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School for a Hollow Life or The Pedagogical Poem 2.0

Abstract

In addition to medical and public health issues, the 2020 coronavirus pandemic raised some serious philosophical, (bio)ethical, social, political and legal questions that are essentially not new, although they appear under a new light. Among them is also the issue of education, because the coronavirus pandemic has accentuated the digitalisation and alienation trends in the field of education, urging us to consider not only the problems of education during the pandemic, but also the systemic problems in education, science and knowledge in the era of technoscience and neoliberal economy and politics.

Key words: *pandemic, corona, education, digitization, alienation, technoscience.*

As is the case with the field of labour, the field of education has also been strongly hit by the coronavirus pandemic. As it the case in the field of labour, including the economic and political context of labour, workers' rights and workers' struggle, the problems in the field of education are not new and are systemic. The crisis caused by the pandemic has only made them more explicit and more pronounced. Both in the field of labour and in the field of education, form has continued to overpower content and the system has continued to overpower people, the same as in this set-up, the interests of the powerful overpower the interest of the oppressed and personal interests overpower the general good. In the field of labour as in the field of education, old hierarchies, discriminations, exploitations, automatisations, bureaucratisations and alienations did not disappear, but have been upgraded by digitalisation, leading us to the dystopia of a dehumanised world, seemingly closer and more unavoidable today than ever before because today resistance to new and essentially negative trends is weaker than ever.

The similarities between the field of labour and the field of education are not random because labour and education are connected in their essence. Moreover, they are closely intertwined, especially in capitalist systems. This is why we can notice negative trends from the field of labour, both the old and the new, in the field of education, and vice versa. I will discuss two trends here: first *alienation*, which is not new, and its new driving force – *digitalisation*.

A classic and to date, the most in-depth discussion on alienation (estrangement) is to be found in Karl Marx's *Economic & Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, more precisely in the chapter Estranged labour.¹⁴⁸ We can tackle the issue of alienation in education simply by reading Marx's deliberations on estranged labour so as to replace the word *labour* with the word *education*, replace the word *worker* (producer) with the word *student*, the word *production* with the word *learning* and the word *product* (product of labour) with the word *knowledge*. Let us then see how this modified Marx would read:

‘The student becomes all the poorer the more wealth he produces, the more his learning increases in power and size. The student becomes an ever-cheaper commodity the more commodities he creates. [...] Education produces not only commodities; and the student as a *commodity*, and this at the same rate at which it produces commodities in general. This fact expresses merely that the object which education produces, its product, confronts it as something *alien*, as a *power independent* of the producer. The product of education is education which has been embodied in an object, which has become material: it is the *objectification* of education. The realization [*Verwirklichung*] of education is its objectification. Under these economic conditions this realization of education appears as *loss of realization* (*Entwirklichung*) for the students; objectification as *loss of the object and bondage to it*; appropriation as *estrangement*, as *alienation*. [...]

148 Marx, Karl, *Ekonomsko-filozofski rukopisi iz 1844* [*Economic & Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*], in: Marx, Karl and Engels, Friedrich, *Rani radovi* [*Early works*], Zagreb: Naprijed, 1989, pp. 187–343, chapter: Otudeni rad, pp. 244–258, (citation in English from: <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1844/manuscripts/preface.htm>).

Indeed, education itself becomes an object which the student can obtain only with the greatest effort and with the most irregular interruptions. So much does the appropriation of the object appear as estrangement that the more objects the student produces the less he can possess and the more he falls under the sway of his product, capital. All these consequences are implied in the statement that the student is related *to the product of his education, knowledge*, as to an *alien* object. For on this premise it is clear that the more the student spends himself, the more powerful becomes the alien world of objects which he creates over and against himself, the poorer he himself, his inner world, becomes, the less belongs to him as his own. [...] The student puts his life into the object; but now his life no longer belongs to him but to the object. Hence, the greater this activity, the more the student lacks objects. Whatever the product of his education, knowledge is, he is not. Therefore, the greater this product, knowledge, the less is he himself. The *alienation* of the student in his product, knowledge, means not only that his education becomes an object, an external existence, but that it exists *outside* him, independently, as something *alien* to him, and that it becomes a power *on its own* confronting him. It means that the life which he has conferred on the object confronts him as something hostile and alien. [...]

Education produces beauty, but for the student, stupidity, cretinism. *The direct relationship of education to its products, knowledge, is the relationship of the student to the objects of his learning.* The relationship of the man of means to the objects of learning and to learning itself is only a *consequence* of this first relationship – and confirms it. [...]

