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## **Theory as ontological rhetoric: Rousseau and the crystallization of the discourse of education**

### KEYWORDS

rhetoric, ontology, education,  
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### ABSTRACT

Assuming the ontological understanding of rhetoric, as proposed by Ernesto Laclau, the paper explores the language of educational theories in their dimensions significant in terms of the discursive construction of societies. The tropes and rhetorical strategies identified in J.J. Rousseau's works are assumed as the point of departure for the crystallization of the modern discourse of education, here understood as an ontologically indispensable element of the political.

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The following article is a brief and partial presentation of the results of analyses, conducted within a research project focused on the identification of the rhetoric of educational theories and policies, within the context of the relations of that rhetoric to the political entanglements of education.<sup>1</sup> Rhetoric is considered in ontological terms, as related to the construction of forms of social identities (totalities, in the words of Ernesto Laclau). The political entanglements of education are not perceived as an unacceptable ideological grasp of education, but rather as an inevitable element of educational rationality (and irrationality) and one of the principal reasons why education has become one of the central issues of modern societies.

Why rhetoric? One should begin by stating that modern education is a social practice shaping both individual subjectivities and social totalities simultaneously.

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These tasks are not congruent, which tends to result in tensions that, at best, from the perspective of logical reasoning, are regarded as dialectical contradictions. In such a dialectical perspective, the accomplishment of the tasks of education requires the sublation of the contradiction between the individual and the society, for instance such that the creation of a social totality is at the same time a completion of human freedom. Starting with Locke and Rousseau (whose *Emile* should be read as it was written, i.e., simultaneously with *The Social Contract*), one finds such visions within the majority of pedagogical theories, particularly those inspired by Hegelianism. Such gestures of overcoming contradictions may be regarded as profaned eschatologies (in the sense proposed by Giorgio Agamben, 2007), eschatologies “returned to the common use of men”. As noted by Daniel Tröhler (2014), the typical aims of modern pedagogy, of subject emancipation and the construction of a new social order, are mutations of the idea of salvation of the soul and of building the earthly kingdom of God. In that sense, the foundations of European educational discourse, including the tension between “Rousseau-type” and “Herbart-type” approaches, illustrate an argument taking place within Protestant theology, particularly, as argued by Tröhler, between the visions of the relations of the individual to society presented by Calvin and Luther. Seeing pedagogy and theology as related finds support in Bernadette Baker (2001) who states that the modern turn to education in Europe (and the resulting educationalization of social problems) occurred at a time of the collapse of the social order founded on religion, a result of the many years of wars over the Reformation of Christianity. Education was then perceived as a hope for reinstating social unity, and the role of the church, now divided and antagonized, was to be taken over by the state, the construction of which required a pedagogical “production” of citizens. This expanded reminder of the genetic relations between pedagogy and theology helps to understand the presence of rhetoric in pedagogy, and to identify the principal rhetorical strategy that is fundamental to educational discourse, i.e., the strategy of constructing identity (totality). Rhetoric exceeds the role of an ornament of language here; similar to the language of religion, rhetoric organizes the structure of the language, particularly as a link between logically incoherent predications.

So far (Szkudlarek 2017), I have isolated three principal *topoi* that may be regarded as the leading aspects of educational discourse: the above-mentioned construction of totality (identity, unity) in terms of both the individual and society, the construction of visibility and invisibility, and the construction of temporality. These are supported by numerous, mostly derivative, strategies and rhetorical figures. I have been able to conduct a detailed analysis of the following strategies: the construction of empty signifiers, a specific figure of time which I call a “temporal

encroachment”, the work of copular metaphors (originally described by F. Tony Carusi, 2015, 2017), strategies of sacralization and profanation, and a postulational rhetoric, suffusing pedagogic texts with obligational statements.

The above-mentioned figures and strategies are closely related. Their foundations can be found in the works of Rousseau, who admits himself that his writing is saturated with paradoxes, which, obviously, demands rhetorical means to make his statements coherent. Rousseau’s rhetoric is not exclusively his personal method of managing the complexity of the matter, as similar devices can be found, in a number of specific variants and applied with diverse intensities, in the language of Herbart, in Polish socialist pedagogy, or in the conception of life-long learning (I will refer to these conceptions in a later section of this article) – as well as in other pedagogical texts. Therefore, the above-mentioned strategies are probably of a more general character and they result from an inability to establish a logical connection between the main themes of pedagogical speculation. This kind of inability, and the fundamental role of rhetoric in building discursive structures, have been comprehensively documented in Laclau’s analyses of political discourse (Laclau 2005, 2014).

In the following part of the paper I reconstruct the relations between elements of the above-mentioned strategies, as seen in the works of Rousseau. In the final section of the article, the presence of these strategies in other variants of pedagogical thinking will be indicated as well.

## **Loneliness and community**

The title of this section refers to the book by Bronisław Baczko (1964) which accurately defines the principal problem of Rousseau’s works. This issue is the tension between the premise of the innate goodness and freedom of an individual (naturally alone, according to Rousseau, 1921) and the need to establish a rational social order. The intellectual task resulting from such a predicament is briefly mentioned at the beginning of the first paragraph of the *Social Contract* (later on referred to as SC): “I mean to inquire if, in the civil order, there can be any sure and legitimate rule of administration, men being taken as they are and laws as they might be” (Rousseau 1923, p. 34). Men “as they are” are “given.” They are determined by nature and are, essentially, individuals. Law is “inquired on”; it must be established in response to the individual nature of the subject. The very question “if (...) there can be any sure and legitimate rule” indicates an awareness of the problematic relation between freedom of “natural” individuals and the social order regulated by the

conditions of a legal contract. Moreover, each of these conflicted ideas is internally ruptured itself. The order of civilization annihilates its own ethical foundations, i.e., the natural goodness of individuals, established by nature on the basis of the love of the self (*amour de soi*) and the ability to empathize. The *amour de soi* is replaced by *amour propre*, love focused on the “properties” that provide an individual with an advantage over others. Therefore, construction of the contemporary social order should refer to tactics of manipulating this secondary love of one’s own properties, such as power, prestige, or wealth. The strategy of constructing social totality, described in *Emile* (later referred to as Em), in the *Social Contract*, as well as in *The Government of Poland* (1972, later referred to as GoP), should assume a discrete manipulation of the fabric of social life, very similar to the one that affects Emile in his process of “natural” education. Both the teacher and the legislator, being the primary actors of the new republican order and the agents that create the foundations of that order, are presented as godlike, and at the same time manipulative figures. Despite the fundamental rank ascribed to nature, the natural in humans must be annihilated in order for the establishment of a society to be possible:

The natural man lives for himself; he is the unit, the whole, dependent only on himself and on his like. The citizen is but the numerator of a fraction, whose value depends on its denominator; his value depends upon the whole, that is, on the community. Good social institutions are those best fitted to make a man unnatural, to exchange his independence for dependence, to merge the unit in the group, that he no longer regards himself as one, but as a part of the whole, and is only conscious of the common life. (Rousseau 1921, p. 11)

The tension between natural goodness, the “whole” of the individual, and a need to construct social totality (a “body politic”, an integral, social organism that sublates the primal integrity and autonomy of the subject) must be reflected in the mode of defining the concept of nature, which is fundamental to Rousseau’s argument. If nature constitutes an inconsolable foundation of the individual, social, and transcendent good (see: the *Profession of Faith of the Savoyard Vicar* in Book IV of *Emile*, which presents the principles of natural religion), and if it is being discarded, or, essentially, intentionally eliminated in the process of constructing totality, the very concept of nature must be “denatured”. The equivocal feature of this concept is significantly increased if one considers that a natural grounding is not only ascribed to human individuals, but to nations as well (GoP). The semantic entanglements ascribed to the concept are inevitable and lead to claims such as the one that a child should be taught a “natural repugnance to mingling with foreigners” (GoP), or that the nations of Europe are disappearing, as none of them “has

been shaped along national lines by peculiar institutions” (GoP). Why do we need to teach individuals and nations that with which they have already been equipped by nature? What is nature here? Baczko (1964) regards the attempts of solving the sense of nature in Rousseau as doomed, and Baker states that the concept of nature appears simultaneously in six intertwining and freely shifted meanings:

Nature appears as an original state (e.g., *First and Second Discourse*), as untamed animal appetites without religious or moral reasonings (e.g., *Second Discourse*), as matter and force (e.g., *Emile*), as uniform laws of motion (*Emile*), as that which is not made by humans (e.g. *First Discourse*), and as those potentials or dispositions that are revealed a posteriori by institutions Man founds (e.g., *The Social Contract*). (Baker 2001, p. 233)

According to Baker, this ambiguity allows Rousseau to write about the education of Emile simultaneously in favor of and against civil society; that is, within political logic as well as within the logic of negative pedagogy that retains the voice of nature. Such a complication of the meaning of nature *de facto* leads to its “semantic clearing”, it turns the concept of nature into an empty signifier. As Laclau says, such rhetorical transformations of particular terms into empty signifiers make it possible, in political constructions of identity, to fasten the discourse, including its contradictory claims, with a figure vague enough to provide for its totality. Rhetoric, therefore, plays an ontological role here: it is indispensable in the construction of identity.

To summarize the above section, the contradiction between the affirmation of human nature and the necessity of establishing a social order initiates a number of strategies of constructing discursive coherence and, with regard to the intent expressed in texts, of constructing an integral identity (totality) of the social. First, the above leads to a multiplication of the meanings of the concept of nature, to the extent that the original meaning of nature, as that which is inborn, is diluted and receives the status of an empty signifier. Second, the loosening of the meaning of the concept makes it possible to look for nature also within social constructions, which results in additional complications.<sup>2</sup> Third, nature is given an ethical quality: everything is good as it leave the hands of the Author of things. In the *Profession of Faith of the Savoyard Vicar* one finds the figure of the Author who speaks not through holy books and churches, but through nature itself. In a way, God is identified with nature here.<sup>3</sup> Simultaneously, human nature requires “denatur-

<sup>2</sup> This issue is discussed in Szkudlarek, 2005

<sup>3</sup> This is an example of copular metaphor, as identified by Carusi, op.cit. If that which exists independently of human creations (i.e.nature) is created by God, it is good. Nature is thus identified with goodness (Carusi calls it a movement of *identification* within the metaphor). Next, if God

ation” in order to raise a social being. This is a transformation of the total, a passage from the totality (integrity and singularity) of the individual to the totality, integrity and singularity of the society, regarded as a “body politic,” “moral and collective body,” and “public person” (Em. V; SC). Simultaneously—regarding the vision of a natural religion presented by the *Vicar...*—the process should be perceived as a profanation of the divine. It seems obvious that such transformation of the bodies and souls of integral individuals cannot be easily described neither in ethical nor logical terms, nor can they be easily implemented without some form of making its internal contradictions invisible.

An analysis of the rhetoric of totality (identity, singularity) transformation requires an identification of its supportive rhetorics of sacralization and profanation. Particularly, however, it appears to be possible when two semantic fields are identified within Rousseau’s texts, fields that, following Laclau, will be regarded as the ontic and the ontological layer. As they are mutually entangled and the argument constantly passes between their registers, they prove difficult to be distinguished clearly. Generally speaking, the ontic regards direct experience (e.g., the educational experience of Emile, the customs of Polish public life, etc.), while the ontological encompasses the process of constructing such experience, and in a broad sense, the very constructibility of the social and individual world. Constructing assumes not the form of direct interference with the contents of individual and social experience, but that of the shaping of the very conditions of possibility of their occurrence and transformation. The shaping must be conducted in a way that would be invisible to the eyes of individuals and societies. Therefore, Rousseau writes as if two mutually entwined texts in one, and that encompasses all mentioned publications. The first text is about what is to be visible to individuals and societies, what is the content of their direct experience. The second text addresses the actors (teachers and politicians) who are to steer this experience and lead towards the transformation of individuals from natural into social beings, from a collective deprived of identity into a conscious nation, or from a loose collection of individuals into a contractual soci-

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is good, and if nature is identified with goodness, then God is present in nature (in Carusi’s terms, this is a movement of *grounding* within the metaphor). The reflective character of these movements stabilizes the connections between the elements of the metaphor, and it thus creates a strong, quasi-conceptual structure capable of binding the whole construction of Rousseau’s text. It does not mean that the figure gains a logical precision (i.e. that it can be defined precisely); on the contrary, it remains a metaphor, or, in Jacques Derrida’s terms, an undecidable. One can identify such a series of metaphors and metonymic displacements as constitutive of Rousseau’s theology, which, maintaining its deistic character, gets very close to pantheism. Further connections that expand this chain with the notions of the child and the nation (both of them are linked to nature by their reference to birth, *natus*) lead to the sacralization of both these figures (see further in this text).

ety, a body politic driven by a common will. That second layer is often accompanied by extensive commentaries regarding the means of concealing the character of the actions responsible for such transformations. Therefore, if the primal natural form of totality (an autonomous, individual subject, but also a nation in its “natural” ancient form) is presented “in the light” (it is good, authentic, available to itself in a direct manner), the other—the social and the national totality—emerges invisibly to such natural beings. What complicates the clarity of this dichotomy is that the “appearing in light” of the natural sometimes requires political and educational action taking place in darkness—i.e., the effort of institutions established “according to nature” of that which is yet to appear. An example is *Emile*, where the silent work of education is based on human nature, while this nature will only reveal itself *a posteriori* (see the last variant of nature in Baker’s typology), when the boy gains maturity. Here we reach out towards the ontological: the very process of constructing individuals and societies and the conditions of possibility of that constructing. The requirement of the process is intervention from teachers and legislators, and a condition is that the intervention must be concealed.

