

Another World Is Possible: Schooling, Multitude & Community Of Philosophical Inquiry With Children

Since 911, world events have taken a dramatic, accelerating turn, implicit in which is the possibility, not just of a general global state of war – including nuclear and chemical war – for the foreseeable future, but an increasing loss of hard-won civil liberties for citizens around the world, including Western nation-states; the increasing displacement and marginalization of millions of refugees; the degradation and gradual disappearance of political democracy and just distribution of economic and social benefits in the hands of states dedicated to exploitation and control in the service of global corporate elites, leading to an increasing disparity between the rich and the poor; and failure of will in the face of the consequences of environmental degradation and global warming.

Faced with a situation of near-apocalyptic planetary human violence and degradation, and mindful that any crisis represents opportunity as well as danger, many are struggling to reconstruct their thinking in search of alternative paradigms that might contribute to the emergence of a truly democratic global society, and that will afford us with strategies – however local and provisional – for countering the forces of economic exploitation, universal surveillance, and dystopic social control. In US education in particular, the issue is deepened and accentuated by the appropriation of the curriculum – and, by implication, pedagogy – of the public school system by the goals of the global corporate economy and its corresponding politics of both neoconservatism *and* neoliberalism in the name of “standards” and “accountability.” The take-over of the national educational system is announced and propagated in the name of social and economic equality, but its net effect is to produce a form of social subjectivity so hampered by instrumentalism, knowledge conformism, and the discouragement of personal and collective inquiry, that it is in fact doubly vulnerable to the hegemonic practices of the control society.

This situation is of particular concern to those working in the field of teacher preparation, for many of whom it represents, not just a challenge to professional integrity, but an undermining of whatever it is in universal education that offers the promise of the emergence of actual, authentic democracy, both at the social and the political levels. This particular arrest and imprisonment of the progressive vision – which has labored since the rise of dialogical, student-centered

education in the early 19th century to disengage the practice of education from the purposes of the state and the elites that control it and to place it in the interests of individual and collective self-actualization, creativity and democratic forms of life – obliges us to think again the connection between education and state and economy, issues of diversity and multiple forms of literacy, of rational and humanistic educational standards, and of the broad reconstruction of universal compulsory education such that it can resist colonization by state and market. How might education, rather than acting as an agent of reproduction, assume the role envisioned for it by the premier US philosopher of education of the 20th century John Dewey, who held it up as the institution in a democracy particularly suited to the ongoing reconstruction of social, political and economic life?

The opportunities signaled by the crisis I have just sketched are multiple and ambiguous. For the purposes of this paper, I want to frame them in three intersecting contexts: a philosophy of childhood, a philosophy of schooling, and the practice of philosophical inquiry with children. My basic assumption is that the latter – as a *praxis* – opens the adult imagination to another philosophy of childhood, which leads to another philosophy of schooling, which in turn offers possibilities for understanding children as key players in emancipatory practice in the current global crisis.

The attempt to imagine the school as one significant site for social transformation is – at least in the context of the history of the public schooling in the modern state – painfully counterintuitive. On the other hand, it is arguable that the liberatory potential of the school has been a part of mainstream educational theory from at least the advent of progressive education in the early 1900's. It can be traced at least to the post-Renaissance educational prophet Comenius (1592-1670) with his notion of “pansophism”, and was an element in the founding social and cultural moment of Enlightenment in the late eighteenth century – represented for us now most vividly by Rousseau's *Emile* – and the Romantic movement of the first half of the nineteenth in the founder of the Kindergarten Friedrich Froebel (1782 – 1852) and William Godwin (1756-1836). Godwin was the first we know of to clearly articulate – in 1797, on the eve of the century in which state-controlled, universal compulsory schooling was installed and regularized as the “official” form of schooling throughout the West – a critique of mass schooling that is still completely relevant

today. And a century later, Jose Ferrer, martyred by the Spanish government in 1909, developed the counterposition, from an Anarchist perspective, to education in the service of control¹.

