

# *Klaus Mollenhauer's "Forgotten Connections: " A sketch of a general pedagogic*

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Klaus Mollenhauer's book *Vergessene Zusammenhänge: Über Kultur und Erziehung* (Mollenhauer, 1983) has been translated into Dutch (1986), Japanese (1987), Norwegian (1996) and now into English with the title *Forgotten Connections: On Culture and Upbringing* (Mollenhauer, 2014). Previously there have been a few references in English to the German original (Friesen & Sævi, 2010; Kivelä, Siljander, & Sutinen, 2012; Levering, 1987; Tenorth, 2001; Uljens, 2002; Vriens, 1996; Wivestad, 2008). Thanks to Norm Friesen, Mollenhauer's interesting and challenging text, which is especially difficult to anglicise, is now available to a wider audience.

Mollenhauer presents his book as a rough sketch of what *Allgemeine Pädagogik* (General Pedagogic) could be – an outline of "a general study of *Bildung* and upbringing" (Mollenhauer, 2014, p. 9) – a daring project, which in my view is even more needed today than in 1983. Mollenhauer shows a way to a practically committed, historically-founded and future-oriented theory of emancipatory upbringing and education; built on reliable elements in the cultural and pedagogical tradition, which we, as responsible adults, should not forget, when we, together with the new generation, face present and future challenges. In this essay, I attempt a short interpretation of his sketch and give some brief evaluative comments in the final section.

*Pädagogik* is not the same as "pedagogy". To mark the difference, I use instead the noun "pedagogic", and will give some reasons for this choice, reasons that I see as important for the translation of Mollenhauer into English.

## **Pedagogic and Pedagogy**

In Continental and Scandinavian European traditions, *Pädagogik* has been understood as "an academic discipline in its own right" (Biesta, 2011, p. 176). It is sometimes translated as pedagogy, but "Pedagogy" is not used today in Britain and North America as a name of academic institutes, faculties or "schools" concerned with education. Why? The noun *Pädagogik* or pedagogic seems to have been formed in analogy with rhetoric. The ending of the word rhetoric, *ik* or *ic*, is a shortening of the original expression *rhetorike techne*, the skill, art and theory of persuasive communication. Pedagogic, as a short form of *paidagogike techne*, combines in the same way both the practical ability in, normative principles for and theoretical study of *paideia*, i.e. upbringing and *Bildung*. For the translation of *Bildung*, see Friesen (2014, p. xxxi). Pedagogy lacks the "ic" and hence a "techne"; it lacks signals of an academic discipline. Andrew Stables has suggested in a discussion that we could avoid the misleading association of *techne* to modern technology by calling the discipline "pedagogology", but this

would probably weaken the double meaning of pedagogic as practice and theory. Pedagogic has a close relation to ethics and politics, and Jan Bengtsson (2006), has proposed the plural form “pedagogics”. However, the unity and autonomy of the discipline (Herbart, 1806/2002, p. 13) is better expressed by using the word in singular, in analogy to rhetoric. Pädagogik “is and continues to be ... until today a collective singular [noun] encompassing the whole spectrum of practical and theoretical concern with upbringing (Erziehung)” (Hügli, 1989, p. 4, my trans.)

The study of professionalized teaching (education) is only a part of Pädagogik. Friesen (2014, p. xxxi) explains why he has chosen to translate Erziehung with “upbringing”. Erziehung is not the same as “education”, which is usually understood as “schooling”. Erziehung includes the adults' “relationship with ... the children” (Mollenhauer, 2014, p. 51) from the very beginning into their informal, non-formal and formal education. Upbringing in this broad sense includes of course parenting, but also training in sports and teaching.

Against a one-sided understanding of education as production of learning outcomes, I have argued that Erziehung, or “education in a broad sense”, should include upbringing from something negative as well as upbringing to something positive (Wivestad, 2013). Erziehung has a moral focus and implies an asymmetrical relationship, where the educator has more responsibility than the educand. The end of upbringing is that the person, who has been “brought up”, takes full responsibility for his or her Bildung.

