EDUCATIONAL THEORY

AN ARCHETYPAL PHENOMENOLOGY OF *SKHOLÉ*

David Kennedy

Department of Educational Foundations
Montclair State University

Abstract. In this essay David Kennedy argues that children represent one vanguard of an emergent shift in Western subjectivity, and that adult–child dialogue, especially in the context of schooling, is a key locus for the epistemological change that implies. Following Herbert Marcuse's invocation of a "new sensibility," Kennedy argues that the evolutionary phenomenon of neoteny — the long formative period of human childhood and the paedomorphic character of humans across the life cycle — makes of the adult–child collective of school a primary site for the reconstruction of belief. After exploring child–adult dialogue more broadly as a form of dialectical interaction between what John Dewey called "impulse" and "habit," Kennedy identifies three key dimensions of dialogic schooling, all of which are grounded in a fourth: the form of dialogical group discourse called community of philosophical inquiry (CPI), which is based on the problematization and reconstruction of concepts through critical argumentation. As a discourse model, CPI grounds practice in all of the dialogic school's emergent curricular spaces, whether science or mathematics, whether literature, art, or philosophy. Second, CPI opens a functional space for shared decision making and collaborative governance, making of school an exemplary model of direct democracy. Finally, CPI as a site for the critical interrogation of concepts encountered in the curriculum (such as "alive," "justice," "system," and "biosphere") and as a site for democratic governance leads naturally to expression in activist projects that model an emergent "new reality principle" through concrete solutions to practical problems on local and global levels.

School as Archetype

In this essay, I aim to offer one normative definition of "school" as a form of intentional community in which certain social, psychological, and political possibilities are present in the purposeful interaction between youth and age that act as agents of cumulative cultural evolution, or "cultural ratcheting."[1] I argue that school, when organized as a purposeful site of intergenerational dialogue or "meeting" in the strong sense, opens spaces for the ongoing reconstruction of habit and belief that are promised both in the long period of neuronal development offered by human childhood, or "neoteny"; and by the related phenomenon of "paedomorphism," or the extent to which *Homo sapiens*, in comparison with its forebears, is marked *throughout the life cycle* by both physiological and psychological characteristics that are childlike.[2] But I also argue that, while (1) political democratization and class mobility — the rise, specifically, of a new class of "free men" in fifth-century BC Athens that challenged aristocratic hegemony[3] — first created a social space for the emergence of this form of adult–child collective, (2) the school's full potential as a transformative social and cultural institution has only been realized through a widespread transformation of

1. Michael Tomasello, *Why We Cooperate* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press 2009), xiii.

2. See David F. Bjorklund, "The Role of Immaturity in Human Development," *Psychological Bulletin* 122, no. 2 (1997): 153–169.

3. James Bowen, *The Ancient World,* vol. 1 of *A History of Western Education* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1981), chap. 4.

© 2017 Board of Trustees | University of Illinois

child-rearing modes that grew out of a new understanding of the child as agent and interlocutor that has emerged in the West over the last two centuries. I contend, in other words, that a particular view of childhood (and hence of individual children), embodied in a "psychogenic mode" and characteristic of a particular "psychoclass"[4] or type of social character, is a critical element in cultural and political evolution to the extent that this evolution depends upon a certain form of school-based education; and that schooling understood as dialogue and emergence rather than monologue and "formation" is its basic template, or *archetype*.

One searches the ancient educational records in vain for even a hint of a dialogical approach to childhood and schooling, save for an opinion expressed offhand here or there — by Augustine, for example, or Isocrates — that younger children should be allowed to play or should not be physically punished, views that likely carried little weight among the general population. From their earliest appearance in Egyptian and Mesopotamian records onward, the Near Eastern and Western traditions reveal a consistent picture of institutionalized education in the service of class domination and the reification of hegemonic knowledge regimes (with these, in turn, serving to bolster the state, religion, and a planned economy), and an understanding of children as raw material for the reproduction of this centralized apparatus.[5] As such, the rather dramatic obscuration in our contemporary public, universal education system of the distinction between what we commonly mean by "training" and what we mean by "education" represents a regression to a previous state. Yet, the very fact that so many of us recognize the current trend as a violation of our deeper values suggests that it represents a historical forgetting of at least two centuries of educational evolution based on a principle of mutuality and interlocution between adults and children, and on the notion, however partially realized, of school as a force for liberatory social reconstruction.

We could, taking a page from humanist–organismic developmental psychology, interpret this regression as one moment in a historical dialectic — a case of evolutionary *reculer pour mieux sauter*: dialogic education will return, better articulated and stronger! This optimism is belied by the historical record, however. School as a site for intergenerational dialogue, student agency, free inquiry, and cultural and social transformation through direct democratic practice — the school, that is, as a neotenic institution in the service of emancipatory personal, social, and political ideals and impulses — has, at least since the emergence throughout

4. Lloyd deMause, ed., *The History of Childhood* (New York: Harper, 1974).

5. Bowen, *The Ancient World*, chaps. 1 and 2.

DAVID KENNEDY is Professor in the Department of Educational Foundations at Montclair State University, University Hall 2139, Montclair, NJ 07043; e-mail <kennedyd@mail.montclair.edu>. His primary areas of scholarship are philosophy of childhood, community of philosophical inquiry, and phenomenology of schooling.

the nineteenth century of postrevolutionary ideals of liberation and social reconstruction, been the seed under the snow of universal, compulsory, state-mandated and controlled education-as-social-reproduction, or training. It is, as the eminent anarcho-socialist and martyr Gustav Landauer put it, a prefiguration, an evolutionary laboratory, a site for the growth of a new society "under the shell of the old."[6]

