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Education in times of fast learning: the future of the school

Jan Masschelein* and Maarten Simons

Laboratory of Education and Society, KU Leuven, Vesaliusstraat 2, Leuven B-3000, Belgium

Against the background of the many attacks on the school as being outdated, alienating, ineffective and reproducing inequalities we offer a morphological understanding of the school as distinguished from functionalist understandings (sociological or economical perspectives in terms of functions and roles) and idealistic understandings (philosophical ones in terms of ‘ideas of education’). Our educational morphology approaches the school as a particular scholastic ‘form of gathering’ i.e. a particular time–space–matter arrangement (including concrete architectures, technologies, practices and figures) that deals in a specific way with the new generation, allows for a particular relation to the world, and for a particular experience of potentiality and of commonality (of making things public). We elucidate how this form performs particular operations of suspension, profanation and formation of attention and how these operations imply a slowing down and an opening of future. Finally, we emphasise the potentially revolutionary character of the scholastic form and discuss contemporary attempts at taming or neutralising the school.

Keywords: school morphology; school education; suspension; profanation; attention; slowing down

Introduction

The school’s very existence has been called into question by radical deschoolers and unschoolers throughout the twentieth century. Schools, so they argue, rest on the false premise that we need them to learn, while we learn much better or faster outside school or outside the classroom (Illich 1970; Bentley 2000; Griffith 2010). Moreover, schools have been compared to prisons and camps (Gray 2013), they have been accused of being brutal colonisation machines. And all this seems to be based on sound observations and arguments. In today’s era of lifelong learning and (digital) learning environments, perhaps one is allowing the school to die a quiet death. One anticipates now really the school’s disappearance on the grounds of its redundancy as a painfully outdated institution. Indeed, besides the recurring charges and accusations levelled against the school (alienating and demotivating young people, corruption and abuse of its power, reproduction of inequality, lack of effectiveness and employability), we must take note of the recent development which states that the school, where learning is bound to time and space, is no longer needed in the digital era of online learning environments. A revolution fuelled mainly by new information and communication technologies makes it possible to focus learning squarely on the individual learner. In this new context, it is argued, the personalised

*Corresponding author. Email: Jan.masschelein@ppw.kuleuven.be

learning process gains increased support through ongoing evaluation and monitoring, and learning itself becomes fun. Learning, it is stated, can take place anytime and anywhere. This means that the class as a communication technology is rendered obsolete. The school and classical education become redundant according to their critics: the entire concept of curriculum and classification based on age is a product of outdated ways of distributing knowledge and expertise. The school as a whole is determined by primitive technologies of the past. When listening to the critics of the school, it seems as if today learning becomes once again a 'natural' event, where the only thing that matters is the distinction between 'rich' and 'poor' or 'effective' and 'ineffective' learning environments.

Is all this indicating or announcing the end of the school? We hope not. In fact we want to offer some elements of a defence of the school, not in order to restore an old institution, but to develop a touchstone to reinvent the school. As part of this defence, we try to identify what makes a school a school and, in doing so, we also want to pinpoint why the school has value in and of itself and why it deserves to be preserved or, maybe better and more precise, deserves to be reinvented. We call this a morphological understanding of the school and we distinguish it from functionalist understandings (sociological or economic perspectives on the school in terms of functions, roles and societal needs) and idealistic understandings (philosophical ones in terms of ideas or meanings of education and schooling). Our educational morphology is, however, not a kind of elaborated theory, but more like a set of propositions or invitations to think about the school in a particular and perhaps more fruitful way in terms of 'forms of gathering and actions', rather than functions and institutions. Indeed, from a morphological perspective, the school is understood neither as an institution (obtaining legitimacy from a transcendent idea or ideal) nor as a (multifunctional) organisation (obtaining legitimacy from the performance of functions), but refers to a particular form of gathering. It is this 'scholastic form', what this form does (or creates) and the very concrete architecture, technologies, practices, figures, experiences and acts that constitute it, that we attempt to clarify, at least by pointing to some of its main features. It is important to be clear from the outset: we do not attempt to imagine an 'ideal school' or the school as 'idea', but to describe the school as a very concrete, material invention including a very particular form of (educational) gathering.

