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“Maturing Towards Childhood” As Longing and Dreaming. A Possible Vision of Pedagogical Guidance?

Abstract

This article explores the concepts of longing and dreaming as categories fundamental for human development throughout life. It aims to creatively employ concepts from philosophical, literary, and cultural studies and to attempt to transpose them into pedagogy through a brilliant paradox called “maturity towards childhood”. The categories of longing and dreaming are peculiar imponderables that require subtlety of description. The phenomenon of ambivalence is used as a descriptive tool. Hence, the argumentation reveals the dual nature of the categories under investigation: as pain and pleasure, as arche and telos, as “the radiance of life and that which frightens” (Pawliszyn 2019: 331). The essence of the article’s narrative is the argument for the titular “maturing towards childhood”, where childhood is understood, following G. Bachelard, as a cosmic childhood, that is, beyond time. Is the vision of pedagogical guidance toward “maturity towards childhood” as longing and dreaming possible? It is undoubtedly needed so as not to completely strip human education of sensitivity, subtlety, reflectiveness, passion, and the depth of experiencing the world. It is our duty, as those who “guide children” into the world (Greek: *paidagogos*), to understand, care, and be sensitive to “maturity towards childhood” as a contemporary “competence of absence”.

Keywords: longing, dream, childhood, maturing into childhood maturity, pedagogical vision.

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„Dojrzewanie do dzieciństwa” jako tęsknota i marzenie. Możliwa wizja pedagogicznego prowadzenia?

Abstrakt

Artykuł podejmuje problematykę tęsknoty i marzenia jako kategorii fundamentalnych dla rozwoju człowieka w całym biegu jego życia. Jego celem jest twórcze wyzyskanie tych kategorii z dyskursu filozoficznego, literaturoznawczego, kulturoznawczego i próba ich transpozycji na grunt pedagogiki w postaci genialnego paradoksu, który nazwano „dojrzałością do dzieciństwa”. Kategorie tęsknoty i marzenia są swoistymi imponderabiliami, które wymagają subtelności opisu. Jako narzędzie opisu wykorzystano fenomen ambiwalencji. Stąd w argumentacji pojawia się dwuwartościowe oblicze analizowanych kategorii: jako ból i rozkosz, jako arché i telos, jako „blask życia i to, co straszy” (Pawliszyn 2019: 331). Meritum narracji artykułu stanowi argumentacja na rzecz tytułowego „dojrzewanania do dzieciństwa” – dzieciństwa rozumianego za Gastonem Bachelardem jako dzieciństwo kosmiczne, czyli poza czasem. Czy wizja pedagogicznego prowadzenia ku „dojrzałości do dzieciństwa” jako tęsknoty i marzenia jest możliwa? Z pewnością jest bardzo potrzebna, aby zupełnie nie wyjałowić edukacji człowieka z wrażliwości, subtelności, refleksyjności, namiętności, głębokości doświadczenia świata. Naszą powinnością, tych wszystkich, którzy w świat „dziecko prowadzą” (gr. *paidagogos*), jest zrozumienie, troska i czułość wobec „dojrzałości do dzieciństwa” jako współczesnej „kompetencji braku”.

Słowa kluczowe: tęsknota, marzenie, dzieciństwo, dojrzałość do dzieciństwa, wizja pedagogiczna.

Introduction

The modern world is constantly searching for something new, different, and unknown. This is the natural course of the world and of the human being who inhabits it. We seek, for example, new technological solutions, strategies for optimal economic development, ways to effectively treat lifestyle-related diseases, or space exploration. Indeed, we do this in the name of humanity, but do we seek the individual human being and their true happiness with equal vigour? Do we find ourselves in this world?

This paper explores the concept of ‘maturity towards childhood’ as a form of longing and dreaming, aiming to seek a possible vision for pedagogical guidance. The paradoxical notion of ‘maturity towards childhood’ holds immense interpretative potential, drawing attention to the phenomena of longing and dreaming. The paper’s entire narrative reveals their facets, emphasising the dual nature of their existence: as pain and pleasure, as *arche* and *telos*, as the radiance of life and that which frightens. The introduction highlights certain issues that serve as initial points of reference for the present author’s conceptualisation.

