

Title	Learning to live with the lack: pedagogy of the beguiled
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Publication date	2005-07
Original Citation	Kuhling, C., Kieran K. and Kavanagh, D. (2005) 'Learning to live with the lack: pedagogy of the beguiled', European Group of Organization Studies 21st EGOS Colloquium: Unlocking Organizations. Berlin, 30 June -2 July.
Type of publication	Conference item
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Download date	2026-08-12 18:38:01
Item downloaded from	https://hdl.handle.net/10468/2794

Learning to live with the Lack: Pedagogy of the Beguiled

Paper presented at the 21st EGOS Colloquium

Berlin 2005

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Abstract

An important aspect of globalisation/Americanisation is, *prima facie*, the global export of televisual products such as *Sesame Street*, *Barney*, etc. that are explicitly concerned with cultivating elementary forms of organisational life. Thus, it is surprising that organization studies has been virtually silent on childhood and pedagogy. This lacuna needs filling especially because the development of a post-national, cosmopolitan society problematises existing pedagogical models. In this paper we argue that cosmopolitanism requires a pedagogy that is centred on the Lack and the mythic figure of the Trickster. We explore this through an analysis of children's stories, including Benjamin's radio broadcasts for children, *Sesame Street* and *Dr Seuss*.

Introduction

This paper is located at the conjuncture of a number of intellectual trajectories. In the first section of the paper we discuss a curious paradox: children are very much the subject of and subject to organization, and yet childhood occupies a subaltern position in organisation studies. This paradox warrants inquiry especially since the development of a cosmopolitan society – the subject of the second part of our paper – problematises existing pedagogical models. In the third section we posit a pedagogy that is centred on the principle of ambivalence (the Lack) and the mythic figure of the Trickster. We then explore these ideas through an analysis of children's stories, including Benjamin's radio broadcasts for children, *Sesame Street* and *Dr Seuss*.

On Children and Organization

While children may be legally excluded from formal organizations, a wider viewpoint – based on a broader understanding of organization – sees children as very much the subject of and subject to organization. Most children in the developed world are forced,

by law, to attend one form of organisation, the school, until their mid-teens. Even pre-school children spend much of their time in and interacting with formal organizations, whether this be the local sport club or leisure centre, or the circus or McDonalds. From this perspective, the organizing that happens in formal organizations is but an extension and subset of a more general organizing logic that includes the organization of children and childhood. This perspective would lead us to the somewhat skeptical position that children are not so much excluded from formal organizations for their own good, but rather for the good of formal organizations (on the basis that children need to be properly ‘cultivated’ before they can adequately contribute). A Foucauldian twist to this might lead us to see childhood as primarily about the production of docile bodies for use in (or indeed harvesting by) corporations. For instance Cooley (1987) reminds us of the emphasis that is placed on timekeeping in school and suggests that this is because of the corporate need for ‘time-disciplined’ workers who can perform their factory duties punctually and regularly. More generally, the formal and informal curricula of elementary school is explicitly concerned with the cultivation of the basic forms of organizational life, such as timekeeping, organisation, teamwork, cooperation, goal orientation, task completion, etc. The micro processes of interaction in the elementary school system is where the values of equality, justice, power, social differentiation, hierarchy are first addressed and cultivated. From a political perspective, practices and values such as communication, decision-making, consensus building, reconciling difference, accepting authority – the very basis of democratic institutions, morality, and organizational life – are all first inculcated in the institution that is the elementary school. This perspective would suggest that far from the child being the Other of organisational life – i.e. falling outside the ambit of formal organisation – the child is actually centrally the subject/object of organizational practices. Of course the reality is that the child *has* subaltern status within organisational life. This is well illustrated in organisation studies, which has been virtually silent on the topic of childhood and organisation, even though the field has an extremely catholic understanding of what is properly within its compass. For instance, while constructivism has impelled many to describe and analyse the processes of organisation through empirical studies, few of these studies have analysed what and how children learn, even though the practices that shape organisational life are themselves clearly a product – at least to some extent – of what individuals learned in childhood. Part of our agenda, therefore, is to address this lacuna and to shift childhood and pedagogy away from their peripheral positions in organisation studies.

We see this shift as especially important in the context of the moral-political problems inherent in globalisation and, in particular, the acute conundrum of how to organise collectively when national identity no longer provides an integrating logic. Drawing on Habermas (2001), this issue might be framed around how best to cultivate solidarity within a cosmopolitan collective. It is to this issue that we now turn.