A particular invention

It may at first sound strange to inquire into the scholastic. Is it not obvious that the school is essentially a place of learning? Is it not self-evident that the school is about an *initiation* into knowledge, practices and skills, and about a *socialisation* of young people in the culture of a society? And is the school not simply the most economic, collective form to organise initiation and socialisation when society reaches a certain level of complexity? These are common perceptions of what the school is and does. In contrast to this view, it is very important to recall that the school is a specific (political and material) invention of the Greek *polis*, which implies that schools have not existed everywhere and always, and that schools might one day indeed also cease to exist (see also Stiegler 2006, 2008; Pena-Ruiz 2005). One could probably say that each society has its forms of learning and of dealing with knowledge and skills in relation to new generations, but the Greeks invented a very particular form (just as they invented the particular form to deal with our living together which is called democracy). In what follows, we make some further reference to Greek antiquity, but we do not intend to offer an historical account.

As part of our morphological account, we start from references to the Greeks in order to sketch some features of the school form.

In order to set the scene for our morphology, we want to start with four remarks. First, the school is not (just) about learning, and hence, we do not approach the school as one (formal) learning environment besides many other (informal) learning environments. Second, the school is not the economic solution for the impossibility of organising or financing individual teacher–pupil or master–apprentice relationships. Third remark: what we often call ‘school’ is in fact (fully or partially) a tamed, neutralised and hence de-schooled school. Thus, in this article we want to reserve the notion of the school for a concrete invention of a particular form of education. It is a form that throughout history was exposed to several attempts of taming and acts of neutralisation. Fourth, we hope the features of the school form that we elaborate here can function as a kind of touchstone in the true sense of the word; not as a kind of benchmark or set of principles to judge, assess or evaluate educational practices, but as a source of inspiration or point of reference in attempts to re-invent school practices. Let us now explore some of the features of the invention of the school. These could be approached as *materialised beliefs and decisions* or acts, written in practice and ethos (i.e. in a form), so to say.

Suspending the natural order

The Greek school emerged as an encroachment on the privilege of aristocratic elites in ancient Greece. Of course, from the very beginning there were operations to restore privileges, to safeguard hierarchies and classifications, but a major act that *makes school* is precisely the suspension of a so-called natural, unequal order. The school one could say is the materialisation of the belief that humans have no natural destination. It is the materialisation of the refusal of natural destiny and of the confirmation of *homo educabile*; since there is no (given) destiny, (wo)men can be educated. The school was doing this while providing *scholé* or *free time*, that is, non-productive time, to those who by their birth and their place in society (their ‘position’) had no rightful claim to it.¹ That is also the reason why Bernard Stiegler defines the school as ‘otium/scholé for the people’ (Stiegler 2006/2008, 150). School is literally a place of *scholé*, that is the spatialisation and materialisation of ‘free time’ and, thus, of the separation of two uses of time. What the school did was to establish a time and space that was in a sense detached and separated from the time and space of both society (*polis*) and the household (*oikos*). The invention of the school constituted an emancipatory rupture and provided the ‘format’ for time-made-free, that is, the particular composition of time, space and matter that makes up the scholastic. With the coming into existence of the school form, we actually see the democratisation of free time which at once is, as Rancière (1995, 55) argues, the ‘site of the symbolic visibility of equality’. The school form should be regarded as the visible and material refusal of natural destiny. This also explains that the invention of the school form was at the same time the start of several attempts to tame or neutralise the school: time and again there have been attempts to reintroduce some kind of *natural* order (e.g. age, talent, capacity, natural development) and hence to claim a kind of natural destiny and to neutralise the free time. These are reactions to the fact that those who dwell within the school literally come to transcend the social (economic and political) order and its associated (unequal) positions. The scholastic format, as a consequence, suspended in various ways the urgency of the moment and enabled a particular dis-closure of the world.

