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# PERFORMATIVITY, MATERIALITY AND TIME

## TACIT DIMENSIONS OF PEDAGOGY



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## **Asymmetry and Gift**

### **On Ethical Implications of the Adult-Child Differentiation**

The very idea of pedagogy seems to point out unambiguously the special ethical dimension that is inherent in the adult-child relation. At the heart of this dimension there is an objectively conditioned asymmetry of life horizons and life positions of the adult and the child. Thus, ethics which is implied in the adult-child differentiation is primarily the ethics of asymmetric relations. In this regard, one can specify two basic concepts which traditionally have been considered as constituting a primordial ethical dimension of the adult-child relation. They are „trust“ (prereflexive trust of a child in relation to his/her adult care persons) and „responsibility“ (absolute i.e. irreplaceable responsibility of adults in relation to a helpless child). This pair of concepts reveals the essential mutual relatedness of the generations according to which the type of ethics that connects the adult and the child, can be named the ethics of support. This kind of ethics assumes a moral inequality of the child and the adult with inevitable power implications. The ethics of support (taken in itself) conforms to the classical - typical for the Enlightenment - understanding of the child as a subject in a deficient meaning, as a not-yet-subject (resp. as an immature one). Such understanding seems natural as it is based on the objective superiority of adults in knowledge, life experience, rationality and independence. I am not going to call into question the declared superiority. Though it is necessary to designate clearly the point of view proceeding from which the asymmetry of life horizons of the adult and the child noted above is treated in a comparativistic way and in such a manner that the characteristics of the adult are conceived as a measure (a norm) and then estimated as Over in relation to the characteristics of the child. Being stated in such a way the stage of adulthood is always valid for the life of the child as its intrinsic purpose. The said is enough to define the declared point of view as an adult-centered thinking. In theoretical regards such a position is directly connected with the classical (modern) concept of the subject, for the essence of adult-centeredness consists in considering intergenerational relations on the basis of the concept of the adult-subject which is in advance placed as a measure for these relations.

One can see in contemporary research on childhood and pedagogy many efforts which are inspired by the very idea of going beyond the adult-centered

thinking (e.g. Meyer-Drawe, Waldenfels, 1988; Heinzel, 2000; Hausendorf, 2001; Corsaro, 2005). It is reasonable to assume that all these efforts would have been doomed to failure and simply would not have appeared, if inter-generational co-existence – that of adult and child – did not conceal in itself ethical implications of some other kind. I do not mean to cancel the dimension of support – that of trust and responsibility. The task will more likely reveal an additional ethical horizon of the adult-child relation that does not allow support to be reduced to subordination. In order to fulfill this task it is necessary to fulfill one basic methodical condition – to refrain from the position of adult-centered thinking – that is the position of ultimate superiority. Attempting to satisfy this condition deserves separate consideration. Here I will confine myself only to mention that the methodical condition mentioned above cannot entirely proceed on principles of autonomy (that is to be entirely in the power of the adult-subject), but it presupposes constitutive affectedness by the other (= child) and readiness to stay open to this affectedness.

The point of view which is found as an alternative to the adult-centered thinking can be defined as that of equal co-participation of both a child and an adult in being-in-the-world. It is this equality declared here that promises to open an essentially new sense of the ethics of intergenerational relations. But what does the declared equality consist in? Or: What can be considered as its manifestations? And how can it be experienced and kept up given the validity of the objective superiority of the adult over the child and, correspondingly, the validity of the ethics of support? Hereinafter I would like to try to answer these questions approaching two phenomena – misunderstanding and curiosity as they are experienced in certain situations in intergenerational co-existence.

