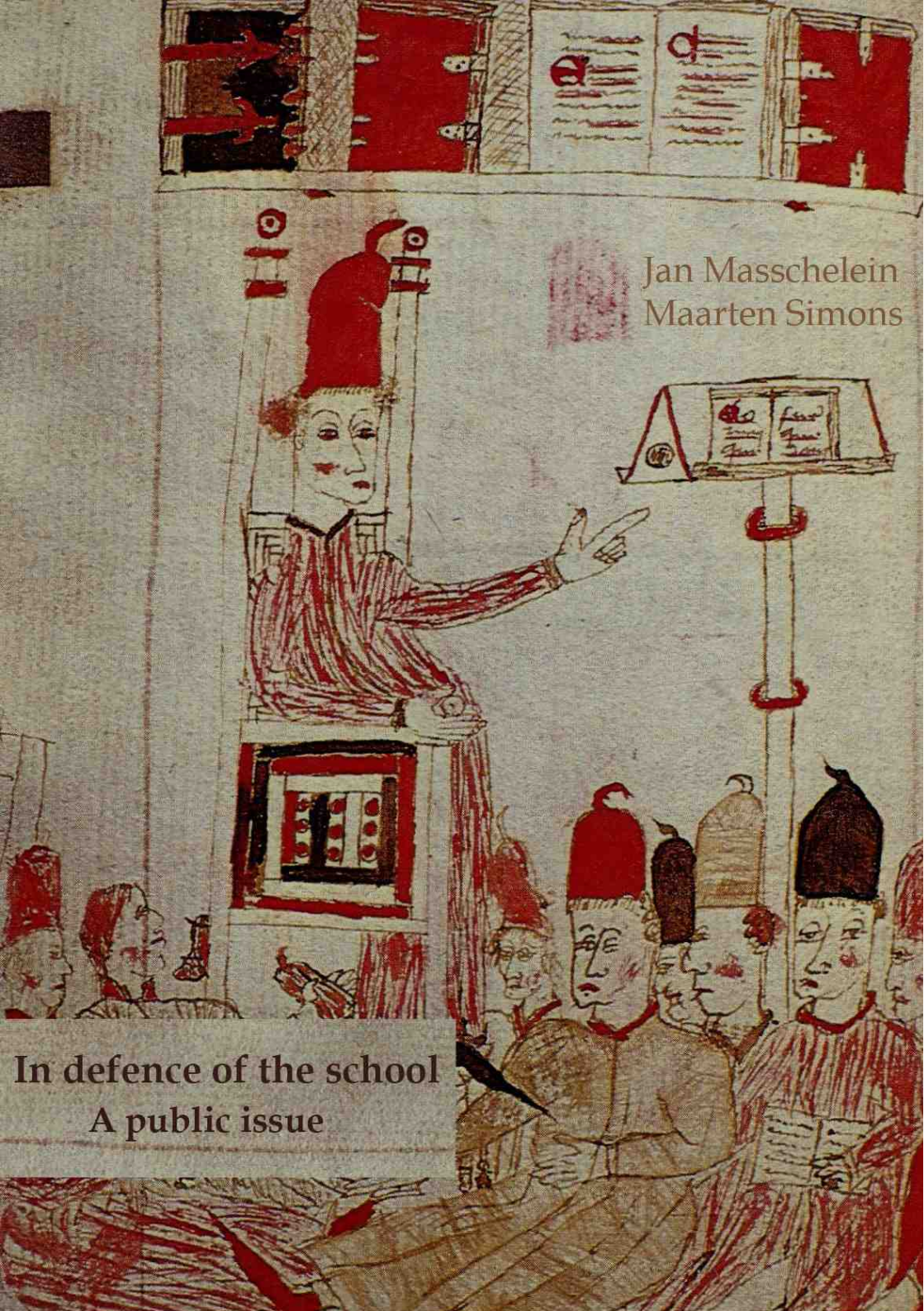

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In defence of the school

A public issue

IN DEFENCE OF THE SCHOOL
A PUBLIC ISSUE

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Translated from the Dutch by
Jack McMartin

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INTRODUCTION

Although the school has often stood as a symbol of progress and a better future, its origins are not without blemishes. Guilty of misdeeds from its inception in the Greek city-states, the school was a source of 'free time' – the most common translation of the Greek word *scholè* – that is, free time for study and practice afforded to people who had no claim to it according to the archaic order prevailing at the time. The school was thus a source of knowledge and experience made available as a 'common good'. It has been the school's good fortune throughout history to have escaped definitive censure by judge or jury or to have been robbed of its right to exist. Or rather, for a large part of history, efforts to chastise the school's transgressions were correctional: the school was something to be constantly improved and reformed. It was tolerated so long as it subjected itself to programmes of adjustment or applied itself in the service of a set of fixed (religious and political) ideals and ready-made projects (nation-building, civilising missions). Beginning in the second half of the twentieth century, however, the school's very existence was called into question. 'Radical deschoolers' – Ivan Illich is perhaps the most renowned among them – made influential pleas to dispatch the school swiftly, arguing that the roots of evil lay in scholastic education itself and that the school is criminal in its institutional logic. Embedded in the school, says Illich, is the false idea that one actually needs the school as an institution to truly learn. We learn much more and much better outside of school, he insists. But in today's era of lifelong learning and (electronic) learning environments, perhaps one is allowing the school to die a quiet death. One anticipates the school's disappearance on the grounds of its redundancy as a painfully outdated institution. The school, so the reasoning goes, no longer belongs to this day and age and must be thoroughly reformed. Every argument offered in defence of the school is discarded *a priori* as ineffective, redundant or mere conservative chatter.

We resolutely refuse to endorse the condemnation of the school. On the contrary, we advocate for its acquittal. We believe that it is precisely today – at a time when many condemn the school as maladjusted to modern reality and others even seem to want to abandon it altogether – that what the school is and does becomes clear. We also

hope to make clear that many of the allegations against the school are motivated by an age-old fear and even hatred toward one of its radical but essential characteristics: that the school provides 'free time' and transforms knowledge and skills into 'common goods', and therefore has the *potential* to give everyone, regardless of background, natural talent or aptitude, the time and space to leave their known environment, rise above themselves and renew (and thus change in unpredictable ways) the world.

The scholastic years are a source of fear for all who seek to perpetuate the old world or for those who have a clear idea of how a new or future world might look. This is particularly true of those who want to use the younger generation to keep the old world afloat or to bring a new world into existence. Such people leave nothing to chance: the school, the teaching staff, the curriculum and through them the young generation must be tamed to suit their purposes. Put differently, conservatives and progressives alike assume a certain air of justified suspicion toward scholastic education and educators – they are presumed guilty until proven otherwise. In our defence of the school, we do not go along with this kind of extortion. We will not defend the school against allegations that arise out of faulty expectations based on a fearful and mistrusting denial of what the school is really about: a society that provides time and space to renew itself, thus offering itself up in all its vulnerability. The danger of putting forward this argument today is, of course, that it is so hopelessly late in arriving. The rationale will sound like a swan song – or worse, a conservative plan to restore the past in the future. Our formulation is quite simple in this regard: the school is a historical invention, and can therefore disappear. But this also means that the school can be reinvented, and that is precisely what we see as our challenge and, as we will hopefully make clear, our responsibility today. Reinventing the school comes down to finding concrete ways in today's world to provide 'free time' and to gather young people around a 'common thing', that is, something appearing in the world that is made available to a new generation. For us, the future of the school is a public issue – or rather, with this apologia, we want to make it a public issue. For that reason, we do not assume the voice of specialised lawyers, but rather that of concerned spokesmen. In the

coming pages, we will endeavour to explain why and how we might go about reinventing the school. But first, let us briefly address some of the charges, demands and positions the school faces today.

CHARGES, DEMANDS, POSITIONS

I. Alienation

Alienation is a recurring accusation levelled against the school. This accusation has existed and continues to exist in several variants. Subjects taught in school are not 'worldly' enough. Subject matter is 'artificial'. The school does not prepare its pupils for 'real life'. For some, this means that the school does not take sufficient account of the real needs of the labour market. For others, it means that the school puts *too much* emphasis on the connection between the school and the labour market or between the school and the demands of the higher education system. These preoccupations, so critics say, render the school unable to provide young people with a broad, general education that prepares them for life as an adult. The focus on the scholastic curriculum in no way allows for an actual connection with the world as experienced by students. The school thus not only closes itself off to society, but it also closes itself off to the needs of young people. Trapped in its own sense of self-righteousness, the school is accused of being an island that does nothing (and can do nothing) but alienate young people from themselves or from their social surroundings. While moderates believe that the school itself is capable of change and thus call for more openness and pragmatism, radical voices insist that this alienation and disconnectedness is characteristic of *every* form of school education. They thus advocate for the end of the school. In any case, all of these critics start from the premise that education and learning must have clear and visible connections with the world as experienced by young people and with society as a whole. We will argue, however, that the school must suspend or decouple certain ties with students' family and social environment on the one hand and with society on the other in order to present the world to students in an interesting and engaging way.

II. Power consolidation and corruption

Critics also charge the school with being guilty of various forms of

corruption. The school, they say, abuses its power both openly and clandestinely in order to further other interests. Despite the scholastic narrative of equal opportunities for all, they say, the school facilitates subtle mechanisms that reproduce social inequality. There is no equal access and no equal treatment, and even if there were, discrimination continues to exist in the larger society and in the labour market. The school reproduces this inequality regardless of the professionalism and educational objectivity that it claims – and some would say that this is precisely *why* the school is able to reproduce inequality. The charge is quite simple: the school is at the service of capital, and all the rest is myth or lies of necessity perpetrated first and foremost in the service of economic capital. Knowledge is an economic good and there is a hierarchy of forms of knowledge that the school reproduces without all too much hesitation. But the school can also serve cultural capital: the school reproduces the polite, unpretentious, hardworking, forward-thinking and part-time pious citizen. Whether referring to business, the church or any other elite grouping, the allegation is: the school can be co-opted by those who stand to gain from the status quo, be it the maintenance of the so-called 'natural', righteous or simply least harmful order. Some critics go even further: the school's capitulation to corruption is no accident and, as such, the school is an invention of power down to the very last detail. The division of students into classes, the system of examination and especially the curriculum and the various courses of study and educational approaches – all of this is a means or a tool to perpetuate power. What makes the school perverse, according to the accusers, is that it stubbornly continues to believe in its autonomy, freedom and neutral pedagogical power of judgement, which supposedly serves to guarantee equal opportunities or justify unequal treatment. We do not deny this corruption, but we argue that the ever-present attempts at co-option and corruption occur precisely to *tame* the distinct and radical potential that is unique to the scholastic itself. From its inception in the Greek city states, school time has been time in which 'capital' (knowledge, skills, culture) is expropriated, released as a 'common good' for public use, thus existing independent of talent, ability or income. And this radical expropriation or 'making public' is difficult to tolerate for all who seek to protect *property*. This may be the

cultural elite or the older generation, which treats society as its property and thus assumes possession of young people's future.

III. Demotivation of the youth

A third indictment: the *demotivation* of the youth. The variants are numerous. Young people do not like going to school. Learning is no fun. Learning is painful. On the whole, teachers are boring and are a drain on students' enthusiasm and lust for life. The so-called popular teachers do not actually teach students anything. And the rare, inspiring teachers actually affirm the school's shortcomings: they are inspiring precisely because they succeed in transforming the classroom or the school into a challenging learning environment. The moderates will argue that it is high time to prioritise well-being at school. The goal, they say, is to find the right balance between work and play, and the ideal is and remains 'playful learning'. Boredom is deadly. It is time to do away with unengaging lessons and dull teachers. Students, so goes the current motto, should always be able to see what they learned and why, and what the value of that knowledge is. The students who ask 'why do we need to know this?' are posing a legitimate question and, in this day and age, a reaction beginning with 'Because later, when you're all grown up...' is inappropriate and even negligent. Besides entertainment value, so say the accusers, what motivates young people is information about the utility of what they are learning coupled with the ability to make their own choices about what they learn. But the school, they say, falls short in this. It deprives young people of these opportunities. The school, it is argued, is essentially conservative: it is about the teacher as a representative of the older generation, the curriculum as the crystallised expectations of society, and teaching itself as the favoured activity of the teaching staff. The school is thus the standard bearer of stagnation. Hence the oft-repeated argument: if the school is to have a future, it must devote itself to creating a learning environment that places the talents, choices and coaching needs of the learner first. The school of the future must embrace mobility and flexibility, unless, of course, it wants to end up as an exhibit in an education museum. Yet we

will argue that the school is not about well-being, and that speaking in terms of (de-)motivation is the unfortunate symptom of a school gone mad that confuses attention with therapy and generating interest with satisfying needs.

IV. Lack of effectiveness and employability

And then there is the economic tribunal's indictment: the school shows a lack of *effectiveness* and has great difficulty with *employability*. Schools simply cannot transcend the era of bureaucracy; it is not about outcomes and specific objectives but rather about rules, procedures and implementation plans. If one does not hide behind the iron hand of a desk, the professionalism of the teaching staff – and preferably the image of the educator/Sun King perched at the front of his or her classroom – continues to provide the alibi for schools to avoid reorganising themselves. Or better still, it provides the excuse to simply ignore the organisational aspects of the school altogether. Schools are blind to their output, and to the targeted organisation and coordination of their activities. Hence the accusers' diagnosis: some schools, despite overwhelming scientific evidence, fail to acknowledge that there are differences in added value between schools, that this added value is in the schools' own hands, that school management and school organisation are crucial to actualising it, and, especially, that doing so is their duty toward society. The grim conclusion: society should just as well, and without a second thought, let these schools disappear.

What output do schools produce? Learning outcomes, of course. And possibly other things that one decides to produce at school, such as well-being. The so-called responsible school allows itself to be judged on the added value it produces and, ultimately, on the extent to which it makes young people employable. Emphasis must rest squarely on the production of learning outcomes – preferably competencies – that students can apply in a work environment, but also in a social, cultural and political environment. The accusers harbour dreams of the responsible teacher willing to base his or her own value on the added value that he or she produces. But it remains difficult to voice

some of these dreams in public – for now. Which virtues, according to the accusers, do schools and teachers lack? An eye for effectiveness (achieving the goal), efficiency (achieving the goal quickly and at a low cost) and performance (achieving progressively more with progressively less). It is clear-cut for the radical accusers: all too often, a statement like 'we are a school, not a business' simply reflects a lack of business sense and entrepreneurial spirit. Indeed, when seen from a business perspective, there is no *fundamental* problem with the school. But if a non-scholastic organisation of learning trajectories were to succeed in achieving better learning outcomes and higher employability levels in a more efficient and effective way, then, of course, a business decision would have to be made, possibly resulting in the disappearance of the school. To this, we will answer that a statement such as 'the school is not a business' expresses a different responsibility: a responsibility – even love – for the young generation as a *new* generation.

V. The demand for reform and the redundancy position

In light of the charges levelled against the school, it is not surprising that many have raised the question of whether or not to radically reform it. The list of reforms is long: the school must become more student-centred, strive to develop talent, be more responsive to the labour market and the social environment so as to motivate students, attend to students' well-being, offer evidence-based education, which is more effective and can contribute to equal opportunities in a real way, etc. Such demands are being made from the perspective that the meaning of the school ultimately comes down to optimising (individual) learning performance. At the same time, we also observe that more and more people want to *reinstate* the school. These 're-schooling' movements primarily take on a restorative attitude and seek to reinstall the 'classical' or 'traditional' school. However, both movements – the reformers and the restorers – see the school primarily as functional and both are concerned with the school as an agent that contributes to a certain purpose (stimulating learning, developing talent, restoring achievement-based learning, mastering skills, passing on values, etc.). They focus exclusively on

the characteristics of this agent from the perspective of its intended purpose or pre-formulated expectations. They certainly do not think twice about what makes a school a school. They entertain the question of the school's purpose and functionality, but they ignore the question of what constitutes the quintessential school: what, *in itself*, does the school do and what purpose does it serve? These very questions will form the basis of our defence. Before we move on, however, we must briefly take note of two recent developments that constitute a rearguard action in the discussion over the school. These two developments, each in their own way, address the *redundancy* of the school.

The first development concerns the introduction of new qualification structures as guiding principles for the organisation of education in an era of lifelong and lifewide learning. When learning is reduced to the production of learning outcomes; when the production of learning outcomes simply becomes a different description for the conversion of potential into competences; when there are numerous formal and informal learning pathways and learning environments that make this process of production possible – what then is the role of the school? One possible answer might be: the school confers a quality seal; it is an institution of recognition and validation. Put differently, it confers a proof of qualification certifying learning outcomes and acquired competencies. It is the government that imparts the school this authority and legitimises this qualification function. In essence, then, the role of the school here is limited to the naked, social function that sociologists of education pointed out long ago: it delivers 'valid' diplomas. But is reducing the school to its qualification function actually any different from saying that the school is redundant unless it produces some added value? The European Qualifications Framework – which makes it possible to scale all learning outcomes according to eight qualification levels – seems to give that impression. This European framework radically decouples learning outcomes from the so-called learning process and the learning context. It unequivocally conveys the message that scholastic education has no monopoly on learning and therefore has no monopoly on qualifying the outcomes of learning pathways. It is the learning outcomes or competencies that count, not where or how one has acquired them. This radically severs the

institutional (qualification) power of scholastic education. According to this logic, any attempt by schools to continue asserting their institutional identity is no more than an expression of brute power politics exerted to perpetuate a kind of monopoly or to secure a market advantage. The Flemish qualifications framework – which is modelled on the European framework – does not (yet) go this far and makes a distinction between so-called educational qualifications and professional qualifications. A professional qualification is a complete and scaled package of competences required for the practicing of a given profession (to be acquired through education, but also elsewhere), while an educational qualification refers to a complete package of competences (learning outcomes) for participation in society or for going on to further studies (only to be acquired through education at government-recognised institutions). In this way, one might say, the institutional education lobby has hit the ball out of the park: certain qualifications remain linked to learning within an institution *and* scholastic education retains its qualification function. The question is whether this is sustainable and not just a sweetener to make the wider system easier to digest. The trade-off is that schools must sign on to a uniform classification framework from the beginning – with the same 'currency' and 'central qualification bank' – for education, the professional world and many other (formal and informal) learning environments. If scaled learning outcomes form the basis for qualifications and the school formulates its objectives in terms of learning outcomes, on what basis can the school still claim that 'going to school' has anything more to contribute? The school is reduced to one learning environment and provider of learning pathways among many others, and thus must demonstrate its value in relation to those other learning environments and pathways. The next step in this logic: the school is dispensable until it proves itself otherwise.

Before we turn to our defence of the school, it is necessary to briefly discuss yet another variant of the allegation that the school is redundant: The school, where learning is bound to time and space, is no longer needed in the digital era of virtual learning environments. A revolution fuelled mainly by new information and communication technologies is at hand, we read. These technologies make it possible to focus learning squarely on the individual learner. Learning becomes

perfectly suited to changing individual needs, say supporters. The learning process gains increased support through ongoing evaluation and monitoring. The act of learning itself becomes fun. Learning can take place anytime and anywhere. This means that the class as a communication technology that brings with it passivity, boredom, and constant letdowns (and the classroom as the core unit of the school in which a teacher brings together a group of students who are dependent on him or her for a fixed amount of time) is rendered obsolete. The classroom, so goes the argument, was best suited for a pre-digital age. Pre-digital society was relatively stable, and therefore had stable requirements of what one needed to know and be capable of doing. In this society, the school, and especially the classroom – so long as it bowed sufficiently to authority – had a self-evident role. But today, so it is said, other expectations have arisen. The school and classical education have become redundant: the entire concept of curriculum and classification based on age is a product of outdated ways of distributing knowledge and expertise. The school as a whole is determined by primitive technologies of the past. The artificial learning that we call school, so it is said, was only ever needed to teach children the things they could not otherwise learn in their natural (learning) environment. When this need disappears, so too will the institution of the school: learning becomes once again a 'natural' event, where the only thing that matters is the distinction between 'rich' and 'poor' learning environments. Adieu school!

High time, then, to present the counter-argument. It will come as no surprise that we do not give in to the extortion that would have us couch our evidence in terms of added value, learning outcomes and (educational) qualifications. We want to try to identify what makes a school a school and, in doing so, we also want to pinpoint why the school has value in and of itself and why it deserves to be preserved.

WHAT IS THE SCHOLASTIC?

σχολή (scholè): free time, rest, delay, study, discussion, class, school, school house.

It may at first sound strange to inquire into the scholastic. Is it not obvious that the school is the educational institution invented by society to introduce children (in)to the world? And is it not evident that the school attempts to equip children with the knowledge and ability peculiar to an occupation, culture or society? This equipping happens in a specific way: in a group, with teachers in front of the classroom and based on discipline and obedience. The school thus as the place where young people (according to a specific method) are provided with everything they must learn to find their place in society. Is it not obvious that learning is what takes place at school? That it is an *initiation* into knowledge and skills and a *socialisation* of young people in the culture of a society? Is this initiation and socialisation not in one way or another present in all peoples and all cultures? And is not the school simply the most economical collective form to achieve this, which becomes necessary when society reaches a certain level of complexity?

These, in any case, are common and widespread perceptions of what the school is and does. In contrasting this view, it is important to point out that the school is a specific (political) invention of the Greek *polis* and that the Greek school emerged as an encroachment on the privilege of aristocratic and military elites in ancient Greece. In the Greek school, it was no longer one's origin, race or 'nature' that justified one's belonging to the class of the good and wise. Goodness and wisdom were detached from one's origin, race and nature. The Greek school rendered inoperative the archaic connection linking one's personal markers (race, nature, origin, etc.) to the list of acceptable corresponding occupations (working the land, engaging in trade and commerce, studying and practicing). Of course, from the very beginning there were several operations to restore connections and privileges, to safeguard hierarchies and classifications, but the major and for us important act that 'makes school' is about the suspension of a so-called natural unequal order. In other words, the school provided

free time, that is, non-productive time, to those who by their birth and their place in society (their 'position') had no rightful claim to it. Or, put differently still, what the school did was to establish a time and space that was in a sense detached from the time and space of both society (Greek: *polis*) and the household (Greek: *oikos*). It was also an egalitarian time and therefore the invention of the school can be described as the democratisation of *free time*.[1]

Precisely because of that democratisation and equalisation, the privileged elite treated the school with great contempt and hostility. For the elite, or for those who were content to allow the unequal organisation of society to continue under the auspices of the natural order of things, this democratisation of free time was a thorn in the side. Hence, not only do the roots of the school lie in Greek antiquity, but so too does a kind of hatred directed at the school. Or at least the continual impulse to tame the school, that is, to restrict its potentially innovative and even revolutionary character. Put differently: even today, there seem to be attempts to stalemate the school as 'free time' between the family unit on the one hand and society and government on the other. For instance, many say that the school as an institution should be an extension of the family, that is, it should provide a second 'upbringing environment' supplementary to that provided by the family. Another variant of the taming of the school has it that the school must be functional for society, be meritocratic in its selection processes and thus bolster the labour market and deliver good citizens. What often happened and continues to happen – and we will return to this shortly – is that the quintessentially scholastic often gets expelled from school altogether. Indeed, we can read the long history of the school as a history of continually renewed efforts to rob the school of its scholastic character, that is, as attempts to 'de-school' the school – which go much further back in time than the self-proclaimed deschoolers of the 1970's

1· In this context it is interesting to note that Isocrates, who has played an important role in this invention, is said to have offered "the gift of time" to the art of rhetoric that was enclosed in political and juridical practices: "Away from the courtroom and outside the general assembly, rhetoric was no longer constrained by a sense of urgency and, in the absence of that constraint, did not have to sacrifice its artistic integrity to the contingent demands of a client's interests." Takis Poulakos (1997). *Speaking for the Polis. Isocrates' Rhetorical Education*. Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, p.70.

might realise. These attacks against the school derive from an impulse to make the free time provided by the school once again productive and thus to halt the school's democratising and equalising function. What we want to emphasise is that these tamed versions of the school (that is, the school as extended family, or the productive, aristocratic or meritocratic school) should not be confused with what being 'in school' and 'at school' is really about: free time. What we often call 'school' today is in fact (fully or partially) de-schooled school. Thus, we want to reserve the notion of the school for the invention of a specific form of free or non-productive, undefined time to which one does not otherwise have access outside the school. Time outside – at home, in the labour market – was and is often and in different ways, 'occupied'. We do not take free time to imply a kind of relaxation time in the way that it is often understood today. Indeed, relaxation time is itself transformed into productive time and becomes the raw material for its own economic sphere. Thus, relaxation is very often seen as useful in the sense that it replenishes our energy or allows us to undertake activities that lead to the acquisition of additional competencies. The leisure industry is, indicatively, one of the most important economic sectors.

The school, on the other hand, arises as the concrete materialisation and spatialisation of time that literally separates or lifts schoolchildren out of the (unequal) social and economic order (the order of the family, but also the order of society as a whole) and into the luxury of an egalitarian time. It was the Greek school that gave concrete shape to this kind of time. This means that this – and not, for instance, knowledge transfer or talent development – is the form of free time through which schoolchildren could be lifted out of their social position. It is precisely the scholastic form that allows young people to disconnect from the busy time of the household or of the *oikos* (the oiko-nomy) and the city/state or *polis* (poli-tics). The school provides the format (i.e. the particular composition of time, space and matter that makes up the scholastic) for time-made-free, and those who dwell within it literally transcend the social (economic and political) order and its associated (unequal) positions. And it is this format of free time that constitutes the common link between the school of the free Athenians and the motley collection of scholastic institutions (colleges,

secondary schools, grammar schools, technical schools, vocational schools, etc.) of our time. In what follows, we will not discuss the rich history of the format of the school in its entirety, but will instead dwell on some of its features and their functioning. Our ambition however is not to sketch out the ideal school, but an attempt to make explicit what makes a school a school, and hence different from other learning (or socialisation, initiation) environments. And again, the aim is not to safeguard an old institution, but to articulate a touchstone for a school of the future.

