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Education Goes Awry.
Dislocating the Education Gospel
from the Margins of Society

ABSTRACT: Education has become one of the seemingly ubiquitous and omnipotent mega spectacles of our time. Belief in its promises and potentials has taken on an almost religious character in recent decades (the education gospel). Because of the overestimated potential of education, social problems are increasingly solved by promoting increased education. The state is not only transferring social problems to school but is itself pedagogizing social issues. Education has become a remedy for almost every social problem while pointing out the pervasive crisis in education. Reform and innovation thrive against the (rhetorical) construct of educational crisis and failure. What strikes me about this scenario is that it surrounds two asymmetrical positions in education as parts of the same picture. In it, education signifies disease and remedy, failure and solution at the same time. In this article, I argue that exploring such ontologically performative structures in education helps to contest assumptions about the education taken for granted.

KEYWORDS: education, education gospel, margins of society, educational crisis, potential of education

INTRODUCTION

Education has undoubtedly become one of the apparently omnipresent and omnipotent megaspectacles of our time. Grubb and Lazerson (2006) argue that the belief in education's promises and potentials has taken on an almost religious character in the last decades (they name it *education gospel*). Due to the overestimated potential of education, social problems are more and more addressed by promoting more education. The third volume in the *Educational Research* series, *The Educationalization of Social Problems* (Smeyers & Depaepe, 2008) discusses these issues in-depth, showing that the "schooling of social problems" (i.e., the transfer of social issues to the responsibility of the school) goes hand in hand with the "pedagogization of the society," (i.e., the Western state becoming primarily pedagogical in character). The state not only relocates social problems to the school (and thus de-politicizes such problems, while making teachers responsible for them) but at the same time pedagogizes social issues themselves (e.g., framing homelessness as "learned helplessness"). As Tomasz Szkudlarek put it, education (through its momentary hegemonic discourse of learning) has become the *solution* and remedy to nearly any social problem, from joblessness to environmental pollution (Szkudlarek, 2013b, p. 1). But education has become a remedy not only for almost any social problem ("ill") – it appears as a solution for its failures, so that "[t]he standard response to educational failure is to provide more education, such that education has become the remedy for its own ills" (Deacon & Parker, 1995, p. 116). At the same time, however, there is also a persistent articulation of an omnipresent *crisis* in education (hence the continuous desire for educational reforms and innovations). These reforms and innovations thrive against the (rhetorical) construction of educational crisis and failure. What strikes me in this scenario is that it encircles two asymmetric positions in education, as parts of the same picture. In it, education signifies an illness *and* a remedy, a failure, *and* a solution at the very same time. I assert that investigating such ontologically performative (and rhetorical, see Carusi, 2019; Szkudlarek, 2017a) structures in education (paradoxes, deadlocks, antagonisms, impossibilities, ruptures, and so on) is helpful in contesting taken for granted assumptions about education.

My interest in this theoretical endeavor stems from the ethnographic research conducted during the past few years in places of urban poverty in Central-Eastern Europe, focusing on the everyday educational realities of ghetto schools, which "ex-

sist" beyond the margins of society and at the very "bottom" of the education systems. I realized that to look at and also *see from* the particular places of urban poverty can be a strategic way to problematize educational discourse. In other words: registering the deadlocks, inconsistencies, fissures where educational discourse as such "go awry" is a particular way to contest and reactivate the sedimented terrains of education.

Looking at and *seeing from* the different sites of advanced marginality[1] education's transformative potential does not seem to be evident, especially in those schools that work beyond society's margin. In such schools, the cacophony of demands and expectations – these schools are exposed to – falls short against the background of the educational struggles and failures daily. This "crack" in the microcapillary realities of the ghetto schools (where the educational reality as such goes awry) became a major concern of my ethnographic research. Policies, standards, goals, and expectations – all those things somehow "crack" in places of advanced marginality. The latest information technologies make very little sense when the child has no electricity at home, the professional development of underpaid teachers who work in urban slums is a naïve dream (policymakers so often dream about), classroom cooperation is short-lived if the child starves and falls asleep on the desk, and democratic decision-making is not an option if the child is absent from class, either because she is begging for money in the city or taking care of her younger brother while her parents are begging for a precarious job in the local factory.

But the problem I'm interested in is not only how educational discourse crumbles against the background of advanced marginality, but how it goes awry *in itself*. Beyond society's margins, the taken for granted assumptions about education appear as they would in a broken mirror, which confronts us with the ultimately contingent and dislocated discourse of education. My aim with investigating "cracks" within the fabric of educational discourse is not to find a releasing solution or an easy way out from the deadlocks and ruptures. I'm more interested in what such "cracks" do to education. I assume that when confronted with these ruptures, antagonisms, paradoxes of the "discursive landscape" of education, one is forced to search for different "shores" where there is an educational horizon held open beyond the deadlocks that hold us captive and perplexed. Among the cracks, deadlocks, paradoxes and other different forms of ontologically performative (discursive) structures within the fabric of educational discourse, I'm especially interested in the form of *parallax*.

WHAT IS A PARALLAX?

Slavoj Žižek introduced his philosophical and ontological reading of the concept of "parallax" in his book *The Parallax View* (2006). Žižek understands the parallax as different views of an object, which views or positions are Kantian antinomies. It

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1 Advanced marginality is a concept developed by Loïc Wacquant, which refers to 'the novel regime of sociospatial relegation and exclusionary closure (…) that has crystallized in the post-Fordist city as a result of the uneven development of the capitalist economies and the recoiling of welfare states' (2008, pp. 2–3).

means that there is an insurmountable gap between the different perspectives, where it is impossible

> to use the same language for phenomena which are mutually untranslatable and can be grasped only in a kind of parallax view, constantly shifting perspective between two points between which no synthesis or mediation is possible, (…) there is no rapport between the two levels, no shared space – although they are closely connected, even identical in a way, they are, as it were, on the opposed sides of a Moebius strip (Žižek, 2006, p. 4).