But the estrangement is manifested not only in the result but in the *act of learning*, within the *learning activity*, itself. How could the student come to face the product of his activity as a stranger, were it not that in the very act of learning he was estranging himself from himself? Knowledge is after all but the *summary* of the activity, of learning. If then knowledge is alienation, learning itself must be active alienation, the alienation of activity, the activity of alienation. In the estrangement of the object of learning is merely summarized the estrangement, the alienation, in the activity of education itself. What, then, constitutes the alienation of education? First, the fact that education is *external* to the student, i.e., it does not belong to his intrinsic nature; that in his education, therefore, he does not affirm himself but denies himself, does not feel content but unhappy, does not develop freely his physical and mental energy but mortifies his body and ruins his mind. The student therefore only feels himself outside education, and in education feels outside himself. He feels at home when he is not learning, and when he is learning he does not feel at home. His education is therefore not voluntary, but coerced; it is *forced education*. It is therefore not the satisfaction of a need; it is merely a *means* to satisfy needs external to it. Its alien character emerges clearly in the fact that as soon as no physical or other compulsion exists, education is shunned like the plague. External education, education in which man alienates himself, is an education of self-sacrifice, of mortification. Lastly, the external character of education for the student appears in the fact that it is not his own, but someone else's, that it does not belong to him, that in it he belongs, not to himself, but to another. [...]

We have considered the act of estranging practical human activity, education, in two of its aspects. (1) The relation of the student to the *product of education, knowledge*, as an alien object exercising power over him. [...] (2) The relation of education to the *act of learning* within the *education process*. This relation is the relation of the student to his own activity as an alien activity not belonging to him; [...]. [...]

In estranging from man (1) nature, and (2) himself, his own active functions, his life activity, estranged education estranges the *species* from man. It changes for him the *life of the species* into a means of individual life. First it estranges the life of the species and individual life, and secondly it makes individual life in its abstract form the purpose of the life of the species, likewise in its abstract and estranged form. [...] Life itself appears only as a means to life. [...]

Estranged education turns thus: (3) *Man's species-being*, both nature and his spiritual species-property, into a being *alien to him*, into a *means* of his *individual existence*. It estranges from man his own body, as well as external nature and his spiritual aspect, his human aspect. (4) An immediate consequence of the fact that man is estranged from the product of his education, knowledge, from his life activity, from his species-being, is the *estrangement of man from man*. When man confronts himself, he confronts the *other* man. What applies to a man's relation to his education, to the product of his education, to his knowledge and to himself, also holds of a man's relation to the other man, and to the other man's education and object of education. [...] Hence within the relationship of estranged education each man views the other in accordance with the standard and the relationship in which he finds himself as a student. [...]

If knowledge is alien to me, if it confronts me as an alien power, to whom, then, does it belong? If my own activity does not belong to me, if it is an extorted activity, to whom, then does it belong?'

It is with this Marx's question, to which any one of us, with Marx's help or without it, could find the answers, that I end this long, transposing quotation. Why at all did I endeavour such a translation of Marx's deliberations on *labour* to the language of *education* and why do I force the reader to read Marx's passages interchangeably, as they were originally written and as they might be understood? The first answer is: because of the key word, which is *alienation*, an occurrence found equally often both in labour and in education. The second answer is: because alienation in education, as we may conclude by reading the 'translated Marx', progresses rapidly in the era of digitalisation, while digitalisation progresses rapidly in the era of a pandemic.

The total reorganisation of life in the era of a pandemic may also be viewed as a laboratory examination of alienation, in education and elsewhere: alienation from own activity, alienation from products of own labour, alienation from other people and alienation from oneself. What is, in the context of such alienation, the role of students in education? What is the relationship of students towards their own education, towards learning and knowledge, towards themselves? What are the relationships among students as living beings and persons like? And what are the relationships between students and teachers as living beings and persons (not to mention the alienation and

self-alienation of teachers, which is a separate issue, although the context is the same) like? – All this became secondary. Efficiency and effectiveness are sought after at all costs and regardless of everything that should actually result from education.

This is known or at least felt by all those who were in the spring of 2020 thrust into the black box of the so-called distance learning or online-classes: teachers at schools and universities, parents who watched their children be de-educated (deformed), while being educated (formed), without being able to do anything about it, and last but not least, students in schools and at universities who are more than ever engaged in their education and reap less results than ever from it. If the first, the second and the third group knows it, i.e., if all of them became aware of this, then they can voice criticism, although there is still not much they can change. If they are not even aware of it, as is the case for most, then their unconscious insight is rummaging through their consciousness and, in the words of Sigmund Freud, ‘it comes to discontent, displeasure for which other motives are sought’¹⁴⁹. Which is a Freudian introduction to neurosis.

