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## The notion of simulacrum as a substantial<sup>1</sup> category of education

The text refers to the concept of simulacrum, a metaphor created by Jean Baudrillard in his work *Simulacra and Simulation*, in which he tries to examine the connections between reality, symbols and society, and in particular to determine the meaning and symbolism of culture and media, which are involved in constructing the understanding of common existence. Simulacra he understands as copies, which represent things that either did not have an original from the beginning or have already lost their original, source original. Simulation is an imitation of the operation of a real process or system in time. The text consists of four parts: 1. Education – terminological clarification; 2. The question of the simulation function of education; 3. The simulacrum as a heuristic tool for the analysis of education; 4. Education as a hypermarket simulacrum. The aim of the considerations is to analyze the semantic scope of the simulation function of education in the context of the question of the usefulness of the metaphor of the simulacrum as a heuristic tool for this analysis.

**Keywords:** education, pedagogy, simulacrum, reality, hyperreality, symbols, codes, culture, hypermarket

### Pojęcie *symulakrum* jako substancjalna kategoria edukacji

Tekst odnosi się do pojęcia *symulakrum*, metafory stworzonej przez Jeana Baudrillarda w pracy pt. *Symulakry i symulacja*, w której bada związki między rzeczywistością, symbolami

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<sup>1</sup> Aristotle distinguished substantial categories (like things) and nine accidental categories: quantity – e.g. three, quality – e.g. green, relation – e.g. is bigger, place – e.g. in Athens, time – e.g. tomorrow, location – e.g. lies, possession – e.g. has wings, action – e.g. speaks, experiencing – e.g. he is hot. He made this division by distinguishing between the subject of the sentence (which is substance) and its predicate (which are accidental categories) and analyzing Greek predicates; after: Thomasson (2004).

i społeczeństwem, a w szczególności stara się określić znaczenie i symbolikę kultury i mediów, które są zaangażowane w konstruowanie rozumienia wspólnej egzystencji. Symulakry rozumie jako kopie przedstawiające rzeczy, które albo od początku nie miały oryginału, albo pierwotny, źródłowy oryginał już zatraciły. Symulacja jest imitacją działania rzeczywistego procesu lub systemu w czasie. Tekst złożony jest z czterech części: 1. Edukacja – uściślenie terminologiczne; 2. Pytanie o symulacyjną funkcję edukacji; 3. Symulakrum jako heurystyczne narzędzie analizy edukacji; 4. Edukacja jako symulakrum hipermarketu. Celem rozważań jest rozbiór zakresu semantycznego symulacyjnej funkcji edukacji w kontekście pytania o przydatność metafory symulakrum jako heurystycznego narzędzia tej analizy.

**Słowa kluczowe:** edukacja, pedagogika, symulakrum, rzeczywistość, hiperrzeczywistość, symbole, kody, kultura, hipermarket

## Introduction

The French sociologist and philosopher of culture, Jean Baudrillard<sup>2</sup>, in his post-modern philosophical treatise *Simulacres et simulation* (Paris 1981), attempted to create a radical theory of interpretation of the relationships between reality, symbols and society, and in particular to define the meaning and the symbolism – the codes of culture and media that are involved in constructing the understanding of common existence. For the purposes of this analysis, he created the concept of simulacra (Latin *simulacrum* ‘similarity, appearance’; plural *simulacra*) – as copies, representations, replicas, imitators, resembling things that either don’t have any original from the very beginning or have completely lost that original. Their source is simulation – the imitation of the existence or functioning of a real entity or process or system in time, as a “way of generating – by means of models – a reality devoid of source and reality: hyperreality” (Baudrillard, 2005, p. 6). Baudrillard distinguishes three types of it: first – “imitative simulation, which dominated in the classical period of the Renaissance, second – simulation of production in the industrial era; and finally, simulation of modern times, in which code plays a decisive role” (Lechte, 1999, p. 404).

The following article considers the thesis that the referent of this third simulation may be, among others, contemporary institutional education. The metaphor

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<sup>2</sup> Jean Baudrillard (1929–2007) – French sociologist and philosopher of culture, initiator of the postmodernist trend in cultural theory, one of the most insightful critics of globalization, post-industrial society and the cultural effects of the development of virtual reality technologies. His works have been published in Polish: *America* (1998), *Conversations Before the End* (2001), *The Clarity Pact. On the Intelligence of Evil* (2005), *The Spirit of Terrorism. Requiem for the Twin Towers* (2005) and *On Seduction* (2005), *Consumer Society, Its Myths and Structures* (2006), *In the Shadow of the Silent Majority or the End of the Social Sphere* (2006), *Symbolic Exchange and Death* (2007).

of the simulacrum can be a heuristic tool for analyzing the semantic scope of the simulative function of (post)modern education with its “reproduction principle contained in the code” (Lechte, 1999, p. 404).

