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**Looking for Advice About Hermeneutic Writing: A Conversation About  
Pedagogy, Hermeneutics, and the Last Supper**

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*Early Morning Blues* (photo by Jardine)

The specific locus of interpretive work is working out the conundrum of who is looking at who, of how to work this out, how to remain still enough to see *myself* behind bars, how to remain open enough to understand what being thus seen might mean. (Jardine, 2022, p. 1)

## To Begin . . .

Living with children means living in the belly of a paradox wherein a genuine life together is made possible only in the context of an ongoing conversation which never ends, yet which must be sustained for life together to go on at all.

David G. Smith (2020a, p. 405)

[Thus] the age-old difficulty of how to enthrall the young with the task of taking up these already ongoing conversations of which their lives are already a part—“the conversation[s] that we ourselves are” (Gadamer 1989, p. 378).

Jardine (2008a, p. xii)

It would be a poor hermeneuticist who thought he could have, or had to have, the last word.

Hans-Georg Gadamer (1989, p. 579).

## To Introduce . . .

We seek conversation not only in order to understand the other person better. We need it because our own concepts threaten to become rigid; the problem [can be] not that we do not understand the other person, but that we don't understand ourselves! We have the hermeneutical experience that we must break down resistance in ourselves if we wish to hear the other. (Gadamer, 2007, p. 371)

This paper begins with references highlighting the importance of on-going dialogue between the young and old, or the more and less experienced. And truly what it attempts to capture is part of an ongoing conversation between myself and a mentor in philosophical hermeneutics and writing more generally. The conversation began with a question, with the hearing of a phrase really. Some of my fellow graduate students in education spoke of needing “to learn to write more hermeneutically” or “to practice their hermeneutic writing.” I had been reading Gadamer's writing and articles in hermeneutic journals and still could not understand what my colleagues meant. Writers and researchers who worked hermeneutically wrote differently. I decided to approach Dr. Jardine, who had agreed to give an informal online class on Gadamer's seminal text, *Truth and Method*, to me and a few fellow graduate students.

What follows is a string of email conversations from late summer 2022 into the fall of that year. The back and forth of emails with Dr. Jardine ended up being, as he himself describes it, “a good example of this kind of work, not just 'about' this sort of work” (September 9, 2022). We covered a lot of territory – hermeneutics as a research

methodology, the affinity of hermeneutics to pedagogy, the protocols of other research methods, ideas of a teacher's pedagogical concern, Biblical, hermeneutic and ecological images of generativity, including thoughts on their hidden overreaches and insights. Rereading these emails, I realize the interest which formed the basis of my PhD work, Paul Tillich's idea of "ultimate concern," which seemed to me to be the heart and source of meaning and creativity in teacher lives and practice, had also to do with me coming to better understand Gadamer's description and explanation in *Truth and Method* of "the thing-itself," those shifts and reversals that occur in dialogue, and our relationship to traditionary texts.

What grasps me and will not let me go is Dr. Jardine's poetic introduction and reframing of the story of the Last Supper, which appears part way through the back and forth of our email dialogue. With that introduction, the question driving my interest in what was meant by "hermeneutic writing" shifted to a more powerful but less well-formed question about what lay in the mysterious connection between Dr. Jardine's "new application to [the] already mediated content" (Gadamer, 2004, p. 487) of the story of The Last Supper. This mystery had something to do with being caught in-between this new application and the traditional text.

We've cleaned up these e-mails a bit, added references where they are alluded to or mentioned. This sort of clean up, in fact, became part of the back-and-forth, because, as Dr. Jardine says about hermeneutic work, sometimes the underground streams of influence and reference get covered over by an often too-glossy surface of dancing words and images. The seeking out of such streams is precisely seeking out the ongoing conversation which is the task of hermeneutics itself.

### **A Conversation . . .**

*On Mon, Aug 15, 2022 at 10:23 AM Daniel wrote:*

Hope you are well and that the summer has treated you well. I am trying to rewrite my candidacy proposal, using a "hermeneutically written" candidacy proposal as a model. I realize from reading that model that I should describe my writing process and structure, using ideas from hermeneutics regarding writing and inquiry. So, I thought of emailing you to ask if you could send me any suggestions regarding reference material that could anchor my approach to the writing of my proposal and the writing I do as the research proceeds.

My research questions now capture what I'm really deep-in-the-core-of-my-being interested in re: teachers and the meaningfulness they find in their work. I am using Paul Tillich's [1957, p. 1-29] idea of "ultimate concern" to go to that existential/spiritual place that really resonates for me. I am asking what ultimate concern might have to do with an individual teacher's practice; about how meaningful events in their lives and practice might point to this concern; and about the role writing might play in helping

teachers understand these events and the ultimate concern that may form and reveal itself in them?

If you have any suggestions about sources to anchor my approach to writing hermeneutically, I would be hugely grateful. Perhaps we could meet online?

*On Tue, Aug 16, 2022 at 6:04 AM Jardine wrote:*

Will write back re a meeting in a bit. Meanwhile, ultimate concern. I read Paul Tillich ages and ages ago...seems that the ultimate concern is a pedagogical concern, and how individual teachers might pose that for themselves ... my own bent (David Smith as well, I think [2020a, b, c, d]) is that hermeneutics itself is full of pedagogical concern, that is, full of concern regarding teaching and learning about our shared and contested circumstances, the threads and forces that have brought us here, what this matter in front of us is all about. Gadamer talks about how encounter and conversation – what happens “in between” (1989, p. 295) are the centerpieces of hermeneutics...the reason I mention this is that, for me, *this* is the 'methodological appropriateness' of hermeneutics to the topics you are interested in -- meaningfulness of their work, which is wound up in the meaningfulness they find in their students, which is tied up with the sort of meaningfulness they find in, well, grammar, or writing, or the periodic table or a poem, or a dispute with another student or teacher...

...drifting the other way is, of course, the loss of meaning, where it isn't just a matter of the job becoming rote, or the topics becoming dull, or the students becoming a bother – often a whole network collapses at once. I recall a teacher years ago who had preplanned boxes all lined up for the year saying in exasperation, "I can't do this anymore" and the referent for the "this," as she pointed to the boxes, became an extraordinarily deep well.

I've attached the table of contents for a collection together a few years back (Seidel, J. & Jardine (Eds.). (2016). Most of the chapters are written by practicing teachers and the whole cluster of folks had a whisper of "I don't want to do *this* anymore" and found the gathering of folks and texts etc. really important – a sort of relief, actually. This, itself, is very hermeneutic, to have read back to you that your concerns aren't "just you" but live in a world of familiars and relations...the book includes some direct and indirect talk about hermeneutics...and demonstrates a wide array of forms of writing...and reading

*On Fri, Sep 1, 2022 at 4:51 PM Daniel wrote:*

I have been jumping around in *The Ecological Heart of Teaching*, as you suggested. The short chapters by so many authors make it like the desert tray that gets brought round at banquets. I stopped at Kirsten Varner's [2016] "Let's Take a Journey" and thought it first to be disappointing and then was overwhelmed by its power. I read the first two lines (*We are going on a journey, all of us, together.*) Sounded saccharine, even smarmy, but by the end of the piece I was weeping. Really the damn thing just started to build, pulling on all the deep chords, the real black earth, of teaching, and then it honed in, found its own surgical way into the heart of what I think good teaching loves. And yet, now, if I read the last stanza alone, it still sounds saccharine. Somehow, though, reading the piece together, somewhere through the middle of the cliched journey she names in the title, the piece kills me.

