

# Education, Schooling, Derrida's Marx and Democracy: Some Fundamental Questions

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**Abstract** Beginning with a reconsideration of what the school is and has been, this paper explores the idea of the school to come. Emphasizing the governmental role of education in modernity, I offer a line of thinking that calls into question the assumption of both the school and education as possible conduits for either democracy or social justice. Drawing on Derrida's spectral ontology I argue that any automatic correlation of education with democracy is misguided: especially within redemptive discourses that seek to liberate education from its present enclosure. This rereading of the field of education in the light of an account of the fundamental ontology of its key institution problematizes all rhetorics of education as social salvation. Education, it proposes, cannot be conceived as the ideal soul of a corrupted or as yet defective body, the school. Education—having taken on the character of an ontotheological principle—has become a governmental instrument as much as its specific institutions. This ontological condition can be understood within various accounts of the nature of contemporaneity. This paper considers the monstrous proposal that education be abandoned as the grounds for social, ethical and cultural redemption. The good news is that this abandonment opens the possibility for thinking beyond education, a beyond that is also beyond the strictures of instrumental rationality.

**Keywords** Derrida · Spectrality · Foucault · Discipline · Governmentality · Democracy · Deconstruction · Schooling · Education

## The Identity and Function of the School

Is it possible to put into question the future of the school? Not only to ask: What will the future school be? but also to ask: Is it possible to think of a future beyond the school?

In the first place, in addressing questions of schooling and the future, it seems essential to give some account of what the school has been and what the school has become and by what forces, within what circumstances, through what processes it has become what it now

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is. This is neither an easy nor commonly undertaken task. In spite of the proliferation of educational discourses of all kinds, including the practically-oriented, the analytical and the academic, there are few accounts given of what, essentially, the school is. What's more, there are few accounts that consider the relation of schooling to education, and to what education has become. It is as though we all already always knew what education is, essentially, as a necessary 'good', and knew too what its now dominant instrument, the school, is. In the field of educational studies, especially in relation to discourses of improvement, there is little engagement at all with questions concerning 'fundamental ontology', to borrow a phrase from (Heidegger 1962, p. 486). Such questions seem vital in any attempt to think afresh the contemporary relations between the school and education, however.

Before any engagement with the object of enquiry, the school, we may consider the question of the semantic status of the noun and the verb, school and schooling, and their relation with one another. The school is an entity; schooling is a process. But this clear distinction doesn't do justice to the semantic resonance of these terms and their force in contemporary usage. The school is a highly complex object and is also a social technology: its status as noun, as thing, determinate object, is predicated on some understanding of the processes it gives rise to, of its role within larger, political, socio-cultural, governmental processes and forces that are powerfully at work in the kind of social formation within which 'we contemporaries' live. On the other hand, schooling has the curious effect of being able to convey the idea of a process that may occur independently of the noun it derives its existence from. Schooling is not confined to or necessarily directly attached to the institution of the school. Schooling may occur within various institutions for various purposes. As Basil Bernstein has expressed it, we now live in a 'pedagogized society' (Bernstein 1996).

The purpose of this brief excursion into semantics is not merely to problematize definitions in order to proclaim an elusive modality of being for the object in question: on the contrary, the idea is to explore a far-reaching proposal concerning the 'ontological difference' between education and its institutions. Clear delineations and definitions of what we are referring to when we talk or write about the school, schools, schooling are rare. Similarly, attempts to explore contemporary relations between education and schooling seldom arise, even among philosophers and theorists of education. Fundamental, ontological questions concerning the nature of the school and the privileging of education tend to be taken as always already given. It is precisely, however, to invoke Heidegger again, in the region of the 'unthought' that we are most likely to touch on what is essential to contemporary ways of understanding and knowing—as well as misunderstanding and not knowing—the school, schooling, education and a schooled society (Heidegger 1968, p. 76).

Such theorizing is far from irrelevant. Ontological arguments are always, in the end, arguments about practices and, ultimately, are political—are, therefore, urgent and difficult. They are, of course, arguments about the nature of 'the Real' and the nature of the relations between the real and our articulation and understanding of it (Lacan 1977). The real is not, however, as the realists would have it, palpably and unarguably given. Ontological arguments—in other words, arguments about what is and how things are—always partake of the uncertain, agonistic realm of the symbolic (Belsey 2004). Recent attempts to finally eradicate ontological interrogation in educational discourses—that is, various forms of anti-theory and the privileging of the empirical—merely confirm a nihilistic acceptance of the given order of things. The anti-theorists privilege practice as though it could be separated clearly from the unnecessary contamination of theory (Carr 2007; Thomas 2007).

The fact that 'educational studies'—that broad and ill-defined agglomeration of practices and writings—frequently seeks to rid itself of the burden or 'irrelevance' of theory is symptomatic of its attachment to an idea about the necessity of a relation to practice, a desire to transform, to improve, and to have 'genuine' impact, in the current and unfortunate policy jargon. Such existential certitude positively encourages thought in education to turn away from fundamental questions. While this turning away may be politically 'sensible', it avoids the significance of fundamental thinking. It misses the point.

## Ontology and Education

Heidegger's attempt to rethink the history of philosophy hinged on the question of being. Heidegger's work consistently proposes that asking and remaining open to the force of this question reveals the history of both philosophy and thinking in general as responses to and enclosures of it. Ontology is *stricto* sensu concerned with the 'big' question of being; but Heidegger's writings insist, one way or another, that ontological thinking is implicit in the most everyday commerce with the world, and—as Lacan comes to insist—is entwined in language itself. Our orientation to being is embedded in our everyday understandings as well as in our more celestial moments. We are constantly referring to states of being of entities in our daily commerce with the world—mostly without thinking too much about it.