VI. A matter of suspension (or freeing, detaching, placing between brackets)

The alarm goes off, the clock starts ticking. A quick bowl of cereal, backpack in hand. The time between now and the toll of the school bell is filled: pulling the door shut, running to the bus stop, just in time, sardined together, counting the stops, get off, the quiet before the storm, bump into friends and slow to a walk, a minute to spare. The school as a threshold to a new world. Here, we don't run through the halls. Peace and quiet for a while. The classroom is not a quiet place; it's a place that becomes quiet, is told to be quiet. The bell reminds us of that, and the shrill voice of Mr. Smith, the math teacher, comes to the rescue for the ones with a short memory. Which is all of us. He begins his lesson with a silly anecdote, the way he always does. Today it's about some mathematical genius. As if he wants to dull the shock that awaits us on the board in the form of a cubic function. Honestly – trick or not – it works. I let myself wade into his mathematical universe, like a stranger in a world of strangers who beg to be known. A second equation on the board. An exercise. We are given the time to do it ourselves. Someone lets out a sigh, everyone starts, time's up, someone dares to ask for more time, he gives us more time. I'm finished, I look around and wonder if Mr. Smith plays teacher at home, too. His poor kids, his poor wife. Do you think he also has a real job? Time's up.

What does the first day of school call to mind? Parents reluctantly taking their children to school, sticking around that extra minute to make sure all is well, letting go. Young ones leaving the family nest. There is a threshold and that threshold is often seen today as the cause of an almost traumatic experience. Hence the plea to keep it as low as possible. But is it not so that this threshold is precisely what makes letting go possible; is it not what allows young people to enter into another world in which they can stop being 'son' or 'daughter'? How else can they leave the family, the household? Very simply, this means that the school gives people the chance (temporarily, for a short while)

to leave their past and family background behind and to become a student just like everyone else. Take, for example, the hospital school, which provides children respite, briefly though it may be, from the role of the sick patient. As the teachers at these schools attest, these schools 'work' up to the very last day, even for terminally ill patients. These schools are transformative: "Out there, they are the patient; in here they are the student. Let's let the 'being-sick' part stay out there."[2] What the school does is to make time in which the needs and routines that occupy children's daily life – in this case, a disease – can be left behind.

A similar suspension applies to both the teacher and the subject matter. Teaching, as it were, is not a serious profession. The teacher is situated partially outside society, or rather, the teacher is someone who works in a non-productive, or at least not immediately productive world. Many of the usual things required of professionals – with regard to productivity, accountability and, of course, holiday – do not apply to the teacher. One could say that being a teacher implies from the outset a kind of exemptedness or immunity. Teachers do not work to the rhythm of the productive world. Equally, the knowledge and skills learned in school do have a clear link to the world – they derive from it, but they do not coincide with it. Once knowledge and skills are brought into the school curriculum, they become subject matter and, in a way, become detached from everyday application. Of course, applications of knowledge and skills can themselves be addressed in a school setting, but only after being presented as subject matter. That knowledge and those skills are thus liberated, that is, detached from the conventional, societal uses assigned as appropriate for them. In this sense, subject matter always consists of self-detached knowledge and skills. Or put differently: the material dealt with in a school is no longer in the hands of one particular societal group or generation and there is no talk of appropriation; the material has been removed – liberated – from regular circulation.

These examples bring us to a first aspect of the scholastic: that the making of a school implies suspension. When suspension

2. 'Voortdoen met het normale, dat geeft deze kinderen kracht' ['To continue with the normal, that is what gives these children strenght'] , De Morgen, 10 September 2011, p.6 (translated by J. oMcMartin).

occurs, the requirements, tasks and roles that govern specific places and spaces such as the family, the workplace, the sports club, the pub and the hospital no longer apply. This does not imply a breaking down of these aspects, however. Suspension as we understand it here means (temporarily) rendering something inoperative, or in other words, taking it out of production, releasing it, lifting it from its normal context. It is an act of de-privatisation, that is, de-appropriation. At school, time is not dedicated to production, investment, functionality or relaxation. On the contrary, these kinds of time are relinquished. Generally speaking, we can say that scholastic time is time made free and is not productive time.

This is not to say that the suspension described above is actually operative in education today. Rather, the opposite appears to be true. Take, for example, the continual tendency to pin pupils to their social and cultural backgrounds or the push to shape teachers into the mould of a 'real professional' responsive to the demands of productivity and intent on making subject matter more (economically) relevant. As we will discuss later, these trends may stem from a fear of suspension and can be seen as an attempt to tame scholastic time.

We think that the very concrete *format* of the school can play an important role in the possibility of lifting the weight of the social order – suspension – in the interest of making *free time*. The specific form of classrooms and playgrounds presents, at the very least, the possibility of literally *becoming separated* from the time and space of the household, the society or the labour market and the laws presiding therein. This can be achieved not only through the built form of the classroom (the presence of a desk, the chalkboard, the arrangement of workbenches in such a way as to facilitate tactile interaction, etc.) but also through all sorts of methods and tools. And of course, the teacher plays an important role as well.

In this regard, Daniel Pennac, in his book *School Blues*, is particularly instructive. He emphasises this suspension by saying that the teacher (at least if he or she is successfully 'working' a classroom) draws students *into the present tense*, that is, into the here-and-now.[3]

3. Daniel Pennac (2010). *School Blues* (S. Ardizzone, trans.).London: MacLehose Press.

School Blues is a literary work in which Pennac tells of his endless misadventures as a disenchanted, unmotivated and altogether difficult student. This is followed up by an account of his (successful) career as a French teacher in the schools of the French suburbs, where he continually encountered the kind of students he once was himself. His account contains very precise observations about the ability of the school and the teacher to 'liberate' students, that is, to allow students to detach from the past (which weighs them down and defines them in terms of their [lack of] ability/talents) and from the future (which is either non-existent or predestined) and therefore to temporarily decouple their 'effect'. The school and the teacher allow young people to reflect upon themselves, detached from the context (background, intelligence, talents, etc.) that connects them to a particular place (a special learning pathway, a class for remedial students, etc.). Pennac expresses this by saying that the teacher must ensure that "an alarm goes off" every lesson. This alarm must succeed in snapping students out of what he calls "illusory thinking", that is, thinking that "imprisons them in fairy tales" and plants thoughts of incompetence in students' minds: 'I can't do anything', 'it'll all amount to nothing', 'why even try?'. This alarm also dispels inverse fairy tales: 'I have to do this', 'this is how it is supposed to be', 'that's my talent', 'this suits me' ...

> "Perhaps this is what teaching is all about: dispensing with illusory thinking, ensuring that each lesson is a wake-up call. Of course, I realise that this kind of declaration might seem exasperating to teachers lumbered with the toughest classes in the *banlieues*. And yes, these formulas may indeed appear trite from a considered sociological, political, economic, familial or cultural point of view… Still, illusory thinking plays a role which shouldn't be underestimated when it comes to the dunce's tenacity for staying buried at the bottom of his own existence. And it has always been that way, whatever his social background."[4]

> "Our 'bad students', the ones slated not to *become* anything, never

4. Daniel Pennac, pp. 142-143.

> come to school alone. What walks into the classroom is an onion: several layers of school blues – fear, worry, bitterness, anger, dissatisfaction, furious renunciation – wrapped round a shameful past, an ominous present, a future condemned. Look, here they come, their bodies in the process of *becoming* and their families in their rucksacks. The lesson can't really begin until the burden has been laid down and the onion peeled. It's hard to explain, but just one look is often enough, a kind remark, a clear, steady word from a considerate grown-up, to dissolve those blues, lighten those minds and settle those kids comfortably into the *present indicative*. Naturally, the benefits are temporary; the onion will layer itself back together outside the classroom, and we'll have to start all over again tomorrow. But that's what teaching is all about: starting over again and again until we reach the critical moment when the teacher can disappear."[5]

Thus, the school is the time and space where students can let go of all kinds of sociological, economic, familial and culture-related rules and expectations. In other words, giving form to the school – making school – has to do with a kind of suspension of the weight of these rules. A suspension, for instance, of the rules that dictate or explain why someone – and his or her whole family or group – falls on a certain rung of the social ladder. Or of the rule that says that children from housing projects or from other environments have no interest in mathematics, or that students in vocational education are put off by painting, or that sons of industrialists would rather not study cooking. What we want to emphasise is that it is through this suspension that children can appear as students, adults as teachers and socially important knowledge and skills as subject matter at school. It is this suspension and this *making* of free time that instils the scholastic with equality from the outset. This does not mean that we see the school as an organisation that ensures that everyone achieves the same knowledge and skills once the process is complete, or that they acquire all the knowledge and skills they will need. The school creates equality precisely insofar as it makes free

5. Daniel Pennac, pp. 50-51 (italics added).

time, that is to say, insofar as it succeeds in temporarily suspending or deferring the past and the future, thus creating a breach in linear time. Linear time is the time of cause and effect: 'You are this, so you have to do that', 'you can do this, so you go here', 'you will need this later in life, so this is the right choice and that is the appropriate subject matter'. Breaking through this time and logic comes down to this: the school draws young people into the present tense ("the present indicative" in Pennac's words) and frees them both of the potential burden of their past and of the potential pressure of a mapped-out (or already lost) intended future.

School as a matter of suspension not only implies the temporary interruption of (past and future) time, but also the removal of expectations, requirements, roles and duties connected to a given space outside the school. In this sense, scholastic space is open and unfixed. Scholastic space does not refer to a place of passage or transition (from past to present), nor to a space of initiation or socialisation (from the household to society). Rather, we must see the school as a sort of pure medium or middle. The school is a means without an end and a vehicle without a determined destination. Think of a swimmer attempting to cross a wide river.[6] It may seem as if he is simply swimming from one bank to another (that is, from the land of ignorance to the land of knowledge). But that would mean that the river itself means nothing, that it would be a kind of medium without dimension, an empty space, like flying through the air. Eventually, the swimmer will of course arrive at the opposite bank, but more important is the space between the banks – the middle, a place that takes in all directions. This kind of 'middle ground' has no orientation or destination but makes all orientations and directions possible. Perhaps the school is another word for this middle ground where teachers draw young people into the present.

6. Michel Serres (1997). *The Troubadour of Knowledge* (S.F. Glaser & W. Paulson, trans.). Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press.

VII. A matter of profanation
(or making something available, becoming a public or common good)

Engines and half-dismantled cars are displayed as if in a museum. But this is no car museum, it is a workshop, an atelier. A sort of garage, but without the troublesome and impatient customers. These parts have no owner, they are just there, for everyone. They are not the latest models and engines – but it's the essence that counts. Assembly and disassembly in its purest form. Maintenance and small repairs, too. We do not talk about the price. Not now, not here. Things must be done right, with an eye for detail, know-how too, and plenty of insight. Not mechanical insight, but insight into mechanics. And electronics. Only the stripped-down engine seems to be able to give that insight, like a nude model around which the teacher gathers his students. As if the thing longs to be studied, admired, but also carefully disassembled, and carefully restored. Not so much the teacher but that engine requires skill, and it is as if the engines on display have sacrificed themselves for the perfecting of those skills. They make time, give time – and the teacher ensures that students use it. To practice, with eyes, hands and mind. A skilled hand, an experienced eye, a focused mind – mechanics is in the touch. Just right, but luckily not quite. Because then there would be no more time for study and practice, and thus no time for mistakes and new insights.

A simple example: the chalkboard, the desk. Of course, for many the chalkboard and the desk are the quintessential artefacts of classical education: weapons for the disciplining of young people, architecture at the service of pure knowledge transfer, symbols of the authoritarian teacher. No doubt they often functioned that way. But do they not also say something about the quintessential school? The chalkboard that opens up the world to students, and students who literally sit down beside it. Or the teacher who, with his voice, gestures and presence, conjures something from the world in the classroom. Something not

only informative but also enlivening, brought across in such a way that a student cannot help but look and listen. These are the rather rare but always magical moments when students and teachers are carried away by the subject matter, which, simply in being said, seems to take on a voice of its own. This means, firstly, that society is in some way kept outside – the classroom door shuts and the teacher calls for silence and attention.[7] But secondly, something is allowed inside: a diagram on the board, a book on the desk, words read aloud. Students are drawn from their world and made to enter a new one. Thus, on one side of the coin there is a suspension, that is, a rendering inoperable, a liberation. On the other, there is a positive movement: the school as present tense and middle ground, a place and time for possibilities and freedom. For this, we would like to introduce the term *profanation*.[8]

A profane time and place, but also profane things, refer to something that is detached from regular use, no longer sacred or occupied by a specific meaning, and so something in the world that is both accessible to all and subject to (re)appropriating meaning. It is something, in this general (non-religious) sense, that has been defiled or expropriated; in other words, something that has become public. Knowledge, for example, but also skills that have a particular function in society, are made free and available for public use. Subject matter has precisely this profane character; knowledge and skills are actively suspended from the ways in which the older generation went about putting them to use in productive time, but this subject matter has *not yet* been appropriated by the representatives of the younger generation. Important here is that it is precisely these public things – which, being public, are thus available for free and novel use – that provide the young generation with the opportunity to experience themselves as a *new* generation. The typical scholastic experience – the experience that is made possible by the school – is exactly that confrontation with public things made available for free and novel use. It is, as it were,

7. Cornelissen, G. (2010). The public role of teaching: To keep the door closed. In M. Simons & J. Masschelein (eds.), *Rancière, Public Education and the Taming of Democracy* (pp 15-30). Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell.

8. We make an 'educational' use of that notion as elaborated 'philosophically' by Agamben: Giorgio Agamben (2007). *Profanations* (J. Fort, trans.). New York: Zone Books.

the mathematical proof taken from the world and written out on the chalkboard for all to see. Or the textbook on the desk. That chalkboard or desk is not, first and foremost, an instrument for disciplining young people, as the usual criticism has it. It is something that makes it possible for things to come into themselves, detached and freed from their regular use, and thus made publicly available. For this reason, the school always means knowledge for the sake of knowledge, and this we call *study*. The language of mathematics comes to stand on its own – its social embeddedness is suspended – and, through this, it becomes a subject of study. Likewise, we can call skills for the sake of skills *practice*. In this case, school is the time and place for study and practice – scholastic activities that can take on meaning and value in themselves. But this does not mean that school, as a sort of ivory tower or island, refers to a time or place outside society. What is dealt with in school is rooted in society, in the everyday, but transformed by the simple and profound acts of (temporary) suspension and profanation. We focus on mathematics for the sake of mathematics, on language for the sake of language, on cooking for the sake of cooking, on woodworking for the sake of the woodworking. This is how you calculate an average, this is how you conjugate in English, this is how you make soup or a door. But all of this happens separately from an immediately-to-be-achieved goal. Examples of immediate goals would be: that average has to give this customer an overview of the projected interest; you used grammatically correct English to formulate a complaint letter to your landlord; this soup needs to be delivered to Table 7; that door needs to be installed at the house on Baldwin Street. Aspects of these things can certainly be brought up in class, but then as an exercise and study. In each case, the 'economy' is what is (actively) suspended from the skills, knowledge, reasoning and objectives that penetrate it in 'normal' time.

It is important to underline, as Pennac also continually indicates, that the making of scholastic time (free time) is accompanied by the fact that at school there is always *something* on the table. As Pennac says, the school is not about meeting individual needs; that falls outside the subject matter. Rather, it is about following along during the lesson, dealing with *something*, being present for *something*. We must limit ourselves, says Pennac, to the subject matter and to the rules of the

game imposed upon us by practicing the subject matter itself. In this way, something from society is *brought into play* or *made into play.* This comes back in one of the Latin words for school, *ludus*, which also means 'game' or 'play'. In a sense, the school is indeed the *playground* of society. What the school does is to bring something into *play* or to make something into *play*. That does not mean that the school is not serious or has no rules. Quite the contrary. It means that its seriousness and rules are no longer derived from the social order and the weight of its laws, but rather from something from the world itself – a text, a mathematical expression or an action such as filing or sawing – and this something is, in one way or another, valuable. Consequently, studying a text calls for certain rules of the game and discipline, just as is the case for those engaged in writing or woodworking. Important here is that precisely by turning something into play, it is simultaneously being offered up for free and novel use. It is being unhanded and placed on the table. That is to say, something (a text, an action) is being offered up and simultaneously becomes separated from its function and significance in the social order; something that appears in and of itself, as an object of study or practice, regardless of its appropriate use (in the home or in society, outside the school). When something becomes an object of study or practice, it means that it demands our attention; it invites us to explore it and engage it, regardless of how it can be put to use.

That school is the *playground* of society is perhaps most evident in those places where something from the world of work is included without any immediate relationship to production. This we see, for instance, in technical and vocational education: working on an engine, carpentering a window frame. This is valuable, but not directly a function of productive life: the car need not be delivered; the window need not be sold. The school is the place where work is 'not real'. This means that it is transformed into an exercise that, like a *game*, is carried out for its own sake, but still requires discipline. Of course, today – where hyper-realistic learning spaces are the norm and competency-oriented education is hailed as the new direction for the school – what happens at school is often criticised as 'not real' or 'not realistic'. And this is often followed up with the additional criticism that one learns a trade better outside the school. What we need, so they say,

are not students but apprentices. Learning a trade must share a direct and immediate relationship with real-world production of the trade's intended use. For us, however, there is a substantial difference between students and apprentices – the scholastic form *does* something, and through it, practice and study is made possible. The school is not a training ground for apprentices, but the place where something – such as a text, an engine, a particular carpentry method – actually becomes separated from its proper use and thus also becomes separated from the function and meaning linking that something to the household or to society. It is this bringing into play, this *turning something into subject matter*, that is needed in order to delve into something as an object of practice and study. Shortly, we will show that turning something into play, that is, detaching something from its appropriate use, is precisely the precondition for understanding the school as initial situation; a situation in which children or young people can literally begin something new. First, however, we would like to say a few words about the way in which profanation and suspension open up the world, and this through attention and interest rather than motivation.

VIII. A matter of attention and of world (or opening up, creating interest, bringing to life, forming)

She had seen those animals often. She knew some of them by name. The cat and the dog, of course – they run around at home. She knows birds too. She could distinguish a sparrow from a tit and a blackbird from a crow. And of course all the farm animals. But she never gave it a second thought. That's just how it was. Everyone her age knew these things. It was common sense. Until that moment. A lesson with nothing but prints. No pictures, no movies. Beautiful prints that turned the classroom into a zoo, except without the cages and bars. And the voice of the teacher who commanded our attention because she let the prints speak. Birds got a beak and the beak a shape, and the shape spoke about the food: bug eaters, seed eaters, fish eaters... She was drawn into the animal kingdom, it all became real. What once seemed obvious became strange and alluring. The birds began to speak again, and she could suddenly speak about them in a new way. That some birds migrate and others stay put. That a kiwi is a bird, a flightless bird from New Zealand. That birds can go extinct. She was introduced to the dodo. And this in a classroom, with the door closed, sitting at her desk. A world she did not know. A world she had never paid much attention to. A world that appeared as if from nothing, conjured by magical prints and an enchanting voice. She did not know what surprised her most: this new world that had been revealed to her or the growing interest that she discovered in herself. It didn't matter. Walking home that day, something had changed. She had changed.

The school is repeatedly charged with being too far removed from the world. That it fails to deal with what is important in society; that it busies itself with outdated or sterile knowledge and skills; that teachers are too preoccupied with details and academic jargon. In response, we want to argue that profanation and suspension make it possible to *open up the world* at school and that it is indeed the world (and not individual learning needs or talents) that is being unlocked. Of course, critics have

a different understanding of what 'the world' is. For them, the world is a place of applicability, usability, relevance, concreteness, competence and yield. They assume that 'society', 'culture' or 'the labour market' are (and must be) the ultimate touchstones of this world. We dare to argue that these entities are, more than anything, fictional. Do we really know what is expected by 'society' (much less the so-called 'rapidly changing society') or what is truly useful? Are not the fashionable lists of competencies just chimeras that have lost every concrete link to reality? Is the insistence upon practical relevance and usefulness not deeply pretentious, misleading and even deceitful toward young people? This is not to say that competencies and practices in society or in the labour market count for nothing. But even if they form the operating instructions or orientation points, the school does something else. The school is not separate from society but it is unique in that it is the site of quintessential scholastic suspension and profanation through which the world is opened up.

In *Night Train to Lisbon*, a philosophical novel by Pascal Mercier, the teacher and protagonist, Gregory, recalls his own Greek teacher. What he writes applies just as well to a teacher of languages as it does to a teacher of mathematics, geography or woodworking:

> "The afternoon began with Greek. It was the Rector who taught them (…). He had the most beautiful Greek handwriting you could imagine; he drew the letters ceremonially, and the loops especially – as in Omega or Theta, or when pulled the Eta down – were the purest calligraphy. He loved Greek. *But he loved it in the wrong way*; thought Gregorius at the back of the classroom. His way of loving it was a conceited way. It wasn't by celebrating the words. If it had been that –Gregorius would have liked it. But when this man wrote out the most difficult verb forms, he celebrated not the *words*, but rather *himself* as one who knew them. The words thus became ornaments to him, he adorned himself with them, they turned into something like the polka-dotted bow tie he wore year in, year out. They flowed from his writing hand with the signet ring as if they too were a kind of signet ring, a conceited jewel and just as superfluous? And so, the Greek words really stopped being *Greek* words. It

> was as if the gold dust from the signet ring corroded their Greek essence that was revealed only to those who loved it for its own sake. Poetry for the Rector was like an exquisite piece of furniture, a fine wine or an elegant evening gown. Gregorius had the feeling that the Rector robbed him of the verses of Aeschylus and Sophocles with this smugness. He seemed to know nothing of Greek theater. Or rather, he knew everything about it, was often in Greece, guided educational tours there and came back with a suntan. But he didn't *understand* anything about it – even if Gregorius couldn't have said what he meant by that" [9]

This passage is particularly expressive for a number of reasons, and we will return to it elsewhere. Here, it is important to clearly indicate what precisely happens at school when it 'works' *as* a school and what is lost as a result of the selfishness and arrogance of the rector in the example. This is *ex negativo* deduced from the example: *something becomes real and comes to exist in and of itself*. Greek words become real Greek words. And although that means they cannot immediately be seen in function of their utility, it does not mean that they are superfluous (like "conceited jewels"). They come to exist in themselves; they do nothing (that is, nothing in particular), but are, in themselves, important. Language becomes real language and language becomes language in itself, just as in other lessons wood becomes real wood and numbers real numbers. These *somethings* begin to become part of our world in a real sense, they begin generating interest and begin to 'form' us (in the sense of the Dutch concept of *vorming*). The example also makes clear that this formative event not only has to do with the classroom and the teacher, but also with love (an idea to which we will return).

We thus understand formation not as a kind of auxiliary activity of the school; as something that occurs outside the actual subjects and that has to do with the values of one or another educational project. Rather, formation has to do with the orientation of students to the world as it is made to exist in the subject or in the subject matter,

9. Pascal Mercier (2007). *Night Train to Lisbon* (B. Harshav, trans.). London: Atlantic Books, pp. 39-40.

and this orientation primarily has to do with attention and interest for the world and, likewise, attention and interest for the self in relation to that world. Pennac, thinking back on his own teachers, tries to articulate what goes on during lessons:

> "All I know is that the three of them had a passion for communicating their subjects. Armed with that passion, they tracked me down in the pit of my despondency and didn't give up until I had both feet planted firmly in their lessons, which proved to be the antechambers of my life. (…) That gesture of saving a drowning person, that grip hauling you up despite your suicidal flailing, the raw, life-affirming image of a hand holding firmly on to a jacket collar is what first brings to mind when I think of them. In their presence – in their subjects – I gave birth to myself: a me who was a mathematician, a me who was an historian, a me who was a philosopher, a me who, in the space of an hour, forgot *myself* a bit, tucked myself between brackets, got rid of the me who, before encountering these teachers, had stopped me from feeling I was really there."[10]

Here, the (in this case despondent) 'I' is suspended into confrontation with the world (lifted up, put in brackets), which allows for a new 'I' in relation to that world to take shape and form. This transformation is what we want to refer to as formation. This new 'I' is first and foremost an I of experience, attention and exposure to something. However, we must be careful to distinguish formation from learning. Or, put another way, formation is typical for learning in school. Learning involves the strengthening or expanding of the *existing* I, for example, through the accumulation of skills or the expanding of one's knowledge base. Learning in this sense implies an extension of one's own life-world, adding something. The learning process remains introverted – a reinforcement or extension of the ego, and therefore a development of identity. In formation, however, this I and one's life-world are brought into constant play from the outset. Formation thus involves constantly going outside of oneself or transcending oneself - going beyond one's

10. Daniel Pennac, pp. 224-225.

own life-world by means of practice and study. It is an extroverted movement, the step following an identity crisis.[11] The I does not add to previously acquired knowledge here, and this is precisely because the I actually is in the process of being formed. The I of the student is thus being suspended, decoupled: it is a bracketed or profane I and one that can be formed, that is, can be given a specific form or shape.