1. Adult-Child Dialogue

The element of adult-child dialogue – latent in Romantic, Anarchist and Progressive visions – was first suggested to mainstream theory in the educational theory and practice of Dewey in *The Child and the Curriculum* and *My Pedagogic Creed*² then articulated clearly in the work of Paulo Freire³. The very possibility of adult-child dialogue implies another philosophy of childhood – a philosophy which emerged as a social *habitus* in what deMause called the “empathic mode” of the adult child relation⁴. Dewey and Freire were, of course only the ones fortunate enough to have their ideas widely publicized. Many Progressives were operating according to the educational principle of dialogue with children both in theory and in practice, including Maria Montessori, Caroline Pratt Patty Smith Hill and A.S. Neil.

Philosophy for children, or community of philosophical inquiry (CPI) with children – understood in the context of Matthew Lipman’s implicit philosophy of childhood⁵ in combination with Dewey’s⁶ ideas about the relation between the epistemology of childhood and the epistemology of the school disciplines and Freire’s⁷ epistemology of dialogue – provides us with the theoretical materials with which to reconceive schooling as a liberatory practice, not just on the political, but on the ontological and the epistemological levels. In fact the latter is necessary for the emergence of the former. As a form of cultural production, liberatory practice both anticipates and produces an emergent form of subjectivity, and thus has ontological status. The epochal moment in which we find ourselves as a global society is in fact characterized by the universal *subjection* – in the Foucaultian double-sense of the term, implying the formation of a modal subjectivity which is normalized on the grid of the purposes of the capitalist state and economy – of citizens and workers on a planetary basis.¹ This process of subjection is embodied

¹ Blechman, 1975.

² Dworkin, 1959.

³ Freire 1993.

⁴ see Kennedy 2006.

⁵ see Kennedy 1993.

⁶ see Dewey 1902/1959.

⁷ see Freire 1993.

and intensified, in the U.S. anyway, by the centralized imposition of an educational system, initiated by the neoconservative hegemony, that exemplifies the basic elements of what Foucault⁸ called “discipline” – that is normalization, hierarchization, and the primacy of the examination. Liberatory practice as a dialectical response to the current situation implies, in the domain of education, a praxis that acts to deconstruct this form of control, and thereby allow for the emergence of another form of subjectivity. In fact, as is characteristic of the dialectic, that form of control is already threatened with deconstruction through the very mechanism that establishes its hegemony. In order to understand this dialectical possibility in its current form, we must have at least a brief account of the contemporary phenomenon of what Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri have characterized as “multitude”.

2. Multitude

In their sequel to the widely read treatise on the emergent form of the “new world order” called *Empire* (2000) Michael Hardt’s and Antonio Negri’s *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire* (2004) argues that the conditions of collective existence in our post-modern global society no longer justify our being characterized as “the people”, but rather as “multitude”. In Hobbe’s original drawing of the distinction between the two terms, “multitude” represented the aggressive anarchic element of the collective that must give its constituent power over to the absolute power of a sovereign – a Leviathan – in order to become a “people”, and thereby avoid the war of the all against all. Hardt and Negri argue that Hobbes’ is a patriarchal misrepresentation of human possibility, and that multitude in fact represents freedom, individuality, social creativity and self-rule, “a whole of singularities”, the collective before it submits itself to the legalized violence of the state. Following Spinoza rather than Hobbes, Negri claims that

. . . the *multitudo* indicates a *plurality which persists as such in the public scene*, in collective action, in the handling of communal affairs, without converging into a One, without evaporating within a centripetal form of motion. Multitude is the form of social

⁸ see Foucault 1983.

and political existence for the many, seen as being many: a permanent form, not an episodic or interstitial form. For Spinoza, the *multitudo* is the architrave of civil liberties.⁹

Empire – which Hardt and Negri characterize as “the new form of global sovereignty ... [that] includes as its primary elements, or nodes, the dominant nation-states along with supranational institutions, major capitalist corporations, and other powers”¹⁰, is a form of “late capitalist society” on a planetary scale that is “dedicated to the exploitation of everyone.” As a form of power, it implies total sovereignty – what Foucault first referred to as “biopower,” which Hardt and Negri describe as “a form of rule aimed not only at controlling the population but producing and reproducing all forms of social life”¹¹ – accomplished through war, trade, control of information through the media, the neutralization of authentic democracy through the corruption that is essential to empire, and through the permanent invocation of a “state of exception”¹².

