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"THE SECRET OF YOUTH" AGAINST NIHILISM OF THE YOUTH ACCORDING TO UMBERTO GALIMBERTI

1. Introduction

The contemporary period, the contemporary “time of education” (Palouš, 1991), is the time of change, conversion, transformation, continual reformation and infinite exploration. The subject of our scientific search is the very status of posing educational questions and the modality of justifying educational thinking and action: What is the way, theoretically appropriate and efficient in its consequences, of grasping the subject of education in the context of insecurity, fluidity (Baumann, 2008) and also autoreferentiality of cultural discourses and practical cultivation processes? Or simply: How to ask about education at all so that possible answers would keep the pace with challenges of culture that self-ironically questions the validity of its expressions already in the moment of their beginning?

Many attributes serve designation of the current post-metaphysical context of education and the attribute of nihilism can be included among them. The term “nihilism” has more than a hundred-year-long history and a wide range of explanations and definitions. Besides the classic passive (negative) and active (positive) meanings of this term (F.H. Jacobi, M. Stirner, D.I. Pisarev, M. Dostojevskij, F. Nietzsche, M. Heidegger, K. Jaspers), attempts at recon-textualisation of nihilism in current efforts to provide a cultural diagnosis keep on appearing at present (G. Vattimo, P.A. Rovatti, R. Rorty, F. Volpi,

G. Lipovetsky). A contemporary Italian philosopher, Umberto Galimberti, belongs to these authors, too – mainly in connection to education.

2. Galimberti and nihilism of the youth

Umberto Galimberti certainly belongs to those contemporary Italian philosophers who represent current philosophical writings in the Alpine country, including all the particularities (exceptionalities and weaknesses) of the Italian way of leading the humanistic discourse. The “Italian philosophy” is definitely not inferior, even though, some of its representatives are very self-critical in this regard (R. Farneti, A. Coliva). Galimberti has published 29 monographs (some in co-authorship) so far, focused on existential, anthropological and ethical topics, with a particular attention to contemporary problems and challenges of the Western (European) society. Galimberti’s intention is not to produce series of scientific treatises meant for privy communities of academics and their “hermetic circles”, but to denote the symptoms of cultural problems in a language accessible for every average-orientated reader. Nihilism and resignation of the youth, who reflect general thinking conceived by preceding generations like a litmus paper, are among these pressing problems which appear to be “epochal”. He introduced his analyses and suggestions related to the current status of the youth in his work *The Disquieting Guest. The Nihilism and the Youth (L’ospite inquietante. Il nichilismo e i giovani, 2008)*. Galimberti’s means of expression in this book could be placed more into the genre of poetry and essay, closely associated with the people coming from a Mediterranean country.

Umberto Galimberti stresses the fact that the youth experience loneliness and depression not as their existential developmental crisis, but as a cultural crisis, which makes it even more radical since it does not provide a promise of overcoming it in the phase of adulthood. Technical perfection without a horizon of one’s meaning only enhances the awareness of human frustration. As Nietzsche predicted, existential sadness is seizing humanity, like after the sunset at the end of a day, because the “day” of the West is setting down (The West = Abendland), which is followed by a night without rules that would guarantee transparency and humaneness.

The real meaning of the “setting West” is disinterest in the youth. A certain interest is demonstrated by the market that offers them entertainment and consumption, but the subjects of their consumption are not really goods and services, but their own lives, which do not represent plans for the future,

since the future does not give them any promises. The present, which they live with a maximum intensity – not because it provides them with joy, but because they are looking for a way in it how to forget the existential loneliness and anxiety, is becoming their absolute. They cannot even describe and express their anxiety, because they are flooded by “emotional analphabetism”. They suppress loneliness by loud music, escapes in drug intoxication, mass psychoses (mega concerts, stadiums), in experiences of group violence as well as individual violence (street criminality, gangs, bullying).

