

School as a sacred space. On the theocratic heritage in the New Education movement

La scuola come spazio sacro. Il retaggio teocratico nel movimento delle Scuole Nuove

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abstract

The discourse about “space” or “spaces” in the context of history is often associated with a martial intention. Following its discovery, geographical space beyond the previously known became an object of desire and conquer. A means of “peaceful” disciplining by the European conquerors was the Christian mission. Education was – and in some parts still is – in curricular as well as in spatial respects organized as an appendix of the (Christian) church. The hierarchical structure connected with it, with a normative transcendence space “above” and an earthly “below”, which was urged to be submissive, was then also adopted by the secular school. The theocratic heritage of pedagogy has thus been more or less visibly passed on, even though the unconditional norm-giving has undergone a change in content, in the State school that represent the transcendental normative of religion under a new guise. With regard to influential school concepts of the New Education Movement, it can be shown how the pedagogical explicitly re-transforms itself into the religious – in the sense of a sacred space in which the salvation of the individual and the community, even of mankind as a whole, is worked on.

Individual concepts define it differently, but they all are united by the conviction that the educational space must and can already be a model for the better world of the future, where the child still learns for life, but now within the milieu of the New World. In it, the child follows his/her teleological intrapsychically-inscribed trace of development (Montessori), the trace of the cosmic universally-acting Spirit (Steiner) or the trace of the dialectic historically inscribed law for the higher development of society and of the individual who is finally rescued from the bondage of capital (Blonsky).

Keywords: *sacral space, New Education movement, Montessori, Steiner, Blonsky*

Il discorso sugli “spazi” in storia è spesso associato a intenti bellici. Le scoperte geografiche di spazi nuovi hanno sempre suscitato desideri di conquista. Le missioni cristiane furono utilizzate dai conquistatori europei come mezzo pacifico per disciplinare le popolazioni conquistate. L'educazione era organizzata come curriculum e come spazialità in connessione alla chiesa cristiana.

La struttura gerarchica connessa, con uno spazio trascendente normativo “sopra” e uno terreno “sotto”, subordinato al primo, venne adottato dalla scuola secolare. Il retaggio

teocratico della pedagogia è stato tramandato, anche se le norme prescrittive hanno cambiato contenuto, nelle scuole di Stato. Circa i concetti portanti del movimento delle Scuole Nuove, si può mostrare come la pedagogia si ri-trasformi nel religioso, nel senso di uno spazio sacro, nel quale si elabori la salvezza del singolo, della comunità, persino dell'umanità intera. Al di là delle differenze tra singoli pedagogisti, resta la convinzione che lo spazio educativo debba e possa essere un modello per un mondo futuro migliore, dove il bambino impara per la vita, ora per un mondo nuovo. In esso, egli segue la traccia dello sviluppo teleologico intrapsichico in lui iscritto (Montessori), la traccia dello Spirito cosmico universale (Steiner), o la traccia della legge, iscritta dialetticamente nella storia, per un più alto sviluppo della società e dell'individuo, finalmente liberi dalle catene del capitale (Blonsky).

Parole chiave: spazio sacro, movimento delle Scuole Nuove, Montessori, Steiner, Blonsky

Introduction

The discourse about “space” or “spaces” in the context of history often is associated with a martial intention. After its discovery, geographical space beyond the previously known became the object of desire. The imperial incorporation of the territory, if it was already populated, was often followed by the expulsion or even annihilation of the indigenous population or its subjection or disciplining. A means of “peaceful” disciplining by the European conquerors was the Christian mission, whose schools could rely on a centuries-old tradition. Education was – and in some parts still is – in curricular as well as spatial respect organized as appendix of the (Christian) church. The hierarchical structure connected with it, with a normative transcendence space of the “above” and an earthly “below”, which was urged to be submissive, was then also adopted by the secular school. The theocratic heritage of pedagogy has thus been more or less visibly passed on, even though the unconditional norm-giving has undergone a change in content. Now it is the state or other substitute variables of absolute decisiveness (such as historical determination, evolution, the “Objective Spirit”, culture, technical and/or social progress etc.) that represent the transcendental normative of religion in a new robe, whereby the reference to God or to the “Highest” etc. is certainly still suitable for the now pale, but as far as possible empty application of the new robe.

