

Less a funeral oration More a wave good-bye!!¹

Thank you, Mr Heinz-Jürgen Riebert, for the friendly introduction; and thank you, ladies and gentlemen, for your interest! The motto of this conference is "Focus on the Future", which is why I invite you to join me on a journey into a future - one which I hope will not be too far away, but one without a focus, because until then there will be no need for a "focus" on this topic. Oh yes, yesterday we were told that Goslar is a place of great history: Who knows, with this "funeral oration" Goslar might become a historically important place again, so that this keynote speech could be a "great moment" to open up new horizons beyond the school ideology!

Ladies and gentlemen, dear guests of this speech!

Certainly the "International Women's Day" on March 8th is not celebrated for the subjugation of women to the primacy of an obsolete patriarchal power; but rather their self-liberation towards becoming autonomous, competent, self-determined subjects. Similarly, I would like "World Children's Day" tomorrow, September 20th, not to be misused to entrench the infantility of civilization leaving the pupil as a needy, deficient, protected object in an inhuman and unnatural state of affairs; but rather to celebrate the young person as a competent and autonomous subject. But self-determination and dignity are incompatible with some of the characteristics of the world of yesterday. With this celebratory speech, I would like to invite you to solemnly bury the now obsolete ideology of schooling and open up new horizons.

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Can we imagine that there were times when no proper lady or gentleman would have taken to the streets without a coat, gloves and hat? And in the street everyone would have greeted the mayor, the priest or the teacher: hats off, curtsy and bow! Oh yes, there were still horse-drawn carriages and carts, and some bikes were already driven on these streets. The better off employed a lot of staff: maids, nurses, servants, coachmen, governesses. The times of a strict social order, a clear pyramidal hierarchy, reverently headed by emperor and king, came to an end with the First World War: the democratic approach of the First Republic on German soil gave rise to a socio-cultural self-image that fundamentally accepted and respected the human being as a self-determined and dignified subject. Nevertheless, it took many years before a girl could dare to choose her husband herself; until a woman was entitled to lead an independent life, to take up studies, to administer money herself, to contradict the well-meaning will of her husband, to drive a car, to take the pill...

Praise God that the change that was heralded at that time was continued with the fact that we were finally able to say goodbye to further bastions of a pre-democratic civilization: from the ban on domination to compulsory military service to racist or religious constraints. And even the very last bastion of that "world of yesterday" could finally be said goodbye to: the time-honoured institution of school is incompatible with our democratic self-image, contradicts our knowledge and requirements and cannot fit into a world with other symbols than those of the 19th century. That is why I have invited you, honoured guests, to join me today, in the second decade of the 21st century, in supporting precisely those who have been quietly and non-violently dismantling the taboo of questioning the school as an institution, thus opening up and anchoring the democratic "landscapes of self-directed education".

¹ My thanks to Derry Hannam for editing the English translation

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Please allow me to begin with a clarifying digression: should people at that time continue to be fobbed off, downright poisoned, by noble ideals and by goals that were attributed to the school, that were imposed on it as ever new tasks? Should the people concerned at that time act as if they believed in the lies that were told to them – as if lies could become true through constant repetition? In short: instead of constantly wanting to verify how great school could or must be, especially if the required personnel, material, financial, pedagogical conditions were fulfilled, instead we applied the postulate of falsification:² Could it also be that some people would not benefit from the claimed benefits of the institution of school? Which paths would then be feasible for them?

There, where people give their schooling a clear "No, thanks!" perhaps because they had found other ways of education and socialisation that were better for them, or for whatever other reason, they and their mothers and fathers were met with full state authority: in the form of threats, police transfers, proceedings, fines, partial or total withdrawal of parental custody: a declaration by the State, which unconstitutionally³ claimed to have a duty of education in the form of school, corresponding to the duty of family education.

