” *Passional Hygiene*, 76.

⁵⁶ Lazarus, *Passional Hygiene*, 31.

⁵⁷ He was also affiliated with Brook Farm in the mid-1840s, a member of Modern Times in the 1850s, and associated with the North American Phalanx and the Free Lovers of Berlin Heights, Ohio.

⁵⁸ Stedman, *Life and Letters: Vol 1*, 180.

⁵⁹ Lazarus, *Comparative Analogy*, 23.

Connecting back to nature aesthetics to socialist politics, like other reformers in this study, Lazarus also explained the ways in which people failed to relate meaningfully to nature, as a result of the pressures of trade and industry. He expressed concern over the treatment of tenant farmers, who were disincentivized from making improvements to their farms for fear that landlords would increase the rent; fruit was therefore picked prematurely and stored and transported inefficiently. Due to their “general ignorance” and the “grossness of their tastes” farmers also cultivated “inferior species...by inferior methods.”⁶⁰

Lazarus and his Fourierist allies not only demanded better treatment of the natural world, they desired a different and better natural world. Though he believed in strengthening connections between working people and the natural world, and that nature was poorly understood in his age, Lazarus also believed, following Fourier, that our diseased and disordered world had produced undesirable creations of nature. With Albert Brisbane and other disciples, he seized upon the many ways in which our “misdirected passions” have resulted in undesirable aspects of external nature.⁶¹ As Brisbane summarizes in *A Concise Exposition on the Doctrine of Association*: “the surface of the Earth is in as miserable a condition as the Race upon it.”⁶²

The habits and values of individuals, as they harmonized or failed to harmonize with the laws of passional attraction, brought into being different natural creations. As Parke Godwin wrote, “A planet badly treated by its administrator [or, humankind], will yield in the act of fecundation only bad germs that will produce monstrosities and hurtful species representing the inharmonious play of the passions.”⁶³

⁶⁰ Lazarus, *Passional Hygiene*, 31-32.

⁶¹ Lazarus, *Passional Hygiene*, 75-77.

⁶² Brisbane elaborated, “Vast deserts and marshes which generate pestilential winds and miasmatic exhalations — the source of the most frightful diseases, such as the plague, the cholera, the yellow fever...and wild forests and plains, inhabited by noxious reptiles, and savage beasts cover at least three-fourths of it.” Brisbane, *A Concise Exposition on the Doctrine of Association* (New York: J.S. Redfield, 1843), 5.

⁶³ Godwin, *Popular View of the Doctrine of Fourier*, 106.

Strict followers of Fourier believed that the most displeasing animals were reflections of the worst human qualities. In his explication of Fourier's thought, Parke Godwin also pointed to analogies "between noxious minerals, noxious plants, noxious animals, and the malignant passions of our distorted souls...Under a subversive system, a man is led into evil by his misdirected passions, and Nature paints the sorry result in some malevolent animal."⁶⁴

With other Fourierists, Lazarus argued that in contrast to the ways we live now, "In Harmony, where universal confidence flows from unity of interests, it will be desirable that the life of the affections and intelligence should be uncalculating, spontaneous, and reciprocal in the highest degree; a continual influx and reflux, a losing of ourselves in all the consciousness of our individual being, to find ourselves again, refreshed and glorified in the being of others."⁶⁵

Lazarus explained that the coming state of harmony would require new relationships with non-human animals, and indeed, new animals, plants, oceans, weather.

"In Harmony new developments of our senses and spiritual powers will create a thousand points of relation with the Animal and the other kingdoms of nature which do not now exist."⁶⁶ Parke Godwin in his explication of Fourier's theories noted that once humanity was better aligned with the passions, "Nature will give again, as an emblem of the happy transformation, some useful animal. Nature, which has shown, even in her malignant creations, infinite grandeur and variety of resource, shall she not be able to show us as great and wonderful a fecundity in her benevolent creations?"⁶⁷ And Albert Brisbane explained that when humans have cultivated their senses to create equilibrium with the natural world, they will form series of cultivated plants, to "form one vast vegetable harmony on the planet" and similarly create

⁶⁴ Godwin, *Popular View of the Doctrine of Fourier*, 108.

⁶⁵ Lazarus, *Passional Hygiene*, 200.

⁶⁶ M.E. Lazarus, "Cannibalism," *Harbinger*, March 27, 1847.

