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Simulating education. The bureaucratisation of schooling as a production of the simulacra

Summary

The argument presented in this article stems from the experience of being engaged in a debate with schoolteachers, who pointed to the bureaucratisation of schooling as their main concern. Taking their way of formulating this problem as a guidepost for my thinking I have made an attempt aiming at understanding the link between bureaucracy and schooling. Starting from Max Weber classical view, thanks to its critique made by Claude Lefort I try to interpret the bureaucratisation of schooling with reference to Jean Baurillard theory of simulation as the production of the simulacra.

Keywords: schooling, bureaucracy, documenting, simulation, simulacra

> *...thought itself arises out of incidents of living experience and must remain bound to them as the only guideposts by which to take its belongings* (Arendt [1968] 2006: 14)

The argument presented in this paper has an empirical origin. Hence, it aims at understanding a phenomenon that is particular in nature. However, this concern refers to a general issue that would appear to be important for all of those who are interested in education and schooling. Being pressed on all sides by hegemonic discourses, performed policies, and common understandings of education, apart from a critical engagement in unmasking the dangers that they produce, educationalists are starting to pose some fundamental questions, such as: What is education? What is schooling? What is school? (see i.e. Biesta 2010a; Masschelein 2011)

Indeed, such issues struck me by the virtue of two particular and locally meaningful experiences. While coordinating a project of Public Educational Debates at the University of Gdańsk[1] about developing science education, I was struck time and time again by

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[1] The Public Educational Debates of the University of Gdańsk were undertaken as an element of a wider project, financed by the European Union Social Fund (UDA-POKL.04.01.01-00-180/08-00), which concerned the modernisation of the University as a space conducive for the emergence of various educational processes. During the project, from November 2009 to April 2010, five public debates on the issue of science education were organized, and about 300 school teachers, university students, academics, officials, parents, and interested citizens, took part in these fully open and inclusive events (the public were informed about the events through advertisements in the local press). Every debate was recorded, which made possible the development of a public statement on the issue, derived from the voices, standpoints,

a statement coming independently from school teachers working in various places. This pointed to the bureaucratisation of schooling as one of the essential problems in their work, and one which it was most important to discuss[2]. What particularly caught my attention however was the lexis they used to express their concerns, and specially the word: 'instead'[3]. These teachers argued that 'instead of schooling', 'instead of working with pupils', 'instead of educating' – they were compelled, more and more, to dedicate their time to filling out or incessantly creating an increasing amount of documentation. They argued therefore that *instead* of thinking, *instead* of being attentive, *instead* of creating their own educational practice, they were forced to work according to an externally imposed, standardized matrix of behaviour that could be indexed, measured, and reported. Here is an exemplary statement of one of the school teachers participating in the debate on 2nd February 2010:

> We, the school teachers, are so incredibly entangled in the system, so incredibly enslaved by school officials, so incredibly compelled to plan, check, control, that even if we try to do something else in a different manner, we get a slap on the wrist. That is not good. Instead of bringing teachers' knowledge into play, we are obliged to act according to imposed ways, to fill up the logbook, to control ourselves – and that's terrible (February debate; schoolteacher voice).

Simultaneous to that experience, I advised on an undergraduate study (Jurczyk 2010) which, as one of its results showed, the average elementary school teacher has to fill out or produce about 620 pages of documents a year, and that almost every kind of activity by her or his pupils should be documented[4].

While attempting to respond to Hannah Arendt's call – taken as a motto for this exercise – to *remain bound* to those experiences, and regard them as *guideposts* for my thinking, it occurred that the questions arising from such particular cases are of general nature. What is bureaucracy and bureaucratisation? How can it be conceived of and explored? What does it mean for education? What does it do to what education is? What does schooling become because of it? Hence, the following argument does not concern a systemic analysis of the empirical data collected during the research, and it is not my intention to

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and arguments of the participants. Such a report was published in various locations (Zamojski 2011; Szomburg 2011; http://www.edunews.pl/badania-i-debaty/opinie/1446-budujmy-spoleczne-srodowisko-oswiatowe [20.03.2011]). Moreover, the whole enterprise was constructed as a project in the form of a piece of research-intervention (conducted as participatory action research) aiming at building a public sphere around education.

