

## ***Culture, Development and Adolescence – towards a Theory and History of Adolescence***



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**Abstract:** The present study identifies specifics of adolescence by reconstructing the cultural-historical process of the emergence of this age, which is essentially connected to modernity, by means of two epochal works of art from the years 1719 (Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*) and 1774 (Johann Wolfgang Goethe's *Die Leiden des jungen Werthers*) which are reflected upon using terms derived from development theory. This study bases its conclusions on a summary theoretical model of adolescence as the awakening of subjectivity, with critical consideration given of current tendencies in dealing with and shaping adolescence. The potential associated with this stage of life as represented amid the unleashing of modernity seems to be decreasing again in its neoliberal late phase. It seems instead to be replaced by empty stagings and conjuration of creativity.

**Keywords:** Adolescence; culture; development; modernity; current tendencies in dealing with and shaping adolescence; a critical view of current social and educational trends.

### **I. Introduction<sup>1</sup>**

The present study identifies specifics of adolescence by reconstructing the cultural-historical process of the emergence of this age, which is essentially connected to modernity, by means of two epochal works of art from the years 1719 (Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*) and 1774 (Johann Wolfgang Goethe's *Die Leiden des jungen Werthers*) which are reflected upon using terms derived from development theory.

Works of art are understood here as elaborate forms of illustrating experiences. The often lamented fictionality of works of art actually proves to be beneficial in view of their successful illustration of particular issues. Thus, for example, as we shall see, the metaphorical fictional presentation of a character leading an involuntary, lonely life on an island was able to so succinctly describe a novel form of life experience that Jean Jacques Rousseau would later characterize his own life in the French capital as being as "lonely in

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<sup>1</sup> The following consideration draws substantially on Zizek (Zizek 2012a; Zizek 2012b) in order to develop thoughts on the tendencies and problems of educational processes in the final chapters.

the midst of Paris as Robinson on his island” (Rang 1959, 231).

Adolescence, the increasingly prolonged transition from childhood to adulthood, has proven to be a social and biographical place of potential increases in experiences of innovation (King 2002; Oevermann 2004; Zizek 2017) as well as fragility and risk (Steinberg 2014) due to the accompanying biological, social and developmental changes.

This study bases its conclusions on a summary theoretical model of adolescence as the awakening of subjectivity, with critical consideration given of current tendencies in dealing with and shaping adolescence. The potential associated with this stage of life as represented amid the unleashing of modernity seems to be decreasing again in its neoliberal late phase. It seems instead to be replaced by empty stagings and conjuration of creativity.

In a culture-historical study (cf. Zizek 2012a) dealing with Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe* and Goethe’s *Die Leiden des jungen Werthers*, I reconstructed with the method of objective hermeneutics (Oevermann 1979; Oevermann 2000; Zizek 2012b; Zizek 2017) two modern subject-formations, the missionary and the romantic subject. At the time the novels were published these subject-formations were avant-garde. Later they became more widespread and were and remain at the heart (nuclear-structures) of the more advanced, specifically modern, formations of the subject. Both are results of a development that presupposes the emergence of a new and specific modern phase of life which both Robinson and Werther experience as vital. Accordingly, both novels begin with this new phase of life, an extended youth, which we want here to call adolescence. The following approach is analogous to Arnett’s concept of emerging adulthood (cf. Arnett 2004).

There are great differences in how Robinson and Werther handle, model and look back on this extended interval. In his retrospective autobiographical reflections, Robinson describes his imagination at the time pejoratively as “rumbling thoughts” and subsequently judges his adolescence as the origin of his life of misery. In Goethe’s novel which is a fictitious document purporting to collect Werther’s correspondence, diary notes and various reports of thirds’ Werther welcomes at the beginning of his first letter enthusiastically this new phase of life “How happy am I that I am gone!”.

Thus, the two subject-formations represent the birth and the first high point of adolescence. Using these examples, I will in what follows designate adolescence as the first life-history enhanced unfolding of the universal potentials of the subject’s corporeality and reflexivity, which were suppressed in the pre-modern age when development and culture experienced its highest tension. The unfolding of these subject-potentials will be differentiated using the developmental theories of Jean Piaget and Lawrence Kohlberg and a theory of relatedness (cf. Zizek 2012a).

