

Letter from
José Ortega y Gasset
in response to a letter from
Walter Paepcke
on his envisioning the creation
of the Aspen Institute

Madrid, 26th October 1949



José Ortega y Gasset

Foreword

The attached letter is from prominent Spanish philosopher José Ortega y Gasset who was a principal keynote speaker at the Aspen International Goethe Bicentennial Convocation and Music Festival held in the summer of 1949. He was writing in response to a letter from Walter Paepcke laying out the vision for the Aspen Institute. We hope you will find it an edifying read.

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"It is not important if one of them thinks A and the other B. What matters, in order that their meeting might be worthwhile, is that their opposite opinions A and B be held at the same level."

"The spirit of the New School must be to refuse to do anything whimsically or just for the sake of doing it; it must be to resist everything which 'means to take things out of one's head'. On the contrary, it must consist of one's adhering to reality and, as a good sailor, hauling the wind and knowing how to sail with a side wind, with the goal of extracting its rules and policies by following the inspiration which each reality carries within itself and conveys to us if it is looked at with respect, devotion and enthusiasm."

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Of course, we would be delighted to hear your thoughts. Thank you for all you have done to inform and support the Aspen Institute and its important mission over the years.

Friday, November 9th, 2018
The Aspen Institute New York Board Meeting

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INSTITUTO DE HUMANIDADES

"Aula Nueva"

Serrano 52 - Telef. 254663

Mr. Walter P. Paepcke

Container Corporation of America

Chicago 3, Illinois

Dear Mr. Paepcke:

I was very pleased to receive your letter. Apart from its kind remarks, it made me aware of the courage with which you and your associates are—undertaking in the Aspen mountains a great task with the aim of fulfilling an—important need in American life. This reply will show you, if you have the patience to read it through to the end, the measure of my genuine interest in your work and its many possibilities.

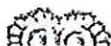
The news that you have something like a university for Aspen in —mind does not make me laugh except in the sense that all joy carries with it a smile. I applaud, unreservedly, the fact that you have appetite for such an idea. The concrete image of what you are attempting is only hinted at in your—brief description. Such words are sufficient, however, to help me envision, in a general sense, the direction your intentions take. Nevertheless, given my —meager knowledge of a number of elementary things which form a part of the U.S. educational world, I cannot picture exactly the various features of your proposal. Therefore, it is not possible for me to express an opinion on the subject. In order to be able to do so, and I shall do so thoroughly and with pleasure, I shall need to ask one of your assistants to take the trouble to answer the following questions:

- 1^a) What number of students do you feel it will be possible and convenient to — gather together there.
- 2^a) What previous studies shall they be expected to have.
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- 4^a) Do you contemplate taking in students only from Colorado and neighboring — states or from all over the country?
- 5^a) You admit the possibility of not granting degrees. If so, what other incentives and purposes do you think may attract students to Aspen?

As I do not like working with vague generalities I need to know — such details in order to formalize my opinion.

While awaiting such data, I shall expound, briefly, what my ideas were when, during my stay at Aspen, I promised to send you a program of what — could be done educationally there in the future. Excuse me for not having done so earlier. Please take into account that I returned from an intensive tour of Germany the middle of September. I had to speak on Goethe in Hamburg and Stuttgart and on more serious matters at the new university in Berlin. I had many—urgent commitments to take care of for Germany; moreover, I had to begin preparations for the second year of my Instituto de Humanidades, which will commence within a few days with a long course of mine under the title "Man and People"— (a thorough study of the social fact, that is, of the more elementary and fundamental facts of the reality, "society"), plus another whole series of courses and seminars in which I need to participate personally.

As I give myself wholeheartedly to whatever I am doing --it is the only way to do things well and be oneself completely— I abandoned myself entirely to Aspen during those two wonderful weeks I spent there; that is, I absorbed that atmosphere to the very marrow of my bones. Thus, many things came to me and caused me to react to them. Hence, one day there appeared to me, suddenly and all together, along with many other subjects, the ideas I shall now succ



*ived in
the moment!*

intly expound.

The word "university" carries with it a nuclear meaning: advanced studies, "Hochschule". But together with that nuclear meaning it implies (everywhere, but I now refer only to the U. S.) many other connotations. When I attempt to transfer the word university to your project in Aspen, such connotations prevent me from doing so. On the contrary, I am able to free my imagination if I set aside the word and keep its nuclear meaning: advanced studies and education. Starting from this point, once we succeed in defining the new under taking precisely, there will perhaps be no objection and it will even be recommendable to use again that term as a name for this most novel institution.

