Post-Critique: A Conversation between Naomi Hodgson, Joris Vlieghe, and Piotr Zamojski

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POST-CRITIQUE
Having read the excellent and thought-provoking responses to our manifesto, we gave a lot of thought to how to respond to and do justice to them. We definitely didn’t want to write separate replies for each of them, and we really wanted to keep the conversation going between us, the authors of the manifesto, and those who wrote such generous and carefully crafted responses to our text. So, we decided that the three of us would each make some written notes on the replies, which we then shared and took as a starting point for a face-to-face conversation. What follows is a text that is largely based on the transcript of that conversation, but that also draws from our own preliminary notes. The conversational form naturally entails some repetitions and returns to earlier threads, as well as rough shifts in the flow of the argument, and these are reflected in what follows. Hence, it is not as smooth as a standard academic text. As it was a conversation in which we were discussing the responses of our colleagues, we refer to them, and to each other, by given (first) names.

Piotr Zamojski: I thought that we could start our conversation by talking about the exercise of reading the responses to our manifesto and preparing our answers. How did you find this
exercise? I ask you this because I found this a very interesting exercise in itself. For me, the two most important questions addressed to us in the responses are those posed by Stefan: *What is the world? And what is love?* Indeed, “the world” and “love” are key concepts for the standpoint we aimed to express. What do you think about these questions, and about Stefan’s response?

**Joris Vlieghe:** I don’t think it’s helpful to start from referring to love in an interpersonal sense. When Arendt talks about love for the world, she obviously means something different. For instance, when Stefan problematizes our notion of (passionate) love for the world/subject matter, he uses examples of love for particular persons, which are indeed partial, blind, prone to jealousy, etc. I don’t think this is a convincing argument. Educational love has to do with caring for things, and this is, precisely, highly impersonal. For that matter, educational love should also not be mistaken for the passionate zeal of the political activist.

Another point that Stefan makes, with Cavell, is that of the irrational aspect that comes with each form of love (and also with love for the world, we should admit). If I understand him correctly, the point at which we are no longer willing to critically interrogate what we care about is the moment when we fall together with the things in question, and Cavell metaphorically names this moment “falling in love.” That is, something comes to a halt. However, in our understanding of love, irrational as it is, love is a *beginning* (in so far as it interrupts a given order of things). Above all, it is a call for continuous work and responsibility (which we take, different from what Tyson says in his response, to be a deeply educational concept): one has no choice but to make it [the world] into an object of attention, interest, and care for the new generation. This is, at the same time, a vulnerable gesture, as it means that the new generation can begin again with it in an infinite number of ways. More positively, to educate out of love is a matter of giving and setting free

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our common world. In that sense, there is a connection between education and politics. Political action is, probably, impossible without educational transformation. But, it doesn’t make sense to reduce, for this reason, education to politics (i.e., claiming that education should be for political change). But on that note, I think Naomi and myself might have different interpretations of the Cavell quote that Stefan is referring to. When I read your notes, Naomi, it seems you have a more positive understanding of what Cavell has to say about love.

Naomi Hodgson: I am not sure “positive” is the right word, but yes, I found that there was some sort of similarity between our use of it [the idea of love] in the manifesto, and what was going on there [in the Cavell quote], because of the idea of blindness.

PZ: But this is a “correct blindness.”

JV: So blindness can be good — to put it very bluntly?

NH: Yes. Love for the world does not in any sense imply a denial that anything bad is going on in the world or with the world, it doesn’t require that you choose to ignore this wrong. But, for Arendt, it was about “loving the world enough”; it’s not falling in love with it, and being unable to criticize it. Arendt’s statement, cited by Stefan, seems to encapsulate that education is precisely premised on hope: “Education is the point at which we decide whether we love the world enough to assume responsibility for it and by the same token save it from that ruin which, except for renewal, except for the coming of the new and young, would be inevitable.”\(^2\) What form of responsibility is entailed in moving on from “the point at which we decide whether we love the world enough” with a will to educate? If we decide that we do love the world enough — that there is something of it that we feel is of value to pass on or protect — this entails the willingness to pass it on. If we are willing to pass it on, responsibly,

\(^2\) Ibid., 193.
this implies that we do love it enough (in spite of its faults). But what is “it” that we love? To take a phenomenological approach to answering what we mean by love and the world does not necessarily lead us anywhere. To suggest an equation with erotic love, of a possessive kind, points to a love for the world that is conservative, fundamentalist, essentialist, perhaps (cf. the book by Rutten that Stefan refers to. She wants to pass on the world as it is, i.e., as she sees it ought to be). Hopefully it is clear that this is not what we have in mind.

It is perhaps the blindness usually associated with romantic love, expressed positively by Cavell (cited by Stefan), that comes closer to capturing the relationship between love, education, and the world in Arendt, and in the manifesto: “To live in the face of doubt, eyes happily shut, would be to fall in love with the world. For if there is a correct blindness, only love has it. And if you find that you have fallen in love with the world, then you would be ill-advised to offer an argument of its worth by praising its Design. Because you are bound to fall out of love with your argument, and you may thereupon forget that the world is wonder enough, as it stands. Or not.” What this draws our attention to, I think, is that love is not the only emotion according to which we view the world: but education requires that we love the world enough to be willing to pass it on.

JV: So what you are suggesting here is taking the same quote that Stefan has used in a different direction?

NH: Yes, I think that quote does not necessarily contradict what we are trying to do. But I think Stefan does raise an important point about this use of Arendt’s idea of love for the world. Because it really has become something of a trope in recent writings in educational philosophy. Many people refer to that specific bit of Arendt, without necessarily unpacking what it means. So I found it helpful — at least for me — to try to pick up that

criticism and ask what we actually mean, in the context of the manifesto, by “love for the world.” And the Cavell quote was quite helpful in trying to articulate that. It is about loving the world enough to be able to go on with those mundane practices.