Reading across Michael W. Derby's wonderful "Bee and Nothingness" [2016] (the lovely spin off of the seven ages of man speech from *As You Like It*, but done in 5 acts or ages with bees and Sartre) to your introduction to his 2015 book, "How to Love Black Snow." I started to rethink my attitude to those anxieties of non-being (death, fear of criticism and conflict, and not feeling in your own heart like you have measured up) which Tillich describes. Your writing about Tsong-Kha-Pa and suffering also opened my heart to the possibilities of greater being, or vitality maybe, that an openness to one's suffering, fear, and loss, might offer—not the dwelling in suffering, fear, and loss, of course, but the facing of and living in those moments.

I loved from the Derby reference in "Black Snow" what for me was a new and beautifully elegant word, *deliquescence*. I think of the earthy, winey smell you smell in fall: what someone I can't remember called "moribund nature," the smell of fallen, rotting, yes liquifying, leaves. That smell has an enriching, lung-expanding, anxiety-reducing power for me. I feel quieted and centered by it. It suggests, along with the slanting of light and shortening of days, the coming of winter and death; and, paired with all that, the promise of new life—the eventual spring. The smell is rich and round and alluring, not at all like the bitter winds that winter's promise brings.

As I was reading "Black Snow", I thought, as I'm trying to do with all the pieces I read now, of my research questions. I kept asking what recurs for me in your work, what really registers and resonates as ultimacy—the infinite and unconditional. I began to hear the song of "beauty and repose" that occurs as "the breaking of a spell." I thought back to that Saturday lecture which Fredy organized, when I first heard you mention that "*schola*" referred to "leisure," the taking of time, whiling. I remember you being quite moved to express that idea, and, though I did find the connection a surprising and beautiful one, I wondered why you were so moved. I thought of our meeting for tea and you describing that sense of the wind at your back while we talked of things that

were meaningful to us, and how that wind became for me in that moment a reminder of non-being—of human finitude—that our discussions in these moments are beautiful because they exist in just that moment, and, though they are necessarily unfinished always, they dally on the edge of infinite possibility. For me, the wind then was like the voice of understanding that this is so, one that whispers also that there is always more, always more.

Thanks again, really truly, for all your inspiration and encouragement! I am going to read and read my way through. I hope Gail and the dogs, and the ravens are well.

*On Sat, Sep 3,, 2022 at 4:51 PM Jardine wrote*

It was quite an experience for Jackie and me to see what energies got released in those classes we did. The specific work of hermeneutics is to untangle the threads so that those energies can be released. Some of the writings in that book are sheer releases and they can be touching, powerful, sentimental, trite, and then not trite. Like Kirsten's piece, voiced as if she is talking to her young students about what she promises to do, letting them know, almost from afar, what work she needs to do. But here's the thing: when I read it.... that arc of a teacher's work being finding a place, topography, topic, that can be safely and carefully explored in all its rich abundance -- so the hermeneutic insight, here...that term of *topos* is directly from *Truth and Method* and other surrounding work that we read in that class. Indulge me for a moment:

"Education cannot tread the path of critical research. Youth demands images for its imagination and for forming its memory. Thus [Giambattista] Vico [b. 1668] supplements the *critica* of Cartesianism with the old *topica*" (Gadamer 1989, p. 21). Somehow, regarding the path that education must tread if the demands of youth (someone new to a place, someone who hasn't especially "been around," someone "inexperienced") are to be met, images, the process of cultivating memory, and topics somehow fit together, and the clear and distinct methodologism of Descartes (*critica*) needs productive, substantive, imaginal, story-laden, allegorical, bloody, bodily, Earthly, supplementation. Without such supplementation, method can come to act with no sense of place and proportion, impulsively, in ways that are profoundly "inexperienced." In this passage about Vico, I recognised something that I had experienced elsewhere. When a graduate student asks me about how to do hermeneutics, my first impulse is always to ask "What is your topic?" Following Vico, Gadamer is suggesting that anyone new to something ("youth," so to speak--Vico's pedagogical point is not necessarily or solely a chronological one) cannot begin the task of coming to understand through being told what method to use (*critica*, from Rene Descartes' [b. 1596] Discourse on Method [1637]). A method has no face, no body, no memories, no

stories, no blood, no images, no ancestors, no ghosts, no inhabitants, no habits, no habitats, no relations, no spirits, no monsters, no familiars. Method doesn't help us get our bearings and learn our way around, because, so to speak, there is no "place" to it. We don't become experienced through the application of a method because a method, properly taken up, must be taken up as if I could be anyone. Nothing accrues to the one wielding such a method, and nothing about the one wielding such a method must affect that method's enactment.<sup>1</sup> On the contrary, the formation of memory, Vico suggests, requires supplementing questions of "how to proceed" with more substantive questions regarding one's topica, one's "topic" and the images and forms and figures--the bodies, one might say--that haunt that place. Thus, the answer to the question "Where am I?" holds part of the answer to the question of how to proceed. Differently put, how could I know how to properly proceed if I don't know where I am? I cannot warrantably devise a method and then simply subsequently aim it at some topic. Topics, hermeneutically conceived, productively supplement, correct, transform or "set right anew" (Arendt 1969, p. 192-3) our desire to proceed without heed to where we are. Topics hold our ways through them in place (but if and only if we allow ourselves to learn from the place and in place how to pay attention properly to the place). The place tells us something of what it needs from us if we are to "understand." This is what it means to "learn" about this place--to realize, to deeply experience how it is that this topic asks something of me beyond what I might ask of it. It means, in part and in short, to become able to learn from the place, from the topic. Hidden here are vaguely ecological images of places, topographies, territories and a sense of bodily bearings. Hidden here, too, are images of education as involving someone coming to "inhabit" a topic and learn our way around from the topic itself. "We can entrust ourselves to what we are

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<sup>1</sup> Jardine's introduction of Vico and the importance of 'topica' recalls Michel Serres and Isabella Stenger's rejection of rigid methodologies in favor of more evolving, adaptive, context-sensitive, interdisciplinary approaches to inquiry and interpretation. As with Serres and Stenger, he challenges "systematic acts of severance aimed at retrieving the given" (Jardine, 1992, p. 52) and questions methods that claim to produce objectivity, making obsolete or superfluous other claims to meaning and truth. Serres highlights the role of the observer and the situated nature of knowledge production. Stengers, similarly, argues that objectivity in science is not about eliminating subjective influences; rather, it is about constructing agreements within specific practices, contexts, and fellow inquirers. She distinguishes between 'experimental' sciences, which create situations that can be testable and reproducible, and 'field' sciences, which are marked by "uncertainty and by the entanglement" (Stenger, 2018, p. 12) of what cannot cleanly be separated into 'facts' and 'values'. Inquiry into educational contexts is most certainly inquiry into a field in which every context entangles the values of a wide range of stakeholders who define the experience of schools very differently. The facts of any particular case or encounter within the field of education are fluid. For any inquiry into such a field to occur, the images, forms, and figures of a certain topica haunts the questions which arise, and the framing of a question changes the topography of the field itself.

investigating to guide us safely in the quest" (Gadamer 1989, p. 378). An adage that is hermeneutic, pedagogical and ecological. ( Jardine, 2012, p. 161-2)

This is all unmentioned but simmering in Kirsten's writing. She was able to understand and deeply experience this line of opening, and how one then invites children into that venture and how it becomes rigorous and mutual and venturous but careful and loving, etc. the underlying scholarly opening up itself, and its warrant against the closures of pedagogy-as-efficient-management is not present in what she wrote. But yet it is there as well.