## 1. Education – some terminological elucidation

In this text, education is understood as a derivative of the Latin word *educatio* – ‘to bring up, to raise’, which originates from the infinitive *educere*. This in turn consists of the prefix *e-*, i.e. ‘out or up’ and the root *-ducare* derived from *ducere* – ‘to lead, to guide, to conduct, to bring forth’. Hence results the polysemantic nature of the concept of education: in the sense of “leading upwards” – called *psychagogy* in pre-war Polish pedagogy (Mirski, 1936, p. 126), and the power of “this action of the moral and intellectual authority of educators, as the best members of a given society and environment” (Kunowski, 1993, pp. 174–175), analogously referred to as *agos* (Greek *ago* – ‘I lead’). Stefan Kunowski describes the functions of this *agos* as: *sanare*, or “the care of educators over the *bios* of the pupil, and thus over the life and health of the organism”; and *edocere* (Latin *edoceo* – ‘to teach, to instruct and to raise awareness’); *educere*: educational protection over the action of *ethos*, or the social life of the environment; *educare*: to care over the spirituality of the pupil and directing they towards the ideal; and finally the function of *initiare*: initiation and preparation of the pupil to meet their fate (Kunowski, 1993, pp. 247–248).

The meaning of education is therefore based on the root of the verbs: *to lead*, *to pull upwards*, *to raise towards something*. It is perfectly present in Germanic and Romance languages – German *erziehen* or *großziehen*, French *élever* or English *to bring up* or *to raise*.

The *Encyclopædia Britannica* defines education as follows: “Education is a discipline concerned with methods of teaching and learning in schools and school-type environments in contrast to various informal and non-institutional forms of socialisation” (entry: *Education*).

However, it particularly emphasises the cultural function of education: as the transmission of the values and accumulated knowledge of society. In this sense, it is equivalent to what social scientists call socialisation or inculturation. Children – whether conceived among the tribes of New Guinea, in Renaissance Florence, or in middle-class Manhattan – are born into a culture. Education is designed to guide them toward learning the culture by modelling their behaviours (*Encyclopædia Britannica*, entry: *Education*).

And it is precisely this function of education – introduction into culture, of growing into the ethos of society – that is at issue here.

## 2. Question about the simulation function of education

Does Polish education fulfill the above-mentioned function of transmitting values, knowledge, social ethos, introducing into culture in the sense of inculturation (or enculturation)<sup>3</sup>; can education be thought of as the transmission of the values and accumulated knowledge of a society? In this sense, it is equivalent to what social scientists term socialization or enculturation.

Is education really “the objective function of pedagogical practice to introduce students to culture, or more precisely to participation in culture” (Kmita, 1982, p. 22)? This is where the line of dispute about the status of educational change and its promotion is drawn most clearly: “The most basic decisions concerning educational systems concern the scopes of participation in culture that they allow, models of desired behaviors and competences for action” (Kmita, cited after: Witkowski, 1988, p. 135).

In principle, there are two such antagonistic models of promoting cultural behaviour, which are a function of education: the evolutionary model (based on the idea of continuity, growing into the existential foundation of society) and the revolutionary model (creating cultural change through negation, sudden, radical transformation, breakthrough) (Suchodolski, 1981, pp. 97–100). However, each of these models is flawed in its extreme: revolutionary change inevitably brings with it “a break in tradition” and “the emergence of an opposition of thought and action” (Król, 1991, p. 11) – these most “elementary forms of realization of humanity” (Król, 1991, p. 9). Rejection of tradition, a break in cultural continuity “makes it impossible to see the world in categories of the past, present and future” (Król, 1991, p. 11); a man remains immersed in the unstable current of his existence here and now, not knowing, indeed not even asking, what the direction of this current is or where he himself is:

Without a tradition that selects and determines, that preserves, that indicates where the treasures are and what their value consists of, there seems to be no conscious continuity in time, and therefore there is neither past nor future, only everlasting change and the biological cycle of life (Arendt, 1961, p. 25).

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<sup>3</sup> According to the classical approach of Melville John Herskovits, inculturation is learning culture; a process in which an individual gains cultural competence. “[...] In different phases of his life, an individual assimilates various components of cultural heritage. It begins with acquiring elementary motor, hygienic or linguistic habits, and in adulthood reaches complex participation in the cultural environment” (Schulz, 1992, pp. 20–21).

The atrophy of the sense of continuity of existence, which must be the result of such an animalistic “bare life”, means that man is deprived of higher, spiritual, “non-instrumental” values, which makes his life in general questionable (Gładzowski, 1996, p. 30). It becomes a multitude of random events, unplanned and unpredictable, a sterile “unbearable lightness of being” caused by the chaotic dis-order of the world. Such a revolutionary change, which “calls for starting all over again” (Król, 1991, p. 13), for breaking tradition as a generational memory and apotheosis of a new beginning, is the source of the will to power of all utopias, which – when realized – inevitably transform into the nightmare of dystopia<sup>4</sup>.

The classic approach to this dichotomy of change promotion models in Polish pedagogy is the typology of Zygmunt Mysłakowski (1964): he distinguished the adaptive and reconstructive function of education, treating them as two non-antinomic aspects of the process. On the one hand, education prepares the growing generation to rebuild, to transform the reality they have found, i.e. socio-cultural reconstruction; on the other hand, it is a form of maintaining cultural continuity through adaptation, accommodation, and the growing of the young generation into the existential foundation of society.

Wilhelm Dilthey claimed however that:

society is the global regulator of life, feelings and instincts; it imposes legal and moral restrictions on immoderate passions, which have arisen from the need for coexistence; through the division of labour, through marriage, through property, it creates conditions for the ordering of satisfied drives. In this way it frees from their terrible violence; life gains room for higher experiences and spiritual aspirations, and these are able to gain the upper hand (1987, pp. 202–103).