Pedagogic, understood as a practical and theoretical concern with upbringing (in a broad sense), is thus wider than a study of pedagogy, but is more limited than a study of life-long Bildung.

## **The Idea of a General Pedagogic**

*Forgotten Connections* does not start with a discussion of general pedagogic as an academic discipline (Wigger, 1996) or with a systematic presentation of pedagogic applied to different age groups (Benner, 1991). It starts with Franz Kafka's letter to his father, written in 1919 and published after his death. Kafka feared his father, and had serious problems in both remembering events relevant to this fear and in giving reasons for it.

Mollenhauer transfers Kafka's humble attitude to his own wider project: He searches for a general pedagogic that may be justified through painstaking examinations not just of personal recollections, but of our collective cultural recollections, “interpreting a range of documents and texts from various periods of European history that are significant for education and child rearing” (Mollenhauer, 2014, p. 4). He challenges all who are responsible to the next generation, to try to “coordinate” all sides of the culture as a connected whole (p. 113). He contends that “it makes good sense to take seriously the principles of pedagogical orientation that have evolved over the course of the European history of Bildung, and to have faith in their capacity to productively address the issues faced by today's educators” (p. 114, note 8).

When Mollenhauer wrote his book, a movement called Antipädagogik (anti-education) was popular in Germany (Braunmühl, 1975; Miller, 1980). He represents an alternative to a choice between sentimental romantic traditions and technological traditions in upbringing (Mollenhauer, 2014, pp. 6, 113, and 83 note 11). We should neither concentrate one-sidedly on having a warm relationship with the children, and forget that they have to be prepared for life

in society; nor should we concentrate one-sidedly on useful knowledge, specialization and cold profit, and forget existential questions – forget to wonder about the life of the child and youth as a whole – across different institutions, subjects and trades. We need a general pedagogic that does not dissolve into specialized pedagogics related to age groups, disciplines, professions and doctrinal camps.

## Culture and Upbringing

Mollenhauer's basic question to all parents and educators is this: "Why do we want children ...?" (p. 8) The answer we give to this question reveals what is important to us in a long-term view, it reveals what we understand as the core of our culture. The basic question may be divided into two equally important questions: What do we wish for our children most of all? And, are our wishes really good for the children? I interpret *Forgotten Connections* as six essays, where each new essay is built on the previous one and also transcends it.

The Introduction gives a starting point in practical experience, discusses the aim and sources of pedagogic as a discipline, and outlines four main principles of upbringing: Presentation, Representation, *Bildsamkeit* or "susceptibility to influence" (Levering, 1987), and Self-activity. Upbringing as Presentation and Representation means "passing on a valued heritage" and "conveying to children what is important to us" (p. 9). The second question, what is good for the child, demands that we make intuitive guesses about the child's own readiness for *Bildung*, i.e. the child's *Bildsamkeit*, and search for ways to encourage the child to reasonable Self-activity (p. 10).

Presentation is an essay that shows how adults in all cultures at all times necessarily share a way of life with the children. From the very beginning we present to the children our gestures and language informally – our "way of life" (Friesen, 2014, p. xxxiii and xlvi note 10). In this matrix, the children have to let themselves be moulded. It is a process of enrichment as well as impoverishment, "a question of what might have been" (Mollenhauer, 2014, p. 2). Adults are not only midwives to the child's development, but also "powerful censors of what the child forms him- or herself to become / mächtige Zensoren dessen, zu dem es sich bildet" (Mollenhauer, 1983, p. 10 my trans.). Adults are powerful, but not "all-powerful", as the English translation says (2014, p. 2), because the child "sich bildet". He refers to the experience of Augustine, who says: Learning to speak "I ... did myself, by the understanding which Thou, my God, gavest me" (p. 12). The essays that follow focus on different aspects of intentional upbringing; aspects connected to epochs in European cultural history.