So us reading Kirsten's piece, or Michael's, and then me reading your own path through them proves something again about hermeneutics and pedagogy:

The whole value of hermeneutical experience . . . seemed to consist in the fact that here we are not simply filing things in pigeonholes but that what we encounter . . . *says something to us*. Understanding . . . is a genuine experience (*Erfahrung*) (Gadamer, 1989, p. 489, emphasis mine).

Gadamer even uses the idea of *entrusting ourselves* to the sway of the encounter and what it gives rise to (1989, p. 378). This is all unmentioned but simmering in Kirsten's writing. She was able to understand and deeply experience this line of opening, and how one then invites children into that venture and how it becomes rigorous and mutual and venturous but careful and loving, etc. the underlying scholarly opening up itself, and its warrant against the closures of pedagogy-as-efficient-management is not present in what she wrote. But yet it is there as well.

Here is the rub...this often happens when some of my own work is read, that the toughly won insights and underpinnings and historical precedents and warrants and supports get too easily swamped by the, as you noted, sentiment of the felt-reaction to that release and to the pretty words, and these latter deeply affected things can last and deeply affect practice. But I've repeatedly found over decades, that this deep affect of practice needs, as so many teachers said, who contributed to that book, re-newing, re-minding, re-gathering around what we have confirmed and elaborated for each other. It wears out under the wearing nature of schooling, and, as we talked about in some classes and as some folks in that book wrote about, that wearing out seems a deliberate feature of the institution itself some days. The language slips back easily into old inheritances and presumptions<sup>2</sup> — this sort of work is "student centered." No, it is not. It

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<sup>2</sup> There is a tendency among the educational leadership of districts of education to turn to old inheritances and easy presumptions in attempts to further pedagogical progress and as a form of self-justification. They can become as Stenger (2018) describes the forsaking of 'big questions' in the name of accepted texts (or the latest educational

is teacher centered. No, it is not. It is merely an intellectual exercise. No it is not. Each child gets to do what they want. No, they do not. It is something like a field trip in the old sense where you can do it if you have time, but you then have to cover the curriculum later. No.

What then is the task of a hermeneutic scholar? We're not in a position, for example, of trying to maintain a staff in a school. And some folks on such a staff will find our articulations ridiculous and a waste of time. Others might find them a great relief to woes that they felt but couldn't quite get a hold of. Some thought they may have dreamed it and when we re-gather, often say yes, after moments pause, there it is, patiently waiting for us all to return. Then we can, once again, pursue the hard-won insights that might give us the ability to marshal ourselves against the often-unforgiving standing logics of schools. I'm going to risk saying, then, that, as with any other form of research, we seek out those who are interested in doing *this* type of work *with* us.

*On Sat, Sep 3, 2022, Daniel wrote:*

Thanks for this second email on the task of the hermeneutic scholar. The main idea I come around to, with humility, from my trying to understand what mattered to me about the first email was something that explains my own particular sense of Heidegger's idea of our being thrown into the world, my thrownness: I had got stopped in my thinking at the release of energy you described seeing in your teacher writers and the insights of "interrelatedness, love, affection," etc. In other words (confession time), I thought the release of energy and the insights above were the "thing," that what was important, what signalled the sense of what is true was that emotional rush.

That's where I became uprooted by your email: I didn't recognize the other truth about such an experience: that more "hard won insights" can give us the ability to "marshal ourselves against the standing logics" of schools. I feel now like I suffered from a kind of fuzzy thinking and that my attempt to label your ultimate concern, in "Black Snow" at least, was stupid and naive, not because "beauty and repose" aren't ideas that seem full of meaning and importance (and perhaps can feel like the source and end of one's understanding of that experience), but because I failed to realize what you make clear in your email: that ideas like these, like interrelatedness, love, and affection, exist in places and don't really live without the relationships that manifest them. To name them without seeing them alive within the worlds they inhabit is a bit like seeing the virtue or power of a certain quality, its value and importance, and cherishing it, but without

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trend) "sleepwalker[s]... perched on the ridge of a high roof, walking up and down without vertigo, fear or hesitation, [posing] no questions that might throw [them] off balance" (p. 35).

seeing and understanding how it plays out in practice, in the structures and logics, against the barriers and within the dead zones of schools, for example. The hard-won insight goes beyond identifying a virtue to the seeing of it in play, or not in play, in a certain *topos* (Gadamer's "topica" [1989, p. 21]) and to somehow describe the place or ground and the relationships where it lives and dies. (I may still be missing some key difference in the two kinds of insights you mention.)

So, when you introduced this other kind of seeing into a *topos*, I was tripped up. I was led past what I thought I was looking for to something harder to locate. I started to imagine that ultimate concern, the infinite and unconditional that draws us, has no location at all. Perhaps, as David Loy writes, it is "no-thing" and its no-thing-ness cannot be fixed within the stories we tell about ourselves. "It is not part of any particular narrative, for it is that which allows narratives to be mutable" (2010, p. 38). Loy writes also that a narrative understanding of the self has two aspects: our identity, "dispositions solidified out of roles that have become habitual" and our "no-thing-ness" (p. 39) which preserves the possibility of doing and becoming different. The stories teachers, all of us, tell perhaps give a sense of both things: our dispositions and roles, as well as this other floating quality, "no-thing-ness," that "something other." That something other is what I find so compelling. Thanks again, so much, for these emails.

*On Sat, Sep 3, 2022, Jardine wrote:*

This other thing, this flowing of myriad, shared, contested narratives, and, to almost quote David [Smith, 1987/2020, p. 405] the task becomes keeping the conversation going, and not allowing it to 'reify', i.e., 'thing-ify' and lose sight of its myriad mutability and the recurring attraction of lovely things, worthwhile ideas and images. "If you love something, you want it to stay around and stay close, and keep radiantly well. And it is precisely beauty that makes you fall in love. [It] gives you the feeling that what is here is to be treasured and not misused or harmed" (Hillman 2006b, p. 192).