Whatever the possibilities hidden in the present historical moment, the current hegemonic onslaught of a narrowly conceived corporate–capitalist model of education — "data-driven" and measurement-obsessed — presents an opportunity to think more clearly and at a deeper level about just what has been snowed under by this epochal crackdown and to identify some universal deep-structural characteristics of what Jan Masschelein and Maarten Simons have called the "form of gathering and actions" that characterizes a school based on dialogue, choice, inquiry, and direct democratic practice.[7] This form of gathering, I argue, is an archetype in the broad sense of the term: a species-wide expression of the evolutionary possibilities inherent in a dialogical as opposed to a monological relationship between youth and age. Its manifestations are, of course, socioeconomically and ideologically marked as well as historically emergent, but as a social life form it is always a present possibility. If it is an archetype, it was always there as a species potential, but archetypes are expressed in cultural and historical contexts, and are realized as cultural constructs. This gathering, while it is clearly a cultural/historical artifact, is also archetypal because it has some universal dimensions that can be identified phenomenologically. Other structures of adult–child interaction can embody it — a family, or a variety of informal educational settings — but, I will argue, its expression in the form of the adult–child collective that we call "school" expresses it most powerfully (at least in the present era) precisely because it is an intentional community that is consciously dedicated to open inquiry, to an ideal speech situation, and to the "cultural ratcheting" implicit in John Dewey's pragmatic notion of the ongoing reconstruction of habit through its dialogical encounter with impulse.[8] This makes of it a place apart — an educational counterculture that interrupts the demands of "productivity," "development," "growth," "advance," "preparation," and "training" through which the state, the economy, and the mass media act to colonize the younger generation; and it does so in the long-term interest of social, cultural, economic, and political transformation.

6. See Gustav Landauer, *Revolution and Other Writings: A Political Reader*, ed. and trans. Gabriel Kuhn (Oakland, CA: PM Press, 2010): and Colin Ward, *Anarchy in Action* (London: Freedom Press, 1972). As a prefiguration, it could also be seen as an evolutionary "sport" — a psychocultural possibility that appears before its time and that is ephemeral because it has little support from the general culture in which it emerges.

7. Jan Masschelein and Maarten Simons, *In Defense of the School: A Public Issue*, trans. Jack McMartin (Leuven, Belgium: Education, Culture & Society, 2013).

8. For a clear exposition of this encounter, see John Dewey, *Human Nature and Conduct: An Introduction to Social Psychology* (New York: Heath, 1992).

School as *Skholé*

We can in fact identify the first recorded appearance of this archetype in Western psychoculture quite specifically: it is seen during the fifth and fourth centuries BC, with the rise of Athenian democracy and the emergent cultural ideal of *skholé*, from which we have the original term "school." It materialized at a moment of economic expansion associated with the widening of trade markets[9] — a moment also associated with the epistemological upheaval represented by the rhetorical struggle between the "philosophers" and the new knowledge-class of the "sophists" — and acted as a wedge by way of which a new proto-bourgeois class began to break open aristocratic social, economic, and political hegemony. Its manifestations in the ancient Greek *polis* were highly restrictive (for example, slaves, women, and noncitizens were excluded), but a central feature, whether defined by the philosophers (Socrates, Plato) or by the sophists (Protagoras, Isocrates), was one particular notion that separates it from school understood as an ideological apparatus of the state, a corporate entity, or a religious institution: the notion of a particular form of temporality, or lived time. This notion is present in the etymology of the word itself: the Greek term *skholé* is translated as "free time … that in which leisure is employed," and, even more originally, as "a holding back, a keeping clear"; this notion is also evident in the Latin appropriation of the Greek, *schola*, defined as "intermission of work, leisure for learning; … meeting place for teachers and students."[10]

The emphasis here is on a form of lived time that is different from workaday life — a time not driven by the economic imperative. Philosopher of childhood Walter Kohan — inspired by Heraclitus's famous proverb, "Eternity is a child playing at draughts; the kingdom is the child's" — has identified this form of time as *aion*, which is traditionally translated as "eternal" time or "eternal present," as opposed to *kronos*, which refers to linear time. In contrast to the production-driven temporality of public compulsory schooling in its function as a social mechanism dedicated to psychological, cultural, political, and economic *re*production, the temporality of *skholé* is *aionic* and *kairotic*: it is a nondirectional or "timeless" time (*aion*), a time dedicated to emergence and timely manifestation, or epiphany (*kairos*).[11] *Skholé* is a place set deliberately apart from the demands of *kronos*; it is a "holding back" or "keeping clear" of the temporality characteristic of the office, factory, or bureau. It is a time in which study — in its original sense of *studium*, "passion, eagerness, zeal, desire, spirit,

9. Mark Joyal, Iain McDougall, and J. C. Yardley, eds., *Greek and Roman Education: A Sourcebook* (London: Routledge, 2009); Gerald L. Gutek, *A History of the Western Educational Experience*, 2nd ed. (Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland Press, 1994); and Bowen, *The Ancient World*.

10. *Online Etymology Dictionary*, s.v. "school (n.1)," accessed November 14, 2017, https://www.etymonline.com/word/school.

11. Walter Kohan, *Philosophy and Childhood: Critical Perspectives and Affirmative Practices* (New York: Palgrave, 2014).

pursuit"[12] — is prioritized. On this account, *skholé* is a place of suspension of the everyday, set apart in the service of inquiry and the emergence, through the interaction of youth and age, of new forms of knowledge and of new social habits; that is, it is a place in which natality is given its due as an evolutionary force.

