FILMMAKING AS "MEANING-MAKING" ACTIVITY: ROBERT KEGAN'S DEVELOPMENTAL THEORY AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR TRAINING FILM DIRECTING STUDENTS

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Abstract: Robert Kegan's *The Evolving Self: Problem and Process in Human Development* (1982) is a psychological theory on personality development that is centered around the idea of meaning-making as the primordial activity of existence, and which proposes an understanding of the ways we conceptualize our *self* and *other* according to our current stage of development, with relevant implications for many types of care work, including education. This theory is presented here in the context of film education for film-directing university students, for which it hopes to inspire a more student-centered approach, which values process over outcome. As many of the professional abilities that are sought after in the training of film-directing students can be seen as intra- and interpersonal abilities, the conceptualization of self and other becomes especially relevant in this particular educational setup, where working with the students involves a close encounter, insufficiently recognized, with their meaning-making activity. This also brings into discussion the way we model ideals for teachers in terms of their own personal development and the role that the film school as an institution could play in this matter.

Keywords: film directing, film education, developmental psychology, holding environments, client-centered psychotherapy, post-formal operational thought, postmodern education, film schools.

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Introduction

The idea that we stop developing psychologically at the same time that we cease to grow physically – in our late teens or early twenties – was not just a widespread public misconception, but one that even most specialists in the field of developmental psychology at Harvard in the 1970's upheld as well. It is in this context that Robert Kegan's *The Evolving Self: Problem and Process in Human Development* (1982) proved groundbreaking at its time, by shedding light on the life-long process of maturation that human beings are engaged in.

"If you want to understand another person in some fundamental way", says Kegan, "you must know where the person is in his or her evolution." (Kegan, 1982, p. 113) An understanding of the students' moment of evolution through a theory of psychological development is crucial in education, and Kegan's theory, as a theory of adult development, can prove to be extremely relevant in the branch of education at university level. Therefore, I believe that it can be really useful for us in the process of teaching film directing.

At our film school, of the I.L. Caragiale National University of Theatre and Film in Bucharest, the training of film directing students has a predominantly practice-based approach, mostly centered on the students making a short film

each semester for all three years of their B.A. studies. This focus on practice also means that the educational process is even less about the traditional 'transfer of knowledge' than it is in more theoretical classes. Instead, it becomes more about counseling students on their projects and providing them with feedback during different stages of their work. Even though the matter of what is being "taught" in a classical sense (what are the contents of the curriculum, of the theoretical classes) is, undoubtedly, of high importance, I believe that this matter of accompanying the students' process through counseling and feedback is, in our case, at the center of the educational process. But in my experience both formerly as a student and currently as a teaching assistant, this is also the most challenging aspect both professionally and personally. As a student, I often struggled with feeling somewhat misunderstood by teachers in my creative process, and as a teacher, I discovered what a struggle it can be to properly understand your students, even when consciously trying to keep an open mind. Our educational process is maybe not best framed as a matter of "teaching film directing", but rather a matter of accompanying each student into teaching themselves about film directing, into becoming *themselves* as film directors.

In this respect lies the great potential of Kegan's theory in inspiring our approach to training film directors in the context of university studies. Kegan's theory of personality is built on the premise that humans are, primarily, meaning -organizing organisms. However, the important distinction here is that a person not only *makes meaning*, but that the activity of being a person is *the activity of meaning-making*. At the heart of this activity is the drawing and redrawing of the distinction between *self* and *other*, each stage of development being a new solution to the lifelong tension between the universal human yearning to be connected, attached and included, on the one hand, and to be distinct, independent, and autonomous on the other. The *recognition* of an individual's meaning-making activity in their specific stage is what the environment can provide most fundamentally in the benefit of the individual's growth.

Through Kegan's workframe, we can feel inspired to recontextualize the professional abilities that we aim for our students to obtain into a larger process of their personal development, to rethink our role as teachers, as providers of recognition, and to redraw our self-actualization objectives, both as teachers and as a film school, in ways that would help us embrace a more progressive and postmodern educational approach.

The Evolving Self: *Kegan's stages of development*

Kegan's model of personality development is based on Jean Piaget's theory of how children organize the physical world.