In everyday language—whether performative, constative or interrogative—ontology is being engaged with. Existence is being affirmed; assumptions about its nature are in play. Language projects at least as much as it reflects its world. Ontological issues are at stake in our mundane language as much as they are when we muse upon the larger meaning of things. Derrida, following Heidegger, emphasized how everyday ideas about the world are organized within and by the history of 'western metaphysics' and its legacy of identities and oppositions. Heidegger's insistence on thinking ontologically had enabled a rethinking of the inheritance of western metaphysics as a certain kind of enclosure. Western metaphysics is strongly constitutive of the world as we receive it. And we always receive a world as constituted, just as we acquire a language. While we may not be able, simply, to stand outside of this enclosure, knowing that we are in it makes a difference. In addition, it is possible to put the oppositions that organize the identity of things within the enclosure into play (Derrida 2001, pp. 351–370).

The consistent urge of western thought has been to solidify being into what is present to consciousness: 'the determination of being as presence' (Derrida 2005, p. 353). Various dominant ideas or ways of thinking have stood as 'ontotheological' principles, presuming to occupy the place of being: God, progress, science, reason have stood as central principle or master-signifier holding all that is together and militating against the tendency of language to problematize identities (polysemy) and to hollow out the solidity of 'things-in-themselves' (Lacan 1977).

In some of the later writings, Heidegger comes to see science in modernity as dominating ideas about Being and giving rise to 'technological enframing' with its emphasis on 'performativity' (Lyotard 1985; Heidegger 1993; Gadamer 2004). A certain kind of rationality pervades technological enframing, a rationality that seeks to assess, order and maximise the use-potential of beings in its endless drive to render things both useful and productive within an ordering that can call upon these various resources that it produces to sustain and develop itself. This teleological will-to-power is expressed in Weber's 'iron cage' of modern rationality that brings on the 'polar night of icy darkness' (Weber 1994, p. xvi).

Heidegger's insistence on the ontological *question* seems designed to open ourselves to a radical uncertainty about the very nature of things: and to indicate that what appears to be the stable order or nature of things is partial, provisional, and questionable. Modern, teleological rationality is clearly questionable on a number of grounds. In the present, among 'we contemporaries', in the wake of enlightenment thinking, and within ongoing processes of modernisation (Harvey 2003), I would argue that education exerts an onto-theological force and partakes of instrumental rationality, as those who work within it constantly complain. Education is not only a powerfully productive apparatus operative throughout the social system, a governmental force, a pervasive and embedded institution engaged in the determination and dissemination of identities and differences: education has become a dominant principle of thinking through which all manner of things are understood and acted upon.

Ultimately, openness to the *question* of being enables the apprehension of the possibility that things could be otherwise. For Heidegger, this was the most essential task of philosophy: to be able to pause within the given order of things and open a clearing for thinking, reflecting, refusing to take for granted the given order of things, especially where that given order expressed pretensions to a mastery over the order of things in the name of knowledge. While thinking outside of the given order may be both difficult to achieve and to sustain, Derrida demonstrates, through deconstruction, that the enclosures of western metaphysics may be understood differently from within (Derrida 2001, pp. 351–370). Deconstruction enables the structure of oppositions that characterise western metaphysics to be put under examination, to be inverted, interrogated and questioned: to be put, essentially, into play.

My argument here is that education has become an ontotheological principle and that education has become ontologically entangled in the instrumental rationalities of modernity. Education in modernity has become almost synonymous with assessment that ranks and orders, that shapes and fashions things, expressing a powerful picture of the world but more importantly that invades and takes hold of subjectivity and identity at the intimate level. The machinery of education, its now vast and globalized apparatus, appears in the guise of a pervasive social technology.

At the same time, much academic educational discourse, including mainstream discourses dedicated to the improvement of the present system and so-called critical discourses dedicated to transforming and liberating it, offer the promise of redemption. An endlessly repetitive ideology critique replays the insight that 'real' education out there in the actual institutions that populate our actual and social landscape may fall lamentably short of 'true' education while insisting that reform can liberate. Actual education may persistently promote inequalities, may time and again be demonstrated as remorselessly racist, and may foreclose the cultural experiences of significant segments of the population—all in the name of equity, enlightenment and progress. Critical education studies insist that education can be fixed. Even those who conduct the most damning diagnoses continue to promote the idea that education can be redeemed from its bad governmental, bureaucratic self and can recover its true and proper role in the destiny of Being in the direction of progress and social justice (Apple 1979, 1996, 2007; Gillborn 2008; Giroux 1989; McLaren 2005).

Equally there is much educational discourse dedicated to redeeming education from the chains that bind it offering to release it from the iron cage of modern bureaucracy with its impersonal drives towards efficiency and its Benthamite goals. A powerful mythology of redemption dominates the most essential institutions of instrumental rationality. Given the right kind of treatment, given the right kind of liberatory thinking and with emphasis on the

right kind of characteristics schools and education can be liberated from what they essentially are. Progressive education rhetorics, positions and moves have often been invoked or implemented in the service of enhancing—paradoxically—the governmental role of education (Evans 1983; Kohn 1999; Watts 1977). What better form of rule and regulation than self-rule and self-regulation? The more free the educational environment the more clear it must be that the educational principle and drive have become internalized, written into the very being of the self.