Whatever its originary virtues, classical Greek *skholé* was hindered in realizing the archetype of a form of gathering because of patriarchy, misogyny, class domination, institutional slavery, and, as expressed in Aristotle's philosophical anthropology, the subspeciation of "woman" and "child," neither of whom he considered to be fully capable of right willing, moral deliberation, or ethical judgment. Aristotle's child is an intemperate, transitional being — not yet a (male) adult, lacking the one functional characteristic that separates humans from other animals, which is reason. Children are not self-controlled enough to deliberate for the good, and they lack the right form of reason. On Aristotle's account, the woman and the slave will never be quite human; the "free" male child is not quite human either, but he will be.[13] As such, Aristotle's educational theory, in encountering the child as prehuman Other, was confined to forcefully turning not-adults into adults through behavioral conditioning — which is characteristic, as psychohistorian Lloyd deMause has argued, of the "ambivalent," the "intrusive," and the "socializing" child-rearing modes, all of which are haunted to varying degrees by the adult projection of the animalic onto the child. As such, Greek *skholé* was restricted to "young men," those who had already escaped from childhood. Education for *children* happened at home as often as not, and the pedagogy of what schools there were was characterized by copying, memorization, recitation, and strict discipline, however "well rounded" this training was in its inclusion of music and poetry, the arts, and physical training. Primary education was dedicated to producing a prototypical subject — an ideal citizen of the patriarchal city-state, "harmoniously balanced in body and mind" and steeped in the dominant discourses — through a process of interpellation. As in all intrusive and, to a lesser extent, socializing mode pedagogies, from the most violent to the most subtle behaviorism, the child is trained in habits he is assumed not to have and to be incapable of acquiring without forceful adult intervention, resulting in adult subjects whose habits, to the extent that they have not been arrived at through the logic of their own internal experience, are not their own; they are subjects rather than subjectivities, types rather than singularities, shaped for the politics of aristocracy, oligarchy, and tyranny.

12. For which see Tyson Lewis, *On Study: Giorgio Agamben and Educational Potentiality* (London: Routledge, 2013).

13. For an analysis of the pejorative use of the word "child" by Athenian philosophers, see Vinicius Vicenzi, "Childhood as a Weapon in the Struggle Between Rhetoric and Philosophy in Plato's *Gorgias*," *Childhood and Philosophy* 6, no. 11 (2010): 21–39.

The movement of *skholé*, on the other hand, is disruptive and thus inherently "modern" in the generic sense of the word.[14] It is closely associated with democratic, emancipatory impulses insofar as the latter emphasize freedom, equality, individualism and self-expression, classlessness, opportunity, mobility, resistance to irrational authority, and pragmatic meliorism. Just as it first arose under the influence of the grand but messy experiment of Athenian democracy, so it would not reenter history with any force until the rise of more universal, nonexclusionary democratic aspirations in late-eighteenth- and nineteenth-century revolutionary Europe and America, which was also the historical moment at which "child" came under revision as an ontological category. In its modern form, *skholé* is an outgrowth and expression of a historical reconceptualization of the adult–child binary as reflecting a difference of degree rather than of kind — a process that social historians, historians of childhood, and psychohistorians have traced through the past half century.[15]

Understood from a psychohistorical perspective, *skholé* has taken on a more concrete historical form during the past two centuries as a result of the onset of what deMause called the "empathic" or "helping" child-rearing mode, the ultimate product of a series of "closer approaches" between adult and child,[16] which has led to (1) a reconceptualization of the educational relationship as encounter rather than formation, cooperation rather than domination, dialogue rather than monologue; and (2) an understanding of school as a democratic, intentional community dedicated specifically to the emancipatory possibilities inherent in this dialogical relationship between youth and age. Its historical emergence can be broadly traced as beginning with Jean-Jacques Rousseau's educational manifesto *Emile*,[17] at which moment the concept "child" may be said to have officially entered — through its problematization — the discourses of Western modernity. The new, aporetic child that Rousseau's fictional character represents moves forward through nineteenth-century romanticism and revolution into what we call "progressive education," including the traditions associated with Johann Pestalozzi, Friedrich Froebel, Rudolph Steiner, Maria Montessori, Francis Parker,

14. In this sense, *skholé* is, whatever historical period we find it in, "modern" if we understand one primary impulse of modernity to be the interruption and disruption of cultural epistemologies and forms of life in the interest of an allegedly better future.

15. Norbert Elias, *The Civilizing Process: State Formation and Civilization*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994); Philippe Aries, *Centuries of Childhood: A Social History of Family Life*, trans. Robert Baldick (New York: Knopf, 1962); Lloyd deMause, ed., *The History of Childhood* (New York: Harper, 1974); Lawrence Stone, *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England, 1500–1800*, abridged ed. (New York: Harper, 1979); and David Kennedy, *The Well of Being: Childhood, Subjectivity, and Education* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2006).

16. DeMause, *The History of Childhood*. For a discussion of this historical process based on deMause's theory of the evolution of child-rearing modes, see Kennedy, *The Well of Being*.

17. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Émile*, trans. Alan Bloom (New York: Basic Books, 1979).

John Dewey, and Margaret Naumberg;[18] anarcho-socialist educational theory and practice;[19] Celestin Freinet and the Modern School Movement; and, in the last hundred years, the "democratic" or left-libertarian school movement.[20] The philosophy of childhood held by most of these pioneers and educational movements no doubt spans a broad spectrum between the empathic mode and its forerunner in the "socializing mode." The latter is, in deMause's formulation, implicit in organismic, development stage theory, whether expressed in its brute form in recapitulation theory or in the complexities of Jean Piaget's constructivism, and their learning theories as well.

Three dimensions of progressive theory and practice have been identified in U.S. education in the first half of the twentieth century: the behaviorist "scientific management" or "social engineering" approach; the social reconstructionist approach; and the child-centered, along with its related "whole child," approach.[21] The first has clearly prevailed in mainstream American educational practice. In deMause's formulation, it could be characterized as a hybrid of the intrusive and socializing modes, or an "iron hand in a velvet glove." That is, the social engineering approach recognizes the child as a lawfully developing organism undergoing the process of adapting to its environment, and, in order to control this process and its outcome, it manipulates either the child (intrusive) or the environment (socializing). Even what actual pedagogy we find in Rousseau may be so characterized. On the other hand, the social reconstructionist approach foundered early on due to the paradoxes and contradictions of political indoctrination. The child-centered approach has clearly moved over into the empathic mode, but apart from its psychoanalytic, art-oriented branch represented in Margaret Naumberg's Walden School and in the radical left Freudian "psychoanalytic pedagogy" movement in 1920s Vienna,[22] its pervasive developmental focus still defuses its dialogical potential: "child" is understood in advance, and the concept of "developmentally appropriate" represents a warm but smothering blanket on the child–adult relation.

