

Education at the Crossroads: Looking Back; Looking Forward (Part 2): Technology, the ‘Fourfold’ and Revolt

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Disobedience is the true foundation of liberty. The obedient must be slaves (Henry David Thoreau).

Abstract

This paper explores the possibility of a politics of technology, before turning to the question regarding a compass of sorts for education. In this regard, Heidegger offers the notion of the ‘fourfold’ as a touchstone for a truly human mode of living, which can therefore also serve to orient education. Unless, through education, a new generation of post-conventional citizens were to be made possible, we might end up like the zombies/consumers in Snyder’s *Dawn of the Dead*. To launch an educational project like this, however, we should remind ourselves of Lyotard’s notion of the inhuman, which (paradoxically) could be a source of rescuing our humanity. This is related to what Kristeva calls the exigency for ‘revolt’ at a time when the entertainment industry distracts people from what is at stake. The paper concludes by alluding to Benjamin’s notion of ‘empty’ time, as opposed to a time when this emptiness can be transcended by seizing the moment and ‘turning’ history in a different direction, as it were. This, and nothing less, is required at present as far as education is concerned.

On a previous occasion¹ the question of technical rationality in modern and

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postmodern societies, as well as the related ‘disciplinary’ character of modernity, according to Michel Foucault, was pursued. The work of Hardt and Negri on ‘Empire’, the new form of sovereign power in the world, and their appeal to the ‘multitude’, which is capable of rescuing democracy from the depredations of Empire in this time of crisis, were also discussed. Returning to Foucault, the preconditions for attaining autonomy in a world where we are reduced to ‘docile bodies’ were outlined in relation to his investigation of the quest for autonomy in the Hellenistic era. Finally, attention turned to the urgent need for recovering such (relative) autonomy in the current global situation of deteriorating ecosystems, and it was argued that this situation is causally inseparable from the dominant economic system of neoliberal capitalism.

Keywords: fourfold, inhuman, revolt, politics, technology

Education and Technology

One cannot ignore the indissoluble link between capitalist development (see footnote 1) and the rapid development of technology. For capitalism to flourish, it is committed to continuous technological innovation (Harvey 1990: 180). And yet, judging by the work of Andrew Feenberg in this regard, if the hegemonic economic position of neoliberal capitalism is considered in the light of the most recent events in the history of technology, it may be that the latter has contributed to an effective politicisation of technology which, in principle, could paradoxically contribute to challenging the global hegemony of capitalism.

Feenberg (2004) takes stock of where humanity has come from, where we are now, and where we are heading in an increasingly technologised environment. He compares two important, but divergent ‘utopian’ novels, both of which represent imaginative responses to the state of the society that the writers were living in at the time of writing their respective books – Edward Bellamy’s utopian sci-fi novel of 1888, *Looking Backward: 2000-1887*, and Aldous Huxley’s dystopian novel, *Brave New World* of 1932.

The two novels depict widely divergent worlds. Bellamy’s is set in a socialist utopia, which – judging by the book’s best-selling status – embodied

what Feenberg calls ‘the hope in a rational society for several generations of readers’. Perhaps it was because Bellamy’s utopia, while collectivist, displays a dual character: part of its imagined social structure is organised along scientific–technical lines, but the other part makes provision for individual personal fulfilment – essentially (something similar to what Marx envisioned), a society where technological advancement would create ample leisure time for individual ‘*Bildung*’ in the arts and sciences (something recently resurrected by Peter Joseph in the third *Zeitgeist* movie, *Moving Forward*). Feenberg remarks on the historical irony, that the kind of socialism (communism) that emerged in the Soviet Union only a generation after the appearance of Bellamy’s novel, did not allow for this benign combination of technological rationality and personal enrichment, where (in the novel) social collectivism is posited as the precondition of a high degree of individualising development. On the contrary, according to Feenberg (2004: 95), ‘this bipolarity is precisely what did not happen in the twentieth century under either socialism or capitalism. Instead, total rationalisation transformed the individuals into objects of technical control in every domain, and especially in everything touching on lifestyle and politics’.