Considering this, education is the critical tool of hominization:

“Each new generation is a new invasion of savages” (Allen, 1992, p. 20), “barbarians” requiring inculturation or – more broadly – hominization as a process of maturing to full humanity, “shaping the human individual” (Allen, 1992, p. 20).

In education, a problem may arise when in this functional adaptation-reconstruction system there is a “deficiency of change” in the sense of insufficient creation

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<sup>4</sup> Utopia is a philosophical idea of omnipotence – originally the Greek polis, then various forms of state, with no chance of realization and disregarding the real state of affairs and social relations, a vision of an ideal, egalitarian society. However, specific programs of social reconstruction grew out of this idea – and it was then that utopia became truly terrifying. As a rule, dystopian societies arise as a result of a radical break in the continuity of socio-cultural tradition as a form of apotheosis of the New Beginning. The view is commonly held that the old, traditional way of life, especially the institution of family and religious life, is archaic, primitive and meaningless. Dystopia – the dark side of every utopia, always appears in attempts to realize utopia, but – as history shows – it is a terminal creation (cf. Gładzowski, 2010, pp. 132–178).

of “one’s own concept of the world and oneself in this world” (Obuchowski, 1987, p. 19) or “excess of change, which [...] disturbs the state of the social environment, which is the subject of educational enlightenment efforts” (Witkowski, 1988, p. 147).

This dysfunctional deficiency of change is characteristic of upbringing in a postfigurative culture (culture of “invaluable ancestors”), which, according to the well-known anthropological concept of Margaret Mead, a representative of the ethno-psychological movement, also known as configurationism or the “school of cultural patterns” or else the “school of culture and personality” (Olszewska-Dyoniziak, 2000, p. 33), consists in the transmission of beliefs, norms of behaviour and patterns of cultural behaviour by elder members of the community. They are guides, intermediaries between the past and the present, “guardians of tradition”. The organization and functioning of the community is based on the reproduction and replication of this tradition, and behaviour contrary to custom may result in condemnation and exclusion from the group. The ascending generations take over cultural patterns from the older generations, maturation implies the imperative role of an adult member of the community. Such a conservative, traditional type of upbringing is characteristic of traditional societies, closed small communities, “primitive societies, narrow religious groups and ideological enclaves” (Mead, 2000, p. 23), in which the horizontal transfer of information within cultural, heterogeneous groups is minimal:

we encounter [...] at the end of the twentieth century individuals who live as they did fifty thousand years ago. Today we can find primitive fishermen, hunters and people who use only curved sticks to obtain meagre harvests. We can find people living in cities ruled to this day in a theocratic and single-power style; peasants whose fate has not changed for centuries – they live closed in their villages and fenced off from urban culture [...]. We live in a time when the natives of New Guinea, looking at a few potato tubers, can only say “a lot” because they cannot count, and at the same time teams of scientists at Cape Kennedy calculate to the second when the Apollo spacecraft must change course to enter orbit around the Moo (Mead, 2000, pp. 7–8).

Perceiving education through the prism of promoting change therefore implies the postulate of “permanently building into the mechanism of pedagogical practice the ability to respond to this change, and even participate in its stimulation” (Mead, 2000, p. 135). The dispute over educational change is always also a “dispute over social change” (Mead, 2000, p. 136) – each educational activity is a form of realization of one of the possible models of education, desired or unwanted due to the political entanglements of the educational system. It is the political and social formation that largely determines which of these two basic paradigms of education determines

the nature of systemic impacts in institutions: whether education is understood as “intentional impact on personality”, shaping the pupil and adapting him to “fulfil specific social roles” – as is the case on the basis of theories derived from the assumptions of behaviourism; or is it understood as “liberating human activity” (Folkierska, 1990, p. 100), leading him “towards freedom”<sup>5</sup>, born from his autonomous subjective identity (Carlgren & Klingborg, 2010, pp. 310–311), as is the case in different varieties of emancipatory/alternative pedagogy.

This opposition is of fundamental importance not only for any reflection on education, but also for the meaning of human life in general. Treating education as a planned and systematic implementation of “relatively permanent personality changes” (Konarzewski, 1982, pp. 5–7) is an “expression of the apotheosis of action”, putting reason before the search for truth. As a rule, we are then dealing with “doctrines-theories, assuming the so-called scientific worldview” (Szołtysek, 1986, p. 108), where the attribute “scientific” is in fact semantically empty and is intended to legitimize the scientific validity of educational technologies<sup>6</sup> constructed on their basis. Science is not a tool for justifying the validity of claims of such hypotheses, theories or doctrines to be true, doctrines that are merely a pragmatic set of psychosocial beliefs about the world (Szołtysek, 1986), but is concerned with revealing the truth about the world discovered and described by the cognitive subject. There is a “theoretical epistemological disconnect” between science and worldview, which is always “created by the social nature of man on the basis of specific reasons and captured in an orderly sequence of values” (Szołtysek, 1986, p. 109). Every properly constructed scientific theory must refer to scientific knowledge in order to formulate, on its basis, means and methods of action “leading to the disclosure

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<sup>5</sup> Freedom belongs to the class of concepts most commonly used, but also the most blurred in terms of their semantic content in language in general, and in philosophy, sociology, and pedagogy in particular. In the social space, the problem with its denotation consists primarily in precisely “defining the class of acts that lie outside the application of law in the proper sense, i.e. those that someone can perform.” The meaning of this aporia was captured by Georg Christoph Lichtenberg, who formulated the essence of freedom *à rebours* in his aphoristic *Brulions*: “What most clearly characterizes true freedom and the true possibility of using it is its abuse” (Lichtenberg, 2005, p. 275).