18. James Bowen, *The Modern West*, vol. 3 of *A History of Western Education* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1981); and Gutek, *A History of the Western Educational Experience*.

19. Paul Avrich, *The Modern School Movement: Anarchism and Education in the United States* (Oakland, CA: AK Press, 2006); Peter Marshall, *Demanding the Impossible: A History of Anarchism* (Oakland, CA: PM Press, 2010); Judith Suissa, *Anarchism and Education: A Philosophical Perspective* (Oakland, CA: PM Press, 2006); and Leonard I. Krimerman and Lewis Perry, eds., *Patterns of Anarchy: A Collection of Writings on the Anarchist Tradition* (New York: Doubleday, 1966).

20. Paul Goodman, *The Paul Goodman Reader* (New York: PM Press, 2011); George Dennison, *The Lives of Children: The Story of the First Street School* (New York: Random House, 1970); and A. S. Neill, *Summerhill: A Radical Approach to Child Rearing* (New York: Macmillan, 1960).

21. Susan F. Semel and Alan R. Sadovnik, *"Schools of Tomorrow," Schools of Today: What Happened to Progressive Education* (New York: Peter Lang, 1999).

22. For a fascinating account of which, see Sol Cohen, "In the Name of the Prevention of Psychosis: The Search for Psychoanalytic Pedagogy in Europe, 1905–1935," in *Regulated Children/Liberated Children: Education in Psycho-Historical Perspective*, ed. Barbara Finkelstein (New York: Psychohistory Press, 1979), 184–219.

Those principles and practices closest to *skholé* — based on the recognition of the agentic nature of childhood and of school as a space and time of encounter — although present in all but the dominant "social engineering" approach, can be found most clearly articulated in the democratic school movement inaugurated by A. S. Neill's Summerhill; in the English anarcho-socialist thought of William Morris and Herbert Read; and in Celestin Freinet's Modern School Movement, which combined inquiry-based cooperative learning with self-determination and democratic self-government. As opposed to the others, which have their roots in nineteenth-century socializing mode theory, these are twentieth-century movements, radicalized by the clear onset of the empathic mode and the bitter "civics" lessons of the First World War. Presaged as the "century of the child" in 1900,[23] the twentieth century saw a steady increase in educational ventures organized on the principle of dialogue.

Monological schooling, on the other hand, is organized — in its construction of built space, human grouping, organization of knowledge and learning materials, communication (pedagogy), and governance (the exercise of power) — around the intrusive mode of child rearing, originally formulated in Aristotle's deficit theory of childhood, and it is based on principles of coercion in the interests of "formation," whether understood as "breaking" or "instilling" or "disciplining"; or "behavioral change"; or "banking"; or even "shaping" or "guiding," which is the chief characteristic of the socializing mode, and which also invokes Aristotle's teleological theory of development. Above all, "formation" in this sense is — in its original and enduring association with nation-state and corporate hegemony, under the sign of a form of temporality (*kronos*) that frames educational activity as economic, that is, as instrumental "work" in the interest of production not just of subjectivities (in the form of habits, skills, dispositions, and beliefs), but of the future (in the form of jobs, "personalities," lifestyles, indexes, and income levels) — the production of productivity as a dominant ideology. The criticism, expressed regularly by educational theorists from Dewey on,[24] that state- and corporate-controlled education represents the most glaring example of cultural lag can be attributed to a fundamental patriarchal conservatism in the adult–child relation, which is articulated in the Aristotelian ontological sub- or pseudo-speciation of childhood. Universal, state-sponsored, bureaucratized schooling understands itself as an apparatus for the formation of one generation by another — the exercise of task, routine, and standardized, normalized expectations, a disciplinary structure imposed by adults in the interest of turning children into images of themselves and their world. Here "school" is implicitly understood as an adult colonial outpost in the aboriginal world of childhood. In Dewey's words,

> Adults have given training rather than education. An impatient, premature mechanization of impulsive activity after the fixed pattern of adult habits of thought and affection has

23. Juliet Kinchin and Adrian O'Connor, *Century of the Child: Growing by Design, 1900–2000* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 2012.)

24. John Dewey, *The School and Society* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1900).

> 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.[25]

It is to these "reorganizing potentialities" that *skholé* is dedicated, under the sign of *aion*, time liberated from linearity (free time, present time), and *kairos*, the time of emergence, of interruption of the everyday time of production that sacrifices the present for a calculated future.[26] These are the form of lived time that we often associate with childhood. As Dewey suggests in the preceding quote, education (as opposed to training) becomes possible in social institutions when the powers of childhood are recognized and given their due, which in turn becomes possible, as deMause argues, when there is a widespread — albeit never universal — collective shift in psychogenic mode. The "closer approaches" between adults and children that deMause identifies as a historical process of dialectical change are based, according to him, on a withdrawal of psychological projection: the adult no longer sees — or more accurately, comes to mistrust and resist — his or her own repressed and split-off shadow material as it appears on the blank screen of the child, and recognizes the latter as a singularity rather than an example of a type, and as an agent of his or her own growth and transformation — in short, as inherently reasonable, in the sense of sharing an interlocutive lifeworld characterized by species-specific communicative rationality, from whatever age. In the wake of this shift in cultural perception, the political ideology of participatory democracy replaces hierarchy, and a belief — bolstered by organismic theory, complexity theory, ethology, and evolutionary psychology — in both individual and social self-regulation replaces "discipline." A constructivist epistemology replaces infusion or transmission pedagogy with a pedagogy of emergence and *autopoesis*. Play replaces production; experience replaces preparation for experience; growth replaces formation; and authority based on power-over is replaced by power-with.

