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FANTASIES OF ROUSSEAU: A LACANIAN VIEW OF NATURAL EDUCATION IN AND BEYOND *ÉMILE*

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Abstract. Beginning with the question of the usefulness of Rousseau's *Émile* for contemporary education, this article explores the fantasy held by educational thinkers and practitioners regarding Rousseau's concept of Natural Education. Using French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan's theory of fantasy, which is based on a relationship between the subject and the object of their desire, Nicholas Stock breaks down Natural Education in a number of ways. Initially, he explores the signifier of nature as an object of desire for both Rousseau and the contemporary educationalist. Next, he examines how Rousseau deploys the signifier in *Émile* and how this creates an ontology of the child that claims to understand their nature while designating them as Other. This point opens up discussion of desires in light of Lacan's examination of Marquis de Sade and sadism. Equally, in exploring Rousseau's dialectical relationship with Sade, Stock goes on to discuss how the fantasy of nature in Rousseau opens up possibilities of sadistic desire. Finally, he concludes the article by deconstructing the binary upheld between nature and culture through an exploration of pastoral literature. It is this pastoralism that gives a desirable quality to nature, thus sustaining its fantasy in educational circles.

Key Words. instrumentalism; Jacques Lacan; Jean-Jacques Rousseau; Marquis de Sade; Natural Education; psychoanalysis

> And hence this Tale, while I was yet a boy
> Careless of books, yet having felt the power
> Of Nature, by the gentle agency
> Of natural objects led me on to feel
> For passions that were not my own …
>
> — William Wordsworth, *372. Michael: A Pastoral Poem*, 1798

Fantasies of Rousseau

What is left to say about Rousseau? This is especially true in regard to the educational classic *Émile*, a 1762 philosophical narrative told from the perspective of a teacher who describes the education of a young boy — the eponymous Émile. As Jack Martin and Ethan Martin say, "Perhaps no single volume, with the exception of Plato's *Republic*, has exerted as much influence on the subsequent history of educational thought and practice as has Jean-Jacque Rousseau's *Émile*."[1] There are obvious manifestations of his work, such as the recent boom in the UK of Forest Schools, where students *be* in nature as their dominant mode of education,[2] something certainly present in Rousseau's appeal to a "Natural

1. Jack Martin and Nathan Martin, "Rousseau's 'Emile' and Educational Legacy," in *The SAGE Handbook of Philosophy of Education*, ed. Richard Bailey, Robin Barrow, David Carr, and Christine McCarthy (London: SAGE, 2010), 85.

2. Claire Skea and Amanda Fulford, "Releasing Education into the Wild: An Education in, and of, the Outdoors," *Ethics and Education* 16, no. 1 (2021): 74–90.

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Education" — that is, an education that resides within nature. There has also been a notable rise in ecopedagogies and posthumanist education,[3] both of which arguably hold traces of Natural Education. The enduring power of Rousseau in educational theory, pedagogy, and curriculum is tangible, too. Papers on *Émile* are still regularly published,[4] particularly ones that concern the regularly contested realm of mass schooling, where nature is deemed as lacking. Less obvious but equally pertinent examples lie in the very way in which educational structures view childhood as something fundamentally distinct, especially in recent debates surrounding discipline in schooling.[5] Much like Claire Skea and Amanda Fulford's lament of education's decoupling from nature,[6] there is a broad theme present in many of these Rousseauist analyses in which Rousseau is taken at his word: "God makes all things good; man [sic] meddles with them and they become evil."[7] For now, let us glean that Rousseau's central educational premise, one that is picked up with gusto (even unknowingly) by much of contemporary education, is that "man's" methods serve to do harm to the child. A new, more *natural* method must consequently be uncovered that is distinct from the formalized education of previous imaginations. Though it might already be apparent that this call of Rousseau's rests on a problematic binary that is not as stable as it first appears, it is important to initially take Rousseau at his word.

So, I ask again, what is left to say about Rousseau? Perhaps it is not Rousseau's ideas, per se, that need to be revisited; rather, it is the way in which Rousseau is invoked, or dreamt of, or *fantasized* about, in educational thought.[8] What are the fantasies that teachers might today hold *because* of Rousseau (and indeed, as will become clear, his sadistic counterpart Marquis de Sade)? It is these fantasies that Rousseau might have held, or the fantasies we hold about him, that suggest something remains to be explored. Though the application of Jacques Lacan to education

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3. Rosi Braidotti, *Posthuman Knowledge* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2019), 142.

4. See, for example, Avi I. Mintz, "The Happy and Suffering Student? Rousseau's *Emile* and the Path Not Taken in Progressive Educational Thought," *Educational Theory* 62, no. 3 (2012): 249–265; and Richard White, "Rousseau and the Education of Compassion," *Journal of Philosophy of Education* 42, no. 1 (2008): 35–48.

5. Winston C. Thompson and John Tillson, "Pedagogies of Punishment: An Introduction," *Theory and Research in Education* 18, no. 1 (2020): 3–9.

6. Skea and Fulford, "Releasing Education into the Wild."

7. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Émile, or Treatise on Education* (Pantianos Classics, 1762/2016), 5.

8. Psychoanalytically speaking, we might say that Rousseau is now a symptom rather than a person or subject.

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is not new,[9] and though Lacan made many of his own allusions to education, the Lacanian approach serves as a fecund tool for engaging with dimensions of education that are often ignored, repressed, or disavowed. To echo educational theorist and psychoanalyst Deborah Britzman, I maintain an "interest in psychoanalyzing phantasies of education — the fate of the ideas we love and hate, the presuppositions unconsciously exchanged in knowledge, authority, and our transferences — that do go on to affect our reading and writing lives and our sense of self with others."[10] My proposal here is that this so-called *nature* that Rousseau appeals to is but an example of Lacanian fantasy. Through this Lacanian approach, in returning to Rousseau's text, and in considering some examples of contemporary education, what you might come to glean is that within the Rousseauist fantasy that lingers today are the very same authoritarian and instrumentalist[11] forms of education that he opposed (and it is no accident that I say "Rousseauist" instead of "Rousseauian," as it signifies more clearly an abstraction or fantasy of his thought). As such, by upholding a fantasy of Rousseau, one upholds the authoritarian, instrumentalist, maybe even sadistic model of education decried by would-be liberators. This instigates a controversial premise for this paper that is enabled through the reading of Rousseau through Lacan: through engaging with the operations of fantasy, we might find that commonly held educational beliefs contain traces of the monstrous or violent, that the fantasy of Rousseau may be less closely aligned with the "liberatory" educational forms of the contemporary moment (eco-pedagogies, posthumanism, etc.) than their supporters would hope, and perhaps that opposing models of education might be suffused with the very same fantasy. Though the argument here will be broadly exploring the authoritarian and instrumentalist forms of education, aspects of its opposing forms will be considered too.

At this early stage, I should also note that the signifier "Education" poses a problem for many readers in its differing registers but is used here deliberately in its flexible manner as a metonym, a function of the signifier in the Lacanian field.[12] It can be substituted for countless associated ideas and practices such as school, lesson, fable, didacticism, rearing, or upbringing. It is also easily substituted for its "pantheon of research and pedagogic styles … [a]ssessment, curriculum, teaching and learning (among many other terms and buzzwords) all function as metonyms for Education on a daily basis … it becomes clear to see

9. For recent examples, see Matthew Clarke, *Lacan and Education Policy: The Other Side of Education* (London: Bloomsbury, 2019); and Deborah Britzman, *A Psychoanalyst in the Classroom* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2015).

