Learning as Swimming: Imaginational School Project in Deleuzean Way

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Summary. This article interprets allegories of water and swimming to create smooth space in the future school, as had been used by Deleuze and other philosophers, who inspired Deleuze (S. Maimon, H. Bergson). These concepts are related to the things, which are straightly or metaphorically important for the educational field: repetition and creativity, deep diving and being on the surface, balancing between a broad field and local area, using different directions of movement, being relaxed and attentive. The proper space in the school is imagined as a flooding space that means a disorder, changing positions of things, which helps to deterritorialize space without stepping out from it. Four dangers: Fear, Clarity, Power and Disgust will be shortly described in the perspective of new school project. All these dangers according to Deleuzean war machine paralyze potentiality of creativity, except of Disgust. What do these dangers mean in the situation of the school flooding is interpreted within this article also.

Keywords: imagination, learning, swimming, flooding, school.

Introduction

In this paper I am ready to interpret allegories of water and swimming for a future project to create smooth space in the school, as had been used by Gilles Deleuze and
other philosophers, who inspired Deleuze (S. Maimon, H. Bergson). The imagination of a proper space can be understood as a flooding space in the school that means disorder, changing positions of things, which helps to find a new territory without stepping out from it. There are some points to consider such a suggestion for imaginational project.

First of all, today we live in a condition when no convincing predictions or projections can be made for the future. Schools suffer from an inability to correspond to the new conditions of humanity, when a declaration of freedom is mixed with an increased control of actions. School is dull and ineffective, mostly related to the past, not to our present and not at all to the future. Many new metaphors and allegories come to the field of education and help to question clearly reasoned educational reforms.

The second point of the topic is the concept of swimming and learning to swim. This concept is popular among Deleuzean researchers, though in Deleuze’s words (2012) he borrowed this allegory from Leibnitz, who saw the sea as a transformative space for relations between singularities and totality. “Swimming” is very convenient for the investigation of the study/learning process for many reasons. This concept is more or less related to those things directly or metaphorically important for the educational field: repetition and creativity, deep diving or remaining on the surface, the balance between a broad field and local area, the use of different directions of movement, relaxation and attention, and sharing of human features with somebody’s else (from fish to God). In other words, there are many oppositions and metaphors to map different directions of imagination and to find some new or intermedium variations. They allow for understanding the space of education, where action (reality) and signs (virtuality) are in relation, as well as to find new ways and styles of teaching/learning to insure intellectual and spontaneous creativity in modern schools.

Third point—the imagination of flooding at school. Flooding is an event which comes as unexpected, disgusted and at the same time insists actions, which are unconscious and conscious. It can come suddenly or slowly, as a resonance of many parallel running lines at school and eventually transforming everything molar. It is very nicely shown by Bill Viola in his video film *The Raft* (2004). He experimented with a crowd of people waiting for a train in the underground station, which suddenly was over flown by huge wave of water. I try to imagine such an event at school life. Therefore, flooding is the event which links swimming as a personal encounter with “waves” and school as assemblage and war machine.

The article is based on the methodology of the imagination for education, which is discussed by Chris Higgins (2009). Higgins describes and analyses different understandings of imagination and suggests his own model. He thinks that tradition to separate imagination and argument or recently popular treatment of imagination as a possibility for reality (future project) can be extended by alternative way of understanding the concept of imagination – skill to make contact with the world in its complexity. It is also ability to go from banality to fantasy, which is related from one side to idealism and from
other – to realism. This does not deny the sense of imagination for better understanding of the possibilities of changes on real and virtual planes. The other methodological view, which allowed imaginal journey in this article, is of Rebeca Coleman’s and Jessica Ringrose’s (2013). In description of many ways to investigate empirical world using Deleuze’s definitions of invention and creation, they give special attention to John Law’s suggestions that “method assemblage involves the making of relations” while attempting “to know realities” (2013, 6). Such an inventive methodology opens up a space for a research using imagination of different forms of presence and absence, Deleuzean “multiplicity”, “transcendental empirism” and “immanence”. Despite quite critical Deleuzean position towards metaphors, we deal with a metaphorical and allegorical imagination for configuration and exemplification of realities, which are in between undesired possible and desired impossible.