Cultivating solidarity in a cosmopolitan collective

In *The Post-National Constellation* Habermas (2001) poses the moral-political problem of globalization as one that is centred on cultivating what he refers to as ‘cosmopolitan solidarity.’ The specific context in which the problem is formulated is anomie arising from the individualizing effects of a “whirlpool of an accelerating process of modernization” (2001: 112) and the eclipsing of the nation state as the basis of social

solidarity. Over the past century and a half “the national basis for civic solidarity has become second nature, and this national foundation is shaken by the policies and regulations that are required for the construction of a multicultural civil society” (Habermas 2001: 74). The nation state can no longer provide the basis of social integration and moral authority, because, as Beck (2002) expresses it: “the metaphysical essentialism of the ‘nation’ ... inevitably give[s] rise to those consequences which made the 20th century one of modernized barbarism. Thus, someone who affirms and elevates ‘his own’ will almost inevitably, rejects and despises the foreign” (sic) (2002: 38). In other words, the idea of the nation as the primary basis for collective identification is ethnocentric and exclusionary, as well as contrary to the experience of the hybrid and mobile subjectivities and identities in an increasingly globalized world. In the postnational constellation not only can this national basis for civic solidarity no longer be relied upon, but also it actually becomes part of the problem since the majority culture can no longer provide the basis for a national culture. These two cultures must be ‘decoupled’ and replaced by a multicultural civil society where “the solidarity of citizens is shifted onto the more abstract foundation of ‘constitutional patriotism.’” (Habermas 2001: 74).

The appeal to constitutional patriotism is not unproblematic however. This is because the converse of Benjamin’s thesis that “there is no document of civilization that is not equally a document of barbarism,” is also true. Put differently, the metaphysical essentialism of the Nation, if it is the cause of barbarism, is equally the cause of civilization. As Durkheim had shown throughout his analyses of solidarity, morality and education, it is precisely the metaphysical essentialism of the nation, now disparaged as the source of extremism, chauvinism, and ethnocentrism, that is the very basis of the moral authority of the collective society, that transcends particular interests, that inspires self-sacrifice of particular interests and commands duty. Notwithstanding this difficulty, Habermas argues that constitutional patriotism can provide the basis of moral authority and sense of duty that transcends ethnic difference: a compulsory cosmopolitan solidarity.

The task of cultivating a constitutional patriotism and a compulsory cosmopolitan solidarity delineated by Habermas and Beck echoes the problem Durkheim faced at the turn of the twentieth century, when, as Professor of Education and Adviser to the Education Ministry, he was assigned the task of formulating a secular morality to promote social integration in the Third Republic, which would counteract the persistence of seductions of sectarianism, monarchism and communism. But rather than formulating religious traditions as sources of barbarism – as Beck does of nationalism (Durkheim could easily have identified religion with inquisitions and pogroms) – Durkheim sees religious inheritance as the repository of morality, a rich cultural legacy, the resource within which a new secular rational morality may be found:

We must seek those moral realities that are as it were lost and dissimulated in it. We must disengage them, find out what they consist of, determine their proper nature, and express them in rational language. In a word, we must discover the rational substitutes for those religious notions that for a long time have served as the vehicle for the most essential moral ideas (Durkheim 1973[1925]: 9).

Is the same not true of modern nationalism? The national society and its institutions were, for Durkheim, rational substitutions for religious morality. In the post-national constellation we must look for substitutes for the moral reality of national identification. The question Durkheim addresses in *Moral Education* – how to preserve and provide rational substitutions for moral ideals that have heretofore only appeared in religious guise – now applies to morality in the post-national constellation. It is not enough to throw the baby of modern secular morality – especially *duty*, the compulsory element of solidarity, which has up to now been institutionalised in *national* patriotism – out with the bathwater of the solidarities of national society. If nationalism is, as Habermas and Beck says, an outdated ‘barbarism’, then we must look for the forms of civilization that it has up to now enclosed.

Durkheim’s analysis identifies three principles of morality dissimulated in myth and religion, namely, the spirit of discipline, attachment to social groups, and autonomy, or self-determination. To cultivate these principles of morality Durkheim advocated a curriculum emphasizing the teaching of Science, Art and History. Science, he argued, would ‘provide a sense of the real complexity of things.’ Echoing Baudelaire (1972: 51) who said, “painting is essentially a system of moral values made visible,” Durkheim argues that the study of art “could eliminate self-centeredness, opening the mind to disinterestedness and self-sacrifice.” History could “give a sense of continuity with the past and of the principle traits of the national character” (in Lukes: 117). The child, Durkheim argued, needed to be

taught about the nature of the social contexts in which he will be called upon to live: family, corporation, nation, the community of civilization that reaches towards including the whole of humanity; how they were formed and transformed, what effect they have on the individual and what role he plays in them” (in Lukes, *ibid.*).

Teaching the ‘principle traits of national character’ sounds rather odd today, of course, and Durkheim wouldn’t deny that. Moral education is historically contingent and culturally relative he argues, and he is trying to specify what is appropriate for his time and place.

Habermas (1987, 1990) approaches the problem from a different angle, not through the analysis of the structure of myth and religion, but through the structure of language itself, and therein finds the basis of moral critical discourse. Habermas (2001) has conceded to postmodern theory that reason is de-transcendentalized, and situated. But, he argues, “from the correct premise that there is no such thing as a context-transcendent reason, postmodernism draws the false conclusion that the criteria of reason themselves change with every new context” (2001: 148). Thus, despite the assertion of paradigm incommensurability and local ‘rationalities’, universal pragmatics and the ideal speech act continue to be amongst the best resources at our disposal for the critique of ideology and for the evaluation of discourse leading to morally binding consensus. These practices allied to the concept of cosmopolitanism can, he posits, provide the basis for new, post-national forms of citizenship or solidarity which could also incorporate an ethical or regulatory framework of rights that takes account of the new trans-national character of power. Habermas argues that what we require is a postnational system of global governance moderated by a cosmopolitan solidarity, or what he calls a ‘Postnational Constellation’ or supra-national regulatory body to complement other, multileveled

systems of governance, which would be rooted in ‘global’, cosmopolitan identifications rather than national identifications. Habermas’ ‘postnational constellation’, Beck’s ‘cosmopolitan manifesto’ and Held’s (2004) ‘global covenant’ all merge this ‘postnational’ version of cosmopolitanism as a bases of collective solidarity. Each of these identifies cosmopolitanism as a system of global governance and formulates, in slightly different ways, versions of cosmopolitan citizenship.