10. Britzman, *A Psychoanalyst in the Classroom*, 6.

11. Tomasz Szkudlarek, *On the Politics of Educational Theory: Rhetoric, Theoretical Ambiguity, and the Construction of Society* (London: Routledge, 2016).

12. Jacques Lacan, *Écrits: The Complete First Edition*, trans. Bruce Fink (New York: W. W. Norton, 2007), 164–167.

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that the [signifier] Education is not a singularly definable object at all."[13] This use of the word education as a metonym is useful for its properties within the Lacanian fantasy, as it allows for the possibility that it can stand in for many other signifiers too, as in the form of a dreamwork — a key image/structure for psychoanalytic thought. Though the dominant understanding of the signifier here will be in relation to schooling, this does not mean that the fantasy does not permeate other educational metonyms.

Lacanian Fantasy

Many are familiar with the idea of a fantasy, those images that play out in a scene in our heads that depicts dreams and wishes, though perhaps few will consider the important role this concept plays in education, particularly in terms of the subject of the teacher (*any* teacher) in the classroom. As I have said previously, unraveling fantasy is essential to revealing our misunderstanding of the thing that we call "education," just as in the psychoanalytic clinic that seeks to engage with patients' fantasies to allow them to see how they misunderstand themselves. A renewed thinking of education in its broadest possible sense is thus called for by the engagement with fantasy. Lacan, the French psychoanalyst who returned to Freud, provides us with a structure to understand fantasy, though its constituent elements need some unpicking. For Lacan, fantasy is that which sustains desire[14] *structured* by a relationship between the subject and their desire (see figure 1) and presented in the algebraic formula $\$<>a$. To work through this a little: the Lacanian "subject" — that is, the speaking-subject who enunciates themselves as a subject, the individual being-in-the-world of communication — is always barred or divided ($). It is barred because it is "cut" by its relationship with the world, which it can only interact with through the Symbolic Order, a structure of signifiers or ordering of language that gives shape and meaning to the unknowable Real. From birth, we, as subjects, arrive into the Symbolic Order (even if it cannot yet be understood). It is "the second nature of every speaking being: it is here, directing and controlling my acts, I as it were swim in it, but it nonetheless remains ultimately impenetrable."[15] Such a structure is palpably clear in the Symbolic Order of education too, where "students" arrive to a world dictated by relational structures, taught by "teachers" to help them "progress" on an upward curve; they will be "assessed," and "pass" or "fail," and so on;[16] these are broadly uncontested structures in the realm of education. Even those who *do* contest them still uphold their very existence, for that is the nature of the Symbolic Order. This is most neatly captured by Ansgar Allen in his blistering analysis of school assessment — one

13. Nicholas Stock, "And What Rough Beast? An Ontotheological Exploration of Education as a Being," *Educational Philosophy and Theory* 51, no. 4 (2019): 405, https://doi.org/10.1080/00131857.2018.1472573.

14. Lacan, *Écrits*, 816.

15. Slavoj Žižek, *How to Read Lacan* (London: Granta, 2007), 40–41.

16. Nicholas Stock, "Deconstructing the Divergence: Unravelling the 2013–2015 Reforms in GCSE," *English in Education* 51, no. 2 (2017): 143–156, https://doi.org/10.1111/eie.12140.

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Figure 1. Barred subject, lozenge, object *a*. Lacan's structure of fantasy (see Lacan, *Écrits*).

of the many arms of education that the Rousseauist educator seeks to challenge, and the most ubiquitous tool of determining "pass" and "fail." Allen rightly notes that "Critics of modern examination are often its most deceptive representatives. They falsely depict examination as a mechanistic and lowly tool."[17] However, what these critics cannot realize is that they are within an educational Symbolic Order that resists such criticism. The educational metonym of assessment (among other educational boogeymen) are part of the Symbolic: "The logic of examination constitutes modern schooling as its ontological condition. Modern examination was not imposed on educational institutions as if from above: it is part of their very being. As such, it cannot be removed or meaningfully resisted without dismantling everything else."[18]

The Symbolic Order cannot be done away with, as many educators would hope. Structures of language are exactly that which enable the subject to access the world, but there is a problem with this for the subject. The Symbolic relies on another element: the signifier. This term, inherited by Lacan from Ferdinand de Saussure's linguistics, posits that the world can only be accessed *via* a unit of speech. What the signifier cannot do is access that which it signifies in its entirety; thus for every utterance of the subject, every enunciation of desire, there is something that is *lacking*. To give a glib example, the teacher who desires that their class will all do well is confronted by the absences that haunt "doing well" as a coherent and complete desire. This is what cuts the subject — their very being-in-the-world is one constituted by a lack. Other cuts exist too: the cut between the broadly present conscious and the inaccessible unconscious, the cut between the Real and its Symbolic/Imaginary structures, the cut between the subject and the mother that occurs at birth, among others.[19]

To return to the structure of fantasy, this barred subject's ($) relationship with the world is also one of desire. Desire is a fundamental concept for psychoanalysis, and arguably an engagement with desire is missing from much of educational theory and philosophy. "'*Ché vuoi*?,'" asks Lacan: "'What do you want?'"[20]

17. Ansgar Allen, *Benign Violence: Education in and beyond the Age of Reason* (Hampshire, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 21.

18. Ibid.

19. Jacques Lacan, *Anxiety: The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book X*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. A. Rae Price (Cambridge: Polity, 2014), 66.

20. Lacan, *Écrits*, 690.

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Ultimately, "desire is the desire of the Other,"[21] that is, we want what another wants; it is you the student's desire, not I the teacher's.[22] Desires cannot thus be fulfilled, for their manifestation from the unknowable realm of the Real into the Symbolic Order as a signifier means that they are only ever a substitute, a Symbolic representation of a Real that escapes complete representation.[23] It is only a signifier plugging the gap, and one found in the locus of the Other rather than "in" the subject. Recalling the figure of the teacher who desires that all their students do well, this subject cannot access the "true" nature of their desire, especially as it is the desire of the Other — in this case, what they perceive to be the desire of their students. The teacher must settle for the signifier — the doing well — that represents it.

We are not fully there yet, however, in understanding Lacanian fantasy. The object of desire has another peculiar quality for Lacan, in that there is a "cause of desire,"[24] designated in the formula as *objet a*.[25] This curious *a* is the object cause of desire — the thing that makes the desired object desirable, even if that thing (as signifier) is not what the subject *really* desires. It is the *je ne sais quoi* of the object of desire, which means ultimately "I don't know what." But it is also a residue of the Real, some bit of waste left over from the Real of our actual desire. A simple example: at Christmas, children desire presents, and their enjoyment is palpable all season as they see those beautifully wrapped parcels adorning the foot of the tree. The opening of the presents often breeds disappointment, of course; not only are the toys that lay inside the paper not what they truly desire, they were only selected as the desired object due to the wrapping. Once unwrapped, when the tatters of paper are collected from the floor around the tree, the Real remains of desire are clear to behold. This is *a* — the thing that made those presents so desirable was the way in which they were tantalizingly, even seductively wrapped, only to be eventually unfulfilling. Indeed, we all know how disappointing it is to get what you have for so long desired. To once more recall our glib anecdote of a teaching friend who desires that their students do well, one might speculate that it is the congratulations and thank-you cards on the day of passing that causes this desire,

21. Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis: The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XI*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Alan Sheridan (London: Penguin, 1994), 38.