Huxley’s dystopic vision, on the other hand, articulated the vision of a hyper-rationalised society where human beings are mere functionaries of a mechanised world. Instead of Bellamy and Marx’s hope, that humans would be freed by a technology that they have mastered, Huxley’s novel depicts a humanity that has become ‘mere cogs in the machine’. Feenberg does not mention that Huxley’s novel also contains interesting insights into eco-friendly approaches to ‘waste disposal’, as well as a powerful critique of such a thoroughgoing mechanisation of society via the eyes of those characters who prefer the discomfort of an ‘outside’ to instrumentalised society. This pessimistic conception is echoed by much of twentieth century thought on society and technology, from Max Weber to Martin Heidegger and Herbert Marcuse, except that in the latter’s work – apart from an endorsement of Heidegger’s view that humans have become mere ‘resources’ for a technological mindset – there is also a hope for a new kind of ‘technology of liberation’, which would leave the integrity of humans and of nature intact. Feenberg regards this as still being a ‘worthy’, but ‘receding’ goal.

These ‘dystopian philosophies of technology’, Feenberg (2004: 97) points out, had a remarkable influence during the 60s and 70s, as shown in the technophobia of the 1960s, which was further fuelled by the war in

Vietnam and the ‘arrogance of technocracy’. What started out as a literary and theoretical critique of modernity, turned into a populist movement where technology became a political issue for the New Left. Feenberg (2004: 98) reminds his readers that the French worker and student rebellion of May 1968 was an ‘antitechnocratic movement, as hostile to Soviet-style socialism as to advanced capitalism’. While the 1960s events were antitechnocratic, motivated by dystopian convictions, as the 20th century wore on such dystopianism made way for a new kind of utopian thinking. Feenberg makes it clear that, in contrast to Bellamy and Huxley’s hope (or despair) concerning the use of technology in their respective visions of the future, the new utopian projections of ‘bioengineered superhumans’ are not very credible, insofar as they generally amount to mere ‘horrific speculation’.

However, these flimsy creations have been counterbalanced by scholarship predicated on the irreversible immersion of humanity in a technological world, and focusing on the social implications of technology. Among such ‘posthumanist’ scholars Donna Haraway and Bruno Latour are probably best known for their enthusiastic embrace of a kind of ‘cyborg’ (cybernetic organism) future in which humans have accepted technology and promote its ‘benign’ development. Perspicaciously, Feenberg (2004: 99) notes that the influence of these writers would not have been what it is today had it not been for the internet affording millions of people first-hand experience of technology-enabled social interaction. Remarkably, such networking has undermined dystopian sentiments, and not surprisingly, given the way its apparently ‘non-hierarchical and liberating’ interactivity counteracts the loss of individuality that occurred in the face of the earlier mass media of the 20th century. The internet represents a kind of technology that encourages initiative rather than being inimical to it, and has enabled even those who may feel otherwise alienated in large, impersonal cities, to participate in (virtual) social interaction.

But although he shows a thorough awareness of the social advantages of the ‘information highway’, Feenberg simultaneously cautions against the McLuhanesque expectation of a world-village utopia in which everyone will work from home, and do everything comprising social life from behind their computer, to boot – in a sense, just a more ‘refined’ version of humans being assimilated to machines. In an era when ‘the public’ has become so large and unwieldy that it cannot, as in former times, gather on the ‘agora’ or village square for participative political deliberation, the political potential of the

internet lies, for him, in its capacity to contribute to the creation of a ‘technical public sphere’, however difficult that process might be. Importantly, the fact that the internet cannot be conclusively controlled by those in power, but instead provides ample opportunity for resistance against ‘strategic’ control, points, for Feenberg, to a step beyond dystopianism as well as posthumanist technophilia (2004: 104): ‘But the dystopians did not anticipate that, once inside the machine, human beings would gain new powers they would use to change the system that dominates them. We can observe the faint beginnings of such a politics of technology today’. I would suggest that this remark, against the backdrop of the useful overview regarding technology which one gains here, points in a valuable direction for educators: do not behave as if the internet is only a medium for information transfer and largely vacuous social-networking interaction. It is potentially a space where autonomy may be cultivated in the interest of resisting Empire in all its guises, from the economic to the political. And educators are in a position to promote this process.