In sum, constructing autonomous subjects (Em) and social totalities (SC, GoP) are accomplished with the use of *topoi*, strategies, and figures shaped by oppositions: the total and the particular, sacralization and profanation, visibility and invisibility. Let me now discuss the rules of the sacralization and profanation game.

### **Dimensions of sanctity, the construction of the invisible, and the genealogy of pedagogic guilt**

As mentioned previously, the divine genesis of goodness, included in the opening words of *Emile*, is identified with a naturalist genesis. Identifying God with nature is a common practice within eighteenth-century culture, and Rousseau is no exception in this matter. As Fritz Osterwalder (2012) notices, Rousseau’s pedagogy was inspired by the Jansenists (an unorthodox doctrine of the Cistercians of Port Royale that was eventually banned by the Vatican) and the tradition of Protestant piety. In Rousseau’s natural religion (*Confession of Faith ...*), nature is the “book of the Author of things” and reflects his will. How can this be coherent with manipulating children, who constitute the most natural, and therefore the most divine version of a human being, and with manipulating nations, also believed to be “natural”<sup>4</sup>? Politics and education within this context should be regarded as ges-

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<sup>4</sup> Both concepts, “nation” and “nature”, are derived from “natus”, “born”.

tures of profanation. The explanation provided by Agamben (2007) proves helpful in understanding this matter: profanation means returning something to public use, returning to the common people (the profane) what was excluded from the world as sacred and taboo. Education and politics serve not only as denaturation, but also as desacralization of the human and of society.<sup>5</sup> Both gestures are fundamentally significant for the modernization of the world, which according to the well-known Weberian diagnosis requires disenchantment.

However, the issue is more complex. The sacral dimension is assigned both to the figure of the child and to the teacher; both to the nation and to the legislator who manipulates its construction. Within the gestures of distributing divinity, the distinction between the ontic and the ontological aspect of theory becomes apparent in a vivid form. With utmost clarity, Rousseau presents it in *The Social Contract*:

In order to discover the rules of society best suited to nations, a superior intelligence beholding all the passions of men without experiencing any of them would be needed. This intelligence would have to be wholly unrelated to our nature, while knowing it through and through; its happiness would have to be independent of us, and yet ready to occupy itself with ours; and lastly, it would have, in the march of time, to look forward to a distant glory, and, working in one century, to be able to enjoy in the next.<sup>1</sup> It would take gods to give men laws. (Rousseau 1923, 61)

The use of the conditional (“It would take gods”, therefore, we do not have gods, we cannot employ them for the task at hand) suggests that the divine action of establishing a society must be turned into a purely human strategy. The human legislator will profane the work of gods, but simultaneously, by the very same gesture, he will be deified. The task of the legislator is to lead society into a state where the will of individuals is fused into one common will of a body politic. The practical form of such a desired society is not difficult to imagine, and Rousseau carefully describes the procedures of electing representatives, passing laws, the rules of voting, etc. Where the divine force is needed is the creation of ontological conditions of possibility regarding the establishment of such a society, the creation of the possibility of establishing the body politic. Rousseau describes the issue as follows:

At once, in place of the individual personality of each contracting party, this act of

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<sup>5</sup> According to Kevin Inston (2010), Rousseau’s idea of the decline of society caused by the progress in civilization disrupts its connection with nature and thus opens space for the operation of modern politics. No longer is the social seen as determined by its natural or godly origins, and it thus can be – and must be – subject to human constructions. Thus denatured, the social is open to projects similar to those of radical democracy, as propagated by Mouffe and Laclau.



association creates a moral and collective body, composed of as many members as the assembly contains votes, and receiving from this act its unity, its common identity, its life and its will. This public person, so formed by the union of all other persons, formerly took the name of city, and now takes that of Republic or body politic.... (Rousseau 1923, p. 44)

Assuming the natural individualism of men, one can imagine that such voluntary renouncement of individual autonomy would be unthinkable without previously having established a certain desire for community. Exactly here, the necessity of quasi-divine intervention occurs. Writing on the types of laws necessary for the functioning of a republican society, Rousseau supplements the basic types, i.e., the political, the civil, and the criminal, with a fourth category, a category not subject to legal regulation, neither controlled, nor recognized clearly by citizens.

Along with these three kinds of law goes a fourth, most important of all, which is not graven on tablets of marble or brass, but on the hearts of the citizens. This forms the real constitution of the State, takes on every day new powers, when other laws decay or die out, restores them or takes their place, keeps a people in the ways in which it was meant to go, and insensibly replaces authority by the force of habit. I am speaking of morality, of custom, above all of public opinion; a power unknown to political thinkers, on which none the less success in everything else depends. With this the great legislator concerns himself in secret, though he seems to confine himself to particular regulations; for these are only the arc of the arch, while manners and morals, slower to arise, form in the end its immovable keystone. Rousseau 1923, 72

Established customs, habits and opinions constitute the fundamental condition of a functioning republican society. They are not natural, however, in terms of their self-generation. They are actively formed by the superhuman legislator, but the process occurs in secret, “insensibly”, invisibly to people subject to the formation process. This is a very good example of constructing the invisibility of what constitutes a real power. It is an important aspect of the theoretical reconstruction proposed here, firmly binding the vision of Rousseau to the theories of radical democracy of Laclau and Mouffe (Inston 2010), simultaneously confirming Laclau’s statement about the ontological role of rhetoric. In short, the ontological foundations of the political order are not created in rational public debate. Such debate is only possible if there is a certain amount of shared beliefs (as says Rousseau) and, as demonstrated by Laclau, on the condition of creating rhetorical figures of social totality. The foundations of totality (identity) cannot be established rationally; they are not constituted by any universal logic of historical reason, similar to those of Hegel or Marx. The discursive strategy proposed by Rousseau, paradoxical, referring to emotions (the foundation of personal ethics and the social order are located “in the hearts”), and saturated with rhetorical figures, appears to be a powerful

instrument for constructing social realities; in this sense, it is strictly political, also in its pedagogical aspects.

