

**“The Memories Of Childhood Have No Order And No End”:
Pedagogical Reflections On The Occasion Of The Release, On October 9th 2009,
Of The Re-Mastered Version Of The Beatles’
Sergeant Pepper’s Lonely Hearts Club Band©.**

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“The memories of childhood have no order, and no end.”
from Dylan Thomas’s (1954, p. 8) *Reminiscences of Childhood*

We are no longer able to approach this like an object of knowledge, grasping, measuring and controlling. Rather than meeting us in our world, it is much more a world into which we ourselves are drawn. [It] possesses its own worldliness and, thus, the center of its own Being so long as it is not placed into the object-world of producing and marketing. The Being of this thing cannot be accessed by objectively measuring and estimating; rather, the totality of a lived context has entered into and is present in the thing. And we belong to it as well. Our orientation to it is always something like our orientation to an inheritance that this thing belongs to, be it from a stranger’s life or from our own.

From Hans-Georg Gadamer (1994, p. 192), *Heidegger’s Ways*.

Reminiscence I

All this is certainly more than twenty years ago today. Grade 11 English class, Winter 1967, some time after February 2, 1967.

I’m mentioning this because I still remember that date, February 2, 1967, was when I first heard the latest Beatles single, Penny Lane/Strawberry Fields Forever, over

an American AM radio station that crackled its way to southern Ontario, to Burlington, one evening whose details are lost to memory. Was it WBZ from Boston? And how we stood in Doug’s rec-room, amazed, wondering whether we were actually hearing what we thought, or whether the radio was blurring in and out of the winter snow-static, like old TV reception.

Good Vibrations the previous Fall of ’66 was strange enough. Now *this*?

What *is* this?

Part of it was the vertigo tremble of being near-17 in oh-so-fortunate days such as those and sensing all around secret and hidden worlds impending. Glimmer of a sort of *Aufklärung* - with its double German roots of “enlightenment” and also “clearing up.”

Some lit cracks “break forth” (Gadamer 1989, p. 458) in those clouds of winter static. Openings. Opportunity. Possibilities, and “thereby possible ways of shaping our lives” (Gadamer, 1986, p. 59).

There. “Through the recess, the chalk and numbers” (Wilson & Parks 1966). Something secret. (“Yo-da-lay-ee-who,”

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sung right over that song-line).

Sometime in late-February that year, in our Grade 11 English class, we were given *Reminiscences of Childhood* by Dylan Thomas to read with the horrifying and boring prospect of discussing it in the days to come. (School not yet ever experienced as a place of *schola*: “leisure,” and a place of “a holding back, a keeping clear” [OED]).

Unexpected, then, in reading this for school, this happens. I seem to already know intimately of this place of reminiscence. I “recognize [myself] in the mess of th[is] world” (Hillman 1983, p. 49). How did this Welshman know this of me? Was I spotted unawares when I was lingering there? (*Aufklärung* is not simply becoming conscious of threads in the world, but becoming, in all its myriad, *self*-conscious—not just spotting but being spotted, and spotting that, experiencing that I am experienced by others, that I am visible).

Dylan Thomas has experienced me and now seems to write down heretofore secret trails of what I am. Images of flying, in memory:

over the trees of the everlasting park,
where a brass band shakes the leaves and
sends them showing down on to the
nurses and the children, the cripples and
the idlers, the gardeners and the shouting
boys. (Thomas, 1954, p. 8)

And these specific streets, “Inkerman Street, Sebastopol Street” (p. 8), names whose very specificity made them both tangible and im-aginable.

Nearby recesses.

My self being formed right there, in front of me. Like bankers, sitting, waiting, midst pictures of possible trims, straight-razor foamed clean-cut around the ears.

And there, a “fireman turning off the hose and standing in the wet” (Thomas, 1954a, p. 15) (safely rushed in from the pouring rain), from “A Child’s Christmas in Wales” (which I quickly read next back then and not at all for school).