Education and the ‘Fourfold’

So, what should educators take their bearings from, apart from what was suggested earlier (see footnote 1), namely the diverse ways of cultivating a measure of autonomy on their own part, and on their students’ part, in the face of the disempowering, infantilising forces and seductions of ‘Empire’? In my judgement, one can hardly do better than to turn to Martin Heidegger’s concept of the ‘fourfold’, which comprises a constellation of four interrelated concepts (distinctive values), namely ‘earth’, ‘sky’, ‘mortals’ and ‘divinities’. Together, Heidegger tells us, they constitute a means of orientation in the world for human beings (1975:149-151). This implies that, if one or more of these are absent as ‘compass’ to find axiological direction, one would not be living a truly ‘human’ life, which is why Heidegger remarks that the four together have to be regarded as ‘a simple oneness’. ‘Earth’ he names as the bearer of (human) life, but in the most primordial sense conceivable: the earth as condition of the possibility of life, but also as that which resolutely resists humans’ penetrating, objectifying, controlling (and ultimately violating) scrutiny. In Heidegger’s words, it is the ‘serving bearer, blossoming and fruiting, spreading out in rock and water, rising up into plant and animal’

(Heidegger 1975: 149). ‘Sky’ is the ‘vault’, or the source of both seasonal blessings and inclemency, but simultaneously marks the limit that reminds humans of their finitude. ‘Mortals’ are humans whose nature makes them ‘capable of death’ (1975: 151), and ‘divinities’ are the ‘messengers of the godhead’ (1975: 150), who are awaited in hope by mortals, regardless of whether they reveal or conceal themselves.

Karsten Harries (1997:159-162), elaborates in an illuminating manner on Heidegger’s ‘fourfold’. He observes that the ‘earth’ as the ‘given’, or as ‘material transcendence’, is a ‘gift’ uncreated by human understanding. As such, it limits the ‘world’ or sphere of intelligibility – something that Heidegger unpacks in greater detail in his essay, ‘The origin of the work of art’ (1975a), where he articulates its ‘material’ resistance to human scrutiny in the context of an artwork such as a Greek temple. ‘Earth’ (in this case, for instance, the marble textures in the columns of the temple) manifests itself precisely as that which appears within the openness of ‘world’ as self-withdrawing: although the form of the columns can be architecturally interpreted, the marble just ‘is’, and therefore resists assimilation to human interpretive designs.

Harries further points out that what ‘opens’ humans to ‘earth’ in this sense, is the body, and urges his readers to remember that (1997: 159):

the embodied self is a caring, desiring self. To be in the presence of the earth is inevitably to be affected, moved, claimed. Earth thus...refers to the elusive affective ground without which all talk of essences, meaning, values, or divinities is ultimately groundless, merely idle talk.

That which ineluctably limits ‘world’, therefore – the linguistic sphere of a cultural tradition – is the ‘ground’ or ‘earth’ which fundamentally affects humans as caring, affective, desiring beings, prompting them to articulate their desires, fears and projects. These projects belong to the open cultural space of what Heidegger refers to as ‘world’. The ‘earth’ is therefore that which inescapably affects the human, embodied self, and any discourse or language game that does not somehow acknowledge this is, as Harries points out, ‘merely idle talk’, an expression that carries all the connotations of inauthenticity and empty ‘everydayness’ that Heidegger gives it in *Being and Time* (1978). Seen in this way, ‘earth’ is, despite its inscrutability, ultimately

inscribed as such, not only in artworks (for instance the marble of the temple's columns) but also in language itself (in the sense of 'discourse') every time personal or collective interest, preference or rejection is linguistically registered, as that which motivates humans to traverse the realm of openness or 'world' in a certain 'value-oriented' manner. From this it follows that anything of human making, including an institution like education, has to make room for the demands of 'earth', lest it lack something essentially human.