[2] Such opinions were also stated informally during the after-debate talks at the University bar / lobby.

[3] Apart from its direct use, there were cases of statements in which the word 'instead' was unspoken, rather its use was implied in the opinion spoken.

[4] It is worth noting that even a 30 minutes excursion with pupils into the nearby park requires about 20 pages of documentation which includes an estimate, and regimen of the tour. All of which has to be approved beforehand by the school authorities. One should not be surprised that – in accordance with the research outcomes – such requirements refrain teachers from organizing activities outside their classroom.

prove a thesis about the empirical reality. Instead, my intention is to propose a hypothetical mode of understanding the issue of schooling bureaucratisation, and so a mode of answering to these questions.

Naturally these are not new questions, they have been, and still are being addressed. Indeed, bureaucracy is recognized as an important issue in research on schooling, and as such it is investigated from various perspectives, for example: in relation to student and school performance (see i.e. Bothe 2001; Smith and Larimer 2004), as a systemic factor disturbing educational processes (see i.e. Endres 2007; Meyer 2010), or as a dimension of schooling that could and should be transformed in order to establish a space for horizontal collaborative practices and criticism (see i.e. Carlile 2012; Honig 2006).

Despite the differences between these perspectives, in general bureaucracy is seen as something external to education, that is either an obstacle that the teachers are obliged to cope with, or the institutional dimension of schooling which could be redesigned in order to work for the good of educational practices. Following the thread brought about by the debating teachers, I assume that the relation between bureaucracy and educational practice (as schooling) is rather problematic. However undoubtedly it is not the case that '…schools are fundamentally bureaucracies' as Ángel Díaz de Rada suggests (2007: 207). In his view, school is reduced to its institutional form and opposed to a living culture explored by ethnography. Such a reductive perpsective could be countered partially with the insight delivered by Benjamin Endres (2007), who, with reference to Anthony Giddens, conceptualises schools as a terrain of conflict between abstract systems (bureaucracies) and face-to-face interactions (education). However, in line with Heinz-Dieter Meyer (2010), I believe that the relation between bureaucracy and education is not dialectical as Endres assumes; it cannot be conceived in terms of an opposition or a negation, and it cannot be solved by some imaginary synthesis or a '…new integration of these conflicting ideals' (Endres 2007: 180). With reference to Jürgen Habermas' thesis on the colonization of the lifeworld by the system, Meyer (2010) argues that the inherent logos of the educational lifeworld of schools is being overwhelmed by bureaucracy (833). So it is not about conflict, but about colonization: an incessantly enforced intervention of external logic into the realm of education, that – if we would follow Habermas further on – could be conceived in terms of juridification (Habermas 1987: 368–373). It is therefore *a process of taking over*, not a mere tension between two contradictory logics.

Hence, the following argument does not concern school bureaucracies as such, but the process of schooling bureaucratisation. Taking the statements of the debating teachers as the guidepost for my thinking, I am interested in the process of making schooling (not the institution of school) more and more subordinated to the requirements of bureaucracy, increasingly dominated by its logic. Therefore, I am interested in the relation between the logics of education (as schooling) and bureaucracy, which can initially be perceived in Habermasian terms as colonisation of the former by the latter.

This process, however, is being analysed by critical educationalists also from a different perspectives than the Habermasian. One of them refers to the thesis of *the explosion*

of audit developed by Michel Power (1994, see also idem 1997). In line with the critical approach, such an *explosion* cannot be seen only as the proliferation of auditing practices, which are applied gradually in the following sectors of social life (including education), but in relation to certain transformations of society as a whole.