But the improvement and liberation fantasy have an important existential function. They are essential to the 'world' of education as posited by the rhetorics that render it meaningful in terms of progress and equity.

The work of philosophy of education is frequently understood in terms of defining what is proper to education in the promotion of 'human flourishing' (Nussbaum 1998). As the necessary adjunct to practice, independent from how education as an existent, established, strongly rooted apparatus, such philosophy of education can propose the transformation of contingent, often disturbing, realities that sociological and other forms of analysis have described with their persistent production of inequalities. Education can be elevated into a vehicle for equality and democracy, in spite of the brute ontological fact that this is not at all how education operates (Flint and Peim 2012). The world of education in general works to perpetuate the idea and discourse of transformation, equity and democratisation.

We can interpret this strange addiction to a progress that is always elusive, never realized in terms of Heidegger's 'fundamental ontology'. Dasein's being in the world—always a matter of being specifically situated—is also conceived of as an ontologically productive business, defining as well as receiving the world. Our being is constituted being *somewhere*—spatially, temporally, but also symbolically and with others. Being in the world of education—our 'mitwelt' that is symbolically as well as materially constituted—means confronting the inheritance of practices, institutions, ideas and understandings (Heidegger 1962). While in contemporary education this tends to be an order of things that believes positively and faithfully in its own socially redemptive destiny, this cannot ever simply be how things are with the world of education. There is plenty of evidence to the contrary enabling other ways of apprehending and engaging with that world.

## Constitutional Discipline

What fundamentally is the school? The account of the school I offer below will indicate that any correspondence between schooling and democracy is highly tenuous. All those positions that assert anything other than a problematic connection between democracy and schooling are suspect on ontological grounds. There is nothing inherent in the school, nor in schools, nor in schooling, that is democratic. What's more, there is much inherent in the school-as-we-know-it that is anti-democratic: and this 'much' is not the accidental outcome of a lost direction, nor the recoverable material suppressed by government interventions and suppression: rather, it is built into the genetic constitution of the institution. It is 'deeply' ontological and not amenable to change through conscious intervention at the level of policy or practice.

There is a long story concerning the ontology of the school. It cannot be simply a matter of declaring a given nature. The school is a product of an accumulated development, embedded in the history of modernity, the history of the rise and modification of such institutions. In fact, the school has become the paradigm institution for the kind of society we now live in. It is unthinkable that a society such as ours could function without the

existence of the school and everything—in terms of governing the population and in terms of the production of identity—that it enacts. The rise of state-sponsored schooling, universally enforced, gradually, but insistently, in the late nineteenth century marks a period of the most significant change in the organization of social life (Donald 1992; Foucault 1977; Rose 1999).

For Michel Foucault, the thinker strongly associated with a far-reaching redescription of modernity, ‘the rise of the schooled society’ corresponds with the gradual arrival of the dispersed system of governance referred to as ‘discipline’. Foucault’s history of institutions and practices identifies how gradual but convergent transformations in the government of space and time change the social topography. Foucault’s ideas, although long available, surprisingly have hardly even begun to permeate mainstream discourses in educational studies. The radical edge of the concept of discipline and its implications for a politics of identity is dangerous for contemporary accounts of schooling, especially for school reform positions and improvement discourses (Foucault 1977, 2007).

This rise of ‘discipline’ involves the enclosure, separation and coding of spaces as ‘functional sites’. Such places enact identity and rank and get deployed for productive purposes (Foucault 1977, pp. 144–146). One key form of organization for space in this regime is cellular. The ‘cell’ or enclosed space divided off from similar enclosed spaces is concerned with the management of bodies. This has a political dimension: the ‘*tableaux vivants*’ of organized spaces is a choreography of potentially confused, useless or dangerous ‘multitudes’ into ‘*ordered multiplicities*’ (ibid., p. 148, my italics). Growing, urban and potentially wayward populations are rendered predictable, productive and efficient in their activity. Another key element in the process is tabulation, an administrative principle designed to organize things and people with the same cellular emphasis (ibid., p. 149). Tabulation is visible in timetables as well as in norms for learning, and is as visible in early versions of schooling as in contemporary. The grids of assessment in National Curriculum specifications and teacher training grids of competence are the apotheosis of this ‘micro-physics’ of ‘cellular’ power’ (ibid.).

One key function of such instruments of order is the management if not the transformation of time itself. In the period of the rise of discipline, there is a concern—economic, moral, governmental—to ensure the quality of time used in various institutional settings. Unregulated time gets transformed into *disciplinary* time. Such ordering is programmed to ensure ‘the elaboration of the act itself’ in myriad practices, including many that owe their existence entirely to their disciplinary role (ibid., p. 152). Time now regulates the individual: ‘... penetrates the body and with it all the meticulous controls of power’ and maximizes the productivity of both the individual and the collective body (ibid.).

Disciplinary practices from late seventeenth century onwards exhort ‘exhaustive use’, working to produce ‘a positive economy’ (ibid., p. 154). Time must be pressed to the maximum: ‘...getting as much out of it as possible...’, ‘taking charge of the time of individual existences’ (ibid., p. 157). Similarly, detailed elaborations of the purposeful correlation of body and gesture appear in terms of ‘the correct use of the body’. The school, increasingly *the* key instrument of person formation, is the context for the instigation of disciplinary procedures for the body: ‘A well-disciplined body forms the operational context of the slightest gesture. Good handwriting, for example. Codes invest the body in its entirety...’ (ibid., p. 152). Innumerable early photographs of schooling demonstrate this bodily training (Horn 1989). The body gets worked on in relation to a series of objects: ‘Discipline defines each of the relations that the body must have with the object that it manipulates’. From handwriting to how to operate a rifle, for examples, ‘the instrumental coding of the body’ prepares for body-tool and body-machine relations (Foucault 1977,

p. 153). In this the rise of techniques for the training of bodies, extensive apparatuses of person-production can be seen as a shift in the relations between government and population (Foucault 2007).

