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Abstract:

This review of Matthew Lipman's autobiography, *A Life Teaching Thinking*, is a reflection on the themes and patterns of his extraordinarily productive career. His book begins with memories of earliest childhood and his preoccupation with the possibility of being able to fly, moves through the years in which his family struggled with the effects of the Great Depression, through his service in the military during World War II, his discovery of the joy and beauty of philosophy, his academic rise at Columbia University, his Fulbright sojourn in Paris, and his early and later career. Lipman's educational project led in four related directions: the practice of *philosophy for children*, which he invented, and which presents an epistemological challenge to a second field, *philosophy of education*, which is as startling as was Rousseau's two hundred years before. Third, it led to a realm of theory called *philosophy of childhood*, upon which the practice of philosophy for children is a kind of action-meditation, prompting adults as it does to reflect on children's differences from and similarities to adults at the same time, and in the same discursive space. Finally, his praxis also implicitly challenged those accounts of *children's philosophies*, paradigmatically represented by Piaget's work, which represent childhood epistemology as evidence for various genetic and epigenetic stage-based theories of cognitive development. The consequence for education of this confluence was a methodology – community of inquiry – that serves as a bridge between the two most influential philosophers of education of the 20<sup>th</sup> century – John Dewey and Paulo Freire. The educational praxis that emerged from his venture, for all its apparent simplicity, operationalizes a postcolonial standpoint epistemology *vis a vis* childhood and children, pulls the linchpin that holds in place the school as ideological state apparatus, and empowers the elementary classroom as a primary site for democratic theory and practice.

Keywords: Matthew Lipman; philosophy for children; autobiography; philosophy of childhood; philosophy of education

Desde un espacio de afuera y cruzando la calle: la doble visión de Matthew Lipman

Resumen:

Este análisis de la autobiografía de Matthew Lipman, *Una vida enseñando a pensar*, es una reflexión sobre los temas y las pautas de su carrera extraordinariamente productiva. Su libro comienza con memorias de la niñez más temprana y su preocupación con la posibilidad de poder volar, pasa por los años en los cuales su familia luchó con los efectos de la Gran Depresión, por su servicio militar durante la Segunda Guerra Mundial, su descubrimiento de la alegría y de la belleza de la filosofía, su ascenso académico en la Universidad de Columbia, su estancia Fullbright en París, y su carrera anterior y posterior. El proyecto educativo de Lipman se movió en cuatro direcciones relacionadas: la práctica de *filosofía para niños*, que él inventó, y que presenta un desafío epistemológico a un segundo campo, la *filosofía de la educación*, que es tan impresionante como era la de Rousseau, doscientos años antes. Tercero, lo llevó a un reino teórico llamado *filosofía de la niñez*, sobre el cual la práctica de la filosofía para niños es una especie de acción-meditación, incitando a los adultos a reflexionar sobre las diferencias y semejanzas entre adultos y niños, al mismo tiempo y en el mismo espacio discursivo. Finalmente, su praxis también desafió implícitamente esos relatos de las filosofías de los niños, paradigmáticamente representados por el trabajo de Piaget, que representan la epistemología de la niñez como evidencia de varias teorías genéticas y epigenéticas basadas en el desarrollo cognoscitivo por etapas. La consecuencia para la educación de esta confluencia era una metodología - la comunidad de investigación- que sirve como un puente entre los dos filósofos más influyentes de la educación del siglo veinte -John Dewey y Paulo Freire. La praxis educativa que emergió de su emprendimiento, con su aparente simplicidad, operacionaliza una epistemología postcolonial en relación a la niñez y a los niños, tira el compresor que tiene en su lugar a la escuela como aparato ideológico del Estado, y empodera las aulas de educación primaria como sitio primero para la teoría y la práctica democráticas.

Palabras claves: Matthew Lipman; filosofía para niños; autobiografía; filosofía de la niñez; filosofía de la educación

## De um espaço de fora e do outro lado da rua: a visão dupla de Matthew Lipman

### Resumo:

Esta análise da autobiografia de Matthew Lipman, *Uma vida ensinando a pensar*, é o reflexo dos temas e planos de sua extraordinária e produtiva carreira. Seu livro começa com as memórias da sua tenra infância e sua preocupação com a possibilidade de poder voar, vai através dos anos durante os quais sua família lutou com os efeitos da Grande Depressão, passa pelos anos de seu serviço militar durante a Segunda Guerra Mundial, sua descoberta pela alegria e beleza da filosofia, seu crescimento acadêmico na Colômbia University, sua estadia Fullbright em Paris, e sua carreira no começo e no final. O projeto educativo de Lipman se direcionou em quatro direções correlacionadas: a prática da filosofia para crianças, que foi inventada por ele e que apresenta um desafio epistemológico com o segundo campo, *filosofia da educação*, que é tão impressionante quanto foi a de Rousseau há duzentos anos atrás. Em terceiro lugar, ele trabalha com a área da chamada teoria da *filosofia da infância*, sobre a qual a prática da filosofia para criança é um tipo de ação-mediação, incitando os adultos a refletirem sobre as diferenças e similitudes das crianças em relação aos adultos, no mesmo tempo e espaço discursivo. Finalmente, sua prática também implica no confronto com as filosofias da criança, pragmaticamente representadas pelo trabalho de Piaget, que representa a epistemologia da infância como evidências de várias variações genéticas e epigenéticas baseadas no desenvolvimento cognitivo em etapas. A consequência de uma educação desta confluência era a metodologia da comunidade de investigação, que seria como uma ponte entre os dois filósofos da educação mais influentes do século XX - John Dewey e Paulo Freire. Uma prática educacional que surge da sua tentativa, com toda sua aparente simplicidade, operacionaliza uma postura epistemológica pós-colonial em relação à infância e à criança, tira o fundamento que sustenta a escola como um aparato ideológico do estado, e dá ao ensino elementar o poder de ser o primeiro espaço para a teoria e prática democrática.