The parallax designates a radical incompatibility of two views, "the confrontation of two closely linked perspectives between which no neutral common ground is possible." (ibidem.) In a parallax, the contours of one view, one aspect "can become clear only when the identity of others is blurred" (ibid., p. 258). Since there is a certain gap between the two aspects, this gap can only be grasped by constantly shifting perspectives. Žižek's parallax shift method is meant to reveal the radical asymmetry between the two positions closely linked, but no abstract narrative or language can encompass into one big story.

> We have incompatible perspectives. It is basically – to be honest – a new, slightly modern way to make the old Marxist point of social antagonism, class struggle or whatever. The idea being, again, that the gap is irreducible. It cannot be overcome through some kind of a higher perspective. All we can do is to formulate the antagonism (Žižek, 2017).

The lack of a grand narrative which would be able to encompass the two views of a parallax means that the philosophical method of parallax shift is not aimed at constructing a synthesis or an alternative solution (a third way), but at registering (encircling) the radical asymmetry (the ontological gap) between the two interconnected perspectives. The only level of abstraction is the very impossibility itself that the parallax registers, i.e., *antagonism*.

Throughout the following pages, my intention will be to identify such parallaxes in education that emerged from my research. As I said, my aim is not to construct an easy way out from these radical asymmetries, but to investigate what such ontologically performative structures *do*. I will try to capture this aspect of *doing* with (the ultimately failed attempt of) *naming* these parallaxes.

EDUCATION VACUUM

Especially characteristic of contemporary struggles in education is demanding "reality" (education should be the preparation for life or even *life itself*), whatever this imaginary entity (reality/life/real-life) signifies. These critiques' structural basis is grounded in the *attachment/detachment parallax* that is irreducibly constitutive of

educational discourse. On the one hand, these critiques point to the school's insidious attachment to reality/life, namely, to what(ever) is considered the constitutive "outside" of the school. On the other hand, one of the most frequent charges levelled against the school by the same critics is its insidious *detachment* from reality/life – namely, that the school is disconnected from what(ever) is outside of it. As Jan Masschelein and Maarten Simons argue (2013), such

> [a]lienation is a recurring accusation levelled against the school. (…) Subjects taught in the school are not 'worldly' enough. Subject matter is 'artificial'. The school does not prepare its pupils for real life. (…) In any case, all of these critics start from the premise that education and learning must have clear and visible connections with the world as experienced by young people and with society as a whole (ibid., p. 15).

To constitute these "clear and visible connections with the world," a common solution is the promotion of *remastering* this presumed "attached-but-detached modality" of the school. However, the dilemma is that there is a radical asymmetry between the two points of departure of the attachment/detachment critique, which is especially visible in the case of ghetto schools. These schools are deeply embedded into (*attached to*) structural mechanisms, where structural inequalities combined with educational exclusion result in the very existence of these schools. They are not intentionally segregative, but their structural function is to "recycle" the useless "child-trash" thrown to the waste dumps of the education system and society. The dilemma inherent to this "recycling" modality was a recurring theme of my discussions with a headmaster of a ghetto school during my research:

> This is a horrible dilemma for us. Even if we do our job well here, we are basically serving an unjust system because we allow other schools to exclude those children, who end up here, in our school…

The dynamics of advanced marginality deeply structure these schools' daily educational life. But suppose one is looking at these schools from a different angle. In that case, it seems that their structural position (beyond the margins of society) and at the "bottom" of the education system) is a condition of detachment. These schools are disconnected, detached to a certain degree from what(ever) is outside of them (their social environment, local struggles, institutional milieu, and so on). Therefore, as critical education scholars would argue, this detachment constrains these schools' active and reflective engagement with "the world" – the contextual reality to which the school is attached, but from which it is detached at the same time. What I try to illuminate here with this example is that looking at the school as attached to and also as detached from reality/life are two simultaneously applied points of departure of the contemporary critiques of education, which two views, however, are radically incompatible – only a constant shift between them can create the *illusion* of "seeing"

a bigger picture, that depicts the paradoxical "attached-but-detached" character of the school.

What this parallax (as an ontologically performative form) *does* through the constant rhetorical attachments and detachments, reconnections and disconnections, is creating a *vacuum* that "sucks in" a variety of scientific and other institutionalized discourses, all striving to *remaster* the "reality crisis" in schools and to solve the impotence of education. This remastering is organized through the "schooling of social problems", where schools (and the teachers) are being *attached* to and become responsible for what(ever) is "outside" them (education sucks in the world). But in order to make this educational vacuum "suck" properly, something has to be removed from it; a void needs to be constructed beforehand, which demands to be filled in[2]. I argue that this "voiding" is organized through "hijacking education" and "outsourcing educational problems", where "school issues" are *detached* from being educational problems, as when "schools put the reduction of juvenile truancy and classroom violence ahead of pedagogy and hire security guards" (Wacquant, 2012, p. 74). The impossible climax of such a remastering of the attachment/detachment parallax would be a complete isomorphism between education and reality/life, where education would not only become a preparation for life but *life itself*, whereas life/reality would become *education itself*. It is as if through the schooling of social problems education would "go outside" and embrace reality, while through the outsourcing of educational problems, reality would "go inside" and embrace the school. Something eerily similar is happening today. The problem is that the school is structurally unable to handle social issues in itself, whereas social actors are unable to address educational problems *educationally* in the first instance. The constant remastering of the "reality crisis" in education leads merely to the reconfiguration and replacement of the attachment/detachment parallax, which leaves the educational vacuum intact.