According to Power, one of them is the shift in the patterns of governance. He argues that contemporary '…reinvention of government is informed by two opposite tendencies' (Power 1994: 12): to devolve, decentralise, release the state commitments – is the one, and to maintain control – is the other. It is crucial to note that the tendency to decentralise is understood here in terms of privatisation of the state agency in different fields. Hence, the other side of the opposition, that is the tendency to control, is shaped according to a financial mode: as professional, unbiased, and apolitical. Such a control has to refer to abstract and quantifiable criteria in order to gain the qualities of independency and objectivity (16, 26).

Gert Biesta (2004: 238–239) links such an '…odd combination of marketized individualism and central control' with the fall of the welfare state and the rise of the neoliberalism. This shift have radically reshaped the relations between the state and the citizens, from their political form, to an economic one. Public issues to debate about, and to decide about became public services (often run by a private entities) and so questions of strategic directions, general aims and rules were replaced by the question of the quality of the services. This

> …positions citizens as consumers who can "vote" about the quality of the service delivered by the government but who don't have a democratic say in the overall direction of the content of what is being delivered (Biesta 2004: 239).

Linking the state with the citizen through financing the services for the citizens by the state results in the reduction of the idea of accountability to its technical-managerial use: '…an accountable organisation is one that has the duty to present auditable accounts of all of its activities' (Biesta 2004: 235). This means that an accountable organisation (e.g. school) providing the service for the citizens financed by the state, has to present measurable indicators of the quality and effectiveness. It also means that it does not have to be open for the discussion whether these qualities and effects are desirable or not. Instead, such an organisation is being pressed by the audit culture to prove its excellence, that is to examine its performativity. To meet such requirements such an organisation or institution has to be *made auditable* (Power 1994: 25; see also Biesta 2004: 239), which means that it has to emphasise what is measurable and demonstrable as an unbiased, objective, and apolitical proof of excellence, and simultaneously supress everything that does not fall under such criteria. Naturally in reference to education such a colonisation is extremely problematic, since it is the very education which has to be supressed to make the school auditable[5].

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[5] It is hard to answer all important questions in one paper, however the argument presented here is founded on a particular answer to the question of education, which – at the same time – is not the subject of the argument itself. Throughout this article I refer to the understanding of education in terms of interaction between people (see i. e. Biesta 2006; Masschelein 2011) as opposed to a process of production of desired

Hence, schools adopt the strategy of fabrication:

> …compulsion to succeed and 'look better' […] means that schools are inevitably caught up in a process of fabricating themselves. By fabrication we mean the management and control of indicators of performance as reflected in the range of promotional activities designed to set off the school to its maximum advantage (Maguire et al. 2011: 6)

What is important to note here is that – following Stephen Ball – fabrications are '[v]ersions of an organisation which do not exist […] they are produced purposefully in order »to be accountable«' (Ball 2001: 216).

I believe that such a strategy might be successful because audit is a form of bureaucratic control, that is the 'control of control'. According to Power '…audits generally act indirectly upon systems of control rather than directly upon first order activities' (1994: 15), which means that '[w]hat is subject to inspection is the auditee's own system for self-monitoring rather than the real practices of the auditee' (28). In other words, audit controls the abstract indexes which signify particular aspects of the social process under scrutiny. Such a control requires the reference to the documents testifying these indexes, documents representing the audited process, however it does not require the reference to the ongoing processes themselves. It is the documentation that is examined of how the audited practices are going on, not these practices themselves (15). This means that '…audit begins to take on a life of its own increasingly decoupled from the process and events which it is intended to address' (29).