One should remind that the manipulatory activity of divine teachers and legislator is conducted on subjects also regarded as sacred. The classic Roman saying *vox populi vox dei* is immediately recalled by Rousseau. The object of the teacher's influence is a natural, therefore good, therefore divine child. *Deus sive natura*, a Spinozian identification of God and nature, is within the canon of eighteenth-century culture, and it is clearly reflected in Rousseau's concept of natural religion. To complete the juxtaposition, one should add that the actions of Emile's teacher are developed in absolute symmetry with the actions of the legislator. Not only *The Social Contract*, but also Rousseau's pedagogical treatise is filled with prescriptions regarding the creation of invisibility. Instead of direct interference with the behavior and reasoning of a child, numerous procedures are discussed aiming at a demiurgic creation of the world of a child, i.e., creating an environment in which a child will acquire "natural" identity-shaping experiences. Starting with shaping himself as an educator, by taking the child to a rural environment, ending with hundreds of meticulous prescriptions regarding the organization of the conditions of possibility of an educational experience, the educator places himself in the role of the creator of the world that is "naturally" experienced by the child.

The dilemma highlighted in the opening sentence of *The Social Contract*—how to create a social order and simultaneously retain the freedom of individuals—is solved by means of replacing direct intervention into educational and political experience with silently shaping the conditions of such experiences. It is apparent that individual freedom in the process of creating an order is limited to actions and choices within an already established horizon of experience, ensured by unified customs, morality, and public opinion. To accomplish such an endeavor, the educator and the legislator divide themselves into a divine and invisible demiurge – and their own appearance visible to the child and the citizen. As divine, the educator meticulously creates the world of human life, starting his work long before the appearance of the child (an educator must earn the recognition and respect of others, in order for the child to hear from others that trusting the teacher is essential; I will return to this notion when I discuss the pedagogical construction of time) and constantly "supplying" the world with objects that will constitute the slowly provided experience. As a profane person, a man among men, the teacher arrives in the world of his creation now as a passive, non-interfering, and benevolent protector, companion and spectator, sporadically answering the questions of the child that were inspired by his previous activity, divinely imperceptible to the child's eyes.

Take the opposite course with your pupil; let him always think he is master while you are really master. There is no subjection so complete as that which preserves the forms of freedom; it is thus that the will itself is taken captive. Is not this poor child, without knowledge, strength, or wisdom, entirely at your mercy? Are you not master of his whole environment so far as it affects him? Cannot you make of him what you please? His work and play, his pleasure and pain, are they not, unknown to him, under your control? No doubt he ought only to do what he wants, but he ought to want to do nothing but what you want him to do. He should never take a step you have not foreseen, nor utter a word you could not foretell. (Rousseau 1921, p. 80)

The pedagogical strategy assumed by Rousseau, later known as the shaping of the educational environment, is because of its location within the ontological layer (the layer of creating the conditions for the possibility of human action and experience) identical to the strategy designed for the legislator. It is a strategy of imitating the divine (Osterwalder op.cit.; Scott 1994)

However, what does it mean that a divine being is secretly manipulating the similarly divine? This may point to a mixture, a conflict, or a hierarchy of deities. The relation may likewise be a reflection of a dual figure of God, as presented in Genesis and some elements of the gnostic tradition. This theme, in a version borrowed from John Caputo, appears in a book by Gert Biesta (2013) dedicated to the risk of education. Caputo remarks that the Book of Genesis speaks of a double-natured God, or of two gods (one should add that there may actually be three gods if we include Satan, which would be appropriate regarding the triadic alignments offered by Hegel<sup>6</sup>). The first deity is called Elohim (this is not a name; primarily it was a plural word for gods or, in general, divinity; within later tradition the word was subject to “monotheization”<sup>7</sup>) and appears in the story regarding the creation of the world. According to Biesta (who follows Caputo here), this is the God of Animation, life-breathing and inspiring that which is. According to the Genesis translation, referred to by Caputo, Earth (although “empty”), waters, and wind already exist in the world. The divine breath animates them and provides them with form. The moment of God’s decision that the effect of his actions is satisfactory indicates that the actions might have been a failure, that divinity (Elohim) is not certainty. In the words of Caputo, we are witnesses to the “beautiful risk of creation.” The second God, or the second layer of divinity present within Genesis, is called Yahweh (again, not a name, as it denotes the one who is). Yahweh establishes the rules of human functioning in paradise, establishes a forbidden place, super-

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<sup>6</sup> I owe this idea to Maria Mendel.

<sup>7</sup> For a more systematic account on the emptiness of the names of God see the essay by Laclau, in Laclau 2014.

vises the execution of the prohibition, and finally exiles the humans from paradise. Yahweh is the God of Law, of testing men and women regarding the accordance of their behavior with the imposed norm, of punishing their transgression, and he is also the God of Exile. Biesta relates these acts of the divinity to their embodiment in the educator (one should remind that the same applies to politicians). The actions that shape the ontological conditions of the possibility of the emergence of a social man and of a social body, which create nothing in a physical sense, but reorganize the given environment, precede the coming of men that will be subject to these conditions. The actions take place at an ontological level (creating the conditions of the everyday, “ontic” functioning) and they are laden with unavoidable risk. There is no certainty regarding how people, who are after all free, would behave under such conditions. This ontological animation, and therefore the very constructibility of the experienced world, is unrecognizable up to the point of developing a reflexive self-consciousness when an opportunity for a retrospective and analytic overview of own experience occurs. A moment of such a conscious recognition is present in Book V of Rousseau’s pedagogical treatise, when Emile, at the brink of maturity, returns from a journey that is supposed to confront his education with the complexity of the outside world. When asked by the teacher about the results of his journeys and his resulting decisions, he replies: “What decision have I come to? I have decided to be what you made me” (p.390). Emile has become aware that his experience was not gained naturally, but controlled by the teacher. However, as he was himself shaped by that experience, he had no choice but to accept it.<sup>8</sup>

The directly visible actions of the educator and the legislator, taking place within the ontic dimension, in “that which is” and is perceptible to individuals subjected to such actions, have a seemingly reactive character, as if teachers and politicians simply responded given situations. The educator as if “merely reacts” to Emile’s questions, but the real source of the child’s questions is not his spontaneity, but the scene previously created by the educator. Along with this distribution of visibility and invisibility, the figures of the educator and the legislator are divided into divine creators of the ontological conditions in which individual and social

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<sup>8</sup> This episode is very close to the figure of “grounding the foundation” in the Hegelian dialectic of identity (Hegel 2010). The ground for Emile’s identity is that which occurred to have shaped him, on which that which he is has accidentally grown. As Slavoj Žižek (1994) notices, this is a retroactive determination of identity: from what one currently is, to the roots of that which one has become, and it is the identification (or invention) of those roots that gives one’s identity the grounding, and thus its “solid” foundation. In spite of the controversy between Žižek and Laclau, as well as of Laclau’s (2005) critique of Hegel, this is precisely what Laclau says about the direction of identity construction.

experience will be acquired, and fellow humans directly normalizing and directing the process of experience, supported by human authority and respect. This second, ontic layer of their work is a reflection of the work of Jahweh.