Suspending the urgency of the moment: delay, suspension, profanation and attention

School is invented to develop faculties through study and exercise without the constraints of the moment. For that reason, school-children are not apprentices of a craftsman. School time is time of knowledge/matter for the sake of knowledge/matter (related to study), of capability for the sake of capability (connected to exercising) and of conversation/argument for its own sake (which is at stake in thinking).² Time for study, exercise and thinking is time to bring oneself into (good) shape. In this sense, school time is freed from a defined end and therefore from the usual economy of time. It is 'un-destined' time where the act of appropriating or intending for a (immediate) purpose or end is delayed or suspended.³ School time therefore is the time of delay and rest (of being inoperative or not taking the regular effect) but also the time which rests or remains when purpose or end is delayed. Study, exercise and thinking are thus, and importantly, practices which in themselves slow down and install a delay. Free time is separated from productive life, it is time where labour or work as economic or instrumental activities are put at a distance, and hence, study and exercise become possible.

A typical feature of this separateness, then, is suspension. Economic, social, cultural, religious or political appropriations are suspended, as are the forces of the past and the future and the tasks and roles connected to specific places in the social order. The school offers students for instance the opportunity to leave behind their past and family background, and indeed to become students like all the rest. Past and background, of course, do not disappear but when entering the school form they are suspended. And a similar suspension exists from the side of teachers (a profession that is not really a 'serious' profession), and from the side of subject matter (knowledge and other things that are not 'for real'). Clearly, suspension seems no longer to be part of education today; in contrast, there seems to be the opposite tendency, that is, to connect students to their past and family background, to transform teaching into a productive activity and to make subject matter directly useful. It is important to stress that to suspend means not to destroy or ignore, but to '*temporally* prevent from being in force or effect' (Oxford Dictionary). Education as a *form* of suspension is not destroying or denying anything, e.g. the past or the institutions, but is disorientating the institutions, interrupting the past. The necessities and obligations of professions, the imperatives of knowledge, the demands of society, the burden of the family, the projects for the future; everything is there or can be there but, as Barthes (1971) would say, in a condition of 'floating'.

Suspension could be regarded more generally as an event of de-privatisation; it sets something free. The term 'free', however, not only has the negative meaning of suspension (free from), but also a positive meaning, that is, free to. Drawing upon the terminology of Agamben, we use the term *profanation* to describe this kind of freedom. According to Agamben '[p]ure, profane, freed from sacred names is that thing that is being replaced in view of the common use by people' (Agamben 2005, 96). A condition of profane time is not a place of emptiness, therefore, but a condition in which things (practices and words) are disconnected from their regular use (in the family and in society) and hence it refers to a condition in which something of the world is open for common use (Agamben 2007). This is in line with Lewis (2013) who suggests to look at study as 'profanated learning'. Thus as part of practices of study, but also of exercise or thinking, things (practices, words, movements...) remain without defined end: means without an end (Agamben 1995; Simons and Masschelein 2009). It is in front of common things available as means that the

young generation is offered the opportunity to experience itself as a new generation, i.e. the experience of (im)potentiality/beginning in front of something that is open for common use.

Things however are not only made profane but the school makes it possible for the new generation to become *attentive* to the world, to some-thing. Through the teacher, school discipline and architecture the school forms attention and makes attentive. According to Weil (1948) and to Stiegler (2010) this is even the most important issue when considering the essence of (school) education. The importance of attention can also be formulated differently: the school does not only make things known, but also exposes students to these things and gives them ‘authority’. The school makes that the common things, or the world, can ‘speak to them’. The magical event of the school – and hence, not the mechanical process of learning – invokes things to become ‘alive’, to come to speak, and hence, creates the possibility for students to become interested. The school does not just offer the opportunity to learn mathematics, but to become interested in mathematics. School then is also a space of *inter-esse* – understood as an in-between and a making of a relation (Stengers 2000, see also Sørensen 2009).

