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"Granice i transgresje współczesnego wychowania. Kontestacyjny wymiar pedagogiki krytycznej i jej praktyczne implikacje", Klaudia Węc, Toruń 2013 : [recenzja]

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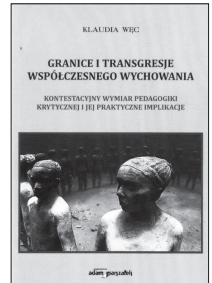
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Klaudia Węc,
**Granice i transgresje współczesnego wychowania.
Kontestacyjny wymiar pedagogiki krytycznej
i jej praktyczne implikacje**

[*Borders and Transgressions in Contemporary Education:
Contestatory Dimension of Critical Pedagogy
and Its Practical Implications*],

Toruń: Adam Marszałek, 2013, 393 pages, ISBN: 978-83-7780-797-2



Klaudia Węc's book, *Borders and Transgressions in Contemporary Education: Contestatory Dimension of Critical Pedagogy and Its Practical Implications* [published in Polish] is a result of her years of research and raises important questions about the sources of inspiration for contemporary pedagogy. She looks for these inspirations primarily in psychoanalysis of a Freudian and Lacanian provenance. From the hermeneutic perspective, her questions about the limits and limitedness of human thinking are particularly valuable. Understanding is not a question of methodology, aimed at establishing clear and universally valid cognitive criteria, but an event (*Verstehen* as *Ereignis*). Since the object of experience always proclaims its otherness over and against the experiencing consciousness, the event of understanding is a never-ending task. Asserting the essential incompleteness of any understanding, not because we lack sufficient scientific tools and experience, but because we are historical, final, and lingual beings, understanding is not so much about the understanding of something (*Verstehen von etwas*), but a way of understanding of the human being (*Grundvollzug des Daseins*), which opens us up toward what is possible/for the possible. (Heidegger's primacy of possibility over actuality:

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“higher than actuality stands possibility”). Opening up toward what is possible is always a discovery of the self and experiencing oneself (in the sense of getting trained) in one’s being in the world (*in-der-Welt-Sein*), which is always a mode of being with the other (*Mit-Sein*). In fact, the greatness of a human being is the recognition of the limits and limitedness of and in relationships with others. The task is not to overcome these limits or eliminate them in order to achieve a comfortable unity and, simple resolution but to become aware of their presence and the importance of the necessity of crossing and thus enlarging our individual intellectual and existential horizons.

The crossing/breaking of conventions, social roles and boundaries of personality in educational contexts is central for Klaudia Węc’s pedagogical endeavor. She poses questions about the boundaries/confines of cognition in the humanities. She demonstrates the ambiguity/nonobviousness/insufficiency of the scientifically established positions as well as the fragmentary and provisional character of any attempts to describe the world in which we live and which always distinctly eludes any scientific formalization. Klaudia Węc’s book is conceived in the form of a collage in order to allow the diverse and unexpected references for highlighting the role of transgression in education. The collage technique seems to be particularly suitable for emphasizing that the hermeneutic discourse in the relationship to the educational theory and practice becomes the fundamental mode of life, which questions one’s own life (Augustine’s *in cuius oculis mihi quaestio factus sum, et ipse est languor meus*—In your eyes [God] I have become a problem to myself, and that is my sickness).

This collage work consists of three parts which Klaudia Węc fittingly calls scenes. Although the scenery does not change, something essential is happening in every part. Those parts illuminate the phenomenon of education in the context of psychoanalytic discourse, addressing the issues of borderline and transgressive behaviors. It is a special—and certainly not linear—kind of complementarity. What it concentrates on is rather a dialectic understanding of truth (*ἀλήθεια*) in the tension between the revealing (*Entbergung*) and concealing (*Verbergung*). The first part, “Borders/Limits and Transgressions in the Humanist Tradition” focuses on the phenomenon of border/limit as a basis for the transgressive character of the humanities. Part II, “Psychoanalytical Transgression/Transgressiveness In

the Horizon of the Limits of Educational Practice: The Contestative Perspective” develops an understanding of a psychoanalytical experience and its place in the pedagogical discursive and practical perspective. Part III, “Pedagogical Project of Changing of the Strategy of Education: Risk As A Condition of Personal Development” is a proposal of a psychoanalytical reevaluation of the educational process. Accepting risk as an eminent condition of personal development is for me a particularly important notion (I formulate it similarly in my “Hermeneutic Education to Understanding: Self-Education and the Willingness to Risk Failure”).

