

**The Relevance of Teaching the Beautiful\***  
**(Time, Past, Future, History)**

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**Keywords:** time, hermeneutics, education, effective history, literature, alternative methods, drama, consumer society

**Abstract:** In my study I am trying to bring attention to some aspects of the so-called alternative pedagogical methods: how they can be interpreted in the horizon of hermeneutics and of their claim of being a universal philosophical system; the issues pertaining to the reasoning that justifies the existence of art raised in Gadamer's study entitled *The Relevance of the Beautiful*<sup>1</sup> – and mainly its pedagogical aspects – how these are brought up in the world of a consumer society. Every time art has to redefine its own reason for being and its relationship to tradition, this fact has a great impact on the question of teaching art.

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My research outlined above restricts itself mainly to the Eastern-Central European region, where the situation is much more complicated since different paradigms are living parallel with each other: consumer mentality, the centralizing habits of the former political system and the traditional middle-class values and standards. I mainly focus upon the question of how literature in general can be taught to the nowadays teenagers. I consider several different aspects of the question such as the theory of literature, philosophy and sociology, because these are also connected to “the relevance of teaching the beautiful”. Besides theoretical considerations, I also base my analysis upon my practical teaching experiences.

The question of teaching literature and art in general is not a new one: whenever we are witnesses to changing social and cultural paradigms, the problem turns up again and again. The rapid changes in the Eastern and Central European societies increase the actuality of the problem. The different research studies in the last few years more or less point in the same direction: the lexical ideal of knowledge is gradually being replaced by the concept that emphasizes the importance of competences and the development of personality in general. Several researchers – mainly Gyöngyi Orbán in her theoretical

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\* *Investing in people!* PhD scholarship, Project co-financed by the SECTORAL OPERATIONAL PROGRAM FOR HUMAN RESOURCES DEVELOPMENT 2007 – 2013. **Priority Axis 1.** “Education and training in support for growth and development of a knowledge based society” **Key area of intervention 1.5:** Doctoral and post-doctoral programs in support of research. Contract nr.: **POSDRU 6/1.5/S/4** – “Doctoral studies, a major factor in the development of socio-economic and humanistic studies” Babeş-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca, Romania

<sup>1</sup> Hans-Georg Gadamer, *A szép aktualitása (The Relevance of the Beautiful)* (Budapest: T-TWINS, 1994)

works<sup>1</sup> and high school literature textbooks as well – consider hermeneutics as a concept able to renew literary education, which is in crisis. Following her example, I focus on the question of how different alternative/reformed pedagogical methods can be gathered into an integral hermeneutic framework; furthermore, the question of how the reason for existence of art raised by Gadamer, the classic of modern hermeneutics – and mainly the pedagogical aspects of this question – should be re-interpreted in the age of post-Gutenbergian globalization.

It is common knowledge that education in general is going through a crisis at the beginning of the 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium. The very large number of studies and articles treating the subject, the numerous educational conferences and courses, the curricula and demands changing almost every year clearly show that education is in crisis. And crisis means: in spite of the feverish search we can no longer find anything that could be considered a secure base. This crisis – as any other problem of great significance nowadays – is a global one. However, in some regions (e.g. Eastern-Central Europe) the crisis manifests itself more intensively, as immense social re-arrangements have been taking place during the last two decades. Being a teacher of Hungarian literature in Romania I am trying to highlight some theoretical and practical aspects of these very complicated phenomena that I am confronting.

In what follows, restricting the question of general educational crisis to the problem of how literature and art in general can be taught, the following consideration seems to be a good starting point: at the background of difficulties of artistic education there always stands the problem of reason for the existence of art itself. Since Gadamer's study, mentioned above, we have been aware of the fact that art has to define its validity again and again, every time a disorder sets in the matter of its social integration.<sup>2</sup>

This disorder was probably formulated first by Hegel when he spoke about “the death of art”.<sup>3</sup> By the age of Romanticism the idea of estrangement of the work of art and the artist from his/her everyday world had become general. Art had become a ceremonial moment of life, but this honoured status also means some exclusion. The artist was not an ordinary person according to this concept; he/she was submitted to other rules as in his/her work another world appeared (the so-called Absolute Spirit) in a sensuous form (this thought can be attributed to Plato's world of the Ideas).<sup>4</sup>