Being detached from the direct contact with educational practices, indicators signifying these practices can be fabricated in order to produce an inexistent but commercially attractive view of particular school. However, I think that the fabrication is not the only process taking place. Following the thread indicated by the debating schoolteachers which started this inquiry, I believe that due to the very instrument of practicing audit, through the materiality consisting the audit culture, that is because of the use of bureaucratic means, schools being pressed by the 'conservative modernisation' (Apple 2005: 11), and defined as an accountable organisations not only fabricate themselves, but also simulate their work. So it is not only about production of the inexistent, the unreal, a false appearance, but it is also about production of the truth, production of the real. And it is not about colonisation of education, but about its substitution.

These teachers, whose insights I have been trying to follow, felt that facing the increasing amount of bureaucratic obligations imposed on their work leads to the renunciation of education. They stated to be compelled to document education *instead* of practicing it. To understand this 'instead' – which seem to refer to something more than just a simple appropriation the time of the teachers – I propose an exercise that would confront the re-

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changes of people subjected as pupils/students; that is I see education as a social process of an ethical and political meaning, as opposed to a technical process of an economic importance.

flection on bureaucracy made by Max Weber, and its critique by Claude Lefort, in order to set in motion the insight of Jean Baudrillard.

Bureaucracy – the classical model

Max Weber in his masterpiece *Wirtschaft and Geselschaft* ([1921] 1978) conceptualizes bureaucracy as the organizational form of the rational, that is legal authority. This form is conceived of as one of the three ideal (pure)[6] types of legitimate domination (Weber 1978): traditional type refers to the authority of sacred Tradition; the charismatic type is based on order revealed by a sacred leader / hero; legal domination means obedience to objective 'impersonal order' (215).

The embodiment of this objective order is law, understood as a '…consistent system of abstract rules' (217)[7]. Legal domination as an authority performed through '…a bureaucratic administrative staff' (220) can act only within this cosmos of abstract rules which indicates order '…without regard for persons' (i. e. 975); an objective order of a 'matter-of-factness' (978).

Hence Weber notes:

> Bureaucracy develops the more perfectly, the more it is 'dehumanized', the more completely it succeeds in eliminating from official business love, hatred, and all purely personal, irrational, and emotional elements which escape calculation. […] [it] demands the personally detached and strictly objective *expert*, in lieu of the lord of older social structures – who was moved by personal sympathy and favour, by grace and gratitude (975)[8].

It is important to note the twofold result of the fact that a bureaucrat acts only within previously established legal standards. Not only is it prohibited to act outside the law, but bureaucratic agency is also impossible without a legal basis. Weber stresses the advantages of bureaucratic administration frequently (see i. e. Weber 1978: 973) but he seems to dispense with the limited (im)potency of this social device which will become significant in the last section of this paper.

Action within the realm of law moreover requires a capability to shape its rules into an administrative form of procedure. Thus the task of applying the abstract and impersonal order of law into the social body requires educated professionals (218) that are 'impersonalized' themselves. Their individual qualities, biases, private life and personal substance should be strictly separated from office (in opposition to the other two distinguished types)

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[6] On the idea of ideal types see: Max Weber ([1904] 2004: 359–405).

[7] The abstract nature of these rules derives from the necessity to validate everyone *a priori*, with no exception and with no regard for persons as opposed to '…the agency to regulate the matter by individual commands given for each case' (Weber 1978: 958), that takes place in the other two types of authority distinguished by Weber.

[8] Emphasis in original. As Fritz Sager and Christian Rosser (2009) note such a view of legal domination is clearly indebted to Hegel's ideas of law and the State. (See also Hegel [1821] 1991).

(218–219, see also 975). Hence, in order to eliminate the individual's ability to judge, bureaucratic procedures are constructed as a matrix: repetitive patterns of behaviour (988)[9]. Following Arendt it could be said, that a bureaucrat does not act, but behaves (Arendt [1958] 1998: 40–41).