The diversity of views addresses by Klaudia Węc (Freud, Lacan, Klein, Adorno, Heidegger, Habermas, Foucault, Kristeva) is not only a demonstration of her erudition nor is it a methodical trick in order to lead the reader into ambiguity. It is rather a form of discourse, which I call the internal logic of the argument. This methodologically indefinable logic of discourse often obliges us to search for an understanding *per viam longam* (Ricoeur), and not to succumb to the temptations of short cuts. I would like to believe that Klaudia Węc allowed herself to be seduced by the internal logic of the discourse, and with radical responsibility patiently attempted to uncover what wanted to be disclosed, unveiling for us, and maybe even more importantly for herself, the dimensions of education which can be easily obscured by petrified formulas on the one hand, and by sheer entertainment of the variety and diversity of cultural trends on the other.

The constructive and creative understanding of the role of the parents in the educational process is an important element of the study. Klaudia Węc captures the role of the father, mainly in the formation of the mechanisms of the superego (Freud), discreetly pointing to the role of the reciprocal relationship of parents to each other in the formation of child’s personality and his/her integral psychological and social development. She manages to avoid both a biased overemphasis and extreme neglect of the discourse on the symbolic function of the father.

Klaudia Węc presents the Lacanian interpretation of the Oedipus myth with considerable sensitivity. This interpretation, due to its provisional and multidimensional, character does not allow for a simplistic understanding of the father figure, and situates it fittingly in the symbolic and imaginary horizon. The discourse on multidimensional

mensional determinants of child's development and the relationality of this process is very aptly inscribed in the context of education within the family. This applies to all relationships to oneself, to our loved ones, and the society. The complementarity of those relations is a condition *sine qua non* for the development of the individual, which calls for the transgression of the experience of education, as well as those which it concerns.

Besides the book, *Borders and Transgressions in Contemporary Education: Contestatory Dimension of Critical Pedagogy and Its Practical Implications*, Klaudia Węc also published an important study on the role of psychoanalysis in the theory and practice of teaching, *Psychoanaliza w dyskursie pedagogicznym, Radykalność humanistyczna teorii i praktyki pedagogicznej. Konteksty nie tylko Lacanowskie* [*Psychoanalysis in Educational Discourse: Radicality of Humanistic Theory and Practice of Teaching: Not Only Lacanian Contexts*] (2007). It is worth noting that theory and practice are not understood in an ordinary sense here but in the Aristotelian. Aristotle distinguishes between *techné*, craft or art, an activity, which is concrete, variable, and context-dependent, and *phronesis*, practical wisdom, knowledge that commands practice. The task of pedagogy is not simply to translate psychoanalytical theory to alternative educational methods, but to understand the psychoanalytical competence creatively in complex educational processes. This is the hermeneutic sense of application.

The value of the academic accomplishments of Klaudia Węc goes beyond her contribution to the study of the history of the reception of psychoanalysis in Poland and the possibilities of its application to the theory of education. Appreciating her contributions in the field of critical reception of psychoanalysis in education, I would like to emphasize her original approach to psychoanalysis from the perspective of the pedagogy of culture as an inspiration for critical pedagogy. I consider her understanding of education as a consistent development of the notion of education and its importance for elaborating on the question of subjectivity and the personal development of a human being, who, as the source and the subject of action is always "someone" in the world. Because of this personalistic understanding of the subject of action, Klaudia Węc manages to avoid the pitfalls of the persuasiveness of the pedagogical discourse and develops an orig-

inal voice in the debate on education. She calls for a psychoanalytical project of education, which is not and cannot be merely a change or shift of existing educational strategies. Therefore, her proposal is in line with the domain of pedagogy, which is in search of a new self-understanding. Pedagogy in its very essence is and must always be open-minded, experimenting with different approaches, constantly facing what is difficult, misunderstood, uncomfortable, or even unattainable, and often confronts us with educational helplessness. But it is this constant conscientious balancing on the edge of vulnerability that does not allow us to be content with any easy systemic solutions or to become discouraged by educational failures measured with the established categories of success.

Klaudia Węc proposes an interdisciplinary pedagogy, ready not only for a critical debate with other humanities and social sciences, but above all—an open pedagogy. Here, the most important experience is an openness to new experience (Gadamer), for what is unknown, unexpected, and surprising. It is precisely this pedagogical unconditional hospitality (*hermeneutische Gastfreundschaft*), which calls for a radical openness to new experience. Consequently, an experienced researcher and experienced teacher are not those who have accumulated the greatest amount of educational experience, but the ones who are open to new experiences, remaining at the same time sensitive to the dialogue with tradition (*wirkungsgeschichtliches Bewusstsein*). Open pedagogy exceeds all boundaries by its very nature: It is not only a transgression (*transgressio*: *trans*-through, over and *gradi*, past participle of *grassus*, to walk, to go) in the sense of crossing the borders/limits of problem areas and research methods, but it is an excess (*ex-cedere*) of cognition. It is thinking about what calls for understanding and, as such, remains faithful to the specific interpretive situation and not to a formally established methodology. In this respect, pedagogy is the art of thinking about education which is able to be engaged in a conversation about a human being who is at the center of pedagogical reflection. The deeper reflection on the human person—and not predominantly on the technical aspects of educational processes and structures, despite their importance—the more pedagogy becomes a practical discipline, because it inspires peoples to live their life to the fullest and understand the world as lifeworld, their living environment (*Lebenswelt*).