The form of *suspension*, *profanation* and *attention* is what makes school time a public time; it is a time where words are not part (no longer, not yet) of a shared language, where things are not (no longer, not yet) a property and to be used according to already familiar guidelines, where acts and movements are not (no longer, not yet) habits of a culture, where thinking is not (no longer, not yet) a system of thought. Things are ‘put on the table’, to use this wonderful image of Arendt (1968/1983), transforming them into common things, things that are at everyone’s disposal for free use. What has been suspended is their economy, the reasons and objectives that define them during work or social, regular time. Things are thus disconnected from the established or sacred usages of the older generation in society but not yet appropriated by students or pupils as representatives of the new generation. In a way, school can be seen as the material, visible form of this ‘not yet or ‘gap’. It is in front of common things available as means that the young generation is offered the opportunity to experience itself as a *new* generation, i.e. the experience of (im)potentiality/beginning in front of something that is open for common use. The profane school or *scholé* functions as a kind of common place where nothing is shared but everything can be shared. In this view, schools are not public because of how they are financed, how they are regulated or by whom they are owned, but due to their form.

Opening a future

The school is the materialisation of the decision of a society to offer a time and space for study, exercise and thinking in order to give the young generation the opportunity to renew society. Therefore, the school form is also the way in which society puts itself at a distance of itself and brings itself into play as way to offer to itself and the new generation a future in the sense of the French ‘*avenir*’ (*à venir*), which is to come and radically unknown, i.e. not knowing what one does not know (Rheinberger 2007). To put it differently, school is the place where a world is dis-closed (its closure is removed) and where the belief that ‘*our children are not our children*’ gets a concrete visible and material shape.⁴ That our children are not our children, means that they are not to be reduced to members of a family or a community, state or society, and cannot be tamed by the destinies imposed on them.

To give a very simple example: the school is the place where the daughter or son of an engineer can become interested in arts or language. In a different register, Stéphane Moses (1992) argues, that school-time is ‘a time of the possible’ (23) or the materialisation of ‘the time of the generations’ (88).

As indicated before, school turns something of the world into ‘school matter’. What is at stake is offering or presenting the world once more without trying to define how it should be continued or used, i.e. to offer it un-destined, without end, to set it free, so that students or pupils can begin anew *with* these things, *with* the world. For instance, at school it is not just about learning a language, but offering young people to possibility to become interested and hence to relate to it. These things can now get meaning again, or get a new meaning. That is also why Arendt writes:

Our hope always hangs on the new which every generation brings; but precisely because we can base our hope only on this, we destroy everything if we so try to control the new that we, the old, can dictate how it will look. (Arendt 1968, 189)

Indeed, in all traditional and archaic societies knowledge and skill is protected and shielded and even kept secret. In contrast, knowledge and skill brought into the school becomes an affair of each and all and *in principle* does not presuppose any exceptional gift, particular talent, election or privilege. Of course, knowledge was, and still is, in fact not really equally available and public, and we are aware of the position of slaves and women in Greek society and several exclusions today. The point here is that in principle, that is, as part of the difficult act and belief of making and remaking school, it was, it is and hopefully it remains.

Again, to bring something (a text, for instance) into play and to set it free from regular usage is always risky. Without this risk, however, without offering the new generation time, space and material ‘for play’ – be it in study, playful conversation or exercise – there is no school. The school form discussed here clearly maintains something of a site of initiation: to conserve and pass on what the older generation knows about how to live together, about nature, and about the world. But the specificity, and the real ‘school form’ of this transmission or passing on, lies in what is transmitted being detached and released from any ‘community’ and ‘position’ (the older generation, the wise, the nation, etc.). This happens through a public time and place that brings knowledge (culture, habits, customs . . .) into play in a radical way. It is important to stress that these objects are not destroyed or radically criticised at school but they are turned into – drawing loosely on Latour (2005) – some-thing of concern, of common interest, and hence something to relate to. It is radical, and even possibly revolutionary, for at school everything can always potentially be put under discussion or be questioned. To put this in simple way, at school reasons can be asked for the most diverse phenomena: Why is the sun shining?, Where comes the rain from?, Why are there poor people?, . . .

Abandoning: an experience of ‘being not unable’

Exercising and studying are forms of learning in which one does not know in advance what one can or will learn; it are open-ended events. Consequently, the experience of school is in the first place not an experience of ‘having to’, but of ‘being able to’, perhaps even the experience of pure ability (in relation to something) and, more specifically, of an ability that is searching for its orientation or destination. Conversely, this means that the school also implies a certain freedom that can be linked to ‘abandon’: the condition of having no

fixed destination and therefore open to a new destination. Here, like elsewhere, we foremost point at the positive, educational understanding of ‘being able to’ and not, as Agamben (1997) elaborated, the negative condition of being banned in relation to sovereign power: *homo educabile* and not *homo sacer*.