A possible way to release the captivity of this vacuum (to disorient, displace its ontological performativity) could be to look at it in a skewed manner and fill it with a breathing space by re-articulating it as a *positively charged void*.[3] While being a part of the normative order, the school detaches itself from it, empties this order out of itself to take responsibility for it and renew it. And such a positively charged void doesn't need to be filled in; it doesn't constitute a vacuum because, in it, the *lack* is what matters the most. It means for education that attachment to reality/life is constituted through the temporary detachment from it. Following Masschelein and Simons, it is a precise "detachment" that makes a school a school – it is a positive condition that opens up a space for education. Drawing on the most common translation of Greek *scholè* as the *free time,* they argue that what differentiates the school from

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2 Ivan Illich argues in a similar fashion: "Education creates an inner psychic void which demands to be outfitted and then proceeds to monopolize the production of this scarce furniture" (Illich, [1984] 2011, p. 11)

3 As used by Slavoj Žižek in the 2005 documentary movie *Žižek!* "There is nothing, basically. I mean it quite literally. (…) The universe is a void, but a kind of a positively charged void."

other apparatuses is that it establishes time and space *detached* (liberated, made free) from the productive and busy space-time of the society.

> [T]he school must suspend or decouple certain ties with students' family and social environment on the one hand and with society on the other in order to present the world to students in an interesting and engaging way. (…) The school provides the format (…) for time-made-free, and those who dwell within it literally transcend the social (economic and political) order and its associated (unequal) positions (Masschelein & Simons, 2013, pp. 15–29).

The "matter of suspension" is what differentiates the school, according to Masschelein and Simons. It releases and liberates certain ties with the society and the family and allows for a non-productive *free* time for thought, study, and liberation. Detachment and suspension is something that teachers *make use of* in the ghetto as well. One of the teachers of a ghetto school told me several times while discussing her praxis that she has *students* and not "disadvantaged children" in her classroom:

> I don't want our children to get stuck in the experience that they are poor, I want them to open up, work, study, ask questions, and stretch the system to its breaking point.

Putting the students' social predicament into momentary "brackets" is a way to disconnect and to liberate them from the heavy anchors of "the real world." It is precise *via* this *separation* that the possibility of education is created as the ties with the society "are put at a distance. (…) Education as a *form* of suspension is not destroying or denying anything, (…) everything is there or can be there, but in a condition of floating" (Masschelein, 2011, p. 531). In this sense, the detached character of the ghetto school can be understood as a positive condition. These schools *can* function as protective places; for instance, they can provide support, shelter, and security for those living in extreme social insecurity. While the ghetto is true "no place to be a child," the ghetto school is the place where it is still possible to be a child. This "protective" modality is something that teachers try to create through minute pedagogical gestures, such as establishing stability in an insecure environment. As one of the teachers in a ghetto school put it:

> It's very important to give stability to these children by saying that "Yes, this is what you can expect every day! You are in the school!"

I heard teachers (in different schools and different contexts) tell their students each and every day that they are not elsewhere but in the school. "You are not at home!" "You are not on the street!" "You are not in the supermarket!" One should consider that these articulations do not impose a clearly outlined order or status on

students, as the statement "You are in the school, behave like that!" would indicate.[4] Of course, the articulation "You are not at home!" is disciplinary in the sense that it usually responds to undesirable behaviour. Still, at the same time, it also suggests that "You are not at home; therefore, *you can* do and *try* to act differently than you would do at home." So a certain suspension and detachment – closing the school's door before the parents and society – opens up and unlocks the world to the students. Paradoxically or not, it is separation and suspension what puts the subject into the world: it is not putting the young directly into the world (socialization), but "*displacing* the young from their milieux (to *educe* means *to draw out*) and prepare them not only for the worlds that are but for those that ought to be as well" (Szkudlarek, 2013a, p. 67). Separation *unlocks* and *opens up* the world relieved from "what is"; it is an act or event of "de-familiarisation, de-socialization, de-appropriation or de-privatization" (Masschelein, 2011, p. 531). It is a liberating event, "this *freeing* that makes things *public*" (Masschelein & Simons, 2013, p. 62). Separation and detachment allow to be fee, to be engendered, *to be put into the world*.

NEVERLAND SYNDROME

Restoring the authority, respect, social esteem, and wage-labour security of the teachers is one of the rhetorical cornerstones of both the neoliberal and neoconservative education projects. It is especially the case in those semiperipheral, post-socialist Central-Eastern European countries, where far-right regimes have been advancing since the 2008 economic crisis (especially Hungary and Poland). Teachers suppose to be a key element in stabilizing neoliberal hegemony after the transitions in 1989. They were not only subjected to the reform-dumping of the new political agenda but also expected to manage and implement the "post-socialist education reform package" (see Silova, 2014, p. 190) and lead the system out from the "oriental obscurantism" toward new, global "standards" controlled and disseminated by international "experts". As Silova and Brehm put it, in the 1990s,

> [d]irectly affected by the 'touch down' of global educational flows – whether education privatization, decentralization, or child-centered learning – school teachers have been affected the most. In the public eye, teachers embodied the success (or failure) that the post-socialist education transitions set out to achieve (2013, p. 56).

Still today, teachers embody either the success or the failure of education (both in the eye of the public and the experts), but they are celebrated *and* degraded at the very same time. On the one hand, there is a neoliberal celebration of the "professional teacher" combined with panic due to the ageing labor force, the feminization of the

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4 I find it similar to Derek Ford's discussion on "the pedagogy of the not", where he argues, that negation as expressed in the "not" draws our attention to potentiality: "When I state, 'I am not a good teacher,' I mean that, as a teacher, I am *anything* other than good" (Ford, 2019, p. 110).