Galimberti compiled several basic symptoms of nihilism of the youth: 1) disinterest in school, bullying; 2) emotional aridity; 3) loss of the sense of intimacy; 4) seductiveness of drugs; 5) resorting to death; 6) carelessness, psychopathy, sociopathy; 7) ritual violence (cf. Rajska, 2009, p. 160–167).

2.1. Disinterest in school. A human creates their own identity mainly through recognition from the others. If an adolescent does not get appreciation in the family and at school, they search for it in the street, in drugs and in sex. The desire for recognition often hits a tough and refusing reality, which is followed by two possible reactions: displacement or frustration. In the first case, a young person takes refuge in alternative worlds and virtual dreams. Distractibility, inattention, lack of interest in what is going on at school, inability to face reality are the consequences of this state. In the second case, an adolescent renounces school, rejects it and moves to other spaces that represent a promise of their actualisation. Bullying of the weaker is often a part of such a reaction. A lapse of contemporary education, as Galimberti states, is the limitation of one’s own activity only to schooling and neglect of upbringing. Upbringing is not a natural consequence of schooling; schooling needs to proceed hand in hand with upbringing. There occurs excessive objectivisation of assessment, where education pays attention to economic efficiency and productivity (of teachers as well as students) and it is reduced to a mere quantitative fact, measured by marks and points. Education is turning into an economic contest of cold and calculating performers of efficiency, without any emotional personal relationships. Learning is losing attraction and the dimension of personal emotional engagement in “conquering the interesting world of knowledge”. This is where to begin, Galimberti writes, with personal preparation and training of future teachers not only at the level of intellect, but also at the level of “heart” (emotional and spiritual education, communication and social skills, building personal charisma of a teacher).

2.2. Emotional aridity. Aristotle claims in his Rhetoric that it is possible and needed to educate emotivity of a human. Extreme dosage of emotional

experiences, direct but mainly mediated (TV, music, the Internet), which adolescents absorb in great amounts without the ability to process and select them, causes that the emotional world of adolescents has crowded, flattened and turned numb. As a result of insufficient emotional education they often cannot process external and internal conflicts, which result into rough aggression and unbridled sex. In their psyche there occurs a vicious circle between the emotional indifference and the absence of emotional resonance. Galimberti suggests breaking the circle by focusing on “emotional education”, by means of which the pedagogues will systematically provide the adolescents with tools for acquisition of desired emotional skills such as self-esteem, self-control, empathy, the ability to listen, to solve conflicts, to cooperate. “I urge teachers who take out assessments of intellectual abilities of their students daily to reflect first upon how much emotional education they handed out, because at least to themselves they cannot hide the fact that intelligence and education do not work if they are not nourished by the heart” (Galimberti, 2007, p. 48).

2.3. Loss of the sense of intimacy. In the words of Max Scheler, shame, shyness, humbleness defend our intimacy, our freedom and the core of our personality, where we decide what kind of relationship we will develop to the other (cf. Scheller, 1993). Shame or shyness is a certain kind of vigilance through which we decide about the level of openness or closeness in a relationship to the other. However, the difference between interiority and exteriority is fading away in our society. Various reality shows spread a belief that the borders separating the sphere of intimacy, privacy, discretion and secrecy from the sphere of public and joint ownership have fallen down. Publicization and disclosure of intimacy occur, because in a consumer society the value of goods is reminded and created by public advertising. The young acquire a belief that they exist only if they display themselves like goods in a shopping window. They confuse their own identity with publication of their image and thus, instead of searching for and building themselves, their individuality, they insert themselves into the hands of advertising that creates them. Humbleness and shame are no longer a signal of protection and a border of a soul that used to dwell in the secret of interiority. The soul has exteriorised so that a human is “seen”, recognised as existing. “To be means to be seen”, or rather, “to be objectised”, “to be on offer”. A competitive publication of one’s own deepest feelings, desires, remorse, love experiences, life plans “needs to be considered more pornographic than pornography itself, since to strip one’s

own soul is worse than to strip the body." (Galimberti, 2007, p. 59). Individuality and uniqueness of a person is lost, it becomes "joint", the society is being homogenised.