Cosmopolitanism as a basis for collective democratic politics is not without its critics however. In some ways, the contemporary discourse of cosmopolitanism illustrates the same problematic tendency towards totalisation as its ancient Greek counterpart, since cosmopolitanism in the Greek sense referred to not only the ideal of diversity or particularity, but also the ideal of loyalty to the universal, which in their case meant empire. Calhoun (2004), for instance, argues that the unself-reflexive celebration of mobility and nomadicism apparent in many conceptions of cosmopolitanism presumes an elite social and occupational status and various material and bureaucratic privileges that are simply not available to the majority of world citizens. (i.e. access to good passports, easy visas, credit cards, airline clubs, etc). As well, he argues, many theories of cosmopolitanism are based on an individualist social ontology and an elitist conception of identity as choice (which overlooks the lack of agency involuntarily localised or racialised individuals have with regards to their ascribed or imposed identities). Because of this, Calhoun claims that contemporary ‘cosmopolitics’ are impoverished because of their tendency to falsely represent their particular standpoint and experience as universal, rather than particular, and are based upon a ‘virtuous deracination, a liberation from the possibly illegitimate, and in any case blinkering, attachments of locality, ethnicity, religion and nationality’ (Calhoun, 2004: 3). To Latour, this is not only ethnocentric, but also anthropomorphic, for he argues that cosmopolitans have an impoverished notion of the ‘cosmos’ which involves purely the lifeworlds of humans, but not other aspects of the cosmos (Latour, 2004). These contradictions and tensions between the particular and the universal are characteristic of the fundamental dilemma within liberal theory. As Pollack scathingly puts it, “this revenant late liberalism reveals in a more exaggerated form, a struggle at the heart of liberal theory, where a genuine desire for equality as a universal norm is tethered to a tenacious ethnocentric provincialism in matters of cultural judgement and recognition” (Pollack, 2000: 581).

If we could imagine Habermas’s theory of communicative action, universal pragmatics and the ideal speech situation as a project of moral education, we could see, like Durkheim, a pedagogy appropriate to addressing some of the central moral practical and political problems of our time: the colonization of the lifeworld and the problem of systemically distorted communication. It wouldn’t be too difficult to specify ways in which this problem would be explained and exemplified to children by developing inclusions to the curriculum – for primary school children even – of critical literacy of media and mass culture. For example, we can envisage classes exploring the ways in which the lifeworld, and the lifeworld of the child perhaps especially, is systematically targeted for colonization by corporate interests. Universal pragmatics and the ideal speech situation could provide teachers and children with rational formulae that would help them to defend themselves against such pervasive interpolation that is both aggressive and subtle. And this is not as far fetched as it sounds. Good teachers, who probably know nothing at all about Habermas, see themselves already as playing a new

moral role as guardians of their classrooms from corporate invaders as they attempt to enable children to interrogate the truth claims of advertisers, control internet and mobile phone use and promote healthy diet.

Mind the Gap!

In his collection of essays *The Making of Political Identities*, Ernesto Laclau (1993) plays with the idea of “Minding the Gap”, the familiar announcement played continuously throughout the London Underground. The gap is dangerous, and we have to mind it, but though dangerous, the gap is essential and indispensable. Without the gap – if the gap were to be closed – the wonderful system of the London Underground, a hybrid fusion of bodies and technologies, a subterranean living sculptural representation of the perpetual mobile that is the modern metropolis, would grind to a halt. Thus, to ‘Mind the Gap’ is to be mindful of the gap: wary of the danger and the necessity; and careful of the gap – that we take care lest the gap be sutured. We find this metaphor of minding the gap useful in thinking through what cosmopolitanism means in practice. The gap symbolises the lack between self and other, the difference that needs to be maintained and respected. Alternatively, it represents the Lack in Lacan’s language.

Underpinning both Durkheim and Habermas is the Kantian masterframe of Enlightenment reason. There must be a rational basis for modern morality. Even when, and perhaps especially now as Habermas agrees, reason is de-transcendentalized and situated, it needs to be supplemented with other capacities and resources. An indication of where such resources may be found is also indicated by Kant. One dimension of Kant that is somewhat undeveloped in both Durkheim and Habermas is what Kant identifies in the third Critique, the critique of Judgement, as that of “the pedagogical role of the aesthetic.” Aesthetic ideas, as Kant calls them – by which, as he elaborates, he means metaphors, allegories and similes, poetic, mythic and religious language – play a crucial role in transcending the limits to pure reason and practical reason. Aesthetic ideas, Kant says, have the cognitive effect of helping “to bring reason into harmony with itself” (Kant, in Coleman, 160).