Let us state precisely: during the 2500-year-old history of European art philosophy the work of art always possessed this special rightful status. But in the Ancient and Medieval culture the work of art was the articulation of a world order uniformly accepted by everybody being an organic part of the community where it

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<sup>1</sup> Gyöngyi Orbán, *Háttérelvezések. Esszék a korszerű irodalom oktatás köréből* (Background Analyses. Essays on Modern Methods of Teaching Literature), (Cluj-Napoca: KOMP-PRESS Korunk Baráti Társaság, 2000). Gyöngyi Orbán, Rita Fóris-Ferenczi, Melinda Székely, Kata Zsófia Vincze, Melinda Zágonyi, *Beszélgetőkönyv a megértő irodalomoktatásról* (Book of Conversations Regarding the Understanding Way of Teaching Literature), (Sfântu Gheorghe: T3), 2003

<sup>2</sup> Gadamer, *A szép aktualitása*, 11.

<sup>3</sup> quoted by Gadamer, *A szép aktualitása*, 13 and by Gyöngyi Orbán, *Esztétikai olvasókönyv a szép aktualitása kérdéséhez* (Collection of Aesthetic Texts to the Question of the Relevance of the Beautiful) (Cluj-Napoca: Polis, 1999), 52.

<sup>4</sup> Orbán, *Esztétikai olvasókönyv...*, 53–54.

manifested itself. All members of such a community could take part in the ceremonial moment of happening art without experiencing the feeling of “otherness” and “strangeness”. But in the modern age – mainly during the Enlightenment – a powerful secularization process started, because of which the former uniform standards became relative, the stress being laid mainly on the individual.<sup>1</sup> But a lot of individuals being near each other (instead of being together) did not form a ceremonial community where the work of art could start to speak on its merits articulating exactly the “human common”. Perhaps it was at this moment that the process started during which the work of art has been gradually squeezed out from the ontological sphere of the human being, becoming an oddity instead, admired from a distance. This curiosity can be created only by people of genial talent in the transcendental moments of creation. According to this concept, the reception of these works also needs a kind of divinatory<sup>2</sup> skill of entering. (How much this manifestation of art differs from the traditional rural communities where people are together on the occasion of some routine activity and they sing or one of them tells a story while the others become the part of the world created by the tale!)

The feeling of community lost in the course of the secularization process should inevitably be replaced somehow – of course not consciously. So there appears the power of creating identity based on the notions of nation and culture. In this respect, the work of art is less than the articulation of human existence; it serves the formulation of identity instead. The work of art becomes part of culture and we look on it as it inflates us with pride. However, the feeling of community in this way is much looser and more virtual than the one coming from the direct experience of a common world order.

After departing from the direct space of everyday life, we discover that works of art need space as they do not find their place. So we establish or develop museums, galleries, music halls, libraries and “stone theatre” buildings. (Of course, some of them had existed even before the 18–19<sup>th</sup> centuries, but not in this estranging sense). We can meet works of art in these places, but we feel something artificial during these meetings, as if a glass wall arose between them and us. These meetings are less an opportunity to find answers to our ontological questions, but rather a mere social event – the extreme form of which is called snobbery.<sup>3</sup>

This is well observable in the changes of the theatrical space: a medieval mystery performance or a *commedia dell'arte* play was always presented in the middle of the crowd (in markets, on the occasion of patronal festivals etc.) where the spectators moved in the space surrounding the stage. The auditorium surrounded three quarters of the stage in Shakespeare's theatre; nevertheless the spectators were sitting on seats. In the realistic theatre of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the auditorium and the stage were strongly separated; two different worlds on the two sides of the invisible “fourth wall” lifted only by the applause at the end of the performance.

The radical turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century art intended to stop this estrangement manifested in the degradation of the work of art to the so-called aesthetic object. The world order of the Enlightenment that had seemed to be steady so far turned out to be insecure. The quick scientific and technical development began to overtake the human

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<sup>1</sup> Gadamer, *A szép aktualitása*, 14–16.