Palavras-chave: Matthew Lipman; filosofia para crianças; autobiografia; filosofia da infância; filosofia da educação

FROM OUTER SPACE AND ACROSS THE STREET: MATTHEW LIPMAN'S DOUBLE VISION

David Kennedy

Lipman wrote his autobiography<sup>1</sup> late—almost too late for a man in a race with the illness that was steadily eating away at his memory and his once-formidable discursive capacities. Parkinson's Disease has a gentle and inexorable cruelty; it works slowly but surely to destroy neurons, like an eraser passing over a full chalkboard. But perhaps this process of erasure also revealed something more deeply inscribed, for there is a glowing quality of immediacy to his earliest memories, as if all the affect was still there. And there at the end—everyone noticed it—the brightness of his eyes and his smile, which appears in photographs of his earlier years as an almost hyperactive light, had both deepened and intensified to a steady benevolent glow. It was felt by his interlocutors as not so much personally directed at them, but as if lifting his vision from some place beyond himself that was also fully himself, that was his body, his cells.

His first memory has to do with an exploration of the possibility of unaided human flight. He is not yet two years old. He is standing on the top of the staircase, staring at the landing below:

The staircase has a carpet on it, and on the landing below, there is a bookcase with a glass door. I stand with my feet even with the front edge of the top step. I slide one foot out a bit. Now I begin to slide the other foot forward. With one hand on the banister, I edge forward again. I try to keep my balance, but suddenly I'm tumbling forward, down the steps, wailing with frustration. My experiment hasn't worked! I didn't fly! When my father comes home for supper, my mother shows him the door of the smashed bookcase—a casualty of my fall. My mother scolds me. My father fixes the door. . . . Lots of nights I have the same sort of dream—of flying through the air on my tricycle. In my dream everyone looks up at me with admiration. (1)

After this initial “defining incident,” as he calls it, the flying motif recurs, appearing at least four times in the course of his autobiography, like a musical theme in the long symphony that is each person's life, and each successive variation turns closer

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<sup>1</sup> All references are to Matthew Lipman, *A Life Teaching Thinking*. Montclair, NJ: IAPC. 2008.

to both a love and a fear of heights. At eight, he is regularly driving his teacher to distraction by attempting to climb out a second story window onto a fire escape. As a teenager in Hebrew school, he jumps out of a first floor classroom, “hitting my head on the window frame and making a loud ‘CRACK’”. I giggled and ran home, not sustaining any great injury—but the Rabbi was furious.” (17) At college age, his fledgling university career interrupted by that “house of horrors” called World War II, the eighteen year old enters basic training, and finds himself climbing a steep bluff in Northern California, in single file with other soldiers in training, and tormented by the “option” of jumping off the ledge of the sheer face of the cliff. He wants to jump but he’s terrified of it too. Partly, he thinks that if he jumped he would be serving his comrades, whom he is slowing down due to his physical distress. And finally, as the “last good war” is ending and he, the Mail Clerk and Company Clerk of Company E, finds himself, as a tourist, on the pinnacle of the steeple of the Bavarian Cathedral of Ulm, driven to ascend to a peak that terrifies him, and fighting again with the urge to jump.

The golden thread of these incidents—in which the desire to fly is, after its first frustration as a toddler, turned in the face of experience to the fear, not just of falling, but of jumping, as if pushed by an invisible hand, to his death—is a mysterious theme in Lipman’s narrative of his early life, embodying some deep site of contradiction. In each case, he says, “a complicating factor was my tendency to ‘forget’ or ‘repress’ my having chosen to place myself on the very brink of the elevated location, so that in effect I was challenging myself or defying myself to throw myself off.” And the thread leads, in a surprising *contretemps* of symbolic mirroring and correspondence, to the experience of philosophy—but it is philosophy that resolves it. He has, after all, known from the age of two that he cannot fly, but the desire to fly remains in its negation—as a death wish—until he encounters that noble preoccupation, which, he finds, takes him to the heights without the danger of self-immolation. On leave in England during the conflict, he comes across a copy of Spinoza’s *Ethics* in “a little London book store.” The intellectually voracious twenty-year old struggles through it, and “. . . when I’d finally

finished it, it was like reaching the top of a great mountain and looking down, seeing the countryside stretching out in every direction." (79)

Later, Lipman specifically connects the experience of reading Spinoza with that of climbing the Cathedral at Ulm, which had in fact been a terrifying one ("The staircase spiraled more and more tightly around the central column, while the open casements pressed in more and more closely as one mounted" (48)); but here, on the summit to which Spinoza's *Ethics* leads him (*amor Dei intellectualis!*), his love and fear of heights is transformed. Philosophy, he discovers, is connected with the high places, because you can see so far from there, and doing philosophy is a kind of flying--not falling, but flying. It's the eye flying, the mind flying over the world, seized, tantalized by the possibility of what he calls "adequate knowledge," the epistemological panopticon, the noetic rapture, the Archimedean point. "I was magnetized by the idea," Lipman writes,

that one could find, at least theoretically and with enough patience and effort, the criteria that interlocked with other criteria that interlocked with other criteria, until the happenings of the whole world could be explained. Humans had pursued the search for this criterion all the way back to ancient Greece. No, we hadn't come up with the answer yet, but the process of trying to capture it was intriguing, exciting, illuminating. (59)

But philosophy did more than just deliver Lipman from a convoluted death wish. In fact in the space of a few pages chronicling his postwar entry into Columbia University as a student on the GI Bill, his book gushes with images, metaphors and exultations about his entry onto the royal road of philosophy. It provided him ("to some degree") with the "objective understanding of the world" that he was seeking. "It opened my view of things," (59) he says, "like discovering a camera that produced pictures that were so much more beautiful and clear than anything I'd ever seen." (107) It was "like learning to speak and write in a different language, it was a language of languages" --not just the possibility of an Archimedean point, but a Rosetta Stone. It was a container for "many forms of logic that could be dissolved in the language all of us spoke." (60) It also fulfilled, he confides, his socially "ambitious side" --it was a way of "taking the conversation to a higher level" by invoking, not just judgments about an artistic event, but calling for the criteria for those judgments. It was a form of social

power that he, always the practical idealist intent on “effecting real change in the world,” (105) could respect.

