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A/r/tographic Remembering of My Ideological Becoming in the Ukrainian USSR: Learning, Compulsory Schooling, and the Search for Dialogic Pedagogy Through the Visual Poetics in Early Years Classroom

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Abstract

In this creative article, the reader is invited into an a/r/tographic chronotope, through which the author remembers her learning and schooling experiences in the Ukrainian USSR. The purpose of remembering is to render an elusive meaning of dialogic pedagogy in the soviet compulsory schooling with a focus on the child's lived experience of learning in the historical context of intergenerational socialist oppression. The visual and poetic a/r/tography reveals the learner's ideological becoming through her rare encounters with dialogic pedagogy as the ontological event of self-consciousness, creative authorship, and agency.

Background and Introduction



Figure 1. My school, 1988.

Acrylic on

wood.

This research is historically situated in a Soviet time of my schooling and childhood experience in Dnipropetrovsk city in the Ukrainian USSR. The focus of my inquiry is on my childhood experience of schooling and learning with an intent to critically and creatively search for my encounters with the socialist dialogic pedagogy in the classroom of my early years. My compulsory schooling experience began in 1988 in Grade 1 of School No 9, which was known for its academic and scholarly focus on “the deep learning of English.” It was the best school because English was consistently taught from Grade 1 through Grade 12. This idea was shared by many parents in our community. I was six years old when my mother had decided to enroll me in this school. Even though the school was not my neighbourhood school, I was admitted on the basis of my academic merit. I successfully passed the entrance English exam at the age of 6. Therefore, my parents had to take me to school every day, which involved us taking a trolleybus number 5 and walking long distances through the Park of Chkalov. This long trip to school felt like a mandatory burden of becoming educated, and thus the act of going to school did not feel natural to me. The school seemed to be a place where all children learned how to become adults, and I felt that I had no other option but to choose this path in order to reach adulthood.

In this article, I invite the reader to follow my journey of *ideological becoming* (Bakhtin, 1981) through the compulsory schooling during my early childhood years in the Soviet Union (Grades 1-6, 1988-1994). According to Bakhtin (1981), ideological becoming is about a formation of self-concept through one’s relationships with others and the world. Specifically,

he explains that “another’s discourse performs here no longer as information, directions, rules, models and so forth—but strives rather to determine the very bases of our ideological interrelations with the world; the very basis of our behavior” (p. 342). My ideological becoming has been about my creative learning experiences that allowed me to author my sense of self during the formative times of my schooling.

Further, this research-remembering is an *a/r/tographic chronotope*, which means that it is a cultural place of time and space, where meanings converge and diverge (Bakhtin, 1981). *A/r/tography* is a research methodology that is rooted in a poststructural philosophy of rhizomes (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987; Irwin, 2004, 2013; Irwin et al., 2013; Sameshima et al., 2009). Rhizomes act as a metaphor of connections and interconnections that can be envisioned, performed, imagined, and reimagined in and through time (Irwin et al., 2006). Deleuze and Guattari (1987) conceptualise a rhizome as an assemblage of multiplicities that grows through connections, just like ginger or iris. The slashes in *a/r/tography* signify my artist, researcher, and teacher identities that are not separated from one another, but exist in the evolving spaces of “dialogic thinking, relating, and perceiving” (Irwin, 2004, p. 30). In this view, *a/r/tographic* chronotopes dwell at the intersection of interconnections and “interrelationships of text, image, approach, and voice as a way to enhance, refute, and/or extend meaning making” (Sameshima et al., 2009, p. 132). Within these interrelationships, I aim to describe and explore the historical context of my ideological becoming through schooling and learning with a focus on my glimpses of dialogic pedagogy in the early years classroom.

The research evidence consists of my personal artistic journal (i.e., poems, stories, photographs, and artworks), intuitive memory, conversations with my mother, and my paternal great grandmother’s published memoir (Lebedeva, 2009). Intuitive memory is a liminal way of knowing and unknowing about my childhood that is creative and tacit in my visual and poetic remembrance. Wertz et al. (2011) think that “intuitive inquiry encourages ambiguity, liminality, and mystery to *enter* [emphasis in original] inquiry” (p. 303). Truly, childhood memories are difficult to analyse because they are the subtle historical experiences that have sedimented in the creative layers and historical strata of time in the depths of my inner life. Their liminality is precisely in uncertainty and complexity because childhood memories dynamically and unpredictably move between the past and present, known and unknown. Learning from my childhood is evocative because I try to listen to my heart and heart-felt memories. Vanier (1998) suggests that the heart is a “powerhouse of love that can reorient us from our self-centeredness, revealing to us and to others the basic beauty of humanity, empowering us to grow” (p. 78). I turn to the heart because I seek to recreate a story of my becoming with hope for my readers to find their heart-felt memoirs of

connections, empowerment, and growth. In this creative and elusive context, I investigate any memorable, albeit very rare, historical traces of dialogic pedagogy in my school.

Historical Context

“Study, study, and study” - Lenin’s slogan in my school.

“Your childhood is always a happy childhood” - a Soviet slogan in my school.

Generally, the socialist education system had been strictly governed and controlled by the Communist Party of the USSR since its origins in 1917. Before the Revolution in the Tsarist Russian Empire, children had not necessarily been schooled at all or schooled in different, non-compulsory, ways including homeschools, gymnasiums, church schools, private schools, free schools, and community schools (Adler, 2011; Lebedeva, 2009; Rempel & Carlson, 2002; Tolstoy, 1982). It is important to note that pre-Soviet education is understudied in the literature; and there are no specific studies of the Tsarist Ministry of Education (Eklof, 1993). Hence, I would like to pause and discuss what I personally know about this historical context. My maternal great grandfather, Zachary Khmelnitsky, homeschooled all of his children (boys and girls) in the late 19th century. He invited many local teachers to his house, and they all sat together around the kitchen table to learn various subjects. Perhaps, it is important to note that his social status allowed him to hire private teachers because he was a relatively rich landlord. Zachary’s father served in the Tsarist army for twenty years. For his civil merit, the Tsar gave him a large lot of land in Obolon that today is a part of Kiev. However, the land was not fertile because it was completely covered with marshes and swamps. That is why he sold it and bought more than 100 hectares of fertile land near the town of Malin. This land gave him the wealth and power of sociocultural subsistence, including homeschooling. At that time, some of his fellow villagers used to attend Church schools and private schools in the nearby communities. It is not clear where these schools were located or how they were organised because the Revolution destroyed all religious institutions and their archives in the area.