## II. Positionality and Relatedness of the Human

The criterion for life in Helmuth Plessner's philosophical anthropology in which he integrates the idealistic and vitalistic perspectives of the nineteenth century by approaching the human from his corporeality (cf. Fischer 2008, 524), is *positionality*. The incessant mediating work between impulses of the environment and the body generates the centric form of positionality which is animal-specific. In contrast, plants' reactions to the environment are not identical or bundled; they do not speak with one voice. The two forms of relatedness of the animal are the environment and the body.

The social human adopts the voices of the socializing primary group. There thus emerges a third form of universal relatedness, that of group relatedness. The conflicts that now occur between body- and group relatedness and between contradictory voices of the group, are movements away from the centre generating the capacity for reflexivity. This is echoed later when different groups generate a human-specific repression of the animal's fluent response to its environment, and results in the moving of the eccentric positionality of spontaneity away from the centre that makes reflexivity possible. A new type of situation emerges, *the crisis*: a situation which demands a decision (cf. König 1994, 32). Directing the voices of the group towards oneself generates the fourth form of relatedness, self-reference.

Following Plessner (Plessner 2004) and Oevermann (Oevermann 1995b), we can understand the subject as the agency which responds to crisis. With centric and excentric positionality we can differentiate between the two sides of the subject, corporeality and reflexivity, and the two universal problems of the subject, to perform and to justify its way of life in outline and retrospectively. Since Plessner did not judge these problems to be culture-specific but as constitutive ones which merely get covered temporarily, I described his theoretical position as *an anthropology of the crisis* (cf. Zizek 2012a).

Furthermore, cognitive and moral development generates the fifth form of universal relatedness, the utopic ideal-relatedness, which can be defined as the possibility and desire to construct possible and counterfactual worlds and ideas to obtain a critical contrast to the factual world. For Karl Mannheim the specific difference between ideology and utopia was the transforming impulse of the latter (cf. Mannheim 1995, 169). The development and handling of this relatedness was the life-long theme of Jean-Jacques Rousseau's work, who was a precursor of Werther, the romantic subject-formation and the *Sturm und Drang* movement (cf. Bollnow 1958, 4). Richard Hönigswald stressed that Rousseau's concept of nature has the cultural function of utopic consideration and in this respect corresponds to Kant's concept of the idea (cf. Hönigswald 1923, 180). It implies the basic anthropological thesis that the human is able to create (cf. Hufnagel 1979, 72). Kant, who admired Rousseau's insight, elaborated the idea systematically as in Rousseau's works it is somewhat unclear (cf. *ibid.*, 91).

### III. The Urge to Probation and to Freedom

Group relatedness implies the urge to prove oneself, to feel oneself to be a valuable part of a community even if, as with the community which Rousseau addresses in *The Reveries of the Solitary Walker*, it looks ahead to future generations. To whom does the solitary walker talk to at the start if not to a future generation? 'I am now alone on earth, no longer having any brother, neighbor, friend, or society other than myself' (Rousseau 1992).

Identity is essentially a social form. The subject identifies itself from an early age through its *figure of probation* (cf. Zizek 2015), which shapes it as a unique being. By the figure of probation, we mean a certain kind of act that you have to believe is a real contribution to a community life and that you believe you are particularly good at it and that not everyone else could do it. This figure of probation emerges through an interactive process. As Erik K. Erikson observes, others can communicate to a child learning to walk: You will stand tall or you will go too far (cf. Erikson 1973, 17). The concept of figure in 'figure of probation' points out that the unreflected imagination of the self's contribution to probation is expressed and shaped through attitudes and sequences of movements. In the course of the ontogenesis, the figure of probation becomes modified and, in any case, more complex (cf. Garz & Zizek 2015). However, essential or pivotal elements of the early figure of probation seem to dominate even the identity and action of adolescents and adults. In an informal interview a very successive 21 years old male student related the story of how, when he was six, his family had to move with him and his younger brother from a quite big house to a small council home due to the failure of his parents' shop. Immediately after, he emphasized his successful enrollment into school. Everything points to the fact that at this time he felt and thought that he was the one who, despite the bankruptcy of the family business, could firmly experience within this spatial constriction the adoption of new spaces through a successful education. This accelerating dynamic of spatial constriction in his area of origin, and the openings secured by successful personal contribution, became a pivotal element of his figure of probation. He described how he usually went for a walk as soon as it became light. Then he would prepare for his seminars, read, listen to music and had just started to learn Japanese.