Let us return to the previously posed question regarding the meaning and the results of the divine manipulation of divine beings: that is, children and nations deified by godly nature being manipulated by self-deifying teachers and politicians. The issue seems irresolvable. The conflict is probably related to educational guilt, resulting from a sense of the highest impropriety in directly interfering in the integrity of a child, from the fear of violating it and assuming a position of direct dominance. Simultaneously, as educators we should educate, initiate intervention, and assume responsibility. The tension between the (practical) necessity and the (moral) impossibility of intervention only increases the distinction between the visible and the invisible, it further divides them to such a degree that manipulation becomes invisible for the intervening and renders the very division between the visible and invisible inconspicuous.

The issue can be best explicated by negation. We can illustrate the possible proceeding of divine intervention into the divinity of the child, deprived of veils and impossibilities, with a painting by Max Ernst (1926). The painting entitled "The Blessed Virgin Chastises the Infant Jesus Before Three Witnesses: A.B., P.E and the Artist," painted in 1926 in a surrealistically "twisted" convention drawn from Renaissance painting typical of Catholic icons, presents Mary vigorously chastising the infant Jesus on her lap. A golden halo lies at her feet, probably from the infant's head. The picture triggered a scandal and was removed from the exhibition following the intervention of the Bishop of Cologne. An attempt to answer the reasons for the outrage is crucial for understanding the game of deification and profanation discussed here. The corporal punishment aspect seems to be of little concern, as it does not seem contradictory to the established interpretation of Catholic education, and the figure of Mary punishing the baby (obviously out of care for the child's future) could very well legitimize Catholic family education. The cause of the unrest seems to be the impossibility of combining, within an act of educational intervention, the two figures of divinity: the figures of the plenitude of goodness and the plenitude of power. Executing the divine right to control, as a result of the authority of the normative God figure taken from Caputo's reconstruction, must imply the profanation of Jesus. Retaining the inviolability of Jesus must necessarily imply helplessness and a limitation of Mary's power. Simply put, direct intervention regarding a child considered a deity appears impossible, particularly when the educator is also equipped with divine features of love and authority. The combination similar to the depiction in Ernst's painting must be

classed as blasphemous. Perhaps this is why the Catholic doctrine is often tempted to incline towards admitting natural sanctity exclusively to unborn, “conceived” children, to a pure human potentiality, while simultaneously retaining an authoritarian form of education (including the right to corporal punishment) for an already-born child. In terms of a logically consistent treatment of the sanctity of the life of a child, only the strategies of invisible influence remain, influence leading to the taming of a child’s will by holding power over “all that surrounds it.” Within child-centered education, similar to the modern society of control and discipline, direct intervention must be replaced by the art of architecture, staging, props and provocation. Additionally, the art described must reorganize the structure of time.

## **Constructions of temporality**

The categories of time are an important element in educational literature, unimaginable without terms such as development, latency, acceleration, accomplishing aims, the transmission of cultural legacy, preparation for future social roles, life-long learning, etc. All such concepts are rooted in a modern, linear concept of time. Pedagogy is eager to refer to the past and the future and remains uneasy regarding the present, i.e., reasoning relating to “the here and now” in education (Starego 2016). The deficit of the educational present is clearly recognized; substantial critique has been offered regarding the temporal structure of education, which results in speculation regarding the possibility of a non-instrumental, “future-free” education, at least concerning the planned future, a future presupposed as the aim of education (Biesta 2014, Masschelein and Simons 2013, Bingham and Biesta 2010, Lewis 2013). The philosophy of Jacques Rancière (1991) has proved to be one of the most significant inspirations for such pursuits, particularly his critique of French education reforms inspired by Pierre Bourdieu’s theories which attempted to eliminate social inequality. As noted by Rancière, if inequality is presupposed at a point of departure, the educational activity aiming to abolish that will inevitably multiply inequality, merely transforming its forms; the dream of emancipation will never be achieved. The only possibility to overcome this impasse is a radical assumption of equality in the here and now and action according to this assumption (which Rancière refers to as verification). In reference to the issue of time, the idea of equality is transferred from the domain of aims (always remote and receding) into that of presuppositions, conditions of educational action. In this context, Biesta (2013) poses a direct question whether one can take “time out” from the repertoire of educational concepts, and whether one can consider education

without a future perspective. Some scholars are skeptical of such proposals, claiming that education has always served and will serve certain externally formulated aims. Currently, these aims are shaped by the economy (education in relation to the employment market or to economic innovation) and politics (e.g., education for democracy, for a multicultural society, etc.). Biesta responds to such critique by differentiating instrumental components within the concept of education (such as socialization and acquiring qualification, which are not specific to education and may appear independently of education) and the component of subjectification, which resides beyond the logic of instrumentality (as it is impossible to plan, subjectification “occurs” as a result of teaching focused on a particular object) as well as beyond the logic of time management (Biesta 2014)

Referring to Rancière’s counterfactual assumption regarding the equality of intelligence (“anyone can learn anything”, “anybody can teach anybody”), critics pose the question whether one can ground educational actions on unfounded premises. We need to consider this issue, as it obviously touches an essential aspect of the educational discourse.