My paternal great grandmother’s father, Sergei, was also schooled in Ekaterinoslav Gymnasium. He comes from a family of artists who were commissioned by the Tsar. Sergei attended the Gymnasium and graduated from it on July 30, 1871 at the age of 13. This school had only seven grades, which were primarily focused on math subjects, languages (e.g., Latin, Greek, Slavic, French, German), and social sciences (e.g., Law of God, Geography, and History). Academic courses were called skills. In addition, his sons also attended different schools, such as a charity-based residential community school in 1910. This school was only for boys where they were taught “different modern, for that time, crafts, including warfare” (Lebedeva, 2009, p. 6). They seemed to really liked their school and childhood. My paternal great grandmother, Maria, also attended a number of schools at different times in different

cities across the country. For example, her first schooling was in a residential girls only school in the town of Old Crimea in 1911. There she studied not only literacy, but also needlework and art. All students had to wear a uniform such as a woolen dark-green dress and black apron in the winter, and white aprons and blue dresses in the summer. Often girls taught themselves how to sing by repeating and improvising folk songs. Maria's school life was "not bad" (Lebedeva, 2009, p. 26) because it taught her how to become an artist, make embroideries, and read/write in Greek and Slavic languages.

The Revolution was a tragedy to all of my family members. In the 1917s, Zachary's land was confiscated by the revolutionaries and given to *kolhoz* or the collective village governance. He was left only with his house and small garden. Likewise, Maria's home village of Chernoglazovka was destroyed by the revolution. She wrote that before the revolution, her village was blooming with organizations, activities, and businesses. There were buildings including a brick hospital, brick power plant, steam mill, stores, warehouses, and tall silo towers. The revolution came and everything fell into pieces. By the 1950s, the village turned into a half-destroyed place with a cemetery, where many of our relatives and ancestors rest today.

Needless to say, revolution had also drastically changed all forms of education across the country. In one of his influential speeches, Lenin (1918) spoke about the importance of socialist revolutionary struggle and, consequently, the global change of the capitalist status quo through the means of schooling. In particular, the education system was positioned as one of the main mechanisms of social renovation that is a full re-organization of social life, infrastructure, and order in line with the dominant ideology of the Communist Party (Korolev, 1970). In doing so, Lenin (1918) defined capitalism as the lies and hypocrisy that can be overturned with the power of "complete and honest truth" (p. 85). Interestingly, he also claimed that "the same is true of education: the more cultured the bourgeois state, the more subtly it lied when declaring that schools could stand above politics and serve society as a whole" (p. 86). Lenin was critical of the capitalist concept of education as schooling because of its instrumental structure of class-based meanings that had served the interests of the dominant elites. The dishonest structures had sought to educate people into obedient masses. For Lenin (1918), education cannot and should not be separated from life and politics because it is the intrinsic power of social change, progress, and development. Lenin defined the foundational socialist meaning of free and compulsory state-led schooling as the people's truth: "...working people have realised that knowledge is a weapon in their struggle for emancipation, their failures are due to lack of education, and that now it is up to them really to give everyone access to education" (p. 87). Lenin saw schools as social renovation, liberation, and spiritual life, where all cultural treasures and scientific achievements had to serve the people.

However, Lenin's ideas had been instrumentally utilised to develop the socialist state and its totalitarian society (Bailey, 2012). In this political context, schooling was its central mechanism through which children's identities had to be "shaped like wax, into real, good Communists" (as cited in Wertsch, 2002, p. 82). The Communist idea of education, in fact, meant control and power over children. Further, this idea had strongly been implemented during the Stalinist regime that was focused on the intense nationalism of the state (van Rea, 2005). Nationalism was shaped by Stalin's racist regime, in which Russian language and Russian ethnicity were imposed onto a diverse society of the USSR as the dominant cultural power of the state. Shcherbak (2013) found that Russians were defined as "the ethnic glue for the USSR" (p. 12). Hence, the totalitarian apparatus of schooling had a two-fold state structure of control, also known as Russification (Shcherbak, 2013): 1) Russian ethnic and cultural identity as an imposed, mandated, dominant, and naturalised icon of a Soviet Communist child-citizen; 2) Russian language as the national language of schooling and the state. In the totalitarian state, schools were the oppressive mechanism through which children's identities and subjectivities had been violently formed and destroyed in order to conform to the nation-building agenda and state-based leadership. In this historical context, Stalin's regime had also specifically outlined the idea of enemy and enemy's identity. The enemy of the state could be anyone who did not fit the dominant Russian iconic view of the Communist citizen and obedient schooled subject of the state (van Ree, 2005).

It is critical for me to highlight that Aleksei, my paternal great grandfather, and Maria's husband, was also labelled as the enemy of people and sent to a political concentration camp, Komi Gulag. Gulag was the name of the agency for the system of the Main Administration of Corrective Labor Camps by NKVD (i.e., People's Commissariat of Internal Affairs) that included labour camps of destruction, concentration camps, and other punitive institutions (Applebaum, 2007; Morozov, 1997). Gulag was an inseparable part of the state governance (Morozov, 1997). It has mainly served as the political and economic means, through which people have systemically been destroyed, not only physically, but also culturally, spiritually, and ethically. In fact, the totalitarian state used gulags to kill its own citizens (Solzhenitzyn, 1974). The gulags existed in the period of 1917-1990s, and the first gulags were constructed by Lenin as a site for imprisonment of all politically *unreliable* people (Applebaum, 2007; Pipes, 2004). Pipes (2004) emphasised that the concept of gulag was basically a legalised and institutionalised system of concentration camps in the early 1920s. Unreliables were meant to be changed and re-educated from the enemies into the correct citizens of the state (Applebaum, 2007; Morozov, 1997). Lenin labeled the unreliables as the parasites that had to be destroyed. The same discourse was used by Hitler in the 1920s; and Hitler's head of security, Himmler, studied and copied the Soviet concentration camps in 1921 (Pipes, 2004).