Such a reduction of actions into repetitive schemes of behaviour as a disconnection from the ability to judge and the exposition of a purely executive position means that the Weberian ideal-type bureaucrat is perceived as a tool or an exchangeable element of a wider whole. Furthermore, in order to manage an increasingly complex social reality, rational administration by means of abstract procedures requires the fragmentation of composed actions into simple tasks (Weber 1978: 218, see also 956 and 988). This relates naturally to the process of the specialisation of the bureaucratic apparatus, understood as the formation of its different departments, which deal exclusively with a particular area of legal (or procedural) reality.

Differentiation of this kind causes a division and limitation of responsibility within the administrative staff. A bureaucrat deals only with a particular element of the procedure, and she or he is professionally responsible[10] for this element exclusively. However, there has to be someone to plan and administrate not only the adjacent elements, but also the procedure as a whole. Hence a rational bureaucratic administration requires a hierarchy.

Naturally the hierarchical relationships between the administrative staff are purely formal, since the legal/rational/bureaucratic order is purely formal itself. In such an order therefore, we are dealing not with persons, but with *a priori* designed positions. Hence, superiors are not rulers, but merely take supreme positions.

Such a disregard for content is ambiguous. On the one hand, it means equality before the law, and hence it is related to the establishment of modern democracies in the aspect of '…the levelling of the governed' (Weber 1978: 985)[11]. On the other hand, the ideal-type bureaucrat taking a position in the apparatus is an embodiment of instrumental rationality[12]: a strict executor of externally formulated tasks, who operates with reference to externally given norms while being detached from their ability to judge, interpret or empathize. A person fully concentrated on professional, fragmented duties, deprived of a meaningful symbolic horizon or an overall view of the whole, which she or he is part of. A bureaucrat's condition could therefore be named – following on from Arendt – as that of thoughtlessness (see i. e. Arendt 2003).

However, there is also one more argument concerning the formal character of bureaucratic order which appears to be the most decisive in the historical development of Western societies. As Weber notes:

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[9] See also Weber (1978: 979) on the discussion about the modern conception of the judge as an automaton.

[10] For the difference between professional and moral responsibility in the context of bureaucracy and the dangers it brings see Zygmunt Bauman (1989: 98–102). Compare also with the notion of personal responsibility developed by Hannah Arendt (2003).

[11] Originally, whole cited fragment in emphasis.

[12] Understood with reference to the work of Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno (Horkheimer and Adorno [1944] 1973; Horkheimer [1947] 2004).

> Experience tends to show that the purely bureaucratic type of administrative organisation […] is, from a purely technical point of view, capable of attaining the highest degree of efficiency and is in this sense formally the most rational known means of exercising authority over human beings. It is superior to any other form in precision, in stability, in the stringency of its discipline, and in its reliability. It thus makes possible a particularly high degree of calculability of results for the heads of the organisation and for acting in relation to it. It is finally superior both in intensive efficiency and in the scope of its operations, and is formally capable of application to all kinds of administrative tasks (Weber 1978: 223)

Hence, starting from the time of both Weber and Kafka, we have witnessed an on-going expansion of bureaucratic devices that can be applied regardless of the matter under consideration or the direction of the desired changes. After all '…bureaucracy as such is a precision instrument which can put itself at the disposal of quite varied interests, purely political as well as purely economic ones, or any other sort' (990). This naturally also concerns the realm of education, and this is what the teachers mentioned at the beginning of this article were talking about: the expansion of the bureaucratic apparatus or to put it more aptly, the bureaucratisation of education.

However, to investigate the latter it is perhaps better to leave Weber's formal approach and turn to its critique, performed by Claude Lefort.

The content of the form

With reference to Hayden White's study (1978) it could be said that Claude Lefort is interested in the formal content of bureaucracy. What Weber describes as the most rational type of domination, according to Lefort's argument cannot be treated as a purely formal, neutral, and transparent instrument of power. As he claims, Weber refuses '…to accept that bureaucracy has its own dynamic and intrinsic goal; thus he fails to investigate its constitute features, that is the ways it is rooted in its social being and increases its power' (Lefort [1960] 1986: 100).

