

# ***Paideia* and the Search for Freedom in the Educational Formation of the Public of Today**

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*In this paper, I explore the ancient Greek concept of *paideia* to contribute to an ongoing revitalisation of educational theory that positions freedom as central to the educational process. I also analyse the current crisis in public life in Europe as a consequence of neglect or inability to incorporate educational theory in the formation of school systems embracing democratic ways of life. I mainly explore the concept of teaching as a radical idea of allowing anyone be the bearer of culture and society and not just an exclusive group of people. I identify three types of abstractions distancing current orders of democracy from concerning the entire population. I also offer an educational strategy to break with these abstractions to be able to take on 'a divine life' in the present.*

## **INTRODUCTION**

'Education would lead to tyranny if it did not lead to freedom' (Herbart, 1898, p. 57).

In this paper I explore the ancient Greek concept of *paideia* for two reasons: 1. In order to contribute to an ongoing revitalisation of educational theory, in Sweden, Ireland as well as elsewhere in Europe, that positions freedom as central to the educational process; and 2. In order to offer a theoretical frame for analysing the current crisis that is affecting the formation of the public and the role of educational theory in relation to that. This twofold ambition is linked to the educational task of staging a true public sphere in which freedom of the other is a necessary concern (Biesta and Säfström, 2011).

## **THE REVIVAL OF EDUCATIONAL THOUGHT**

In Sweden as well as in many other countries within Europe, educational theory (educational philosophy, *allgemeine pädagogik*, *pedagogik/allmän didaktik*) has been challenged by, on the one hand, shifting political demands on educational research and, on the other, corresponding shifts of priorities

within universities (for an analysis of the consequences for educational theory, pedagogik[k] see for example Säfström and Saeverot, 2015). Such marginalisation has been understood as quite necessary, from the viewpoint of nation states, in order to secure control over educational systems and to guarantee that they are truly understood in their proper context—that is, in their materialisation of not only the idea of the nation, but also of mirroring the foundational economic order of the nation (Popkewitz, 2008).

The result of these beliefs and strategies is a marginalisation of education as a tradition of thought in its own right, since in such a context no educational theory is either needed or possible to formulate. What seems to be needed instead of educational theory is, rather, an application of other theories (mainly psychology and recently medicine) dealing with particular problems in constructing and re-constructing the nation state through its educational systems (Popkewitz, 2008). A problem with this state of affairs is not only that it becomes increasingly difficult to understand what an educational problem *is* or could be, but also that the very idea of education itself seems to vanish into yet another technical problem of learning, or into a sociology of the function of educational systems within society and culture. Today when we see not only conservative forces gaining popularity but also, and much more seriously, fascism re-establishing itself all over Europe (Arnstad, 2016), it becomes even more acute to reconnect to the core traditions of thinking within education, since educational thought is, by its nature, I will claim, anti-fascist. Educational thought is, in other words, about freedom (of the other) and hope for a future able to embrace a sense of freedom for the individual as well as the community in which the individual lives (Biesta and Säfström, 2011). Fascism is, on the other hand, about a certain pessimism towards the possibility of such a future where freedom is replaced with an idea of a moral law that conglomerates all individuals and generations in a single tradition and purpose. In fascism, each individual is the nation and the land, and their purpose in life is to fulfil the moral law on which the nation is supposed to be founded. Higher than any self-assurance, a moral law of this kind is understood as representing the value of being itself, in tune with morality as such and therefore also more important than the individual freedom of a singular life or death (see also Arnstad, 2016).

Within such a reading, the problem of seemingly vanishing educational thought within the European nation states, and the accompanying economisation/globalisation of education, emerge as seriously dangerous strategies where education can no longer be a prophylactic against fascism, but indeed risks becoming—if not a catalyst for the revival of fascism—at least not able to hinder the spread of authoritarian life forms. This is particularly true where the admission of neo-liberalism has reduced education to a system for competition for position in the market—replacing the idea of freedom within education with adaptation to supposed laws of nature as interpreted by, for example, psychology (and lately medicine), and regarded increasingly as conditional for a well-ordered society. It seems as if there is something fundamentally problematic with political liberalism itself.

Referring to his theory of justice, Rawls says about the function of what he calls a well-ordered society of ‘justice as fairness’:

it argues that the laws of nature and human psychology would lead citizens who grow up as members of that well-ordered society to acquire a sense of justice sufficiently strong to uphold their political and social institutions over generations (1996, p. xlii).