One should note that neither Rancière, nor Joseph Jacotot (whose teaching experience is the model of radical equity for Rancière), nor the contemporary theorists who perceive these ideas as an alternative to the current subjection of education to the economy and current politics, are exceptional in a historical perspective. Moreover, one should consider if radical, counterfactual assumptions (like Rancière’s view of equality), which Charles Bingham<sup>4</sup> (2010) calls presumptive tautologies, are not by accident the condition of education, however education is conceived. One should recall that for Herbart, educability (*Bildsamkeit*) is the principal term of educational theory. In other words, while conducting educational activities, one must assume that people can be educated, and we continue to do so despite constant failures and against popular conceptions of the natural determination or divine predestination of human life. In order to educate people, we must assume that they are not determined by natural conditions, divine plans or, which is significant in the historical context, their inherited social statuses. At the outset of the modern project of education, the presumption of universal educability must have been scandalous: being an “educated man” had been an elite prerogative, and accepting such a presumption during the construction of the premises of public education must have seemed unwise and ominous. The case of Rousseau is even more explicit in this respect: his statement about the natural goodness of men is constantly questioned by experience. As contradictory to the doctrine of original sin and the role of baptism in directing humans towards the path of good, the statement was also regarded as scandalous in religious terms. However, in or-

der to make an attempt to create a good society by non-violent means, one had to assume that the individuals constitutive of such a society are “good by nature.” The assumption makes it possible to solve the issue of constructing a good society by people raised in a bad society, in spite of the existing authorities and institutions. Isolating a young generation from the influence of the bad world, and leaving it in a nature-determined environment are believed crucial for the emergence of people free and strong enough to be able to reach an agreement regarding a social contract. Persistence in assuming the natural goodness and educability of individuals had a political context. The time of Rousseau was a time of imminent revolution; the time of Herbart was a time of post-revolutionary dread. There was no doubt that the social world had to change. Education (including public education) appeared to be an alternative to mass bloodshed. One had to assume that it was possible.

As seen in the works of Rousseau, at the level of theoretical constructions, such presumptive tautologies result in the entangling of structures of argumentation, which often become circular. For example, Rousseau claims that nations become themselves (which may be read: acquire, or regain their nature) when formed by institutions organized according to their nature (GoP). The attempts at tackling such tautologies in those places of theory where linear construction of rational and, particularly, instrumental argumentation is necessary, activate rhetorical strategies (mentioned above) of constructing coherence, e.g., by limiting the visibility of the designed action, *inter alia* by placing them in the past of the projected educational experience. A particular form of temporality arrives here, specific to the educational theories and strategies (and they are transferred to the realm of politics) that intend to refrain from direct interference in the “naturally good” (or even holy or venerable) bodies of subjects and sovereigns. As mentioned in the introduction, I call this strategy “temporal encroachment”. Let us examine the following quote:

Remember you must be a man yourself before you try to train a man; you yourself must set the pattern he shall copy. While the child is still unconscious there is time to prepare his surroundings, so that nothing shall strike his eye but what is fit for his sight. Gain the respect of every one, begin to win their hearts, so that they may try to please you. You will not be master of the child if you cannot control every one about him; and this authority will never suffice unless it rests upon respect for your goodness. (Rousseau 1921, p. 59)

Strategies of sacralization and profanation are indubitably linked to this construction of temporality. Omitting the present constitutes the construction. One must consider what rhetorical effect is caused by the omission, and how it is re-



lated to the ontological function of rhetoric within the public discourse. However, first I intend to present one additional aspect of the educational rhetoric, as it is necessary for understanding the meaning of games of omission and veiling of the present.

## The postulational rhetoric

“Teachers should...,” “the school should”—educational texts constantly employ such statements. An obligational, postulational rhetoric seems to be a dominant feature of educational discourse (Szkudlarek 2017). This rhetoric is strictly axiological. The idealistic theory of value, eagerly recalled within the pedagogical tradition, (e.g., the work of Nicolai Hartman, often cited by Sergiusz Hessen, 1997), apprehends values not as existent but rather as valid. In other words, they are the ideas determining desired but non-existent states; that which “should” exist. The postulational rhetoric recalls (and, as I attempt to demonstrate, constructs) such a perception of values; it assumes, as a presumptive tautology, the primacy of that which should be over that which is, and it leads to that primacy being “verified” in educational practice. The intensity of such statements within educational discourse is a result of the shaping of education as an axiological machine, shaping individuals and societies in something they were not. Such obligational transformation, as seen in Rousseau, affects even nature. This means negating or ignoring the present, which may lead to paradoxical results.

The use of postulational rhetoric is particularly interesting when the postulated already exists. What is the experience of a child who tries hard and yet hears “You should try hard”? Or “It would be nice if you would do the cleaning from time to time,” when the child has just done the cleaning? Such statements not only refer to what should be and ignore what is; the statements *invalidate* what is. Effort is no “effort.” Order is no “order.” The true order and true effort are located elsewhere, in a world that should be constantly pursued. Statements similar to “the truth will come” or “not yet, but we are close” (which we hear from Jarosław Kaczyński speaking in public rallies every month) are rhetorical devices, employed for the purpose of invalidating the truth which is.<sup>9</sup> The obligation of striving for that which is not constitutes an axiological pump depleting our actuality: a nihil-

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<sup>9</sup> J. Kaczyński is the leader of the ruling PiS party in Poland, and such statements are typical of his speeches in which he promises that the cause of the crash of the plane in which his brother, then the president of Poland, was killed, will soon be revealed. Rhetorically, such statements invalidate the findings of the commission who declared that the crash was an accident.

ist, in Nietzschean terms, a necrophiliac machine depriving life of meaning. The obligation may possess an existential meaning only when life is unbearable, and the only meaning is to remain in hope which will never be fulfilled, as the idealistically portrayed values, essentially, exist only in the life to come, in obligation and anticipation.

To refer this mechanism to the politics of theory, one could speak of gestures of invalidating the reality of education by a discourse axiologically oriented toward that which does not exist: toward aims, toward the future, and toward the potential awaiting to be actualized. The rhetoric of postulates joins the above-mentioned rhetoric of time, the temporal encroachments that locate educational activity in the past in order to control the future. This location constitutes a manipulation, allowing the limitation or exclusion of direct forms of educational control from the present (as in the case of Rousseau) and, therefore, establishing educational work as invisible to the educated subjects.

The search for “the educational in education” (Biesta, Bingham, Lewis, Masschelein, Säfström, and others), in the above context, must distance itself from this distinctive feature of education discourse, i.e., its axiological orientation towards that which is not yet. The authors mentioned here complement Rancière: it is not, and, in the dominant configuration of education, it will never be.

## **The return of the invisible and the question of ideology**

The rhetorical construction of the distinction between the visible and the invisible, analyzed here in the contents of particular theories, is rooted in the construction of the very foundations of educational theory. The very aim of theorizing education as action oriented towards the future, placing it in the game of existence and non-existence, of being and values, activates dozens of strategies as well as dozens of internal tactics of visibility and invisibility, differentiated regarding the features of particular cases of the universal tension, typical for modernity: that between the ideals of individual freedom and of a rational social order.