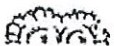
Bearing this in mind, I see in your initiative a magnificent possibility for creating something completely new, much needed in America today and something which may gradually attract, as regards both students and teachers,—some of the best intellectual forces of that country.

On setting aside the term "university" we have freed ourselves from the commitments —frightful for their variety and number— which the term implies, and we can picture a superior school which would be very limited in its instruction but highly concentrated on educational efficiency and with a clear, definite, attractive pedagogical, thus human, style, endowed with great allure for the best American conscience.

It would be as follows:

1. A Superior School of Humanities is established. I understand by Humanities not only the traditional humanities —which are summarized in the study of Greece and Rome— but all those matters which are concerned with the human fact specifically, including —and even primarily— their most current problems.

The reasons which invite us to attempt it are: there is in America an extremely unbalanced state as regards education in favor of naturalistic- (not humanistic), physical, biological and technical education. The idea then-



would be to concentrate on the cultural themes which are insufficiently treated in the American mentality. It should be noted that also in Europe we feel the need of giving more attention, and in new ways, to the problems of the fact -- "Man". Hence, among many other indications, the establishment of my Institute of Humanities.

2. The Superior School of Humanities should not be --at least for the moment-- a research center but an attempt at synthetic science. In my Mission of the University I postulate the urgent need of creating the science of synthesis, that is a type of scientific intellectual work which specializes in creating in all-subjects "synthetic bodies of doctrine" to make possible education in a total-synthesis of human life.

3. A consequence of 1. and 2. is that the new School would offer a quite limited number of disciplines. Physical and biological sciences would be reduced to a single matter. This is not Utopia. If you go to Germany today and inquire -- which intellectual figures are the most outstanding the answer will be: v. Weizsaecker and Jordan. The most recent and typical books of theirs are:

Jordan: Physik im Vordringen

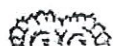
Die Physik und das Geheimnis des organischen Lebens

Weizsaecker: Die Geschichte der Natur

These books are literally that single discipline concentrating all physical and biological subjects.

The other "sensu strictu" humanistic subjects you may see suggested in my Mission of the University. To those mentioned there, which are only the fundamental ones, others should be added to reach a total of some fifteen-- to twenty.

To this curriculum of constitutive subjects should be added brief- and effective minor teachings of an instrumental character to the extent concretely needed by these or the other students. For instance, they should be made-



more familiar with Latin, Greek and some other language, the essential and clear fundamentals of economic science, including economic history, etc. These minor courses could be given as a complement to their work by the same professors who lecture on the major constitutive subjects.

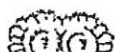
4. The synthetic teaching would be made on the basis of a library with very few but masterly chosen volumes. This scarcity would not have a sense of deprivation, of deficiency, but, on the contrary, a deliberately positive sense; for—the aim would be to teach how to read, that is, to really absorb an important—book, applying also to reading the principles of concentration or condensation and synthesis. The idea is to attempt an education and culture which are pure nerve, without adipose tissue and lymphatic exuberance.

Up to this point I have confined myself to the purely didactic — side. I will now touch upon the actual educational side. In this field, in — fact, it is also possible, desirable and urgent to introduce certain innovations.

The art of living consists in availing oneself of all possible — circumstances, including that which seems to be negative, with the aim of extracting an optimum yield from it. Let us attempt to do so in this case.

The fact that the new school should have to be established in Aspen, far from any large city, in a geographical setting which is exalting for its beauty —what is called "heroische Landschaft" in the history of painting— a milieu which is delightful in summer and hard during the rest of the year, — invites the attempt at an educational style of a character which is not only — new but also necessary as a partial ferment in the life of the country. My idea is as follows:

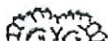
The industrial technique of the United States has flooded the market with wonderful objects. Thanks to them, the comfort of the American existence is extremely high. Nevertheless, I have the impression that the Ameri—



can suffers from an excess of comfort. Is it not arbitrary to say so?. Is it possible to speak of excessive comfort?. Is it not desirable —even more, essential— that human comfort be unlimited, precisely with the aim and end that nothing material or physical be an obstacle and that he is able to devote himself to being a man?. Undoubtedly. How could there exist consequently a unit of measure which allows a definite standard of comfort to be called excessive?.