Nevertheless, it would be naïve to think that it was the pandemic that led to this. A long process of ‘modernisation’ of education in the form of ‘informatisation’ and ‘digitalisation’ of teaching and learning lies in the roots of this phenomenon, and this is in turn based on the never overpowered model of repressive and manipulative education, for which digitalisation represents only a new means to an old end.

The instrumentalisation of education by the ruling elites and structures, in accordance with their ideology is not new. Ever since it became clear that public (mass and compulsory) education is a much more effective means of ideological indoctrination, manipulation and oppression than restrictive education, that is, the education of upper, wealthier and more powerful social classes as paired with keeping the lower, poorer and disempowered social classes uneducated – a sophistication of education methods has been undertaken, without forgetting about the objectives, purposes and values of education that have been continuously reinterpreted to serve the maintenance and advancement of the ruling regimes. Automatisation, informatisation and digitalisation of education only bring the old educational malice to a higher level and make it less noticeable, thus weakening resistance. This is not only because manipulative elements are becoming ever harder to notice but also because the system remembered in time to make use of human weakness for its benefits, be it ignorance (because knowledge, as we can clearly see today, need not necessarily be the result of education and schooling), laziness or shyness.¹⁵⁰

149 Freud, Sigmund: *Nelagodnost u kulturi [The Discomfort in Culture]*, in: Freud, Sigmund: *Iz kulture i umetnosti [From Culture and Art]*, translated by Đorđe Bogičević, Novi Sad: Matica srpska, 1984, p. 346.

150 For instance, it is only when ‘distance learning’ was no longer just one of the teaching methods and a matter of choice, that I realised that among my fellow colleagues and teachers there were some who like this ‘virtualisation’ because the ‘classic method’, ‘the face-to-face’, is too strenuous and they do not enjoy it, be it due to laziness or certain psycho-emotional aversion from social contacts. So, it could be said that they are not only the advocates of ‘distance learning’ (teaching/learning from a distance), but that they are advocates of ‘distanced learning’ (distanced and thus alienated teaching/learning), thereby repressing the obvious negative implications of this model of teaching/learning.

The reorientation of education towards outcomes, outputs and impacts (all 'key' and 'buzz' words) only confirms the theory by the Brazilian educator, Paulo Freire, on the 'banking concept' in contemporary education as an instrument of disempowerment and oppression.¹⁵¹

Sociological and pedagogical criticism of the 'banking concept' of education is undoubtedly useful, but deeper layers are at play here, that only deeper philosophical analysis may tackle. In other words, a phenomenology of technicised education is necessary. but without essential questions into the nature of education and the nature of the technique we are not going to reach the core of the problem. A discussion on this topic would lead me to far astray from the points I would like to stress here. Nevertheless, I would like this, if only exemplary, to be mentioned in this review. In this context, I find illustrative a passage from the book *The Technical Society* by a French thinker Jacques Ellul:

"The milieu into which a technique penetrates becomes completely, and often at a stroke, a technical milieu. If a desired result is stipulated, there is no choice possible between technical means and nontechnical means based on imagination, individual qualities, or tradition. Nothing can compete with the technical means. The choice is made a priori. It is not in the power of the individual or of the group to decide to follow some method other than the technical. The individual is in a dilemma: either he decides to safeguard his freedom of choice, chooses to use traditional, personal, moral, or empirical means, thereby entering into competition with a power against which there is no efficacious defense and before which he must suffer defeat; or he decides to accept technical necessity, in which case he will himself be the victor, but only by submitting irreparably to technical slavery. In effect he has no freedom of choice."¹⁵²

The unwilling or disillusioned participants of the educational process in the era of digitalisation and during a pandemic should have their minds tickled at least a little, but even if this does happen, the question is: what to do with these realisations? What kind of 'pedagogical poem' (after discussing and dissecting the socialist *Pedagogical poem* by Anton Semyonovich Makarenko¹⁵³ and other pedagogical theories and practices, from anarchist to capitalists, for example from William Godwin to Benjamin Bloom) could be written in these digital and pandemic times? I still have not determined its kind, but I know it should be written because there are still no comprehensive deliberations regarding the recent educational situation, with answers to old and unsolved problems which have been digitally and pandemically distorted these days. Although now, in accordance with the spirit of the times, they are not called problems. Other, more endearing terms are employed, such as 'challenges.