> A preoperational child (our typical four year-old) is unable to distinguish between how something appears to him or her and how something is; but the newborn (Piaget's « sensorimotor » child) is unable to distinguish between itself and anything else in the world.(...) When the child is able to have his reflexes rather than be them, he stops thinking he causes the world to go dark when he closes his eyes. (Kegan, 1982, pp. 30-31)

Each stage of development is considered a process that involves the transformation of subject into object: when the child identifies with his reflexes, they are the subject, therefore, he *is* his reflexes. When the child no longer identifies with his reflexes, it means that they have become object. He is able to *have* them, rather than *be* them.

This activity of constantly transforming the old subject, that is, the *self* into object is at the core of the developmental process. As a consequence, each new evolutionary step puts us into a state of vulnerability, as it involves the loss of an old self. It is what Piaget describes as "decentration" and the recovery of a new self, a "recentration". (*Id.*) Kegan goes to show how our lifelong evolution finds itself under the sign of constant loss and recovery of balance, of fundamental renegotiations of evolutionary truces, into a history of successive emergence from embeddedness, from the 'world', through *differentiation*, in order to then relate to it, through *integration.*

From the **(0) incorporative** stage, we emerge from the motherly *holding environment* towards the **(1) impulsive** stage, by beginning to *have* our reflexes, rather than be them. From the impulsive stage, we begin, instead of identifying with our impulses and emotions to possessing them and therefore becoming better at managing them, which brings us into the **(2) imperial** balance. This is when we also begin to stop believing that things just "happen in the world", and we come to realize we can actually influence it through our actions. Primary school children are typically at this stage, and it is at this time that they start to understand relationships in transactional terms. They cannot yet "care about" other people's feelings or well-being as, for the child in the imperial balance, other people are being instrumentalized into catering for his needs. From a socio-moral perspective (Kegan correlates his stages with Lawrence Kohlberg's stages of moral development), a transactional understanding of relationships translates into a "I can do anything as long as I don't get caught" mentality.

This is, for a young child, in the beginning, an emergence from embeddedness towards greater independence from the familial holding environment. But in order to develop a conscience, to be able to value relationships in and for themselves and not just as means of getting his needs met, the child evolves into the **(3) interpersonal** balance, which allows him to organize his interior life into the structure of a *shared reality.* Like all rebalancings, this one too comes with both costs and victories:

> The creation of guilt, or the development of conscience, may seem to some a terrible burden and a terrible loss. And, of course, in some way it is; but it is also quite liberating, as it frees one of having to exercise so much control over an otherwise unfathomable world. It frees me of the distrust of a world from which I am radically separate. Without the internalization of the other's voice in one's very construction of the self, how one feels is much more a matter of how external others will react, and the universal effort to preserve one's integrity will be felt by others as an effort to control and manipulate. (Kegan, 1982, p. 91)

It is in the interpersonal stage that our *needs* turn from subject into object, thus enabling us to become reciprocal and empathetic. The newly found strength of this stage lies in its capacity to be internally *conversational*: we can (usually as teens) hold a plurality of voices in our internal organization of the self, finally liberated from the previous frenzy of the imperial stage of constantly 'looking out' for what an external voice will say about our actions.

This stage has its shortcomings too, as the shared reality is controlling the individual to a large extent. When we live in the interpersonal balance as adults, we are likely to seem as "too dependent" on the way others perceive us, and as "lacking self-esteem". We might usually be advised that we should become more "selfish" and "self-reliant". But Kegan says that this type of description is not properly addressing the interpersonal adult into his predicament. It is not the case of a self that is not sufficiently esteemed, but rather, that there is no *self* outside the context of other people's approval. It is not a matter of a *lesser* self, as rather, a self that makes itself and the world cohere through its relationships with others.

This balance might be *interpersonal* but it's not quite *intimate*, despite what could be assumed, as intimacy is here the *source* of the self rather than its *aim*. There is not yet a self to be shared with the other, because the other is called upon to bring the self into existence: "Fusion is not intimacy. If one can feel manipulated by the imperial balance, one can feel devoured by the interpersonal one." (Kegan, 1982, p. 97)

Only when we begin to be able to review, reflect upon and mediate the obligations, expectations, satisfactions, purposes, or influences of interpersonalism, can we cease to be overruled by them. This is precisely what defies the strength of the next balance, the **(4) institutional**. In no longer *being our relationships* but rather *having our relationships*, the interior world is now organized into a psychic "institution", for which the new self serves as an "administrator". Each stage of development gives us new powers of self-regulation by enabling us to better digest ambivalence, and now, the institutional self is capable of "holding both sides of a feeling simultaneously, where stage 3 tends to experience its ambivalences one side at a time." (Kegan, 1982, p. 101) Kegan characterizes stage 4 as follows:

> A strength of this is the person's new capacity for independence, to own herself, rather than having all the pieces of herself owned by various shared contexts; the sympathies which arise out of one's shared space are no longer determinative of the « self », but taken as preliminary, mediated by the self-system. But in this very strength lies a limit. The « self » is identified with the organization it is trying to run smoothly; it is this organization. The « self » at ego stage 4 is an administrator in the narrow sense of the world, a person whose meanings are derived out of the organization, rather than deriving the organization out of her meaning/principles/purposes/reality. Stage 4 has no « self », no « source », no « truth » before which it can bring the operational constraints of the organization, because its « self », its « source », its « truth » is invested within these operational constraints. In this sense, ego stage 4 is inevitably ideological (as Erikson, 1968, recognized must be the case for identity formation), a truth for a faction, a class, a group. And it probably requires the recognition of a group (or persons as representatives of groups) to come into being[.] (Kegan, 1982, pp. 101-102)

In the institutional stage, emotional life seems to be more successfully managed as it is more internally-controlled, but its dangers lie precisely in the risks of the exacerbation of this self-control. The fragility of this balance resides in the fact that it does not have a self to which to bring the self-governorship for examination. What is 'just' is being derived from what the self-system constituted as 'legal', instead of the 'legal' being derived from what is 'just', and thus, the self-governorship risks of becoming tyrannical.

When we stop being well served by the institutional balance as a way to make sense of ourselves and the world, this manifests through feelings of exhaustion from having to "administrate" ourselves with an excess of control,

rigidity, and self-scrutiny. The self-sufficiency that used to be a victorious form of emergence from the constraints of interpersonalism is now rather alienating, and *integration* tendencies might be perceived by this self as threatening, as posing the risk of throwing us back into the chaotic fusionism of interpersonalism.

It is only in the last stage, the **(5) interindividual**, that this conflict is resolved. Its mode of coherence finally allows us to find others not as *fellow instrumentalists* (as in stage 2 – impulsive), *partners in fusion* (stage 3 – interpersonal) or *fellow loyalists* (stage 4 – institutional), but as *individuals*. Others are finally recognized in relation to their potential or their capacity to recognize themselves and others as value-originating, system-generating and history-making individuals. The communitary reality that the interindividual self can now construct is for the first time a truly universal one, in which all people are granted membership by virtue of being human beings. The group that this new self is adhering to is no longer a "pseudo-species", but finally "*the* species". (Kegan, 1982, p. 104)

> If one no longer *is* one's institution, neither is one any longer the duties, performances, work roles, career which institutionality gives rise to. One *has* a career; one no longer *is* a career. The self is no longer so vulnerable to the kind of ultimate humiliation which the threat of performance-failure holds out, for the performance is no longer ultimate. The functioning of the organization is no longer an end in itself, and one is interested in the way it serves the aims of the new self whose community stretches beyond that particular organization. The self seems available to « hear » negative reports about its activities; before, it *was* those activities and therefore literally « irritable » in the face of those reports. (Kegan, 1982, p. 105)

This is a newly found freedom, as the interindividual self is much more capable of moving back and forth between the psychic systems within itself, which gives the self dynamism and 'flux'. Moreover, emotional conflict seems to have become in this new stage both recognizable and tolerable to its subject.

The three functions of the holding environment

Kegan sustains the idea that, however much we evolve, we are always *still* embedded. There was, he pointed out, a bias in most descriptive paradigms of development from his time towards viewing growth as a matter of differentiation, separation and autonomy-enhancing, lacking in vision the idea that adaptation is equally a matter of integration, attachment and inclusion. This we might also attribute

to a patriarchal bias: feminist psychologists such as Carol Gilligan and N.S. Low have pointed out that "differentiation (the stereotypically male overemphasis in this most human ambivalence) is favored with the language of growth and development, while integration (the stereotypically female overemphasis) gets spoken of in terms of dependency and immaturity" (pp. 108-109). Kegan's model is better at recognizing the duality of our lifelong tension between integration and differentiation, as the evolution of the self is seen as a constant rebalancing between the two, each stage being characterized by favoring one of them (1. impulsive – inclusion; 2. imperial – independence; 3. interpersonal – inclusion; 4. institutional – independence; 5. interindividual – inclusion).