This is a child’s love of philosophy – always as if he had just discovered it, in its beauty and power, and its *usefulness*. One of its first uses was to provide a framework for addressing the problematic that his youthful experience of WW II had posed him, the underlying elements of which I interpret as a binary: 1) the extraordinary cruelty, stupidity, immorality, extravagant wastefulness and the malicious, gratuitous destructiveness of humans at war, which inspired in him, he says, a “lifelong horror . . . with regard to cruelty and violence,” and a smoldering if usually hidden contempt for the ignorant hypocrisy that sanctions it; and 2) the extraordinary optimism and generosity of a generation and a nation that could claim the benefits of winning the only (it was thought) “just war” of the century – the optimism of US empire in ascendance. He had left home a child of parents in straightened circumstances--condemned by the Depression to a financial failure that had no logical relationship to his father’s hard work, intelligence, tenacity and inventiveness (his father was in fact, like him, an inventor), and with no money to enroll in the school he longed to attend, Columbia. He returned home in the euphoric national aftermath with a free ticket to Columbia through the GI Bill – a doctoral degree if he could do it all in less than five years, which he did.

The first element of the problematic – the war and its aftereffects – encouraged in him a desire to “effect real change in the world,” to live as much as possible for the “exemplary act,” to pursue that life of “principled practicality” which he identifies as his father’s psychological patrimony. So, when he married an African American woman, a student like himself (“I had fallen in love with beautiful Wynona”) in the Paris City Hall in 1952, he (and she) could be considered to have been asserting the cash value of the victory over fascism. “I felt,” he writes, “that somehow or other, sooner or later, I would have to take the initiative and not wait for others to exemplify what needed to be done.” (80) The second element provided him with an environment of dramatic felt opportunity, a sort of cultural equivalent of the “spoils of war” which,

after so much youthful picaresque wandering in the chaotic, high-jinx global theatre of war, bolstered his trust in his own capacity, not only to survive, but to prevail--a trust in his luck.

As a young child, he was preoccupied with flying. In middle childhood "I preferred play to study, and there were lots of opportunities to play" (9) in the small southern New Jersey Russian Jewish middle-class immigrant town of Woodbine, where his father owned and ran the machine shop until the Depression brought him down. In his high school years, "although I was the youngest in my class, I was the leader in mischief," (7) and was in fact expelled from school in his senior year three weeks before graduation because "I caroused a bit too much, and the principal of the high school, Mr. Foley, interpreted my behavior as uncooperative to the point of being defiant" (29) His aunt, influential in the little town, and with whom he was living temporarily, managed to fix things up with the principal in time for the insouciant carouser to receive his diploma, but with grades "unimpressive" enough to deny him acceptance to Rutgers. Then, in his twentieth year, came the massive interruption of total war on foreign soil, in which he participated as a humble Company E, 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, 14<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment clerk.

Lipman characterizes himself as an "unhero" in WW II—the one who found a spot away from the flying bullets, and who decided half way through the conflict that he would rather not load his rifle at all. He refers to himself at various points in the narrative of his own youth as stoic, modest, diffident, phlegmatic, shy, a novice, a naïf of sorts, with elements of a "passive self-destructiveness," whose gifts surprise even him, and whose success always feels at least partially undeserved. His powerful analytic skills are projected, not onto himself or his relationships, but onto the world of philosophy and art.

Given how his life turned out, I would suggest that Lipman's self-narrative is organized, not just around a response to the problematic put to him by his participation in a world war, but by a larger, archetypal narrative, not of the unhero, but of the Hero, interlaced with those of the Fool--for the two narrative tropes are often found together



in interplay. The Fool, who is fully thematized in Tarot, is, in Russian and German folk and fairy tale, the youngest of three sons, which Lipman was. The Hero often has an early wound, in Lipman's case the early onset and unnatural progress throughout his childhood of myopia, which did not stop him from devouring his parents' bookshelf—he "repeatedly reread" the ten-volume sets of Mark Twain and Edgar Allen Poe, and read *The Education of Henry Adams* five times over—or lugging a duffel bag full of his favorite books and a typewriter all over Europe for four years.

The Hero encounters early trials. Lipman's family was threatened by bankruptcy, foreclosure, and his father's heart attack in his mid-childhood. At the moment he was poised to enter college, the war struck. The Fool sets forth with boundless but vague enthusiasm, and overcomes danger and mishap through pure and bumbling innocence and a good heart. He is unaware of the hardships he will face as he ventures out into the world to learn its lessons. The Hero defies fate and necessity in the search for his destiny, which ultimately comes from within. Lipman's search was exemplified in his insatiable thirst for the "wealth" of the "enriched experience" of poetry, the novel, philosophy, music, art, academic courses, intellectual friendships. The Fool finds himself before kings, always somewhat improbably. So Lipman, a young, slightly shy man with boundless enthusiasm and a gargantuan capacity for intellectual work, secures a Fulbright for post-doctoral work after Columbia, travels to Paris (he meets Wynona on the boat, and they bond immediately) and encounters Madame Marc Chagall (the painter is away at the time). She invites him back, to dine with her "lively, Renoir-like family." He lets the opportunity pass—"due, I have since reflected, to my own shyness rather than to any lack of friendliness on the family's part"—and thus misses the opportunity for meeting the eminent painter himself.<sup>(72)</sup> He meets Merleau-Ponty, Bachelard, and multiple other prominent artists, poets and intellectuals. Merleau-Ponty, who has taken notice of one of his papers, invites him to a reception, where the Fool, like Parceval in the home of the Fisher King, meets the great man's beautiful young niece, whom, he suspects,

had been given the job of making me feel comfortable at the soiree. It seemed that the perfect evening was unfolding right before my eyes and that I was unable to keep up with it. Suddenly I felt embarrassed by my crude French, and by my soiled, wrinkled clothes. I wanted desperately to stay and talk some more, or at least find out from my beautiful hostess whether I could see her another time. But all I managed to do was to mumble a hastily invented excuse and, despite her efforts to persuade me to stay, to flee. . . . When at last I was in a situation where the culture I wanted to possess wanted to give itself over to me, and even paraded its feminine beauty for me to see, I could do nothing with polish or cleverness or charm.

