

Invited Guest Editorial

Just Saying: For H/heaven's Sake... Here's Hoping --- "All Hell Could Break Loose!"

Jim Paul

Bodies are not only biological phenomena but also complex social creations onto which meanings have been variously composed and imposed according to time and space.
(Karkazis, 2008)

Preface

If you have been reading, to date, in the *Journal of Applied Hermeneutics*, Dr. John Williamson's PhD thesis-come-novel serialized, then you have read, more or less, four texts:

- *Guest Editorial: Preface to "A Strange and Earnest Client" Part One of the Case of the Disappearing/Appearing Slow Learner: An Interpretive Mystery* by W. John Williamson [January 11, 2016];
- *The Case of the Disappearing/Appearing Slow Learner: An Interpretive Mystery. Part One: A Strange and Earnest Client* [January 11, 2016];
- *Invited Guest Editorial. Lives Worthy of Life: The Everyday Resistance of Disabled People* by Nick Hodge [February 22, 2016], and
- *The Case of the Disappearing/Appearing Slow Learner: An Interpretive Mystery. Part Two: Cells of Categorical Confinement* [February 22, 2016].

My name is Jim Paul. I am the Invited Guest Editorial provider for the third installment of John's work titled - *Part Three: All Hell Could Break Loose*.

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Editorial Remarks

Part Three is, in my opinion, methodological interpretive research magic, which carefully advances the investigation regarding the educational category of slow learners. The methodological magic is evident, in this section, in *HOW* Max explores portrayals of slow learners in popular media, exposes John Williamson's deep implicated-ness with slow learners, opens up the archival history of slow learner as an educational label, and wrestles with the complex history of programming for slow learners in the province of Alberta. As you will read, Max is getting closer to revealing what is really at stake in the case of the disappearing/appearing slow learner. So, here and now, I seek to make a case, in this editorial, that the content explored in *Part Three* is necessarily required regarding the case at hand, but the magic in this section is *HOW* the writing manifests as Max's internal and external voice didactically positions and re-positions a reader into and out of the content both intellectually and emotively. That invitation is achieved, I believe, in this section, because of how Max exists, phenomenologically and hermeneutically, often at the same time, as teacher and learner.

Let me explain and let me begin where *Part Three* concludes as a clue that leads this editorial forward.

(Max) I pulled into the passenger drop off and thanked Summit for his candor as he thanked me for the ride. Before he got out of the car, Summit gave me the names of a few curriculum leaders currently working with the K & E series of classes and told me where I could find them. *Then he offered a theory about how to find justice for slow learners that didn't make much sense to me at the time. He told me to look to my own methods for an answer. I felt there was practical wisdom in so much of the rest of what he said; I hoped I might gather some more clues to shed some light on this last cryptic statement.* (Italics emphasis added, p. 55)

"*He told me to look to my own methods for an answer.*" Indeed. Is it not attributed to Socrates that... The unexamined life is not worth living. So, Max... examined.

Max is a true hard-boiled mystery formula detective. True to intent and form, throughout a convoluted twist and turn, friend as foe, foe as friend, investigation all pales in comparison to his unrelenting quest for the discovery of and necessity to bring justice to the case at hand. As such, it is his very being, language, actions, and mere presence in the service of seeking justice for slow learners that seems to position him as a significant threat to all involved directly and indirectly in the case. As Max digs deeper and wider into the case, in *Part Three*, the push-back against his investigation increasingly becomes more layered with twists and turns and, of course, Max is routinely assaulted, captured, drugged, and beaten by a layered criminal element who seem to have vast political, economic and social powers.

So, we, as readers, experience Max as a quintessential hard-boiled detective who is deeply marginalized and often dark, vulgar and verging on being an illegitimate "professional" - not unlike sleazy lawyers, or shady cops, or used car salesmen. However, it is also obvious that Max lives as he chooses to. As well, embodied, again, in his life style is a rejection of the sanctioned and privileging Modernity markers of standard decorum and normalized achievement. Max is,

more or less, not a standard antihero as he moves beyond being merely an irritating grain of sand, and becomes a significant threat whereby the criminal rich, powerful, and beautiful attempt to draw Max into their worlds and to use him for their own corrupt purposes. Ironically, when Max is invited in, he finds himself confirming that such worlds are riddled with what he knows already to exist - categorical violence, layers of deceit and quagmires of corruption. Still, Max's own storied marginality not only sustains him in such circumstances it continuously serves to feed his quest for contextual justice.