As for the former, traditionally it is considered as a communicative obstacle which must be overcome through verbal clarifications in the course of dialogue. In a pedagogical field misunderstanding taken in that traditional sense is a phenomenon which is constantly expected by a teacher due to deficiency of knowledge and experience and language skills of a child. This in turn is based on an assumption of the total insufficiency/immaturity of a child as a rational subject. In other words, insofar as a child is considered as a not-yet-subject it is in advance expected by adults that the child will “pathologically” cause misunderstandings in communication since the child (as a deficient being) drops out of the communication logic which builds upon the reversibility of the perspectives. Such an expectation can lead to an attitude called by Meyer-Drawe and Waldenfels “Pädagogisierung” (Meyer-Drawe,

Waldenfels 1988, p. 278) which means actually an appropriation (Aneignung) of the otherness of the child. The attitude implies that the difference between the adult and the child manifested by the very fact of misunderstanding in their communication is removed and “processed” into the didactic purpose that tries to eliminate the very reasons because of which misunderstandings happen during teaching, that is to eliminate insufficiency of a child as a rational subject. Such a vision of misunderstanding is formed originally in the perspective of a teacher as a subject of knowledge and corresponds to the understanding of education as an introduction into the world of adults, as “preparing for ...” i.e. for a future *adult* life.

Fink suggested an essentially different comprehension of misunderstanding as a phenomenon in pedagogical situations. His late works were devoted mainly to upbringing and education and had a character of a certain practical program. Fink considered it necessary to reform the educational system that existed in the 60s–70s in Germany and tried to outline a new pedagogical theory whose philosophical basis was his cosmological conception – an original variant of post-metaphysical ontology (i.e. an ontology which does not consider being of the world as something substantially present and/or something comprehensible for the transcendental subject). Fink’s philosophical ideas led him to approach intergenerational co-existence – including the pedagogical one – as an interactive *sharing* of the world understood as a *cooperative* constitution of the world by different generations. For pedagogy the challenging character of this approach consisted in the fact that educational co-existence should be thought of as a mutual relation of the different periods of life (“old and young”) where none has an absolute advantage. In this context, Fink considered the mutual misunderstanding of the generations as a structural (i.e. irreducible) phenomenon which enables such intergenerational egalitarianism (Fink 1970, p. 206).

I would say that Fink’s vision keeps the distance of surprise – which may be understood here as maintaining fidelity with the otherness of the child and not subordinating him/her to the category of adult-subject. It means that life horizons of the adult and the child cannot be reduced to one and the same general (unified) basis. The lack of such unified horizon seems to be clearly articulated in the very word *mis-under-standing*. Thus in his version the misunderstanding between generations is not a communicative obstacle that should be eliminated, but rather a structural phenomenon which constitutes the very field of intergenerational coexistence. In Fink’s formulation, mutual

misunderstanding of the generations is a free space of educational co-existence<sup>1</sup> (Fink 1995, p. 55).

Considered as a structural phenomenon the mutual misunderstanding of the generations manifests the irreducibility of differentiation between them. This has a particular heuristic potential in so far that the adult and the child are considered equal in their coexistence. There is something they can learn from each other, in their mutual-relatedness and due to it, there is something to be experienced! In other words, their relation can be thought of as a certain mutual enrichment, instead of unilateral instruction or introduction into the (adult) world, as it is represented in the traditional theories of socialization that consider intergenerational relations only as receptive internalizations of social structures and norms by the child (see: Corsaro 2005, p. 7ff.). It is to stress that Fink's notion of misunderstanding can come about as an heuristic event only insofar, as an adult refrains from taking a position of superiority i.e. of being-a-measure for a child (for a more detailed analysis see: Shchytsova 2011).

Fink's new vision of the phenomenon of misunderstanding, which as we have seen provides misunderstanding with ontological status, implicitly refers to the other basic phenomenon of intergenerational being-with-one-another, to curiosity. Misunderstanding taken as a free space of educational co-existence – i.e. as a structural phenomenon indicating that the adult and the child relate to each other in their *irreducible otherness* – implies at the same time a “free place” for curiosity in mutual relatedness of the adult and the child. This approach presupposes that instead of a traditional point of view, where the child acts as the subject of curiosity in intergenerational (educational) co-existence, a new vision can be suggested. This new vision thematizes curiosity as a phenomenon which engrosses and *connects both* generations already *before* the adult takes a pedagogic (instructive) position in relation to the child. The previous reasoning about the mutual experience of otherness in intergenerational co-existence allows for the assumption that the above mentioned dimension of curiosity presupposes *circular relations* in which the adult and the child relate to each other and act as equal participants – equal owing to their difference – owing to the asymmetry of their life horizons and positions. This “circle of curiosity” can be revealed in different practices which are a natural part of an everyday life with children. An adult is involved in this circular structure when “passively” watching a child playing. Here we are not considering a purely functional supervision