On May 9 1938, Aleksei came home from his workplace at the Black Sea Fleet in Sevastopol where he served as a commander-captain of D-13 submarine. He told Maria that he would probably be arrested by the NKVD. He said that all artists had already been arrested, “Today, artist Spazinsky was arrested. And another young artist of our studio was also arrested. He used to work with me” (Lebedeva, 2009, pp. 172-173). He could not even finish the sentence because the NKVD knocked on the door. They took all journals, artworks, and other hand-written narratives. Shortly, Aleksei was arrested. Then, a letter from the local attorney came stating that Maria had to deny her marriage because her husband was the enemy of the people. The detective said to her, “I will send you to Siberia.” She replied, “All right. Nice people live there too. I have always dreamed about Siberian forests.” The detective could not say a word and simply kicked the table, screaming, “Shut up” (Lebedeva, 2009, p. 173). Maria never renounced her husband and fought for his liberation because he had never done anything illegal. On the contrary, he was labelled as the enemy because he had always been interested in self-study. Maria told me that he would always read at home after work and write as well. This self-educational act of free reading, researching, and writing was deemed as the political act of betrayal.

Theorizing Ideological Becoming

In this historical context, Ideological Becoming (IB) is a process, through which my self-consciousness has come into an active and creative being. For Bakhtin, consciousness is an embodied, ontological event (Holquist, 1990). This means that consciousness may be understood “through bodily experience, responsibility, addressivity, responsivity, respect, human dignity, and relationship with the other” (Matusov, 2011, p. 100). Hence, the process of becoming in my early and late childhood education has been mainly about my self-expressions through dialogues with others or lack thereof. The lack of expression and absence of dialogue has left multiple scars on my sense of self, identity, subjectivity, and voice. Matusov (2011) finds that a restricted dialogue of compulsory schooling is often “distorted, oppressive, and painful” (p. 104). As a result of schooled oppression, my IB has been about the search of my authentic, free, and creative voice as the ontological expression of self-consciousness.

Hence, this search of my creative authorship of learning has also been a struggle against an overall objectivity of myself as a student, which presumed my silent and obedient acceptance of all imposed authorities (e.g., teachers, principals, writers, curriculum). According to Bakhtin (1981), IB is “the process of selectively assimilating the words of others” (p. 341). However, IB is more than a selective assimilation of words; it is a creative transformation of cultural discourse. Hence, I tried not just to consume others’ utterances, but to attend to their unfolding meanings, tones, and significance in my encounters with them. This process has been about my self-conscious choice of expressions along with others’ ideologies in and

through schooling. For example, I have kept my journal since I learned how to write. This journal helped me to process my emotions, thoughts, and feelings about my daily experiences. Through my utterances, I tried to create a meaning of my inner life and sketch a general sense of my life directions. In this view, IB involved my identity formation as the subject of the school, family, the state, and life.

The discourses of identity and subjectivity may be conceptualised as authoritative and persuasive. For Bakhtin (1981), authoritative discourse is about authorities and dogma such as the religious, political, economic and educational words of teachers, fathers, politicians, and other authority figures (p. 342); whereby internally persuasive discourse is about the conscious awareness, assimilation, and expression of words (p. 346). Bakhtin (1981) explains, The internally persuasive word is half-ours and half-someone else's. Its creativity and productiveness consist precisely in the fact that such a word awakens new and independent words, that it organises masses of our words from within, and does not remain in an isolated and static condition... it enters into interanimating relationships with new contexts. (p. 345) Interestingly, internally persuasive discourses are always in-between the self and other relationships and interactions. They inspire, provoke, and evoke mutual understandings. In this view, the discourse of Communist citizen-identity was the authoritative discourse of instrumental meanings that had been imposed on me. For example, English was taught through various political narratives about Lenin, Moscow, and Great October, which should have helped us to understand the greatness of the USSR.

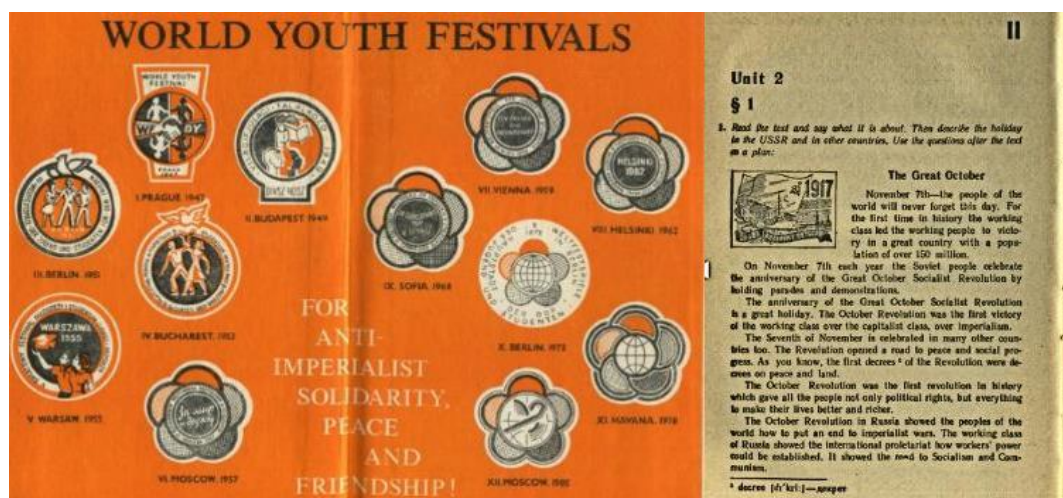


Figure 2. A page and the interior of my English textbook for Grade 10 (1986).