The dialectical element referred to above is represented in the fact that empire becomes vulnerable to resistance and refusal through the very means – the increasing perfection of communications technology – by which it asserts its ever more inclusive control. Multitude as a form of collective subjectivity is possible now according to Hardt and Negri, because the characteristic form of labor in late capitalism has changed from “industrial” to “immaterial” – that is, increasingly centered on knowledge, information, affective relations, cooperation and communication. They characterize it as “‘biopolitical labor’, or labor that creates not only material goods but also relationships and ultimately social life itself. The term *biopolitical* thus indicates that the traditional distinctions between the economic, the political, the social, and the cultural become increasingly blurred.”¹³

The emergent *socius* that is suggested by this new form of labor in which the distinction between the economic and the political tends to disappear, makes possible forms of collaboration, and multiple forms of resistance to the hegemony of biopower. Empire is inimical to the form of power of multitude, which is biopolitical production, understood as “immanent to society and

⁹ Negri 2002, p. 21.

¹⁰ Hardt / Negri 2004, xii.

¹¹ Ebd., p. 13.

¹² Agamben 2005.

¹³ Hardt / Negri 2004, p. 109.

[which] creates social relationships through collaborative forms of labor”¹⁴ Multitude is "an internally different, multiple social subject whose constitution and action is based not on identity or unity (or, much less, indifference) but on what it has in common. [...] The multitude is the only social subject capable of realizing democracy, that is, the rule of everyone by everyone."¹⁵

The latter is referred to, after Spinoza, as “absolute democracy”, a form of democracy based, not on the people’s abdication of their rights to a sovereign in order to protect themselves from a feared anarchy, but on the recognition of singularity and difference, through which a “common” is created through “encounter”, “communication”, “concatenation”, “hybridization”, and “miscegenation” – that is, through constant process of meeting and affiliating and mixing and grouping across traditional boundaries. This “queer” form of democracy resists war and totalitarianism in any form, and is in a continual process of the reinvention of the political forms of democracy.

The multitude constantly creates new social being, and thus a new human nature – new forms of subjectivity. Hardt and Negri understand the common as an emerging ontological condition, the social “body” that the social “flesh” of the multitude is forever producing. And although the multitude is still held in thrall and exploitation by the purposes of Empire and global corporate capitalism, the very technological, economic and social development that this exploitation stimulates and demands makes possible the dialectical emergence of what they call “revolutionary agency”. But it is, they emphasize, an agency of “exodus” – of refusal, of the constant emergence of small singularities, not the massive revolution in which one state is replaced by another, but a piecemeal “withering” of the state in the emergence of a global citizenship, the possibility of affiliations across boundaries, of subversive action that, vastly outnumbered as it is by the ever increasing forces of repression, captures the planetary imagination through the increasing savagery of the repressive apparatus used against it, and as such presents the possibility of another world. Multitude utilizes the power of decentered, transnational, rhizomatic forms of organization in the obstinate refusal of biopower, in a war

¹⁴ Ebd., p. 94.

¹⁵ Ebd., p. 100.

against war. “The project of the multitude, then, becomes not one of forming instrumental class based oppositional blocs, but awaking the revolutionary agency that is dormant in all of us.”¹⁶

The emergence of multitude – of the power of the singular, the plural, the communicative, the affiliated rather than the “unified” – was announced over a century ago, not just by the philosophical anarchism that was one flower of the powerful socialist impulse of 19th century Europe – but in as mainstream a political thinker as Dewey, in a series of lectures given in Japan at the end of the First World War, and published as *Reconstruction in Philosophy*, There he asked “whether the national state, once it is firmly established and no longer struggling against strong foes, is not just an instrumentality for promoting and protecting other and more voluntary forms of association, rather than a supreme end in itself”.¹⁷ Dewey uses the word “state” to represent “the conspicuous culmination of the great movement of social integration and consolidation taking place in the last few centuries, tremendously accelerated by the concentrating and combining forces of steam and electricity”¹⁸ [to which we may now add “oil” and fibreoptics]. It is not difficult to apply “state” so defined to Hardt and Negri’s definition of “empire” as a “ruling structure of production and communication.” Read through Hardt and Negri’s lense, Dewey’s dialectical insight is that the triumph of empire eventually gives birth to the very social impulses and sensibilities that will dismantle it, in spite of its best efforts to repress them.