Looking back, we can only wonder: the mothers and fathers were accused and certified as "unfit to educate" because they were not able to drag their unruly pupils to school, if necessary by using violence! Had the courts, which argued in such a way, overlooked or had to ignore the fact that also in Germany a prohibition of any physical, psychological and emotional violence had finally been enshrined in law when § 1631.2 BGB⁴ was reformulated? Therefore: The ethical position of respect for the dignity of young people and their expression of will was not only reflected in the appeal proclaimed in 2015: "Violence? Without me"⁵; the legal provisions that put an end to intergenerational violence were clear – which school authority or which court could ignore this and disregard it? But other terms were also circulating, such as the postulated "*endangerment of the child's well-being*" (see footnote 14). This accusation was all the more self contradictory because, strictly speaking, in quite a few cases it was precisely the state authorities, the youth welfare office or school board, that practised conduct that obviously should have been described as "endangering the welfare of the child"... Or the third attempt of the state's defence: the wicked parents were accused of wanting to abolish the school in order to impose their own intentions to the detriment of their offspring: from educational ambitions to religious or political positions, to other sectarian ideas, including those of "family schooling." This was a particularly stupid accusation in view of the fact that those affected here were not at all interested in abolishing something: why should they? How could they? But to break out of an obsolete compulsion to which they did not want to submit, especially since it was completely absurd!⁶

² On "Verifying" and "Falsifying" see in particular the writings of the science theorist Karl Popper

³ See for example: Matthias Kern Ed., Selbstbestimmte und selbstorganisierte Bildung versus Schulpflicht (Self-Determined and Self-Organised Education versus Compulsory Education) Leipzig, 2016.

Tobias Handschell, Compulsory education before the Basic Law, (Nomos) Freiburg, 2012.

⁴ BGB: Bürgerliches Gesetzbuch (German civil Code)

⁵ <http://www.gewaltohnemich.de/>

⁶ In this respect, it is necessary to specify that the position presented here can truly have nothing in common with the demands of certain - populist - parties who, for completely different reasons,

Despite all the grand speeches and lofty ideals, in 2016 such cruelties still forced some people affected by this experienced reality to flee to a foreign country without compulsory school attendance; or they risked the legal disputes I will tell you about later, which actually brought about the change, the radical break with what had gone before.

By the way: Today, when we have finally overcome this violence and cruelty, are we not exactly the in "future" postulated for the year 2030?

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The famous US-American developmental psychologist Peter Gray⁷ has described the institution of school as a Prussian experiment of the 19th century. For one thing, the design of the school resembled that of the factories: profit maximizing exploitation through piecework in a barrack-like location. On the other hand, the protection of so-called children was only meant to be an educational alibi, to conceal the fact that this state institution was intended to form future, well-behaved, subservient, adapted citizens – no, not competent, knowing, self-determined people! It is also important to emphasize that the institution of school correlated with work as an ideological meaning and purpose in life: on the one hand, school was supposed to prepare for this work; on the other hand, it was supposed to protect from premature exploitation of work, especially in times of a policy of civilizing expansion. Why? Since the nobility feared for their rule when the excessive exploitation of the youngest people meant that no soldiers capable of military service could serve to defend their fatherlands, the school was to serve as a protective reserve under the alibi of the humanist. It was precisely this that was later misused by the state as an alleged duty of care: in the form of compulsory school attendance. By the way, it should be mentioned here that this absolute and unconditional compulsory school attendance was established by the National Socialists in 1938: no one should be able to escape political manipulation disguised as a pedagogical benefit!⁸ Who today would want to boast of this historical pinnacle of the idea or ideology of schooling?

How could this typically totalitarian and authoritarian principle be maintained after the liberation from National Socialism, even though the Basic Law proclaimed on May 23rd 1949 as the foundation of our free democratic basic order does not even mention that school for good reason? Obviously, the idea of schooling was already so firmly established that in the course of time it only underwent various changes. Let us not be deceived by the once postulated diversity of schools: In reality, the ever-new reforms merely concealed the shifts in emphasis: once it was revolutionary coeducation, then the curriculum was changed; then the methods were to be

advocate the "abolition of the school": Moreover, is it not a strange phenomenon that from 2015 onwards a right-wing conservative political grouping announced that it will advocate the abolition of absolute compulsory school attendance, when the National Socialists introduced and enforced this in 1938 – admittedly in the name of equality of all?