profession, declining salaries, and the deteriorating quality of teaching as measured by PISA. On the other hand, there is a neoconservative celebration of the "patriotic teacher" combined with panic due to the lost and eroded prestige of the teachers, the erosion of eternal (national) values, and general moral atrophy in education. Simultaneously, however, within both discursive terrains, teachers are treated as infantile servants, who are considered immature or incapable of working autonomously, unable to participate in decision-making, or bringing the expected results desired by society. I call what this parallax between the glorification *and* infantilization, celebration, *and* degradation of teachers *does* (as an ontologically performative discursive form) the "*Neverland syndrome*", which refers to the mystical island where the story of Peter Pan and the Lost Boys takes place. While Peter and his friends have special abilities (they can fly, materialize objects with imagination, etc.), they cannot grow up, and thus will never be mature enough to live in (or live up to) the "real world" of the "real adults." Similarly, educational discourse attributes special abilities to teachers (they become conducive to economic prosperity, upward mobility, quality and equity, the fullness of the society), which abilities, however, are doomed to fail in advance. The glorification of teaching and the celebration of teachers does not simply conceal their public degradation, the mistrust against them, and their economic exploitation. Teachers' infantilization and degradation are also effectively and precisely *produced* through their celebration and glorification ("teachers are the keys to the future"). That exposes them to unattainable expectations, to which they inevitably fail to "grow up." Their alleged omnipotent abilities can only thrive in an imaginary Neverland constituted by means of educational rhetoric. In other words, what the parallax (that emerging between the glorification *and* infantilization, celebration *and* degradation of the teachers) *does* is that it constitutes a Neverland (a no-place, a *u-to-pia*, where – i.e., *no-*where – teachers' special abilities can thrive) *through* the rhetorical construction of unattainable roles, attitudes, identity-scenarios of a professional "adult". This twisted scenario of the infantilization of teaching and teachers produces an endless urge (and perpetual failure) to grow up, and thus teachers "grow childish". Being unable to grow up to the expected (yet impossible) ideals, teachers are not only exposed to labels, such as pedagogical backwardness and an unprofessional attitude, but the freedom of teaching gets limited as well. It is especially true for those teachers who work in places of advanced marginality with children of the underclass. As a teacher of a ghetto school put it:

> I feel that the spaces where it is possible to move are getting narrower for us. I do not know whether you've read Orwell's 1984. In the beginning, they define what kind of words they want to create, to create a new language [Newspeak]. 'A,' 'B' and 'C.' Do you remember that? And 'A' was sort of the basics that can be said, 'B' might have been related to arts, and C to politics, but it is very well sorted out, what words can be used. And what I feel in education, is that the space for us [teachers] is getting narrower. A lot of things… such as poverty, or educational failure… you cannot really talk about such things.

As I understand what she said, the prefabricated identity-scenarios of teachers anticipate certain subject positions that delimit what is sayable within the field of discursivity, hence the limited spaces of "talking." Quite obviously: a "professional" teacher's subject position doesn't allow for constant educational failure. This captivity of the pre-defined identity-scenarios reminds me of the parable of the Door of Law in Kafka's *The Trial* (1925), where a man from the country spends years waiting for the doorkeeper to allow him to enter, although the entrance was intended alone for him, as it turns out at the end. Similarly, although the symbolic regimes of professionalization were intended to serve the teachers, these nonetheless contributed to teachers' infantilization. They *grow childish*, just like the man from the country in Kafka's novel, where he, waiting for the doorkeeper to allow him to enter to door that was meant for him only "curses his misfortune, out loud in the first years, later, as he grows old, he just mutters to himself. *He grows childish*…" (1925/2009, p. 154 italics added). If, as K. Gawlicz argues, there is a hegemonic "discursive construct of the incompetent child" (Gawlicz, 2009, p. 92), one shall also add that there is also a hegemonic discursive construct of the infantile teacher.

One shouldn't forget that Peter Pan never wanted to grow up, and in order to stay childlike, he had to forget his adventures and whatever he learned about the world – he had to be *ignorant*. Turning the story upside-down could be a possibility for the teachers to release the captivity of Neverlands: to really "exist in the world in a grown-up way" (see Biesta, 2017), one should ignore or *refuse* the prefabricated identity-scenarios of teaching and of being a teacher. Foucault argues in one of his essays, that "the most certain philosophical problem is the problem of the present time, and of what we are, in this very moment," and thus "[m]aybe the target nowadays is not to discover what we are, but to refuse what we are" (Foucault, 1982, p. 785). It means refusing the pre-defined ideals (the professional, the practitioner, the patriot, etc.), and "abandoning the habits" (Wittgenstein, 1956, p. 132) characteristic of the celebrated subjectivities promoted by educational discourse.

PEDAGOGICAL WONDERLAND

When Louis Althusser claimed that in mature capitalist social formations, the educational apparatus is the dominant ideological state apparatus, he also argued that the school "certainly has the dominant role, although hardly anyone lends an ear to its music: it is so silent!" (Althusser, 1971, p. 251). Today, in the context of late capitalist 'knowledge-based societies' hundreds of thousands of scholars, researchers, academics, activists, politicians, and policymakers lend their ears to its music; *thus,* it is harder than ever to listen. Since a variety of scientific and other institutionalized discourses strive to solve the alleged "crisis" in education, it is not surprising at all, that the discursive field of education is dominated *not* by education, but by what sociology, psychology, politics, economics, and other disciplines claim the education *is* (for). Thus, the meaningful field of educational discourse is not merely conflictual

but also characterized by an intensely expanding polysemy, which pulls the discursive landscape of education apart.

This immense surplus of meaning results in the parallax appearing as an accelerating oscillation between the dissolution (detotalization) of meaning and the totalization of meaning. It doesn't mean, that there are no hegemonic formations in educational discourse (there are over-rapid and momentary fixations of the meaning); rather it means, that the dissolution of meaning is equivalently (if not more) powerful and "over-rapid" in the construction of the meaningful field in education. One could imagine the discursive landscape of education as an infinitely expansive map whose discursive depth (deepness in a sense) is replaced by its extensive width (i.e., it incorporates new territories – discursive landscapes – by extending its borders). As Gilles Deleuze put it in *The Logic of Sense*: "One could say that the old depth having been spread out became width. (…) Paul Valéry had a profound idea: what is most deep is the skin" (Deleuze, [1969] 1990, pp. 9–10). The infinitely expanding flat map of educational discourse is the deepest. It creates a discursive landscape that is perplexed and puzzled in its main character, conducive to loosening the discursive grounds of education, and creates an insecure and unstable world. The endless dumping of educational reforms, innovations, know-how, technologies, and methods (based on what seems to work at the moment) contributes to a large extent to the dissolution of meaning in education. It leads to the permanent lack of clarity in Wittgenstein's terms as if language had gone on holiday ([1953] 1986, §38). And the schools beyond the margins of the society are especially exposed to this logic. Since these schools inevitably fail to meet social and political demands, they are expected to constantly experiment with alternative frameworks, newer and newer methods and techniques, (in sum "what works"), which results in a further "accumulation of pedagogical instability," since nothing ever really works out for them. As the headmaster of one of the schools told once to the officers from the Education Bureau, who were monitoring the school according to international standards:

> You have seen it all, we are working beyond the margins of the society. We [he and the teachers] are aware of the European directives, but here… this is a totally different reality. I mean… you've seen it all. Now tell me, how should I meet those standards from the bottom of the pit… in the midst of poverty?!