<sup>2</sup> Dilthey's term quoted by Rudolf Bultmann, *A hermeneutika problémája* (The Problem of Hermeneutics), in *Filozófiai hermeneutika* (Philosophical Hermeneutics), ed. Béla Bacsó (Budapest: 1990), 94.

<sup>3</sup> Gadamer, *A szép aktualitása*, 17.

being, leading to significant social and existential conflicts. As religion seemed to be unable to recover its prestige damaged before, the task of filling in the ontological gap was partly taken over by art.

The art of the 20<sup>th</sup> century can be characterized by search. But this search is rather a controversy: on the one hand, the work of art tries to regain its former position where it would be able to create its own community in such a way that the reader/viewer could also ask it his/her most private questions, on the other hand, it seems to become more and more estranged from everyday life. Those who have grown up in a traditional spirit expecting a kind of cultural self-justification from art consider modern creations to be non-sensical, confused, gradually becoming the exclusive possession of an elite group. (This does not contradict the fact that even modern art creates its own fashion: but this process has nothing to do with the former integrating role of art).

The so-called popular arts seem to find their way to the public lost for “aristocratic” art. But this way is usually determined by commercial interests and the creation of communities is often an additional element.

Taking all these things into consideration, the relationship between art and society has become so considerably modified that we cannot help asking the question: what is the reason for the existence of art in these circumstances?

Gadamer’s study entitled *The Relevance of the Beautiful* (1974) focuses on this problem. The German philosopher starts from the experience that modern arts have changed the relationship between the work of art and the audience so strongly that we could consider the existence of two kinds of art, a classical and a modern one, and these differ from each other so radically that it is impossible to place them in an integral aesthetic frame.

Gadamer tries to solve this dilemma by taking one step back and suggesting: let us disclose the common base of art called by him the ‘anthropological base’ from which art has always sprung.<sup>1</sup> His art philosophy of uniform approach is built on three notions included even in the subtitle of the study: “art as game, symbol and feast”.

He starts from the reconstruction of the notion of beauty through a linguistic analysis, which discovers that the essence of beauty is to show itself. In this respect, beauty is in close relationship with the self-representing way of existence of the good and ethic, being superior to any practical purposes. Furthermore, the understanding realized by language is similar to the shine of beauty: the appearance of reason that separates things from each other is similar to light, the way of existence of which is appearance on something, on the “other”.<sup>2</sup>

The game is an activity that suspends the purpose-aspects of the external world and builds an internal order of the game-tasks. The subjects of the game are not the players but the game itself. In fact, the game is the only authority in this co-ordinating relationship. The game, if it was created by the players, must be played according to its rules.<sup>3</sup>

The work of art, similarly to the game, creates its own space, where it counts on the immersed attention of the “players” who unbend in this situation. Although the game is “just” a game, it is also closely related to the “serious”. Those who play are aware of

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<sup>1</sup> Gadamer, *A szép aktualitása*, 38.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 26.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 38.

the fact that they are only playing, but they do not consider the truth appearing in the game to be an illusory one, a quasi-truth, but rather a universal human truth. In this way, art as a game is in special relationship with reality and with the imitation of it. The world of art is not another reality created beside the real world (as it would be an untrue one) but a world coming from reality and standing above it, a kind of “fuller” reality condensing the entirety of existence.

The work of art always gives us the recognition of something, being a symbol as well.<sup>1</sup> The existential common human content being spread and occasional in everyday life, in the work of art is articulated in a condensed way.

