

# *Hitler's Car as Curriculum Text: Reading Adolescents Reading History*

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One of the more prominent exhibits at the Canadian War Museum is a black Mercedes-Benz bulletproof limousine that was once used by Hitler as a parade car (CBC 2000, Cobb 2000). The vehicle, which has been part of the museum's collection since 1970, is a source of both controversy and fascination, a dynamic that I witnessed recently while using the museum as a field site for teaching. The context was an educational foundations course that I taught in a pre-service teacher education program. As part of the curriculum students debated theories of child and adolescent development and considered the possibilities and limits of teaching and learning from histories of genocide and war. The museum visit was an opportunity to further animate the learning theories we had explored in class.

In total I took approximately 150 teacher candidates to the museum, on four separate occasions. One of the pedagogical tasks involved making connections between museum programming and our classroom discussions and so I devised a worksheet to help students orient their discovery of the exhibits in the permanent collection<sup>1</sup>. Since our field trip was scheduled during public school hours and several school groups were visiting the museum, teacher candidates had a chance to notice the displays to which children and youth were drawn. In their culminating

assignment for the course many of the teacher candidates wrote passionately about what they had observed, speculating as to why young visitors were attracted to certain exhibits and commenting on the various reactions they had witnessed. Their written papers described how the museum promoted the moral development of children and youth but I was surprised to encounter a different kind of narrative, one that I did not initially expect. These alternative accounts offered insight into how teacher candidates construct the time of childhood and adolescence in relation to narratives of moral citizenship, national identity, nostalgia and loss.

An over-riding theme in the papers made these constructions particularly apparent: many teacher candidates remarked on the profound interest that adolescent visitors took in Hitler's car, a display that is part of the WWII exhibit. According to their accounts, they were most disturbed by the ways in which adolescents responded to the car. Instead of expressing moral outrage towards a material object that, for my students, held so much symbolic evil, the young visitors were in awe of the display. Many posed for pictures beside it while uttering phrases such as "awesome!" and "cool!" To witness the adolescent visitor responding to Hitler's staff car with exclamations of awe was profoundly disturbing to my students, who wrote about it in their essays with zeal. While many interpreted these utterances as inappropriate and most likely the result of bad teaching, bad parenting, or just bad museological practices, I would like to suggest a different analytic framework.

Though adolescents' responses to the car do signal the need for pedagogical framing, an issue I revisit in later arguments, my intent with this paper is not to provide an instruction on 'how to' elicit appropriate moral responses to symbols of war. Rather, I give some thought to how adolescent exclamations such as "awesome" and "cool" narrate the conflicts of learning at stake when the curriculum contains representations of social trauma and war. Further, I reflect on how *adult*

interpretations of adolescent life can foreclose and enable consideration of such work. Several research questions are raised: How do adults 'read' adolescents reading history and understand adolescents' emotional connections to difficult historical objects? And, what can adult interpretations of adolescent life tell us about the construction of adolescence in relation to narratives of social redemption and hope?

Exploring the adult world that endeavors to contain adolescent experience is important if one is to think about the conditions of classroom learning within which youth encounter and make meaning from representations of traumatic history. I am particularly interested in what happens to learning when conflict as it is represented in the world outside meets conflict within the individual's inner world or psychology. Felman (1992), one of the key initiators of the link between pedagogy and trauma, suggests that one reason educational encounters with difficult histories are challenging is because the learner is asked to make significance from experiences that break the frame of human understanding. Instead of closure, an encounter with social devastation and loss might bring the self into contact with the reality of one's emotional ties to others, an encounter which may itself be traumatic. This emotional experience too must be symbolized if the learner is to construct meaning from the meeting of outer and inner worlds.

I give some thought to these pedagogical dynamics as they are dramatized in the written narratives submitted by students in my course. I reflect on two dynamics of encounter with Hitler's staff car that these accounts animate: how adolescents encounter the car and how teacher candidates interpret adolescents encountering the car. While it is not every adolescent who will respond to Hitler's staff car with an exclamation of glee, I am no less fascinated by what this expression might signal with regard to the quality of emotional attachment being made. Equally so, I am curious about ways in which teacher candidates interpret these expressions.

Though an object of material history, the social and cultural narratives that produce the car as a curricular text make it also a subject of learning. But what lessons of history does the car teach? Of the rise of Nazism and its destructive power? Of social fascination with the villains of history? Of war trophies and the details of their capture and display? Each of these questions (and there are more) hints at the narrative threads that situate the car in historical and museological context. While I briefly touch on the material history of the car, my primary interest is with how adolescents and beginning teachers variously encounter the car and how their distinct learning projects – learning to grow up and learning to teach – are implicated in the promise of progress that public history education suggests. Further, I consider the project of public history education as a story of the conflicts of modernity itself. What I am concerned with is how adolescence, as a lived experience and socially defined category<sup>2</sup>, symbolizes the nostalgic hope for an adult world reconciled as free from war and human suffering. The problem for history education is how adult phantasies of adolescent life foreclose or enable the difficult psychological work of growing into adulthood, which also entails learning to make an ethical relation to human suffering and loss.

In what follows, I put forward a view of historicity that considers how one's present-day attachments to historical objects repeat the dynamics of earlier psychological conflicts, including the conflicts of learning to find the self in the world. To make sense of these psychological dynamics I draw on the psychoanalytic concept of interpretation, which offers a view on how to think with emotional experience. I then consider how the process of coming to know the self in relation to history converges with redemptive models of commemorative practice.

## Historical Time

To understand history as an interpretive encounter between external and internal reality rather than simply a representation of the world outside means that we face the problem of relationality: of how one experiences the self in relation to others and how that encounter is shaped by one's own psychical history. This paper makes the claim that histories of material conditions include our emotional ties to others and that that our ways of knowing history are both cultural and emotional. My intent is to provoke dialogue about what it can mean to learn from, as well as about, historical experience and to reflect on the pedagogical conditions and dilemmas that enable this instruction. For instance, Hitler's private limousine is a cultural artifact of World War II and so brings the events of that conflict into the presence of the museum visitor. What this encounter offers, however, is more than a series of historical facts. There is an emotional response too. Each sentiment, whether curiosity, fascination, horror or grief (to name just a few), tells a unique story about how one attaches to knowledge when that knowledge returns the shock of genocide and social victimization. We may be reminded of the fragility of our own beginnings and the vulnerabilities of making and sustaining the self in a harsh world. Thus, an encounter with the car brings more than the historical evidence to light – also revealed are the emotional conflicts of making a relationship to representations on the outside that aggravate forgotten struggles within.