This means that bureaucracy is '…a framework which goes beyond the active core of bureaucrats' (107) and creates an order (108) that affects the social world as a whole.

The logic of this order is exposed in '…the need to develop forms of calculation and prediction which are as rigorous as possible' (109). So what bureaucracy wants to do to the reality which it dominates, is to make such a domain technically manageable and calculable. Social reality under such authority thus becomes a set of cases that are firstly recognized and qualified in reference to purely formal, quantitative criteria, then modelled according to the outlines of the procedure, and finally evaluated on the basis of the former indexation[13].

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[13] In accordance with a Weberian formal perspective, it seems that bureaucracy tends to evaluate the reality under its authority, while excluding its own influence on that reality. Hence – with regard to education – from a bureaucratic point of view, it is schooling that is ineffective or a pupil that is below expectations, and it is not an issue of an unreasonable criteria or an oppressive procedure. (See, on that issue, Meyer 2010: 840).

Moreover – as Lefort notes – 'naturally conservative' (Lefort 1986: 112) bureaucracy is striving to preserve the conditions of the actual social *status quo* by means of its own expansion. Hence, here we are dealing with a double proliferation: of bureaucrats and of their unproductive functions (109)[14].

We usually name this process bureaucratisation and we can experience its strength and velocity with reference to one of Lefort's own examples. Back in 1960, he argued that a secondary-school teacher should not be considered as a bureaucrat because: 'the content of his [her] activity is only very partially determined by ministerial decisions'; 'the teacher is not aiming to make a career out of his [her] profession'; 'the division of labour may require him [her] to specialize in one branch of teaching […] but it does not generate a unified production process' (102–103). Are these arguments valid today? To what extent can we agree with them in the face of, for example, evidence-based educational policy (see Biesta 2007, 2010b), the regime of randomized controlled field trials as the 'golden standard' of educational research, assessment, and examination, or other more or less systemic devices aimed at making education a calculable and manageable production of *a priori* designed effects[15]?

However, the bureaucratisation of education does not only mean that in order to make it technically manageable, education starts to be perceived as a standardized production process. What seems to be most revolutionary and interesting in Lefort's approach, is the acknowledgment that bureaucracy '…establishes a certain order and style of relations between its members, produces a history of its own' (Lefort 1986: 99), and that it demands a particular '…behaviour which should be manifested by any member of the bureaucracy placed in the same conditions' (103). Hence bureaucracy cannot be conceived exclusively as a form of domination, as it creates a system of social relations and an aggregate of intersubjective interactions, that impose definitions of particular situations, indicate a repertoire of possible (acceptable and unacceptable) behaviours, a palette of available means for action and a horizon for understanding the world as a whole. In short: it develops a culture that is disseminated into the social world constantly by the work of the proliferating apparatus (see also Meyer 2010: 840).

In other words, bureaucracy is a social device that apart from being an effective instrument of management – socialises (Lefort 1986: 107); that is, it adjusts people to the *office world* (104), and makes them think and act according to its own logic. So '…the development of bureaucracies […] must affect the nature of the political and economic system' (98), and hence, the '…social nature of bureaucracy cannot be deduced from its economic function; it must be observed in order to be understood' (116), it must be ap-

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[14] Such an acknowledgement of the unproductivity of bureaucracy can be linked to the critique of the alienation process concerning bureaucratic institutions. This naturally refers to a perspective governed by an opposition of truth and false appearance (truth and false consciousness), in which bureaucracy can be interpreted as neoplastic in nature. According to my earlier statement I will try to present another, and, I believe, more radical perspective, acknowledging the proliferation of bureaucracy in terms of the production of the simulacra aimed at the destruction of the foundation (of the origin).

[15] Such as, for example, the European Qualifications Framework.

proached '…as a system of meaningful behaviour, and not simply as a formal system of organization' (120).