This “condensed presentation” is always an outstanding moment, a feast having its own time, the so-called “filled time”. The feast, similarly to the game, is an authority: the feast is not celebrated, the feast comes itself and that is why it has to be celebrated according to the rules ordained by it. The regular purpose-orientation of everyday work is suspended in the feast, people begin to pay attention to each other and to themselves as members of the community created by the feast. During the feast the other always appears; one turns towards the other curiously, considering the other’s otherness; the difference between the ‘I’ and the ‘other’ always shines in the light of the feast.<sup>2</sup>

In order to place the question raised in *The Relevance of the Beautiful* and the answer suggested by Gadamer in their horizons, it is necessary to have a look at their antecedents, namely at the hermeneutical turn in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Hermeneutics had been the science of translation, interpretation, explanation and application of (mainly written) authoritative texts (e.g. the orders of Greek gods or the text of the Bible during the Middle Ages and the first part of the modern era) for ages. It was a kind of collection of several methods always serving some dogmatic purpose. The real turn took place in the 19<sup>th</sup> century by Schleiermacher’s work, who enlarged the notion of hermeneutics towards the understanding of any verbal utterance (not only written but oral as well). In parallel with this, language had become more and more important for hermeneutics, as the medium that makes possible any kind of cognition and understanding.<sup>3</sup>

In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, by Heidegger’s achievement followed by Gadamer, hermeneutics became a common conceptual base of the humanities. Understanding as the basic ambition of the human being determines every moments of his/her existence, since the “other” revealed to us (the other man, the text or any social-historical phenomenon, group of reason) always offers itself as something that needs understanding.

This turn is also marked by the fact that Gadamer – by abandoning the traditional methods of science – approaches the problem of understanding from the direction artistic and historical experience instead of the scientific one. This also shows the changes in the scientific thought of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The hierarchy, which evolved during the Enlightenment, and which placed natural sciences with their serious, reliable and measurable data above the humanities dealing with difficult, uncertain relations, is gradually shaken. Humanities present themselves with their own statement of the problem as they do not want to resemble natural sciences by all means. (Here we have to

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., 51.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 62.

<sup>3</sup> Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Hermeneutika* (Hermeneutics), in *Filozófiai hermeneutika* (Philosophical Hermeneutics), ed. Béla Bacsó (Budapest: 1990), 11–27.

mention that this process of becoming independent has not finished; public – and sometimes even scientific – thought is determined by the concepts of the 18–19<sup>th</sup> centuries. Even nowadays the “true” sciences are mathematics, physics etc., which appear on the top of any lists, showing the fact that they enjoy the highest prestige. Humanities experienced this fact with frustration sometimes, intending to become much more precise than the natural sciences, which caused a complete dehumanization of them during the last century).

The hermeneutical turn beginning with Heidegger underlines the event-like character of understanding. Understanding is a process that happens; its motion is not linear but circular. A circle does not have a starting or a furthest point. Hermeneutics does not separate the one who understands from the one who/which is understood (see the classical opposition of the aesthetic subject and object), as the one who understands is always part of the larger reality experienced by him/her; in this way, the understanding of the “other” cannot be separated by the moment of self-understanding.

Understanding is always realized through dialogue supposing the permanent motion and change of the horizons. Dialogue means that I must abandon my former point of view in order to assert another one that helps me to discover another aspect of the respective thing. In parallel with this, we must realize that we cannot become free of our prejudices and preconceptions on the basis of which we experience everything that offers itself to be understood. This consideration also implies the fact that we must make our prejudices relative, which is necessary in order to keep the event of understanding in motion.

The Heideggerian and Gadamerian hermeneutics puts the experience of history in a different, new light, as understanding always means the (partial) surmounting of distances (whether cultural or temporal). In this respect, “the life-manifestations put down in writing”<sup>1</sup> (the written texts) are especially important as writing – due to its character – always separates the partners of a dialogue in time.

As a result of this, hermeneutics re-considers the relationship between text and interpretation as well. According to this concept, a text is not a mere object grasped by the reader with the help of interpretation: both of them are just a moment of the event of understanding. The text counts on the phase of interpretation right at the moment of its creation. The text must be composed with regard to the interpreter. On the other hand, the text always presents itself to us through the medium of different forms of interpretation (the simple, even silent reading is also an interpretation), so the two moments cannot be separated. This automatically leads us to the perception that the text is not a closed, ended unity of meaning, but rather part of a process taking place during understanding.