Holloway (2000) also finds that foreign languages in Soviet schools and during Perestroika were taught through the ideological discourse that presented politics and education as one and the same phenomenon. To me, the instrumental structure of grammar seemed to support the

political textual meanings. I thought that language serves the only purpose to be the instrument of predetermined meanings that have to be ordered in sentences and uttered in sound. Also, the language served as a means to shape our cultural identities into becoming good communists. Hence, the concept of identity had a grand and totalitarian, albeit vague and elusive, meaning of being in the Soviet Union. We were supposed to emulate Lenin because he had an ideal identity. In fact, his omnipresence in schools (e.g., portraits, murals, photographs) had constituted the meaning of socialist identity.

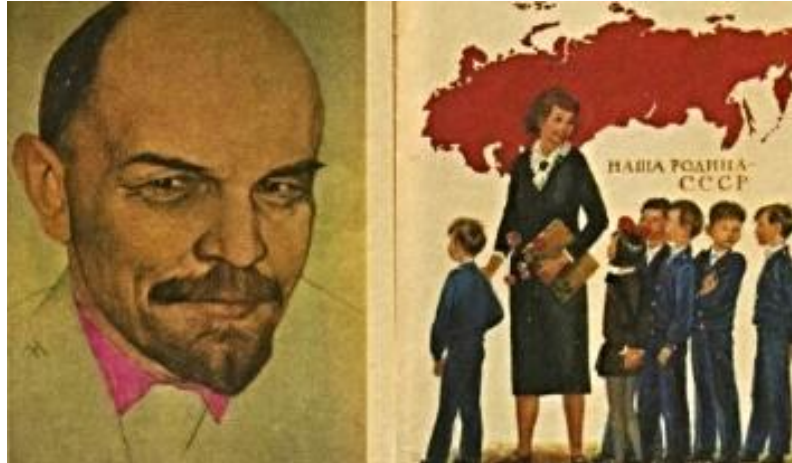


Figure 3. A snapshot of my first textbook, *Букварь* for Grade 1 (1982), that shows the first page with Lenin. The map of USSR is on the background with the slogan “Our Motherland [is] USSR.”

Kirschenbaum (2001) also claims that “in order to raise ‘fighters for communist ideals,’ all schools had to introduce children to the ‘personality of comrade Lenin’” (p. 124). This means that I had to overcome my personal interests for the collective good and follow my teachers. Lenin was the cultural embodiment of my ideological becoming, or rather my *ideological* becoming. Moreover, our school had a large mural of Lenin in a concert hall as well as a small portrait of his in all classrooms. Clearly, the authoritative discourse of national identity had a strong visual presence. Further, Lenin’s slogans were embedded in all texts, documents, and school posters. Lenin was the grandfather of the whole USSR. Kelly (2007) asserts that all schools in the Soviet Union followed the cult of Lenin. She writes, “Pioneer camps, nurseries, and kindergartens, for example, were decorated with a regulation image of Illich’ leaning slightly forward (as though making concessions to child height), his face crinkled into an indulgent smile, and his hand raised in a friendly wave” (p. 132). This particular form of visual discourse was objective, silent, monologic, and oppressive. Lenin was the objective witness of our learning. In classes, we had to face Lenin, as his photo was always above the blackboard. He was silent in all of his images; he never seemed to talk to anyone on his

photos. Lenin's presence was oppressive because his image had created the sense of ongoing surveillance.

Even though the visual authoritative discourse had been powerful enough to lead me toward Lenin's ideals, the discourse itself could not fully persuade me in becoming like Lenin. In fact, Lenin's discourse was present throughout my schooling from the beginning until the end (1982-1999). Haskins and Zappen (2010) write:

Viewed from a contemporary historical perspective, however, these apparently monologic poster images are also potentially dialogic, insofar as they seem to contain meanings beyond their self-evident monologism and so seem to elicit unanticipated and unintended responses from the many "others" whose voices they seek to silence or destroy. (p. 329)

Hence, I did not feel totally oppressed by Lenin because his image was just there. Even though the posters were monologic, I could internally respond to them with fear and wonder about its different meanings. Lenin did not destroy my voice. This resistance provoked me to question who I was in my school and in life. My sense of self has been predominantly shaped by the internally persuasive discourse, through which I questioned the authority of the state, school, and, even, family in order to become a creative, active, and critical meaning maker and author of my education. In this view, the concepts of identity and subjectivity had a particular meaning in my childhood that should be defined as "the role of the individual, through [which my] self-reflection and self-conscious articulation of thought" could transform the authoritative discourse (Murphy, 1995, p. 11). The self-concept has emerged through my creative reflections and self-conscious criticisms of my lived experiences in the school.

Methodological Context

My methodological context is specifically connected to my research question and theoretical framework (Harding, 1987). It is important for me because my theoretical overview of dialogic theory focuses on the importance of internally persuasive discourse in my historical IB. Therefore, I have chosen a/r/tography as the creative context through which I can render my experiences and memories in a coherent, creative, and critical framework that may also allow my readers to become co-researchers of their situated histories, memories, and lives. In this context, the concept of coherence is not about any predetermined order of meaning or a chronological accuracy, because my childhood memories are liminal and elusive, unknown and repressed. My memories have been ruptured by time; however, they have become rhizomatic through art. Irwin et al. (2006) suggest that "instead of preconceived coherence, the emphasis becomes a methodology of situations" (p. 85). Likewise, my a/r/tographic coherence is situated in the art-making process and its rhizomatic spaces of emergent and

generative meanings, including the sense of rupture and loss, silence and voice, self and other. Further, a/r/tography gives voice to my identity and subjectivity as an artist, researcher, and teacher. La Jevic and Springgay (2008) confirm that “a/r/tographical researchers may begin from a familiar place, for example a material process (like felting) or an autobiographical narrative, which is then intertwined and in conversation with unfamiliar questions, things hidden, or silenced” (p. 71). Similarly, I begin with my familiar place of poetic writing, visual art, and photography that inspire me to remember. I place these remembrances together on paper as a situated quilt of moments through which the silenced memories, repressed/unknown experiences, aesthetic reflections, and school actions are uncovered, revealed, and unschooled.