151 Cf. Freire, Paulo, *Pedagogija obespravljenih [Pedagogy of the Oppressed]*, translated by Sanja Bingula, Zagreb: ODRAZ, 2002, (citation in English from: <https://envs.ucsc.edu/internships/internship-readings/freire-pedagogy-of-the-oppressed.pdf>).

152 Ellul, Jacques, *Tehnika ili Ulog veka [The Technological Society]*, translated by Nenad iz Erevona, Beograd: Anarhija/ Blok 45, Bratstvo iz Erevona, 2010, pp. 101–102, (citation in English from: <https://ia803209.us.archive.org/2/items/JacquesEllulTheTechnologicalSociety/Jacques%20Ellul%20-%20The%20Technological%20Society.pdf>).

153 Makarenko, Anton Semjonovič, *Pedagoška poema [The Pedagogical Poem]*, Beograd: Zavod za izdavanje udžbenika SR Srbije, 1965.

We fought problems called ‘challenges’ even before the pandemic, so we should not cover them in a pile of new problems. We should rather try to unearth both piles and review them together at one glance. My reference here is, of course, to the Croatian ‘comprehensive curricular reform’ and its avantgarde, the experimental programme called School for Life [*Škola za život*], which promises that students will ‘learn how to think critically and how to solve problems and not just cram facts’, that is, that ‘each student will get his or her own tablet to learn and thus prepare for the digital era’.¹⁵⁴ Whether and (how exactly) ‘critical thinking’ will be reconciled with the ‘use of a tablet’ and ‘navigating the digital world’ remains completely unclear, especially if we read these statements parallelly with warnings, such as those by Ellul, and especially when, in accordance with the pandemic and police measures, the entire teaching and learning process has overnight become virtual.

The answer to the ‘challenges’ of the pandemic digitalisation should at the same time be the answer to the problem of digitalisation in general, and thus to problems in education in general. Some thoughts, written down *ad hoc*, might help:

– The tabletisation of education through tablets (computers) is equally as dangerous as the tabletisation of children through psychotropic drugs (as used increasingly more often in the ‘developed world’ as a shortcut to treating misunderstood psycho-emotional and psycho-social problems, such as ADHD). Oftentimes, tablets (as in computers) are the cause of the problem that is tried to be solved by tablets (as in pills).

– Digitalisation (in education and in general) does not contribute to acceleration or simplification, in line with the slogan used every time new technical and digital tools and procedures are introduced. Truth be told, it does contribute to acceleration, but not to simplification, because acceleration, which is entangled, without necessary reflection, in all of the old issues, even if in fact it aims to solve them, only causes additional and all the more difficult complications to be eliminated later. If digitalisation simplifies anything, then it simplifies, bordering on banality and stupidity, reflection and criticism.

– The key failure of the recent educational reform in Croatia is that it relies on ‘informatisation’ or ‘digitalisation’ as its core element, while the key problem of the pandemic reorganisation of the school system in Croatia is that digitalisation of teaching and learning is embraced uncritically and superficially, as if it had no implications on teaching and learning.

Against the backdrop of such (lack of) deliberation and (lack of) criticism, one should carefully monitor, both at school and at home, the devastating impact of digitalisation on the minds of children and youth. Should special attention be drawn to this? Obviously, it should, because the deconstruction of the mind (ratio, identity, autonomy, freedom, etc.) under the influence of information and communication technology is noticed even in those who spent most of their lives without the information and communication devices now available, let alone those who never came to know life outside the ruling matrix.

¹⁵⁴ Cf. promotional video *Škola za život* at: <https://skolazazivot.hr/promotivni-video-skola-za-zivot/>.

Therefore, in the field of education, we should strive to save as much of children's souls and as many of children's souls from the virtual techno-Moloch, rather than plugging the last remaining cracks in the wall that keeps the children from reaching to digitally unmediated world with gadgets. The world in which love and hate, acceptance and unacceptance, gentleness and cruelty and other important traits of humanity live a different life from that lived among cold and calculated bits.

This advice could have counted with understanding and acceptance until recently, while informatisation/digitalisation was only one of the options (although preferred) for 'modernising' and 'reforming' education. Now, in the middle of the coronavirus pandemic, it seems that this advice has no foothold in anything from the 'real world', that it is completely 'unrealistic' because: if there is no 'distance learning' and 'digital education', then there will be no classes or education at all!

However, I still think that we should not fall for arguments that apply in 2020, but perhaps will no longer apply in 2021 or 2121. Moreover, I think that no flaws that we found in education and education systems in the pre-pandemic and the pre-digital era should be disregarded under the pandemisation and digitalisation pressures, because these are, as I tried to show, only symptoms of very old maladies which will continue to plague us for a long time to come.

