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## On The While of Things

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It's like making a path through the forest. At first it's rough going, with a lot of obstructions, but returning to it again and again, we clear the way. After a while the ground becomes firm and smooth from being walked on repeatedly. Then we have a good path for walking in the forest.

Ajahn Chah from *Everything Arises, Everything Falls Away*. (2005, 83)

### I

What is it that makes classroom experiences worthwhile? This formulation hides too much of the deep etymological inheritances of such a question: what makes a classroom experience worth, not simply zero-sum school-grade exchange, but while? What makes some experiences worthy of rest and repose, worthy of returning, worthy of tarrying and remembering, of taking time, of whiling away our lives in their presence? These questions are framed, for me, as a way to think through some of the classroom work I have witnessed over several decades of attention to a specific phenomenon: how, in vigorous and intellectually challenging and pleasurable classrooms, time and memory gather together, both things and thinking accrue and return, and there is a sense of plenitude wherein the panics of schooling are cooled in favor of good, worth while work.

Many of the tasks asked of students in schools are not worthwhile in this very particular sense: they are not worth lingering over, meditating upon, remembering, and returning to. They don't gather us together and demand gathering of us (an archaic way of saying "knowing") but rather they isolate and pathologize and accelerate attention into scatter-shot pursuit. And this pursuit is not of the marks and vestiges (L. *vestigia*, "tracks"--root of the work "investigation") of the topic under consideration, but of the marks of schooling itself. In short, the purpose of, say, learning about a topic like "sovereignty" in Social Studies is not to articulate one's life and make it more knowledgeable and perhaps livable (sovereignty, after all, is part of the *topos* that we inhabit day to day, in multifarious ways) but to pass the upcoming examination.

With many examples of classroom work, no matter which aspect of which living discipline is under consideration, in schools, so often, the real topic is, as Ivan Illich told us over thirty years ago (1970), "school."

This helps us get a glimpse of why it is that many of the tasks asked of

students are purposefully designed precisely to rebuke whiling away over. In light of provincial test scores, sovereignty, for example, is the definition that can be rattled off. It is (a). & (c). or "none of the above." In light of industrial images of time-lines and efficiency and task-management, whiling over such matters seems archaic, useless or, even worse, mere unproductive, hazy, liberal laziness. Many school tasks don't need a while because "needing a while" is understandable only as gumming up the works. Since most school curriculum is delivered in such a fragmented way as to not need a while, "needing a while" is understandable only as a "special need" (a need of what used to be called, ironically, "slow" children). Here, a while is understood only as a slowed-down version of that which "normal" students can do quickly and efficiently. The while needed to properly take up a topic like sovereignty in one's life is thus pathologized into the slow-wittedness of the one considering such a topic.

Given Fredrick Winslow Taylor's insinuation of the efficiency-movement industrial assembly line into the consciousness of schooling (Taylor 1911; Wrege, C. D. & Greenwood, R. 1991; see Naqvi & Jardine in press), students and teachers are, more often than not, living in the midst of industrial temporality and its measures. It is in light of these measures that most schooled tasks have been stripped of that character which would take a while. A "continuity of [our] attention and devotion" (Berry 1986, 32) to some classroom work is very often not simply unnecessary but impossible because the school-matters at hand have been stripped of the very memorability and relatedness and demand that might require and sustain and reward such attention and devotion. From the point of view of efficiency and management, intellectual whiling in the leisures (schola) of school simply seems dense and unproductive.

Worth while instead of simply worth cramming-as-time-runs-out-for-upcoming-examinations speaks, therefore, to a sense of temporality. "While" and what might be worthy of it is about time. One can't while over disconnected fragments. They don't ask this of us and will reject any such efforts at whiling.

There is thus a hidden ontology here, that to be worthy of while means not being disconnected and fragmented and distanced, manageable object, but to be lived with, "lebensweltlich (close to the living world)" (Ross 2004). Living disciplines full of topics we are living in the midst of and to which we belong in contested and multifarious ways. A side comment: whiling over a topic--working at it, composing it, composing ourselves over it, remembering and cultivating one's memory of it--defines the work of hermeneutics.

Interpretation whiles.

And such whiling, I suggest, defines pedagogy at its best.