Neoteny, Paedomorphism, and *Skholé*

Like all intentional communities, school as *skholé* aspires to be, after Dewey, an "embryonic society" — or, more specifically, an "embryonic democratic community."[27]The intentional community called "school" is dedicated to the possibilities inherent in the phenomenon of neoteny, the extraordinarily long childhood of our species; and in paedomorphism, or the retention of childlike characteristics throughout the human life cycle, including what Dewey counted as the great virtue of childhood, "plasticity."[28] The archetype of *skholé* embodies a form of gathering and action that facilitates the paedomorphic impulse — the impulse to interrupt,

25. Dewey, *Human Nature and Conduct*, 96.

26. In *On Study*, Tyson Lewis has distinguished between "bureaucratic," "prophetic," and "messianic" time in education; he critiques the first and second in the interest of the third (95–97) in a comparison that does not, in my view, affect an understanding of the temporality of *skholé*.

27. Sorel and Navodnik, *"Schools of Tomorrow," Schools of Today*, 367.

28. Stephen Jay Gould, *Ontogeny and Phylogeny* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1977); Ashley Montagu, *Growing Young,* 2nd ed. (Westport, CT: Bergin & Garvey, 1989); Bjorklund, "The

invent, transform, create, cooperate, love, and collectively thrive — that is one psychohistorical driver of cultural and social evolution.[29] A phenomenology of the archetype — that is, a description of its appearance in the human social world — identifies it as a spontaneous expression of the adult–child relation in the form of an encounter that brings into practical focus what Paulo Freire has called "humanization," or our "ontological vocation to become more human" that is based on the understanding that we are "unfinished," which in turn implies the "transformational character of reality."[30] *Skholé* is a form of gathering that allows what Hannah Arendt identified as "natality" its transformational power through the affirmation of a culture of psychological paedomorphism. Evolutionary psychologist Ashley Montagu identified the adaptive characteristics of paedomorphism as "curiosity, playfulness, affection, sociality, and an innate desire to cooperate."[31] Although each of these concepts — plasticity, neoteny, paedomorphism, humanization, unfinishedness, and natality — can be said to include its others, the last most clearly marks the possibilities inherent in human difference and singularity. If, as Arendt argues, each birth signals the appearance of something "uniquely new" in the world, we must create the conditions necessary for each unique being to "disclose itself," and doing so holds promise for the founding of a new political space, a public space where "freedom can appear as a worldly reality."[32]

While monological schooling is dedicated to the (re)production of calculated, pre-ordained outcomes (whether test scores, skills, dispositions, workers, consumers, "citizens," or even "self-actualized" persons), *skholé*, as a form of dialogical gathering and action, is dedicated to emergent inquiry, individually, collaboratively, and sometimes collectively undertaken. More broadly and however implicitly, it is dedicated to the possibilities for personal, cultural, and social reconstruction that follow from an educative relationship between adults and children that is based on understanding children as bearers of the novel, a notion that Dewey evokes through his faith in the "reorganizing potentialities" of the "immature impulse" of child life. Impulses, in Dewey's vocabulary, are "the pivots upon which the re-organization of activities turn, they are agencies of deviation, for giving new directions to old habits and changing their quality."[33] As a paedomorphic as opposed to a gerontomorphic institution, *skholé* is an evolutionary outpost, that is, a site of intergenerational dialogue in which the dialectical relation between impulse and habit is explored by means of practices that encourage emergent forms of (1) individual and social subjectivity; (2) work, play, and interaction;

Role of Immaturity in Human Development"; and John Dewey, *Democracy and Education* (New York: Macmillan, 1916).

29. Montagu, *Growing Young*.

30. Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Continuum, 1970).

31. Montagu, *Growing Young*, 107.

32. Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), 17.

33. Dewey, *Human Nature and Conduct*, 93.

and (3) connections between epistemological domains. These emergent forms ultimately yield new forms of production that are taken back into the world of *kronos* and that then act to interrupt, disrupt, and transform that world.

It is important to keep in mind that the child–adult binary is a contrastive pair, and that the two terms are inseparable. To problematize and reconstruct the concept "child" necessarily implies the reconstruction of "adult." When Dewey invokes the Hobbesian catalogue of adult failings of "love of power, timidity in the face of the novel and a self-admiring complacency," he identifies them as sins against childhood — that is, against the "reorganizing potentialities" of childhood impulse in its encounter with adult habit. This implies that if these impulses are, in his words, "permitted" to enter dialogue with adult habit, both are transformed, with the ongoing pragmatic result, as Dewey phrases it, of "steady re-organization of customs and institutions" in the interest of "a future new society of changed purposes and desires."[34] This possibility of a transformative encounter between impulse and habit has its material analogue in the biology of neoteny theory, which is the evolutionary basis for the archetype of *skholé*. The extraordinarily long childhood of the human species is made necessary by the fact that neurons in the frontal lobe are organized more densely in the human brain than in other animal brains, and that different brain regions such as the amygdala and temporal lobes, which are involved in emotion and forming memories, are more complex in humans than in other species. Human intelligence is linked to increasingly advanced networks of brain activation and to multiple connections between different neural regions.[35]

The human brain takes roughly twenty-five years to develop completely (about one-third of the average human life span), and most significantly for education, it is composed of a combination of "experience-expectant" and "experience-dependent" neurons. The former term, we are told, refers to "incorporation of environmental information that is ubiquitous in the environment and common to all species members" — that is, to universal human functions in normal patterns of development. The latter term refers to "incorporation of environmental information that is idiosyncratic, or unique to the individual.… [T]he neural basis of experience-dependent processes appears to involve active formation of new synaptic connections in response to the events providing the information to be stored."[36] In other words, the individual's interaction with his or her environment fosters specific new brain growth and refines existing brain structures, influencing neural connections uniquely in different individuals. Although neural plasticity — the ability of the brain to modify itself and adapt to challenges of the environment — is increasingly understood to be present throughout the life cycle, during