That educational solitude, openness or indeterminacy is aptly expressed in the following excerpt from a novel by Duras (1990, 79–80) about a boy who does not want to go to school because there he learns what he does not know (which is of course the exact reverse of Meno’s slave learning what he did know):

The mother: You notice how he is, schoolmaster?

The schoolmaster: I see.

The schoolmaster smiles.

The schoolmaster: So you refuse to learn, sir?

Ernesto looks long at the schoolmaster before he answers. He is so amiable.

Ernesto: No Sir, that is not the point. I refuse to attend school, sir.

The schoolmaster: Why?

Ernesto: Let us say that it makes no sense.

The schoolmaster: What has no sense?

Ernesto: To attend school (pause). It is useless (pause). Kids at schools are abandoned. The mother brings the kids to school so that they learn that they are abandoned. In this way she is released from them for the rest of her life. *Silence*.

The schoolmaster: You, Master Ernesto, didn’t you need to go to school to learn?

Ernesto: Oh yes sir, I did. It is only there that I understood everything. At home I believed in the litanies of my idiot mother. It was only at school that I met the truth.

The schoolmaster: And that is...?

Ernesto: That God does not exist.

Long and deep silence.

When Ernesto is confronted with the truth ‘that God does not exist’, we take that to mean that he has come to the realisation that there is no fixed (natural) destination or finality. But that does not mean that the school has no meaning. Quite to the contrary. What the school makes possible is ‘formation’ through encounters and opportunities to study and practice. In other words, the absence of any destiny does not make (school) education impossible or meaningless, instead it makes school meaningful: school is about the time and space offered to find a destiny.

Scholè, then, is not simply a time and space of passage (*from past to future*), project-time or initiation-time (*from family to society*). It is precisely an open event of ‘preparation as such’, that is, preparation without a pre-determined purpose other than to be prepared and ‘in form/shape’. Being prepared must therefore be distinguished from being competent or being able to perform (well), and from the claims of employability that are associated with this goals. In this respect, it is not surprising that the most basic role of the school is to impart basic knowledge and basic skills. These are part of the exercises and study that prepare us and help us to ‘come into shape’.

A form of gathering

We want to emphasise once more that the school is not an idea or ideal, but a form of gathering that is to be made. Education, or *pedagogy* if understood in its broadest sense, then could be regarded as being the art and technology to make school happen, that is, to spatialise and materialise free time. School pedagogy is about the tracing of spaces and the aesthetical arranging and dealing with matter that sets things free, makes students attentive, places them in the silence of the beginning and offers the experience of potentiality in front of something that is made public. School forms, then, are forms of suspension, profanation and attention, and pedagogy is the art and technology to give shape to these forms. It is beyond the scope of this article to discuss this in detail, but we want to stress here that a school pedagogy that aims at constituting the happening of ‘free time’ includes particular architectures and particular forms of discipline (intellectual and material technologies of mind and body, specific pedagogic gestures) and certain pedagogical Figures (persona characterised by a particular ethos, i.e. an attitude or stance such as embodied in the figure of the teacher) (Masschelein and Simons 2010; Simons and Masschelein 2011). Here, we just want to call out two often-neglected aspects of the school form.

First, as Stiegler (2006, 174–175) states, there is no school before and without writing and reading practices: these practices are not only about disciplining the body, but foremost about ‘learning to sit still when listening attentively.’ Without the school form, this particular kind of attention, and the related experience of being-able-to, would be impossible. In this context, it is interesting to remind that Isocrates, which is in fact for the school much more important than Socrates (e.g. being the inventor of particular school techniques such as the essay and the exam), emphasised the practice of writing as a way to install a delay and to suspend urgencies. More particularly, Isocrates is said to have offered ‘the gift of time’ to the art of rhetoric that by that time was enclosed in political and juridical practices:

Away from the courtroom and outside the general assembly, rhetoric was no longer constrained by a sense of urgency and, in the absence of that constraint, did not have to sacrifice its artistic integrity to the contingent demands of a client’s interests. (Poulakos 1997, 70).