<sup>6</sup> Many works from the PRL period, however, were burdened with the ideological flaw of the orthodox neo-modernist concept of society and man, fitting into the “broadly understood paradigm of instrumental pedagogy” (Hejnicka-Bezwińska, 1990, p. 158), “courtly” pedagogy (Kwieciński, 1982), “designing comprehensive systems of enlightenment” (Hejnicka-Bezwińska, 1995, p. 33), without real development of analytical and systemic consequences and often remaining at the level of functional models, postulating the totality of the impact of educational indoctrination of the socialist society. An example here is the concept of the theory of education by Heliodor Muszyński, devoid of the dimension of axiological and teleological reflection, having the character of a pragmatic, mechanistic system technology with elements of simplified cybernetics. Muszyński claimed that “upbringing is a purposeful and intended influence on the human psyche, especially on individuals growing up socially” (Muszyński, 1976, p. 25). More on the criticism of “technology of upbringing” (see Gładzewski, 1996, pp. 36–37).

of the good – the social or state or theistic goal” (Szołtysek, 1986, p. 112). Aristotle already wrote that the cognitive sphere (logos) should precede the action sphere (ethos): one must first know in order to know how to act<sup>7</sup>.

Ethos is a natural consequence of logos. Any pedagogical theories-doctrines that attempt to reverse this sequence “programmatically cause incalculable consequences in the process of education” (Szołtysek, 1986). In fact, they are a faithful reflection of the perverse formula that Mephistopheles utters in Johann Wolfgang Goethe’s *Faust*, travestyng the biblical (but in fact of Heraclitean origin) formula that opens the Gospel according to St. John: instead of “In the beginning was the word” – a reverse expression is spoken: “In the beginning was the deed” (Goethe, 1967)<sup>8</sup>.

Education that based on such a Mephistophelean formula comes down to the logic of appearances, to “giving ignorance the appearance of scientific knowledge” – i.e. to formulating a so-called scientific worldview, ideology – not knowledge. Theories of education are only doctrines of education, because their basis is reality not as it objectively is, but as it should be in the opinion of the authors of these theories. Hence the persistent proclamation of the need to shape, mold and form the pupil so that he or she adapts to the postulated social order<sup>9</sup>.

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<sup>7</sup> “There are three factors that influence citizens to become good and virtuous: nature, habit, and reason. First of all, one must be born a human being, and not some other living being with the appropriate properties of body and soul. As for certain characteristics, birth does not determine anything, because habit causes them to change. Namely, there are certain natural properties that are subject to change through habit, both in one direction and in the other: for the worse and for the better. Other beings live mostly according to their nature, some are shaped in minor details by habit, but only man is shaped by reason, because he alone possesses reason. Therefore, all three of these factors must be harmonized in him” (Aristotle, 2001, pp. 203–204). Aristotle therefore points to three developmental factors: physis (biological organism), ethos (custom, habit) and logos (reason, mind) of “a human being who can act against human habits and their nature if he comes to the conclusion that it is better otherwise” (Kunowski, 1993, p. 186).

<sup>8</sup> “Here I will open the original text and, full of worthy fervour, the most sacred content of the original. I will translate it into my dear native language [opens the volume and begins]. It is written: ‘In the beginning was the word’. What shall I do? I see the difficulty already ready. After all, no one can value the word so highly; so I will translate it differently, if I can rise to the sphere of spirit. It is written: ‘In the beginning was the content’. [...] Did the content work and create everything? It should be: ‘In the beginning was the power’. But even now my pen shudders; until suddenly I feel that the spirit is helping me. I have a solution without flaws and without faults. And I write already: ‘In the beginning was the deed’” (Goethe, 1967, pp. 74–75). In Polish pedagogy, Florian Znaniecki wrote: “To exist means to act everywhere” (Znaniecki, 1987, quoted in: Szacki, 1986, p. 200). The individual’s ingrowth into the existing society was of primary importance to him. Only after full adaptation could people “appointed as guides of others” (Znaniecki, 1964, p. 129) make changes. “Man, by his nature, ‘must submit to the order that has already been created before us and that we find around us; we cease to exist as spirit, as consciousness, as body, if we deny the reality transmitted to us’” (Znaniecki, 1987, p. 199).

<sup>9</sup> See, for example, Stanisław Kowalski’s concept of education as “growing up to the tasks resulting from the perspective of the development of a given society” (Kowalski, 1979, p. 15). The basic function of education is to “prepare the growing generations for active and creative participation

The fundamental point of dispute between post-behavioural and emancipatory-humanistic theories is therefore the status of change, the method and purpose of its educational creation in the sequence of logos and ethos:

The only question that remains controversial is whether to manage, manipulate, steer, etc. this subject, which is essentially an object, or not to hinder, to cramp him in developing its inherent possibilities of authentic and spontaneous experience, growth, development and self-realization (Folkierska, 1990, p. 101)<sup>10</sup>.