We want to emphasise once again that this makes it possible for the school, insofar as it succeeds in doing so, to open up the world to the student. This literally means that something (Greek words, a piece of woodwork, etc.) is made part of our world and (in)forms the world. It informs our world in a dual sense: it forms part of the world (which we can then share) and *in*forms, that is, shares something with, the existing world (and in this way adds something to the world and widens it). When something becomes part of the world, it does not mean that it becomes an object of knowledge (something we know about the world), which is somehow added to our knowledge base, but rather that it becomes part of the world in/by which we are immediately involved, interested, intrigued, and thereby also something that becomes an *inter-esse* (something that is not our property but that is shared between us). We could say that it is no longer an (inanimate) 'object', but a (living) 'thing'.

This is literally what we see happening in the film *The Son* by the brothers Dardenne. We are confronted with a teacher at work, Olivier, a very 'ordinary' teacher that is more or less the opposite of the teacher described above by Gregorius. He succeeds in sparking an interest for woodworking in one of his utterly 'beaten' and troubled students (a youth offender convicted of murder who comes to learn an 'occupation' in the hopes of someday being able to return to society). We see how wood becomes real wood for this student and not simply something with which to make cabinets or chairs or to use for fuel in the fireplace, or, for that matter, something that leads him to an occupation that 'will get him somewhere' (even if this turns out to be the case). As before, the wood here becomes detached from its proper place; it becomes actual wood, in itself, and therefore becomes in a strong sense

11. Peter Sloterdijk (2013). *You must change your life*. (W. Hoban, trans.). Cambridge: Polity Press, pp. 187-188.

part of the world of this student. It begins to belong to his world, to what interests him and occupies him. It is something that begins to *form* him, brings about changes in him, changes the way his life and the world really appear to him and allows him to begin anew 'with' the world. Opening up the world not only means coming to know the world, but also refers to the manner in which the closed-in world – that is, the determined way in which the world is to be understood and used, or the way it actually is used – is opened up and the world itself is made open and free and thus shared and shareable, something interesting or potentially interesting: a thing of study and practice.

There remains one very important point. Insofar as the scholastic is concerned with opening up the world, attention – and not so much motivation – is of crucial importance. School is the time and place where we take special care and interest in things, or in other words, school focuses our attention on something. The school (with its teacher, school discipline, and architecture) instils the new generation with an attentiveness toward the world: things start to speak (to us). The school makes one attentive and ensures that things – detached from private uses and positions – become 'real'. They do something, they are *act*-ive. In this sense, it is not about a resource, product or object for use as part of a certain economy. It is about the magical moment when something outside of ourselves makes us think, invites us to think or makes us scratch our heads. In that magic moment, something suddenly stops being a tool or a resource and becomes a *real* thing, a thing that makes us think but also makes us study and practice. It is an event in the strong sense of the word, or, as Pennac again aptly recounts:

> "They were artists at conveying their subjects. Their lessons were feats of communication, of course, but also of knowledge mastered to the point where it almost passed for spontaneous creation. Their ease transformed each lesson into an event to be remembered. As if Miss Gi were resuscitating history, Mr. Bal rediscovering mathematics and Socrates speaking through Mr S.! They gave us lessons that were as memorable as the theorem, the peace treaty or the basic concept that constituted their subject on any particular day.

Their teaching created *events*."[12]

One might formulate this 'event' as something that makes us think, arouses our interest, makes something real and meaningful; a matter that matters. A mathematical proof, a novel, a virus, a chromosome, a block of wood or an engine – all of these things are made meaningful and interesting. This is the magical event of the school, the *movere* – the real movement – which is not to be traced back to an individual decision, choice or motivation. While motivation is a kind of personal, mental affair, interest is always something outside of ourselves, something that touches us and moves us to study, think and practice. It takes us outside of ourselves. The school becomes a time/space of the *inter-esse* – of that which is shared between us, the world in itself. At that moment, students are not individuals with specific needs who chose where they want to invest their time and energy; they are exposed to the world and invited to take an interest in it; a moment in which true *commun*-ication is possible. Without a world, there is no interest and no attention.

12. Daniel Pennac, pp. 225-226.

IX. A matter of technology (or practising, studying, discipline)

I often had to drag myself to my desk. Homework and other tasks were just sitting there waiting for me, always impatient, always the source of a constant struggle. I tried to force myself and, when necessary, entice myself to study by conjuring hell or promising myself heaven. But these inner dialogues didn't always work. I knew my own weaknesses too well. I knew which distraction could tempt me. What persuaded me to study, to practice, to get things started? To be honest, nothing and nobody. It's a strange command: you must study, you must not only take on the task *but you must also* take yourself to task. *It was not some command from my parents or teacher that brought me to see the importance of a diploma. Their warnings were at best an afterthought, nagging. I never found an explanation for this command. Not even later as a student of philosophy. The requirement to study and practice is not a hypothetical imperative – it is not linked to conditions or purposes. But it is also not a categorical imperative – it is not a requirement derived from a pure want. A wild thought: perhaps my blind spot is the blind spot of the whole of philosophy. A philosophy by and for adults. What if the school brings time and the world to life, generates curiosity and makes the experience of taking one's life into one's own hands possible, instils the drive to achieve something? It is about the birth of the pedagogical consciousness and the pedagogical imperative. A person that can become interested, that has to study and practice, to hone and shape him or herself. 'Do your best', 'keep it up', 'watch closely', 'pay attention', 'give it a try', 'begin' – these are the small gestures of a great philosophy of the school. And where does love for the school come from? Perhaps we should explain our forgetting of, and perhaps even hatred for, the school first.*

There is no curiosity and interest without the world – but this also means that curiosity and interest must be rendered *possible*, just as the world must be rendered as such, that is, presented. At this point, we enter the

technical dimension of the school (which exists parallel to the role of the teacher, to be discussed later). School and technology may at first appear to be a strange combination. Indeed, from a humanistic perspective, it is often assumed that technology is primarily of concern to the productive world and the mastering of nature and man. Self-actualisation, it is argued, takes place in the sphere of culture, of words and meanings, of content, of fundamental knowledge. Technology, on the other hand, belongs to the sphere of making and manufacturing, of the applicable, of instrumental logic. From a humanist perspective, technology is something that should be kept outside the school or, at least, something that must be carefully approached in terms of a means that enables the so-called well-formed person to reach for his or her humane ends: first, the acquiring of basic understanding and knowledge, and second, the translation of this into concrete techniques and applications. But giving form to the school, that is, stimulating interest by carefully creating and presenting the world, is inconceivable without technology.

Here we are thinking very simply of the chalkboard, chalk, pen, paper, book, but also of the desk and the chair. The architecture and spatial arrangement of the school and the classroom are also relevant. These are not tools or environments that can be freely used or that are used according to one's intentions. The student or the teacher does not automatically assume total control over them. Rather, there is always an inverse element at work: these instruments and spaces assert control over the student and teacher. In a way, the class expels the immediate environment and makes it possible for something from the world to be present. Sitting down at a desk is not only a physical state; it also calms and focuses attention: a place to sit and be at ease. The chalkboard is not only a surface on which subject matter appears in written form. Often the chalkboard keeps the teacher grounded. Step by step, a world is made to unfold before the eyes of the students. Writing out course outlines is a classic chalkboard activity. Outlines from previous lessons bring our minds back to the moment of their making – and they are typically hard to decipher for students who missed the lesson itself. These instruments are thus – for the time being – part of what we would like to call scholastic technology. But they do not stand on their own. Their working strength hangs together with an approach, a

method of application and concrete acts. Here we can speak of *teaching methods* and, more particularly, methods that both *generate interest* and *open up the world* or *present* it. Many of these teaching methods still stick in our minds as archetypes (algebra problem set, dictations, essays, class presentations, etc.).This is perhaps because these methods have such a strong scholastic character – and they are only effective as part of a scholastic technology. Here again it is useful to bring in Daniel Pennac:

> "So, dictation's reactionary? It's certainly ineffective if sloppily handled by a teacher interested only in deducting marks in order to arrive at a final score. (…) I've always thought of dictation as a head-on encounter with language. Language as sound, as story, as reasoning; language as it writes and constructs itself, meaning as clarified through meticulous correction. Because the only goal in correcting dictation is to access the text's precise meaning, the grammar's spirit, the words' richness. If the mark is meant to measure something, it is surely the distance covered by the interested parties on this journey towards understanding. (…) However great my childhood terror when dictation loomed – and God knows my teachers administered it like wealthy raiders besieging a town's poorest quarter – I was always curious about that first reading. Every dictation begins with a mystery: what's about to be read to me? Some dictations from my childhood were so beautiful that they carried on dissolving inside me like a pear drop long after I'd received my ignominious mark."[13]

Dictation, as Pennac describes it, aptly calls out two particular aspects of scholastic technology. A dictation is an event in which the world is communicated – "a head-on encounter with language" – and one that stimulates interest. A dictation is also something of a game. The text is removed from its common use and offered up to the act of writing as such, that is, to the exercise and study of language as a whole. In this sense, there is always something at stake: language is put into play

13. Daniel Pennac, p. 113-115.

and so too are the students. They occupy an initial situation – "on this journey towards understanding".

Just like any other teaching method, dictation makes explicit the place of the teacher as mediator connecting the student and the world. This encounter enables the student to leave his or her immediate life-world and enter the world of free time. In this sense, a teaching method must constantly be connected to the life-world of young people, but precisely in order to remove them from their world of experience. The rules for a dictation are clear; everyone knows what it is and how it goes. A dictation is a dictation. It is a pure teaching method. But the 'effectiveness' of scholastic teaching methods lies especially in the small – often very small – details that spark young people's curiosity, proclaim the existence of new worlds and entice students into giving themselves over to initiating something (that is, practicing and studying). This minutiae implies that curiosity can rapidly turn to insecurity, that students can refuse to play the game and that the encounter with the world can be elusive. In such a situation, the encounter with a dictation is experienced by students as a public proclamation of their incompetence or ignorance. A scholastic teaching method does not centre its focus on the incompetence or ignorance of the student. If it were to do this, a dictation would become another form of test or quiz and would place students in a position of guilt and incompetence until they prove otherwise. First and foremost, the scholastic teaching method makes the experience of doing and learning – the experience of 'I want to be able to do that or know that' – possible, ideally awakening a new dedication to practice or study. One could also call this 'self-confidence' and 'belief in oneself', but with the important addendum that, in school, this trust or faith always involves *something* (from the world). The experience is consequently a starting-point experience – an experience of being able to do something. Of course, self-doubt can set in once this experience of having been able to do something has been achieved. There is also the temptation to resign oneself to incompetence on the basis of previous failed attempts. But a successful teaching method, just as a successful dictation, entails the severing of this link with the past (and its negative experiences of

inability and ignorance), thus allowing practice to begin. This positive, scholastic experience can be described as the experience of 'not not being able to do something'. The dictation and every other teaching method reminds young people precisely of this *in so far as they make or actualise school*. The risk that an emancipatory initial experience will devolve into a surrender to incompetence exists in all scholastic techniques: time, space and material are organised to make the starting-point experience and the event of encountering possible. They enable the experience of being engaged in interesting practice and study but they do not fabricate it. The proper application of a technique does not guarantee that students will automatically give themselves over to practice and study. The register of scholastic technology is in this sense more magical than it is mechanical, more of an alchemic kind than of a chemical chain reaction.[14] But that does not mean that all of this is just a matter of blind faith or wait-and-see. It means that scholastic technologies are experimental in nature, always to be improved by trial and error, over and over again. Teaching, studying and practising are a *work*. Finding form and forming oneself takes effort and patience.

There are numerous other examples of teaching methods. Take the class presentation on an assigned or chosen theme. Not only is the moment itself important, but so too is the preparation process; it is an exercise in selection and public speaking, but also in studying and writing. Students often turn something from their own world (a hobby, for instance) into their chosen object of study. They assume the role of the teacher – but not entirely. Attentively watching the victim at the front of the room, fellow students are transformed into an audience of sitting teachers – but not entirely: it remains a game in which students themselves and something from the world are brought into play. This is also true of essay writing – is there any other term with a more scholastic connotation? Here, too, we can speak of the "head-on encounter with language", which at the same time is also a head-on encounter with one's own (writing) abilities. It is an exercise and therefore it is still partly about *doing* for the sake of doing. Once young people leave

14. Isabelle Stengers (2005). The Cosmopolitical Proposal. In: Latour, B. & P. Weibel (Eds) (2005), *Making Things Public. Atmospheres of Democracy.* (p. 994-1003) London/Cambridge/ Karlsruhe: MIT Press/ZKM.

school, they no longer have to write school essays. They do, however, have to be able to write in a wide variety of styles and on a wide variety of subjects. But at school, writing is to be practiced and the essay is possibly the foremost signifier for this total exercise. (Integrated) tests in more technical and vocational-oriented programmes are additional examples of scholastic technology. Here, of course, the application, design and making of concrete things take precedence. But technical and vocational students are also placed in that initial situation that allows them to begin with something. They give form to something while at the same time forming themselves. The productive world is set at a distance so that design, development, creation, invention and presentation become important in themselves. It is primarily an exercise in testing one's own abilities and knowledge; a scholastic technology where trying is central. Assignments, prompts and problem sets are yet another typically scholastic form of teaching method. Assignments are often presented as the ideal way to make subject matter tangible, demonstrate its applicability and thus cement it as the last step to actual, real-life application. But their scholastic function exerts an influence on something else. Assignments bring the world into the classroom but they also leave it out. They offer recognisability but at the same time they focus attention on something. And this is precisely why they are exercises. In completing assignments – and therefore in confronting something concrete – students are first and foremost confronted with themselves. The emphasis is not on solving concrete societal problems – and the pressure and expectations that come with them. On the contrary, when the boundary between scholastic assignments and concrete social problems fades, assignments are no longer exercises. At that moment, students are suddenly addressed as experts and assignments, prompts, problem sets, hypothetical questions, etc., lose their scholastic function. They no longer place students in the position to try and to practice. Or formulated more sharply: at school, there are no problems, only questions.

There are also less obvious scholastic technologies. Consider memorisation, for example. Or reciting a poem, copying a text. Mental arithmetic and multiplication tables are other examples. From the perspective of applicability, these activities are pointless. It is, of

course, possible to defend them by pointing to their handiness and efficiency: mental arithmetic is handy and efficient because your brain is always at your disposal and you need not reach immediately for the calculator. But in seeking out the significance of these scholastic technologies, it may be wise to look in another direction. Perhaps they have a chiefly *formative* significance, particularly if we take formation to mean 'forming oneself'. They then become examples of a sort of scholastic gymnastics. Human beings practice and study by means of these technologies – all of which had a long history and a prominent place in antiquity. They are basic techniques for the experienced and cultivated person endeavouring to achieve and maintain a certain level of mental strength, just as techniques in physical education hone the body in motion.[15] We can speak here of 'techniques of the self' because the students themselves – not the teacher – utilise them to place themselves in an initial situation.[16] In the final analysis, the significance of these techniques does not lie in some ultimate end – they are in a sense 'endless'. Their significance lies precisely in the very experience of *being able to begin*, which is repeated anew, again and again. In short, it is the experience of restarting so typical of the act of memorisation. It is through this repetitive motion that the self of the student takes form; the spoken and written word, but also numbers become incorporated in the student. The person becomes practised, cultivated, proficient in mental arithmetic. And of course, when formed in this way, he or she is not immediately employable for the carrying out of a single, very specific task or job but rather is prepared, in form. Calling into question the usefulness of the technologies described here also entails calling into question the value of preparation and free time.

A final scholastic technique we will discuss here is the exam. Can we conceive of the school without the exam? Probably not. But perhaps the reason for this is not to be found in the exam's qualification function. This qualification function is appropriated to the

15. See also: Joris Vlieghe (2010). *Democracy or the flesh. A research into the meaning of public education from the stand point of human Embodiment*. Doctoral dissertation KU Leuven.
16. For a history of these techniques (even if their formative and pedagogical meanings are not emphasised as much as their ethical meaning), see: Michel Foucault (2001). *L'herméneutique du sujet.* Paris: Gallimard, and Peter Sloterdijk (2013). *You must change your life* (W. Hoban, trans.).Cambridge: Polity Press.

school by the government in the name of society: accredited diplomas and qualification certificates organise the flow of students into higher education and the job market. Or school-issued certificates function as proof of the relevance of the collective time graduates spend in school, which in turn reaffirms the importance of this time. Nor is the reason to be found in the exam's normalising function. It is true that teachers collect information about each student on the basis of test results. This is mostly used to indicate the mean or the average level of standardised knowledge, which then triggers statements about the low-, average- and high-performing student and eventually 'normalising' (once test results drawn from an extended period of time from multiple exams become equated with a single, 'comprehensive' test result) statements about the underperforming, average and accelerated student. From the perspective of scholastic technologies, the exam has at least one other significance: exam preparation. Exam preparation is central and it is the effort rather than the result that counts. The (lead-up to an) exam often creates a period of being freed (from other tasks) and a space in which students can apply themselves to the subject matter in a concentrated way. In this intensive period of study and practice, preparation as such is what is on the line. The exam is thus a pedagogical tool for *exerting pressure*. The purpose of the exam is not to drive young people to despair or to celebrate students' ignorance, let alone to pit one well-prepared student against another for the sake of ranking them. The exam provides the pressure necessary to study and practice. There is an evaluation, of course, but it is often only of token significance. Not that the exam is unimportant for the teacher, let alone for the pupil. Quite the contrary. It is about the valuation of the test to which the student has submitted him or herself and bringing that test to a conclusion. It is important to reiterate that an exam is not a (one-time) test of one or another natural talent. An evaluation is not final, or rather, the possibility of a re-examination is always present, and, with it, a belief in starting over and trying again. Is a school conceivable without the ritual of the exam? There are most probably also other possible pressure-exerting pedagogic means and other ways of rounding off a scholastic career with a gesture of achievement.

A concept we have not yet mentioned in this defence of

scholastic technology is *discipline*. This too is a term that is not so warmly received in education circles today. Together with terms like *authority*, discipline belongs to a pedagogical terminology that we would prefer to put behind us. We seem to immediately link discipline to oppression, subjugation, repression, control and surveillance, compliance and obedience. Despite this, we want to re-appropriate the term by – unsurprisingly – assigning it a positive, scholastic significance and one that expresses a fundamental component of scholastic technologies. Practice and study are impossible without some form of discipline, that is, without following or abiding by a number of rules. School rules are not life rules (for living the good life) and they are not political rules (standards or laws for the order(ing) of society). And in this way they are not designed to initiate young people into a group or society by means of submission. By school rules we mean the rules specific to a given teaching method, such as dictation, but also the rules laid down by the teacher – whether explicit or implied – aimed at keeping students engaged in class. They are not rules for the sake of rules, and thus do not exact submission and obedience for the sake of obedience. These school rules serve to make it possible to present the world in an engaging way: they attempt to focus attention, minimise distraction, and maintain (or, when necessary, avoid) silence. They are also the small personal rules that guide students during study and practice. How could we write or read without these rules and forms of discipline? We therefore want to reserve the term 'discipline' for the following of or abiding to rules that help students reach that initial situation in which they can begin or maintain study and practice. Put differently, leaving one's own life-world and rising above oneself requires a sustained effort facilitated by sticking to the rules. In this sense, a scholastic technology and the rules attached to it are what make it possible for young people to become 'disciples'. This is discipline as scholastic technology – although it is clear that society and politics have gradually become interested in using this technology to subdue and tame their citizens.

Scholastic technologies, as we have described above, are by no means tools that, when used correctly, produce well-formed young people, like finished products off an assembly line. They are not technologies deployed by the old generation to manipulate the young

generation, although that danger certainly still exists – conservative and progressive reformers alike have amassed a large arsenal of scholastic technologies to serve their political imaginings. Scholastic technologies are techniques that engage young people on the one hand and present the world on the other; that is, they focus attention on something. It is only in this manner that the school is able to generate interest and thus make 'formation' possible. A scholastic technology is geared toward making free time possible. More specifically, it is a technique that enables the 'being able' itself or that makes the 'I can do this/I am able' experience possible. In this sense, it is not a technique that man applies to nature in order to manipulate nature. It is an artful technique invented by man to be applied to man, in order to allow man to exert influence upon himself, shape himself and come into his own form, as it were. In this context, there is also a need for scholastic technology: a theory of techniques with the unique potential to induce attention and interest and present or open up the world.

X. A matter of equality (or being able to begin, in-difference)

He knows them all. The statistics and the newspaper articles. Immigrants who have fallen behind even before they set foot in a school. Children of single parents – it's still a risk. The mother's diploma. Watch out! Socio-economic status; the acronym SES speaks for itself today. He knows that these are correlations, not causal relationships. They are chances and averages. He also knows that newspapers are quick to blame and name names. He knows the numbers. But he doesn't recognise his students in them. Maybe he would if he really tried, or if it all becomes too much to bear, too exhausting, or if he removes himself from the role of the teacher – and stops being himself. Stevie's having trouble in class – one of those students with a bad home situation. Naomi's making trouble; she's biding her time – waiting until she can get out and find a job, just as her brothers and sisters, her cousins and her parents did at her age. Her grandparents, too. And then there is Amir, the smart Moroccan – the exception that proves the rule. But if he allows himself to be his well-prepared self, he doesn't think in terms of statistics; he doesn't let himself get caught up in the rules, patterns and indicators. He is annoyed by the bird's eye view that insists on averaging his students and himself, his work, into a statistic. It breaks his concentration. As if someone is looking over his shoulder, forcing him to see his students and his work from another perspective. A world of puppets; social and other capital that frivolously accumulates upon itself and mercilessly reproduces inequality. In the classroom, during the lesson, that world does not exist. Naïve. But he likes to think of it that way. He can't help himself. Students deserve to be addressed by name. He stays true to his belief that being interested is not innate, and talent and intelligence cannot be assumed as starting points. These qualities tend to show themselves only later. As far as he's concerned it is about to be there for everyone and no one in particular. And that means he sometimes has to make sure that Stevie, Naomi, even Amir keep their minds on the lesson. But the lesson is not about them. It's

about the subject, calling things to attention, giving a taste, insisting on study and practice, arousing interest. In his world, there are also differences; study and practice require effort, after all. These differences have a name: Stevie, Naomi and Amir. When it comes to providing new opportunities, he clings to his naivety against the (supposed) better judgement of others. This is required of him by his subject matter and his students. Equal opportunities and social equality – these things are beyond his power. He is not a puppeteer.

That the school *temporarily* deactivates ordinary time also means that it plays a specific role in the matter of social (in)equality. In this respect, perhaps no other insight into the school has attracted more scientific scrutiny than the oft-repeated claim that the school does nothing more than perpetuate – and perhaps even strengthen – existing social inequalities. Indeed, since the 1960s, study after study has been published 'proving' that the school reproduces existing social inequalities and even creates new ones. In this sense, it becomes difficult to refute the accusation of corruption and power consolidation. In our view, this is a misrepresentation; the claim that the school reproduces social inequalities perverts and misunderstands the concept of the school as such. Indeed, there is perhaps no human invention more adept at creating equality than the school. It is exactly in (re)cognising this that the dream of social mobility, social progress and emancipation – which, in all cultures and contexts, has been rooted in the school since its invention – is nourished. (Re)cognising this function also explains our enduring fascination for the countless movies made since the birth of cinema that portray the school and particularly the teacher as agents capable of helping students escape their life-world and their (seemingly predestined) place and position in the social order. It is perhaps no coincidence that these films are nearly as popular as love stories. In a sense, as we will soon see, they actually *are* love stories. Indeed, (re) cognising this effect explains, simultaneously and conversely, much of the suspicion and even hatred directed towards the school. If the school can have such an effect, then it is also capable of thwarting and disrupting the plans that (grand)fathers and (grand)mothers have made for their (grand)sons and (grand)daughters, just as it can inhibit

and threaten the plans religious leaders and politicians (whether they be social innovators or conservatives, statesmen or revolutionaries) have for their citizens or followers. Actually, the school always already succeeds in this, despite the best efforts of fathers, mothers, religious leaders, statesmen and revolutionaries to stand in its way by using the school for their own purposes and ideals. The school, in this sense, always has to do with the experience of *potentiality*.

The elements that 'make' the school – suspension, profanation, the world, attention, discipline, technique – are connected (or certainly can be connected) to the experience of ability and possibility. Pennac was referring to this when he said that the teacher must try to bring students into "the present indicative tense" in order to free them from the weight of sociological and other dynamics that otherwise push them down into a psyche of worthlessness. Bringing them into the present tense or calling their attention to the point can bring about a situation in which this weight is suspended, creating an experience of ability or readiness in students and allowing the teacher to assume that everyone 'has the ability to…'. In other words, scholastic space arises as the space par excellence in which equality for all is verified. This equality thus becomes the starting point, an assumption that time and again is verified. The equality of each student is not a scientific position or a proven fact but a practical starting point that holds that 'everyone is capable' and thus that there are no grounds or reasons to deprive someone of the experience of ability, that is, the experience of 'being able to'.[17] This experience not only means that some*one* can detach from his or her normal position (children become students/school children), but also that some*thing* can be detached from its normal use (material becomes subject matter, that is, study material or practice material). Pennac describes the latter quite effectively. He shows that the teacher who 'makes' the school does so via a double manoeuvre: she (the teacher) says 'this is important, and I see it as my duty or responsibility to present it to you', but precisely by presenting – by making something present – she is also saying, 'and I cannot and will not tell you how to use it later on (in society)'. She frees material for use and it is precisely

17. Jacques Rancière (1991). *The Ignorant Schoolmaster: Five lessons in intellectual emancipation* (K. Ross, trans. and introduction). Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

this *freeing* that makes things *public*, present, presented, shared. As we already indicated, the school is thus a place that makes *something* into an object of study (knowledge for the sake of knowledge) and an object of practice (ability for the sake of ability). Study and practice are activities that no longer serve (a means to) an end or final purpose, but rather make new connections possible precisely because they are removed from it. This situation in which something is separated from its supposed purpose and made open to new connections is, in so many words, the *initial situation* we discussed previously. It is a situation in which one experiences the ability and possibility to speak (in a new, novel way that makes new links between words and things), to act, to see, etc.

