
Fuller's Reproductive Originality

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Abstract

My focus in this talk is on the interrelation between Fuller's pedagogical process and her ideas on artistic creativity. Fuller's teaching methods-both her Socratic secondary school instruction and the series of Conversations that she held in Boston-depend centrally on the framework of the conversation and what she calls "knowledge reproduction." In this presentation, I discuss Margaret Fuller's literary philosophy of creativity as it is reflected through the journals of students at the Greene School, a progressive co-educational school in Providence, Rhode Island where Fuller taught from 1837 to 1839. A close look at the school journals of one of her 16-year old students, Mary Ware Allen, shows that the reproductive mode of education and writing is a central focus of Fuller's pedagogy. These journals are not just a literal record of the practice of copying-their function in broad strokes is to paraphrase Fuller's lessons and to record passages from texts that the students have read-but they also function as a place to reflect critically on that copying. This self-reflection was crucial to Fuller and can help to explicate terms such as originality, reproduction, and creation in her literary canon. Ultimately, I argue, Fuller's teaching encourages students to reproduce forms and lessons in order to gain sense of their own personal voice and the limitations of the copy.

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