## II

"The way we treat a thing can sometimes change its nature"

Lewis Hyde, from *The Gift: On the Erotic Life of Property* (1983, p. xiii).

Worthwhileness is not simply some sort of objective property or set of properties pertaining to certain topics and not to others. We can't just get a list of "great classroom ideas" and splay them out for students or hand over to student-teachers some sure-fire "activities" that just

need to be "done." This just leads, more often than not, to the complain that "it didn't work with my kids."

Worthwhileness has to do with a way of treating things, a way of composing our understanding of something, seeking its kinships (Wittgenstein 1968, 36) and versimilitudes (Gadamer 1989, 21), and, in the same breath, composing ourselves, finding our composure in the face of what we have encountered. "Objectivity" and "subjectivity" are inadequate to this phenomenon. Such alternatives already bespeak the severing of the often hidden or occluded or forgotten, sometimes contested, sometimes revelatory kinships and "'family resemblances (Familienähnlichkeiten)" (Wittgenstein 1968, 32) upon which whiling relies. Stripped of all their relations, fragments don't draw us in. Whiling, on the contrary pulls at us, because it seeks kinships, bloodlines. Whiling is the work of someone looking to be implicated in what they while over, looking to "recognize themselves in the mess of the world" (Hillman, 1983, p. 49). ("we do not understand what recognition is in its profoundest nature if we only regard it as knowing something again that we already know. The joy of recognition is rather the joy of knowing more than is already familiar. In recognition, what we know emerges, as if illuminated. It is known as something." [Gadamer 1989, 114]).

More simply, yet more mysteriously put, when we experience something worthwhile, we experience something being asked of us. "Understanding begins when something addresses us" (Gadamer, 1989, 299), or, as the old man put it in his 94th year, fragmented bits and pieces (like those requisite of assembly-schooling) are not in any living sense "the basics" (see Jardine, Clifford & Friesen 2003): "something awakens our interest—that is really what comes first!" (Gadamer 2001, 50). In asking after worthwhileness, we are asked to find our measure in such things that awaken us and our interest. We are asked to learn and, in learning, to become something more than we had been before such encounters. A worthwhile matter "would not deserve the interest we take in it if it did not have something to say to teach us that we could not know by ourselves" (Gadamer 1989, xxxv).

### III

Part of my initial interest in these matters stems from this being the 12th year that I have taught a course that involves reading Hans-Georg Gadamer's *Truth and Method* (1989) cover to cover. This experience of re-reading--this experience of whiling away over this work for so many years--always ends up the same. Something always unanticipatedly happens, and a heretofore timid thread of Gadamer's work spins around and finds a face and faces me with something: the whiling time of works that Gadamer's text addresses, in combination with how many years I've lingered over this text. In this work, I was aided by happening upon Sheila M. Ross's brilliant article "Gadamer's Late Thinking on *Verweilen*" (2004). This text help me see vestiges in *Truth and Method* that I had not experienced before, and yet, reading Ross's article was a peculiar act of recognition, of knowing something more in knowing the same thing.

This experiential sense of vestige links up with earlier work (see Jardine 2006) on the composition of memory and how such composition involves the effort, not to "amass verified knowledge" (Gadamer 1989, xxi) but rather to keep something in mind. And the act of keeping something in mind is the act of shaping my life (*Bildung*) as one who carries himself this way, with this in mind. In such memorial whiling-work, I become someone lodged in the

multifarious memory of the world. I come upon myself making myself up, getting a hold of myself, composing my self in the middle of this worldly life.

There is something about such matters that provides clues to understanding an intimate form of classroom practice that sidesteps the panics of industrial time-consciousness and provides for whiling. And this interweaves with the opportunity I have had over the past year of working, in some small ways, with a group of wonderful teachers and students at a local high school. This has given me a site of meditation, a site of attention consider again the issue of worthwhile work in the face of the particular ways in which it arises in the work of students and teachers and the curriculum topics entrusted to them in schools.