Discipline operates through the genesis, dissemination and reproduction of techniques and institutions. The school divides the body of pupils into age-stratified classes, designating time periods for activities and affirming norms for performance and competence. The school exemplifies the process of norm related person-formation crowned by the examination. The purpose of examination is threefold: to ensure the level of competence achieved; to ensure parity of training; and to differentiate the abilities of individuals (Foucault 1977, p. 158). Schools became the institutions par excellence for this specific organization of time: 'disciplinary time'... 'that was gradually imposed on the pedagogical practice...' gets transposed into an array of settings that share the same technologies of organization (ibid., p. 159).

Foucault brings Marx's 'analogy between the problems of the division of labour and those of military tactics' to bear on the development of the pervasive social technology used in population production and organization that the school is (ibid., p. 163). 'Discipline is no longer simply an art of distributing bodies, of extracting time from them and accumulating ... but of composing forces in order to obtain an efficient machine.' The demand for efficacy transforms both the individual and collective body within an organization designed towards purposeful ends: 'The body is constituted as a part of a multi-segmentary machine.' The development of the individual is organized according to a series designed to differentiate purpose and function. To implement this, a precise system of command is required for the 'carefully measured combination of forces' (Foucault 1977, p. 164; Lowe and Seaborne 1977).

Discipline operates also through and with its more subtle companion, care. The pastoral dimension is the means for discipline to inhere in the self, even as that self is in process of formation. A threefold spatial organization effects a complex governmentality that operates through the specific topography of the school and seeks to work on the self via distinct but linked technologies of person-formation (Hunter 1988; Peim 2001):

- the playground: pupil culture meets official culture and values system;
- the hall: pupils adjured to participate in acts and discourses of collective identity and to assent to explicit rules for conduct;
- the classroom: pupils subjected to a more intimate technology of the self that seeks to produce a mode of self-governing subjectivity.

Through age-stratification, through the prescription of norms of development, through the proscription of cultural forms, identities and social modalities, the school effects a systematic management of identity, accrediting the normative accoutrements of the dominant culture. In addition, the school operates a pastoral regime, designed to provide both care and an ethic of self-care, of self-direction and self-government. Through innumerable practises and an array of relations the school coaxes the pupil increasingly to take charge of its own conduct, its own performance, even its own assessment. Such pastoral practices serve to ensure that the exterior practices of discipline are properly internalized. The most effective form of government, after all, is the carefully crafted and norm-driven self-management of the population (Foucault 2007; Hunter 1994).

The school stands in a special relation to government. Occupying a near universal constituency, being geographically dispersed throughout the territory, historically so deeply embedded in general consciousness it is difficult to envisage a world without school. Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes's overworked reference to 'beacons of the future'

now signifies an entity so well established, so much a feature of the social landscape that any future that is not managed by this overpowering institution is foreclosed (Donald 1992). The future is thus rendered predictable, programmed and constrained (Derrida and Ferraris 2001). Schooled, in short.

The contemporary form of schooling is not at all accidental: it is fundamental. It is constitutionally, genetically at odds with any democratic modes of order. Its mode of pastoral discipline exists within a feudal hierarchy of being. To imagine that the school can be refunctioned to serve the liberal dream of equality or to become a vehicle for democracy is to fail to understand the role schooling plays in the social division of labour. This analysis may not be particularly new, but it is rarely taken seriously by advocates for reform and redemption. It threatens the very existence of academic discourses of education that remain strongly predicated on a misplaced ethic of improvement or an unaccountable faith in reform (Peim and Flint 2009).

### Well-Managed Inequality

Education as a vehicle for equality remains a powerfully current orthodoxy, in spite of all the indications to the contrary. Self-proclaimed critical educators and champions of 'social justice' produce voluminous data and analyses, undaunted by sociological research and social theories that confirm, time and time again, that education actually *produces* and sustains inequality. Often it is the very same 'critical' education theorists that affirm the need to reform education in the direction of equality, even as they provide abundant and repetitive evidence of its inequalities (Apple 2007; Ross and Gibson 2007).

Back in 1975, Bowles and Gintis published their famous *Schooling in Capitalist America* (1976), a book that explicitly presented the scandalous thesis that education had not been a mechanism for social equality in the USA, rather that it had operated to sustain inequality. What's more, Bowles and Gintis demonstrated that through its history, apparently well-meaning attempts to reform state education in the direction of greater equality had proven futile. The same inequalities were resilient and resistant and continued to be replicated. In the same decade, work by Basil Bernstein on schooling and language had convincingly established how structural social class bias was inherent in the most minute mechanisms of schooling. Not only were inequalities resistant to reform, they appeared to be ineradicable precisely because they were written into the institution's 'DNA'. Pedagogy itself was class-biased. The structure of the curriculum was similarly infected: indeed, according to Bernstein, by implication at least, the main function of the ordering of knowledge in contemporary western societies was to ensure that code distinctions operating through the social division of labour would be echoed and amplified in the delivery and ordering of official and state-sanctioned knowledge systems through formally regulated institutions of education (Bernstein 1971). The examination was simply the final realization of the systematic determination of social identity that the school enacted (Foucault 1977).