Liberalism, or more precisely Rawls’ theory of justice as he recounts it, is therefore not only reducing educational change to a subordination to the ‘laws of nature’ (as interpreted by psychology) within culture and society, but also reducing education to the task of ‘leading citizens’ according to those laws. That is, it is really these laws of nature themselves that not only guarantee a stable and well-ordered society but which also embody real educational content. From a general viewpoint, therefore, when it comes to education it is not the possibility for change and freedom of and in culture and society that is the driving force for Rawlsian political liberalism, but the pursuit and unfolding of the law itself. From this perspective, replacing moral laws with ‘laws of nature’ puts us in the current situation of growing fascism in the sense that both rely on an idea of unchangeable law as an absolute frame of reference (alongside the accompanying idea that certain people embody this frame of reference). The point is, by not recognising education as a form of lawless praxis, necessarily enshrining the vital possibility of unpredictable change and freedom, education is stripped of its defining tasks: that of planting at the centre of culture and society a radical openness. An understanding of educational change unfolding in accordance with a predetermined law, either of nature or of morality itself, places an un-changeable content at the centre of culture and society. This then ultimately underpins the claim, made by some, that such content is immanent in culture and society; a true manifestation of culture and society—and as such only within the reach of some people at the cost of others who are then deemed to be at the periphery of such true culture and society (this idea is developed below as the foundation of the key distinction between ‘the people’ and ‘the population’).

The consequence of such stripping of education of its *differentia specifica* leaves not only a theoretical problem but also a very real problem since it tends to create a mechanism for exclusion at the very centre of society, and to exalt this as the same mechanism through which the educational system can work and should work. This, what I would call an anti-educational impulse to regulate through educational systems instead of educating people, has consequences in line with what Dewey already warned of in 1910. In arguing against Kant’s categorical imperative as foundational for education Dewey says:

As long as moralists plume themselves upon possession of the domain of the categorical imperative with its bare precepts, men of executive habits will always be at their elbows to regulate concrete social conditions through which the form of law gets its actual filling of specific injunctions. When freedom is conceived to be transcendental, the

coercive restraint of immediate necessity will lay its harsh hand upon the mass of men (1999[1910], p. 75).

According to Dewey (1999[1910]), it is not only that freedom can not be about tomorrow in order to have any meaning today, but also that if education is understood as an exercise of moral law or of laws of nature, it inevitably leads to regulation of the masses and their concrete social conditions. Such regulation cannot educate a democratic humanity, which was Dewey's goal for education, but can only be leading towards the production of a cadre of executors willing to regulate the masses in accordance with pre-set principles defined through an equally preset un-changeable law. This results, for Dewey, not only in the pernicious promotion of a non-democratic society divided between regulators and regulated, but also in a paralysis of educational change and freedom. Education as regulation then feeds the idea that such regulation through educational systems is actually necessary for social stability. From this standpoint, no educational theory is needed or possible, because the problem is not any longer about education at all, but about regulation of the masses by an elite of regulators.

Hence by reinforcing a limited idea of educational change as a positioning within the socioeconomical structure, and by reducing freedom to a moral law founded on the 'nation' or the 'market' or even something called 'democracy'—or all three united—the people are reduced to nothing other than 'a mass of men', prone to manipulation and control. There is no freedom possible, and no education: only regulation and therefore manipulation of the masses, within a frame of pre-set laws defining the totality of the real as unchangeable and immovable to its core. In these sombre conditions, to re-think education, or to re-connect to educational thought, is not nostalgia for a lost past, but a necessary move in order to have any possible future at all—that is, a future not already foreclosed by those who own the means of interpreting the laws and regulating the masses in accordance with those laws.

## EDUCATION WITHOUT THE LAW

There have been several critiques of how educational theory has been diminished but also at the same time attempts to strengthen educational theory (Biesta, 2010; Masschelein and Simmons, 2011; Saeverot, 2013; Smeyers and Smith, 2014; Thompsson, 2009; Todd, 2009) roughly along the lines I suggest here. However, what has not been discussed in any depth is how educational theory owes its tradition of thought to a concept of *paideia* that places education at the centre of culture and society. That is, the ancient Greek concept of *paideia*, which was based on the idea that we need a shared space of communality for political and social life to exist at all.