2.4. Seductiveness of drugs. The drug problem cannot be solved by focusing on products, but on persons and their social relationships. Our cities are being flooded by a nihilistic indulgence in the devastating drug without us being able to reverse this trend by medicaments and therapies. Craving for a drug is insatiable, because it increases with the drug use, just like every pleasure that is insatiable and bottomless (Plato). The narcotic pleasure is negative mostly due to the fact that it does not lead to the feeling of happiness, but to a temporary suppression of unbearable pain, a feeling of under pressure and negative nothingness. Each following dose does not bring pleasure, only a sedative against suffering. That is how a "full-time" addiction originates, a string of destructive "sedatives", which is very hard to break. An-aesthetic effect of a drug distracts from the care for reality and leads to a blind alley of carelessness and resignation. Plato offered the adventure of thinking against the bottomlessness of negative pleasures, Freud called for acquisition of the principle of reality, according to which a pleasure has to be an outcome of effort. Galimberti suggests reviving Plato's aesthetic way of processing and elevating common pleasures (not narcotic pleasures, but "daily delights"), which do not bypass reality, but "aestheticise" it, elevate it from the sensory to the suprasensory, the beautiful, the sublime. A daunting preventive task for educators – to arouse a sense of reality and to light up an interest in the world in the young.

2.5. Resorting to death. Death has become a media product, which in the homogenised virtual world does not have a greater seriousness than for example getting off a car, dinner with some wine or one night-stand. Television distributes general human carelessness to values, which creates a nihilistic mentality in the souls of the young. Black chronicles deliver news on juvenile murderers who killed without a reason, without a motive. A murder out of jealousy, revenge or due to enrichment is at least explicable; in a sense, its "rational" causality calms us down. A murder without motive, happening only because the young murderer wanted to "find out what it feels like", loses clarity, explicability, it scares us. Galimberti points out to the neglected emotional education, which would teach the youth to transform inner storms into words. An affective desert has become a habitual country for many adolescents. They live in scattered loneliness, where there is no precious identity

of an individual, because it has been absorbed by the homogenised society. Their words and gestures do not find an addressee, their existence becomes unimportant and meaningless and, in an unprecedented measure, they solve their “nothingness” by the most radical gesture – suicide. The only preventive method how to preclude this radical solution is a real interest in a young person from the side of parents and teachers: open unreduced communication, listening to the words of an adolescent, appreciation of their precious existence. Sigmund Freud wrote, “School has to do more than simply not to allow encouragement of young people to commit suicide. School has to arouse joy of life in them, to offer support and recourse in such a period of life in which the position of their own development forces them to loosen the ties with a parental house and family. It seems evident to me that school does not do it and that in many aspects it does not fulfil its own role, which is to offer a substitute for a family and to arouse an interest in life that is happening outside, in the world” (cf. Galimberti, 2007, p. 105).

2.6. Carelessness, psychopathy, sociopathy. Umberto Galimberti writes about three last generations of the young, in whom a gradual change of post-modern nihilism is visible. He calls them “generation of a clenched fist”, “generation X” and “generation Q”. These three generations still coexist and they represent a range of forms of the lost meaning. “Generation of the clenched fist” is represented by revolutionaries, rebels and notifiers of a radical break of social order. In the Western society, the most turbulent manifestations were reported at the beginning of the 1970s, but they continue in smaller groups and in a latent manner up to present. In the 1990s “generation X” appeared; a generation of emptied and uprooted youth, with no life plans, no lifestyle; their inner world is a great unknown, just like the unknown “X” (Douglas Coupland). The most fitting characteristic feature of this generation of the youth is indifference, carelessness. They often take refuge in myths and imitations, live amidst unprecedented prosperity and uncritical consumerism. They resign higher aims and better future. They do not experience despair, because they do not know hope that could be disappointed. They identified themselves with the homogeneous wave of consumption of today. If it seemed at the end of the 20th century that this is a clear symptom of the collapse of the West and its identity, the beginning of the 21st century brings even a more depressive form of nihilism of the youth. They are called “generation Q” according to a low intelligence and emotional quotient (FalkoBlask). Young people of this generation are egocentric, not self-critical at all, narcissistic