While all the discoveries of villainy, duplicity, and corruption are necessary plot essentials, in *Part Three*, it is how the criminality element is threatened by Max's very presence that is directly linked to how Max methodologically exists that also illustrates the life-blood of his hard-boiled being-ness. Max, found wanting as a modern person, citizen, and as a regular detective, plays a complex and ambiguous adversarial role to hard-boiled villains at hand who are often disguised as seducers, or provocateurs, or even allies. What Max reveals in the tangled layers of criminality evident in *Part Three* is that categorical evil has become essentially systemic within Modernity's operational and functional designs. It is Max's paradoxical mix of suspicion and respect, cynicism and honor, attraction and repulsion, brutality and sentimentality, and failure and success and his unrelenting need for justice served wrapped up in his own world of violence and treachery, that explicitly opens up the regimes of persuasive corruption and criminality evil endemic to Modernity's Heavenly sought politically powerful, economically-divided, and hierarchical social orders. So, why can't Modernity, via its categorical guardians, deal with Max if he is merely just another paper-tiger or glass elephant, antihero construct?

Simply, I believe, methodologically, as a Socratic-like pedagogue, Max opens, by drawing out, Modernity's dominating Cartesian metaphysics of presence. Modernity, and its institutional agencies and grand design discourses, seeks to continuously encode and decode humans into accepting the given commandment categories of rational-defined splits between mind and body, individual and collective, and between exposition-argumentation and narrative-description. Remember, Max has chosen to cast himself out of Modernity's Heaven on Earth, and in doing so, he seems to know that H/heaven and H/hell is a false dichotomy. Max, crudely and rudely, like a displaced hell-boy in heaven, via his embodied and mindful pedagogic use of the ancient Greek Socratic Method returns Modernity's Scribal Society (Purves, 1990) and its split-inducing mechanisms writing and reading literacy and numeracy to their original, negotiable difficulties as categories of this-that, here-there, now-then, and I-you also as false dichotomies. Again, how so? Max is a Socratic-embodied pedagogue - even if he doesn't know it; he is IT... a solitary unified symbiotic learning-teaching presence.

Plato was teaching, then, precisely at the moment when the new technology of reading and writing was shedding its specialized 'craft' status and finally spreading, by means of the Greek curriculum, into the culture at large. The significance of this conjunction has not been well recognized by Western philosophers, all whom stand - to a greater or lesser extent - within Plato's lineage. Plato, or rather the association between the literate and his mostly non-literate teacher Socrates (469?-399 B.C.E.), may be recognized as the hinge upon which the sensuous, mimetic, profoundly embodied style of consciousness proper to orality gave way to the more detached, abstract mode of thinking engendered by alphabetic literacy. Indeed, it was Plato who carefully developed and brought to term

the collective thought-structures appropriate to the new technology. (Abram, 1996, pp. 108-109)

It is Plato's teacher, Socrates, who seemed to have understood that a radically different language game would mean a radically different form of consciousness, meaning-making, and determiners for what counts as sanctioned or not ways of knowing, doing and being. The movement from orality reality and its primary sensory-representational ways of storied knowing, doing and being to a referential, abstract alphabetic-phonetic sign system would mean for all things – human and otherwise – a new world order riddled with penultimate categorization. In an old technology orality-based society, a speaker's word-actions are birthed, developed and legitimated throughout oral exchanges within a speaker's membership in a collective whereby ways of knowing, doing and being are learned. The teaching speaker and the listening learner as one is a necessarily present embodiment of the collective's cultural practices, moralities and social customs. The socializing power of an orality-based collective lives in its method of inclusive induction for members which requires all present be spoken into the collective's past, present and future. Presence becomes the cultural methodological learning-teaching requirement. Presence is the essential element of a reality metaphysics in orality-driven cultures whereby narrative as words, actions and images are presented as emotive storied expressions to all gathered. The word-image-action performances are witnessed in the emotive moment and it is in this being situationally presence whereby understanding and meaning making regarding self, other and world via story-telling and story-receiving lives. Embodied in the telling and listening relationship is a reciprocal responsibility to ensure connectivity between experiential understandings of past-present-future and self-other-world. In the specific arrangements of story-sounds, story-images, and story-performances, cultural virtues and vices are passed on as living entities. And herein lives a fundamental aspect of an orality-based society. The qualities of what it means to be right and wrong, good and bad, truthful and deceptive, or just and unjust and so on are intertwined with meaning derived, over time, as embodied in the specific storied-narrative contexts. All virtues and all evils and so on were situationally locatable in the stories told over and over from century to century as lessons to be learned and retaught. Always, however, what counts as virtue or evil is explicitly defined experientially by the workings of the storied representational contexts. Situations, meanings-derived, and the oral representations of those situations were one and the same. As such, in an orality-based culture, all vices and virtues are justifiably experienced as a storied-event alive with intent, meaning, understanding and impact. That is why, in the presence of a story, one becomes responsible to re-tell the story because the pedagogy of transferability demands it.