JV: So, what I said earlier might not have been entirely correct, or at least it might testify to the way in which I initially responded to the replies. With this I mean that I responded in a rather defensive way. I have tried to point out where our readers and commenters have read things wrongly or that they have read their own ideas into our manifesto, so it is like I have tried to dot the i’s and cross the t’s. That was my feeling, but at the same time I thought it was worthwhile, because it gave me the opportunity to be more explicit about particular points.

PZ: Further to that, while reading the replies, I really got the impression that a manifesto is too short as a form in itself to get to grips with the ideas. And so, particular names, notions, and phrases can be interpreted in so many different ways that sometimes you could be really surprised by a reading of particular concepts, like the notions “hermeneutical pedagogy” and “pedagogical hermeneutics,” which was rendered by Norm Friesen in his reply not entirely in line with our intentions.

NH: I was glad that the respondents each picked up different aspects of the manifesto. And I think you’re right that the manifesto form is necessarily short and makes bold claims and statements that you don’t have the space, or give the space, to fully justify. And so, in a few of the replies, the authors start off being very supportive of the claims we make in the manifesto, and then go off on a tangent that reverts back to the original critical position. Hence, I was concerned that my response was also quite defensive, and that I was writing in a way that kind of went against the idea of the manifesto. In the sense of saying, “You haven’t really understood what we have written, let me explain that to you,” and I wanted to avoid doing that. But at the same time, you want to have that opportunity to elaborate what
it means to say “love for the world” or “separation of the educational and the political,” precisely because you can’t do that to the necessary extent in the manifesto.

**PZ:** Before we go deeper into this matter, let me just repeat and specify that for me reading the replies and commenting on them was a very interesting exercise, one that went against the dominant academic practices in these “publish or perish” times, that is, in times when one should write more than one can read and think. Most of the time, when we publish something, we get no response at all, it’s like publishing into a void. What we write is usually lost in this universe of proliferating papers. So the way we have proceeded was exceptional: we had the experience of reading the replies and hence we saw that our colleagues really took the time to think about what we have written and to give a response. That was so enjoyable, and in a way it was also for me an existential experience of how wrong the academic world is these days.

**JV:** But now you are critical, not post-critical!

**PZ:** Yes indeed, in a way you are absolutely right, but on the other hand in doing this exercise, together with six other colleagues, we have retrieved what is really academic: commenting on each other’s work.

**NH:** I agree. I made a note on that, after reading Tyson’s response, which led me to think about what it is that we have actually made manifest. I would name this as a movement in thought in educational philosophy that is better articulated collectively, as a conversation, than as isolated publications towards individual research profiles, developed in contexts that increasingly lead us to question why we do what we do, the value of what we do, and the fact that it is assessed by criteria that do not belong to us or the matters at stake, i.e., not educational criteria. So how we’ve done it is also a part of what we make manifest.
PZ: I couldn't agree more! In that regard, I had an interesting experience while reading Oren's response which, contrary to its intentions, has awakened my “Hegelian” soul, so to speak, and reminded me of the origin of the idea to write the manifesto in the first place: more and more we have the impression that there is a shift in educational theory of which we are not yet aware.

JV: You even suggested that there might be a new Zeitgeist or, more correctly, Weltgeist, which I thought was a surprising but perhaps very accurate thing to say. Hence, I found it very interesting to play with the idea that our manifesto should not aim at changing people’s minds, but that it is, first and foremost, the expression of the feeling that there are new ideas hovering in the air, so to speak.

PZ: Indeed, Oren’s reply proves that there is something in the air, as you say. From various positions, using many diverse concepts, theoretical traditions, and ideas, theorists from all around the world are making visible efforts to express a new way, a particular way, of understanding education. Indeed, the first part of Oren’s response aptly synthesizes the manifesto, but the second part relates to a tradition of thought that is completely unfamiliar to me, and so I found it difficult to understand. But, if people from theoretical backgrounds as different as Oren’s and mine can — let me use Hegel again — recognize themselves in the manifesto, it means that it serves its purpose, and that maybe a shift in the “Spirit” is ahead of us. On that note, were there other interesting, significant, intriguing, or maybe even disturbing things in the replies we haven’t discussed so far?

JV: Well, what I found fascinating — as you already hinted at — is that Norm rendered some of our ideas in a way that is not exactly what we meant.

PZ: Yes, I agree with that. I think there are two major misunderstandings between the position we sketch in our manifesto and the reading of it offered by him.
The first one concerns the difference between a political logic and an educational logic, and the question of mediation. Norm observes that: “Rather than seeing pedagogy’s principle task as a critical negation and transformation of the world, Hodgson, Vlieghe, and Zamojski call for the affirmation of elements in the present as worthy of being passed on to future generations.”

And then — at the end of his reply — he argues that educational responsibility is “oriented simultaneously to the child’s present well-being and to his or her future — a future conceived through hope as the realization of the potentialities (and also the limitations) that may be apparent in the present.”

I would say that this is not the case. In our manifesto — which is strongly influenced by Arendt’s formulation of what is at stake in education — the future is a matter of risk. It is essentially unknown, and it is left to the new generation, and their inventiveness. Therefore, the future is not a realization of a potential that is visible now. Potential that has to flourish in the future, develop, grow stronger and greater, etc. Rather, it refers to an opening of pure potentiality⁴ and hence it regards something unforeseen, incalculable, unpredictable. In that sense, education is always about a transformation of the world, but not about a particular transformation, and not about direct transformation. This is how we understand the Arendtian concept of renewing the world. The hope, though, lies in the present — not in the future: it is a purely educational hope that relates to establishing a thing in common between the generations, and the possibility of a rejuvenation of the world. Education, by making a subject matter into a thing of common interest, gives hope, here and now, that the world will neither wither from lack of interest nor be destroyed by people who would act without being introduced to it and knowing how it has worked so far. Or, as Arendt puts it: “But the world, too, needs protection to keep it from being overrun and destroyed by the onslaught of the new that bursts

upon it with each new generation.”\(^5\) This entails that education is not interested in the child’s Eigenwelt directly, as Norm suggests: this might be of interest in sociology or psychology. Education, as we understand it, is all about relating to the child’s Eigenwelt through the mediation of a common thing, i.e., a subject matter, a part of the world that is being studied, thought about, and exercised with.