Myths of probation, which have the function of answering the questions Who am I? Where do I come from? Where do I go? (Oevermann 1995a, 35), are generated ontogenetically later –when the subject starts to reflect on the question of its own contribution to a community. Ordinarily they are not identical with the preceding figures of probation. Moreover, figures of probation operate on the level of action, whereas myths of probation operate on the level of interpretation.

Furthermore, Max Weber stresses that there is an urge to freedom which motivates humans to act in a way that is "irrational" from the point of view of interests and needs. Weber calls this a "psychological magic of freedom" (Bendix 1964, 24) and subsequently,

in his analysis of effective motives, he differentiates between interests and ideas (Bendix 1964, 30). The urge to probation and to freedom are integral components of one urge, as the urge to freedom always has a social relatedness and, conversely, the more the probation-searching subject makes an appearance as a subject, the more independent of the approval of others it has to become (cf. Garz 1996, 57–61).

#### **IV. The Group as Generator of Culture**

According to Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann (Luckmann 2009), the group is a social formation that is capable of a process of handing down and thus is culture-generating. On the one hand culture provides collected experiences and from it emerges 'the ratched effect', a 'cumulative cultural evolution' (Tomasello 1999, 5). On the other hand, Sigmund Freud's remark that it is not the superego of the parents but of the grandparents that is dominant in the education of the child, makes clear the inertia of culture. As a result, Freud also calls the superego an agency of tradition (cf. Freud 1999, 73). Culture can be both the precondition of development and thus either conducive to, or a debilitating factor in, the development of the urge to probation and freedom: but it seems to urge individual development.

#### **V. The Three Big Subject-Formations**

Using Georg Simmel's sociology of the group (cf. Simmel 1992) and Piaget's and Kohlberg's theory of moral development, I will now compare Robinson's and Werther's adolescence from a culture-historical and developmental perspective in order to outline a final theory of adolescence.

With Piaget's concept of morality and Berger and Luckmann's concept of institution we can describe morality as a situation-independent and anticipative orientation of institutions. A central criterion of morality is the situation-independent 'element of obligation' (Piaget 1983, 46). Piaget analyses moral development, seeing it as an interdependency of rule-practice, rule-consciousness and different forms of social interaction (cf. Piaget 1983) which can be differentiated as group relatedness. Rule-practice precedes rule-consciousness, whereby the understanding of the rules (rule-consciousness) has a beneficial effect on the internalisation of the rule.

#### **VI. The Pre-modern Subject: The Absorption of Adolescence**

Wolfgang Reinhard describes pre-modern forms of coexistence as primary-group-societies, which have a maximum of 150 members (cf. Reinhard 2006, 268). Using Georg Simmel's concept of the logic of quantity it is possible to determine which characteristics a form of coexistence has in relation to the size of the group. Small groups are face-to-face-

societies. Because of the problem of cohesion specific to them they show a sociological radicalism which is necessary for their self-preservation and which implies the commitment of the individual to the tendencies of the group and its sharp border against neighboring figurations (Simmel 1992, 71). This explains why pre-modern societies obstruct the development of the formal-operational stage of cognition (cf. Piaget 1986, 118), which subverts through its counterfactual potential both the cohesion of the group and the totalitarian character of pre-modern thinking (cf. Lévi-Strauss 1980, 29). In this way the utopian ideal relatedness is contained.

In the pre-modern world, the idealisation of the older generation obstructs interaction among equals (cf. Piaget 1986, 118). This idealised group relatedness is essentially asymmetric. On the moral stage of heteronomy rules are evaluated as fixed and unchangeable (rule-consciousness) whereby the internalisation of the rules is deficient (rule-practice) and compliance depends on the presence of the group. There is no mobility enabling “psychological gyroscope” (cf. Riesman 1989, 16). Body relatedness is unrestrained and self-relatedness does not step out of the daily routine (cf. Hahn 1995, 132).

The pre-modern subject who is dependent on the judgement of its primary group is comparatively immobile and proves itself by preservation. Thus, the pre-modern subject fulfils the cooperative requirements of pre-modern small groups. On the one hand, in their initiation rites pre-modern societies perform certain practices that have the function of constraining development. On the other hand, they provide certain positions for deviants: “In such societies a person who might have become at a later historical stage an innovator or rebel, whose belonging, as such, is marginal and problematic, is drawn instead into roles like those of the shaman or sorcerer” (Riesman 1989, 12). On the level of action, of course, there were also impulses and tendencies towards autonomy in individuals in the premodern age. But these had to be kept latent, hidden and secretive. In some essential aspects it is comparable to the situation under modern totalitarian society systems (Zizek 2018). The impulses towards autonomy could not come to a reflexive realization and utopically effective articulation. In the words of Georg Misch, adolescents were not allowed to become philosophers (Misch 1950) like Robinson and Werther.