22. There are multiple ways of interpreting this phrase, though the above reading is the most pertinent to this paper because it exists within the relationship between teacher and student. However, we might read Lacan as saying that we desire to be the object of the Other's desire, or desire to be the Other/have the Other, and so forth.

23. Lacan notes that the subject's unconscious desires are unrepresentable, like that of the Real. Consequently, the signifiers to which the subject attaches their desire will always be insufficient.

24. Lacan, *Anxiety*, 101.

25. The big Other is a translation from *Autre* in the original French. The *a* derives its matheme from *petit autre*, i.e., little other. The lowercase *a* thus distinguishes it from the symbolic and from the locus of signifiers, as it is that which makes the object of desire desirable and, like the Real, defies signification.

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or perhaps it is the report that shows every student reaching their target grade (only for those reports and cards to become leftover bits of garbage as soon as the next cohort begins).

And so, $<>a is almost complete. It is only <>, the "lozenge,"[26] that needs addressing. This lozenge is an obstacle, that which characterizes the subject's relation to the object cause of their desire. Its shape posits that they are both more than > and less than < their desire,[27] a relationship both backwards and forwards, a "contrary relationship between the two sides."[28] Put differently, the subject is caught up with the object cause of their desire as constitutive of their fantasy. For the teacher who is caught in an interplay between the celebrations on results day and their own place within it, they are both that which conjures the "doing-well" as their desire and they are conjured by it, *subjectivated* by it. It both dominates them and is dominated by them. For it is this that sustains their desire; they want to keep educating the students due to this relationship with *a*, a fantasy that they will all succeed.

Desiring the Signifier of Nature

With Lacan's structure of fantasy and the vocabulary of desire in hand, we might now return to Rousseau's work and seek out the fantasies he holds, or that educators hold of him. Indeed, the very relationship that we-teachers have with Rousseau is itself already a relationship with a signifier — the Rousseauist fantasy, as it were. What we seek now in this fantasmatic exploration is the signifier that stands in for desire for Rousseau. What does Rousseau want; what do we want when we invoke Rousseau in education?

Émile, or Treatise on Education is divided into five sections, each charting the development of the young student Émile and the methods that the narrator Jean-Jacques uses to "teach" him how to grow as a child. The education[29] at play is away from the urban world and offers the "potential to be revolutionary."[30] It is told chronologically through the "stages" of Émile's life, and thus "naturalness

26. Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, 181.

27. Ibid., 209.

28. James S. Ormrod, *Fantasy and Social Movements* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 99.

29. Alongside Paulo Freire and the critical pedagogues, Rousseau is held as a figure with potential for liberatory education. As Daniel Cho has shown in his psychoanalytic intervention into critical pedagogy, Lacanian theory problematizes and destabilizes the liberatory claims made by the likes of Freire, Henry Giroux, bell hooks, etc. (Daniel Cho, *Psychopedagogy: Freud, Lacan, and the Psychoanalytic Theory of Education* [New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009]). This is not to say that their approaches possess no liberatory potential, but rather that they lack an engagement with the subject to be liberated. See also my own quasi-psychoanalytic rethinking of the figure of the oppressor as opposed to the oppressed subject (Nicholas Stock, "Darkness and Light: The Archetypal Metaphor for Education," *Educational Philosophy and Theory* 53, no. 2 [2021]: 151–159). The psychoanalytic approaches Cho and I take in those works differ slightly from the one I have taken in this article, but ultimately demonstrate the need for a Lacanian critique of so-called liberatory educational theory.

30. Szkudlarek, *On the Politics of Educational Theory*, 20.

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is staged and controlled."[31] The first book demonstrates the essentiality of inculcation in nature for the boy Émile, developed further in book 2 as we see Émile's interactions with nature being fostered by the teacher. Book 3 introduces the essentiality of learning skills and a trade once the boy reaches puberty, and finally, as he becomes "strong." Though religion and sentiment are taught in book 4, it is because of the "zero degree" — the "hidden, good Nature"[32] — that Émile experienced that he can succeed in society. We should note that book 5 diverges in its outline of the education of Sophy, Émile's female counterpart, in which she is not offered the same sorts of interaction with nature as Émile and is, consequently, not presented as the same fully formed participant in society that Émile is.[33] Thus, in this brief overview alone, the signifier of desire has already been revealed to us: *nature* — nature as goal, as structure, and as metaphor — permeates *Émile*, and indeed it does our contemporary educational landscape. The structure of this narrative also allows us to understand the signifier "nature" in a more coherent manner. Clearly Rousseau is chaining growth, progress, and the non-cultural with nature. The signifiers within the text will also be closely aligned with these values, as will be made clearer in the following section.

The signifier of nature was of course essential for Rousseau in a broader philosophical sense. The ongoing debate about the "state of nature" prevailed before Rousseau. However, for Rousseau, nature is not violence, as it is for Thomas Hobbes or John Locke, but rather freedom. In an overturning of the commonly accepted nature/culture binary, Rousseau believed that man does not need civilizing, for civilization is more barbarous than the savage. Rousseau was striving toward, or returning to, nature as opposed to combatting it. This does not mean, of course, that the current use of the signifier has lost the significations of violence rejected by Rousseau. Nevertheless, Rousseau's use of nature as a term predominantly intimates that, in *Émile*, he wishes to "champion the retreat to the Reason of Nature — meaning also the essence of human nature itself, the presence of Being — as the source of purity and 'the good.'"[34] Indeed, this very phrase of the Reason of Nature already poses an issue in that it can possess the faculties of a thinking subject but from an external Other. As such,

31. Ibid.

32. Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), 115.

33. Arguably, Sophy is denied the right to be a subject, while Émile is granted this status owing to his interactions with nature. This sense of sexual difference is also explored in great detail by Lacan in *On Feminine Sexuality, the Limits of Love and Knowledge*, 1972–73, *Encore: The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XX*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Bruce Fink (New York: W. W. Norton, 2000). In this seminar, he claims that "there is no such thing as Woman" — in a way, there is no such thing as Sophy. This argument goes beyond the scope of this paper, though James Donald makes allusions to it in his book *Sentimental Education: Schooling, Popular Culture, and the Regulation of Liberty* (London: Verso, 1992).

34. Peter Trifonas, "Derrida and Rousseau: Deconstructing the Ethics of a Pedagogy of the Supplement," *Review of Education, Pedagogy, and Cultural Studies* 22, no. 3 (2000): 257.

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nature is upheld by Rousseau as a goal to be aimed toward in education, and this aim is equivalent to pursuing a purity of Reason. Reason as the faculty to think, to philosophize, is disturbed by the Freudian discovery of the unconscious, one that infects the pursuit of Reason with an unknowable, unconscious dimension that can be wholly irrational and monstrous in its desires and logic. Rousseau's alignment of Reason and Nature, therefore, imply an idealized form that would remain inaccessible in the psychoanalytic parlance. Put differently, the Reason of Nature is always-already suffused with the unreasonable as a primary force.