This is especially relevant to us in education, as this bias towards independence has had a huge influence in this field and continues to be, perhaps, patriarchally reinforced. But Kegan's model not only brings to our attention the legitimacy of the values of integration and attachment, but also to the fact that we are constantly in an act of trying to find balance: "The original and continuing model for deliberative developmental education has been to provide experiences which might inform a person of the limits or contradictions of his or her way of constructing the world. This is good Dewey progressivism[.]" (p. 276) But Kegan's model helps us see that the role of the educator is maybe not best understood as that of the *challenger*, of the one that emphasizes *the contradictions of a person's meaning-making*, as we are, already, most of the time, slightly out of balance, challenged and close to painful doubt of our conceptualization of ourselves and the world.

Understanding that university is for students, at their typical age, the main **holding environment** and that the relationship with the teachers constitutes one of its main coordinates, we may take into consideration in our practice the three functions that a good holding environment has to perform in sustaining the students' development:

1. ***To confirm – or "to hold".*** This refers to an environment's capacity to recognize the individual in his or her transformation crises. What often happens in schools is that the differences in students' developing phases are not sufficiently acknowledged and that the general tendency is to give all students the same treatment which might not sufficiently recognize that some of them are in a different type of predicament. Kegan emphasizes that we pay huge personal costs when we are not seen *as who we are*, but as who we are *expected* to become.

   While it may turn out hugely beneficial to try to understand our students through the transition from the interpersonal (3) towards the institutional (4) balance, as their usual age upon entering UNATC is most

commonly that of 18-19 years old, we must always strive to be sensitive to exceptions to this rule, or to understand that these are not such well-defined categories, but rather a spectrum of evolution with a multitude of smaller steps in between. Some students might be more embedded in their interpersonalism, in a way that they cannot help but take our feedback very personally and we might feel that they are even over-compliant or too "dependent" on our opinions or approval. Others, who are already further into the institutional stage might be rather overly-defiant. Understanding the different types of resistances that the students pose as manifestations of the way they hold themselves and the world together might be especially helpful in our own efforts of not "taking personally" their more challenging reactions to our input.

2. ***To contradict – or "to let go".*** This function is not properly sustained when the holding environment is asking to be *held* by his "guest" instead of performing the holding for him or her.
   This function is the one that can help us understand the importance of boundaries in the student-teacher relationship. While a great goal of postmodern education is to establish this relationship as one of a partnership, in which the old hierarchical rapport is replaced with a tendency towards horizontality, a reciprocal transfer of knowledge and a reflection over power dynamics and structures (Cătălina Ulrich, *Postmodernism și educație*, 2007), the contradiction function brings into our attention the dangers of a misunderstood 'reciprocity'. Because we are, as teachers, in a position of power. Asking students to perform anything that could be viewed as *holding* might even veer into a spectrum of abuse. It helps, in our quest for more horizontally-inspired rapports with our students, if we take inspiration from the application of *secure attachment* in pedagogy, such as through Louis Cozonlino's *Attachment-based Teaching* (2014).

3. ***To show constancy – or to "stay put for reintegration".*** This is what makes a loss in the exterior world especially damaging for development if it occurs at the same time that the individual has not yet acquired a new self, and is in the transition between *me* and *not-yet-me*. In childhood, this could mean the loss of an attachment figure, or any relevant type of "disappearance", even moving to a new house or town. The act of development is at risk of being strongly associated with an experience of irreconcilable loss.

In our case, this type of dysfunction can be noted in students' enrollment in university (often including a change of residence), at a time when they are not yet finished mourning their former interpersonal self. Even though on a conscious level, students might wish to start their adult life away from their families and are excited for their new life at university, there might still be some part of this experience that is lived as an expulsion from the "womb", a "separation anxiety", even if it is as subtle as the difficulty to get out of bed in the morning.

Similarly, we might reframe the students' predicament after graduating – either BA or MA – in more emotional terms: they might experience that the holding environment is 'done' with them before they were 'done' with it.

Our students and the interpersonal – institutional transition

"Whatever excitement, adventure, and joyous emancipation may be associated with a young person's going off to college, it is as true that it is a time of vulnerability and high susceptibility to depression" (Kegan, 1982, p. 185). To understand this difficulty specific to the interpersonal – institutional transition that our students might experience, we must understand that it is not just about an overt "homesickness". Students might be sincerely 'excited' and 'joyous' in their leaving home or high school, but there might be, from a developmental perspective, also the case of a "grief over the loss of balance, the loss of feeling at home in the world (*Heimlichkeit*)." (*Id.*) This susceptibility to depression is so visible that in UNATC we even have an insiders' expression for it: "the second-year depression".