Following Carpendale, we can characterise this initial morality, when rules are being appropriated *en bloc*, as practical morality, as distinct from reflexive morality (cf. Carpendale 2009, 275). This distinction can be illustrated by Kohlberg’s one-sided continuation of Piaget. On the one hand, the early Piaget can be regarded as the forerunner of this form of verbal judgment-oriented moral research (cf. Piaget 1983). As Detlef Garz (Garz 2008) points out, Piaget already had the idea to examine moral judgment and action separately. On the other hand, Piaget has emphasized the precedence of action and he methodically preferred the observation of the action of questioning the children. The storytelling, the origin of the well-known dilemma interview, he describes, however, as a methodological stopgap (cf. Piaget 1997, 29).

With the coexistence of central and eccentric positionality, Plessner differentiates between two aspects of the subject, corporeality and reflexivity. His criterion for an adequate lifestyle is the activity of these two sides of the subject. Therefore, for him faith is a negative ideal as the believer has to sacrifice himself as a reflexive being in order to attain absolute answers to his life crisis. The pre-modern subject only makes a reduced appearance in his corporal and reflexive potential as a subject. Indeed, it has been shown that this harmonises with the necessities of pre-modern coexistence. In this respect the pre-modern age is adversarial to the subject as such, as it obstructs freedom and accordingly there is no prolonged adolescence. In pre-modern societies individual development and culture experience the greatest conflict.

## **VII. Robinson Crusoe – The Missionary Subject and the Birth of Adolescence**

Robinson Crusoe is motivated by a figure of probation to leave his primary group. Against the will of his parents, whom he will not see again, the 19 years old Robinson “went on board a ship bound for London” (Defoe 2007, 8). He only returns after an extremely eventful journey and an involuntary stay of twenty-eight years, “all alone in an un-inhabited Island on the Coast of America, near the Mouth of the Great River Oroonoke; Having been cast on Shore by Shipwreck, wherein all the Men perished but himself” (Defoe 2007, 1). Robinson’s figure of probation which he himself thematises as a spirit of adventure can be characterised as willingly risk taking (cf. Bonß 1995, 136) and crisis-oriented (cf. Oevermann 1996, 82). This is something that had already existed in the fifteenth century (Bonß 1995, 124). In the fictitious preface to the novel an embryonic opening for the future can be discerned: “The wonders of this man’s life exceed all that (he thinks) is to be found extant; the life of one man being scarce capable of a greater variety” (Defoe 2007, 3).

First, and on the one hand, the readers being addressed are hungry for sensation; while on the other hand sensation as such does not touch the personal reality of life. Secondly, and on the one hand, the readers start to develop an interest in the everyday life of subjects; but on the other hand, the reason for the publication itself is still in question: “If ever the story of any private man’s adventures in the world were worth making public, and were acceptable when published, the editor of this account thinks this will be so” (Defoe 2007, 3).

In his fictitious autobiography, Robinson shows a strong orientation towards society. His characterisation of his family as a “good family” takes the point of view of society, which is an exterior position. It is helpful then to look at the moral development in question. In contrast to the pre-modern subject, Robinson follows the rules in the absence of the primary group (rule-practice), yet still he considers those rules untouchable (rule-consciousness) – which marks the transitional phase towards what Piaget understands as

an autonomous morality (Piaget 1983, 237). As the degree of the internalisation of rules is high, his body relatedness can be characterised as restrained. According to the metaphor of the gyroscope which implies an “increased personal mobility” (Riesman 1989, 14), the missionary subject “can receive and utilize certain signals from outside, provided that they can be reconciled with the limited maneuverability that his gyroscope permits” (Riesman 1989, 16). By giving his date of birth Robinson reveals, in comparison to the pre-modern subject, a culture-historical competence in locating himself in a societal, anti-cyclical way. It allows more complex, anticipatory forms of societal cooperation, such as labour division, and causes life to become a definite period of individual composition and probation.

By looking at the activity of reflection, as noted by Erikson, a psychosocial moratorium can be recognised. This is thematized by Robinson himself and next to the adventurous figure of probation it can be regarded as a second central motive for leaving the primary group, which is delayed again and again and strongly opposed here by his parents:

Being the third son of the family, and not bred to any trade, my head began to be fill'd very early with rambling thoughts: My father, who was very ancient, had given me a competent share of learning, as far as house-education, and a country free-school generally goes, and design'd me for the law; but I would be satisfied with nothing but going to sea ... (Defoe 2007, 5).