As I understand the matter, that unit of measure does exist — and appears to us in the principle itself, which makes us desire and promote comfort. I said before that this is desirable and essential so that the human individual, free from material hindrances, can devote himself to being a man; that is to say, allow his inner self to live intensely and give himself fully to thinking, imagining, loving and feeling. Man is "inwardness!" Now we could call a certain amount of comfort excessive as long as it does not produce this effect and man does not give himself to comfort instead of to himself. I think I can be understood if I say that in my opinion the — American handles too many objects. The circle of his personal life is too- much taken up by implements, devices, gadgets. During my trip to the States I had the impression that the American runs the risk of getting lost in objects, of living on an in objects. For it is not a question only of their handling and taking care of them but of worrying excessively about them, de- siring them, getting excited about them, being obsessed with their production and acquisition, sacrificing for their sake too much of oneself, of one's excitement, imagination, attention, energy. If this fear which I mention— had any semblance of truth we would find ourselves faced with a case of excessive comfort against which we had better react.

5. Hence, in my opinion, education in the new Superior School must be cha- racterized by the quality of discomfort. The students shall lead a highly



austere life in every sense; they shall enjoy very few conveniences as long as that discomfort cannot result in a shortage of their working capacity — and joy.

The new School, which will be "attic" on its didactic side, — will be "spartan" on its educational side. Through the new School we shall succeed in making it fashionable in America not to do without objects but—
to be capable of doing without them gladly.

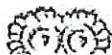
Its spartan character shall not be confined to that which I— have called "austerity" but it shall rather consist of the students being— obliged to develop their power of resistance through physical exercise and of the continuity of certain efforts. A part of the system of school duties shall be a certain forced labor, not of an ornamental nature but useful to— Aspen; opening up roads, building bridges, arranging gardens, constructing— houses and community centers. In Hamburg, where I went from Aspen to speak on Goethe, the air raids destroyed the University. Well, the building where I spoke has been perfectly rebuilt, brick by brick, by the students them— selves!

Therefore, the first educational principle of the school shall be:

A. "Spartanism"

But American life, because of the way the country has been for med, suffers from a deficit of forces that are socially aristocratic. Noti ce that I say socially and not politically aristocratic.

This is the reason why it lacks, that is, it possesses in insu— fficient quantity a quality which is characteristic and essential in every truly strong people, namely elegance. The idea generally had about it is a stupid and superficial one. The fact that it is an ingredient and at the— same time a token of every genuinely energetic life is completely ignored.— The reason why this is so I cannot show in a few words, precisely because— it is a very profound matter; but I would commit myself to giving in Aspen



a course of six lectures under this simple title: Elegance.

I dare predict that, if I do give such a course, you will be—
amazed when you realize that such obvious, evident and humanly important —
things as stated by me had never been mentioned upon the subject.

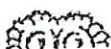
I said that, educationally, the School will promote a "spartan"
style in teaching and fomenting austerity. But Sparta did not consist only
of austerity, and all I have included in that concept: energy, hardness, —
continuity in effort, endurance, etc., but it also implied to every Greek —
this other attribute: elegance. When the Greek thought of intellectual dex-
terity "atticism" was the word that came to mind, but when he wanted to —
think of elegance the word that came to him was "doric". The elegant side
in Hellenic culture was always "doric", which was Sparta.
The second educational principle should therefore be:

B. Elegance

This must penetrate, influence man's entire life, from his ges-
tures and ways of walking, through his way of dressing, through his way of-
using language, of carrying on a conversation, of speaking in public, to —
the most intimate side of moral and intellectual actions. Our manner of re-
acting to what our neighbor does to us may be elegant or inelegant. To ta-
ke possession of the shares of a large industrial company may be accomplish-
ed in an elegant or inelegant way. It is only too notorious that an "ele-
gant" solution may be given even to a mathematical problem —for instance,—
that of proving an important theorem.. Whoever takes the trouble to analyze
which features make a mathematical reasoning elegant will understand, as if
suddenly struck by the lightning of intellection, everything that I have —
hinted at about the vital human virtue called "elegance".

This second principle leads us to a third side of our new School.

I said that the Aspen climate, with its chant and discant of winter and sum-



mer, imposes upon the life led there two different forms which polarize and complement each other in a fortunate annual rhythm. The "ratio paedagogica" must also be extracted from this circumstance. It would be desirable for the students to have their vacation in winter; on the other hand, it would be desirable for them to remain at Aspen in summer.

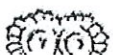
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Subject to the cosmic rhythm, the New School shall have two forms of life: winter life, which lasts practically the whole year, and summer life, which goes from the beginning of July to the end of September. The difference between them must be a drastic one. The winter spartanism, without renouncing its basic norms, must be complemented by that which stands in sharpest opposition to it: Versailles.

Aspen is, and above all can be to a high degree, the most elegant summer resort. . . . "the glass of fashion and the mold of form", as Shakespeare says.