It is Freud's (1915) claim that in psychical life time has no reference (191), so that when one meets new experience it is difficult to distinguish the conflicts that belong to the past from those which respond to the present. It is this meeting of inner and outer worlds that allows us to learn how we are constituted in the histories we engage. The question is one of how to interpret emotional experience and to notice how interpretations gather social and cultural meaning. Because I am

interested in conceptual models that account for the affective dimensions of human encounter I look to psychoanalytic inquires of learning and experience to understand these dynamics (Britzman 1998, 2007; Farley 2006; A. Freud 1979; Gilbert 2007; Waddell 1999; Winnicott 1971).

Psychoanalytic models of interpretive practice inspire the method of 'reading' that I bring to this study. A feature of the clinical relationship, the status of interpretive technique has been hotly debated in the psychoanalytic literature since the time of Freud. I find use in Lacan's description of interpretation as a kind of "tactical device" (Evans 1996, 89) used by the analyst to help the analysand explore the unconscious knowledge that structures expressions of conflict. By subverting conscious patterns of meaning making, interpretation in the Lacanian sense seeks not to unearth or discover some hidden truth but rather, following Evans (1996), to disrupt meaning:

An interpretation...is simply a tactical device aimed at enabling the analysand to continue speaking when the flow of associations has become blocked. The value of an interpretation does not lie in its correspondence with reality, but simply in its power to produce certain effects (89).

Simply put, the work of interpretation, as Evans (1996) points out, is to provoke not resolve. Similarly, my endeavor to 'read' adolescents reading history resists the demand to settle meaning about what it is that adolescents really think and feel. Instead, I try to stay close to the psychical conflicts at stake in their encounter with the car. Here is the methodological problem as I see it: moving too quickly towards interpretive conclusions neglects the complex emotional work of making a relation to representations that return the traumatic past<sup>3</sup>. The desire for closure may be a defense against the anxieties that such representations provoke.

Considering this same dynamic but from the perspective of the visitor to the museum, we again meet the problem of how moves toward conclusion can stall rather than proliferate meaning. The various moral and commemorative purposes set out by sites of memory may inhibit the flow of associations one makes in relation to particular museum objects. What is then foreclosed to the visitor is the opportunity to symbolize more freely the affective dynamics at play. We see this in the mandate of the Canadian War Museum, *"to remember – to preserve – to educate"* and *"...to help ensure that the memory and meaning of Canada's military past will never be forgotten"* ([www.warmuseum.ca](http://www.warmuseum.ca)). There is an interpretive directive here that reminds me of the adage, often present at sites of memory, *"to never forget"*. I feel there is something tacit about this interpretive plea that borders on a reproach. The precise difficulty is articulated by Simon et al (2000) who provide us with the concept of *"remembrance as a strategic practice"* (3). Strategic remembrance, the authors argue, is flawed in the sense that memory work is constructed as consolatory rather than interrogative, resulting in the urge to *"tell again, and to tell with increased urgency"* (4) which brings about *"an absolutist moral demand that one listen"* (4). In my view, the moral demand elides the pedagogical work of learning from that past because it defends against the more intimate horrors that traumatic narratives present and re-present for us. These affective dilemmas the cliché cannot address.

Even as the term trauma describes the range of human difficulties that characterize experiences of profound helplessness and breakdown, an encounter with trauma may repeat those same qualities. There is something about trauma that is difficult to situate – experience comes before understanding is made and so the self feels unmoored – significance is belated and not easy to recognize. The self is vulnerable. There is the external world - the social awakening to trauma and human devastation as it is met through narrative; but also the inner world or psychical reality that shapes our interpretation of, and response to, that

encounter. The worry is that one will be touched by the story of another in ways that disturb. When, in educational contexts, we encounter representations of social devastation and war, the abject outside resonates with the abject within. Discord is made. The question is one of how think with emotional experience. Learning, in this sense, is the work of being human. While both adolescent and adult share this work, it is different work. One of the struggles of this project is to conceptualize how difficult it is for adults to separate their own conflicts of making a relationship to history from those of the adolescent learner, and to encounter the adolescent as more than a story of historical consolation.

### The Car

A preliminary sketch of the car's genealogy will provide a context for further discussion. The Canadian War Museum acquired the vehicle in 1970 as a donation from a private collector (Pulsifer 1999). Originally thought to be Goering's staff car, historical research revealed the correct provenance: from 1940 – 1943 it was used by Adolf Hitler as a private staff vehicle (Kosche 1982). This new association has had a profound significance on both the ways in which the museum has chosen to display the object as well as how the visitor reacts to it. Pulsifer (1999) suggests that the identification of the object with Hitler

...not only greatly increased its monetary value, but transformed its significance, both for the museum itself and for the visiting public...Its positive identification as a car that had been used by the Fuhrer himself imputed to it new meaning and levels of significance that transcended its status as a car, even one with known Nazi provenance...It is a constant of museum life that, however intrinsically fascinating a piece is in its own right, a perceived association with a famous or infamous figure tends to enhance its interest to the public. And this in turn can provide the museum with a useful tool that can help to explain historical developments and the unfolding of historical events. (74)

I want to think closely about Pulsifer's claim that it is the celebrated status of the car more than the object itself that might leverage the visitor's attention. A "tool" after all is an instrument and perhaps an apt metaphor if one sees the museum as the chronicler of historic events that require chiseling into public memory. It would be easy to dismiss Pulsifer's intuition about the transcendent status of a car "that had been used by the Fuhrer himself" as a play for museological spectacle, something that does warrant critical consideration. But I think there is more to his insight than the troubling view that one's affective engagement with historical objects serves merely to spice up the otherwise dry story of history's development. Taking his perspective seriously we might ask, how do such objects ignite and engage an emotional response and for what educative purpose?