Nature as a signifier in its signification of a pursuit of Reason is complicated by the way Rousseau writes within the conflicting thought of Romanticism and the Enlightenment. Though reason and rationality are present in his vocabulary, Rousseau also deploys the Romanticized spirit of nature, and as such the signifier takes on a radical dualism in its form.[35] The regular use of other signifiers in the chain of signification from nature are evident too, from the "soil," "fruit," "trees," or "mother's milk" in book 1[36] to the "seeds" and "roots" of book 4.[37] Herbert Lindenberger, too, notes the appearance of another Romantic concern that embodies nature as a signifier: the pastoral tropes within Rousseau's writing, such as the "isolated moment … a kind of island in time,"[38] highlight that Émile's education occurs away from the troubles of modernity and urbanization in a space that feels abstracted from reality.

In Rousseau's work, nature does not function as an empty or floating signifier that an infinite number of significations can be "bundled" into, as Tomasz Szkudlarek claims it does.[39] There is certainly "a meaning" to nature, but more important from the Lacanian perspective, it stands as that which Rousseau's education seems to desire, and what is desired in the lingering trace of Rousseauist thought in contemporary educational discourse. It appears that nature poses as a key signifier of his discourse, the goal of Rousseau's treatise, a being-toward-nature, and thus, ultimately, the object of his desire.

The Other as the Child

Our contemporary educational fantasies that invoke Rousseau are thus sustained by our relationship with a signifier, but most pivotally, in its form as *a*, as a residue, a remain of our desire as the desire of the Other. We carry forward

35. The two sides of this dichotomy are explored by Terence Marshall and Frederick Dame. See Terence E. Marshall, "Rousseau and Enlightenment," *Political Theory* 6, no. 4 (1978): 421–455; and Frederick W. Dame, "Jean-Jacques Rousseau and the Spirit of Romanticism in American Colonial (Folk) Music: Immanence and Influence," *Song and Popular Culture* 46 (2001): 71–116.

36. Rousseau, *Émile*, 5–15.

37. Ibid., 154.

38. Herbert Lindenberger, "The Idyllic Moment: On Pastoral and Romanticism." *College English* 34, no. 3 (1972): 338.

39. Szkudlarek, *On the Politics of Educational Theory*, 27.

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the traces of Rousseau's signifier into our contemporary fantasy of what Natural Education might be. I will explore the object cause (a) of this desire in due course, but the "Other" that enables this fantasy is unclear. In educational terms, and certainly for Rousseau's student and teacher, we might find the Other in the question "what do you want?" I contend that in *Émile*, and indeed in current educational structures, it is the child that stands as the Other in this question, and thus the teacher enters into a relationship with the desire of the Other in its form as a child (or as a student). In this section, I will expand on the Other that we invest our desire in so as to gradually unravel the way the fantasy manifests in contemporary education.

A close engagement with our educational landscape should incur a consideration of the ontology of "the child." Children, for Rousseau, are depicted in terms of pastoral and agricultural metaphors — a clear move in the chain of signification from nature. Forthwith I will engage more closely with the language of Rousseau's *Émile*, but this is not to move away from fantasy. If we see Rousseau's work as a collection of signifiers that form a symbolic whole, then close engagement with those signifiers may enable us to see how they have continued in a chain of signification through the fantasies of the present day. We might see this process in the form of recalling a childhood memory: if I recall an argument from a family dinner, the signifiers within that image will have been metaphorically or metonymically substituted from their "original" source.

Rousseau observed how the children subjected to the oppressive schooling measures that prevailed during the eighteenth century were treated "like a vine forced to bear fruit in spring, which fades and dies before autumn."[40] In the demand for children to *be* adults — productive citizens, workers, and so forth — they are deformed. The metaphor speaks of a defiance of their natural growth, encapsulated in its quick withering "before autumn." As such, a pivotal remnant of Rousseau's signifier is its relationship with the ontology of the child throughout the last century, the reshaping of its "Being" into something quite different from before. The call for premature adulthood is also interesting from a Lacanian perspective, for who is it that makes the demand on the child? In Lacanian terminology, it is the big Other — a formation of the Symbolic Order that the subject looks to for recognition *as* a subject. It is "the locus in which speech is constituted,"[41] that is, "the pack" of "signifiers" that the subject draws from.[42] In the subject's reliance on the signifier that it draws from the big Other, a belief in its affirmative and adjudicating quality is perpetuated, particularly through figures and bodies like government, religion, and indeed education as "a complex

40. Rousseau, *Émile*, 97.

41. Jacques Lacan, *The Psychoses: The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book III*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Russell Grigg (London: Routledge, 1993), 274.

42. Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, 67.

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and often contradictory Symbolic Order as the site of authority, disciplinary propriety."[43]

The Other of the child is here a formation of signifiers from the site of the big Other to be recognized; through this Being of the child created in *Émile*, Rousseau creates a desiring-thing. It becomes the Other, a thing into which he, and we, as subjects, invest our desire. Take, for example, the preface to *Émile*, which immediately presents childhood as a special realm that needs to be understood: "We know nothing of childhood. … They are always looking for the man in the child, without considering what he is before he becomes man."[44] Rousseau challenges the demand from another Other, and in turn, challenges the order of nature: children are not born men. He continues,

> Suppose a child born with the size and strength of manhood, entering upon life full grown like Pallas from the brain of Jupiter; such a man-child would be a perfect idiot … he would not even be aware of sensation … he would only have one idea, that of self, to which he would refer all his sensations. …[45]

Now Rousseau invokes the vital signifier of nature: the challenging of the "natural order of things." Through the mode of birthing, a natural act that transcends both nature and man, we are presented with the abject image of the delivery of a crying and greasy child, unable to create any sense of the world (its lack of sensation), but in the shape of some sort of motherless (and thus supposedly orderless) creature (as implied by the unnatural birth of Pallas Athena). It is an abomination, a "perfect idiot." This thing knows nothing of others, or of the Symbolic Order; it only exists for itself. The distinction created between child and man, idiot and thinking, compel us to desire the alternative from the one yielded by a disorder of nature. It is said by the voice of the big Other that we must be born weak, and that consequently the Other needs to be allowed to develop and grow.

Once again, the Symbolic Order of education begins to appear, an upward curve toward betterment. The implication is that "man's education begins at birth"[46] and that this is necessary to avoid becoming the abominable thing birthed in Rousseau's allegory. As such, when Lacan claims that "desire is the desire of the Other,"[47] pedagogically speaking, the teacher might invest in the desire they believe the student holds — to progress, reach their potential, succeed, go far, do well, and so forth. They uphold the belief that, as Tony Carusi notes, teachers in this fantasmatic imagination become "*the* instrument for changing structural

43. Nick Peim, "The Big Other: An Offer You Can't Refuse — or Accept, in Some Cases. Education as Onto-Theological Principle (Empire): An Anti-Manifesto," *Other Education* 1, no.1 (2012): 235.

44. Rousseau, *Émile*, 4.

45. Ibid., 18.

46. Ibid.

47. Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, 38.