Data Collection: Reflective Journal, Poems, and Creative Interviews

LeBlanc, Davidson, Ryu, and Irwin (2015) emphasize that a/r/tographers pay embodied attention to memory and, in doing so, research is composed through stories and creative moments of becoming. These moments create motions “in which pedagogical significance emerges” (p. 356). Therefore, my a/r/tographic data constitute my reflective journal that I kept during my late childhood experience as well as the poems and journal sketches of my early years. The reflective journal is basically a diary that consists of short stories, recollections of the day, emotional expressions, self-conscious reflections on my schooling, poems, and visual images. The journal embodies my historical process of IB with a focus on my creative voice, and it also contains my recollections of school experience. However, my early memories are uncertain and ambiguous. As Carter (2014) notes:

The ambiguity related to defining a/r/tography is in essence what it is about for it must be embodied, lived, felt, practiced, inquired into. Engaging through/with a/r/tography involves dwelling and becoming within an interstitial borderland space where meanings and understandings are vulnerable and constantly in a state of becoming. (p. 23)

In this state of becoming, I also asked my mom about her memories of the time with a focus on my early years. In doing so, I engaged a creative and conversational a/r/tographic interview (Douglas, 1985; Irwin et al., 2006; Patton, 2002). According to Patton (2002), conversational interviews are the most appropriate in a naturalistic setting because their informal context allows participants to share their own views, and it also allows them to remain in control of research dialogue. For example, Irwin et al. (2006) suggest conversational interviews because of their open-ended focus that “allows for an emergence of ideas” (p. 77). The purpose of my interviews is to learn from my mom and myself about my childhood. Douglas (1985) reveals that creative/conversational interviews emerge from heart–felt discussions; they are “partially the product of creative interactions—of mutual searches for understanding, of soul

communication” (p. 13). This mutuality allows me to become attuned to the subjective complexity of my experiences (Bresler, 2006; Sinner et al., 2006). According to Blodgett et al. (2013), creative conversations “convey the complexity and depth of experiences.” Bresler (2006) also thinks that researchers who pay attention to the subjective complexity during all research stages develop the highest ethical research merits.

Data Analysis, Interpretation, and Representation

In a/r/tography, data analysis, interpretation, and representation are relational, recursive, and contiguous, “allowing deeper understandings to emerge with [and through] time” (Springgay, Irwin, & Kind, 2005, p. 903). At the beginning, I analyse my poetic reflections and interviews with the help of the main a/r/tographic renderings such as openings, reverberations, contiguity, living inquiry, metaphor/metonymy, reverberations, and excess (Irwin & Springgay, 2008; Springgay, Irwin, & Kind, 2005). Renderings are the organizational creative processes that help to visualise, analyse, and synthesise data (Irwin & Springgay, 2008). Openings begin with a brief overview in which I situate myself in the context of my schooling and learning experience. These openings emerge from within the data and the literature review. As such, reverberations constitute a poetic quilt of reconstructed memories through the journal and interviews. For me, poetry is embedded in my data collection, analysis, interpretation, and representation because it authentically embodies my sense of self, identity, and subjectivity (Shugurova, 2014). In this way, poetry is my researcher’s voice, and my *researcher-voiced poems* (Prendergast, 2009) emerged from other data sources (i.e., journal notes, poems, stories). Drawing on the work of Glesne (1997), I immerse myself in my voiced poems by “searching for the essence conveyed, the hues, the textures, and then drawing from all portions of the interviews [and the written journal] to juxtapose details into a somewhat abstract representation” (p. 206). In this view, I find my voice as a learner through the abstract memories. Like Butler-Kisber (2002), I try to stay close to my words, experiences, meanings, emotions, and other subjectivities of the time; and therefore, I distill the *generative themes*.

My openings lead me to living inquiry, reverberations, contiguity, metaphors/metonymies, and excess. Drawing on my doctorate research (Shugurova, 2017), I engage contiguity as a combination of a visual and written analysis in a doubling process that “is the contiguous interaction and the movement between art and graphy [through which] research becomes a lived endeavor” (Springgay, Irwin, & Kind, 2005, p. 900). My contiguity is a juxtaposition of photographs, poems, and interviews that invites the reader to connect with the emotional context of learning (Sameshima et al., 2009). These juxtapositions lead toward an excess that is “an ongoing practice concerned not with inserting facts and figures and images and representations into language but with creating an opening where [my] control and regulation disappears” (Springgay, Irwin, & Kind, 2005, p. 907). The excess is the conclusion.

Contributions to A/r/tography

My research contribution lies in the a/r/tographic provocation to remember the unknown, hidden, and repressed experience in one's own childhood. Further, the provocation includes a layered juxtaposition of a visual and poetic self-imagery that creates a rhizomatic (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987; Irwin, 2004; Irwin et al., 2006) context of finding one's authorial voice through childhood experience.

In this context, the a/r/tographic remembering unsettles and problematizes the critical question of child learning through oppression. Irwin et al. (2017) explain that a/r/tography is different from any other research methodology because it does not "pose questions in order to discover what already exists. A/r/tography continually asks questions in an effort to engage with ongoing practices in art and education in order to create knowledge rather than discover it" (p. 2). Hence, a/r/tography is a dialogic activity that troubles the research process and intensifies it through creativity (Irwin et al., 2006). It is a dynamic state of unlearning and unknowing that lives in moments and in flux. In this context, my a/r/tographic remembering unveils the habitual sense of self and the vision of childhood with an intention to question what has been taught about the self as a child learner. In doing so, I attend to the unknown, unseen, hidden, and invisible process of ideological becoming.