Thus Lefort calls for inquiries into the behavioural connection between formal features and the intrinsic tendencies of bureaucracy (noted by Marx, Weber, and Lefort himself), such as: the internal hierarchy of professional relationships, the pursuit to control a particular domain of social reality, and the imperative of procedural coordination of the systematically fragmented and specialized actions of the apparatus.

In order to respond to such a call we should go back again to the empirical origin and the guidepost of this investigation, that is: our teachers participating in the public debate on education and their indication of the bureaucratisation of schooling as one of the central obstacles for them to deal with[16]. As I argued at the beginning of this article, it is the form of this indication that seems to be crucial: they linked bureaucratisation of education with an irrational growth of the obligations to document most of the activities that they initiate or witness. As they put it: documenting education is what they do *instead of* educating. Hence, what should be investigated here, is documenting as the behavioural adhesive of bureaucrats, and the bureaucratic tendency to relate to social reality through its substitution.

Documenting as producing the simulacra

Documenting is the life of the bureaucratic apparatus exactly in the same way as *law is the ethical life* of the Hegelian subject (see Hegel 1991, §147, p.191)[17]. Documenting is the principle and the means of a bureaucrat's action. It is a method of managing reality and a method to control this management. It is an instrument for the coordination of the specialized sectors of the bureaucratic apparatus, and simultaneously an instrument of authority performed by this apparatus. Documents are the reality of bureaucracy.

A bureaucrat does not act in the realm of law – as Weber stated – but in the realm of documents that are produced in reference to particular legal standards. The design and the development of the procedures is not an overall bureaucrat prerogative. However, all of them participate in the circulation of documents (which is naturally set in motion and controlled by these procedures). Every bureaucrat deals with documents. Handling documents is what they do.

But what is a document? It can be seen as a medium, through which bureaucracy perceives and – at the same time – controls reality. A document testifies about the real and its *status quo*, but simultaneously it also has the power to change this *status quo*. For a bureaucrat reality manifests itself only through documents. As (in line with Weber) the action of the apparatus is impossible without a legal basis, as the bureaucrat's perception

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[16] In doing so I also follow Lefort's advise '…to define the bureaucratic attitudes and behaviour by listening to those who know them, those who are not easily misled by the bureaucrats and who, in being dominated by them, form the basis upon which the bureaucrats became what they are' (Lefort 1986: 120–121).
[17] See also Weber on documenting (1978: 219).

of the administrated reality is impossible without documents. Hence, the documents not only testify, they substitute reality, they *are* the bureaucrat's reality.

Moreover, it is not only a matter of perception, but it is the overall *relation* with reality that is mediated by documents. A bureaucrat communicates with reality only through documents and manages reality only by such a medium. It means that what bureaucracy does is 'substituting signs of the real for the real itself, that is, an operation to deter every process by its operational double' (Baudrillard [1981] 1983: 4).

While documenting managed reality and through the process of managing itself, bureaucracy tends to substitute reality with documentation, which – as a testimonial of a particular *status quo – simulates* both: facts and the process of handling them. Hence, in the world of bureaucracy an official certificate can testify to the existence of a fact inexistent outside of the documentation[18] (which is possible by means of purely formal procedures and criteria as the basis of documenting behaviours that make a bureaucrat interested only in a purely formal, indexical description of the *status quo*, regardless of all the other possible data counter to such a description).

So it is not a matter of false appearance or false consciousness (Baudrillard 1983: 25), it is a matter of simulation, that is: the production of reality. A bureaucrat perceives through documents, acts within them, but at first: produces them. Thus, it is a closed circle 'exchanging in itself, in an uninterrupted circuit without reference or circumstance' (11).