Today, an increasingly far-reaching detection and classification apparatus has been developed in the name of securing a future for our children (and ourselves). This apparatus turns children and young people into objects of classification and intervention and lock them into their so-called individuality and mutual differences (their typical aptitude, their unique talent, their particular level of development, their limitations, their brain condition, etc.). Using the uniqueness of and mutual differences between children and young people as a starting point presumes, in one way or another, an actual inequality in ability. However, the school and the teacher that aim to keep students' minds on the lesson start from the assumption that all students have equal ability. In this assumption, the school and the teacher bring something to the table – something that becomes a 'public good' and, consequently, places everyone in an equal initial situation and provides everyone the chance to begin. For the school and the teacher, the equality of the student is a practical hypothesis – it is not a scientific certainty – which one strives to verify while teaching. Naturally, in carrying out this verification, the teacher can and will take the individual student, his or her situation and questions into consideration. But this attention to differences belongs to the realm of teaching itself and is separate from the construction of an education system based on so-called factual or natural differences and inequalities.

This does not mean that there can be no differentiation within the school. What is problematic is a differentiation imposed by society

upon the school in the name of a natural or other necessity. Specific to forms of scholastic differentiation is that they are always of an artificial character. They are scholastic conventions, not societal diktats. They are not absolute and do not predetermine students' position and opportunities. Consider the example of the most common and in some ways the most 'natural' basis for differentiation: age. This is pre-eminently a matter of convention. Naturally, it is tempting to legitimise this convention in terms of a biological and cognitive development process – the maturity – of young people. But nature does not follow the human calendar, and more importantly, the purely conventional character of the age criterion becomes clear when considering how it stands in the way of the opportunities of the student. The artificial character of scholastic distinctions is perhaps most evident in the familiar and gripping stories about the school: the story of the difficult students who persevere and succeed against all odds and advice; the story of the teacher whose single comment profoundly touches a student and keeps him or her coming to school; the student who suddenly becomes interested and rises above himself. From a statistical view, these are the non-significant outliers. But the reason why they still continue to appeal to us is because these stories express the uniqueness of the school itself. We are shaken to our senses, and we suddenly see that what we once took to be an unshakable fact or a natural given was in fact prejudice. It reminds us all that criteria, classifications and differentiations are conventions – conventions that we must continually dare to call into question. In other words, we must evaluate and perhaps redesign the way the school functions using these significant 'success story' events as a backdrop: in light of them, is it best to stick to certain types of expertise and classifications? And this in contrast to the tendency to consider success stories as statistically insignificant cases that legitimise the existing structure and conventions. We submit that the school has a duty to continue to believe in the potential of the next generation: each student, regardless of background or natural talent, has the ability to become interested in something and develop himself in a meaningful way. What happens at school in this respect is always 'unnatural' or 'unlikely'. The school goes against the 'laws of gravity' (e.g. the 'natural law' that says students from a given socio-economic status have no interest in a given subject or thing) and

refuses to legitimise differences based on students' specific 'gravity'. Not because the school, in its naivety, denies the existence of gravity, but because the school is something of a vacuum in which young people and students are given time to practice and develop. And the 'success stories' retold in countless films about schools, teachers and students continue to speak to us because they remind us all of the meaning of the school. It is a meaning related to the practical hypothesis of equality as part of the workings of the school.

XI. A matter of love
(or amateurism, passion, presence and mastery)

'Me? I'm a teacher.' And then silence. I know what that silence means: generous holidays, job security but monotony, an ideal job for people with children. Admiration, too. You have to keep at it school day after school day – and with today's youth, that's saying something. But I also sense incomprehension: who voluntarily returns to that cursed place after eighteen years of schooling, knowing that you will be taking up the role of someone that you as a student didn't always – to put it lightly – look up to? What I know now – and it's a realisation that is immune to the customary subtle and not so subtle comments – is that this is a job unlike any other. I love my profession, my students. Sometimes it is too much for me. Of course it is! At those moments, I sometimes think: if they would only pay me per hour, or pay double for overtime, triple for weekend work. But that thought is always immediately followed by this one: I don't do it for the money. Obviously. How could I? I dwell in a place where the community leaves its children behind, giving me time to do interesting things with them while their parents are being productive at home or at work. The first day of school: it's not only a special day for children and young people but also for us teachers. The day never fails to fascinate me; it triggers something, seems to bring everyone together. It is a sort of celebration with speeches and promises of all kinds, and exciting too; things are happening, never entirely under control. I am fully aware that these parents are entrusting me with their children; society trusts that I am good teacher. But I also realise that this is a fragile trust. Perhaps that explains the craving for security, quality guarantees, strict accountability, the obsessive impulse for innovation, the standards and the measurable job profiles – the professionalisation of the teacher as a drug against breaches of trust, a pill to prevent the anxiety attacks of a competitive society that insists on the maximal exploitation of talents. I realise that there is no such thing as blind trust. But I also know that measures inspired out of distrust, suspicion or fear, whether or not they be

wrapped in the rhetoric of professionalism and quality, are a sure-fire way to cure me of my love.

School as a form of free time *is made* and must *be made*. We have already pointed out that this form is created through the establishment of thresholds and rules: by scholastic time (the bell) and scholastic discipline, by closing doors but also by chalkboards, desks, books, classrooms, etc. They help enable the opening up and sharing of the world one must experience in order to 'be able to begin'. But as many of the earlier examples show, an important role is set aside for the figure of the teacher. Today, the teacher is evidently considered an expert, that is, someone whose expertise is based on (scientific) knowledge and/or someone who acts methodically and competently. And this undoubtedly plays an important role. But to us, there is more to the story. To tease out what that could be, let us first return to Pennac. The following is a conversation between a teacher and a so-called 'difficult student':

'Methods aren't what's missing here; in fact methods are all we've got. You spend your time hiding behind methods when deep down you know perfectly well that no method is sufficient. No, what's missing is something else.'
'What?'
'I can't say it.'
'Why?'
'It's a rude word.'
'Worse than *empathy*?'
'No comparison. A word you absolutely can't say in a primary school, a *lycée*, a university or anywhere like that.'
'Tell us?'
'No, really, I can't…'
'Oh, go on!'
'I'm telling you, I can't. If you use this word when talking about education, you'll be lynched.'
'…'
'…'
'…'

'It's *love*.'[18]

For the teacher, knowledge and methodology are important but so too are love and caring.[19] As the example given earlier by Gregorius makes very clear, it is important to clarify precisely what is meant by 'love'. His Greek teacher was obviously extremely knowledgeable, knew everything there was to know about Greek, was very experienced and well prepared, travelled often to Greece and had beautiful penmanship. Moreover, he spoke of his love for Greek words. But in his case, it was really about self-love; it was all *about him* and this is what deprived the Greek words of their realness. On the other hand, the love that comes into play in 'making school' is described as 'love for the subject, for the cause (or for the world)' and 'love for the students'. But as the example of Olivier in *The Son* makes very clear, we need not idealise or dramatise this love. The love we are speaking of here is expressed not in a spectacular way but in a rather ordinary one: in small, commonplace gestures, in certain ways of speaking and listening.

In other words, expressed in consciously provocative terms, we might say that making school rests in part on the *amateurism* of the teacher. Could it be that the teacher is never fully a professional, is at least partly an amateur (someone who does it out of love)? A teacher is someone who loves her subject or subject matter, who cares about it and pays attention to it. Beside 'love for the subject', and maybe because of it, she also teaches out of love for the student. As an amateur, the teacher is not only knowledgeable about something, she also cares about and is actively engaged in it. She is not only knowledgeable in mathematics but passionate about the subject, inspired by her work and by the material. This is an enthusiasm that shows itself in the small actions or precise gestures, expressions of her knowledge, but also expressions of her concern for the job at hand and for her place in it. This enthusiasm literally has the ability to give a voice to the object of study or practice, be it mathematics, language, wood, or prints. In this way, she succeeds in bringing students into contact with the subject matter and allows them

18. Daniel Pennac, pp. 257-258.
19. Ilse Geerinck (2011). *The Teacher as a Public Figure. Three Portraits*. Doctoral dissertation, KU Leuven.

to lose track of time; that is, she manages to take them out of ordinary time and bring them to a point in the present where their attention is demanded – *a presence in the present*, you might say. This enthusiasm, this assuming of a specific relation to the subject matter, is connected to the fact that the subject matter is made free, becomes released, is separated from its intended use and can thus become an object of study or exercise, both for the teacher and the student. As Gregorius pointed out, this is how words actually become words. Various things converge together in the love for the subject: *respect, attention, devotion, passion*. Love shows itself in a kind of respect and attention for the 'nature of the matter' or for the material the teacher is engaging. Wood, as it were, calls on its crafter to be worked in a certain way, just as the teacher calls the attention of his students to language and mathematics. This respect and attention for the subject matter also implies devotion. One gives oneself over to the wood in a certain way, or to the English language, or to mathematics or to another form of subject matter. Moreover, a form of passion accompanies that relationship of respect, attention and devotion. The amateur teacher is inspired in some way, or rather – to formulate it explicitly in a passive form – she is inspired *by* her subject or by the subject matter.

How do we recognise the amateur teacher? Simply put, this is revealed through the extent to which a person is present in what she does and in the way she demonstrates who she is and what she stands for through her words and actions. This is what one might call a teacher's *mastery*. While knowledge and competence guarantees a kind of expertise, it is presence, care and devotion that give expression to the mastery of the teacher. She *embodies* the subject matter in a certain way and has presence in the classroom.

> "If I want their full attention, I've got to help them settle into my lesson. How to do this? It's something you learn, on the job mainly, over many years. But one thing is certain: for my students to be present, I have to be present, for the whole class and for each individual in it, and I have to be present for my subject matter too, physically, intellectually and mentally, during the fifty-five minutes

that my lesson will last."[20]

"You can immediately tell if a teacher fully inhabits his classroom. Students sense it from the first minute of the school year, it's something we've all experienced: the teacher has just walked in, he is fully present, this is clear from the way he looks at his students, the way he greets them, the way he sits down, the way he takes ownership of his desk. He hasn't spread himself too thin, fearful of the students' reactions; his body language is open; from the word go, he's on the case; he is present, he can distinguish every single face, for him the class *exists*."[21]

"Oh, the painful memory of lessons when I wasn't *there*. How I felt my students drifting away, floating off as I tried to gather my strength. That feeling of losing my class… I'm not here, they're not here, we've come unhitched. And yet, the hour passes. I play the part of the person giving a lesson, they play the part of listeners."[22]

You can also recognise the amateur teacher by his pursuit of perfection. Perfectionism here does not refer to some pathological mindset. It is the perfectionism of the English teacher who demands respect for and careful attention to the language. Things have to be correct. Perhaps the amateur teacher can also be recognised by the manner in which she prepares. She not only prepares her lesson but also herself. She is someone who charges herself up and works on her attentiveness, concentration and devotion so that she can stand embodied and inspired at the front of her class. This preparation in itself does not guarantee a successful lesson, but it is necessary to one. It is about being equipped, literally and figuratively, and about the small and, when seen from a distance, often silly customs and habits – yes, even rituals – that teachers observe before entering the classroom; the little things that inspire and bring one into the moment.

How does the amateur teacher relate to her students? It is precisely the mastery and interested, inspired engagement on the part

20. Daniel Pennac, p. 105.
21. Daniel Pennac, pp. 106-107.
22. Daniel Pennac, p. 105.

of the masterful teacher that enables her to inspire and engage students. Indeed, like a child, the student does not want someone who is (only) interested in him/her, but rather somebody who is interested in other things and so can generate interest in those things. Peter Handke recounts how he absolutely hated going to school in his younger years and was usually totally uninterested in what the teacher had to say. His attention was captured only in those moments when the teacher began to speak as if he had forgotten the students – when he was speaking to no one in particular – carried away by his words. He was not absent in these moments but incredibly present in what he said, and this enabled his students to take interest.[23] Perhaps Handke is speaking here of the amateur teacher who shows love for his subject or subject matter, and in it, love for his students. In that moment, the love for his subject and the love for his students were inextricably intertwined. Put differently: for the teacher, the formative aspect of love-infused teaching is the shinning shadow of her mastery. Formation is not a secondary responsibility; it is not an additional task or competency. Rather, it is part and parcel of each lesson and is called upon in the course of every subject and type of content. It is the possibility of interest, attention, and therefore, formation that is offered up over and over again in each masterly lesson, and it is not the result of some sort of intention – e.g. 'and now I will attend to formation instead of simply subject-related knowledge and skills'.

In this sense, the amateur teacher knows full well that 'love for the subject' cannot be taught. The teacher can ask her students to practice, to prepare themselves, to attempt to get engaged. She can give instructions, set down rules, require study, practice, perseverance and dedication of her students. And in this sense we can also speak of a kind of discipline. Discipline that enables something to come about and that brings both teacher and student into the present, closing the classroom door for a while to make this temporality possible.

> "You're right, my colleagues have got me pegged as a character out of the nineteenth century! They think I pay lip service to respect, that

23. Peter Handke (2002). *Der Bildverlust oder Durch die Sierra de Gredos*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, p.102.

> the kids queuing up, standing behind their chairs, all that business, is just nostalgia for the old days. It's true, a little politeness never hurts, but as it happens this is about something else. By giving my students a chance to settle down quietly, they're able to come to land properly in my lesson, to begin from a calm place. As for me, I get to scan their faces, note who's absent, see how cliques are forming or splitting up; in short, I get to take the class's temperature."[24]

Many examples in Pennac's book make it clear that individual needs do not take centre stage: this, he says, falls outside of the subject matter. Teachers restrain themselves to the material, scholastic techniques and the rules of the game imposed by the practice and study of the subject matter. These rules of the game form the core of scholastic discipline. For the loving teacher, that discipline is not an empty shell or a suit of armour that protects her against an 'impossible' new generation. They are the rules that flow forth from her love for the subject and for the students, and therefore are constantly borne in mind, embodied in her actions and speech and necessary for making her lesson possible, and for giving students the opportunity to be present and attentive. Once they take on a life of their own, detached from the teacher, these rules do indeed become 'nineteenth century-like': they lose their strength, the need for new rules arises in order to break loose from the old ones, and so on. When this happens, scholastic discipline transforms into a system of reprimands and rewards, or – in a more contemporary form – classroom management based on incentives and contracts. The discipline that makes practice and study possible and that is shown by the loving teacher and her subject is of a different order.

It is on the basis of scholastic techniques and scholastic discipline that interest and attentiveness are made possible and that the actions of the loving teacher can be seen in terms of equality. Restricting oneself to the discipline required for practice and study – and thus not allowing oneself to get sidetracked by individual needs – actually means that the teacher, time and again and perhaps often against her better judgment, gives students – including the so-called 'impossible students' – a new chance.

24. Daniel Pennac, pp. 111-112.

> "Not that they were any more interested in me than the others, no, they treated all students alike, good and bad; they simply knew how to rekindle the desire for learning. They supported our efforts step by step, celebrated our progress, weren't impatient with our slow-wittedness, never took our failures personally, and ensured that the rigorous demands they made of us were matched by the quality, consistency and generosity of their own work."[25]

> "It wasn't just their knowledge that these teachers shared with us, it was the desire for knowledge itself. And what they communicated to me was a taste for passing it on. So we turned up to their lessons with hunger in our bellies. I wouldn't say that we felt liked by them, but we did feel well regarded (*not* 'disrespected', as the youth of today would put it), a regard even apparent in the way they marked our homework, where their annotations were intended exclusively for the individual concerned."[26]

The focus is on everyone and no one in particular. And this does not mean that individual questions and needs are not taken into account or are neglected, but it does mean that they cannot be the starting point for the loving teacher. The starting point is the love for the subject, for the subject matter, and for the students; a love that expresses itself in the opening up and sharing of the world. On this basis, he or she can do nothing but assume equality, that is, act from the assumption that everyone is capable of attentiveness, interest, practice and study. Thus, she does not start from the assumption that certain individuals differ from the outset, and she sees in exam results no objective evidence to confirm this assumption (e.g. 'can't you see, he can't do it; he doesn't have it in him'). Love for the subject and for her students does not allow for such a resignation, just as the loving teacher does not allow students to hide behind the stories of failure or ineptitude they tell about themselves or others tell about them. In short, the amateur teacher loves her subject and believes that everyone, time and again, should be given

25. Daniel Pennac, p. 224.
26. Daniel Pennac, pp. 226-227.

the chance to engage themselves in the subject matter she loves.

And how do students respond to the loving, masterful teacher? Here we want to call out an often-neglected aspect of the school: typical for the scholastic is that it involves more than one student. Individual education, or focusing exclusively on so-called individual learning pathways, is not a form of scholastic education. This is because, as Quintilianus wrote centuries ago, the teacher cannot express herself with as much strength, skill and inspiration to an audience of one as she can to a group. The reason for this is simple but profound: it is only by addressing the group that the teacher is forced, as it were, to be attentive to everyone and no one in particular. The teacher talks to a group of students and, in doing so, speaks to each one individually; she speaks to no one in particular and thus to everyone. A purely individual relationship is not possible, or is constantly interrupted, and the teacher is obliged to speak and act publicly. These are the rules of the game; it is the scholastic discipline imposed by the group on the teacher, and it ensures that whatever she brings to the table becomes a common good. And that also means that the typical scholastic experience on the part of students – the experience of 'being able to...' – is a shared experience from the outset. It is the experience of belonging to a new generation in relation to something – always for the students – from the old world.[27] This something thus generates interest, calls for attention and attentiveness, and makes 'formation' possible. A community of students is a unique community; it is a community of people who have nothing (yet) in common, but by confronting what is brought to the table, its members can experience what it means to share something and activate their ability to renew the world. Of course there are differences between students, be it clothing, religion, gender, background or culture. But in the classroom, by concentrating on what is brought to the table, those differences are (temporarily) suspended and a community is formed on the basis of joint involvement. The scholastic community is in that sense a profane (i.e. secular) community. Common referents that define the community (such as identity, history, culture, etc.) are rendered inoperative – but not destroyed – and appear as a common

27. Hannah Arendt (1961). The Crisis in Education, in H. Arendt, *Between Past and Future: Eight Exercises in Political Thought* (pp. 170-193). New York: Penguin

good, thereby making them open and available for new uses and new meanings in study and practice. This is why we wish to emphasise that the school should not, in whatever guise, be put to the service of community building in political projects of cultivation or socialisation. The scholastic model contributes to community building in itself and is the time and place where the very *experience* of community is at stake. And this brings us to the question of the so-called social significance of the school.

XII. A matter of preparation (or being in form, being well-trained, being well-educated, testing the limits)

The mission of the school? It's a strange question for a CEO. Honestly, a CEO can't fully answer it. Of course I could list the things my staff should know and be able to do and design a curriculum based on it. But that would mean that every company should open its own school. And not just every company, but every group in society. That, in turn, would be misunderstanding the place of the school in society. Teaching specific competencies – that is our responsibility; it's a matter of training, or simply, of learning on the job. And I'll be honest: what my business needs and who my business needs changes so fast that I would be deceiving young people by insisting that specific competencies be taught in school. By the time they complete their education, all those competencies will be just about be worthless. If you ask me what the mission of the school is, you're addressing me not as a CEO but as a member of this society: as a citizen. And if I look at my company from the standpoint of a citizen – and really, if I look at the entire business world and what lies beyond it – I must say: what I look for are young people who embody a number of key competencies, yes, but primarily young people with a practiced hand who are studious and really interested in one thing or another. No bobble heads who know it all, but also no well-balanced heads who lack competencies. People of the world, well-rounded people, people who are engaged in something. Maybe a CEO has something useful to say about scholastic education precisely because I am very well aware that the school does not exist to serve my company. It is the school that places a responsibility on me: to add my voice to the conversation about what we as a society think young people should be engaging themselves in.

What is the purpose of the school? We often speak in terms of objectives and functions when it comes to characterising the significance of the school. But in doing so, we are referring to something that lies *outside*

the school, such as society, culture, employment or higher education. The school imagined here serves to provide a general education that enables one to participate independently and critically in society. Or it serves to prepare young people for the work world or for further studies in higher education. Preferably, the school does all these things simultaneously. There is obviously a lot to be said for this formulation, and, in general, we support it. The problem, however, is that it runs the risk of glossing over the question of what the school itself actually *does*. The task of the school imagined, explicitly or implicitly, by such a characterisation is to deliver people who are perfectly and immediately 'employable' – ready to hit the ground running – in society, the labour market or higher education. All of this is more than just talk. The success of competency-based education initiatives (and perhaps the discourse on learning and learning to learn itself) could be explained by this implicit promise of employability. Indeed, competencies are explicitly intended to link up with the needs and demands of the labour market (e.g. professional competencies) or society (e.g. civic competencies). The cornerstone of so-called competency developing education is the linkage between education and the expected 'capacity to act' in the work world or in the wider society. It follows that actors from these two realms should have a say in identifying desirable competencies. These tend to be knowledge, skills and attitudes that can be effectively and concretely put to use. 'Employability', it would seem, is the word around which the discourse and thinking about the school is oriented today. And this applies not only to students but also to teachers and administrators as well.

One must consider whether a great illusion is being created and perpetuated here based on the false premise that it is actually possible to realise an effective link between scholastic knowledge and skills on the one hand and the labour market and society on the other. The massive disillusionment of both graduates and 'demand side' seems to lend this question some serious weight. For us, this illusion constitutes no grounds to call for an even more radical reform of the school (which would actually result in its dismantling), but rather, and alternatively, forms the fundamental starting point for elaborating a more precise meaning for the school. For us, the problem is that this emphasis on employability or, in other words, on maximising education's productive

potential, actually hollows out the form of the scholastic. At the least, it presents an ambiguous message: on the one hand, something is brought to the table (knowledge, skills), but it is never actually unhanded, relinquished. The accompanying message is, after all: this is important to know, but you have to go about it this and that way, and it must lead to this and that competency, otherwise you will never become a successful member of society or find a place in the labour market. The opportunity or experience of renewing the world (the experience of interest and 'being able to') is no longer there, or, put another way, it disappears once the stringent needs of a demanding society and labour market are invoked. Education thus becomes a form of specific training, learning, or learning to learn and not a matter of formation.

Formation – as a kind of self-shaping or 'coming into form' – is actually about preparation. This can certainly take the form of preparation for very concrete things in higher education or in the labour market, but that is not the primary concern of the school. Rather, it is preparation itself that is important. It is about study and practice, and to really qualify as study or practice, the orientation toward productivity, efficiency or employability must at least temporarily be placed between brackets or neutralised. The school, we might say, is preparation for the sake of preparation. This scholastic preparation means that young people 'come into their form', and that means that they are skilfully adept and well educated. This adeptness and literacy is not empty, it is not a formal competency; rather, it always takes on form in relation to *something*, that is, to subject matter.

Hence, if we are to take the scholastic model seriously, we need not ask what the function or significance of the school is to the community, but, on the contrary, what significance the society can have for the school. And this comes down to asking ourselves what we find important in society and how to bring these things 'into play' at school. It is not about keeping society (or the labour market) outside the school or about making the school into a kind of island in order to protect against pernicious influences. In a sense, the school shoulders society with the duty of determining what can and should qualify as subject matter suitable for practice, study and preparation by the young generation. This means that the school compels society to reflect on

itself in a certain way. That is, that the society takes responsibility, as it were, for identifying representatives of the things that are important in that society. These representatives are exempted from the ordinary productive world. They simply enter the school as teachers and help the school make free time possible. In that sense, there is nothing wrong with (professional) competencies in themselves. The trouble comes when we make them the fundamental objective of the school – as is often the case – and when they start functioning as learning outcomes that must be produced as output; in short, when learning (competencies) takes the place of study and practice. In so far as (professional) competencies dictate what is important in today's world, the challenge really lies in the search for suitable subject matter. Subject matter is what is dealt with at school – and not profiles and competencies.

We have used the distinction between learning and study/exercise several times already and have pointed out that the school is not about learning. This may sound very strange or seem far-fetched. It seems obvious to think of the school as a place and time for learning. Current thinking about education today tends to reiterate the notion that school is for learning, not education; that learning is active, not passive; that the learner must be the point of focus and that the 'school' is actually equivalent to a – preferably rich – 'learning environment'. Nevertheless, if we pause to think about this for a moment, it quickly becomes clear that equating the school with a learning environment deprives us of the view of the *typical scholastic*. After all, learning is something experienced by everyone, everywhere and at all times (and even by things such as organisations or society itself; think of the learning organisation, the learning society, etc.). And of course, we have known for a long time that many things can be learned better and faster outside of school. Speaking and understanding one's mother tongue – perhaps one of the more important things that we learn in our lives – is a prime example of this. Thus, saying that school is for learning says nothing about what makes a school a school. At the same time, this does not mean that one does not learn at school, but it does mean that scholastic learning is a particular kind of learning, namely, learning without an immediate finality. This is not to say that the school is about learning how to learn either. It is about learning *something*

(mathematics, English, woodworking, cooking, etc.), but that something stands alone. At school, the goal is to focus on something from close up and in detail, to engage something and to dig deeper into it. In other words, it is about practicing and studying something. As the dictionary suggests, studying is a form of learning in which one does not know in advance what one can or will learn; it is an open event that has no 'function'. It is an open-ended event that can only occur if there is no end purpose to it and no established external functionality. In this sense, 'formation' through study and practice is not functional. It is knowledge for the sake of knowledge and skills for the sake of skills, without a specific orientation or a set destination. Consequently, the 'experience of school', as we have indicated, is in the first place not an experience of 'having to', but of 'being able to', perhaps even of pure ability and, more specifically, of an ability that is searching for its orientation or destination. Conversely, this means that the school also implies a certain freedom that can be likened to abandon: the condition of having no fixed destination and therefore open to a new destination. The free time of the school can thus be described as time without destination.