Very strange.

Nurses, imagined in memory with poppies in a tray in the park with old men and brass bands, my own old “dame school . . . so firm and kind smelling of galoshes, with the sweet and fumbled music of the piano lessons drifting down from upstairs to the lonely schoolroom” (Thomas, 1954, p. 7). Lakeshore Public School, built in 1923, red brick, facing Lake Ontario, “the singing sea” (p. 8) where by Grade Six we’d smoke stolen cigarettes and meet at the water’s lap edge, a “world within the world [into which we are drawn]” (p. 4), “secret” (p. 4), housing “its own, even sacred, seriousness” (Gadamer 1989, p. 102).

“A space specially marked out and reserved” (Gadamer, 1989, p. 107).

“This is for *us*, not for the ‘others’. What the ‘others’ do ‘outside’ is of no concern to us at the moment. We are different, we do things differently” (Huizinga, 1955, p. 12):

And a packet of cigarettes: you put one in your mouth and you stood at the corner of the street and you waited for hours, in vain, for an old lady to scold you for smoking [“a world wholly closed within itself, it is as if open toward the spectator in whom it achieves its whole significance” (Gadamer, 1989, p. 109)]. (Thomas, 1954a, p. 17)

Good heavens, there it is: “the wild boys innocent as strawberries” (1954, p. 6).

What am I going to do with this secret? (“Every game presents the [one] who plays it with a task” (Gadamer, 1989, p. 107).

I ended up, of course, humming along in our Grade 11 class as I read about hunchbacks and how “the boys made the tigers jump out of their eyes,” (Thomas, 1954 p. 6) and “the smell of fish and chips on Saturday evenings” (p. 7) (tethered later to even more dirty-secret Beatle pies).

And our teacher asking me about the humming song, and me telling him about Penny Lane and Strawberry Fields and how this Reminiscence we were reading sounds so familiar, and him getting one of those purple smelly Gestetner™ machine mimeograph sheets and telling me to take it home and type out the lyrics.

And I did. And our teacher copied it out. And we looked there and then and long and hard into the deep face of the world that some of us were actually already secretly living in.

Ear whisper. Remembered thus, our teacher to me: “you need to read more Dylan Thomas.” This is what he said in truth but it may not be what he actually said. I can’t quite remember but I remember it as clear as day, that invitation out of yet back into childhood sleepiness, out of and yet back into to play.

And then.

Four months later, June 1 1967, a month to go before school is finally out, K. P. and I go into Hamilton’s West End, Kensington Mall (a name worthy of Wales or Liverpool) to a record store, and buy *Sergeant Pepper’s Lonely Hearts Club Band*©.

Not right away, but slowly, soon, there, some recognition, right above and between Marlon Brando and Tom Mix, themselves above the Madame Tussaud’s wax figures of The Beatles reminisced from 1964.

There. A round and unmistakable puffy-tousled face in black and white.

There!

Dylan Thomas.

Reminiscence II

We do not understand what recognition is in its profoundest nature if we only regard it as knowing something again that we know already - i.e., what is familiar is recognized again. The joy of recognition is rather the joy of knowing *more* than is already familiar. In recognition what we know emerges, as if illuminated, from all the contingent and variable circumstances that condition it (Gadamer, 1989, p. 114).

The joy of recognition. The joy of knowing *more*. In blurry retrospect, this is the first time I remember having the experience of actually *knowing something*, of actually having read something “right” up out of my own according life.

The pedagogy of this is important and almost intractable.

“Over and above our wanting and doing,” things sometimes “happen to us” (Gadamer, 1989, p. xxviii). This, of course, is an insight long in coming and points to why I still remember this event, still call it to mind and make something of it, again and again, in such callings. “Every repetition is as original as the work itself” (Gadamer, 1989, p. 122). There are adventures in the world, secret places that will yield those secrets if I care to venture and do what the place requires of me when I arrive. Our teacher seemingly “ignor[ing] the orthodox who labor so patiently trying to eliminate the apocryphal variants from the one true text. There is no one true version of which all the others are but copies or distortions. Every version belongs” (Thompson, 1981, pp. 11-12). A conspiracy, a common breath.