Representation demands a selection of "what to convey" (Mollenhauer, 2014, p. 34), a task connected to the shift in pedagogical orientation after the Renaissance and the Reformation. Comenius, in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, experienced his contemporary culture as violent, deceitful and confusing to the new generation. He proposed to teach a selected, coherent content – to all children – in a thorough way, combining sensory experiences with a justified understanding of the world as a whole. "*Every phenomenon (Sachverhalt) and concept (Vorstellung) should be represented in such a way that its location in the context of human action is clear*" (Mollenhauer, 1983, p. 58; 2014, p. 39). Just before this sentence, Mollenhauer clarifies that Comenius did not focus on improving "a citizen's social status", "profits" and material well-

being (p. 37), but on "Human Endeavor (Kunst)" (p. 37) in the cosmic order: bringing everything back to God by leading a life "pleasing in the eyes of God" (p. 39), with "actions of love towards our neighbors and actions of awe towards nature, i.e. right action, right practice / den Mitmenschen gegenüber liebevolles und den Naturdingen gegenüber ehrfürchtiges Handeln; rechtes Handeln, rechte Praxis" (Mollenhauer, 1983, p. 58 my trans. The sentence is missing in the English translation). The "context of human action" (2014, p. 39) should therefore be read as "*right human action* (Praxis)". (The addition of the concept 'right' in the italicized principle was accepted in a letter 27.02 1996 from Mollenhauer, when I made the Norwegian translation.) Comenius argued against Descartes, that human beings err if they in vainglory think they can find a secure foundation for life through their own thinking. Against Bacon and the new science movement, he contended that we ought to see all specialized studies in a universal ethical and political context (Schaller, 1992). His pan-paideia was a counter-culture combining insistence on using our senses with openness to insights both in the philosophical and religious tradition.

Mollenhauer refers to Pestalozzi's experience in Stans, and endorses that the adult's "relationship with the children" (Mollenhauer, 2014, pp. 50-51) should be the foundation of a theory of upbringing. The essay on *Bildsamkeit* or "Trusting that children want to learn" (p. 56) turns the attention towards what is happening when the child or youth encounter particular cultural content. The story of Kaspar Hauser gives an interesting insight into the transition from being an organism to becoming a subject who responds to the call of the culture. We have to trust in the child's readiness to contribute to its own formation, and should be open to the child's unexpected and unique rational potentialities, a task connected to the pedagogical orientation after the Enlightenment (Rousseau, Herbart and Schleiermacher). The child's potentialities are hidden to us, and adults therefore have to cultivate their "divinatory abilities" (p. 64). In each situation, the adult may "strike a chord" and hope for "resonance" in the young person (Grue-Sørensen, 1975, p. 254). Stories about what has happened in such particular situations are like "precedents in law and case histories in psychoanalysis" (Mollenhauer, 2014, p. 74). Pestalozzi's letter from Stans and similar "self-reflexive narratives of relationships" with young persons, constitute, according to Mollenhauer, the elementary experiential material that the pedagogy is "built on" (p. 74).

Through Self-activity the child and youth actualizes his or her *Bildsamkeit*. The new person realizes unique potentialities by "taking on projects and solving problems", which are inherently meaningful to him or herself (p. 84). Together with the *Bildung* from "outside" to "inside" (through Presentation and Representation), there is always a movement from "inside" to "outside", whereby the young form themselves using their own reason (p. 85). The adult should encourage such activity, a task that has been in focus in the 20th century (Sartre and Piaget).