Recent studies by scholars of history education explore models of understanding that help us to apprehend how emotional life works in historical learning (Farley 2006, Lazare 2005). Drawing on perspectives in cognitive psychology that propose to construct insight as it is made from the learner's point of view, Lazare (2005) investigates how adolescents gain a "feeling for the past" through their study of historical texts. And yet in this framework there is a compulsion to know or reconstruct the student's perspective that forgets how claims of mastery defend against or resist the work of uncertainty in making a relation to knowledge. Indeed, there is a view that the time of history is always already outside of the self. Conversely, Farley's (2006) study of presentations created by students for a national heritage fair, views learner's attachments to historical narratives as psychical events that describe the struggle of coming to know the world as historical. Drawing on the psychoanalytic concept of identification, she explores why the mythic and romantic aspects of history are so beguiling to young learners. Children's fascination with heroic and tragic narratives, she suggests, may indicate

a crucial position of learning in which phantasies of what was and what might be organize a relation to reality before one is ready to approach the losses of history, including ones own. Though identification may not enable a critical or ethical relation to history - in the sense that the emotional tie is with a phantasized or ego-driven version of the historical other as opposed to recognition of the other's radical difference from the self - it might frame the complex emotional work of "trying to represent the world as historical, that is, before the time of the self" (1021).

Farley (2006) makes the argument that making a relation to historical narratives involves a process of psychological attachment. This same point is evident in Pulsifer's (1999) claim that public interest in historical archives and museological objects must be somehow *won over*. With regard to Hitler's car, what is implied by the notion that a car in the museum's collection, "even one with known Nazi provenance" (74) may not be enough to "enhance" (74) public interest in learning about World War II without that villainous connection? What makes the correlation of the car with Hitler so potent and what quality of psychological attachment is at play? Objects themselves, while they represent the historical, do not give it meaning - it is rather one's associations that symbolize the connection between thought and feeling. On how history works within psychological life, Green (2000) proposes a strange affair, an intermingling of reality with desire:

The historical could be defined as a combination of: what has happened; what has not happened; what could have happened; what has happened to someone else but not to me; what could not have happened; and finally - to summarize all these alternatives about what has happened - a statement that one would not have even dreamed of as a representation of what really happened. (2-3)

Green's comment on history reminds us to consider the slippery nature of our relation to the world. One of the issues raised by traumatic history is that reality loses its capacity to be interpreted because the

boundaries between subjective and objective experience become confused. When we try to stabilize the object in order to have a proper response to 'what really happened' without a theory of what happens to us when we confront painful events, we miss the significance of our emotional connection to historical objects.

The curatorial controversies surrounding the exhibition of the car are a good illustration of the trouble of trying to concretize the work of memorial learning. What I find relevant are the ways in which the museum draws on the visitor's emotional attachments in order to generate interest in military history, which, at least from the standpoint of the museum, is an ongoing concern with respect to the generation of revenue and the promotion of civic education. The problem is not with the provocation of phantasmic association but rather with the lack attention towards the conditions of meaning making within which such associations might conceivably gain significance. An overview of the exhibition history will make this apparent.

Discrepancies over the correct provenance of the car plagued museum staff until further historical research finally identified it as one of seven limousines at Hitler's personal disposal (Pulsifer 1999). From 1984 – 2000 it was exhibited at the war museum's first location on Sussex Drive in Ottawa (Pulsifer 1999)<sup>4</sup>. In that context, the car was displayed next to a partial reproduction of what appeared to be the exterior wall of a traditional German post and beam style dwelling. Nazi paraphernalia, including a swastika banner, a bust of Hitler and a mannequin dressed in SS attire, completed the spectacle. According to Pulsifer (1999) the exhibit was intended to bring critical awareness to Nazism as a significant factor in the developments of WWII (74). Despite curators' attempts to situate the car within a specific circuit of meaning, the critical response for which they had hoped was not forthcoming. Instead, public sentiment expressed exactly the opposite,

that glorification of the Nazi regime was the closer result: “the car and the exhibit did invoke what might be termed the Leni Riefenstahl view of Hitler, with its emphasis on adulating crowds, torchlight parades and Nuremburg rallies, more than on the Hitler of military aggression, racist politics and the Holocaust” (Pulsifer 1999, 75). Though collective criticism of the exhibit led to an attempt, in 1991, to further stabilize meaning by the addition of a series of small photographs depicting the Nazi death camps, the pedagogical and interpretive problems of the exhibit remained unresolved (75). In a media interview almost 10 years later, Jack Granatstein, then director of the museum, reported that the exhibit was “badly done, objectionable and conflicts with the war museum’s mandate” (Cobb 2000). He went on to remark that:

If you look at the car the instinct is to say, ‘Hitler must have been a real cool guy to have such a sharp car’. People come away with a sense of power and glamour of that regime rather than its horror. Because of the passage of time, and a lack of historical knowledge, Hitler is as far removed for most Canadians as Napoleon and Julius Caesar. They don’t have the context because they know nothing about Hitler or the Second World War. (Cobb 2000)

Reading these comments I think that Granatstein has it exactly backward: it is the *car* that people find cool because of its proximity to Hitler, an association that suggests a relation of immediacy not one of distance. Further, I wonder if an object belonging to Granatstein’s other named icons - Napoleon, Julius Caesar - might not also bring history’s ghosts uncannily close. That public attachment to the car runs deep precisely because of its historical provenance became apparent during deliberations over whether to sell the vehicle and generate funds for the construction of the new museum (Cobb 2000). While the prospect of public auction had its own set of difficulties,

such as worries that the car might fall into “the wrong hands”, it was public outcry against the sale that secured the vehicle a home in the museum’s permanent collection (Cobb 2000).

But there is more to consider here. If, following Granatstein, the exhibit leaves the visitor with an impression of “power and glamour” at the expense of “horror”, what is “historical knowledge” that it returns to the viewer the shock of horror’s affective force? There is another view vis-à-vis Green’s (2000) description of history as made from the confluence of our phantasies for and defenses against, what was, what never was, and what might have been. This second perspective asks that we think our relation to historical representations (which may both glamorize and horrify) through the psychological dynamics of desire and resistance. It is this interplay between fascination and revulsion that is so difficult to hold on to when one tries to imagine the pedagogical work of the car. The problem is not how to stabilize the object so that the viewer might land on one side or the other of the split, but rather how to contain and represent those ambivalent tensions.