If we address problems on this primary level, by giving them a historic dimension and removing the euphoria that currently surrounds them from the equation, we will see that both the 'pandemisation' and the 'digitalisation' of education stem from what has been well-established much earlier. Specifically, education in a certain social, political and economic system is always the education for that system. What a system is, is reflected in education, while education helps to maintain the system such as it is. Bluntly speaking, education today, regardless of standard rhetorical euphemisms, is merely a reproduction of an oppressive society in the form of school. Ideological, curricular and, finally, financial underscoring of the importance of STEM¹⁵⁵ at the expense of humanistic and social sciences is not only promoting a certain vision of science and education. It also shows only a certain vision of society, which is, as it seems, more dystopic than utopic because it is mechanistic and technical, devoid of wider social and deeper humanistic reflection.

Nevertheless, this is the situation, this is the hand that has been dealt to us and that we must play. Do we have an ace to pull out of our sleeve? Probably not much else than analysis and criticism, whose meaning and dignity we have to defend from the hegemonistic attacks of the system. Sometimes this means invoking 'common sense', because even 'common sense' tells us that the system is cheating at this game, that the cards are fixed. For instance, there is the earlier mentioned 'School for Life' which will, as it is being promised, finally meet the needs and interests of students through, for example, tabletisation. Some (more superficial) critics of this educational reform have complained that this is cosyng up to children who are already completely digitalised because it attempts to make education more fun and more memorable, but not better. This type of criticism misses an important point: it is not the case of cosyng up to autonomous children's wants and needs, but a

155 STEM = science, technology, engineering, mathematics.

case of deceptive cosying up to children's wants and needs manufactured by those who now promise to fulfil them. The key manipulation is hidden in the fact that methods of discipline and control are now presented in the form of something children like and that goes in their favour, as if children themselves chose or created this manipulative system they have been planted into, as is often deducted from their capability to quickly master technical procedures and skilfully use technical gadgets.¹⁵⁶ Information and telecommunication technologies (cunningly programmed to create addiction) and mass media (cunningly programmed to anesthetise and stupefy) are a much more efficient means of control and manipulation than military or police repression, as was understood long before the internet, mobile phones or social media.

Since this medialised, virtual world, the world of information and communication still does not meet all human wants and needs, human life still cannot, luckily, be reduced to direct inputs and outputs, so the 'School for Life', which aims to reduce education to inputs and outputs and reproduce this medialised virtual world in the field of education, is not a school for life but rather a school for a hollow life. As one, but an important one, segment of manipulation with life – in which, in Marx's words 'Life itself appears only as a means to life.'¹⁵⁷ – 'School for Life' is in its essence contrary to life, antibiological. And, if freedom is written in the essence of the human, and if liberation is written in the essence of human activity, then this 'school for a hollow life' also serves to enslave, no matter how happy the slaves are to participate.

In short, Croatian reformist 'School for Life' and all other schools for a hollow life offered at today's market of pedagogical and political ideas get further and further removed from life, unless human life is irretrievably made equal to controlled execution of functions in complex technical systems. Being removed from life also means being removed from the purpose and the sense of education, upbringing and knowledge, of which today we get to read only in the works of critically and radically minded theorist – not in various documents of educational politicians, which serve as an unsatisfactory compensation for deep and far-reaching contemplation of education, while we find less and less meaningful contributions to such deliberations in pedagogical, psychological, sociological and philosophical tractates dedicated to education, because they mostly recycle and thus confirm that what has already gained prevalence in the social and historical as well as in economic and political sense.

¹⁵⁶ Interesting in this context and even very relevant today is an article by the German theologian, teacher and 'the father of European bioethics', Fritz Jahr, *Children and technology*, from 1933, in which Jahr contemplates 'two characteristics of today's youth', 'one is the propensity for technology and a gift for it' (Jahr Fritz, *Dijete i tehnika [Children and technology]*, in: Rinčić, Iva and Muzur, Amir, *Fritz Jahr i rađanje europske bioetike [Fritz Jahr and the Emergence of European Bioethics]*, Zagreb: Pergamena, 2012, p. 239). Jahr examines this in the context of the then technological wonder, a camera, while in the context of recent gadgets his conclusions seem even more true. He states: 'It is most significant that children do not see these things as miraculous at all. [...] The young use the advantages of apparatus without knowledge of its technical or biological assumptions. [...] When all this is cleared, one comes to realise that the young are in extreme danger of the greatest superficiality in technical matters and, in my opinion, one might say that not only a few succumb to this danger. [...] Simply stated: the change in the relationship between children and adults as a result of their seemingly independently acquired greater technical knowledge seems, in my opinion, wrong, as well as educational measures (or neglect thereof) that are based on this misconception.' (Ibid., pp. 240–241).