**Being Prepared to Swim: Maimon and Deleuze**

Keeping in mind a Deleuzean understanding of learning to swim as described in *Difference and repetition*, every move is marked by difference despite its repetition. It always leads to a novelty:

“When a body combines some of its own distinctive points with those of a wave, it espouses the principle of repetition which is no longer that of the Same, but involves the Other-involves difference, from one wave and one gesture to another, and carries that difference through the repetitive space thereby constituted. To learn is indeed to constitute this space of an encounter with signs, in which the distinctive points renew themselves in each other, and repetitions takes shape while disguising itself” (Deleuze, 2012, 26).

Such an extract becomes classical; we can find references to it in the publications of Semetsky, Wallin, and Ramey, who first of all emphasize body and mind learning, and the conscious and unconscious content of mind. In this particular paper, the investigation of swimming is important as the continuity of a Deleuzean conception and on the other hand a distinction from philosophers who influenced Deleuze and used the concept of swimming as learning.

First of all is Salomon Maimon, who lived in the 18th century and was a Lithuanian-Polish Jew. According to Daniel W. Smith (2012, 65), Maimon’s investigations “exerted an enormous influence on Deleuze”, correcting the Deleuzean conception of immanence and the concept of difference. Maimon in his book *An Autobiography* (second part) was very attentive to Maimonid, from whose A *Guide for the Perplexed* he cited and interpreted select quotations. Sometimes it is difficult to recognize which are Maimonid’s words and which are Maimon’s. However, it seems Maimon agrees with Maimonid, who for the understanding of metaphysical learning gives an example of Bible interpreters:
“He who can swim, may bring up pearls from the depth of the sea, he who is unable to swim will be drowned, therefore only such persons as have had proper instruction should expose themselves to the risk” (Maimonides, 1904, 124).

It is clear that for Maimon and Maimonid water is understood as a divine wisdom, which is described in Holy Law. Swimming in the sea means being in a space which has riches such as pearls somewhere very deep. They represent marvelous insights, ideas, and knowledge which can be obtained only if someone is prepared for them. It is a traditional understanding of the teaching / learning process as a matter of working with ideas which belong to a transcendental field. Knowledge in this sense is related not to something unexpected and new, but to something which is valuable, like a pearl, growing for many years, waiting until someone will discover and use it. They are countable and can be reached only by the best students. Creativity in this case is beyond their personal everyday life and the field of immanence. Student can be connected to creativity as the process which is in the disposition of God. It requires following special instructions.

Maimon's vision, in comparison to that which Deleuze gives us, is different. However, Maimon's concept of being in the process of learning in some aspects is not so extreme. He emphasizes waiting on the event which depends neither on only personal efforts nor on someone from outside. That is obvious from Maimon's quotation, where he rethink teaching as learning and says:

“Proper expression of the object and proper to the subject teaching method sometimes seems are suggested by themselves in the right time, but sometimes we have to torment oneself over, until find them” (Maimonas, 2004, 190).

According to Maimon, what must happen does not depend on reasonable and obvious things. It is the glorification of success in the proper time when wholeness and potentiality are evidently concentrated in singularity and personal expression. This outside and inside connection can be understood as divine forces, but not only that.

In the process of learning Maimon's concept of an idea is not separately valuable; ideas are immanent to experience, and he posits the “principle of difference as the fulfillment of this condition” of real thought (Smith, 2012, 67). So the reasoning of learning action and results contains and exposes potentiality, which is hidden but actualized during actions that later on were developed by Deleuze as intrinsic and extrinsic difference. It is being in the interconnection with others and the surroundings, and being in chain, in the process of becoming, which is actualized through the differences. Semetsky in her interpretation of Deleuze would name it being in the chain of collective unconscious (2013), while others identify it as relating to the mystical world (Hallward, 2006), as eventually becoming “worthy” of the event (Duff, 2013), or as learning the uncanny (Ramey, 2013). The connection of the learner with the outside world is marked by an intermediary between the known and unknown, the material and spiritual, or the immanent and transcendent, but in Maimon's version, as different from Deleuze's, primarily as a preparatory process.
Courage and Will: Bergsonian Concept of Swimming