That solitude, openness or indeterminacy is aptly expressed in the following excerpt from a novel by Marguerite Duras about a boy who does not want to go to school:

> "The mother: 'You see how he is, sir.'
> The teacher: 'I see.'
> The teacher smiles.
> The teacher: 'So, you refuse to learn, young man?'
> Ernesto studies the teacher at length before answering. Oh, Ernesto and his charms.
> Ernesto: 'No, that's not it, sir. I refuse to go to school.'
> The teacher: 'Why?'
> Ernesto: 'Let's just say that it's pointless.'
> The teacher: 'What's pointless?'
> Ernesto: 'Going to school (pause). There's no reason to (pause). Kids are abandoned at school. Moms drop their kids off at school to teach them that they've been abandoned. So they can be rid of their kids for the rest of their lives.'

> Silence.
> The teacher: 'You, Ernesto, you didn't need school to learn…'
> Ernesto: 'Of course I did, sir. That's where it all became clear to me. At home, I believed in the litanies of my idiot mother. Only after going to school did I realise the truth.'
> The teacher: 'What truth …?'
> Ernesto: 'That God does not exist.'
> Long and deep silence."[28]

When Ernesto is confronted with the truth "that God does not exist", we take that to mean that he has come to the realisation that there is no fixed (natural) destination or finality. But that does not mean that the school has no meaning. Quite to the contrary. What the school makes possible is 'forming' through study and practice, but this forming does not derive from any preconceived notion of a 'well-formed person'. It is precisely an open event of pure preparation, that is, preparation without a pre-determined purpose other than to be prepared and 'in form', or, in a more traditional sense, to attain a well-educated, purely skilled (or practiced) maturity. Being prepared must therefore be distinguished from being competent and from the claims of employability that are associated with it. In this respect, it is not surprising that the most basic function of the school is to impart 'basic knowledge' and 'basic skills' such as reading, writing, arithmetic, drawing but also cooking, carpentry, physical education, etc. These are the exercises and study that prepare us and help us to 'come into form'.

There is one final element we should mention in connection with this scholastic preparation, namely, the action of testing the limits:

> "You sat on the bench and you gave someone a nudge – just to see what he'd do. And then a push on his shoulder, a knock on his head – did you get one in return? You took something from someone, yanked it right out of his hands; not because you held a grudge against the guy but just because; just to try it. And if you were the

28. Marguerite Duras (1990). *Zomerregen* [Summer Rain]. Amsterdam: Van Gennep, pp.59-60 (Cited text translated by J. McMartin).

> target of an attack like that, you immediately began to scream – to see what would happen. Or: your neighbour had his head turned to one side, you grabbed a marker, held it just right and waited until he turned his head back and got himself a stripe on the cheek. You threw someone's pen or ruler on ground over and over until you got a slap; then you stopped – for a while anyway, until your victim thought your mind had moved on to other things – and then you started up all over again. Sometimes things weren't even aimed at a classmate: somebody chewed up a piece of paper and spit the little wet wad against the ceiling where it stuck for weeks. It was a matter of testing the limits. First with each other and later with the teachers. (…) The school was a large and extravagantly arranged social laboratory where one could experiment to the heart's content – it was the ideal terrain for exploring the changes we had undergone in the last few years."[29]

Of course, school is not the only place that such testing of the limits occurs. Today, it has perhaps partly spilled over into social media, which means that social media have in that respect taken on an element of the scholastic. And this while the school itself becomes more and more trapped in a net of therapeutic diagnostic tools and practices that immediately see testing the limits as a signal ('the student needs this or that') or a symptom ('the student is afflicted with this or that'). But scholastic testing of the limits, as Stephan Enter so nicely puts it, is done 'just because; just to see what happens'. It is not done to get back at someone, to target someone, to make a point, to send a signal. It is a testing without aim. It is an investigation into the very ability of doing.

29. Stephan Enter (2007). *Spel*. Amsterdam: G.A.van Oorschot, p.171 (Cited text translated by J. McMartin).

XIII. And finally, a matter of pedagogical responsibility (or exercising authority, bringing to life, bringing into the world)

And yes, the hospital school works until the very last day – for terminal patients, too. There are people who say 'let a terminal child be, let him watch television, read something to him if he likes'. But she thinks it's important to a child to be taken seriously. Even if that child's days are numbered. And she knows that there are few, if any, children who are too sick to use their minds. School need not stop, even when the doctors have done all they can and all that is left is to say goodbye. A terminally ill child is entitled to time with her. Time to be engaged together. She knows that even though it will end in tears, her parents experience her as someone who makes time for their child, and in that time, not sickness but algebra, grammar and how to paint a bear are the topics of conversation. To her, the child is not a patient but a student. She expects him to behave as he would in a classroom; even a sick child can conduct himself correctly and politely. And 'not feeling like it' isn't an option. Even if the child's health begins to fade and death threatens, she finds algebra, grammar and painting important. And the parents agree. Their child has his good days and his bad days, but one thing is sure: school opens the world to him; school lets him leave his illness behind.[30]

And yes, let us now explicitly address the pedagogical significance of the school. Of course, we realise in doing this that we are inviting judgement upon the perhaps not entirely revered figure of 'the pedagogue'. Traditionally, this figure, who in antiquity was usually a slave, was often disdained, although occasionally he enjoyed exceptional recognition and admiration. What deserves our attention here, however, is the fact that the pedagogue was in the first place the person who escorted children from the house to the school and, once there, often remained by their side throughout the day. School, as we have said

30. Loosely based on 'Voortdoen met het normale, dat geeft deze kinderen kracht' ['To continue with the normal, that is what gives these children strenght'], *De Morgen*, 10 September 2011, p.6.

already, meant free or indeterminate time. This time is not or need not be productive; it is time that allows one to develop him or herself as an individual and as a citizen, exempt from any specific work-related, familial or social obligations. Taking this configuration as a starting point, we can describe the pedagogue as the person who makes free or indeterminate time available to and possible for young people. Or, in other words and more generally, we can say that pedagogy refers to *making free time a reality*. And further along those lines, that pedagogy is about guaranteeing the scholastic element of the school (stated in the negative) or about helping to realise it (stated in the positive). If we take this definition as a starting point, we come to a thought that at first sight seems peculiar: it is often assumed that a child's formation ('the pedagogical') is the province of the family, but in fact the school plays an important, and, for us, principal role in this as well. Our position is this: to truly understand what raising and educating a child is all about, we must first understand what happens at 'school', or what the scholastic form does, and accept this as the original, fundamental starting point. Only then can we avoid confusing formation with socialisation, providing care or assisting in development. Forming and educating a child is not a matter of socialisation and it is not a matter of ensuring that children accept and adopt the values of their family, culture or society. Nor is it a matter of developing children's talents. We do not say this because socialisation and developing talents are not important – they certainly are – but rather because forming and educating a child has to do with something fundamentally different. It is about opening up the world and bringing the (words, things and practices that make up the) world to life. That is exactly what happens in 'scholastic time'.

Usually we see education as goal-oriented and as providing direction or a destination. This implies that adults dictate what children or young people (should) do. But education is just as much about *not* telling young people what to do; it is about transforming the world (things, words, practices) into something that speaks to them. It is finding a way to make mathematics, English, cooking and woodworking important, in and of themselves. Indeed, in Dutch the word 'authority' (*gezag*) is derived from the verb 'to say' (*zeggen*): exercising this authority makes things *say* something to us, makes them appeal to us. We can

identify a similar significance in the English word 'authority', for this is what 'authors' the world, that is, what renders it into something that speaks to us and commands our attention. Education is the giving of authority to the world, not only by talking *about* the world, but also and especially by dialoguing *with* (encountering, engaging) it. In short, the task of education is to ensure that the world speaks to young people. Consequently, free time as scholastic time is not a time for diversion or relaxation, but a time for paying attention to the world, for respect, for being present, for encountering, for learning and for discovering. Free time is not a time for the self (for satisfying needs or developing talents) but a time to *engage in something* and that something is more important than personal needs, talents or projects. It is by opening a world to children and young people (and, as we have said before, this is not the same as simply making them familiar with it; it is bringing the world to life and making it appeal to them) that children or young people can experience themselves as a new generation in relation to the world, and as a generation capable of making a new beginning. Children and young people experience an involvement in the world (in mathematics, language, cooking, woodworking) and they realise not only that they have to get started in the world, but also that they are *able to begin*. The democratic – and political – element of education is located in this double experience of the world as a common good and of the 'I can' (as opposed to the 'I must'). It is the opening up of a world outside ourselves and the involving of the child or young person in that shared world. It is thus not a matter of starting from children's or young people's immediate world, but of bringing them into the wider world, introducing them to the things of the world (mathematics, English, cooking, woodworking) and, literally, bringing them into contact with these things, getting them in their company, so that these things – and with them the world – begin to become significant to them. This is what enables a young person to experience himself as a citizen of the world. That is not to say that he experiences himself as someone with formally defined rights and obligations. Rather, it means taking an interest in the world (in something) and feeling involved in something beyond oneself as a common good. The political, democratic significance of education lies not in the fact that it imparts certain predefined civic competences

or a knowledge of politics. The political significance of education lies in the 'freeing' of the world (of things and practices) in such a way that one (like a citizen) feels involved in the common good. This implies that one is amenable both to the obligation of care that comes with this involvement and to the freedom it implies.

This is another way of saying that education is about free time. Experts and professionals are unfamiliar with free time. Theirs is the time of development and growth. That is, their time is a predetermined time with a destination or a specific function that is measured out as precisely as possible (for instance, as phases that are suitable for this or that, or as growth stages, learning thresholds, etc.). This is expressed, inter alia, through a mentality of imminence and diagnosis – 'We have to catch it in time before...'; 'We must work preventatively to avoid...'; 'If we would have seen it sooner, it could have been helped...'. This mentality is evident in the many diagnostic tools used to determine where one stands in relation to the rest and how far one has progressed. However, the teacher as pedagogue is the one who makes time where there previously was no time (to lose) – think here of the hospital school for terminal patients. This time is not personal time but time to be used engaged in something beyond oneself (the world). And making time often means 'doing something that is important in itself' (algebra, grammar, cooking...), which makes one lose sight of (ordinary) time and its destination and, in doing so, allows something meaningful and worthwhile to transpire. Free time is not 'quality time'; it is not time set aside beforehand that must be taken advantage of or made subject to certain requirements. It is the pedagogue, or the teacher as pedagogue, who undoes any such pre-appropriation or allocation of time. In doing so, he or she creates the opportunity to allow interest in and love for the world to emerge. Without such an interest and love, a 'citizen of the world' is just another name for a consumer or a customer, that is, someone who puts his individual needs or talents first. Such a person sees the world as no more than a source for the gratification of his needs or the development of his individual talents, and is thus a slave to them.

And this brings us to the weighty and often rather loaded term: *responsibility*. In light of what we have been discussing up to this point, we can now say that the pedagogic or scholastic responsibility of

teachers lies not (only) in the fact that they are responsible for the growth and development of young lives. It also lies in the fact that they *share the world with them* in its parts and particularities. This responsibility translates into two tasks.

Firstly, the teacher must free the child from all expertise that ascribes an *immediate* function, explanation or destination to what that child does. In a sense, 'letting a kid be a kid' is no empty slogan. This means allowing a child to forget the plans and expectations of his parents as well as those of employers, politicians, and religious leaders in order to allow that child to become absorbed in study and practice. It means allowing a child to forget the ordinary world, where everything has a function and an intention. It means keeping out the ordinary world of experts for whom every kind of conduct is either a call for help or a symptom to be remedied. It means suspending the question of usefulness or value and eliminating one's selfish intentions for students.

The second task is to stimulate interest, and that means giving authority to words, things and ways of doing things that are outside of our individual needs and that help form all that is shared 'between us' in our common world. Pedagogical responsibility lies not in aiming directly for (the needs of) the child or student, but in things and one's relation to those things, that is, the relation that the teacher as pedagogue has to these things. A teacher's manner of dealing with, giving concrete shape to and embodying things and practices is what shows what is, for her, valuable and 'authoritative'. Only then can she communicate and share the world in such a way that children and young people become interested and engaged, only then do things take on authority and only then does the world become interesting. Indeed, in Latin *inter-est* literally means something that exists between us. One can only create interest for the common world by showing one's own love for that world. And how could one arouse interest in the world if the message relayed to young people is that *they* are most important and thus most interesting?

By taking responsibility for the world in this way ('as the older generation, this is what we find valuable') the teacher also takes responsibility for children and young people as students. Bringing nothing to the table and relaying the message that 'I don't know what is

important; I cannot and will not tell you, so figure it out for yourselves', would mean leaving the younger generation to their fate and depriving them of the opportunity to renew the world. Indeed, how can they renew the world – how can they experience 'newness' – if no one actually introduces them to the old world and brings the old world to life? But this also means that the teacher must let go of and make free whatever she brings to the table. She must allow children and young people to renew the world through study and practice – through the way they interact with the world and give their own meaning to it. Failing to do so – and thus saying 'this is important, so you have to handle it this way' – would mean depriving the young generation of the chance to renew the world. This is precisely what Hannah Arendt urges teachers to remember when she eloquently and aptly says that the teacher acts out of love for the world ('this is important to us, the old generation') *and* out of love for children ('it is up to you, the new generation, to shape a new world').[31] This is what constitutes the teacher's pedagogical responsibility. It thus has more to do with *love* than being able to provide explanations or justifications – which is what is so often expected of teachers today. And what's more, one might ask whether this love – and, with it, one's interest in the world and even one's concern for children – is lost in the face of the ever-increasing pressure of meeting expectations of accountability. This concern will bring us to a more detailed discussion of how, today, school (and thus pedagogy) is being tamed.

31. Hannah Arendt (1961). The Crisis in Education, in H. Arendt, *Between Past and Future: Eight Exercises in Political Thought* (pp. 170-193). New York: Penguin.

TAMING THE SCHOOL

The school, as we said, is a historical invention of the Greek *polis* and was an outright attack on the privileges of the elites of an archaic order. It is a democratic intervention in the sense that it 'makes' free time for everyone, regardless of background or origin, and for these reasons it installs equality. The school is an invention that turns everyone into a student – and in this sense it places everyone in an equal initial situation. The world is made public at school. It is thus not (only or specifically) about initiation into a culture or lifestyle of a particular group (social position, class, etc.). With the invention of the school, society offers the chance for a new beginning, a renewal. Given these essential democratic, public and renewing qualities, it is not surprising that the school has incited a certain fear and turmoil since its origins. It is a source of anxiety for those who stand to lose something through renewal. So it is not surprising that the school has been confronted with attempts to tame it from its inception. The taming of the school implies reining in its democratic, public and renewing character. It implies the re-appropriation or re-privatisation of public time, public space and 'common good' made possible by the school. Perhaps we should not read the history of the school as a history of reforms and innovations, of progress and modernisation, but as a history of taming; a series of strategies and tactics to dispel, restrain, constrain, neutralise or control the school.

The school as a 'modern institution' – the form it assumed in the eighteenth and early nineteenth century in the West – is an instance of the attempt to dispel the school's renewing, radical potential and the 'ability to begin'. This occurs by putting something on the table and simultaneously making it clear that 'this is how it must be done, and these are the learning materials you must use'. The school as an institution serves a predetermined ideal. This ideal might be filled in with a civic or religious sensibility relating to an existing social embeddeness or to a projected future. The attempt to tame in the modern institution always takes the form of connecting 'subject matter' with knowledge, meanings and value in an existing or new social order. As an *institution*, the school must embody this ideal – it reins it in – and new arrivals are initiated in the *appropriate use* of a given text or skill. The teacher as

a representative of the old generation who has made this knowledge and these meanings 'her own', is in a position to transfer this subject matter. The school-as-institution is characterised by a ceremonious time and place of transfer and in it, special care is taken to tame and monitor teachers as 'masters of ceremony' presiding over this transfer. The institution deprives the young generation of the time and place to practice and experience free time – it denies them of scholastic time – and the young generation is subsequently deprived of the opportunity to actually become a new generation. Instead, they become (at most) performers of the renewal imagined by their parents.

Today, institutions and ideals have obviously lost much of their significance, and knowledge transfer and teacher-centred education are outdated. Precisely because of this, modern schools are being converted to student-centred learning environments. The belief in tradition and transfer has been replaced by a belief in the creative power of the individual and in the uniqueness of the learner. But even today's learning environment seems to stand in the way of renewal and blocks every opportunity to begin. It does this by effectively putting nothing on the table and saying, 'Have a seat at the table, try things out, and I as your learning facilitator will help you along.' The young generation is thrown back into their own direct life-world, and there is no longer anything or anyone who can lift them out of it. The person of the learner – her needs, experience, talent, motivation and aspirations – becomes the starting point and the ending point. The taming of the school here means ensuring that students are kept small – by making them believe that they are the centre of attention, that their personal experiences are the fertile ground for a new world, and that the only things that have value are the things they value. The result is the taming of the student: he becomes a slave to his own needs, a tourist in his own life-world. The importance placed on learning to learn is perhaps the most telling expression of this attempt to tame. The pupil is thrown back upon his own learning, and the link to 'something' – to the world – is broken. The old generation withdraws itself and its ideals, but in doing so it denies the younger generation the chance to be a new generation. After all, it is only in confrontation with something that has been put on the table by the older generation *and* unhanded that young people are placed in a situation

in which they themselves can make a beginning, ascribe new meaning to the things that attract their attention and pull themselves out of their immediate life-world. The school as a nineteenth-century institution put something on the table but in the same motion placed a manual for its appropriate use alongside that something. The contemporary learning environment is full of manuals and instructions, but there is nothing on the table. In both cases, the public character of the school – that is, as the place where anything can happen because two generations are brought into contact in relation to 'something' – disappears. And with it disappears the renewing character of the school since the young generation is no longer able to experience itself as new generation in relation to something on the table.

The taming of the school casts a somewhat different light on the polemical debate currently being waged between so-called 'reformers' and 'traditionalists'. What these two camps have in common seems to be an urge to tame the school. Employing the school (exclusively) in the service of society and employing the school in the service of the student both imply curtailing the scholastic action of making public, of renewal and of democratisation. But besides these general taming strategies, there are also attempts at taming that are more tactical in nature and therefore less obvious – but no less effective. In this respect, there is no single malicious individual or crafty group to blame for these forms of taming. Often, dispelling the scholastic ideal is not the intention. Initiatives and proposals often appear reasonable and legitimate. And a first step is often followed logically by a second step, and a third, and a fourth... But each step impacts the other, and concrete initiatives and proposals begin to function as tactical moves in a strategy that tames or even neutralises the school.

XIV. Politicisation

Policymakers are often tempted to look to the school for solutions to societal problems such as the radicalisation of society, intolerance and increased drug use. The school thus becomes the place and time to remedy these social problems. This means that the school is held

(at least partially) responsible for solving societal problems; social, cultural or economic problems are translated into learning problems, or a new list of competencies is added to the curriculum. This first tactic can be described as the taming of the school by a *politicisation* of the school. What is problematic about this is not only the unbalanced distribution of tasks between school and politics, between teachers and politicians. Indeed, there is more at stake than overworking the teaching staff. It means above all that the school is entrusted with tasks that are impossible to fulfil without abandoning the school itself. The young generation in effect is simultaneously held responsible for existing social problems and for the realisation of the political dream of another, better society. In this way, the young generation is borne the burden that the old generation is no longer able or willing to bear. Formulated sharply: it is an expression of an irresponsible society that no longer follows the path of political change, but rather looks towards the young generation and suspends its free time in the name of addressing exceptional, urgent challenges on the path to a new society.

In this regard, we make a clear distinction between school and politics, between educational responsibility and political responsibility, between the renewal made possible by pedagogy and political reform. In one way or another, politics is about negotiation, persuasion or a struggle between different interest groups or social projects. The table at school is not a negotiating table; it is a table that makes study, exercise and training possible. It is a table upon which the teacher offers something up and in doing so allows and encourages the young generation to experience itself as a new generation. This, as Hannah Arendt points out, is why a political project that envisions a new world often looks to the school as its political tool of choice.[32] What is problematic about this is not only that it entails the politicisation of the school – students are addressed as citizens who have something to learn – but also the scholasticisation of politics – citizens are addressed as students who must take up their civic duty. The first trend we can simply

32. In this sense, one can also pose the question of whether it is in fact the school that forms the basis of a political democracy instead of the other way around. In other words: one could argue that in establishing and instituting a school, society bears the responsibility of deciding in a democratic way which knowledge and meanings are made public.

call indoctrination, while the second could be called infantilisation. They find their expression in the figure of the doctrinal teacher as the interpellator of students and the condescendingly instructive minister who insists on teaching citizens a lesson.

What is problematic about the politicisation of the school is that both young people and the subject matter become the means by which social problems are addressed in a project of political reform. School as politics by other means. What is neutralised by this is free time and the possibility of young people experiencing themselves as a new generation. If young people are immediately inserted into the old world, we no longer allow them the experience of being a new generation. This is not to say that the school has no political significance, the establishment and organisation of the school – as free time for practice – *is* a political intervention. And by this we do not mean to say that so-called social issues should have no role at school. What matters is that they take on the status of subject matter and therefore are not inflated into a political question or into competencies shrouded as solutions for a given issue. This brings us to a subtler variant of the politicisation of the school: the emphasis on 'employability' and, specifically, the tendency to reformulate the aims of education in terms of 'employable skills'.

The dream of a school that prepares young people for society – that is, the labour market and higher education – is not new. What is new is the way in which it is being realised today. Crucial here is the shift of emphasis from employment to employability. Against the background of employment, education still retained relative autonomy in relation to society and in particular in relation to the labour market. Optimising employment was largely a political issue, and at a minimum it was the objective of social and economic policy. With the emphasis now shifted to employability in the context of the active welfare state, employment is increasingly becoming a responsibility of the individual. The individual is baptised as a (lifelong) learner, learning is an investment in one's own human capital, and the activated citizen-as-learner carries the lifelong responsibility of finding his own employment. In an era of employability, policy becomes a matter of activation, of empowerment and of providing cheap loans for investment in human capital. The adage is: be employable! The gospel: employability is the path to buying your

own freedom and contributing to social progress! The sermon: do not alienate yourself and do not shrug your responsibility to society! The soothing reminder: let he who is without learning needs throw the first stone!

The success of the term 'competencies' – not only in the professional world but also throughout society and education – can be understood as a symptom of this emphasis on employability. In the most general sense, a competency refers to the ability to perform, and thus to a specific set of knowledge, skills and attitudes necessary to the performance of certain tasks. Competencies and competency profiles are created for the most diverse social tasks – not only professional competencies, but also civic competencies, cultural competencies, social competencies, and so forth. In other words, competencies, validated as qualifications, are the (European) currency by which the lifelong learner – who neatly goes about collecting competencies in his portfolio – expresses his societal employability. The school, and with it the younger generation, enrols itself in the social project of maximising employability insofar as it allows itself to be seduced into reformulating its goals and curriculum into terms of competencies/qualifications. The concept of 'employable competence' thus fuses the sociological terms of reproduction, integration and legitimacy: competencies ensure integration into society, reproduce that society and legitimise the existing order. It is worth emphasising again here that this vision is not so much espoused by near-sighted policymakers looking through a narrow economic lens, but rather by far-sighted policymakers looking through a broad sociological lens – and a functionalist frame. It seems that policymakers have become sociologists; they compress the functional relationship between education and society into a 'learning-competency-qualification-employability' bond and hope for a chain reaction. In political terms, they resurrect an old scientific story. This form of politicisation of the school boils down to a radicalisation of the socialisation function of education, which is problematic in several respects.

First and foremost, this subtle but profound politicisation entirely eclipses the subject matter and the young generation. With all attention focused toward the compulsory and urgent acquisition of useful

competencies, any possibility of renewal and free time is suspended. Whether they be competencies to be applied in the existing society or competencies for a new society, the young generation is the generation that must be properly trained in every way. Added to this is the focus on competences stemming from an idea of employability that education cannot possibly guarantee. After all, how can we promise employability to skilled youth in a society that is constantly changing? Doing so not only needlessly wastes the youth, it also misleads them. Unless, of course, we limit ourselves to basic competences, in which case the logic of employability and performance capacity are no longer of the order. And this brings us to another objection: the practice of competency developing education implies an analytical and abstract logic (sub-competencies, degrees of complexity, etc.) that actually corrodes the link between concrete reality and employability. A student who has acquired a number of sub-competencies does not necessarily command an (integrated) ability to act in a particular domain. Let alone the ability to give meaning to his skills as a person; that is, the ability not only to carry out competencies but to do so in an independent, responsible way. And finally, it is important to mention that competence-based education, both for the school and teachers on the one hand and students on the other, has an administrative side (competency lists, modules, roadmaps, checklists, etc.) with its own propensity to proliferate itself. What threatens is a mad bureaucratisation of the school under the political pretext of employability.