The re-location of the museum in 2005 to its current site at Vimy Place provided an opportunity for curators to revisit the exhibition strategy. While efforts to stabilize the narrative are still apparent, there are significant changes. The dioramic display has been displaced by a minimalist approach in which the car is simply presented on a raised platform that effectively separates it from the viewer. The “Riefenstahl” association, however, remains: mounted to the wall behind the car is a large iconic photograph of a Nazi Party rally at Nuremberg, reminiscent of Riefenstahl’s (1934) film *Triumph of the Will*<sup>5</sup>. From the perspective of the spectator, one looks forward over the heads of thousands of SS officers, towards a distant central dais

flying three Nazi banners. The photograph is black and white, save for the banners, which are photo-tinted red.

While an analysis of the symbolic content of this new display strategy is beyond the scope of this paper, I will remark on one important element of the vehicle restoration. When obtained by the museum from the private collector, curators took pains to rectify any inaccurate preservation details, except for the bullet-ridden windows left in place by the original restorer who felt that they “lent more authenticity to the war action the car had seen” (Pulsifer 1999, 69). Since there is no accurate historical record of exactly what war action the car had seen, this was mere speculation. Though captured from German snipers by American soldier just north of Salzburg in 1945, it is not clear how the bullet marks to the vehicle were incurred (Pulsifer 1999, 73). These curatorial choices speak to the desire to evoke a particular historical narrative by inviting the projection of phantasy while at the same time condemning the production of an ‘incorrect’ response. The problem is not that historical objects generate phantasmic associations, but rather how our interpretations of these associations preclude or enable particular modes of historical understanding. But beyond the museum’s attempt to situate this particular historical object, what can an encounter with Hitler’s car mean?

### The Work of Psychic Learning

I now return to the adolescent utterances of which my students made note and consider what it might mean, in terms of psychic learning, to think of Hitler’s car as “awesome” or “cool”. Necessarily, I come at this discussion from two interrelated perspectives: that of the adolescent encountering the car and of the adult encountering the adolescent. These views are linked by the intimate tie between adolescence and adulthood: while adolescence is negotiated via the pushes and pulls of letting go of

the child-self even as adulthood beckons, what the adult perceives in the adolescent must pass through the memory of their own maturation. Here we approach the thorny territory of trying to understand historical conflict as it is lived on the inside in relation to the history of conflict on the outside. The first side of this relation requires that we enter the realm of the developmental conflicts and understand what the psychological labor of growing up asks of both the child and the youth and those around them. To do this I reflect on the psychical dynamics of finding and making a self in relation to others, which is the work of human development. I then consider what happens to development when the external environment reflects real or imagined relations of war and social breakdown. As Farley (2006) suggests, historical characters may join the host of those other significant adult figures against which the young child learns to negotiate a self that is distinct yet still attached. Identification with historical others, she argues, may "have less to do with history itself and more to do with the fulfillment of their own wishes" (1028). To understand this dynamic, we need to think about what the wishes of the young child might be.

Anna Freud's clinical work with young patients as well as her thinking about the implications of psychoanalysis for pedagogy has broadened our understanding of the psychic life of children and how education works to contain it. Her (1979) claim that "the education of the child begins with his first day of life" (39) conveys a sense of the conflicts at play between the child's wants and desires and the limitations of his environment. These limits, established initially through parental containment, family life and schooling, are the child's first instruction. Having to share parents with siblings, for example, is one of the first experiments in relating to others outside of the self. With these researches the child faces vulnerability and loss but gains, perhaps, a sense of their own identity.

One childish wish tells the story of sibling rivalry: the child desires the mother all to himself and so phantasizes the disappearance of his brothers and sisters. The conflict that inaugurates this figurative death foreshadows the one the child feels when the limits of education are brought against the wish: “an emotional conflict arises within him only when he notes that his mother, who loves these disturbing brothers and sisters (he cannot understand this at all), *requires him to give up* these evil desires, share the mother with them and even love them” (A. Freud 1979, 31 *my italics*). Here education is in the form of the constraints that the mother imposes on the child. Development involves learning to use constraints such as these to feel out new boundaries and expand one’s view of the self. It is for this reason, Anna Freud (1979) insists, that parents and teachers need to think about establishing limits that are neither too lenient nor exacting, a difficult task without a theory of what the child’s behavior might mean. One of Anna Freud’s crucial contributions to pedagogy is the recognition that what the child brings to their relations with other are “really additions to and repetitions of very old conflicts” (35). This realization is important precisely because it allows the adult to recognize, tolerate and support the immense creativity that goes into making a young self.

Anna Freud’s (1979) discussion of the relation between the child’s external environment and their psychical development is important to my project for two reasons. First, I am interested in how the boundaries established by history education are encountered by the young learner who must negotiate the developmental tasks of growing up against the goals of historical consciousness<sup>6</sup>. As a set of developmental objectives, the latter may involve (but is not limited to), gaining an awareness of what it means to be civically minded, establishing and expressing moral positions, making empathetic relations to others, having an appreciation for the human costs of war and social violence, engaging in collective forms of remembrance and developing what Lavalley (2004) calls the

capacity for “historical thinking” – “those intellectual and affective qualities students will need in the exercise of their civic responsibilities” (166). Each of these educational ‘goals’ expresses a desire to bend the young learner’s instincts towards a particular purpose, which begs the question of how that pedagogical influence is felt. The issue is one of how pedagogical conditions foreclose or allow the critical work of self-development, which may include the development of historical consciousness. The second challenge Anna Freud’s insights raise for my project has to do with how, despite the best wishes of history education, young learners make their own use of curricular objects including the limiting object of pedagogy itself.

Let us now consider more closely the dynamics of psychical development that adolescent responses to Hitler’s car might signal. Located as it is in a museum of Canadian war history, the car offers a particular set of historical lessons, but as we have seen via the controversies over the car’s exhibition, this curriculum is difficult to stabilize. Nevertheless, it is in reply to this expected curriculum that responses like “awesome” and “cool” seem not to fit. One possible curriculum to which these utterances do respond, is that of leaving childhood behind. Since the conflicts instantiated in the child’s early years have significance for both adolescence and adulthood, I want to begin with an example from childhood.