3. Multitude and Schooling

Is there any necessary relation between “multitude” and schooling? Can childhood be said to inhabit a psychosocial space before ritualization under the binding word of the Father, which is the sign of “the people” and the “sovereign”? Do schools – understood more generically as adult-child collectives, or spaces where childhood and adulthood meet and speak with each other – have the potential for becoming socially transformative spaces, spaces that encourage the form of subjectivity we call multitude? If we take history as our guide, the answer is a clear negative. Looked at from the point of view of a possible future – most specifically the refusal of war and

¹⁶ Hardt / Negri 2004, p. 347.

¹⁷ Dewey 1920, pp. 202-203.

¹⁸ Dewey 1920, p. 202.

the collective resolve to take action to reverse the global disaster promised by climate change – the school *could* represent one of those institutions that Dewey referred to as in some way repositioned in a way that is beyond the control of, or at least struggles to place itself beyond the control of, the state.¹⁹ To take up his argument in *Reconstruction in Philosophy* again, what he noticed and encouraged in his view of the emergence of social democracy were two tendencies. First, as he put it,

. . . a movement toward multiplying all kinds and varieties of associations: Political parties, industrial corporations, scientific and artistic organizations, trade unions, churches, schools, clubs and societies without number, for the cultivation of every conceivable interest that men have in common. As they develop in number and importance, the state tends to become more and more a regulator and adjuster among them; defining the limits of their actions, preventing and settling conflicts.”²⁰

Second, Dewey noticed at the end of World War I a tendency towards what is now known as “globalism”, expressed in the slow resolution of the “opposition between the claim of independent sovereignty in behalf of the territorial national state and the growth of international and what have well been called trans-national interests.”²¹ This tendency connects with the first, in that the voluntary associations which form the heart of a social democracy “do not coincide with political boundaries.” It could be argued that he is referring to the moving forces of multitude – that is, the growing insistence on the recognition of the ontological desire for both independence and collaboration, for social and personal creativity, for the recognition of difference, and for the refusal of war and exploitation.

If we assume the latter, then Dewey’s evocation of the school as “embryonic society” takes on more than a merely sociological significance. In this vision, the school becomes one locus for social transformation, and necessarily – because it is an adult-child collective – transformation in the context of the interaction between children and adults. This lends a new dignity to the possibilities of childhood. It recognizes that childlike ways of knowing and acting are not simply

¹⁹ Dewey 1920.

²⁰ Dewey 1920, p. 203.

²¹ Dewey 1920, p 204.

to be replaced with adult ones through education, but are expected to inform them as well. That childhood in fact is a marker for the possibility of the species is emphasized throughout Dewey's *Human Nature and Conduct*, and expressed in the concept of neoteny – the persistence in the species of the “childlike” characteristics of the species as a whole, and the capacity to reproduce before attaining maturity. The physical marks of neoteny in the human species, among which are a relatively hairless body, a flattened face, short jaw, and bulbous forehead compared to other adult primates, are referred to as paedomorphism. Paedomorphism also indicates the unfinishedness of the species, and its capacity for self transformation through the child-reading and educational process. The school understood as a paedomorphic rather than an adultomorphic institution is, on this account, the matrix for cultural adaptation, novelty, and those characteristic that Hardt and Negri associate with multitude – “concatenation”, “encounter”, “communication”, and “hybridization”.