Considering all these, if we wished to define in brief the significance of the hermeneutical turn in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, we could say that hermeneutics offers the people of the 20<sup>th</sup>–21<sup>st</sup> centuries a unifying concept integrating the whole domain of existence; it can solve our dilemmas often deriving from the fact we treat our rather complicated relations of everyday life by paradigms inherited from former centuries.

This fact is clearly present in the everyday experience of teaching.

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<sup>1</sup> Dilthey's term quoted by Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Szöveg és interpretáció* (Text and Interpretation), in *Szöveg és interpretáció* (Text and Interpretation), ed. Béla Bacsó (Budapest: Cserépfalvi, 1991), 17.

If we started from Gadamer's stating the problem regarding the reason for the existence of art, we can ask the same question related to teaching – especially teaching literature and arts in general: what is the role of school, what should it teach, how should it do this and, first and foremost, why do we teach literature?

In those ages when the integration of art into everyday life was not problematic, the question of teaching literature did not arise. Art, being the articulation of the divine order and of a world view shared by everybody, did not need to be explained or to be taught – at least not in today's sense of the word. It simply had to be practised, to let artistic experience happen.

The first age when the problem of teaching art emerged was probably the Renaissance. In this case the greatest difficulty derived from the temporal distance between the humanists and the Ancient culture. The spirit of Humanism partly dissolved this distance, as they did not imitate just certain cultural forms but the whole way of living; however, they had to harmonize it with the horizon of the Christian culture.

The problem of teaching literature culminated during the Enlightenment when the exact, scientific research came to the foreground and the experience of art could no longer be included into this concept. The intention of understanding during the Enlightenment was completely different from the hermeneutical one, as it was not based on the dialogue but on an one-sided effort of possessing. Literature – according to its character – hardly tolerates such militant efforts. Unwillingly, it had to give up its place to the science of literature that tried to "raise" it to the rostrum of natural sciences with the help of notions and facts. But a work of art is unattainable in this way; we can point out to several aspects of the "aesthetic object", but in this way we deprive it of its real way of existence. The experience of art was replaced by the knowledge of culture, reading texts was replaced by reading "documents". The work of art became a distant and unattainable idol; the correct thing to do was to get to know it, as it determined people's social position and judgement.

In fact, this non-aesthetic conception pushes the work of art back to the past moment it derives from; in other words, it does not permit the work of art to appear in the present moment as the question arising is not aimed at the work itself but at culture. So the work of art keeps silent as if it were not asked any questions; it hides its own character.

In fact, education is built according to these concepts even in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, in spite of the fact that considerable changes took place in the domain of art, humanities and social relationships during this period. It seems to us as if education, getting more and more distant from everyday life (despite the fact it states about itself that "it prepares students for life"), had not been influenced by these effects.

Traditional school preserves a worship of culture that gradually has become more and more anachronistic by the beginning of the 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium, as it seems to be unaware of the increasing effect of alternative cultural effects – e.g. pop culture. Besides, the dichotomy of "elite" vs. "pop" culture has been present since art became estranged from the community that determined it before. Pop culture has the power of forming communities in the original meaning of the term, functioning according to democratic principles, being accessible for everybody. (Of course, we have to make a distinction between the terms of traditional popular culture and the mass culture of our days. The former is the culture of "inner development" of a community, while the latter one is based upon samples adopted from foreign spheres. This mass culture is governed

by commercial interests focusing on the consumer, the effect of creating communities is just an appearance (e.g. at a rock concert). Undoubtedly, mass culture is also able to fulfil the role that previously belonged to culture in general (see the latest virtual communities, fan clubs etc.).

The so-called “elite” culture has become estranged from the integrating community functions based on feudalistic principles. From the start it has been aimed only at specific strata of society (one “must be born into it”), being hardly accessible for disadvantaged groups.

School preserves these feudalistic principles even nowadays: as it presupposes from the first that all children possess highly developed communication skills and use the standard version of language; it excludes from this culture everybody who does not live up to these expectations. In this way, school increases the cultural distance between the different social groups instead of decreasing it.

Taking everything into consideration, we can say that the worship of culture inherited from the Enlightenment and Romanticism and practised even in the present days has got an excluding character.