In France, Pierre Bourdieu had produced a parallel account of the role of state sponsored schooling and institutions of education. Symbolic capital was the special field of education in western modernity. Cultural capital was unevenly distributed. Schools—and schooling—were imbued with the power to confer value positively and negatively on the varied forms of cultural capital that came within its arena. Symbolic violence enacted and maintained an arbitrary but powerful hierarchy ensuring the 'reproduction' of social distinctions and the uneven distribution of symbolic capital. Historical perspectives have also

identified the strong discrepancy between rhetorics of reform and equity and the increasing inequalities enacted by schooling in modernity (Jones 2003; Lowe 1997).

In recent times particular interest has been shown in the performances of so-called ethnic minority pupils' performance with emphasis being given to the subtle and the not-so-subtle forms of racism that pervade schooling. David Gillborn's research in this area has been applauded as exemplary, generating shocking insights into the pervasiveness and persistence of structural racism (Gillborn and Mirza 2000; Gillborn 2008). In spite of the fact that this work is well-known, frequently cited, and much applauded within education, the rhetoric of school reform continues to flourish—even while the inequalities it identifies prosper. Is it not scandalous that the discourses of school improvement and reform are so frequently founded on the very premises that render them untenable? Commentators such as Gillborn, and virtually all other critics of the status quo and advocates of reform, astonishingly align themselves with the general ethic of school improvement. The persistent inequality they identify gets interpreted as a function of poor policy, poor management or poor deployment of resources, or poor legislation or residual but eradicable surface attitudes, and so on. In spite of all the overwhelming evidence to the contrary, even in the face of a strong 'conspiracy' theory (Gillborn 2008), the persistent inequality enacted by schooling is never represented as essential to the very function of the institution. It is never attributed to the sovereign sway of education at large. It is always assumed, rather, that education itself is a 'gift' and that the injustices and arbitrary discriminations performed by the school are deviations from its proper destiny.

There is no essential reason to think like this.

### **The Politics of Deconstruction and Derrida's Rethinking of Democracy**

Educational commentators, including liberal advocates and radical critics, have persistently aligned schooling with democracy (Apple 1993; Dewey 1997; Gutmann 1999; Neill 1995). The state provision of education is represented in innumerable educational discourses as essential to the proper functioning of democracy. Liberal advocates improvement consort with more radical revolutionaries. The shared dream proposes an education system free from social and cultural bias that is responsive to communities and operates a participatory institution (Apple 2007; Bentley 1998; Giroux 1989; Gorard 2000; Ranson et al. 1997).

According to the account of the school briefly offered above, however, there is little reason to insist on this transformation, apart from the need to sustain a message of social hope and an apparatus of reform within education.

Affirmations of an essential relation between education and democracy at some point must take into account contemporary understandings of what democracy is. The question of democracy has taken on a problematic nature since Francis Fukuyama announced 'the end of history' claiming western liberal democracy after the fall of the Berlin wall had triumphed through force of rational right. Derrida's *Spectres of Marx* was in part the expression of a counter-position to Fukuyama's premature declaration. It expresses an ontological stance with powerfully troubling implications for discourses of educational improvement founded in an assumed but essential correlation between schooling and democracy.

Derrida's affirmation that deconstruction is intimately linked with democracy—and vice versa—provides a way of beginning to articulate a thinking of democracy that might impinge on some of the easy assumptions that inhabit so much educational discourse. The

connection between democracy and deconstruction has very far reaching implications: and these mean that we have to rethink the very nature, even the very possibility, of democracy as we presently—and this word is important—understand it (Derrida 2005, p. 100; Thomson 2005).

Derrida's disturbance of the ontology of presence that has characterized western metaphysics troubles the stability of all political concepts and positions. Derrida has explicitly addressed, at length, the aporias of political association in *The Politics of Friendship* (1997), addressing and problematizing assumptions about the relations between democracy and sovereignty. The interrogative ground for this rethink of the fundamental ontology of democracy is evident in Derrida's earlier, more abstractly, linguistically-oriented, 'grammatological' work, where the principle of difference is declared as the disruptive element in all attempts to signify a present presence.

The structure of democracy, for Derrida, is essentially, and in a special and challenging sense, messianic. In *The Politics of Friendship* it is made apparent that a necessary condition of democracy is the *promise*, not the fact, of universal inclusiveness, of each singularity counting equally. But this inclusiveness must also be—within the organization of specific contexts—dependent on exclusions: on some definition of identity that declares a right to be included as well as a right to exclude. This doubleness of inclusion and exclusion determines an aporetic structure fundamentally at odds with itself. In this sense democracy signifies an unfulfilled, perhaps unfulfillable, promise—and yet it is frequently referred to and demanded as an orientation. It is in other words, to borrow a term from Derrida's grammatological thinking, deferred, infinitely deferred, always 'to come'. It is messianic in the sense that it is awaited, but not in the sense that one day it will arrive complete. It is a messianism without a messiah.