However, I argue that the immense accumulation of pedagogical instability is characteristic of the discursive field of education in general. It is part of what the parallax that emerges from the accelerating oscillation between the totalization and dissolution of meaning in education *does* – it constitutes a discursive landscape analytically similar to Alice's *Wonderland*.

The most common interpretation of Lewis Carroll's Wonderland is that it is a world of marvelous events. Still, as Peter Hunt argues, "[t]he most important, most neglected, fact about 'Wonderland' is that it is not a 'land of wonders', but rather 'a land where one wonders'" (2009, p. ix). What inspires curiosity in Wonderland?

I assume, that the object-cause of wondering, as stated in Jefferson Airplane's psyche-delic song *White Rabbit*, is that "logic and proportion have fallen sloppy dead" – or more precisely, as George A. Dunn and Brian McDonald put it:

> [l]ogic, of a sort, is alive and well in the worlds Alice visits. It's proportion that's dead and gone. The creatures Alice meets aren't mad because they've lost their ability to perform operations of formal logic. They're mad because they've lost all sense of proportion, all sense of how matters of fact actually fit together and how reason can be used to shed light on them (2010, pp. 71–72).

As an analytical category, Wonderland refers to a symbolic structure, where everything that appears is possible (in meaning), and whatever is possible (in mak-ing sense) will appear.[5] Thus, in Wonderland's symbolic structure, one wonders how proportion has fallen sloppy dead so that the construction of meaning takes any di-rection (i.e., any sense, from Old French *sens* ~ direction) at the same time. It means

> to move and to pull in both directions at once: Alice does not grow with-out shrinking, and vice versa. Good sense affirms that in all things there is a determinable sense or direction *(sens)*; but paradox is the affirmation of both senses or directions at the same time. (…) Hence the reversals which constitute Alice's adventures: the reversal of becoming larger and becoming smaller – "which way, which way?" asks Alice, sensing that it is always in both directions at the same time (Deleuze, 1969, pp. 1–3).

Which way, which way? This is also how we wonder in the Wonderland of edu-cation that the expanding polysemy takes every direction at once. It is not surprising that a multiplicity of edited volumes, articles, policy papers, and reports are con-cerned with "bridging gaps in education" between theory and practice; between macro- and micro-level analyses; between reflection and action; between quality and efficiency; between teaching and learning; between regulation and deregulation, and so on – the symbolic structure of educational discourse moves, pulls and pushes in all directions at once. Within this educational Wonderland, one is confronted with the constant dis- and re-solution of sense, just as Wonderland's creatures apply *any* meaning they choose to Alice's words.

I argue that in such an educational Wonderland something important is lost. When educational discourse is more and more constituted around *anything* general (*any* sense [or sens], as opposed to – and quite correctly against – *something* funda-mental, universal or essential), we lose sight of the idea that the 'educational' (just as the political) is grounded in *nothing particular*. In other words, the logic of immense overdetermination in the meaningful field of education conceals the fact that what really gives presence to the apparent polysemy is the *lack* of an essential determining

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5   A transliteration of a line from Guy Debord's *Society of the Spectacle* ([1967] 2005, §12): "What appears is good; what is good appears."

force (the absence of an *a priori* formal structure that would determine the meaningful field of education in the first or the last instance). But if the educational is grounded in nothing particular, if there is nothing foundational "down there", then this constitutive lack "needs to be filled with lived experience, and structured and furnished along with *ethical desires*."[6] The way to take the radical indetermination of education seriously is not by creating wonderlands, where anything goes (in *any* sense [*any* direction] at once), on the contrary: paradoxically or not, the way to encircle the lack of foundations as a concern, as something that *matters* in education, is to constantly raise and re-articulate the question of what is ethically desirable (i.e., the *telos*) in education. What is education *for*?

Thus, contrary to the critics who hold that the question of what is educationally desirable has become ideological (in the sense that it appears as taken for granted), I rather argue that this question got lost (maybe because it is taken for granted, but also because it is not taken care of). The *par excellence* educational question, the question of the *telos* of education got lost and disavowed within the educational Wonderland. And when the question of what is educationally desirable is neglected and abandoned when it is not taken care of, then it is atrophying (it becomes poorly nourished). This atrophy of the ethical in education means, as Gert Biesta argues,

> the remarkable absence in many contemporary discussions about education of explicit attention for what is educationally desirable. There is much discussion about educational processes and their improvement but very little about what such processes are supposed to bring about. There is very little explicit discussion, in other words, about what constitutes *good* education (Biesta, 2009, p. 36).

Suppose the question of what is educationally desirable is not taken care of. In that case, the ever-expanding discursive landscape of education becomes a flat map without depth, scale, distance, orientation, and compass (from Latin *com* [together] and *passus* [step, pace], that is *sharing* a step, a [to-]gathering of *sens* [direction]). The atrophy of the educational is further intensified by the techno-scientific discourse of "what works in education" and the discourse of learning in which "teachers end up being a kind of process-managers of empty and in themselves *directionless* learning processes" (Biesta, 2012, p. 36 italics added). Again, the result is an educational landscape that *does not make sense* [neither *sens* as direction], that does not raise the concern for what is educationally desirable.

