

VALEDICTORY LECTURE

*Masschelein*

# WITH TIME

Regarding pedagogical forms



Notes for a lecture

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and  
Jacques Debroux**

# With time

## Regarding pedagogical forms

Notes for a lecture<sup>i</sup>

Jan Masschelein

Caminante, no hay camino, se hace camino al andar  
*Traveller, there is no path, the path is made by walking*  
Antonio Machado

May I please ask you to switch off your phones and place them out of sight so that you won't be tempted to reach for them. I will come back to this a little later.

I'm a little nervous, as is often the case before giving a lecture, though the feeling today is perhaps a bit stronger than usual. It is not so much a result of this being a farewell lecture—while it is a farewell to an institution or at least the closing of a period of time spent at that institution, I still hope to be able to continue lecturing in the future, and hence it is not in that sense a farewell to the lecture as such, even though the university nowadays seems to be moving away from the lecture as a pedagogical form. Rather, I feel somewhat nervous given that my audience, if I may be so bold as to say so, is very diverse. Let me try then, to turn our *company* into one of *students*, thereby inviting you to *become acquainted* with the world of pedagogical forms as ways of giving shape to pedagogical life. I want to try and bring this world to the 'middle', to the *center* of our attention so we may perhaps *perceive* its richness and potential/power a little better, and in doing so *considering* it and *care* for it a bit more, especially today, when so many forms of pedagogical life are already quite damaged and weakened, some even existentially threatened, and the pedagogical world itself seems to be wearing out before us. Although this situation isn't new of course, the pandemic appears nevertheless to have accelerated or intensified such a trend. And while this

pandemic may well have produced new forms, it has also reminded us of the meaning and power of certain older forms—think, for example, of the children and youth who for some reason were itching to go back to school, a place many had once deemed not particularly appealing to students. In a similar vein, the pandemic reminded us of the significance of the plant and animal worlds—think, as well, of how many people suddenly took up hiking or cycling, or how trees and birds became all the hype—and made us more aware of the extent to which our way of life is threatening these worlds, and I would argue the pedagogical world as well, hence ultimately impoverishing and depleting them. Yet before taking up this impoverishment and depletion along with their consequences, let me first address certain forms of pedagogical life in order to describe in greater detail their own nature and power. Let me begin, as I often have in pedagogical lectures, with the example of the *Oikoten* initiative.

### ***Oikoten*: An adventurous journey**

*Oikoten* is the name of an initiative started in 1982 by a group of volunteers working with disaffected youth, more specifically those from a closed institution in Mol, a kind of last chance youth program. This initiative consisted in setting these young people out on a four-month hike to Compostella, thereby leaving the institution, under the condition that if they managed to reach this final destination on foot without committing (too many) violations of the law, the juvenile court would wipe their slate clean, they would be ‘free’. In an old documentary from 1983, which is still fantastic to watch today, the initial volunteers explained that they decided to organize such an initiative because they refused to accept that young people might be tied to a certain past and come to be ‘buried alive in Mol’, as they put it. In other words, they refused to think that these young people might not have a future and chose instead to believe that something was still possible, even though all the evidence (ranging from their personal histories to research in sociology and psychology) pointed in the other direction. In fact, inferring from their family and social backgrounds, or at the very least from their concrete histories,

one would most likely have concluded that these young people were indeed destined to leading a marginal life or ending up in prison. Not only did others see them that way, but they themselves shared this perspective most of the time. Of course, such a view is and has been supported by abundant evidence. Mol is after all an end station of sorts, since everything has been tried and nothing seems to help. However, let me stress at this point that pedagogical work is not primarily evidence-based, not only since evidence is only statistical and cannot therefore say anything specific about a given young person. But more importantly, pedagogical work always starts from the hypothesis, shared both by the Dutch and French philosophers Baruch de Spinoza and Jacques Rancière, that ‘it is possible’, and that we do not and will never know what someone is or might be truly capable of. This is precisely why the initiators want to take young people with them—into the world and out of the house so to speak. This nicely captures the meaning of the Greek word *oikoten* (‘from home’) and suggests by the same token the Greek origin of the ‘pedagogue’, referring to the slave that took young people by the hand and out of the house (the *oikos*) to school.