The second misunderstanding in Norm’s reply concerns the difference between hermeneutical pedagogy — which, I think, Norm advocates for — and pedagogical hermeneutics. The latter is not an application of 20th-century philosophical hermeneutics to education, and it is not operational when a pedagogue has to invent her response to a child’s being, as Norm puts it. Rather — as we have put it in the manifesto — by pedagogical hermeneutics we understand the core task of post–critical educational theory: rather than creating applicable means, or debunking existing educational reality, we want to draw attention anew to what we are doing as educators, what the essence of these doings is, what their immanent value is, but also that they increasingly become dwarfed, functionalized, instrumentalized, and deprived of their meaning.

JV: So, in that sense, the Weltgeist is maybe a split Weltgeist. With this I mean, a Weltgeist that is both still critical and at the same time post-critical in statu nascendi.

NH: Yes, I don’t know if this is felt more specifically in educational philosophy than it is across the board in educational studies. Because one of the things that came out strongly, and especially in Olga’s piece, was that the hold of critical theory and the hold of politics on educational theory is so strong. It seems fundamental to how critical research goes on. Perhaps our own orientation is clearer if we take a less direct approach. That is, if we say that our issue is not with critical pedagogy per se but a) with how it is taken up today in educational research and b) with

\(^5\) Arendt, “The Crisis in Education,” 186.
our current context and the need to look again at how best to find a way to go on with it. Not to accept it, not to deny inequality and suffering, but to take seriously what Latour means when he says that “critique has run out of steam.” The constitution of prejudice and structural inequality is different now than it was when such theories proposed radical contestation to the status quo — and achieved huge shifts. For Olga, the concern seems to be, in part, that we are dismissing the concerns of critical pedagogy and critical theory and, in doing so, are turning our backs on the political issues that motivate them. But this — and I’m afraid this is an issue with theory that has long existed — implies theory to be an immovable thing, unaffected by the conditions in which it exists, and changes in the constitution of the objects of its concern. Thus, when Olga writes that the post–critical approach is “methodologically akin to constructivism, philosophically affiliated to functionalism, and theoretically unsympathetic to critical social theory,” the implication is that this lack of sympathy is politically irresponsible, and the principles we set out are then swiftly assimilated in to existing paradigms. As Olga herself laments, sociology of education itself is political in its concern with social mobility and not, for example, with conscientization and praxis, in the Freireian vein, and so there is a need to think otherwise than in instrumental terms. The way in which this is expressed in the manifesto is precisely to respond to this by affirming the educational dimension of our educational practices. We could, of course, show more of the ways in which education today is marketized, privatized, data– and output–driven, and we will no doubt continue to do so in a certain manner. But we know this. The question is how we respond in educational terms — or perhaps better, in the name of education, in the name of what we hold as worthy of passing on — so as to protect these aspects of education. In doing so, we challenge ourselves not to default to cynicism, or outright despondency, as we do have a responsibility to find a way to go on.

The manifesto, then, does not endorse a functionalism, call for stability, and seek consensus, as Olga suggests. She states that, unlike figures ordinarily associated with critical sociologies of education, such as Foucault, we do not seek a criticism of the present. But, as indicated above, the purpose here is a reorienting of critique from one that reveals a hidden “truth” (and therefore maintains the place of such critique in the order of things), to one that articulates those aspects of our current conditions that are left out of view by both dominant discourses and practices, and by the negative critiques that show us how we are oppressed by these. It is precisely out of a concern with the present—not a utopian or even dystopian future state—that we articulate these principles. I have argued elsewhere that the use of Foucault in educational research has remained within a Marxist understanding of power, and this tendency is visible in Olga’s response also.

PZ: I think what we have to state is that we are not against critical approaches to education. Let the critical inquiries go on; we are just looking for other strategies. That is the reason why we refer to Latour in the manifesto: since radical critique seems not to bring about any significant change in the order of things, maybe we should try something else.

JV: What I find difficult about that perspective is that the implicit message we are giving to our colleagues and friends whenever they make a “critical” point is, “Ok, you go to your office, and go on doing all your interesting work, but by no means tell us about it. When we meet, let’s talk about the weather and not about our academic research.”

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NH: Yes, the danger is that positions are again relativized and we remain in our “siloes,” as Oren states.

PZ: Alright, I just wanted to stress that the post–critical perspective is never possible without critical research. You have to be aware of the wrongs, in order to know how to care for the good in the world, not repeating the sins that are already being recognized as sins. That’s why our stance is post–critical, and not anti–critical.

JV: Can I play the devil’s advocate and be very critical? What you seem to say is, “Ok, we shouldn’t be naïve; the post–critical has to take into account things that are wrong in the world, and therefore the traditional critical paradigm is very important.” However, this seems to be a very dialectical position again. In a sense, we are dependent upon the traditional critical paradigm, in order not to be naïve.

NH: Perhaps this is partly a problem of what we mean by “post” in post-critical. One sense is that it’s “post” because the critical did its massively important work, but we are living in a different time and it doesn’t have the same purchase that it had before. So, post-critical necessarily comes after critical. A second sense is that the problem is not critical theory per se, but the way it is taken up in educational research, and the fact that that hasn’t changed as conditions have changed. And so it’s not necessarily that we are dependent on the entire body of critical theory and the paradigm, but that there is something in those texts that have something to say in this context.