By an aesthetic idea I mean that representation of the imagination which induces much thought, yet without the possibility of any definite thought whatever, i.e. concept, being adequate to it, and which language, consequently, can never get quite on level terms with or render completely intelligible ... Such representations of the imagination may be termed ideas. This is partly because they at least strain after something lying out beyond the confines of experience ... no concept can be wholly adequate to them. (ibid, 161).

For Kant, aesthetic ideas, metaphor and myth have an important cognitive value, as they give cognition greater depth and transcendence. Moreover, the aesthetic idea is beyond representation, beyond conceptualisation, beyond language, and beyond intelligence. Thus it is dangerous, ambivalent, and unmanageable. For us, a good term to describe what Kant is speaking about is the *Trickster*, always remembering that the Trickster represents that which is beyond representation. Minding the gap means recognising the Trickster’s reality as integral to the underground system, and also recognising the Trickster’s potential to run amok, destroying categories and entities at will. We find the concept of the Trickster useful because sometimes explicit attempts are made to

concretise the idea – in, for instance, the role of the fool, jester, in the carnivalesque, in fairytales and children's stories, etc. – and sometimes that which is beyond representation is, literally, left out of the picture.

Humour is an essential part of the Trickster's bag of tricks. A joke works because, for a while, our present reality is disturbed as we are temporarily brought into an alternative world where codes, categories and rules are transgressed. The comic stimulus is our response to 'getting the joke', wherein we are re-assured of the existence and security of our present reality, but where we also recognise the potential for fantasy, for parallel, alternative worlds, for a space where the fixities of our present reality are absent (Koestler 1949, Westwood 2004). Thus, humour is part of our way of playing near and with the gap, part of our way of 'minding the gap'.

The televisual Trickster

Our difficulty with Durkheim and Habermas is that while they provide us with the principles of reason for a moral education that are crucial for stabilization and order, these need to be supplemented and fortified by the capacities for creativity, humour and cunning that are best represented by the Trickster. We can illustrate this difficulty by considering certain pedagogical broadcasts directed at children in the mythic age of globalization. Two of the most widespread are *Thomas the Tank Engine*, and *Barney the Dinosaur*. Both are ideological in the purist sense; they represent reality as a sutured totality. Both close down, rather than open up the notion of the lack, ambivalence and the sublime. While fairytales, horror stories and other aspects of children's culture have historically functioned as expressions of fears and desires of childrens' ambivalence, and their power lies in the capacity for children to triumph over their own destructive fantasies, in contrast, Barney is represented as a benign but clearly patriarchal authority, which quite literally 'fills in the gap' of the absent father in American society. The popularity of Barney is perhaps related to the alleged 'crisis of the family' – in the US whereby in the 1950's, 80% of all children in the US lived with both biological parents; by the 1980's this had fallen to 12% (Lipsky and Abrams, 1994) – yet, social institutions have been slow to recognise and support non-traditional family configurations which has resulted in a variety of 'risks' for certain families. A recurring theme in children's television and film culture in the US that reflects this 'crisis of childhood' is the fear of absent parents and the non-existent community, a theme apparent in diverse genres such as teen fantasy television shows like 'Buffy the Vampire Slayer', and in big-budget Hollywood family films such as 'Home Alone'. Barney thus is the resurrected 'dinosaur' of the patriarchal American family, albeit couched in a façade of multi-ethnic harmony, and reflects a nostalgic desire central to the 'new right' in America and the alleged focus on 'family values'.

Of course any analysis of *Barney* is subject to the counter-argument that it (literally and metaphorically) attacks a 'straw person'. Clearly the programme works hard at teaching children to recognise and respect the diversity that exists in the world, just as *Thomas the Tank Engine* reminds children that even in railway-land there are naughty and mean trains about. Nonetheless, the overarching picture in *Thomas* is of a seamless network of integrated systems of communication and control where hardworking and dedicated little engines run around on a closed circuit, industriously performing routine tasks and

keeping the Fat Controller happy. *Barney* similarly represents a sutured totality, but here living children reduced to automatons take the place of the anthropomorphized trains, and go through their paces in synchronized, choreographed set-piece, song-and-dance routines, marching to the band, saluting the flag and munching popcorn. *Barney* purports to teach children “to use their imagination,” but *Barney* dictates both the content and the form of the children’s imaginary.

By way of contrast, Walter Benjamin provides valuable directions on what is required to develop a ‘pedagogy of the beguiled’ in his essays on the task of the critic and the task of the translator, and from what he calls his ‘little tricks of the trade.’ In particular, we consider the pedagogy behind his series of radio broadcasts for children who were already being beguiled by fascist propaganda.