What must be said about longing at the outset is its so-called ‘mineness’ and its evocative nature. How should this be understood? The object of longing is always giv-

en as absent. But what kind of absence is this? It is what is known as 'absence-for-me', that is, the deprivation of something that affects only the individual.

Antoni Płoszczyniec explains that longing is essentially a first-person act, that is, one whose dominant feature is the relation of the act's content to that specific 'I' which I myself am, I cannot long on behalf of anyone else. Longing is therefore distinguished by its 'mineness', that is, longing is something that is in each case mine (Płoszczyniec 2014: 119; cf. Heidegger 1994: 59).

Furthermore, longing is a private phenomenon as it concerns certain absence, lack (Latin: *privatio*) (Płoszczyniec 2014: 119). Longing is also a mood, a unique colouring of experiences, functioning as a kind of *a priori* sensitivity (Michalski 1998: 86).

In *The Flame of a Candle*, Gaston Bachelard writes that a sensitive heart loves fragile values. It finds common ground with fighting values, and therefore with a faint light, for it too fights against the darkness, and the dreamer is the chiaroscuro of the thinking being (Bachelard 1996: 12–13). By employing the metaphor of a candle flame, Bachelard demonstrates both the fragility and the creative power of a reverie. The rising light ennobles and elevates the fire, giving it a positive, humanistic value. The symbolism of the flame thus transforms it into a metaphor for human dignity (Bachelard 1996: 39). Rising of the flame is an image of human consciousness which strives upward, perfecting, strengthening, and illuminating itself (Kamińska 2017: 60). It is then that a person enters the world morally (Bachelard 1998: 38). The dreamer and their reverie enter totally into the substance of happiness (Bachelard 1998: 21).

Thus, 'maturity towards childhood' teaches one to seek the mineness of lack, to reclaim it in an evocative longing full of sensitivity, and to venture with dignity into a reverie beyond existing constraints, beyond the refusal to conform, and beyond the limits of reality (Kamińska 2017: 50). For cosmic childhood, as Bachelard understands it, is the boundless expanse of reveries and creatively domesticates the world. In this sense, one might speak of a possible vision for pedagogical guidance that seeks absence and finds it, making the world a better place and people happier – perhaps? The question mark posed here reflects a deep concern regarding whether such a subtle, unhurried path of pedagogical guidance – like a ritual of taking two steps forward, one step back – is even possible in a world driven by rapid, sudden and desired concreteness of action. In contrast to this concern over the *raison d'être* of such a path, arguments are presented for its absolute necessity. It is a matter of ensuring that human education is not completely stripped of sensitivity, subtlety, reflectiveness, passion and the depth of experiencing the world. If so, the symbolic windows of transcendence must be thrown wide open for education, so as to go beyond the boundaries of human maturity towards 'maturity towards childhood'. This is understood as maturity towards a non-naïve trust that builds lasting communities; maturity towards a phantasmagorical imagination that builds other, better worlds; maturity towards the creation of instrumental reveries that build us; and maturity towards unconditional love that builds bonds despite differences. These are, in many instances, the deeply painful absences of the contemporary world on both an individual and a supra-individual level.

Longing as pain and pleasure in both enduring and proceeding... at the same time

Longing is a category that should be described from the perspective of humanistic meta-formation. Reflections on it are most commonly found in philosophical, cultural and literary studies. Looking up dictionary definitions of longing, one encounters meanings centred mainly on feeling a state of loss. It is an unpleasant state which, engaging the senses, manifests itself in various forms of expression. This is reflected in the diverse ways of describing the spectrum of the intensity of longing. It can therefore be painful, immense, intense, desperate, heart-wrenching, unspeakable, sudden, concealed, and so on. All these distressing manifestations of longing provoke in a person a simultaneous desire for swift compensation for the loss and for the soothing of the pain. Loss may be conditioned by personal experience (e.g. longing for a home left behind) or by a mental state arising when one feels unwell because of losing something irretrievably or having had to part with someone or something that one very much likes to have close to them (Doroszewski 1967: 139). However, is longing always and only directed towards the past? Longing, as Józef Tischner says, grows out of the present and is a protest against it (Tischner 1998: 41). It seems that if one longs for the absent, one can also situate the object of their longing in the future, touching upon the desire/reverie of a different life, the experience of something one has never had or experienced so far.