⁶⁷ Godwin, "Popular View of the Doctrine of Fourier," 105.

harmonic series for animals. Ultimately, “All discords such as noxious weeds, and reptiles, beasts of prey, swamps, marshes, deserts, irregular streams, etc will be done away with and a general state of simple order established.”⁶⁸

Free Lovers, Spiritualism, and New Knowledge of Nature

The holistic and expansive environmental awareness that Lazarus demonstrated and called for was also central to the world of nineteenth-century spiritualists. The central tenet of this movement, that the spirits of the dead were everywhere with us, and that those most sympathetic and sensitive could cultivate the ability to communicate with them, was built upon a similar perception of networks of affinities and invisible lines of connection.

For Fourierist social reformers, spiritualism also became a political movement, closely entangled with women’s rights, as well as movements for individual sovereignty and free love. Lazarus’s colleague in physiological reform, Thomas Low Nichols, wrote in 1855, “Spiritualism tends everywhere to socialism. It’s first action is the sundering of old ties, the bursting of old bondages.”⁶⁹

Reformers brought together a multiplicity of causes— land reform, women’s rights, communitarianism, antislavery, phrenology, etc – not only as a means of building a shared culture of progress, but because they perceived links and analogies between reform movements and how they worked to effect change. Phrenology and free love, for example, were connected to

⁶⁸ ⁶⁸ “Functions of Man,” unpublished treatise, 1867, Albert Brisbane Papers, Part A, Folder 3, Illinois History and Lincoln Collections, University of Illinois Champaign Urbana.

⁶⁹ Thomas Low Nichols, “Social Movements,” *Nichols Monthly*, July 1855. Historian Molly McGarry agreed, “in reading the Spiritualist press, as well as the writings and speeches of prominent Spiritualists, what emerges is a picture of a large group of Americans who found impetus in their spiritual life for their political beliefs and who were deeply involved in reforming the world.” Molly McGarry, *Ghosts of Futures Past: Spiritualism and the Cultural Politics of Nineteenth-Century America*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), 4. Historian Mark Lause notes the radical nature of spiritualism as well, as “disembodied voices began speaking in often thunderous tomes through the young, females, people of color, and the working poor.” Lause, *Free Spirits*, 19.

dietetic and other physiological reforms by beliefs about the heritability of disease and sanctity of the body. Land reform, antislavery, women's rights, free love, and of course individual sovereignty all shared a discourse of individual freedom. But there were plenty of points of tension between reformers, as well, and free love was perhaps the most controversial element of this shared discourse for antebellum reformers.

Accusations of free love in communities plagued socialist communities of the nineteenth-century, beginning with Robert Owen's community at New Harmony, Indiana in the 1820s, and touched nearly all the Fourierist and Universal Reform communities of the 1840s.⁷⁰ The religious "Perfectionists" at the Oneida community in Upstate New York, founded by John Humphrey Noyes in the 1840s, were the most prominent communitarians of the era that genuinely practiced open marriage, represent an important movement in the free love conversation. All members of the Oneida community were married to one another and Noyes personally oversaw the union of individual couples for sex and for reproduction. This "closed" religious community followed a different pathway than other communities in this study; for one, it was directed by a single charismatic leader, and had an exclusive, inward-facing orientation; it also persisted for several decades beyond other socialist experiments, ultimately resulting in the Oneida flatware business.⁷¹

The Shakers, committed to celibacy, also flourished at this moment, representing the antithesis of free love. Yet, the leadership of women in the sect – from their founder Mother Ann Lee to numerous other Shaker eldresses, including Catherine Allen (daughter of John Allen and

⁷⁰ Robert Owen was influenced by British thinkers Mary Wollstonecraft and William Godwin and became a vocal champion of marriage reform in the 1820s, as well as a religious free-thinker. New Harmony was plagued with accusations of sexual impropriety, though scholars have found little basis for these rumors. Spurlock, *Free Love*.

⁷¹ Ellen Wayland-Smith, *Oneida: from Free Love Utopia to the Well-Set Table* (New York: Picador, 2016).

Ellen Lazarus, of Brook Farm and Modern Times) – has meant that they also figured in conversations about women’s rights, and their communities offered refuge from the institution of marriage as much as Oneida and other colonies of free lovers did. Unsurprisingly, scholars have contested precisely how liberated women in the Oneida community of collective marriage, the Shaker communities, or Mormon polygamy were in this era.⁷²

In practice, questions of ‘Free love’ in communities has never been disentangled from questions about the institution of marriage and rights of women. Free love enthusiasm was also, in part, the product of tortured reflections of physiological reformers and their sustained attention to the misplaced desires and unmet needs of middle-class Americans and Britons. Sylvester Graham and other temperance activists encouraged people to examine their own bodies and its needs, a dangerous proposition in the 1830s, particularly as these physiological reformers, anxious about the effects of over stimulation and questing for purity, began to address carnal appetites. Graham, William Alcott, and James Pierrepont Greaves all warned in the 1830s and 1840s about the physiological and moral dangers of too much sex (a too-stimulating action not unconnected to the forcing tendencies of modern agriculture). Some reformers, like Abraham Brooke, openly practiced celibacy in the context of their own marriages. Charles Lane and Samuel Bower both temporarily joined the celibate community of Harvard Shakers following their time at Fruitlands.⁷³

Sylvester Graham’s system helped to bridge the divide between understandings of male and female physiology, as he argued that stimulation affected men and women equally. He

⁷² Louis J Kern, *An Ordered Love: Sex Roles and Sexuality in Victorian Utopias : The Shakers, the Mormons, and the Oneida Community* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1981).