Reverberations through Openings: Self-Consciousness, Authorship, and Creative Agency

I now focus on my learning and schooling with a set of poetic reverberations in openings that I have remembered through my creative interviews and poetic reflections. According to Springgay, Irwin, and Kind (2005), "openings are a foundational part of the cloth—its fibers woven and strands joined together with spaces in/between. There are openings like holes worn with time, reflecting the fragility and temporality of meaning" (p. 906). The early memories are hazy and transparent, known and unknown. The opening reverberations allow me to perceive these meanings through a replay of poetic images, interpretations, and utterances (Irwin & Springgay, 2008; Springgay, Irwin, & Kind, 2005). Specifically, the replay is about "the movement, the quaking, shaking, measure, and rhythm that shifts other meanings" (Springgay, Irwin, & Kind, 2005, p. 906). Hence, I render these perceptual shifts with attention to the dialogic encounters and their situated meanings.



Figures 4. My self-portrait “remembering my schooling and learning” in acrylic on board. My photo as a young girl as the cover page of my journal.

Self-Consciousness

I open a/r/tography with these images because they represent my retrospective vision. The left image is the self-portrait that I created at the beginning of this research. The colour schema attempts to depict a sense of memorable and forgotten time that rests around me with a warm feeling of comfort and subtle mosaic. The photo on the right is a photo of me as a young girl before Grade 1. I attached this photo to my journal cover page a long time ago (circa 1988). Together, these images create a visual perception of time passage and my elusive sense of self-presence. As a little girl, I turned my head down and put my hands against my face. I wanted to be nice and smile, just as the photographer asked me to do. Now, as an adult, I face the world and myself. The fragility of memory is depicted by the worn out photograph and the slightly cracked portrait.

The juxtaposition of these images opens my a/r/tography with a focus on my face as the ontological expression of self-consciousness and, hence, answerability for my becoming. Bakhtin (1993) suggests that “it is only my non-alibi in being that transforms an empty possibility into an actual answerable act or deed” (p. 42). My face embodies the non-alibi in my being as the intrinsic author of my educational experience. With the self-portrait, I re-imagine the creative agency as an individual learner who is not a passive consumer of disembodied slogans and photo-memories, but an active person in “the ongoing event of Being” (Bakhtin, 1993, p. 42). In this view, I become answerable for my learning experience. Through my art and answerability (Bakhtin, 1990), I find the inner connections to my

childhood and my self-authored meanings. Bakhtin (1990) asks and answers, “But what guarantees the inner connection of the constituent elements of a person? Only the unity of answerability. I have to answer with my own life for what I have experienced and understood in art” (p. 1). My self-portrait, in this context, helps me understand my memories that come to life through the openings of colour, shade, light, photo, and self-expression.

First Bell and School Performance (1988)

*My hair was cut short
I had to wear a white shirt
And sing Lenin’s songs
I didn’t. I kept silence all along.*

I wrote this poem when I began this memoir on the basis of my journal and after I spoke with my mom. Together, we remembered how I did not like my school, but I always tried to be polite and nice to everyone. We also remembered that my hair had to be cut short for reasons unknown to me at the time. It turned out that my short hair cut was perceived by everyone in the family as neat and disciplined for the school year. My hair spoke about my sense of self that is ready to study, study, and always study. My mother always helped as much as she could to me to look the best for my school, especially for the First Bell, the first day of school, or the Day of Knowledge on September 1. All students were expected to wear white shirts. We also had to gather in one line that was called a ruler and sing Lenin’s songs about school. During this ruler experience, we had to behave like soldiers and turn our heads to the right, then look straight at the front of the ruler, where our administration people and teachers stood. This act signified our collective consent to behave well. Clearly, I disliked this ruling experience and kept silence all along. I felt alienated from the formal nature of the experience and the silent order to become schooled.

The memory of the ruler brought forth my intense emotions of repressed frustrations and even the anger that was associated with the strict discipline and control over my body. The school required me to act against my will and to embody its authoritative discourse of dogmatic order and silent obedience. Bakhtin (1981) acknowledges that authoritative discourse “demands our unconditional allegiance” to external and imposed authority (p. 343). In fact, this discourse imposes not only loyalty, but also the external or *alien will* (Bakhtin, 1984b, p. 236). I felt that I had to follow the will of Lenin or someone else (Bakhtin 1984b). The ontological act of alienation had undermined my learning because I could not freely express my feelings and thoughts about the ruler and other activities. In fact, I could not freely act on my interests and think about myself because I did not have time to do so. My time was governed by the ruler and its strict time of ordered behaviour and control. The poetic opening above helps me to understand my inner connection to this school event and its authoritative discourses of my

depersonalization. Bakhtin (1981) argues that “poetry depersonalizes ‘days’ in language” (p. 291). Hence, the a/r/tographic act of poetic and visual remembering has also depersonalised my schooled days to reveal this hidden within my memory experience.



Figure 5. Memories of the first school day in acrylic on canvas.

This painting emerged through my initial conversational interviews with my mom about the first school day. Hence, the image represents my memories as hazy, elusive, and impressionist. My mother recalled that I felt sad every time I had to celebrate the day we gathered for the ruler. I did not want to go there and did not feel connected to the alien will. I was supposed to be cheerful, yet I was not cheerful. I did not want to let my mother go to work and did not want to stay there with complete strangers. This painting depicts my experience of depersonalization, alienation, and sadness with the help of the violet and blue colours that seem to be like the waves of sad feelings and tears. The figures of people show that I did not have a clear understanding of my school community. Everyone seemed to gather just because they had to, and not because they were organically drawn to each other in a mutual sense of community. The figures here are the people’s shadows and contours because I did not experience any warm feelings of belonging.