Multitude is not just an ontological category, but necessarily an epistemological one – a way of knowing – and school is the chief epistemological site of any culture. School is the space of interchange where not just knowledge but how knowledge is acquired is communicated to the next generation, and it is the psychological space where the modal relationship between work and play in a given culture is constructed, the latter being a fundamental attitude toward the relationship between creativity and necessity, reason and desire. Finally, school is the place where a general attitude towards authority is formed, and by implication, towards power and responsibility. It is where I learn what I am authorized or encouraged to do or say vis a vis the collective, and what I am not; what my sphere of political action is, i.e. my possible role in the governance of my own group life, the life of my classroom and of my school; who is “in charge” of what and whom, and what or who legitimates that status. It is where the relationship between the individual and the collective is defined for me – where habits and dispositions of social/collective action are formed, and where attitudes of political hope or fatalism are reproduced. The classroom is after all a proto-political entity – a community of individuals capable of deliberation, judgment, decision and action.

Given that the school is the epistemological control center of the culture – the site where epistemology is enacted in a characteristic form and style of curriculum, pedagogy and

assessment –the task of constructing multitude there, although it is arduous, lengthy and fraught with political difficulties, is at its base simple. Multitude is a form of knowledge as much as a form of being, or of action and reaction: a way of applying categories to the world, an implicit way of determining what is relevant and what is not, an attitude to “truth” and therefore also an attitude to “right and wrong”. The source of empire’s power over its subjects lies in its ability to impose, through both force and seduction, a unified way of knowing the world. Empire is a source of stable meanings as well as a set of taboos (“step outside of this knowledge-circle, and there is danger”) – a set of “truths” about the world, and an implicit set of ethical constructs that follow from them. The ethical constructs are about what we are responsible for and what we are not – in particular, which responsibilities are to be delegated to “those in authority”, and which are the task of *our* little collective. As such, it determines the possibility of collective action – or action in the interest of the collective – on the most practical level.

4. Schooling and Philosophy

The epistemology of empire is reproduced in school in two particular spheres: first, in what is studied and how it is taught; and second, in how the adult-child collective is governed. Everything else flows from that – including the “hidden curriculum”, which is in fact a reification of a way of knowing the world. We feel obliged to train children to form lines when walking down the hallway, for example, because we “know” that the Hobbesian multitude – that “state of nature” which shuns authority and seeks only its own selfish goals, which falls so easily into a chaos of impulse and antagonisms, that “human nature” so clearly exemplified by the behavior of children – will never be anything but a threat to civilization without the imposition of order.

The reconstructive task of the school is “simple”, then, because what is needed on its most basic level is to alter the learning paradigm, which is a concrete, practical, day-to-day affair. It has to do first off with *what* is studied – the curriculum – and how that study is approached, which necessarily results in a shift in the way adults involve themselves in that study – which is the pedagogical paradigm – which eventually results in a shift in the epistemological framework. The order of causation between these three dimensions of experience is in fact not sequential but circular, for it is a particular epistemological framework that determines what is studied and how.

The educational shift in question is, broadly speaking, from transmission to inquiry. An inquiry-based learning paradigm is different from the transmissional in several key aspects. For one, implicit in the notion of inquiry as a psychological phenomenon is that it is intrinsically initiated. In the context of the school, this implies dialogue and an emergent curriculum, for it requires that adults take into consideration the interests of children in determining what is to be studied. An emergent curriculum is the ever-on-going outcome of a dialogue between the child's natural inquiry into the world and the world as understood through the disciplines or content areas. Dewey formulated this insight partially in *The Child and the Curriculum*, published in 1901.

Curriculum as an outcome of dialogue between what Dewey alternately called the "impulse" or the "instincts" of the child and the "habits" of the particular content area in fact touches on the second key sphere mentioned above – governance, or the construction of power in the classroom. The dialogue between the two shifts the balance of power such that curriculum is not imposed by adults, but negotiated. This power shift in the determination of *what* is studied and how – whether through collaborative projects, independent research, individually programmed learning, and even transmission as one form of pedagogy among many – is crucial to the organization and expression of power in the school as a whole, to issues of collective order, discipline for infractions of that order, and on an even broader level, to the organization of time and space, and by extension, to issues of authority and governance among adults.