Within such a hegemonic formation, the absence of the concern for what is ethically desirable is not simply a means for secretly impregnating the educational discourse with a hidden stream of desires; on the contrary: disavowing this question in education is effective precisely in overshadowing the very existence of the question. Those critical education theories, which bring back the concern of what is

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6 Quote from prof. Tomasz Szkudlarek's final assessment of my doctoral thesis (*Crossing the Threshold in the Margins*, 2019), italics added.

educationally desirable (by promoting social justice, inclusion, democracy, etc.) don't help either, since they also put aside the question of what is educationally desirable by simply answering[7] it (i.e., displacing the ethical by anchoring another normative order). I assert, however, that one doesn't take care of a question or a concern by answering it, solving it, or by hunting out new facts (it leads rather to the elimination of the concern). The proper way of taking care of concern or question (expressing that it *matters*), I assume, is to raise it, to ask it, to investigate it, to be interested in it over and over again. Taking care of the question of what is educationally desirable means *reminding* ourselves of this question, or more precisely, it means reminding ourselves that it is a question. One doesn't raise this question to give a final answer. Taking care of this question means rather *keeping it alive* (instead of eliminating it again and again). It means *slowing down* (that is, installing a temporal break into the accelerating oscillation between the totalization and dissolution of meaning characteristic of the meaningful field in education). It means the *contamination* of the educational Wonderland's surface with depth (because we want to walk, so we need *friction*[8]). And it means setting the education *free* from its apparent overdetermination that holds it (and us) captive, just as the freedom in making (any) sense constrains and – after all – limits the movement of the creatures in Wonderland.

AN IMMENSE PEDAGOGY OF WAITING

The dominant conceptualizations of education are based on strong expectations. Gert Biesta and Carl Anders Säfström argue (2011) that there is, on the one hand, a "populist" attack against education, which depicts education as a one-dimensional, straightforward process, which only needs to be managed and ordered by teachers according to scientific knowledge about "what works." On the other hand, there is an "idealist" attack on education that imposes overwhelming expectations about what education should deliver:

> Here education is linked up with projects such as democracy, solidarity, inclusion, tolerance, social justice and peace, even in societies marked by deep social conflict or war. Education never seems to be able to live up to such expectations and is thus constantly being manoeuvred into a position of defence (Biesta & Säfström, 2011, p. 540)

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7 These multiplying answers, solutions, best practices, gaps and bridges are common flows and streams of the educational landscape – these all are constituted around the ability to say something "new", and they thrive against the background of an immense innovation complex in education. I think, however, that the condition for change is not the ability of always saying something new, but the possibility of sometimes saying something *different*.

8 The flat map of the educational wonderland is perfect for those, who want to solve problems, but not for those, who want to travel (walk and talk) through a landscape. "We have got on to slippery ice where there is no friction and so in a certain sense the conditions are ideal, but also, just because of that, we are unable to walk. We want to walk: so we need *friction*. Back to the rough ground! (Wittgenstein, [1953] 1986, §107).

This overwhelming overdetermination of education (i.e., the extreme multiplicity of strong demands and expectations as present in "policy discourses" for instance) exposes teachers to an increasing cacophony of expectations based on the assumption that education is *the* solution of social problems. But considering the density and scale of social issues, the postulated potentiality of education doesn't seem to be evident at all, especially in those schools, which work beyond society's margins. There is literally and figuratively no future in such places of marginality. All the educational demands and expectations – either populist or idealist – construct an imaginary, shiny-happy future that directly contrasts with the dystopian present. In places of advanced marginality, the insurmountable gap between the dystopian present and the promised Disneylands of tomorrow is shockingly spectacular, but still, this parallax constitutes a conflation in temporality, where the dystopia of the present is displaced by a utopia (a no-place) of the future. But, as Loïc Wacquant stresses, the dystopian present – marked by exclusion, poverty, exploitation, and so on – is not something we can simply leave behind. The notion of *advanced* in his concept of advanced marginality is meant precisely

> to indicate that these forms of marginality are not behind us: they are not residual, cyclical or transitional; and they are not being gradually resorbed by the expansion of the 'free market', i.e., by the further commodification of social life. (…) Rather, they stand *ahead of us*: they are etched on the horizon of the becoming of contemporary societies (2008, p. 232).

The most elementary experience at the margins is that the present's dystopia is here to stay, and the promised Disneylands of tomorrow are always yet to come. Something similar happens in Samuel Backett's *Waiting for Godot*, where under a leafless tree, Vladimir and Estragon wait for Godot, who never arrives. They end up in circular repetitions of surreal dialogues and practices while waiting to escape this captive predicament. Confronting the parallax that emerges between the presence of a dystopia (may it be poverty, the emergence of far-right regimes or any other kinds of exclusionary logics) and the utopias of tomorrow, education finds itself at the epicenter of a dramaturgy that evokes *Waiting for Godot*. What counts (makes a difference) in such dramaturgy is how one reacts to such a predicament: Vladimir and Estragon respond to the endless waiting for Godot (i.e., for *sense* amidst the loss of sense) with repetition, suicide, and immense waiting. Julia Kristeva (1982) calls the specific reaction to such ruptures in meaning (e.g., *waiting* for sense amidst the loss of sense) *abjection*. For instance, the traumatic encounter with a corpse reminds us of our own meaninglessness – to our irreducible materiality, to our own constant disintegration and inevitable death – to which we react with vomiting, fainting, panicking. Similarly, tomorrow's promised Disneylands remind us of the present's dead waters, that tomorrow is not at all different from today, and that nothing really changes – to which we tend to react with *giving birth to hope*, especially in educational discourses. What I claim is *not* that hope engenders imaginary Disneylands of tomorrow that

could release the captivity of the present; rather I claim, that it is the parallax between the presence of a dystopia and the promised Disneylands of tomorrow, that (on the ontologically performative level) *does* give birth to hope in education so that the *telos* of education crumbles into an *ethos* of a "yet to come." Hope is, however, a fastidious construct, whose distribution is extremely uneven at the margins of the social. As Zsuzsa Ferge, Hungarian sociologist argued recently:

> What we see, and researches point it out as well, is that hope disappeared for the poorer strata of the societies. There is no hope that their children will ever get out of this situation. The maximum they can hope for is auxiliary work, jobs in the black market, part-time labor, under completely precarious conditions (2018, translation mine).