JV: So maybe the problem with the critical paradigm is that, for many, still today it seems to be the be all and end all. Let me come back to Olga’s contribution as an illustration. She approaches education solely from a critical-sociological angle. Taking this perspective, one rightfully only has the choice between two options: either to take sides with, or to expose and to denounce, a system that is through and through oppressive.
And so, Olga's critique comes down to saying that we, in view of our concern with transformation and our firm hope that things can be different, should join the critical camp, and that, in the end, we betray our starting point: the manifesto just contributes to the status quo and, more precisely, this is because we adhere to (what is presumed to be) an elitist account of education. As such we are advocating, in her reading, a functionalist view that serves the powers that be.

I believe we should not bring in as a defence that we do sympathize, politically speaking, with the oppressed. That is, from an educational point of view, immaterial. What matters is that education can transform us and that this is intrinsically worthwhile (and this is not dependent upon the place education plays in the larger societal context). Political change and educational transformation are altogether different things, and confusing both comes down to making, what analytical philosophers call, following Gilbert Ryle, a category mistake. Educational transformation is good in and of itself. Asking for an external justification that explains why it is good is missing its point.

This is, again, not denying that in our contemporary world the way education is organized often supports oppression, and that there are good reasons to analyze our social world, inclusive of educational institutions, in terms of hidden power structures. The problem with this approach, however, is that it automatically implies that we need to reform those institutions and make them into an instrument for creating a better world. An attempt, that probably is bound to fail and that demands a constant call for reform, which is what we see happening today. Another way to put this, with Chesterton, is that the sociologist only asks what is wrong with the world, and thus forgets to ask what is good — and thus worth preserving — about it. We claim that once one starts to play the game of criticism, one never gets out

of this entrapment. One has no choice but to denounce evil, oppression, and injustice. However, this is first of all a political concern, not an educational one.

In view of this, it could be said that Olga’s account is itself a functionalist one: education serves political emancipation to such an extent that the educational evaporates. Likewise, our drawing attention to the logic behind critical approaches is not trivial, as Olga maintains. It is exactly pointing out that the critical-sociological perspective misses out the educational in education. The same applies to her argument that we — again — join the right-wing critique of critical pedagogy that each and every individual has the ability to think for herself and hence that the interference in her life by an enlightened teacher is by definition patronizing. In our view, this testifies to a blindness to the educational as such. When we call for a move beyond the platonic scheme of the student enslaved by ignorance and in need of a “master explicator,” as Rancière puts it,\(^\text{10}\), we do this for purely educational reasons. We agree that we can learn a lot from the plumber in the example Olga discusses, but this is, of course, not an educational situation. What is unique about education is the assumption of a radical equality that is indeed lacking in most other societal contexts and situations. This equality is guaranteed because teacher and student devote themselves to a subject matter to such a degree that both are under the authority of this thing (which makes them relate to one another as equals). Put otherwise: educational and sociological equality belong to different spheres of life.

PZ: However, if we would like to express the relation between a critical and post-critical perspective — which I think is also at stake here — we should refer to a phrase I found in Naomi’s notes and which I found particularly important: “that we must ensure to distinguish hope from denialist optimism.”

NH: When I wrote this, I was responding to what Oren was doing in his reply with the idea of mindfulness. He does draw on a rich Eastern tradition, but what he says is in line with a positive psychology discourse. My experience of this is that we should just go on, saying “It’s all fine! Just think positively, it will all be fine!” This is exactly what I mean by denialist optimism. Oren’s reply, however, captures the very work upon oneself that is required when seeking an educational, rather than a political, response to our conditions: an intervention in our own thoughts when we revert to cynicism or negativity. But it quickly moves again from the educational to the political in Oren’s assumption that by correcting a negative disposition with a positive one, we can engage in positive social change. There is a risk here that hope becomes imbued with a positive psychological zeal. While mindfulness practice, in the rich sense that Oren invokes, may be one way in which a love for the world and affirmation of the present is made manifest today, this is not necessarily the inflection that is implied in the manifesto: we must — as you have noted — ensure to distinguish hope from denialist optimism. Whereas for Olga we are denying social inequality and injustice by our move from critical to post–critical, the move to mindfulness as affirmation of the present might effect its own denial.

PZ: In other words, perhaps we are dealing here with a continuum between two extremes: on the one hand, the denialist optimism of positive psychology and similar standpoints, which suppress the existence of the wrongs in the world, and, on the other hand, a radical critical perspective, which doesn’t allow us to see anything positive at all, anything in the world that would be worthy of affirmation. What we are trying to do is to escape both of these extremes.

NH: So I think that we need to be clearer about what we mean by hope. Because, it is obviously ordinarily associated with optimism, and with “everything will be fine” — but I don’t think this is what we mean.
JV: This reminds me of a recent book by Terry Eagleton, *Hope without Optimism*.\(^{11}\) I think we could say — referring to Heidegger’s well-known difference — that hope is an *ontological* dimension and optimism an *ontic* manifestation of a more fundamental attitude towards the world. In other words, optimism takes hope in a very particular direction, which may be completely unjustified, and so optimism is very often very naïve. But, different directions are possible.