Socrates was an inherited storied-being. He was an orality-based human being. He was pedagogically presently to his student, Plato, when the alphabet-writing-reading literacy technologies were emerging. However, as Plato acquired these new technologies, he was also his teacher's student. As Socrates projected the alphabet literacies manifest as writing-reading would fix, concretize and render, ironically, orality and narrative as untrustworthy and an old technology. The new literacies required disciplined training in encoding and decoding and the future was to be one dominated by visible/see-able codes, policies, laws, commandments, rules and scripts. Socrates challenged Plato to understand the new literacies required a split between subject and object, and of writer-speaker from reader-listener and literally such gaps would lead to recognizable and measurable differences. As well, within the inherited recombinant and abstract

referential nature of the new literacies, Socrates foresaw the directionality of the new literacy paradigm as preparing the Ancient Greeks to adopt the concept of “-ness.” That is, if the alphabet is referentially abstract, then reasonability indicates all things were conceptually referentially absent but gap oppositional definable as well. If “-ness,” like whiteness, chair-ness, or faithfulness, was a referential category, then it must have an ultimate, ideal and unchanging reality essence. Everything and anything could have multiple shape-shifting forms, but only one true essence - for example, water (H₂O) may deceptively be a liquid or solid or gas. Such a concept of “-ness” leads on quickly to ordering and cementing those now so obvious life-world dichotomies and polarities previously contextually and complexly storied but now seemingly just waiting to be named, grouped and declared categorically. Philosophical, pragmatic, and natural sciences evolved to accomplish such a task - to seek out, via hypothesizing, experimenting, or autopsies - the discovering of the essential essence of everything on, under, or over this planet and its characteristic shape-shifter attributes and properties. It became the norm to imagine, dream, theorize, invent and meditate the existence of a perfect essence - perfection unaffected by uncontrollable circumstances, or mutating contexts, or born-to-die bodies.

Descartes studied the ancient Greeks and read Plato and Aristotle. He read about how alphabetic literacy emerged and the civilizing power it held, and the possibility of human beings progressing developmentally towards Godly-Heavenly perfection on Earth or beyond. Being cognitively reasonable, Descartes dismissed Plato’s teacher’s (Socrates) thought and methods because they were, well, unusable in that they were storied and thus deemed illogical, emotional, and irrational. So, Descartes confirms his head-selected, mind-verified and falsified ancient Greek inferences and fixes western progress on one pathway forward, a Cartesian Modern World. A world whereby selected polarities and dichotomies become privileged and writing-reading literacies and numeracy must continue to be the definitive citizen-personhood sorting machine technologies regarding what constitutes inclusivity or exclusivity as a tribal member of western civilization. Today, contemporary citizens and persons are awash in the normalcy of Cartesian precise category developmental measurements. What counts as normal, verifiable, and justifiable progress and development for everything and everyone is to be sorted by gradations according to established and verifiable standards of necessary judgmental exactness within fixed and normalized categories. The need for constant reductive literacy/numeracy testing and the categorical judging of everything and everyone into elevated winners and grounded losers actually justifies itself as a legitimate process - just look at the amazing progress of the West. This is systemic Modernity, and it is protected by its guardians who are robotic discourse vampires selectively trained to suck the living blood out of every and each failed category thus ensuring each opposition pales in comparison to the desirable Heavenly categories glorified by such unjust comparison.

The institution of schooling becomes the primary literacies learning sorting machine. Within the institution, mimicking Modernity, the preferred and privileged discourses are numbers and exposition or argument word-thought-action arrangements. The motto for schooling becomes: One, Two, Three... Testing, testing, testing. Learners are measured and categorized according to their effective and efficient dexterity with literacy and numeracy. As well, today schooling’s mandate has a new partner - digital and social media technologies manifest as popular culture is every bit or more effective as a trainer of the young within Modernity’s design for perfection. Media plays directly, experientially, to the minded-eye, but the message is the same regarding

how one must be if he or she is to achieve posthuman (Hayles, 1999) perfection. As Godly posthumans, via forever advancing communication and social technologies, we can achieve the dream of elevating ourselves, virtually and pragmatically, from that dead-weight tangible sensory ‘thing’, a decaying body, holding us down in everyway imaginable. With modern literacies technologies as elevated, abstract and ideal languages, human Beings can take a rightful place as the ultimate abstract prime signifier - a single solitary unified God-ness perfection incarnate.