I was recently a very small part of some conversations in a Grade Ten Social Studies class about British Minister Jack Straw's comments (from October 5, 2006 [see [news.bbc.co.uk](http://news.bbc.co.uk)]) regarding Moslem women wearing the hijab. Minister Straw was suggesting that Moslem women unveil in his presence, and that their refusing to do so is nothing more than a way of cutting themselves off from British culture. One student's (a Moslem girl, wearing a hijab) comment was that it is often seen as "hiding something" and that, perhaps, helps start to explain the hushed conversations and stares on the bus on the way to school. I've wryly laughed since over the terrifying coincidence of George Bush's security fetishes and images of Texan wild-west outlaws with their faces obscured--bandannas, banditos ready to violate any and every border of civility--plundering, robbing us of house and home. The glare of the unobstructed, irresistible, you-have-no-say-in-it security-gaze, and the demand to uncover, to strip down, is occurring precisely in a time of great secrecy and cover-up, a time of the deliberate and systematic "enfrauding" of the public sphere (Smith 2006). Fredrick Winslow Taylor's security and surveillance-based line-ups that underwrite much contemporary schooling have made us ripe for accepting and even embracing the entrenching of security-paranoia. We've been schooled into experiencing a world that asks nothing of us beyond what we ask of it. We've been had.

As I meditate upon Smith's words about the deliberate veil of enfrauding that has fallen over the public sphere, that Grade 10 conversations starts to turn, to converse, to shape and form itself and seek verisimilitude ("the spontaneous and inventive seeking out of similarities" [Gadamer 1989, 432]). I start to "think it over," or "ruminate" or "worry" this bone of contention. Memory, in such a case, doesn't simply "store" these events and these ideational, image-filled speculations that they engender (including a terrible hesitation over the fact that Islam turns its back on the image in vital and telling ways). Memory "works" each event in relation to the other, working to "place" them properly and safely. This might sound a bit controlled, but consider: that link between Taylor's efficiency-movement schooling of our attention and contemporary security fetishes needs to be calmed down a bit, worked over a bit, not just blurted out. It needs to find its proper measure, its proper proportionality to the matters at hand that are emerging in memory and its ways.

The inventive seeking out of similarities is necessarily premised upon a slow and gathering memorial inventory, a "niche" where things are not simply stored but restored, measured, shaped, and formed in relation to and in the witness of each other. This leads to an emergent

experience of the memorability of a place (a "topic") rather than to the simple memorization of fragments to which I bear no memorial obligation and which ask nothing of me in return. In this cultivated, worked and whiled-over space that develops "in between" (Gadamer 1989, 109), each initially seemingly "separate" tale becomes more than it might have been without the other. Oddly enough, in such memorial working, the "time" of each event changes as well. Each enters into the same while as I while away over them, caring for them, placing and replacing in the invenio memory-dance that is both inventive and inventorial. (Carruthers 2003, 11). My "making something" of these events (my formative activity) is, at the same time, also "made" by the formative encounter with the fleshy "otherness" of the experiences undergone and remembered:

Thinking is not a disembodied "skill"; there is no thought without matters to think with. People can only think with the contents of their memories, their experiences. And human memories are stored as images in patterns of places (or "locations" or "topics"). (Carruthers 2003, 89).

About a week after this class, one of those Grade Ten Social Studies students talked to me about how she understands that her hijab is seen by many as a form of oppression. She explained how, in her tradition, if you wear a hijab simply because someone tells you to, you might as well not wear it at all, but she understood how some Canadians, some of her classmates, have trouble understanding how anyone would chose such a thing. She admitted, as well, and without hesitation, that, of course, some in her tradition simply do what they are told. We commiserated a bit over how this is a deep kinship that many traditions share that we, here, share face-to-face, of mindlessly simply doing what you are told and remaining silent and silenced (see Naqvi & Jardine in press).

There is something, here, about the decision to be regarded a certain way and what that says about who you are in a profoundly worldly sense, here, in relation to, in standing with, others. There is also, echoing here, an issue of having to simply submit to another's demands for their right to have my self as the object of their unveiled regard, as with Minister Straw. It seems that Minister Straw did not while over those women who might visit his Ministry office. It seems that he did not ask himself what they might have to say about him and his unveiling presumptions. At least that is what the media has left us with--fragments of a fragmented story that flitters by our attention and leaves us fluttering and, once again, bereft of the possibility of whiling except through great effort. Faint echoes of that old Grade Ten Social Studies topic of (for Canadians especially, British) sovereignty and (American-style) self-sovereignty and the nature, occasion and limits of submission.