The world enfolded in the imagination is too broad and this is one reason why it is tempting to leave it. The following remark by Thomas Ertl has to be understood in this sense. Though Marco Polo's travelogues were largely fabricated, they captured the imagination and thus contributed to the development of trade (cf. Ertl 2009). Compared to the totalitarian thought of pre-modern times we first find here an emancipation of reflection, which opens up a leeway for the subject and enables the subject to step out of line.

Throughout his life Robinson regrets his ‘rumbling thoughts’ and his leaving. He does not criticise the judgments of his primary group, but instead they are internalized and this prompts him to condemn his own adventurous tendencies. The metaphor of the desert island mirrors the problem of the modern subject, which has to handle the relative absence or pettiness of the primary instance of care and recognition: “What became of my second brother I never knew any more than my father or mother did know what was become of me” (Defoe 2007, 5). While, secondly, the self-chosen life is perceived as a pain-inducing break from this primary instance.

The fact that Robinson writes an autobiographical narrative indicates that he himself judges his experiences as extraordinary and himself as an exclusive witness. Thus, he can interpret his situation as a period of probation: ‘If I overcome this, I will have important things to tell. Furthermore, by this means, he generates the imagination of an absent-present recognising community. There is then a tension between the spirit



of adventure and the intended lifestyle, which is disrupted by the 'strange surprising adventures.' It is important to note that Robinson is not an adventurer who is searching for adventures. This tension heats up in a crisis of identity representative of the people of England in the seventeenth century, because the lifestyle produced by the adventurous figure of probation can no longer be framed by traditional conceptions of reality. Thus, the subject has to unfold an individual myth of probation which must make it plausible to itself that the self-chosen way is the only right one. Hence in his myth of probation Robinson interprets his life as a period of probation on behalf of a transcendent instance:

But now I began to exercise my self with new thoughts; I daily read the word of God, and apply'd all the comforts of it to my present state (...) But tho' I could not say, I thank'd God for being there; yet I sincerely gave thanks to God for opening my eyes, by whatever afflicting Providences, to see the former condition of my life, and to mourn for my wickedness, and repent (Defoe 2007, 91).

Because he interprets his life as a mission of probation and because of his tendency to convert others to his own ideas, we can call him a missionary subject. Robinson condemns the personal psycho-social moratorium, the duration of potentially enhanced activation of the subject-potential, and in the diary which he starts on the island he practises a subsuming reflexivity and spontaneousness obstructing classification of the reality of life. Robinson's adolescence exists only in a seminal state; it is, so to speak, aggravated by neglect.

### **VIII. Werther: The Romantic Subject**

In contrast to the shipwrecked Robinson, Werther willingly isolates himself in order to put some daylight between himself and his culture of origin. In his correspondence with his best friend, he immediately starts a particular kind of authentication in which he critically examines the practices and rules of his culture of origin and creates an intimate and reinforcing dialogue between peers: "How happy I am that I am gone! My dear friend, what a thing is the heart of man! To leave you, from whom I have been inseparable, whom I love so dearly, and yet to feel happy! I know you will forgive me." This reinforcing dialogue among peers is an innovation of the *Sturm und Drang* period. It supports emancipation from the older generation, and in this way, it becomes clear why Stanley Hall regarded the *Sturm und Drang* period as the phylogenetic age of adolescence (Hall 1904). The group relatedness becomes dynamic. The interaction between equals assists the understanding and criticism of rules and thus the development of autonomous, reflexive morality. With Kohlberg it is possible to identify Werther's reflexivity – his 'Leiden' – as the crucial transition from conventional to post-conventional moral judgment.

Concerning corporeality, Plessner uses the example of laughing and crying as human-specific expressions that stress how central and eccentric positionality are two

functions for coping with life. Laughing and crying are answers to ambivalent situations to which a rational response is not possible anymore, and as such they solve a problem of the human-specific way of life.