After two years in Paris, the Hero--this modest, deeply ambitious young Jewish intellectual from the hinterlands of New Jersey, son of gritty, principled, cultured, inventive immigrants intent on assimilation, labors in the Augean Stables of academia in greater New York for the next decade and a half as in a series of untenured positions--at the Columbia College of Pharmacy, the Mannes School of Music, City College of New York, and Brooklyn College--writing slightly labored philosophy in his work on aesthetics, at which he doesn't consider himself particularly talented ("I had no great confidence in myself as a traditional philosopher"). He turns down offers from Reed College and the University of Arkansas. "I didn't want to leave the city," he explains, "because it seemed to me doubtful that an interracial marriage could flourish outside New York at that time. As a result, the out-of-state offers gradually trickled away." (150) In the course of time, he secures an assistant professor position in the Philosophy Department of the Columbia College of Pharmacy, which he supplements by teaching a course in the well-known general education course for undergraduates, *Contemporary Civilization*, in Columbia College proper, which he does for eight years, and added to that, a logic course at various sites in the city, all to make ends meet.

At the point of the realization of his dream of assuming a permanent position in the Philosophy Department of Columbia--the sanctum of his youthful scholarship, home of the very John Dewey, author of the first philosophical work he had every read and with whom he had formed a tenuous, diffident friendship during his doctoral

period (he sent Dewey his dissertation)—on the verge of the conventional success he had labored for so long for, the Hero undergoes a crisis. He and Wynona had by then settled in Montclair, NJ, where they moved when she found a high school teaching job there. Pushed to the tipping point by commuter life, by the necessity of teaching adjunct courses in addition to his now tenured post at the College of Pharmacy (“The stress of driving each day from Montclair and rushing around the city was slowly wearing me down”), by the assumption of new parenting responsibilities when Wynona got involved in New Jersey politics—she was to become a New Jersey State Senator, a post that she held for thirty years—and beset increasingly by his ever-felt need “to make a meaningful contribution to the world”—he slips on an icy sidewalk and breaks his ankle while on a stroll with his three year old son.

His ankle is put in a cast and he is put on crutches. While being given training in the use of the crutches, he loses his balance, falls, and sprains his back. He spends five days in the hospital, where he reads Stendhal’s *The Red and the Black*. Seized by the “breathtaking moment” in which the hero, Julian Sorel, risks his life by seizing his lover’s hand while her brute of a husband sits nearby with a gun, Lipman realizes, he says, that

I too *must change my life*—not some little bit of it, but change it as a whole. It must be understood that I was not despondent over anything—Wynona and I were getting along well, I devoted any leftover time I had to working in her campaigns, the kids were a delight, and I enjoyed my own teaching in New York. Nevertheless, I strangely thought, *this cannot go on. I must change my life*. Was it something I’d read in Rilke or Gide or Camus? It did not matter. Things could not go on as they were. Either my life’s meanings were the wrong meanings for me or else my life had no meaning at all. I was unhappy with my happiness. *I must make a fresh start*, I neurotically continued. But the only fresh beginning I could think of making was to do something *more* (which would be the down side of a new beginning) but also something *different* (which would be the up side of such a new beginning). (98)

This is probably as close to the voice of God sounding within a person as one could find in postwar secular academic Greater New York, yet Lipman—who from childhood was “intellectually comfortable” without the sense of deity (which foundered in the young child’s mind on the notion of omniscience), and whose parents, on his account, attended synagogue “not only because it was expected of them, but because it added a touch of mystery and elegance to their lives” (8)—is content to reference the grand European existentialist tradition in his description of this profound turn. There remains, however, the question of exactly what it was that moved him to realize this imperative of “something different” in the construction of a combination of elementary school curriculum and pedagogy both so obvious and so novel that in one stroke it lays a framework for a radical new theory of education. The educational praxis that emerged from Lipman’s venture, for all its apparent staid simplicity, operationalizes a postcolonial standpoint epistemology vis a vis childhood and children, pulls the linchpin that holds in place the school as ideological state apparatus, and empowers the elementary classroom as a primary site for democratic theory and practice.

Certainly childhood has had many interlocutors, known and unknown, in the classroom or out of it. Bronson Alcott, Tolstoy, Kornei Chukovsky, George Dennison, John Holt to name a few, but not Peirce, not Dewey in particular, not Lipman’s mentors Meyer Shapiro and Justus Buchler—not his intellectual heroes. Where are the models in his life for such a bold undertaking? When questioned about his predecessors, those to whom he is intellectual heir, Lipman tended to cite no lineage. His is an example of a man crossing into another zone altogether—from slightly abstruse, intellectualizing academic aesthete and metaphysician to radical curriculum inventor—and not just that, but protagonist and tireless proponent of that curriculum. The extraordinary entrepreneurial enthusiasm and persistence with which he wrote, published, publicized, operationalized and propagandized his deceptively simple invention are signs of utterly focused intent, completeness of realization, the power of the idea or the ideal over outer form and behavior—all of which suggest the Hero. Seized by the imperative “I must change my life!” he simmers with the inchoate stirrings of his first

novel *Harry Stottlemeir's Discovery*, the seventeen chapters of which he writes in a matter of seventeen weeks, on a card table set up in his basement, aware but not aware in the heat of creation that what he is organizing into a children's book are the main elements of the Philosophy 101 class that he has been teaching to college undergraduates for years.