Klaudia Węc does not promote an understanding of education as a transgressive experiment as a sheer play/entertainment of diversity. She actually holds dispute about a human being, who is the subject of any concern for education. It is about such an understanding of a person, which emphasizes what is irreducible, distinctive, and particular in a human being, and what makes one not just this particular being (*haecceitas*, individualizing moment), but the unique person incommunicable in the deepest sense of personal mediation (*persona est intellectualis naturae incommunicabilis existentia*, Richard of St. Victor).

Thinking about education is a challenging and difficult task. The phenomenon itself defies formal depiction, and, at the same time calls for thematization and elucidation. The desire to understand what happens to us and in us when we learn (Gadamer) reveals the need for an interdisciplinary reflection on education. It opens up a path to productive dialogue with thinkers from different schools, disciplines, linguistic and cultural milieus.

The diversity of perspectives of understanding of the phenomenon of education as a comprehensive human development requires a clear focus on the person as *l'homme capable: l'homme agissant et souffrant* (Ricoeur). Klaudia Węc definitely appreciates cultural function of education without offering an easy alternative to a problematic understanding of education in the dominant theories and pedagogical practices. However, her achievements allow us to believe that the reflection on education in the spirit of a personal and social responsibility can reveal to us new horizons of understanding and suggest previously unexplored ways of approaching a human person as a primary subject of education. Experiencing constant tension in the discourse on subjectivity in pedagogy, we can treat this tension as a threat but also as an opportunity for pedagogy, and repeat with Hölderlin that “where there is danger, the saving power grows too”. (*Wo aber Gefahr ist, da wächst das Rettende auch*) Deconstructing false hopes in education can reveal the world to us. This world can be very different from that which we are used to, but this world is indeed our homeland.

Klaudia Węc effectively shows that knowledge of the methodology applicable/proper to presented interdisciplinary issues is a requirement of solid academic work. At the same time she effectively

warns against simplistically and naively believing that the accuracy and effectiveness of one methodology would reveal the phenomenon of education. The variety of approaches and perspectives presented in the book lets us hope that psychoanalysis as an open project for education is not just another interesting research topic. It is rather a challenge for pedagogy, if it truly wants to serve human beings in their development. This is why Klaudia Węc suggests a role of a Lacanian *sinthome* (*sinthome*) for pedagogy as a practice of education, which is sensitive to borderline behavior and conscious of heterological transgression. It would opened up an opportunity for each person to discover the universal place where a human being would reach oneself and engage the other in creative relationships. I consider this horizon of exploring of our own individuality as the *locus pedagogicus* par excellence.

Klaudia Węc's interdisciplinary research enables the disclosure and illumination of the boundaries/limits of understanding of the phenomenon of education. Those limits cannot be covered up by the traditional/established forms of scientific discourse. Education thus becomes an issue that we have to continually face and learn to live with rather than a specific problem, calling only for an effective solution.

Klaudia Węc's book does not lack references to important educational experience. This is not a matter of illustrating individual issues in question, but of engaging reality in its concreteness. Frequently referring to experience does not simplify the problem, but it rather complicates it by pointing to the complexity of the educational process and warning against simplifications and all too hasty solutions. From a hermeneutic point of view, it is not a question of solving possible or actually existing problems, but of noticing them in their complexity and significance. As a hermeneutician, I read the works of Klaudia Węc as the continuous endeavor to engage the understanding of the phenomenon of education, which infinitely calls for interpretation. If we understand reading as a conversation, in which we are rather conducted than leading (*die Partner des Gesprächs sind weit weniger die Führenden als die Geführten*, Gadamer), then Klaudia Węc's books not only widen our horizons of understanding of human existence and its multidimensional determinants, but they transform the partners of the conversation. A hermeneutically understood task of academia is not pushing forward our own, even the most creative



way of understanding, but about creating a community of inquirers patiently searching for a conception which calls for thinking. And it is in this humble (*humilitas*) attention to the new, difficult, ambiguous, and challenging where the transformation into the community of people seeking understanding takes place. Nobody will remain what we were/we will not remain what we were. (*eine Verwandlung ins Gemeinsame hin, in der man nicht bleibt, was man war*, Gadamer).