It is as if I was, all those years ago, presented with a task that was wedded to a prospect, a promise, that settling here will bring unexpected yield, that staying here has a future (linked somehow to reminiscence, to a past's future that is remarkably "standing" still "in a horizon of ... still undecided future possibilities" [Gadamer, 1989, p. 112]). Still. This is how stillness anticipates. *Stillare* - "to drip, drop" (O.E.D.).

Every version belongs: "interweaving and crisscrossing" (Wittgenstein, 1968, p. 36). Undergoing an "increase in being" (Gadamer, 1989, p. 40) in such interweaving. Slowly becoming what it is. Slowly become who I have become. Crisscrossing.

It would be a mistake for me to portray that June 1967 event simply as some thunderbolt flash of some sort of full illumination at the time in the mind and life of a 16 year old. I've since read of Gadamer's teacher, Martin Heidegger, and his oft-used image of lightning, where a territory gets suddenly illuminated and gathers into a place, a *topos*, a "topic" (see, e.g., Caputo 1982, p. 195). This idea of an opening or clearing or field (see Friesen & Jardine, 2009) that suddenly opens up and illuminates, has long since haunted me. See, too, Gadamer (1989, p. 21), on *topica* and the young needing images, like nurses selling poppies, for the formation of their memory. All this is of that reminiscence.

Slow emergence. Flash and then slow glowing arrives, but only if I take on as my own the work of remembering. Hermeneutics is a *practice*. An earthly sort of *Aufklärung*. "You should read more Dylan Thomas" as a call to prayer, to practice, with a promise that something will yield through patience and "a continuity of attention and devotion" (Berry, 1986, p 32). Hermeneutics

as an ecological practice. All the work I've come to do starts here, at this absent origin.

After all, "understanding begins when something addresses us," (Gadamer, 1989, p. 299), but it only *begins* there. Reading *A Child's Christmas in Wales* was compelled as a way to continue to remain in the same place and cultivate it a bit more, as is writing this paper, a gathering that is also a whiling (Jardine, 2008), like the festive (Gadamer, 1989, pp. 122-123) 09-09-09 release of the re-mastered *Sergeant Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*©, its date echoing a white album yet to come back in early 1967.

And, just to foolishly rub this wound, we are dealing with an event which *itself* was *already* about memory and reminiscence, in and of Wales boyhoods, in and of Liverpool streets and orphanages, in sound and shiny brass band accordances in Edwardian suits, young men singing, in 1967, about being 64 (and how I'm now actually three years away!) and me, at that time, 16 going on 17, beginning to feel full-fledge the reminiscent pull of my own life, my own imagined childhood, now clearly ago, and slowly, slowly, drip-drop, becoming the sort of perhaps-never-was that I can henceforth live with remembering and recognizing thus.

"To reconcile [my]self with [my]self, to recognize oneself in other being" (Gadamer 1989, p. 13).

It has taken years for that event to become what it was.

Read that again.

It has taken years for that event to become what it was. What it *is* - "What *really* happened back then in that English class or that ride to Kensington Mall?" - becomes a more and more trivial question, because the question that drives here is "What has become of it?" Even asking "What *really* happened?" is itself a formative act. This is how

memory works, because memory doesn't just store information: it does *work*, and its workings are how it shapes the one remembering. This is why memory is always *someone's*:

Whoever uses his memory as a mere faculty - and any "technique" of memory is such a use - does not yet possess it as something that is absolutely [one's] own. Memory must be formed; for memory is not memory of anything and everything. One has a memory for some things, and not for others; one wants to preserve one thing in memory and banish another. "Keeping in mind" is ambiguous (Gadamer, 1989, pp. 15-16).