Anna Freud and Dorothy Burlingham’s (1943) account of their experiences supervising nurseries populated with children evacuated from London during WWII, provides for the reader a survey of children’s psychological responses to war time conditions. Their concern is with what happens when the external world fails to provide the containment that is so necessary for the child’s development, which includes negotiation of the instinctual drives<sup>7</sup>. These inner conflicts rage in the child and find sense in the meaning he makes of the world around him. When reality comes to the child too soon, which is the case, for

example, with the brutal conditions of war-time experience, the trouble, the authors suggest, is not that the child will be “shocked into illness” (24) but rather that “the destruction raging in the outer world may meet the very real aggressiveness which rages inside of the child” (24). The difficulty is that reality and phantasy have merged before the child has had time to render their distinction. Where external limits might have allowed the child to sublimate the force of their primitive wishes, the literal explosion of these limits due to war only confirms their veracity (24). The consequence of this failure to provide “the right proportion of instinct-gratification and instinct-restriction” (A. Freud 1979, 105), is not learning.

It goes without saying that in terms of external reality the brutal circumstances of war are distinct from the peace-time representation of those circumstances encountered in settings of public history education such as the Canadian War Museum. But the insight that I draw from Freud and Burlingham’s observations is how crucial it is for the child to learn how to distinguish between inside and outside. Once collapsed, the labor of development stalls. Britzman (1998) encapsulates the dynamic perfectly: “the difficulty of living in times of war is that war confirms the aggressive instincts of the human. The difficult in ignoring aggressive instincts in times of peace is that insight into the split between one’s own actions and feelings cannot be made” (128). If one of the aims of history education is for the learner to make a relation to experiences outside of the self, then pedagogy also needs “the right proportion of instinct-gratification and instinct-restriction” (A. Freud 1979, 105) for the child to distinguish the conflicts of the world from those of self-development. Now we come close to the dilemma earlier raised: how does the young learner attach to the past when, for a critical relation to be made, they must pass first through their own psychical present?

## Adolescent Encounters

Klein (1975) uses the term “object relations” to describe the range of psychical dynamics that organize our affective relations to others. The muddle of love and hatred that we feel is a constitutional conflict that persists throughout life (Klein1957). There is a struggle to hold onto both the good and bad parts of the self and their psychical representatives in the external world. This is the effort of instinct integration, itself a form of learning. The child, who cannot yet tolerate the existence of both of these feelings, acts out their confusion: the world is perceived to be either all good or all bad. Freud and Burlingham (1943) find this expression in children’s reactions to Hitler and what young people see as his “badness” (181). Unable to fully grasp his significance with regard to the war, what the child perceives in Hitler is not “a powerful enemy” but rather “the incarnation of evil, ie. a new edition of the devil” (181). For the child, Hitler is the psychical representative of primitive aggression, an object unmoored from its external anchor and so belonging largely to the conflicts of instinct integration.

At this point, let us think about instinct integration with regard to the developmental conflicts of adolescence and so come closer to an understanding of adolescents’ responses to Hitler’s car. In addition to describing the biological phenomenon known as puberty, adolescence is viewed in the psychoanalytic literature as an affective relation or what Waddell (1998) calls a “state of mind” (126). She makes the bold claim that adolescent states of mind may belong to any age, reasserting themselves long after youth whenever conflict returns us to modes of action that are distinguished by lack of thinking (137). In this view thinking is conceptualized as the ability to tolerate and reflect on the psychic pain of instinct integration without defending against its force (176). This may be one way of describing maturity. Gilbert’s statement that “there is no such thing as an adolescent” (53) signals another

dimension of the relationality between adolescence and adulthood; adolescence cannot be constituted apart from the world of interests, ideals, institutions and authority figures both old and new, that work to contain it. "Show me an adolescent", she states, and "you certainly also show me parents, teachers, friends and peer groups, school, police, the fashion industry, the media, the mall, and so on" (53).

Psychoanalytic perspectives on human development offer a critique of the modern view of progress that the concept of maturity implies. There is something about the trials of self encounter, Waddell (1998) suggests, which chronology cannot grasp (4): "an adult's state of mind may be found in the baby; an infant's in the adolescent; a young child's in the man..." (8). Current educational thinking follows this outlook, challenging the idea that development is a sequential passage from infancy to adulthood, "as if it [were] a correction for childhood" (Britzman 2007, 1). And yet the physiological force of puberty and the presumption of new sexual and physical limits do pose a distinct set of conflicts for the adolescent. A range of developmental tasks must be satisfied in order to leave childhood behind. These include articulating the self in an expanding world without the loss of personal spontaneity, finding new love objects while mourning the loss of the primary parental relation, feeling the vulnerabilities of dependence before independence is fully established, living comfortably with the discomforts of changing physicality, meeting disillusionment in others and in the self, awakening to loss without losing the desire for life and dealing with these immense changes while new experiences beckon.

At times the tensions are felt to be too much and the vicissitudes come into play. For this intensity, there are many apt metaphors. We speak of "letting off steam" as if the adolescent is a boiler that cannot be contained. The aggressive and libidinal drives, once enacted through childhood phantasy, now produce real physical heat. Also in the boiler

are the authority figures. Both needed and repudiated, these psychical representatives of primitive love and hate must be cast out in order to make room for new love objects and so are experienced as particularly harsh. By the same token the new love objects are felt to be particularly desirable. Winnicott (1971) paints a stark image of this fury: "if, in the fantasy of early growth, there is contained *death*, then at adolescence there is contained *murder*" (144 original italics). In phantasy, growing up involves taking the place of the parent and so rebellion is a condition of selfhood. Even as the adolescent rages against the machine, the anxiety of imminent separation invokes the earliest vulnerabilities.

Various defenses come to the service of the psyche in order to dissipate the immense amount of internal tension that is felt. There may be an attempt to run away from the internal conflict by running toward the outside, a mechanism of psychical defense characterized by Waddell (1998) as projective in the sense that action takes the place of thought and feeling. There is a preference for the safety of the group over the exposures of the individual. Here, as elsewhere, the familiar childhood defense of splitting finds new footing in the idealization of some objects to the denigration of others, doubly painful when one is the target of this same intolerance by one's new loved group. The body may become the psychical representative for the interminable suffering of individuality, a pain that is then somatized. There are attempts to "literally become mindless" (Waddell 1998, 131) such as drug experimentation. If such behaviors are symptomatic of the curriculum of growing up, then the objects of this curriculum are everything in the world for which the adolescent finds use: friends, parents, teachers, authority figures and even historical narratives.