¹⁵⁷ K. Marx, *Ekonomsko-filozofski rukopisi iz 1844 [Economic & Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844]*, p. 251, (citation in English from: <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1844/manuscripts/preface.htm>).

If we only focus on the fate of knowledge in contemporary education, we witness an accelerated reduction of the term *knowledge* to the term *information*, which is extended to the reduction of the term *information* to the term *data*. The volume and the greatness of human knowledge – as a historic project in which each man, without exception, participated – has been ironically reduced to ‘big data’, collected and processed by machines.

Knowledge is further and further away, and wisdom – as lived knowledge and as the purpose of knowledge in the entirety of a fulfilled human life, both individual and joint – has already become a completely archaic idea. This process is also not new. But, while until a few decades ago it brewed beneath the surface, chipping away at the roots of thousand years-old trees, it is now happening on the surface, where heavy machinery is felling weakened trees.

Thomas Stearns Eliot, in *Choruses from ‘The Rock’*,¹⁵⁸ in verses that are more than ninety years old already vailed:

O world of spring and autumn, birth and dying!
The endless cycle of idea and action,
Endless invention, endless experiment,
Brings knowledge of motion, but not of stillness;
Knowledge of speech, but not of silence;
Knowledge of words, and ignorance of the Word.
All our knowledge brings us nearer to our ignorance,
All our ignorance brings us nearer to death,
But nearness to death no nearer to God.
Where is the Life we have lost in living?
Where is the wisdom we have lost in knowledge?
Where is the knowledge we have lost in information?

However, far from it that reducing wisdom to knowledge, knowledge to information and information to data is not ‘useful’. Of course, it is useful (if it were not, it would not be done systematically), but the question is: to whom? I would like to repeat Marx’s question that can be applied here as

158 Eliot, Thomas Stearns, *Choruses from ‘The Rock’*, in: Eliot, Thomas Stearns, *Collected Poems 1909–1962*, New York: Harcourt, Brace & World Inc., 1963, p. 147. (citation in English from: https://www.arak29.am/PDF_PPT/6-Literature/Eliot/Chtherock_eng.pdf).

well: ‘If my own activity does not belong to me, if it is an extorted activity, to whom, then does it belong?’¹⁵⁹

Knowledge has always been manipulated; it has always been both the subject and the means of manipulation. The same goes for information, while in the case of data, there are virtually no obstacles to manipulation. Those that are economically, politically and socially the most powerful manipulate the most and most successfully, and the primary ground for manipulation is education, that is, the system of education. Various authors in various fields wrote about the usurping and manipulation of education by the ruling classes and associated structures and ideologies – which was always combined with the (re)defining of the term knowledge and its purposes – among them were also those of the anarchist persuasion.¹⁶⁰

So, in addition to internal restrictions of knowledge – which I previously mentioned, and for which I used T. S. Eliot – also important are the external restrictions of knowledge, that I underlined as well, and that the American poet William Carlos Williams wandered about in his legendary poem *Paterson*:¹⁶¹

*Who restricts knowledge? Some say
it is the decay of the middle class
making an impossible moat between the high
and the low where
the life once flourished ... knowledge
of the avenues of information –
So that we do not know (in time)
where the stasis lodges* And if it is not
the knowledgeable idiots, the university,
they at least are the non-purveyors*

159 Marx, Karl, *Ekonomsko-filozofski rukopisi iz 1844* [*Economic & Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*], p. 258, (citation in English from: <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1844/manuscripts/preface.htm>).

160 A provisional list includes contemporary authors such as Paul Goodman, Paulo Freire, Colin Ward, Ivan Illich, Noam Chomsky, Joel Spring and Judith Suissa, then authors from the 19th and the first half of the 20th century, such as Mikhail Bakunin, Peter Kropotkin, Leo Tolstoy, Francisco Ferrer and Emma Goldmann, but also older (e.g. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, William Godwin, Mary Wollstonecraft and Max Stirner), whose criticism of educational models and systems, with a certain degree of recontextualization, are relevant even today. For a relevant concise overview of the anarchist and/or libertarian approach to the problem of education cf. Kranjec, Jelena and Jurić, Hrvoje, *Anarhija u školi* [*Anarchy at school*], *Ispod pločnika*, No. 7, Year 3 (2009), April/May 2009, pp. 5–10; also in: Jurić, Hrvoje, *Iskušenja humanizma* [*Temptations of humanism*], Zagreb: Hrvatsko filozofsko društvo, 2018, pp. 139–156.