Here is the real reason that I've pursued this connection between education, Buddhism, ecology and hermeneutics. It has to do with the cultivation and protection of our affection for the life and beauty of the world and wanting to rescue it, and myself, shall we say, from its often-ugly demeanor in its schooled version of fragments. To paraphrase Elbow, letting your query, or my grandson's have a say in deciding what the main idea is in the first draft, or letting a newly found citation suddenly demand to be the title of what I'm writing.

In Buddhism, the central affliction we suffer is reification, attempting to make solid and unchanging that which, in its ontological reality, is a myriad of dependent co-arising causes and conditions and relations and entanglements and loosening and tightenings

[Sanskrit: *pratityasamutpada*]. This pushes against the contemporary current of fragmentation. As Loy mentions, "Mental tendencies congeal and we bind ourselves without a rope" (Loy 2010, p. vii) very easily. This no-thingness (because what *appears* to be a fix and separate and singular thing is *in reality* a node of relations which are in motion -- things *are* 'all their relations' /... it is not that they first *are* and *then* 'have' various relations...so 'that other' which is so compelling and so elusive is precisely its elusiveness, even though it is also palpable and undeniable.

Gadamer called this "breaking open the *being* of the object," (1989, p. 362, emphasis added) "an escape from something that had . . . held us captive" (p. 356). His teacher often warned of the "tranquillizing self-assurance [of] 'Being-at-home' with all its obviousness" (Heidegger, 1962, p. 237). Teachers often spoke of the languid draw of simply doing what is familiar in classrooms. He also called insight a matter of "breaking the spell," (p. 356) of the often turgidness of day-to-day thought and action. So *this* is why I often couple Buddhism with hermeneutics:

Every word [has an] inner dimension of multiplication: every word breaks forth as if from a center and is related to a whole, through which alone it is a word. Every word causes the whole of the language to which it belongs to resonate and the whole world-view that underlies it to appear. Thus every word, as the event of a moment, carries with it the unsaid, to which it is related by responding and summoning. (Gadamer, 1989, p. 458).

This "*as if* from a center" is vitally important. *As if*, because "*the center is everywhere*. Each and every thing ["every word"] becomes the center of all things and, in that sense, becomes an absolute center. This is the absolute uniqueness of things, their reality" (Nishitani 1982, p. 146). "We should apply this [as if] to *every* phenomenon. Every phenomenon . . . is empty of having an inherent self-nature that exists from its own side" (Tsong-kha-pa 2005, p. 182). So that at "the periphery" of experiencing that young child's slow and agonizing work of pronunciation resides, for example, the phenomenon of names and how we are called by them, how they "summon and respond," or the appearance of spaces between words into written English in the 11th century . . . There, too, is the example of a colleague . . . telling me of her daughter learning to read the Koran out loud, and how she often did this well-honed pronunciation without understanding what many of the words mean. I queried this and found that *uttering the very sound of the words themselves* was understood to be a mirroring of the very sound of God speaking to the prophet, so the very sonority itself was blessed and precious, independently of the meaning and message of the text. Yes, oral recitation, a commonplace of Canadian elementary school classrooms.

Reading aloud, "even there." God uttering the world into existence over the face of the deep. ( Jardine, 2016, p. 295-6)

Why would I not want to venture into schools with student teachers if *this* is the sort of news I might help bring, if *this is the sort of life I might be able to live as a teacher and a scholar*. This sort of hermeneutic affection for the entanglings of the world and for the soreness that comes, inevitably, with uprisings of hidden woes and guilts and lost voices. That wind at our backs out on the deck on Friday has *the very same character*: long gone on to dry out a piece of earth, carry up a bird or swat it aside, or fallen to stillness in a heat wave. And the stillness has been curled up by a passing deer. And the deer has been killed on the highway, and the Ravens have come to feast, and so on. Now that there might be the best description of the Last Supper I've ever read. Take. Eat. This wind at my back *is* the sustaining blood fuel of those deer that know that winter is coming this way:

My [DJ's] dog Daniel just brought down another front deer leg from Cougar Ridge. He stood and waited again, just up at the skirt of the forest, facing the house. There's a pedagogy here, but it is hard to tell who is the teacher and who is the student: the leg? The ridge? The dog? Domestication? Herd animals? Settlement? That bloody death and all its fears and chases and falling to gravity? Or perhaps the deaths of two of my other dogs at the very same cougar locale a few years back? Or the feeling of being already likewise pursued and those Buddhists who say that the only way to outrun what is coming is to stop running. Another old story: when you are chased by the Lord of Death and you trip and fall and your body scatters into blood and bone and air and earth and water, *who will the Lord of Death pursue?* Who was the Lord of Death pursuing before that trip and fall?

Or during that buzzer-driven race to cover the curriculum too often conceived in panic and regret? Who? Gary Snyder (1990, p. 175) cites Dong-Shan, a ninth-century Chan/Zen Master:

One time when the Master was washing his bowls, he saw two birds contending over a frog [they were ripping to pieces]. A monk who also saw this asked, "Why does it come to that?" The Master replied, "It's only for your benefit."

This leg, its blood, Daniel's waiting, is for our benefit, as are the little panics that schooling arouses without warning or recourse. But then we're left with the task of understanding, a path now not quite laid out, almost ready to be taken. Step. We've come to know and let ourselves experience great depths of the troubles

that surround us—not only our profession and our work but also our lives. Sometimes, for each of us in different ways and at different times, it is more than we can bear. We know that we’ve only scratched the surface of these woes, but we’ve scratched it enough to know that what lies underneath that surface is infinite and inexhaustible.

It is standing ready to exhaust us if we let it. It stands ready to uplift us if we practice.

“The way we treat a thing can sometimes change its nature” (Hyde, 1983, p. xiii).  
(Jardine & Seidel, 2016, p. 245)

This, of course, is from the same collection as Kirsten’s writing.

*On Sat, Sep 3, 2022, 8:48PM. Daniel wrote:*

What a gorgeous and fierce response! Thanks so much! Yes, the best ever description of the last supper, and a poet’s painting of it! What you have written has its own power to shift or throw me somewhere else. In Tai Chi, we would say that you uprooted me. All this needs seeping in—ears to hear and eyes to see, as the good book says. Will write back tomorrow. Thanks again, so much, Dr. Jardine!

*On Sun, Sep 4, 2022, 6:30AM. Jardine wrote:*

What a pleasure it is to be in such a slipstream, even when the insights sting or cut deep. The sometimes-painful joys of it. And how much students, even the youngest of children, take such pleasure in delving into the good stuff, the real stuff. This is how I’ve coupled this hermeneutic work w. Buddhism, I suppose, that, e.g., these emails back and forth are one more lovely locale to practice stilling myself enough to have the gorgeousness and fierceness overtake me and run away with my woes and find living coursing right under my fingers.