Such strategies are not only significant for theory, not only in terms of its coherence or incoherence. Moreover, all this concerns not only its direct recipients, like academics and students who are to become public school teachers. Theories are part of culture; they are bound to other texts of culture; and, particularly, they are a part of the “actualized” culture, the aspect of culture that operate as public discourse. In this discursive dimension, theories are bound to the practices of predicating and non-predicating on particular phenomena, of linguistic pragmat-

ics, and with particular social policies. They establish certain entities while not establishing others; they arrange them in particular compounds that determine probable and improbable interpretation, and possible and impossible worlds. In reference to Rancière's terminology, social theories are located among the practices of the distribution of the sensible, and, in this sense, they constitute elements of politics (and the police, in Rancière's terms), regarded as the construction of human communities.

Thus, how can one perceive the political role of the invisibility constructed in theoretical languages? To put it differently, how does one define the contribution of educational theories, as elements of public discourse, to the construction of political communities? What interests me here most lies within the logical and rhetorical structure of theory, rather than their applications, implementations within educational policies, etc.; the latter aspects of theory-policy relations are often discussed and are quite clear nowadays. In other words, the matter of concern here is politics of educational theories in the context of their specific strategies of the distribution of the sensible, of creating (and challenging – see the final paragraphs) the rules regarding the public visibility and invisibility of particular social objects and practices. Such strategies may be identified not only in texts written by Rousseau. With their obvious modifications, they were replicated and developed by Herbart, in Polish socialist theory of education, in educational approaches towards lifelong learning and the knowledge-based society (Szkudlarek 2017), and, certainly, in numerous other theoretical positions. Referring to those theories briefly, I shall focus solely on the invisibility which can be identified within the relation between theories and their social and political contexts, mainly through the scope of postulational rhetoric. Here are some brief observations regarding this matter.

Herbart postulates immersing a child in, "as it were, a fluid element", which, in a scarcely visible way, supports or delicately impedes some of the child's behavior. This description is a metaphorical explanation of discipline. Unlike the government over children (direct interference in a child's behavior), discipline encompasses unspoken intentions, in addition to physical behavior. The instance, invisible to the child, is established as a result of the internalization of direct control. Herbart's description is strikingly similar to the reconstruction of the modern disciplinary power featured in the works of Michel Foucault. If Foucault describes the process of the generation of a disciplinary society accurately (which remains unchallenged), then, when Herbart wrote his *Allgemeine Pädagogik* (General Pedagogy, first published in 1806), such a society already existed. Herbart was surrounded by practices of disciplinary control. However, Herbart does not discuss such already existing practices; according to the logic of designing desired realities, they are

postulated as if they were non-existent. This raises a question regarding the role, within a space abundant in such practices, played by a theory that disregards their existence and offers instruction as to how to establish such practices. Additionally, the metaphorical description of discipline included in *Allgemeine Paedagogik* is not simply a linguistic ornament of a precise, mostly “scientific” text; the metaphor of a fluid element is the sole available means for describing discipline. Not only does it speak of something meant to be invisible; being a metaphor, it is removed, in a methodological sense, beyond the scope of objects that are scientifically examinable in the text determined by the standards of natural sciences. The concept, essential in Herbart’s theory, thus remains vague.

The Polish pedagogy of an educating society, developed particularly in the 1970s, designed systemic models of networks of educational institutions encompassing learning subjects. The theory assumed the need for systematic influences of such institutions, coordinated by the school, for the purpose of overcoming a crisis that started with the youth revolts of the late 1960s. Interestingly, it was established at a time of an unprecedented level of state control over the processes of socialization and education, as well as of the coordination of these activities among particular institutions.<sup>10</sup> Schools, housing cooperatives, youth organizations and associations, sports clubs, factories, farms, the military, and so forth – it is impossible to describe the entirety of the conglomerate – were seen as participating in a mass “struggle for the future of the country,” coordinated by experts (educators employed in schools, but also in housing cooperatives, factories, youth clubs, military bases, etc.) on the “frontline” of education. Interestingly, the postulates of building a coordinated system of education employ the concept of an educating society taken from the sociological theories of Florian Znaniecki. In the 1920s, Znaniecki coined the category as a descriptive one; he considered all societies *to be* educating societies. In the 1970s, when the educational functions of Polish society were expanded to a vast scope and subjected to almost total institutional control, the descriptive category of an educating society was raised to the rank of an ideal, to the expected (and thus apparently non-existent in a complete form, requiring effort, struggle, and collective concentration) model of a “truly” educational, truly socialist society.

The UNESCO report prepared under the supervision of Jacques Delors (1996), the first such a clear indication of the coming “invasion” of learning, places learning in the domain of humanist values, and ascribes to learning the role of over-

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<sup>10</sup> In terms of intensity of such practices and of treating education as remedy to nearly all political problems, the “educating society” in socialist Poland in 1970s can be compared to the processes of educationalization of social problems in contemporary neoliberal societies.

coming roughly all aporias and conflicts of the contemporary world. Learning is established as the means of uniting the individual with society, the past with the future, the global with the local, the particular with the universal, etc.; the very list of oppositions serves the purpose of assuring that learning is positioned as a hegemonic, empty signifier. Simultaneously, Delors is employing a metaphor that unambiguously fits economic discourse: learning is a treasure ensuring wealth, comparable with that previously provided by estate and hard work. In other words, the value of the treasure in a literal, economic sense, metaphorically grounded in the all-encompassing pan-humanist value of abolishing barriers and impossibilities, is invested in learning, which in turn becomes morally valid capital. The silenced consequence is that becoming capital, it must, contrary to the idealist rhetoric of abolishing all contradictions, assume expropriation, the creation of fields of unawareness and of established ignorance. Nothing held in common can be regarded as capital; it would be similar to the protagonists of *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*, who after colonizing a planet select leaves as its currency. The transformation of capital into knowledge and learning follows a track of expropriation and of the creation of a class of workers deprived of intellectual property, similar to the phenomenon described by Marx (Szkudlarek 2010). A substantial literature is available documenting the current active policies of managing ignorance in a knowledge-based economy (e.g. Jessop 2007; Roberts and Armitage 2008; Proctor and Scheibinger 2008)

What seems to be the common ground of these cases of educational discourse? They have all been described in terms of postulational rhetoric (discipline, the educating society and learning are aims that should be accomplished). The consequences are similar to those described previously. Postulating a certain thing employs a twofold gesture: first, it conceals what is proliferated (massive disciplinary control of societies, proliferation of educational rationality into all spheres of social life and subordinating them to rigid institutional control, the on-going transformation of education into learning that serves the market economy). Second, it transforms the postulated into a value, which in turn impedes recognition of the negative effects of the practice sublimated as such (e.g., the systematic exclusion of vast social groups from access to significant knowledge because of its capitalization). However, this time we are not speaking of the internal rhetoric of the theoretical language of pedagogy, subordinate to the aims of constructing and maintaining the coherence of argumentation, where it cannot be constituted logically, but of the external, ontological rhetoric of public discourse. Therefore, we are speaking of the politics of theory *sensu stricto*, of the employment of theory in the fields of constructing hegemony, of creating

and maintaining particular social orders, as well as of protecting the resulting privileges and inequalities.