Using Oevermann's theory of the artist's action, we can consider the methodically controlled spontaneity of the artist as an ideal because it is a creative relation to one's own body. It presupposes a restrained-unrestrained body relatedness. Thus, with a lively relation to his or her own body the subject has a greater potential for conflict resolution and innovation. We can see in Robinson's negative description of his psychosocial moratorium that body and nature are entities which disturb a clear brain. In contrast, Werther's correspondence shows a high degree of spontaneous expressivity which generates new points of view. Because of his particular kind of authentication and expressivity we can call Werther a romantic subject. Karl Rosenkranz showed that the subjects of the Sturm und Drang period already had essential elements of the later romantic period (cf. Rosenkranz 1839, 278).

### **IX. Philosophy of Adolescence and Bildung: Specifics and Potentials of a Modern Transition Phase and a Critical View of Current Social Trends**

To identify the theory of adolescence proposed here I will now reconsider the use of the terms such as *adolescence* and *youth* in the different approaches highlighted here. Helmut Fend remarks that their usage exhibits a specialist tendency, in which "[s]ociologists speak of youth, psychologists speak of adolescence and biologists of puberty" (Fend 2003, 22). The terms are also routinely used to describe successive phases of life. In Kohlberg, for example, adolescence follows on from youth, whereas Vera King observes the reverse: "It is striking (...), that the term adolescence is often used where a 'prolonged' or 'modern' youth is the subject, a fact which offers a moratorium on the strict sense of the word" (King 2002, 21). Here, adolescence is considered to be the first biographically enhanced unfolding of the universal potential of the subject, its corporeality and reflexivity. In the light of this criterion, I follow the description of adolescence as prolonged youth and thus as a specifically modern phenomenon (cf. King 2002, 21). As already mentioned, following Arnett (Arnett 2004), we could also speak of emerging adulthood.

The adolescent subject is, so to speak, the awakening subject. Oevermann stresses that in routines subjectivity evaporates (cf. Oevermann 1995b, 179). Accordingly, Plessner regards the modern age as a period of emancipation of the subject's potential reflexivity and corporeality (cf. Fischer 2002, 85). While King captures adolescence as a space of opportunities emerging from an environment which is structured socially and generationally, I consider the emergence of this space of opportunities as the result of dealing with social reality in a creative and leisured way. And while King approaches adolescence by following the theory of socialization, my approach can be seen as a complementary theory of competence. Using Piaget and Kohlberg, Robinson's and

Werther's degrees of reflexivity can be identified. The theory of relatedness allows the identification of the relation of Robinson and Werther to their primary group, their respective bodies, and the extent of their respective expressivity.

Adolescence ends when the adolescent decides upon the societal position through which he will try to satisfy his critical impulses. Against this background we can, for example, read George Vaillant's concept of a second adolescence, which he associates with the experience of the mid-life crisis (Vaillant 1983), as a revival of the subject's questioning of her or his existing routines and views. This decision regarding a societal position was never easy, as George Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel already noted at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The adolescent who has previously focused critically on the whole in order subsequently to transform it, has to do with working on a part of it only (cf. Hegel 1999, 83).

How have prolonged adolescence and the conditions of growing up changed since the period of origin considered above? In what follows, I will highlight a few trends and, against this background, justify the need for a return to core aspects of education [*Bildung*].

### **X. An Authenticity and Originality Claim Makes Adolescence More Difficult**

In addition, there is the historically grounded, increasingly high demand on authenticity and originality of one's own life (Zizek 2015), so that the postponement of commitments such as a family foundation makes the authentic life at least potentially feasible. For example, the Y-generation young adults born after 1985 find a "marked life with strong certainties boring" (Hurrelmann & Albrecht 2014, 41). The demand is rather the "best way of self-realization" (Hurrelmann & Albrecht 2014, 12), an "interesting life" (Hurrelmann & Albrecht 2014, 41) or even the "perfect life" (Jeges 2014, 20).

The communication and interaction possibilities of digital media meet this demand of evaluation and optimization and cultivate it. Sherry Turkle cites a very instructive sequence from an interview with a teenager in which she reports on the digital possibilities of perfecting one's own life and its social consequences:

Instead of talking to who we are with, we are on our phones, checking out other parties, asking what's happening at other parties, trying to figure out if we should be there. You end up not talking to your friends because you're on your phone, getting information about whether you should be someplace else altogether (Turkle 2015, 146).

The expansion of adolescence also seems to be related to the increased demands of the tasks to be accomplished during this transition (the foundation of an authentic, original, unique life).