With regard to influential school concepts of the New Education Movement it can be shown how the pedagogical explicitly re-transforms itself into the religious – in the sense of a sacred space in which the sal-

vation of the individual and the community, even of mankind as a whole, is worked on. New Education is seeking the means by which the Great Goal can be achieved. Single concepts define it differently, but they all are united by the conviction that the educational space must and can already be a model for the better world of the future. In this space the child still learns for life (and often quite successfully), but now within the milieu of the New World. In it, the child follows his/her teleological-intrapsychically inscribed trace of development (Montessori), the trace of the cosmic-universally acting Spirit (Steiner) or the trace of the dialectic-historically inscribed law for the higher development of society and of the individual who is finally rescued from the bondage of capital (Blonsky).

1. Spatial concepts of pedagogy in the perspective of an absolute normativity

Neither in its general sense (as territory or as cosmos), nor less in a specific functional sense (school, apartment, office, etc.) “space” is to be understood as a mere “passive container”. Space is always more or less mediated “the outcome of social relations” (Robertson, 2018, p. 44). Explicitly, the social reference in pedagogical space comes to light because the social belongs to the founding logic of all education.

Long before the so-called “spatial turn” in cultural studies, there had been a reflection on the pedagogical space in two respects: the school space as a geographically distinguished and defined place with specific access privileges and/or obligations, usually also architecturally determined/designed, *and* as a specific, pedagogically-intentionally constituted place with a functional, factual and personnel endowment. For the actual addressees, the pupils, this place is a temporary place of transition, as it were a liminal space of no-longer-child- and not-yet-adulthood.

The probably oldest testimony of this fact can be seen in the following text: “Son of the slatehouse, where have you gone since your earliest days? I went to the slatehouse. What were you doing in the slatehouse? I read my blackboard, ate my breakfast, made a new blackboard, scribed on it, and finished it. Then they determined my oral work, and in the afternoon they determined my written work. When the slatehouse was closed, I went home and saw my father sitting there. I told my father about my written work, then I read him my blackboard; my father was

satisfied with it ... give me water to drink ... give me bread to eat ... I will sleep immediately. Early in the morning wake me up, I don't want to be late, otherwise my master will whip me" (Cf. Alt, 1966, p. 43).

It is a testimony of Sumerian culture, written in cuneiform script, and originated around the year 2000 BC. It already makes transparent a broad spectrum of the social, in particular with regard to education, coercion and control, which has since belonged to the core of the pedagogical – a spectrum that could not have developed without discourse, planning, decision-making and collective action. The pedagogical functions must – necessarily – also be reflected in the space, although not necessarily as precise correspondences of the pedagogical intentions. Already its "territorial" and architectural "boundary" ("campus") signals as such: the access to the space, the stay in it and its abandonment are subject to strict rules. And the modification of the contents and forms, whether caused by social necessities or cultural-historical or intellectual-historical developments, results in a change and reshaping of the educational space.

Augustinus also emphasizes the coercive character of the school. Because of man's corruption (original sin and above all "carnal" temptations) coercive means in education were inevitable and theologically justified. The teacher was the representative of the universal, divinely given order which he had to implement in the souls of those entrusted to him. This could not take place without resistance on the part of the pupils. "A boy's ears are on his back, he hears when he is beaten" (cf. Woody, 1949, p. 58).

In this discourse we find the reference to the personal, painful experience. This is the case when Augustine in his *Confessiones* in the 4th century refers to the torments of hell at school and, as a friendly counter-image, upholds the importance of childlike learning in a loving community. Or – if this leap in time of a millennium is permitted at this point – when Erasmus of Rotterdam in his "Praise of Folly" (1509) caricatures the beating teacher with biting irony. On the background of their painful experience, both thinkers, Erasmus even more than Augustine, reject the ancient, Hellenistic and medieval idea of the necessity of (inordinate) discipline and plead for a humane education. With Augustine, however, school hell may continue to exist because it gives a living taste of real hell as the domicile of the soul to be expected after a life of grave sin.

First Comenius then finds a formula that expressly conceives the school as a lovely place that the children joyfully visit, surrounded by a beautiful garden – and he thus explicitly formulates an educational im-

perative that says that the school must encourage the voluntariness of its visit, i.e. the consent of the child to its upbringing. Comenius wants to put an end to the perishable “head torture” of the school of his time with new methods, some of which are described in detail. Thus he brings essential moments to the concept which will later shape the image of a humane school as a “laboratory of humanity” and will inspire reform initiatives.