The gift of time was related to the practice of writing that Isocrates favoured; writing being in itself a delay and being not only a way to make words readable and storable, but also a way to make ‘things’ audible, to liberate them from their muteness and to change objects into things that can concern us. Through and in writing, the world is materialised and is opened for study, that is, to reveal various, often unsuspected and uncontrollable, dimensions.

Second, and equally important, typical for the school form is that it involves more than one student. Of course, often we consider education in (large) groups to be a matter of efficiency, and hence, implicitly or explicitly a one to one relation between teacher and student is considered to be the most optimal learning context, but practically impossible or just considered to be inefficient. Individual education, or focusing exclusively on so-called individual learning pathways, is however not a form of school education. This is because it is only by addressing the group that the teacher is put in a vulnerable position and is *forced*, as it were, to speak to each one and to no one in particular and thus to everyone. In such a condition, a purely individual relationship is not possible, or is constantly interrupted, and

the teacher is obliged to speak and act *publicly*. The scholastic discipline is imposed by the group on the teacher, and this discipline ensures that whatever she brings to the table becomes a common good. That also means that the typical scholastic experience on the part of students – the experience of ‘being able to . . .’ – is a shared experience from the outset. It is the experience of belonging to a new generation in relation to something – always for the students – from the old world (see also Arendt 1961). This something thus generates interest, calls for attention and attentiveness, and makes ‘formation’ possible. A community of students is a unique community; it is a community of people who have nothing (yet) in common, but by confronting what is brought to the table, its members can experience what it means to share something and activate their ability to renew the world. Of course there are differences between students, be it clothing, religion, gender or culture. But in the classroom, by concentrating on what is brought to the table, those differences are (temporarily) suspended or put between brackets – hence, not destroyed – and during that event a community is formed on the basis of joint involvement.

Taming or reinventing the school?

When considering the features of the school form, we can read the long history of the school as a history of continually renewed efforts to (intentionally or unintentionally) tame the school (and the teacher) and to rob the school of its scholastic, i.e. potentially innovative and even revolutionary character, that is, as attempts to de-school the school. Today, the school seems to be under attack more than ever before, because it concerns the very things that make a school to school. The attacks on the school today are lurking in the appealing calls to maximise learning gains and optimise well-being and pleasure in fast and personalised learning for each and all. Behind these calls lurks a strategy of neutralisation of the scholastic form, one that reduces the school to a service-providing institution for advancing learning, for satisfying individual learning needs and optimising individual learning outcomes. The focus on learning, which today seems so obvious to us, is actually implicated in the call to conceive of our individual and collective lives as an enterprise focused on the optimal and maximal satisfaction of needs (Simons and Masschelein 2008). In this context, learning appears as one of the most valuable forces of production, one that allows for the constant production of new competencies and operates as the engine for the accumulation human capital. Time as time to learn is equated here with *productive time*. Or more precisely, learning becomes a matter of constant calculation keeping one eye towards (future) income or return and the other eye focused on useful resources to produce learning outcomes. Learning becomes a personal business, a matter of productive and investment time, something that is open to endless acceleration.

Indeed, today as yesterday there are many strategies to tame the school.⁵ However, today the most important one is to conceive of the school as a ‘learning environment’ helping students to produce essential ‘learning outcomes’. The issue of offering good education now becomes the issue of the efficient and effective production of *employable outcomes* as being investments. It becomes unimportant where these outcomes are produced and therefore schools are challenged to prove their added value – just as teachers have to prove they are productive and become responsible in terms of outcomes, and as learners (learning coaches, etc.) have to manage their time investment in an efficient way. Therefore, the space of a learning environment seems to be the perfect mirror of our hyperactive, *accelerating* society, aiming at returns on investment in a way which is as

effective and efficient as possible. The space of learning environments is no materialisation of free or public time, time of delay, but of time of investment and production. The school is no longer a place where society puts itself at a distance of itself. It becomes a (public) service delivered to individuals and to society, the community or the economy itself in order to reproduce itself, to strengthen, grow or expand.