In Castoriadis' (1987) reading of *paideia*, education is understood as central for the creation of a 'public': that is, *paideia* is the idea that only (ethically based) education of the citizen in its role as citizen can give the public sphere a real and authentic content. However, in order to assign the public sphere an authentic content of this kind, people need equal rights to speak their true meaning (*isogoria*), as well as the duty to speak

freely about everything that concerns the public (*parrhesia*). It is a duty to speak truthfully about everything that builds the world in common. If this were the political context for the establishment of democracy in Ancient Greece, as Castoriadis claims, it is also necessary to formulate an idea of education itself as consistent with such a political context. According to Jaeger (1965[1939]) it was the Sophists who contributed this idea. The idea of ‘teaching’ was formulated by the Sophists as the very foundation on which they could develop an educational theory: the first theory of this kind in the history of the Western world. A theory like this was placed in the centre of *paideia*, in the centre of culture itself, as both the condition and the goal for humanity. As such, it was intended to guarantee the double task of renewal and change of culture and society. Teaching was considered to be a form in which everyone, regardless of class, abilities or ‘nature’, could embody areté, the insight of politics and ethics in order to live a full life in the polis. That is, before the Sophists, Jaeger (1965[1939]) states, areté was solely for the aristocracy and teaching was therefore exclusively aimed at the aristocracy and directed to ‘lure out’ that which was essentially already there, in order to realise a ‘birth right’ for embracing the culture as such.

For the Sophists, the elevated position in culture of which areté was an embodied expression, could not be inherited but was rather a direct consequence of being included in education, included in the context of ‘teaching’. As a consequence, the idea of teaching was formulated in opposition to the idea that areté was always already inherited by a certain class in society, only in need of perfection by teaching. Instead the Sophists claimed not only that the individual needed teaching in all the arts that were valued by the Greek society, in order to embody the core of culture, but also, that it was possible for *anyone* to be educated this way (Jaeger, 1965[1939]). Teaching, in other words, is from its very first formulation, within an educational theory, a concept signifying the possibility of radical change, that is, change as an expression of certain and particular ‘lawlessness’. A lawlessness in which teaching precedes the law, and therefore makes the law as such possible, as something more than producing adaptation to something already fixed by nature or ‘morality’. Teaching and education, not successive adjustment to pre-set frames of natural and moral laws, is for the Sophists the guarantee of an ordered and stable society; a democratic society. That is a society in which change is possible. Not only Jaeger (1965[1939]) but also Castoriadis (1987), as well as Dewey (1966[1916]), to mention only a few, understand the Sophists’ conceptions of education and teaching as the very condition for the possibility of thinking democracy at all. It then follows, in a democracy, that teaching *per se* is an unregulated praxis that rejects an order of power which states that only the already privileged can embody culture. Teaching is, on the contrary, the determining concept to describe this radical idea: that *anyone*, through intellectual work, can acquire an elevated insight and position in culture and society, and consequently be included in the continuation and change of its very direction. It became, through this change in scope, possible for anyone included in teaching to form their life in line with the freedom that comes with the embodiment of areté; the ethical and political insight into, and embrace of, all essentials of

living a mature life: self-fulfilling as well as filling a social purpose in the creation and recreation of culture and society (Jaeger, 1965[1939]).

It is of course as much body and soul, reason and affect, that give early Greek culture an expression for harmony in and through *paideia*—and a concretisation of the wholeness in which the universe as well as society and the individual are united, in the lived areté of the people. Arété is, in short, a concept describing the way in which the individual gets included in all this. It is a concept that signifies that an individual that embraces areté also embraces wholeness. Here lies the necessary freedom that comes from education and teaching according to the Sophists. It is a necessary freedom, they argued, because if there is no freedom (of the will) there would be no possible law. If a person does not act on the basis of free will, he or she could not be responsible for his or her actions. Freedom through and in education (teaching) is a necessary condition for the very possibility of law, and not a result of, or expression of, one such law (Jaeger, 1965[1939]).

To the sophists, the human can be something of a demi-God, as formulated in Greek mythology and poetry, or maybe more precisely, the Gods of the Greeks are seen to possess markedly human qualities. Since the Gods had qualities found in each and every one, it also followed that the sphere of Gods was not distinctively separated from human life, and humans could in themselves as well as in others find God-like qualities. Therefore, the human in early Greek thought did not subordinate the self to the realities of life, but rather embraced such realities in living a divine life in culture and society. Who are you who come before me? God or human? Humans are essentially free to act, but in a way that keeps the wholeness of areté, the wholeness of the individual, society, culture and the universe intact. But it is also a wholeness in which the human is not one, but an undecidable two, both god and human (Cassin, 2016). A wholeness of this kind, even though freedom and change have its place within it, is still problematic if we do not also acknowledge that areté is perceived literally as the world (which it was for the Greeks).