So, if we turn back to our previous statement of the problem, namely, what triggered the educational crisis and when it started, we can state: the cause is the same as that which raises the question of the relevance of art. After departing from its community, it has to redefine its reason for existence. The process began when the unifying world order was questioned, and the new world order proved to be unable to fulfil this integrating role at the former degree.

So the crisis has been lasting for a long time. But why is it that we have talked about it so much recently? Because during the last two decades considerable and quick social changes have taken place, probably more considerable and quicker changes than ever. The educational system is ripe for change.

Undeniably, the permanent search resulting from the feeling of crisis has got its advantages as new pedagogical methods appeared, the so-called alternative or reformed pedagogies (the Waldorf-, Montessori and Freinet-school, the step-by-step method, the Jena-plan, and dramatic pedagogy known in the English specialized literature as DIE – Drama in Education – and TIE – Theatre in Education). The earliest methods appeared during the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, mainly in Germany and Great Britain, in parallel with the above mentioned changes of art and humanities. These alternative methods did not have a considerable effect in Eastern and Central Europe until the decline of the communist regime. In most countries, similarly to the reaction of the communist political class, the strongly conservative political regimes between the two World Wars did not favour the idea of being alternative. In some countries where the socialist regime presented its “softer” face (e.g. Hungary or Czechoslovakia), several reformed methods (such as Drama in Education) appeared in the 1970s, while in such hard-line regimes as Ceaușescu’s dictatorship even the idea of reform was considered a sin.

After the political changes in 1989, the different alternative methods began to “come in”, but adapting them to the characteristics of local cultures raised at least as many questions as the general crisis of education.

Before dealing with these questions in detail, let us have a look at the main features of alternative pedagogies. As we have mentioned above, their appearance coincided with the deep social changes Europe was confronted with at the beginning of



the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The authoritative system based on rigid social rules proved to be estranged from the human being. The gradual process of democratization taking place in the (Western) European societies of the period, deriving from the spirit of liberalism, urged the educational system to redefine its own role.

One of the most important features of alternative pedagogical methods is partnership. Such a school is defined by a co-operating relationship between the teacher and the students. They are not each other's 'enemies', as their interests are common: to promote the children's personality, skills and knowledge always with regard to their interests and values. Reformed pedagogies abandon the intention of developing everybody according to the same standards, they are aware of the fact that each of us is a unique and complex world with different skills, ambitions and aspirations (in contrast to the always levelling traditional school).<sup>1</sup> Alternative pedagogies lay emphasis on the individual differences, without forgetting to search 'the human common' from which the micro-society of the class (and later on the macro-society of the outer world) can be built up.

It is not accidental that the game is a basic notion of any alternative method. In the world of the game the purposes of the external world (being often compulsory, making the educational process rigid) are suspended. Traditional education often focuses on an 'input-factor' classifying and measuring the result of the work-process (e.g. exams, final degree etc.); this pedagogy is submitted primarily to these purposes.

Alternative pedagogies, on the contrary, focus on the process itself; time is not simply 'passed' during the class but 'filled in' creating the communal spirit of the game that makes the participants relax and ontologically enriches them.

Another important mark of these methods is the greater prestige of artistic education (in traditional schools fine arts and music are limited only to art classes – probably because art is considered to be something that 'does not prepare one for life'). Reformed pedagogies realize that artistic education offers the children such reflective skills by which their cognitive processes of other type will be more developed.

Alternative pedagogies start from the following precondition: the universal human demand that has always given birth to art has not disappeared (in spite of the non-artistic features of the present society); however, if we do not keep this demand alive, it will probably become dull (let us think of a 5<sup>th</sup> form pupil who willingly reads everything we ask him to; after 5–6 years, being in his/her late teens he/she abandons reading as he/she has given up the demand to look for his/her private questions in literary texts; the school and its environment has made him/her do so).

We do not state that these considerations are not formulated by classical education, however, they are rarely put into practice. Even traditional pedagogy states the spiritual education must be completed by a physical one, but it is questionable if this principle is applied during the educational practice. For example, does a literature lesson combine the aesthetic experience of the text with the experience of the students' own physical skills – motion, voice, etc.? The response is mostly negative.