In a way, pedagogical work always assumes that ‘it (the impossible) is possible’. - Think also of the numerous school films where teachers manage against all odds to open a path for children or young people without a future. - What is really being said, and this is perhaps one of the most characteristic of pedagogical statements, is: *try*, try this (and try it again), despite all reasons not to try and even though it might be risky and destined to failure. The initiators claimed that they wanted to offer these young people an ‘awakening experience’, something they might *experience* both in the sense of *undergoing* but also of getting affected from *doing* something (of *going*) – and experiencing something that might bring meaning to life again—to awaken means to ‘animate’ or ‘reanimate’—thereby granting them freedom from those forces that predestined them to a certain future given their past and present. It should be noted that the initiators did not adopt a policing attitude, which aims to bring about or help maintain social order, nor were they trying to set these young people on a ‘right’ path, since they themselves neither knew nor even assumed that such path might exist. Moreover, they were not attempting to offer

some form of therapy that starts with the assumption that something is wrong and needs to be remedied. Rather, this reanimating/reviving experience was made possible by the fact that these young people were put in a particular situation: they undertook a journey under certain conditions (on foot and alone) that enabled them to think for (and about) themselves (something that caused a great deal of unrest, actually, and which they often felt as burdensome and challenging, confrontational even), and where the act of walking itself provided them the opportunity to *become acquainted*, a very beautiful word (in Dutch at least, *kennismaken*), since it points both to knowledge (*kennis*) and to the effort involved, the making (*maken*), as well as to an encounter—something that does not resonate in ‘producing’ knowledge. Getting to know something, becoming acquainted, is not just a matter of knowing that it exists, but more importantly of it becoming meaningful to us, to thereby see our own world change as a result. When it gets the power to speak to us, we begin to perceive it in the real sense, we take it into account, and it consequently begins to matter. At this point, the burden and challenge of confrontation turns into the joy of acquaintance. A joy that is foremost characteristic of an event, or a ‘birth’ as Isabelle Stengers would say—think, for example, also of the joy of the first step. Simone Weil has pointed out that observing the world’s beauty, useless in itself, brings about self-detachment and a release from social pressure. As one young person in the documentary put it: “I never really had an eye for the beauty of nature, but now that I have learned to see it, my outlook on life has changed and I have found the will to go on”. Many of the other young people on this journey made similar remarks that it changed them *along the way*, step by step, *with time*. This journey seems not so much to have brought them to a predetermined destination, as it has step by step changed the mood, one might say, changed their mood by altering the ‘mood/voice’ (*Stimmung* in German) of the world. This reflects the experience of a certain opening, as well as a capacity and freedom, which isn’t the freedom of choice, but perhaps the formative experience of the possibility of a different life, since it is the experience of a different world, or at the very least the experience of a world that has somehow changed, and in which we can find ourselves once again set in

motion but differently so. ‘Can’ affords no guarantee, hence no spectacular salvation, and no great learning outcomes to tick off as profit or gain. Neither does the *Oikoten* initiative presuppose nor expect any (learning) outcomes; it only proposes a path, whose final destination Compostella, although symbolic, does not really matter that much. In the 1980s, none of these young people could have an ‘image’ of Compostella. They were simply taken on an *adventure*, that is to say, along an indeterminate road where something could happen or come to them (*ad-venire*), something they themselves, as well as the people accompanying them, had no prior knowledge or idea of, and which therefore could not have been planned or predicted. As the documentary also clearly shows, embarking on such an adventure created at once a certain tension (the fear of the unknown) and a (somewhat retained) excitement. And while there naturally was the ‘reward’ (of the judge wiping their slate clean), it was predominantly this sense of adventure and tension that ended up moving them, that caused them to go along, that set and kept them in motion if you will.

### **The hospital school: the perfect school**

The second example of a pedagogical form I often discuss is the hospital school. In particular, the school for terminally ill children, which in a certain sense we might call the perfect school, since such a school no longer serves any clear purpose or leads to anything specific—that is, it does not derive its meaning from possible outcomes (e.g., a diploma, access to university or the job market) and thus from something outside itself, something that would be there at the end of school, at the end of schooling. In other words, a school where learning gains have become an empty or meaningless concept, yet which nonetheless is very ‘effective’ since it allows certain experiences that are meaningful in and of themselves, and which we could therefore also describe as ‘awakening’ or ‘(re)animating’.