Can one, then, long for something that does not yet exist? This theme is found, for example, in the philosophy of Ernst Bloch, who, in his profound study of the human will, emphasises that the human spirit encompasses everything, including another world that does not yet exist (Bloch 1981: 33). The world for which one longs is something that does not yet exist, that lives and dreams in the darkness of life, in the background of every thought as the deepest content of hope and wonder (Bloch 1981: 34).

Longing is inextricably linked to time and space, as it is directed towards events, places and people distant from one's here and now. The proximity of things and objects does not guarantee the persistence of a deeply felt longing. On the contrary, longing intensifies the connection precisely with things that are (temporally and) spatially distant. At its core lies the experience of spatial distance, which Heidegger described as the 'pathos of distance' (Symotiuk 2009: 14). However, the pathos of distance does not imply dualism, binary opposition, or the contrast between closeness and distance, but rather a 'near distance' – that is, something which is indeed in the distance, yet within one's subjective distance, bringing one closer to the object of one's longing. This may often last and encompass the entire course of a person's life. Such a metaphysical experience of longing makes it bearable within everyday human existence.

Longing is therefore a state composed of feelings of regret at loss and hope that this void might be filled. It is a state of intense yearning, a reverie that 'regret and

hope' might be fulfilled simultaneously. This defines it as ambivalent, intentionally dual-valued, full of pain and pleasure in enduring with the absent and in moving towards the absent. This dual nature of longing can, for example, be found in the description by Władysław Witwicki, a philosopher and historian of philosophy, who in his *Przechadzki ateńskie* writes about longing as follows:

For this misfortune, which is called longing, has its own delightful aspects, mingled with bitter ones. The worst pain of longing is that there is no longer an object towards which one reaches out in vain, and the eyes will not see what they desire. Time slowly blurs the images of what is lost from memory, and the loss thus becomes all the deeper, yet its trace begins to heal slowly. If one were to remove everything that reminds one of the lost object, perhaps the wound would heal sooner. But then that fragment of delight which lies within longing would be lost. To catch up with it and somehow hold on to it, illusory imitations of past moments in stone, in an image, in a description are enough. They bring back, as it were, what will never return, and there is something to smile at, and an appearance of a return when the pain of loss fades. In this way, longing, once it has lost the sting of pain, lingers harmlessly and takes on a rosy hue (Witwicki 1960: 73).

Thus, two contrasting sensations intermingle in longing: delight and bitterness. According to Mirosław Pawliszyn, "the former evokes a natural desire to remain in that which is delightful; the latter gives rise to a desire to flee, a longing to withdraw. [...] one intoxicates, causing one to lose oneself, the other rather heightens vigilance" (Pawliszyn 2019: 321). It should be emphasised that both sensations engage the individual with equal force, though clearly in opposite directions.

A similar sense of the duality of the phenomenon of longing is evident in the thought of Martin Heidegger:

A double, contrary movement is contained in longing: the striving away from itself to spread itself, and yet precisely back to itself. As the essential determination of the ground (of being a ground) in God, longing characterizes this Being as urging away from itself into the most indeterminate breadth of absolute essential fullness, and at the same time as the overpowering of joining itself to itself (Heidegger 1985: 125).

It must be strongly emphasised that longing is by no means an incidental state, but a fundamental one, essential to human life. Its significant status as a category was introduced into philosophical studies by Jakob Böhme, a mystic and key figure of Silesian spirituality, who claimed that the entire nature of the world is based on longing (Kosian 2001)¹. Böhme, seeking to transform the world in accordance with the teachings of the Gospel, argued that by longing in earthly life for the perfection of the Creator (*Gottessehnsucht des "Ich"*), the individual recalls their origin (Ławnikowska-Koper, Majkiewicz 2022: 22). It can be said that longing is the non-verbal voice of the soul,

¹ The mysticism and philosophical thought of Jacob Böhme had a profound influence on thinkers such as F. Schleiermacher, W. Dilthey, G.W. Leibniz, N.A. Berdyaev, S.F.W. Schelling, E. Bloch, Novalis, S. Kierkegaard, A. Schopenhauer, C.G. Jung and M. Buber.

which can be heard, when longing is correctly recognised – as the ‘ambassador of infinity’ (Symotiuk 2009: 31). This means that longing can be perceived as a trace of Transcendence imprinted in the individual, in their soul, which is meant to lead them back to where they came from: back to Transcendence (Symotiuk 2009: 32).