It is worth noting that Gilbert Germain (2004) enlists Baudrillard, Virilio and Merleau-Ponty to make a similar point about the urgency of waking up to the consequences of the increasing distance between humanity and the earth being created by cyber-technology. He shows at length that the 'reality' of cyberspace is incompatible with the earthly reality correlative to human embodiment and perception – where distance and mediation via the body are inescapable – and argues persuasively that this technological drive towards a 'reality' that is wholly of human making ignores the paradoxical truth that the experience of nature, or the earth, as 'other' is a precondition of a meaningful existence. Should this realisation not form a cornerstone of education today – given the headlong rush, by all and sundry, into social networking spaces which resemble a realm entirely of human design and manufacture (a domain which alienates humans from their ineluctable bond with the earth) with hardly any constitutive features acknowledging the 'otherness' of the earth? Paradoxically, humans are both immanent and transcendent to the earth – it is our 'originary' spatio-temporal home, but as such 'different' from us. The more our consciousness coincides with a substitute cyber-world, however, the more we lose our salutary, embodied, 'human' contact with the earth-bound world.

Returning to Harries's interpretation of the 'fourfold', his (1997:160) account of 'sky' reminds one that it is metaphorically linked to the ability of humans to surpass the 'here and now', the fact that they are always 'ahead of' or 'beyond' themselves. According to Harries, this is partly what the spiritual dimension of being human entails. It is also related to Heidegger's contention, in *Being and Time* (1978: 458), that humans are not merely characterised by 'thrownness' (the facticity of being-in-the-world), but also by 'projection', even if they further tend to be subject to 'falling' (back into conventional ways of doing things). 'Projection' here means the capacity of individuals to appropriate a given situation and transform it creatively, even if

the tendency to ‘fall’ back into the comfort zone of custom, tradition and fashion – for example the valorised discourses of capitalism and bureaucracy – always exerts its gravitational attraction on them. ‘Sky’ therefore suggests the creative ability to transform or revitalise cultural traditions or the ‘normalising’ discourses surrounding one in the face of their inherent tendency to limit one’s actions within certain constraints.

There is a connection, as Harries (1997:160) reminds one, between ‘mortals’ and Heidegger’s existential analysis (in *Being and Time*) of *Dasein*’s ability to accept its death resolutely as precondition for an ‘authentic’ existence. For as long as one fails to reconcile oneself with the ‘uncertain certainty’ of death, one is not free to live a culturally creative life. ‘Mortals’ is therefore a reminder that we have only a limited time on earth, and that unless we accept our mortality, we may not have the strength or motivation to live a constructive, socially responsible life.

It is not hard to understand why Harries (1997: 160-161) regards Heidegger’s notion of ‘divinities’ as being the most questionable of the ‘fourfold’, given the secularism of the present age. Nevertheless it represents the deepest source of meaning for humans, but not in the sense of the gods or ‘God’ of any specific tradition. It names precisely the divine as *unknown*, Harries avers, because naming it would violate, for Heidegger, what is essential about ‘the many-voiced ground of all meaning and value’ (Harries 1997:161). Accordingly, the term ‘divinities’ ultimately denotes the most profound, but also most ambiguous (albeit pervasive) source of justifying cultural activities on the part of humans, including the cultural practice of educating those in need of education. ‘Divinities’ therefore implies that, whatever one may understand by the divine or a deity, everyone (even atheists) who can cope with the demands of living, has a (usually unconscious) ‘ground’ of meaning in their lives. Heidegger’s important claim is that, taken together, the forces represented by these four concepts provide the evaluative means for assessing whether a human practice, whether it is art, architecture, literature, science, politics or education, is capable of being appropriated and understood by individuals in a meaningful, life-enriching manner. Lacking resonance with the axiological orientation of the ‘fourfold’, a practice or institution such as education would be fundamentally in conflict with the very being of being-human, where the latter concept (‘being-human’) should be understood precisely in terms of the unity comprised by the four ‘members’ of the ‘fourfold’ as explained above. That is, unless one

comprehends the being of humanity as being rooted in the *earth*, as well as being subject to all that *sky* implies, while being able to accept the human finitude implied by *mortals*, and simultaneously being mindful of the many-tongued voice(s) of *divinities* (in whatever manner this is conceived), the ‘being’ of being-human would be distorted or even perverted.