This genuinely elegant world has to be attracted precisely by the Spartan side of Aspen, that is they shall be made to consider it elegant not to count on big luxurious hotels, theaters, etc. On the contrary, during the summer season they will shape their elegance of luxury upon the elegance of austerity. The presence of women of real distinction is an all-important requisite.

To this can be added all that Aspen is and can be completely--



apart from the New School: summer sports in the delightful valleys with a background of snow, "saison de haute musique", etc... Besides this, the School in the summer will add to its normal curriculum a not-very-numerous series of courses and lectures designed to gather there five or six persons of the highest intellectual rank. In order that their living together might be fruitful it is absolutely necessary that their intellectual level be approximately the same. It is not important if one of them thinks A and the other B. What matters, in order that their meeting might be worthwhile, is that their opposite opinions A and B be held at the same level. Conversely, it is not productive if two think A but each of them thinks it at a different level. (Please keep this opinion confidential: the gathering of those persons who signed a letter addressed to Mr. Hutchins would be entirely fruitless because they are of quite different intellectual levels and their talk could only result in gabble.)

The subject matter of such courses, lectures and seminars should be extremely lively, deeply human, and should be of interest to the general public even if they must be treated with all scientific rigor.

Through this coordination of Aspen as a social summer resort on the one hand and the scholarly Aspen on the other, several things can be attained at the same time.

First, the students who have lived out of the "world", that is, out of all "worldliness", for the rest of the year, suddenly feel immersed in it —and in the best world— intellectually and socially.

It is not necessary for the students to have individual and direct contact with those persons who build up their "select world" —select for their "social elegance" or their high intellectual position. It is enough for the students to see them live. This living of such persons —men and women— irradiates their example upon young souls to a sufficient de-

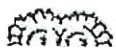
gree even if the personal relationship does not take place. This happened

in Europe fifty years ago: in many places --for instance, at the "fashion - days" at the theaters and at the great scientific and literary ceremonies-- young people had the opportunity to see, merely see such exemplary figures; and that acted upon them without their realizing it, with the character of models to be imitated. The disorganized, vulgarized form of social life in the last few years has caused this possibility to disappear; above all, very young women, girls, have not been able to find the opportunity to receive the formidable, decisive impression that the presence of a model produces. It is convenient for the girls to see such exemplary women from a certain distance, to see them being, moving, showing their good manners.

Secondly: The opposite use is also achieved: "elegant people"-- find themselves, in their turn, immersed in a high intellectual and moral - milieu, stimulating and austere, that is, in a dimension of elegance that-- they are not acquainted with or that they are less aware of." As the "gens du monde" are far more sensitive and sagacious than it is generally believed --Descartes repeatedly and expressly affirmed that he held the opposite -- view-- they will promptly feel charged, as it were, with a new and exquisite electricity, will be interested in the intellectual efforts, and lose -- their horror in part justified toward all "pedagogy".

The idea is, then, to create in the Aspen summer a "world." A "world", however, is not a fortuitous crowd of individuals. That living together must of necessity be influenced by unity. In order to attain such-- unification it is not of little importance to have them attend courses and-- lectures, concerts and festivals --as was the case of the Goethe Bicenten - nial, with its musical counterpart. Such unity will however not crystallize if there is no permanent instrument of community life in Aspen. What do I suggest by this?

You assume in your letter, dear Mr. Paepcke, that I would --



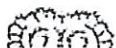
laugh on reciving the news that you and your associates were planning the -
 creation of a university in Aspen. As you see, your assumption has not been
 fulfilled. I consider it highly probable, on the contrary, that you and —
 your associates will certainly laugh on reading the last suggestion of my —
 project, which reads: The most urgent need in Aspen is a place that can —
hold some one thousand people and where these people can move freely, spend
 their time comfortably, have their meals, have tea, have their drinks, in -
 short, see one another all together many times a day. It would be the place
 for their collective existence, of co-existing for practically all the visiu
 tors to Aspen. The premises need not, nor must they have more than a gro-
 und floor, with walls and ceiling of the least costly architecture. I do -
 not think it should be difficult to obtain good restaurant facilities, etc.
 The grounds of the premises must be terraced so that everyone can see each
 other within the enourmous space. I know you will smile, but I have good -
 reason to belive that this humble physical detail is vital to the project -
 which these pages briefly suggest.

The greatest sin of what has for centuries been called "spirit"
 —I detest the word cordially— has been almost always to forget that it —
 cannot exist without the so-called "matter" and of not having the necessary
 humility to count on matter.