Benjamin had a lifelong interest in children’s toys and books, and he thought of the adoption of the perspective of the child as one of a number of methodological ‘tricks of the trade’ for developing a critical perspective. Between 1929 and 1933 he wrote and broadcast a number of radio programmes for children. Thirty of these scripts survived amongst his papers in Paris. Benjamin was somewhat ambivalent about the status of his radio broadcasts. They were a source of income to him, and though he badly needed the money he tended to disparage this pecuniary interest and was somewhat self-deprecating about his work. On the other hand, when seen in the context of his larger critical conception of modernity in terms of the recurrence and amplification of myth, and the mass media as the primary means of dissemination and propagating mythic consciousness, his broadcasts to children can be seen as an exemplification of his principle of using myth against myth. Benjamin sought to use the very means through which the public, adults and children, were becoming beguiled and enthralled by commercial advertising and political propaganda to wake them up from their dream state. At the time Benjamin was making his broadcasts to children, the same airwaves were carrying, or soon would carry, the speeches of Goebels and the Führer. Against the background of the anomie of the Weimar Republic, disintegration, and apparent directionlessness, the mass media communicated a variety of hegemonic articulations that purported to identify the bases of solidity, stability and order. The myth of Progress through technology, the myth of happiness and fulfilment through consumption, the myth of destiny and historical coherence, the myth of identity and permanence of blood race and soil, and myths about the Others who were causing trouble, thieves of national enjoyment, decadents, demoralizers, conspirators, paradigmatically myths about Jews.

What could Benjamin offer to children that might help to inoculate them against these influences? In Benjamin’s own terms his broadcasts might be thought of as little *denkbilder*, toy versions of his theoretical tools. In Wittgenstein’s idiom Benjamin was trying to give the children ‘tips,’ trying to tip them off, give them little pointers that would teach them good judgement. Let’s look at some examples of his *klein denkbilder*.

Catastrophe, disaster, earthquakes and volcanoes are frequent themes in Benjamin’s broadcasts, evoking as they do the sublime, and awakening a sense of awe in the face of rupture, breaking open and unfathomable depth. In other words, the aesthetic images Benjamin selects for his stories literally and metaphorically open up the theme of Lack. One story, for example, concerns a catastrophe, a famous railway disaster in Scotland in the 1870s, when a train crossing a railway bridge over the Firth of Tay plunged into the

river, killing all on board. The train is thundering along through the darkness in the midst of a raging storm, and suddenly disappears through a gap in the bridge plunging into the river below. When it doesn't arrive at the other side, and telegraph communications are lost, another train is sent back in the opposite direction, and it too, barely avoids plunging through the same gap in the bridge. Benjamin provides no elaborate explanations of the awesome disaster, and barely averted second catastrophe. The story hangs there, inviting interpretations, for example, how iron construction and engineering, the high bridge spanning the broad estuary, the speeding train, represent the modern ideal of Progress; the gap in the bridge, the precariousness and risk underpinning technology and faith in Progress, the break in communication that can have catastrophic consequences; the careful vigilance of the driver of the second train, who seeing the gap in time, averts a second catastrophe. In contrast, the railway world of *Thomas the Tank Engine* fails to 'mind the gap' in a paradigm that is centred on control, harmony, order and predictability.

Another broadcast concerns the forgery of stamps – stamp-collecting being both the interest of the serious Collector, and a popular hobby amongst children, and a practice implicated in fetishistic consumerism. Benjamin relates how rare and valuable stamps have been faked, to a degree of perfection that even the best Collectors are duped. Accordingly, it became common practice that collectors only accepted stamps that had been postmarked, and thus certified as authentic. However, the postmark, the stamp of authenticity on the stamp, became a friend of the forgers, as the postmark could be faked, and moreover the postmark could be used to obliterate and mask any small imperfection on the forgery – the stamp with the stamp of authenticity may in fact be a fake. Moreover, good forgeries, exemplary pieces, 'absolutely authentic fakes,' then began to become collectors' items in their own right, often with a value greater than that of the face value of the original 'real' stamp, and so the game goes merrily on: forgeries of fakes of forgeries and the erosion of the possibility of discerning the real at all.

Another broadcast tells a "pretty story" about bootleggers during the American Prohibition era. The story takes place in a railway station near New Orleans:

Young Black boys move alongside a train which has just come to a stop, concealing beneath their clothes containers of various shapes on which may be read in large letters "iced tea." After signalling to a vendor, a traveller, for the price of a suit, buys himself one of the flasks, which he adroitly conceals. Then a second one then ten more, then twenty or fifty. "Ladies and gentlemen", the Black boys implore, "wait for the train to leave before drinking your tea." Everyone winks complicitously ... the whistle blows, the train starts up, and all the passengers raise their containers to their lips. But disappointment soon clouds their faces, for what they are drinking is indeed iced tea."

This beautifully entertaining story is a Trickster tale for modern times, a tale of multiple layers of deception and self-deception, wherein the literal truth – "iced tea", written on the containers – becomes in fact a lie. The lack, the indeterminacy of meaning, even when the thing is in fact what it literally says it is, means that it may not be what it is. The story works on many levels. The white Northerners expect the black boys to be both criminal, and innocent; hawking illicit moonshine but at the same time simple straightforward Black boys. The white passengers are similarly ambiguous, they appear