Indeed, the first reaction that might spring to mind with terminally ill children is: Do you really have to bother them with language and mathematics? Shouldn’t you just let them watch television series or play games so they can forget about their worries? Yet it is precisely this kind of ‘forgetting’

that is brought about by the hospital school, albeit in an entirely different way, and which more importantly does not entail forgetting as an end in itself or killing time, but rather an *animating* therefrom, bringing it to life. The example of the hospital school teaches us something par excellence about what constitutes a school—school, not as an institution, but as a special form of being together of people with matter and substance, a form of being in each other's presence, a form of 'company' that can also very well exist outside of those buildings we usually think of and that are made possible by certain material arrangements, practices and, of course, teachers. Altogether these elements create a certain kind of time, which in Greek antiquity was distinguished from the ordinary time of housekeeping and production (the time of *oiko-nomia*). Instead, it represents a time when one is free to study and practice, to *get acquainted* with the world and thus to also (co-)share the world and form oneself, without the demands of immediate productivity nor the need for profit. It is the time that the Greeks therefore called 'free time', the first translation of the word *scholè* from which the word for school in many languages originates, and which Hannah Arendt has rendered as a 'time for the world'.

In such a situation, one is first and foremost addressed as a pupil or a student and not as a patient, although this condition won't be entirely ignored either. Here again, the guiding idea is that that we do not know what a person can be or become capable of, and even though the end is near and practically certain, it is not this 'certainty', this 'evidence', that matters most. Of course, there are in this case obvious reasons why it does not seem to make any sense, and yet the pedagogical still speaks: 'try', despite all the reasons not to. This 'try' protects the child from the influence of social forces that quickly want to bind the child to the diagnosis and the expected or foreseeable 'end'. Consequently, the child's condition, for a moment, no longer casts a shadow over what might be deemed possible. Furthermore, this trying is also always a trying of something: a world for which attention is needed, be it the world of numbers, letters, or nature. It is this 'try' that draws the child (as well as the teacher) into a time that is neither determined by a past (illness) nor a future (death). In fact, it draws the child into the *present time* (*tegenwoordige tijd*), again a



very beautiful formulation (at least in Dutch) since it signifies a time when something begins to speak, while also suggesting a counter-word (*tegen-woord*)—the numbers, letters, words, and shapes that all begin to say something, to speak (begin, one might say, to ‘present’ themselves).

One could perhaps say that the world becomes a source of ‘inspiration’ (in the sense of breath or put life or spirit or soul into the body) in this schoolwork experience that allows students to be intensely involved with something, along with the teacher’s voice that helps the world to speak and invites them, somewhat forcibly it is true, to observe and perceive it. This inspiration is the animation of a shared world: by making the world speak one overcomes solitude and experiences a certain capacity, of being able to (still) participate in and (still) belong to a world, as Martin Buber would put it. The hospital school searches for a way to let the world speak to this child. How can we shape the *adventure* of getting to know the world and thereby enable an experience in which time is not killed but brought to life, and where joy can also spring forth, even in such a forlorn situation?

As its teachers have noted, the hospital school continues to work, even though many might feel that such children ought to be left alone. Instead of a self-enclosed wellbeing, what these children want, as one teacher explained, is to be taken seriously even though they may be gone tomorrow. Furthermore, this teacher pointed out that children are rarely if ever sick to the extent that they are no longer open to using their minds. Even terminally ill children are entitled to her time—the time to get acquainted with something together. She knows that even if everything might end badly, the parents will consider her as someone *who makes time* for their child, not to talk about the illness but about algebra, grammar, or painting a bear. The teacher sees the child not as a patient but a pupil or student, and consequently expects the same classroom behavior as from healthy children. Lack of enthusiasm doesn’t count either. Even when a child’s health falters, she finds algebra or painting important. And while she hears from parents about the ups and downs of their child’s motivation, she also hears from them that going to school nonetheless opens up a world for these children.