Summing up: the idea would be to stablish a Superior School deu
 signed to educate young people, chiefly Americans, in the coscience that —
 they are to be a group of the leading minority who later on will be called-
 to influence all walks of American life.

As I want to give Mr. Hutchins' interesting paper, which you-
 kindly sent, due attention, I shall wait until another letter to comment on
 it.

I got in touch with your nephews on the same day that I reci-



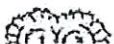
ved your letter in Lisbon mentioning their presence there. They were leaving for England two days later, but I had the pleasure of being able to—invite them to dinner together with a Portuguese friend of mine, one of the most distinguished ladies in Portugal, who is half English and the wife of Major Luis Pina, now the Portuguese military attaché in London. It is not, then, in England —where I have never been— but in Lisbon where I had the pleasure of meeting them.

I send to your daughter Paula and to you all my best congratulations on the occasion of her wedding, and am glad to hear that your other two daughters, most beautiful creatures, are so well.

Whith my regards to them and Mrs. Paepcke.

I am yours sincerely,

José Ortega y Gasset



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"The spirit of the New School must be to refuse to do anything whimsically or just for the sake of doing it; it must be to resist everything which 'means to take things out of one's head'. On the contrary, it must consist of one's adhering to reality and, as a good sailor, hauling the wind and knowing how to sail with a side wind, with the goal of extracting its rules and policies by following the inspiration which each reality carries within itself and conveys to us if it is looked at with respect, devotion and enthusiasm."

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"Aula Nueva"

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Mr. Walter P. Paepcke

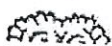
Container Corporation of America

Chicago 3, Illinois

Dear Mr. Paepcke:

I was very pleased to receive your letter. Apart from its kind remarks, it made me aware of the courage with which you and your associates are undertaking in the Aspen mountains a great task with the aim of fulfilling an important need in American life. This reply will show you, if you have the patience to read it through to the end, the measure of my genuine interest in your work and its many possibilities.

The news that you have something like a university for Aspen in mind does not make me laugh except in the sense that all joy carries with it a smile. I applaud, unreservedly, the fact that you have appetite for such an idea. The concrete image of what you are attempting is only hinted at in your brief description. Such words are sufficient, however, to help me envision, in a general sense, the direction your intentions take. Nevertheless, given my meager knowledge of a number of elementary things which form a part of the U.S. educational world, I cannot picture exactly the various features of your proposal. Therefore, it is not possible for me to express an opinion on the subject. In order to be able to do so, and I shall do so thoroughly and with pleasure, I shall need to ask one of your assistants to take the trouble to answer the following questions:



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intly expound.

The word "university" carries with it a nuclear meaning: advanced studies, "Hochschule". But together with that nuclear meaning it implies (everywhere, but I now refer only to the U. S.) many other connotations. When I attempt to transfer the word university to your project in Aspen, such connotations prevent me from doing so. On the contrary, I am able to free my imagination if I set aside the word and keep its nuclear meaning: advanced studies and education. Starting from this point, once we succeed in defining the new under taking precisely, there will perhaps be no objection and it will even be recommendable to use again that term as a name for this most novel institution.

Bearing this in mind, I see in your initiative a magnificent possibility for creating something completely new, much needed in America today and something which may gradually attract, as regards both students and teachers,—some of the best intellectual forces of that country.

On setting aside the term "university" we have freed ourselves from the commitments —frightful for their variety and number— which the term implies, and we can picture a superior school which would be very limited in its instruction but highly concentrated on educational efficiency and with a clear, definite, attractive pedagogical, thus human, style, endowed with great allure for the best American conscience.

It would be as follows:

1. A Superior School of Humanities is established. I understand by Humanities— not only the traditional humanities —which are summarized in the study of Greece and Rome— but all those matters which are concerned with the human fact specifically, including —and even primarily— their most current problems.

The reasons which invite us to attempt it are: there is in America an extremely unbalanced state as regards education in favor of naturalistic— (not humanistic), physical, biological and technical education. The idea then—

would be to concentrate on the cultural themes which are insufficiently treated in the American mentality. It should be noted that also in Europe we feel the need of giving more attention, and in new ways, to the problems of the fact — "Man". Hence, among many other indications, the establishment of my Institute of Humanities.

2. The Superior School of Humanities should not be —at least for the moment— a research center but an attempt at synthetic science. In my Mission of the University I postulate the urgent need of creating the science of synthesis, that is a type of scientific intellectual work which specializes in creating in all-subjects "synthetic bodies of doctrine" to make possible education in a total—synthesis of human life.