XV. Pedagogisation

A second tactic that we want to call out is the *pedagogisation* of the school. While politicisation can be seen as a ‘breaking in’ or disciplining of the school as a function of society, pedagogisation also has to do with the breaking in of the school as a function of the family. Here again the expression is all too familiar: ‘parents no longer raise their children’; ‘teachers must take over the tasks of the family’; ‘teachers are surrogate parents’. This is not to say that the school has no pedagogical responsibility. On the contrary, the teacher is performing

a pedagogical act insofar as she shares the world with students out of love for the world and for the new generation and in so doing pulls them from their immediate life-world, which includes the family. In this respect, the teacher is not a nanny or a part-time (or full-time) parent, as many would have her be today. It is by putting something on the table, by being passionate about her subject and by opening up the world through all kinds of subject matter that the teacher fulfils her pedagogical responsibility. In this sense, the school is neither a family nor a household.

We do not have space to examine in detail the difference between school and family, and between teachers and parents. We simply wish to say that at school, and in the figure of the teacher, love of the world is central. This love is necessary to be able to share something. It implies a love for the next generation. In our eyes, the teacher who loses her love for the world – who has lost enthusiasm for the subject matter and so has nothing more to share – will not last long at school. Unless, of course, she shifts her focus to providing care and gives up being a teacher to become a surrogate parent. In and through doing this, she tames the school and denies young people the opportunity to be a student. This is not to say that care has no role at school or that teachers do not give a certain kind of care. Rather, it is a care that is motivated by the love of the world; a concern directed toward keeping students on the ball, toward providing support when they come up short and toward ensuring that students inhabit free time despite a difficult home situation. Demanding that teachers provide parental care – and therefore subordinate their love for the world to the care of children – is a form of taming. In other words, the school expects children to care for themselves and thus expects that they arrive at school both reposed and prepared.

XVI. Naturalisation

A third taming tactic can be summarised by the term *naturalisation*. We have explained that the invention of the school implies a democratic act: it creates free time for everyone, regardless of origin or background.

In this respect, the school is by definition a school of equality. The teacher's focus is on her students and she keeps them engaged through her love for the subject or through her enthusiasm for the subject matter. Her amateurism is the best guarantor of equal opportunities. However, there are constantly attempts to tame this scholastic equality by pinning students down according to so-called natural differences: 'of course we want equality, but it must take into account the natural differences between students.' In an earlier era, these were differences of birthright or wealth. The story went that the social inequality associated with these differences was natural and thus justified. And insofar as everyone is naturally predisposed to a particular social position or group, so goes the story, each social position or group has its own form of initiation or socialisation. It was the invention of the school that broke through the aristocratic order, though there were always attempts to tame and re-tame the school in the name of 'nature' – in the name of something that belonged to the necessary order of things.

Modern forms of taming begin from assumptions about differences in intelligence or differences in ability. These differences are often invoked as natural and thus legitimate and even necessary justifications for unequal treatment. We can thus say that, to the extent that these differences form the basis for determining a student's orientation toward or placement in a particular level of (secondary or higher) education and a particular field of study, the student's future is fixed 'naturally'. Put differently, in this form of taming, the school becomes the continuation of natural selection by other means. Forms of categorical education are an expression of this. The school of equality, on the other hand, is – to use modern terms – a comprehensive school. This means that when the school charges society with determining what is worth sharing as subject matter (that is, determining the so-called 'general education'), society is effectively making this determination for every member of the next generation – to the extent permitted by the 'school of equality'. In the social determination of what makes the cut and what does not, there is no preliminary selection based on differences between students. When it comes to the school, and thus to the next generation, it is not the place of the old generation to create a young elite. If it were to do this, the distinction between those who are entitled

to renew the world and those who are not would be predetermined.

Perhaps the subtlest form of naturalisation with a taming effect is talent development. Talent as a concept refers to differences in predisposition between students. The difference between our current concept of talent and that of the classical discourse on disposition and ability may be that the current talent discourse has a positive connotation – everyone has their own talents, and every talent counts. Translated into an educational context, this means that it is important to recognise these different talents, acknowledge the value of each talent and adjust learning trajectories accordingly. On the other hand, the concept also refers to a form of latent potential present in the young generation that must be maximally developed: no talent must be allowed to go un(der)-utilised (to ensure a competitive knowledge society). In this context, talent development implies the effective and efficient transformation of talent into competencies and qualifications that maximise the employability of young people. Perhaps what makes the term 'talent' so successful today is that is carries both of these meanings. Talent development embodies the ultimate reconciliation between humanism-inspired education reformers and mobilisation-focused policymakers.

Viewed from the perspective of the school, this reconciliation can be seen as a coupling of politicisation and naturalisation. In the context of talent-developing and competency-based education, the school ultimately becomes the selection apparatus *par excellence*. It's slogan: every talent in its rightful place. The politicising chain reaction 'learning-competency-qualification-employability' is given a natural and human substructure: learning as the conversion of talents into competencies that lead to qualifications to ensure maximum employability. This interweaving of politicisation and naturalisation is reminiscent of Plato's *Republic*. In *The Republic*, Plato sets out to find the ideal organisation of society, and he argues that each group should have a place in society predestined to them by nature. Today we no longer speak of natural predestination nor of social groups or classes, but rather of individual talents. But is talent not simply another word for natural predestination? Is the current story not the perfection of what Plato suggests in *The Republic*: to ensure that all are employed according to their natural talents? It is useful to remember that Plato himself thought

of the natural destination story as a 'fable' or a 'necessary lie' to keep social groups and classes in their place and to maintain order in society. Is the current story about the school as a place for talent development not just as much of a 'necessary lie' told to legitimise differences, secure the social order and create a competitive knowledge society? Whatever the case, the establishment of the school launched a movement from its very beginnings to expose such falsehoods. Concretely, this means that the school of equality – where students are equal in relation to the subject matter regardless of any sort of predestination – exists precisely to generate interest and to make the 'I can' experience possible. In the context of talent development on the other hand, the emphasis is on the obligatory 'I must' experience as an answer to the call of one's predestined talent: 'You must develop your talent – everyone must develop their talents.' Even if talent developing education strives to let students (learn) to choose what to study – potentially on the basis of their interests – this choice must always be informed by the student's individual talents. And this 'choice' granted to the student can just as well be seen as a tool of self-selection deployed in the interest of optimal employability. Differentiation based on talent (naturalisation) and in the interest of employability (politicisation) is in this sense a quintessential and sophisticated tactic to neutralise the scholastic event.

Equality evokes perhaps the most fear when it comes to the tactic of naturalisation, and this fear never fails to feed attempts to tame the school. It is a fear mainly motivated by the fact that school is essentially a public time and space where public matters are the order of the day. It is in relation to these matters – the *subject matter* that is brought to the table – that pupils emerge as equals in an 'initial situation' in which they can begin the work of attentively engaging in something, exercising their minds and forming themselves. One's position relative to the school is in this respect similar to one's position relative to democracy.[33] Even among supporters of democracy, there is the temptation to express only conditional support: 'everyone has the right to speak, but some have more right than others by virtue of their capabilities and expertise', 'the voter does not always know what is good

33. Jacques Rancière (2007). *Hatred of Democracy* (S. Corcoran, trans.). London and New York : Verso J.

for him', etc. Democracy has something radical and it is at odds with the aristocracy (with nobility, the Church, etc.) and is therefore subject to pressure from a great many forms of taming and neutralisation. The same applies to the school and the radicality contained within it. School is about expropriation, de-privatisation and de-sacralisation, and thus about the radical – we dare even say the potentially revolutionary – opportunity to renew the world. What is brought to the table in the school of equality is essentially for everyone and no one in particular. It is about common good and this means that the school also has a kind of communistic dimension, if we may still use that word. Communistic not as a political doctrine, but as the temporary state of suspension or expropriation during which, when the world is opened up, the experience of 'being capable of' is made possible. You could say that communism (as a political strategy) is actually an attempt to recover the school politically and to institutionalise the school socially. And that comes at a high price. Communistic as referring to the radical act of de-privatisation and freeing for public use is perhaps firstly an educational rather than a political term. The communist effect is of course something that is greatly feared by everyone with specific vested interests, sacred cows or even scientific propositions to defend. Hence the aristocratic whip and the attempt to make the school a selection machine for perpetuating the position of an elite. But there is also the meritocratic whip that legitimises inequality on the basis of merits and that couples the degree and extent of training with performance. There is also the recent incantation touting individual talents according to which a student's predetermined path can be divined. The starting point in all these attempts at taming the school is not equality, but a *supposed* factual difference which the school is asked to acknowledge, recognise, confirm and accept. The starting point is not equality. What is actually being verified time and again and in different iterations is inequality and difference. It is therefore not an experience of emancipation or being able to begin, but one of 'not being able', 'only able to', 'being less able', 'have to be able' or simply, 'have to' in itself.

These three tactics – politicisation, pedagogisation and naturalisation – tame the school by coupling it to something outside of the school (society, family, nature). But there are also some tactics that

'de-school' the school from within.

XVII. Technologisation

As we have seen, the design of the school has an unmistakable technological dimension. Engaging in study and completing exercises imply employing techniques. These techniques are what enable young people to take on tasks and simultaneously take on themselves, and this with the intention of shaping, improving and rising above themselves. Technology includes the concrete materiality of the school (the building, the classroom, the chalkboard, tables, desks, etc.) but also the tools (pen, books, chalk, pencil, etc.) and work methods (essays, problem sets, exams, etc.) all of which are aimed at a sort of discipline to focus the attention of young people on a particular task or thing. Achieving this focus is the touchstone of an effective scholastic technique. We use the term *technologisation* thus to refer to a taming tactic by which the criteria for a good scholastic technique – and the criteria for a good teacher and a good school – come to be situated in the technique itself. In other words, the taming tactic of technologisation refers to the search for technical criteria and technical guarantees where the objective becomes the optimisation of technical performance.

This form of taming comes in several variants, primary among them being a focus on efficiency and effectiveness in education. Effectiveness implies that the goal of a technique – and also of the school, the teacher and the student – is fixed and that the emphasis thus lies in finding the right resources to meet that fixed goal. The focus on efficiency means identifying the appropriate manner of allocating resources (for instance, in terms of workload or cost) given the intended goal. Once the focus has been set on effectiveness and efficiency, the goal becomes fixed and the taming whip can thus be cracked down on resources and all other factors standing in the way of effectiveness and efficiency. Taming is achieved by making the fixed goal the criterion for determining appropriate resources and proper use of those resources. In countering this argument, we do not want to claim that scholastic work methods have no efficacy, nor that we should not consider what that

efficacy may be. We also do not mean to imply that teachers are not goal-oriented. Indeed, they are – they do not come from some foreign planet untouched by technology. What we argue, rather, is that this no longer allows the school and the teacher to try new things. Work methods must be tried out and tested, and this always implies that the teacher herself, the whole class *and* stated goals must be made part of the experiment. This is what we understand as an experimental approach to education. Not in the sense of empirically testing resource-goal relationships – which implies that you already know what it is you seek and thus that you are simply out to increase efficiency and effectiveness – but rather in the sense of daring to bring yourself to that point at which you do not know what you do not yet know, and therefore do not know precisely what it is you are looking for.[34] This is what it means to experiment with something in the strict sense of the word. What a new technique or a new application of an existing work method does to you as a teacher, to the students, but also to the *goals and the subject matter* is to put them all into play. The efficient and effective school or teacher resigns to the 'facts': 'these are the facts and this is how we deal with them!' The school and teacher we have tried to sketch here see any reference to 'facts' as a signal to try something else: 'can we deal with this in a different way?' We can formulate this as follows: formation also applies to the teacher and the school. They too must 'shape up' and consequently must try new things to find their form.

A second variant of taming through technologisation is performativity: the search for an optimal ratio between input and output.[35] The school in this conceptualisation becomes another name for the processing of input into output, that is, of intelligence into learning outcomes, talents into competencies, the socio-economic status of students into (un)qualified outflow. While in the logic of efficiency and effectiveness only the goals are fixed in the pursuit of optimal resources, in the logic of performativity both the goals and resources are fixed. And once this happens, the demand for optimisation becomes

34. Hans-Jörg Rheinberger (2007). Man weiss nicht genau, was man nicht weiss. Über die Kunst, das Unbekannte zu erforschen. *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, 5 Mai 2007.

35. Jean-François Lyotard (1984). *The postmodern condition: A report on knowledge* (G. Bennington & F. Jameson, trans.). Manchester: Manchester University Press.

a demand for performance: better results, faster results. The criterion moves from 'the goal' to 'the most recent results' (we performed better than before, therefore we are high-performing) or to 'the results of peers' (we outperformed other (similar) schools or teachers, therefore we are high-performing). In this way, the imperative 'be competitive – with yourself and with others' is inscribed into the educational system. With the advent of performativity, competitive drive becomes an end in itself and creates a culture of testing and spectacle and, of course, an out-and-out race. The keywords of a performance-based society are well known: faster is better; more is better; to stand still is to go backwards. Think of the performance mentality around cars, computers and, indeed, researchers. Top speed, capability, memory, high ranked publications – competitiveness and curiosity apparently go hand in hand. The obsession with learning outcomes and learning gains can be seen as the educational equivalent of this. Just as the whip of efficiency and effectiveness results in instrumentalisation (in order to meet defined goals), so does the whip of performativity lead to monitoring. The ideal is a continuous measurement of performance in order to produce permanent feedback. A finger on the pulse of everything and everyone. Everything and everyone must be monitored, and not a second can be spared to adjust or fine-tune. This begs the question of whether the economisation of the school today is indeed the result of an intrusive labour market. We would argue that the school is taming itself from within, in the name of performativity and competitiveness. In other words, the educational system is creating its own growth economy, with added value, learning gains, learning credits, and a growing monitoring and feedback apparatus as its focus. As for describing the ultimate goal of all of this, we are given words with largely empty significance: 'achieving excellence'. Or rather, these are the all-significant words touted by those who give their competitive drive free reign. Meanwhile, 'innovation' becomes the symptom of an 'excellent' school. For such a school, competitive innovation is a goal in itself requiring no further explanation. In an era of innovation, that which currently exists is by definition obsolete the moment it is created. It is self-evident that a school such as this is susceptible to trends – and plays a role in creating and perpetuating trendy education. And what makes this taming tactic

so ironic? It turns on a technique developed *by* the school *against* the school: the exam. Besides its typical function as a pedagogical tool for encouraging young people to study, practice and test themselves, the exam has long been an instrument wielded by teachers to measure and guide the progress of these young people. More recently, however, the exam – as a test of learning outcomes or a measure of performance – has become an instrument for auditing teacher and school performance. And what is the prize of the high-performing school and teacher? The learning outcomes of the new generation. The task? To generate profit (by maximising output) using the young generation as venture capital. Put differently, schools and teachers are compelled to return to school indefinitely – and are made to accept a system of constant performance measurement. We see this as the birth of the capitalist school and of the capitalist teacher focused on the maximisation of learning gains – a demolition of their communistic heart. The fall of this (Berlin) wall amounts to de-schooling from the inside out.

XVIII. Psychologisation

Psychologisation is another tactic deployed from within the school to condition teachers and students. It is undeniable that psychology plays an important role in education. This is not new, and it is not in itself problematic. What does threaten the scholastic event is the tendency to replace teaching with a form of psychological counselling. Here, the teacher is expected to play the role of both teacher and psychologist, replacing pedagogical responsibility with therapeutic care-giving. One expression of this trend is the emphasis on students' psychological well-being and 'motivation to learn'. Psychologisation occurs once taking into account the psychological world of the student is made a necessary condition of teaching. In practice, psychologisation happens when the acts of arousing interest and focusing attention on something – acts inherent to pedagogical responsibility – are reformulated into 'motivating students to learn'. School is about being attentive to or having interest in something, and that something is precisely what makes it possible to pull young people out of their surroundings.

Motivating, on the other hand, is a personal matter – the student is thrown back on himself. Pulling young people out of their world – even if only within the walls of the school – is an exciting event. But there is also a tendency to speak of this as a potentially traumatic experience. Additionally, study and practice require effort, a kind of discipline. If attentiveness and interest are present among students, then they are willing to pay this price. Or rather, study and practice are about paying this price time and again in moments of difficulty, and that sacrifice is worth the effort because the focus is on something more important. In these intense moments, well-being is not a primary concern to students – unless the teacher as an amateur therapist reminds them that it is. Extensive psychologisation actually ends in a 'emopedagogy'[36]: a pedagogical act performed not out of love for the world, but rather wholly framed around the emotional well-being of young people. This denies young people the chance to be students, to represent the young generation and to be gripped by something beyond their psychological universe.

XIX. Popularisation

Linked to this extensive psychologisation is the tactic of *popularisation*. One example, drawn from the United Kingdom, is the use of techniques from the entertainment world (such as popular television) in classrooms to counter boredom. The idea is to put teachers with the ability to guarantee a high number of 'viewers' and 'listeners' at the front of the class. A boring lesson is out of the question, and a bored classroom is a sign of failure. Stronger still, employing boring teachers is to be avoided and bored students are a red flag calling for rapid intervention. The exclusive focus on relaxation and (viewing/listening) pleasure amounts to a taming of the tension required for study and practice. It is about easing these tensions – between students and the subject matter – and, as it were, getting as close as possible to the world of the students. This popularisation, so goes the thinking, provides the relaxation needed to

36. Frank Furedi (2009). *Wasted. Why education isn't educating*. London: Continuum.

learn. There is no need for young people to get off the proverbial couch; the teacher settles in beside them and enters their world. Of course, the popular teacher can captivate students' attention, just as popular television shows do.[37] They keep people glued to the screen. And perhaps they also teach you something. Our point is not that learning cannot take place in a playful, relaxed manner. Our point is that school is about something else: the attentiveness for the subject matter, mediated through the classroom, pulls students from their world and brings them 'into play'. The tension is not converted into relaxation but into effort. This means that the student constantly loses himself in something worthy of his effort. Of course, one can also lose oneself in relaxation – by passing the time idly on the couch, for instance – without exerting any effort. At school, time is *created* rather than allowed to pass, and formation rather than relaxation is the order of the day. Formation refers to rising beyond one's world. Learning refers to expanding one's world. In this sense, there is truth in the statement that television is a window to the world, and that one can learn something by watching television. But it remains a stationary activity that does not require one to leave the house. It does not pull you out of your (domestic) world – no matter how big the screen may be. Formulated sharply: popularisation keeps students infantile while the school is a place for maturing, advancing, finding a way in the world, and rising above oneself – and thus also of rising above one's world. This takes time and can lead to moments of boredom. It can be unpleasant – hence the temptation to relax – but often it is precisely these moments of boredom or disinterest that are impregnated with the potential to suddenly burst into something interesting. We are not making a plea for boredom and dullness here. We are making a plea against the common tendency to immediately problematise and propose a remedy for everything that belongs to the *condition humaine et scolaire*.

37. Bernard Stiegler (2010). *Taking Care of Youth and the Generations* (S. Barker, trans.). Stanford: Stanford University Press.

TAMING THE TEACHER

School – as free time in which the world is shared and children or young people have the experience of being able to begin – must be created. In this 'made space' of hallways, classrooms, textbooks and technologies, the teacher, as we have already indicated, occupies a particularly special role. For us, however, the teacher is not a historical, sociological or psychological *type*, but rather a pedagogical *figure* that inhabits the school. Strictly speaking, it would be more appropriate and more precise to use the old word 'schoolmaster': she is a master, someone who understands and loves her craft, but she carries it out not in a workshop or in a business but at school. She is a master of the scholastic, where 'scholastic' refers to the scholastic 'essence' we have described. Unfortunately, the word has fallen out of usage. It now has an almost exclusively negative and waggish connotation and is associated only with not-so-fondly-remembered individuals who haunt our personal and collective memory. For that reason, we will stick to using the word 'teacher'. The teacher as a pedagogic figure and a master both devoted to and well versed in her subject. But also a master who makes the conscious choice to remove her craft or business from the productive sphere, where it still has a clear return, in order to engage it and offer it fully and exclusively as subject matter (the subject for the sake of the subject, the craft for the sake of the craft).

This is what the engineer does when she leaves her job in industry to take a position in education, because as an engineering teacher she can occupy herself solely with the technique itself and not with technique in an economic or societal sense. In doing this, she confesses not only a love for technique, but also a desire to freely explore it, not unlike the way children do, making it public and freeing herself and her subject – at least temporarily – from submission to an economic or societal order. But she is also expressing that she loves technique *and* children enough to bring these things to the table for the new generation – which simultaneously frees her and her students from the power of the old generation (parents, grandparents, adults), or at least temporarily suspends their power (something of which members of the old generation are acutely aware when they drop off their children at school every morning). The engineer-turned-teacher is

no longer a 'slave' of the economy, nor of the social order, nor of the domestic sphere and their so-called 'realism'. She is a kind of freed slave.[38] One who surrenders to her love for technique (or, in a general sense, her love for the subject or for the world). She cares more about the subject than she does about herself or the social order – with is more or less fixed in space and meaning – within which the subject is contained. She also gives herself over to her love for the children – she loves the children more than she loves their parents. There are, of course, risks involved: a freed slave such as she must gain our trust if we are to entrust our children to her and may quickly become an object of suspicion, fear and perhaps even jealousy (brought on by an envy of her liberated or emancipated status). On the one hand, a person who chooses to give up being a 'real' or 'actual' engineer is regarded as an idealist. On the other, she is viewed with pity as a weakling who could not handle 'the real world'. And as a teacher, like many before her, she inevitably becomes the object of very ambivalent feelings: admiration, attraction, occasional awe mixed with jealousy and deep contempt. She is the object of ridicule and banal claims, simultaneously considered necessary and utterly unnecessary, useful and useless. As we have said, this has to do with the teacher's public, pedagogical significance and (lack of) position. The teacher is not a psychologist, sociologist or engineer, nor an ordinary woman or man, father or mother. The teacher is a figure without properties – her status is a non-status, one which is not entirely incomparable to that of the child. The teacher is a figure with no proper place in a social order, and is thus a public figure (as artists are, for instance). The teacher is a figure that, in some way or another, always falls outside the established order. The teacher is not 'real'. Consequently, the teacher always destabilises the established order – or better: she always suspends it or renders it inoperative in some way.

The teacher is a figure whose way of life implies a certain level of self-reliance and self-discipline. She is someone who constantly reminds herself that she is a freed slave and that there is a price to be paid for this. She cares for herself. She is someone who constantly

38. We are alluding here to the well-known fact that our word 'pedagogue' has its root in the Greek word for the slave whose task it was to bring a child to school.

reminds herself that she does not serve a particular social or economic order that than pays her for the trouble – that is, she is concerned with her own relation to the subject matter, and thus is someone accepting to be called a profiteer. And she is someone who reminds herself that she does not serve parents or the old generation despite being member to it – someone who is thus taking care of her relation to children and is willing to be called a 'smarty pants'. This also implies that she must keep herself in check: she must fight egotism, avoid pedantry, and above all eschew two forms of misplaced or absolutised love, both of which are actually privatising or self-indulging love. The first is an absolutisation of the love for the world whereby the things of the world are made into *her* things and are no longer brought to the table and unhanded for all to use. Such a teacher blocks the new generation because she experiences it as a threat. She tolerates or (mis)uses the young generation for her own ends *and* rejects all forms of renewal. The second is the absolutisation of the love for children whereby children are made into *her* children and the task of teaching is relegated to the margin. Such a teacher does not take children seriously and deprives them of the opportunity of formation. A choking absolutisation.

A teacher is someone who has no sharply delineated 'task' in the way that a 'professional' does. Conversely, the teacher is someone who puts *herself* at the service of the subject or the task. These she does not see primarily as something to be exploited for financial gain, nor as 'her' subject or 'her' task, precisely because it is the subject or task that captivates or impassions *her*. She is at the service of children who are not *her* children but are entrusted to her. She loves the world and she loves children, and therefore she is an enthusiast or an amateur whose love is not limited to working hours. She *re*presents the world, the task or the subject (she "brings it into the present tense", to cite Pennac once more), renders them present and thus makes them public in relation to the new generation. She does this not only in the sense of exposing or showing, but also in the sense of profanation: the rendering inoperative of ordinary productivity. And with this, she makes the subject or task and *herself* available. If teachers as schoolmasters have a special art, it is the art of *disciplining* (in the positive sense of focusing attention) and *presenting* (as in bringing into the present tense or making public).

This is not an art that teachers can possess merely through knowledge or skills. It is an *embodied* art and thus one that corresponds to a way of life – something to which one might refer as a 'calling', a word also used for artists or even politicians, often with a connotation of surprise regarding the (economic) irrationality of certain life choices and pursuits. The art of disciplining is not only the art of preserving order, as we like to believe, but also the art of utilising the right techniques to create attention and focus in the classroom. It is discipline not as dumb submission and punishment but as a technique of attention. And the art of presenting is not merely the art of making something known; it is the art of making something exist, the art of giving authority to a thought, a number, a letter, a gesture, a movement or an action and in that sense it brings that something to life. It is the art of bringing something into proximity by engaging it and offering it up. This is not a passive, neutral act of offering, nor an indifferent handing over. It is encouraging, engaging or inviting the student to participate in the task at hand – in short, creating interest – and this from an embodied position. This creating of interest is precisely what calls up feelings of ambivalence: there is, on the one hand, admiration, fascination and appreciation for teachers' passion and inspiration, and on the other, distrust (and fear) of this self-same passion and inspiration on the part of parents, politicians and leaders who do not and cannot approve of it. Their greatest fear: guidance toward the 'wrong path' – the son or daughter pre-anointed to take over the family business or become a surgeon who now, through a teacher's influence, is intent on becoming an artist or an historian.