After the ruler celebration I went to my grade 1 classroom where I met my teacher. I do not remember anything special about this encounter; however, I felt that this was a new life for me. This life resembled my previous daycare experience, but I felt the school was different because there were no beds and we did not have to sleep during the day. For a moment I felt excited and inspired by novelty. Then, I remembered that my mom was on her way to work

without me. I cried, cried, and cried. Then I stopped because my teacher, Asia, began her lesson.

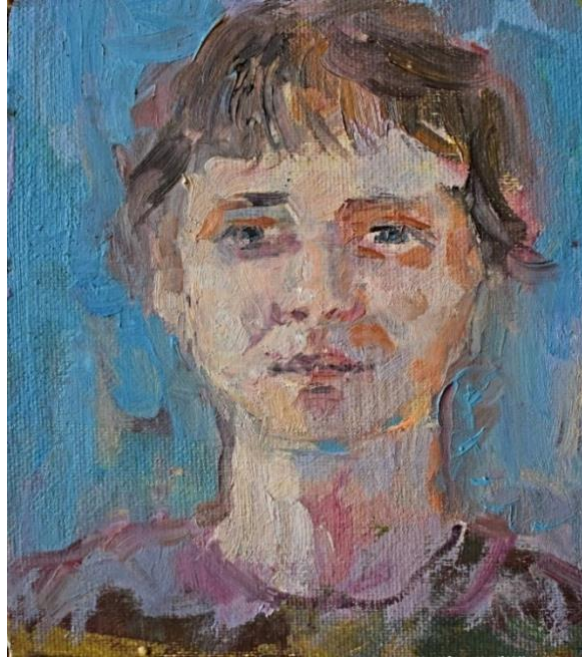


Figure 6. My impressionist memories of Asia, Grade 1. Acrylic on canvas.

Authorship: Literature Class with Asia Yakovlevna, Grade 1

“I didn’t know you were a poet, Olga.”

Asia said at the beginning of my Russian class

in front of all classmates. I blushed in silence without a breath.

Asia was reading a newspaper “The Evening Dnieper.”

“Your poem is here,” she turned the paper in her hand, like glass.

I blushed again in silence, breathing deep, deeper.

I thought of my diary. My dad had published my poems

without my permission. I didn’t know. I wanted to throw them.

My peers laughed. I felt ashamed in being named in that moment, then.

I wrote this poem after the conversation with my mom. I clearly remembered this dialogue with Asia about my poems in 1988. This experience stands out in my memory as an iceberg in the cold ocean of forgetfulness. My father decided to publish my first poems that I had composed on the way from school. I felt embarrassed in front my classmates for being a poet. I actually did not even define myself as a poet. My classmates giggled, which meant that they had no respect for poets. It felt shameful to be a poet in the USSR. My father was a published poet, and he was not recognised by anyone except for a local union of poets. Nobody seemed

to care about his poems. He had to work as a teacher in order to make a living. Poems did not bring any income to our family. To me, it seemed that poets were useless and meaningless for the state. For Asia, however, my poems meant connections. She did not think that being a poet was shameful. On the contrary, she wanted to praise me for being a poet, not to shame me. Even though I felt embarrassment, Asia had empowered me with her acknowledgement and recognition of my creativity. Here are these published poems of mine:

*A little feather flew across the sky,
So bright, so delicate, and light.
Winds came. It then became
a blanket for a butterfly.*

*

*The sun is hiding in trees
The sun is hiding in grass.
The sun is hiding in you and me.
We just need to open eyes and see.*

*

*The sun is looking at a crystal mirror of the puddle.
Everyone needs a mirror, even those like Suns.
(Shugurova, 1988, n.p)*

Asia read my poems out loud and declared that we are all poets and writers, and that we should approach language learning from within poetic imagination and creativity. This was the first lesson that left an enormous impression on me. I was named a poet, felt ashamed, but paradoxically, I felt empowered with a new sense of agency or a creative capacity to act through poetic words and their open-ended meanings. This means that I did not have to follow the alien will; I could become willful in my learning. Thus, my creative agency emerges from the internally persuasive discourse (Bakhtin, 1981) of Asia's dialogic action that initiated a new, subjective sense of learning structure. Bakhtin (1981) states that "an internally persuasive discourse is not finite, it is open; in each of the new contexts that dialogize it, the discourse is able to reveal even newer ways to mean" (p. 345). Hence, the internal structure was shaped by a learner-centred authorship because it was about me as a person with my fears and ideas, desires and interests, will and creative power of meaning making (Matusov & von Duyke, 2010).

Creative Agency

*Choose your favorite poem.
Read it, learn it by heart.
Asia said. I chose A. Blok.*

*I had a choice. I felt smart.
I had a choice of poems, books.*

Asia let us choose our favorite poems. This was our homework. I decided to choose Alexander Blok (1880-1920) because he was critical of the dominant environment of cultural degradation. Bakhtin (1973) thinks that Blok could elevate himself in his poetic imagination above the authoritarian oppression. Specifically, he could do so through his intentional, creative agency of self-transfiguration or transformation within the boundaries of his poetic personality that had nothing to do with the visible, objective world (Igosheva, 2013). For Bakhtin (1973), this agency of inner transformation is even more powerful than the worldly transformations. Likewise, I decided to learn his poems by heart with hope for my interesting transformations, exciting elevations, and academic achievement. In fact, Blok helped me to imagine myself as the author of my education by elevating my self-consciousness beyond the authoritative discourse of oppressive schooling. Consequently, I became an A-plus student in Asia's class and graduated with a medal of academic excellence (i.e., I received 5 which stands for A plus in all of my high school courses).

Am I poet?

*If yes, I can create my life,
Write meaning into existence,
Like Blok, I can write resistance.*

After this class, I told my mother and father that I was a poet of life. Blok inspired me to think about myself as a poet who was different from society and the world. All children were supposed to be the same in our school: wear the same uniform, read the same lines, answer the same questions, and provide the same answers. Yet, I felt that Blok was different because he wrote about his true knowledge and inner feelings. For example, Bakhtin (1973) remembers Blok by saying, "I felt right away that he was an unusual man. . . he was made of the different dough than all of us, the sinners" (00:33). For Blok, the poetic agency of difference was precisely his pursuit of inner self-transformations (Bakhtin, 1993). In this context, the outside world of school and society became only a shady background of the self and her/his becoming (Bakhtin, 1973).