*Harry* is decidedly, determinedly even, not fantasy, not oversimplification of complex ideas, not didactic re-renderings of the "great philosophers." In fact it is almost totally composed of conversations between children. No philosopher's name is mentioned, and no philosophical terminology is used. The children are "normal" – they give an impression of kids from Queens or New Jersey, semi-urban kids, middle and lower middle class from the mid 60's, and if there is a dark side to their family lives, it is only hinted at. This is the slight shock and wonder of the book: the kids might be "normal" but they are talking philosophy, and doing so without big words or complicated sentences. The conversations, in other words, are completely *abnormal*, presented in such a way that they appear completely normal – until one realizes that they aren't at all, or needn't be. Here are children talking about mind and body, about beauty, art and nature, about culture, logic, about authority, about the purposes of education, about religion, science, about inquiry itself, in a completely believably unbelievable – or vice versa – way. What Lipman has invented on the card table in his suburban basement is a new form of philosophical novel, whose topics are written in what he calls a "double-function language that would be understandable to adults on one level and understandable to children on a rather different level." (108) It is a novel that can be discussed as easily by adults as by children, and thus represents a bridge between childhood and adulthood, a site for intergenerational conversation. He has invented a form of philosophical literature.

If he had done this and only this, *Harry Stottlemeier's Discovery* would be nothing more than a charming curiosity in Western literature, most likely all but forgotten. But the novel is the beginning of that change of life that had called him, and the first weapon with which the Hero ventures forth into the both hidebound and treacherous

terrain of American education. Although Lipman's autobiographical style is characteristically both modest and delicately ironic, even so there is a felt breathlessness in his account of leaving forever the academic prize of the Columbia College Philosophy Department that was at that very moment—the moment of his crisis—within sight. Instead, he takes a job at a rather provincial normal school--Montclair State College—because they promise support for his project, and spends the next nearly forty years gathering collaborators and colleagues around him, writing more novels, writing manuals for each that are in fact just huge books of philosophical questions, developing a post-Socratic pedagogy for facilitating communal conversation of the novels in classrooms (“I was determined to be “radically inventive. . . Is a new pedagogy needed? Invent it!”) (116), organizing pilot and research projects, initiating, organizing and maintaining actual Philosophy for Children programs in local and national schools, seeking and obtaining grants, lobbying influential figures in education and philosophy, writing and editing multiple volumes on theory, singlehandedly founding and editing a journal dedicated to Philosophy for Children, organizing conferences, developing academic programs, organizing summer training retreats (the pedagogy of which is exactly the pedagogy that will be used with children—viz. reading and discussing the philosophical topics in the novels together, just as the children do in the classroom), hosting international students and collaborators, and going before the American Philosophical Association year after year to argue the case for children doing philosophy with snobbish and skeptical academic philosophers, who mostly turn a deaf ear.

He drove forward continuously, tirelessly, spending the first ten years in a trailer on one edge of the campus, then, as the project prospered, moving the operation to a small two story house on the other edge--Alderice House, which became the internationally known, central site of the Institute for the Advancement of Philosophy for Children, with its kitchen, its resident cat Ellie (which Lipman observed, pampered, and communed with), its seminar room and handful of offices. All through the seventies, eighties and nineties, Alderice House served as a cozy, communal gathering

place for the continual stream of visiting scholars and graduate students – philosophers, educationalists and everywhere in between, at least half of them international-- drawn to Lipman's idea and to his own humane magnetism as if by an invisible melody. One had the impression that each new wandering scholar who arrived at the door of Alderice House had the same light in his or her eyes – was drawn by the same inquiry, whatever the combination of its three elements – philosophy, childhood, and education.

But the biographical question remains: why *children* and philosophy? What pushed him to that radical reconstruction of philosophy as dialogue, and dialogue, moreover, among children? What led him to choose childhood as the site for this radical democratization of the discipline? One senses Lipman asking this very question of himself in this book, with typical economy and modest understatement. His approach to the question is as refined, allusive and illusive, as befits a philosopher reflecting on his life at a late date, and also oddly sparse. Here is a passionate scholar who has no particular interest in developmental psychology, genetic epistemology, cognitive development, systematic analysis of children's thinking, or the history of education, who brings into being a movement that, for those who embrace it, provides, not just insight but unlimited data into all those fields, and illuminates in one stroke the very core of the progressive tradition in education. As stated simply and eloquently in his first theoretical book on the subject, *Philosophy in the Classroom*, it suggests a revolution in education that replaces the goal of "learning" with the goal of "meaning." It results in a classroom methodology – dubbed by him community of inquiry--that serves to operationalize the call from Freire for dialogue as the fundamental fulcrum of educational theory and practice. As the one who develops Dewey to the point where his thought is focused enough to meet Freire, Lipman's work represents the methodological bridge between the two most influential philosophers of education of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

What made him do it? Was it the wonder stirred by encounters with young children – for example the two-year old girl in the Jardin de Luxembourg--where he often strolled, sat, read, and eavesdropped during his "two wonderful years of

adventure" in Paris--who, when commanded by her parents to hide herself ("Cache-toi! they told her"), squeezed her eyes shut? (70) Was it the concern for the education of his two young children, which, he says, took up "a considerable part of my thinking" in the early to mid sixties? Was it reading Hannah Arendt's "Reflections on Little Rock" which "first stirred me deeply on the issue of children's educational entitlements"? (94). Or his conversations with the eminent aesthetician Rudolph Arnheim about children's art as they strolled in the bucolic surroundings of Sarah Laurence, where both were visiting professors? Was it teaching third graders in Sunday School at the Montclair Unitarian Church, where he attended with his bi-racial family? Was it his encounter with an exhibition of art by children from Summerhill School that he visited at New York's Museum of Modern Art in the late 60's, where his eyes were opened to "a depth that I hadn't thought children were capable of," where he saw "their creative processes as a form of thinking," where he thought, "Could there not be certain topics on which children's thinking approached or perhaps even exceeded the thinking of adults?" Or was it, finally, the 60's themselves--that torturous epoch, slashed, scarred and repeatedly astonished by internecine violence and heady social experiment--that period of wrenching cultural change, when the deep angst, rage, longing, and felt meaninglessness of mainstream American culture could no longer be contained by what seemed overwhelming forces of repression--that secreted in him, as the decade "slouched and stumbled along" (107), a response to his own times that was worthy of his own "strange confidence" and "chronic optimism"? (159)