Thinking the school space starting from outcomes actually prevents it from being a potentially revolutionary space, a space of renewal of society offering itself up in all its vulnerability. A society does not put itself on a distance of itself spontaneously, and certainly not at the moment that she is dominated, as Stiegler (2010) argues, by all kinds of (private) media powers that are used ‘to form opinions’ and ‘capture attention’. Bachelard ([1934] 1967) once spoke about ‘une société faite pour l’école’ (that means a society that fits the school not a school that fits a society). He asked whether society is ready to recognise the school as such, as having its own public role and to provide it with means to work, a society which does not asks of the school what it cannot do but offers the means to be school: to provide ‘free time’ and transform knowledge and skills into ‘common goods’, and therefore has the *potential* to give everyone, regardless of background, natural talent or aptitude, the time and space to leave their known environment, rise above themselves and renew (and thus change in unpredictable ways) the world. The price such a society has to pay is to accept that it is *slowed down* (because there could be something more important), that it gives its future out of hands (and reconfirms that there is no destination, fundamentally accepting its finitude) and ready to trust people enough to free them of requirements of productivity in order to enable them to make school happen (and allow them to be teachers and students).

The assumption of our school morphology is simple in this regard: the school is a historical invention, and can therefore disappear. But this also means that the school can be reinvented (and re-decided), and that is precisely what we see as our challenge and as our responsibility today. Reinventing the school comes down to finding concrete ways in today’s world to provide ‘free time’ and to gather young people around a common ‘thing’. This reinvention could be guided by the touchstone we tried to sketch. But it definitely has to deal with an important challenge: the new information and communication technologies. ICT may have a unique potential to create attentiveness (indeed, the screen has the ability to attract our attention in an unprecedented way) and to present and unlock the world – at least when ICT is freed from the many attempts to privatise, regulate and market it. Many of these techniques are geared towards capturing attention and then redirecting it as quickly as possible towards productive purposes, that is, towards penetrating the personal world to meet predetermined targets (determined by the state or others), produce particular learning gains (as part of a learning capitalism) or to increase the size of the market (in advanced economies) (Stiegler 2010). In this case, we can speak of the capitalisation of attention, with the school being an accomplice in the effort to reduce the world to a set of resources. ICT certainly does make knowledge and skills freely available in an unprecedented way, but the challenge is whether and how it can truly bring something to life, generate interest, bring about the experience of sharing (gathering around a ‘common good’) and enable one to renew the world. In this sense, making information, knowledge and expertise available is not the same as making something public. Screens – just as a black board – might have a tremendous ability to attract attention, exact concentration and gather people around something, but the challenge is to explore how screens help to create a (common) presence and enable study and practice.

The challenge clearly does not only concern the reinvention of a school form, but also the decision regarding a (public) belief: a belief that there is no natural order of privileged owners, that we are equals, and that the world belongs to all and therefore to no one in particular. For us, the future of the school is a public issue, and our defence is meant to contribute to maintain it as a public issue.

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Notes

1. The Greek word *scholè* means first of all free time, other related meanings are: delay, rest, study, school, and school building. Free time however is not so much relaxation time, but rather the time of play, study and exercise, the time separated from the time of production. *Scholè* as time to cultivate one self and others, to take care of the self, i.e. of one’s relation to self, others and the world. See Masschelein and Simons (2010).
2. See also the remarks of Huizinga on some sentences from Aristotle (*Politeia* 1337 b 28) where he clarifies also that *scholè*/free time is opposed to labour-time and is the time in which we ‘learn certain things – not, it be noted, for the sake of work but for their own sake’ (Huizinga 1949, 161).
3. The *Oxford Dictionary of English* traces the original sense of ‘destination’ and ‘to destine’ back to the Latin *destinare*: ‘the action of intending someone or something for a purpose or end’.
4. We give here a particular twist to the famous words of Kahlil Gibran’s poem: ‘your children are not your children’ (Gibran n.d.).
5. For a detailed discussion of several taming strategies (such as politicisation, psychologisation, naturalisation, pedagogisation, flexibilisation and professionalisation), see: Masschelein and Simons (2013).

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