⁷ Peter Gray, *Free to Learn*, Basic books, 2013

⁸ The fact that in Prussia, among other places, compulsory schooling was introduced much earlier does not at first say anything about what happened if this was not observed! Then, around the time of the Weimar Constitution, for example, home schooling was allowed as well as non-state school (re-)forms. Only National Socialism in 1938 transformed this compulsory schooling into an absolute obligation without exception. The fact that this still applied in the 2015s may illustrate what happens when children refuse to attend school: In order to break the will of the "school-ridden person" and get him into school, he is threatened with a police feed – and this is even carried out: without regard to whether the appearance of the police as an execution of state authority could cause further emotional damage, completely regardless of how senseless and inappropriate this is.

adapted; then the tasks and roles of the educators were to be discussed; then the introduction of the obligation to attend a day-care centre was discussed, another time over eight or nine school years. Should symptom-oriented changes make it possible to achieve the normatively set goals better, i.e. technically easier and above all more subtle, against better knowledge? At the latest since Ivan Illich⁹ and Hans A. Pestalozzi¹⁰ we know that institutions are immune against everything that could question their system of order: Therefore, it was also characteristic of this institution that every attempt at reform inevitably led to a new and renewed institution; just as the result of the reform of the hospital was logically a reformed hospital, but by no means a centre of health; so was an approved reform school a school...

I will come back later to three very different moments which caused the school experiment from the 19th century to disappear:

- School was incompatible with economic change.
- Constitutional concerns: In several respects, the unsustainable school attendance was considered to be contrary to the constitution and a consistent way out of it initiated and made possible.
- More and more affected people resisted the paternalism of the state and successfully committed themselves to being able to practise self directed education.

Before we look at this path together, I have to assume that the younger ones among us, who were spared the fate of compulsory schooling, may not be able to understand what is meant by it at all. Therefore I will first try to explain what I understand by the ideology of schooling and its embodiment in the form of the institution of school. I am glad to accept that some of your older colleagues will call some of the aspects mentioned an exaggeration, since we all know how selective memory is in suppressing or belatedly glossing things over...

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A clarifying interjection: the institution of school was only a concretisation of a school ideology, which had quite different aspects; similarly, the "Egotechnomobil" or the train, the bicycle or the plane were not supposed to be considered as individual aspects, but as typical phenomena of a much more comprehensive mobility system-ideology. In this respect, my radical criticism goes far beyond the mere school and refers first and foremost to the meta-level of civilizing ideologies.

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Since in Germany the term school was occupied by the state and defined accordingly, it was not at the discretion of the people to interpret it this way or any other: All ideas about how a school should be organized needed to be approved by the school authorities, which provided for their restrictive and normative guidelines; therefore, in this country the sacrosanct institution "school" could only be and remain what the school authorities high-handedly considered approvable: unfortunately not a place of meeting or education, but a pyramidal structure with an unimpeachable, anonymous leadership authority and corresponding subjects who laid their fate in the

⁹ Ivan Illich, Celebration of Awareness, New York 1970; Deschooling Society New York 1971

¹⁰ Hans A. Pestalozzi, Auf die Bäume ihr Affen, (Zytglogge) Bern 1989

success defined by it; with their own dogmatic norms, rules and rites. Since this system was given the power to prescribe the conditions of success, i.e. to define the curriculum, the timetable, the content of teaching, the age and the quality of examinations, this institution therefore had a selection function. I will come back to the particularly scandalous aspect of "triage", which was carried out according to supposedly objective standards.