In her study of the "aims of hatreds" in adolescent development, Young-Breuhl (1996) portrays early adolescence as a time of great bloodthirstiness. Occupied with their own wickedness and that of others, the world is a projection of the adolescents' own felt badness (320).

However acutely the adolescent encounters aggression from the inside there is an equal pressure from the outside to give that aggression up. The developmental conflicts of navigating aggression as it is felt within the self against the external limits set by education may provide some insight with regard to adolescents' responses to Hitler's car. The car is a physical symbol of Hitler, himself a psychical representative of badness, which is the very thing that adolescent must to renounce. Fascination with the car then serves two psychic purposes: it safely holds the aggression the adolescent feels yet cannot explicitly express, and it provides a point of rebellion. Less than an indication of the adolescent's scorn for human suffering or a failure to respect, the reaction speaks instead to a certain kind of mindlessness. How then, might history education establish conditions that will allow the adolescent their developmental struggles but still engage the critical work of historical learning?

I find helpful Winnicott's (1971) insight for the parent who must not just tolerate but also survive the challenge to authority that adolescence presents.

Adolescence...needs to be given reality by an act of confrontation. Confrontation must be personal. Confrontation belongs to containment that is non-retaliatory, without vindictiveness, but having its own strength. (150)

It is the case that the adolescent needs the adult as both an imagined limit and one that is real. This containment is close to Anna Freud's (1979) view of the capacity of the external environment to provide "the right proportion of instinct-gratification and instinct-restriction" (105). The work of the adult is to tolerate the adolescents' struggle to be human (Gilbert 2007, 60), neither collapsing their boundaries under the strain of that challenge nor hardening their authority (Winnicott 1971, 145). In the museum setting where adolescents encountered Hitler's limousine, there

were no censoring adults, a perceived freedom that may have encouraged candid expression, even as these expressions seem “mindless”. The museum is not the history classroom where the student mobilizes a different phantasy of limits. As Farley (2006) argues, this may be one of the values of educational sites that provoke in students psychic attachments that are identificatory rather than critical. If the expression of phantasy is an essential position of learning to integrate instinctual conflict, then limiting this expression too quickly via moral rebuke forecloses the adolescent the opportunity for psychic growth. On the other side, the moral limit is necessary for the adolescent to grow into their own sense of ethicality, a relationality to others that may only be won over the figurative “dead body” of the adult and consequent desire for reparation. Only then may the adolescent find their own ‘mind’ and the capacity to relate to others.

### Encountering Adolescence

“When I grow up I want to be a ‘dult’”  
(Waddell 1998, 175)

So begins the chapter entitled “The Adult World” in Waddell’s book that explores human development from a psychoanalytic perspective. The statement, made by a six-year old child describing his life’s ambition, tells the wishful story of what the young-self might yet become. What the child doesn’t know, and is perhaps best protected from knowing if he is to find courage for these early years of growth, is that the conflicts of growing up instantiated in infancy do not end. Indeed, as Waddell reminds the reader, to believe in the seamless narrative of maturity may be a “seriously infantile delusion” (175). And yet it is this delusion that engenders the adult perspective that by comparison, the child’s life is easy. In other words, the adult has ‘forgotten’ the trauma of growing up, itself a defense against

encountering the traces of those early conflicts within. In place of the child or the youth, the adult encounters their own wish for what childhood or adolescence might have been. This phantasy may involve locating aggression as a 'stage' belonging to adolescence that is the responsibility of the adult (or history education) to root out. Or perhaps the phantasy is of the child as innocent, with aggression belonging to the world 'out there' as opposed to the constitutional fight of self-hood. Certainly we might read the complaints against adolescents' responses to Hitler's car as reflective of these wishes, particularly the desire to construct redemptive narratives of childhood and adolescence.

How childhood and adolescence is imagined in times of war can provide some insight into our peace-time phantasies. In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century when media portrayals of war were solidified as part of propagandist efforts, educators and psychologists began to take an interest in how children were swept up in discourses of civic duty (Cohen 2002). In France and Germany for example, the concern was not with protecting the younger generation from war's devastating effects but rather with making good future citizens and soldiers by inculcating martial values and hatred for the enemy (Cohen 2002, 45). Discourses around citizenship and nationalism would characterize much of the discussion about children and war for the next century. Scates (2002) explores how cultures of commemoration built around Australian children's memorialization of the Great War supported particular social values and notions of nationhood in early 20<sup>th</sup> century Australia. A similar focus on the rhetorics of citizenship, patriotism and the glories of the battlefield is made by Heathorn (2002) who examines elementary school representations of war and war heroes in late 19<sup>th</sup> century England. Children were encouraged to embrace narratives of war that romanced the military hero, which was part of their training first as patriotic citizens and then as brave soldiers (108). Evidence of this rhetoric can be found in children's comic books, war posters and

educational curricula of the time (Marten 2002). For example, Guillaume de Syon (2002) analyzes popular posters in World War 1 Germany, focusing on how images of 'flying machines' promoted a view of pilots as national martyrs.

Many who grew up in North America during the Cold War and the Cuban Missile Crisis will recall the "duck and cover" drills instituted at schools, the sirens and alarms, and the building of family or neighborhood bomb shelters. Part of the school-based curricula at that time, was a 1955 television documentary demonstrating the effects of a nuclear bomb on a family dwelling (O'Brien 2002). I would note here that another of the popular exhibits at the Canadian War Museum recalls this fascination: the object, known as the 'pig suit', was a chemical suit made for a pig and used by researchers during the Cold War to test the effects of chemical weapons. With these examples, the educational discourse is that of protection from threat as opposed to martial duty. What is demonstrated by this research is that our view of the child as well as our rhetoric of the child's role in war changes with historical context. Theories of learning are also shaped within historical context. Discourses of nationalism and patriotism shape pedagogical programs that address the status of war in times of peace. How are the child and adolescent constructed as subjects of public history education? As an innocent victims, potential soldiers, active citizens, the hope for a new tomorrow?