Get this, then, from 1406, Tibet, about me wandering around in schools, not especially, of course, to everyone’s taste and my thinking of colleagues who taught my student-teachers courses but never went to a school except to “do their own research” which did not especially involve involving those living in those schools:

Those who achieve their own livelihood by praising or explaining the good qualities of the trainings, while not striving diligently to practice them, are not suitable to be teachers. That sort of meaningless praise is only words. It is similar to when someone who diligently seeks sandalwood asks one who makes a living

by explaining the good qualities of sandalwood, “Do you have any sandalwood?” and that person replies, “No.” (Tsong-kha-pa, 2000, p. 74)

It is like showing a horse a racecourse before you race. Once you have shown it you then race there. It would be ridiculous to show the horse one racecourse and then race on another. Similarly, why would you determine one thing by means of study and reflection, and then, when you go to practice, practice something else? (p. 52)

Do not devote yourself just to piling up words in great numbers without engaging in practice. (Tsong-kha-pa 2000, p. 61).

The more you practice these things, the more accustomed your mind will become to them, and the easier it will be to practice what you had initially found difficult to learn. You will have visions of the Buddha day and night. (p. 185-6)

"Wherever you are is a place to practice" (Tsong-kha-pa 2004, p. 191).

Even in the middle of trying to read about the hollow men, the stuffed men, headpieces full of straw, and watch high school English students become horrified at how familiar that image is, how wonderful and awful. Thinking at least that I know something of the odor of sandalwood, a bit.

And then a-musing of mine:

*... the lineages of Buddhism, hermeneutics and ecology give us ways to practice the craft of teaching and learning in the classroom as well as ways to study and articulate that practice. My own personal relief came when I realized how these two things – practice and study –are somehow the same thing, the same gesture, attention and work. ( Jardine, 2016, p, xxviii)*

*On Sat, Sep 4, 2022, 12:25PM. Daniel wrote:*

Thanks for these pieces, the reminder about those tricky *kleshas*, about the importance of stilling oneself so that the gorgeousness and fierceness can come, and about the importance of practice. For me, it was Alisdair MacIntyre’s book, *After Virtue* (2007), that turned me on to the importance of practice, the value and beauty that fellow practitioners share because of it. Fellow teachers, it seems to me, understand and feel certain things that non-teachers can’t—writers, too, musicians, and fellow martial arts guys. Same thing. In aikido, we called practice “training,” and yet, even though the same techniques were practiced over and over—trained into us, I guess—there was

never supposed to be anything rote about our practice of those techniques. Each attempt was meant to be fresh and demand the attention of something newly arrived, something different from before. Rote practice, routine, was and is the real enemy. I think of that as maybe the proper attitude to take in stillness before the page or the computer, knowing that what arrives deserves that kind of attention, like it's newly arrived and different.

I want to write more about what you revealed in the idea of the last supper, and what I found so fierce and unflinching in that last email, and why the totality of what you wrote needs seeping in. I'm bookmarking them here, for tomorrow hopefully. Thanks for sharing these many wonderful references and the slipstream!

*On Sun, Sep 5, 2022, 7:26AM. Daniel wrote:*

It's morning now. The funny thing about convalescing after a hip replacement is that day and night lose their separateness. You sleep whenever it comes upon you: darkness and light, day and night, just kind of flow over you. Anyway, thinking on the balcony over a coffee about what we were training in aikido was our receptivity. The techniques really didn't matter as much as this receptivity to your partner and the world. We were told that the techniques were perfect: if they didn't work or felt clumsy, forced, or without grace, then that was our fault as practitioners. Again, this premise loaded us up to be more receptive to the effect of our actions in relation to each other. There were no excuses. This assumed perfection led us to keep searching and refining and listening.

That's the other big thought for the morning: openness is not just yielding, the Yin part of the practice; it's extension, the yang part, as well. So, one doesn't just sit back and wait openly. One invites the guest and, like a good host I suppose, serves it, waits on its needs, makes it at home, shows it loving compassion, perhaps as one would a weary traveller. Please join me, feel welcome, what can I do for you? How can I help? I love this bit from the editor of Morehei Ueshiba's *The Art of Peace*:

Morehei did speak of one kind of contesting for a great prize (generally there is no competition in aikido, no tournaments, no sport), however. He used the images of the Shinto creator deities Izanagi, or "He Who Invites," and Izanami, or "She Who Invites" — whose lovemaking gave birth to the world — to symbolize the irrepressible yearning for unity, the ceaseless striving to come together, that followers of Aikido should emulate as they seek to link themselves with the universe. (Ueshiba, 2002, p. 34)

Nice, hey, and right back into the earthy, bodily kind of life that we often forget in the western world. Full of coming together, unifying, seed and birth, and then all the unpredictability of a wild world that gets born out of this desire for unity.

Thinking of the last supper in the context of the wind at our backs and the birds who live and die because of it, of ravens coming to feast on the deer killed on the highway, what needs "seeping in" is the fearful truth of our beautiful mortality and the way that the world just keeps moving with us. It's one thing to hear this and know it to be true, and it's another to really know it, so that one's heart changes (not an easy place to go, but go we must, it seems, in order to really live) and with that change, one's whole way of existing, of being in the world, shatters all our defenses against the world we have established as separate and opposite how we define ourselves. What a fearful notion: this much change of heart! The only more impossible thing is not changing in the face of seeing that we are, in addition to this person who writes, this eternal unanswerable and beautiful flow of life and death, light and dark, yin and yang.

*On Tues, Sep 7, 2022, 8:42AM. Daniel wrote:*

In trying to understand the ideas that were already there, my pre-conceptions of the story of the last supper, I turned first to Proverbs, Chapter 9 (KJV). The beginning of that chapter describes the bread and wine of The Last Supper, the Passover meal for Jesus and his disciples:

Wisdom hath builded her house, she hath hewn out her seven pillars:  
 She hath killed her beasts; she hath mingled her wine; she hath also furnished her table. She hath sent forth her maidens; she crieth upon the highest places of the city, Whoso is simple, let him turn in hither: as for him that wanteth understanding, she saith to him, Come, eat of my bread, and drink of the wine which I have mingled. Forsake the foolish, and live; and go in the way of understanding.

I am drawn to this section, not only because it anticipates The Last Supper of the gospels, but because wisdom has mingled *her* wine not *the* wine, a phrasing that suggests the wine represents herself; wisdom is the wine, the beasts, the killing, and the bread. She is the whole ritual and the ritual captures the whole of living and being somehow.

There is something similarly evocative in your saying, "'that other' which is so compelling and so elusive is precisely its elusiveness, even though it is also palpable and undeniable":

That wind at our backs out on the deck is long gone  
 on to dry out a piece of earth, carry up a bird or swat it aside,  
 or fallen to stillness in a heat wave.  
 And the stillness has been curled up by a passing deer,  
 and the deer has been killed on the highway,  
 and the Ravens have come to feast.  
 Take. Eat.

For me, what cleared the way, was the illusive movement of the wind that is the world's seamless becoming, first the carrier and swatter of birds; then the stillness of the heat wave; the deer; the death of the deer on a highway, and then the Ravens come to feast; that all of this was testament to something kindred in us—that we live in the idea of the magnificence and remorseless changes of being. This is our bread and wine. It is the meat on which the ravens feed, and really, we are the same Christ as the deer is Christ, anointed (from the Greek, *christos*) by our being in the world. Our redemption lies in the death of the deer and our own deaths (should we be on that highway someday when the Ravens come). I wonder now at your Ravens: friends, fellow travellers and communion-takers, taking and eating of the bread and wine, the beasts, ourselves.