1 In German: “Spielraum erzieherischer Ko-Existenz”.

(protecting), but an engaged contemplation, which does not cease to be surprised. The work of this circle becomes even more distinct when the initiative of the adult is present and actively supporting or even provoking the child's curiosity. Consider the example of a visit to the theatre (for children). For parents who take their children to the theatre the most joyful moment might be when they secretly observe faces/emotions of their children during the performance. Whilst engrossed in the show the children's behaviors and their live reactions become a curiosity for the adults.

This asymmetry of curiosity in the intergenerational coexistence deserves a deeper analysis. A simple distinction of intentions (objects of attention) of the child and the adult is obviously not enough to explain how and why one and the same performance *repeatedly* rouses curiosity in the child, while the same manner of behaviour of the child *again and again* rouses curiosity in the adult. The German term for curiosity is *Neugier* which means (literally) craving for the new. The return of curiosity noted earlier is the indicator of the fact that the New in each of these cases is something more inexhaustible than a cognizable “object” which attracts our attention. What might be understood (experienced) as “the New” in curiosity by the child and by the adult in the example given above? I have to confine myself to a brief answer to the posed question. At the heart of my interpretation there is a distinction of two senses/dimensions of curiosity: cognitive and existential. In the existential sense, the New in “*Neugier*” (curiosity) of the child is his/her own being-in-the-world respective the horizon of the world which in a sense is still empty and should be filled with meaning. The world is to be discovered – should be unfolded – as a coherent field of meanings. This process is carried out step by step and for the child it is the opening of something unexpected, and in this sense the founding of the world. In other words: by virtue of being-engrossed by a performance (or a book) the child experiences the opening of him-/herself as being-in-the-world.

Now let us see what occurs on the side of the adult. When the adult promotes the child's opening of the New or, just watches a child playing, he/she empathizes with the child's discovery-of-the world. The adult comes to occupy the external point of view in relation to the familiar semantic field of his/her life world in a kind of *as if*. Habitual meanings ‘may become suspended and can emerge for him/her as something un-known, something New, just ahead of the child's discovery where *for the first time* this ‘something New’ will be filled with meaning. Such participation in curiosity of the child is for the adult a light “earthquake”, because what is going on for him/her here is the approach to habitual meanings *as* undefined and unfixd.



Thus, when the adult participates in the child's discovery of the world (as an initiative "provoker" or as "a participative observer"), his/her own being-in-the-world can undergo a kind of existential suspension, a gravity-free state. Through this being-suspended (as if) the adult loses the weight of worldly identifications and therefore can experience his/her own life as something which cannot be identified with the given. The expression *as if* indicates a virtual (playful) freeing of the adult from his/her confinement to the given worldly identifications. This freeing refers to the adult's understanding of his/her own life as something which cannot be identified with the given. In other words, in this existential getting-suspended, getting-weightless the adult actualizes the openness for a renewal of his/her being-in-the-world. It is this openness for the existential (ontological) renewal which is the New in the craving-for-the new of the adult. Such an existential openness is not something given, but it is experienced only in the mode of being-actualized which is why its newness never goes out of date. Insofar as it is experienced, it is always (experienced as) New. Here it is important to underline that the described actualization of the existential dimension of the New occurs not purposefully as a result of certain intentional action of the adult-subject, but rather as an unexpected event or as a gift that cannot be anticipated or planned, but "received" and lived through in the intergenerational circle of curiosity. The adult comes about to be captured, intrigued by this or that behaviour of the child.

Let's return to our question about the ethical implications of the adult-child differentiation. This question can be more precisely directed to the existential intertwining of the curiosity of the child and the curiosity of the adult described above. This intertwining reveals characteristics of intergenerational relation that go beyond the ethics of support. In the final part of this paper, I am going to show that a synchronic interrelation of adult and child can be experienced as a unique event of a *gift* which happens in-between two generations insofar as the adult gets suspended as a subject endowed with power and knowledge due to his/her being-fascinated by the child and by the virtue of his/her curious preoccupation with the latter.

