

K Ö N Y V I S M E R T E T É S

DARVAI TIBOR

The Hungarian Educational Periodicals and the Iconographic/Iconological Method

‘Education and Society’ Doctoral School of Education

PhDstudent

darvai.tibor@gmail.com

Géczi János: Press, Picture, History of Education. Iskolakultúra, Veszprém-Budapest, 2010. p. 220.

In his book entitled Press, Picture, History of Education, János Géczi offers an overview of 19th - and 20th -century Hungarian pedagogical periodicals. Since only an insignificant amount of academic research dealing with the Hungarian Educational periodicals has been published in Hungary so far this volume of studies may definitely be regarded as unique and needed. The book’s novelty is that besides being concerned with articles of the press it also includes press photographs and that it applies the iconographic/iconological method while dealing with them. This is the first time in Hungarian pedagogy that the iconographic/iconological method reconstruct has featured in a monograph format; individual studies treating this topic have so far appeared only in edited books. Another novelty to be noticed is the integration of anthropology into the discipline of the history of education.

The understanding of Géczi’s book necessitates a broad enough perspective, and it is to be placed within the context of iconographic studies. There are four different academic research groups in Hungary focusing on the history of education which are characterised by a relatively balanced and regular activity. Two academic communities are organised within the Pedagogical Institute of ELTE; the one is defined by András Németh, the other by György Mikonya. The third and the fourth groups are associated with the Pedagogical Institute of the University of Pécs; and are lead by Katalin Kéri and János Géczi.

The four schools apply different methodological approaches in their iconographic/iconological research. The studies completed by András Németh and his colleagues are based on art history, and they mostly follow the approach established by Erwin

Panofsky. György Mikonya places the analysis of photographs in the context of what can be called pedagogical genre pictures. The research lead by Katalin Kéri is grounded upon the history of education and is combined with a photographic perspective. In his book Géczi develops another program which is different from the previous ones in that it is based on the discipline of anthropology. According to his conception during the examination of photographs, or icons what is to be analyzed is man, and culture, material as well as mental, defined by human activity.

According to Géczi's philosophy, research should always focus on the individual, because it is always a human being who appears and comes to be reflected in a photograph. And, in order to complete such a research that one needs is a branch of science and a body of knowledge with the individual in their focus. This branch of science can be the science of man alone, namely, anthropology. In this field of research the primary focus is always on the person in the photograph. He may not be perceived as a constituent of society; still, the mentality of the individual can be assumed to be latently visible in the cultural context. The individual is the substance that is to be made the subject of investigation. The person is the elementary, yet not the smallest unit, Géczi proposes, because the person is always represented in culture by various objects. Thus, the smallest units that appear in a picture are always the attributes of objects. From the presence and the absence of objects we can draw various conclusions. If we analyse the pictures in the pedagogical periodicals issued in the socialist era we may soon notice that as the date of the change of regime is approaching the ideological symbols, such as the pioneers' red tie, or their uniform, tend to disappear gradually. From this the conclusion may be drawn that the ideological, so called movement pedagogy might have come to be reinterpreted; moreover, it was pushed into the background, which was likely to contribute to the eroding of the socialist system. Consequently, the change in the objects in photographs also reflects the changing of the socialist system. By means of the iconographic/iconological method the results of other (co)disciplines can thus be assisted, confused, or completed.

If we wish to categorise the four research approaches based, as mentioned above, on the history of arts, on pedagogical genre pictures, on the history of education, and on anthropology, we can assume that the anthropological approach might be regarded as the "primary" one as it is precisely the research methodology that mostly deals with the basic unit, the "actor" of social situations, that is, man himself. In this respect, any other research approach can only be considered "secondary", since the subject of their examination is not the individual himself, but the material and ideological culture created by the individual. In the

case of the research approach working in the context of the history of arts this material culture comprises the attributes of objects, in the case of the genre pictures it is the pedagogicum, and in the case of educational history it is the historical traditions, facts, and data.

According to Géczi the anthropological parameters are the primary ones, and any other viewpoints, let them be sociological, art-historical, historical, or psychological, are only consequences thereof. This is reflected in the case of the anthropological spaces, too. In the course of his analysis, Géczi creates and defines three anthropological spaces. The first one is the individual's most confined space: the human body itself together with the clothes it is wearing. In the case of the first anthropological space the individual appearing in the picture is analyzed. The information thus collected refers for example to the individual's gender, age, and clothes. The second anthropological space always focuses on the location of human activity. In this case, the emphasis is placed on the place where these activities happen, such as, for example, in a classroom, or in Parliament. The third anthropological space comprises the elements of the landscape and the geographical space. The theoretical background of the anthropological spaces is that anthropology does not manifest itself in the individual alone, but also in the spaces created by the individual, and they are in constant interaction with one another. The significance of the anthropological spaces is that as a theory it can provide a framework for the grouping of the individuals, objects and attributes appearing in a photograph. On the basis of this conception we can categorise the photographs in question and we can create order from disorder.

It is the anthropological questions and problems that generate the studies of the book. The article "The Conception of the Socialist Children. Iconographical Representation of Adult Education. 1956-1964" derives from the adult-children dichotomy, the investigation of the anthropological attributes of children triggers the study "The Picture of Children in Hungarian Pedagogical Periodicals from the 1960's to the 1980's". We can find the anthropological areas in the study called "The symbolism of space in Hungarian Periodicals in the 1960's".

Besides its anthropological perspective and the questions raised by it Géczi's book also progresses along an empirical track and pursues such a methodology in iconographic/iconological studies too. In his studies he makes considerable efforts to transfer empirical data into facts and figures in this way trying to avoid the possible mistakes deriving from the scholar's subjective point of view. Instead of concentrating on only one or two pictures from the press of the history of education, and presenting them as general and most characteristic of the era he first quantifies the pictures and the attributes depicted by them. Only after collecting these purely empirical facts does he make generalisations and qualify a

given picture as the one representing a certain era and theme. His research methodology, however, does not derive from the fact that he deals with the object of his research, and while doing so he develops a certain approach upon which to found his message. First he quantifies, then it is from the results of the quantification that he creates a theory. Whereas the first research methodology stems from a strongly subjective approach which might result in focusing on the problem group that is mostly highlighted, even if unconsciously, by the researcher himself, the research approach applied by Géczi focuses on objective investigation. The subjective questions that emerge on the researcher's intellectual horizon, and their thematic aspects gain little importance. What receives more stress instead is what derives from the quantitative data. The subjectivity of the researcher is forced into the background; what define the direction and tendency of the research are the data themselves.

János Géczi's work is inevitably a solid basis upon which the press history and iconographic/iconological research of Hungarian pedagogical periodicals can be built. Surely the major merit of this book is that it enriches the Hungarian pedagogical research methodology and it can hopefully inspire the pedagogical scientific community to complete further studies in press history, anthropology and iconography/iconology.