161 Williams, William Carlos, *Paterson*, Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1983, p. 34. (citation in English from: <http://www.patersonproject.com/Paterson-Poem.html>).

*should be devising means
to leap the gap. Inlets? The outward
masks of the special interests
that perpetuate the stasis and make it
profitable.*

*They block the release
that should cleanse and assume
prerogatives as a private recompense.
Others are also at fault because
they do nothing.*

But what could be done? If we speak about education, the first answer is – a reform of the education system. If we are unhappy with the situation in education and if we find the existing model, organisation and the effects of education unacceptable, we should design and try to implement or at least support reform. This was, as it seems, also claimed by the Spanish anarchist and pedagogue Francisco Ferrer when he said that the method of ‘changing school’:

‘[...] offers great advantages, and is in harmony with the evolutionary conception which men of science regard as the only effective way of attaining the end. They are right in theory, as we fully admit. It is evident that the progress of psychology and physiology must lead to important changes in educational methods; that the teachers, being now in a better position to understand the child, will make their teaching more in conformity with natural laws. I further grant that this evolution will proceed in the direction of greater liberty, as I am convinced that violence is the method of ignorance, and that the educator who is really worthy of the name will gain everything by spontaneity; he will know the child’s needs, and will be able to promote its development by giving it the greatest possible satisfaction’¹⁶².

However, Ferrer immediately voices his doubt in the reformist endeavours, thus really rejecting them as an option:

¹⁶² Ferrer, Francisco, *Moderna škola: poreklo i ideali* [*The Origin and Ideals of the Modern School*], translated by Bratislav Srećković and Milenko Srećković, Beograd: Centar za liberteranske studije [Center for Libertarian Studies (CLS)], 2010, p. 65, (citation in English from: <https://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/francisco-ferrer-the-origin-and-ideals-of-the-modern-school>).

‘In point of fact, however, I do not think that those who are working for the regeneration of humanity have much to hope from this side. Rulers have always taken care to control the education of the people; they know better than any that their power is based entirely on the school, and they therefore insist on retaining their monopoly of it.’¹⁶³

And he is right. All those who have participated in educational reforms – and only a few of us who work in the system could afford the luxury of not collaborating in reform processes – know how little can be changed and how many frustrations arise out of every attempt at change.

So since those in power ‘organised the school in accord with the new scientific ideas in such a way that nothing should endanger their supremacy’, ‘the hope of reformers has been void because the organisation of the school, instead of serving an ideal purpose, has become one of the most powerful instruments of servitude in the hands of the ruling class. The teachers are merely conscious or unconscious organs of their will, and have been trained on their principles. (...) ‘Education’ means in practice domination or domestication.’¹⁶⁴

As a result, there is no other way for radical pedagogist but to found – new schools ‘in which principles may be directly applied in the service of that ideal which is formed by all who reject the conventions, the cruelty, the trickery, and the untruth which enter into the bases of modern society.’¹⁶⁵

However, since ‘education’ has, step by step, been made equal with ‘schooling’, and schooling became entangled in social life to such an extent that it has become as necessary for survival as breathing and eating, today it is even hard to imagine the possibility of a socially efficient education outside the system and outside institutionalised education. In Ferrer’s era, when state repression was much more explicit than today, the possibility for this, was paradoxically, much greater because society was not as ‘schooled’ as today, so the request for ‘deschooling’ of society could appear only decades later.¹⁶⁶

Ferrer and other 19th century anarchists managed to create autonomous educational enclaves outside the system, which were not only against the system but were really undermining it. That is why they could go frontally against the system of public and compulsory education that serves to uphold and advance an oppressive social and political system. Radical, free-thinking educational theorists of the second half of the 20th and the beginning of the 21st century (e.g. Paulo Freire, Colin Ward, Noam Chomsky and Joel Spring) are mostly academically established, so they have been corrupted from the very start, untrustworthy to a degree, and in the end inefficient, while the

163 Ibid., pp. 65–66.

164 Ibid., pp. 69–70.

165 Ibid., p. 65 – Ferrer did it too, by establishing Modern school [Escuela moderna] in 1901 in Barcelona and in several others Spanish cities. He paid for his free spirit with his life: he was sentenced to death and executed in 1907 and his schools were closed. However, schools modelled after Ferrer’s Modern school were established elsewhere as well, for example in the USA, thanks to anarchists such as Emma Goldman and Alexander Berkman.