I want to explore this line of inquiry in the context of how student teachers reacted to the interests of adolescents visiting the War Museum. I earlier raised the concept of nostalgia as one kind of relation to adolescent experience. Svetlana Boym (2001) defines nostalgia as a romance with one's fantasy of a home that no longer exists or has never existed. Nostalgic love, she suggests, "can only survive a long-distance relationship" (xiii). In the long-distance between the experience of adolescent life and the deferrals of adult development, the student

teacher's phantasy of adolescence is preserved and remembered as a time of hope and moral innocence: free from the burdens of moral struggle and ambivalence characteristic of *their* encounters with representations of war and social violence witnessed at the museum. For the adolescent, war – in terms of psychic conflict - is familiar. For the adult, war is a problem. The romance is with a phantasy of adolescence that might save the adult from the wars – both internal and external – of the future. This phantasy defends the beginning teacher against the adolescent 'wars' they fear will take over their classroom teaching, as well as the internal dynamics of "difficult knowledge" (Britzman 1998) that encounters with representations of social trauma might bring.

It is my belief that these dynamics may structure the expressions of outrage lodged by student teachers against adolescents' excitement over Hitler's limousine. But this is not a condemnation for in every phantasy is the rudiment of new knowledge. I have argued that the defenses and phantasies that organize psychic life are part of the work of development, and the luck for the adult is that this transformation is never complete. It may be that the adult visitor who encounters Hitler's car responds in a way that is distinct from adolescent desires because the adult and the adolescent have different developmental projects. If adolescence describes a collection of developmental conflicts rather than a set of biologically determined characteristics, is it possible that the adult visitor too might respond to the car in ways that could be characterized, even disparagingly, as somehow "adolescent"? As Granastein's (Cobb 2000) comments suggest, it is not only the adolescent visitor who perceives the car as 'cool'.

What then, is the developmental work of the adult and how does this work meet the figure of the adolescent? In psychoanalytic terms the task is to integrate the early impulses into the personality and thereby find freedom in love and work. Waddell describes this freedom as the ability to "experience the other as genuinely other, as the one with independent

needs and priorities...[which]...involves carrying the burdens of being grown-up as well as claiming rights and privileges" (180). The adult responsibility is one of containment which, through a good enough education of one's own, involves the capacity for self-reflection and thinking (Waddell 1998). This may be the very facility in jeopardy when teacher candidates meet the external representative of their internal dilemmas via representations of war and human suffering such as found in the War Museum. If aggression can be located on the outside – in the conflicts of nations or those of adolescence – as opposed to within the self, then the phantasy becomes one of how to fix others not attend to the self. This is not to suggest that outward expressions of aggression and conflict do not have a material effect, but rather to point out that these qualities are also characteristic of psychic reality.

How student teachers 'read' adolescents reading traumatic history may be shaped by the traumatic losses that the concept of adolescence, as a category of the human, works to contain. The delusion is that growing up does not also require a fight. To tolerate in the adolescent the struggles of finding a self when that reminder returns one's own history of loss is a difficult task. This is doubly so when the history of despair on the inside is met by the despair of war on the outside. Just as the phantasy of biological development protects the adult from a return of the past, so history education is posed as a corrective for the conflicts that wage outside. We see this in the popular maxim "those who do not learn from the past are doomed to repeat it"<sup>8</sup>. The phantasy here is that we can rescue the future from the traumas of the past if only we can learn from our mistakes. Not only is it unclear exactly what must be learned in order to ensure this liberation, but for the phantasy to work we must actually be able to do some rescuing. The reality of enduring and violent conflict on a scale of global proportions renders the aphorism at best an empty promise and at worst an individual failing. Foreclosed is an understanding of how experience works in psychical life.

What to make of my students' outrage toward the adolescent visitor who found fascination with Hitler's car? Here I would like to suggest that the developmental project of learning to teach may influence student teachers' reading of adolescence. Like the adolescent who is reaching between the protections of childhood and the independence of adulthood, teacher candidates must straddle the line between their student and teacher selves, a position of vulnerability. But as argued by Britzman (2007), "there is no such thing as teacher education without us creating the conditions to tolerate and value the uncertainty of development as a strange and even alienating resource for understanding the great conflicts our field absorbs, creates and lives within" (2). I read Britzman's insight as a reminder of the responsibility toward the student teacher who, like the adolescent, needs an external environment that is both generous and resilient towards the conflicts of becoming a teacher identity. This means understanding that the student teachers' love of, or hatred toward, the authority figures of their own education or the institution of teacher education, is also part of learning. No matter the pressure, the responsibility is not to abdicate to phantasies of teacher education that refuse affect as a vital dimension of making the self. For example, the phantasy that teaching entails mastery of knowledge or of technical skill may protect the student teacher from the psychical vulnerabilities of learning to teach, but it also sacrifices the capacity for self-reflection and thinking.

### Nostalgia as Relation

In this paper I have offered some ways of thinking about adolescent utterances to Hitler's car that take interpretation beyond the realm of the pathological (ie. youth are rebellious, belligerent, disrespectful or lacking in ethical capacities). As well, I have suggested that there is more to the story of their excitement over the car than lack of good influence. Rather than situate adolescent responses to the car in accounts of either

individual or collective irresponsibility, I have explored how these utterances are narratives of self-understanding through the difficult time of development. The adult, or teacher, who dismisses the narrative will miss the opportunity to experience the adolescent on their own terms and to provide the challenge of personal confrontation that Winnicott claims is so crucial for learning. Perhaps it is the adult who needs assistance to interpret the ways in which adolescents use objects to sort through the conflicts and turmoils of development. But what is it about the messiness of adolescence that is such trouble for the adult? I believe that the adult must tolerate not only the conflicts of understanding that adolescents may bring to their study of difficult texts but also their *own* conflicted encounters with histories of loss and social suffering. The displeasure that my students wrote about in their papers might be an expression of how their own worries were both magnified and refused by the adolescent visitor. For these anxieties to become knowledge, we might search out the conditions for teacher education that enable us to reflect on how the traumas of adult loss figure into the phantasies of adolescence that structure social theories, history curricula and human interactions. This too, is development.