Understanding our students from a developmental workframe has several beneficial applications. First of all, this paradigm informs us of their natural and understandable inability to *receive* feedback. As we have seen, this is a capacity we only gain in the fifth stage of development.

The "interpersonal student" will probably – and naturally – be tempted to listen to our feedback in search of cues on whether *we like them or not* – and that is, whether we like them as *persons*. Naturally, we might as teachers find ourselves a little irritated at sensing this. We think of ourselves as giving feedback to them as future professionals, as film directors, and we might feel it is in our responsibility to emphasize this. But sometimes, this overemphasis – especially if irritation is, indeed, something we feel and manifest, ever so subtly – can translate exactly into something that can feel for them as 'we not liking them' *or* as we 'being judgemental about their need of approval'. This is an example of not performing the confirmation function very well, as we are addressing them not in their moment of evolution but in the one we are anticipating from them. Only a real,

deeply-felt trust in the natural development process can provide us with the real patience that the students need.

The "institutional student", on the other hand, might not seem so overly dependent on our appreciation, at least not in a *personal* sense. But they are expecting us to respect them "ideologically" – not necessarily in a *political* sense, though it might be this too, but in a broader sense, in their vision and choices, philosophically and aesthetically. The institutionally-balancing student has just 'escaped' what she or he might now regard as the 'perils' of interpersonalist life and the power of her or his identity is drawn from the strongly-held opinions (on life, on cinema, on politics etc.). We are often at risk of labeling this student as "stubborn". Their sense of identity and personal integrity is so invested into the films they make for school that this often means that they are not usually very open to suggestions. This level of autonomy is admirable – especially since we want film directors to "think for themselves", be original and self-reliable – but it is also what often puts us in a sensitive spot as teachers. When the student doesn't want to hear our feedback, take our input into consideration, we might be faced with another type of irritability. We might be tricked by the institutionally-balancing student in another way as well: we might mistake their defiance as self-sufficiency, and we might instinctively put our efforts into trying even more to defy their modes of filmmaking. But their resistances are not purely intellectual. They cannot accept feedback on their work because they *identify* themselves with their work. Just as in the case of the still interpersonally-balancing student, we might, as teachers, think we are discussing their films. This is, from the developmental perspective presented here, an illusion – and if we made the effort of properly remembering our own experience as students, we would be able to better see right through it. What we are discussing is *them.* The students, wherever they are on the interpersonal – institutional spectrum of development, have the experience of us giving feedback on *who they are.*

Second of all, Kegan's theory has even a larger application in our case. So far, the previous observations are representative for students in their late teens and early twenties from any field of study that involves the giving and receiving of feedback, and since most education is based on the idea of evaluation, we can count on its universality. But the act of filmmaking is, itself, a complex act of meaning-making that is not just internally-bred and projected outside through behavior, but an *explicit* externalization of made-meaning. A film is an object that is created by an individual in order to be presented to an audience, in the hope of having its made-meanings recognized.

Several skills that we attribute to the education and training of a film-directing student can actually be translated through Kegan's model and concepts.

Just as a young child who slowly differentiates himself from his reflexes, impulses and feelings and learns how to 'manipulate' the world around, so is a young cinephile learning to deconstruct films into separate elements (shots, sounds, cuts, script, story, style etc.) whose variations also produce a variation in effects. We often dedicate the first semester, or even the first year of film directing classes to helping students 'conceptualize themselves' as the authors of the film – not yet in the sense of *auteurs*, but in the sense that they are the creators of the communication, of the sensorial experience that they make through an audiovisual outlet, that each and every of their choices has an effect on the viewer.

Then, the capacity of developing stories, of taking into consideration the points of view of multiple characters, of the underlying themes and discourses that are proposed for the viewer are very intimately tied to the students' means of conceptualizing self and other. Sometimes, interpersonally-balancing students have a hard time creating morally-ambiguous secondary characters. They invest all their sympathy for the protagonist, while all the other characters are solely defined as what their effect is on the main character, which is usually a source of naivete in their films (unless the genre of the film calls for it). We must understand that this limited capacity for empathy, for recognizing ambivalence, is not just a "screenwriting" or a "directing" skill that must be, by some sort of pedagogical insistence, *added* to the student's self, but that it is part of the way the self composes itself.