I couldn't help reflecting on whether there might be an opportunity, not for microscopic half-measures but for dramatic across-the board educational changes that would affect not only the college students of tomorrow, but the professors of the day after tomorrow as well. What was needed, I thought, was an education that made children more reasonable and more capable of exercising good judgment. (107)

Perhaps it was a felt sense, in the slow burn that was the sixties, that the repression of affect, of creativity, of social conscience and autonomous thinking that announced itself everywhere around him, and which had suddenly become startlingly,



even grotesquely clear in a new post-colonial age, was somehow maintained through its capacity to hoodwink children; everybody to be sure, but children first of all. In this first stage of what appears in retrospect as almost an alchemical process, Lipman was disabused of his “gradualist,” “melioristic tendencies” vis a vis educational reform by the acrimonious events of the Columbia student riots of 1968. They jolted him into the conviction that “[a] whole new plan, a whole new practice, a whole new theory – all of these had to be drawn up and set in place virtually instantaneously.” He was “deeply moved,” he found, “by how children suffer, and how little they can do about it.” He began, he recounts, to “see the importance of freedom of inquiry, not simply for teachers, but for children as well. The academic rights that college faculty enjoyed were not extended to children in the schools, and I was coming to realize how badly something of the sort was needed. What could be done, I wondered, to help children not merely to think, but to *think for themselves?*”

It was, in other words, not just the lure of children’s epistemological curiosity and their capacity for philosophical play that drew Lipman, but a genuine political concern. A kernel of democratic activism is hidden in the seemingly purely academic activity of P4C, and has been there since it was an idea in the mind of its maker – indeed, this implicit radicalism also shone in the eyes of those who showed up at Alderice House. The Hero’s felt need to “contribute,” to do something “radical,” combined with his nascent sense that the child is in many ways an oppressed and marginalized class led him to a project of educational reconstruction which “I hadn’t the least doubt . . . would have to be radical.” (112) “Education would have to mean something new and different, and the place to begin couldn’t be the adult world – the teacher, the professor, or the parent – for none of these were spoiling for a fight. It would have to come from one questioning layer of the social system – the child . . . ” (110) He would invent a curriculum and a pedagogy designed to protect children “against ambiguity and vagueness in the classroom, since this would in turn protect them from manipulative propaganda and advertising,” (108) and thereby provide them

with the tools necessary to reconstruct their relation to the adult world, and later, the adult world itself.

Lipman's alchemical project led, with characteristic fruitfulness, in four related directions: the practice of *philosophy for children*, which he invented, and which spontaneously presents a challenge as startling as was Rousseau's two hundred years before to a second field, *philosophy of education*. Third, it led to a realm of theory called *philosophy of childhood*, upon which the practice of P4C is a kind of action-meditation, prompting adults as it does to reflect on children's differences from and similarities to adults at the same time, and in the same discursive space. Although philosophy of childhood had long been present in literary criticism, and in certain themes in phenomenology (during his Parisian post-doc idyll, Lipman attended one or two of Merleau-Ponty's lectures on child psychology at the Sorbonne), Lipman's philosophy of education forced an encounter with philosophy of childhood that skirted those disciplines—cognitive and developmental psychology and sociology—that have long held it in their positivist thrall. Finally, his praxis also implicitly challenged those accounts of *children's philosophies*, paradigmatically represented by Piaget's *The Child's Conception of the World*, which represent childhood epistemology as evidence for various genetic and epigenetic stage-based theories of cognitive development, the most notoriously global of which is Recapitulation Theory.

Philosophy of childhood makes its first appearance in a fascinating collection of contemporary essays and historical texts gathered into a special double issue of *Thinking: The Journal of Philosophy for Children*—the journal that he originated and personally maintained for nearly thirty years, and which has hardly a mention in this book. In the course of his career, Lipman left it to University of Massachusetts philosophy professor Gareth Matthews to articulate the philosophical view of the child that he assumed, and concentrated on the pursuit of the practice of actually writing for children and, in his theoretical texts, in advocacy of philosophy as an elementary school curriculum standard. Matthews attempted to articulate a critique, from a philosophical point of view, of Piaget's view of children that had persuaded the mainstream

educational establishment that they could not reason; to make the argument for children as moral thinkers that Kohlberg, Piaget's intellectual disciple, had discredited through an overly simplistic developmental stage theory; and to offer clear evidence for the epistemological and metaphysical curiosity of children.

Lipman's memories of his own childhood, as fragmentary as they are and as modestly presented, have the vividness of "screen" memories, in the post-Freudian sense of being symbols of all the depths of childhood experience—incidents containing a whole world of primeval experience. In brief, laconic strokes, he evokes the small town world of untrammelled, almost continuous, unsupervised outdoor child's play (now considered an idyll reserved for past generations), and provides us a child's view of the Promethean energy of his father's machine shop, where he loved to spend time after school. There, "A huge electric motor empowered a ceiling-high shaft and wheels, which were then connected by leather belts to the individual machines," and the young child "never tired of watching the blue-hot curls of metal spin off these cutting and shaping tools," or marveling at the "sheer awesomeness" of his father—who was gentle and good humored at home—working at his forge, "heating a piece of metal and then bending and shaping it with his heavy hammer at his anvil."

Reading these quietly glowing shards of memory, one cannot help but feel, given what came after, that Lipman's love of philosophy, which drew him like a Siren song from his late teenage years, is based at least in part on its potential to *conserve* childhood. Perhaps what he called the "strange path" (23) of philosophy was for Lipman—as Rilke said of artists—a way of remaining a child, in the sense of always being at or near some beginning, of beginning again, which vocationally translates into a love for inquiry, of never presuming an end to inquiry—of, as many children are, being in a certain way haunted by wonder. Childhood is also a representation of the unity of being and existence—of the capacity to act that Lipman demonstrated paradigmatically in the initiation and fulfillment of his project. Once he had his task, the Hero worked with complete single-mindedness, with the whole dedication of one whose work is indistinguishable from his play. Here the principled practicality that he

admired in his father and adopted for his own *modus vivendi* assumes exemplary form. "Purity of will," says Kierkegaard, "is to will one thing." Childhood does so effortlessly – as, it appears, did Lipman.