Democracy, then, given its unrealizable but necessary nature, according to Derrida's thinking, partakes of the spectral. This means that democracy cannot be taken to refer to a given state of affairs, or the condition of a given state, even, but must always refer to a difference between promise and actuality. What's more, political democracy, as a form of association at the level of the state, or institution, come to that, is always deconstructable in terms of its status as a form of *sovereignty*. Democracy in this sense is a ruling principle and a principle of rule. Democratic sovereignty—as sovereignty—brings with it a certain ineradicable force that is anti-democratic (Derrida 2009). If the sovereign force at work in the ontological structure of the school as I have described it is palpably non-democratic (socially, culturally and linguistically exclusionary, in fact), any automatic association of schooling and democracy is, surely, doubly questionable. The association of schooling with a move towards recognition of differences in the name of equality is equally questionable. The school can be defined in this sense as outside and even alien to the promise of democracy.

In *Spectres of Marx*, Derrida implies that Marxist critique opens the possibility for social meanings that are deemed to be natural, inevitable, or unchanging to be actively redefined. Marx's thought is shown to share this disruptive potential with deconstruction: its exposure of exclusions, indicative of possibilities for future rethinking, implies a necessary and perhaps unconditional openness. This openness is essential to Derrida's thought, especially concerning the key political concept of hospitality. Derrida's reading of Marx differs in respect to this emphasis on openness from all other well-known readings.

The provocative account of both history and politics Derrida derives from his reading of Marx relates strongly to an understanding of how educational thinking may anticipate a future that is not simply the programmed triumph of schooling as we know it, either in its blunt material form, nor in its idealized, willed form as a portal to social justice.

The politics of the future must, according to this reading, be considered differently. Derrida's thinking of the spectre invites reconsideration of the structure of temporal logic, redefining the relations between past, present and future. In this rethinking the future is not merely the predictable product of past and present; it represents the possibility of something totally other: 'the to-come of an event'... in the form of 'an alterity that cannot be anticipated', a 'messianic opening to what is coming' (1994, pp. 81–82):

Awaiting without horizon of the wait, awaiting what one does not expect yet or any longer, hospitality without reserve, welcoming salutation accorded in advance to the absolute surprise of the arrivant from whom or from which one will not ask anything in return and who or which will not be asked to commit to the domestic contracts of any welcoming power (family, State, nation, territory, native soil or blood, language, culture in general, even humanity), just opening which renounces any right to property, any right in general, messianic opening to what is coming, that is to the event that cannot be awaited as such, or recognized in advance therefore, to the event as the foreigner itself, to her or to him for whom one must leave an empty place, always, in the memory of the hope – and this is the very place of spectrality. (pp. 81–82)

Derrida's affirmation of the 'coming of the event' and the 'future-to-come' clearly indicates an orientation to Marxist thought that acknowledges, and perhaps celebrates, the indeterminacy of history, and retains, in spite of all the forces that may work to the contrary, the possibility of both active intervention into the meanings that structure social existence and an openness to what is not programmable, predictable. This is neither a done deal with history whereby the arrival of a revolutionary telos is awaited either actively or passively; nor is it a willful submission to unpredictable forces that drive history. The vigilance of a habitual deconstruction anticipates without guarantee the always possible arrival of a disruption of often oppressive, or at least constraining, systems of meaning.

This possibility is messianic because, not belonging to a finally achieved state of things, and reversing the conventional vision of the arrival of the messiah and the end of history, the time, place or manner of the opening cannot be predicted, it *always* prepares for the arrival of what it anticipates, and does so in the form of retaining an empty space, an openness that is the opposite to a theological, dogmatic closure:

Now if there is a spirit of Marxism which I will never be ready to renounce, it is not only the critical Marxism which I will never be ready to renounce, it is not only the critical idea or the questioning stance (a consistent deconstruction must insist on them even as it also learns that this is not the last or first word). It is even more a certain emancipatory and *messianic* affirmation, a certain experience of the promise that one can try to liberate from any dogmatics and even from any metaphysico-religious determination from any messianism. (1994, p. 89)

But this openness toward the *messianic* possibility for disruption and change cannot come about through a mere acknowledgement of the instability of meaning. Derrida claims that an active process of welcoming and 'working' with the spectres that haunt the temporary closure of meaning, must occur. But it's a matter of keeping a space open rather than occupying it with a determinate programme.

Derrida affirms the idea that deconstruction is a revolutionary way of thinking. Being open in deconstruction to possibility means being open to rupture in the name of both critique and creativity. There is an ethical and political dimension to this openness. Indeed, the critical, the creative, the ethical and the political are difficult to distinguish:

Open waiting for the event as justice this hospitality is absolute only if it keeps watch over its own universality. The messianic including its revolutionary forms (and the messianic is always revolutionary, it has to be) would be urgency, imminence, but, irreducible paradox, a waiting without horizon of expectation. (1994, p. 168)

This literal and metaphoric hospitality requires a vigilance against one's own universalizing tendencies. It requires a vigilant 'reading'—of things, of texts, of the world, of oneself, of ideas that dominate, one way or another, the time of the present. And it requires, paradoxically, perhaps, a faithful and persistent resistance to a closed, curriculum-bound, timetabled, norm-driven non-future.

If education, in the present age, has come to occupy a central space of thinking in general, this dominance and this centrality may be precisely what stands to be deconstructed.