Institutionally-balancing students are, on the other hand, usually better at balancing the different perspectives of their characters and are more aware of the kind of discourse that their films are constructing – they are often very preoccupied with that construction. This is also, for them, a cause of growing hesitancy: while the interpersonally-balancing student experiences a somewhat greater degree of freedom, as filmmaking is mostly for him or her still a form of "self-expression", the institutionally-balancing student has become somewhat more aware of the complexity of the relationship between his or her film and an audience, the world at large, and even, between the film and himself/herself. Institutionally-balancing students become more and more hesitant because of their self-scrutiny, and their approach to their own films can sometimes be characterized by a lack of flexibility – a flexibility that would allow them to creatively explore their own projects from more various angles.

Last but not least, the work of a film director also implies the work of managing different relationships, with the creative collaborators, with the producers, and with the technicians. This complex degree of teamwork also calls for complex intra- and interpersonal abilities, and Kegan's concepts also help understand and reframe them. While we cannot directly give students feedback on the way they handle their professional relationships, as we are not present with

them during this type of activity, the way we conduct our relationship with them is – I believe – an underestimated educational resource. Our teacher-student relationship has great potential in modeling the student's relationship with their collaborators.

When we see to what extent the *professional* development of a film directing student is in direct relation to his *personal* development, we can start to reframe our role as teachers. Rather than sticking to the classical paradigm of Dewey progressivism, and continuing to conceptualize film directing in terms of purely professional skills and information-based knowledge, we could instead, by taking inspiration from Kegan's workframe, explore an educational approach that focuses on **the recognition of meaning-making.**

The interindividual teacher

By approaching the problem through Kegan's workframe, we can start to see how the educational process – in general, but especially in our case – would benefit from teachers being in the interindividual balance. One of the ideals of postmodern education is that the teacher does not impose his or her values over the students, but rather helps the students find their own values (Ulrich, 2007). This kind of freedom and respect is something that, on an intellectual level, many of us agree with. Of course we want our students to find their own voices as film directors, to explore cinema well outside the constraints of our inevitable, contingent, preferences and value-asserting systems. But what Kegan's theory reveals to us is that we can only truly perform this task, of providing this type of freedom and respect, if we are sufficiently personally developed. Sometimes, accusing a teacher of not being 'open' enough to certain aesthetics or ideas on cinema is attributed to a lack of knowledge: as if the teacher is not 'well-cultured' enough, has not read enough or watched diverse enough films. While this could, sometimes, be the case, I believe it is only a superficial understanding of the problem involved. The vastness of our intellectual baggage is not the sole ingredient of the real tolerance and open-mindedness that we need in providing the best medium of development for our students.

The institutionally-balancing teacher is at risk of being irritated with the interpersonal student's need for approval, as he himself has not long ago repudiated his need for approval. Because his self's power comes from having, in a sense, overcome such dependency, he is liable, even in a very carefully converted manner and with noble intentions at heart, to manifest his discomfort towards more explicitly emotional needs of the student.

With the institutionally-balancing student, the institutionally-balancing teacher is at risk of not being able to overcome his own 'ideological' contents. He

might try to simulate a tolerance that he does not actually possess, which might work for the most part, but that we must believe – again, by recalling our own experience – that the students can sense. They can feel when the teacher is truly excited about a colleague's project proposal but only 'politely' affirmative of their own.

Also, the institutionally-balancing teacher can be overly-identified with his own work. This might be a cause for rigidity, excess of control, and identifying his performance as a teacher with the performance of the students. This is often not in the best interest of students. Dedicated teachers are something we desperately need – in the world at large. But teachers who identify their self-worth with their students' results, instead of their students' process are at risk of hurrying students in harmful ways, as Kegan's theory shows us.

Kegan also developed his theory as an attempt at laying the theoretical foundations for the concept of "unconditional positive regard", Carl Rogers's concept, who was the founder of client-centered therapy and also Kegan's professor (Kegan, 1982, pp. 5-6). The idea behind it is that, in order to grow, we need to be 'held' in the affirmative regard of others, that we must have our meaning-making recognized, as it is the essence of our existence. Rogers's therapeutic approach is based on the idea that, instead of addressing someone's anxiety (for example, by finding solutions), we need to learn to address *them* as people in the moment of anxiety, to join them in their meaning-making.