Education, the ‘Inhuman’ and ‘Revolt’

Against this backdrop, I shall return to the epigraph from Lyotard that provides a clue to my argument in this two-part paper. Lyotard alludes there to the truism that humans, unlike animals, require education. This allusion is embedded in a far-reaching argument about two kinds of ‘inhuman’ that humanity has to reckon with today – first, the ‘inhuman’ (in the sense of excluding humans) system of (technological) development (which he sees as the current global ideology), and second, an ‘inhuman’ in each member of the human race, which has to be presupposed by every act of rebellion, of criticism, and, in fact, every creative cultural action. Why?

Put as simply as possible, Lyotard’s fundamentally psychoanalytical argument is that the very practice of education presupposes something that is ‘not-yet-human’ in the full sense of that term, and even, ‘inhuman’ in a sense. And importantly, he raises the question, whether the education of children erases this initially inhuman ‘element’ completely. This is his answer (Lyotard 1991: 3):

If this were the case, it would be inexplicable for the adult himself or herself not only that s/he has to struggle constantly to assure his or her conformity to institutions and even to arrange them with a view to a better living-together, but that the power of criticizing them, the pain of supporting them and the temptation to escape them persist in some of his or her activities. I do not mean only symptoms and particular deviancies, but what, in our civilization at least, passes as institutional: literature, the arts, philosophy. There too, it is a matter of traces of an indetermination, a childhood, persisting up to the age of adulthood.

To some, this might sound like gobbledygook, to others’ ears it would be strangely attractive music. I believe that, at least to educators, it would make

sense to say that Lyotard is reminding us, first, that we would not go to the trouble of ‘educating’ a child if children were born, virtually ‘fully programmed’, like cats – allowing for the hunting and other skills that cats may learn from their mothers, which do not amount to ‘education’. The latter always involves the acquisition, through language, of values and virtues well in excess of mere ‘skills’. More importantly, however, he is also reminding us that even the slightest inclination, on the part of humans, to ‘improve’ their own situation, to break down the obsolete or to build the new, let alone rebelling against unconscionable conditions (think of recent, and ongoing, events in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya and Syria), only make sense if one assumes or presupposes a kind of ‘remainder’ of the ‘savage soul of childhood’, which cannot ever be fully ‘rationalised’ by any conventional system of education or training. This is nothing to lament, however; paradoxically, it is this ‘inhuman’ that constantly makes it possible for humans to resist, and overcome, conditions that are, in a different sense of the word, ‘inhuman’.

Julia Kristeva may help one grasp this better where she argues passionately for the need to ‘revolt’ on the part of human beings – not necessarily in the form of political rebellion, but in the etymological sense of ‘revolt’, namely to ‘turn’, or ‘return’ to, or to question and probe something that has become too familiar, or has been forgotten, repressed, allowed to be covered over by what is currently fashionable, and so on. This practice of revolt enables one to engage in renewal and transformation of some, usually creative, kind. What she has in mind here is eloquently articulated in the following passage (Kristeva 2000: 7):

Happiness exists only at the price of a revolt. None of us has pleasure without confronting an obstacle, prohibition, authority, or law that allows us to realise ourselves as autonomous and free...on the social level, the normalizing order is far from perfect and fails to support the excluded: jobless youth, the poor in the projects, the homeless, the unemployed, and foreigners, among many others. When the excluded have no culture of revolt and must content themselves with ideologies, with shows and entertainments that far from satisfy the demand for pleasure, they become rioters.

The last sentence in this quotation touches on something that is extremely important for the question of decision in the face of a crossroads: the

dominant culture, globally, is neoliberal capitalist consumer culture, and it is arguably unequalled in the efficacy with which it anaesthetises ‘consumers’ – thousands of spectators at soccer or rugby matches, millions of television viewers, absorbed in the kitsch world of soaps – anaesthetising the potential for revolt (Lyotard’s ‘inhuman’) that still exists in the interstices of people’s psyches². From her allusion to ‘ideologies ... shows and entertainments’ in the above excerpt, it is apparent that Kristeva is acutely aware of this, but notable that, while insisting on the ability to say no, she does not reject the media outright (Kristeva 2002: 82). Moreover, it is highly relevant to the question of education that she approaches the issue of receptivity to dogmatic religious fundamentalism on the part of disillusioned, unemployed (French-Algerian) young people in France in a way that stresses the need for communication and creative educational engagement with them, lest they become victims of dogmatism (Kristeva 2002: 106):