### **Towards a Future Beyond Education**

I have argued earlier and elsewhere at length that the project of school improvement directed towards a reform of education in the direction of greater equality and as a mechanism for enhancing democratic participation is founded on a failure to understand the history and identity of the school in modernity (Peim 2001; Peim 2009; Flint and Peim 2012). The apparatus of school improvement, including and all the academic discourses conducted in the name of social justice through school improvement and through education in general, vainly propose to reform what is always already structurally and necessarily working in the opposite direction. The post 1988 emphasis in the UK context, for example, on performativity is a symptomatic product of this misreading. Although frequently couched in terms of equity, as well as in terms of efficiency, the 'reforms' it has enacted ensure that persistent inequalities persist, as they have done—in a changing context, within changing institutions, amid changing practices—since the inception of universal secondary schooling. Current emphasis given to assessment as the necessary predicate of improvement—and consequent refinements in the measurement of performance and improvement (Gorard 2000)—persist in purveying the myth of schooling as capable of delivering social justice or contributing to it in terms of the redistribution of cultural capital and in the long run by implication economic capital. Broadly speaking, the inequalities remain since they are structurally embedded in the most minute operations of the institution, its state function, its organization of knowledge and its pedagogical operations (Bernstein 1996).

In spite of this evidently persistent fact, in spite of wave after wave of so-called reform, in recent times, education has come, increasingly, to occupy the horizon of the social as the necessary, essential medium embracing all aspects and all phases of life. For many this is not necessarily a matter of social justice at all: governing the population, exerting various forms of sovereign power through localized practices, is still best effected through the institution that has operated a powerful technology of person formation and population management for a long time. In recent times this governmental function of education has intensified. The current emphasis on lifelong learning, for instance, with its implication of endless improvement, and always mobile identity, is symptomatic of a tendency towards total education, even totalitarian education, where education has become the master concept dominating contemporary life (Coffield 1999; Flint and Peim 2012).

To cut a long, Foucauldian, story short, then, education has come to serve as an extensive, invasive form of governmentality. Everyone stands in some relation to

education: in terms of identity, status, potentiality. Everyone—with possibly only few exceptions—experiences their standing, at some point in their educationally staged development, as a lack, in relation to education. The project of the educated self is always incomplete. Institutions and their powers proliferate to address this endless need. More and more of the life span is covered from the pre-school curriculum onwards. Contemporary infants end their day with a record of their progress expressed in terms derived from a central, tabulated curriculum. This is the first stage of their life-long progress of bureaucratized but self-managed development. The Weberian 'iron-cage' may now have a more user-friendly architecture, but its enclosure is all the more pervasive and tight for that.

The acceptance of education in general as an unquestioned, unqualified 'good' represents the triumph of a certain will to knowledge, the triumph of a certain bureaucratic rationality and the triumph of a subtle technology of the self that is founded on a specific and limited world view. Historically speaking, the effects of this increasing encroachment admittedly have often been benign: in the transformation of childhood in the nineteenth century through gradual emergence of legislation and regimes of disciplinary care and through the drastic reduction of child labour. Schooling emerges as an enormous project in the late nineteenth century as the quintessential institution of a new world order operating under biopower, seeking rationally to organize productively the time, space, age-stratified competence of the population, defining and ordering accomplishments and dispositions. This massive technology has both produced and mobilized a citizenry of self-regulating units, ordered, categorized, credentialized and generally sorted out in terms of their orientation to social destiny, to themselves and to their potentialities.

On the other hand, the prime instance of this quintessential institution, the school, operates unarguably, I believe, according to several forms of symbolic violence: including age-stratification, norm-related judgments, the production of negative identities, especially in terms of race and class, the intensive and absolutist management of time and more. The prevalent idea among educationalists that some form of redemption of education—through progress and reform—will restore the school to a proper function at the centre of the life of community persists. But this frequently invoked spectre of redemption belongs—I believe it is demonstrable—to a politically questionable theological commitment to the promise of bureaucratic rationality. That promise does not provide a good basis for such faith. On the contrary, bureaucratic rationality promises to sustain the modalities of inequality and symbolic violence that characterize schooling. That is not necessarily to say that schools are not more benign now, for instance, than they were eighty years ago, nor that schooling is not more benign than mass child labour 200 years ago. But the structure of inequality and symbolic violence remains an ineradicable feature of the school as we know it.

### **Where are We Now?**

Discourses of school improvement are programmed to see education as the site for social renewal and for the realization of personal freedoms and capacities. They depend on an essentially modernist vision of rational improvement. They must rely on the suppression of the ontological dimension: in so far as they conceive education not in terms of what it is in its historical being. The defects of schooling and education are seen as essentially amenable to governmental, bureaucratic and cultural intervention in the direction of a redemption from their historically established identity. The implicit consensus of the school improvement ethic is to liberate the soul of education by rational intervention into

the institution. Much political rhetoric, much educational philosophy and many research grants are the products of this anachronistic ontology.