34. Ibid., 100, 96.

35. Joseph Chilton Pearce, *The Biology of Transcendence* (Rochester, VT: Park Street Press, 2002).

36. William T. Greenough, James E. Black, and Christopher S. Wallace, "Experience and Brain Development," *Child Development* 58, no. 3 (1987): 539–559.

human childhood an overabundance of neurons are in process of being organized through experience into individualized synaptic connecting patterns, grids, and relationships. If the latter are not, through use, permanently "insulated" by myelination into neural circuits, they undergo a periodic neurochemical "pruning"; thus, connections that are used become strengthened and survive while unused connections are replaced by different pathways or disappear.[37]

Skholé, then, is the institution dedicated to the evolutionary possibilities of neoteny to the extent that it provides a rich, brain-friendly environment designed to meet the urge for novelty, the preference for social stimulation, and the heightened attention to sensory experience that we associate with childhood. It is implicitly dedicated to the paedomorphic evolutionary project, which we may characterize — with both strong and weak utopian theory, including anarchism and Deweyan pragmatism — as creating spaces that encourage the emergence of new forms of sensibility; in psychoneural parlance, this means creating the best environments for the development of more adaptive connections between the brain's cognitive, aesthetic, and emotional regions. By "best" I mean those environments that encourage forms of subjectivity that improve intelligence, which I understand as a style of adaptation that, in Dewey's formulation, makes possible "a release of capacities that have not previously functioned," which through a process of "continuous reconstruction" undergo "a steady reorganization of habits to meet new elements in new situations," and through "a new distribution of energies which have henceforth to be employed in ways for which past experience gives no exact instruction" leads to the formation of "habits … 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," all in the interest of "a future new society of changed purposes and desires."[38] *Skholé* may be thought of as one laboratory of this evolutionary project; a relatively new one in species history, but one that has always been an implicit dimension of the adult–child relation. Historically, we find the first normative inquiry into and analysis of this dimension in Dewey's earliest works on schooling — in the laboratory school that he and his wife founded at the University of Chicago in 1896, and in the cooperative research he and his daughter conducted on six exemplary schools, published as *Schools of Tomorrow* in 1915.[39] We also find *skholé* in emergent form in the history, roughly contemporary with Dewey, of libertarian anarchist schooling. The most well-known and longest-lasting school established in conjunction with this movement, Summerhill (founded in 1921),

37. Ross A. Thompson, "Development in the First Years of Life," *Caring for Infants and Toddlers* 11, no. 1 (2001): 21–33.

38. Dewey, *Human Nature and Conduct*, passim: 284, 101, 104, 285, 128, and 96.

39. John Dewey and Evelyn Dewey, *Schools of Tomorrow* (Boston: E. P. Dutton, 1915).

had a profound influence on the emergence of the "free school" in the 1960s, and its influence can still be seen in the worldwide democratic education movement.[40]

PHENOMENOLOGY OF *SKHOLÉ*

As already stated, the archetype of *skholé* is characterized by a suspension of the "natural" order. It is a place apart, dedicated to the nonproductive, or "free" and emergent, temporality of *aion* and *kairos*. It is a transitional space, like the theater, art studio, or other settings for deep play — a psychological space in which the symbolic boundaries between inner and outer, subject and object, real and imaginary, possible and impossible, self and other, dream and reality are provisionally tested. As such, the primary curriculum of *skholé* is centered on aesthetic inquiry, the human activity in which those boundaries are most visible and often called into question. The transitional is the psychological and social space of creativity, interruption, and innovation, and of intrinsically motivated inquiry of all kinds — scientific and philosophical as well as artistic and interpersonal. It is the epistemological space from which new paradigms arise, and new ontologies are considered. In a paedomorphic culture, it is the space of inquiry that leads to transformation and reconstruction, and to the form of joint communicative inquiry and action that Dewey identified as social democracy.[41]

In its transitionality, *skholé* is a complex *poietic*[42] intentional space, in which the long-recognized psychodynamic characteristics of play — self-regulating arousal modulation and drive reduction, moderate complexity, discovery, intrinsic competence and mastery motivation, the primacy of the nonliteral and representational — constitute the basis for a theory of self-organizing learning and of a dialogical pedagogical approach. Deep play — play that dissolves the conventional work/play dichotomy — is an aionic activity, in which time is experienced as presence (*parousia*) and immediacy, as opposed to an external metric driving or dragging me forward, waiting for me, demanding a predetermined product of my time. The artifacts that result from playful work — a poem, a drama, a dance, a story, a piece of music, a model, a painting, a handcrafted object, a philosophical dialogue — carry the symbolic resonance of *kairos:* lived time as the "right" time, the opportune or "appointed" moment, the time of lived completion or manifestation.

Skholé as a laboratory of the transitional has several other neotenic brain-friendly environmental features. As an open structure, it is characterized by richness, variety, and emergent order in the communicative organization of space, of stimuli, and of activities; in the balance between individual and group experience and the balance between teacher and student initiative; in the forms

---

40. Neill, *Summerhill*; Avrich, *The Modern School Movement*; Herbert Read, *Education through Art* (London: Faber and Faber, 1955); and International Democratic Education Network, www.idenetwork.org.

41. Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, 87.