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issues like poverty through the proxy of raising student test scores."[48] Even students who "appear" not to want to progress are often challenged by teachers as needing to "unlock their potential" or to "realize they *can* succeed" — to make an unconscious desire to learn become conscious. This is not the student's desire, of course, but the desire of the Other from the perspective of the teacher invested in the fantasy. The child as the thing created by Rousseau's ontology is a thing that desires to be educated, even if unconsciously — this is supposedly the order of nature. As such, our contemporary Rousseauist fantasy perpetuates such a belief, and as Carusi has made clear, this belief only further gives ground to the instrumentalist mode of teaching beyond the obvious means of neoliberal policy enactment.[49]

Sadistic Fantasies

It is not just instrumentalism that is of concern here, however, but also the disciplinarity and sadism that often accompanies it. Contemporary media's engagement with education often cites the necessity to let children *be* children.[50] This Other should be seen as a being with its own rights not to undergo the violence of punishment, a call undoubtedly traced with Rousseauism. Indeed, it is Rousseau's formation of *nature* and the *natural* that lingers in these counterarguments. Yet, in spite of a lingering Rousseauist belief in childhood, what we see in the current educational landscape appears to be *contra* Rousseau: There is a rising educational instrumentalization in policy and curriculum,[51] particularly but not exclusively in the UK, that has produced overtly authoritarian schooling models that seem in direct opposition to the sort of Natural Education called for in *Émile*. Clear examples are notable in school policies such as SLANT, which stands for "Sit up straight, Listen, Answer questions, Never shout out, Track the teacher,"[52] and the (racialized) disciplining of students' language,[53] something especially prevalent in the academy system. Beyond material examples of schooling, even some philosophers of education are voicing approval of an archaic disciplinary mode

48. F. Tony Carusi, "Refusing Teachers and the Politics of Instrumentalism in Educational Policy," *Educational Theory* 72, no. 3 (2022): 384 (emphasis in original).

49. Ibid.

50. Emine Saner, "Let Them Be Kids!' Is 'Free-Range' Parenting the Key to Healthier, Happier Children?'," *The Guardian*, August 16, 2021, https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2021/aug/16/let-them-be-kids-is-free-range-parenting-the-key-to-healthier-happier-children.

51. Carusi, "Refusing Teachers and the Politics of Instrumentalism in Educational Policy." Carusi's article is part of a symposium on "The Politics of Instrumentalism," published in *Educational Theory* 72, no. 3 (2022), https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/toc/17415446/2022/72/3. The papers in this symposium pursue in great depth the issue of instrumentalism in educational policy and curriculum.

52. Richard Smith, "Writing Up and Down: The Language of Educational Research," *Journal of Philosophy of Education* 54, no. 3 (2020): 675.

53. Ian Cushing and Anthony Carter, "Using Young Adult Fiction to Interrogate Raciolinguistic Ideologies in Schools," *Literacy* 56, no. 2 (2022): 106–119.

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of teaching, seeing punishment as a necessary feature of education.[54] Educational researchers and theorists who critique educational instrumentalism only seem to suggest another instrument. It might seem, then, that the fantasy of Rousseau is used to contest this rise in authoritarian schooling — and certainly for some subjects it *can* function that way.

However, if we are to revisit Rousseau's pedagogy through a Lacanian lens, we might begin to notice an "environmental control of experience" with nature as his "instrument."[55] So, despite the regular invocation of Rousseau as an educational liberator for revolutionary subjects, his educative model actually lays the foundation for the current instrumentalized and authoritarian state of affairs.[56] To use Lacanian vocabulary, perhaps we might see these authoritarian individuals, systems, and philosophies as Sadean, a notion that Lacan regularly employs in his outlining of certain fantasies and fetishes — projecting aggression outward toward students and, conceivably, finding *enjoyment* in the disciplining of students.[57] Even those who fundamentally oppose this sadistic mode of schooling are practicing the inverse — the inward turn of their aggression through the mode of masochism. As Lacan notes, he who "flagellates himself does it for a third party,"[58] that is, the call of the big Other discussed earlier decrees that the subject who masochistically punishes themselves does it to please an external They, the teacher who plans lessons and marks books late into the night, who in turn punishes themself for their students' low grades. Elsewhere, Lacan describes obsessional subjects as holding "deep attachments" in "a certain relationship to the Other, that we call sadistic."[59] Much like the flagellating for the Other, sadism harbors an obsession with the Other too — here the students for whom the teacher flagellates themselves.

What is interesting in the Lacanian approach to Rousseau is how we might see the structures of *Rousseau's* fantasy as Sadean too. If we maintain the Lacanian structure of fantasy as a subject in relationship with *objet a*, and trace the way both Rousseau and Sade do this in the relationship between the subject and nature, we find resonances. In turn, the semantic horizon in which Rousseau operates reaches out toward our own epoch, and with it the very conception of Natural Education might be called into question. In fact, to propose something radical, Rousseau's opposition to Sade may be *dialectical* rather than oppositional, in that

54. Michael Hand, "On the Necessity of School Punishment," *Theory and Research in Education* 18, no. 1 (2020): 10–22.

55. Szkudlarek, *On the Politics of Educational Theory*, 26.

56. Ibid., 20.

57. Ansgar Allen and Emile Bojesen, "The Economic Problem of Masochism in Education," *Confero: Essays on Education, Philosophy, and Politics* 6, no. 1 (2018): 55–85.

58. Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, 183.

59. Jacques Lacan, *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis: The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book VII*, ed. Jacques Alain-Miller, trans. Dennis Porter (London: Routledge, 2008), 250.

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Rousseau's natural forms of education bring with them the Sadean method.[60] Indeed, Lacan and Slavoj Žižek make similar claims regarding the Sadean nature of Enlightenment philosophy, which I will address in due course.

Due to nineteenth-century laws passed in response to the likes of Rousseau, children were no longer to be the slaves of urban industry (of course, their contribution to the growth of capital was only transformed rather than erased through the introduction of mass schooling, something quickly repressed in remembering the history of education). These anti–child labor laws certainly yield an aspect of object *a*, a certain something when invoking Rousseau's natural child that makes it all the more desirable — the free child who is not sent down a mine or underneath a loom. But this very same image of the child as Other creates the space for the sort of schooling so vehemently opposed by the followers of Rousseau today. Through Rousseau's questioning of the order of nature, and his consequent creation of the Other of the child, came the *naturalization* of apparatuses to support them. If children are indeed special, sacred, withering vines, then something must be done to allow them to grow abundantly, in the same way that agrologistical farming was essential to maintain mass crop production. The inception of education in its contemporary form needs to be seen in this context, and it is not hard to see the origins of how education has entered the sacred realm of childhood, here in terms of mass education throughout the nineteenth century.[61]

This apparatus, one that appears naturalized when attached to the biological imperatives of growth and nurture, does something with the child once it has been created. It is in this apparatus that the opposition between Sade and Rousseau arises also, as I will explain. To return to *Émile*, Rousseau claims to allow his fictional student to mature at his own pace, but really Émile is subtly influenced and manipulated at every turn. In Rousseau's premise about the necessity of education in its supposedly natural form to allow the student to grow at the correct pace, a justification is made for the tutor's actions. For example, Émile is taught to avoid fables; instead, the ideal, natural method of teaching is to "teach by doing whenever you can."[62] True, the fable is a manipulative form of education, a story draped in silent didacticism that nudges the student toward a moral absolute. But what Rousseau supplants fables for is perhaps even more troubling. Émile breaks a window in book 2, and rather than lecturing the boy, Jean-Jacques leaves him to suffer in the cold: "let wind blow upon him day and night."[63] The plan is, of course, that Émile will suffer enough to "make an impression on his memory,"[64] that is,

60. James Donald and Adam Greteman said this elsewhere. See Donald, *Sentimental Education*; and Adam J. Greteman, "Corrupting Conversations with the Marquis de Sade: On Education, Gender, and Sexuality," *Studies in Philosophy and Education* 35, no. 6 (2015): 605–620.