Can one therefore state that the modern discourse of education is a false consciousness of modern societies, a Marxian ideology?

Not fully so, but the above cases seem to support the suggestion. I shall illustrate that referring to the example of Herbart's theory and its omission of disciplinary power as identified by Foucault. In order to grasp the issue precisely, we must employ a distinction between pedagogics (like the "general pedagogy" as proposed by Herbart, i.e. the academically viable knowledge of education, or "the science of education" as the editors of the first American translation of Herbart's work called it) and pedagogism. The latter term should be regarded as an intensification of social educational practice, within social relations, particularly the disciplinary practice necessary for the process of creating, motivating, and supporting the subjective autonomy of individuals: autonomy regarded as controlling the self, which, according to Kant, Foucault, Piaget, or Hessen is a result of the internalization of external control (Szkudlarek 1995) The expansion of such practice was a result of the political and cultural turn after the Christian Reformation. The creation of a system of mass education was accomplished within this turn and within the framework of its logic. Pedagogics (educational theory) as an academic discipline, therefore, as a logically and rhetorically specific language, occurs after a religious and cultural turn, along with the institutionalization of techniques of discipline extracted from the religious sphere, craftsmanship, prisons, the military, the family, etc., and regarded as techniques of power over self, of constructing the "ego" as a rational and autonomous subject. Therefore, pedagogics would be the cultural consciousness of pedagogism, of the logic of this practice, making it possible to gather, classify, produce, systematize, and distribute descriptive and technical knowledge regarding the modern formation of the subject. However, the above-mentioned knowledge employs the subject not as a social fact, a being generated by the expanding disciplinary practices, but as a value. The discourse that employs the category of the subject as a value *postulates* disciplining individuals on their path to autonomy. Simultaneously, as is constantly apparent in theoretical debates within this discipline, it constantly wonders at the contradiction between the conscious organizing and practicing of discipline, on one hand, and treating the subject as a principal value, on the other. As demonstrated by this article, this "inconvenience" lies at the core of pedagogical discourse, seems to be its constituent, and is probably unavoidable. The wonder, often the objection, seems to permit a resolute denial and rhetorical concealment of the genetic relation between the autonomy of the subject and the heteronomy of control. Pedagogics, especially

in its humanist and emancipatory form, seems meticulously to impede an understanding of the logic of power in modern societies, thus becoming essential, or even necessary for making a fluent employment of this logic possible. Pedagogics, “the science of education”, in this aspect, is indeed ideology.

Fortunately, the issue is not as unambiguous as that, and this is for at least two reasons. First, modern power is not exercised in a top-down manner, it is not a traditionally conceived violence. Supporting its logic, which can be understood as an ideology in Marxian terms, is not identical to a forfeiture of the idea of emancipation. In other words, in the light of the theory of hegemony (Gramsci, Laclau, Mouffe), the contradiction between the freedom of a subject and the construction of society, fundamental for pedagogy and still bothersome, appears to be relative; both values are juxtaposed as antagonist and as cooperative. Therefore, the language of Rousseau, vastly influential regarding this matter, is heavily saturated with paradoxes, and often refers to rhetorical instruments. Second, one should consider the role of empty signifiers (along with negativity as a *locus* of ethics, see Laclau 2014) in creating social totalities. This issue, along with a discussion of the role of educational theory and practice in creating empty signifiers, is beyond the scope of the analyses presented here. A broader explanation regarding this topic is offered elsewhere (Szkudlarek 2007, 2011, 2013, 2017). Succinctly, pedagogical discourse, both within the layer of theory and everyday communication practice in the classroom, is excessive in relation to the ideological functions outlined here (Szkudlarek 2014). According to the above, education may be seen as a “factory of empty signifiers,” which is closely related to its axiological aspect. We should recall that values are characterized by a specific, obligational (therefore, literally unreal) form of existence. The orientation of education towards values indicates, *inter alia*, that both in theory and in practice we must attempt to define them, leading to an inevitable multiplication of their meanings. Neither within theoretical debates nor in school will categories such as subject, society, emancipation, education, value, or friendship, patriotism, wisdom, and love receive unambiguous definitions, definitions which are supposedly essential for the accomplishment of the future “mission” of education. The vigorous debates regarding “humanistically productive” subjects (What is patriotism today? Is the happiness of the individual more important than obligations towards others?) mostly result in teacher’s comments such as “you are right,” “and you are right as well,” and “that is all true, *but there is more.*” The undefinable “more,” a semantic void of that which is most significant, is the condition of the hegemonic role of empty signifiers which, in order to integrate that which is internally incoherent (as demands regarding earlier and higher-paid retirement), or that which is unrelated (as active historical policy

and the uncontrolled felling of trees), must have an imprecise common label (like a “good change”).<sup>11</sup> This aspect of the production of empty signifiers may be regarded as contributive to the construction of hegemony, and it appears as a part of the ideological aspect of pedagogy. However, the very same semantic void is the place of the appearance of the ethical (Laclau 2014): a constantly empty space for an unachievable plenitude, which makes it possible to assume a critical distance from all actualized hegemony (“That is not it! That was not what it was meant to be!”). I suggest that the intensity of our production of the undefinability of values within the process of education, both via arguments and theoretical polemics, but also by the idle talk typical of academic conferences and of the humanities classes in secondary schools, by the unending papers and essays on values, heroism, dialog, love, the devotion of fathers and the entrepreneurship of mothers, by the perpetual multiplication of millions of examples from empirical research, life practice and literary fiction, impossible to make coherent under clear-cut labels – all that intensity is essential in a political sense, in a much broader meaning than in terms of the ideological employment of a discourse concealing the structure of hegemony. Simultaneously, apart from the practice of concealing what is, impeding the understanding of social processes and legitimizing current hegemonies, education creates pools of “temporarily useless” meanings: partial, indeterminate, and semantically depleted of unequivocality; meanings currently unspent in the work of ideology, still appealing with promises of plenitude, biding their time until the currently significant passes away; meanings announcing *future* identities, and future struggles for hegemony. Referring to the classic distinction by Karl Mannheim (2002) one could say that pedagogical discourse simultaneously and meticulously creates rhetorical resources for the ideologies that legitimize what is, and for the utopias that question the *status quo*. If it is working for the future, then honestly, and probably fortunately, no one knows which one.

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<sup>11</sup> All examples given in this sentence come from the current political discourse in Poland.



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