The imperative of a child- and human-friendly school will no longer fall silent in history, and it is a lasting (and fruitful!) motive for reform efforts. Especially the New Education promises to create a space in contrast to the criticized “old education” with its established means of coercion – a new space in which the child may and should freely develop according to his/her own law and the corresponding laws of the cosmos (and/or history) under the expert guidance of his/her educators enlightened by the “true” knowledge. The core idea of many New Education approaches thus consists in the assumption of a consistent congruence (or a fundamental identity) of cosmic or historical and individual development. It is in this belief that the high aspirations of New Education are rooted; and by means of an appropriately designed educational environment, the educator hopes to find a solution to the old annoying dilemma of freedom and adaptation, of the individual and society, of the will and the should of the pupil – in other words, ultimately to overcome any compulsion in education.

The old theocratic legacy of pedagogy in modern times is transformed and/or supplemented in such a way that – as effects of Enlightenment and rationalism – the new pedagogical approaches are also claimed to be scientific. Especially the popular idea of evolution originating from biology – further thought as religious-social, as physical-spiritual or as historically necessary-dialectical development of man and mankind – had a formative influence. Thus the pedagogical discourse was – again – embedded in a comprehensive ideological framework which, after the social upheavals of the early 20th century and the associated “end of the great narratives” (Lyotard), was able to offer the seeking contemporaries new, hopeful horizons of meaning.

- In Montessori’s work, for example, an empirical-rationalist moment is added to the explicitly religious-evolutionistic, partly esoterically enriched duktus.
- Steiner invents and constructs an esoteric, physio-spiritually and evo-

lutionistically oriented world view, based on centuries-old traditions of a *“philosophia perennis”*. At the same time, however, he claims to be scientific for his edifice of thought, and passionately emphasizes its superiority over profane empirical-rational science, which has ignored or forgotten the Spirit that permeates everything and the universe.

- Blonsky follows in the footsteps of dialectical materialism (Leninist-Bolshevik coinage), which is able to offer an allegedly scientifically secure picture of the course of history – towards a just society liberated from all exploitation.

These ideological provisions shape the respective concepts of the pedagogical space. The child is the saviour, the Messiah, the guarantor of the future, and his or her teacher becomes the servant of the mission enclosed in the child. The Messiah motif, the religious service motif (teacher as a priest) and the paradise motif characterise the particular space of the New Education. Montessori condenses this pedagogical view in the sentence: “The power of vision of the teacher should be at the same time exact as that of the scientist and spiritual as that of the saint” (Montessori, 1976, p. 131). Thus she expresses the longed-for marriage of religion and science, which will remain an important motif of both pedagogical and general ideological discourses in the 20th century and to this day.

In this way the old theocratic legacy of absolute, transcendental-normative decisiveness is passed on in a changed form. At the same time with the absolutistic justification, and sometimes supported by it, a space is created which – because it succeeds partly in eliminating weaknesses of the “Old Education” (such as the excessive coercion) – in fact often grants the participants an extended room for creativity. This space can then appear to the observer as a “laboratory of humanity” in the sense of Comenius. The discipline that can often be observed and the joyful devotion of the children to the tasks suggest this conclusion. – Nevertheless, a skeptic may argue, it is a question of the (presumably futile) effort to eliminate contingency in education. And he will persistently ask for the price that such an effort may cost.

The pedagogical space reflects the concrete “social relations” (see above) in society in a pedagogically reflected, i.e. not directly impacting way. However, the “laboratory” of New Education is now additionally influenced by a transcendental-normative moment, from which the didactic-methodical and organizational measures derive their final mean-

ing and their legitimacy anchored in the unconditional. The old structural model of the (profane) “didactic triangle” is thus sacrally transformed and exaggerated by a fourth reference value. It transforms into a “didactic tetrahedron” whose upper tip refers to the transcendental of the educational process, which is to be determined normatively overall in such a way that the Great Goals can be achieved.