⁷³ Lane remained with the Shakers for a year and a half. He also committed his son, William, to the community, and for three years after Lane had left, William remained contractually obligated to remain with the Shakers. Emerson eventually intervened to separate William from the Shakers. Francis, *Fruitlands*, 274-275.

specifically argued that masturbation, the “solitary vice,” was as much of a problem for women and girls, as for boys and men. These were highly touchy issues; Graham’s lectures on women’s physiology led to riots in the streets. As with dress reform -- which critiqued the ways in which bodies were constricted by corsets and petticoats, limiting the natural growth and health of the body – and as with water cure – which provided new social and recreational opportunities for women, as well as self-guided tools for the maintenance of health, anti-masturbation discourse in public lectures, female physiological societies, and female medical colleges created opportunities for women to learn physiological principles and spaces in which to discuss sex and reproduction.⁷⁴ Rebecca Codman of Brook Farm was a founding member of the Ladies Physiological reform society of Boston.⁷⁵ The American Physiological Society, formed in 1837, had 128 male members and 78 female members.⁷⁶

In 1852, Lazarus published *Love vs. Marriage*, a text that caused waves beyond the socialist circles that Lazarus traveled in. In this highly controversial work, Lazarus meditated on the nature of pure sexual relations, free from the strictures of conventional marriage. Lazarus’s text, like other socialist free love works, focused on liberating women from the abuses of marriage and created a vivid distinction between corrupt and divine sexual unions – either of which might occur in the context of legal marriage, though it was usually the former.

The introductory chapter of *Love. Vs. Marriage*, an excerpted translation of eighteenth-century French writer and botanist Bernardin de St. Pierre’s *Harmonies of Nature*, describes reproduction and “conjugal harmonies” in the natural world, and explains that human language developed in concert with the sounds of the natural world. The purpose of including St. Pierre’s

⁷⁴ April R. Haynes, *Riotous Flesh: Women, Physiology, and the Solitary Vice in Nineteenth-Century America* (University of Chicago Press, 2015).

⁷⁵ Codman Butterfield Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society.

⁷⁶ Annual Report of the American Physiological Society, 1837, 7.

wide ranging and lavish descriptions of conjugal harmonies was to illustrate the wide discrepancy between these harmonies and the unhealthy relationships that predominated among white middle class men and women, according to Lazarus' observations. Throughout the rest of this work, Lazarus explores ideal relations between men and women in Fourierist terms.⁷⁷

Lazarus's work was extremely controversial, but he was supported by a few radical reform allies. The popular theorist of Individual Sovereignty, Stephen Pearl Andrews, waded into the debate over Lazarus's *Love vs. Marriage*, defending it in a public debate in the pages of the *New York Tribune*.⁷⁸

Andrews established a new community, Modern Times, founded on Individual Sovereignty, and Josiah Warren's theory of Equitable Commerce, or exchanging goods at cost. This community was populated by numerous former Fourierists in the early 1850s. It was also a center for Spiritualist activity; in fact when Josiah Warren was planning Modern Times, he consulted the spirit of recently departed J.P. Cornell, a member of the Universal Brotherhood, who offered advice on building a strong community. Soon after, Mary and Thomas Nichols arrived at Modern Times, having created a scandal at their previously successful hydropathic institute, with the publication *Esoteric Anthropology*, a work by Thomas Nichols that endorsed free love. The Nichols's brought their theories and their reputations to Modern Times, to the dismay of co-founder Josiah Warren.

Free love, as practiced at Modern Times, was fairly chaste, amounting to informal marriage and divorce, rather than open relationships with a wide variety of partners. The purity

⁷⁷ Lazarus, *Love vs. Marriage* (New York: Fowlers and Wells, 1852).