What this example and these children teach us about forms of pedagogical life, perhaps explaining as well why children and youngsters wanted to go back to school during the pandemic, is that when the school truly operates as a school—that is, when it takes children and young people seriously, when it does not ‘define’ them (stating you are so and so, hence ..) but takes and creates the time for an adventurous encounter with the world—it becomes meaningful to students, for it produces experiences of ability and joy, and creates a ‘hole’ in the ordinary, chronological time, in this specific case the time when one is sick. This concludes my second example. As a final example, let me now turn to the lecture.

### **The lecture: The (re)birth of (new) knowledge**

‘*Hoorcollege*’ is the delightful Dutch word we use to refer to what we try *to make happen* in an auditorium (in German ‘*Hörsaal*’). I say *try* because it can and often does fail. It often failed in the past, but it certainly will often fail today, because, and I will elaborate on this in greater detail later, both the (social and intellectual) climate as well as the very concrete conditions (including the intentions and expectations of professors and students, along with the introduction of all kinds of technology) make it difficult both to give and attend lectures.

The word ‘*college*’ (used in Dutch for what is rendered in English as ‘lecture’) derives from the Latin ‘*com*’ or ‘*cum*’, meaning together, and from the Proto-Indo-European ‘*leg*’, which is also found in the Greek *legein* and the Latin *legere*, referring respectively to both speaking and reading, as well as to enumeration and addition, to sorting out (gleaning is also called *aren lezen* in Dutch), and collecting (the collection). This term therefore describes a collective form of reading, speaking, enumerating, counting, sorting out, and collecting. Of course, you can not only read, discuss, and pick out texts together, but also stones, soils, and rivers, for example. In English, we have the word lecture, in Dutch the word ‘*hoorcollege*’ implies ‘*horen*’, that is hearing (hence, a ‘hearing-lecture’). However, it should be noted that hearing does not refer to obedient listening, as many often accuse the lecture of, but to a collective

reading and discussing of a world, which, *if successful*, brings us to (a) hearing (of) that world. In other words, we experience that world, and what we learn to perceive and name from it ‘starts to matter,’ starts to affect. The lecture (‘hoorcollege’) is therefore a form of public and collective study that indicates a common matter which demands our attention and care and which makes ‘us’ (i.e. very diverse people) into a ‘community (of study).’

Indeed, one could probably say that a lecture ‘succeeds’ when it manages to bring a certain world (e.g., physics, geology, or in this case the pedagogical world) to the center of our attention and maintains it there, making it speak, and at times even contradict what we previously thought or imagined. Putting it differently, to make it speak so that we hear it and learn to perceive it better. Not only in the cognitive sense, but in the strong sense that we become sensitive, that we learn to be affected—to perceive, from the Middle English, means to sense, notice, pay attention and care for, so that it manifests itself in our thinking and doing, in our seeing and speaking—sensitive to more and more entities and distinctions in that world which we learn to read and start to matter to us, and whose names we must also learn in order to perceive them. Lectures therefore form, gradually and over time, our ‘capacity to perceive’, to *be affected* (to be ‘moved’ to do something) and hence to act.

Lectures are not only about presenting and passing on existing knowledge, but, when they succeed, they are also a way of generating knowledge and putting it to the test, questioning it, and confronting it with an attentive audience. *Colleges* (lectures) are to be attended (*bijwonen*), which, as the good old Van Dale (a Dutch dictionary) reads, means ‘to be present at something which *happens*’ (*‘tegenwoordig zijn bij iets dat gebeurt’*). Students often declare that attending successful lectures is, in a way, attending the birth of knowledge, insights, thoughts, the birth of new knowledge and thoughts—but also the rebirth (re-birth) of existing knowledge and insights—and thus akin to taking part and participating in the wonderful adventure of thinking and discovery. By the way, this also resonates with what professors often describe when they say that lecturing pushes them to think and thereby generates new

insights. To give a famous example, George Lemaître, who originated the Big Bang theory, once exclaimed in complete earnestness and wonder while discussing something at the blackboard: ‘and this is a step forward in science’. Humboldt, the father of the modern university, similarly claimed that lectures, viewed as a form of confrontation with students, were more important for the progress of science than meetings with colleagues at conferences or in the academy. This also allows us to understand that attending and giving lectures can be accompanied by joy, provides energy, and incites and moves one to study, to go deeper and further.

The power and significance of lectures also has to do with the fact that science exists in this case not only in written form, but also and pre-eminently in a spoken form in front of a present audience, through which it comes into play and becomes public in a different way than in the form of written texts (books, courses, articles), and through which it can also be brought to life in a completely different fashion, and moreover be questioned.