Another great philosopher who influenced Deleuze was Henri Bergson. Giving the example of swimming and learning to swim, he raised the idea that reason must be pushed out of its limits by the courage to do so. The emphasis is on courage, not on a preparatory process. Jumping means a move from the rational to irrational, from one surrounding/space to another, like the change from walking to swimming. Bergson (1911) says:

“If we had never seen a man swim, we might say that swimming is an impossible thing, in as much as, to learn to swim, we must begin by holding ourselves up in the water and, consequently, already know how to swim. Reasoning, in fact, always nails us down to the solid ground. But if, quite simply, I throw myself into the water without fear, I may keep myself up well enough at first by merely struggling, and gradually adapt myself to the new environment: I shall thus have learnt to swim” (Bergson, 1911, 192).

In the Bergsonian position such a process of learning and cognition is a risk, a desire to invent new things, the courage to investigate and at the same time create by using intuition and imagination. Such is the process of the creation of oneself, which follows the will to choose this way. Instinct is so strong and alive, which gives the direction for the development of oneself, while the intellect provides some frames for this spontaneous development. Deleuze borrowed the idea of the unconscious, the desire to act in affection despite unexpected conditions. It is the linkage of body and mind, of the self and the surrounding.

Learning means the combination of instinct, intuition, imagination and reason, as Bergson states, and also the process of becoming an educated and creative person, sensitive to signs, as Deleuze posits. In a Deleuzean sense this process is based on affects and percepts. It is the learner’s process of becoming, becoming a swimmer or a kind of mermaid (nymph), animal, hybrid, which can live in another territory.

Project for the Future School based on Deleuze: Flooding in the School

The Deleuzean proposition for education can be reconstructed using concept of micropolitics, school as an assemblage of student and teacher actions, based on various directions towards becoming educated. Schooling has to be deterritorialized and reterritorialized into a new, smooth, not striated space. Examples of such proposition in real life are modern schools which work in new conditions, with free space and timeless schedules, which presented in Pedagogical Encounters (Davies, Gannon, 2009).

In our case the proper space for a modern school is allegorically understood as a flooding space, which means changing territory without stepping out from it, but letting stream school culture out of the borders. There are some points to consider such a suggestion.
First of all it can be a continuation of the understanding of micropolitics, which is transforming the hegemony of teachers into a nomadic interrelated trajectory of teacher and student, their equal right to be and move on the surface of the plane, at their own personal speed, to change vectors and dive as deeply as wanted and is able to. The priority is to the horizontal – nomadic, not vertical – arboreal – moving. In such a way there is no advanced order for things, subjects, and restriction of time and space. Everyone is in the individual movement and “we never know in advance how someone will learn” (Deleuze, 2012, 205).

Secondly, the teacher and student will be in the same conditions of “swimming”, when body-mind learning and teaching should be two sides of the same coin. Everyone will be pushed out from a strict position into one which requires an exchange of instructional knowledge with instinctively active and creative forces, to link sign with action, to be a kind of hybrid of teacher and student, without clear identity. This kind of catastrophic situation requires a transformation of the school community and the multiplication of its functions.

Thirdly, during the flooding the treasure will not be “pearls”, which are limited, but everything that will be seen through feculent-like “crystals”, which are valuable personally, and an event of learning, while in the process of repetition encountering with others as well as novelty of the surrounding. In Deleuzean words: “There is no more a method for learning than there is a method for finding treasures, but a violent training, a culture or paidea which affects the entire individual” (ibid, 205), it is “living passage from one to the other” (ibid, 206).

Finally, flooding means the other consistence of space, which requires a changing gaze and understanding of things, how they move in time and which positions they take; it creates conditions on the very broad scale: from the contemplation to the affectation, seeing and being in different regimes, finding novelty, which arises from the linkage of the partial with a whole, when the singularities’ “variation among relations” are “incarnated in the real movement of waves” (ibid, 204).