Inquiry in any discipline is a whole educational experience as opposed to a partial one – a three-dimensional as opposed to a two. Authentic inquiry is about the personal construction of subject and world through the interaction between the two. This is its third dimension. In this sense, inquiry is always oriented toward the deep structure of its object – which is *how* one knows the object, and is therefore necessarily a reflective activity in the sense of always asking, "How do I know what I know?" The question "how do I know?" immediately evokes issues of certainty, which in turn place us in the realm of belief. The deep structure of the academic disciplines is in fact located in a set of beliefs that on their deepest level are philosophical – that is, beliefs about truth, certainty, causation, nature and culture, identity, logic (i.e. what can be included or excluded in any account) and so on. These concepts are preeminently philosophical in that, as Splitter and Sharp have pointed out, they are "common" to all members of the species, "central"

in their importance, and “contestable”, that is, ultimately structures of belief. As such, they are in a continual process of reconstruction; in fact they are reconstructed through experience itself, but it is philosophical inquiry in particular that focuses that reconstruction – that makes it conscious and reflective. This is because philosophical inquiry has a *deconstructive* dimension; it takes concepts apart, tests them through thought experiments and application to contexts in which they are not usually found. It *doubts*, but for the purposes of reconstruction, of understanding the concept more deeply, of holding one’s beliefs more intelligently.

To reaffirm the old designation of philosophy as queen of the sciences may not be appropriate for the sciences, for which philosophy is so often perceived as, if not a residual organ, then a handmaiden – clarifying concepts, definitions and assumptions. But in education, and especially childhood education, philosophy represents the original meaning of philosophy as a universal, primal impulse toward investigation – not in the interests of some finite empirical solution, but to consider how the world works, to formulate its meaning whole. Philosophy promises a form of cognitive mastery removed from any specific practical interest – as Aristotle says, a form of contemplation, of “beholding” (*theorein*, “to see or behold”, from which we have the word “theory” -- the world, a way both of engaging and remaining open toward the world. And we can appropriately identify communal philosophical conversation with children, facilitated by a philosophically sensitive and dialogically skilled adult, as the “queen” *and* the “handmaiden” of the curriculum. As a regular practice in school, it offers a group discourse-setting, democratic in nature, that encourages inquirers, as a community, to question, in the context of their own lives and experiences, the common, central and contestable concepts that form the epistemological understructure of the curriculum. For example, as a preparation for historical inquiry, we question what we mean when we call something a “fact”. How is a historical fact different from a scientific fact? Can two contradictory facts exist? Is any given fact the same for any two or more people? From here it is an easy step to the issue of what are the agreed-upon criteria for a historical fact, at which point one has entered the discipline of history proper.

Thus defined and practiced, community of philosophical inquiry represents the most fundamental and generic activity of the curriculum – the ground floor of any discipline, the discursive location where the transition between common sense and “scientific” or reconstructed concepts is

negotiated. What distinguishes CPI is that this transition is made collaboratively, through dialogue, in everyday language, and through thought experiments within everyone's range, in a cognitive context of distributive thinking, and thus within a spontaneous, peer-mediated zone of proximal development. And equally important, it creates a discursive space for the practices, skills and dispositions of social democracy and a new collective subjectivity through constructing and maintaining a deliberative form that facilitates ethical inquiry and practical decision-making within and outside the school. And it is in this space in schools – the space of free deliberation leading to the possibility of collective action, which is to say in a space of collaborative agency, or power – that the role of the school in the emergence of multitude is clarified. For in fact it places children in the active realm of biopolitical production, or what Hardt and Negri call the “constant creation of a new social being”.

To imagine the role of childhood – and more specifically, schooling – in this process of biopolitical production means to reimagine childhood, which is in fact the task of a philosophy of childhood. Philosophy of childhood is dedicated to thinking childhood in multiple, changing ways: as a historically and culturally marked form of subjectivity, socially constructed and maintained; as an alternative epistemology to the adult's; as a set of capacities and a unique form of potentiality, as a form of temporality, and a particular relation between habit and impulse that – in dialogue with the adult's relation between habit and impulse – has the capacity to transform habit. As Dewey describes it, “it must be through utilizing released impulse as an agent of steady reorganization of custom and institutions”²² that institutions, which are “embodied habits”²³, change, and that “habits be formed which are more intelligent, more sensitively percipient, more informed with foresight, more aware of what they are about, more direct and sincere, more flexibly responsive than those now current”.²⁴

Of course “child” is a nonsensical term apart from the term “adult.” Children are, like anyone else, co-producers of social being, whether at home or at school. Any philosophy of childhood, then, implies a philosophy of adulthood as well, or a philosophy of the subject. And as

²² Dewey 1922/1988, p. 72.