42. In the sense of the original Greek term "making," that is, in the form of an action that transforms oneself and the world.

of problem solving applied to the emergence of conflict within the social system; and in the praxis of communal governance that approaches democracy as a form of collective problem solving. *Skholé* is multisensorial; in other words, it is stocked with materials and activities that engage all the senses. It is also polysymbolic in the sense that it offers activities and projects that call on all of the "one hundred languages" of representation: verbal, written, and symbolic language; imaging in various forms; the shaping of things (sculpture, craft); mime and movement; and music. Aesthetic experience is the curricular ground of *skholé* and is its primary form of action, that which is most closely connected to the sensible body, and the most natural of the disciplines in that it is, as Herbert Read argued, "a discipline imposed by the tool and the material."[43]

As a space of child–adult encounter, three principles of dialogue are primary: maintaining a fundamental respect for the other as a singularity, practicing a balance or mutuality of power, and an openness to being changed through interaction with the other.[44] In his analysis of the dialectical relation between impulse and habit, Dewey understands the latter as broad patterns of action and reaction, of belief, attitude, and judgment. Habits, in his words, are "affections" with "projectile power," "predispositions," "demands for certain kinds of activity," which "constitute the self" and which, "in any intelligible sense of the word will, … *are* will."[45] Habit is tested, exercised, and transformed by the vital, spontaneous, emergent active or reactive energy of immediate impulse in response to the manifold stimuli in each situation. Impulse — which Dewey in one place calls the child's "vital logical movement,"[46] which he sometimes calls "instinct," and which we may associate with "interest" or "desire" — interrupts, challenges, and vivifies habit, and transforms it such that, ideally, it becomes "an expansion of power[,] not its shrinkage."[47] Herbert Marcuse invokes a similar evolutionary dialectic when he speaks of the historical emergence of a "new sensibility" through the "reconstruction of experience," which would "find expression in the transformation of

43. Herbert Read, *The Grass Roots of Art: Lectures on the Social Aspects of Art in an Industrial Age* (London: Faber and Faber, 1955).

44. In his essay "Education," Martin Buber provides an analysis of what he calls a relationship of dialogical "inclusion," arguing that in child–adult dialogue, the adult assumes the existence in the child of those powers of self-initiation, self organization, and self-regulation — the existence, that is, of a natural, biologically-based "reason" — which she as an adult also assumes in herself. Martin Buber, "Education," in *Between Man and Man*, trans. R. G. Smith (New York: Macmillan, 1965), 115–120. For a further elaboration of this concept, see Kennedy, *The Well of Being*, 159.

45. Dewey, *Human Nature and Conduct*, 25.

46. John Dewey, *How We Think*, in *John Dewey: The Later Works, 1925–1953*. vol. 8, ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1983), 179.

47. Dewey, *Human Nature and Conduct*, 93.

the *Lebenswelt,*" marked by "the appearance of new instinctual needs and values" that make authentic democratic character and practice possible.[48]

As appropriate to a site dedicated to the dialogical encounter between the child's "vital logical movement" of inquiry and the adult's storehouse of cultural memory or logic of the disciplines (that is, the codified results of previous inquiry), the curriculum of *skholé* is emergent: children's interests[49] are met by adults in the form of activities, projects, and courses of study — designed, depending on circumstances, for individuals or small or large groups — in a thoroughly polysemic setting. Poetry, narrative, languages, drawing, painting, sculpture, handicraft, ceramics, dance, movement, sport, song, musical improvisation, drama, theater, performance, nature study, scientific inquiry, mathematical inquiry, social inquiry, cooking, sewing, carpentry, gardening, and communal philosophical discussion — these make up the varied palette of symbolic materials and languages. And the teacher becomes, as in Elizabeth Jones and Gretchen Reynolds's compelling formulation of the ludic facilitator, Planner, Stage Manager, Mediator, Player, Interrupter, Scribe, Assessor, and Communicator.[50]

Communal Philosophical Inquiry and *Skholé*

The last of the symbolic languages named above — communal philosophical inquiry — invokes the historical emergence of *skholé* most directly in the staking out of a site within the culture dedicated to an interruption of the temporality of state and economic production in the service of Platonic *theoria* — beholding or contemplating through the "eye of the mind" or *noesis*, a process that is secularized, democratized, and operationalized in the Socratic *elenchus*. In *skholé* the post-Socratic communal discussion functions as an ur-discourse. It provides a vehicle both for the interruption and problematization of epistemological and ontological habits of belief that underlie the disciplines — history, sociology, psychology, anthropology, and so on — *and* for the everyday ethical and juridical praxis of the school community. The former is perhaps the most direct expression of the shift from gerontomorphic to paedomorphic education that *skholé* represents: the primacy of the question replaces the primacy of the answer or statement. The original questions to which the disciplines are a set of answers are excavated through philosophical questioning, and explored through group dialogue, in the implicit interest of ongoing conceptual reconstruction.

Questions that interrogate common, central, contestable concepts — such as alive, human, animal, justice, self, god, cause, duty, freedom, possibility, peace,

48. Herbert Marcuse, *An Essay on Liberation* (Boston: Beacon Press, 45). See also David Kennedy, "Neoteny, Dialogic Education, and an Emergent Psychoculture: Notes on Theory and Practice," *Journal of Philosophy of Education* 48, no. 1 (2014): 100–117.

49. In *The School and Society*, Dewey speaks of children's impulses/interests as "instincts," of which he identifies four: construction, communication, investigation, and expression.

50. Elizabeth Jones and Gretchen Reynolds, *The Play's the Thing: Teachers' Roles in Children's Play* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1992).

mind, nature, culture, society, language, evil, love, and so on — implicitly explore the boundaries of the paradigms we live by; as such, interrogation of these concepts in philosophical dialogue is potentially (and never perfectly) a form of interruption of the world of contingent, implicit, and unconscious norms that is analogous to the interruption of the perceptual world represented by art. The space of the philosophical circle is transitional in the same way as the experience of art, although the material of the former is linguistic and conceptual. What sets it apart from other forms of transitional space, however, is its connection with the ethical — with the question "What shall we then do?" that implicitly connects it with action, thus bringing us back to the second role of group inquiry: its function as juridical praxis in the intentional community of *skholé*. The circle that is a setting for philosophical inquiry into the paradigmatic beliefs that make up the disciplines is also a circle for practical problem solving within the democratic community, which is always emergent and never free of problems, both great and small. The inquiry circle is where issues of governance — which involve shifting balances and imbalances of power on every level, conflict, transgression, violation, and consequence — are raised and worked through. Rules are made, challenged, changed, and, in some cases, thrown out; complaints are aired and resolved; plans are made.[51] Here, at least two of the basic building blocks of the democratic social character — a capacity for dialogue and a tolerance for ambiguity — are laid and practiced, as well as habits of direct democratic action, in which participation in governance on the micro and macro levels is understood as an existential requirement. The dialogical circle is the heart of *skholé* as a place apart and a community of reflection, theory, belief, speech, and action; it is a perennially unfinished version of the ideal speech community, in which we both theorize theory and practice justice, or Platonic *dikaiosune*.