⁷⁸ This was a three-way debate between Andrews, who defended Lazarus's position on marriage reform, Henry James Sr., who advocated looser divorce laws but also tried to defend the sanctity of marriage and family, and Horace Greeley, editor of the *Tribune*, who argued that marriage was divinely instituted. Stephen Pearl Andrews, Horace Greeley, Henry James, *Love, Marriage, and Divorce, and the Sovereignty of the Individual: A Discussion by Henry James, Horace Greeley, and Stephen Pearl Andrews*. (New York: Stringer & Townsend, 1853).

and chastity of free love was a common refrain for reformers like the Nichols.⁷⁹ While free lovers aligned themselves with progressive movements, including antislavery, purity (particularly the purity of white women), was a theme that inevitably informed even the most radical free lovers.⁸⁰ When Mary Gove and Thomas Low Nichols left *Modern Times* in 1854, the reputation for Free Love in the community endured.

In the early 1850s, John Orvis, formerly of the Skaneateles community and Brook Farm, became closely connected with a group of spiritualists who vocally advocated free love, as a follower of religious mystic John Murray Spear.⁸¹ With Universal Reformers John Collins, Orson Murray, Abraham Brooke, as well as abolitionists Frederick Douglass and Abby Kelley, Spear had been one of the speakers during the Hundred Conventions antislavery tour of 1843. In June of 1848, He opened a “home for reformers” in Boston, where he invited “friends of Temperance, Peace, Purity, Freedom, the Prisoner, etc,” to lodge with him.⁸² Like other reformers in this study, Spear began his career as a Unitarian minister in New Bedford Massachusetts, before finding his way to antislavery, and, in the 1830s and 1840s becoming a Garrisonian abolitionist, lecturer for the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society, prison reformer, and a leader in the Nonresistance movement.

In the early 1850s, Spear became an ardent spiritualist and medium, directly receiving messages from Benjamin Rush and Thomas Jefferson, among others. In 1853, he received

⁷⁹ As Historian John Spurlock wrote, “The sexual hygienists and marriage reformers of the 1830s and 1840s had invested the individual, the married couple, and finally the family with the millennial hopes of the country. These experts had taught that purity, sexual continence and moderation, married love, and healthy offspring would redeem society.” Spurlock, *Free Love*, 129.

⁸⁰ As Historian April Haynes shows, “the doctrine of purity did not merely exclude women of color; it depended on their sexual debasement and effected their continued exploitation.” In *Riotous Flesh*, April Haynes points out that “passionless white femininity” was juxtaposed with “hypersexual black womanhood.” Haynes, *Riotous Flesh*, 21–22.

⁸¹ Orvis was very active in spiritualist circles and in the mid 1850s built a spiritualist home in Boston called “Fountain House,” which published Spear’s revelations.

⁸² *Christian Spiritualist*, October 7, 1854.

samples of a mineral spring with purported healing powers, sent to him for “psychometrical examination.” When he did psychically examine the spring water he was powerfully impressed and decided to establish a community on the site, in Central New York, near the Pennsylvania border.⁸³

Spear and his colleagues embraced modern theories of electrical science to develop a number of mystical technologies. Their most ambitious invention was a machine – a “New Motor”— based on instructions received from the spirit of Benjamin Franklin and others, that was intended to revolutionize industry by providing an infinite supply of energy.⁸⁴ This was part of a broader project among socialist reformers to free laboring men and women, including those who were enslaved, with utopian technologies that would give them greater leisure.⁸⁵ Spear and his followers invested thousands of dollars and countless hours of labor in constructing the machine. They attempted to power it through magnetism (Spear wearing a copper and zinc suit to facilitate a magnetic connection to the machine) and at a late stage, one of Spear’s female disciples gave “birth” to the machine in a community ritual -- purportedly a spiritual and physical process. This machine, was to these reformers, a result of the union between humanity, the spirit world, and the material universe, and was a novel creation of nature. As one disciple wrote, “Unto your Earth a child is born. Its name shall be ELECTRICAL MOTOR...” This motor

⁸³ Emma Hardinge Britten, *Modern American Spiritualism: A Twenty Years' Record of the Communion Between Earth and the World of Spirits* (The author, 1872), 232.

⁸⁴ Joseph Laycock understands this experiment as part of a long history of “Gnostic science” or divinely received “hypothetical technologies” that “offer a special type of knowledge that promises to bridge the gap between the human and the divine.” Joseph Laycock, “God’s Last, Best Gift to Mankind: Gnostic Science and the Eschaton in the Vision of John Murray Spear Le Dernier, Le Meilleur, Cadeau à l’humanité: Science Gnostique et Eschaton Dans La Vision de John Murray Spear,” *Aries* 10, no. 1 (January 1, 2010): 64, 65.