An open mind, a mind set on revolt as I understand it, could become a permanent voice on a level of esthetics [sic], literary creation, discussions, art and the communication which has to be established with these young people. It is this type of liberated form of representation of revolt that I am looking for. This implies that a new cultural space will open up that will not become a space for religious [and one may add: political] dogma, but one that understands the spiritual anxiety driving religious dogma. In this scenario it is via education, culture and creativity that this need for revolt could be

² See in this regard Olivier (1998), for a related investigation into contemporary consumer culture’s ‘entertainment solutions’ for problems anticipated by Freud regarding the ‘discontent’ on the part of humanity, caught between the need for pleasure or fulfilment, on the one hand, and the demand of civilization, on the other, that these needs be repressed. As for what she says about people becoming ‘rioters’, instead of being still capable of satisfying or fulfilling ‘revolt’, perhaps contemporary society is witnessing a kind of turning point between mindless ‘rioting’ and regaining the capacity for ‘revolt’, judging by what Hardt and Negri (2005: 268-288) have argued about the contemporary symptoms of resistance, on the part of ‘multitude’, against the global forces of what they call ‘Empire’ (Hardt & Negri 2001).

expressed, without strangling itself in dogmatism and fundamentalism.

Kristeva therefore puts educators squarely before the imperative that educational ways be devised to invite, if not challenge, the young to channel their readiness to revolt along creative channels, instead of yielding to another kind of revolt, a politically and socially destructive variety, for lack of creative options. Knowing what frustration is inculcated in (especially young) people under conditions of economic deprivation, and ostensibly faced with a dearth of alternatives to the one-sidedly elitist economically empowering system of neoliberal capitalism, a novel educational focus on the needs of society within the context of deteriorating social as well as natural ecosystems, is a deserving cause to promote. But this would be to no avail unless the custodians of education policy find the means to counteract all the mechanisms in our society which effectively stand in the way to individuals' ability to acquire a certain measure of (relative) autonomy.

Understandably, this would be difficult to achieve in the kind of society which, as already indicated, undermines such autonomy in many ways, not least through the systematic creation of consumerist dependence, as Kristeva is well aware. Noëlle McAfee (2004: 107-108) observes that, in this respect, Kristeva follows thinkers such as Guy Debord, author of *Society of the Spectacle*, who argued that, in contemporary societies, 'life' is represented as a series of 'spectacles' or shows, which serve the dominant economic order in so far as people's needs and 'desires' are manufactured for them by means of certain 'desirable' spectacles. All the major agencies of the dominant order – advertising, branding, 'entertainment', 'information' and capitalist propaganda (capitalism is also an ideology, although it subtly hides this fact) – combine their forces to this end. McAfee (2004: 108) puts it well: 'in the society of the spectacle, people are tools of the economy; their desires are not their own; desires are manufactured as surely as are the commodities meant to fulfil them'. Is it at all surprising that, in *New Maladies of the Soul* (1995: 8-9), Kristeva (a practising psychoanalyst) elaborates on the 'loss of soul' on the part of contemporary (consumerist) people, who do not even know of this loss because they are 'swept away by insignificant and valueless objects...[l]iving in a piecemeal and accelerated space and time'. It is easy to read this remark as an allusion to the frenetic pace of everyday existence through the reduction of social 'reality' to the perpetual, but ephemeral

‘schizophrenic’ present of an endless series of tantalising, money-invested images, urging the consumer to ‘Spend, spend, spend!!’

Conclusion

I have already pointed to Heidegger’s notion of the ‘fourfold’ as a kind of ‘compass’ for orienting oneself in a complex, confusing world. One final hint of how this may be achieved, this time from Book II (377b) of Plato’s *Republic* (Bloom 1991: 54), where Socrates, speaking on education, says,

Don’t you know that the beginning is the most important part of every work and that this is especially so with anything young and tender? For at that stage it’s most plastic, and each thing assimilates itself to the model whose stamp anyone wishes to give to it.