This therapeutic approach might just be exactly what we are looking for in improving our educational practices in the case of film directing. Instead of always being so preoccupied with trying to find 'solutions' to make the students' films "better", we could acknowledge that sometimes what the students need more than anything is rather a form of *mirroring*. Of cultivating a sort of listening that is very different from the diagnoses and evaluations that too often dominate our feedback and counseling. By helping students understand their ways of meaning-making, they might make even more progress in understanding and acquiring exactly those "professional skills" that we aim for in their education. It is when we force that progress that we trigger their resistances. When we insist, for example, on the importance of moral ambivalence in her characters, a student hears it "irritably" not because she is "stubborn" and refuses to "learn", but because she is not yet prepared to take fully onboard this level of moral ambivalence in herself and others. Because we can only 'operate' in films with the narrative formulas that we can intimately narrate our sense of self. Joining students in their meaning-making might prove the most effective way of "teaching" some of the "subjects" of film directing.

I believe that we should not let taboo prevent us from discussing the limitations of teachers in embracing educational values, as we might miss out on important points. What Kegan's paradigm shows us is that the kind of values that

postmodern education upholds are not just intellectual assets. By pointing out that **post-formal operational thought** is a characteristic of the interindividual stage, we have the chance to understand that development in a more holistic way, one that does not compartmentalize affect from intellect, emotion from rationale. Among the distinctive features of post-formal operational thought are:

> (a) Rather than making the form or closed system ultimate, it orients to the relationship between systems.
> (b) It takes the relationship between systems as prior to, and constitutive of, the systems themselves.
> (c) It regards motion, process, and change (not forms and entities) as the irreducible and primary feature of reality; this differs, too, from seeing motion as the behavior of entities whose essential nature remains fixed and unchanging.
> (d) Rather than orienting primarily to movement *in* a form, it orients to movement *through* forms.
> (e) Beyond grasping the nature of a form or a structured system, it views forms in a larger context which includes relationships among forms, movement from one form to another, relationships of forms to the process of form construction or organization.
> (f) Rather than having the experience of contradiction « happen to » it, it seeks out contradiction and is not ultimately threatened by it; its organization does not exist solely for the purpose of driving out contradiction, but also recognizes its nourishment in it.
> (g) Rather than exercising its dynamics in a relatively closed, self-contained dichotomous system, its dynamism is between systems, oriented not to one pole or another but to the tension between them. (Kegan, 1982, pp. 229-230)

Just as the students' capacity of understanding and applying film form is dependent on the development of their interior form of organization, so is our capacity of being truly intellectually *and* emotionally flexible as teachers dependent on ours.

Transcending the institutional: a challenge for the film school

We might find ourselves, because of cultural prejudice, holding back from the idea of such a strong association between education and therapy, even though postmodernists think that "education can be considered, in a certain sense, a type of therapy" (Ulrich, 2007, p. 72). Kegan also talks about the idea of *natural*

therapies, drawing our attention to the fact that we ought to think about professional psychotherapy as a solution for when our natural holding environments fail in supporting us, and not as a replacement for them:

> In an age when psychology has become the secular religion and the practice of psychotherapy the new priestly rite, the impression is often conveyed that the solution to life's ills could be found in universal psychotherapy, if it were only practical. The natural supports of family, peer groups, work roles, and love relationships come to be seen as merely amateur approximations of professional wisdom. From a developmental perspective this view of things is quite backward. Developmental theory has a long-standing appreciation of nature as the source of wisdom. For example, the single most important contribution developmental theory makes to schooling is its exposure of the child's « natural curriculum », an active process of meaning-making which informs and constrains the child's purposes. Rather than seeing the child as a passive receptacle to whom appealing curricula must be brought in order to initiate the learning experience, the developmentalist urges curriculum designers and teachers first to recognize the agenda upon which the child is *already* embarked, and which the teacher can only facilitate or thwart, but not himself invent. (Kegan, 1982, p. 255)

If we come to see that teachers' development into the interindividual balance is one of the greatest assets that can be brought to the educational process, then we might also question how well is the school as an institution supporting this type of development. According to Kegan, institutions are, as the name suggests, often highly beholden to the fourth stage of development, the institutional. They are not usually easy to convince that it is in their interest that their employees discover "the self that runs the institution" (as in the interindividual balance) and can easily feel threatened by such a perspective. Furthermore, institutions are liable to abide to the idea that its members' developing process is a matter of the "private" life: "But this polarized conception of public and private, professional and personal, may itself be a very function of the ideological evolutionary balance in which some heads and definers of organizations are overembedded" (Kegan, 1982, p. 248).