Regarding the potentiality of education in such a hopeless predicament, Ágnes Kende (2018) argues that education in itself is unable to provide a remedy for structural social problems and "teachers will not be able in themselves to compensate for the dysfunctions of the system" (ibid., p. 158, translation mine). Education inevitably fails, and this failure engenders an ethos of hopelessness that constitutes the general atmosphere of ghetto schools as well. And from this point of view, all the hopes planted in education can become questionable and problematic, especially if we consider that hope has become the basic *form* of the opiatic illusions in global capitalism. While according to the myth, where only "hope" was left within the jar from which Pandora released the evils of humanity, in postmodern global capitalism one could add that nowadays everyone owns this jar as a commodity, with only "hope" left in it, with which we can sustain the unbearable reality, for we all know that "hope dies last". But as The Invisible Committee claims, under the present predicament of global capitalism, hope for a better future is not only doomed, but hope itself became the gravedigger of change.

> Hope, that very slight but constant impetus toward tomorrow that is communicated to us day by day, is the best agent of the maintenance of order. We're daily informed of problems we can do nothing about, but to which there will surely be solutions tomorrow. The whole oppressive feeling of powerlessness that this social organization cultivates in everyone is only *an immense pedagogy of waiting*. It's an avoidance of now. (…) A mind that thinks in terms of the future is incapable of acting in the present. (2017, pp. 10–11 italics added).

The result of the accumulation of hopes is "an immense pedagogy of waiting" in education as well, which not only loses the educational moment (now, now and now) from sight but also forces education into a position of defense as it continually fails to deliver the expected Disneylands of tomorrow. I'm not talking about the captivity of false hopes, as opposed to real, liberating hopes. I understand hope as an ontologically performative formal structure *per se*, every instance of which – as

a "pedagogical vacuum cleaner" (see Szkudlarek, 2019) of the present tense – displaces our desires, dreams, and demands as already realized in a future that is yet to come. However, the solution is not to resign from dreams, desires, and demands, because hope is not equivalential to these notions – it is rather a performative form that *frames* our dreams, desires, demands. A possible "contamination" of the parallax which *does* give birth to hope, and which emerges between the presence of a dystopia and the imaginary Disneylands of tomorrow, could be to lose grip on the imaginary futures imposed on education, both in the sense of letting it out of our hands and also ignoring it, in order to anchor our educational desires in the present tense. As Biesta and Säfström put it: "To keep education away from pure utopia is not a question of pessimism but rather a matter of not saddling education with unattainable hopes that defer freedom rather than making it possible in the here and now" (ibid., p. 541). I "learned" this style of thinking and was confronted with such an educational stance in a Romanian ghetto school in 2017, where student absenteeism and drop-out rates were quite significant at that time. The school headmaster paid 50 lei extra for the teachers to visit the families in the slum every week and talk to them. As the headmaster told me, their aim was not simply to convince the parents that school is good for their children's prosperity, since this was not true as such. Their purpose, rather, was to show how education can be *meaningful* for the children:

> I'm not selling dreams here. I'm very well aware what the chances are if you grow up in such an environment like this. The only thing I can do, is to spend these few years with my students in a meaningful way, in a way that they would never experience at home, that they would never expect.

I argue that it is, in fact, such an act of hopelessness that can put change into motion in the present, as opposed to the immobility of an immense pedagogy of waiting. Hopelessness and despair (see Carusi, 2017) understood as ethical investments introduce cracks into the order of hope, hits on the ultimately dislocated character of the future, and diverts our attention to the present. I think that confronting a situation's deadlock in such a hopeless manner can unlock and liberate the future, without offering another prefabricated solution or utopia. The act of hopelessness doesn't mean resigning from critique or giving up desires and dreams – rather, it means losing grip on the promised Disneylands of tomorrow, hence rescuing our own dreams for the sake of the present. For education, it means "to rethink and re-act education in no future time" (Szkudlarek, 2017b, p. 54), in order to hold the future open. In this sense, hopelessness enacts the impossibility of education, namely "the fact that it cannot be conceived as a technique, that its outcome cannot be predicted" (Biesta, 1998, p. 503), since education is not predetermined and not limited by any preceding necessity. But isn't the refusal of the future, the ignorance of a clearly discernible utopia just another imposition of an ideal, another utopia for education?

CECI N'EST PAS UNE UTOPIE!

I started this paper with the declaration that my aim is not to construct an easy way out from the presented parallaxes, but to investigate what such ontologically performative structures do. But have I not fallen into my own trap by outlining possibilities for releasing the captivity of parallaxes? What if – despite all my intentions – I am alluring the audience with solutions, ready-made answers, or even worse: utopias? However, I claim that the ways I outlined above as possibilities to release parallaxes' captivity *do not* offer another positivity (educational objectivity) – neither a replacement of what is nor a positive alternative for what should be. So releasing the captivity of the parallaxes is not achieved through the replacement or the elimination of them, but by means of disorienting, displacing their ontological performativity. *Encircling the educational vacuum as a fertile void* (against constantly voiding and filling it in), *ignoring and refusing identity-scenarios* (against the constitution of educational neverlands), *reminding ourselves of the ethical challenge of a constitutive lack* (against the extension of an educational Wonderland), and *losing grip on the future* and the promised Disneylands of tomorrow (against an immense pedagogy of waiting) are not (pre)defined ends, but *means without ends* – these are only means for escaping into the "unknown yet possible". These are "negative" interruptions (either heterotopias or negative utopias) that are meant to release the captivity of what the presented parallaxes as ontologically performative structures create. If the possibilities I outlined are utopias, then they are somehow close to a negative conception of a utopia, or as Chris McMillan calls it, the "utopia of the impossible (…) [that] emerges at the very limits of our imagination" (2012, p. 249). In this sense, "utopia" stands merely for a limit, an impossibility. For Frederick Jameson, a utopia is

> most authentic when we cannot imagine it. Its function lies not in helping us to imagine a better future but, rather, in demonstrating our utter incapacity to imagine such a future – our imprisonment in a non-utopian present without historicity of futurity – so as to reveal the ideological closure of the system in which we are somehow trapped and confined (2004, p. 46).