Within the framework of the traditional approach that considers intergenerational relations from the point of view that the child, as Hegel has put it, should *rise* to the condition of the adult (Hegel 1932, p. 223), the gift discourse always has had an unilateral character. The giver is the adult while the recipient is the child. A counter-gift was not excluded, but *postponed* until the time, when the child reaches maturity. From Hegel to Nietzsche and on to Levinas we find the same attempt to interpret the adult-child relation in

a *diachronic* perspective. The last allows for a dimension of a special kind of 'gift-giving' one which involves intergenerational relations. First of all, this gift experience presupposes that the child is becoming an adult. Strictly speaking, here the donor is not simply a child, but a child having-matured. This child is the *successor*, the one who takes over what the adult-subject previously performed (represented). In Hegel this refers to the world as a form of ideality to be owned (i.e. reproduced) through adult consciousness (Hegel 1932, pp. 224-225) and in Nietzsche the capability of creating as such (Nietzsche 2006, pp. 51-53). In Levinas it refers to the capability of fecundity (Levinas 1979, pp. 267ff.). Regardless of certain theoretical differences between these three thinkers all of them talk about the same structural conditions for the diachronic intergenerational experience of giving and receiving a gift. According to them, the constitutive features of the gift (to be given by the adult to the child *as* his/her successor) are (1) temporal: *postponing* of the child's becoming an adult-subject and (2) ontological: *separation* of the recently matured subject from the "old" (parental) one. The diachronic intergenerational gift then has something dramatic in its very essence, since the other principal condition of the possibility of a gift is the death of a giving adult (resp. parents). The adult has nevertheless to enthusiastically welcome his/her death in face of his/her growing successor. Such an enthusiastic in-advance-accepting of one's own death is unthinkable without a joyful anticipation of the child's growing independence. The anticipation here has nothing in common with this or that "foreseen" (planned or just desirable) identity of the successor. What is anticipated is rather a pure ontological capability – namely, the successor's potentiality of being an independent origin of production of meanings. Such anticipation is therefore nearer to a *hope* than to an expectation. The only "thing" thus which can satisfy the adult-subject as a "counter-gift" by the successor is something uncertain and something that cannot be objectified.

Well, enough is said in order to discern in the diachronic intergenerational experience of gift the characteristics which Derrida ascribes to a true gift: "For there to be gift, [...] must the donor or donee not perceive or receive the gift as such, have no consciousness of it, no memory, no recognition". (Derrida 1992, p. 16). Let us briefly consider the process of 'gift-giving' in light of this claim.

The gift given by the adult cannot be identified by the child as a gift, because the ability to do this is a constitutive feature of a mature subject. Neither can it be identified as a gift by the already matured child (successor), because what he/she „receives“ can only be perceived as his/her sovereign

ownership. Since the successor cannot identify himself/herself as a donee, the giving adult cannot have an intention to give because it is impossible to have and to follow the intention to give without an addressee of such an action – that is without having the donee as a subject. The same can be claimed when considering the counter-giving of the successor i.e. the very person who is supposed to be a donor does not have an intention to realize the counter-giving in relation to his/her predecessor.

What deserves a critical analysis here is not the paradoxical („impossible“, as Derrida puts it) character of the gift experience, but the fact that the ultimate point of the adult-child relation is conceived of as a replacement of one adult subject by another. In other words, the gift experience as it has been viewed out of a diachronic perspective has nothing to do with the idea of actual sharing between two different generations. On the contrary, two constitutive principles of the gift experience described above – namely death of the „parental“ adult on one hand and the maturity of the child from the other –, excludes the very possibility to thematize such a sharing.