A lecture is made possible by all kinds of concrete arrangements and practices that help to remove us from ordinary time, to draw us into the present time we referred to earlier as ‘free time’, in order to create a shared attention, to make a presence of mind possible, and to keep something in focus and convoke it to speak. I think that physical presence plays an important role here.

Consider the arrangements that were made today. You had to travel here, at this precise point in time, and were given no choice in that respect. Since this lecture is neither streamed nor recorded, you could not choose the time. But neither could you choose the place. After all, you were invited here, into this rectangular space, slightly elevated, somewhat enclosed, a sort of cave, where you are also invited, somewhat forcibly it is true, to sit on benches you did not bring with you, whose shape and placement you have not chosen, and which force your body to settle into a certain position, face a certain direction. You are not ‘at home’ here; you are not the ‘boss’. And now that you are here, there is a certain ‘pressure’ to stay put, since leaving this space (unnoticed) is not such an obvious

thing to pull off. You are forced to look at where I am standing, in front of a big blackboard, behind a long desk and at a reading stand—I am not at home either, nor am I the boss, although I can move about more freely, and am entitled to speak by the implicit rules we observe. Nevertheless, there are many things that keep me here, if I want to address you all at the same time or use the board for example, and there are many things that limit my freedom of speech as well—after all, you can all very well suddenly get up and leave the room or even physically carry me outside, or you can simply answer back as well.

My asking you to put your phones out of reach (as I did in the very beginning) goes against a form of power that very much distracts our attention nowadays. Laptop screens (which most of you don't happen to have in front of you today) would also impede me from being visually and aurally present, since they might prevent you from noticing all of my gestures and expressions ('screen them out'), which according to research is vital to understanding and 'hearing' what I say, and therefore equally important to allowing those words to make you think and shape you in turn. The professor's voice plays an important role in this. As Michel Serres has pointed out—and this applies not only to professors but also to teachers, educators, and all those for whom the use of their voice can be counted as a core feature of their profession—if you want to give your voice the power to bring a world to life, to make it speak, you have to realize that you will only be able to do so provided your voice is inspired and animated by its 'hearing', its listening. Hearing is here essential in all respects to enable speech and perception, and it is perhaps for this very reason that 'hearing-lectures' ('hoorcolleges') are such a crucial part of any pedagogical formation.

The 'hearing-lecture' is a very fragile form of pedagogical life. It allows the present time to unfold, but many things can draw one back to ordinary time again. For example, when professors require that students mainly learn what is being said, students often start to take notes along the lines of usual learning and ordinary life, where qualifications and certain kinds of exams play a central role, which means that they leave with a summary (and today, helped by laptops, preferably even with a transcription) rather than with an

experience of a real and shared world—of living an event. Other factors also make giving and attending lectures increasingly challenging, such as excessively large group sizes, as well as the intrusion of all sorts of digital devices (laptops, cellphones) into the auditorium, the ‘hearing room’ (*Hörsaal*), along with the belief that a recording or live stream can somehow replace the lecture. For sure, listening and viewing recordings or live streams ‘at home’ certainly have pedagogical meanings and potency of their own. They are, however, largely cognitive operations (consuming a lot of energy) and very different from *attending* a (succeeding) lecture, and thereby being a *participant* in a very specific way, which generates energy.

In such forms of distance learning, computer screens are still somewhere, of course, but that somewhere is not shared, and people are literally separated from one another. As a result, the atmosphere and mood become something else entirely, and the relationship between those ‘present’ is also altered. Behind a screen, we are in some respects more in control and in ‘the boss mode’ (one click and we are gone, sorry the connection is lost). Of course, we are less contagious to others as well (that was after all the driving reason to replace lectures during the pandemic). Yet this ‘contagiousness’ turns out to be of great importance pedagogically speaking, not only in a metaphorical sense, but also in the sense that assembled bodies—bodies that smell, move, sit, shift, cough, itch, scratch, turn pages, and so on—can help generate a certain enthusiasm, a certain inspirational energy, which can in turn help make the meeting an adventure, an event where something might happen that is not expected or predetermined. They may likewise stimulate greater attention, not only as we have learned from the example of (successful) lectures where knowledge is born, but also from the case of students starting studying *en masse* in university libraries, again very specific places, with their own rhythms and constraints. And curiously, this phenomenon occurred when new technology enabled students to study anywhere and at any time. They rediscovered, you might say, the power of this old form of pedagogical life, where the presence of mind is made possible by the presence of other bodies, as well as the presence of voices that are ‘heard’ from the writings in books along the walls. There is a different mood (‘*Stimmung*’), a study mood. This ‘rediscovery’ offers some