3. A consequence of 1. and 2. is that the new School would offer a quite limited number of disciplines. Physical and biological sciences would be reduced to a single matter. This is not Utopia. If you go to Germany today and inquire — which intellectual figures are the most outstanding the answer will be: v. Weizsaecker and Jordan. The most recent and typical books of theirs are:

Jordan: Physik im Vordringen

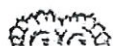
Die Physik und das Geheimnis des organischen Lebens

Weizsaecker: Die Geschichte der Natur

These books are literally that single discipline concentrating all physical and biological subjects.

The other "sensu strictu" humanistic subjects you may see suggested in my Mission of the University. To those mentioned there, which are only the fundamental ones, others should be added to reach a total of some fifteen— to twenty.

To this curriculum of constitutive subjects should be added brief— and effective minor teachings of an instrumental character to the extent concretely needed by these or the other students. For instance, they should be made—



more familiar with Latin, Greek and some other language, the essential and clear fundamentals of economic science, including economic history, etc. These minor courses could be given as a complement to their work by the same professors who lecture on the major constitutive subjects.

4. The synthetic teaching would be made on the basis of a library with very few but masterly chosen volumes. This scarcity would not have a sense of deprivation, of deficiency, but, on the contrary, a deliberately positive sense; for—the aim would be to teach how to read, that is, to really absorb an important—book, applying also to reading the principles of concentration or condensation and synthesis. The idea is to attempt an education and culture which are pure nerve, without adipose tissue and lymphatic exuberance.

Up to this point I have confined myself to the purely didactic — side. I will now touch upon the actual educational side. In this field, in — fact, it is also possible, desirable and urgent to introduce certain innovations.

The art of living consists in availing oneself of all possible — circumstances, including that which seems to be negative, with the aim of extracting an optimum yield from it. Let us attempt to do so in this case.

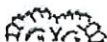
The fact that the new school should have to be established in Aspen, far from any large city, in a geographical setting which is exalting for its beauty —what is called "heroische Landschaft" in the history of painting— a milieu which is delightful in summer and hard during the rest of the year, — invites the attempt at an educational style of a character which is not only — new but also necessary as a partial ferment in the life of the country. My idea is as follows:

The industrial technique of the United States has flooded the market with wonderful objects. Thanks to them, the comfort of the American existence is extremely high. Nevertheless, I have the impression that the Ameri—

can suffers from an excess of comfort. Is it not arbitrary to say so?. Is it possible to speak of excessive comfort?. Is it not desirable —even more, essential— that human comfort be unlimited, precisely with the aim and end that nothing material or physical be an obstacle and that he is able to devote himself to being a man?. Undoubtedly. How could there exist consequently a unit of measure which allows a definite standard of comfort to be called excessive?.

As I understand the matter, that unit of measure does exist — and appears to us in the principle itself, which makes us desire and promote comfort. I said before that this is desirable and essential so that the human individual, free from material hindrances, can devote himself to being a man; that is to say, allow his inner self to live intensely and give himself fully to thinking, imagining, loving and feeling. Man is "inwardness!" Now we could call a certain amount of comfort excessive as long as it does not produce this effect and man does not give himself to comfort instead of to himself. I think I can be understood if I say that in my opinion the —
 X American handles too many objects. The circle of his personal life is too-
much taken up by implements, devices, gadgets. During my trip to the Sta—
 tes I had the impression that the American runs the risk of getting lost in objects, of living on an in objects. For it is not a question only of their handling and taking care of them but of worrying excessively about them, de—
 siring them, getting excited about them, being obsessed with their producti—
 on and acquisition, sacrificing for their sake too much of oneself, of one's excitement, imagination, attention, energy. If this fear which I mention—
 had any semblance of truth we would find ourselves faced with a case of excessive comfort against which we had better react.

5. Hence, in my opinion, education in the new Superior School must be cha—
racterized by the quality of discomfort. The students shall lead a highly



austere life in every sense; they shall enjoy very few conveniences as long as that discomfort cannot result in a shortage of their working capacity — and joy.

The new School, which will be "attic" on its didactic side, — will be "spartan" on its educational side. Through the new School we shall succeed in making it fashionable in America not to do without objects but—
to be capable of doing without them gladly.

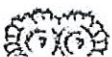
Its spartan character shall not be confined to that which I— have called "austerity" but it shall rather consist of the students being— obliged to develop their power of resistance through physical exercise and of the continuity of certain efforts. A part of the system of school duties shall be a certain forced labor, not of an ornamental nature but useful to— Aspen; opening up roads, building bridges, arranging gardens, constructing— houses and community centers. In Hamburg, where I went from Aspen to speak on Goethe, the air raids destroyed the University. Well, the building where I spoke has been perfectly rebuilt, brick by brick, by the students them selves!