The intergenerational experience designated earlier as *the circle of curiosity* develops in a *synchronic* dimension and presupposes that the child is conceived not in the aspect of his/her future maturing, but in that of his/her actual being-a-child. It is this actual (vivid) being-a-child which fascinates and intrigues the adult and evokes his/her passionate involvement into sharing of this or that creative (world-inventing) situation with a child. Material settings and the scenarios of such situations can differ. At the same time, all of them are characterized by the fact that such situations are perceived of as an *enjoyment* for both, child and adult. Enjoyment (according to the very etymology of this word) indicates being in a certain mood, being in a joy. Following to some extent Heidegger's analysis of „*Befindlichkeit*“ in *Being and Time* (Heidegger 1979, pp. 134-140), I would like to point out that joy can be understood as a constitutive emotion of that special kind of *being-with-one-another* of adult and child which was characterized as the circle of curiosity. It is, thus, an attempt to think joy (experienced in the circle of curiosity) *ontologically* which means to think it as a mood (an affectedness) which discloses to both participants of the circle their vivid relatedness to each other (see: Meyer-Drawe, Waldenfels 1988, pp. 279, 282). It means that joy is conceived of as a *shared* emotion. What must be stressed in regard to this is that the very way of its sharing is of a kind where joy, *while it is being shared*, excludes totalization (that is interpretation of intersubjective experience in terms of one and the same truth – i.e. one and the same reason for joy). Totalization is excluded, because the joy concerned is an emotion

which proceeds from the experience of difference – from that of the relatedness to one another and the playful (curious) co-operation of two different periods of life *as* different. Thus, like curiosity, joy is possible and actual insofar as the adult-child difference is not reduced to some general equivalence, but displayed as a vivid interplay of the mutually related positions. It means that strictly speaking there is not any *common* – one and the same – joy in the shared by adult and child. Rather, there are joys which structurally intertwine and are unthinkable without each other. Both of them take place by the virtue of sharing and at the same time cause an emotional binding. Sharing is thus a kind of *third term* to describe the joyful interplay of adult and child. We need to elucidate the nature of this notion in order to support our attempt to interpret the adult-child relation as being a unique experience of gift compared with what Derrida considers “the true gift”. Sharing as the third term per definition cannot be objectified since the sharing, as far as it really happens, *is taking place* due to a personal/individual participation of every side (age) involved. In other words, the third notion concerned is always in *statu nascendi*. It is a vivid openness which implies the relation of transcendence, but does not presuppose *anything* transcendent. The sharing of a certain playful situation is a genuine worldly *event* of being-with-one-another of adult and child. Witnessing incomparable joy in this event, one has to recognize that such a happy gift does not proceed (has not been received) in accordance with the classical anthropological scheme of “giving – accepting – counter-giving”. Neither does it presuppose an intention to give. Bilateral joy, or participative joy of the child and adult, binding the two periods of life in the circle of curiosity, presupposes a gift without intentionality. Rather “the giver” is the event of the intergenerational relation itself.

Joy is not the only gift which might be experienced in the synchronic relation between adult and child. I refer to Derrida again. Trying to conceptualize the transcendence of the gift, he discerns in all that might be given two different structures: 1) giving which gives something definite, *some-thing* which is present in any form, and 2) giving which gives *no-thing* definite, but gives a *condition* for giving *any-thing* which might be presented as a gift. Such a logic of gift, as I argue, is valid when the intergenerational experience is considered in the synchronic perspective. That is, the adult-child relation can be considered as a *giving* relation which is characterized by certain primary gift which is the condition of the possibility of other gifts including the joy which appears (on each side of the relation) as something present, definite, given in a concrete phenomenal form. But what could be comprehended here as the primary gift? I suppose it is a specific *temporality* constitutive for the

experience of togetherness (being-with-one-another-in-the-world) shared by the adult and the child in the circle of curiosity.