individuals, yet underdeveloped in terms of intelligence and emotions, who despite their lack of education and limitations behave as if the world belonged only to them. The bearers of the "Q factor" suffer from sociopathy and psychopathy. A psychopathic personality is emotionally immature, childishness is covered up by resistance to frustrations, they are not able to express positive feelings of empathy and thankfulness, they are morally apathetic, with no remorse or feelings of guilt, they are irresponsible and systematically insincere and dishonest. A sociopath has antisocial behaviour, which is not episodic or impulsive, but constant and program-like; they often resort to illegal ways, which are carried out coldly and indifferently. "Q factor" is an approach to life with no responsibility, no respect for oneself, no commitments and no fear from the consequences of one's own actions – all decisions can still be taken back: employment, marriage, sexual identity, pregnancy, etc. (cf. Galimberti, 2007, p. 134).

2.7. Ritual violence. A typical example of mass ritualised violence is the nihilistic violence at stadiums. The participants of regular violent orgy experience euphoria from excess, extreme excitement, destructive scenery, massacre, group planning of brutality, cruel laughter over the pain of victims. Their violence is nihilistic, because it is absurd – it is not a tool for reaching a goal. It is a clear abreaction in a mass, without any prediction of consequences.

3. How to overcome nihilism of the youth?

After discussing the dismal diagnosis of the context of educational reality of today, the question presses on us spontaneously: is it possible at all to overcome nihilism through education and, first of all, to prevent the youth from the atmosphere of fatalism, frustration, fear and uncertainty? The impression of irreversibility and the awareness of chronicity of cultural and educational crisis could easily lead to actual acceptance of apathy and real anti-pedagogical resignation. The critical diagnosis of nihilism in education, which I tried to sum up together with Galimberti, would like to be a presupposition and preparation for suggestion of certain therapeutic methods, reflecting the real cultural-educational situation of the present day.

Umberto Galimberti sees the path to overcoming nihilism in "ethics of a pilgrim". Young people adopt the position of the pilgrim Odysseus, when they let themselves to be carried along by life, but not as spectators, but as castaways, hoping to meet up with the faithful Penelope once again. Today's young

people have already left the territorial waters of traditional schemes of thinking and morality and they set off to search for new dismal paths and countries. Pilgrimage without a clear goal evokes in them a radically different view of the world in comparison to travelling due to transportation to a specific destination. Nomadism as a worldview perceives the world as an offer of adventures, among which one can find a temporary accommodation. The generation of today's youth is leaving the model of stability, closed into defensive walls of a safe society, leaving behind the scheme of progress and meaning so that they can express an agreement with the world, not with the calming ideas of the world. The ethics of a pilgrim is not a wandering anarchism. Nomadism is the disappointment of the strong, who reject a fictional game of protective illusions, it is the ability to inhabit the world in its innocent randomness, insecurity by a beforehand given meaning. Unlike a man rooted in his territory, who has his certainties in possession, borders and laws, a pilgrim, amidst various experiences, is looking for support not in a territorial map, but in two orientation points, in two "things" that fill him with admiration and honour: the starry heaven above and the moral law within himself" (I. Kant). The loss of solid borders (de-territorialisation) and solid forms in contemporary morality does not mean a complete absence of morality, but its replacement by the ethics of unrootedness, respect to difference and diversity, careful experiencing of individual untouchability, almost sanctity of the other, the different.