There is a deep and disturbing paradox here. The politically hegemonic vision of a rational intervention that will liberate the essence of education is predicated on an implicit redemption of the community—of the collective totality—to a state of social justice and to restoration of identity. This roughly Hegelian political philosophy envisages the state, in its ideal form, as an ideal community-in-common. The Hegelian view, though, is hardly applicable to the contemporary order of things. Again, this raises ontological questions about the nature of the contemporary world. Lyotard's 'postmodern condition' (1985), Harvey's 'condition of postmodernity' (1991), Bauman's *Liquid Modernity* (2001); Castells's *Information Age* (1996); Appadurai's divisions of the world not into geographic areas but into spheres of activity (1996): all contribute to a refashioning of the global, signaling the impossibility of any conventional understanding of 'community' as the organizing principle and ground of collective identity. According to these varied positions, time and space along with the global topography of the cultural, the social and the political have changed forever. Jean-Luc Nancy questions the persistence of community in western political thinking identifying the myth of 'original community' as a last-ditch attempt to salvage a correlation between identity and the state (2004). The imaginary lost way of life is perceived to have been an immediate 'being-together': intimate and harmonious in direct emotional opposition to the depredations of contemporary difference. Although the idyll is lost or has been broken it returns in idealized form in accounts and images of the natural family, the village, the polis, the republic (ibid). A parallel approach occurs in Giorgio Agamben's projection of a 'new' community, a 'being-together' based on the notion of belonging *without identity*. This is a community of singularities and fragments: it is a '... community ... mediated not by any condition of belonging... nor by the simple absence of conditions... but by belonging itself' (Agamben 1993, p. 85). Hardt's and Negri's *Empire* (2000) offers a sustained explicitly political counter to the Hegelian legacy of the state as ideal community. In the condition of 'Empire' the form of political sovereignty associated with the nation has declined but sovereignty remains all the more powerful and intense now freed from national boundaries. The globalisation of markets and the predominance of exchange value relations along with the globalisation of cultural forms effects a new world order. Economic relations become autonomous from nation states. There comes into being a new form of supranational sovereignty. This Empire is a generalized entity, not specific and centred. Empire is the ruling force of contemporary world: it is related strongly to bio-power but where discipline and surveillance have been supplemented by control and where control is invested *in* its subjects:

We should understand the society of control, in contrast, as that society (which develops at the far edge of modernity and opens toward the postmodern) in which mechanisms of command become ever more 'democratic', ever more immanent to the social field, distributed throughout the brains and bodies of the citizens. The behaviors of social integration and exclusion proper to rule are thus increasingly interiorized within the subjects themselves. (ibid., p. 23)

Empire is transnational and suggests the rapid transformation of identities within the accelerated logic of hybridity. Empire is deterritorialized: so that increasingly we see the first world in the third world and vice versa and the disappearance of the second. The proliferation of hybrid identities accompanies flexible hierarchies and plural exchanges: the economic, the political and the cultural overlap and meld into one another. Empire works against old order boundaries.

Within this variously described new world order, such changing forms of identity though can be seen, politically speaking, as having both negative and positive charge, as can the diminution of national state sovereignty over its 'local' citizens. If the state of Empire seems to propose a nightmare world of cultural homogeneity, that is not what Hardt and Negri propose at all—and certainly it is not to be confused with the end of history envisaged by Francis Fukuyama (1992). Although Empire may represent itself as the end of history, it is rather the transformation of history.

Against Empire, Hardt and Negri set the forces of 'multitude'—where multitude is the vast, varied and diffuse forms of counter-practice that Empire brings into being. Following Foucault, Empire is predicated on the idea that the exertion of power generates resistant power. For Hardt and Negri politics consists of marshalling the creative forces of the other side, of multitude, the project being to access and contribute to alternative global flows and exchanges. Multitude here is conceived of as global, diverse, hybrid, resistant, productive, an active force as opposed to, say, Baudrillard's uncannily absorbent 'masses', a diffuse, popular and ubiquitous version of Derrida's decentred, diverse, variously active 'new international' (Baudrillard 1983; Derrida 1994).

According to this thesis, schooling may be regarded as a force necessarily on the side of 'Empire', given its intensely normative aspirations, its hierarchical structure, its ingrained governmental procedures, its restricted curriculum and its reproductive *modus operandi*. The force cannot be rescued or redirected from its imperial mission via the resistant category of community, through acts or movements of empowerment since the forms of community rooted in locations inhabited by schools no longer apply. Just as the very topography of community embedded in the idea of nation or people is problematized as a political force—even as a category—by the thesis of Empire, so the micro idea of a community located in a present-to-itself locale with a common identity expressive of common interests no longer applies. Community in this sense has become a purely rhetorical figure.

Although perhaps scandalous, it might also be possible—even necessary perhaps—to suggest that education itself, as an ontotheological principle, has also, in its global force and in the politics it partakes of in global flows and processes of knowledge and identity to be aligned with the forces of Empire (Martin and Peim 2011).

### **What If ... ?**

What if the school is unredeemable? Why has this question not been posed by all the interest groups that claim a space within educational studies? What happens to the whole apparatus of school improvement with its research statistics, analyses, projections and projects when that question gets taken seriously?

It is difficult if not impossible to envisage our world without the school. It is an unlikely prospect, given the absolutely central governmental role that the school now occupies as paradigm institution. Given also the weight of political rhetoric that is thrust upon it. And given the extent that it has taken root as an essential feature of our social landscape.

What is being proposed here is not a formula for the redemption of that institution from its fallen past to a reborn future more aligned with the essence of some ideal 'education'. That, it seems to me, is the dream of the school improvement ethic and its adherents. It is a dream in the phantasmic sense, although it often presents itself as a hard-headed, statistically verified, *scientifico-bureaucratic* possibility on the horizon of the present. What is being proposed here is an understanding of what schooling and education are in their

contemporary manifestation. This implies a further understanding of what they might be and this in turn includes the possibility of being otherwise.

My proposal here is that any serious thinking of the future must include the possibility that the school, schooling and education be displaced from their present sovereignty. In Derridean terms, to be open to the future negates the absolutism of known certainties in order to open oneself up to the spectral, uncertain nature of what is both past and to come. Such a receptive vigilance implies a reading of the present that interrupts the given certainties of contemporary mainstream, improvement-oriented educational discourses. Is it possible, then, to cultivate an openness to futures that are not determined by the onto-theological sovereignty of education and its apparatuses?

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