This element of freedom in education and becoming of a human being constituted at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries the power of criticism of representatives of New Education, directed against the formalism of Herbartian pedagogy<sup>11</sup>, and still marks the field of confrontation between positivist-Enlightenment and “romantic” trends of pedagogy. Human development determined by the logos-ethos sequence – “becoming, understood as the effort of existence, the effort of being” (Folkierska, 1990) – was already included in the interwar period in the concept of Sergiusz Hessen, who wrote directly about “the effort to develop a personality” (1973) or later works in the field of philosophical anthropology by Bogdan Suchodolski (1985)<sup>12</sup>. Education in such humanistic or “romantic” concepts of man consists in creating conditions for the pupil to acquire such

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in the dynamics of socio-cultural progress” (Kowalski, 1979, p. 16). According to Kowalski, “natural” education in the family should be subject to the overwhelming influence of institutional, purposeful education, organized by and for society (cf. Gładzowski, 1996, p. 35).

<sup>10</sup> Zbigniew Kwieciński asks: “Can school do anything to reconstruct the principle that organizes the system? Let’s take into account that I do not dream of a quick change, nor one that is implemented by violent methods. The crisis gives us a particularly long perspective for the realization of greater hopes. Therefore, we need to prepare new generations for a deliberate, gradual change, teaching and training them in cooperation, in techniques of conducting an open discourse, mutual honesty, persistent training in critical and alternative thinking, in choosing the right utopias and the ability to postpone gratification due to its realization” (Kwieciński, 2011, p. 163).

<sup>11</sup> “To calmly and patiently observe how nature manages, and to see only that the conditions surrounding nature’s work support it – that is education” (Key, 2005, p. 65). And then he adds: “To raise a child means to hold its soul in your arms, to guide its steps along a narrow path. It means never exposing yourself to the danger of seeing in the child’s eyes the coldness that silently tells us that we are not enough for it and considers us inconsistent; it means to humbly acknowledge that the opportunity to harm the child often comes, and to help it rarely. [...] The slightest distrust, the slightest indelicacy, the smallest injustice, the fleeting mockery leave burning marks on the tender soul of a child, while unexpected gentleness, just anger, also make a deep impression on the memory and on the senses, which we call soft as wax, but treat like oxhide!” (Key, 2005, pp. 68–69).

<sup>12</sup> In particular, the chapter *In the beginning there was an act*: Suchodolski argues in it that for a human being “a characteristic feature is an ‘excess’ of drive forces. [...] A human being has energy beyond the level of what is necessary for life, [...] is a being who is never satisfied, constantly desiring and constantly searching. Gehlen believes that a particularly important feature of a human being is precisely that its drives, which are not specialized in limited, rigidly defined directions, must be ‘ready’ for various circumstances, and therefore ‘chronically’ alive, and not only periodically active, and at the same time they must be restrained in specific situations and moments. This structural drive excess, maintained in human development through a long, playful childhood, is therefore

knowledge and experience, so that in his development he will achieve a subjective identity acquired in the effort of being of a conscious being (*Dasein*) in the world. This effort is the creation of self-knowledge achieved in returning to oneself from what is other, that is, in the theoretical-practical assimilation of what is ‘alien’, incomprehensible, obscure. This assimilation is the dialectic of obedience and disobedience, a dialectic that is the very ‘essence’ of the educational experience. The effort of being is a striving towards truth, it is the experience of truth ever anew present in the negativity of the experience itself (Folkierska, 1990, p. 110)<sup>13</sup>.

This effort towards change should not be degraded by pragmatic-ideological pedagogical procedures aimed at shaping the individual through indoctrination in the form of judgments and opinions about the social reality postulated by him<sup>14</sup>, but promoted in the context of the empirical, praxeological and hermeneutic dimension of pedagogy – as a science and as an art of leading a person to a valuable, and therefore meaningful life (cf. Gnitecki 1989a; 1989b; 1989c).

The promotion of the reconstructive function of education (developmental change) is always probabilistic, however, because it is mediated each time in the unique “order of life” of a person: he is at the same time the source and the goal of creating himself – transgression, surpassing himself – in order to remain the same person in this constant change; because after all, “a person does not need to be someone else in order to be himself, but what he is and will keep on being is not enough for him either. [...] A person is someone because he becomes himself” (Łukaszewicz, 1990, p. 286) – i.e. the more he changes, the more he remains the identical (but not the same) – constantly becoming someone – himself.

A very special place of this dispute about education as enculturation is the school as a social educational institution. In reality, it constitutes a specific “field of tension”, it is the resultant of a multitude of various forces, influences and interests, therefore its structure and function are a kind of conglomeration

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a specific equivalent of that basic feature which [...] makes a human being a creature in many ways open to the world, placing him in difficult, variable situations, not at all coupled with his ways of reacting” (Key, 2005, pp. 203–204).

<sup>13</sup> Identity can be defined here as “a set of ideas, feelings, judgments, memories and projections of the subject, which he relates to himself. This concept includes such components as: the self-awareness of the individual, the awareness of continuing and remaining oneself in changing life conditions, the awareness of the subject’s participation in social groups, the self-concept, the ability to make interpersonal and group comparisons” (Kamiński, 1996, p. 77).