hope for pedagogical life, which is nonetheless threatened to become increasingly impoverished by what I shall call the new learning factory.

### **The impoverishment and destruction of pedagogical forms**

Around the end of the last century, the first signs of what we might call a hypermodern learning factory started to appear. A factory can be described as a production facility that combines all kinds of processes on a large scale to create a product. A simple description of the learning factory might then be the production facility or apparatus designed for learning outcomes. This factory is made up of various components. It is guided in its functioning by all kinds of policy measures (at the European, regional and local level), and by the deployment of all sorts of ‘machines’ and (state-of-the-art, increasingly digital) technology that support its functioning and growth, thereby ensuring that as many learning gains as possible are produced. This factory’s foundation can be discerned in policy texts that literally speak of a ‘fundamental shift’, and in that respect I do believe a major turning point was reached when learning started to be defined as the *production of learning outcomes*. Indeed, the learning factory approaches and organizes ‘learning’ as a production process that must be managed (in its operation) through predetermined, anticipated, and desired outcomes. As with all production processes, it attempts to make production as efficient and effective as possible, both cost-effective and cost-efficient, as well as time-effective and time-efficient. A key point to understand here is that ensuring effectiveness and efficiency presupposes that outcomes are predetermined and precisely defined, otherwise it would not be possible to compare measures or interventions and thus judge their productivity. Like many factories, the learning factory is increasingly ‘global’, operating more and more through digital platforms. Ideally, the learning factory would like to be everywhere, that is to say nowhere in particular (otherwise its processes and operations could be too much disrupted), and perpetually in operation. It is increasingly delocalized, detached from time and place, from the shared

place and collective rhythms of ‘institutions’, such as the university or the school, which hinder its productivity. It addresses all of its workers (including managers) as ‘learners’ and tries to increase their individual and collective productivity (the learning gains they achieve) by personalizing and analyzing production processes down to the smallest detail and permanently monitoring them as far as possible by means of sensors and measurements applied to each worker (e.g., current eye-tracking technology), which with the help of learning analytics and catalytics are then displayed on personalized and collective dashboards. This in turn enables learners at all levels of the factory to continuously manage their (individual and collective) production of learning outcomes and intervene when necessary. After all, the factory is also concerned with learning time, the production time of learning outcomes, which represents a cost it would likewise wish to save on as much as possible. Consequently, it essentially monitors time as the interval between two tests—that is, two measurements of produced outcomes.

The shareholders (amongst others the government), along with the builders and workers (the learners) of this factory, cannot help but rejoice at the fact that archaic forms of pedagogical life (such as the lecture) are disappearing, since they neither meet current demands and needs nor do they offer the possibilities expected today. The factory is therefore expanding rapidly while these forms are being replaced. A small token of this shift can be glimpsed by the fact that, despite the introduction of new work forms with new ‘names’ (such as the webinar, web lecture, zoom session, etc.), we no longer tend to talk about pupils, students, schoolgirls and schoolboys, apprentices, professors or school teachers, but are (at least in many European and Flemish policy texts on education and training, as well as in scientific publications) increasingly referring to everyone simply as ‘learners’ without any further distinction—thereby defining them solely by their ‘function’ in the factory: learning. This paucity of vocabulary is only a small indication of the growing impoverishment and degradation of many pedagogical life forms, following the learning factory’s expansion through the ever-increasing number of measures and means it develops and deploys to promote its own growth and optimization.