166 Here I refer to analyses and criticism by Ivan Illich, expressed in the book *Deschooling Society* from 1971 – cf. Ivan Illich, *Dole škole*, Beograd: Duga, 1972.

projects of 'alternative' or 'free schools', such as Summerhill, were in one way or another incorporated in the system and, what is even worse, they were private schools attended only by students whose parents could afford them.

What then is the alternative? An unsatisfactory but accurate answer would be: acting in small, almost invisible liberated territories within the system, i.e., subversions undertaken with a slim hope that they will lead to more substantial changes. However, in neither of the cases as well as in the existing, extremely unfavourable circumstances, may great objectives be forgotten, although we know that they will not be attained, either soon or easily. Ferrer knew how to express such grand objectives concisely and simply:

'We do not hesitate to say that we want men who will continue unceasingly to develop; men who are capable of constantly destroying and renewing their surroundings and renewing themselves; men whose intellectual independence is their supreme power, which they will yield to none; men always disposed for things that are better, eager for the triumph of new ideas, anxious to crowd many lives into the one life they have.'¹⁶⁷

Can this be achieved within the ruling system, regardless of whether we describe it in the narrow sense, as a capitalist system, or in the broad sense, as a technical system? The answer has, in a sense, already been given. It is quite simple and almost surely accurate: no way!¹⁶⁸ It is much harder to provide an answer to the question whether we even still have the capacity to act outside this system, the capacity that is not deeply infected by the maladies of the system? This paradox was also pointed out by Jacques Ellul when he said:

'There is no place for an individual today unless he is a technician. No social group is able to resist the pressures of the environment unless it utilizes technique. To be in possession of the lightning thrust of technique is a matter of life or death for individuals and groups alike; no power on earth can withstand its pressures.'¹⁶⁹

What we can do and how – remains unanswered here. However, being satisfied by asking a question, even without finding an answer, need not necessarily be a sign of defeat, especially if circumstances are such that even asking question has become scarcer and scarcer. All in all, if sudden exaltation about anything transcends into euphoria and quiets or eliminates criticism, it is our duty to fuel scepticism. If digitalisation (pre-pandemic or pandemic) is a trend praised from all sides with diminishing resistance, if digitalisation is considered an 'ultimate solution' for many of our

167 Ferrer, Francisco, *Moderna škola [The Origin and Ideals of the Modern School]*, pp. 72–73, (citation in English from: <https://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/francisco-ferrer-the-origin-and-ideals-of-the-modern-school>).

168 Ferrer says that the ruling elites 'have resolved to use education for their purposes, and they will take advantage of every improvement of it', because 'there is question only of imposing ready-made ideas on it [the child], of preventing it [the child] from ever thinking otherwise than is required for the maintenance of existing social institutions — of making it, in a word, an individual rigorously adapted to the social mechanism.' – Ibid., p. 71.

169 Ellul, Jacques: *Tehnika ili Ulog veka [The Technological Society]*, p. 102, (citation in English from: <https://ia803209.us.archive.org/2/items/JacquesEllulTheTechnologicalSociety/Jacques%20Ellul%20-%20The%20Technological%20Society.pdf>).

educational issues, and often even a ‘magic wand’ which will make certain problems disappear, we must remember Jean-Jacques Rousseau and his work *Emile, or On Education*, where he provided advice as helpful today as it was in 1762:

‘Reverse the usual practice and you will almost always do right.’¹⁷⁰

Škola za životarenje ili Pedagoška poema 2.0

Sažetak

Uz medicinska i javnozdravstvena pitanja, pandemija koronavirusa 2020. godine izazvala je neka ozbiljna filozofijska, (bio)etička, socijalna, politička i pravna pitanja koja nisu u bitnome nova, premda se pojavljuju u novome svjetlu. Među njima su i pitanja obrazovanja jer je pandemija koronavirusa potencirala trendove digitalizacije i alijenacije u sferi obrazovanja, što nas upućuje ne samo na razmatranje problematike obrazovanja u doba pandemije nego i sistemskih problema obrazovanja, znanosti i znanja u epohi tehnoznanosti te neoliberalne ekonomije i politike.

Ključne riječi: *pandemija, korona, obrazovanje, digitalizacija, alijenacija, tehnoznanost.*



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¹⁷⁰ Rousseau, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Emile or On Education*, translated by Allan Bloom, New York: Basic Books, 1979, p. 94 (source of translation into English: <https://oll.libertyfund.org/title/rousseau-emile-or-education>).