⁸⁵ A famous example, popular among antebellum reformers, was John Adolphus Etzler’s *Paradise within Reach of All Men, without Labour, by Powers of Nature and Machinery; an Address to All Intelligent Men* (Pittsburgh: Etzler and Reinhold, 1833).

had been “electrically, magnetically, chemically, spiritually, and celestially, impregnated. It needs material care, like other newborn babes.”⁸⁶

Like many colleagues writing in the spiritualist press, Spear also received spirit communications pertaining to the reorganization of society. Spear’s followers described the importance of “lessons from nature” in harmony and cooperation, evinced in trees, mint plants, bees, birds, and stars, which offer lessons in cooperation, giving and receiving sustenance, and the harmonies between individuality and society. As they conclude: “the whole matter of a true society lies in a nutshell—the discovery of natural laws.”⁸⁷

Given Spear’s deep roots in reform, many of his former colleagues took his views seriously. Adin Ballou, Henry C. Wright, and Andrew Jackson Davis all promoted his schemes. The famous Hutchinson family of musicians donated their land for Spear to conduct his New Motor. Others, including Bronson Alcott, thought him mad. With his colleagues, Spear also attempted to build a telepathic tower to strengthen magnetic communication, a scheme to “replace telegraphy with telepathy,” as well as constructing several other inventions.⁸⁸

For Spear and other radical reformers, Spiritualism was always progressive, opening up the material world, and worlds beyond. While many in the Spiritualist community were scandalized by the associations between their scientific and spiritual beliefs and movements for free love, others supported the idea that free love could achieve true liberation for women and fulfill a vision of perfection for future generations. Drawing a direct connection between spiritualism and free love, radical reformers like Spear and his followers believed that spirits

⁸⁶ A.E. Newton, ed., *The Educator: Being Suggestions, Theoretical and Practical, Designed to Promote Man-Culture and Integral Reform, with a View to the Ultimate Establishment of a Divine Social State on Earth. Comprised from a Series of Revelments from Organized Associations in the Spirit-Life Through John Murray Spear* (Boston: Office of Practical Spiritualists, 1857), 248.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 109, original italics.

⁸⁸ Buescher, *The Remarkable Life of John Murray Spear*, 107.

could guide the regeneration of the race. For spiritually receptive women, spirits would play an active role in the moment of conception and pregnancy, resulting in more perfect children.⁸⁹

Spears and his followers, like Lazarus and other reformers in the Fourierist tradition, believed that nature was profoundly erotic. They used the language of electricity in sexual terms. According to the reformers at Kiantone, all vegetable life, for instance, was created through negative and positive “invisible lifes, or fluids” which “marry, copulate, transmit, and send forth.” In Fourierist and Lazarus terms, they believed that, “Where these fluids flow most harmoniously together, and copulate most finely, there exist what are called the richest soils.”⁹⁰

The Free Love enthusiasm embraced by Lazarus, the Nichols’, and Spear and his followers, was controversial among other reformers. Many spiritualists did not welcome the association. Emma Hardinge Britten, one of the best-known spiritualists and mediums of the 19th century as well as a historian of the movement, wrote in 1879 that Kiantone sadly gave fuel to the association between free love and spiritualism, “bringing a scandal and reproach on the heads of thousands of innocent persons, who loathed and repudiated the doctrine, and causing thousands of others to shrink back from the investigation of a belief which was so strangely associated with the most repulsive features of communism.”⁹¹ Yet the connections between lovers, between spirits and their loving friends and loved ones, and between humans and the natural world continued to find expression. While Lazarus and Spear were read at the time and since for transgressions of sexual propriety, much of the content of their thought deals with observations of nature and the will to transform it.

⁸⁹ Buescher, *The Remarkable Life of John Murray Spear*, 154.

⁹⁰ Newton, *The Educator*, 360.

⁹¹ Britten, *Modern American Spiritualism*, 234.

In 1863, colleagues in Psychometric research, spiritualism and socialism, William and Elizabeth Denton, published an account of their own experiments, *Nature's Secrets*. William Denton was a lecturer on temperance, antislavery, and spiritualism. He was a friend of John Otis Wattles, and acquainted with Fourierist, Universal Reform, and Swedenborgian reformers.⁹²

Denton pioneered a new technique of knowing nature – not with the intention of changing it, but treating rocks and fossils as colleagues in the project of psychometry. He posed the question, if psychometers could read the character of individuals from a piece of paper, “why could not rocks receive impressions of surrounding objects, with which they had been in immediate contact for years, and why could they not communicate the history of this relationship in a similar manner to sensitive persons?”⁹³ Denton thought it was likely that “fossil remains of animals are imbued with feelings of the animals of which they formed a part, and under their influence, the Psychometer... feels all that was felt by them.”⁹⁴ By touching fossils and minerals to their foreheads, William’s wife Elizabeth and his sister Annie, both psychometers, were able to experience volcanic eruptions and perceive ancient landscapes and prehistoric animals. (Annie Denton Cridge, William’s sister, was an author in her own right and a leader in women’s rights and spiritualist circles.)⁹⁵

Denton, Lazarus, Spear, and Buchanan were connected through Spiritualist and reform circles of the 1840s and 1850s. In September 1857, a socialist convention was organized at the free love colony at Berlin Heights in Ohio at which Annie Denton Cridge and Elizabeth Denton were guest speakers. John Allen was also a speaker at this conference. The purpose of the

⁹² Spurlock, *Free Love*, 144.