to be respectable, law-abiding white folk, and at the same time eager to partake in an illicit exchange. The white passengers are sufficiently subject to convention that the Black boys can rely on their not drinking until the train is in motion. The white passengers ‘fool themselves,’ blinded by their racial prejudice that Blacks are criminal and stupid so that they cannot anticipate being outwitted by the boys. The Black boys emerge as the Trickster heroes, as they out-fox those who conventionally regard themselves as racially and intellectually their superiors, coming away from the encounter having profited from the whites’ prejudice, and having confounded their stereotype, while remaining scrupulously ‘truthful’ throughout. The story alerts children to the artful practices of Trickery, where things, even when they ‘do exactly what it says on the tin,’ may in fact not be what they seem. Truth, even literal truths, can be misleading. Benjamin tips off his audience of children about the trickery of advertising and propaganda, and at the same time he redeems the heroic virtues of the Trickster’s humour and cunning (as typical traditional tales simultaneously warn about and celebrate sly fox, who uses cunning, charm and guile to get what he wants). Benjamin’s ‘tip’ is designed to work as simultaneously a critique of trickery, while redeeming Trickster capacities so that children, and subaltern groups subject to power may need to appropriate for themselves. Referring to an incident that occurred not very long after Benjamin’s radio broadcasts, Žižek (2001, 89) relates the story of the residents of a small Jewish community in Romania who, when the Nazis occupy the country and plan to transport them to the concentration camp, organize a fake train with Nazi guards, board it, and of course instead of going to the camp take the train to freedom. A Trickster’s ruse that Hermes himself would be proud of.

The task of the critic, Benjamin says, is not to give his own opinion, not to pass judgement, but to enable others to form their own opinions and make their own judgements (Benjamin, 1999, 548). In ‘Little Tricks of the Trade’ Benjamin says that the art of storytelling entails the storyteller not providing an explanation of the story, but letting listeners themselves explore the multiplicity of possible interpretations. In this way the story does not expend itself, but “preserves its strength concentrated within itself and is capable of releasing it even after a long time” (Benjamin 1999: 729). Such stories Benjamin says, echoing Aristotle and Heidegger, are still capable of arousing wonder, astonishment and thought after thousands of years. His children’s broadcasts are conceived of as enabling in this way.

What would be contemporary approximations of Benjamin’s pedagogy? In his *Program for a Proletarian Children’s Theatre* Benjamin emphasizes the central importance of improvisation that “enables the child’s gesture to stand in its own authentic space”. “The kind of “fully rounded” performance that people torment children to produce can never compete in authenticity with improvisation” (Benjamin, 1999, 204). We can see that even though Barney seeks to promote a sense of tolerance for difference and a sense of self-worth amongst children, it also annihilates ambivalence through the highly regimented, overscripted, almost militaristic performances of the very obedient child actors that precludes the improvisation that is so vital for Benjamin. Thus its latent content is clearly for children to follow orders and internalise the values of globalised capitalist consumption, for, despite continuous directives to celebrate our particularity, and to use our imagination, Barney represents the limits of the celebration of particularity in the absence of a positive version of collective identity, beyond nationalist references to

the American flag and a shared engagement with (or subjection to) corporate and consumerist jingoism.

But even in Barney, the Trickster finds a way back in. The child's utopian gesture is a revolutionary de-colonization of the lifeworld, an attempt to reclaim the unpredeterminable space of the Lack and the improvisation that is the true form of play. This is expressed in the widespread practice of 'killing Barney'. Tormented children, trapped in the asinine, cloying totalitarian state of 'Barney's Imagination Island,' appropriate and invert the ideological platitude and sing:

I hate you, You hate me,
We're a dysfunctional family
Then a shot rang out / and Barney hit the floor
No more purple dinosaur!

Another example of a children's television programme that does not contain the same cultural imperialism of Barney, but which involves a problematically harmonious multiculturalism is the programme *Sesame Street*. *Sesame Street* represents a conventional classical liberal pedagogy following Durkheimian principles (Gettas, 1990). A recurring theme song is "Who are the people in your neighbourhood?" which articulates and celebrates harmonious interdependency and reciprocity of occupational specialization in the division of labour, the principle of organic solidarity. This is crucially important and indispensable for metropolitan multicultural society. But while necessary, it may not be sufficient. It has problems and limitations. For example, its inclusivity is 'linear', expanding to include a proliferation of differences and identities to a point where a norm is eclipsed, emphasizing the particularity of difference rather than the reciprocal interdependence between differences. This problem, represented by the recent elaborations of the cast of characters to be 'more inclusive,' more 'representative of diversity' is what besets programmes of multiculturalism: the categories of difference are extended infinitely on a diachronic axis, but there is insufficient synchronic integration. Difference proliferates as more and more discrete identities, but unity recedes. Second, this kind of pedagogy can gloss differences where there is no reciprocity or recognition and where there is intractable conflict. There is, for example, an Israeli / Palestinian *Sesame Street* (Mifflin 1996, Honig and Lampel 2000). Can we imagine how the elementary school anthem of organic solidarity might run there? "Who are the people in your neighbourhood?" "The West Bank Settler is a person in your neighbourhood/ in your neighbourhood, in your neigh-bour-hood/ O, the Suicide Bomber is a person in your neighbourhood ... a person that you meet/ when you're walking down the street.. etc"!

According to in Honig and Lampel (2000):

The programs showed that the two societies could co-exist, but only by first disengaging. It was not a celebration of commonality, as CTW [Children's Television Network, the production company] and Bernstein [the American producer] had hoped, but at best a respectful recognition by each side of the other's right to be different. What CTW discovered was that the concept of "separate but equal" which stood for segregation and discrimination in the United States, was precisely the one that found favor in the Middle East, where the right to be distinct and self-governing is the essence of self-determination.