NH: Relating what we have said about hope in relation to the separation of politics and education we advocate, I was formulating my replies to the responses on the morning of 9th June 2017, and it was difficult not to relate the notion of hope with contemporary politics. The Conservative Party had, overnight, to the surprise of many, including themselves, not won the UK elections (They had not lost it either, though). This was attributed in part to the electorate — including (reportedly) an increased proportion of young people (18–25-year-olds) who often don’t bother to vote — voting for hope: hope that another politics is possible, hope that the unlikely might just happen. So, people voting on the basis of principle, in the collective interest, not just “what’s in it for me?” and how it will affect the economy. There is no necessity in the current order of things; change, or at least disruption, is possible. This is not to overstate the events of the UK general elections; life and politics will remain within a certain parameter of recognizability. But something has changed. The so-called “post-truth” politics based on assumption and personal belief rather than reason and collective responsibility does seem to be wearing thin already, even though we do not yet fully understand its depths.

Twice in recent weeks I have started the day by having to tell my children that there has been an attack in the UK. The first took place in Manchester, at the end of an Ariana Grande concert attended largely by teenagers and their families. The second,

less than two weeks later, was in London. In this context, what can hope mean? As a parent, trying to reassure the younger generation that it will all be fine, that they are safe, when actually, you don’t feel able to say that with any certainty. It is perhaps in the face of this question that we can make sense of the strict division between politics and education in the manifesto: to try to educate for this context, or for a future context that, to the older generation, might look bleak, and from which we seek to protect our children, we already take it from them. In an Arendtian sense, to do so would be already to decide on how they should take care of the future. But how does this work in the context of family life, as opposed to the specific confines of the classroom? In the classroom, it makes sense to say that “educational and sociological equality belong to different spheres of life,” as you put it earlier, Joris. In the familial context, no such separation, or “suspension,” as Jan Masschelein and Maarten Simons call it, is possible.\(^\text{12}\) Partly because the teacher–student relationship, particularly one founded on the assumption of equality, is of an impersonal nature (to some degree) in a way that the parent–child relationship could never be. Put simply, what distinguishes these relationships is love, in the interpersonal sense, as we discussed above. Or the form this love takes. The suspension, the working out how to move in the gap between past and future that we find in Arendt’s articulation of the crisis in education, is oriented not to a crisis in our educational institutions or systems, per se, but to a crisis in upbringing. It is precisely the intergenerational relationship that Arendt is concerned with. What we mean by love for the world, then, now seems an obvious question to ask. As you said earlier, Piotr, the questions that Stefan raised were among the most important.

So, by bringing into play the current context, I wanted to put to the test whether and how the manifesto principles could make sense if we were talking about upbringing or the parent-child relationship. But also, in relation to the responses, I wanted to

take seriously this concern that you get in Olga’s response, and that I think would be a quite standard response to what we’ve done, which is “but what does this look like in reality, when you’ve got all this stuff going on? How do you actually make this real, when we are dealing with these kinds of questions that necessarily impose themselves on education?” So that was part of the reason for drawing on the current socio-political context, but also I wanted to wait until after the election to start writing, because with a different result, the idea of hope might have taken a different direction.

**PZ:** I think what is interesting in what you have just said is that you have tried to reply to the responses in a particular, exceptional context, which—in a way—brought all these ideas into everyday life. As mentioned before, the manifesto calls for retrieving the educational. And one of the profound educational notions we want to make manifest is exactly upbringing (rather than for instance, parenting). The meaning of this notion became strongly visible and is also problematized by the context that you have mentioned at the beginning of your comments [the UK elections and the terrorist attacks].

**JV:** Yes, I would say that what Piotr and I wrote in preparation for this conversation is more on a theoretical level and that it offers theoretical clarifications of the standpoint we defend in the manifesto, whereas you started from a very precise and concrete educational question: upbringing against the background of the very evil things we are confronted with today, and what it means to educate in such a context. What unites our three perspectives, however, is a particular notion of *time* that informs our manifesto—to move on to another topic.

This has also been picked up by Geert and Tyson, in their responses. Hope in change is, they claim, predicated upon a denial of the present. I tend to disagree. This teleological perspective is exactly the time of political action: what Geert and Tyson describe is the tension between a present situation, which is the object of dislike and indignation, and a (never-to-come) future
in which a better life is actualized. Education, on the other hand, produces a gap in such a teleological (and, hence, political) ordering of time. Love makes us forget about (this) time, and brings about a full concentration on the *here and now*—a full attention and devotion to the object of study, and nothing else.

**PZ:** Coming back to the relation between optimism and hope, I think that we simply cannot be very optimistic, especially in view of all the critical research that has been done in the field of education. But, on the other hand, we need to somehow struggle further, we need a purpose in education. In that regard, particularly in relation to Geert’s, but also to Tyson’s reply, hope shouldn’t be conceived within an eschatological logic, i.e., as something that refers to a distant future that has to be accomplished (which means that the present is simply the time of waiting, dispensable time, time to be used—in the name of a “future-goal” to come). We are rather talking about *hope in the present.* When one is in an educational situation—e.g., studying something with one’s students, or repeating some mundane doings with one’s children—one has hope. These things make hope present; hope that the world will not perish and will be rejuvenated in some way.

**JV:** Yet another way to put this, more technically or philosophically, is that an eschatological take on hope deals with it as a “technical precondition for education.” I refer here to an expression coined by a Dutch phenomenologist and educational philosopher, Martinus J. Langeveld (whose work has not been translated into English). For Langeveld, we can only educate because we rely on the fact that tomorrow things might be better. If we don’t have that hope, our efforts are futile. But the criticism of this standpoint is that this is a merely instrumental account of hope. For me it has been very helpful to refer to the film *Le Fils* by the Dardenne brothers.¹³ What the father/teacher does in

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¹³ Jean-Pierre Dardenne and Luc Dardenne, dirs., *Le Fils* (Diaphana Films, 2002).
that film is embody hope in the present (instead of displaying a hopeful attitude in an instrumental sense). What the educator is doing in the present situation, as depicted in the Dardennes’ film, is good and can make a change. It’s not about planning ahead what might be happening tomorrow — there might be a disaster tomorrow, the boy might kill the father/teacher (or vice versa) — but that’s not important. The important thing is that they do something together: they explore the world of woodwork, and that actually brings hope to the situation, because it changes something here and now.