The Conclusion gathers all the previous aspects into a question that both youth and adults have to answer today: Who am I, and who do I want to be? The whole book revolves around understandings of the "I" and the "self" of the person; around ideals that people have for the future and realities they are confronted with in the present society. In the beginning of the 20th century, there was a hope of steady progress. There was confidence that everything would be better for everybody. In this century, however, there is much more doubt and despair. Edvard Munch's *The Scream* has become an icon for our time. Mollenhauer rejects the usual

understanding of identity as something one can attain and possess, for instance by being a member of a group or conforming to role expectations. "The fact that the person has problems in relation with himself or herself ... is what sets his or her Bildung in motion and makes self-activity necessary" (p. 129, note 1). "I", the central unit of the person, standing "outside both the body and the soul" (p. 17), have to sketch a picture (in German a Bild) of my "self" as I want to be, if my self-activity is to be meaningful and have impact on my real self. The task is personal growth, character formation, or Bildung, but the sketch of my self-image is constantly open to be challenged; it is open to doubt and despair. The young person will not just fulfil the projected expectations of others. He or she wants to come to "den Grund der Gründe" (Mollenhauer, 1983, p. 173), to come to the ground, or basis, of the reasons that make the projections of his or her life and future meaningful (Mollenhauer, 2014, p. 128). What is this basis? This will continue to be a challenge through life.

As adults we have to "represent the problem of identity by setting an example" (p. 129), neither giving in to outward pressures nor living insensibly by illusions. We have to organize our routines to make and take the time necessary to confront ourselves with existential questions, reflect on our personal and collective recollections, and give the new generation time and encouragement to do the same as well.

### **Some Evaluative Comments**

Mollenhauer had a broad interest in art and literature. People who were important to him include Lessing, Pestalozzi and Schleiermacher (Friesen, 2014, p. xxi; Winkler, 2002, p. 83), Helmuth Plessner, Wittgenstein, and Sartre. In the introduction to the Norwegian translation, he mentions especially Edvard Munch (Mollenhauer, 1996, p. 9). Mollenhauer presents interesting documents from the cultural tradition in a very convincing way. The book is coherent and persuasive, and its rich content challenges the reader to self-active thinking and practice. Even if it connects primarily to European culture, it may have a general application. In the European history of upbringing, it has been necessary to encounter differentiation and diversity. Such European experiences may therefore be relevant also to the global multicultural challenges that we face today.

Mollenhauer interprets the tradition in a thorough and serious way, letting it speak to him and to us. He is aware of both losses and gains in the development – for instance, in connection with the establishment of the school system. One important historical change, which he sees as an improvement, in my view is not. After around 1500, we have gradually removed God from the centre of the world by putting the rational, autonomous individual at the centre. This seems to be a premise for his concept of self-activity. Mollenhauer contends that "also for Augustine, in spite of emphasis on problems connected to the self, there was no rational autonomous individual as a final instance for the legitimacy of that, which governs the activity / auch für Augustinus gab es, trotz aller Hervorhebung der Ich-Problematik, nicht das sich rational selbst entscheidende Individuum als letzte Instanz für die Gültigkeit dessen, was die Tätigkeit leitet" (Mollenhauer, 1983, p. 147 my trans.; 2014, p. 108). According to Augustine, the individual could not ultimately justify right practice. The "I" as understood by him, should be actively emulating ("nachahmend") the order of the cosmos. Does this presupposition make

Augustine's thinking inferior to the thinking of the self-active "I", who presuppose no authority except the reason accepted by him- or herself? Modern and post-modern thinking is certainly different from Augustine's, but is it fundamentally better? Today many still presuppose the understanding, expressed by Leon Battista Alberti in 1444, that we are owners of our body and our soul and our time, and that the purpose of our activities is to "earn money ... as a resource for an 'open' future" (p. 109-110). There are good reasons for an understanding today, which is more in tune with Augustine and Comenius than Alberti. Life can be seen as a gift, where my purpose is to share what I have received – for the benefit of my fellows and foes (Wivestad, 2008, 2011), and the cosmos as a whole.

The "experience of human finitude" (Gadamer, 1979, p. 320) means that we have to acknowledge our limitations. It is hubris to think that our plans always will lead to progress. New is not necessarily better. We have to trust our own reasoning, but we cannot put absolute trust in human rationality. It is inconsequent to doubt everything – except the legitimacy of our own doubt. I agree that we should attempt the realization of our own self-projections, but putting the rational autonomous individual person at the centre of the world, means in reality an idolization of ourselves (Wivestad, 2013, p. 69).

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