There are other narrative dimensions of this book of sketches, intriguing anecdotes, and self-questioning musings that invite a speculative glance – narratives of race, ethnicity and class, for example, with which his frank account of a small town southern New Jersey Jewish immigrant town is redolent. More mysterious, and no doubt more difficult to interpret, are the sudden, momentary appearances, throughout his youthful wanderings in the global theatre of war, of "special" women. These too have the qualities of screen memories, appearing as they do with a startling, archetypal brightness, each brief encounter delivered with a careful restraint that only enhances their romantic force. For example, during his first months in the army, while camped in a mountain bivouac in California, he hitchhikes to Los Angeles, and is "given a lengthy ride by a charming woman driver with whom I had a stimulating conversation." (26) On another weekend in Los Angeles, he takes the bus back to camp instead of hitchhiking:

I arrived early for the bus – the first, in fact, in a small queue, and I had my choice of seats, choosing a window seat halfway down the aisle. A moment later a young woman got on who was about my age (20) and was exceptionally attractive. She paused a moment to survey what seats were available, and then came down the aisle and sat with me. I had had a number of experiences attesting to the hospitable nature of Californians, but this exceeded all expectations. We almost immediately turned to each other and began to talk. She told me she would be getting off in Santa Barbara. I said nothing, but when the bus stopped at Santa Barbara, I couldn't help thinking about what would happen if I went AWOL and got off with her. (26)

These women continue to appear throughout wartime, figures each of whom one feels has been sent to pay the shy, courtly Parceval a mysteriously admonitory visit. In the last few weeks of the war, for example, while billeted in a small German town,

I found a young woman staring at me and asking if we could talk. She took me into her house and showed me a framed photograph of her husband. What was startling was that her husband and I looked almost identical. She hadn't heard from him for some

years: he was a soldier on the Eastern front. She was quite shaken by the experience of seeing me. Had our orders not suddenly changed and we had to move out, I would like to have stayed for a while longer. Before leaving, I looked again at the photograph. The resemblance was indeed uncanny. Maybe he eventually returned home to his attractive young wife and children and is at this moment writing his memoirs.

Perhaps in one sense these fragments are brief evocations of the erotic economy of wartime; when the distance between life and death has narrowed, the natural mistrust between the sexes narrows as well. In the autobiography as mythic narrative, they signal the appearance of the Goddess--the Muse--to the gifted, starry eyed one, the Fool who will be transformed into the Hero through the unification of his will. As befits Lipman's dogged secularism, his insistence on Ockham's razor in all situations, they are offered with a matter of factness that creates a startling contrast. If they are so matter of fact, why would they be so vividly remembered or remembered at all, 60 years later?

Equally distinctive are his rather circumspect accounts of his darker urges or refusals. In 1950 he was, he recounts, in a "dismal period" that was exacerbated by the advent of a war (the Korean) that he thought the US had no business waging, combined with a "disastrous" (read, he was jumped by his committee) doctoral dissertation defense, which led him to re-write the whole thing, even though he was asked only to revise the introduction. Having lost respect for the committee, he filed the revised work in the Columbia Library without even informing his chair. Later, his chair stopped him in the hall and apologized, and Dewey wrote him a consolatory note: "It never seemed right to me to use the beliefs of the faculty as a measure of a student's work."

During this period he had, he says, "a series of encounters, which were less than admirable, with certain women in my life." If there is any theme that characterizes them, it would be a sort of seizure of troll-like irritation, a sudden breakthrough of the negative, which is perhaps the shadow side of the energy implicit in the unity of the will, the purposeful, unyielding work on his vocation which also characterizes him. Indeed, he alludes throughout the book, to felt moments of inversion, rebellion, arrogance and defiant anti-realism, and even a low-grade emotional cruelty, or indifference.

In one incident, he “had established an enjoyable friendship with a young woman who was also a graduate student in philosophy.” She has decided to marry a law student whom she thinks will provide her with a financial security that Lipman will not. Lipman argues repeatedly with her from the point of view of good reasons (not his own desire, apparently), she ends by changing her mind and breaking off the engagement, and he, in turn, brusquely informs her that he “doesn’t wish to continue our relationship.” In another, he is working at the Columbia bookstore,

where I spent many hours chatting with a very attractive clerk: an anthropology major, as was her boyfriend. I think I must have envied them their secure, stable relationship, because I remember her saying she liked Prokofiev, so I sent her a recording of his violin Concerto, lacking any indication who it was from. When she questioned me as to who might have sent it to her, I steadfastly denied having had anything to do with the matter. I suppose the pleasure I took was in her speculations that she might have a secret admirer. In the fall of 1950, which I was spending in France on a Fulbright scholarship, I received a pleasant letter from her, which I answered as gruffly as an old bear. She had never done me the least bit of harm, and my cantankerousness was totally undeserved. (64)

These incidents have the aura of raw youth—the involuntary, desire-driven feinting and parrying and colliding of the sexes in the social world of Ivy League twenty-somethings. One wonders, then, why they burn so in his memory that they are subjects for a late confessional, while, on the other hand, he recounts the history of his thirty year relationship with his wife Wynona with such brevity and aplomb. As it was, Wynona became a New Jersey State Senator, which required her moving to Newark, and Lipman stayed in Montclair in order to “attend to my own career.” (126) Neither thought of it as a separation, just a temporary inconvenience. But “after a time,” Wynona “took it upon herself to bring some order into our relationship; she decided to file for divorce.” Initially, he was “staggered.” “Such an action, I reflected, was one I couldn’t have taken. Ultimately, I concluded, she must have thought a divorce was for the good of both of us. It is conceivable, even probable, that she did it for my sake alone.” Their relationship remained “friendly and affectionate, a relationship we

rightly or wrongly considered ‘par for the course’ among highly professional academics.” 126