I will end with some thoughts about the value of thinking adolescence through a different kind of nostalgia – one that dwells less in the *nostos* – the return to the fictive ‘home’ of one’s youth that never existed, and more in the *algia* – the longing for it. Boym (2001) notes the quality of this distinction as that between restoration and reflection:

The past for the restorative nostalgic is a value for the present; the past is not a duration but a perfect snapshot. Moreover the past is not supposed to reveal any signs of decay; it has to be freshly painted in its “original image” and remain eternally young... Reflective nostalgia does not pretend to rebuild the mythical place called home...this type of nostalgia is ironic, inconclusive and fragmentary. (50)

Restoration of adolescence according to the design of the adult is a nostalgic phantasy that protects the adult from feeling the losses of becoming human. Reflection leaves room for the phantasy but as a fragment of self-knowledge, an opportunity for the adult to approach their own maturity. Recognition of the adolescent as wholly other and yet inside of the self allows one to take up the adult responsibility to think and to narrate a relationship between past, present and future that can tolerate the longing without needing to belong.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> I provide several of the worksheet prompts that guided students' exploration because they illuminate the findings that were raised in the students' analytic essays:

Is this a place for children and/or youth? What can they learn from this environment? Do you notice any children and/or youth interacting with the exhibits? What are they drawn to? If you were to try and see the war museum from a child's and/or youth's perspective, what do you think that you would see? What theories of child./youth development do you see reflected in the museum exhibits? What makes children ready to think about difficult issues associated with death, war and social suffering? How would you know if and when it is too much? What kind of measures has the museum taken with their pedagogical strategies that demonstrate an awareness of children's moral development?

<sup>2</sup> There are many theoretical perspectives and narratives of social realities that attempt to encapsulate the paradigm of adolescence. I am inspired by Gilbert's (2007) perspective on adolescence as viewed from three complementary but also sometimes contradictory vantage points: adolescence as a psychical dynamic, adolescence as a social construction,

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and adolescence as a lived experience. To speak of adolescence as a psychological dynamic, Gilbert suggests, is to consider how the outside world – including the world of parents, friends, symbols of cultural life and even historical narratives – are used to work through psychological, or interior, conflicts. What I will focus here is adolescence as a set of culturally defined narratives against which the concept of adulthood might be imagined. What adolescents grow into, Gilbert argues, are versions of adult life organized by cultural memory, by phantasies of remembrance and forgetting and by the desire to narrate a story about the self that renders the distinctions between past, present and future legible even as psychic time confuses these distinctions.

<sup>3</sup> While an extensive exploration of the concept of traumatic history is beyond the scope of this paper, a few notes to situate the reader are in order. My view of historical trauma is not an “event” or external phenomenon that involves devastating human loss – for example, the dropping of the atomic bomb. Rather, I use the term trauma to refer to the possibility of a *response* to an event, most notably in educational contexts, as an encounter with unprecedented events of violent human devastation and collapse lived as psychological rupture. Attempts to comprehend or understand such ruptures are characterized by belated returns to repetitive experience that nevertheless remains obscured from consciousness. Indeed, trauma is characterized by a failure to know - an inability to grasp either the event or one’s survival of it. Following Caruth (1996):

...to define trauma as simply that which comes from outside, rather than as a possibility inscribed within experience, would be, essentially, to make a claim for the possibility of defining, and thus anticipating, the difference between experience and trauma: to be able to

categorize, to name and thus, theoretically, to anticipate the accident. It is rather the notion of the traumatic possibility inscribed in human experience, a possibility always there but never certain, that transmits what is most accidental in, and hence unique to its actual occurrence.

(115 n5)

Like an accident that subverts our ability to predict or prepare for its occurrence, by definition trauma breaks the frame of that which in experience one might conceivably circumvent. That is not to say, nor would Caruth argue, that all experience is trauma, but rather “to allow, within experience, for the very unexpected interruption of experience constituted by the traumatic accident” (115 n5). For Caruth, the writing of a straightforwardly referential history, which would include the possibility of enclosing trauma under the name of the event, is impossible because we cannot rely on stable notions of experience. “It is only in and through its inherent forgetting ... in the very inaccessibility of its occurrence” (17), Caruth argues, “that a history can be grasped” (18). The relevance of this discussion for the theory of trauma at stake in my project lies in understanding how our responses to the provocations of trauma’s return bring history into the present. This new representation is a distinctly social endeavor in that it allows for multiples forms of response – for example, the opportunity to work through the dynamics of the original tear. The full impact of learning to live with a history shaped by trauma can be felt in the ways in which we learn to accept a future where trauma is “always there but never certain” (Caruth 1996, 115 n5). It is this uncertainty that organizes our social responses to traumatic awakening.

<sup>4</sup> While the car was on exhibit at the museum between 1971-1979 it was incorrectly identified as belonging to Hermann Goring. In 1979, the

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museum planned to move the limousine from the Third to the Second Floor galleries at the Sussex Drive location. This provided an opportunity for further historical research and testing which revealed the correct provenance. As of 1984, this new knowledge was reflected in public materials.

<sup>5</sup> Verbal inquiries with interpretive staff at the museum confirmed that the origin of the photograph is not evident to the visitor. My informal conversations with staff members revealed that the attribution was unknown.

<sup>6</sup> For the status of this term in relation to history education see Seixas (2004).

<sup>7</sup> Freud (1915) tells us that an instinct is felt as a demand or pressure that seeks release. Because this is an internal event from which one cannot flee, the tension must be transformed. This is the work of the psyche. The instinct seeks a psychical representative outside of the self in order to satisfy the internal pressure of the demand. Psychical defenses are phantasies that attempt to disperse the internal pressures that an instinct supplies. If defenses are concretized, that is, there is an inability to distinguish between phantasy and reality, then the work of negotiating instinctual demand is foreclosed. Melanie Klein (1950) gives us insight into one kind of defense she calls splitting where the tensions between love and hate (which derive from the instincts towards life and death) are experienced as singular. At the earliest stage of human relations, those of natality, this tension is projected outward onto objects, beginning with the breast which is both loved and hated: loved for the good nourishment it provides and hated for the bad withholding of that same nourishment. These same dynamics continue throughout life, but

with new objects. The task for the baby, the child, the adolescent and the adult, is to contain the anxiety that the instinctual demands provoke and to sustain an attitude of ambivalence that allows for the coexistence of one's good and bad objects. This is the developmental work of integration, which also involves the capacity to reality test, in other words, to distinguish between what belongs to the self and to the world (Segal 1991).

<sup>8</sup> The original phrasing, found in Spanish-American philosopher George Santayana's treatise on reason and humanism, *Reason in Common Sense* (1905) reads: "Those who cannot remember the past are doomed to repeat it" (289).

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