Living Inquiry

Living inquiry is reflective and, therefore, it allows me to weave together my creative memories and theoretical understandings. According to Irwin (2004), living inquiry as a method is "a life of awareness, a life that permits openness to the complexity around us, a life that intentionally sets out to perceive things differently" (p. 242). I position this concept at the

end because it creates a retrospective perception of reflection and unfinished conclusion of my IB (Bakhtin, 1984a; Irwin et al., 2017). For Bakhtin (1984a), life and its living inquiry is the act of becoming or “the eternal incomplete unfinished nature of being” (p. 52). In this context, dialogic pedagogy was a rare phenomenon because the school had a monologic structure of authoritative discourse that had been shaped by the state-based socialist ideology. This structure was characterised by a culture of silence, which meant that we, as children, had no embodied voice outside of homework and teacher-led questions. We broke the silence during recess and lunch times. However, the burden of silence has imprinted itself on my memories in a way that my early learning experience has become hidden, unknown, and repressed within me. As a child, I wondered why the school was there in the first place, and why it had to be regulated by this ruling regime of silent order. Later, I learned that silence signified the cultural norm and behavioural convention. If students were silent during their lessons, they were doing some study work. If they were not silent, they were disobeying the teacher, school, and society. Kelly (2007) also finds that the culture of silence was instilled into young children from the first day of school. She claims that “the first day of school introduced children to the daily life of the school itself, to the need for stillness and silence” (p. 520). I was also indoctrinated into the same ideology through the authoritative discourse.

In this context, dialogic pedagogy was not a planned pedagogical event. It seemed to be an unpredicted disruption of presumed silence. In fact, dialogic pedagogy was not even an event, but a social act and *postupok* (Bakhtin, 1986). In Russian, *postupok* means more than an act or action, it is a conscious event that an individual willingly creates. My teacher’s *postupki* were mainly about her provocative utterances that inspired me to perceive myself as an active individual, who was capable of creative agency as the author of learning. For Bakhtin (1986) *postupok* is a personal act of responsibility and answerability. My teacher provoked me not to become the depersonalised follower of the alien will, but to think and speak about myself in order to be *answerable from within* myself (Bakhtin, 1993). Bakhtin (1986) points out that “any understanding of live speech, a live utterance, is inherently responsive... the listener becomes the speaker” (p. 68). Asia’s brief dialogues with me have encouraged me to transform my self-consciousness. White (2016) writes about provocations as invitations “for further dialogues, not a set of rules that are adhered to” (p. 11). Asia’s provocations led me to think freely about my learning without any specific rules, handouts, or taken-for-granted assumptions. During these moments of dialogic encounters, I felt that I also could become a teacher, which meant to become an author of my future.

The concept of authorship is precisely about my ability to create stories through free poetic texts and visual expressions. Hence, Asia’s utterances have internally transformed the authoritative discourse of schooling and created a dialogic culture of learning, “where subjectivities encounter one another in an act of social communication” (White, 2016, p. 2).

Even though I did not necessarily like to respond to her provocations, I could invent myself in and through the spontaneous encounters with the unscripted lessons and possibilities of self-authorship. Muckle (1990) finds that Soviet curriculum was highly regulated in such a way that teachers could not really decide what and how to teach; it was never a question. In this sense, Asia's critical remarks were not a part of the curriculum. Her utterances were not in compliance with the state-led ideology. She intentionally tried to express her genuine thoughts to inspire us to question our beliefs, ideas, and personal conditions. This stance was never a neutral remark, but rather an ontological expression about the social nature of our creative world. Schwab (1991) suggests that dialogic learning is an internally persuasive act of transformation: "what was finished off, closed, monologic, is now opened for dialogue" (p. 61). This means that I as a child could imagine my learning alongside my teachers.

My authorship has become embodied in my artistic voice that allowed me to resist silence and self-alienation. Bauer (1988) reveals that voice is often the "struggle to refashion inherited social discourses into words which rearticulate intentions other than normative or disciplinary one" (p. 2). I tried to express and develop the creative agency of self-consciousness and voice through the journal. In the classroom, my voice was in my choice of poems and literature. I could hear my voice in Blok's poems and think about these poetic, internal connections. During the conventional instruction (i.e., teacher-centred monologues), my voice was absent in silence and day-dreams. The teacher's monologues did not inspire meanings and understandings. I chose to distance myself from their monotony and banality. I distanced myself into the future where I could poetically imagine, artfully envision, and author my future. Asia intentionally or unintentionally provoked me to resist and transform my passive consumption of authoritative discourse, and even her own teachings. As Bauer and McKinstry (1991) assert, "Resistance is not always voiced in authoritative or public ways; what is crucial... is the idea that resistance can begin as private when women negotiate, manipulate, and often subvert systems of domination they encounter" (p. 3). I resisted in my own creative ways, trying to author myself out of socialist oppression and compulsory schooling.

Conclusions

This remembering does not provide any definite or coherent conclusions, but it poses new questions about children's ways of dialogic learning and the necessity of compulsory schooling. Irwin and Springgay (2008) think that a/r/tographers "interpret concepts to be flexible intersubjective locations through which close analysis renders new understandings and meanings" (p. xxviii). In fact, a/r/tography is about an evolution of questions in the process of inquiry (Leggo et al., 2011). Hence, future research may focus on a historical context of remembering not only dialogic pedagogy, but also unschooling and self-authored child learning in order to advance knowledge about ideological becoming through oppression. All in all, the dialogic pedagogy of a/r/tography allows researchers to render

childhood in a critical lens of authorship, creative agency, and self-consciousness through which children's ways of learning are at the heart of inquiry and becoming.

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