So, in accordance with educational theory in the world, in which teaching signifies the freedom and change of a certain ‘lawlessness’, there can be no liberal or fascist educational theory at all. Hence educational theory cannot be what liberalism presumes it to be: an interpretation of laws of nature into culture by psychology. On the other hand, it cannot be a fascist educational theory; that is, it cannot be a realisation of a moral law that is supposed to be expressed in the individual by a nation or a land. ‘Education’ on these terms only leads to regulating the masses and the turning of areté into an asset exclusive to a certain group or class. Education is a lawless praxis in so far as the educational impulse is not about regulation from a centre, but signifies a radical openness in which culture and society can change to its core, as such, without a given beginning or end. In so far as the impulse and the very possibility of law are producing a future, which is not only a nostalgic repetition of the past nor an adjustment to laws without time, it is educational. Education works by infusing the freedom of embracing life with others at the centre of culture and society in the present.

It is therefore of outmost importance for us to reconnect to educational theory in the current social and political realities of the European nation states, in which educational systems seems to be oscillating between the two extremes of laws of nature and moral law as foundational for schooling and as demanding full attention, discipline and order of the single self. This is how I understand the real crisis of European education beyond the failure of all the matrix systems used to steer and evaluate educational systems on all levels simultaneously. There is no educational theory left. No idea of radical change, freedom or a hope for a possible future embracing both.

### **DIVIDING THE WHOLE**

Raising this idea of the possibility of an educational theory, here described as the possibility of freedom and change in and of the world, still risks subordination of the individual to a collective oppression, since, as Rancière (1995, 1999) reminds us, the world in the current historical and political moment is essentially divided between those who have access to power and wealth and those who do not. It is therefore vital, I think, to adhere to Rancière's understanding of democracy as the possibility to both divide that which presents itself as a whole and to count the parts of society differently. This is critical in order for educational theory to remain educational: that is, to give room for freedom and change in the very constitution of education in a divided world.

Seen from this angle, the crisis of education in the European nation states is that education all too often is not about the world at all, but is instead feeding an abstract representation of one world. This may entail reducing its outlook to a concern with socialisation and qualification (Biesta, 2010). But it may also reside—and this may be harder to accept—in the claim that schooling is exemplary for democracy: that the schooling system in itself is the institution in society that guarantees the very possibility of democracy. This idea of schooling as necessary for democracy is almost a truism in various influential documents, from the OECD to the local school curricula, and seems increasingly to lose any meaning for those actually affected by schooling. Instead of materialising such an abstraction into an experience of the everydayness of life in 'the school', it seems only to be speeding up an ongoing abstraction of, and refusal of, democracy: turning democracy into a dead object, into a limited 'schoolbook' object, not really affecting the course of life at all (see further Ekerwald and Säfström, 2015).

When democracy is not understood as intimately connected to the 'everydayness' of living, but is detached from experiences of living in the present—and understood instead as a product of an alienating educational system—the actual experiences of social life are fashioned in direct opposition to 'schoolbook democracy'. The consequence is more or less systematically to exclude democracy as a meaningless abstraction, in order to live one's life (see Ekerwald and Säfström, 2015, pp. 44–47). This means not only that democracy is, as we see, increasingly renounced by youths in order for them to recognise their own lives, but also that by being forcibly included in democracy 'by law and constitution', individuals are dragged

into an abstract category where each and every one is turned into an abstracted version of ‘the people-as-One’ legitimating political power but only as abstracted from any connection to the pluralism of the world (see also Butler, 2015). In addition, such ongoing abstraction in education, through ‘the people-as-One’ concept, is, I would claim, also an unavoidable consequence of neo (or economical)-liberalism, particularly where the school is turned into a business; adhering primarily to the rules of the market; conditioning every student as an ‘asset’ within this market; forcing the individual to ‘posit oneself’ exclusively in terms of usefulness and economic value. The second type of abstraction lies here in the reduction of the variation and sensibilities of life where being is streamed through ‘a simulation model’; that is, ‘a simulation model bound to code all human material and every contingency of desire and exchange in terms of value, finality and production’ (Baudrillard, 1975, p. 19).