PZ: If I could add something here referring to the issue of time that Joris mentioned just a minute ago. This is most important, especially in Geert’s response, which refers to Biesta and Säfström’s “Manifesto for Education,” and asks about the relation between our manifesto and theirs. Where we differ is precisely on the issue of time. It seems that the rejection of the time dimension in education that Biesta and Säfström are proposing stems from the metaphysical understanding of time they have adopted. Indeed, conceiving time as a line linking past, present, and future, reduces education to a purely productive process that can be easily determined by the economy and subordinated to various political aims. However, this is not the only way one can understand time. And — I think — that a post–critical perspective may be also rendered as regaining an educational sense of time. Referring to Agamben here, educational time is kairos, i.e., now–time, radically present time, which he opposes to the traditional chronos–conception of time that underlies Western metaphysics. It is true, however, that we didn’t emphasize this enough in the manifesto itself: education is an event of kairos, it suspends the work of normal, metaphysical, productive time (chronos), makes it inoperative, and makes all engaged in educa-

tion experience a radically different flow of time, which arises in the profound absorption of attention by the subject matter. In that regard, I think that Biesta and Säfström are right in their diagnosis: if you think about time in metaphysical terms, as a “past–present–future continuum,” and when you think about education using this concept of time, you are turning education into some kind of productive process, structured within a continuum of “intention-process-and-product.”

What we are trying to do, in the manifesto and in developing a post–critical educational philosophy — as Joris and I recently did in an article on Agamben and Badiou\textsuperscript{16} — is to appreciate the present as such. Naomi, in my view, did something similar in her article — written with Stefan — on Haneke's movie *Die Siebente Kontinent/The Seventh Continent*.\textsuperscript{17} In a very controversial way, you have interpreted the movie by leaving its ending outside of consideration (an ending that can impose itself as the meaning of the film), and by solely focusing on the family and their doings as presented to the viewer throughout the film. More exactly, you didn’t relate to the future of this family or, better, the lack thereof, in order to say something about the essence of family life as such. Family life, being a parent, being a child in a family, upbringing, all happen in the present. To put it differently: there are other ways to understand time, and what we simply try to do is to regain educational time.

JV: Likewise, we could take the example of the film *Le Fils* to a greater extreme. What the protagonist does in the Dardennes’ film is, literally, give the future out of hand; in a sense, the father/teacher is not interested in what is going to happen in the future. As I said, things might go awfully wrong, but there is a moment when you are truly educating and you are not bothered


\textsuperscript{17} Michael Haneke, dir., *Der Siebente Kontinent/The Seventh Continent* (Wega Film, 1989).
to be interested in the future. And, I think, from a phenomenological point of view, it makes sense to say that when we teach, we lose control over time, i.e., over *chronos*, and hence that the future doesn’t exist, or that it has no meaning at that moment.

**NH:** Or: the future doesn’t explain the practices you are involved in at that time.

**JV:** Going back to the relation between Biesta and Säfström’s and our manifesto for a moment, let me add that what—I think—is at stake in both texts is to retrieve the educational in education. Education regards the possibility of a fundamental change in our own and our collective lives in relation to a world (subject matter) we become attentive to. Education also regards relations between persons, a relationship towards the world, as well as techniques and practices that are particular and unique. These are not to be found elsewhere, and especially not in the sphere of politics. A political activist relates in a different way to the world than the educator does: whereas the first is driven by indignation and hate, the latter is infused with passion and love; whereas political techniques are all about mobilizing people against perceived societal problems, educational techniques aim at neutralizing the responsibility for solving these problems and at “slowing down,”¹⁸ and making time and space, etc. What we essentially claim is that a critical perspective—even out of the best of intentions—tends to push the particularity and uniqueness of the educational under the carpet and to replace it by things that are not educational, properly speaking.

**PZ:** I think in view of the replies, but also referring to recent discussions we have had with the audience after presenting the manifesto on recent occasions, the idea of love for the world is predominantly understood in a very sentimental way and/or in relation to hate—as a rather dangerous political concept. So

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colleagues would typically respond to our manifesto: “nationalisms are expressions of love for a particular nation—is that what you want? Would that be a post-critical standpoint?” Of course not. Nationalist zeal is a form of love that is predicated on hatred towards other nations, and of “otherness” as such—and so it is not educational at all. In our view, education stems from a purely affirmative relation to the world. Now, the reactions we have received to our manifesto clearly show that love is indeed a complex and difficult notion that needs further clarification.

So let me come back to Stefan’s response, which also testifies to this problem. I think that one can have doubts, as his reply shows, when one tries to understand love in phenomenological terms. To a certain extent this thread is present also in our manifesto, but essentially love in the post–critical perspective has an ontological meaning, signifying the labour of studying, thinking, exercizing. This is love for the world—not for a person. However, this love is twofold, as love for the world entails love for the new generation. It is so because only the new generation can rejuvenate the world. In that sense, a pedagogue loves her students—but if other ways of loving are engaged in that relation it is not educational love any more. Love for the world is testified by the teacher, who teaches her subject passionately and, in that sense, this particular way of loving is justified, it can be explained, and there are reasons that can be shared. This is why this love, common love, is not an individual feeling, but an attitude that can be shared with others. While exhibiting one’s love, that is, while practicing the labour of study, thought, and exercise with a thing (subject matter), the teacher is not only providing reasons how and why this thing can be loved. She is also inviting her pupils to fall in love with it.

NH: But that’s why—and I think both of you have remarked on this—the example of the politician (Rutten) that Stefan refers to in his response, doesn’t actually work.