So, then:

What Gets Passed On?

I remember you telling us about hearing the principal of the school you were visiting one day saying that the school needed new blood (Jardine, 2008b). Every time a new cohort of student teachers arrives, you hear that phrase. Seeing them, just beginning their practice, we experienced teachers are all brought back to our own sense of fearfulness, of being lambs to the slaughter in our first days of teaching. The idea then, as brand new teachers, that we might prompt the new life and generativity of the old was not foremost in any of our minds.

None of us really had any idea that we were the heralds of the timeless passing on of things. I mean I think we knew that we brought new ideas. We were told that, but the idea that there was this current of life that coursed through all of what we do in schools and that our students were also part of this work of renewal, this abiding of life and death, this passing on of being itself, was not on our minds. Not mine, anyway.

Passover, as described in Exodus was God's way of allowing the congregation of Israel deliverance out of slavery in Egypt, but first it was a way of escaping God's attack on the continuation of Egyptian generations and their gods:

For I will pass through the land of Egypt this night, and will smite all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and against all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgment: I am the LORD.

[13] And the blood shall be to you for a token upon the houses where ye are: and when I see the blood, I will pass over you, and the plague shall not be upon you to destroy you, when I smite the land of Egypt.

Interesting for me to observe here that the blood of sacrifice and the continuation of generations of a people go hand in hand here. The blood of the sacrifice ensured, by the markings made on the side posts and upper door posts of the houses, that the Lord's followers escaped the destruction of their lineage, both man and beast. The destruction God wrought was upon the generational life of a people,

From the firstborn of Pharaoh that sat on his throne unto the firstborn of the captive that was in the dungeon; and all the firstborn of cattle" (Exodus, 12:29).

It also ensured that the Jews were freed from bondage. So, Passover, the sacrifice and the blood, marked the freedom from slavery, the birth of a new Jewish nation, and even the resetting of time, a new world of time. God instructed Moses and Aaron to begin their calendar anew with his instructions about the Passover. The story of exile and the idea of living out of time reminded me of sometimes feeling, as a teacher, that I was not working for myself, that I had become a slave to my paycheck and to the routines of school life. I was living according to the reality defined by each yearly school calendar, counting the days to the next break, living my life through the artifice of class periods and through my role as "teacher." Students taught, papers marked, lessons planned and lived out, all these were more than mere trappings of the job. They defined and limited my perception of myself as a practicing teacher. I begin to see how fulfilling the requirements of the calendar and all of its associated routines can replace the creativity and vitality that I hoped to bring to the work of teaching at the outset of my career.

I think again now of the arrival of student teachers and the new blood and energy they can bring to the work of schools, and I think that freeing the present generation of teachers from a kind of slavery and a deadening approach to time is part of their sacrifice, part of what their "fresh blood" does. David Smith, from Chapter Fifteen of *Confluences* (2020c, p. 159-168), "Modernism, Postmodernism, and the Future of Pedagogy," wrote about a kind of reflexive disdain for children that one grad student of his expressed. They had gone to lunch together, and the grad student complained about the noisy children there: "behind his 'Tom Cruise' sunglasses and surface cool, he was already voicing a problem which has reached tragic proportions in the West, namely, a

cutting of the connective nerve with the young in favor of some sort of notion of smooth progress." He writes, "the difficulties, dilemmas and ambiguities which children place in the path of adults are a reminder to us not to take ourselves too seriously. In postmodern terms, it could be said that children embody and keep alive a sense of the play of the world, giving voice to the powers of human regeneration."

It could be that to drink in this lively sense of play in the world is the burned-out teachers' deliverance from slavery and false time. The bread and the wine, the wind and the ravens, are all one body of the truth of our connection to the rising of the new, renewing and reclaiming of the old, our understanding of our own existence as something caught up in the transformations of time and being. I like Jodi Latromouille's (Seidel & Jardine, 2016, p. 37-42) chapter in *The Ecological Heart of Teaching*, "A Modern Hunting Tradition," because it affirms this idea of the generations getting along and learning from each other. I like how her father Vern scoffs at his son-in-law freeing the moose-laden packboard to fly down the terrain on its own, and then, moments later, is screaming, "Look out, moose meat on the loose!" while the kids jump and dive out of the way. She describes youth, "coming into traditions," challenging and questioning "everything that has been handed down to us, while our elders may wait patiently for us to sort things out, sometimes pushing back, other times conceding, always listening" (p. 38). There is the healthy connection between the generations restored, and perhaps also that recognition of the passing of generations and of our own lives. To look backward and forward across generations is to also recognize that we die and that we hold a covenant with each other to recognize the coming of the new and passing away of the old, to accept the poignance and beauty and sadness of our limited time within the life of our own generation's passing.

Jodi writes about her father's keeping the moose head as a trophy, not as an exercise in vanity, but as:

. . . a single body of worship  
Of participation in the world  
A world that demands our respect. (p. 42)

That's where I want to end, I think, with this idea of respectful participation in the world. It seems like a good idea to promote among students, one which demands some understanding of what the world is and how to respect it. I imagine that Jodi's father, Vern, understood that the moose's head on the wall represented his life too, his own possibility of existing and loving his children and grandchildren, knowing his ancestors and anticipating the generations to come. At the end of Jodi's piece, she recalls her

shameful torturing and murdering of a grouse, and describes how even that suffering did not go to waste:

A coyote dragged it off, cleaned it down to bones and remnants  
Some birds picked at the remains, and others used its feathers for a nest  
The worms fed off the tiny, dark stain. (p. 42)

She writes that her attack on the grouse when she was a child will "remind me of what I am" — what we all are, truly. And so, the memory of her terrible act reminds her and us of the respect life is owed, a respect revealed in the binding together of a coyote, birds, and worms around the body and blood of the murdered grouse. In her promise to not waste its life, I think she makes an oath to respect the dependency we have on each other; that, as O Sensei says, "All things are bound together harmoniously; [that] this is the real law of gravity that keeps the universe intact" (Ueshiba, 2002, p. 47). This is the worldview that makes the idea of The Last Supper and the passing of generations meaningful. In the face of our knowledge that all things pass on; old things (and people) pass away, and new generations come, and we are part of all that passing, which carries on forever. We hold onto this idea that there is a *unus mundus*, a primordial unified reality with which we can participate in a deeply soulful way. The blood of Christ, the ravens and the wind: we can consume them, we take them inside us and live in the promise of eternity, what Tillich calls, "the transtemporal unity of the consecutive moments of time." Not timelessness or the simultaneous presence of everything or immovable presence in a simultaneous way or endless temporality, but in our belonging to the order which transcends temporality. Tillich argues that we belong to both the order of temporality and eternity (Tillich, 2019). It could be that the eating of the bread, the drinking of the wine, the sacrifice, is a kind of dying to live. It is the recognition that if we are to enliven what in us is a transtemporal order of being, we must sacrifice that part of us which fearfully defends the temporal and material part of ourselves. We must stand, most humbly, before the truth of all our passing and see the blood of sacrifice in every death. How can we not feel compassion then, for ourselves and the rest of the passing world which we have taken into ourselves.