## **XI. An Autonomy Eroding, Medially Cultivated Tendency to Other-Direction**

The digital media seems to be a reinforcing training ground for *other-direction* in the sense made famous by David Riesman (see Riesman 2001; Zizek 2017). Todd Gitlin (Gitlin 2001) points out that at the end of the twentieth century, the beginning of the diffusion of the other-direction, which Riesman had established at the time, had become widespread. He also points out that Riesman emphasized that people were ready to use the medium of television in their attitudes before it began to spread gradually (cf. Gitlin 2001, p. xv). One could add that the Internet is structurally the perfect medium of other direction. And that by the end of the twentieth century, people had become habitually prepared for this and, above all, Web 2.0.

Due to a medially cultivated, dominant orientation towards the views of those surrounding us (online or offline), one seems to learn less, to endure problems and crises on her/his own for a while, in order to arrive at a deliberate and, above all, more independent and perhaps also special and creative solution. But that is essential for autonomy. In this respect, the subject potentials, which were thematic above, seem to be affected here.

## **XII. Neo-liberal Transformations of the Education System Reduce Leisure and Educational Opportunities**

In the wake of neo-liberal currents and the very suggestive pressure of increased globalization, the education systems in both the Western and the Asian world have for at least two decades been moving in a direction that leaves less and less room for leisure and subjectivity. For the purpose of contrast, aspects of a classical educational idea of school are recalled:

In fact, the word ‚school‘ comes from the Greek *schole* and interestingly *schole* means leisure giving a clue about how far ideas about education have changed between then and now. Then, it seems, the assumption was that leisure was synonymous with learning and contemplation (Thomas 2013, 3).

In an international comparative, qualitative study on adolescence, which uses narrative interviews to examine the biographical digestion of the globalized, digital age by the adolescents (Zizek, 2019a, unpublished data), we were also able to identify strong tendencies driven by globalization and competition fears: For Germany, it is possible to mention, by way of example, the measures to ensure measurability and control, which were taken as a result of the so-called PISA shock (!) (Tenorth 2008). With Nicolopoulou’s much-noted contribution in alluding to “[t]he alarming disappearance of play from early childhood education” (Nicolopoulou 2010), another aspect of this development can be highlighted in the US. This tendency is particularly pronounced in the expanding

education system of South Korea. The young people who have been raised there find free, unfocused, reflective activities a waste of time (Cho 2015, 451). They shy away from new things, or risks, preferring to be guided, a feature that has been retained in the context of the app generation concept for the US (Gardner & David 2013; Zizek 2017, 2018). On the one hand, the attitudes of the addressed, young generations can show a high degree of discipline, but on the other hand they are ready for a passive and uncritical intake of education and are more in need of guidance. Kyung-Sup Chang recently confirmed this to us in an expert interview at Seoul National University (Chang 2018, unpublished data). Of course, these attitudes contrast very strongly with the conception of the classical tradition of educational [*Bildung*] theory, which sees education as essential in coping with crises, errors, “in dealing with adversities” (Hastedt 2012, 124). For Hegel, for example, education is alienating mediation [*entfremdende Vermittlung*] (Hegel 1978), and Humboldt speaks in this sense of the need for alienation and estrangement [*Entäußerung und Entfremdung*] (Humboldt 1960). I pointed out the following facts in Zizek (2017): Apparently the crisis character of a lifestyle experiences a certain amount of mitigation due to technical problem-solving. But the more central and course-setting the crises are, the less they can be solved through routine or by deputizing them. Thus, autonomy has lost no meaning in the digital age. To further illustrate this thesis and its focus, we can turn to the following anecdote by Howard Gardner (Gardner & Davis 2013) regarding a university situation:

A bright and somewhat aggressive student brandishing his smartphone approached Howard. Flashing a grin, he said, “In the future, why will we need school? After all, the answers to all questions are – or soon will be – contained in this smartphone.” Howard reflected for a moment and then responded, “Yes, the answers to all questions ... except the important ones (Gardner & Davis 2013, 9).