It is thus not surprising that both the school and the teacher have been confronted from the beginning with attempts to tame them. And in this case, too, we can speak of an overall strategy. This strategy consisted and consists in neutralising or 'professionalising' the double love relationship either by transforming it into a relationship of obedience, as in the modern era – that is, by turning a freed slave into actual slave (the civil servant-slave of the state, the faith-slave of religion, the domestic-slave of the economy) – or by transforming it into a contractual relationship, as happens more and more today – that is, by turning the freed slave into a service professional or a 'flexible'

self-employed and entrepreneurial person. Teachers were/are made into civil servants, service providers, employees/workers and entrepreneurs and in that respect become 'professionals' occupying clear and unambiguous positions in the social order. Their amateur and public character – their status as a 'freed slave' – becomes neutralised and their work becomes loveless and privatised. More and more, the freed slave assumes the position of a private business manager. And remuneration is now tied to specific services rendered. In other words, it is not linked to the (financial) resources necessary to carry out the overall task, namely, the embodying of the manner in which society receives the new generation and renews itself. This would require that teachers be allowed the means to take special care in determining their own relation to the subject matter and to the students, and thus in a sense that they be exempted or freed from society's regular productivity requirements. The general strategy of the professionalisation of the double love relationship is therefore also an attempt to banish the risks of the school as a public place where something can happen (and not only something can be learned). In addition to this general strategy, this form of taming finds its expression today in several more specific tactics that neutralise or even deactivate the teacher's care of the self and her relation to and distance from herself, the society and the domestic sphere.

XX. Professionalisation

First of all and from all sides is the call for an organised *professionalisation* of the teacher. This is a taming tactic with a rather long history. We will call out three variants.

A first variant of this tactic is aimed at replacing teachers' so-called wisdom of experience with expertise or competency. The dream teacher in this professionalisation discourse is one whose expertise is based on validated and reliable knowledge: someone who acts according to 'the methods' and in an 'evidence-based' manner. The dream – which may or may not be fuelled by education researchers – is to create a teacher equipped with a knowledge base encapsulated in professionalism. That knowledge base is made up of scientifically

proven theories, models, methods and even a scientifically validated deontology. To the extent that this professionalisation is propelled by disciplines that position themselves as 'techno-sciences', all of this is accompanied by the dissemination of technical criteria: professionalisation as a continuation of taming by technologisation. Hidden behind the 'scientific' label is the presumed criterion that 'it works' (or it doesn't), and often involves the application of knowledge that has been 'proven' to reach given targets (better) or that leads to a (better) realisation of given learning outcomes. Goal realisation, learning gains and growth margins thus become the professional basic terms of the teacher in the mould of a (techno-) scientific ideal: professionalisation as a path to progress through the application of science and technology. Amateurism appears here as the jaded condition of the teacher caught in a private world of self-sure ignorance, subjective hunches, perceptions and persistent misunderstandings. The moral imperative that goes with professionalisation is this: rise above the state of amateurism. This implies the taming and even elimination of amateurism. It also implies that the accompanying significance of the teacher as lover – who acts out of love for the world and for the next generation – no longer carries currency in the discourse. Any reference to love for the cause, for the subject, for the subject matter becomes ridiculous – these are characteristics of the cave-dwelling teacher. The forward-looking optimism of professionalisation relegates terms like embodiment, inspiration and attention generation to the dustbin of the past or to the margins: interesting material for historical research or for marginal romantics but hopelessly unusable as a guide for contemporary – let alone future-oriented – research. The air of the school is crystallised by the cold-blooded ideal of scientificity. But the jury is still out on whether the crystal palace in the dream – that beautiful, illuminated, transparent, measured-out and endless space where everything works – is even habitable. Everything may work, but nothing has meaning. It is as if we lost love somewhere along the way. The figure of the loving teacher is not antithetical to research or professional development. Quite the contrary. It just does not gel with a learning process that expands in length and width and a professionalisation that takes aim at the subjective world of the teacher. It sees research and professional

development as a process of formation that expands in depth and height in which the teacher continually brings herself into play. The teacher, too, needs free time, that is, time for self-formation through study and practice.

A second variant of the professionalisation tactic equally begins from the now-presupposed expectation that the teacher is a specialist or an expert but emphases a 'realistic' grounding more than a scientific ideal. Illustrative of this are the professional profiles compiled by governments and the accompanying lists of basic competencies expected of (beginning) teachers. These transform teaching into a profession 'in its own right' with a clear function and specific benchmarks, services and outcomes to deliver. In this formulation, the teacher's expertise is generally translated as 'competency', that is, as (assumed) knowledge, skills and attitudes that can be employed to perform concrete tasks. In other words, the actual work context and, more specifically, the functions and duties that populate it are of guiding importance. Here again the technical criteria of efficiency and effectiveness are at the forefront: professional competencies literally express what must be done in order to perform the actual work. Competencies are a translation of all the necessary elements in a given work environment – in this case, the school as a workplace for teachers – that must be in place in order to implement the required functions and tasks. The professional teacher, in other words, is the competent teacher, and more specifically, the teacher whose competencies are employable in the actual work environment. A professional profile thus functions as an instrument for assessing, adjusting and developing the professionalism of the teacher on the one hand and, on the other, as the starting point for determining the basic competencies (in the form of end-term learning outcomes) expected of young teachers fresh out of teacher training. These profiles and competencies place a whip in the hand of the government used to tame not only the school but also experienced and novice teachers. It is a taming in the name of the current market demands, of optimal intake and of employability. Professional profiles are conservative in essence; compliant teacher training programmes reproduce the competencies for the educational context of the current moment. In that sense, the default motto for young teachers-in-training becomes 'onward to

the past'. Another aim is the uniform positioning of the 'profession' within the standardised language of competencies. And as with any standard language, dialects arise as a hard-to-eradicate phenomenon and something that is still cherished, with a certain nostalgia, in private quarters of education, but that nonetheless will soon be provided with standardised subtitles. The ideal of scientificity clears space here for the realism of the professional world. But while professionalisation in the name of scientific idealism results in a cold, business-like reality, a realism-motivated professionalisation seems to result in an laughable virtuality. The lists of functions, competencies and sub-competencies evoke an intricacy that takes on a life of its own. The handiwork of determining course objectives and developing a curriculum becomes a challenge for professional puzzlers; the rules are laid down and pencils are sharpened for the checking off of achieved sub-competencies. For the student and the teacher-in-training at the start of her professional development, the game starts here, with a business-like reality and a laughable virtuality. What disappears – or is at least silenced – is the caring teacher who is truly devoted to the cause. Knowledge, skills or attitudes are reduced to 'competencies'. But obtaining these competencies cannot guarantee a job well done, let alone a loving relation to it. Love for the world and for the new generation shows itself in wisdom, actions and relationships. Or, to put it another way, a competent teacher is not the same thing as a well-formed teacher.

A third tactical variant is related to the previous two: professionalisation through the pressure of accountability. The two previous versions of professionalisation see providing education or teaching as a form of rendering a service. In those variants, the professional or competent teacher is someone who is at the service of something or someone, and more specifically, she is someone who is demand-driven. This can range from student-centeredness to labour market-centeredness to a focus on achieving certain objectives (imposed by a government in the name of societal expectations). And once education becomes a supplied good in the service of a specific demand – as vague or unclear as it may be – then 'quality' becomes an all-important measure. The term 'quality' – as we have all probably encountered by now – carries currency by virtue of its 'emptiness'.

Everything and anything can become an indicator of quality, and nothing can escape the all-seeing eye of quality assurance. The term 'quality culture' perfectly expresses the voluntary submission to the all-seeing eye of quality. Every first-order activity must, as a kind of automatic reflex, be accompanied by a second-order activity that always boils down to the following questions: 'How does this contribute to a high-quality service?' and 'Does what I am doing constitute a supply at the service of demand?'. When these kinds of questions guide the actions of the teacher, an accountability culture is created: an ability, need, and especially a desire to hold oneself accountable to predefined quality indicators (student needs, satisfaction, targets and gains, performance indicators, etc.). Unsurprisingly, this is often accompanied by a third-party external body – a visitation panel or an inspector's office – that fulfils a third-order function: a culture police that regulates whether the quality culture is in fact present. In such a quality culture – which ours increasingly resembles – the inability or refusal to account for one's performance is viewed with suspicion or seen as a sign of a lack of quality. There are likely quality culture variants related to the scientificity-based or labour market-based variants of professionalisation: the professional realism where quality assurance gives way to a coercive bureaucratisation (where accountability is a serious, formal matter of appealing to the established rules, procedures and indicators), or the playful virtualism where quality assurance is the name of the game (where accountability is a thing of its own; an exercise in juggling words, concepts and procedures). But there is also a third variant, which comes about when accountability (as a second-order activity) actually *precedes* teaching and the making of a school (as a first-order activity). In this culture, whatever is deemed unnecessary or unacceptable according to the established rules of quality service is simply never actually done. In this way, the teacher-as-service-provider actually tames herself: she submits to a quality tribunal and obeys the laws of quality service. In such a culture, quality assurance is no longer experienced as bureaucratic (over)reach nor as a boring game, but as a mad regime – with totalitarian characteristics.

It is not inconceivable that all this leads to a situation in which so-

called activities of the second and third order get the upper hand – both in terms of time and importance – in determining how a school is made and teaching is done. And, quite apart from the illusion of control over teaching and learning that characterises the entire pattern of thought around professionalism and quality assurance, this implies that the teacher is called on to assume an attitude focused exclusively on results, growth and profit – and to continually justify her actions in this regard. This makes focusing on the (socially-determined) things of importance increasingly difficult or impossible for the teacher, and so revokes her authority to share the world. Her amateurism, which takes the form of a certain embodiment and dedication to the cause, is seen as ridiculous and unprofessional. An able, quality-oriented teacher certainly knows no 'free time' in carrying out her work and calls on her time are constant. Her time must be productive and functional and be put to as efficient a use as possible in the service of predetermined targets and goals. Even the time spent on social activities or the attention paid to students' emotional problems is made functional. All of this must be justified in terms of providing yield-bearing services. Unproductive time, in this formulation, can only exist as leisure time outside of work or as break time during work. But again, both leisure time and break time are actually just forms of productive time: time used to create energy and 'recharge'. In this regime of quality assurance, the teacher may also be more inclined – as a reaction or escape route – to emphasise the distinction between work and home. Privacy becomes jealously guarded and hours carefully counted – not so much to escape from teaching, but to escape from the permanent pressure of accountability that comes with it. This has an ironic and extreme consequence: the only time left over for occupying oneself with love for teaching is the free time claimed outside of working hours. For the self-liberating teacher, assigned reading becomes vacation reading and thorough lesson planning becomes a weekend pastime. The time for amateurism is exiled to evenings, nights, weekends and holidays. The school becomes a business and teaching becomes a job, rather than a way of life in which there is no clear distinction between work and private life and in which one can and may lose track of time in pursuit of a love that often extends beyond working hours. In other words, there

is no longer any 'free time' to give form to the love for the subject, the cause – at least not during business hours.

In a condition such as this, responsibility is replaced by its tamed version: responsiveness in view of accountability. When responsibility is understood in terms of justifying results and returns, pedagogical responsibility disappears. This responsibility refers to the (difficult-to-measure) giving of authority to things and the forming of interest. This goes beyond simply helping students to develop talents (or learning ability) or keeping up with the curriculum. It is about opening up new worlds (and thus pulling students out of their immediate life-world and needs) and forming interest. This is possible precisely because the teacher herself shows interest, embodies it, and gives it time to develop – and in so doing perfects herself. This is where pedagogical responsibility is situated. Placing the emphasis so strongly on the accountable provision of a service and permanent responsiveness displaces the significance of the teacher's own relationship to the cause, the manner in which she embodies and gives shape to it in the presence of the student, and the manner in which she cares for *herself* as a person. The rapidly increasing pressure of accountability threatens to eradicate that love and interest for the world (love for the cause/subject as the cause/subject) and for students. The risk: a teacher who no longer shares the world with young people and can no longer care for herself, that is, a teacher who ceases to be a teacher at all.

XXI. Flexibilisation

A modern corporate culture that places a premium on quality and professionalism demands flexibility of its staff. Lasting love, perseverance, conviction, and basic trust are bad for innovation and thus are bad for growth and profit. Or rather, these attitudes become inscribed into competencies which can be deployed wherever and whenever necessary – and so can also be deactivated wherever and whenever necessary. Why? Because the meta-competence of the competent teacher is the ability to ensure that she is deployable and employable

at all times and everywhere. Therefore, she must see to it that she has all the competencies needed to make herself deployable. This is what the tactic of *flexibilisation* aims to achieve: the teacher who is never 'employed', but can be 'deployed' anywhere. The flexible teacher is no longer someone who is enraptured by her subject and lives for it, but someone who can be enraptured by everything – as demand requires. For her, every school is a workplace like any other; she can – if necessary – show loyalty to any school, and also withdraw it – after all, loyalty is a competency. Flexibility also means mobility. The time of limiting the word 'mobilisation' to the context of war – the movement of people and equipment – is over. Moreover, we accept without much resistance that we must enter the struggle for a competitive knowledge economy; the struggle to achieve the highest-performing education system in Europe or even the world; the struggle to win the championship of excellent schools and teachers. But as such things usually go, it remains unclear *which* war or championship we are being mobilised to contest. It is framed as a matter of necessity: flexibility and mobility are requisite parts of the militant teacher's blind obedience to order. All battles have casualties; all championships need losers. But that is the price to be paid for providing a high-quality service and achieving excellence. The tactics of flexibilisation function subtly and conjure new ideals of and for the teacher, many of which exert a taming effect on her.

First of all, flexibility demands a kind of permanent (self-) monitoring. The ideal has it that the teacher should be on top of the situation everywhere and at all times in order to increase deployability. Insofar as the flexible teacher must be maximally deployable, it is surely important to monitor deployability on a constant basis. Today, as has been said, the good teacher is the competent teacher and the competent teacher is the teacher whose portfolio has check marks next to all the right sub-competencies. It is the teacher who, as a manager, exercises a continuous self-monitoring of the capital acquired in her portfolio and of its strengths and weaknesses. She permanently thinks in terms of degrees of (partial) competence. Self-reflection takes on a very specific meaning here: with a view to permanent deployability, this implies the continuous evaluation of one's own performance in terms of strengths and weaknesses, the permanent documentation of one's competency

bottom line, and the continuous development of marketing strategies to sell one's own labour power. Self-reflection, in other words, is a factor of self-management. The dream is the teacher as a small but excellent and well-managed enterprise. The teacher, then, is increasingly expected to manage her own time ('set priorities'), energy output ('exert effort and recharge batteries'), competences ('couple tasks to adequate human resources') and level of quality ('develop service with added value'). The result is that all sorts of problems in the school and in its functioning can be attributed to problems in the self-management of the teacher; with certain freedoms come new responsibilities, and often this brings with it new sticking points that can be used to take the teacher to task and attribute problems to the person or attitude of the teacher.

Additionally, an ideal image of the teacher as *omnivalent multi-tasker* is called into being. Teaching here is seen as a position made up of a collection of tasks to be performed, the completion of which requires the presence of certain competencies (which may or may not be possessed by a single teacher). It is clear that the teacher must conceptualise what she does in terms of tasks to be performed in order to actually be able to perform them. Once again the message is: do not allow yourself to get carried away; set priorities. In several respects, this mobilisation of the teacher – which either is no longer anchored to a single location or thing or requires teachers to give up these bonds (to a school, a subject, a particular subject matter) – implies that the development, deepening and formation of the loving relationship becomes more difficult and, in fact, becomes regarded as undesirable. The relationship to a given subject or subject matter today seems increasingly to be of secondary concern. Love for the subject or for the cause is given no role at all. The teacher finds herself situated between the learner (with his talents and needs) on the one hand and competencies (with instrumental subject matter) on the other. In such a position, it is difficult to give expression to love for the subject and love for the students, and it is exceedingly difficult to generate interest through the embodied interest and engagement of the teacher herself.

Particularly in terms of educating new teachers, this conjures an ideal of the perfectly *trained* teacher. Subjects with a more or less academic background are no longer the starting point for curriculum

development within teacher training. Increasingly, a modular structure based on a list of competencies is the norm. This calls to mind an analogy with the gym and bodybuilding: bodybuilding is about training individual muscle groups, going through a checklist of exercises and repetitions and keeping track of results. Heart rate and exertion levels are meticulously observed and monitored, the smallest deviation is recorded and feedback on one's condition is constant. It is an analytical, atomistic training regime. Muscles and other core parts of the body are trained and growth is closely tracked. In this way, today's teacher training programmes are not unlike a fitness regime. Once again, the idea is to practice partial competencies and work to instil a permanent feedback mechanism based on monitoring growth. How much this analytic training contributes to a good synthesis of and embodied love for a subject is still an open question. Is a heavily muscled teacher a well-formed teacher? Self-monitoring and self-reflection as a function of deployable knowledge and skills trivialises and ignores the self-care of the teacher. First and foremost, the loving teacher orients herself not toward (partial) competences but toward a certain way of life, a dedicated attitude toward life that manifests itself in her personality and her relationship to the subject matter and the new generation.

Another idealisation that invokes the tactic of flexibilisation is the image of the *standardised* teacher. This refers to the tendency to model the teacher on a standard, and often as a consequence of the emphasis on 'evidence-based teaching' (effective instruction and teaching methods) or on professional profiles and basic competencies. This is not to say that there are not (or should not be) differences between teachers, but that these differences are variations within the framework of the basic competencies needed to perform the job. Maximal flexibility, in this conception, is only possible within a standardised framework that enables employability and mobility; a framework where everything and everyone is interchangeable and interconnected, has the same unit of measure and uses the same language. For us, however, differences are what make a corps of amateur teachers excel. Each individual teacher is not a variant that can be situated within a singular profile or a standardised framework. The loving teacher, as it were, is the embodiment of a uniquely individual standard; she seeks

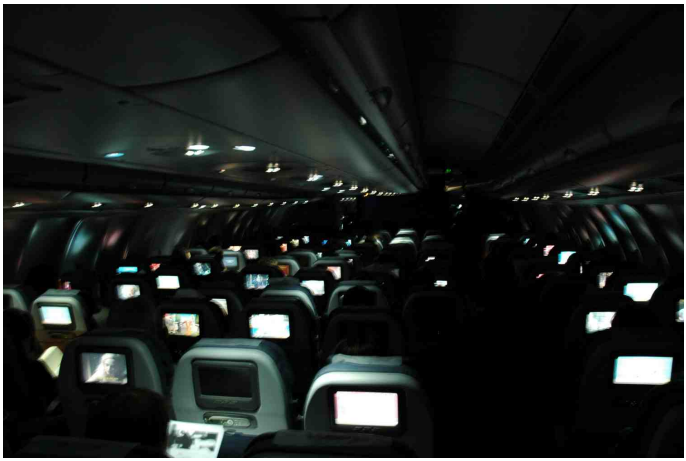
to find equilibrium in what she does and in the position she assumes in relation to herself, the subject matter and her students. Forcing all of this to fit within a standard, measurable framework quite frankly usurps a teacher's soul. And even if that is the intention, such usurpation is certainly not a good thing for the teacher. That standardisation is a potentially (soul-)damaging tactic does not mean that the teacher is above any form of control, accountability or assessment. In this respect, perhaps the challenge, now more than ever, is to seek out new processes and forms of assessment that give a place to love and the self-care of the teacher. Amateur school leadership instead of professional school leadership is almost certainly a prerequisite to this. Such leadership would likely abandon a standardised corps of competent teachers in favour of a diverse corps of loving teachers who embody something, who differ because of this, and yes, who are somewhat less mouldable because of this. A group of diverse, loving teachers increases the chance that a student will meet at least *one* teacher who stimulates his or her interest; loving teachers as well as school leaders are well aware that they cannot stimulate every student's interest and that being popular does not necessarily coincide with being inspiring.

And finally, the tactic of flexibilisation conjures the figure of the *calculating* teacher. This trivialises the generosity, dedication and perfectionism of the loving teacher, or, stronger still, projects a continuous signal of fundamental distrust. As an extension of the one-sided competence profile and the far-reaching quality culture, today's teacher is increasingly expected to monitor and demonstrate her own accountability. And this self-justification must be expressed mainly in terms of the effectiveness and efficiency of 'services rendered' and output. Indeed, many contemporary forms of school management encourage this as a basic premise. The term 'accountability' has become a permanent fixture in the contemporary policy discourse. The starting point is usually that the teacher is a calculating person who only exerts extra effort if 'incentives' are involved. As such, an economic version of the behaviourist stimulus-response theory is introduced into policy practice: a desired behaviour can be provoked if and when the right incentives are offered up. In other words, the assumption is that teachers essentially act according to their own interests and make continual cost-

benefit analyses before deciding to act. Justifying something on the basis of love for the subject or for the students is, from this economic perspective, nothing more than an ideology utilised by the teacher to cover up her own self-interested intentions. The cautionary message is: be suspicious of anyone who calls upon higher and noble interests to justify her actions because it is often an attempt to evade control and dodge direct, transparent accountability. The trick of the trade, in this conception, is the effective use of incentives to influence the cost-benefit matrix and coerce teachers into doing what needs to be done – and if these incentives give teachers the (false) impression that they themselves chose to do the work or wanted to do the work, all the better. The question that must be raised here, however, is whether the appearance on the scene of the calculating teacher is the result – rather than the cause – of the contemporary quality culture and the pressure of accountability. Isn't it conceivable that teachers are becoming more calculating because they are constantly and relentlessly being held accountable? After all, being held accountable implies that a teacher must show that her accounts balance out, or at least that she can demonstrate results in some way – even if these results say little or nothing about her work as a teacher. Our counter to this conception can be summarised in an alternative question: Is it really so crazy to trust in the perfectionism and the often tireless efforts of the amateur teacher? Proving that a teacher acts only in her own interest (and thus that a policy of distrust is to be preferred) is as difficult as proving that a teacher does *not* act out of self-interest (and thus that a policy based on trust makes the most sense). And if proof eludes us, all of this becomes a matter of faith, an assumption. We resolutely choose to start from the assumption that teachers act out of love for the world and love for the new generation. We choose trust. Once again, this is not to say that there is something wrong with the idea that the teacher must be held accountable. Rather, we take issue with the specific form that this takes in today's policy discourse, which forces the teacher to conceive of her work as a productive, outcome-oriented enterprise. For today's teacher (as a representative of society), teaching is no longer a pedagogical assignment involving an (uncalculated) obligation to the cause, the subject, and the children, which goes above and beyond

producing learning outcomes and collecting the incentives that come from it. The immeasurable authority that a teacher imparts on things or the act of generating interest in a student implies an acceptance of the scholastic practice as an open event; one that cannot be controlled or calculated through predetermined outcomes or incentives, and thus cannot be accounted for in those terms. If society is to be renewed, it must free itself and hazard to entrust responsibility for this renewal to figures – teachers – exempted from the obligation to produce results.

EXPERIMENTUM SCHOLAE:
THE EQUALITY OF BEGINNING



At first, it may have seemed strange to put forth a defence of the school's very right to exist. No one could truly believe that the school is on the verge of disappearing and that it is being threatened in very real ways. School buildings are still standing, many of them as massive and immemorial as ever – built of solid stone. And new schools are being built, too. Teacher training programmes are in high demand, although it must be said that certain courses have problems and there is a risk of a shortage of spots. And everyone, or almost everyone, still goes to school. Indeed, many schools are overcrowded; students are lining up to be admitted within their walls. Moreover, if there is one thing we are convinced of in these times, it is that Flemish schools are performing well in the global education championship. We may not lead in every category – not everyone gets the chance to shine – but we are certainly not bringing up the rear and forward progress is being made. And yet...

And yet, the school is under attack now more than ever before. As we have indicated, these attacks are not new. From its inception and throughout history, the school has been confronted with attempts to tame its democratic and communistic dimension. Those efforts are deadlier today than ever. New schools may be many, and nearly everyone may (want to) go to school, but, as we have indicated, strategies and tactics to tame the school remain. And those strategies and tactics target the heart of the school itself; the very thing that makes the school a school and animates its existence: love for the world and for the new generation.

Our concern for the school and our defence of its existence can certainly be understood as a plea *pro domo*. We are 'pedagogues' and that means that, for us, the school, its teachers, its subject matter and its students are what we love. But this is not just an issue for educators. It is a public issue, an issue that affects us all. In his own famous apology narrated to us by Plato and Xenophon, Socrates defends himself by pointing out the importance of the philosopher and of philosophy to the state and society. Philosophers and philosophy ensure that citizens do not fade into complacency but remain alert and take care of their individual and collective existence. In our view, the invention of the school – where these philosophers and their philosophy would (luckily) go on to find shelter – is socially much more far-reaching

and radical. The school and the associated scholastic experience of 'being able to' (and not the philosophical experience of 'wonder' or the moral experience of 'obligation') are what produce the eminently revolutionary mark of democracy in and upon society. The concrete embodiment of the distinction between 'free or undestinated time' and 'productive or destinated time' that gives rise to the school and its figures goes hand-in-hand with the making visible of equality and the making possible of the ability to begin. The school rejects any and all notion of a predetermined fate. It is deaf to the invocation of a fate or of a natural predestination. The school is based on the hypothesis of equality. It offers up the world as a common good in order to enable its renewal through the formation of interest and curiosity. The school is therefore not only a democratic invention but also a communistic one by which the world is not only passed on but also made free – the school creates a 'common good'. To us, it is an invention particularly worthy of defence today, at a time when unproductive time seems to no longer (be allowed to) exist; when natural predestination is making its return via the talent myth and when common good is being reduced to a source for the capitalisation of individual existence – a *resource* for the realisation of individual choices or preferences for investment in the productive development of talents.