Echoes, then, of a decision to be seen to belong in this multifarious world this way, veiled from something of its gaze and telling us something of the unremitting glare of that gaze and its pretenses.

That student also voiced a profound idea about herself and her classmates. Some of her female classmates believe that they are free to dress any way they want and if a boy ogles them, it is the boy's fault. She, on the other hand, suggested that how she is looked at, the gaze she attracts, affects who she is, and that it is her responsibility, at least in part, to protect how she is seen, because letting herself be seen a certain way is who she is. You become who you are in the

witness of the world with which you surround yourself. If you surround yourself with ogling gazes, you become someone.

This, among, of course, clusters of other threads, is a reason for the troublesome demand to remove the hijab. This is also a troublesome reminder of the hollowing effect of being a young female who is nothing but gazed at--Paris, Lindsay, Britney, Nicole and the Olsens come to mind, and the fact that this list will seem positively ancient and out of date in a year is, of course, precisely the point. We bounce, here, between anorexia and obesity, between too much and too little, between darkness and hiddenness and security threats, and paparazzi unveiled glare.

Again, "understanding begins when something addresses us" (Gadamer 1989, 299). But what occurs in such moment of address is that something starts to slow around these classroom events and the memorial ruminations they spawn, and memory starts to double in on itself and coalesce and become compositional. I want to remember this, but this remembering is not simply an issue of brute storage, but of exaggerating (Gadamer 1989, 115), forgetting (15-16), seeking out resemblances or versimilitues or family resemblances as places to place such a memory safely, a place it can take root, be restored and recalled.

Something, in remembering, starts to form, to shape (this is what that whole "transformation into structure" section is about in Truth and Method, when the "to and fro" [1989, 114ff.] of play starts to become "a play," that is, a "work" that somehow begins to "stand there" with a life of its own [this is the Da of Heidegger's (1962) Dasein. But something else starts to happen in such memory work.

I gather things in memory, but then, as Clarissa Pinkola-Estes (1992, 27-8) describes so wonderfully, I also sing over these bones and something happens:

The sole work of La Loba is the collecting of bones. She is known to collect and preserve especially that which is in danger of being lost to the world. . . . [H]er specialty is said to be wolves.

She creeps and crawls and sifts through the montanas. . . and arroyos. . . looking for wolf bones, and when she has assembled an entire skeleton, when the last bone is in place and the beautiful white sculpture of the creature is laid out before her, she sits by the fire and thinks about what song she will sing.

And when she is sure, she stands over the critura, raises her arms and sings out. That is when the rib bones and leg bones of the wolf begin to flesh out and the creature becomes furred. La Loba sings some more, and more of the creature comes into being; its tail curls upward, shaggy and strong.

And La Loba sings more and the wolf creature begins to breathe.

And La Loba sings so deeply that the floor of the desert shakes, and as she sings, the wolf opens its eyes, leaps up, and runs away down the canyon.

Clarissa Pinkola-Estes' re-citing of the tale of La Loba can be read as

an expression of the deep experience that hermeneutic writing entails. It is a mytho-poetic evocation of the life of those who, in some sense, gather together the dry bones of a particular topic (snippets, passages, citations, references, suggestions, turns of phrase, hints, clues and page numbers, all the bones of the old place, the resting place) and who must carefully and patiently sing over them, hoping that they will come to life, hoping that the song sung, this enchantment, will result in a re-enchantment (Berman, 1983) and a reanimation of the world—a wonderful twinning of the formative power of the living Word and its profound helplessness (Gadamer, 1989, 390) before the ways of things.

Right in the midst of dwelling on these old bones and worrying them in memory, something leaps up with a life of its own (which is precisely what the phenomenological presumption of hermeneutics pursues in its compositional work, an experience of the lebensweltlichkeit--the "life-worldliness" of something. Here is the great difference. For phenomenology, this life-worldliness is a given that is presented to consciousness is phenomenological reflection. For hermeneutics, it is not a given. It is "a task for consciousness and an achievement that is demanded of it" [Gadamer 1989, 127).