<sup>14</sup> Zbigniew Kwieciński points out here the new nature of the class face of society: “Four hypotheses for the emergence of new stratification and new elites: political capital, human capital; sectoral mobility, entrepreneurship. [...] Four proposals (what to replace social classes with): 1) culturalism (lifestyles and consumption, aesthetic choices, use of information, intellectual achievements, recognized values); 2) fragmentation (similar to class, but dynamic and global); 3) atomization (selections based on level of education, marriage and income patterns, self-identification); 4) change of meaning – resignification based on subjective choices and interests” (Kwieciński, 2012, p. 382).

of “diversity of pedagogical practices” (Berg, 1983, p. 108) and non-pedagogical factors of pluralistic authorship. *A priori*, hopes are placed in it for the realization of multiple cultural functions:

After all, it is the school – next to the family – that is the main agency of socialization, through which it ensures the continuity of values, cultural norms, and thus the continuity of society. It is the school that prepares (or at least should prepare) for necessary social changes, for innovations at critical moments (Sawisz, 1989, p. 5).

However, in the light of research on Polish schools, these assumed functions appear to be more than questionable. Zbigniew Kwieciński classified them as “endogenous illusions as to the essence of education” (1987, p. 88). He showed that the school has minimal influence on upbringing, and there is such a large gap between the content it conveys and the socio-cultural reality that “only after leaving school does identity reintegration occur, without taking into account the knowledge and experiences acquired at school” (Kwieciński, 1987, p. 91). In these conclusions, the school appears definitely as an “inhibitor of change” (Kwieciński, 1988, p. 9), not its promoter.

Long-term school attendance based on compulsory schooling has, in fact, a “myth-making character” (Kwieciński, 1990, p. 238). Namely, parents and students are made to believe that school imparts the necessary knowledge and introduces them to the achievements of national and educational culture, that it:

supports the development of individuality, an individual personality, that it is a usefully organized time of childhood and early youth, that it properly introduces them to social and civic life, teaches democracy, constant choice, criticism, self-definition. This belief is not only not supported by the actual functions of school, but is all the stronger the less success it has achieved in its development for children and youth (Kwieciński, 1990, p. 239).

School, on the other hand, while declaring its function as a medium of cultural transmission, in reality performs a “diaphragmatic, screening function, interrupting generational memory” through “the historicism of its content and the long-term separation of children and youth from the problems of current social life” (Kwieciński, 1990, p. 240).

Kwieciński sees the chance for authentic and valuable educational agency of the school institution in education understood as a “meeting of peers and youth with adults”, at the same time postulating the abandonment of “facade educational efforts” in favour of implementing the school function “as a moratorium in the development of identity, where youth ‘try on’ and ‘play’ various trial roles and different versions of themselves” (Kwieciński, 1987, p. 89).

### 3. Simulacrum as a heuristic tool for the analysis of education

The above, so very illusory image of the institution of school in the social consciousness as a place of socio-centric cultural transmission, in the traditional understanding of Herbart's pedagogy, is very different from reality. One could even attempt to explain it using the application of the category of simulacrum. After all, does not school as a concept, sign, emblem in its social reception conceal the fact that education as such does not function in the sense of belonging to the ontological order, but exists only as a simulation of reality – an appearance, an illusion – precisely a simulacrum?

A simulacrum or symulacrum (Latin *similarity, façade*) is an image, appearance (fr. *l'apparence*) or a signboard constituting a pure simulation, pretending to be reality without being in any actual relation to it, or even creating its own reality. The word is derived from the ancient Greek word *eidōlon* (εἶδωλον) – 'spectre, image, picture of a god', which in Latin took the form *idolum*, which is translated as 'pretend, appearance, illusion' and contrasted with the word *icona* (Greek *eikōn, eikōn*), meaning 'copy'. However, while copy refers semantically to the concept of imitation of reality, without its dissimulation, i.e. concealing or hiding, *eidōlon* breaks away from it in the form of Greek *eidōs* or *idea* (ιδέα), translated as 'form, shape, exterior, outline'. The word *eidōlon* appears in the works of Plato (*Sophist*) (Plato, 1956), but also in pre-Socratic philosophy of nature (in Democritus – particles, "likenesses" sent by objects and evoking sensory impressions) and among the Epicureans.

A simulacrum (*ibidem*) can also be an object representing a supernatural or fantastic figure, made for magical purposes, religious rituals, scientific and didactic needs (*artefact*) or folk (doll). Sometimes idols are equipped with features that legitimize their validity, e.g. mechanisms that move them or realistic animistic attributes.

The simulacrum as a philosophical term was reintroduced into contemporary scientific discourse by Jean Baudrillard in the form of an original concept of the evolution of signs, the so-called simulation theory, in his programmatic work *Simulacra and Simulation* (Baudrillard, 2005): with the development of semiotic (sign) systems, the boundary between the real world and the forms of its representations slowly but inevitably abolishes, disappears, which results in the increasing independence of the sign. Baudrillard called the stages of this emancipatory process simulacra. In its course, the referential function of the sign is

lost – “the simulacrum no longer conceals reality, it conceals that reality does not exist. This simulacrum is true”<sup>15</sup>.

The epigenesis of the simulacrum, together with the process of simulating reality, has been mediated to the ontologically ambiguous status of signs undergoing the process of becoming independent – on the one hand, signs do not physically exist in time or space, on the other hand, they do not function as abstract elements of some superior semantic system. However, they simulate their real existence, analogously to a patient who simulates an illness, i.e. they evoke authentic symptoms belonging to real phenomena, they enter into real interaction with the surrounding world<sup>16</sup>. Their apparent existence leads to the creation of simulacra of double reality (Łotman, 2008, pp. 57–58), and consequently to the impossibility of separating phenomena of the ontological order from the sign order. Baudrillard called this state of simulating “simulation hyperreality”<sup>17</sup>.