In the face of all this, I feel a great sadness, and need what Tillich (2000) has called the "courage to be." I don't want to be weakened by my understanding. He argues that facing up to our finitude requires this courage and that it comes from our ultimate concern, our connection to those things that we consider infinite. This is faith, the clarity and force of our connection to that which we seek as infinite, beautiful, graceful, and true. Perhaps the main point for me now is that I can't always be asking what those things are. I need to live in them. I need to consume them to truly live. I need to let go of the questions, yes, and the seriousness. Perhaps, this letting go is an emulation of

Hermes, "who was a young god always." I need that kind of humility and surrender and acceptance, all of which is part of the sacrificial ritual too. We give ourselves over to this other elusive thing. We say thank you for what has been given.

On Sep 8, 2022, at 6:28 AM, Jardine wrote:

Okay, well, yes, great stuff. Of course, I hesitate: the buried issue, buried too often unmarked (excuse this flippant analogy), is the too-frequent sacrifice of *others* in the name of what you/we might hold sacred. Again, that thing Smith details so well, exploring the work of Enrique Dussel and the complex of the salvational/emancipative and the sacrificial/genocidal. I must quote it in full. Think of this as a version of introducing each other to even more ancestors we have learned from and remember as we talk. This is a great spot to remember for me, that this isn't just plopping in anything and everything. Despite my own sometimes overeagerness in this regard, it has to do with hearing angels singing the architecture, if you see what I mean, and giving them voice, and therefore also betraying that my life is only surrounded by part of the myriad, my memory is only so good, my past is full of dark omissions, but that is *always* the character of being someone. This very comment needs David's help below as you'll see:

As the dominant myth of modernity, the myth of emancipative reason [in an eerie parallel to the myth of blood sacrifice salvation] is in fact defined most profoundly not so much by liberty, as it pretends, but by *subjectivity*, or, most importantly, by an elision of liberty into subjectivity, such that self-enclosure, in the name of a strong sense of personal identity, becomes the character of modern Western man [and a whiff, here, of the successful student in a school who is then often punished for precisely such strength – all this is nothing if not ambiguous]. It is this self-enclosure of the Western *episteme*, its basic narcissism, that is the source of its violence, because under the assumption of its inherent superiority, the myth of emancipative reason is actually incapable of registering the experience of those falling outside of its own operating paradigm, and the most especially of those suffering under it [since the suffering is understood, in advance, as either their own fault or necessary to their salvation]. Hence the myth of emancipative reason has its underside, which Dussel call 'the myth of sacrifice', meaning, in the starkest terms, that any refusal of the myth of emancipative reason [or analogously, emancipative believe in the one truth God], or even ignorance of it is just cause for genocide [see "The Doctrine of Discovery" (1493) which codifies the blending of Christian and being European, the latter of which attached its Age of Enlightenment to the "missionary zeal" of colonialism. See Gilder Lehman Institute of American History (accessed

August 2022). Ironically, this marks the 'irrationality' of the myth of modernity, and its powerful underside; the irrationality of total rationality. (Smith, 2003, p. 495).

Again, all this becomes a bit like a waking nightmare of analogies to schools and pedagogy and mission statements and the still lingering verities of the young arriving to "set things right anew" (Arendt, 1989, p. 197) if this meeting of teacher and student and inheritances and ancestors and contestations can be handled well, with alertness and dignity. Then, that humility and acceptance you mention can actually come down out of the upper reaches and up out of low lower bowels of all these thoughts and warnings and woes, and portends and become not big, but small. Right here.

It is small, I'm finding. Flighty like those wings in that illustration you sent along. I recall years and years ago standing out on the deck in full sun when it started raining from a cloud arched behind me out of view. I took a deep gasp and laughed and muttered something like, okay, well, this standing here, calming your breath, what in hell did you think a moment of "enlightenment" would be? ALL CAPS? Angels dropping down from painted ceilings and European orchestral music worthy of the moment? What are you waiting for? A good and relieving laugh, just like I brushed up against that one child's writing down of *neige noir*. Funny, simple, exhilarating, saving us from the risk of the word wall gathering being just another 'activity' in the service of some hidden teacher's goal or objective. It is that and needs to be that. But the place itself can sometimes offer more.

James Hillman talks about the flightiness of the puer/puella spirit and how wisdom can, if properly handled, help settle that flighty spirit into insight. This description of the negative version 'the old' is tragically stunning:

The negative senex is the senex split from its own puer aspect. He has lost his "child." The archetypal core of the complex, now split, loses its inherent tension, its ambivalence. Without the enthusiasm and eros of the son, authority loses its idealism. It aspires to nothing but its own perpetuation, leading but to tyranny and cynicism; *for meaning cannot be sustained by structure and order alone*. Such spirit is one-sided, and one-sidedness is crippling. Being is static, a pleroma that cannot become. Time euphemistically called 'experience' but more often just the crusted accretions of profane history becomes a moral virtue and even witness of truth, '*veritas filia temporis*'. The old is always preferred to the new. Sexuality without young eros becomes goaty; weakness becomes complaint; creative isolation becomes only paranoid loneliness. Because the complex is unable to catch on and sow seed, it feeds on the growth of other complexes or other people,

as for instance the growth of one's own children [telling words for essentialist pedagogy]. Cut off from its own child and fool the complex no longer has anything to tell us. Folly and immaturity are projected on to others [see Immanuel Kant's "overcoming of immaturity" (1784/1983, p. 4) and Descartes' "repudiation of childhood" (Bordo, 1987, p. 98). Without folly it has no wisdom, only knowledge, serious, depressing, hoarded in an academic vault or used as power. The integration of personality becomes the subjugation of personality, a unification through dominance, and integrity only a selfsame repetition of firm principle. (Hillman, 2016, p. 43-4)

Some great images of teachers gone wrong, of schools gone goaty and musty, of periodic tables losing their tell, become, not a living insight handed to us, but a mere mechanism to which one must simply concede. I'm finding it especially horribly/beautifully temporal, passing by, these days. And this phrase of yours "I don't want to be weakened by my understanding," except in the sense that weakness can portend openness. That luscious weakness is not the exhaustion of the machinations of many schools from which teachers need to protect themselves and their students. What you've written is lovely and good and important and I'm really glad you ventured there ...so now. Pedagogy. Teachers. It cannot work through the negative senex and the demeaning of the young as immature and full of sheer folly, needing to be corrected and 'shaped up' – there is too much of this in the spirit of colonialism and hidden in the spirit of some instigations of Christianity and either the eradication or salvation [if they concede] of the unbeliever. So wisdom, when it works, involves "let the children come to me," not simply because I like kids, but because *without them*, what I know and have to teach can become mere pretentious folly. But the enactments of Christianity have a lot to answer for here, as we have come to know more and more – unmarked graves, stolen languages, names erased all, beneficently meant, "for their own good."