To be sure, by and large people would agree that young minds are tender and impressionable, and would probably also agree, in conversation, that this points to the need for sound education of young children. But if this is the case, it would seem ironic, and of unfortunate consequence, that in the US, indications are that children as young as two years have already developed ‘brand loyalties’ (Steger 2003: 77); their tender minds are left to the mercy and cynicism of advertisers, which could hardly be regarded as a source of sterling moral education. Instead of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, among the ancient Greeks, or any other imaginatively uplifting literary or philosophical works (as well as music) across a wide cultural spectrum informing the education of the young, in contemporary households, where the parents mostly also lack a sense of existential orientation that would resonate with Heidegger’s ‘fourfold’, television programmes seem to do most of the (pseudo-) educating these days.

For this reason, educators other than parents have to step into the breach, making use of all the literary, cinematic, philosophical and scientific means at their disposal, to ‘enlighten’ the young as far as their path through this complex world of ours is concerned. By way of summary, the field that they have to be introduced to – which, because it is unavoidably discursive, will be axiologically oriented, albeit not in ideological terms – is the following, starting with the broadest frame of reference: *Firstly*, students have to be made aware of the precarious state of the planetary ecology, and of

the fact that it is an indispensable condition for the survival of all life on earth that anthropogenic climate change, as well as other sources of eco-destruction be urgently addressed. This should have the effect of conscientising them.

Secondly, they have to be made aware of the indissoluble connection between such anthropogenic eco-destruction and the dominant economic order of neoliberal capitalism, which is predicated on the untenable principle of limitless growth. *Thirdly*, they have to be educated as far as the prerequisite for enlightened action is concerned, namely how to be (relatively) autonomous. *Fourthly*, they have to be made aware of the many creative avenues that are open to them to pursue an enlightened mode of citizenship when they enter a working career – there is hardly any career or profession in which people will *not* be able to contribute meaningfully (that is, socially, culturally and if necessary, politically) to change in ecological, economic, educational or cultural ways. If educators could rise to this ‘fourfold’ task, they may just – to return to the metaphor of Oedipus – be able to lead the young to the point where they are able to take over the reins from the older generation, like any appropriately (in psychoanalytic terms) Oedipalized child, and do so with a sense of responsibility for recovering what has been lost.

And lest anyone should think that I have omitted what many still regard as being of central importance today, namely to address the sources of racism in society, the latter is intimately linked to all those things that I have singled out here. It never ceases to amaze me that no one points to the historical link between colonialism, racism, and capitalism. In fact, I would go as far as saying that racism is a social and political function of capitalism. Think of the slave trade, of the abuse of indigenous people’s labour in 19th century colonies such as the Belgian Congo, and of cheap black labour on the gold mines in the erstwhile Transvaal of South Africa. Hence, addressing the issues that I have singled out does not preclude addressing the sources of racism – on the contrary, it would go right to the heart of the matter.

But no one should make the mistake of believing that this is an easy matter. One has to seize the moment when the opportunity presents itself; instead of dogmatically believing in the ‘law’ of *progress* (as if anyone still can!) – which, according to Walter Benjamin (1969: 261), is tied to a conception of time as ‘homogeneous’ and ‘empty’ – one has to ‘blast open the continuum of history’ (Benjamin 1969: 262). This moment, which corresponds to Kristeva’s moment of ‘revolt’, is tied, for Benjamin, to an

‘explosive’, revolutionary ‘leap’, and constitutes time as the possibility of the appearance of something qualitatively different from ‘empty’ time: it marks ‘the present’ as ‘Messianic’ (Benjamin 1969: 263-264), as the epiphany of the possibility of redemption, of a qualitative ‘turning’ of history. Our present, too, is ‘shot through with chips of Messianic time’. It is up to us, either to consign it to the ‘empty time’ of the ruling elites, or to seize it ‘in order to blast a specific era [the present] out of the homogeneous course of history’ (1969: 263). And educators are in a position to do so.

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