The formulation of the concept of simulacrum as a philosophical category by Baudrillard in the 1980s became an important inspiration for the development of the entire trend of late postmodernist reflection in the philosophy of culture and sociology, taking the form of a practical methodological tool for the analysis of mass culture phenomena. However, the multitude of contexts and reference points generated by this concept and the rather hermetic language of postmodernist discourse make it quite difficult to effectively define the semantic scope in which it could be applied. Baudrillard himself used the category of simulacrum to analyze phenomena such as the existence of the image of God and its cultural

<sup>15</sup> “Le simulacre n'est jamais ce qui cache la vérité – c'est la vérité qui cache qu'il n'y en a pas. Le simulacre est vrai” (Baudrillard, 1981, p. 9).

<sup>16</sup> “To dissimulate – to hide or conceal – means to pretend not to have what one has. To simulate means to pretend to have what one does not have. The former refers to presence, the latter to absence. But the matter is more complicated, because to simulate does not mean to pretend: ‘He who feigns an illness can simply go to bed and convince others that he is ill. He who simulates an illness produces in himself some of its symptoms’ (Littré). Pretending and concealing thus leave the principle of reality intact: the difference is always clear, it only remains concealed” (Baudrillard, 2005, p. 8).

<sup>17</sup> “What does it mean that there is no more reality? Namely, that it is no longer possible to reach its unmediated level, to what is absolutely real. However, if something has really disappeared, it is the difference between what is real and what is imagined. Instead, by eliminating the traditional division that is the foundation of the philosophy of representation, hyperreality grows: a reality more real than reality itself, as in the case of simulated space flights or computer simulations of the natural environment. Do we therefore live in a world of illusion, as all post-Kantians (or rather post-Schopenhauerians) supposed, for whom the world was equal only to the imagined, presented world? Of course not, because illusion exists only insofar as the real world exists. The moment this becomes impossible (to grasp), illusion also becomes impossible. [...] Reality does not disappear in favour of imagination, but in favour of what is more real than reality: hyperreality” (Markowski, 2001, pp. 178–179).

reception<sup>18</sup>, the emergence and functions of the institution of Disneyland<sup>19</sup>, the social role of photography, as well as various aspects of pop culture: mass media, film, science fiction, advertising, the institution of the hypermarket. Baudrillard distinguishes three orders of simulacra:

- a) natural, naturalistic simulacra, based on image, imitation and counterfeiting, harmonious, optimistic and aiming to restore, recreate or establish in an ideal way nature on the model of God;
- b) productive, productivist simulacra, based on energy, force, materialized by means of a machine in the entire production system – their Promethean goal is globalization and constant expansion, the release of infinite energy (the desire for energy is part of the utopia associated with this order of simulacra);
- c) simulacra of simulation, based on information, model, cybernetic game – complete operationalization, hyperreality, their goal is to obtain complete control (Baudrillard, 2005, p. 149).

The first of these orders corresponds to the imagination of utopia, the second to the literary constructions of science fiction, while the third is

just beginning to emerge [...] when the distance, including the distance separating reality from the imagination, begins to disappear, is absorbed, and in its place appears the model. [...] Models no longer constitute transcendence or projection, they are not an imagination in relation to reality, they themselves constitute an anticipation of reality, and therefore leave no room for any kind of imaginary transcendence. The field is opened for simulation in the cybernetic sense, that is, for the multidirectional manipulation of these models (scenarios, staging of simulated situations, etc.), but then ‘nothing distinguishes this operation of control from the operation of reality itself: there is no longer fiction’ (Baudrillard, 2005, pp. 149–150).

In a paradoxical way, reality has thus become a true utopia – “a utopia, however, which no longer belongs to the order of possibility, of which we can only

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<sup>18</sup> “The fury with which they [the iconoclasts – M.G.] wanted to destroy images stemmed precisely from their intuition of the omnipotence of simulacra, their ability to erase God from human consciousness, and the fatal and annihilating truth that can be guessed: in reality, God never existed, there are only simulacra, and God himself was only his own simulacrum” (Baudrillard, 2005, p. 10).

<sup>19</sup> “Disneyland exists to conceal the fact that the ‘real’ country, the whole of ‘real’ America, is Disneyland (a bit like prisons, which exist to conceal the fact that the whole of society in its banal omnipresence is carceral in nature). Disneyland presents itself as an imaginary space to convince us that the rest is real, when in fact the whole of Los Angeles and the America surrounding it are no longer real, but belong to the order of hyperreality and simulation” (Baudrillard, 2005, p. 19).

dream as a lost object” (Baudrillard, 2005, p. 150)<sup>20</sup>. It seems that education has become such a utopia, a simulacrum belonging to the third order, as a sign generating a simulation of reality, more real than reality itself (e.g. diplomas as emblems of knowledge are more real than knowledge itself).

#### 4. Education as a simulacrum of a hypermarket

In December 2013, the American website *The Atlantic* published a report on the state of higher education in the USA (Pratt, 2013). It gave it a telling title: “Creating the Walmarts of Higher Education”. *Walmart* (Wal-Mart Stores, Inc.) is an American hypermarket chain founded in 1962 by Sam Walton, the world’s largest retailer (2010)<sup>21</sup>, known for its lowest prices (the rule is a profit of one cent on each product offered), low quality goods, identical procedures for organizing trade, and huge sales volume.