2. Maria Montessori: “We must take as our instrument the child”

Montessori’s pedagogy is designed to give the child the opportunity to follow independently and freely the path of his or her inner development plan. Her concept of education is based on the idea of the “normalized” child, who has found the connection to his/her “nature”, to the law of development anchored in the divine will or in the cosmic plan. This plan is according to Montessori scientifically discoverable. Normalization according to the specifications of the inner blueprint is the actual (cosmic) task and “work” of the child. This event becomes visible as a development, which is individual in each case, but according to a phase plan that is uniform for all. The development is characterized by different time-definable sensitive periods, in which the child is particularly disposed for the formation of certain physical, mental and moral abilities. The current disposition shows itself in a particularly deep interest in a thing or an activity, namely in the increased concentration or polarisation of the child’s attention. The focus on an activity is accompanied by a state of calm, inner order, satisfaction, which leads the child to “goodness”. Failures in a sensitive period lead to damaging deviations from the path of normalization, the consequences of which can only be compensated with difficulty and sometimes not at all. This results in the highest responsibility of the educator. He has to provide the special means of a normalizing education. This includes centrally: the prepared environment, the exercises of practical life and the development or Montessori material. In an appropriately “prepared environment” the child soon shows an increased, deep inner concentration, visible above all in the correct use of the Montessori material and during the “practical life exercises”.

Since Montessori’s “discovery of the child” in the “casa dei bambini” in Rome in 1907, the so-called Montessori phenomenon, the “polarisation of attention”, has been observed in Montessori institutions worldwide. At the same time, this is the key to “normalising the society of adult

people” (Montessori, 1980, p. 287). Education based on the inner blueprint wants to “bring salvation”. It follows a universal curriculum “which can unite the mind and conscience of all people in harmony ...”. (Montessori, 1979, p. 139) Montessori’s vision is a “super-organism made up of humanity”. This possibility lies in the “biological liberty”; in the “free and peaceful development of life” (Montessori, 1913, S. 477) itself. The direction of this “free” development lies in the “*horme*” that has been declared as the “divine” or “universal power” inscribed in evolution. This power is identified by Montessori with the principally good (Montessori, 1949, p. 123, 375), while evil and the devilish, wherever it may appear, do not belong to this universal power. To lead the child into the trace of this higher power or to let this driving force inherent in the child work its way through – that is the actual task of the teacher.

For the child, following this trail means a spontaneous, natural order or discipline. The child finds in the “prepared environment” only what he/she wants in the depth of his/her being anyway; he/she finds to himself/herself, namely to the path of development of his/her “normalization”. The pedagogical dilemma no longer exists, the gap between wanting and shoulding is bridged, the unspeakable struggle between child and adult ends, any contingency is eliminated.

The transformational nucleus of the “prepared environment” is formed by the Montessori materials. This material is the condition for the “polarization of attention”, i.e. individual development, and thus the most important fuel in human genealogy. It functions as the “key to the world”, represents the cosmic order, holds the spiritual food of the child ready in itself, which is *absorbed* by the “polarized” child – and only by him – through the right, precisely prescribed use of the means. – In relation to the “didactic tetrahedron” (see above), this is the transcendental meaning of the Montessori material, its “holiness”. That these are actually sacralized objects can be imagined by a simple thought experiment. The children could, for example, certainly come up with the idea of playing freely with the materials, of using the beautiful round insert cylinders (intended for the cognitive anchoring of a concept of proportions) as rolling and rumbling objects in a kind of bowling game, or of letting them glide over the smooth table surface, which – as I once experienced – was previously prepared with water to increase the gliding effect. Or – *horribile dictu!* – the teacher (certainly one without a Montessori diploma) uses a cylinder as a stopper for the open window shaken by the draught.

In the Montessorian-style pedagogical space – qua conception – the profane, the pleasurable and the creative have only little space. The pedagogical space as a whole will become the strictly controlled incubation space of a future better world, which will one day be inhabited by maximally “normalized” individuals. Montessori also emphasizes the child’s “love for the environment” (Montessori, 1949, p. 139); and she believes that the children will become “like the thing they love” (p. 146). Behind this lies a (mechanistic) idea of development and education that basically knows *no free statement of the child* towards external influences and pedagogical interventions. The possible resistance of the child, his “no” to the educational offers or his refusal or his inability to enter into the quasi-meditative state of consciousness of polarisation can only be seen – as far as there are no hereditary causes – as a sign of the socially conditioned deviation. If Montessori can nevertheless confidently say “The children in our schools are free, ...” (Montessori, 1972, p. 220) – one has, with knowledge of the eschatological background and the technical concept of education, to supplement this sentence by „as long as the children are following the laws of normalization”. Against the non-following of the divine laws teacher’s resistance up to the destruction of the bad within the child (cf. Montessori, 1972, p. 242) is appropriate. – Here the sceptic and pedagogical ethicist would have to follow up, and to ask about the psychological costs of such an approach, if it would actually be realizable and effective.