⁹³ William Denton and Elizabeth M. F. Denton, *Nature's Secrets: Or, Psychometric Researches* (London: Houlston and Wright, 1863), 81.

⁹⁴ Denton and Denton, *Nature's Secrets*, 94. Spear’s followers, writing in their publication, *The Educator*, similarly note that it is a well established fact “that persons can and do...impart their vital emanations, or magetisms, to inanimate matter, so termed, as to wood, metals and others substances.” Newton, *The Educator*, 243.

⁹⁵ Ann Braude, *Radical Spirits*.

conference was “to plan what in us lies toward maturing a practical and successful effort at Social re-construction.” As Denton understood the world, “you cannot walk into and out of a room without leaving a portion of your influence in that room... You cannot sit upon a chair but the chair receives from you that which can convey to a sensitive person the idea of your presence and your mental peculiarities.” Denton further notes that all the materials and objects circulating through the modern world “arrow-heads made by Indians, tea fingered by Chinese, coffee and cotton by negroes,” all leave impressions on sensitive people.”⁹⁶

In a world connected by global commerce, the Dentons, like Lazarus, Buchanan, Spear and his followers, were alive to the ways in which the smallest, invisible nodes of connections left a trace, and had an impact. Moreover, they were open to exploring what the world looked like, sounded like, felt like from non-human perspectives, and believed the world demanded such a lens.

⁹⁶ Denton and Denton, *Nature's Secrets*, 100. The Dentons believed that spiritual communication between the living and dead might be in many, if not all cases, rather communications for other parts of the world and, presumably, other moments in history.

*Conclusion***Better Natures**

I have for a long time, felt very curious to know what the people of the future will be, and do, and what they will think of some of our strange customs. Sometimes I seem to be visiting their public assemblies, and hear them compare their lightning times to our stupid present – when people are eleven days in getting from one continent to the other –when a great unbroken Atlantic is allowed to cover that large portion of fine country now occupied by the beautiful villas, lovely rivers, lakes and fish ponds of the Atlantis – when people were content to travel over the Earth at forty miles an hour, instead of riding on the lightning. Or scribble on paper to communicate with friends some days distant, instead of speaking to the most distant inhabitants of the earth, as if face to face.

– Maria Loomis, 1847

The reformers in this study occupied an aspirational and liminal space, in which they explored idealized versions of the self, and society, and nature, and believed that daily acts of life could bring those idealized states into being. It is challenging to write about this liminal space in which much was promised but little achieved. A significant literature in the history of intentional communities has been dedicated to analyzing success and failure of communities, almost always assessed through longevity. Of twenty-five Fourierist communities that began in the mid-1840s, only three persisted beyond 1850. None of these survived past 1855, though other communities were launched in the 1850s. Fires, floods, and failed crops destroyed several communities. And when these communities broke up, many of their leaders simply moved on to the next reform trend, turning from radical socialism to water cure to mesmerism. Yet this focus on the gulf between the aspirations and achievements of communities overshadows their many contributions.

In the particular expression of moving toward perfection together that was community-making in the 1840s and 1850s, we can see clearly that nature was woven into the journey

toward perfection, and new relationships to nature were being asked for and created. This environmental consciousness was expressed through ideas about manual labor, ideas about growing and consuming food, ideas about interconnections between bodies in nature, and ideas about better versions of plants and animals to be brought into being with better versions of people. For these reformers, social and environmental and individual progress could not be disentangled.

Reformers in this millennial age believed the depraved state of the natural world was a result of human arrogance and avarice. In the coming social order, this state of nature would be redeemed. Maria Loomis wrote in a letter to people of the future that she worried what they would make of her own times, “When [humans] allowed the earth to lie in vast swamps and deserts, monotonous oceans, frozen hemispheres and burning zones, instead of turning the key and equilibrating the temperature, gases and electricity, as easily as turning the hands on the dial plate.” Future people, in their profound connection to and knowledge of nature would “[make] the atmosphere and temperature just what we wish, at any moment, in any part of the earth—so that one can luxuriate in regions formerly uninhabited or stand on the end of the North Pole with bare feet.”¹ Baked into these ideas was the implication that the natural world ought to reflect the moral health and social condition of the world.