The careful neutrality of this description—from an affective point of view, the tone is of one who has, unfortunately, and through no exact fault of his own, just missed a train--is suggestive in itself. Lipman was always the first to arrive and the last to leave Alderice House, and was known as something of a fish out of water in situations where collegiality veered towards more unrestrained sociability. As such, it would be easy to interpret this moment—1972, when he was launching the project that would preoccupy virtually his every waking hour for the next 40 years—as the closing down of his social and erotic life for the sake of his professional one. But at this very moment the Hero meets and, several years later, marries his anima, in 1972, in the person of a student 30 years his junior named Theresa:

. . . she was . . . visibly joyous, radiant and healthy . . . I had never met anyone like Teri before. In the presence of a philosophical idea, her face positively glowed. . . It was my first experience with such radiance, the product, I believe, of joy and spiritual insight . . . deep friendship . . . eventually grew into a love that was simple and pure . . . for all the years that seemed to separate us, the age difference proved to be insignificant, and the marriage continued to be one of great happiness and fulfillment for us both for many more years.

One cannot help but speculate that Lipman has, in the history of his own erotic narrative, re-encountered the girl on the bus in 1952 whom he met as Fool, but whom, as Hero, he meets and wins without even having to go AWOL. His intergenerational marriage—she was 20 and he 50--is as exemplary an act as his first, interracial one, but what it exemplifies is more ambiguous. And the veil of obscurity that Lipman draws over his private life through a few bland phrases—“we became the ‘campus couple’ and more than one campus commentator was led to explain his pleasure that she and I had ‘found each other’. Teri was a continuous support to me too in my work”—suggests, either a tale too fraught to tell, or the same absent-minded attention to his private life— one side-effect of being, as he describes himself, a “workaholic’ -- that led to him to be blindsided by Wynona’s request for a divorce.

Lipman outlived both his wives—Wynona felled by cancer, and Teri by an overdose of sleeping pills—but he himself was progressively crippled in body and in the kind of spontaneous discursivity of which he was an effortless master by Parkinson's Disease, the onset of which he recounts here. This memoir, in fact, was written at the moment just before it would be too late to write it, and as such it represents one last gesture of the Hero. Then he embarked on his last Labor, which is the one labor most philosophical—the Stoic labor of retaining his “chronic optimism” and what he describes, at the end of this book, as his love for philosophy, and his “love [for] the world that has produced something as beautiful as philosophy” (170) through the hours, days and weeks, months and years of gradual, crushing disempowerment, and the consignment of his body to the care of virtual strangers. The tone of Lipman's memoir, both modest and pared-down, and even its unassuming title, are signs of this last labor. “What is great,” Seneca wrote

is a steadfast soul, serene in adversity, a soul that accepts every event as if it were desired. . . . What is great is ...to remember that one is a man; it is, when one is happy, saying to oneself that one will not be happy for long. What is great is having one's soul at one's lips, ready to depart; then one is free not by the laws of the city but by the laws of nature (Seneca, *Natural Questions*)

In the larger narrative of his life, Lipman's Stoic resolve in the face of the grim sentence of Parkinson's is, for me, linked to the moment at the end of the war at which, it could be surmised, the ground was laid for the transformation of the Fool into the Hero. In a passage that simmers with the analytic intelligence and laconic decisiveness that is vintage Lipman, he narrates the deep-seated metaphysical change that war's end war announced for him:

For some veterans, the war they had experienced had a certain insularity in it; other memories kept these veterans distant from the war. It is almost as if this time serving in the war belonged to—or actually was—someone else's life...hence the reluctance of many soldiers to discuss their lives, for this is a period one may share with other veterans, but hardly with anyone else. For other veterans, the wartime experience came to be the defining moment in their lives. It was to that experience that every alleged reality had inevitably to be compared. Either the war was the criterion of reality for these veterans, or else it was the criterion of



ultimate unreality. Its authenticity superceded all other authenticities; its unreality superceded all other unrealities.

These are far from being the only possibilities that veterans might have experienced. There were then, as there are now, skeptics for whom nothing was believable, and there were those for whom everything had a dream-like status, including the dreams themselves. In addition, there were some who conceived of reality as a matter of intensity, so that the real was whatever evoked horror, terror, grief and other such experiential extremes. There seemed to me something wrong-headed about positions like these, and I could not help agreeing with an alternative answer to the question "What is real?" That answer was: "Everything." (47)

It is Lipman's "alternative answer" – "Everything" – that, I would surmise, purchased for him the extraordinary grace under pressure that he demonstrated over the last years of his life in his one-room lodgings in an elder care home, and that represents the personal fulfillment of one promise of philosophy – the promise of becoming "free not by the laws of the city but by the laws of nature." As such, it was his final--and crowning--exemplary act. His capacity to stare into the abyss, combined with his deep generosity – a sort of filial piety writ large – towards the world and all its species, rests in the final account on that love for philosophy that seized him in his adolescence, and which drove him forward with what he described as "my strange confidence in what I was doing" (113)-- a sense of utter sureness, a quality of single-mindedness that bespeaks some larger sense of destiny, a kind of mastery from beyond himself that he always trusted implicitly.

"I feel for philosophy," he writes in the last paragraph of this, his last book, "what an astronaut might feel at the sight of the earth's sphere, all green and brown and blue, as it appears from a space station." He then expresses the hope that Philosophy for Children "will build a better and more reasonable world for our children and their children to inhabit: a world that looks as beautiful from across the street as it does from the distance of space." (170) Lipman was faithful, not just to the world, but to its highest possibilities. His memoir is a modest testimony to an extraordinary life-trajectory, and an exemplification of the philosopher as one with the form of double-

from outer space and across the street: matthew lipman's double vision

vision—seeing life from outer space and from across the street—that is perhaps philosophy's most profound vocation.

*Recebido em: 22/05/2011*  
*Aprovado em: 17/06/2011*