According to Jean Baudrillard's analysis, simulation takes place by virtue of two operations: the duplication of reality with signs (18,23) and the substitution of those signs in place of reality (4–5,11). Signs that substitute (not re-present) reality are named *simulacra*. To simulate reality means to produce simulacra. In a bureaucratic apparatus of power, documents function as simulacra. They function *instead of* reality:

> No mirror of being and appearances, of the real and its concept. […] The real is produced […] it can be reproduced an indefinite number of times. It no longer has to be rational, since it is no longer measured against some ideal or negative instance. It is nothing more than operational. (3)

Simulating education

Following the argument presented above, it could be said that the bureaucratisation of schooling by virtue of the imperative to document the processes taking place in schools (that is, while duplicating them) develops the conditions for, or even directly forces the substitution of those processes by the simulacra. Thanks to this, the (im)potency of bureaucracy initially understood in Weberian terms as the impossibility to act without a legal basis, is to be conceived now in terms of the (in)existence of the (un)documented. In the

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[18] This is a commonly known fact which is brought into play mostly by criminals. Their success in using false documents depends on such a detachment by the bureaucratic apparatus from the living reality that is simulated (certified and managed) within the realm of documents.

eyes of bureaucracy the undocumented (competences, achievements, activities, situations, events… etc.) are inexistent. However, it is not a confirmation of the reality that documents are supposed to assure. Bureaucracy does not need any kind of relation with reality, as such, anymore; it is not interested in reality – it is interested exclusively in the formal fact of certification, regardless of the actual existence of what is certified. The existence of anything apart from the simulacra – is meaningless. Our debating teachers then, noted this disregard – they felt compelled to document education *instead* of practicing it.

Again, we are dealing here with two phases of simulation as introduced by Baudrillard. If the lifeworld of a school is not yet fully colonised by the bureaucratic apparatus, the work of teachers is duplicated: they act in the realm of interactions and in the realm of documents. So, as long as teachers complain and criticize the bureaucratisation of schooling in terms of a parasitizing set of obstacles, their work is still doubled and related to the realm of interactions, and we can still interpret the bureaucratisation of schooling in Habermasian terms. As long as teachers duplicate their work, we can perceive its documented version as an effect of fabrication. However, if they see their work in terms of documented procedures and hence tend to ritualise their actions, these rites and scripts of behaviour (methodical procedures), substitute the relations and interactions between educational subjects, and education is simulated as such. In this case there is nothing left to be colonized, no double of the real and its fabricated view, and so we are dealing only with the operational, the documented image of education as education.

But what does it mean that education is simulated? Is it important to notice this view on bureaucratisation of schooling? My answer to this would be 'yes', as I think there are at least three meaningful issues opened up by this perspective.

Firstly, it is not only education that is simulated. Naturally, bureaucratisation also concerns other domains of social life which are affected by its logic. Such a view is thus something to think about in order to re-think our contemporary human condition.

Secondly, acknowledging that school education is simulated means the necessity to redefine the critical perspective of educational research on schooling. The approach derived from the critique of false consciousness, aiming at unmasking social oppression and defining the work of school in terms of alienation, assumes an essential relation with a 'true' reality – a relation which is ruptured by the simulacra. Simulation means that reality is produced (not masked or unmasked, revealed or unrevealed, presented or represented etc.), so in relation to schooling it poses a question about reality that is produced by the bureaucratized work of schools. What kinds of worlds do schools bring into presence? What is the meaning of their simulations?

Finally, directing ourselves from the critique of false consciousness, towards the critique of simulation, we have to redefine our understanding of the normative which cannot be related to the notion of truth anymore, as it is an issue of death or 'murder'. Simulating school education is a substitution for the realm of intersubjective relations and interactions by the realm of documenting. As Baudrillard suggests, such a substitution is lethally dangerous for the reality which is substituted. In the end simulacra are the '…murders of

the real, murders of their own model…' (1983: 10), they are copies without the original. Hence, any answer to the question about what is produced must be mediated with an essential question about what is lost, what is 'murdered' in simulating education? Or maybe, in a more optimistic variant: what is to be lost, but can still be saved, cared for, attended to, reminded?

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