²³ Ebd., p. 77.

²⁴ Ebd., p. 90.

coproducers of new forms of social being in schools, children and adults share a distinctive project.

4. Childhood and Multitude

The distinctive project now, today, in this emergent critical moment in planetary history, is in fact the production of the form of subjectivity of multitude, specifically a form of subjectivity that is able to resist the subjection of empire. Multitude is on one crucial level about refusal, about saying no to the everyday abuses of power, to the pervasive psychological manipulation by corporations and politicians, to the dramatic forms of economic exploitation sanctioned and upheld by the state, to the contempt for the voice of the people in matters of state, to the automatism of communication, to the repression of difference, the crass manipulation by the corporate media, to the pervasiveness of denial and double-speak. Multitude recognizes that, in the grip of empire – a soft, even comfortable grip if one is privileged, an increasingly harsh grip if one is marginalized or excluded -we are, as Giorgio Agamben (1995) argues, all refugees, the exploited, whether privileged or not. Multitude is then necessarily oriented to the sublation of nationalistic identities in the emergence of a sense of global citizenship, a planetary identity that is based on both cultural and personal singularity as well as an insistence on human rights and shared democratic ideals, and which seeks a “common” based neither on totalization nor exclusion.

If it is no longer a question of taking up a gun, because the guns are too many and too large, and too much in the hands of empire or its polarized foes – who, if they “win,” will simply create a worse empire. When it becomes useless to even consider taking up guns, then adults and children are equalized as cultural producers. As Negri (2002) says of multitude,

it is not a question of ‘seizing power’, of constructing a new State or a new monopoly of political decision making; rather, it has to do with defending plural experiences, forms of non-representative democracy, of non-governmental usages and customs. [...] the contemporary multitude is fundamentally based upon the presumption of a One which is more, not less, universal than the State: public intellect, language, ‘common places’.²⁵

²⁵ Negri 2002.

If the “revolution” consists in the production of social subjectivity rather than just another form of subjection, then a child’s work and an adult’s work in biopolitical production are related. More specifically, children’s capacity to understand the three major issues that confront the planet today – the general global state of war or “ontological warfare”, the global environmental crisis, the radical impoverishment of one half of the world’s population and the radical homelessness through geographical displacement of millions more – is equal or in ways superior to that of adults. The extremity of these three situations – universal war, radical impoverishment and displacement and environmental crisis – places them in an ethical category in which the only realistic response is what in a situation of lesser gravity might be called an “idealistic” one.

Children, if allowed and encouraged to do so through a community that encourages it, are arguably more capable of collaborative communicative action based on ideals than adults, if only because they have not yet – in most cases anyway – fully recognized the power and ubiquity of evil. Thus, children as a group have the possibility of becoming political actors on the current world stage, and the locus for that political action is, both logically and psychologically, the school, which is the adult-child collective in which social and cultural ideas are both reproduced and – in a system of truly democratic schooling – reconstructed.

To argue for the encouragement of children’s voices in the realm of biopolitics implies that those voices can travel – as is still possible (although threatened by increasing state interference) in the new world order – across national and cultural boundaries, and that, because it represents a form of subjectivity not so deeply inscribed by nationalism and ethnocentrism, childhood as a political force is almost by definition a global and international one. This philosophical turn in our understanding of the political agency of childhood has implications for how one understands the school under the conditions of absolute democracy, and for how it constructs its policies and practices.