To illustrate what the former schooling represented, I would like to mention as one of the many rituals it cherished the idea of "learning" that was typical for it. First of all, it is no coincidence that most people associate "learning" with school and connote this memory negatively! It is precisely this school-bound "learning" that I would like to analyse and present as a five-part process:

- 1st link: "Learning" in itself has been emptied of its actual meaning as a process of experiencing, discovering, grasping, understanding; and has been alienated from its authentic purpose to become a compulsory imposition of fixed knowledge packages that only meet certain "educational" criteria. This purposeful "educational good" took place, so to speak, separately from actual life. What did it mean when students, in their jargon of the time, said that they had to "choke in" this externally determined, often laborious burden? It made three things clear: this filling according to plan and program was comparable to that of the former goose fattening, which is why it was also called fattening food; it didn't matter whether the subject matter to be learned interested, concerned, or touched the students... In retrospect, it can even be said that this learning imposed "general answers" to questions that had often not or not yet been asked! Secondly: since it was not about the innate potentials of human beings such as competence, ability, knowledge, which literally cry out to be allowed to unfold and prosper, this "learning" required special measures to allegedly optimise it: what special authorities were to administer was therefore disguised as "pedagogical motivation". And thirdly, "learning" reduced to the well-behaved spitting out of what had previously been simply learned by heart did not have a lasting effect, but in quite a few people it even led to a lifelong disruption of their willingness to engage in self directed education. How unnecessary and regrettable it is to hinder the discovery and expansion of knowledge and techniques in this way!
- 2nd link: "Learning" became bound to compulsory practising. We know today that people who open themselves to what is important and meaningful to them, at the right time in their lives, immediately "grasp" what they have discovered. Practice? What an abstruse idea! Have we discovered our first words or steps by compulsory practising? Were we compelled to eat and sleep? No, certainly not! And also the young people we see around us, who play with numbers and letters and words, for example, to juggle with them, do not "practice"! Whenever they do what is essential to them, they do it seriously, concentrated – and highly efficiently, lastingly, because what they practise is done out of an inner drive, because it is important to them. What we recognize today as a matter of course and acknowledge with due respect is fundamentally different from the "practice" of that time, which as a "preform to something more important" had an almost disrespectful quality inherent in it.

- 3rd link: the aim of learning was the examination, which did not document and confirm a skill! Examining was mostly the art of "spitting out" the "thrown in" learning material according to the curriculum and to get a good grade for the required "throwing up", which was given with the claim of objectivity. Thanks to it, climbing the next level on the scale of recognized success should be made possible. In other words: the secret purpose of such examinations was not to confirm the acquired skills, but rather the "triage" mentioned earlier. Thanks to a programmed failure rate, the "few successful" could thus be separated from the "not successful": the "failed"!
- 4th link: what has been learned, compulsory practised, tested has now been corrected. "Correct" is etymologically related to the "Reg" (or "Regina") as the governor! Correction was hardly a matter of realizing that something in another form could be better; rather, the mostly dualistically simple idea of "right" and "wrong" was to be internalized: the idea of a unique, objective truth. Because many of the schoolchildren interviewed at the time felt that this "correction" – usually indicated by red ink– was a degrading disqualification of what they had done and brought about, this disgrace all too often blocked the possibility of real understanding. Instead of the possible insight into another solution, the marked thing mutated into the criticised flaw of not following the school curriculum properly.
- 5th link: in view of the human need for hygiene of their neuronal activity, the processes described were followed by the fastest possible "forgetting". Admittedly, the observation in what short time the "learned", "compulsorily practised", "tested" and "corrected" was forgotten despite all efforts has always caused amazement; today we know that this organismal self-purification is a healthy reaction to the aggression of alienating violence that is felt and suffered.

Two further remarks may illustrate the school dominated climate at the time: the institution school was the key to success. So anyone who got a good grade in an examination could hope for a well-paid job and gain prestige through a large income. What a questionable and unstable result in view of the fact that the success attested by school was often far beyond of what people were really able to experience and know in life! On the other hand, in retrospect, it can be called impertinence that the failed students were told that the examinations had provided devastating proof of their imperfection, their lack, their disqualification – whereby the institution of school created and cultivated precisely those "educationally deprived strata" which would not have existed without them!