3. Rudolf Steiner: “Space and god are the same”

Despite some affirmative references to non-Christian ideas (e.g. during her stay in India), and despite her flirting with Italian fascism for more than a decade, Montessori remained closely attached to the faith of her childhood, Catholicism. It is somewhat different with Steiner, who was also a Catholic and remained a member of the church throughout his life. He is the founder of the Waldorf School and, as its ideological basis, the founder of anthroposophy, a new holistic worldview that emerged from Blavatzky’s theosophy.

That “space and God are the same” refers to a way of thinking that is rooted in a spectrum that theology and (Christian) philosophy sought to classify as “rejected knowledge” (cf. Hanegraaff, 2012). It refers to an esoteric world view, whose most important axiom can be described as “the

great all-and-all-encompassing identity”. Everything is contained in the Great One, and everything is vice versa identical: the above and the below, the small and the great, space and time, life and death, moment and eternity, being and becoming, heaven and hell, near and far; or expressed in a mathematical formula: “ $a = b$ ”, whatever a and b in themselves may be on a logical or empirical level. The *a priori* of knowledge and thought, the rational “discrimination” (Gerd Brand), is suspended on the spiritual level. This fundamental suspension makes a discourse between the faithful and the non-faithful (or in anthroposophical terms: the “outside critics”) that is supported by sensory empirics and committed to (traditional) logic difficult, because the difference and contradiction (on the logical empirical level) in “truth” or in a higher, esoteric (or cosmic-spiritual) sense does not exist at all. As a reaction to the reflection on the epistemological validity criteria of their statements for which the “outside critics” repeatedly ask, anthroposophy bases its esoteric understanding of the world on a specially developed epistemology, namely on an autistically self-referential one which cannot accept a criterion of truth founded outside of itself. Ultimately it is based on the vision of the seer, who of himself claims to be a human being gifted by the “Ruling Being”, thus a person who has direct access to this very “Ruling Being” of the cosmos. This is the reason for Steiner’s extremely creative-associative, sometimes systematic, then again narrative language. At the same time, the „Axiom of the One” is repeatedly overridden when individual phenomena (animals, things, human races, peoples, individuals, etc.) are more or less advantageously located on the hierarchical ladder of the Spirit. Somehow, however – at least on the level of verbal communication – the annoying differentiations are needed as a basic condition of discourse, decision-making and action; above all in our world of political and theoretical conflicts, in which it is indispensable to identify the opponents of one’s own project (More details: Skiera, 2010; 2018).

Even more clearly than with Montessori, the child and its educator enter a sacred space with the Waldorf School in which – ultimately – the encounter with and the transformation of the child’s spirit by the spirit of the cosmos is at stake. This is conveyed through architecture (avoiding the right angle according to an organic model) and a special, spiritually effective colouring as well as through the encounter with the teacher, who is already further advanced in the spiritual. For Steiner, the teacher is nothing less than the representative of the cosmos. His service is “altar service”, and the teacher – again in contrast to Montessori, where he

works rather indirectly and from the background – has an explicitly leading role.

The connection of the Waldorf School to anthroposophy is also visible in the highly developed aesthetics of its own. Its concrete model is the anthroposophical temple building in Dornach (Switzerland), the “Goetheanum”, which is built according to aesthetic (organological, “Goethean”, special colour and form theoretical) principles. These principles are reflected in almost all newly erected buildings that are committed to anthroposophy or close to it, as well as in school architecture and equipment. In this respect the talk of school as a sacred space and appendix of the anthroposophical “church” is quite justified.