The specific relation between childhood and multitude remains to be thought. But no specific attributes or privileged ontological character – as if childhood were “essential” or “potential”, or “original” multitude – as if childhood represented the *socius* before the capitulation of rights to the sovereign, before disciplinary subjection has marked and shackled some original “multitude-

nature” – need be claimed. All that is necessary (and this may in fact be an argument for what I have just disclaimed) is to recognize that the child is what Merleau-Ponty called a “polymorph”. The child is the master of all (and no) forms of species-being. Just as young infants are able to discriminate almost all phonetic contrasts, whereas older infants discriminate better between phonemes that occur in the language that they normally hear, rather than foreign-language phonemes,²⁶ so what Dewey calls the “plasticity” or “original modifiability” of childhood allows the child to recognize multiple forms of social being, and because of that ontological polymorphism, to practice and develop privileged forms even further than adults, as is the case with the documented ability of members of the “Net Generation” to familiarize themselves with and problem-solve within computer environments more quickly than many adults. In such a cultural-historical world, the situation of adult-child dialogue is deepened: the child has new information, is intuitively aware of a future that the adult is not. In a situation such as ours of dramatic biopolitical transformation and global shift of information environment, neoteny is advantaged, and children – if not suppressed – enter the realm of biopolitical production as actors and shapers, capable of embodying forms of subjectivity that adults only know as ideals and principles. This was exactly Dewey’s meaning when he criticized traditional education for its unwillingness to allow the impulse-habit relation of childhood to find its own way, to reconstruct the school as a laboratory for the opportunity of reconstructing the impulse-habit relation in general.

Having suggested that childhood can “learn” multitude more quickly, more easily than adults, there is the problem that adults don’t “know” multitude themselves. It is a form of social being that we already, through no agency of our own, “are” – distilled by new conditions of existence but strangely so, as if something that has been forced upon us. But this is exactly the point. An emergent form of subjectivity has no paradigmatic masters. Or rather, its masters can be found everywhere –there is no privileged age or culture or social niche for mastery. In fact because of the “original modifiability” of the young, because of the socio-productive aspects of neoteny, children are the privileged learners of whatever is emergent – especially in times of great change, or “future shock.” As a result, the school, that adult-child collective where social being is –

²⁶ Kuhl, Williams, & Lacerda 1992.

potentially – produced through open dialogue between old and young, is one of its (potential) “green zones”, or laboratories for biopolitical production.

The traditional school is hardly a green zone. Rather it is a colony, a reproductive and not a transformative institution, an authoritarian structure, a closed and not an open system. And because the school is about producing knowledge, the epistemology of the school is a chief determiner of its systemic characteristics – whether it is an open or closed system, a democratic or authoritarian structure, a colony of the state or a zone of emergence of new social being. Therefore, what is first necessary for fostering the emergence of multitude in schools is a shift in epistemological emphasis. A shift from a transmissional to an inquiry-based, dialogical epistemology of schooling promises to tip the balance of subjective energy towards the emergence of multitude – toward singularity, differentiation, redistribution of power, the many, concatenation, communication, hybridity, emergence, dialogue, freedom, desire, wonder, social creativity and self-rule (or “the rule of everyone by everyone”), “a whole of singularities”, and a refusal of subjection by hegemonic state, corporate and media knowledge/power structures. And communal philosophical inquiry with children or Philosophy with Children is the epistemological workshop of inquiry – its normative space, the space in which it understands itself. Most importantly, it is the space – because it is dialogical and democratic – which reconstructs power. It is a space of action, where the rule of everyone by everyone can emerge in action, and the multitude shows its possibilities for transformation, its capacity to produce new being.

ENDNOTES

1. In fact this form of subjection is available only those who have a chance to participate in it, which does not include the increasing numbers of radically poor and marginalized, who are in fact its victims.
2. And also connected originally to the word *thea*, goddess, which gives it a spiritual turn, the idea that to “see” or “behold” the world is to see its spiritual nature.
3. In *Human Nature and Conduct*, Dewey argues: “An impatient, premature mechanization of impulsive activity after the fixed pattern of adult habits of thought and affection has been

desired. The combined effect of love of power, timidity in the face of the novel and a self-admiring complacency has been too strong to permit immature impulse to exercise its reorganizing potentialities. The younger generation has hardly even knocked frankly at the door of adult customs, much less been invited in to rectify through better education the brutalities and inequities established in adult habits. Each new generation has crept blindly and furtively through such chance gaps as have happened to be left open. Otherwise it has been modeled after the old".²⁷

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²⁷ Dewey 1922/1988, p. 70.

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