Please allow me to draw an analogy with the damage and impoverishment experienced by the animal and plant worlds, taking the example of bees, whose form of life plays a crucial role in our own lives and households, not simply for the sake of producing honey, but more importantly for pollination, which as it were happens almost incidentally. Bees have apparently been unable to adapt themselves to an increasingly toxic environment due to parasites and pesticides brought in by modern factories and, more generally, modern production methods to promote growth. The approach to solving this problem now seems to entail the replacement of bees with little robots. In other words, the bees' form of life has been reduced to one unique function, namely pollination, and this function is now being robotized. This robotization is, of course, computerized and computer-controlled, and involves 'sterilization' as well. In fact, one researcher has explicitly stated that this could be an advantage of robot bees: 'In the long run, they may even have a potential advantage over natural pollinators as pollination would be their sole function.' Of course, such an approach can be pushed even further, improved on so to speak and rendered more efficient and effective with a better monitoring system. It would even have the added benefit of eliminating all kinds of nasty elements—after all, bees can disrupt our parties and sting us, whereas robot bees might only be hacked at the very worst. What I am trying to point out here is that the bees' form of life is being reduced to a single function according to one sole concern—the concern for what they bring or deliver us. And I believe that the kind of solution offered by robot bees simply continues this careless, inattentive, negligent productive form of life that is responsible for their threat in the first place, since it approaches their life in a purely functional way as what can be exploited for one's own survival/profit and interest.

In a similar way, the pedagogical life has been damaged (and is being replaced), since we have begun to approach it primarily as something that can be exploited to produce profit, hence as a source of capital. No one has formulated this more clearly and explicitly than our current Minister of Education, who in his policy statement calls himself a 'happy capitalist', and declares that children are our capital. By that he means, of course, the capital of the older generation

and a certain Flanders which he has in mind regardless of what the children may think, whereby teachers, as he likewise declares, are the capital managers who must ensure that (learning) gain is produced on all (personal and social) levels. This kind of mindset therefore reflects a call to invest in producing (for all) the proposed learning outcomes as optimally, efficiently, and effectively as possible. As with the bees, pedagogical life is reduced to a single function, in this case 'learning', where learning is understood and defined as the 'production' of predetermined learning outcomes. It is about people *having* as quickly as possible the appropriate knowledge, skills and attitudes. Thus, it primarily stimulates the desire to *possess* knowledge (skills and attitudes), the desire to know rather than the desire to study and take the time to devote oneself to getting acquainted in depth, as Philippe Meirieu would say. In fact, many policies and technologies could be seen as growth agents or pesticides for learning in view of production, and hence as agents and pesticides that are simultaneously destructive to many forms of pedagogical life. Forms that have difficulty adapting to the circumstances (climate and conditions) created by the learning factory's expansion. Forms that potentially disrupt production, for example, by making non-productive time possible: the time to look again and once more (in Latin *respicere*, which also means to care and respect), the time to better perceive what truly matters, or the time it takes to simply say, 'wait a minute, perhaps we are wrong'. Forms that find it difficult to adapt to the needs and expectations that the factory places on its workers and learners: the demand for personalized production tools and production routes to achieve optimal *learning gains*. Indeed, the factory assumes that its workers are primarily interested in profit or gain, a sad passion as Spinoza would point out.

However, the factory is starting to face growing challenges as well, due to what one might term a de-pedagogization of our educational practices and institutions, which concerns not only schools, colleges or universities, but youth work and welfare in addition. The word de-pedagogization should be understood in the sense that reducing pedagogical forms to one single function, and hence transforming free time (i.e., school time) into production time

(transforming school time into learning time as Maarten Simons has expressed it), extracts a lot of formative power—which also means ‘vital energy’ or ‘moving forces’—out of pedagogical forms, thereby weakening them in the process and thus affecting their efficacy.

If we banish (or attempt to banish) the adventurous from the pedagogical life because the destination is already predetermined as an outcome, if we do not address the participants as adventurers taken along a journey, but instead as capital and production managers, if we reduce education and training to production processes with a single well-defined function, which we also strive to render as efficient and effective as possible by analyzing, personalizing, monitoring, and controlling everything in those processes with that one unique objective in mind, so that nothing can ‘happen’ which might disturb productivity, so that there are no unexpected breakdowns and interruptions, and drawbacks can immediately be detected, if we assume that learners—the employees of this neo-Fordist learning factory—must themselves provide the energy for these production processes, and furthermore assume that this energy will arise motivated solely by the pursuit of profit or gain, then it wouldn’t be all that surprising if these learners started to experience their ‘work’ in this perpetual factory as precisely that: stressful, energy-consuming, and time-consuming labor, just like the workers in old industrial factories had. And neither would it be astonishing if they asked that their stressful lives be taken into account, refused to no longer do anything without incentive (i.e., compensation, think of credits and student evaluations), or demanded a good ‘learning-life’ (‘work-life’) balance as well as therapeutic support, in order to be able and willing to sustain their often joyless efforts.