Properly worried over, properly cared for and remembered, these things keep "coming up," erupting and interrupting of their own accord, asking for attention, needing something from me, it seems. This is a reason why Gadamer (1989, 366) suggests that understanding is "more a passion than an action. A question presses itself upon us", thus undermining the subjective-activity centeredness of constructivism and its consorts (see Jardine 2006a, 123-136):

In a very literal and deeply bodily, deeply phenomenological sense, these events worry me as much as I worry over them:

I am not anthropomorphizing. It's more like a thing is a phenomenological presentation, with a depth, a complexity, a purpose, in a world of relations, with a memory, a history. And if we look at it this way we might begin to hear it. It's an aesthetic appreciation of how things present themselves and that therefore they are in some way formed, ensouled, and are speaking to the imagination. This way of looking is a combination of the Neoplatonic anima mundi and pop art: that even a beer can or a freight car or a street sign has an image and speaks of itself beyond being a dead throwaway object (Hillman, 1982, pp. 132-3).

Thus, the image of being culpable for the gaze I attract--in remembering such an event, what begins is a shift in temporality and an ontological shift. What begins is a whiling over it, a whiling that seeks out the worth of that while (the keep-seeking of kinships and family resemblances that shape the inventorial, root of invenio) while, at the same time, makes the thing worth while through whiling (the inventive root of invenio).

What starts to occur is an experience of things that breaks the surveillance-gaze and mastery-pretensions of subjectivity (and its rude consort, "objectivity"). Whiling "breaks open the being of the object" (Gadamer 1989, 382) and we begin to experience how things are not simply arms-length objects in which we have no stake and we are not worldless subjects living inside our own experiences.. Such a

belief in the being of things and the nature of our selves is simply an outcome of how they have been treated.

Rather, in whiling, things start to regard us and tell us about ourselves in ways we could not have experienced without such whiling. And we become selves that recognize themselves in the recognition of the world:

All things show faces, the world not only a coded signature to be read for meaning, but a physiognomy to be faced. As expressive forms, things speak; they show the shape they are in. They announce themselves, bear witness to their presence: "Look, here we are." They regard us beyond how we may regard them, our perspectives, what we intend with them, and how we dispose of them. (Hillman 1982, 77)

But they will only regard us, speak to us, if we treat them properly. "Look, here we are" is not a phenomenological or ecological given. It is a task to be taken up, a dedication whose consequences must be suffered.

#### IV

Several weeks after that cluster of conversations and musings, I returned to a lovely Website that houses "unpublished" work by Ivan Illich. I'd been reading Illich's work on fragmentation, commodification and regimes of scarcity as a way of thinking through what might be meant by "curriculum in abundance" (Jardine, Friesen & Clifford 2006). All this was a follow-up to considering how classrooms might function as gift-economies (see Jardine, Clifford & Friesen 2003, 211-222) rather than market economies where regimes of scarcity reign.

In such market economies, "time is always running out" (Berry 1983, 76). The time involved here, in the efficiency movement's fragmenting of the living disciplines entrusted to teachers and students in schools is not while-time simply sped up. Rather, this time is "empty"--"measuring time [as distinct from whiling time] requires a separation of the temporal units which measure from that which is measured; to separate time from its contents is to 'empty' it." (Ross 2004, discussing Gadamer [1970]). In light of such an empty measured-time, things are no longer understood to have a time of their own. Rather, things are rendered measurable by such empty, formal, clockwork temporality and thus things lose their while--things no longer are all of their relations and kinships and family resemblances, not any of the beckonings that might haunt us and call for our thinking (see Heidegger 1968). We can no longer say of something that "only in the multifariousness of voices [does it] exist" (Gadamer 1989, 284). Empty time fragments things, cuts their bloodlines and reduces their multifariousness to singularity--the singular voice of empty, leveling, measurable surveillance.

Once time becomes detached from that which it measures, quite literally nothing holds time at bay, nothing can cause it to linger or tarry. Worse yet, once time becomes thus clocked independently of that which it measures, this temporality of industrial fragmentation demands the fragmentation of that which it measures and measures the truth of things by the ability to control, predict and manipulate such fragments. This is why, following James Hillman's admonition cited above, that we might suggest that such empty time is a form of anthropomorphism, but it is a special form. It isn't the living, Earthly



body (morphos) of humanity or the Earth-bodies of things that are the measure. It is the morphology of an abstract idea into which we have shaped ourselves: clock-watchers whose lives have become machined. Anthropos has rendered itself into surveillable DNA sequences, or into the image of computer storage and retrieval, or scannable identity cards and the like. As many teachers have said, in one way or another, we and our students and the disciplines entrusted to us all become rendered to fit the institutional machine of schooling.