Unfortunately, even learning-oriented institutions such as schools and universities have, according to Kegan, a tendency to suffer a kind of displacement of value, "in which the organization rather quickly moves from existing for the purpose of expressing or promoting the founding ideal, to existing for the purpose of maintaining the organization" (Kegan, 1982, p. 244). Transcending

the institutional as an organization implies that we cease to identify ourselves with the "products" that we create – this brings to our attention even more the need to focus on the students' (and our own) development and not the quality of their films in a more conventional, evaluative manner.

> The traditional workplace overholds ideological adulthood just as surely as a mother and father can overhold a five-year-old by failing to contradict her « subjective » confusion of her impulses with those of her parents. And just as surely as her inability to separate can manifest itself in depression or a depressive equivalent such as school phobia, an ideological adult with no supports for development beyond the institutional, who is overheld or struggling at all costs to resist a new emergence from embeddedness, is vulnerable to depression or a depressive equivalent such as workaholism.
>
> Workaholism is the hypermasculine analogue of the institutional balance to the hyperfeminine self-abnegation of the interpersonal balance (though neither predicament is the exclusive province of men or women, respectively). The picture of the workaholic – with his or her all-consuming investment in the exercises of achievement, self-esteem, independent accomplishment, self-discipline, and control – looks like that of the evolutionary truce of institutionality in peril, working overtime lest it fall apart. I doubt very much that we would find many workaholics who have come to the interindividual or intimate evolutionary balance. (Kegan, 1982, pp. 245-246)

UNATC might have a hard time transgressing the institutional, even though, as an arts university, the demand is even higher, also because, like other Romanian public institutions, it might in some ways still struggle to transgress the interpersonal. Furthermore, the neoliberal climate of our days is not really helpful in this regard either. As public institutions are more and more encouraged to follow the practices and models of organization of corporations, art schools and universities are at risk of losing even more touch with their mission and founding ideals. Many developments that UNATC has been going through in recent years are great departures from the **tribalism** of the interpersonal paradigm (that was characterized by favoritism and the following of so-called "personal interests") towards more equity and transparency. But at the same time, we are left to wonder to what extent the school is capable of imagining itself as also transgressing the stage that it is now working itself towards and entering an interindividual balance. Because especially in the beginning of the institutional stage, any orientation

towards inclusion and interindividuality is still liable to be perceived as the threat of interpersonalism.

But as teachers become more and more absorbed by administrative work and activities that do not directly involve the benefit of their students, as workaholism is subtly being encouraged and overtime becomes the new norm, we must strive to emphasize that universities are *not* corporations and that they should not be pressured into adopting any more of such "business models". It is crucial that the personal development of students, teachers and all members of the community remains at the core of the school's understanding of itself. We must, inspired by the understanding of filmmaking and creativity in general as meaning-making activity, to try, even in our very definition of ourselves, "to transcend the tyranny of the form and the confusion of us with it" (Kegan, 1982, p. 247). Forms would become something that we *have,* rather than *are.*

Conclusions

Kegan's psychological theory from *The Evolving Self: Problem and Process in Human Development* enables us to regard the few years that the students spend at film school as a short time period in which we can, as teachers and as an institution, support their life-long process of personal development. Given the intimate relationship between both the professional and artistic abilities that we aim to cultivate for the students in film directing classes, as well as their conceptualization of *self* and *other*, we can take inspiration from Carl Rogers, founder of client-centered psychotherapy, and his concept of *unconditional positive regard*, which implies joining people in their meaning-making process instead of addressing the made-meanings. This approach could prove beneficial as it would encourage a more natural progress on the students' behalf and trigger less defensiveness on their part. Kegan's theory helps us frame the students' capacity at receiving feedback, their responses to external input and their personal and professional struggles through the characteristics of their moments of development, through the idea of loss of *Heimlichkeit* and the old self-system, and through the recognition functions that we can provide as part of their *holding environment*.

To become postmodern educators that are capable of constantly reevaluating their systems of meaning-making in order to properly embrace the diversity, originality and particularities of each student's creative process, we need the flexibility of *post-formal operational thought*, which is not something that we can acquire solely through a purely intellectual enhancement, but through personal growth towards the interindividual stage of development. This aspect brings into question the school's capacity of supporting the teachers' development into

the interindividual stage, as institutions often have difficulty in transgressing the institutional balance themselves. Romanian public institutions might find themselves in an even tougher predicament as many of them seem to only recently have started to transgress the tribalism of interpersonalism. Despite current unfavorable ideological influences of current Romanian society, UNATC must strive to imagine itself as an **interindividual organization,** based on the capacity to recognize the members of its community in their meaning-making activity.

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