In relationship to the future, according to Galimberti, instead of expectation there comes hope. Expectation is a future firmly tied to a certain event, a schematic answer to current decisions. Expectation is a purpose, a set up objective of the pilgrimage, understood as transport. On the contrary, hope is a distanced future full of mysterious promises, without the features of anxiety, restlessness, impatience and uncertainty, which accompany expectation. Expectation contains staggering acceleration and anticipation of the future of bright forms. In expectation there is no duration, because time was absorbed by the future. Whereas hope is an openness for the possible, which shines through the horizon and does not provide any fact, any event – it is "the new heaven and the new Earth", a space where one becomes, creates himself. The young are tangibly "becoming" and creating. Galimberti senses the role of educators in encouraging the shift of the young from a passive approach of frightening boredom and depression from unfulfilled expectations to an active approach of hope, in which the uncertain future depends on the certain present (cf. Galimberti, 2007, p. 147).

4. "The Secret of Youth"

Galimberti also proposes to rediscover and appreciate the so called "secret of youth" (*il segreto giovanile*; *ibid*, p. 163–169), which as an inner strength represents a unique opportunity and challenge for educators to use it positively. The strength of youth is like an "arrow", "blessed is the man whose quiver is full of them" (Psalm 127). The dynamics of youth is expressed by several manifestations that can be grasped and used pedagogically by educators:

- 1) cordiality (expansiveness, fullness, strength, acceleration of life);
- 2) teamwork (identification with a community, togetherness, desire for recognition);
- 3) detachment (dynamic desire to explore and experience, imagination and fantasy, alternative of reality);
- 4) passion (not a blind one, but a visionary one; fervour and eagerness);
- 5) playfulness (creation of new rules, testing utopias of life);
- 6) nomadism (desire to overcome every border, to discover the new, to marvel);
- 7) sense of challenges (taking exams, throwing oneself into bets);
- 8) mission to change the world (reinvention, transformation, recovery, reform, reconstruction);
- 9) ability of self-discovery (examination of one's own heart, emphasis on the "reflexive pronoun myself", I that is in search for its home, its identity);
- 10) symbol of life (sign of vitality, promise of the future, openness to the new).

The age of youth is not an age of transition, bridging childhood and adulthood, an age that "has to be experienced fast and safe", but it is a real human present, a delicate and precious reality, which deserves the greatest attention – because of our young people and because of their world, which is our world, too.

5. Conclusion

In Galimberti's reflection of nihilism, my focus is on his ability to capture the oppressive causes of cultural frustration as well as promises of transformation, release and authenticity of the humane, which occur in the mentality of unrootedness, however, mainly in the position of "nomadism" of a singing

and dancing man of today. Undoubtedly, the openness to potentially developmental aspects of contemporary nihilism is a positive feature of his analysis. Although he does not spare the reader, he does not leave him completely at the mercy of this “disquieting guest”. He can also be recognised for a lively and attractive language, even though he uses it at the expense of accuracy and theoretical clarity.

On the other hand, we cannot shade our eyes from certain contradictions and inconsistencies of the Italian philosopher. The main criticism of his work is the repetition of the theses expressed on several occasions, recycling of his own ideas as well as ideas of other authors whom he does not cite appropriately (cf. Sokolíčková, in: Galimberti, 2013, p. 17–18). In Galimberti’s thinking there persists an archetypal, however, uncritical belief that the good times are gone. The work could be also criticised for not supplementing the philosophical-psychological analyses with political-economic analyses. The author presents a redemptive function of emotionality: he prefaces emotionality and its renewed appreciation as a way of restoration of subjectivity and after all, morality, too. He identifies emotions with the “soul”, with relationships, with will (“the power of spirit”), without the necessary differentiation between affectivity, sociality, virtue and morality as such. He accepts the role of will and reflexive rationality (e.g. p. 25), but apparently, only as laterality of emotional procedures. Subjectivity above all; emotionality is always bounded to personal experiencing of an individual and every perspective, asking about objectivity, has in Galimberti’s perception automatically an equivalent of empowering, hegemonisation and homogenisation. For instance, he rejects school assessment of outcomes through the system of marks as a subjective judgement, which just looks objectively (p. 21); however, “life world” cannot be reduced to a cumulation of emotional experiences. Blaming school, the Italian author assigns the responsibility for nihilism of the youth to school institutions and mainly, to teachers, their lack of personal interest in students. I believe that the “frightening guest” has committed a significant portion of the damage earlier – at home, in a family – by legitimising its real decomposition and latent uselessness.