PZ: Absolutely, first of all this politician says that our tradition, i.e., Western civilization, is better. She uses the word “superior.”
But “better” is not synonymous with “good” — the use of the former requires hierarchies. However, an educational logic doesn’t entail hierarchies. It is based on the affirmation of the worth of a thing, a part of the world, which is simply worth studying. This is the thing we, the existing generation, would like to point the attention of the new generation to, just by saying, “Look, this is important, please take a closer look,” instead of by saying “What we have is superior!” Moreover, passing on to the next generation doesn’t mean indoctrination, but requires giving it away, letting it go. It implies a risky relation with the new generation: their attitude to the thing we offer them is not constrained by the need for conservation, but is opened to new, unforeseen uses they might invent. The world is to be rejuvenated, not replicated. I’m not sure this would be Rutten’s intention. If our tradition is better, we shouldn’t aim at rejuvenating it, we have to simply reiterate it, impose it on the new generation — which is a rather political than it is an educational point of view.

JV: I completely agree. In view of the transformative character of true education, Stefan’s reference to Rutten’s book is misguided, as what she advocates is exactly the opposite. She — being the leader of a political formation — wants to completely determine what the meaning of this common world is, for us and for the generations to come. Also, what seems to be at stake for her is — once more — a rather sociological approach vis-à-vis education: introducing the newcomers in what Arendt calls “the art of living,” i.e., socialization. However, the idea of education articulated in our manifesto is much richer, and has first and foremost to do with the possibility that socialized norms, expectations, and identifications are temporarily suspended. However, let me make a small remark here, because — knowing the discourse of the political party she leads — I can imagine she would have immediately replied: “Yes, but it’s only the Western tradition which allows for rejuvenation of the world. If we would live in Turkey or Iran, we would not be allowed to begin anew with the tradition.” Maybe this is not an unimportant aspect, since an
essential part of the Western tradition is that it also allows for going against the tradition.

PZ: I agree with the latter, but I have some serious doubts about the former.

JV: And so do I.

NH: And it would be a slightly cynical move [on Rutten’s hypothetical part] to invoke critique as a defence of her conservative stance. I don’t know who said this, but the opposite of love is not hate, it’s “I don’t care.” It is indifference that is on the other side.

PZ; JV: Yes!

PZ: After having discussed the issue of love (and hate) to such a large extent, maybe this is the right moment in our conversation to come back to the other, but related question on which we briefly touched at the beginning: what exactly do we mean by “world”?

JV: There are many concerns to raise here. Obviously, one issue is as follows: if we claim that education should be based on love for the world, we always have to deal with the very practical question what we are going to teach, and to pass on. The other issue is that the word “world” implies some kind of totality: it refers to something of an enormous dimension, or something that encompasses everything. So how to define it? Of course, you could do it very superficially, i.e., in a geographical sense, which is of course not what we mean. Although, at the same time, in view of the problem of climate change, world might exactly refer to our planet. Furthermore: do we only include stuff that has been historically formed, of which the disciplines would be very nice illustrations: mathematics, history, carpentry, etc.? Or do we also include ways of life? In Norm’s interpretation, on the basis of Mollenhauer, the world means exactly this: our way of life. And, as he goes on showing, we have no choice but to start
from our own way of life, even if we deny this, and even if we don’t want the new generation to follow our way of life. For him, and maybe also for Mollenhauer, the world refers first of all to the way in which we as a human community relate to the world and organize our living together on this planet. One way I’ve found fruitful in order to explain the concept of the world in Arendt is to refer to her Heideggerian background, that is, the idea that world always implies some kind of exteriority. According to Heidegger, we are thrown in to the world, we are born into something that is already there, and that is really objective, concrete. There is something out there, something that is beyond our own making, and yet we have to relate to it, although it’s not fully under our control.

PZ: In that last sense, everything, including lifestyles and things, is a part of the world.

NH: Yes, but there is a distinction to be made there between that which is open to question (i.e., ways of life, cultures, and disciplines), and thrownness, which is not negotiable. We cannot escape it, it’s there.

PZ: I find the question about this negotiable dimension of the world — i.e., what are the parts of the world that you are willing to pass on? — a political question, rather than an educational question. In other words, the question, what to include in the curriculum is for me a political question. Or, this is a question that regards the point where education and politics meet. In this respect, there is no final, universal, “firm” answer to the question “what is the world?” Posing this question to which we have no answer makes education a public matter, it raises the issue of education, which is constantly discussed and reflected on by society in the public sphere. In that regard, Masschelein writes that school is an invention that is “the time and space that society gives itself to reflect on itself when confronted with the new
Again, we do not have an answer to that question, we are just pointing to the fact that what to include, what to teach is the central political question about education. We have no choice but to debate about this issue. Any selection regarding the things we invite the new generation to study, think, and exercise with is subject either to democratic debate, or to some kind of authoritative decision.

NH: I also think this relates to the question of the extent to which our manifesto is normative, and the extent to which that is a problem. Because for some people, in their responses, it is a problem—because there seems to be some sort of elitism implied, or there are some things that we want to protect, and other things that we wouldn’t—and I don’t think we have addressed that aspect of the manifesto as yet in our conversation. I certainly think we need to be clear on this point: that our manifesto is not normative in terms of the content, but it is normative in terms of an attitude, a way of proceeding—just at that very minimal level. But also, and I think this is an issue perhaps because respondents have tended to pick up on perhaps one principle, rather than taking the principles as relational. If you just take one, and take it to its full extent, then it doesn’t necessarily reflect the entire attitude of the manifesto. For me, the principles are, rather, regulated by one another, but the responses are raising the question of whether this is a manifesto on what education is, or normatively, conceptually, what it should be.

PZ: I would say that it is neither.