I would also like to use the word "mistake" to explain why some people were almost broken by the attitude they had at school. Was there anything wrong with the word "mistake"? No, the mistake had a moralistically derogatory quality! Social psychological comparisons between the way in which young people today joyfully and fearlessly devote themselves to the challenges they face and the rediscovered school diagnostic reports of the time make it frighteningly clear to us what a constant and paralysing fear of the error, the wrong result, young people lived in those days! In the face of this "structural cruelty" we speak today of "madness" and recognize in it the prerequisite for a good shaping of knowledge. And this "madness" leads to a

quality of openness that cannot be achieved through effort or practice, which is described by the term "success"¹¹.

Let me illustrate this with an example: how does man arrive at the result of adding "3+3"? Through a school mathematical postulate to be internalized – or through repeated error? Thanks to what intelligence or genius does man gradually discover and understand not only that the sum "3+3" does not add up to "5", nor "7", nor "9", nor "33", but "6" and, moreover, why this is so?

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In the first two decades of the 21st century, an increasing number of people began to refuse to attend school in the name of their self-determination and dignity¹². Why should the imperative against violence recommended to young people: "say no!" not apply where they felt that what they experienced was violence? This categorical "No!" raised fears among some contemporaries of the time as to whether a lack of hierarchically strict order would or should lead to chaotic disorder? Would people misuse the freedom granted to them as a *carte blanche* to allow themselves to do anything and harm others ruthlessly? What a misunderstanding! Our experience today shows us that freedom is a structure based on trust in life and in the person: the absence of compulsion at school, of curricula and timetables linked to it, of dictated class groups and, above all, of obedience, was not a problem where people – precisely in this aspect! – actually curious by nature, committed, enthusiastic, socially competent, are concerned. And we can also see that the great context in which each person is embedded provides the appropriate framework for connecting the different, even conflicting interests, which is why I would like to call it – in reference to Ivan Illich – "convivial". In relation to our topic this means: the radical break from the supremacy of the institution of school did not bring about the feared lapse into personal, family, socio-cultural, educational, religious or political interests; rather, it freely reflected a dynamic balance between the socio-cultural environment and the people embedded in it. In order to create this balance, we now understand the need for suitable places where people can meet and exchange in a self-determined way. In this sense, the three main tasks of the responsible community should be described in this way: once a constitutional fundamental right to self directed education has been enshrined, the infrastructural and financial prerequisites and conditions must be created and made available, and even the worldwide networking of interested parties must be guaranteed. Therefore, in a free form of life and culture, the central task of the "public authorities" is to provide such places, such networking points. That such "decentralized centres" are not called "schools" is due to the heavy burden of the former school norms and laws. Accordingly, the people who indulge their passion there, who are not dependent on school, cannot be seen as "pupils" either. Even those who want to provide or exchange knowledge, competence, or techniques, reject the title "teacher", which was once considered a pedagogical authority. Because of their undoubtedly worthy authority, they were able to free themselves from that former authoritarian behaviour, which merely reflected senseless structural violence.

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¹¹ I owe this reference to Gerald Hüther.

¹² "Depending on the federal state, up to 40% of young people who are in youth detention centres, are there just because they refuse to go to school" Karen Kern, Plädoyer für einen Paradigmenwechsel in der Bildung in M. Kern Ed., Leipzig, 2016, p. 14

Allow me at this point to digress in order to answer the question that you, Mr Rickert, asked me at the beginning: whether I wanted to make the teachers unemployed? Firstly, I find it absolutely unacceptable the way in which the teaching staff is mistreated (may I even say "burned out"?) by the school authorities in particular and their demands and expectations transferred to them (on the so-called "pedagogical front": how symptomatic!), as well as by parents and students. Secondly, what does the high rate of early retirement, burn-out syndromes and other characteristics mean, especially among teachers? Doesn't it indicate beyond doubt that there is an insurmountable contradiction between your vocation to teach and the reality of school? And thirdly, I would like to understand my statements as a pronounced appreciation of an important mission: teaching is important, of course, but please in conditions other than those of school violence, so that it can flourish and thus be recognised as an important task.