The author of the report compares American higher education institutions – colleges and universities – to these gigantic hypermarkets focused solely on goods turnover and profit. He provides alarming examples of this mechanistic-reductionist syndrome of the mercantilization of education: universities in South Dakota, Nebraska and other US states are radically reducing the number of subjects (courses) that students must pass. In Florida, online courses are to gradually replace traditional forms of university education. In California, legal solutions are being introduced that allow this type of online education to be subsidized at state universities as well. The University of North Carolina is getting rid of history, political science and many other “low-productivity” educational courses from its programs, and the chancellors of universities in Florida, North Carolina and Wisconsin are questioning whether taxpayers should really pay for teaching at state universities teaching humanities.

There is pressure to “educate” as many students as possible in the shortest possible time and at the lowest possible cost, while linking the skills of graduates directly to the needs of the labour market. This means reducing the number of required credits, emphasizing practice at the expense of theory, removing some

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<sup>20</sup> More on utopia and its derivatives – atopia, heterotopia and dystopia: see Gładzowski, 2010.

<sup>21</sup> According to an unofficial classification, Wal-Mart would be placed 33rd among national economies, between Ukraine and Colombia. The chain’s slogans are: “Wal-Mart. Always Low Prices. Always” and “Save Money. Live Better”. The company is the largest private employer in the US, Mexico and Canada – it employs 1.8 million people in the US, but it is criticized for the exploitation of workers – lowering wages, banning the formation of trade unions and limiting health insurance. A characteristic feature of the Wal-Mart chain is very low prices of products, which causes the poorest groups of the population to buy there. From: Wikipedia, available at: <http://pl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Walmart> (accessed: 12.12.2023).

courses from the curriculum and moving them to the online sphere. Critics are sounding the alarm: such practices devalue university education, lowering its level. Under the auspices of the Campaign for the Future of Higher Education, they warn against rushing too quickly to increase the efficiency of education at the expense of its quality, arguing that there is no scientific evidence of the real educational value of mass online courses, even if a growing number of students are taking them. (A study conducted by the University of Pennsylvania showed that only four percent of students enrolled in such courses graduate with a credit): “We are creating the Walmarts of higher education – convenient, cheap, and low quality” (Pratt, 2013).

The concept of the “McDonaldization” of education, introduced to social discourse in 1983 by sociologist George Ritzer (2003) to describe the trend of dehumanization in favour of the affirmation of efficiency and control, is experiencing a renaissance. The effects of the pressure for “university efficiency” result from politicians’ frustration with statistics – only 56.1 percent of students graduate within six years. However, “the idea that the system is working properly and that we should be letting students through even faster is wrong” (Pratt, 2013).

Americans are looking for solutions, knowing that there is no single, radical way to change: creating so-called learning communities, in which groups of students will participate in subject courses together, can increase their motivation and reduce the number of students who drop out of college; improving the quality of interactions with the teaching staff (“Anything that creates distance in the teacher-student relationship harms the student”), learning in the form of experimental classes outside the university walls.

Such a diagnosis of education corresponds well with Baudrillard’s hypermarket simulacrum:

A hypermarket resembles a large assembly factory, almost to the extent that subjects (or objects), mobile and decentred, instead of being bound by the chain of work by some rational and constant compulsion, give the impression of moving from one link in the chain to another along completely random trajectories. The order, selection, purchase are also governed by chance, unlike the activity of work. Nevertheless, we are dealing here with a chain, a programmed discipline whose prohibitions have been blurred by the slippery slope of tolerance, accessibility and hyperreality (Baudrillard, 2005, pp. 96–97).

Tolerance, accessibility and hyperreality are also increasingly attributes of our school as an educational institution:

when a function becomes hyper-specialized to the point where it can be designed from start to finish on site, “turnkey”, it loses its proper purpose and becomes something completely different: a multifunctional set of “black boxes” with multiple inputs and outputs [...]. These factories and universities are no longer factories or universities, and supermarkets have nothing from the market (Baudrillard, 2005, p. 98).

The category of Baudrillard’s simulacrum introduced in the above critical discourse may be one of many tools of hermeneutic analysis of such a polymorphic and polysemantic social phenomenon as education<sup>22</sup>. This contribution does not claim to be a complete diagnosis or infallible in interpretation. Even the metaphor of a hypermarket is not original – it remains in the sociological trend of analyses, well represented by Georg Ritzer in his thesis on the McDonaldization of society or – in Poland – e.g. in-depth critical analyses of educational phenomena by Zbigniew Kwiecieński, Lech Witkowski, Bogdan Śliwerski or Teresa Hejnicka-Bezwińska.

This essay is only a kind of attempt to name an internal anxiety: is it possible that Polish education, steadfastly following the example of pragmatic American standardization and the principle of efficiency, introducing cybernetic assumptions of unitary education according to the Bologna system, is not following this path – towards the simulacrum of hyperreality of a supermarket?

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<sup>22</sup> Postmodernists use the term bricolage in this context (from the French bricoleur – ‘to do meaningless work that brings little profit, to tinker, to tinker with something’) to convey the meaning of such a construction of discourse narrative: ‘Derrida and deconstructionists are well aware that each such term [e.g. idealism, Cartesianism, metaphysics of presence – M.G.], despite its immanent semantic claims, implying the possibility of universalization, ‘strengthening’ each of them, has its application in its proper conceptual and discursive context – it would be better to operate with them (bricolage) than to build theories from them’. See: Hartman, 1997, p. 216.

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