Once it is compositionally and topically unheld, fragmented time can only try to become fulsome through accelerating (this again is a lived-experience in schools caught in empty time and its effluence). Cut off from the while of things, there is nothing to hold memory and attention and experience in place, nothing to call it to collect itself or attend or return. Time speeds up. Whiling appears as a luxurious waste of time that many teachers have told me they would pursue with their students if it were not for how many fragmented things needed covering and the fact that time's running out.

To repeat, there is something worse yet. We start to believe that we live in a world where nothing requires a while. We experience a world in which nothing is asked of us beyond what we ask of it:

The Gadamerian dystopia is not unlike others. In his version, to be glib, little requires human application, so little cultivates it. Long alienated from abiding in inquiry as a form of life and a way of being, a restless humanity defers to models, systems, operations, procedures, the ready-made strategic plan. (Ross 2004).

The time things need from us is forgone in favor of the time we have to "cover" them in class, and in such measured time, as every teacher has experienced in the institution of schooling, there is never enough time to take a while over something and make it worthwhile. Thus rendered under the demand of another, measured-time becomes akin to the Straw-gaze that Moslem women were asked submit to. It renders.

The sovereignty of the fragmented, measured-time curriculum disassembly is, of course, on behalf of the ease of management and surveillance. In measured time, ideally, nothing happens. Things just occur according to the rules that measured time has measured out for things, or they deviate from such a measure and need realignment. In such a light, whiling now appears as a potential threat to the security and orderliness and manageability and surpriselessness that measured-time demands of that which it renders.

In whiling you can happen upon something unanticipated.

Insurgency is possible. Something can "come up" of its own accord, "over and above our wanting and doing" (Gadamer 1989, xxviii). Whiling is epiphantic, and, thus, because it cannot lay out in advance what will happen, it appears veiled and suspicious.

After all, the voices say, what are those teachers and students up to who while over the hijab even though the curriculum guides don't say that it needs to be covered? (A pitiful pun, I know).

On this Illich-related website (see [www.davidtinapple.com/illich](http://www.davidtinapple.com/illich)) there are two papers I spotted that I hadn't quite seen before. My susceptibility to seeing them was a vestige of memory and its composition. Their titles have now become full of address: "Protecting the Gaze in an Age of Show (2001.)" And "The Scoptic Past and the Ethics of the Gaze (2001a)." In these paper Illich speaks of what he names, in another context (2005, 108), the "custodia oculorum, the guarding of the eye" that was once a commonplace idea in European thought (and clearly, from that Grade Ten conversation, an idea borne somewhere near the heart of Islam):

Until quite recently, the guard of the eyes was not look upon as a fad, nor written off as internalized repression. Our taste was trained to judge all forms of gazing on the other. (Illich 2001, 5).

In 726, the emperor Leo III had the icon of Christ torn from the tympanum of his palace's bronze gate, to be replaced by a naked cross. In this event, three distinct currents find a common expression: the Old Testament awe rejecting any visualization of the Word of God that touches the flesh, the heart of the believer; the later Muslim exaltation of the sound of the Koran with whose majesty and beauty no picturing of the Almighty could possibly compete; and, of course, the Greek Ikono-skepsis, the philosophical hesitancy in giving the weight of truth to representations. (Illich 2001a, 7).

Like any of the good fields entrusted to teachers and students in school, (curriculum) topics emerge and show their fullness and richness and abundance if they are worked carefully and in ways proper to them and their (sometimes contested, sometimes contradictory, sometimes worthy of repudiating or valuing or re-evaluating in light of new circumstances) familial limits. After all, who would have imagined on September 10 that the vitality and difficulty and particular ancestries and worries about a Canadian Social Studies curriculum topics like "multiculturalism" or "sovereignty" would have turned out quite like this? They need our while anew.