61. Donald, *Sentimental Education*.

62. Rousseau, *Émile*, 80.

63. Ibid., 37.

64. Ibid.

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to learn his lesson. The tutor does not enact the punishment, but rather allows nature to do it for him. As Szkudlarek says, "apparently natural experiences," made "invisible to the child," are used as a pedagogical instrument.[65] We see in such examples how the ontologization of the child as a subject and the broader appeal to nature have been enacted as a mode of manipulation.

As aforementioned, a central figure invoked by Lacan is the Marquis de Sade. Sade may be of more importance to educational thinking than he is given credit for. Like Rousseau, Sade's works are "relentlessly, tediously educational, perhaps unrivaled in their singular commitment to the course of instruction."[66] Quite so: "Sade has a lot to say about education, challenging in many ways the work of Rousseau that used education as a way to put off corruption from society, cultivate freedom," and so forth.[67] In the "pornographic pedagogy" of his 1795 educational treatise *Philosophy in the Boudoir*, Sade depicts the teaching of the virginal Eugénie in libertinism through a series of lectures and sexually violent "activities."[68] Her tutor Dolmancé, a typical embodiment of the Sadean libertine and of the sadistic teacher, makes great claims throughout about her education and its necessitation by nature: the treatise seeks out a "true" education (as Rousseau does), and Dolmancé justifies his sadistic methods by saying that man must "submit to nature's laws."[69] The text cogitates on nature, asking "What is man, and how does he differ from all the other plants, from all the animals in nature? There is no difference whatsoever."[70] Elsewhere, Eugénie, just like Émile, is described through botanical and agricultural metaphors that invoke the signifier of nature. She is "a flower bed that's lying fallow," that needs "tak[ing] care of."[71] Again, akin to Rousseau, it is claimed that "Education" in its dominant form "isn't part of nature. Education harms the sacred effects of nature just as cultivation harms trees."[72] Man meddles and disfigures the Other, leaving children to wither on the vine.

As such, Sade's use of the signifier is not dissimilar from Rousseau's. What we might thus notice is that Sade "provides a useful contrast against which to set the techniques of public and mass schooling, which emerged in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries" in response to the likes of Rousseau, Romanticism, and the Enlightenment.[73] Just like Sade, the modes of schooling that we use today, whose

65. Szkudlarek, *On the Politics of Educational Theory*, 24.

66. Ansgar Allen, "Education, Mastery, and the Marquis de Sade," *Other Education* 5, no. 2 (2016): 41.

67. Greteman, "Corrupting Conversations with the Marquis de Sade," 612.

68. Donald, *Sentimental Education*, 12.

69. Marquis de Sade, *Philosophy in the Boudoir, or, the Immoral Mentors* (London: Penguin, 1795/2006), 96.

70. Ibid., 139.

71. Ibid., 77.

72. Ibid., 66.

73. Donald, *Sentimental Education*, 12.

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foundations were laid in the "national education"[74] of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, "have persistently attempted to shape children to their measure by means of discipline that claim, like Rousseau's Tutor or Sade's Dolmancé, not only to understand the nature of the child, but to be able to emancipate it."[75] Sade and Rousseau alike make claims to understand the Other, and its desire, and to sustain this desire through the signifier of nature.

At the same time, Sade's fantasy is different from Rousseau's, as will be seen in the next section, because of the relationship between $ and *a* involved. Nevertheless, the trace of each thinker is palpable in the other, and this should come as no surprise. The dialectical relationship between sadism and the Enlightenment (discussed elsewhere by Lacan and Žižek as a relation between Sade and Kant) raises the possibility that the methods of Émile's tutor, in their desire to be *natural* and for the pursuit of *nature*, hold traces of their opposite. The tutor's belief in his duty to ensure Émile's progression incurs the justification of *any* method of education, be it Sadean or not. As Žižek notes in his analysis of Rousseau,

> [T]he excuse to do our duty should be rejected as hypocritical; suffice it to recall the proverbial example of a severe sadistic teacher who subjects his pupils to merciless discipline and torture. Of course, his excuse to himself (and to others) is: "I myself find it hard to exert such pressure on the poor kids, but what can I do — it's my duty!"[76]

As the lessons in *Philosophy in the Boudoir* become more intensive, the characters also make an appeal to duty: "[I]f … she neglected the duties imposed here by lust-," asks Saint-Ange, to which the teacher Dolmancé replies, "I would never forgive her! … An exemplary punishment … I swear to you that she'd be whipped."[77] Though Rousseau does not whip or torture his student, as Sade does, he disavows his agency as torturer by leaving the job to Nature and seeks to justify the pressure and methodology of his actions, saying "it's his Duty towards the Progress of Humanity."[78] An appeal to nature as signifier allows the sadist's method to continue; the Natural Education of Rousseau has uncanny similarities with Sade's torturous instruction (when the tutor intentionally leaves Émile to shiver and suffer in a room with a broken window, what should we call that?).

Today, the "discipline policies that are avowedly authoritarian, emphasizing strict discipline, the wearing of identical uniforms with complete uniformity, and zero tolerance of infractions"[79] sound more like Sade than Rousseau, but

74. Sade, *Philosophy in the Boudoir*, 112.

75. Donald, *Sentimental Education*, 12.

76. Slavoj Žižek, "Kant and Sade: The Ideal Couple," *lacanian ink* 13 (1998): n.pg., https://www.lacan.com/zizlacan4.htm.

77. Sade, *Philosophy in the Boudoir*, 70.

78. Žižek, "Kant and Sade," n.p.

79. Smith, "Writing Up and Down," 675.

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ultimately the subject of both fantasies demonstrates a relationship with Nature through the formula S<>*a*. Students required to "SLANT: Sit up straight, Listen, Answer questions, Never shout out, Track the teacher"[80] allow teachers to uphold their fantasy of Natural Education in continuing to do their "duty" for the child. An assumption is made about the desire of the Other, and a claim to know the Other's nature. As Rousseau iterates, "Canaries who escape from the cage are unable to fly."[81] Consequently, *that* they are caged matters more than *what* shape that cage takes.

The Pastoral as *a*

What has been arising throughout this analysis of Rousseauism is the way in which the fantasy of a Natural Education is sustained to justify any act of education — whether it be benign or sadistic — and how they might be dialectically intertwined. What is perhaps missing in the Lacanian sense is the object *a* that is interacted with in the fantasy of Rousseau's nature. If nature is so desirable for teachers as $\$$, what is it (*a*) about nature that makes it desirable? It is clear that for Sade it is in the domination (>) of the object of desire — the Other — that he finds the *a*; for him, "pain is always what leads to pleasure."[82] There are fragments of this same Sadistic pleasure in Rousseau too, as I discussed above in his manipulative methodology to teach the young boy. But there are other aspects to the signifier of nature that make it so desirable, educationally speaking.