This also means that the school cannot be seen and understood in isolation. For it is integrated into an overarching cosmos. Its use is not specifically recommended to the pupils and their parents, but it is open to all believers and interested persons as a spiritually permeated cosmos of anthroposophical character. Anthroposophy actually succeeds in producing a synthesis, convincing for many people, of almost everything that is articulated in the context of alternative forms of life, starting with questions of tillage and agriculture, proper nutrition, natural healing methods, the social constitution, the economy and working world, art and architecture, Christian-religious or spiritual renewal, education from preschool to university.

Thus an incomparable cosmos, a spiritually interwoven and charged space, a “spiritual territory”, an alternative anthroposophical parallel world, often networked with the rest of the world, has emerged, in which all aspects of human life from the cradle to the grave and far beyond are placed in a uniform horizon – namely that of the universal impact of the Cosmic Spirit.

Particularly important for concrete life are the corresponding social and pedagogical institutions, which together form a networked system of effectively working organisations. The anthroposophist sees in the existence and further development as well as in the practical successes an empirical confirmation of his teaching, seeks this confirmation and public recognition also by cooperation with external experts and empirical researchers. Anthroposophy is life philosophy and practice, life, social and educational reform *par excellence*.

4. Pavel Petrovič Blonsky: “The factory of the future will be the school of the future at the same time”

The observer can enter Waldorf or Montessori schools and explore the question of how the transcendental normative or the sacred of concepts manifests itself in the architecture, in the furnishings, in the teaching-learning process and in the atmosphere. This is not the case with Blonsky's conception, which, unlike the other two, has not been intentionally implemented in hundreds of schools. There is no definitive Blonsky school. Nevertheless, the influence of his conception can hardly be overestimated, especially in the sphere of communism, and here again in the establishment of the so-called “Polytechnical High School”.

Blonsky's work can be located in the horizon of socialist-communist aspirations and their fundamentalist axiomatics, thus in the conviction that historical development, after a dialectical process of militant confrontation, ultimately leads to a world of peace and happiness for all. His educational goal, if one wants to speak in ancient images, is the final synthesis of Sparta and Athens, of power and spirit in the “worker-philosopher”.

Blonsky sees his merit and his contribution to the development of the new man and the new society in creating the pedagogical conditions for this development to perfection. The most important means for him is the creation of a “work school” oriented towards industrial work. Its specific character is already prepared in the “preschool education” and the “school of the first stage” (for the age group from eight to thirteen) by various references to industry and the (mythically exaggerated and mystically charged) man-enhancing power of the machine. In the “second stage school” (for the fourteen- to eighteen-year-olds) the educational space is then explicitly extended to industrial production in the factory.

The educational prerequisites go hand in hand with the political decisions, the aim of which is to achieve “the perfect congruence of production conditions and productive forces” (Stalin, in Glucksmann, 1976, p. 105). To this end, Lenin gave the order soon after the October Revolution to “clean the Russian soil of all harmful insects” (Lenin, quoted in *ivi*, p. 83 – for details on Blonsky see also Skiera 2018).

Blonsky's conception reflects some of the belief of almost all reform educators in the power of proper education in general and the pedagogical concepts of activity and self-activity in particular. For Blonsky, this

goes hand in hand with the attempt to demonstrate the dialectic of emancipatory subject genesis and social development in a materialistic historical perspective in the medium of work and to make it pedagogically fruitful.

The “worker-philosopher”, i.e. the reconciliation of the worker with the intellectual in the individual himself and in society, remains, of course, in Blonsky’s case ultimately an educationally uncertain fiction, because he does not really succeed in constructing a uniform curriculum and educational space tailored to industrial work. Once again, it is a grandiose, politically initially supported attempt to think of the world as a whole, “holistically”, and to represent it curricularly. For him, his “industrial work school” is the “village and state of the future” (Blonsky, 1973, p. 25). His attempt has the character of an eschatological doctrine of salvation of quasi-religious character with all essential components of such a doctrine, including a paradisiacal vision of this world. On the one hand, there is the all-encompassing cause, industry, as the crowning glory of creation, i.e. of history, which promises equality among men and happiness for all. And there is the Messiah, the builder of the unified world to come: the child as the little industrialist who, after the annihilation of capitalism, accepts the concerns of his people and of “labouring humanity” (p. 143) as a whole with an altruistic heart and lives for them. He has become a Narodnik, a teacher of the people, til deep “into the bones” (p. 142). Our little Narodnik emerged from the factory, in which not only machines produce new goods and new machines; for in the production process and through it man forms himself as a new man of a higher kind. Blonsky: “The factory is nothing else but a quite distinct organism, a ‘structured machine system’. As such, it is an ideal cooperation of labor forces, and the regime of the factory is the regime of a maximum socialized cooperation disciplined by the production process itself. The factory creates a closed working organism out of the individual workers” (Blonsky after Hierdeis, 1973, p. 94).