Indeed it is. This ambiguity hides an often-secreted mechanism of becoming *myself* right at the very moment when contingent and variable circumstances both fall away and gather up into illuminating recognition all at once. Look there. Wild boys, innocent.

Ambiguous, this keeping in mind.

So, that "past" event's eventfulness is recurrently experienced as "a task that is never entirely finished" (Gadamer, 1989, p. 301). After all, here we are, writer and reader, 44 years on, still struggling with how and whether to learn to live with the entreaties of this event. "By forming the thing [I] form [my]self" (Gadamer, 1989, p. 13), and by informing, now, in this writing, I set out for readers a gentle pedagogical demand on thinking, on memory formation and its ways.

This: that "*every word* breaks forth" (Gadamer, 1989, p. 458) thus.

Shush! This is the hermeneutic secret regarding pedagogy. *Every* seemingly-moribund thread of every program of studies for *every* Grade (and even Grade 11 English class now 44 years ago) has secrets such as these, reminiscences to be had in the leisure of schooling.

Reminiscence III

Spiel: Origin: 1890–95; (noun) < German Spiel or Yiddish *shpil* play, game; (v.) < German *spielen* or Yiddish *shpiln* to play, gamble.
(www.dictionary.reference.com)

And become in English parlance, in the great IMac desktop dictionary definition: "a long or fast speech or story, typically intended as a means of persuasion or as an excuse but regarded with contempt or skepticism by those who hear it."

Wild schoolboy ruses, then, little persuasions or excuses or deceits needed to make our way in the world down by lake-lap edge. But still, we secretly knew, I secretly knew that "something is going on, (*im Spiele ist*), something is happening (*sich abspielt*)" (Gadamer, 1989, p. 104). That's why I ended up reading *A Child's Christmas in Wales* in short order back then, simply and only because The Beatles fan in me seemed to have already read it. That, I expect (or, actually, hope in retrospect), is why our teacher ventured like he did. Risking the wild that turned out to not only reveal but also revive a deep and hidden civility, an emergent culturedness (*Bildung*) in that uprising that can save the world (of Grade 11 English) from its too-often over-schooled moroseness.

Because the world is made by mortals it wears out; and because it continuously changes its inhabitants it runs the risk of becoming as mortal as they. To preserve the world against the mortality of its creators and inhabitants it must be constantly set right anew. The problem is simply to educate in such a way that a setting-right remains actually possible, even though it can, of course, never be assured. Our hope always hangs on the new which every generation brings. (Ar-

endt, 1969, p. 192)

A triple rescue in this setting-right. Thomas's *Reminiscences of Childhood* is rescued from its moribund locale in the English Grade 11 program of studies, that overloaded canon. It is *awakened*. Beatles rescued from pop-culture momentariness. And me finding a place of comfort for my own awakening, finding my own strength strengthened, housed and cared for in the common embrace of these Welsh and Liverpool worlds.

As I become myself, I also become un-alone in this becoming.

Handed, and handed over to, an inheritance. Both and always "in between" (Gadamer, 1989, p. 109). All at once spotting and spotted. A great ecological convergence at the heart of coming to know. This, then, is the pedagogical task, working this out and thus working out a life.

And in this working, preserving the world from the mortality of its creators and inhabitants while all that while becoming more and more mortal.

"*Pathei mathos*: learning through suffering" (Gadamer, 1989, p. 356).

Reminiscence IV

"Something awakens our interest - that is really what comes first!" (Gadamer, 2001, p. 50). Something *awakens*. Something *clears*. *Aufklarung*.

The lane was always the place to tell your secrets; if you did not have any, you invented them. Occasionally now I dream that I am turning out of school into the lane of confidences when I say to the boys of my class, "At last, I have a real secret."

"What is it - what is it?"

"I can fly."