The concept of the ‘human of longing’ was introduced into the humanities in the broadest sense by Eduard Spranger, a student of Wilhelm Dilthey. It is a state of mind in which one feels within themselves the power of species, of humanity – something that transcends one’s individual smallness (Symotiuk 2009: 13). Longing embodies the idea of humanism within the self; therefore, it is a momentous state in the architectonics of human existence, of the humanity that exists within the individual. The human of longing, of the so-called ‘near distance’, is condemned to eternal wandering; they remain a tireless traveller as they experience the horizon receding endlessly and feel the permanent infinity of space (Bachelard 1961).

Of particular interest in terms of the subsequent argument in favour of the ‘maturity towards childhood’ referred to in the title is the understanding of longing suggested by cultural theorist Svetlana Boym (2019). Referring to the Greek etymology of the concept of nostalgia – namely, *nostos*, meaning ‘return home’, and *algia*, meaning ‘longing’ – the author defines nostalgia as a longing for a home that no longer exists or never existed. However, this is not a longing for a place in the geographical or spatial sense, but rather a yearning for a different time – the time of our childhood, the slower rhythms of our dreams (Boym 2019: 100). Boym distinguishes two distinct types of longing: restorative longing, whose object is home (Greek: *nostos*), and reflective longing, which is triggered by the Greek term *algia* itself. In the former case, it concerns longing, for example, for a lost home, homeland or family, and the reconstruction of that experience; in the latter, it concerns longing itself, which places at its centre the ambivalences of human longing and belonging (Boym 2019: 106).

The following narrative will focus on childhood in the sense of a lost dream home. The longing for this home is a longing full of trust and sincerity comparable to a child’s trust and sincerity, for “neither can one deceive it [the longing], nor does it deceive the self” (Symotiuk 2009: 32).

Childhood as a magical home of dreams... being lost

In setting out the argument outlined in the subheading, the author highlights three concepts that are essential to its substance. These are childhood, home and dreams, but the analysis of these does not follow a linear sequence; rather, they complement one another in a spatial manner, provoking new meanings within the unfolding narrative.

When discussing childhood, it must be emphasized that this is a fascinating area of humanistic reflection because one encounters an inherently ambivalent category. Why? Wojciech Józef Burszta and Waldemar Kuligowski explain that the ideas and actions concerning childhood lie between the excess that characterises it and the

deprivation that constantly threatens it. It is not the case that if there are children – and after all, there have always been children – childhood follows in their wake. The Middle Ages did not recognise this concept, and perhaps – as Postman posits – future humanity will not recognise it either (Burszta, Kuligowski 2005: 29–35).

The theses put forward by contemporary philosophers – Odo Marquard's claim that childhood permanently takes hold of the adult, and Neil Postman's assertion that childhood is disappearing – prompt deeper reflection on childhood, which must be saved from vanishing (Pluta 2011: 11). Yet, what kind of childhood is the focus of the subsequent text and is to be considered by the author?

Bachelard claims that within every human being lies what he calls 'permanent childhood', or 'cosmic childhood', which exists beyond time and beyond any specific history (Bachelard 1998: 115). Childhood has many sources, and it is impossible to define its geography. When one recalls their childhood, one evokes a refuge of reveries, which, according to Bachelard, is an open space where individuals can dwell as the first inhabitants of an undivided world of solitude (Bachelard 1998: 118). It is then that the excess of childhood – which is also an excess of the Magical – is released, and poetic images are set free. Hence, assuming that childhood – its events, images, and characteristic relationships with others – has shaped human sensitivity in the most profound way, defining as it were the field of creative possibilities, one is condemned to attempts at achieving the impossible; for it is difficult, through shaped means, to arrive at that which shaped them. In a sense, childhood thus becomes the transcendental foundation of artistic creativity, beyond which one cannot go – just as, according to Kant's philosophy, in the perception of objects one cannot transcend the transcendental forms of intuition: time and space (Kaczyński 2003: 128).

Bruno Schulz, whose interests encompassed, among other things, the areas of magic and fairy tales, and who was drawn to the moods of Romantic philosophising and poeticisation, for example by Friedrich Hölderlin, asked himself: "I do not know how we come by certain images in childhood, images decisive for us. They perform the role of those filaments in a solution around which the meaning of the world crystallizes for us. They constitute a capital of the spirit, a kind of core around which the sense of our life develops" (Schulz 1988: 108)².