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Although it has become a matter of course for us to speak of self directed education instead of the school-based, five-sectional "learning", I would like to explain the emergence of this concept – introduced by the philosopher Bertrand Stern¹³ in the first years of the 21st century – which also implies a choice to be justified ethically. This makes clear how incompatible the process described here is with any institutionalized paternalism, especially with any school approach!

How different are people today, who have so many interesting things to do in life and in the world and are allowed to experience important things, from those whose daily routine was once dominated by school. Isn't it amazing to see how bored and uninterested many of those were whose daily routine was dominated by school seemed? Is it really possible that so few attentive contemporaries at that time noticed the yawning emptiness produced by school teaching? Today, where we are proud of our flourishing "landscapes of self directed education", the devastation of school left countless people in a convulsive search for meaning in life, for real content. Or, to put it another way: whereas we today live self directed education, many just survived their school days... Didn't anyone take offence at the fact that some of those affected by school already criticised the fact that they actually didn't have any time for school because life was so exciting? Did their active, creative, social potential have to be sacrificed on the altar of norms in such a senseless, absurd way?

Anyone who today looks at pictures of old school buildings from the 19th or 20th century, whose specific architecture, design and equipment were associated with factories where piecework was the order of the day, will hardly be surprised that more and more people did not feel at home there. Consequently, most of the old and unusable school buildings, monuments to an educational devastation in the midst of a flourishing and prosperous landscape of self directed education, were gradually demolished. In contrast, unlocated self directed education flourished when it took place exactly where people wanted and where people set up their homes: outdoors, in nature, as well as in university lecture halls, in laboratories and workshops, in studios and sports arenas, in theatres and living rooms, in cinemas and libraries; but also everywhere where people are professionally active: in offices and factories, in

¹³ Bertrand Stern, *Frei sich bilden. Entschuldigende Perspektiven* (edition unerzogen) (tologo verlag) Leipzig, 2015; ders. *Die Saat der Freiheit – Impulse für aufblühende Bildungslandschaften* (Drachen Verlag), Klein Jasedow 2016

shops and handicraft businesses. Yes, education takes place wherever people are; and wherever people are, it flourishes! That is why we can observe young and old people everywhere today, who meet to enjoy their joy, to educate themselves freely: of course, because man is a curious, social, (inter)active, creative being!

It was precisely this matter of course that prompted young people today to ask those who were there at the turn of the millennium why they behaved so obediently. What unease, what a guilty conscience was felt by many older people who, out of a gnawing fear, had not resisted the oppression. And yet: just as hardly any well-bred person would have dared to question the power and authority of the churches, the emperor, the king - whose power was not *abolished*, but melted away when people simply ignored them – so the school violence felt by some people disappeared. While it may not always have been convenient, easy, safe to replace the betrayal of the young generation with a steadfastly loving support, it was still logical and reasonable.

But the younger ones among us wanted to understand why at that time only some mothers and fathers resisted the official encroachment and really defended their daughters and sons, actively stood by them. For example, they were stunned by the decisions of judges who, unconstitutional and illegal, openly or subtly wrote violence as a means of enforcing compulsory school attendance in the reasons for their judgements. They were disappointed by what they could not imagine: family court proceedings leading to the partial or total withdrawal of parental authority because a young person had clearly and unequivocally said "no!". In this "No!", youth welfare offices and courts saw in particular the proof of the educational failure of the parents, but also a clear sign of an imminent "endangerment of the child's well-being"¹⁴. The idea that the institution school per se was so obviously in several respects "endangering the well-being of children" by simply "spoiling" many of the potencies of human beings that were to be protected, sacrificing them on the altar of their blinded systematics, did not occur to those how well-meaning courts and their servile experts at first. It must not be what was not allowed to be – until proof of the contrary, the evidence that could no longer be overlooked. Out of their horror at the numerous fines for the same question, these young contemporaries kept asking questions. Why? For what? Because they do not understand how a compulsion can have a positive effect, especially when it is not necessary, since it is an innate potency that characterizes man. A shy girl asks whether the compulsion is not to be understood as a declaration of bankruptcy. Did the school system have such a distrust of people that it thought it could only maintain itself through compulsion? Unbelievable! Cruel...