Therefore, the first educational principle of the school shall be:

A. "Spartanism"

But American life, because of the way the country has been for med, suffers from a deficit of forces that are socially aristocratic. Noti ce that I say socially and not politically aristocratic.

This is the reason why it lacks, that is, it possesses in insu fficient quantity a quality which is characteristic and essential in every truly strong people, namely elegance. The idea generally had about it is a stupid and superficial one. The fact that it is an ingredient and at the— same time a token of every genuinely energetic life is completely ignored.— The reason why this is so I cannot show in a few words, precisely because— it is a very profound matter; but I would commit myself to giving in Aspen



a course of six lectures under this simple title: Elegance.

I dare predict that, if I do give such a course, you will be—amazed when you realize that such obvious, evident and humanly important — things as stated by me had never been mentioned upon the subject.

I said that, educationally, the School will promote a "spartan" style in teaching and fomenting austerity. But Sparta did not consist only of austerity, and all I have included in that concept: energy, hardness, — continuity in effort, endurance, etc., but it also implied to every Greek — this other attribute: elegance. When the Greek thought of intellectual dex-
terity "atticism" was the word that came to mind, but when he wanted to — think of elegance the word that came to him was "doric". The elegant side in Hellenic culture was always "doric", which was Sparta.

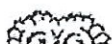
The second educational principle should therefore be:

B. Elegance

This must penetrate, influence man's entire life, from his ges-
tures and ways of walking, through his way of dressing, through his way of-
using language, of carrying on a conversation, of speaking in public, to —
the most intimate side of moral and intellectual actions. Our manner of re-
acting to what our neighbor does to us may be elegant or inelegant. To ta-
ke possession of the shares of a large industrial company may be accomplish-
ed in an elegant or inelegant way. It is only too notorious that an "ele-
gant" solution may be given even to a mathematical problem —for instance,—
that of proving an important theorem. Whoever takes the trouble to analyze
which features make a mathematical reasoning elegant will understand, as if
suddenly struck by the lightning of intellection, everything that I have —
hinted at about the vital human virtue called "elegance".

This second principle leads us to a third side of our new School.

I said that the Aspen climate, with its chant and discant of winter and sum



mer, imposes upon the life led there two different forms which polarize and complement each other in a fortunate annual rhythm. The "ratio paedagogica" must also be extracted from this circumstance. It would be desirable for the students to have their vacation in winter; on the other hand, it would be desirable for them to remain at Aspen in summer.

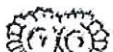
The spirit of the New School must be to refuse to do anything whimsically or just for the sake of doing it; it must be to resist everything which "means to take things out of one's head". On the contrary, it must consist of one's adhering to reality and, as a good sailor, hauling the wind and knowing how to sail with a side wind, with the goal of extracting its rules and policies by following the inspiration which each reality carries within itself and conveys to us if it is looked at with respect, devotion and enthusiasm.

Subject to the cosmic rhythm, the New School shall have two forms of life: winter life, which lasts practically the whole year, and summer life, which goes from the beginning of July to the end of September. The difference between them must be a drastic one. The winter spartanism, without renouncing its basic norms, must be complemented by that which stands in sharpest opposition to it: Versailles.

Aspen is, and above all can be to a high degree, the most elegant summer resort. . . . "the glass of fashion and the mold of form", as Shakespeare says.

This genuinely elegant world has to be attracted precisely by the Spartan side of Aspen, that is they shall be made to consider it elegant not to count on big luxurious hotels, theaters, etc. On the contrary, during the summer season they will shape their elegance of luxury upon the elegance of austerity. The presence of women of real distinction is an all-important requisite.

To this can be added all that Aspen is and can be completely—



apart from the New School: summer sports in the delightful valleys with a background of snow, "saison de haute musique", etc... Besides this, the School in the summer will add to its normal curriculum a not-very-numerous series of courses and lectures designed to gather there five or six persons of the highest intellectual rank. In order that their living together might be fruitful it is absolutely necessary that their intellectual level be approximately the same. It is not important if one of them thinks A and the other B. What matters, in order that their meeting might be worthwhile, is that their opposite opinions A and B be held at the same level. Conversely, it is not productive if two think A but each of them thinks it at a different level. (Please keep this opinion confidential: the gathering of those persons who signed a letter addressed to Mr. Hutchins would be entirely fruitless because they are of quite different intellectual levels and their talk could only result in gabble.)