## **Concluding**

Let me first summarize what I have discussed. Pedagogical forms as concrete instances of the pedagogical life share the following characteristics: they are awakening/animating experiences (they make the world speak, they give birth to knowledge, etc.); they are adventurous in

spirit, not in a grand and spectacular way, but in the simple yet crucial sense that there is no pre-determined destination nor path, for the path of formation appears while walking it, *with time*; they create a certain kind of time, which differs from that of economic production, and which we might call a ‘time for the world’, to better perceive what matters and hear the world; they materialize through their methods and practices (e.g., saying ‘try’) the idea that we do not (and cannot) know what bodies and minds are capable of, since they are a testament to believing that it (the impossible) is possible. As I have argued, many forms of pedagogical life are now threatened.

Some zoologists and biologists claim that the pandemic has enabled certain forms of animal and plant life to recover and rejuvenate to some extent, given that the shutting down of economic life has reduced extraction, pollution, and interference. I fear that this has not been the case for many forms of educational life, and that the learning factory has continued its expansion and with that its harmful extraction, even though undoubtedly passionate teachers, professors, adult educators, youth workers... still make a lot of adventurous learning happening in many places (both within and despite the learning factory). And, the pandemic seems to have brought forth certain new forms as well, though whether they are adventurous and life-enhancing remains to be determined, and while this may very well turn out to be the case, it shouldn’t lead us to forget the learning factory’s expansion and pernicious consequences. Can we shut down the learning factory? Can students, or professors think of anything else than the demand for ‘incentives’, compensation, and therapeutic support as well as a good work-life balance? I don’t know, but I certainly hope so.

Maybe pedagogues do have a role to play in imagining a different future for pedagogical life. Perhaps they should refrain from imitating capital managers in search of profits or (learning) gains, or engineers trying to increase productivity based on evidence of what works (what is effective and efficient), but follow instead the example of biologists, zoologists, or geologists, who, conscious of the threats to natural and terrestrial life, during intensive and prolonged fieldwork, seem increasingly to develop a patient attention to

observing and documenting the intertwining (and therefore interdependence) of many forms of life as well as their vulnerability, to develop an attention to discerning the smallest things that matter for these forms of life and for their potency and power, in addition to paying attention to their beauty. Perhaps pedagogues could help tone down the pervasiveness of the language of profit and capital, of output and feedback, by finding (or rediscovering) a language to name and help perceive the richness of pedagogical life forms and the differences that matter, to show their beauty and power. As perhaps some of those school films do, or as, I think, the *Oikoten* documentary referred to earlier does. They don't try to deliver a proof of the 'effect', they don't defend the added value, but testify to their power and awakening/animating action, make us feel and perceive it, if we are attentive ....

I have tried here, as I indicated at the beginning, to make a small contribution as well. I don't know if I have 'succeeded', but if I have indeed been able to let something of the inherent potential and beauty of certain forms of pedagogical life be heard and perceived today, then it is because my speaking has long been able to feed on the fertile compost that distant and close relatives, colleagues, collaborators, workers in the field as we say, and of course friends and students, from home and abroad, many here present, have made together over the years, in all kinds of places and moments. You were also an attentive audience today, for this, in retrospect, perhaps rather introductory lecture in pedagogy. Really, very sincere and very heartfelt thanks for that, it was a privilege as well as a great source of joy to study in your company, because after all, what else is a professor but an eternal student. I sincerely hope for further opportunities to get acquainted.

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<sup>i</sup> I am very grateful to Yannick Coeckelenbergh for his excellent translation of the Dutch text I used at my valedictory lecture on Friday 16 September 2022. All references have been omitted, only very occasionally a name is mentioned though the thoughts formulated here and the words used for them are inspired by or drawn from writings of and conversations with very many others. They helped form the compost to which I refer at the end of the lecture.