It becomes clear that here information is confused with knowledge and education. The latter requires an active acquisition (Zizek 2019b, unpublished data). It is not seen that education [*Bildung*], in contrast to the product logic of the market, requires one to get involved insofar as it essentially, in the sense of an objectification process, consists of a transformation of the subject, its patterns of meaning making (Kegan 1982, 29). It seems that these tendencies in the handling of educational processes erode autonomy, understood here as the human-specific ability to perceive and to cope with open-life situations. This must be considered a key objective of successful socialization and education.<sup>2</sup>

Although there are increasing signs that the nineteenth-century’s driving-forward idea of progress, which harmonizes with the thematic, quantifiable, output-oriented concept of education, has reached its limits and that people need urgently to consider and act with self-restraint (Kesselring 2015), there is currently little hope of

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<sup>2</sup> In his essay on Kant, Erwin Hufnagel has shown that the autonomy of the developing subject is also the inevitable explicit or implicit criterion of evaluation in educational discussions (Hufnagel 1990).

this. Symptoms such as widespread burnout, for example, show a secret “fascination for the waste of energy: Better to live short and lavish than long and bored” (Haubl 2014, 172). But it seems to be a “frantic stoppage” (Virilio 1992). This metaphor “symbolizes a late modernity that cannot let go of its progress mania, even though its catastrophic features are long since obvious” (Haubl 2014, 173). And instead of transcending national boundaries for necessary joint action, we can now note an astonishing return of attitudes that were considered to have been overcome.

These remarks focus on great historical tendencies and problems. But how does it look on the micro level? Conversations and interviews with prospective teachers have alerted me to the following surprising and disturbing facts.

Not infrequently, teachers are successfully cornered by students who think they have understood everything, with questions like ‘why should I still learn music, mathematics ... or religion today’. While I was revising the present text, my research assistant Hendrik-Zoltán Andermann drew my attention to the following sequence of classroom interactions experienced and recorded by a teacher’s student trainee:

Before the following interaction extract was created, the class dealt with the structure and function of a relay. The teacher asked the students how it could be possible to get a relay as small as the size of a grain of rice.

Student 1: Why do we need to know, how to get a relay into a grain of rice?

Teacher: Think about it. For what purpose do you need a rice grain sized relay?

Student 1: When you ask it this way, I know that such relays exist. But for what purpose do we need them? None of us will become an inventor or anything.

Teacher: How can you know, what you will be in 20 years? (Author’s research archive).

Surprisingly, most prospective teachers have a problem to answer clarifyingly and effectively. This is a burdensome, structural problem that needs to be taken seriously. I recalled the following in dealing with these reports, and it is, I hope, a vivid example of the openness and unpredictability of educational processes:

While reading a biographical analysis during my study of social science, where it turned out that the parents of a very successful elementary school student had completely opposite basic experiences, I remembered the parallelogram of forces that we had dealt with in my schooling in physics lessons. The father was convinced that the son would someday take over the craft family business. The mother, on the other hand, had developed the conviction, based on her family history, that only education (intellectual capital) would really last.

In physics lessons, we learned that a car, to which two forces are applied, moves in the direction of the diagonal (and with the force represented by its length) of the parallelogram. But what would happen, I wondered, when the forces acted in the exact opposite way. The car could not go in any direction, but would shiver under the forces pulling on it. And that corresponded to the expressive form of epilepsy, with which the young elementary student began to suffer at the secondary school. In the years that followed, I continued to think a great deal about the forces that work on each human being and in this way gradually developed the theoretical model of the relatedness of the human set out in the present work (source: author's academic archive) (Author's research archive).

It has hopefully become clear that in educational institutions, unlike, for example, in a department store, one cannot say here and now what something might be worthwhile. That would be completely against innovation and a form of uncreative thinking. Incidentally, the thematic tendency to demand the direct demonstration of the usability of education and the eradication of idle play and reflection seems to mate strangely with a widespread aesthetic and evocation of creativity. Undoubtedly the creativity suggestive coloring of Google has been aesthetically very influential in this respect:

Each of the six letters has a different color, and all six different colors contrast with each other to a maximum, thus forming a maximum colorful sequence, as would be expected of happy children in the joyous use of their crayon box. In a way, this color sequence turns the user of Google into a happy-nosy kid who opens up a colorful world. In any case, this is suggested by the logo as a logo in its specific expressive valency (Oevermann 2014, 51).

I have also found these colors in garden chairs, which have been increasingly installed on university campuses in recent years. In the spirit of creativity, one should be able to assemble there spontaneously, according to the particular need for discussion.

To come back to my anecdote. Could my physics teacher have explained to me at the time what I would later do with the contents of his lesson? Maybe it would not even have made sense to him what I was trying to understand by transmitting the model. In my opinion, the educational institutions should confess again confidently and more closed to the classical idea of education. And for this purpose, in the spirit of a philosophy of education, we need a self-reassuring clarification of the *significance of a world-opening education [Bildung] aiming at autonomy as an end in itself*, without any immediate purpose of utilization, which would resist any neoliberal tendencies.

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