If we a surrounded, not by the living world but by surveilled and manageable fragments rendered by measured-time, this has an effect. As with the zero-sum scarcity regimes of market economies, "it nullifies precedent, it snaps the threads of memory and scatters local knowledge. By privileging individual choice over the common good, it makes relationships revocable and provisional"(Gray1998, 35-6). We become something under the gaze of such revocability. If we surround ourselves with fragments, we become fragmented, isolated, entrenched, tribalized, paranoid, and any sense of relatedness or worldliness is simply a site of a possible security breach. If we surround ourselves with things that are trivial and cheap, our lives become trivial and cheap. If learning becomes just "for show" on an exam and no longer about the formation of our lives, our lives become susceptible to the trivializing and infantilizing flicker of the business of show (this hides the great critiques in hermeneutics of the metaphysics of presence). In being formed by such flickering, I become:

the ideal-type channel-hopping MTV viewer who flips through different images at such speed that she/he is unable to chain the signifiers together into a meaningful narrative, he/she merely enjoys the multiphrenic intensities and sensations of the surface

This was written in 1994. The enjoyment of such multiphrenic intensities and sensations of the surface of things is now, post 9/11, underwritten by a paranoia about what is hidden behind the imaginal veil. And it links back, too, to those older musings about regimes of scarcity and market economies:

People whose governing habit is the relinquishment of power, competence and responsibility, and whose characteristic suffering is the anxiety of futility, make excellent spenders. They are the ideal consumers. By inducing in them little panics of boredom, powerlessness, sexual failure, mortality, paranoia, they can be made to buy virtually anything that is 'attractively packaged'. (Berry 1986, 24)

Illich (2001, 3) asks us "'What can I do to survive in the midst of show?' not 'how do I improve show business'."

Tarrying, involving the "temporal structure of being moved" and occasioning "durationalless" time. . . suggests a most practical and accessible solution [to this issue of how to survive], demonstrating how practice is a solution. "The Weile [the 'while' in Verweilen, tarrying] has this very special temporal structure" (Ross 2004, citing, at the end of this passage, Gadamer 2001 ).

## VI

Obviously such streams of consequence and gathering get out of hand very easily when whiling is trying to be portrayed in narrative form, because each of these incidentals and their "interweaving and crisscrossing" (Wittgenstein 1968, 36) is only especially sensible if such matters are compositionally experienced and undergone, not simply rattled off in some "brainstorm" wherein none of the possibilities tossed around are taken especially seriously. That is what is meant by suggesting that the scattershot fragmentation of attention has a practical solution.

Whiling must be practiced in order to be understood. This is why hermeneutics cannot be adequately described procedurally and why the proper first response to the question of "How do you do hermeneutics?" is "What is your topic?" Without the worldly resistance of a topic and the topical work of memory, composition and composure around this or that topic--without the "fecundity of the individual case" (Gadamer 1989, 33)--hermeneutics doesn't "work" because it has nothing to work in concert with, no "other" to heed, no vestiges, no need to compose myself, nothing over which to while.

Equally obvious is that what starts to occur in the task of whiling is that we begin to experience the matters we are whiling over as something that "outplays" us. We begin to experience the fact that the thing under consideration is itself and not us. With measured time, the thing measured comes more and more into our purview, under our gaze, in our control and subjected to our demands. With spending time over things that are worth while, something else occurs:

When any of us think of those things in the world that

we dearly love—the music of Duke Ellington, the contours of a powerful novel and how it envelopes us if we give ourselves over to it, the exquisite architectures of mathematical geometries, the old histories and stories of this place, the rows of garden plants that need our attention and devotion and care, varieties of birds and their songs, the perfect sound of an engine that works well, the pull of ice under a pair of skates, and on and on—we understand something in our relation to these things about how excessiveness might be basic to such love. We do not seek these things out and explore them again and again simply for the profit that we might gain in exchanging what we have found for something else. What we have found, in exploring and coming to understanding, to learn to live well with these things is not an arms-length commodity but has become part of who we are, and how we carry ourselves in the world. We love them and we love what becomes of us in our dedication to them. And, paradoxically, the more we understand of them, the better—richer, more intriguing, more complex, more ambiguous and full and multiple of questions—they become, and the more we realize that gobbling them up into a knowing that we can commodify, possess and exchange is not only undesirable. It is impossible. We realize, in such knowing, that the living character of the things we love will, of necessity, outstrip our own necessarily finite and limited experience, memory, and exploration (Jardine, Clifford & Friesen 2003, 208).