The desire for nature is better understood from unraveling some other aspects of *Émile* and its deployment of the signifier. Rousseau generally describes nature within the binary opposition of nature and culture: "In the natural order men are all equal."[83] We again see the presumption of the natural order of man, which he challenged to generate the ontological space for the Other of the child. But in this line of thought, Rousseau sees culture and society as a polluting force that will infect the state of nature so admirably described previously as the place of freedom: "Civilized man is born and dies a slave," he says; thus "The infant is bound up in swaddling clothes, the corpse is nailed down in his coffin. All his life long man is imprisoned by our institutions."[84] Rousseau seems to neglect that education is *always already* grafted onto culture. As in the mode of any binary, each oppositional term carries the trace of the other: "Human nature is not independent from the influence of evolution, environment, and culture."[85] Conversely, evolution, environment, and culture are deeply affected by human

80. Ibid.

81. Rousseau, *Emile*, 18.

82. Sade, *Philosophy in the Boudoir*, 90.

83. Rousseau, *Émile*, 7.

84. Ibid., 8.

85. Bernadette Baker, "(Ap)pointing the Canon: Rousseau's *Emile*, Visions of the State, and Education," *Educational Theory* 51, no. 1 (2001): 33.

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nature. Our ecological impact, the shape in which we have altered evolution, our "footprint," is indelible in the World. Can we say that nature, the plane of beings as objects unaffected by anthropocentrism, is knowable to us in any way beyond our frame of them; or do they, as Heidegger would say, remain enframed by our being-in-the-world? This is not to say that objects do not exist without subjective interpretation. It is quite the opposite; it is precisely because these objects exist as they are that we desire their enframing through lenses such as "nature."

Following from Derrida's consideration of Rousseau, we might unravel this binary further. Derrida's deconstruction of Rousseau's nature/culture binary in *Of Grammatology* displays the sort of charge that has been leveled against contemporary education through the desire for nature as a signifier. Derrida states how Rousseau seeks to find a "hidden good Nature, as a native soil recovered, of a 'zero degree' with reference to which one could outline the structure, the growth, and above all the degradation of our society and our culture."[86] But Derrida highlights that this "zero degree" sought after is merely a product of culture, a manifestation of the desire to justify the "degraded" state in which we find ourselves. The "native soil" that is to be excavated will only ever be found through the lens of the observer, through their cultural perspective, framed by their culture, and of course framed by the culture of those who are being investigated. Consequently, this binary cannot be disjoined as Rousseau intended. It is also noteworthy that Sade makes many of the same attacks on the institutionalized education of eighteenth-century France as Rousseau and, much like Rousseau, because institutionalized education is fundamentally "unnatural." For example, in *Philosophy in the Boudoir* Dolmancé asks, "Isn't everyone out for himself in the world?," and then notes that "Nothing is as egotistical as nature's voice."[87] Regularly, Sade appeals to the "true" nature of man, the pursuit of the pleasure principle, as a justification for his method of Natural Education. As Derrida notes, however, Sade makes the same misstep as Rousseau. For though the pleasure principle is a fundamental aspect of the psyche of the human subject, the Lacanian subject always attempts to go beyond this principle, manifested through its pursuit of enjoyment in transgressing boundaries and limits[88] — which are themselves products of culture. The pleasure of the sadist in their domination of the Other is only available to them through the designation of the Other by a subject ($), by the rules of "decency," and by the taboos dictated by culture. The primal and orgasmic pursuits of the Sadean educator are no more "natural" than the virtue-imbued education of schools in eighteenth-century France, or the schooling systems of today. All rely on a distinction between nature and culture that is fundamentally flawed.

This lack of distinction suggests that an *a* is lingering around the signifier of nature that continues to constitute its almost mythical desirability, beyond

86. Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 115.

87. Sade, *Philosophy in the Boudoir*, 65.

88. Lacan, *Ethics*, 256.

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the reaches of the culture. Rousseau's invocation of nature implies that it can be saved from the fallen, monstrous cultural formation, and it is here that the *fantasy* and the *a* become clearer in a Lacanian sense. As previously mentioned, the pastoral is evident throughout *Émile* in both its language and form. Lacan made his own claims about the pastoral, claiming that "the domain of the pastoral is never absent from civilization; it never fails to offer itself as a solution to the latter's discontents."[89] Much like Derrida, Lacan notes the presence of the pastoral in its civilized counterpart. Lacan's argument, in his reworking of Freudian "discontents," is that pastoralism often lingers as a fantasy that sustains civilization by posing as its escape, even when the escape is absent. Indeed, the pastoral haunts the signifier of nature too, especially when we consider the pastoral not as a style or genre, nor as an image or scene, but as a mode of presencing an idyll within an epoch of being. For example, Lindenberger presents the pastoral as follows: "a mode of thought — above all, one that exists in relation to other modes of thought rather than as a static form or setting or type of imagery."[90] There must be a manipulation of "stages" to reach this idyll (or fantasy); the individual must tread a clearly defined path to attain it. To be closer to nature, one must follow a natural path outlined by the structure of the text. This is of course what Rousseau does in *Émile*: he uses the narrative of the boy's education as a mode of presencing an idyll and breaks the boy's life down into clear and palpable stages to ensure that the path is trodden directly. Without time being construed as such, without being compartmentalized, the Other of the child would cease to be; it is possible because it is posed as a different time from that of the adult. To this effect, "Time was long during early childhood … now it is the other way; we have not enough time," says Rousseau.[91] Further, this time that belongs to the child is divisible, easily "chopped" into manageable stages that each build upon the last. It is as if we are an unfolding narrative that must start, develop, and resolve; it is the essence of progress and an embodiment of the educational Symbolic Order previously described. The division of time into stages, years, and hours of the day is commonplace in schools around the world, and the more recent focus on lesson planning in education demonstrates that time must be capitalized upon, down to the minute.[92] Not a moment must be wasted. Once again, Žižek's claim of "the Duty towards the Progress of Humanity" is posited as the justification.[93]

89. Ibid., 109.

90. Lindenberger, "The Idyllic Moment," 346.

91. Rousseau, *Émile*, 75.

92. Graham Butt, *Lesson Planning*, 3rd ed. (London: Continuum, 2008).

93. Lacan made an interesting intervention into the psychoanalytic clinic, one that could pose similar challenges to the typical one-hour lesson. Freud's clinic sessions were fifty minutes, and this length remains the standard in psychotherapeutic practice today. However, in his own clinical practice, Lacan introduced "the variable length session": he would end the session whenever the patient had a revelatory moment that punctuated their session, just as syntax is punctuated to arrest meaning (see *Écrits*, 99). This approach was intended to increase the impact of the revelation for the subject, with Lacan claiming any

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Other pastoral aspects make this signifier of nature desirable. If we return to *Émile*, it is easy to see Lindenberger's "isolated moment … a kind of island in time."[94] We only need consider Rousseau's proposition that "[a] happy man is a hermit."[95] Certainly, Rousseau calls for an existence away from large communities, as these embody the acculturated that he so vehemently opposes. To again paraphrase Rousseau, man meddles with all good things and makes them evil. This island existence requires solitude, and we can easily fantasize about the school, and even more precisely the classroom, as this space away from the demonic outdoors of culture. So too does Rousseau deploy the pastoral trope of something akin to the "life of herdsmen … whose occupation is of a sort that leads to meditation on the beauty of the visible world."[96] Speaking of both Rousseau and his intellectual descendent Claude Lévi-Strauss, Derrida notes,

> on the one hand, as with Rousseau, the theme of a necessary or rather fatal degradation, as the very form of progress; on the other hand, nostalgia for what preceded this degradation, an affective impulse toward the islets of resistance, the small communities that have provisionally protected themselves from corruption.[97]

It is the belief that society is inherently degrading due to the amputation of our Being from nature, plunging us further into demonic culture, while also holding onto the ideal that the natural serves the Other's betterment, that propels Natural Education toward the pastoral. Thus, the inverse of this tragic descent into culture is characterized by an idyllic existence in a small, rural community. Take, for example, the sort of educative method that Rousseau proposes, where "Nature … is schoolmaster," where he favors the playground over the classroom: "Instead of keeping him mewed up in a stuffy room, take him out into a meadow every day."[98] Clearly his intention is to let children be-in-nature, that is, the pastoral form of nature, as it will provide the education he so desires.

