

## AFTERWORDS

MAYBE THOSE WHO WILL READ OR HAVE read our little defense of the school will be as surprised as we are by Jon Zaldívar's review of it (see his review in this issue; see also Jan Masschelein and Maarten Simons, *In Defense of the School: A Public Issue* [Leuven, Belgium: E-ducation, Culture & Society, 2013]). A large part of Zaldívar's review is about explaining the work of Ivan Illich, and in that discussion he seems to suggest that we oversimplified Illich's work. But in fact we referred only once to Illich in order to emphasize that we do not want to defend what Illich is critiquing. We wanted and still want to take the school out of the hands of those who confuse school with all kinds of manipulative and institutionalizing mechanisms. We do not ignore or trivialize these mechanisms — not at all — but we think it is more just to talk educationally and appreciatively about the school first, and to reserve the notion of deschooling for all non- and even contra-educational strategies. Our ambition was to articulate school experiences, not the institutionalized experiences that are often mobilized to attack the school. But to be clear from the outset, and here we probably do differ from Illich, we want to stress that the school, just like democracy, is an invention and as such has nothing to do with the kind of natural or informal learning that is often cherished by those who oppose institutionalized forms of learning. Since it is apparently possible to completely miss (or misread) that, let us use this opportunity to try to further clarify what we were attempting to do. There is something to be defended and it is neither "teaching" nor "learning."

We assumed that our review of the charges leveled at the school and the attention we gave to all kinds of taming of the school would have reassured the reader that we are very aware of most of the critiques (including the one by Illich) that have often rightly been directed at the school. We hoped that this would help

the reader, at least for a moment, to suppress the strong (extremely common, and in fact very uncritical) inclination to immediately reenact all those frustrations regarding school. We invited the reader to accompany us in our effort to explore what makes a school into a school from *an educational point of view*. This is not a sociological point of view in terms of functions, not a philosophical one in terms of ideas or purposes, not a psychological one in terms of development, not an ethical one in terms of values, norms, or interpersonal relations, and not a political one in terms of struggle or interests. It is an educational one in terms of the effective and real operations performed by a particular arrangement of people, time, space, and matter.

We also didn't want to go into the history of the school or into historical issues about ancient Greece. What we do claim is that just as the Greeks invented a particular way to deal with living together that is called democracy (which has provoked, of course, strong questions ever since), they also invented a particular way to deal with the common world in relation to the new generations. This is not socialization or initiation, but precisely school education, that is, taking the new generation out of (any) family and putting them in a school. School in this sense is not an institution, but, first and foremost, a particular arrangement of time, space, and matter where young people are brought into the company of (something of) the world. We have tried to explore what this educational invention is about, not to idealize the past (it is not about romanticizing school), or worse, to return to the past. The reason we took this approach is that we think that it is still worthwhile to deal with the future of our world and of the coming generations in this particular way that we can call school. Although, just as with democracy, it remains an issue to be discussed.

Much about the history of and accusations leveled against the school seems to be repeating what we all seem inclined to hear about the school. Perhaps this criticism is nothing more than a kind of intellectual continuation or even cultivation of the feeling that people don't like to go to school — as if we want to forget about the school, and as if we are not pleased to be reminded that who and what we have become maybe somehow depend on the school. Of course, there is this typical appreciation of teachers, but at the same time there is the pervasive contempt toward nearly everyone who is involved with education. There are many versions of this looking down on education, ranging from the often-repeated claim that teaching is not a real job, to educational research being not true research, to educational theory and educational philosophy being marginal. According to us, this contempt actually expresses how society deals with what is immature, with minors, and that one always assumes and protects the idea that being involved in serious matters requires a kind of maturity or being grown-up. Isn't there always a deep fear motivating this type of looking down? It results from recognizing that the coming generation actually *becomes a new generation*, and is directly or indirectly questioning what grown-ups value and take for granted.

In our book, we took the risk of using the notion of school for the always artificial space-time configuration that makes this radical educational experience possible, instead of using the notion for what makes this experience impossible. Actually, we think it is our duty as educational theorists to take the notion of school out of the hands of those using it only to express political, economic, and ethical frustrations or expectations. If the school does

not meet someone's expectations, isn't it not always also because young people do not meet expectations, and hence they do not fit or want to fit the image we have in mind for them? If that is the case, all this is about a fear for school, as far as school refers to the time and space that starts from the assumption that human beings have no (natural, or social, cultural, etc.) destiny, and therefore should have the opportunity to find their own destiny. We want to reserve the notion of school for that simple but far-reaching assumption. And deschooling, for us, refers to the opposite assumption: that society has to impose a destiny on young people through developing their so-called natural talents, through projecting a predefined image of the educated person, and so on.

It is suggested in the review that we are looking to the past in an idealized way, with our backs to the future, and without noticing crucial historical developments, current challenges, and other helpful conceptualizations. We are not sure. We experience ourselves living in the present and trying to open up another future by intervening in the current conceptualizations of the school, including in the historical narratives (of increased normalization, etatization, educationalization, etc.) that are part of our conceptualizations. In that sense, our book is perhaps a counternarrative. Or to continue in a Foucauldian idiom: the book does not envision a critical but a creative ontology of the present, and history is not used to "de-familiarize" by warning how school education is in fact oppressive due to political, economic, or other powers, but to "familiarize" by remembering what school makes possible and by reminding us we have been young too.

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Designed to stimulate ongoing dialogue among authors and between authors and readers, "Afterwords" is a forum for critical and constructive responses to the articles and book reviews published in *Educational Theory*. Contributions are short and to the point: 750–1000 words for longer responses; 350–500 words for shorter rejoinders. While some responses are commissioned by the editor, the journal welcomes submissions to "Afterwords." Submissions will be vetted by the editor according to how well they prompt further reflection on positions advanced in the journal. Manuscripts should be submitted as an e-mail attachment to EdTheory@illinois.edu.