Nevertheless, thank God some of the accused mothers and fathers had not given in to all the threats and declared courageously to refuse to betray the next generation. It is thanks to them that the corresponding supreme court decision was made, which forced the executive authorities to change in full respect of the constitution¹⁵.

¹⁴ "Endangerment of the child's well-being": one of those terms without an objectifiable value, without a clear definition, which, like some words in the days of witch-hunts, was circulated again and again in order to justify often inhuman, absurd measures which should never have been taken. See in particular: Martin Stoppel, *das Kindeswohl im Spannungsverhältnis selbstbestimmter Bildung und Schulpflicht*, in M. Kern Ed., pp. 105; see in particular: "*Childs well-being* is probably the most cynical lie that a German judicial and official apparatus has come up with for more than 50 years: A cliché to cover up the greatest crime against children. Matthias Matussek, *die Vaterlose Gesellschaft*

¹⁵ See the "Björn judgment" in *Bertrand Stern*, 2016, S. 60

Therefore, with regard to the right of man to educate himself freely, we can speak of a possible and necessary evolutionary leap: for, of course, there is no need for a project that overthrows society as a whole, in order to no longer deny man his natural being as a subject, to no longer train him as an object, to no longer seduce him. Or, in other words: where once the normative value of a person, defined by institutions was in the foreground, today human dignity is a general, constitutional obligation. Therefore, everyone may feel recognized and acknowledged in his essence. Gone are the dramatic times when young people were pathologised, medicated, psychiatrised or criminalised because of an alleged anomaly – or subtly mistaken for "children" because they were considered "children"! Isn't it the "acid test" of this change to trust in the primal ability and in the primal need of human beings to discover life freely, to meet people and pursue their interests? Isn't this as obvious and logical as it is simple?

As we now know, the state authorities were not able to prevent the change. Against better knowledge and despite all the less praiseworthy attempts, first and foremost by the school authorities, to make people compliant, the break from the school ideology was unstoppable.

For this purpose seven elements were at work:

- The counterproductive effects of compulsory school attendance did not manifest themselves only in an increasing number of cases to be treated, including medical or psychological cases, and in the statistics for private tutoring; the continuously rising number of "functional illiterates"¹⁶ for example, reached alarming levels in Germany in particular. Did it take that expensive institution to produce so much "scrap"? Was it really useful to take the easy way of cheaply assigning blame and criminalise these people as "uneducated"? After it had become clear what a loss it would be to renounce the genius, the natural skills of different people, new types of institutions were created, capable or willing to really respond to these people, to accompany them as necessary, to support them.
- In the professional world, the claim once made by schools to prepare for later work was met with rejection by more and more companies: when hiring their employees, it was no longer school diplomas and certificates that were essential, but human qualities, factual skills and creative and active commitment. The change, which also operated in the economy, meant that their demands on people could no longer be met by school-pedagogical ambitions and measures.
- In politics, too, it was inevitably realised that the hope that more schooling – in the sense of more and longer school attendance, such as all-day care – would lead to more knowledge and more success for more people was misguided. In reality, this only increased their counterproductive effects; for this reason, politics increasingly shied away from the demand for more and more financial and other resources for an expansion of the institution of school – especially since the funds budgeted increasingly served the mere maintenance of school ideologies, goals, measures and the maintenance of its "employees". How

¹⁶ "functional illiterates": People who, despite almost a decade of schooling, cannot read and understand a text properly or write. According to official figures, their number in Germany is estimated at at least 7.5 million people, i.e. about 13-15% of the adult population.

much more easy (not: cheaper!) was the enabling and support of self directed education – in contrast to an expensive and counterproductive administration of people, schools, courts, psychiatrists, doctors...