In *The Poetics of Reverie* (1969), Bachelard describes childhood as a Word marked by wonder; and his philosophy of poetic reverie allows one to capture the very soul of childhood – its distinct sanctity, felicity, and the lucid consciousness of its bright side. For Bachelard, childhood constitutes 'an archetype of simple happiness', an image of coherence and harmony of human existence, an openness to the world and 'an invitation to the world'. As the philosopher emphasises, childhood is not merely its biographical dimension. It is something more, a philosophical category, the aforementioned permanent cosmic childhood. This is a state of the soul; for when an individual immerses themselves in gentleness and peace, their soul enters

² Schulz was deeply fascinated by childhood, which inspired many of his short stories, such as *The Age of Genius*, *The Republic of Dreams*, and *The Night of the Great Season*.

a state of childhood. "In every dreamer there lives a child, a child whom reverie magnifies and stabilizes. Reverie tears it away from history, sets it outside time, makes it foreign to time" (Bachelard 1969: 133).

Beyond its physical existence, home takes on the function of a symbol or interpretative category through which other cultural phenomena can be understood. It becomes a structure of the imagination that organises our perception and experience of the world. Barbara Kwaśny writes that the home, as a person's dwelling, the place of one's birth and death, acquires the status of a universal model; it constitutes the centre of the Universe and symbolises the cosmic order" (Kwaśny 2011: 177).

Childhood is a symbolic home of dreams, but did one dream enough within it to discover the joy of dwelling there? This is a very important question since, for Bachelard, the home of childhood – and thus the home of dreams – constitutes an intimate space (*l'espace intime*), which is a space of happiness (Greek: *topophilia*). It is then, while feeling all-encompassing happiness and through "imagination, thanks to the subtleties of the irreality function, we re-enter the world of confidence, the world of the confident being, which is the proper world for reverie" (Bachelard 1969: 14).

It is then that the excess of childhood – which is also an excess of the Magical – is released, and poetic images are set free. These images are the seed of a poem, and the poem expresses "the continuity of the great childhood reveries with the reveries of the poet" (Bachelard 1969: 100). According to Bachelard, it is poets who convince us that all our childhood reveries deserve to be started over again (Bachelard 1998: 122). What the philosopher emphasises as important and helpful for situating cosmic childhood within the realm of values is this triple connection of imagination, memory and poetry. Thus, poetry and poets summon us to the realms of so-called pre-existence, that is, the realm of magical paradox. As Bachelard puts it, this paradox consists in the fact that the past has a future within us, the future of its living images, the future of the reverie which opens up before any found image (Bachelard 1998: 130). If, therefore, poets seek such 'pre-existence', it means that it truly exists; Bachelard's certainty is determined here by the axioms of a philosophy of oneirism (Bachelard 1969).

Using the metaphor of a well, the philosopher says that childhood is 'the well of being'. It is the deepest memory, so distant that we are unable to determine whether it ever existed at all – or whether it existed prior to all being. On the other hand, a person recalling a dream discovers that which is timeless, i.e. something that is unrecognisable, constant and unchanging. Thus, for Bachelard, pure memory has no date, but it does have a season, and this constitutes the fundamental sign of memory. These seasons are not merely 'spectacles for the eye', but above all 'values of the soul' that beautify everything (Bachelard 1969).

What is essential for evoking eternal childhood is not only poetic imagery, but the scents of a magical dream home. For Bachelard the child is a genius of wonder, who is able to marvel genuinely at the world, recognise its value and receive it with admiration. Wandering through the seasons, the memory of childhood also traverses

worlds of scent. Childhood is inscribed in us through scents, because it is through scent that a person merges most strongly with the world and experiences intimacy (Kamińska 2017: 49).

Moreover, the scents of the dream home, which trigger a longing (Greek: *epithymia*) for eternal childhood, are released within the magical wind known as *thymos* (Greek: *thymos* – wind) – fleeting, elusive, yet at the same time boundless, all-pervading and all-encompassing (Mizińska 2009: 33). Where do they come from and what is their significance? Bachelard explains it as follows: wardrobes with their shelves, desks with their drawers, and chests with their false bottoms are veritable organs of the secret psychological life. Indeed, without these objects and a few others in equally high favour, our intimate life would lack a model of intimacy. They are hybrid objects, subject-objects. Like us, through us, for us, they have a quality of intimacy (Bachelard 1976: 236).