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It is not a project for the final understanding of a future school, but it can be the transition position on the road from old to new learning style and school culture. Deleuze and Guattari in A Thousand Plateaus (2013), describing micropolitics and segmentarity with a help of Nietzsche and Castaneda, defines four dangers: Fear, Clarity, Power and Disgust. All this dangers paralyze potentiality of creativity. Analyzing war machine they give us only one exception – Disgust. It is affectual, nomadic and oriented to search for new territories. It is more or less based on desire and affectation, but unfortunately it is destructive.

School works in a specific regime. Of course there is no clarity and no power in the situation of flooding, except of a flooding power. What do Fear and Disgust mean in the dramatic situation of the school flooding? As Deleuze and Guattari say “we are
afraid of losing” and add “we have overcome fear, we have sailed from the shores of security, only to enter a system that is no less concentricized, no less organized (Deleuze, Guattari, 2013, 265, 267). The flooding situation is obviously dangerous in any case, but flooding panic leads to transformation of fear into something which has no exact words, only action, immediately action, though Brian Massumi in essay Fear (2005) states that there is a short gap between shock and stupor moment and starting to act, so fear is distinct from the affect. But in most cases it consequently insists action, activates person forces in unconscious condition and finally provokes affection. Frank Furedi in his book Culture of Fear Revisited describes life in contemporary world stating that “Today we frequently represent the act of fearing as a threat itself” (Furedi, 2006, 1), we are addicted to be at risk, to feel stress or trauma, to have “vocabulary that influence out sensibility of fear”, fear of everything and in the same time we lose the object of fear, it is permanent feeling of a threat. It becomes norm of everyday life, supported by governmental documents, instructions and public media. The school culture is similar. It multiplies fear while teaching about climate, pollution, crimes, food and in the same time sows in the seed of a threat. It works like State apparatus with a cultivation of a threat while Fear in school’s flooding is a new condition, transformation of a threat, objectivity of Fear, activation and affection of school culture. It is disgusted in the presence of demolition and destroying of stable life. But such a situation pushes a school community to move further, beyond any striated space of a school culture, to be affected through a desire to survive in a disgusting conditions and probability for a new culture, which comes after.Flooding awakes a desire to live, the action for surviving and catch of the line of flight through swimming and floating as serial actions of learning how to be in new conditions.

References


Mokymasis lyg plaukimas: įsivaizduojamas mokyklos projektas pagal Deleuze’ą

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Santrauka

Šiame straipsnyje interpretuojamos vandens ir plaukimo alegorijos, kurios leidžia sukurti ateities mokyklos projektą, pasižymintį glotnia erdve, apie kurią kalbėjo Deleuze’as. Deleuze’o įžvalgų užuomazgų randama kitų filosofų (S. Maimono, H. Bergsono), inspiravusių Deleuze’o alegorines figūras, veikalose. Minėtieji konceptai yra tiesiogiai ar metaforiškai susiję su ugdymo lauku ir mokymusi, t. y. pakartojimu ir kūrybiškumu, giliu nardymu ir plūduriavimu paviršiuje, atsipalaidavimu ir dėmesio sukaupimu, balansavimu tarp plato ir lokalaus veiksmų lauko, skirtinį judėjimo trajektorijų pasirinkimo. Kitokia, atsinaujinti tinkama, mokyklos erdvė šiame straipsnyje įsivaizduojama kaip potvynio teritorija – tai reiškia tam tikrą chaosą, daiktų padėties pasikeitimą. Visa tai leidžia deteritorizuoti erdvę nepažeidžiant jos ribų. Aptariami Deleuze’o išskirti keturi pavojai – baimė, aiškumas, galia ir šleikštulys, kurie paralyžiuoja kūrybinę potencialią ir inovatyvumą. Straipsnyje svarstoma, ką šie pavojai reikštų įsivaizduojamoje mokykloje, apimtoje potvynio, ir kaip jie keistų mokyklos veikėjų elgesį.

Esminiai žodžiai: vaizduotė, mokymasis, plaukimas, potvynis, mokykla.

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