Here we are going to discuss in brief a special variant of alternative pedagogies, namely dramatic pedagogy (or Drama in Education). It can be used not only in literature classes but also in others; as it starts from the child's experience of the so-called 'as-if-

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<sup>1</sup> Dr Ildikó Pinczésné Palásthy, *Dráma, pedagógia, pszichológia* (Drama, Pedagogy, Psychology), (Debrecen: Pedellus, 2003).

game', it can be the starting point for any theme. In what follows, I will also focus on its literary applications.

In the course of drama lessons we also deal with texts. But we do not stop at the mere explanation of the questions and answers related to the respective text, we always go on towards the common presentation and re-creation of it. We look for the possibility of how could we get closer to the things articulated by the text. A student who shows skill during drama lessons knows the way towards the understanding of the text which always leads through self-understanding, and vice-versa, we always build the characters and the situations starting from ourselves. The stage is arranged and made alive according to our fantasy, the text speaks to us through our game. But this game cannot be played by arbitrary rules as theatre always has its own conventions. We can depart from them, but we cannot do so as if they did not exist. We are in a permanent motion: here, in the present moment we try to start a dialogue with a text from the past, we create something new that has not yet been and will never be again, doing all this through conventions inherited from others. We are interpreters and creators at the same time: we act in a scene directed by ourselves. We are at the same time in the external space of direction and in the internal space of the scene just acted. We act in different roles, but we still remain the same, with our questions and alternative answers. During the game we can feel that we step out of ourselves for a moment in spite of the fact that we know that our existence is continuous and unique. However, the truth valid in the internal world of the act is always valid, even if we stay in the external world of the lesson. It is the truth of the existence, in the light of which we experience the illusion that all these things are just virtual.

This complex process of interpretation and creation is completed with another level in cases when we make a performance for the spectators and not only a drama lesson for ourselves. Even when we are the only spectators, the presentation is also theatrical; but in the case when 'real' spectators are present at the performance, the reflection upon our game is more emphasized: how the act can be interpreted by the 'other', how we can realize the festival community with the 'other' (meaning the spectator and the text).

The creating-interpreting activity in drama lessons also means a continuous process of self-training. The students' skills of forming sounds, their reflexes, coordination of motion, creativity, improvisation skills etc. are permanently developed, manifesting the hermeneutical view on the human being, who is not a system of separate skills but a unique entity. Not body and soul, not interpreter and player, but a complex personality who reflects upon himself/herself in a more and more mature way, in parallel with his/her development. According to his/her concept, art is not a mere imitation of reality but something that helps us to get back to ourselves by experiencing it. In this respect, they make the hermeneutical concept of understanding their own. The process of thinking realized in the space of the language is a circular one which also progresses. Text and interpretation, the 'I' and the 'other', past and future, feast and workdays, the space of the game and of the civil existence are the aspects of the same existence.

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Taking all these things into consideration, we can state the following: if the teaching of literature intends to redefine its role and reason for existence at the turn of the millennium, this can be achieved by starting from a hermeneutical horizon. A possible answer (though not the only one) for these questions can be given by the alternative or reformed pedagogies.

Before creating the illusion we have found a perfect method to confront all educational problems, we have to consider those difficulties and questions which arise from the adaptation of these pedagogical methods to the educational system of the Eastern-Central-European countries.

One of these problems originates from the fact that these methods are usually adapted as a licence without considering the specific cultural features of the respective country. Although the methods are usually successful in Western cultures, in Eastern Europe they can prove to be artificial. On the one hand, these cultures are more used to informal interpersonal relationships, on the other hand, they are more traditional; people's opinion about the role of school differs from Western people's view. Some reformed pedagogies seem to be over-standardized (e.g. step-by-step) and hardly accepted by the participants of the educational process.

Beside the cultural distance, the temporal gap is also considerable. The reformed pedagogies elaborated in the 1920s or 1930s, but even the later methods of the 1960s and 1970s are partly 'old-fashioned', partly idealized in the horizon of the rapid changes of the millennium. In this region the traditional Christian standards, the centralizing efforts inherited from the Communist era, as well as globalization and consumer mentality are present at the same time, so the application of a sample always has to take into consideration a great number of aspects.