Conclusion: Childhood, Paedomorphism, and Paradigm Shift

As an archetype, *skholé* is a constant possibility in the human community of adult–child relations, but it is also a historical invention. It emerges at times and in circumstances that allow or require it, and it appears in different forms, although its fundamental morphology as a form of "gathering and action," "suspension of the natural order," "suspending the urgency of the moment," "opening a future," and open-ended, emergent study[52] is always recognizable. As an evolutionary gambit, it comes "to bring not peace but a sword" in the sense that it disrupts and transforms, and represents the imminence of paradigm shift in a given culture.[53] It was made possible in our time when "child" entered Western history as

51. For existing models of this practice in schools associated with the Democratic Schools Movement, see https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Democratic_education.

52. Masschelein and Simons, *In Defense of Schools*, passim.

53. In an analogous account, David F. Lancy, in *The Anthropology of Childhood: Cherubs, Chattel, Changelings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), offers an ethnographic description of the advent of the "village school" in premodern societies, which frequently became a site of cultural conflict,

interlocutor rather than as "cherub, chattel, or changeling,"[54] and has appeared in the guise of various educational approaches (including anarchist, libertarian, and progressive) since the early nineteenth century, albeit in differing ideological registers. There is not sufficient space here to take up the question of *skholé*'s influence on mainstream conventional education, or the related question of whether it can survive in any form — for example, in an individual teacher's classroom within a school and a system otherwise devoted to the "impatient, premature mechanization of impulsive activity after the fixed pattern of adult habits" implicit in the high-surveillance, "result-oriented," hypercompetitive, standardized, and monetized climate of mainstream education today.

Another, related issue is associated with the concrete material requirements necessary to support the emergence of *skholé* in time, space, and culture. Are there limits, for instance, on school size and teacher–student ratio beyond which the archetype cannot manifest? How profoundly does school architecture influence the realization of a "space that is … detached and separated from the time and space of both the society and the household"?[55] What — in an age of ever-increasing, whole-planet intervisibility, in which billions of us are involuntarily complicit in systems that pose dramatic challenges to sustainability; social welfare; human, animal, and ecological rights; and even, ultimately, species survival — is the responsibility of *skholé* as "embryonic society" to bear witness and to take action of some kind in local and global communities?

Finally, I would suggest that the entry of child into history as an interlocutor with adult — to the extent that this psychohistorical movement is associated with the broad emergence of cultural paedomorphism — promises not just a humanizing or "civilizing" influence on adult societies, but a reanimating influence on adult epistemological and ontological discourses. As for the first of these influences, to the extent that a more consciously paedomorphic culture values the childlike traits identified by Montagu — "curiosity, wonder, playfulness, imagination, creativity, open-mindedness, flexibility, experimental-mindedness, explorativeness"[56] — the more intelligent that culture is and the greater its capacity for evolutionary adaptation: for dealing with, to repeat Dewey's classic phrase, situations for which "past experience gives no exact instruction," and for developing "habits … 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."[57] This assumes that our paedomorphic traits are the cognitive and emotional engines of cultural evolution.

---

and an early historical example of how school is "the way in which a society puts itself at a distance from itself" (Masschelein and Simons, *In Defense of the School*, 183).

54. Lancy, *The Anthropology of Childhood*; and Kennedy, *The Well of Being*.

55. Masschelein and Simons, *In Defense of the School*, 181.

56. Montagu, *Growing Young*, 107.

57. Dewey, *Human Nature and Conduct*, 285, 128.

Second, psychological paedomorphism suggests an openness to difference and singularity — that is, to natality — and a psychosomatic grounding in what Marcuse called "sensuous reason,"[58] which he considered a mark of the emergent sensibility his work explored. Recent ontological discourses, which revisit historical notions of animism and vitalism in search of an expanded notion — and one that is in fact truer to experience — of "life," "living," and the agentic characteristics of matter,[59] suggest a new reading of those characteristics of young children's perceptual reasoning that Jean Piaget explored a century ago in his book *The Child's Conception of the World*.[60] Here, following the dominant interpretation, Piaget identified these characteristics with the thought of "primitives" and the mentally ill. In the age of the Anthropocene and the Sixth Extinction, the influence of children's epistemological and ontological persuasions and the communicative rationality associated with childhood (for example, belief in the capacity for interspecies recognition and communication) could be seen as prophetic elements in the emergence of the paradigm change upon which ecological survival may depend. We may, in fact, interpret every paradigm shift as an expression of natality and an assertion of paedomorphic intelligence. As a laboratory for the development of this form of intelligence, *skholé* is one institution that can save us.

58. Herbert Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization: A Philosophical Inquiry into Freud* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1955), 148.

59. Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009); Diana Coole and Samantha Frost, eds., *New Materialisms: Ontology, Agency, and Politics* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010); Rupert Sheldrake, *A New Science of Life: The Hypothesis of Formative Causation*, 3rd ed. (Los Angeles: J. P. Tarcher, 2009); and David Skrbina, *Panpsychism in the West* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2007).

60. Jean Piaget, *The Child's Conception of the World* (1929; repr. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2007).