Schooling as an expression of a simulation model of this kind, then, becomes both a place for the production of a certain finality; where the limits of learning are defined, explained and valued in their finality, and where the value of such learning is identified, through its instrumental usefulness, in the exchange of grades for economic success and social power. Reality itself is staged as an economic reality, ordering society and possible relations within it, at the same time as the possibility of a divine life in the world is as such extinguished.

The third force of abstraction affecting the ideas of education and democracy is simply the impossibility of being ‘part of the people’. The proposition ‘I am the people’, shows not only the complexities of the idea of ‘the people’ but also the impossibility of embodying such a position, since it is clearly false, and seems rather to be pointing to fascism. This would, in effect, claim that the existence of every ‘I’ is dependent on a moral law connecting the single ‘I’ with the wholeness of the people and with generations, history, land and nation; in consequence establishing a nostalgia for ‘the people equalizing nation and land’ as the foundation for social and political power. In such a context, ‘I am the people’ is exclusively an expression of power based on moral law and a foundation for dictatorship. But the proposition ‘I am the people’ is also true, since if I am part of this democracy ‘I am the people’, who else could I be? ‘I am the people’ as much as ‘you are the people’. This double nature of the expression ‘I am the people’ shows how ‘the people as One’ as an abstraction of an undivided whole, can function through an educational system in which exclusion of the poor and powerless is not only already within, but is a defining characteristic of this abstracted ‘people-as-One-democracy’. Thus, it is not the argument that ‘people have left democracy’ that is the growing problem in Europe, but that ‘democracy has left people behind’ in an abstraction and a miscalculation. The betrayal of European democracies, as I understand it, is to be found in the very real split of ‘the people’ into those who have access to power and wealth and those who do not and this fundamental rift is then concealed falsely, through schooling, behind an abstracted idea of one undivided ‘people-as-One-democracy’, preventing the poor from appearing as other than a silent confirmation of the same abstraction. At the same time as the poor and

powerless, ‘the wrong people’, are placed off stage, they are reduced to a silent mass whose only function is to confirm the abstraction. By establishing educational systems as performers of the wrongdoing of counting poor people out, the role of schooling in such a construct not only becomes empty of the very force of education, empty of the possibility to change and freedom, but also anti-democratic to its core.

The real problem, then, with the decline of an educational theory as foundational to educational systems in diverse European countries is that such a loss risks contributing to, rather than hindering, the political space that opens up for fascism’s re-entry into history. Fascism risks becoming the only alternative to unite ‘the One people’ with its history and land in a ‘nostalgic’ idea of the future.

The problem that arises, as a consequence, is not that ‘the public’ can no longer define itself, as Dewey claimed it must do in any functional democracy, but rather the reverse: that ‘the public’ can define itself too well, and by doing just that excludes any possibility of democracy and, for that matter, education. In order to be able to claim an educational theory subjected to freedom and change one needs in other words to learn how to count differently, supplementing the part that has no part, as Rancière says, to the equation. This is basically achieved, I suggest, by a claim: that is, the claim that ‘I am the people too’.

#### **‘I AM THE PEOPLE TOO’**

If the above analysis is correct, it means there is always a risk of a central flaw in democracies that are based on ‘the people’ as foundational for power, in that only ‘some’ of the people are really those who matter. As Butler (2015) argues, in an analysis of who is ‘defensible’ according to a rationale for militarisation in such a context, the flaw consists of ‘differentiating the people from the population’, resulting in the defence of the legitimacy for some at the cost of others (Butler, 2015, p. 16). It is not therefore the borders of a clinical definition of ‘the people’ that is sought here, because that which is really at stake in this analysis is the very possibility of counting oneself in, of being perceived as part of the people and not just a—to speak with Butler—population; as something more than bodies filling the space/territory of a nation state. Nevertheless, Butler argues that the assembly of bodies in themselves manifests as a possible claim of ‘here we are!’: ‘Showing up, standing, breathing, moving, standing still, speech, and silence are all aspects of a sudden assembly, an unforeseen form of political performativity that puts livable life at the forefront of politics’ (p. 18). What livable life is very much about, as I have been arguing in this essay, is the very possibility of freedom and change in and of the world, of being counted in as a productive part of culture and society; in short, about education, and the possibility of teaching. This is teaching as a condition for addressing the sensibilities through which the world takes shape and meaning. Paraphrasing the Swedish poet, Tomas Tranströmer, who in one of his poems identifies the place and space in which the world becomes my world; where the outside and inside meet to form a livable life, we can say

teaching is to give birth to such a place and space in which the outside of 'the people' meets the inside of a form of life.