The subject matter of such courses, lectures and seminars should be extremely lively, deeply human, and should be of interest to the general public even if they must be treated with all scientific rigor.

Through this coordination of Aspen as a social summer resort on the one hand and the scholarly Aspen on the other, several things can be attained at the same time.

First, the students who have lived out of the "world", that is, out of all "worldliness", for the rest of the year, suddenly feel immersed in it —and in the best world— intellectually and socially.

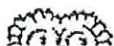
It is not necessary for the students to have individual and direct contact with those persons who build up their "select world" —select for their "social elegance" or their high intellectual position. It is enough for the students to see them live. This living of such persons —men and women— irradiates their example upon young souls to a sufficient degree even if the personal relationship does not take place. This happened

in Europe fifty years ago: in many places --for instance, at the "fashion - days" at the theaters and at the great scientific and literary ceremonies-- young people had the opportunity to see, merely see such exemplary figures; and that acted upon them without their realizing it, with the character of models to be imitated. The disorganized, vulgarized form of social life in the last few years has caused this possibility to disappear; above all, very young women, girls, have not been able to find the opportunity to receive the formidable, decisive impression that the presence of a model produces. It is convenient for the girls to see such exemplary women from a certain distance, to see them being, moving, showing their good manners.

Secondly: The opposite use is also achieved: "elegant people"-- find themselves, in their turn, immersed in a high intellectual and moral - milieu, stimulating and austere, that is, in a dimension of elegance that-- they are not acquainted with or that they are less aware of." As the "gens du monde" are far more sensitive and sagacious than it is generally believed --Descartes repeatedly and expressly affirmed that he held the opposite -- view-- they will promptly feel charged, as it were, with a new and exquisite electricity, will be interested in the intellectual efforts, and lose -- their horror in part justified toward all "pedagogy".

The idea is, then, to create in the Aspen summer a "world". A "world", however, is not a fortuitous crowd of individuals. That living together must of necessity be influenced by unity. In order to attain such-- unification it is not of little importance to have them attend courses and-- lectures, concerts and festivals --as was the case of the Goethe Bicenten-- nial, with its musical counterpart. Such unity will however not crystallize if there is no permanent instrument of community life in Aspen. What do I suggest by this?

You assume in your letter, dear Mr. Paepcke, that I would --



laugh on receiving the news that you and your associates were planning the -
 creation of a university in Aspen. As you see, your assumption has not been
 fulfilled. I consider it highly probable, on the contrary, that you and --
 your associates will certainly laugh on reading the last suggestion of my -
 project, which reads: The most urgent need in Aspen is a place that can --
hold some one thousand people and where these people can move freely, spend
 their time comfortably, have their meals, have tea, have their drinks, in -
 short, see one another all together many times a day. It would be the place
 for their collective existence, of co-existing for practically all the visiu
 tors to Aspen. The premises need not, nor must they have more than a gro-
 und floor, with walls and ceiling of the least costly architecture. I do -
 not think it should be difficult to obtain good restaurant facilities, etc.
 The grounds of the premises must be terraced so that everyone can see each
 other within the enormous space. I know you will smile, but I have good -
 reason to believe that this humble physical detail is vital to the project -
 which these pages briefly suggest.

The greatest sin of what has for centuries been called "spirit"
 —I detest the word cordially— has been almost always to forget that it —
 cannot exist without the so-called "matter" and of not having the necessary
 humility to count on matter.

Summing up: the idea would be to establish a Superior School deu
 signed to educate young people, chiefly Americans, in the conscience that —
 they are to be a group of the leading minority who later on will be called-
 to influence all walks of American life.

As I want to give Mr. Hutchins' interesting paper, which you-
 kindly sent, due attention, I shall wait until another letter to comment on
 it.

I got in touch with your nephews on the same day that I reci-

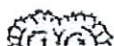
ved your letter in Lisbon mentioning their presence there. They were leaving for England two days later, but I had the pleasure of being able to—invite them to dinner together with a Portuguese friend of mine, one of the most distinguished ladies in Portugal, who is half English and the wife of Major Luis Pina, now the Portuguese military attaché in London. It is not, then, in England —where I have never been— but in Lisbon where I had the pleasure of meeting them.

I send to your daughter Paula and to you all my best congratulations on the occasion of her wedding, and am glad to hear that your other two daughters, most beautiful creatures, are so well.

Whith my regards to them and Mrs. Paepcke.

I am yours sincerely,

José Ortega y Gasset





THE ASPEN INSTITUTE