The traditional, adult-centered approach is characterized, as it has already been stated, by the priority of future and, accordingly, by the idea of progress (advancement) in the upbringing of the child. The future for which the child is prepared, is supposed to be his/her future as an adult-subject. The ultimate authority of the actual adult-subject (educator) presupposes a corresponding temporal structure of intergenerational co-existence. From the temporal point of view, the power of the adult-subject means nothing else but colonization of the future which is ascribed to the child as a future adult subject. Insofar as the adult-educator sees in the child a future adult subject the former takes so to say the child's place in the future in order to bring the child up in accordance with the educator's own understanding. Certainly, the visit to the theatre can be interpreted from this position and it can be viewed as a means which is used in order to bring up an educated person in the future. Yet while the circle of curiosity works, the adult-child relation has another temporal structure: it is centered on the present and only due to such a constitution of temporality other unique gifts of intergenerational co-existence become possible. They are joy, specific vivid perception of the world, a playful relation to one's own identity, and – last but not least – the unique heuristics of the adult-child relation since both generations realize (open) the amazing and (in its own manner) encouraging fact that “child and adult learn from each other, each of them learning something different”<sup>2</sup> (Fink 1970, p. 206).

In English, the connection of any phenomenal gift with the special mode of temporality described above is clearly fixed in the word *present* (gift) and in the expression *to make a present* (or simply *to present*). Such a linguistic coincidence (a hint) seems to indicate that the gift as if raises present time to a superlative degree i.e. the gift makes the presence outstanding; it discriminates the present time of the presenting of a gift from the normal (routine) present time. It applies also to the temporal constitution of the circle of curiosity. The present time of the joyful interplay of child and adult and the present time in which the adult's didactic stance reigns are two essentially different time modes. The present time of the traditional didactic introduction into the world (the world of adults) – that is the present time subordinated to the idea of future (i.e. to the idea of preparation for the future) – is hard and tough. It is rigorously structured in order to make a child focus on certain actual tasks which should be fulfilled for the sake of the child successfully

2 The original text: “Kind und Erwachsener lernen von einander, lernen je Verschiedenes”.

becoming a mature adult. As such the hard present time correlates with a fixed “givenness” (pre-given meanings and norms) to be learned and appropriated by the child during the education process. The present time which is constitutive for the circle of curiosity on the contrary is connected with softening and making fluid any set meanings. It might be also characterized as self-sufficient or „pure present“, free from the dictate of the future (that future which is projected resp. controlled by the adults). Anyway, I here prefer the German phenomenological term *lebendige Gegenwart* (the living present) which is capacious enough to cover (to hold) both, equally original features of the present discussed – namely that it is soft and favoring and that it is heuristic and creative.

It is worth reminding that the temporal constitution outlined above is that of the intergenerational co-existence, i.e. it is enacted due to the asymmetry of life horizons of adult and child. In the circle of curiosity the asymmetry is not abolished, but it is displayed in the way which is ultimately different from the traditional didactic stance. It has been shown earlier that the circle of curiosity is a co-existential experience in which there is no subject in the classical sense i.e. subject as an instance which might *underly* the experience as a principle of its (total) conceivability. What is happening in the circle of the intertwined intergenerational curiosities and joys is only accessible in terms of *sharing* and respectively cannot be autocratically understood and controlled by any of the „subjects“ engaged. The living present is, thus, the temporal modalization which corresponds to an a-subjective structure of the intergenerational co-existence.

To summarize, the temporality of the joyful interplay of adult and child is not in disposal of any subject. Once it *takes place* it can only be experienced as non-repressive time regime „initiated“ by the intergenerational co-existence itself. And while being shared, the temporality actualizes itself as the ultimate gift in „presenting the presents“ i.e. in making other gifts of the intergenerational co-existence actual. It is not difficult to see that the interpretation of the adult-child relation as the gift experience developed above does not at all cancel the main principle of the ethics of support, namely, the absolute (irreversible) responsibility of the adult for the child. At the same time, the a-subjective paradigm which has been outlined in delegating the act of giving to the event of the intergenerational relation, allows for a prevention of the authoritarian abuse of this asymmetry of responsibility. If to remain true to the a-subjective approach the ethics of support should be “crossed”, so to say, with the ethos of sharing – namely, sharing the world so that the last one could be experienced in intergenerational coexistence as the world

deprived of a hard core of stable meanings and norms i.e. as an unexplored horizon, as the world in *statu nascendi* (see: Shchytsova 2012). In other words, the “lebendige Gegenwart” is a temporal arrangement by virtue of which the ethics of the adult-child coexistence is performed as *poetics* i.e. as a creative relationship *ab initio*.

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