## VII

So long as [these curriculum topics are] not placed in the object-world of producing and marketing [the object-world, of course, of measured time, not of while], [they are able to] draw us entirely outside of ourselves and impose [their] own presence on us. [They] no longer [have] the character of an object that stands over against us; we are no longer able to approach this like an object of knowledge, grasping, measuring and controlling. Rather than meeting us in our world, it is much more a world into which we ourselves are drawn. (Gadamer 1994, 191-2).

This final section is, in part, a memo to myself as a teacher. I have witnessed, over and over again, the profound thoughtfulness that teachers and students can display in their whiling over the world, if their time and the topics they while over are treated properly and they are allowed to become untethered from the time-measured panics of schooling. Such untethering is difficult, life-long work and, given the pervasiveness of the spells of measured time, engaging in such work is not necessarily viewed as honorable by one's colleagues. This, again, is Gadamer's version of dystopia: in the day to day work of most schools, "little requires human application, so little cultivates it" and those who pursue such whiling cultivate can seem pretentious, perhaps even mad.

I have witnessed, too, over the twenty years I've worked in schools in the Calgary area, how intellectually vigorous and sound is the work so many teachers and students have done once they are able to get their bearings in the often-wild whiles of things. The intellectual and

spiritual pleasure to be experienced, and the honorability of the suffering such whiling requires, is beautiful and true.

Finally, there is another connection that links up some of the phenomenological rootedness of hermeneutics with what I believe is a profoundly ecological idea. Here is a difficult hint in a commentary by Hans-Georg Gadamer on the work of one of his great teachers, Martin Heidegger:

The existing thing does not simply offer us a recognizable and familiar surface contour; it also has an inner depth of self-sufficiency that Heidegger calls "standing-in-itself." The complete unhiddenness of all beings, their total objectification (by means of a representation that conceives things in their perfect state [fully given, fully present, fully presented, finished]) would negate this standing-in-itself of beings and lead to a total leveling of them. A complete objectification of this kind would no longer represent beings that stand in their own being. Rather, it would represent nothing more than our opportunity for using beings, and what would be manifest would be the will that seizes upon and dominates things. [In whiling over something rather than rendering it in measured time] we experience an absolute opposition to this will-to-control, not in the sense of a rigid resistance to the presumption of our will, which is bent on utilizing things, but in the sense of the superior and intrusive power of a being reposing in itself. (Gadamer 1977, 226-7).

Worthwhile things are thus experienced as standing-in-themselves, "over and above our wanting and doing" (Gadamer 1989, xxviii). As anyone rapt of the Earth's ways will understand, it takes quite a while to experience the while of the Earth and its ways.

As hinted at above, having become more experienced about some thing through whiling our time away over it has a strange result: what is experienced "increases in being" (Gadamer 1989, 40) while our knowledge of such things becomes more and more incommensurate with the thing itself. Things become experienced as having their own measure. We begin to experience them as there. Understanding such things is no longer a matter of mastery and control which forces things to face this way and unveil. Things reposing in themselves do not just face this way.

But we must work to cultivate an experience of such repose. It takes time and practice to learn how to treat things well. It takes a while to let things repose ("letting things be" is how Heidegger [1962] defined phenomenology). Even here, in the meager beginnings of ventures in this paper into the gaze, into sovereignty and the strange positioning of Islam in the iconophilic midst of a contemporary Canadian high school, we can start to recognize ourselves in this mess of the world. We can start to experience ourselves, not as having such matters belonging to us, but as belonging to and implicated in such matters. This is what is meant by something being worthwhile: Our knowledge of the world instructs us first of all that the world is greater than our knowl-edge of it. To those who rejoice in abundance and intricacy, this is a source of joy. To those who hope for knowledge equal to (capable of controlling) the world, it is a source of unre-mitting defeat and bewilderment. (Berry 1983, 56).

This constitutes an ontological assurance about the abundant while of things and about the worthwhileness of treating things with such soft and loving assurance. This love of the while of things is an assurance around which pedagogy, hermeneutics and ecology turn.

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