Yes... Max! Max is basically, in my opinion, a throw-back to a narrative-based Socratic human Creature incarnate. He is self-authored as his own counterfactual and as such a storied O/other represented as a Modern loser wrapped up in a disguising, imperfect body. Yet, as a storied interruption Max presents an unsettling and threatening presence to Modernity and its guardians. He does not speak as they do - he doesn’t use exposition or argument. I believe, he embodies the simple Socratic Method that evokes in all around him, more or less, to a greater or lesser degree, interpretive angst. Perhaps, such a vibration is all that is need to move the categories of this-ness and that-ness. In *Part Three*, Max consistently and continuously seeks out persons to engage. He asks all speakers to repeat and re-tell what they said. In doing so, he gets them to reflexively listen to what they were mouthing - explanations, reasons, rules, justifications, and so on. In doing so, he Socratic-like induces speakers to wonder or question, if only for a moment, about their own lack of being present in Modernity’s objectifying knowing, doing and being design. Once voice has been located and then dislocated via questions that come to rest in how justification for this or that might be understood in a moment, even Modernity’s guardians’ catch a glimpse of how they have become essentially, as Paulo Freire once commented, narration sick. Via Max’s method, those he engages with - friend and foe - are re-located not in the abstract, but in a specific bawdy, emotive, complexly experiential context of a storied moment. In that moment justice, courage, strength and ethics slip out of their fixed scribal categories and are returned to their original contexts-specific difficulties. That is, in the evocative moment, one feels compelled to re-understand the categories that have been so taken for reasonable granted-ness. Right and wrong, good and evil, or just and unjust are no longer universal abstract constructs, but contextually-specific living entities requiring personal re-authoring. Max is a storied pedagogic moment. He is a threat to all those who must live, ironically, those stories advancing the story that humans are not essentially storied persons and citizens.

Postface

In *Part Three*, Max works his way through portrayals of slow learners in popular media culture that reveal more about Modernity than slow learners, he attends to Williamson’s deep, self-deprecating, humbling, and storied implicated-ness with slow learners, and Max investigates the archival ‘factual’ history of slow learner as an educational label, and concludes by attending to the “official” history of programming for slow learners in the province of Alberta. However, in every situation where Max takes up his case to examine slow learners, in *Part Three*, he subsequently tracks down or attracts a Modernity guardian of the categorical status quo establishment or even resisters to that agenda. Using a hermeneutic phenomenology-sympathetic Socratic Method, Max calls upon every guardian and resister to lay bear their storied-ness or not, implicated-ness or not, in the case of slow learners. The beauty here is Max uses the essential reflexive questioning method very well, because he doesn’t really know he is using it, but rather he is it. Max is a walking and talking question mark, period. His mere presence demands a response!

When face-to-face with Max those with criminal intent or those experiencing such intent, having reflexively, if only for a moment (because that is all it takes is a pedagogic moment) understand that they have authorial rights and responsibilities, and not to use them is to live a life unexamined. In this process, in this pedagogic context, all humans being, more or less, recognize, archetypically, we are all storied entities. Max raises the interpretive possibility, again, if only as an in and out breath's moment, of shaking the decontextualizing, objectifying fixedness of Modernity's meta-desires. Max is the counterfactual who, in this case, truly and actually, and magically, reminds all presence that every grand narrative is nevertheless also a fabric of millions and millions micro-stories. Slow learners are especially already storied persons. Max's storied presence brings into the reflexive light the real possibility that we all, categorically, could be otherwise, and we should be deeply shaken by the rigidity of Modernity's categories that prevent us from knowing that - there by the grace of a magical outcome of nature and nurture, go I. *The unexamined life is not worth living*. How Max is Max pulls everyone - friend or foe - reflexively towards such an examination. Seemingly, many of us are no longer able to or feel the necessity to do so; we are literate but deaf and dumb to what that really means to attend to self as other and other as self. Here's hoping, in *Part Four*, that Max continues to be a methodological hell-boy cutting a swath of reflexive destruction through all those living in denial of S/self and S/self as O/other and that we are all symbiotic Storied Creatures and Narrative Beings and in and of itself that may be all we really are!

“I sent my Soul through the Invisible,
Some letter of that After-life to spell:
And by and by my Soul return'd to me,
And answer'd: 'I Myself am Heav'n and Hell'.”
Omar Khayyam

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