A negative utopia is merely an "end-*less* means" to confront a predicament's deadlock, beyond which an unknown possibility is yet to be disclosed. The investigation of what parallaxes *do* can, in a certain way, unlock the closure of certain situations. What is intriguing for me in the analysis of educational parallaxes is that it seems to me (as a theoretical excess of this investigation) that parallaxes are educational in themselves. They confront us with the inconvenience that no reassurance can be found for them within their own structural coordinates. The educational moment of investigating parallaxes is that a certain closure of a system is born through them. With this I mean, that a deadlock, the impossibility of a predicament, is not something that one discovers, uncovers, or reveals *via* critique – *a deadlock must be born*, it is something to which one gives birth in order to release it, and giving birth to an im-

possibility is an educational gesture. Investigating and naming parallaxes is a means to give birth and confront the deadlock of the incompatible aspects of a situation, where there is no higher perspective, no objective solution, synthesis, or easy way out. The negative intrusions I presented in this paper are meant to release educational parallaxes' captivity by indicating that the education is not predetermined and not limited by any preceding necessity. The radical freedom of education is guaranteed by its radical indetermination, by its ultimately dislocated character. Education is itself *out of joint* (this is precisely the ontological condition of why education can be risky, revolutionary, transformative, and so on).

I also tried to argue that sites of advanced marginality and ghetto schools are places where such deadlocks are already born. Moreover, I claim that such places are subversive – they can contest educational discourse in order to think about it differently, in a skewed manner. In the midst of poverty, exclusion, and dispossession, educational issues appear in a radically different light. Maybe ghetto schools are the germs of a radical reconceptualization of the "educational", as these schools might be closer (or maybe simply forced) to liberate what education "can be" all about: that education is not only about qualification and socialization, but also about *detaching* and *freeing from* the ties of the society and its expectations (especially when it comes to the heavy anchors of poverty); that education can be about *opening up* the world in order to expose the students to the risk of education (especially in those marginal places where every corner roars closure); that education is not necessarily about de-livering predetermined outputs, goals, and indicators, but maybe about *keeping open the possibility* of an unpredictable, unforeseen (and thus unmeasurable), unknown, uncertain, risky future (especially at the margins of the society, where there is no future anyway); that education can be about *making time and space free* for studying, practicing and being attentive (especially in places of advanced marginality, where there is no time to be attentive to the world); and that education is not only about growing up, but also about *letting the child* (of the poor) *be a student* (especially in the case of those who had to grow up too soon).

But isn't such an educational endeavor still idealist (while it promotes no-ide-al) and instrumental (while it promotes end-*less* means)? What if it itself expresses a certain instrumentality, or even worse, an ideal of what ought to be? I think it does express a certain instrumentality (even if we know that the "ideal of something" and the "ideal of no ideal" are not the same at all). However, I also think that a positive language of a negative ontology of education is still necessary to a certain degree. Especially because the negative, non-instrumental accounts of the education[9] are lo-cated in the conflictual discursive field of education. It means that it is already a part of the hegemonic struggle over the meaningful field of education. Consequently, it needs to articulate itself "positively" as something desirable. From this perspective,

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9 Such non-instrumental and weak accounts of the „educational" are discussed by a growing number of scholars, including Gert Biesta, Charles Bingham, F. Tony Carusi, Naomi Hodgson, Tyson E. Lewis, Jan Masschelein, Carl Anders Säfström, Maarten Simons, Tomasz Szkudlarek, Joris Vlieghe, Piotr Zamoj-ski, and many others.

I see nothing contradictory in engendering a "negative" account of education with the means of a "positive" language that expresses what is ethically desirable. Again, the question of "ethical investment" in education stands for our conviction that the weak, non-instrumental accounts of education matter.

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EDUKACJA IDZIE W ZŁYM KIERUNKU. DYSLOKACJA EWANGELII EDUKACYJNEJ Z MARGINESU SPOŁECZNEGO

ABSTRAKT: Edukacja stała się jednym z pozornie wszechobecnych i wszechmocnych megaspektakli naszych czasów. Wiara w jej obietnice i potencjały nabrała w ostatnich dekadach niemal religijnego charakteru (ewangelia edukacyjna). Ze względu na przeceniany potencjał edukacji, problemy społeczne są coraz częściej rozwiązywane poprzez promowanie zwiększonej edukacji. Państwo nie tylko przenosi problemy społeczne do szkoły, ale także samo pedagoguje kwestie społeczne . Edukacja stała się lekarstwem niemal rozwiązaniem każdego problemu społecznego przy jednoczesnym wskazywaniu wszechobecnego kryzysu w edukacji. Reformy i innowacje rozwijają się wbrew (retorycznej) konstrukcji kryzysu edukacyjnego i porażki. To, co uderza mnie w tym scenariuszu, to fakt, że otacza on dwie asymetryczne pozycje w edukacji, jako części tego samego obrazu. Edukacja oznacza w nim chorobę i remedium, porażkę, a zarazem rozwiązanie. Twierdzę, że badanie takich ontologicznie performatywnych struktur w edukacji jest pomocne w kontestowaniu przyjętych za oczywiste założeń dotyczących edukacji.

SŁOWA KLUCZOWE: edukacja, ewangelia edukacyjna, margines społeczny, kryzys edukacyjny, potencjał edukacyjny