In this way man is reduced to the individual worker or industrialist. His home is the factory, which “inevitably”, i.e. naturally (“organism”) and optimally socializes. The unmistakable sign of subjectivity, the contradiction against incorporation, can only appear as the outgrowth of a pathological egoism (lack of altruism) that has to be treated pedagogically and, if necessary, therapeutically, or as a false (class) consciousness.

5. Discussion and conclusion. The “Didactic-Eschatological Tetrahedron” and the victims of the sacred

The sacred demands sacrifices. The “*sacrificium intellectus*”, which is annoying for the positivist and scientist, is indispensably connected with faith, because the belief of transcendental orientation transcends our “earthly” experiences and Aristotelian logic, and relativizes or even denies their meaning in the realm of the soul and last existential meanings. The sacred also demands material sacrifices. The costs of its manifestations generally go far beyond what profane purposes demand. And it also requires sacrifices in the sense that the child and the human being are encouraged to be obedient towards a higher “true” idea, thus demanding devotion, humility and altruism. This also applies – *mutatis mutandis* – to pedagogy, insofar as it refers to transcendental-normative, i.e. absolute values whose validity is definitely beyond discourse. Nevertheless, there is a dispute between different fractions of the absolute, because it cannot be interpreted as universally consensual.

The educator-reformers of the New Education wanted and want to free people and humanity from the constraints of the Old Education and at the same time from the horrors of the old world. They and their followers are undoubtedly convinced of the correctness, universal significance and truth of their mission. But they have a cosmos of totalitarian constitution. For the educator-saint no longer acts in the name and within the framework of human necessities and in the mode of ever fallible human efforts. She has qua function and mission a special task and position. She is now the representative of a historically necessary, cosmic, divine or eschatological power of control, which she herself has recognized, knows and acknowledges. Thus, if we theoretically consider the ultimate consequence, she works, contrary to her declared intention, on alienation, ultimately on the release of man from his humanity. – In the eyes of the faithful, of course (i.e. from an affirmative or emic point of view), this is the completion of man and the history of mankind, and thus the final victory of the light over the powers of darkness. For at the peak of the didactic-eschatological tetrahedron, the believer can recognize the image of the better man, and with it the image of the perfectly good society or community as the goal perspective of all striving and becoming.

Again it is Montessori who bluntly expresses the educational attitude implied therein, and who certainly finds in it the applause of all those

who believe in their own vision of a New Man and a New World: “We must take as our instrument the child” (Montessori, 1949, p. 103).

What does all this mean with regard to a child who enters into an educational environment optimally equipped according to the theoretical standards of its creators with a suitably prepared educator-saint; that is: enters into the “prepared environment” (Montessori), adapted to the child’s inner law of development, into the maximum socializing communist educational collective (Blonsky) or into the special aesthetic and social world of Steiner’s imprint aimed at the child’s spiritual life and its spiritualization, artistically designed and in every detail through and through?

The flexible, adaptable and learning-minded child, as well as the successfully adapted and adapting child after various curative treatments, will undoubtedly learn many good and interesting things, and will find himself confirmed in his need for recognition. The permanently unadapted, the disobedient child, on the other hand, experiences a lonely inner emotional struggle between the will to assert oneself and the willingness to readily adapt, the possible external, situational and ideological causes of which cannot be recognized by the child himself or by his educator, who is guided by the infallible theory. The child is left alone and cannot find anyone who really wants and can listen to him in a human way. The resistive self in the child and in the educator – as long as she shows resistance from insight into insurmountable limits of her actions or doubts regarding her previous convictions conforming to theory – has no place in the perfected cosmos.