- With regard to the young people concerned, there were those who took the certainly uncomfortable and even dangerous path of ignoring the institution of school, of simply ignoring it: for example, because they had better things to do in life, to discover, to explore... And there was a small group of resolute and determined young people who finally appealed to the Federal Constitutional Court because they criticized the subtle incapacitation or paternalism by the monopoly-like institution of school as being contrary to the constitution. Incidentally, some of those employed at various levels of the school hierarchy reacted to the increasingly undeniable refusal of those concerned by refusing to follow this absurd obedience. The official who feels a connection to the free democratic basic order and who sees a conflict between the order and the applicable laws is under a real obligation to report this to the referring authority. Some of the teachers made use of this very "right of remonstrance".
- The courts, in turn, found that the plaintiff was in no way – as was often assumed at the time – intending the "abolition" of the institution school. Wouldn't such attempts at threatening to abolish the school have paid far too much honour to that school? They could no longer ignore the fact that the living, the human aspect of self directed education could only be cultivated beyond the school, especially since it became clear that nobody remained uneducated only because he or she was not forced to be happy in school.
- And "from the outside" there were loud cries of horror regarding education: after educators doubted that the school was a suitable place for people to flourish, the threat of cultural devastation was to be countered with an "enthusiasm initiative". Various studies¹⁷ contradicted the fear that without schooling, people would remain ignorant, stupid, antisocial; indeed, even the repeated fears that without school, young people could remain at the mercy of their families like sects could not be substantiated.
- Moreover, it seemed important to finally distinguish between the "obedience" learnt in school, which was linked to submission and good manners, and that really necessary quality which we call "discipline", which is a human and professional virtue.

Can we now say that the building of the institution school simply collapsed because it was rotten and obsolete? Or because the structural violence demanded was no longer effective? Slow agony or miraculously fast eruption? Implosion or explosion? I believe that the criminalistic or investigative question as to whether a decisive stab in the back should be considered murder, or whether what happened was only logical, need no longer be addressed today, thank God. Instead, we can be grateful to those intrepid people who, through their confidence and certainty, caused a rebellion, and thus causing many others to perceive the school to be violent, and even though their fate was resigned, nourished within them the hope of redemption. Who would have

¹⁷ For instance: Olivier Keller, *Denn mein Leben ist Lernen – Wie Kinder aus eigenem Antrieb die Welt erforschen*, (Mit Kindern wachsen-Verlag) Freiamt, 1999. André Stern, *... und ich war nie in der Schule: Geschichte eines glücklichen Kindes* (Herder spectrum) 2013. Alan Thomas, *Educating Children at home*, 1998

dreamed then, in the early years of the 21st century, how quickly this institution would be "eaten up" by change, reason and time and disappear? Who would have thought at that time that it would be possible to oblige the "public authorities" to represent the community as guarantor for the "landscapes of self directed education", and that the many hundreds of millions that were once spent on the counterproductive school could now be put at the disposal of the naturally self directed subject? That is why we observe today, every day, that nobody is left by the wayside "without education". Is it possible that what the former minister (and honorary president of the German UNESCO commission) Walter Hirche named as goals for 2030 in his introductory speech to the Unesco symposium 2016 in Goslar will come true? (1) With the resolution on education adopted by the UN General Assembly in September 2015, all states of the world have committed themselves to a central goal on the path to sustainable development: "To ensure inclusive, equal opportunities and quality education for all by 2030, and to promote opportunities for lifelong learning. More specifically, in subgoal 4: "To ensure by 2030 that all potential learners acquire the knowledge and skills to promote sustainable development, including through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, world citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity and the contribution of culture to sustainable development"¹⁸ Allow me to emphasise once again that education and the support of people are mentioned here; thank God, there was no mention of school.

Dear guests of honour, we have gathered today to take this obsolete school to its final resting place in a satisfying manner. Although this very school was a symbol of discord for so many people, I want to conclude this ceremonial speech, which should not be a funeral oration, with the usual ceremonial formula: "resquiescat in pacem – rest in peace!

Bertrand Stern,
Goslar, September 19th, 2016

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¹⁸ Walter Hirche, Thesen prospektiver Bildungspolitik – Impulsreferat bei der 51. Fachtagung der UNESCO-Projektschulen "Brennpunkt Zukunft – Herausforderung und Chancen prospektiver Bildung", Goslar, 18.-22. September 2016

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