Childhood memory is rooted in the vitality of the imagination, and thus, childhood becomes the foundation of anamnesis and the symbol of symbols. If we are to preserve our childhood with its excess of the Magical – and therefore also of innocence and trust – we must evoke images of the happy space of the dream home, namely, the Greek *topophilia*. These are intimate, beloved spaces manifesting in vastly diverse shades of the chosen spaces, of the spaces praised (Bachelard 1976: 236).

Our love for a place that appears to be a magical, happy dream home prompts us to seek a kind of code to Transcendence. It turns out to be a permanent childhood – woven from images, symbols and scents – for which we long and which we wish to preserve within ourselves.

Longing for maturing towards childhood... rediscovered

At the outset of the final argument in favour of longing for maturing towards childhood, the present author draws upon the words of Bruno Schulz, which he himself used to describe his own works:

What you say about our artificially prolonged childhood – our immaturity – takes me a little aback. After all, the kind of art closest to my heart is precisely a regression, childhood revisited. If it were possible to reverse development, to grasp some road back around to childhood again, to have its abundance and limitlessness once more – then that ‘age of genius,’ those ‘messianic times’ promised and sworn to us by all mythologies, would come to pass. My ideal goal is to ‘mature’ into childhood. That would be genuine maturity (Schulz 1988: 126).

This argument is taken up here, in close alignment with what has been established so far regarding simultaneous longing and dreaming as well as about childhood as a home of dreams. As has been emphasised throughout this narrative: childhood, dreaming and longing are fundamental, essential phenomena. One might venture to say that this is the brilliant triad of human existence and humanity. The

phrase 'maturity towards childhood' is a paradox, but an extraordinarily life-giving one, both on an individual and a supra-individual level. Why? Because for every child, or indeed every childhood:

The child sees everything in a state of newness; he is always *drunk*. [...] sensibility is almost the whole being. But genius is nothing more nor less than childhood recovered at will – a childhood now equipped for self-expression with manhood's capacities [...] It is by this deep and joyful curiosity that we may explain the fixed and animally ecstatic gaze of a child confronted with something new (Baudelaire 1964: 8).

A childhood saturated with reveries, invoking embodied images, symbols, and scents – that is, Bachelard's permanent cosmic childhood – must be nurtured, sought out, preserved, and longed for. One must remain faithful to the maturity towards childhood, to the childhood within oneself, detached from individual biographies. This applies to everyone, regardless of who one is. The following words, though they refer to the artist, nevertheless they resonate universally: The artist [...] remains closer to his childhood throughout his life, one may even say more faithful to it. This closeness is no longer the intensity of a child's perception regained by the creator, nor the natural, spontaneous activity that forgets the dependencies of the adult world. The word 'fidelity' better captures this relationship between the artist and his own childhood (Kaczyński 2003: 127).

The paradoxical concept of 'maturity towards childhood' reveals the dual nature of childhood. In the context of the argument presented here, it can be understood as an *arche* (Greek), that is, a first cause, and as a *telos* (Greek), that is, an end. These categories, mythical on the one hand and philosophical on the other, capture the essence of this duality. *Arche*, as the first principle, the first cause, directs our thinking towards cosmic childhood in Bachelard's sense, which exists beyond time, beyond concrete history. "In their cosmic reverie, poets speak of the world in original words, in original images" (Bachelard 1969: 188).

By dreaming on childhood, we return to the lair of Reveries, to the reveries which have opened up the world to us. It is reverie makes us the first inhabitant of the world of solitude. And we inhabit the world better because we inhabit it like the solitary child inhabits images. In the child's reverie, the image takes precedent over everything else ... The reverie toward childhood returns us to the beauty of the first images. (Bachelard 1969: 102)

The Greek concept of *telos*, as an end in itself, defines our duty of fidelity to childhood – the home of dreams. This fidelity is an endurance in longing, of maturing towards childhood. For one cannot incite the flower against the roots, because it is precisely the roots – the element in which life, time, place and fate are formed – that determine the shape of the flower in each case, and define human consciousness (Kaczyński 2003:117). Maturity towards childhood is a beautiful, oneiric flower that conceals within its independence an essential dependence (Kaczyński 2003: 121).