The individual child with its individual possibilities, limits and possibly contradictory needs, as well as the educator as a laboring but nevertheless fallible human being is sacrificed on the altar of higher, teleologically justified, ultimately undeniable human goals in favour of a superior overchild respectively a super- or overeducator. The stomachs of the Absolute feed on the abandonment of the individual and the subjective. The superhuman is the enemy of the small needy ego. The Great Idea is the enemy of everything imperfect, whose transformation and subordination it must demand. Thus in the “tetraedic” pedagogical space imperialistic desire prevails – as an occupation of the psychic space and its “colonization” with foreign quasi-religious ideas, which the child is supposed to experience and introject as his or her own.

The cosmos of Blonsky’s coinage aims at the social integration of the child forced and controlled by the collective; the Montessorian cosmos

at the tracking-in of the child according to the immanent divine prescription; the Steiner cosmos at the quasi-noncoercive spiritualization of the child by exposing the child by means of a sophisticated aesthetics and didactics to the ultimately irrefutable effects of the Great Cosmic Spirit.

Neither in the one nor in the other, as little as in the third cosmos, there is the possibility of creating an open, creative space for the establishment of a pedagogy of dialogue, of participation in common affairs, of a pedagogy of conflict and of rational conflict resolution. Such an “open pedagogy” in the indicated sense can theoretically not be justified in the present conceptions, because it has to renounce – as a matter of discourse and human decision – any reference to absolute truths.

This conclusion refers only to the original concepts outlined here with their respective theoretical foundations and the practical arrangements based on them, insofar as each of the concepts must be regarded as a theoretical-practical system, the elements of which are interconnected in themselves or meaningfully related to each other. It is another question to what extent later interpreters with an affirmative tendency have distanced themselves from the original theocratic or quasi-theocratic heritage in the works of Montessori, Steiner and Blonsky, and found new theoretical solutions that take into account the aspects of the dignity of the child as subject and relevant co-author of his/her life, the freedom of the person as well as the contingency of history and human action. The question that needs to be examined here would be whether the new interpretations are legitimate developments, i.e. those that lie within the original logic of the approaches, or idiosyncratic modifications that – possibly despite good intentions – alienate or even distort the original sources.

6. Epilogue: on the possibility of an “Open Pedagogy”

Yet another important question relates to the pedagogical practice itself. For theory can well determine perception and practice, it can also prejudice them, but not to such an extent that – if this expression is permitted here – the “social-ontological” (i.e.: inescapable) fact of education could be normed *at the level of action* in an absolute meaning. The child – and every human being – is a person who is able to take a stand, i.e. to make a value decision. The totalitarian and authoritarian or the absolutely set norm is thus (as a real possibility) reflected and “broken”, even if in ex-

tremely oppressive circumstances perhaps-initially only “inside the soul”, and/or in a mode of pre-conscious presentiment and distancing.

And it may also be stated that all the discursive moments just mentioned can be caught up in pedagogical practice, because in the space of any education, no matter what normative orientation, imperfect people necessarily (have to) live and interact with people of the same kind. Experience shows this even in the extremely totalitarian political systems, where education by those in power is understood as reactive adaptation and secured by monstrous means of disciplination. The theoretical justification of a dialogical, participative, i.e. “open” pedagogy must, of course, be sought in sources other than eschatologically and teleologically oriented concepts. For an “open pedagogy” starts from the insight that education is a *human* effort for the sake of man. But the true success of this effort lies “in God’s hand” or – in the sense of an anthropology of freedom – ultimately in the decision (more precisely: in the many innumerable answers and decisions) of the individual child and human being. And if history is able to teach something, then in relation to education this is: that the recognition and appreciation of contingency in education is fundamentally important. This includes the fundamental recognition and appreciation of the child’s personal response, whether consenting or rejecting, ambivalent or indifferent. And it requires – besides the creation of good external conditions – a continuous striving for the child’s authentic consent to the ambivalent and sometimes painful, then again joyful process of education and upbringing. Otherwise the child can easily and unnoticed, even unnoticed by himself and by the benevolent educator, become a victim of foreign claims and forces. The task is to overcome the fatal possibility that exists in any power-based relationship, which is that the more powerful might be tempted to overtake total control. An “open pedagogy” is aware of the fundamental ambivalence of the educational, and it tries to justify and shape education theoretically and practically in such a way that it is not constituted as an “occupation of the psychic space of the other”.

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