Eric's<sup>3</sup> peak inside that "chem.-book" inside cover, even simply a little school-related, happening on the kitchen table – this event was *not* flighty and puerile. It was not a threat that needed punishment or marginalization or eradication. It was the possible advent of wisdom arriving, lit up, lighting him up and me, too, in the listening and remembering of it all these years. Here, of course, is the great dilemma of Christian (and many other) histories and many school-teacher ones as well – what will you say to the arrival of the new? What will you do? Do they have something to teach you or are you all set up in advance of their arrival, armed with what you know they "need" without having really met. Without being someone especially practiced in meeting and

listening. Colonial nightmares. But also, an analogue to many closed-down, angry classroom nightmares as well. Pedagogy as punishment.

There's a passing thing here that Ivan Illich speaks of where it is not the "light of Reason" that sheds light on things, texts, but rather the thing, the text, illuminating us in *its* light:

Hugh [of St. Victor (1096-1141)] begins to explain what wisdom does. The sentence begins, *sapientia illuminat hominem*, "wisdom illuminates man" . . . *ut seipsum agnoscat*, "so that he may recognize himself." Once again, in this rendering, translation and exegesis are in conflict, and the English words chosen could easily veil the sense that interpretation can reveal. Enlightenment in Hugh's world and what is understood as enlightenment now are two different things. The light, which in Hugh's metaphoric usage illuminates, is the counterfoil of the eighteenth-century light of reason [a child of the Cartesian lineage talked about below]. The light of which Hugh speaks here brings man to a glow. Approaching wisdom makes the reader radiant. The studious striving that Hugh teaches is a commitment to engage in an activity by which the reader's own "self" will be kindled and brought to sparkle. (Illich, 1993, p. 17)

And there we have another example of the thing Illich is detailing, that the hermeneutic gesture isn't one of ego-centered parsing, but of opening up pathways of exploration stretching far far beyond my own life left to live, a whole other contemplating about learning to read till the text starts to shine. It is the deer on the farside of the deck railing showing me standing there, seeing it and amazed.

Just scanning over David Smith's *Confluences* some more. He cites this passage from Thomas Merton (1975, p. 117) on his page 141:

The contemplative life must provide an area, a space of liberty, of silence, in which possibilities are allowed to surface and new choices—beyond routine choice become manifest. It should create a new experience of time... not a blank to be filled or an untouched space to be conquered and violated, but a space which can enjoy its own potentialities and hopes ...open to others—compassionate time, rooted in the sense of common illusion and in criticism of it.

I'd speculate that somewhere around *here* is your candidacy/dissertation work. Imagine the type of writing back and forth that you and I have been doing, the type of deeply personal, and then deeply historical/scholarly swerving around these things that have

emerged. Many scattershot sidelines that may prove to be central and vice versa. Imagine finding some fellow teachers who want to walk and run and write and talk and play their ways through these sorts of field as a serious venture in coming to understand being a teacher, a student -- pedagogy, generativity, wisdom, regeneration, hope...after all, we seek this out every September on purpose, this locale where the conversation just might be able to continue and deepen and, as per the image of the child, save us in a small way, just like the breeze come by. Imagine offering them this sort of open space in their own working through their own deeply, ecopedagogically entangled selves. And, of course, you yourself have to find your own way through this tumult you instigated, and my always very over-active itching and scratching and sniffing around for deer legs to bring to the edge of the forest. Look at this, look at this! ...oh, and a lovely typo in what you wrote: "illusive movement of the wind" -- some who long for heaven find the Earth rife with illusion and deception and temptation. But teachers don't do that...it is elusive and *potentially* deceptive, hence the need to learn. Hence David's brilliant article on "The Deep Politics of War and the Curriculum of Disillusion" (Smith, 2020, p. 274-294) --the importance of disillusion as the locale of opening and breakthrough, the locale of pedagogy when it works best, a locale of when scholarship of this sort works best as well. Hence the preciousness of disillusioned young'uns who want the goods on what's up.

. . . and, in the meanwhile, this just drifted through, Brian Eno, lovely song and video that is shedding is light on me:

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Dehxp3PUTkM&ab\\_channel=BrianEnoVEVO](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Dehxp3PUTkM&ab_channel=BrianEnoVEVO)

*On Sep 8, 2022, at 9:40 AM, Daniel wrote:*

As a student coming to the idea of what hermeneutic work really entails and questioning where writing fits into that work, I have to confess being overwhelmed by those "angels singing the architecture."

Seeing that the myriad world always exceeds my view is a weight, for sure. That, as you write above, "my memory is only so good, my past is full of dark omissions" leaves me feeling like I have accidentally tossed my paddle overboard into the rapids. How do I survive those rapids other than with the realization that follows the admission of faulty memory and dark omissions, that both are "*always* the character of being someone."

So, thank-you, in the midst of more and more of the myriad possibilities, of the angels singing the architecture, of being wildly tossed about in the rapids, for the Brian Eno piece: the calming breath throughout and the sense of something eternal exceeding but addressing me. May "We let it in. We let it in." The piece is full of a beautiful

tranquility; so clear and restful and harmonic, it made me think of one of O Sensei's sayings:

...seclude yourself among deep mountains and hidden valleys to restore your link to the source of life ... Breath in and let yourself soar to the ends of the universe; breathe out and bring the cosmos back inside. Next, breathe up all the fecundity and vibrancy of the earth. Finally, blend the breath of heaven and the breath of earth with that of your own body, becoming the breath of life itself. (Ueshiba, 2002, pp. 47-48)

Thanks so much for the Merton, Hillman, and Smith references, and your own wonderful comments. I have been breathing in what you have written and soaring, and then with my own thinking and writing, breathing out and bringing a cosmos back inside. It has been (in addition to a necessary bewilderment) wildly freeing, not a place to stop, but a kind of living between the lines. It's that living between the lines that just keeps rolling along.

I take away this idea that wisdom requires other voices. I really need to take the opportunity to write back and forth with teacher writers, as we have done, and to explore many conversations about that writing, if I am going to find the understanding that I'm looking for in my research. I understand now, more than ever, how much I need those different voices to open my own assumptions and interpretations of the world. Yours has been and continues to be a powerful mentor's voice. You lead me out into the open again, steer me away from false closings, and have in your brain so many years of joyful scholarship to connect me to a larger, wiser, expanding vision of the world. Thanks so much for your generosity in this regard. I am so grateful and feel quite humbled in the face of your big-heartedness.

Thank you for all the emails back and forth, and take care of yourself. Much love to you and your family! When I'm back on my motorcycle (after this hip heals up) next summer, I will drop a gift of tea on the way to my dad's. Let me know if you have a favorite. All the best,

Craig

P.S. Happened upon the following Gadamer quote:

Thus the concept of transformation characterizes the independent and superior mode of being of what we called structure. From this viewpoint "reality" is defined as what is untransformed, and art as the raising up (*Aufhebung*) of this

reality into its truth. The classical theory of art too, which bases all art on the idea of mimesis, imitation, obviously starts from play in the form of dancing, which is the representation of the divine. (Gadamer, 1975/1989/2004, p. 112)

Thanks again!

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