Thus, the name ‘Sesame Street’ has been changed to ‘Sesame Stories’ as it became untenable to depict Israelis, Palestinians and (more recently) Jordanians mingling freely in a shared space. And while the original shows were built around the notion that erstwhile enemies could become friends, the ambition is now to help children to humanize their historic enemies through separate but parallel stories.

Another example is the spin-off from *Sesame Street* called ‘the Best of the Muppets,’ which is no longer on the air but has recently been re-released on video. Several of the Muppet’s skits are explicitly about the multiple ways in which existing structures of regimentation can be subverted, a message directly at odds with Barney’s smooth and linear performance narratives. For instance, in one musical skit there are no words, but it consists of the interaction between a free-wheeling hairy, orange-haired, lead singer (who sings Mna Mna) and his two straight-laced and disapproving fluffy pink alien background singers (to which they respond ‘Do do do do do’) Whenever he starts to improvise and change the content of the duet through jazzy vocal solos, they shake their heads and force him to start over using the accepted content. In response however, he subverts the structure of the song by agreeing to their format, but by singing the ‘proper’ words from very far away, sideways, upside down, by telephone, right up close to the camera. As well, the Muppets also contains a serious ‘high culture skit’ in which Fozzy bear pompously reads an excerpt “Stopping by woods on a Snowy Evening” by Robert Frost only to be interrupted by a Mariachi band who were scheduled to perform at the same time. He responds to this by reading the lines “miles to go before I sleep” to the tune and the rhythm of the music played by the mariachi band, and thus illustrating a capacity for negotiation and improvisation in creating a new high/low culture hybrid which doesn’t exactly satisfy them both, but which allows both to perform. The strength of this example is not necessarily in the representation of hybridity, but rather in the comic tension between these oppositional groups represented, and in the ongoing negotiation between them. As well, these examples display rather than conceal antagonism, but also show it as an inescapable moment of cultural negotiation, but one that can only be overcome provisionally and temporarily. The lack is not sutured here; rather it is continuously left open.

For two other good examples we turn to Dr Seuss’s stories, *The Sneeches* and *What Was I Scared Of?* a.k.a. *Pale Green Pants*. In *The Sneeches* we meet two groups of creatures who resemble one another in every respect except that some “have bellies with stars” while the others “have none upon thar’s.” The star-belly Sneeches “look down their snoots” at the plain-bellies, and exclude them from “ball games and picnics and frankfurter roasts”, and the poor plain-bellies are disparaged and socially excluded year after year. Then, one day, along comes Sylvester McMonkey-McBean, a “fix-it-up chappie” with a wonderful machine, that (for a modest fee) puts stars on the bellies of the plain-belly Sneeches. As soon as the significant difference is eliminated, the former elite, the star-bellied Sneeches, want to reinscribe the difference again. So Sylvester McMonkey McBean (for an increased fee) puts them through a star-off machine. Now, to have a star belly is a stigma when previously it had been a sign of status. Things spiral wildly out of control:

All the rest of that day on those wild screaming beaches

The fix-it-up chappie kept fixing up Sneeches

Off-again on-again, in again out again
Through the machines they ran round and about again
Changing their stars every minute or two
Until neither the plain or the star bellies knew
Whether which one was what one or what one was who.

Soon the Sneeches' money is all spent. Sylvester McMonkey McBean packs up his machines and drives away laughing at the foolish Sneeches.

Here is a classic Trickster (Monkey) who enters into a situation where there is latent animosity and potential conflict – racial and ethnic tension, colonial resentment. The Trickster's inventiveness – his “wonderful contraption” – disrupts stasis and gets history moving. He stands at the centre of a whirlwind of antagonism and violence, playing one side off against the other, profiting from the tragi-comedy. Dr Seuss concludes the story with the Sneeches, bewildered, bruised and broke, coming to realize that maybe the difference between star-bellies and plain bellies isn't so important after all. This tale warns of wily Tricksters, who, even though they do not actually cause trouble – the trouble between the Sneeches pre-dated the arrival of Sylvester McMonkey McBean – stir up trouble, which can quickly spiral into wild, screaming destruction. Dr Seuss's story alerts children to the dangers of inequality and social exclusion and the latent potential for conflict and violence such situations engender. And it also redeems the creative power of Trickster. He breaks the historical stasis, the paralysis of relations between colonizer and colonized. Trickster sets politics in motion. But the outcome is uncontrollable, and it may as likely end in genocide as mutual recognition and reciprocity.