The fundamental message of Galimberti’s study is the recognition that culture that would stop looking at education and would willingly surrender the possibility to shape its future bearers.

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Summary: The contemporary period is the time of change, conversion, transformation, continual reformation and infinite exploration. The subject of our scientific search is the very status of posing educational questions: What is the way of grasping the subject of education in the context of insecurity, fluidity and also autoreferentiality of cultural discourses and practical cultivation processes? How to ask about education at all so that possible answers would keep the pace with challenges of culture that self-ironically questions the validity of its expressions already in the moment of their beginning? The term “nihilism” has more than a hundred-year-long history and besides the classic meanings of this term attempts at recontextualisation of nihilism in current efforts to provide a cultural diagnosis keep on appearing at present. A contemporary Italian

philosopher, Umberto Galimberti, belongs to these authors, too – mainly in connection to education. His work *The Disquieting Guest. The Nihilism and the Youth* (2008), is not to produce series of scientific treatises meant for privy communities of academics and their “hermetic circles”, but to denote the symptoms of cultural problems in a language accessible for every average-orientated reader. Galimberti compiled and analysed several basic symptoms of nihilism of the youth: 1. disinterest in school, bullying; 2. emotional aridity; 3. loss of the sense of intimacy; 4. seductiveness of drugs; 5. resorting to death; 6. carelessness, psychopathy, sociopathy; 7. ritual violence. In the final section, we show his answer to the question: How to overcome nihilism of the youth?

Keywords: nihilism, youth, Umberto Galimberti, contemporary education, postmodernity, nomadism

„TAJEMNICE MŁODOŚCI” UMBERTO GALIMBERTI WOBEC NIHILIZMU MŁODZIEŻY

Streszczenie: Okres współczesny to czas zmian, transformacji, ciągłej reformacji i nieskończonej eksploracji. Celem naszych naukowych poszukiwań jest postawienie pytań o to, jaki jest sposób pojmowania przedmiotu edukacji w kontekście niepewności, płynności, a także autoreferencjalności dyskursów kulturowych i praktycznych procesów nauczania. Jak zadawać pytania o edukację, aby możliwe odpowiedzi nie zaprzęcały wyzwaniom kultury, które same ironicznie kwestionują?

Określenie „nihilizm” ma ponad stuletnią historię, ale pomimo pierwotnego znaczenia tego terminu zostały podjęte pewne próby jego rekontekstualizacji w celu zdiagnozowania kultury współczesności. Jednym ze współczesnych filozofów, który się tego podjął, jest Umberto Galimberti. Celem jego publikacji *Nihilizm i młodzież* (2008) nie było opracowywanie serii naukowych traktatów przeznaczonych dla środowiska akademickiego oraz jego „hermetycznych kręgów”, ale wskazanie symptomów problemów kulturowych i sformułowanie ich w języku przystępnym dla każdego czytelnika. Galimberti zebrał i przeanalizował kilka podstawowych symptomów nihilizmu młodzieży: 1) lekceważenie w szkole, zastraszanie; 2) uczucie wyjałowienia emocjonalnego; 3) utrata poczucia intymności; 4) atrakcyjność narkotyków; 5) uciekanie się do śmierci; 6) nieostrożność, psychopatia, socjopatia; 7) przemoc rytualna. Ostatnia część artykułu poświęcona jest propozycjom Galimbertiego dotyczącym odpowiedzi na pytanie: „jak przezwyciężyć nihilizm młodzieży?”.

Słowa kluczowe: nihilizm, młodzież, Umberto Galimberti, współczesna edukacja, postmodernizm, nomadyzm