The desire to return to a more domestic kind of education, commonly seen in the pastoral depiction of small communities of shepherd folk, now proposed by the likes of other child-centered education movements, such as Waldorf or forest schools, is of course enticing. Such pastoral sentiments, summoned by images of quiet communities away from the horrors of modernity, or the sort romanticized in Coleridge and Keats — "the power of Nature," as Wordsworth says — grant the signifier a quality that causes it to become an object of desire. How could those of us oppressed by the relentless everyday of capitalism and urban drudgery not dare to dream of a more peaceful world? And can that world not be one fostered by

further analysis would diminish that discovery. One might wonder whether the lesson could be finished in a similar manner, where the class left at the moment the intended learning was reached.

94. Lindenberger, "The Idyllic Moment," 338.

95. Rousseau, *Émile*, 100.

96. Martha Hale Shackford, "A Definition of the Pastoral Idyll," *PMLA* 19, no. 4 (1904): 585.

97. Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 134.

98. Rousseau, *Émile*, 48, 25.

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education? Could education not reside in such a world? The pastoral is, however, a work of fiction, a myth, and a unit of fantasy. In this sense, the teacher as a subject, the one who allows the Rousseauist fantasy to sustain their desire to educate, is dominated (<) in the Lacanian formula for fantasy by *a* in its appearance as the alluring pastoral. The seductiveness of "the return" of course pervades many aspects of political and social being, so it is no surprise that it exists in educational thinking too. Here, in the desire for the power of Nature to take hold, the teacher is dominated by all that the Rousseauist fantasy brings in the signifier — the instrumentalist, the authoritarian, the *Sadean*.

A New Fantasy

Though many teachers might not believe they are operating within the realm of fantasy, especially those who oppose the creeping sadism, instrumentalization, and surveillance in schools, fantasy is indeed still dominant in the educational Symbolic. Central to this fantasy is the idea of a population of educated, thoughtful, and qualified young people, fostered by letting them mature at their own pace and learn from nature, allowing them to flourish. Teachers still desire educated Others, despite mass levels of skepticism and dissatisfaction in the education profession and indeed from children themselves in school. Furthermore, teachers believe that by enacting this teaching ritual, not only are students going to progress, but so too will society. Such an orientation toward an unlikely future,[99] which is highly visible in Rousseau's determination of Émile's progression, is fostered by a Rousseauist fantasy, one that sustains our desire to educate *no matter what* and one inspired by the false image of the pastoral. As Szkudlarek neatly states, the Rousseauist fantasy revolves around "gently taking the child a hostage of the utopian future."[100]

It would be tempting to call for an abandonment of fantasy within education in order to avoid the concerns I have raised. Maybe then education could get on with its "Real" endeavors, whatever they might be (though arguably the Real endeavors of education are far more traumatic for some students than many would like to admit). Many teachers who leave the profession say they "no longer believe," but really they no longer believe in a particular fantasy. As such, fantasy must remain if there is to be any form of education. Lacan argues that not only *should* fantasy remain in the subject's Imaginary, but that is *essential* for the subject who desires. Without fantasy in the form of $<>*a*, desire loses its sustenance; as such, we stop being able to enjoy at all. Fantasy cannot, therefore, be elided or waved away. In

99. See F. Tony Carusi, "Why Bother Teaching? Despairing the Ethical through Teaching that Does Not Follow," *Studies in Philosophy and Education* 36, no. 6 (2017): 644. He discusses this same issue in a different manner in his question of "why bother teaching?" He notes how the teacher's attachment to hope for a better future acts as the primary goal of education. Along the same lines to my Lacanian rethinking of Rousseau, Carusi identifies that such ceaseless optimism in educational logic (though here it is oriented toward a futurity rather than a mythical return) "offer[s] ends to which instrumental means of teaching are attached." In essence, we both identify how optimistic educational thinking carries instrumentalism with it.

100. Szkudlarek, *On the Politics of Educational Theory*, 25.

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any desire to educate, what might be called for is the injection of new fantasies. As Britzman declares, "we invite more phantasy" rather than seek its repression.[101]

It would be easy to go on repeating the same old fantasies here.[102] We should not forget that it is our belief in the desire of the Other of the child and their very nature that has allowed this fantasy to enter, so perhaps we might start by abandoning this belief that we know the Other's desire. Perhaps we might start by abandoning the belief that education can be something natural, an imperative that must occur for our duty to progress to be fulfilled. What might enter instead remains to be seen, and I am in no position to be able to prescribe such a fantasy — as Carusi suggests, to prescribe a new fantasy would only be to repeat the same problem.[103] The fantasy must find some other way of allowing itself in, but that can only start through a sober engagement with the fantasies that are so regularly disavowed in education. Alternatively, what I have shown here is that, through engaging with ourselves as teachers through the lens of Lacanian fantasy, we might start to reevaluate how we see our roles as educators and settle for a fantasy that does not return to a mythical pastoral past, but stands for something a little more mundane. When asked in an interview about the place of psychoanalysis in thinking about politics and power, Lacan replied,

> I don't want to be heard saying that a psychoanalysis applied universally would be the source of the resolution of all antinomies; that if we analyze all human beings, there will not be any more wars, no more class conflicts; formally, I say the opposite. All that we could expect is that human dramas might be less confusing.[104]

A similar charge could be led against the so-called educational liberator — that a Natural Education like that of Rousseau's might lead to the resolution of political antinomies and free us from war and conflicts. But the humble claims of psychoanalytic praxis by Lacan, that human dramas might be less confusing, should feed into our educational fantasy. Though this seems underwhelming as a conclusion to the argument I have made, the implications might be more radical and far-reaching than they seem, for they challenge the dominant beliefs and claims of education in its broadest, ontological sense. As such, I finish by asking you to *imagine* an education that abandons its aims and claims of liberation, one that cannot save its students, and certainly cannot/should not get them closer to nature. Instead of finding yourself trapped in a constant repetition of the same fantasies that have always been upheld, if something Other than those can find its place, perhaps that is a better place to begin.

101. Britzman, *A Psychoanalyst in the Classroom*, 84.

102. Not forgetting that repetition is one of Lacan's "four fundamental concepts of psychoanalysis" (see Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*).

103. Carusi, "Why Bother Teaching?," 644.

104. Jacques Lacan, "Interview with Jacques Lacan," *L'Express*, May 1957, https://www.lacanonline.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/Interview-with-Jacques-Lacan-LExpress-1957.pdf.

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