NH: No, ok, but I think that how it is read: within this opposition.

PZ: For this reason I really think we must stress the following: the manifesto is addressing what already is. It is not normative in the sense that it is supposed to point out what these practices

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(e.g., education, upbringing, school, studying, thinking, lecturing, note-taking, and practicing) should be. They are already there. But they are not acknowledged, as they are being hidden from view by the dominant way of thinking about education, which reduces education to a matter of bureaucratic control and management in view of accountability and measurable outcomes. So what we have tried to do, is to say: “Look! These practices continue to exist, we are doing them, they are important, they constitute what education is all about, and so these are exactly what we should care about.” Hence, the manifesto is neither normative — in the above mentioned sense — nor purely descriptive either.

**NH:** The responses are also asking, I think, whether the manifesto is methodological rather than practical? And what does it mean for educational-philosophical research?

**PZ:** In my view, this is exactly how I understand — and I hope you share this understanding — the role of theory in a post-critical perspective. What we have called pedagogical hermeneutics is neither practical nor methodological, but rather — paradoxically — it is both at the same time, since it refers to opening a way of speaking, thinking, and theorizing that allows people to act in a particular way, and to understand their own actions, to refer and relate to them, to defend them if needed, and to put into words why they are important. This desire for a pedagogical hermeneutics is, in my understanding, virtually present in the critical approaches towards education that abound today, such as the critique of the audit society, of the role of measurement in education, of the obsession with league tables, and so on: it is often argued that these — rightfully criticized — ways of grasping education miss something essential to education, but this “what is missed” is not so easily identified by these critical discourses. For me this is one of the main issues for post-critical pedagogy. This is how I read the attempts of Gert Biesta, Jan Masschelein, Maarten Simons, Tyson Lewis, and others; as actually articulating this unacknowledged essence of education. As attempts to
make us again attentive to the thing that runs the risk of remaining absent in neoliberal arrangements of education. Following this, what we call for is not simply designing an effective method. I could recall here the idea of a “poor pedagogy” as suggested by Jan Masschelein. Post-critical pedagogy is poor in the sense that it doesn’t offer any particular means regarding good teaching or conducting good educational research. However, it gives a meaningful horizon within which we can practice and understand what we are doing.

JV: Yes. By the way, you mentioned the term “poor” just now, which Tyson also uses as a possible alternative description of what we have done. What about the term “manifesto” for naming our project: are we intending to change it, following Tyson’s suggestion, into a declaration?

NH: As far as I am concerned, I’m fine with the name “manifesto.” I think we should acknowledge that, on the basis of what Tyson says, it should be called a “poor declaration,” but I don’t think we should change it.

JV: My main reason for sticking to the name “manifesto” is that the book project is about publishing what we did [at the launch] on 17th October 2016, and at that moment it was a “manifesto”…

NH: Quite. I think it still makes sense to call it a manifesto, since our project tries to capture something that exists and to put it on display, i.e., to make it manifest. It’s not that we have made up a whole new theory, and that we try to get rid of the critical theory. There is rather a growing momentum to articulate a shift in the way we theorize education, as Piotr hinted at earlier on when talking about the contemporary Weltgeist.

PZ: Again, I think we have to emphasize that the intention behind the manifesto is really modest. We didn’t try to say that we are going to introduce something completely different that will revolutionize the field.
NH: I think there is a certain sense that this was a bit of an arrogant move, to make these claims and write a “manifesto,” but you are right, it wasn’t our intention to claim that we have a brand new paradigm, as for instance Olga seems to suggest—a paradigm shift that will amaze everyone.

PZ: On that note, I think we can all agree with Tyson’s comment that the form in which we choose to present our ideas matters a lot. The only thing I disagree with is the way he describes, or defines, what a manifesto is. I think Norm has also indicated that manifestos in the world of art are not, as Tyson seems to imply, necessarily referring to the future. Is the manifesto, as a form, essentially prophetic? Although I like very much the distinctions Tyson has developed in his reply (i.e., between creed, charter, manifesto, and declaration), I don’t think that manifestos are what he claims them to be. The majority of aesthetic manifestos argue precisely what real art is—not what it should be in a better future. I would even say that perhaps the Communist Manifesto is an exception, even though it has dominated the public imaginary with its prophetic (eschatological) attitude. So, apart from Marx’s and Engels’s texts, isn’t a manifesto mostly an attempt to manifest something, i.e., to make something that is present (in an ontological sense) present (in the ontic sense), as you put it earlier, Joris? And conversely, isn’t a declaration—despite the beauty of the definition given by Tyson—always also the establishment of something: a country, an institution, a movement? Our intention is much more modest: we simply have come to a point where we felt that we had to make explicit a way of looking at education that we see emerging. In that sense, the manifesto is a retroactive attempt to articulate a view on education that already is there, and that we consider to be worth developing. It is tempting to agree with Tyson’s rendering of declaration, but—I think—our intention was precisely to make manifest what is already there. Hence—manifesto.

JV: Although I am very sympathetic to the argument that particular forms have particular educational or non-educational
consequences, I would also say that this very claim is a most anti-educational gesture. I say this because it comes down to arguing that a manifesto cannot ever be educational. And, this goes against what Tyson is saying himself, i.e., that we should profanate forms, and so give them a new use and new destination. Well, we tried to do that with the form of the “manifesto.” Tyson seems to exclude this from the very start by saying: manifestos are one category, declarations are an altogether different category, and so on. In that regard, we should even be able to write a profanated creed. Moreover, what we try to do is change the attitude from one of a desire to force upon an evil world a certified bright future, to one that is all about starting to relate affirmatively and attentionally to the world as it stands. “Manifesto” exactly means what it originally refers to: the fundamental educational act of showing something, to make it present — here and now.