

“Who will tell the children?”

Toward a Pedagogy of the Suppressed

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“The future ain’t what it used to be.”

Yogi Berra

“We had fed the heart on fantasies.
The heart’s grown brutal from the fare.”

W. B. Yates, *Meditations in Time of Civil War*

In 1993 William Greider published a book entitled: “Who Will Tell the People?” in which he exposed the multiple ways in which corporations and government authorities systematically subverted democratic institutions and marginalized the public to cut privileged deals for the sake of private profit and the appearance of streamlined government. Agreements were routinely made through what became known as a process of “deep lobbying” whereby corporations and those government agencies that were supposed to regulate them would meet behind closed doors and “negotiate” deals.

At the time, there seemed to be virtually no qualms about these procedures among those concluding these sweet-heart deals. The only major question after these corrupt agreements had been reached was: “Who would tell the public?” That is, who was going to be given the task to spin out the narrative to dupe the people into believing that their best interests – and, of course, the good of the economy and the country -- had been served?

Three decades after Greider’s book we now find ourselves in essentially the same dilemma on a massive, inter-generational scale across all cultures. Although it is widely acknowledged by rational minds around the world that unfettered capitalism is now launched on a suicidal trajectory for humankind, the question for us has become simply: *who will tell the children?*

This is why the matter of pedagogy has been thrust forward in every society throughout all cultures across the entire globe. We know that what got us here will not get us out of our predicament, but what should we do about this? Our collective dilemma has become “who will tell the children?” or, perhaps, more precisely, “who will we entrust to tell the children?” and “what is the narrative these chosen few will be allowed to spin in this daunting task?”

With unprecedented events and sweeping trends in our daily experience, including a changing climate, a double Presidential impeachment and wave after wave of global pandemics we all now know what Yogi Berra once observed: “the future ain’t what it used to be.” Yet we have not figured out how to prepare our children for the untoward circumstances in store for us all. How can we possibly write an adequate curriculum for the unknown? Who should we entrust to teach it?

Perhaps it is best to start with the basics required in any pedagogy for a survivable future.

Most fundamentally everyone must come to understand thoroughly that, as a species, we are entirely dependent upon millions of other species for our existence. Simply put, humans do not “produce” food. In fact, we *cannot* produce food, simply because we do not photosynthesize. With the single important exception of women’s breast milk, humans cannot produce food to keep themselves or their children alive. This is not a contested fact. Any biologist will affirm that, as mammals, we exist at best on the second trophic level in a complex ecosystem. Ultimately there is a ratio between the “green leaf” on the one hand -- which *can* capture solar energy and deliver it to us in a chemically ingestible form -- and the total sustainable human population on the other. Herman Daly, the ecologically astute and courageous economist, published several seminal works with these insights decades ago to help us think about the

implications of these fundamental scientific understandings and underscore the need for a total overhaul of market-based economics. More [recently many others](#) have [continued to develop](#) these insights.

The corollary of these basic ecological realities is that if our social, economic and political institutions continue to extinguish biodiversity and destroy Earth's topsoil at currently accelerating rates, our species will not be able to function as part of Earth's ecosystem. [We will become extinct](#). No population can outlast its life-support system. We will be no exception, no matter how clever we think we are. This will be true for [all cultures on all continents](#), as internationally organized "[landgrabbing](#)" [for control](#) over the last arable topsoil proceeds on [an escalating basis](#).

In the process, much of what we have come to regard as particularly clever and inventive about ourselves in "modern" civilization, may turn out, upon further analysis, to operate so as to accelerate our own extinction as a species. During the last hundred years, for example, humankind, following the lead of Dr. Norman Borlaug, -- an agricultural "expert" who was largely responsible for creating and promoting the "Green Revolution" -- humankind has [transformed the global food system](#) from a solar-sustainable one to one that is now largely petro-dependent.

If this tendency is not reversed, it will drive toward [system-wide collapse](#). Agriculture is our "primary production" system, capturing through-put solar energy and converting it to a stream of humanly digestible food. If this primary production system becomes [irretrievably dependent](#) upon non-renewable fossilized energy resources, in the long run it will not be renewed.

Any honest pedagogy for the future must therefore include an extended examination of how, together, we came to be [so collectively deluded](#) by patently absurd ideologies in the Western world emergent since 1492 from of the "colonial moment" in human history. Colonialism, after all, was built upon the pervasive practice of slavery, and it both spawned mythologies of racial superiority and nurtured fanciful notions techno-scientific control that we are now recognizing as severely delusional. As W. B. Yates declared in his *Meditations in Time of Civil War*, "We had fed the heart on fantasies. The heart's grown brutal from the fare." [Alternative narratives that dissented from the dominant story](#) about the progressive growth of human domination over nature did, of course, exist, but they were [generally suppressed and effectively silenced](#) in the capitalists' collective march toward "progress."

Perhaps most importantly, therefore, a successful pedagogy of transition will need to pay careful attention to cultivating the mental equipment and multiple sensibilities required to enable sustained thought and clear communication. Although we have taught machines to digitize ancient and sacred manuscripts and "read" previously indecipherable texts from clay tablets or chiseled stone, large portions of the public across all cultural traditions in the world have now become functionally illiterate, or more accurately "post-literate."

From an early age -- even before they have learned to speak their mother tongue -- infants are being "taught" that it is normal to experience reality by "clicking" on icons that appear on a pale blue screen. After all, they see their parents doing it, and many of these same parents [squeal with delight](#) as "junior" proceeds to "learn" the same "skills." Why bother with spelling? complete sentences? the paragraph? or an extended line of thought? As for an identifiable idea, or a metaphor, or a trope, or a *cliché*, or a coherent narrative, or the notion of irony -- these days, many students simply ask: "*what are these things? Why are they important anyway?*" The pedagogical challenge before us is to teach students to identify these things before the wordsmiths whose job it is to manufacture consent have effectively taken control of their curious, eager and precious minds.

Yet despite our near universal tendency as we "grow up" to slip into this well crafted mass-mediated unconsciousness, we are reminded that exceptional youth have preserved clear thinking and direct action. They [demonstrate](#) the imaginative capacity for forethought, empathy, honesty and passion, and they have sharpened [their skills to speak truths to those in power](#). At first we may only hear this in the voice of a [15-year old Swedish school-girl](#), but if we [bother to become attentive](#) we can hear it all around us. This chorus of voices deserves to be [embraced and championed -- not suppressed](#). If there is hope of surviving as a species we all now need to learn from the pedagogy of the suppressed.