In the slow awakening to climate change and its implications in the twenty-first century, much work has been done in the environmental humanities to think about the consequences of alienation from our environment, and what it means, and what it costs, to fall in love with the world again, or to “love our monsters.”² Environmental thought has always been about

¹ Maria Loomis Varney, “Letters from the Queen City: No. III, To the People of the Future” *The Herald of Truth*, Nov 1, 1847.

² Anne-Lise François, “‘O Happy Living Things’: Frankenfoods and the Bounds of Wordsworthian Natural Piety,” *Diacritics* 33, no. 2 (2003): 42–70. Bruno Latour, “Love Your Monsters” in Shellenberger and Nordhaus, eds. *Love*

envisioning alternatives, and therefore, by its very nature, is utopian.³ This project explores expressions of this utopian impulse. In the 1840s and 1850s, reformers like Loomis and Lazarus married their hopes for an emerging utopia to a rejection of those parts of nature which they recognized as undesirable. They were invested in categories of benevolent and malignant plants and animals (which we have not quite dispensed with) yet were also attached to radically exploding divisions between nature and culture, as they connected to and penetrated the consciousness of pears, for example.

Recovering the perspectives of these reformers requires acknowledging the violence in attempts to categorize and classify humans and non-human animals with respect to their advancement and desirability. But bringing awareness to their perspectives helps us to better understand how activists for social change during the 1840s constructed the “reformer” identity in part around particular practices that emphasized interconnection with the more-than-human environment. Lazarus and his colleagues in physiological reform sought to remind their fellow reformers to be attentive to their own “hygienic relations with the earth, air, water, sunshine—vegetable and animal creatures; social or human relations of sympathy ... in short, all the physical... and passionate relations for which we are formed and for whose functions and uses we exist.”⁴

Following their experiences in community in the 1840s and 1850s, many reformers made more conventional choices; they made money, lived in traditional families, moved west. But at several communities—Modern Times, the North American Phalanx/Raritan Bay, Skaneateles, for

Your Monsters: Postenvironmentalism and the Anthropocene (Breakthrough Institute, 2011); Dolly Jørgensen, Finn Arne Jørgensen, and Sara B. Pritchard, eds. *New Natures: Joining Environmental History with Science and Technology Studies* (Pittsburgh, Pa.: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2013).

³ Ruth Levitas, *Utopia as Method*.

⁴ Lazarus, *Homeopathy*, 11-12.

example—former communitarians remained on the site for the rest of their lives, though they may not have maintained the ideological purity of early days of community. In terms that remain familiar to many who have experimented with shades of radicalism, John Spurlock’s assessment of Modern Times sums up the story for many communities and communitarians: “As time passed...the town’s radicalism became more moderate and discreet, changing the town from a bastion of radicalism into a sleepy village with a shady past.”⁵

Mary Gove and Thomas Low Nichols converted to Catholicism in the late 1850s and moved to Britain for the rest of their lives. A few years after moving to Kansas with Augustus and Sarah Wattles to prevent slavery from taking root in that state, John O. Wattles died in 1859, still full of plans for community. Esther Wattles remained an antislavery and women’s rights activist and a diet reformer.⁶ Several Brook Farmers went on to illustrious careers in journalism, politics, and education.⁷

Bronson Alcott remained a prominent intellectual in New England progressive circles until his death in the 1880s. After a brief sojourn as a Shaker, Charles Lane returned to England. Maria Loomis Varney and Thomas Varney moved to California, where Thomas became an inventor and Maria continued to participate in reform movements until her death in 1888.⁸ Abraham Brooke reaffirmed his commitment to antislavery action, and settled down at the site of a former communal settlement in Ohio, where he died in 1867.⁹

In 1879, after returning to organized religion, joining the California gold rush, becoming a lawyer, and embracing spiritualism, John Collins of the Skaneateles Community, at the age of

⁵ Spurlock, 137.

⁶ Journal of Esther Whinery Wattles, n.d., Wattles Family Papers, 1860-1953, Oberlin College Archives.

⁷ George Ripley, for example, became a critic for the *New York Tribune*, with his old colleague in Fourierism, Horace Greeley; Charles Dana, another Brook Farmer, also joined the Tribune as Managing Editor and served as Assistant Secretary of War during the Civil War.

⁸ Papers of Maria and Thomas Varney, 1849-1878, California Historical Society.

⁹ Hamm, *God’s Government Begun*, 216-218.

68, resumed correspondence with his friend and fellow abolitionist, William Lloyd Garrison. Collins reaffirmed many of the views he expressed in the past. He advocated radical land reform as a means of re-establishing connection to the earth. Writing in the same year as publication of *Progress and Poverty*, Henry George's hugely influential work arguing for a single tax, Collins drew explicit connections between environmental and social justice.¹⁰ He also still expressed wonder at the connections forged through the natural law of cooperation.