Alternative pedagogies – in an explicit or implicit form – presume the sense of responsibility of the individual, as well as the priority of democratic values. But this region is also characterized by sympathy towards such standards as rigid order and strong prestige.

Communities also go through considerable changes. It is not yet clear whether we witness the disappearance of communities in general, or new type communities are just being formed. The question is raised again: in such circumstances how is art able to create its own communities?<sup>1</sup>

The priority of prestige pushed into the background does not necessarily mean that teaching literature becomes easier. The work of art always presents itself in an authoritative way, as it demands the reader's attention; in a society of levelled values attention and prestige suffer damage, hindering the formation of a dialogical situation.

During the last two decades the dialogue with the cultural tradition has also become difficult. The man's skill to read historically can be formed rather early but it presupposes the existence of former experiences. If these experiences are missing (e.g. because the student does not read), the ability of historical sense will be less, the students will be unable to make dialogues with ancient texts. Consumer mentality does not demand focusing on the past or the future as both of them means: I am able to reflect upon my present situation having a more critical attitude. However, consumer society

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<sup>1</sup> Sándor Karikó, *Megérett-e az ember a közösségre?* (Is Man Matured to Community?), in *Közösség és instabilitás* (Community and Instability), ed. Sándor Karikó (Budapest: Gondolat, 2008 ), 209–224.

does not need thinking people but individuals (not communities) who accept everything without question. It prefers existence in a permanent present moment, the individual being caught up in the view of the virtual pictures.

This considerably differs from the contemplative reception that the work of art demands from us. The aesthetic contemplation makes us depart from the real experience looking at the general, which presents itself as the most private existence at the same time. Consumer picture-viewing gets us away from the moment of reception as it lets us see the picture itself. In this way, the moment of reflection disappears or decreases.

The work of art makes us turn back to it again and again, because we still experience in it secrets that has not been revealed to us so far. On the other hand, the elements of pop culture are 'interchangeable', lacking the individual character of the work of art. The question is whether school can arouse interest towards this individuality in students.

Mass culture has accelerated our way of living and our visual perception. Classical works of art cannot fulfil this demand, being considered by teenagers 'boring' and 'slow'. They believe that dwelling on details is unnecessary, their strategies of reading (if they have any) focus on the final result (e.g. who is the murderer?) not on the process of reading, of getting acquainted with the text. This is probably a result of the fact that the present society is less able to celebrate feasts than former societies; the loss of holiness also means the decrease of the ability to celebrate the present feast moment.

Another problem that makes teaching literature difficult in the case of present teenagers is the question of the decline of language and thought. The simplified spelling of the SMS texts, the narrowing vocabulary used by them can lead to the simplification of thinking, as something exists for us only until the moment we can name it.

Summing up what has been said: how should school define itself at the turn of the millennium in Eastern- and Central-Europe?

If the former unique standards are shaken, can they be replaced by other standards and can we build a pedagogical construct upon them?

Can we find again our lost sense of game and feast – in school and in our everyday life?

Will the society ever grow up to consider plurality as an advantage not as the lack of the secure base?

How can we define our perspectives? As the fulfilment of Orwell's prediction<sup>1</sup> (communities and language declining, knowledge of the past disappearing, identity decreasing, etc.) or do we witness the birth of a new plural society that radically re-interprets the role of tradition, creates new communities, makes 'the relevance of the beautiful' problematic again?

We cannot answer these questions as we are just in the middle of the process of happening truth.

One thing is clear: pedagogy will continue what it has always tried to do, namely, to preserve the prevailing traditional values for posterity by adapting them to the permanently changing circumstances.

Hermeneutics has made us discover the relativity of our world. But it has not eliminated our faith based on 'the universal humanity', it has not made us nihilists, since for thousands of years we have been existing, asking – and teaching.

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<sup>1</sup> Expounded especially in 1984. George Orwell, 1984, (Budapest: Európa, 2005).