We have certainly noted that the attacks on the school today manifest themselves as appealing calls to maximise learning gains and optimise well-being for all. But behind – or on the underside of – this call lurks a strategy of destruction and a denial or neutralisation of the scholastic ideal, one that reduces the school to a service-providing institution for advancing learning and thus for satisfying individual learning needs and optimising individual learning outcomes. That focus on learning, which today seems so obvious to us, is actually implicated in the call to conceive of our individual and collective lives as an enterprise focused on the optimal and maximal satisfaction of needs. In this context, learning appears as one of the most valuable forces of production, one that allows for the constant production of new competencies and forms the engine for accumulating human capital. Time as time to learn is equated here with productive time, or more precisely, with constant calculation with an eye toward (future) income

or return and useful resources. For the enterprising individual – which today includes students, teachers and parents – time is always occupied: individual talents *must* be found and developed; optimal choices *must* be made; added value *must* be produced; human capital *must* be developed and accumulated. This condition is aptly articulated in the now well-trafficked terms 'permanent' and 'permanence'. Being entrepreneurial means being permanently busy and learning on a permanent basis. Time for the entrepreneurial self is thus a means of production, or even a product, and hence something that can and must be 'managed'. It is a time of priorities, investment, and return. If we read policy texts from recent years, for example, a very specific image of education becomes apparent, namely, education as a means of production of human capital. Education produces output in the form of useful learning outcomes or employable competences. This is accompanied by a political story in which all of us are called upon to deploy our talents and competences for an (economic) war that, so it is said, must be permanently waged to ensure a prosperous society, to provide opportunity for all and to make Europe the world's highest performing knowledge economy. As the Flemish government's *Competence Agenda* has it, it is all about "literally mobilising everyone to discover, develop and deploy competences".[39] The government and society are at war or are fighting a permanent battle and – backed by science – urge us all to contribute our competences and talents to the effort and, above all, to ensure that our competencies and talents are *de*ployable and *em*ployable. We are being mobilised and called to duty: we must apply ourselves totally and always. There is no time to lose. The message is: time is not something you receive, and it is not something you give; it is a *resource* that can and must be *managed*. In this sense, there can *be* no 'free time', and we *have* no time – we can only set priorities for how to use always-already occupied time. In this conception, all time becomes time to learn i.e. productive time that must be optimised for maximal effectiveness and efficiency.

This focus on learning – which today seems so obvious to us because it is connected to our understanding of individual and collective

39. Retrieved from: http://www.ond.vlaanderen.be/nieuws/archief/2007/2007p/0514-competentie agenda.htm

life as the optimal use of resources for the satisfaction of needs – constitutes not only a direct attack on the school as unproductive time, but also functions as a Trojan horse. By designating learning as the central task of the school, one finds oneself confronted with a radical threat from within. After all, if the school really were (only) about learning, one must prove that one learns better, more or in a different way in school than outside school. And this is becoming harder and harder to do. Not only are there many things that one learns – better and faster – outside the school, but learning today has become something that we can and must do everywhere. Especially with the appearance of virtual learning environments (thanks to new information and communication technologies), the school seems to, or better, threatens to become superfluous to learning. Indeed, in the digital age, the school conceived of as a place for learning where learning is space- and time-bound is in fact no longer needed. The focus on learning thus leads to a focus on learning *environments* and to an approach to information and communication technology as technology that helps establish productive learning time achieve maximal effectiveness and efficiency.

To us, what is needed is a change of focus. First of all, all of us today can agree that the current economic crisis (and its effect on employment, poverty, etc.) has absolutely nothing to do with a lack of competencies or effort on the part of the (working) population, but rather is/was largely caused by capitalist speculation. Mobilisation, urged on by competency agendas and grand narratives about the struggle for competitive knowledge economies and the fable on human talent, rests on wobbly empirical evidence and leads to a blind race that 'capitalises' everything and everyone and leaves us all with nothing but occupied time. Stronger still, this mobilisation creates, especially in education, a quality and accountability culture in which we are all constantly filling in our own personal ledger books – and fighting the urge to use dubious means to make them balance out. A subculture of padded numbers, doctored calculations and bubbles is never far from the surface.

But this mobilisation also leads to the demise of the essential task of the school and education: the renewal of society through the new generation. As we have said, the school is not (so much) the place where one learns what cannot be learned in one's own direct life-

world, but rather the place where society renews itself by freeing and offering up its knowledge and expertise as a common good in order to make formation possible. This does not concern the demand for optimising learning gains or provisioning productive time. It concerns the demand for enabling formation and provisioning free time for study, practice and thought. In a context where teachers and students have no time anymore and developments in information and communication technology are increasingly pulling the plug on previous scholastic architecture, technology and practice, what we are faced with is the very reinvention of the school. At its heart, our defence is not a call for the stalwart preservation of or glorious return to old forms, techniques and practices, but a call to experiment with concrete ways to create 'free time' in today's world and to gather young people around 'common good' – a trial or experiment that is not controlled from the outset by a fixed human or societal vision, but one informed by what we have called the typical scholastic. Up to this point, we have endeavoured to develop a touchstone – an identifier elaborated as precisely as possible – of the typical scholastic and its democratic and communistic character. It is perhaps a slightly unusual touchstone. Or rather, it is a touchstone in the actual sense of the word: a marker to establish a measure of authenticity; in this case a marker that enables an appreciation for the stuff that makes up the scholastic – the scholastic *gestalt*. It is not a comprehensive set of criteria and indicators for determining quality and added value. The aim, concretely, is to experiment with the different characteristics of the scholastic.

One thinks of experimenting with the different ways 'free time' can be created today, time in which society's seemingly all-important logic of employability and efficiency can be placed between brackets, temporarily suspended so that one is no longer mobilised but allowed to dwell on one thing, in one place, for a while. It is not so much about 'slowing down' – although that may be a result – but rather about experimenting with exercises that are not directed from the outset toward a specific result. Attempts to create free time will undoubtedly be accompanied by attempts to *present* the world: the imparting of authority to a thing in such a way that it has something to say and a way to say it – in short, an ability to *speak* to someone. So-called 'school

subjects' and subject matter are the classic forms in which this attempt is carried out, and 'multidisciplinary' curricular content is the more modern extension of this. Increasingly, however, subjects and subject matter are becoming tools – usually expressed in terms of competencies – to produce particular learning outcomes. The challenge here is to find out what is worthy of being designated a 'common good', what passes the test of love for the world and thus what is worth freeing for study and practice and for personal formation. In this respect, we can no longer limit ourselves to a so-called literary-cultural education (languages, history, etc.) and a (natural) scientific education (mathematics, physics, etc.). Technology affects every part of life today, and 'freeing' this technology is our pedagogical responsibility. Not to do so would be to deny young people the chance to renew the world. As technology becomes more and more interwoven into our lives, the book/writing as a culture carrier is increasingly being replaced by digital media and digital forms of communication with the screen and the image as primary culture carriers. Experimenting with technological and digital education does not so much mean developing learning pathways that result in basic competencies in these areas. Rather, the challenge is to make the experience of '*being able to begin*' possible, particularly with regard to aspects of the digital and technological world. There is no (urgent) need to teach competencies in these areas – the school is probably not the best place for that. But experimenting with methods and content that make technological and digital *formation* possible is indeed an eminent scholastic matter. Venturing outside one's own life-world, getting interested and having the time to develop one's 'digital and technological self' are what is important here. It goes without saying that this calls for amateur teachers who are themselves well-developed in this regard. Not only teachers who share their expertise, but teachers who can suspend productive knowledge and skills and give young people the time to practice, study and think. Perhaps a traditional course structure is not best suited for this and may not lend itself fully to multidisciplinarity. In this area, too, experimentation is necessary. In any case, a competency-based approach is not advisable because the focus on employability and personal output threatens to make formation – and the practice and study of that which is made into a common good

– impossible.

We must experiment with ways of arranging and designing schools to create a dedicated space and time separate from that of the family, the economy and the political sphere. This should be a time and space that is not characterised by multifunctional use, permanent circulation and flexible services rendered to individuals with personal learning needs and individual learning paths geared toward maximising learning gains. But rather a time and space that stand alone and help to enable a shared interest in the world; a tranquil time and space in which one can dwell, a time and place where things can emerge in themselves and whose functionality is temporarily suspended. How might time and space appear if it were not (completely) occupied by expectations of individually-achieved gains but by a temporary suspension of those expectations allowing for the creation of shared, new interest through which a shared world can be awakened? This calls for experimentation in the design of a time and space that emphasises the ability of the world (the thing, the subject) to emerge and not one focused on the needs of individuals. And perhaps this emergence and unlocking of the world today is no longer just a question of walls, windows and doors, but also of screens. Is there a new need for scholastic screens?

We must experiment with new techniques and so new working methods. In this respect, ICT can be approached as a scholastic technique. Scholastic techniques are not techniques whereby a government or a teacher achieve results by meeting a predetermined target or by producing particular learning gains. On the contrary, it involves techniques that enable attention through the profanation of something (the suspension of that thing's commonplace use) and the presenting of it in such a way that it can be shared, can arouse interest and can bring about an experience of 'being able to'; of possibility. This is also connected to scholastic methods. ICT may have a unique potential to create attentiveness (indeed, the screen has the ability to attract our attention in an unprecedented way) and to present and unlock the world – at least when ICT is freed from the many attempts to privatise, regulate and market it. Many of these techniques are geared toward capturing attention and then redirecting it as quickly as possible toward productive purposes, that is, toward penetrating the personal

world to increase the size of the market.[40] In this case, we can speak of a capitalisation of attention, with the school as an appealing accomplice in the effort to reduce the world to a resource. ICT certainly does make knowledge and skills freely available in an unprecedented way, but the challenge is whether and how it can truly bring something to life, generate interest, bring about the experience of sharing (a 'common good') and enable one to renew the world. In this sense, making information, knowledge and expertise available is not the same as making something public. Screens – just as a chalkboard might – have a tremendous ability to attract attention, exact concentration and gather people around something, but the challenge is to explore how they help to create a (common) presence and enable study and practice. There are plenty of new work methods to devise and test out in this regard. The dictation, so we said, can be seen as a head-on encounter with and unlocking of the world of language. Is *hacking* not a kind of head-on encounter with and unlocking of the (pre)programmed world? Are scholastic forms of hacking possible?

We must experiment with policies at all levels that start from the assumption that the teacher strives to excel for the love of the job, the subject and her students – not policies, in this age of professionalism and controlled competence, underpinned by suspicion or distrust and aimed at controlling and constantly calling schools and teachers to account for output (learning outcomes). Loving teachers remain the best guarantors of equal opportunities. Instead of fixating on expertise and methodology, one might explore how to give amateurism and its lexicon a chance and how to ensure as diverse a group of amateur teachers as possible rather than standardising the teacher according to a single profile, skill set and methodology. After all, every teacher cannot inspire every student, and it is important to ensure that a student has the best possible chance of encountering at least one teacher who successfully imparts the 'I can do this' experience. One could start by trying out different ways of giving teachers (including teachers-in-training) the (regular) chance to engage with content and subject matter – which implies creating free time for teachers. This would not be time for professionalisation, but

40. Bernard Stiegler, (2010) *Taking Care of Youth and the Generations* (S. Barker, trans.). Stanford: Stanford University Press.

time to devote to their unique approach to their craft. One might think about how to avoid allowing a focus on the learner take the place of the teacher's responsibility toward content and students.

And finally, we accompany this call for experimentation with a spirited call to all pedagogues to stand up (again) and be heard. Undoubtedly, many have done so and are to be applauded, but the voice of educators seems dimmer today than ever before. Admittedly, there is probably no title more maltreated than that of the educator. Again and again, malicious do-gooders, ideologues, wayward leaders of youth, authoritarian manipulators, salesmen and recruiters disguised themselves as educators. Today, educators are only tolerated if they have been transformed into professional learning facilitators who manifest themselves as disciples of the educational, and meanwhile increasingly learning sciences. And yet, we emphatically call on educators to be *pedagogues*, that is, figures that guide children and young people to school and help give shape and form to the school. We implore teachers to be figures that love the school because they love the world and the new generation; figures that insist that school is not about learning but about forming; that it is not about accommodating individual learning needs but about awakening interest; that it is not about productive time but free time; that it is not about developing talents or pandering to the world of the student but about focusing on the task at hand and lifting students out of their immediate life-world; that it is not about being forced to develop but about the experience of 'being able'. We value teachers because they are the ones who unlock and enliven a common world for our children. They are spokespersons for a place and time invented as a physical embodiment of a belief: a belief that there is no natural order of privileged owners; that we are equals; that the world belongs to all and therefore to no one in particular; that the school is an adventurous no-mans-land where everyone can rise above themselves. In the beginning there may have been the word, but with the school there is a shared beginning.

Allegory of the school (or the school as explained to our children)

Imagine a society in which everyone is able to develop his or her talents. All talents are valued equally and everyone is given the opportunity to develop them into employable competencies. Suppose that society is organised in such a way that the supply of skills is in balance with demand and that everyone is willing to develop and renew their competencies on a regular basis. Imagine a society in which life-long and life-wide learning is embraced by all. Everyone is in constant motion and everything and everyone is in the right place at the right time. Flexibility and mobility are guaranteed – the free movement of talents and competencies is assured and, through it, so too is the development and innovation of society. There are learning and competency centres to maintain this harmonious society. Customised learning pathways are offered to every citizen to help the citizen-learner develop competencies or assist the less experienced learner to lead a life of learning. To keep all of this moving in the right direction, personal learning files are maintained and a learning currency and central bank are put in place to regulate educational services in accordance with the needs of all. All learning outcomes are accurately documented and valued; all learning pathways are closely tracked; specific learning needs are compiled into lists; the degree of well-being, happiness and employability is accurately monitored. And this from the cradle – or rather: from the mother's womb of – to the grave. It is a society where transparency, good communication and quality service are central. A society where you are addressed from the outset as a learner and where acquiring a number of basic skills is assured as a kind of basic right. In this society, virtually everything can be and is possible – it is a large, shared, constantly evolving learning community.

Perhaps it is not all too difficult to imagine that world. But let's really put our imaginations to the test: behold, a person – we will call her a pedagogue – who does not address young children as learners but takes them by the hand and persuades them to follow her into a dark cave lit only by a smouldering fire. This pedagogue

appears to be the accomplice of a group of idiots intent on chaining children to a chair – and as these children are accustomed to the bright light and transparency of the learning society, they'll want to flee from the cave as quickly as possible. Holding them there seems nothing short of an act of violence and a usurpation of their basic rights. Formal charges, surely, will follow in no time. But the idiots are incredulous; they see things differently. They call themselves teachers. They gather these children before them, one and all – race and origin are irrelevant here, as are the learning needs that make each child so unique in the world outside. In the cave, the teacher addresses them as students, and the teacher is there for everyone and no one in particular. Alert the Child Protection Services! But it gets worse. Imagine that these teachers project things upon the rock wall and, more still, that they force the students to gaze upon them. And this without asking them what they themselves want to see. To the contrary, imagine that the idiots insist that what they are projecting is important. Not because it is useful and employable, but because they want to share what they found interesting about it. And these teachers go one step further. They are convinced that the world shows itself in what they project and what they have to say about it. They are convinced that only in the dimly-lit cave is it possible to conjure this world and awaken students' interest for the world. These troubadours of formation are intent on pulling young people out of their own worlds so that they can begin forming themselves. They call for practice and study with a clear intention but without predetermined results. They are greeted with apprehension in the learning society. How could they not? These idiots believe in the existence of a world outside the world of daily life and learning. They deserve to be met with mockery, ridicule and even hatred. Why? Because with their love for the world they – and with them their students – stand outside the bounds of the prevailing economy. It does not appease the learned members of society to hear that rendering the economy and accumulation of skills inoperative is something altogether different from calling the economy into question or advocating for its destruction. Be employable or continue developing new skills – this is a basic value of the learned

public that cannot simply be cast aside. Suppose, finally, that these teachers eventually liberate the students from their chains. Surely, it will take some time before they adjust to the glare of daylight and are able to turn their attention to the economy of things. At first sight, nothing will have changed. And that is, of course, ammunition in the hands of the critics: alienating children from their world and denying them employability is in itself too preposterous for words, let alone the fact that no discernible added value has come of it. And watch as students gradually begin to show slight deviations: flexibility falters, repetition fatigue sets in, some get stuck in a rut. Again, grist to the mill: the cave – what else?! – has corrupted the youth and has deprived society of its flexibility. But that's not all... As time goes by, the well-educated seem to have developed a strange kind of love, one directed toward both humans and things. It calls up curious questions. Learning files begin to gather dust. The currency of learning competencies begins to lose its value. The learning society's economy continues to run. All remains the same, with slight differences here and there. But its dimensions are wholly changed because a world exists outside one's own life-world. Just imagine.

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Picture credits

cover *Lecture notes* (1467), drawing on Aristotle's *Physics* by George Lichton, a student at Leuven University

p. 7 *De lezende man* [The reading man] (1963), wood cut on paper by Frans Masereel

p. 13 Schoolgate from *De letterdoos* (2001), realisation by Wim Cuyvers

p. 25 *Ecole Parfaite* (2005) by Jan Masschelein

p. 89 Still from *The Son* (2002) by The Dardenne Brothers

p. 111 Still from *The Son* (2002) by The Dardenne Brothers

p. 131 *Screens in flight* (2012) by Wim Cuyvers

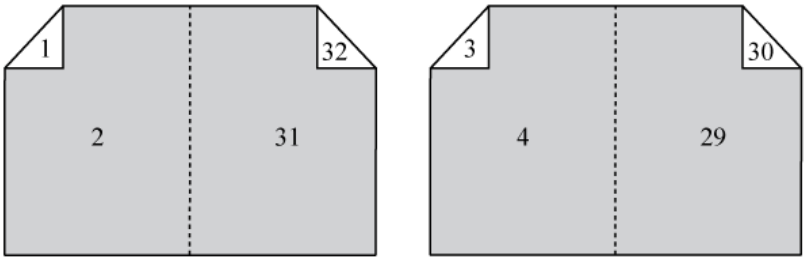
p. 152 *Sewing book* & *Book tied up in boards* (1903), engravings by Paul N. Hasluck

Bookbinding instructions

However digital an e-book may be, the old ways of bookbinding are on the rise again. As the bibliophile would say, nothing beats studying a physical copy. There are a lot of ways to bind a book, from simple stapling to elaborate bindings. Here are some instructions on how to bind your own book. There are basically 4 steps to every form of bookbinding: printing, folding, stacking and binding.

Print full pages. This is the easiest to print, but it will limit your binding possibilities to pasting, side stitching or punching.

Print booklets (aka imposition printing). Printing folded pages can be tricky, but it gives you the most solid book. The paging can be a bit confusing. For instance, if you print a book that has 32 pages in total, pages 1-2 and 31-32 are printed on the first sheet; 3-4 and 29-30 on the second, and so on.

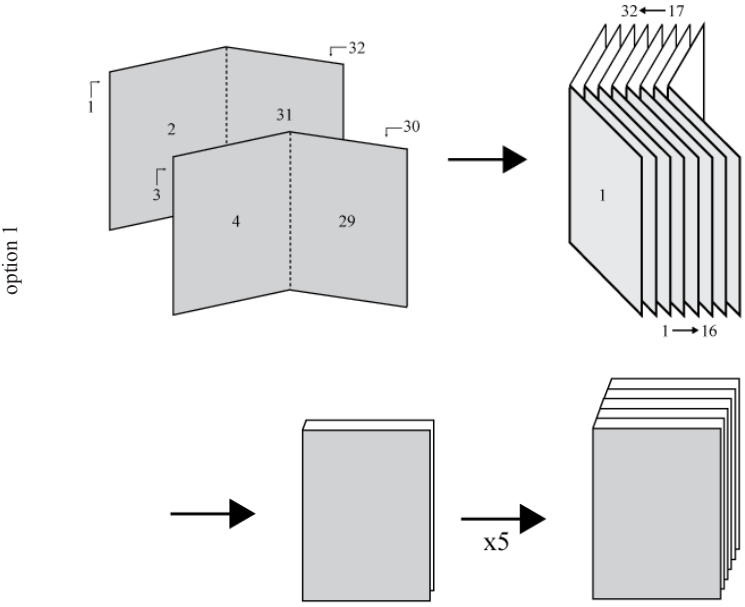


Booklets can be created with your pdf reader. Instructions for PC (Reader and Acrobat X) can be found on http://helpx.adobe.com/acrobat/kb/print-booklets-acrobat-reader.html. Instructions for Mac (Preview) can be found on http://www.macupdate.com/app/mac/21068/create-booklet. Other free alternatives are Impose Online (http://www.imposeonline.com) or the program BookBinder (http://www.quantumelephant.co.uk/index.html)

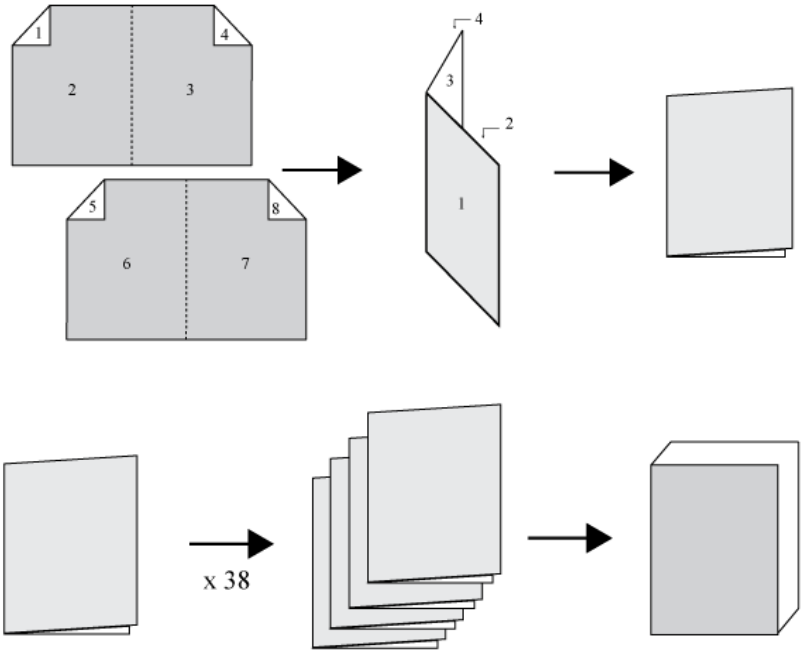
No matter what software you use for printing, make sure that your printing settings are accurate. You need to select 2 pages per sheet, double-sided printing, and saddle stitch.

Since *In defence of the school* counts 150 pages, there are too many pages to fold into one single booklet. This means you need to print the book into multiple booklets, which are called signatures. Every sheet of paper has 4 pages printed on it, so a signature is a multitude of 4 pages. The printing software will make signatures for you, or you have to set the page range yourself. Once you have printed everything, you only have to keep to your signatures when folding and stacking.

A first option, and probably the most convenient choice for this book, is 5 signatures of 32 pages. One signature equals 8 sheets of double-sided printed-paper. If you make signatures of 32 pages, fold 8 papers *into* one signature, repeat 5 times, and then stack the 5 signatures *onto* each other:

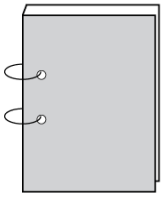


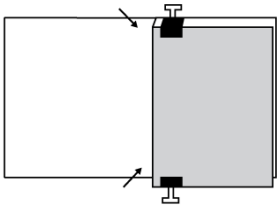
A second option is to print 1 sheet of paper as 1 signature, which means that you will put pages 1-4 on the first sheet, pages 5-8 on the second, and so on. If you make single sheet signatures, fold each sheet individually and stack them onto each other:



Lastly, we need to **bind** all the pages together. There are a lot of ways to do this, and this is where the art of bookbinding really shows itself.

If you prefer punching, there are plenty of binding supplies available, such as decent ring binders. You should be able to find your preference.





If you prefer more of a book, but are not very eager to take out needle and thread, you can easily paste the signatures together. Do this by firmly holding the signatures (for example with a clip), adding a cover, gluing the back, and gluing the cover to the back. Use strong, flexible glue, such as vinyl glue, and you should be fine. A good example of this binding can be found here: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oBSUHbyf7Ss

The most solid way of binding is of course signature stitching, and pasting the book with a decent, strong cover. A simple DIY video can be found here: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XGQ5P8QVHSg

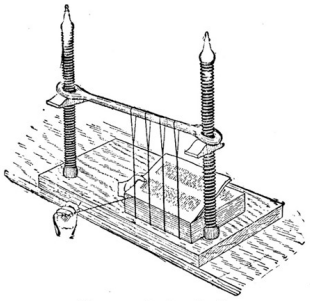


Fig. 33.—Sewing Book.

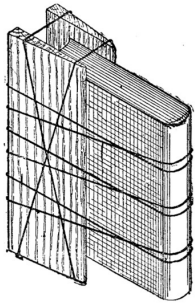


Fig. 43.—Book tied up in Boards.

Good luck!