Cooperation is a dominating principle of the material and we have a right to infer it is equally so in the spiritual universe. The planetary system is conducted on the cooperation system. The very air we breathe, the water we drink, the food we eat, the clothes we wear, are the products of cooperation. Our government is constructed in harmony then with minerals, animals, and planets, [and] subject to the same universal law. How admirably this principle is illustrated in a human being.

Long after the experiment at Skaneateles, Collins carried with him assumptions about humans in relation to one another, and in relation to natural systems, that were developed, teased out, and worked over in dialogue with other communitarians.

The 1860s saw a number of new communities, and planned communities, that continued to advocate for connection to the earth as the pathway to health, social harmony, and financial success.¹¹ Radicalism, and waves of communalism, new socialist and environmental visions took root in new sites. The environmental contributions of these reformers persist in unlikely ways. Sylvester Graham's ideas about excited soils informed future practitioners of hygienic agriculture. Russell Thatcher Trall, author of vegetarian cookbooks and health manuals and editor of the *Water-Cure Journal*, shared Graham's beliefs about the stimulating powers of

¹⁰ Collins argued that "our slothful, or rather, wasteful system of cultivation of the soil and our destruction of forests is preparing for a future desert." John Collins to William Lloyd Garrison, May 1, 1879, Boston Public Library Anti-Slavery Collection.

¹¹ See, for example, A. B. Child "Plan for a Farming Community," *Banner of Light*, July 27, 1861.

manure, and taught them at his New York Hygieo-Therapeutic College.¹² The desire for pure, whole, clean foods and lifestyles, which communitarian reformers cultivated, has certainly persisted.¹³

These reformers belong to a long lineage of “alternative” or “fringe” environmental and bodily practices and theories, a trajectory that extends to the countercultural twentieth-century environmental movement and the wellness influencers of the twenty-first century. The connections these reformers forged between ‘hygienic’ and ‘natural’ have become both commonplace and invisible. These community members sought and offered new relationships with growing and eating food, performing labor in and communing with nature, that anticipated twentieth century ecology and environmentalist projects of going back to the land.

In a further connective thread, in the twentieth and twenty-first century, Charles Fourier’s writings have inspired artists, activists, and environmental scholars, who do not feel obligated to defend all of his claims yet can draw inspiration from the spirit of his ideas. Fourier serves as a guide for thinking about the collaborative relationships possible across species in agriculture, based in conviviality, mutual pleasure, and “attractive” labor.¹⁴ There is prescience in Fourier’s

¹² Trall’s *Hydropathic Encyclopedia*, subtitled “a guide to families and students and a text-book for physicians” described the pollution of soil by manure in Grahamite terms. *The Hydropathic Encyclopedia: A System of Hydropathy and Hygiene in Eight Parts* (New York: Fowlers and Wells, 1854). In 1863 he acquired a new water-cure establishment, “Hygeian Home,” which he argued would include “a model fruit farm...to show to the world a practical demonstration of the meaning of the phrase—HYGIENIC AGRICULTURE.” Russell Trall, “Opening of Hygeian Home,” *Herald of Health*, July 1863.

¹³ Moreover, the Grahamite notion of hygienic agriculture, while marginal, found a following for well over a century. In the 1920s, the diet reformer and naturopath Herbert M. Shelton recovered Graham’s teachings. Shelton developed a movement for “Natural Hygiene” inspired by Graham’s dietary theories and his insights regarding fattening and stimulating soils. Shelton argued that the use of fertilizer and other inputs constituted a “white flour” diet for our crops. Shelton’s movement persists to this day, institutionalized in the Florida-based National Health Association. Herbert M. Shelton, *The Hygienic System: Vol. II, Orthotrophy* (San Antonio: Dr. Shelton’s Health School, 1935), 283.

¹⁴ Anthropologist Kelly Donati, for example, in recent work on the entangled cross-species relations on a working farmstead, reclaims Fourier’s “convivial imaginary to challenge the instrumentalisation of animal-human relations engendered by capitalist production.” Kelly Donati, “‘Herding Is His Favourite Thing in the World’: Convivial World-Making on a Multispecies Farm,” *Journal of Rural Studies* 66 (February 1, 2019): 120.

vision of climate change, and value in his attention to social technology as a strategy for environmental reparation.¹⁵ While Fourierists and Universal Reformers were of their own unique moment, these thinkers and activists deserve to be recognized as part of the hopeful history of environmental thought and practice.

¹⁵ Goldstein, "Attracting the Earth."

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