From this viewpoint teaching is the staging of a space in which a subject attaches to the world as it is. To speak in and through the context of 'teaching' is to take on the world, and to literally take part in this world, as we know it. To claim one's part in this world is also to claim, in education and democracy, that 'I am the people *too*'. It is to supplement oneself as speaking, as having a voice in a meaningful discourse and to claim one's life as divine, that is as embracing all the sufferings and joys of living a life together with others 'who comes before me', human or god? 'To teach', then, is also literally to count those who are, in the present system, merely included in the whole only to be immediately excluded from the possibility of having a voice; condemned to the shadows of the epithet 'the people-as-One-democracy'; reduced to a disposable population under the weight of the abstraction and whose only appearance is as noise-makers outside the 'meaningful' discourse of the 'right people'; sufficiently 'enlightened' through schooling to be able to vote responsibly, but in all other matters filling the role of the populace. To teach in this context is to claim the possibility of teaching; that is, the possibility of change and freedom as foundational for culture and society, and for the very possibility of a 'divine' life, of pluralist democracy. The purpose of teaching in this sense is necessarily to listen to the 'wrong people' speaking, and to attach meaning to that speech and therefore to add to, to supplement, that part who have no countable part. This means, in consequence, transforming the world, so that teaching becomes in short, the possibility of staging the world differently and to hear the other speak.

## EUROPEAN UNREST AND EDUCATIONAL THEORY

The current crisis in Europe is quite visible through increased political violence and an intensified and quite visible division (and subsequent exclusion) of certain marginalised people within our societies. European states at large seem to experience increasing difficulties dealing with an ongoing fragmentation of the public sphere, coupled with extreme right wing and fundamentalist violence, repressive laws and increased surveillance and control of their citizens. This is visible in the wake of the UK voting itself out of EU, where racist violence and even ultra-nationalist motivated murders have erupted. In Sweden, repressive migration laws, either hindering families from reuniting altogether or severely restricting the possibility have been implemented with a broad majority in parliament (2015), in large measure accepting the agenda set by the (fascist/ultra nationalist) Swedish Democrats (SD), the second biggest party in the country. This is only to mention a few of the many recent repressive events pointing at a racist/fascist agenda taking hold in the public domain within Europe.

What seems to be urgently at stake is the very possibility of freedom as a necessary condition of public life; that is, the very idea of *paideia* as other than either overloaded with moral law or stripped of any meaning outside the laws of a naturalised capitalism. This is very much a crisis of education, since

the force of education is central for the continuation and change of culture, for praxis. Or maybe more precisely, it is also a crisis in educational theory, in its inability to point out the necessary freedom required as a base for any sound idea of teaching the plurality of the people; for that is what is truly educational. Such an educational theory of teaching must also move beyond the heavily normative discourses on learning and learning-sciences that flourish in various policy institutions, from the EU and OECD to national agencies of education—reinforced most prominently by psychology and the medical sciences. To reclaim educational theory as educational, in the centre of culture, as its very praxis, is a necessary move, I have argued, for affording the possibility of forming just and democratic societies at all. I mean societies that are not oscillating between neo-liberalism and fascism in their response to a world of increasingly porous national identities (inside as well as outside Europe). It is therefore with a certain urgency that the concept of *paideia* needs to be re-thought through the insights that the Sophists brought to the world: that teaching is the name of the possibility of a fundamental and radical change in the course of individual lives as well as in the course of culture and society. To reclaim that teaching within an educational theory is possible, is in a profound way to reclaim a divine life, embracing the hardships and joys of living together with others in the materiality of this world and therefore also about the formation of an authentic public with a commitment for a possible future. It is about forming publics and counter-publics representing the whole of the population beyond right-wing populism with fascist and racist overtones, as well as beyond neo-liberalism's reduction of life into competition and economic value. Our task today, as intellectuals and researchers in education is, in short, all about revitalising democratic freedom as a necessary condition for the possibility of a decent life for everyone in our various societies.

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