Drawing on the notions of fidelity, trust and innocence typically attributed to childhood, attention is drawn to Aleksander Nalaskowski's interesting discussion of wildness and becoming wild (Nalaskowski 2006). Wildness, as Nalaskowski emphasises, is a state in which the Magical dominates the Rational. Therefore, when developing the argument in favour of maturity towards childhood, Nalaskowski's concept is creatively employed here. As a way of practising wildness, Nalaskowski proposes its externalisation, that is, becoming wild for the rest of one's life (Nalaskowski 2006: 61). In explaining this semantic relationship, one must recognise that in order to externalise (make something manifest), one must first internalise (make it part of oneself) that thing. Socialisation – that is, the process of introducing a person into the order of the dominant culture – is responsible for these processes of internalisation. Any resistance, attempt at contestation or questioning of the existing order, on the other hand, is part of the processes of desocialisation. Becoming wild is therefore a return, or an attempt to return, to an earlier stage, accompanied by a reduction in certain traits resulting from cultural and civilisational influences (Nalaskowski 2006: 57).

The term of 'becoming wild' encompasses a variety of forms, including so-called 'temporal wildness', which involves suspending the linear conception of time as past, present and future. These three aspects of temporality correspond respectively to three modes of human thought. Vertical thinking, which draws upon the reservoir of collective and individual memory, is characteristic of the past. The second dimension, the horizontal one, associated with the present, accounts for what is immediate. The third dimension is the transcendental dimension, which transcends time. In relation to cosmic childhood, as understood by Bachelard, the concept of transcendence has already resonated many times in the narrative presented above. It can therefore be said that the transcendent code for maturing towards childhood is to become wild for the rest of one's life

Is this an easy path? As the author has tried to argue, it requires faithfulness and sincerity in one's longing, and this, in turn, demands the effort of close self-examination and rebelling against oneself. It contains both the splendour of life and that which frightens us, it is not merely a fleeting emotion, a tearful rekindling of memories, but actually opens a person up to the infinite mystery of existence (Pawliszyn 2019: 331).

Conclusion

Concluding, it is necessary to ask the following question: is the vision of pedagogical guidance towards 'maturity towards childhood' – as a longing and a dream – possible? The discussion presented above leads to the conclusion that it is possible, but that its existence is not easy, though it is very much needed. We currently live, on the one hand, in a world of accelerated pace of civilisation, fascinating technologies and enchanting digitalisation; on the other, in a world of stifled presence, painful loneli-

ness and frequent anonymity. Is this a happy space (Greek: *topophilia*), as envisioned by Gaston Bachelard in his concept of the cosmic home of childhood?

‘Maturing towards childhood’ as a pedagogical approach involves preserving an element of childhood throughout the course of life. To be more precise, it is the educational task of nurturing a child-like sensitivity, tenderness, fragility, trust, sincerity, wisdom and curiosity, which, when tested throughout one’s lifetime, take on a different, more mature dimension.

It seems that the vision of pedagogical guidance towards ‘maturity for childhood’ is doomed to compete and struggle against the world that has been seduced by dehumanised technologies, humanoids with digital hearts and hard-disk-like skills. Is that enough to be happy? Is it even possible to live a life stripped of sensitivity, subtlety, reflection, passion and the depth of experiencing the human world? Does living with a sense of lacking the sensual images, smells, sounds, and symbols of childhood constitute an act of conscious renunciation of a part of oneself?

Human existence is always defined by absence, because the human is a being which lacks that which exists (Sartre 2007: 131). Paradoxically, this existential lack becomes a source of great possibilities in human life – opening up new perspectives, finding new trails, setting new goals, or transgressively pushing beyond one’s own limits (Gara 2021: 178).

Should we not, then, speak of ‘maturity towards childhood’ as a competence of lack? It is the responsibility of all those who “guide children into the world” (Greek: *paidagogos*) to understand, care for and show tenderness towards ‘maturity towards childhood’. This responsibility renders one the guardian of lack, supporting concern for deficits in potential, pitfalls or threats, which may be applicable in various areas of pedagogical activity” (Witkowski 2009: 22).

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