What Was I Scared Of? tells of a plucky little fellow who ordinarily isn't “scared of anything, not really,” but walking in the woods one night he comes upon “a pair of pale green pants, with nobody inside them.” He has encountered the uncanniness of the Other, an Other whose Lack – lack of a body, lack of substance, the unrepresentable Other, an empty pants, standing in the air. The Other is unfathomable: “what can a pair of pale green pants be standing in the air for?” Unnerved, he runs away, but over the next several days and nights has more and more encounters with this unrepresentable, unfathomable Other, who / which takes on an increasingly menacing aspect in the mind of the hero. Eventually, they meet face to face – or face to Lack: face to ‘empty pair of pale green pants with nobody inside them!’ The little creature screams, but then he notices that the pale green pants are trembling too – “it was just as scared as I was.” They are equally strangers and alien to one another, equally lacking, equally vulnerable. And Dr Seuss's conclusion to the story is a remarkable elementary lesson in how to “Mind the Gap”. He doesn't resolve the difference between the protagonists with a premature or false closure between the one and the Other. He doesn't fill the lack by providing some positive content to “the pale green pants with nobody inside them.” He preserves the irreducibility of the otherness of the Other. He cancels the opposition, but preserves the difference between the two subjects. They become mindful of one another's presence and the difference between them, and they interact with civility towards one another:

And now we meet quite often, those empty pants and I

But we never shake or tremble, we just smile and we say ‘Hi’

Every culture has its own repertoire of stories that give us tips about Tricksters and about how to ‘Mind the Gap.’ These stories are resources that may help us to mediate the antinomies of Law, Land and Longing. To conclude, let us look at one last example, a highly successful product of the global culture industry, a mass broadcast to millions of viewers, but unlike the previous examples aimed at the very young, this, like Benjamin’s, is a broadcast to older children and teenagers.

In his radio broadcast *Demonic Berlin*, Benjamin praises the horror story writer E.T.A. Hoffmann, whose works Benjamin’s parents had forbidden him to read, and of whom it had been said the ‘the devil himself could not write such diabolical stuff.’ What is the good of such literature, which today has its equivalent in Joss Wheedon’s¹ *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and *Angel*, popular television shows aimed at the same demographic as Hoffman’s stories and Benjamin’s radio broadcasts? The pedagogical importance of such literature / broadcasts / television Benjamin says, is that it attunes its readers and listeners to the “satanic, ghostly, eerie and uncanny” as qualities not as it were ‘out there’, figments of the imagination “floating freely in thin air, but in quite specific people, things, houses, objects, and streets” (1999c: 324). By drawing attention to the haunted and possessed quality of what is taken for granted as ‘everyday life’ and ‘ordinary people’ through this genre of literature, children may learn to become “physiognomists.” Physiognomists learn the arts of scrutinizing faces and surfaces for signs of deeper truths and hidden realities: how, by looking at someone’s “face, their walk, or their hands, [they can] judge their character, their profession, or even their fate” (ibid). What is being cultivated here is the ability to make good judgements by paying close attention to the seemingly superficial and also the ability to see things from different points of view.

And the Devil – the Trickster, is never an entirely unsympathetic character. A young physiognomist, analyst-exorcist – vampire slayer has much to learn from her demonic adversaries: “The devil – alongside his many other peculiarities – is also an ingenious and knowing fellow” (Benjamin, ibid). One of the recurring tropes in *Buffy / Angel* is the ambivalent and changeable character of vampires, demons and evil spirits. The protagonists are never simply ‘good’ and ‘evil’, but perpetually slide from one into the other: the ‘good’ ones grapple with the dilemmas of being seduced and drawn into the darkness (the character “Faith”, for instance), and / or conversely, ‘evil’ characters seek redemption from evil (“Angel”, the vampire fighting to recover his soul). Demons and Slayers, as well as the ordinary residents of Benjamin’s Berlin and Buffy’s Los Angeles, live in a state of permanent liminality in a world animated by mythic powers, and the quality of mind and the capacities needed to survive in such a world is not the singular point of view of rationality alone. Apollo’s baleful gaze has great penetration, but it has blind spots, and it doesn’t have access to a realm that lies beyond the limit of pure reason, as Kant suggests, a realm that is only to be glimpsed through aesthetic images. Knowledge and reason are necessary conditions of this quality of mind, but are not sufficient. Thus, the school library is the locus of much of Buffy’s preparatory work for vampire slaying. She and her friends must develop a mastery of history and demonology.

¹ It is worthwhile bearing in mind, in the present context, that Wheedon’s political allegiances are quite explicit and public. He has been the leading figure in organizing and lobbying a Liberal and Left opposition to the Bush administration in Hollywood and in the entertainment industry in recent years.

They pore over ancient and arcane texts, and this enables them to identify and outwit their demonic adversaries, just as children today, if they are to be enabled to grapple with the zombies and monsters of Mbembe's Cameroon or find their way through the labyrinth of smoke and mirrors and illusions of globalization, first and foremost need literacy, libraries, and public schools; they need the standard, modern Liberal education explicitly and implicitly called for by Durkheim and Habermas. But this will not be sufficient. The devil's greatest trick is convincing us that he does not exist. This is the great self-deception of Enlightenment. "The program of the Enlightenment was the disenchantment of the world," yet "the fully enlightened earth radiates disaster triumphant", because "the only kind of thinking that is sufficiently hard to shatter myths is ultimately self-destructive" (Adorno & Horkheimer, 1992: 3-4). A program for a post-modern pedagogy of the bewitched, whether in the zombified post-colony or the beguiling consumerist phantasmagorias of the West needs new mythologies and a contemporary demonology. And the resources for this pedagogy are to be found in the indigenous patrimony of local folklore and Trickster tales, as well as in the broadcasts of the global culture industry.

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