And when they do not believe me, I flap my arms and slowly leave the ground only a few inches at first, then, gaining air until I fly waving my cap level with the upper windows of the school, peering in until the mistress at the piano screams and the metronome falls to the ground and stops, and there is no more time. (Thomas, 1954, pp. 7-8)

It is odd to have steeped - meaning, wonderfully, both "soaked" and "softened" (O.E.D)-- so long in this lane of confidences, these images, roiling back and forth in intimate relations of "responding and summoning" (Gadamer, 1989, p. 458), of me being summoner and then summoned some, responding and feeling waves of resistance and response, memory and lapse, formative, shaping.

Glimpses of "the unsaid" (p. 458).

You see, I could have sworn, starting this paper, that Dylan Thomas' nurses in the park had poppies.

They do not.

And that there was an orphanage in Wales, wasn't there, like Strawberry Field in wild boy days in Liverpool?

No.

Thus I, too, have a secret.

A new idea is never only a wind-fall, an apple to be eaten. It takes hold of us as much as we take hold of it. The hunch that breaks in pulls one into an identification with it. We feel gifted, inspired, upset, because the message is also a messenger that makes demands, calling us to . . . fly out. (Hillman, 2005, p. 99)

And when they do not believe me, I write my way down lanes of confidences.

This is the secret. This reminiscent world is my first memory of a genuinely hermeneutic experience. Such "experience has its proper fulfillment not in definitive

knowledge but in the openness to experience that is made possible by experience itself” (Gadamer, 1989, p. 355). Because I’ve dwelt in this territory for so many years, it has ripened such that I am now *more susceptible* to its summoning. “[This world] compels over and over, and the better one knows it, the *more* compelling it is. This is not a matter of mastering an area of study” (Gadamer, 2007, p. 115) and yet it is something of ripe pedagogy at its best.

Something in me keeps expecting to see Hans-Georg Gadamer’s face one day on that re-mastered record sleeve - “record sleeve,” itself, of course, a reminiscence.

A “Have No End”

The world, too, needs protection to keep it from being overrun and destroyed by the onslaught of the new that burst upon it with each new generation. (Arendt, 1969, pp. 185-6)

You all know that as a beginner one comes to find everything questionable, for that is the privilege of youth to seek everywhere the novel and new possibilities. One then learns slowly how a large amount must be excluded in order to finally arrive at the point where one finds the truly open questions and therefore the possibilities that exist. (Gadamer, 1986, p. 59)

“The memories of childhood have no order, and no end” (Thomas, 1954, p. 8). But Dylan Thomas knew clearly of a secret order in the park, by the water’s lake lap, in the old woman’s scold.

That ecological scold of wildness that comes in response to wild erupts, as simple, sometimes, as innocent boys humming tunes in school.

Or little children who laugh behind the backs of bankers.

“To find free spaces and learn to move therein” (Gadamer, 1986, p. 59). Real possibilities that might just open up unseen unsaid worlds (“even though it can, of course, never be assured” [Arendt, 1969, p. 192]).

To re-cite: “and thereby *possible* ways of shaping our lives” (Gadamer, 1986, p. 59), even though such shaping can never be assured.

So, here’s to miraculous happenstance, the remembered ventures of a teacher, and the great lack of assurance that underwrites pedagogy at its best. I know that this age-old experience of being drawn into a world and finding myself already there is one that has been and remains a steadfast refuge and path of my own work, and a key to what I hope can happen in schools.

Here’s another small secret that isn’t much of a secret. It’s not just a hope. I’ve seen something of it happen in many dame schools, firm and kind.

At least, that is what I remember through this recess of reminiscence.

And when they do not believe me, I flap my arms and write out of the joy of recognition.

The best news of all in this vague season is remembering such events and chancing to see their kin bubble up in kind in the lives of students and teachers.

It has allowed me to still feel a bit of a wild boy, still somehow innocent as strawberries.

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Bio

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